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Hysterical Personality and Sexual Adjustment, Attitudes and Behaviour*

H. J. EYSENCK

INTRODUCTION

Recent empirical studies of the relation between personality, on the one hand, and sexual behaviour and attitudes on the other, have shown that N (neuroticism) is negatively related to overt interpersonal sexual behaviour, while E (extraversion) is positively related to such behaviour (Eysenck, 1971a). High N scorers, while thus less active sexually than low N scorers, nevertheless showed strong evidence of sexual desire (Eysenck, 1971b, 1971c); extraverts also showed strong positive attitudes to promiscuous and biologically-oriented sexual behaviour. These results suggest that it would be interesting to study the behaviour and attitudes of subjects combining high N and high E scores; theoretically one would expect strong conflicts to arise between the positive attitudes and behaviours characteristic of high extraversion, and the negative behaviour patterns and the guilt feelings attending sexual practices characteristic of high neuroticism. According to Eysenck's (1947, 1957, 1967) theory, well supported by several empirical studies, hysterics tend to be found in the high N, high E quadrant of the space generated by these two factors, and psychiatric opinion does indeed recognize the existence of this postulated conflict in hysteric patients. This is well expressed in Lewis's phrase characterizing hysterics as "coquettish and frigid" (1956). Chodoff and Lyons mention both the lasciviousness, sexualization of all non-sexual relations, "coquetry, and provocativeness" of the hysteric, as well as his "sexual frigidity, intense fear of sexuality and failure of the sex impulse to develop toward its goal". O'Neill and Kempler (1969) and Jordan and Kempler (1970) have published experimental studies which make use of the concept of approach-avoidance conflict; this fits in well with our scheme. The N component raises the avoidance gradi-

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ent above the average, and the E component raises the approach gradient above the average; it follows from the general theory of approach-avoidance behaviour that this should exacerbate the conflict.

Psychiatric interpretations suffer from certain weaknesses which necessitate more formal testing of such hypotheses. It is well known that diagnoses such as "hysteria" are highly unreliable (Eysenck, 1968); furthermore, the very diagnosis may be contaminated by the sexual attitudes and behaviour of the patient to be diagnosed! Given the diagnosis, the psychiatrist may look particularly closely at sexual behaviours and attitudes which might be said to agree with expectation; sexual conflicts in patients otherwise diagnosed may escape notice more easily. Last, behaviours not overtly sexual may easily be "interpreted" as such in line with theory and expectation. For these reasons, we consider that psychiatric observations such as those quoted above can at best be used as suggestions for research; they do not constitute proof for the hypothesis outlined. The study reported in this paper attempts to subject that theory to an empirical test, using normal university students with high N—high E scores as subjects.

DESIGN OF THE STUDY

Some 800 unmarried university students, aged between 18 and 22, were administered two sex questionnaires and a personality inventory; half the students were male, half female. All replies were completely anonymous. The personality inventory was a slightly modified form of the Eysenck Personality Inventory (Eysenck & Eysenck, 1965); the modifications are too slight to make any appreciable difference to the interpretation of the N and E scores obtained. The sex inventories used have been described in detail elsewhere (Eysenck, 1971a, 1971b). The first described a series of 19 types of sexual behaviours, from kissing through petting and intercourse to perversions; for each behaviour the subject had to indicate whether he or she had ever indulged in it. The second inventory contained 98 questions regarding attitudes to various sexual matters; these questions can be answered "Yes", "?", or "No", with occasional "True" and "False" alternatives used instead where the sense of the answer would otherwise not be clear. These questions were intercorrelated and the resulting matrix analysed; they fell into 14 clear-cut factors relating to such general issues as pre-marital sex, sexual repression, sexual curiosity, sexual guilt feelings, sexual hostility, etc. These oblique (correlated) factors

in turn gave rise to two independent super-factors, sexual pathology and sexual libido (drive).

For the purpose of the present analysis, 50 male and 50 female subjects were selected on the basis of their extraversion and neuroticism scores; the method of choice was essentially analogous to plotting the position of each subject on a two-dimensional scatter diagram in relation to E and N, drawing a line at 45° to these two coordinates, and moving a ruler parallel to this resulting line until it cut off roughly 50 high N—high E subjects who then formed the experimental population. This group will be called the “hysterics”, although of course these are non-pathological university students not clinically so diagnosed; the term is used merely for the convenience of designating the members of this group by a single word, and implies the correctness of the theory linking this combination of personality traits with predisposition to hysterical personality and symptoms. A control group was created in exactly the same manner, made up of 50 male and 50 female subjects having low N—low E scores, i.e. made up of stable introverts. Comparisons between the endorsements of the various items in the two questionnaires will constitute the main content of this paper. “Hysterics” will be designated “H,” controls “C” in the various Tables.

