

# A need for sexual health education? Queer women experience more pain during sex and expectations for dyspareunia.

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## BACKGROUND

- Pain during sex (dyspareunia) is common for women, but not all women are equally impacted.
- Dyspareunia disproportionately impacts women who are Black, queer, and from lower socioeconomic groups.
- While physiological factors may explain some differences, many of these differences are likely due to psychosocial influences.
- Most literature on psychosocial factors related to dyspareunia has focused on psychological distress, however **anticipatory social-cognitive variables, such as expectations, may play an equally important role in dyspareunia**, and may be particularly important, as education may be effective intervention and effective intervention for expectancy-based dyspareunia.
- The purpose of the present study is to understand if differences in response expectancies vary by demographic groups, potentially explaining differences seen in dyspareunia.

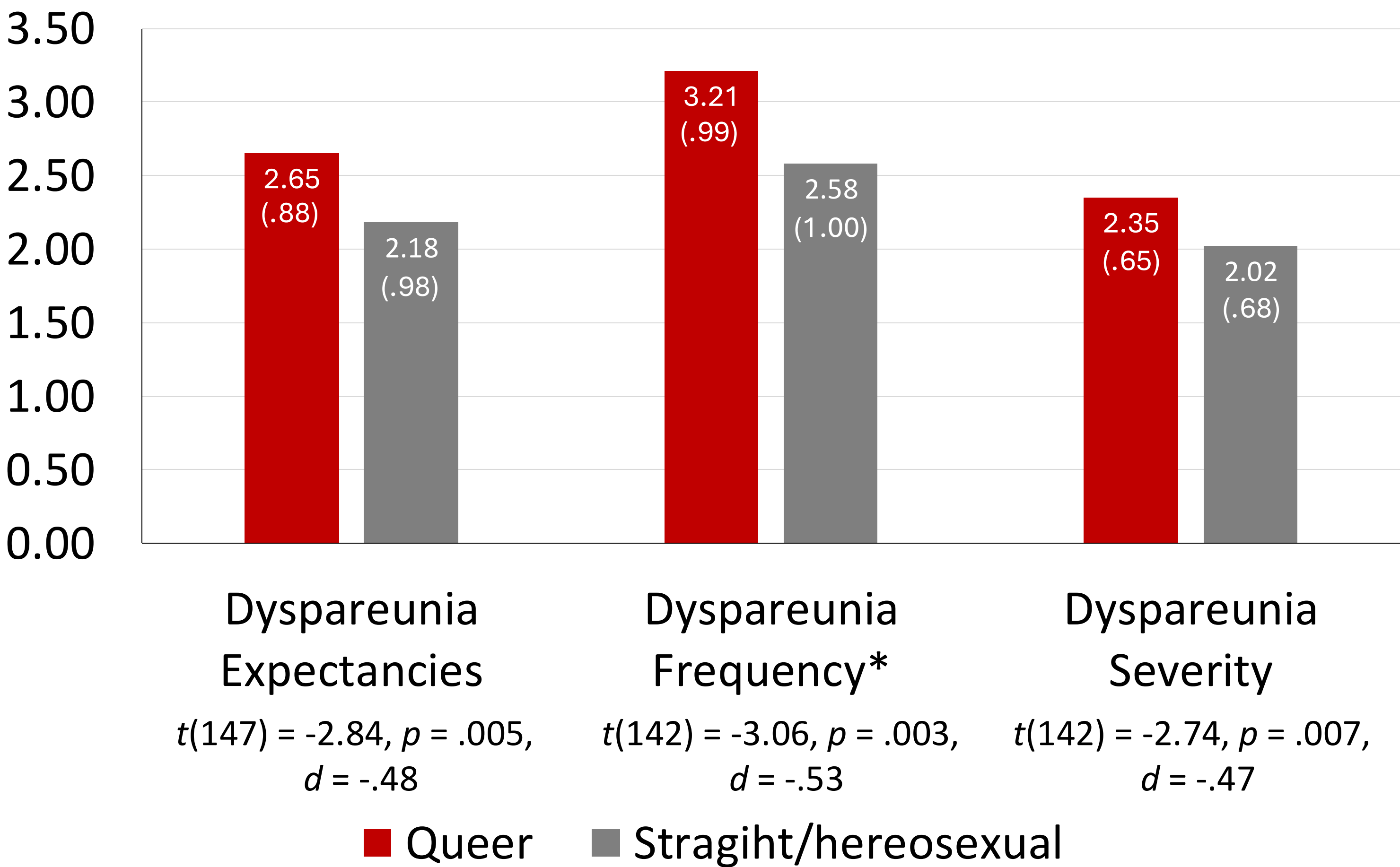
## METHOD

- Data on expectancies for dyspareunia, pain frequency and intensity, as well as sex education history and demographic information were collected via a survey package distributed on Prolific.
- Participants (N = 150, M<sub>age</sub> = 32.4, SD = 10.4) who were assigned female at birth were recruited from Prolific.
- Dyspareunia frequency was assessed with the item, “How often do you experience pain during vaginal, penetrative sex?” on a scale ranging from 1, never to 5, every time
- Dyspareunia severity was assessed with the item, “How severe would you rate the pain you experience during vaginal, penetrative sex?” on a 4-point scale (not at all painful, mildly, moderately, severely painful).
- Dyspareunia expectancies were assessed with the Symptom Response Expectancy Scale (Clemens et al., in preparation). Items are scored on a 4-point scale.

