

Abstract

This project examined the role of preferred and actual sexual scripts in women's physiological and subjective sexual arousal responses. Sexual scripts provide a framework around which people organize their sexual behavior, sexual fantasies and sexual relationships (Gagnon, Rosen & Leiblum, 1982). While sexual scripts are utilized in sex therapy, little empirical research has been conducted on the relationship between preferred sexual scripts and the sexual scripts that are acted out with a partner. We hypothesized that greater congruency between sexual scripts and sexual behavior would predict greater sexual arousal both in the laboratory and with a partner.

Female participants completed self-report questionnaires on preferred power dynamics and sexual functioning. Physiological and subjective sexual arousal was measured continuously during exposure to sexual videos portraying sexually dominant and submissive women. Participants later completed event logs about their sexual arousal, sexual satisfaction, and the power dynamic during five partnered sexual activities.

Preliminary analyses suggest that participants who reported a preference for a sexual power differential showed greater subjective arousal than the control group during both the dominant and submissive films. Specifically, participants in the submissive group showed higher subjective arousal during the submissive video than both the dominant and control groups. Physiological sexual arousal was not significantly different between groups. While analysis is still ongoing, these results suggest a relationship between sexual preferences and subjective sexual arousal, a finding that can aid in the development of efficacious clinical sex therapies for sexual arousal dysfunction. Moreover, these results suggest the crucial role of the subjective experience during sexual arousal and how, even if physiological sexual responses may not differ between women, individual differences in sexual preferences may lead some women to interpret their physiological sexual responses more strongly than women with different sexual preferences.