RESULTS

Results for the sexual activities inventory are given in Table 1. It will be seen that for both men and women, hysterics exceed controls in the amount of sexual activity shown for every item, although not all the differences are statistically significant. Item 5 (sexual intercourse) gives significant differences for both sexes; male hysterics report having had intercourse in 86% of the cases, male controls in only 62%. For females the figures are 50% and 24% respectively. Thus as far as actual performance is concerned, there is no doubt that hysterics show stronger sexual tendencies than controls.

Results for the attitudes inventory will be given in turn for each item which by chi square showed significant differences between the two groups at the .05 level or better; each item will be given the number it has in the original questionnaire (Eysenck, 1971b). Males and females tended to agree on most items, but more items are significant for the females than for the males (27 vs. 19); this may be in accord with the belief that hysteria is more characteristic of women. Items are

TABLE 1

Item:	M _H	M _C	F _H	F _C
1. One minute continuous lip kissing	98%	90%	96%	78%*
2. Manual manipulation of male genitals, over clothes, clothes, by female.	70%	66%	70%	52%
3. Kissing nipples of female breasts.	88%	82%	74%	50%*
4. Oral contact with female genitals.	44%	34%	44%	32%
5. Sexual intercourse, face to face.	86%	62%*	50%	24%*
6. Manual fondling of female breasts, over clothes.	98%	88%	82%	68%
7. Oral contact with male genitals by female.	48%	38%	36%	32%
8. Manipulation of male genitals to ejaculation, by female.	58%	54%	64%	40%*
9. Manipulation of female breasts, under clothes.	96%	86%	78%	60%
10. Manipulation of male genitals, under clothes, by female.	68%	62%	78%	52%
11. Sexual intercourse, man behind woman.	30%	26%	24%	16%
12. Manipulation of female genitals, over clothes.	84%	74%	74%	58%
13. Manipulation of female genitals to massive secretions.	76%	64%	46%	34%
14. Mutual oral-genital contact to mutual orgasm.	26%	10%	6%	12%
15. Mutual manipulation of female genitals, under clothes.	86%	72%	68%	52%
16. Mutual manual fondling of genitals.	84%	66%*	72%	48%*
17. Oral contact with male genitals to ejaculation, by female.	32%	16%	18%	12%
18. Mutual manual fondling of genitals to mutual orgasm.	52%	44%	36%	24%
19. Mutual oral-genital contact.	32%	18%	28%	20%

Frequency of 19 different sexual acts performed by male and female Hysterics and Controls. Significant differences between H and C groups are asterisked.

given roughly in order of degree of significance; in view of the difference in significance between the sexes it is impossible to do this other than roughly.

The details are given in Table 2. Listed there are the number of each item, the actual wording of each item, the proportion of "Yes" answers for the four groups (male hysterics, male controls, female hysterics, female controls), chi square values for men and women, and P values for men and women. It should be noted that the proportion of "Yes" answers given in the Table does not give a perfect picture of the differences observed, as it leaves out the "?" responses. Item 44 is a good if extreme example of this. As Table 2 shows, female hysterics agree significantly less frequently with the statement "The thought of a sex orgy is disgusting to me", but the males show almost no dif-

ference. Yet the chi square is higher for men; this is due to the fact that if we combine "Yes" and "?" answers the proportions are 24% and 42%. All this has of course been kept in mind when discussing the results shown in Table 2; fuller results have not been given in order to save space.

Some of the items showing significant differences between hysterics and controls are irrelevant to our hypothesis, and will not be discussed; item 31 (I have many friends of the opposite sex) is an example. The rest may be divided into two groups; those demonstrating the excessive sexuality of the hysterics, and those showing their excessive inhibitions and restraints. (The term "excessive" is here used simply as a comparison with the control group; no absolute judgment is intended). Let us consider first of all the items demonstrating the hysteric's excessive sexuality. Hysterics consider it all right to seduce a person old enough to know what they are doing; they wouldn't be bothered if the person they married were not a virgin; they consider impersonal sex quite satisfactory; they do not think only rarely about sex; they have at times been afraid of themselves for what they might do sexually; they are not disgusted by the thought of a sex orgy and would accept an invitation to one; if they loved a person, they could do anything with them; sexual feelings sometimes overpower them; sex thoughts drive them almost crazy; they have been involved in more than one sex affair at the same time; buttocks excite them, and they also get excited when touching a woman's breasts; they would like intercourse very frequently; they have been bothered by perverted thoughts; they do not mind self-relief; they think about sex almost every day, and could get sexually excited at any time of the day or night; when they get excited, they can think of nothing but satisfaction; they do not mind "sex before marriage". In addition they have had many dates.

