

THE PERSONALITY AND SEXUAL PREFERENCES OF SADOMASOCHISTIC WOMEN

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Summary—Eighty-seven women who enjoyed using sadomasochistic components in their sexual life completed the Eysenck Personality Questionnaire, a slightly modified version of the Wilson Sexual Fantasy Questionnaire and demographic questionnaires exploring the sadomasochistic and other features of their sexual lifestyle, the results being compared with those from a sample of 50 women of conventional sexual lifestyle. Results showed that sadomasochistic females score significantly higher on psychoticism and extraversion and lower on neuroticism than control women. They were in general also more sexually active, both in fantasy and activity terms.

INTRODUCTION

In Gosselin and Wilson (1980) a brief study of a small number of sadomasochistically-inclined women scored higher on extraversion and psychoticism and lower on neuroticism in Eysenckian terms than both a sample of control females and a larger sample of sadomasochistically-inclined males. Their sexual life also appeared to be more active and diverse than that of the female control sample. Eysenck (1971, 1972) had hypothesised on the basis of reviewed evidence that extraversion would be associated with an active and variform sexual life, though the data involved referred more often to males than to females. Schenk and Pfrang (1986) showed this to be more easily demonstrable where young unmarried men were concerned. It was therefore decided to extend the original Gosselin and Wilson study to a larger sample of females who enjoyed using sadomasochistic rituals in their sexual lives.

In this context, however, it may be necessary to define the term 'sadomasochism' (or 's/m', as it will be termed henceforth) and its reference to the females taking part in this study. S/m is often defined in the psychological literature as the giving or receiving of pain as a means of achieving sexual pleasure. The subculture from whom the present sample was drawn, however, regard s/m as any ritual in which one person yields entirely to the desires (sexual or otherwise) of another. The individual who 'submits' to the dominance of his or her partner is usually a willing participant in the ritual concerned, and the dominant partner seldom does anything that the submissive partner does not really want or can fairly easily be persuaded to accept. Pain may or may not be involved: in all situations, however, the ritual is a contract between two (or sometimes more) people designed to produce a maximum of sexual pleasure, and those taking part in the present study were therefore volunteers culled from s/m subcultures in the U.K., Europe, America and Scandinavia on the basis that they enjoyed s/m fantasies and/or activities either as the dominant or as the submissive partner.

METHOD

The Eysenck Personality Questionnaire (EPQ; Eysenck & Eysenck, 1975) and the Wilson Sexual Fantasy Questionnaire (WSFQ; Wilson, 1988) as well as a tailor-made questionnaire relating to sadomasochistic activities were distributed within the U.K. subculture by personal recommendation and by advertisement in a fetish and s/m magazine of trusted repute and relevant controlled circulation. The latter produced volunteer participants from Holland, Germany, Spain, Scandinavia and the U.S.A. as well as U.K. responses: single-country responses were nevertheless too small in number to permit separate analysis.

Data from the control sample were already available from Gosselin and Wilson (1980): the samples were therefore compared directly by *t*-test analysis for all but the demographic

variables, and Pearson correlations between all variables within the experimental group were also calculated.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results of the *t*-test analyses, plus sample means for the EPQ and WSFQ variables are shown in Tables 1 and 2; results for the demographic variables are given in Tables 3 and 4, the variable description and questionnaire instructions being given to aid interpretation where necessary. Because of the large correlation network involved, only the significant correlations of interest are reported; these are set out in Table 5.

Inspection of the means for the demographic variables in Tables 3 and 4 provide a flavour of the type of woman figuring in the present study. Sadomasochistic thoughts and behaviour clearly figure quite largely in her sex life, and whilst she is more often submissive than dominant (i.e. 'obeys' rather than 'commands' in the rituals in which she is involved), she can often change from one role to another—though a correlation of 0.69 ($P < 0.0001$) between her submissiveness and her difficulty in switching roles shows that the more submissive she is by nature, the harder it is for her to take a dominant role. This group seems more heterosexually inclined than Spengler's (1977) group of s/m-inclined males (30% heterosexuals, 38% homosexual, 31% bisexual by self-classification), yet from the time she has been in the s/m 'scene' it seems likely that the sadomasochistically-oriented woman is enjoying herself there, especially if her partner shares her enjoyment, and that her enjoyment is sexual in nature as much as for the other reasons cited. It is also clear that the tentative findings in our earlier research (Gosselin & Wilson, 1980) have been confirmed in that the sadomasochistic women emerge as more extraverted, stable and higher in psychoticism than control women, and are also lower on the Lie (dissimulation) Scale. In all of these respects, our sample of s/m-oriented women appear more sexually adventurous than control women. However, this is not to say that they do not possess many distinctive female features (physical as well as psychological) which make them attractive to male partners, and the majority are predominantly heterosexual (Table 4). The elevated scores of the s/m women on Item 8 of the WSFQ (Homosexual/lesbian activity) is often indicative of a general exploratory tendency rather than a lesbian preference overall. Indeed, the Edwardian term 'adventuress' seems to describe this type of woman quite accurately. Certainly, the high P scores by this group should not necessarily be taken as indicative of clinically significant levels of psychoticism.

