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Beliefs About Gender Predict Faking Orgasm in Heterosexual Women

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Abstract

The majority of women have faked an orgasm at least once in their lives. In the current study, we assessed how women's worldviews about gender relate to their faking orgasm behavior. A survey of 462 heterosexual women from the UK (M_{age}=38.38 years) found that those who espoused anti-feminist values—that is, those high in hostile sexism—had faked significantly more orgasms over their lifetime. In contrast, those who espoused ostensibly positive but restrictive ideas of gender relations—that is, those high in benevolent sexism—had faked significantly fewer orgasms over their lifetime. Furthermore, the more that women believed female orgasm was necessary for men's sexual gratification, the more likely they were to have faked an orgasm at least once in their lives compared to women who had never faked an orgasm. These effects were small to moderate and emerged after controlling for demographics, sexual history, ease of orgasm, and previously established psychological correlates of faking orgasm, including suspected partner infidelity and intrasexual competition.

Keywords Faking orgasm · Ideology · Hostile sexism · Benevolent sexism · Gender

Introduction

Some women exaggerate their sexual enjoyment when with a partner. For example, women do not moan loudly when masturbating, but many do when they are having sex (Brewer & Hendrie, 2011). Similarly, women would not fake an orgasm if they were engaging in solo sexual activity, but 56–76% of women have faked an orgasm with a partner (Ellsworth & Bailey, 2013; Goodman, Gillath, & Haj-Mohamadi, 2017; Wiederman, 1997).

This performative aspect of sex is intriguing and has garnered increasing research attention over the past four decades (Frith, 2015). However, little is known about whether women who fake their orgasm differ from those that do not in terms of their general worldviews and belief systems. This study examined the role of religiosity, political orientation, and beliefs about gender and sex in predicting self-reported faking orgasm behavior. In so doing, we contribute to an emerging frontier of quantitative research linking people's ideologies and worldviews not just to attitudes toward sexuality in general, but also "in-the-moment" sexual behaviors.

Why Do Some Women Fake Orgasm But Not Others?

Women (and men) rely on salient ideologies to guide their behavior (Davis & Greenstein, 2009). In order to develop a concept of what men want during sex, and what women should do, women rely on their past experiences and information from peers and society in general (Fahs, 2014; West & Zimmerman, 1987). It is these networks of beliefs that help us to navigate intimate interactions.

Ideologies and sexual behavior have been discussed at length in the sociological and philosophical literature (e.g., see de Beauvoir, 1989; Butler, 1988; Lindsey, 2015; Lorber, 1994). However, the scientific study of ideology and sexual behavior is relatively new. Recently, gender ideology has been linked with sexual communication and orgasm, condom use, and sexual motivations (Fitz & Zucker, 2015; Harris, Hornsey, & Barlow, 2016). We propose that faking orgasm may also be driven by broad sets of beliefs about gender and sex.

Below, we discuss previous research on the factors associated with a woman's likelihood of faking an orgasm, including her ability to orgasm, her partner's sexual skill, and her fear of

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partner infidelity. We then discuss faking orgasm as a function of ideological factors, including religiosity, political orientation, and gender beliefs.

Ease of Orgasm

A significant pragmatic factor related to faking an orgasm is how easy it is to orgasm in the first place. In a recent study, 33% of heterosexual women reported experiencing orgasm during sex "always" compared to 75% of heterosexual men (Frederick, John, Garcia, & Lloyd, 2018). Ease of orgasm determines the number of occasions where a woman could consider faking an orgasm, and so it is not surprising that women who orgasm frequently are less likely to fake their orgasms (Ellsworth & Bailey, 2013). Relatedly, sexual dysfunction is related to increased likelihood of faking an orgasm (Goodman et al., 2017; Jern, Hakala, Kärnä, & Gunst, 2018). However, not having an orgasm does not necessarily lead to faking an orgasm—a woman then must have a reason to fake her orgasm.
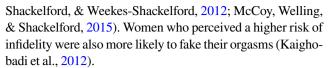
Wanting Sex to End

"Bad sex" is a commonly cited reason for women to fake orgasm (Thomas, Stelzl, & Lafrance, 2017). Some women state that they fake orgasm because they want to end sex when they are tired, bored, or not in the mood (Cooper, Fenigstein, & Fauber 2014; Goodman et al., 2017).

In the present study, we measured women's ratings of their partner's sexual skill to assess the quality of their sexual experiences. While wanting sex to end may explain specific instances of faking an orgasm, subjective ratings of partner sexual skill provide a general indication of how much a woman enjoys sex with her partner. To our knowledge, research on the quality of sex and faking orgasm has been qualitative or has included only women who have previously faked an orgasm: the current paper provides the first quantitative test of whether a woman's likelihood of faking her orgasm is a function of her partner's sexual skill.

Partner Fidelity Concerns

A woman's orgasm is highly prized by her partner, with 90% of men stating that they are concerned with whether their partner experiences orgasm (McKibbin, Bates, Shackelford, Hafen, & LaMunyon, 2010). Men who report that their partner orgasms infrequently are also more likely to have cheated in the past (Ellsworth & Bailey, 2013). Hence, there may be relationship benefits for women who orgasm frequently, and to the extent that women are aware of these benefits, they may fake orgasm as a "mate retention" strategy. Previous research has found support for this hypothesis. For example, women who engaged in mate retention strategies, such as enhancing their physical appearance, were more likely to fake their orgasms (Kaighobadi,

Shackelford, & Weekes-Shackelford, 2012; McCoy, Welling, & Shackelford, 2015). Women who perceived a higher risk of infidelity were also more likely to fake their orgasms (Kaighobadi et al., 2012).

