

# From ‘It Does Nothing for Me’ to ‘I Can’t Function Without It.’ When, Why, and for Whom Does Vaginal Penetration Become Important?

Karen L. Blair<sup>1,4</sup>, PhD, , Rhea Ashley Hoskin<sup>2,4</sup>, MA, Kay Jenson<sup>3,4</sup>, Caroline F. Pukall<sup>2</sup>, PhD, Kelly B. Smith<sup>5</sup>  
<sup>1</sup>St. Francis Xavier University, <sup>2</sup>Queen’s University, <sup>3</sup>Acadia University, <sup>4</sup>KLB Research, <sup>5</sup>University of British Columbia

## Introduction

- Majority of women indicate they usually do not orgasm from vaginal penetration alone.<sup>1</sup>
  - Only heterosexual men report that vaginal penetration results in frequent and satisfying orgasms.<sup>2</sup>
- From US nationally representative study, 11.6% of women found vaginal intercourse as *not at all appealing*.<sup>3</sup>
- Prevalence of genital pain disorders ranges from 12 to 16% in adult women.<sup>4,5</sup>
- Why are women regularly engaging vaginal penetration if it doesn’t typically result in an orgasm is sometimes associated with genital pain?**
- Research Questions:
  - Examine how women conceptualize the importance of vaginal penetration to their sex life.
  - Explore whether these associations differ as a function of relationship type or pain status.
    - Mixed-Gender vs. Same-Gender
    - With Genital Pain vs. Without

## Method

### Study Design

- 876** cis-women completed a questionnaire:
  - Demographics (i.e. sexual identity, gender of partner, etc.)
  - Experiences of genital pain:
    - Those who experienced genital pain on a regular basis for at least 6 months were coded as experiencing genital pain.
  - How important is vaginal penetration to you?**
    - 11-point Likert Scale
  - Please comment on the importance of vaginal penetration to your life.**
- Open-ended responses to Importance of Vaginal Penetration (VP) ratings were analyzed qualitatively for emerging themes<sup>6</sup>

### Participant Breakdown

- Gender Identity: 100% cisgender women
- Relationship Type:
  - Mixed-Gender: 77%; Same-Gender: 23%
- Sexual Identity:
  - Straight: 43.5%
  - Bisexual: 31.3%
  - Lesbian: 19.8%
  - Queer: 3.8%
  - Gay: 1.6%
- Genital Pain Status:
  - Genital Pain: 32%; No Pain: 68%
- Average Relationship Length: 3 years and 6 months
- Relationship Stage:
  - Seriously Dating: 56.9%
  - Married/Equivalent: 26.6%
  - Casually Dating: 8%
  - Engaged: 7.3%
  - Separated: 1.2%

## Open Ended Response

### Emotionally Significant

*“Sex feels sort of **empty** and **disconnected** without vaginal penetration. Even though I’ve only been able to achieve orgasm 3 times, all with the same partner, I’ve always enjoyed it and found it to be very disappointing and somewhat of a **rejection** if vaginal penetration does not happen.”*

– 9/10 Importance of VP, Mixed-Gender Rel., Bisexual, Genital Pain

### Physical Pleasure

*“It greatly **enhances** my sexual pleasure leading up to and during orgasm.”*

- 9/10 Importance of VP, Mixed-Gender Rel., Bisexual, No Pain

### For Partner

*“For years it was too painful for me to have my partner penetrate. Eventually I **summoned the courage** to let him penetrate and gradually it has become easier and less painful, although it **is rarely if ever pleasurable**. It is a relief to me though that I have **managed to allow** vaginal penetration and it makes **my partner so happy** that I am glad to do it. However earlier this year I became pregnant and since then my partner has been reluctant to penetrate.”*

- 0/10 Importance of VP, Mixed-Gender Rel., Straight, Genital Pain

### Menu Analogy

*“I enjoy it when it's a possibility (for example, when I'm with my boyfriend or using a vibrator on myself), but it's definitely not the **be-all** and **end-all** of sex to me.”*

- 4/10 Importance of VP, Mixed-Gender Rel., Lesbian, No Pain

### Does Nothing for Me

*“Well, I don't receive much pleasure from penetration. In fact, it's quite uncomfortable for me so I just **focus on clitoral stimulation**.”*

- 0/10 Importance of VP, Mixed-Gender Rel., Straight, Genital Pain

### Masturbation Preferences

*“I enjoy vaginal penetration when having sex **with my partner**. I have very rarely wanted it when masturbating.”*