## RESULTS

| Participant Demographics                         | N   | %    |
|--|-----|------|
| Gender   |     |      |
| Women  | 141 | 94.0 |
| Men  | 1   | .7   |
| Non-binary, genderfluid, or gender-nonconforming | 8   | 5.3  |
| Sexual Orientation                               |     |      |
| Asexual  | 4   | 2.7  |
| Bisexual/pansexual                               | 41  | 27.3 |
| Lesbian  | 5   | 3.3  |
| Queer  | 4   | 2.7  |
| Questioning                                      | 3   | 2.0  |
| Straight (Heterosexual)                          | 93  | 62.0 |
| Race   |     |      |
| Asian (South, Southeast, East)                   | 24  | 16.0 |
| Arab or Middle Eastern                           | 1   | .7   |
| Black or African American                        | 20  | 13.3 |
| Latina/e/x                                       | 13  | 8.7  |
| White  | 81  | 54.0 |
| Multiracial                                      | 11  | 7.3  |

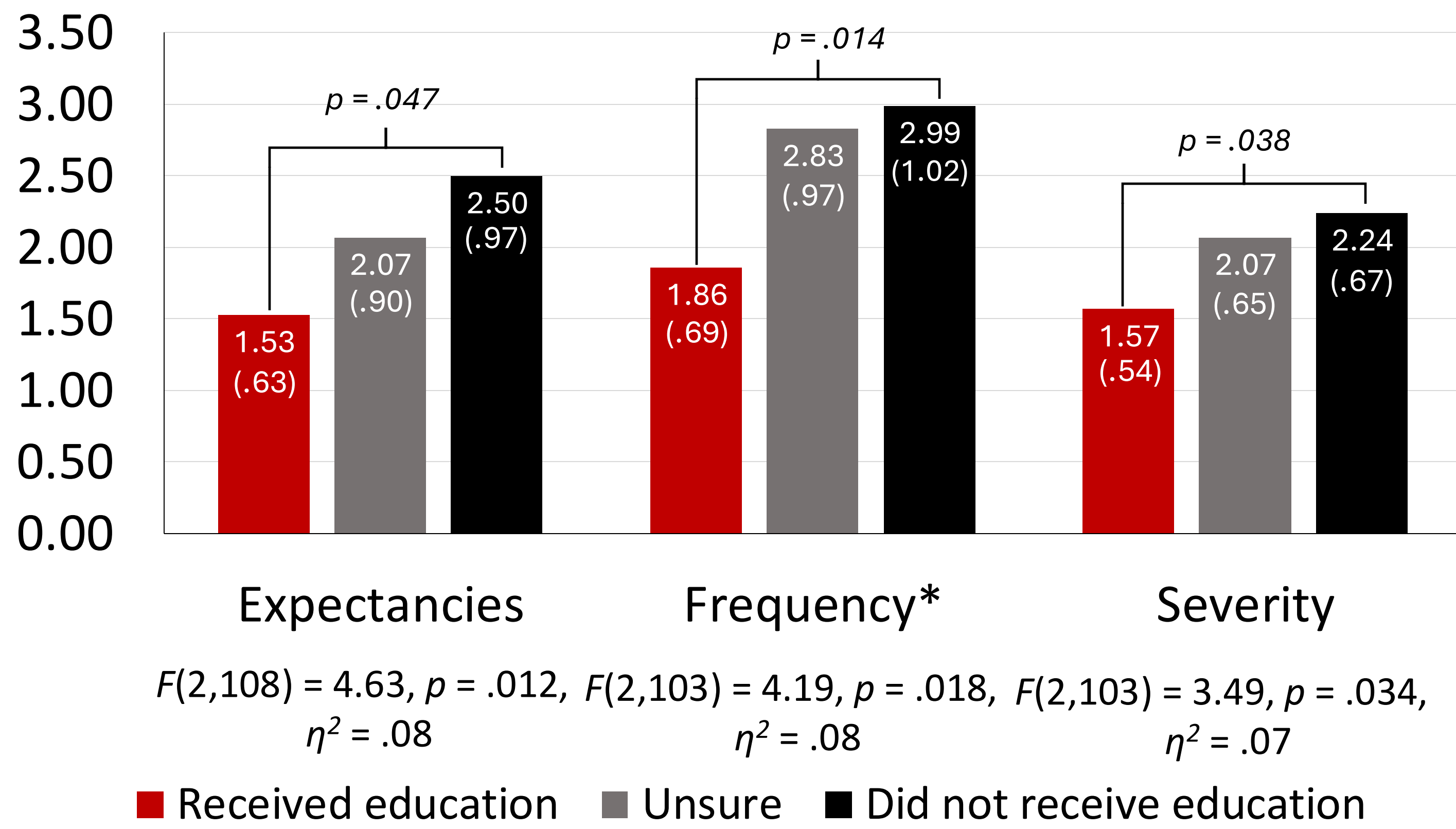
- T-tests indicated that queer individuals reported greater response expectancies for pain reported greater pain frequency/severity during vaginal intercourse.



\*Dyspareunia expectancies and severity were measured on 4-point scales. Dyspareunia frequency was measured on a 5-point scale.

## RESULTS

- No differences or associations emerged for dyspareunia frequency or expectancies by age, race, or education level.
- 110 participants (73.3%) reported receiving formal sex education. Of those participants, 7 (6.4%) reported that their sex education addressed pain during sex.
- One-way ANOVAs indicate significant differences between in dyspareunia expectancies, frequency, and severity depending on if their education had included dyspareunia education. Post hoc tests using a Bonferroni correction indicate that those who received education significantly differed from those who did not for each DV.



## DISCUSSION

- The present study illustrates emerging evidence that response expectancies mirror experiences of dyspareunia, and differences are highlighted between queer and straight women.
- Additionally, this study suggests that educational interventions targeting dyspareunia may be effective.
- Future work should explore targeted health education efforts to address dyspareunia, and to identify best approaches in reducing dyspareunia in queer women.