At present, quantitative research testing predictors of faking orgasm has mostly been advanced by evolutionary psychologists, who have made a strong case for the role of mate retention and suspected partner infidelity in motivating women to fake orgasm. In the present study, we extend the existing literature on predictors of faking orgasm by testing the role of ideologies and worldviews. Below, we first consider broad ideological views, including religiosity, political ideology, and hostile and benevolent sexism. We then consider beliefs that are more proximal to faking orgasm by reviewing research discussing women's beliefs about gender, sex, and orgasm.

Political and Religious Ideology

Historically, religiosity and political ideology have been linked with general social conservativeness (e.g., see Blogowska & Saroglou, 2011; Graham, Haidt, & Nosek, 2009; Hall, Matz, & Wood, 2010), decreased acceptance of non-heterosexual relationships (Lottes & Kuriloff, 1992; Olatunji, 2008), and greater sexual guilt among women (Woo, Morshedian, Brotto, & Gorzalka, 2012).

It therefore seems plausible that women who are religious and politically conservative may be more likely to fake orgasm to conform to an expected sexual script and abide by social norms (Muehlenhard & Shippee, 2010). An alternative possibility is that these women may be more likely to uphold strict moral codes around honesty and, as such, may be less likely to fake orgasm (Geyer & Baumeister, 2005; Graham et al., 2009). Given the lack of existing research on this question, we made no strong a priori hypotheses regarding the relationships between faking orgasms, religiosity, and political ideology.

Feminism and Sexism

Women who endorse traditional gender views value female purity and chastity (Glick & Fiske, 1996); as such, they may consider their sexual pleasure as secondary to male pleasure. Research on gender ideology and women's orgasm frequency has found that women who endorsed traditional gender beliefs were less likely to ask for sexual pleasure and, through this indirect path, experienced fewer orgasms (Harris et al., 2016). Relatedly, women exposed to more benevolent sexism—a subtle form of sexism that is superficially flattering to women, but undermines their competence and autonomy—are more likely to engage in sex for relational reasons than for their pleasure (Fitz & Zucker, 2015). Hence, women who endorse traditional gender views may be less likely to fake orgasm because they may not view their orgasm as important or expected during sex. Women who endorse feminist attitudes, on the other hand, value

female sexual agency and mutual sexual pleasure (Lafrance, Stelzl, & Bullock, 2017). As such, feminist women may be more likely to "resist" faking their orgasms (Lafrance et al., 2017).

Gendered Beliefs About Sex and Orgasm

Qualitative research focusing on women's sexual experiences finds that gender beliefs frame how women think, act, and feel during sex (Nicolson & Burr, 2003; Salisbury & Fisher, 2014). Some common themes include beliefs that men want their partners to orgasm during intercourse, women should accommodate men's voracious sex drives, it is a man's responsibility to make a woman orgasm, and if a woman does not orgasm, it will negatively impact a man's ego (Muehlenhard & Shippee, 2010; Salisbury & Fisher, 2014).

However, the extent to which gender beliefs are associated with a woman's likelihood of faking orgasm is yet to be empirically tested. In the present study we tested whether faking orgasm behavior was predicted by the degree to which women endorsed three beliefs about gender, sex, and orgasm: (1) it is the man's responsibility to make a woman orgasm; (2) men need women to orgasm in order to be sexually satisfied themselves; and (3) men are sexually selfish, and are primarily interested in their own sexual satisfaction (vs. caring about partner satisfaction).

The Present Study

In the current survey, we measured established predictors of faking orgasm, including suspected partner infidelity, number of sexual partners, and ability to orgasm. We then tested novel ideological predictors of faking orgasms: political ideology, religiosity, hostile and benevolent sexism, and gender beliefs surrounding sex and orgasm.

Faking orgasm has typically been measured as a dichotomous outcome—have you faked an orgasm or not? (Wiederman, 1997)—or as a continuous outcome, where the percent of times a woman faked her orgasm during sex was measured (Ellsworth & Bailey, 2013; Goodman et al., 2017). We propose that the two decisions: "Do I fake orgasm?" and "Do I keep faking my orgasms?" may be determined by related but distinct psychological processes. We sought to disentangle these psychological processes by using a "two-stage" statistical model that first tested the likelihood that a woman had faked an orgasm versus not, and second, among women who had faked an orgasm, the frequency of faking orgasm.

Method

Participants

Participants were recruited online via Prolific Academic, an online platform for researchers and participants. Eligible participants were invited to take part in a "Study of Sexuality" that took approximately 10 min and would result in payment of £0.85. To be eligible, participants had to be female, over 18 years old, heterosexual, reside in the United Kingdom, currently in a relationship of at least four months' duration, had an approval rate of 85%, and had completed at least two previous studies on the platform.

The final sample comprised 462 women ranging in age from 19 to 73 years ($M_{age} = 38.38$, $SD_{age} = 10.98$). The racial composition of the sample was 95% White/Caucasian, 1% Black/African/Caribbean, 2% Asian, < 1% Hispanic, < 1% Middle Eastern, and 1% "other".

Measures and Procedure

This study was approved by the University of Queensland's Ethical Review Committee (16-PSYCH-PHD-28-AH). We informed participants that the study included questions relating to their sexual history and current sexual experience. Participants who agreed to continue were then asked to complete demographic questions, followed by measures of faking orgasm, and our key predictors: political ideology, religiosity, hostile and benevolent sexism, gendered beliefs about sex and orgasm, relationship history, ability to orgasm, partner sexual skill, and fidelity concerns. Scales were presented in a randomized order. At the end of the survey, participants were debriefed and thanked for their time.