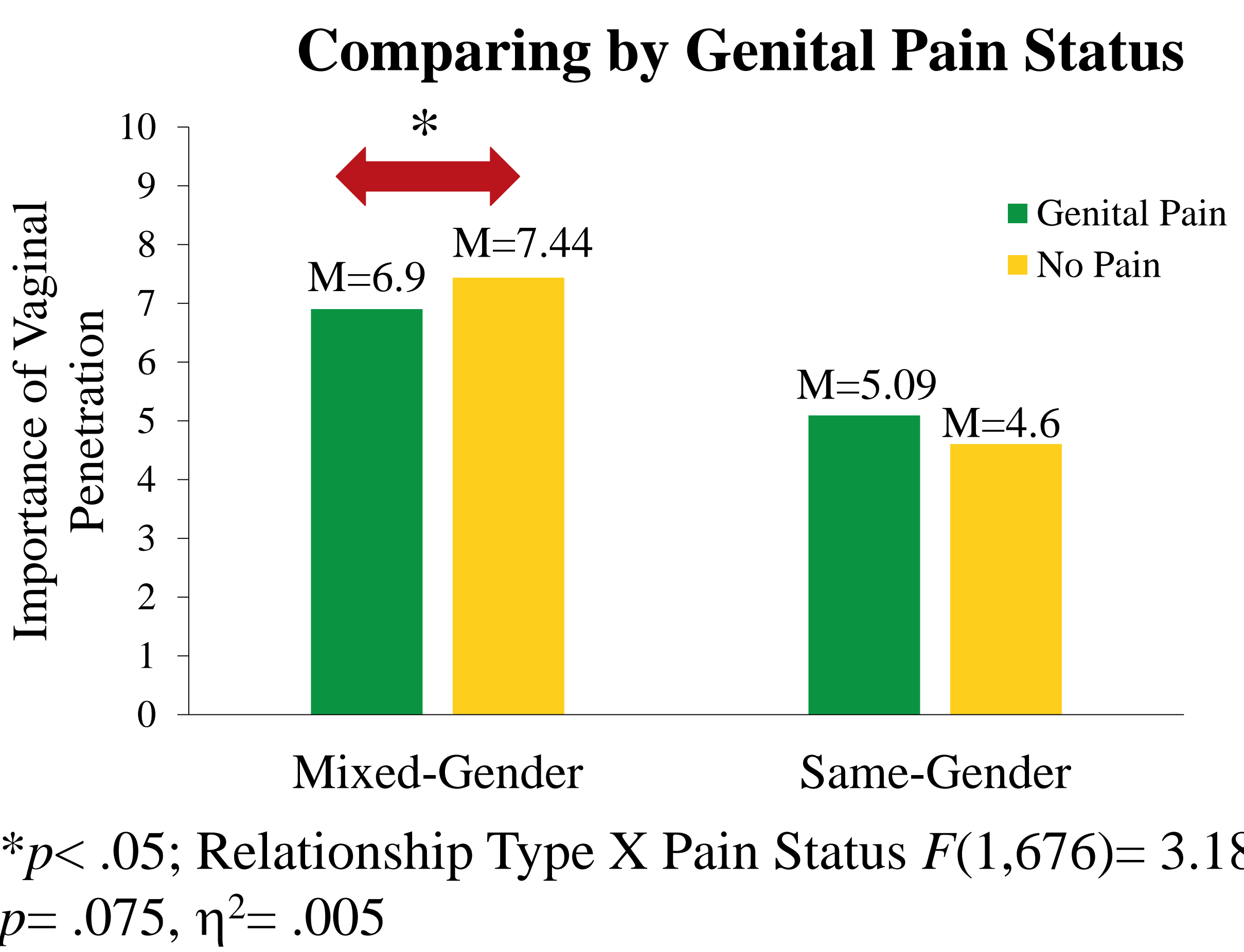
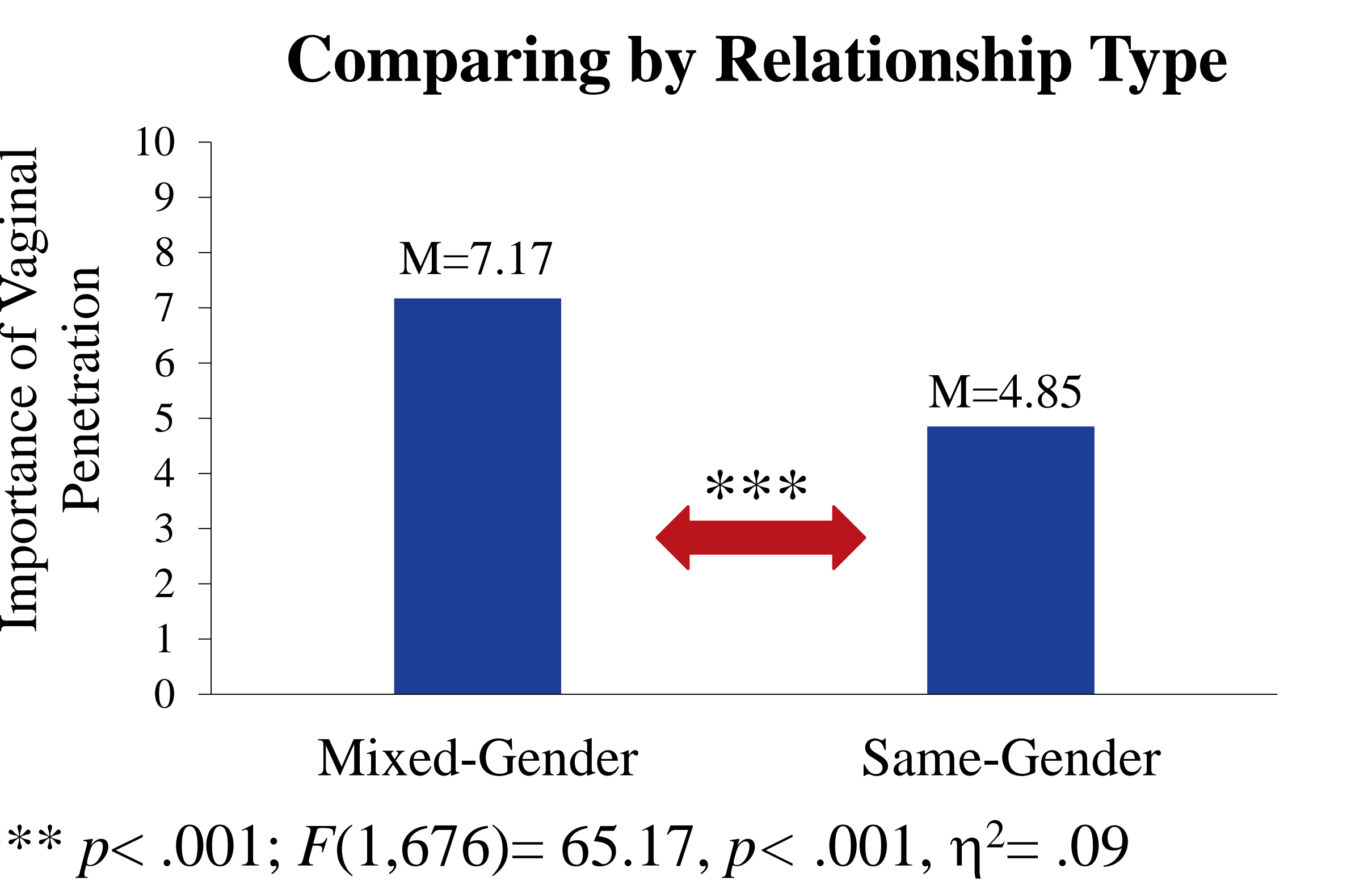
- 7/10 Importance of VP, Same-Gender Rel., Lesbian, No Pain

