

Letter to the Editor

## How (Un)Important Is Penis Size for Women with Heterosexual Experience?

It is well known that the importance of penis size is a matter of considerable public interest. We also know, on the basis of mostly anecdotal (and personal) experience, that penis size matters to men a great deal (Pietropinto, 1986), at least in their adolescent years. Unfortunately, much less is known about how important women judge penis size to be. Popular accounts abound (Anonymous, 2003), but there is a lack of solid research data regarding this issue (Eisenman, 2001). Information on how important penis size is to sexually active women could be potentially useful in the context of sex therapy, as well as in intersex management. Regarding the latter, there is a debate about the implications of micropenis for the quality of life, which is further linked to the question of possible surgical reassignment to female sex versus early androgen treatment (Wisniewski et al., 2001). While a number of authors point to case reports of people who manage a reasonable sex life with a micropenis (Bankhead, 2003; Reilly & Woodhouse, 1989; van Seters & Slob, 1988), some patients report that their partners have left them because of small penis size (H. F. L. Meyer-Bahlburg, personal e-mail communication, July 27, 2005).

The data presented below were collected in the “Sexual Styles of Urban Women in Croatia” study, which was carried out in the five biggest Croatian cities in 1998 (Štulhofer, 1999). The sample consisted of 556 women aged 19–49 years. A list of randomly chosen addresses was used as the basis for participant selection. Women without coital experience were excluded from the study. Respondents were surveyed in their home by trained female interviewers. The questionnaire consisted of 82 variables, including 3 questions regarding the importance of partner’s penis size (length and girth), as well as its overall esthetic appeal, for the respondent’s sexual pleasure. Respondents used a 3-item scale (unimportant, somewhat important, and very important) for recording answers. It should be noted that the questions regarding penis size did not allow us to distinguish between the claims that relate penis size to pleasure and those who relate it primarily to discomfort or pain.

As expected, girth was found to be more important than length (Table I). A fifth of respondents (21.8%) reported that they found both girth and length unimportant, while 12.8% judged both qualities very important. Table I shows responses broken down by age cohorts. The differences among the groups were not statistically significant.

It was hypothesized that sexual experience (as measured by number of lifetime sexual partners) would have an effect on penis size evaluation. The results of this analysis are presented in Table II. As expected, the differences between the groups were significant, with more experienced women judging penis size more important, both in the case of penis length ( $p < .005$ ) and girth ( $p < .007$ ).

In addition to questions regarding penis size, we asked women how important they found the overall esthetic quality (appearance) of their partner’s penis. The majority of respondents judged it to be somewhat important (44.9%) while the rest were almost equally divided between it being unimportant (28.2%) and being very important for their satisfaction (26.9%). Should men start worrying not only how it hangs, but also how it looks?

**Table I.** The Importance of Penis Size in Three Age Cohorts of Urban Women in Croatia

	Age cohorts			
	Total <i>n</i> (%)	18–27 <i>n</i> (%)	28–38 <i>n</i> (%)	39–49 <i>n</i> (%)
<b>Penile length</b>				
Unimportant	140 (24.6)	59 (24.2)	38 (21.6)	43 (29.1)
Somewhat important	326 (57.4)	136 (55.7)	113 (64.2)	77 (52.0)
Very important	102 (18.0)	49 (20.1)	25 (14.2)	28 (18)
<b>Penile girth</b>				
Unimportant	142 (25.4)	58 (23.8)	42 (24.3)	42 (29.8)
Somewhat important	296 (53.0)	124 (50.8)	97 (56.1)	75 (53.2)
Very important	120 (21.5)	62 (25.4)	34 (19.7)	24 (17.0)

**Table II.** The Importance of Penis Size and Sexual Experience (Number of Sexual Partners)

	Number of partners			
	Total <i>n</i> (%)	1–2 <i>n</i> (%)	3–5 <i>n</i> (%)	>5 <i>n</i> (%)
<b>Penile length</b>				
Unimportant	131 (24.2)	77 (31.3)	36 (20.3)	18 (15.3)
Somewhat important	312 (57.7)	125 (50.8)	111 (62.7)	76 (64.4)
Very important	98 (18.1)	44 (17.9)	30 (16.9)	24 (20.3)
<b>Penile girth</b>				
Unimportant	134 (25.1)	74 (30.8)	40 (22.9)	20 (16.9)
Somewhat important	284 (53.3)	128 (53.3)	89 (50.9)	67 (56.8)
Very important	115 (21.6)	38 (15.8)	46 (26.3)	31 (26.3)

## REFERENCES

- Anonymous. (2003, April). The female stereotype truth-o-meter. *Esquire*, 139(4), 88.
- Bankhead, C. (2005). Men with micropenis have well-adjusted outcomes. *Urology Times*, 33, 20.
- Eisenman, R. (2001). Penis size: Survey of female perceptions of sexual satisfaction. *BMC Women's Health*. Retrieved July 28, 2005, from <http://www.biomedcentral.com/1472-6874/1/1>.
- Pietropinto, A. (1986). Misconceptions about male sexuality. *Medical Aspects of Human Sexuality*, 20, 80–85.
- Reilly, J. M., & Woodhouse, C. R. (1989). Small penis and the male sexual role. *Journal of Urology*, 142, 569–571.
- Štulhofer, A. (1999). Hypnerotomachia poliae: Seksualni stilovi urbanih žena u Hrvatskoj [Sexual styles of urban women in Croatia]. *Revija za sociologiju*, 30, 1–17.
- van Seters, A. P., & Slob, A. K. (1988). Mutually gratifying heterosexual relationship with micropenis of husband. *Journal of Sex and Marital Therapy*, 14, 98–107.
- Wisniewski, A. B., Migeon, C. J., Gearhart, J. P., Rock, J. A., Berkovitz, G. D., Plotnick, L. P., et al. (2001). Congenital micropenis: Long-term medical, surgical and psychosexual follow-up of individuals raised male or female. *Hormone Research*, 56, 3–11.

Aleksandar Štulhofer, Ph.D.  
 Department of Sociology  
 University of Zagreb  
 I. Lucica 3, 10000 Zagreb, Croatia  
 e-mail: astulhof@ffzg.hr