Faking Orgasm

Participants were presented with the following definition of faking orgasm: "Faking or pretending orgasm describes an exaggeration of sexual pleasure to the extent that your partner may believe that you have experienced an orgasm without you having had an orgasm. This may involve exaggerated moaning and vocalizations, and/or muscular contractions". Participants were then asked: "What percentage of the time that you have had sex have you faked orgasm in your life?" and "What percentage of the time that you have had sex have you faked orgasm during sex with your current partner?"

Political Ideology and Religiosity

Political ideology was measured using the single item: "In political matters, people sometimes talk about the 'left' and

the 'right.' Where would you place yourself on this scale, generally speaking?" Response options ranged from 1 = Left to 9 = Right. Religiosity was measured with a single item: "How religious are you?" with response options ranging from 1 = Not at all religious to 5 = Strongly religious.

Hostile and Benevolent Sexism

Hostile and benevolent sexism were measured using a shortened version of Glick and Fiske's (1996) Ambivalent Sexism Inventory. We included three items from the Benevolent Sexism subscale ("Women tend to have a superior moral sensibility," "A good woman should be set on a pedestal by her man," and "Women should be cherished and protected by men"; $\alpha = .68$), and three items from the Hostile Sexism subscale ("Feminists are seeking for women to have more power than men," "Most women fail to appreciate fully all that men do for them," and "Most women interpret innocent remarks or acts as being sexist"; $\alpha = .71$). Response options ranged from 1 = Disagree strongly to 6 = Agree strongly.

Gendered Beliefs About Sex

We measured three gendered beliefs about sex that have been discussed in previous research. First, the belief that men are responsible for a woman's orgasm (Muehlenhard & Shippee, 2010; Salisbury & Fisher, 2014) was measured using three items: "A man should know how to make a woman orgasm"; "The man is responsible for bringing his partner to orgasm"; "If a woman does not orgasm, it reflects poorly on the man", $\alpha = .63$.

Second, the belief that men want their partner to orgasm during sex (Ellsworth & Bailey, 2013) was measured using three items: "Men expect women to be able to orgasm"; "I believe that men do not want to be with a woman who is unable to orgasm during sex"; and "Men need women to orgasm in order for sex to be satisfying". However, due to low scale reliability ($\alpha = .57$) and relatively low correlations between the three items ($r_s < .36$), we selected the single item: "Men need women to orgasm in order for sex to be satisfying" to measure the belief that men want a woman to orgasm during sex. We used a post hoc method of selecting this item, based on item clarity and construct validity (Simms, 2008). We chose this item because it was the closest conceptually to the idea that men are less likely to enjoy sex when a woman does not orgasm.[1]

Third, the belief that men are selfish in bed (Harris et al., 2016) was measured using three items: "During sex, men only care about their own pleasure"; "Men are very focused on women's sexual enjoyment" (reverse scored); and "Men are more focused on satisfying their own sexual needs than their partner's sexual needs," $\alpha = .75$. Response options for these items ranged from 1 = Strongly disagree to 7 = Strongly agree.

Relationship History

The number of lifetime sexual partners was measured using a nine-point scale ranging from 1 = 0 to 9 = More than 50, with a mean of 5.15 (SD = 1.96), where five on the scale represented "4" sexual partners. Relationship length was measured using an 8-point scale ranging from 1 = Less than 1 month to 8 = More than 10 years, with a mean of 7.20 (SD = 1.07).

Ability to Orgasm

This was measured using two items: "How easy is it for you to orgasm from sex in general?" (1 = Very difficult and 7 = Very easy) and "How often do you orgasm during sex with your current partner?" (1 = Never and 7 = Always). These two items were highly correlated ($r = .72$) so were combined to form a scale.

Partner Sexual Skill

This was measured using a single item: "How would you rate your current partner's sexual performance?" (1 = Not at all talented to 7 = Very talented).

Intrasexual Competition

This was measured using 10 items adapted from Buunk and Fisher's (2009) Intrasexual Competition scale. Participants were asked to indicate how much each statement applied to them; for example, "I tend to look for negative characteristics in attractive women" and "I want to be just a little better than other women" (1 = Not at all applicable to 7 = Completely applicable, $\alpha = .90$).

Partner Fidelity Concerns

We measured suspected partner infidelity by asking: "How likely is it do you think that your partner will/did do any of the following" regarding the following five behaviors: "Kiss another person," "Have sex with another person," "Have feelings for another person," "Flirt with another person," and "Get emotionally involved with another person" (1 = Very unlikely/has not happened to 7 = Very likely/has happened; $\alpha = .91$).

Analytic Strategy

We analyzed the data using two-part models for semicontinuous data. Two-part models (akin to "hurdle models") first test the probability that an outcome is zero versus not zero using

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[1] We also conducted our analyses using the full scale, and the results remained unchanged.

binomial logistic regression. In the case of faking orgasm, this involves predicting the likelihood that a person has faked an orgasm versus not. The second step is then to model the frequency of the outcome for those cases that are not zero using linear models. In the current study, this means modeling the frequency of faking orgasm among those participants who had faked an orgasm at least once.