### Phallocentric Scripts

*“It helps me reach a **true orgasm** and it is simultaneously pleasurable for me and my boyfriend. He has been my one and only sexual partner. When I do experience slight pain, I am pleased because it makes me feel tight and not **‘loose or slutty**.”*

- 10/10 Importance of VP, Mixed-Gender Rel., Bisexual, No Pain

## Results



## Discussion

### Summary

- Vaginal Penetration appears to lack importance in the absence of a male partner.
  - Remains important for women in mixed-gender relationships, even for women who experience genital pain.
- Emerging themes highlight the contextual nature of sexual scripts.

### Implications and Future Directions

- The current study further highlights the importance of using inclusive methods of all genders and sexual identities.
- Flexibility in sexual scripts may allow for more opportunities for women to cope with genital pain.
- Future research should explore whether the experience of genital pain has less of an effect on sexual and relationship functioning as a function of sexual identity and/or gender of current partner.
- Comparing the importance of vaginal penetration by gender of partner provides further insight into how to reduce the Orgasm Gap.

To get more details on this study and other research conducted by KLB Research, visit [drkarenblair.com](http://drkarenblair.com)

<sup>1</sup> Lloyd, 2005; <sup>2</sup> Blair et al., 2017; <sup>3</sup>Herbenick et al., 2017; <sup>4</sup>Latthe et al., 2006; <sup>5</sup> Harlow et al., 2001, <sup>6</sup> Braun & Clarke, 2006