Hypnotic Susceptibility, Inhibitory Control, and Orgasmic Consistency

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Willingness to relinquish control, as evidenced by hypnotic susceptibility, enjoyment of alcohol, and inability to control thoughts and movements near the end of coitus, was found in this study to be predictive of the consistency with which females reported experiencing orgasm during sexual intercourse.

KEY WORDS: hypnosis; cognitive inhibition; sex; orgasmic consistency.

INTRODUCTION

Both psychoanalytic and social learning theorists have hypothesized that fear of relinquishing control over one's behavior is a central determinant of orgasmic difficulty in females (Fenichel, 1945; Shope, 1968, 1975; Adams, 1966). This study investigates the generality of the fear-of-losing-control construct and determines the extent to which it is predictive of orgasmic difficulty.

METHOD

Subjects

Subjects were selected from a group of women who volunteered to participate in a study of "psychological aspects of female reproductive functioning." The study was advertised at a large southwestern university by means

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of the school newspaper, campus posters, and announcements in psychology classes. About half of those responding came from outside the psychology department.

Using a criterion of 15 coital experiences (Shope, 1968), a total of 87 women were selected, with ages ranging from 19 to 59 (median age = 23.9). All women had at least a high school level of education, with 71.1% being current undergraduate students and 26.4% current graduate students. About half were married or had been married at one time. The median reported age for first experienced coitus was 17.4, with a range of 13 to 24. Of the women in this study, 78% rated coital orgasm as important; 83% reported having intercourse at least once a month; and 72% reported having experienced coitus over 100 times. Nearly all the women (98%) reported becoming aroused during coitus, with 80% reporting very strong arousal.

Materials

Information on demographics, sexual history, attitudes, and willingness to relinquish control in specified social settings was obtained through a 40-item Sexual Behavior Questionnaire. Among the items were questions on the ability to control one's thoughts and movements during coitus, which Shope (1968, 1975) found differentiated significantly between orgasmic and nonorgasmic women. Orgasmic consistency was determined by responses to the following question: "Circle the number which best completes the following question as it applies to you: During coitus I experience orgasm... (1) never (2) rarely (3) occasionally (4) frequently (5) nearly always (6) always." High consistency was defined as a score of 4 or more, while low consistency was defined as a score of 3 or less. Willingness to relinquish control was further assessed by means of the Harvard Group Hypnotic Susceptibility Scale, Form A (Shor and Orne, 1963). Hypnotic susceptibility has been found to be related to the ability to suspend effortful, controlled cognitive processes (Hilgard, 1974). A "fall-back" task was also given. Stevens (1971) suggests that falling back into another person's arms requires placing responsibility for personal safety in the control of another; hence, a controlling attitude might manifest itself as hesitation or anxious verbalization on the fall-back task.

Procedure

The Harvard Group Scale of Hypnotic Susceptibility and the Sexual Behavior Questionnaire were administered in small groups of 15 or less. While answering the Sexual Behavior Questionnaire, the women were taken in-