This approach is appropriate for the current data for two reasons. First, our data have a large number of zero counts—that is, people who have never faked an orgasm. A linear or Poisson model of data with excess zeros will not provide a good fit to the data and will under-predict the zero counts (Dietz & Böhning, 2000; Yang, Zucker, & Buu, 2016). Second, there are conceptual reasons for distinguishing between women who have faked an orgasm and those who have not. While there are various reasons a woman may fake an orgasm, not all women do fake orgasm. Hence, it is important to assess: Why do some women fake orgasm and not others? Second, of the women who do fake orgasm, there is variation in the frequency with which they do so. So, of the women who fake orgasm, why do some fake more than others? A two-stage model can address both of these related but distinct research questions.

We used this approach to test two criterion variables: faking orgasm with one's current partner and lifetime history of faking orgasms. As such, we report two sets of binomial logistic regressions (predicting whether or not women have ever faked with their partner and whether they have ever faked in their lifetime) and two sets of hierarchical regressions (predicting the frequency with which women have faked with their partner and the frequency with which women have faked in their lifetime). In each case, the predictors were entered in five steps. It seems reasonable to suggest that the extent to which a woman has faked orgasm at least once would be affected by non-psychological factors such as age, relationship length, and number of sexual partners. As such, these factors were controlled for at Step 1. At Step 2, we entered physical factors that might predict faking frequency: ability to orgasm and partner skill. At Step 3, we entered variables relating to infidelity concerns: intrasexual competition and suspected cheating. Step 4 included two variables that tapped into gender ideology: benevolent and hostile sexism. Finally, Step 5 included gendered beliefs about sex and orgasm.

Results

Descriptive Statistics

In our sample, 33% of women had never faked an orgasm with their current partner ($n = 153$), compared to 67% who had ($n = 309$). Over their lifetime, 23% of women had never faked an orgasm ($n = 106$) compared to 77% who had ($n = 356$). Of the women who had faked an orgasm with their current partner, on

Table 1 Means and SDs of outcome and predictor variables in the full sample

	M	SD
Fake with partner[a]	16.73	23.75
Lifetime faking[a]	24.74	26.59
Age	38.38	10.98
Sexual partners[b]	5.15	1.96
Relationship length[c]	7.20	1.07
Partner skill[d]	5.22	1.44
Ability to orgasm[d]	4.37	1.72
Intrasexual competition[d]	2.66	1.19
Suspected cheating[d]	2.30	1.49
Religiosity[e]	1.85	1.08
Political ideology[b]	4.47	1.73
Hostile sexism[f]	3.15	1.15
Benevolent sexism[f]	3.50	1.06
Men want orgasm[d]	3.15	1.68
Men are selfish[d]	3.65	1.22
Men are responsible[d]	3.68	1.18

[a]Absolute range, 0–100

[b]Absolute range, 1–9

[c]Absolute range, 1–8

[d]Absolute range, 1–7

[e]Absolute range, 1–5

[f]Absolute range, 1–6

average, those women faked orgasm 25% of the time they had sex with their partner. Of the women who had faked an orgasm over their lifetime, those women faked an orgasm 32% of the time they had sex.

For a summary of means and SDs for all variables, see Table 1. For intercorrelations among variables for the entire sample, see Table 2.

Main Analyses

Faking Orgasm with a Current Partner

The first regression predicted whether or not women had ever faked an orgasm with their current partner (see Table 3 for a summary of results). At Step 1, no predictors reached significance ($p_s > .570$). At Step 2, ability to orgasm was a significant negative predictor, such that for every unit increase in ability to orgasm, the likelihood of faking orgasm decreased by 19%, $p = .004$. No other predictors reached significance ($p_s > .543$). At Step 3, suspected cheating significantly predicted likelihood of having faked an orgasm. For every unit change in suspected cheating, the likelihood of faking orgasm increased by 37%, $p < .001$. No predictors entered in Step 4 reached significance ($p_s > .302$). Finally, at Step 5, the belief that men need women to orgasm emerged as a significant predictor, such that for every

Table 2 Intercorrelations among variables for entire sample

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
1. Fake with partner															
2. Lifetime faking	.80**														
3. Age	.04	−.05													
4. Sexual partners	.03	.15**	.05												
5. Relationship length	−.01	−.13**	.39**	−.16**											
6. Partner skill	−.33**	−.18**	−.26**	−.05	−.12**										
7. Ability to orgasm	−.42**	−.37**	−.02	<.01	.06	.50**									
8. Intrasexual competition	.16**	.14**	<.01	.07	−.07	−.16**	−.07								
9. Suspected cheating	.24**	.18**	.07	.14**	−.05	−.20**	−.16**	.21**							
10. Religiosity	.02	<.01	.17**	−.12*	.07	−.12*	−.07	.10*	−.07						
11. Political ideology	.05	−.01	.16**	−.01	.08	−.12**	−.04	.11*	−.02	.12*					
12. Hostile sexism	.10*	.12*	.01	−.08	<.01	.04	<.01	.22**	.10*	.08	.24**				
13. Benevolent sexism	.03	−.01	−.09*	.02	−.05	−.07	<.01	.30**	.02	.14**	.23**	.35**			
14. Men want orgasm	.10*	.08	.10*	−.03	.02	−.05	.10*	.12**	<.01	.15**	.09*	.11*	.09		
15. Men are selfish in bed	.23**	.16**	.08	.02	.02	−.46**	−.31**	.19**	.24**	.08	.13**	.14**	.13**	<.01	
16. Men are responsible	.05	−.01	.07	−.01	<.01	−.13**	.04	.31**	−.01	.08	.09	.07	.26**	.29**	.25**

*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$

Table 3 Hierarchical logistic regression predicting likelihood of faking orgasms with a current partner