This pattern of answers clearly supports the view of hysterics as overwhelmingly sex-oriented, with an almost unbearable degree of tension and sexual excitement induced through a very strong libido. Considerations of virginity, of pre-marital chastity, of the taboo on seduction clearly carry no weight with hysterics; they seem little inclined to take seriously these social taboos. The picture might be that of a happy philanderer, but the general impression conveyed by these statements is rather that of an addict hooked on his favourite activity and unable to escape from it. This feeling is borne out by the second

TABLE 2

Item No.	Content of Item	Proportion of "yes" answers (per cent)				chi _M ²	chi _F ²	P _M	P _F
		M _H	M _C	F _H	F _C				
4	All in all I am satisfied with my sex life	24	50	40	68	7.42	17.55	.05	.001
26	It wouldn't bother me if the person I married were not a virgin	62	66	88	52	.28	15.83	NS	.001
79	It is all right to seduce a person who is old enough to know what they are doing	76	76	52	18	—	13.88	NS	.001
25	I have felt guilty about sex experiences	32	18	62	20	2.79	18.88	NS	.001
48	My conscience bothers me too much	26	10	42	14	9.36	12.73	.01	.01
44	The thought of a sex orgy is disgusting to me	22	20	48	72	9.59	8.32	.01	.02
60	I worry a lot about sex	42	10	24	4	13.61	8.36	.01	.02
9	If I loved a person I would do anything with them	68	38	58	32	9.81	7.45	.01	.05
2	Sex without love ("impersonal sex") is highly unsatisfactory	44	40	72	82	.43	12.25	NS	.01
6	I think only rarely about sex	4	6	4	24	1.20	10.12	NS	.01
29	At times I have been afraid of myself for what I might do sexually	26	6	44	14	7.50	11.12	.05	.01
31	I have many friends of the opposite sex	80	56	96	72	6.62	11.17	.05	.01
50	Sometimes sexual feelings overpower me	36	16	36	12	5.20	9.47	NS	.01
52	Sex thoughts drive me almost crazy	16	0	2	0	8.73	1.33	.02	NS
41	I think about sex almost every day	94	74	68	38	7.52	9.03	.05	.02
77	I have been involved in more than one sex affair at the same time	44	14	20	8	10.93	3.00	.01	NS
80	Do you ever feel hostile to your sex partner?	48	30	56	24	3.42	10.95	NS	.01
82	Buttocks excite me	46	34	16	4	2.90	12.64	NS	.01
95	Would like frequent intercourse (f and g)	54	40	40	12	4.52	24.14	NS	.01
94	Would accept invitation to an orgy	66	44	10	2	5.75	1.60	.02	NS
86	Decisions about abortion should be the concern of no-one but the woman concerned	60	48	52	26	1.45	8.35	NS	.02
63	Sometimes thinking about sex makes me nervous	26	8	18	14	8.41	5.81	.02	NS
65	Perverted thoughts have sometimes bothered me	40	18	20	16	8.18	2.35	.02	NS
73	Did you ever feel like humiliating your sex partner?	32	12	18	2	5.90	9.02	NS	.02
75	Self-relief is not dangerous so long as it is done in a healthy fashion	82	78	76	38	1.05	9.14	NS	.02
39	I could get sexually excited at any time of the day or night	90	84	60	56	.91	7.79	NS	.02
23	I never had many dates	28	40	16	40	2.60	7.87	NS	.02
76	I get very excited when touching a woman's breasts (Female version: when men touch my breasts)	52	62	48	24	1.79	6.40	NS	.05
42	One should not experiment with sex before marriage	6	8	16	34	2.04	6.25	NS	.05
53	When I get excited I can think of nothing else but satisfaction	34	12	14	6	7.05	2.93	.05	NS

group of items. Hysterics may be successful in their sexual activities, but they are not happy; one of the most significant differences between them and the controls appears in the item "All in all I am satisfied with my sex life", which shows controls much happier than the hysterics. Other items which bear this neurotic overtone out are the following: Hysterics have felt guilty about sex experiences; their conscience bothers them too much; they worry a lot about sex; they have felt hostile to their sex partners, and felt like humiliating them; sometimes thinking about sex makes them nervous. In other words, inhibitory forces are almost as strong as the libidinal ones, thus creating conflict which leads to unhappiness and dissatisfaction. Within the limits of the data collected to test the hypothesis of hysterical conflict, our results seem to support the theory.

DISCUSSION

Our comparison of the sexual attitudes and behaviours of "hysterical personalities" (high N—high E scorers) with those of stable introverts (low N—low E scorers) demonstrates clearly that the former are far more active sexually, have much stronger libidinal drives, are more excited by sexual stimuli, pay less regard to social taboos on sexual matters, and are more strongly affected by perverted thoughts (as well as carrying on perverted activities more frequently). They also, however, have strong inhibitions which produce guilt feelings, worries, nervousness, and trouble with their conscience. All in all, the resulting conflict creates an overwhelming dissatisfaction with their sex lives, very much as prognosticated in the psychiatric literature on "hysteria". Our data thus support the traditional account in this respect; they would also seem to support the writer's theory linking hysterical personality with the combination of high N and high E (Eysenck, 1947). Positive results in our study would be unlikely unless both hypotheses were along the right lines, although of course their truth cannot be established in any absolute sense by a single experiment. Further work along these lines, perhaps including other social, age and national groups, would seem to be of some interest.

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