	Step 1			Step 2			Step 3			Step 4			Step 5		
	b	SEB	Exp(B)	b	SEB	Exp(B)	b	SEB	Exp(B)	b	SEB	Exp(B)	b	SEB	Exp(B)
(Intercept)	0.44	0.77	1.55	1.57	0.95	4.81	0.06	1.06	1.06	−0.55	1.16	0.58	−0.27	1.28	0.76
Age	<0.01	0.01	1.00	<0.01	0.01	1.00	<0.01	0.01	1.00	<0.01	0.01	1.00	<0.01	0.01	1.00
Sexual partners	<0.01	0.05	1.00	0.01	0.05	1.01	−0.02	0.06	0.98	−0.01	0.06	0.99	−0.01	0.06	1.00
Relationship length	0.03	0.10	1.03	0.06	0.11	1.06	0.09	0.11	1.10	0.10	0.11	1.10	0.11	0.11	1.11
Partner skill				−0.06	0.09	0.95	0.01	0.09	1.02	0.01	0.10	1.01	−0.01	0.10	0.99
Ability to orgasm				−0.21**	0.07	0.81	−0.20**	0.08	0.82	−0.21**	0.08	0.82	−0.23**	0.08	0.79
ISC							0.13	0.09	1.14	0.09	0.10	1.09	0.09	0.10	1.09
Suspected cheating							0.31**	0.09	1.37	0.32**	0.09	1.37	0.33**	0.09	1.40
Religiosity										0.06	0.10	1.06	0.04	0.10	1.04
Political ideology										−0.01	0.07	0.99	−0.02	0.07	0.98
Hostile sexism										0.11	0.10	1.11	0.10	0.11	1.11
Benevolent sexism										0.09	0.11	1.09	0.10	0.12	1.10
Men want orgasm													0.15*	0.07	1.16
Men are selfish													−0.08	0.10	0.92
Men are responsible													−0.07	0.10	0.94
Fit	Nagelkerke R^2 = .01			Nagelkerke R^2 = .05			Nagelkerke R^2 = .10			Nagelkerke R^2 = .11			Nagelkerke R^2 = .13		
Difference	Model χ^2 = 0.62			Model χ^2 = 15.27**			Model χ^2 = 34.18**			Model χ^2 = 37.08**			Model χ^2 = 42.73**		

b represents unstandardized regression weights. Exp(B) indicates the standardized change in odds of faking an orgasm versus not. A significant b also represents a significant Exp(B)

ISC intrasexual competition

*p < .05. **p < .01

unit change in women's endorsement of this belief, the likelihood of faking orgasm increased by 16%, $p = .035$. In addition, ability to orgasm and suspected infidelity remained significant predictors of having faked orgasm.

In the second regression, we used the same step-wise approach to predict the frequency of faking orgasms, focusing only on the 309 women who had reported faking an orgasm with their partner (see Table 4). No predictors were significant at Step 1 ($p_s > .289$). At Step 2, ability to orgasm and partner sexual skill significantly negatively predicted faking orgasm, such that women who found it easy to orgasm and women who rated their partner's sexual skill highly faked their orgasm less frequently ($p_s < .001$). No additional predictors were significant at Steps 3 or 4 ($p_s > .087$). At Step 5, the belief that men need women to orgasm again emerged as a significant predictor, such that women who endorsed this belief more reported faking orgasm more frequently with their partners ($p = .042$).

Lifetime History of Faking Orgasms

As above, we performed a hierarchical logistical regression to test predictors of faking orgasm versus not faking over the course of one's life (see Table 5 for detailed results). At Step 1, number of sexual partners was a significant positive predictor of having faked an orgasm, such that for every additional sexual partner, the likelihood of faking orgasm increased by 13%, $p = .043$. At Step 2, a woman's ability to orgasm was a significant predictor of faking orgasm, such that for every unit increase in a woman's ability to orgasm, the likelihood of having ever faked orgasm decreased by 16% ($p = .032$). At Step 3, suspected cheating emerged as a significant predictor of having faked an orgasm, such that for every unit increase in suspected partner infidelity, the likelihood of having faked an orgasm increased by 36% ($p = .003$). None of the ideological predictors entered at Step 4 were significant ($p_s > .085$). At the final step, the belief that men need women to orgasm emerged as a significant predictor, such that for every unit increase in this belief, the likelihood of faking orgasm increased by 18% ($p = 036$).

Finally, we conducted a hierarchical linear regression to investigate the predictors of faking frequency among women who had faked an orgasm at least once in their lifetime (see Table 6). At Step 1, number of sexual partners emerged as a significant predictor of faking orgasm, such that the more sexual partners a woman had, the more frequently she faked her orgasm ($p = .036$). At Step 2, ability to orgasm emerged as a significant predictor such that women faked orgasm less frequently the more easily they were able to orgasm ($p < .001$). No predictors entered at Step 3 were significant ($p_s > .224$). At Step 4, women high in hostile sexism tended to fake orgasm more frequently ($p = .001$), and women high in benevolent sexism faked orgasm less frequently ($p = .001$). No additional predictors entered at Step 5 were significant ($p_s > .064$).

Discussion

The present study assessed the ideological, gender, and sex beliefs associated with faking orgasms in women. One set of analyses related to the question of whether our respondents had ever faked an orgasm (the dichotomous measure). Consistent with previous research, women were more likely to have faked an orgasm if they found it difficult to orgasm, suspected their partner of cheating, and (for lifetime ratings of faking) if they had a higher number of sexual partners. Ideological factors and more proximal beliefs about gender, sex, and orgasm played very little role in predicting whether or not women had faked (versus never faked) orgasm, with one exception: women who subscribed to the general belief that men needed a woman to orgasm to achieve their own sexual pleasure were more likely to fake orgasm, both across their lifetime and with their current partner.

In regards to how often women faked their orgasms, findings varied depending on whether we examined frequency of faking orgasms with one's current partner or frequency of faking orgasms over one's lifetime. Women who faked their orgasms more frequently with their current partner rated their partners as less sexually skilled, reported greater difficulty reaching orgasm, and were more likely to endorse the belief that men need women to orgasm. Ideological factors emerged more strongly when predicting frequency of faking orgasms over one's lifetime. Specifically, women faked orgasms more frequently if they were high in hostile sexism (i.e., anti-feminism) and low in benevolent sexism.

This study identified new evidence in support of the role of gender-specific beliefs about sex in predicting faking orgasm. Specifically, in three of the four statistical models tested, we found an effect of the belief that men need women to orgasm. We know from previous research that men value their partner's orgasm (McKibbin et al., 2010), over-estimate women's orgasm frequency (Shirazi, Renfro, Lloyd, & Wallen, 2018), and that for some men a woman's orgasm signifies a masculinity achievement (Chadwick & van Anders, 2017). According to an evolutionary perspective, men's preference for women's orgasm may be fitness related, such that a woman's orgasm signals fertility in the woman (Fox, 1976), and genetic quality in her partner (Sherlock, Sidari, Harris, Barlow, & Zietsch, 2016; Thornhill, Gangestad, & Comer, 1995). As such, men and women's interests in orgasm are naturally aligned—women want orgasms and men are motivated to provide them (Kaighobadi et al., 2012).

Depending on the perspective one takes, men's desire for women to orgasm might be considered a coup or a blow for women's sexual pleasure. Historically, men's sexual pleasure has been centered, and women's sexual pleasure has been discouraged or ignored (Rudman & Fetterolf, 2014; Willis, Jozkowski, Lo, & Sanders, 2018). Hence, the fact that men

Table 4 Hierarchical linear regression predicting the frequency of faking orgasms with a partner

	Step 1			Step 2			Step 3			Step 4			Step 5		
	b	SEB	β	b	SEB	β	b	SEB	β	b	SEB	β	b	SEB	β
(Intercept)	25.23*	11.20		68.32**	11.23		59.36**	11.96		59.78**	13.28		46.60**	15.23	
Age	0.15	0.14	.07	−0.07	0.12	−.03	−0.08	0.12	−.03	−0.07	0.12	−.03	−0.08	0.13	−.04
Sexual partners	0.34	0.78	.03	0.59	0.65	.05	0.34	0.66	.03	0.32	0.68	.02	0.26	0.68	.02
Relationship length	−1.05	1.44	−.05	0.78	1.24	.03	0.98	1.24	.04	0.89	1.24	.04	1.27	1.24	.06
Partner skill				−4.32**	1.09	−.23	−3.85**	1.10	−.21	−4.02**	1.12	−.22	−3.24**	1.20	−.18
Ability to orgasm				−6.46**	0.92	−.41	−6.50**	0.92	−.41	−6.53**	0.93	−.41	−6.78**	0.94	−.43
ISC							1.43	1.06	.07	1.34	1.11	.06	0.94	1.15	.05
Suspected cheating							1.12	0.83	.07	0.84	0.85	.05	0.75	0.85	.05
Religiosity										−1.15	1.23	−.05	−1.45	1.24	−.06
Political ideology										0.22	0.80	.01	0.08	0.80	.01
Hostile sexism										2.14	1.25	.10	1.83	1.26	.08
Benevolent sexism										−0.99	1.39	−.04	−1.19	1.40	−.05
Men want orgasm													1.62*	0.79	.11
Men are selfish													1.47	1.30	.07
Men are responsible													0.41	1.22	.02
Fit	$R^2 = .01$			$R^2 = .31**$			$R^2 = .32**$			$R^2 = .33**$			$R^2 = .34**$		
Difference				$\Delta R^2 = .30**$			$\Delta R^2 = .01$			$\Delta R^2 = .01$			$\Delta R^2 = .02$		

b represents unstandardized regression weights. β indicates the standardized regression weights. A significant b also represents a significant β. Women who reported never having

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Table 5 Hierarchical logistic regression predicting lifetime likelihood of faking an orgasm

	Step 1			Step 2			Step 3			Step 4			Step 5		
	b	SEB	Exp(B)	b	SEB	Exp(B)	b	SEB	Exp(B)	b	SEB	Exp(B)	b	SEB	Exp(B)
(Intercept)	1.32	0.93	3.74	1.35	1.10	3.86	−0.03	1.22	0.98	−1.17	1.33	0.31	−1.06	1.47	0.35
Age	<0.01	0.01	1.00	<0.01	0.01	1.00	<0.01	0.01	1.00	<0.01	0.01	1.00	<0.01	0.01	1.00
Sexual partners	0.12*	0.06	1.13	0.13*	0.06	1.14	0.11	0.06	1.11	0.13*	0.06	1.14	0.13*	0.06	1.14
Relationship length	−0.11	0.13	0.89	−0.08	0.13	0.93	−0.06	0.13	0.95	−0.05	0.13	0.95	−0.04	0.14	0.96
Partner skill				0.09	0.10	1.09	0.15	0.10	1.16	0.16	0.11	1.17	0.16	0.11	1.17
Ability to orgasm				−0.18*	0.08	0.84	−0.17	0.09	0.85	−0.17*	0.09	0.84	−0.20*	0.09	0.82
ISC							0.12	0.11	1.13	0.04	0.11	1.04	0.05	0.12	1.05
Suspected cheating							0.31**	0.10	1.36	0.32**	0.11	1.38	0.34**	0.11	1.40
Religiosity										0.14	0.12	1.14	0.11	0.12	1.12
Political ideology										−0.05	0.07	0.95	−0.06	0.07	0.95
Hostile sexism										0.11	0.12	1.12	0.10	0.12	1.10
Benevolent sexism										0.22	0.13	1.24	0.23	0.13	1.26
Men want orgasm													0.17*	0.08	1.18
Men are selfish													−0.03	0.12	0.97
Men are responsible													−0.10	0.11	0.91
Fit	Nagelkerke R^2 = .02			Nagelkerke R^2 = .04			Nagelkerke R^2 = .09			Nagelkerke R^2 = .11			Nagelkerke R^2 = .12		
Difference	Model χ^2 = 5.864			Model χ^2 = 10.77			Model χ^2 = 24.19**			Model χ^2 = 31.48**			Model χ^2 = 36.39**		

b represents unstandardized regression weights. Exp(B) indicates the standardized change in odds of faking an orgasm versus not. A significant b also represents a significant Exp(B)

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*p < .05. **p < .01

Table 6 Hierarchical linear regression predicting lifetime frequency of faking orgasms

	Step 1			Step 2			Step 3			Step 4			Step 5		
	b	SEB	β	b	SEB	β	b	SEB	β	b	SEB	β	b	SEB	β
(Intercept)	44.12**	10.59		71.85**	11.36		65.66**	12.28		76.07**	13.28		71.49**	15.14	
Age	−0.08	0.14	−.04	−0.19	0.13	−.08	−0.19	0.13	−.08	−0.21	0.13	−.09	−0.21	0.13	−.09
Sexual partners	1.57*	0.75	.12	1.98**	0.67	.15	1.91**	0.67	.14	2.05**	0.68	.15	2.01**	0.68	.15
Relationship length	−2.36	1.37	−.10	−1.13	1.24	−.05	−1.03	1.25	−.04	−1.24	1.22	−.05	−1.11	1.23	−.05
Partner skill				−1.15	1.10	−.06	−0.87	1.12	−.05	−1.55	1.11	−.08	−1.24	1.20	−.07
Ability to orgasm				−6.67**	0.92	−.41	−6.68**	0.92	−.41	−6.49**	0.90	−.40	−6.53**	0.92	−.41
ISC							1.33	1.09	.06	1.77	1.13	.08	1.83	1.17	.08
Suspected cheating							0.30	0.85	.02	−0.34	0.85	−.02	−0.50	0.86	−.03
Religiosity										−0.81	1.20	−.03	−1.05	1.22	−.04
Political ideology										−0.25	0.78	−.02	−0.34	0.78	−.02
Hostile sexism										4.13**	1.19	.18	3.85**	1.21	.17
Benevolent sexism										−4.55**	1.37	−.18	−4.45**	1.38	−.17
Men want orgasm													1.45	0.78	.10
Men are selfish													0.80	1.30	.04
Men are responsible													−1.01	1.23	−.05
Fit	$R^2 = .03*$			$R^2 = .23**$			$R^2 = .23**$			$R^2 = .27**$			$R^2 = .28**$		
Difference				$\Delta R^2 = .20**$			$\Delta R^2 < .01$			$\Delta R^2 = .04**$			$\Delta R^2 = .01$		

b represents unstandardized regression weights. β indicates the standardized regression weights. A significant b also represents a significant β. Women who reported never having faked orgasm were excluded from this analysis

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*p < .05. **p < .01

want women to orgasm, and that women are aware of this may be considered a sign of progress toward more egalitarian experiences of sexual pleasure.

Feminist scholars have, however, argued that a woman's orgasm should be experienced primarily for her pleasure, and not her partner's (Chadwick & van Anders, 2017; Frith, 2015). It is, of course, possible (and potentially preferable) for both partners to be sexually excited by the potential of a woman's orgasm, but it becomes problematic when women forego their own genuine pleasure (such as when women fake orgasm) for their partner's pleasure and satisfaction. Thus, while a man's strong desire for a woman to orgasm during sex may reflect both arousal and generosity, it may, somewhat counterproductively, inhibit a woman's sexual pleasure (Salisbury & Fisher, 2014). We note here that at the zero-order level, women who believed that men generally care about women's sexual pleasure, and focus on pleasing their partner (as indexed by low male selfishness beliefs) was associated with less faking. In contrast, the belief that men need a woman to orgasm to meet their own pleasure needs was associated with more faking.

The beliefs that men are selfish in bed and that men are responsible for women's orgasms have been discussed in qualitative research by women who have faked an orgasm (Muehlenhard & Shippee, 2010; Salisbury & Fisher, 2014). However, the current study suggests that these beliefs do not uniquely distinguish between women who do and do not fake orgasm when considering other predictors and control variables. Consistent with Harris et al. (2016), the belief that men are selfish in bed was positively correlated with benevolent sexism. After controlling for benevolent sexism, the belief that men are selfish in bed did not uniquely predict faking.

Across all analyses, two of the strongest effects emerged with regard to the role of hostile and benevolent sexism in predicting frequency of faking over the course of a lifetime. Women high in hostile sexism faked orgasm more frequently over their lifetime. This finding makes the most sense when interpreted in reverse: women low in hostile sexism (i.e., women who are more likely to endorse feminist beliefs) were less likely to fake orgasm. This is consistent with qualitative research showing that women who "resist" faking orgasm often express feminist motivations for doing so (Lafrance et al., 2017).

On the other hand, women who endorsed benevolent sexism faked orgasm less frequently over their lifetime. A benevolently sexist ideology values purity and chastity in women and, as such, places limits on women's sexual agency and expressions of sexual enjoyment. Women who endorse a benevolently sexist worldview, therefore, may be less likely to fake orgasm because they place less value on their orgasm and instead aim to maintain composure and control.

These findings fit neatly with ambivalent sexism theory and research on gender ideology and sex. A benevolently

sexist worldview emphasizes women's right to special treatment from men, yet this special treatment is likely to come in the form of physical and financial security, and not necessarily sexual attention. Indeed, according to benevolently sexist ideology, women should be only afforded special treatment from men because they are more refined, moral, and pure relative to men. Therefore, according to a benevolently sexist worldview, women would be expected to assume the role of passive sexual agents, while men pursue their more animalistic, unrefined, and impure sexual urges (Harris et al., 2016). The expectation that women will suppress their sexual urges then negates the need to fake their orgasms.

Consistent with previous research, we find a moderate correlation between hostile and benevolent sexism. This relationship likely explains why we did not see a zero-order correlation between benevolent sexism and faking orgasm frequency. Given the intercorrelation between hostile and benevolent sexism, and their opposing effects on faking orgasm frequency, the independent effect of benevolent sexism may be suppressed at the zero-order level. Therefore, the unique effects of hostile and benevolently sexist worldviews only emerge when both are entered into a regression simultaneously (as recommended by theorists; Glick, Sakalli-Ugurlu, Ferreira, & de Souza, 2002; Sakalli, 2001), and the shared variance is accounted for.

The predictive roles of hostile and benevolent sexism were specific to frequency of faking orgasms over a lifetime, and not any other measure of faking orgasm. This raises the question: What might be different about frequency of faking orgasms over a lifetime? Qualitative research indicates that women who deliberately resist faking orgasm tend to express ambivalence around their decisions. On the one hand, women want to be open and honest with their partners, but on the other hand, they also want to protect their partner's feelings (Lafrance et al., 2017; Salisbury & Fisher, 2014). These competing motivations may lead some women to fake an orgasm at least once if they find it difficult to orgasm in the first place. It may be that ideological factors only become important when women decide whether to continue faking their orgasms. This interpretation is, however, largely speculative, and it would be useful to replicate our findings to test whether the same pattern of results holds across the various measures of faking orgasms. Furthermore, our findings were limited to our operationalization of hostile and benevolent sexism, measured using a shortened version of the Ambivalent Sexism Inventory (Glick & Fiske, 1996). We encourage future research on gender ideology and faking orgasm to include a minimum of 10 items to assess ambivalent sexism (Sibley, 2009).

In addition to gender ideology and specific beliefs about gender and sex, we sought to test whether political ideology and religiosity might influence women's likelihood of faking orgasm. We presented two possible outcomes. First,

we suggested that women who were politically conservative and religious tend to value tradition and social norms, and so these women may be more likely to fake their orgasms to conform to traditional sexual scripts. Alternatively, women high in political conservatism and religiosity may be more likely to value honesty and may therefore be less likely to fake their orgasms. We found no support for either of these predictions; political ideology and religiosity were unrelated to willingness to fake orgasm, both at the zero-order level and in the regression models.

While political orientation and religiosity may be indirectly related to sexuality, these constructs are perhaps too psychologically distal to influence a woman's willingness to fake an orgasm. Further, the content of these ideologies is heterogeneous, such that there is large variation in the attitudes and beliefs of women who identify as politically conservative and religious. Political ideology and religiosity may be relevant to other sexual behaviors, such as sexual infidelity and masturbation (Ahrold, Farmer, Trapnell, & Meston, 2011; Haidt & Hersh, 2001); however, these worldviews appear to be unrelated to faking orgasm behavior.

Our measures of gender ideology—hostile and benevolent sexism—typically assume a heterosexual relationship, since ambivalent sexism theory speaks to the power imbalance between men and women in society, and how that can have spillover effects on interpersonal relationships. Future research is needed to test how gender beliefs might impact orgasm experiences among gender and sexually diverse people. In addition to more diverse sampling, future research should consider longitudinal and experimental research designs when investigating predictors of sexual behavior. To our knowledge, all of the research on faking orgasm behavior, including the current study, has been cross-sectional, and so we cannot draw causal conclusions from these findings. Ideally, a study of couples over time would address this issue, and would broaden our understanding of the factors that predict faking orgasms from personal factors to partner and relationship factors. It would be interesting to test whether women are more likely to fake their orgasms if they have a male partner who is particularly sensitive to whether or not his partner has an orgasm (e.g., men who are high in masculine gender role stress), independent of women's own gender ideologies (Chadwick & van Anders, 2017).

A major concern in sexuality research is a woman's ability to find her voice during sex (Fahs, 2014; Frith, 2018). The frequency with which women fake their orgasms is potentially concerning; it may reflect a hesitancy to communicate honestly and openly with a partner about sex, including sexual preferences and difficulty experiencing orgasms. Our study provides the first evidence that the values assigned to men and women, including hostile and benevolent sexism, and the belief that men need women to orgasm, can predict women's likelihood and frequency of faking orgasm.

Women's gender beliefs may therefore guide their sexual behavior, and the expression of authentic, or inauthentic, sexual pleasure.

Compliance with Ethical Standards

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