Another point to notice is that although our s/m women are non-conformist and show considerable initiative in expressing their high sexual drives, they are not especially enamoured of feminism as a philosophy. Several reasons may be hypothesised for this: the women may feel that feminists would disapprove of their activities as catering for male fantasy and playing games on male terms; alternatively, it may be that they do not object to being exploited by men because of the socio-sexual (and sometimes financial) rewards involved; again, it may be that they do not feel themselves threatened by the sort of male behaviour and thought-patterns which often militate women towards the feminist viewpoint.

In summary—and in conversation with a number of the Ss studied—it appears that these s/m women are neither (as male pornography often depicts them) lesbians nor despisers of men to any appreciable extent. Rather, they participate with their partners (and sometimes clients) in sexual rituals that they merely find mutually pleasurable.

Results on the SFQ show that the s/m women differ from controls not just with respect to s/m fantasies but also on exploratory and impersonal themes. Only as regards to intimate themes are the

Table 1. Comparison between groups on the Eysenck Personality Questionnaire

EPQ variable	Experimental group. mean score	Control group. mean score	Significance of difference ($P <$)
Psychoticism	5.09 (2.58)	2.28 (2.20)	0.005
Extraversion	15.33 (4.26)	11.97 (5.00)	0.005
Neuroticism	10.78 (5.66)	12.57 (5.30)	0.05
Lie scale	6.92 (3.69)	8.84 (4.10)	0.005

All significances are for a 1-tailed hypothesis.

Table 2. Comparison between groups on the modified WSFQ questionnaire

		Experimental group		Control group		Significance ($P <$)	
		F	A	F	A	F	A
(1)	Making love out of doors in a romantic setting, e.g. field of flowers, beach at night	1.54 (1.36)	1.69 (1.14)	1.60 (1.02)	1.89 (1.55)	NS	NS
(2)	Having intercourse with a loved partner	2.93 (1.80)	4.01 (1.30)	2.98 (1.33)	4.37 (1.18)	NS	NS
(3)	Intercourse with an anonymous stranger or with someone you have not had sex with	2.62 (1.78)	1.47 (1.52)	1.61 (1.39)	0.56 (1.13)	0.005	0.005
(4)	Sex with two other people	2.24 (1.67)	1.77 (1.39)	0.81 (0.94)	0.22 (0.58)	0.005	0.005
(5)	Participating in an orgy	1.39 (1.46)	1.08 (1.36)	0.09 (0.87)	0.07 (0.27)	0.005	0.005
(6)	Being forced to do something	2.56 (1.87)	2.12 (1.60)	1.00 (1.38)	0.67 (1.04)	0.005	0.005
(7)	Forcing someone to do something	2.14 (1.79)	2.22 (1.83)	0.60 (1.20)	0.44 (0.95)	0.005	0.005
(8)	Homosexual/lesbian activity	2.24 (1.95)	2.17 (1.81)	0.54 (0.87)	0.22 (0.97)	0.005	0.005
(9)	Receiving oral sex	2.61 (1.76)	3.70 (1.30)	1.73 (1.78)	3.26 (1.83)	0.005	NS
(10)	Giving oral sex	2.58 (1.75)	3.54 (1.42)	1.60 (1.79)	3.11 (1.76)	0.005	NS
(11)	Watching other have sex	1.63 (1.58)	2.02 (1.45)	0.83 (1.10)	0.15 (0.36)	0.005	0.005
(12)	Whipping or spanking someone	2.21 (1.77)	2.69 (1.75)	0.15 (0.73)	0.33 (0.83)	0.005	0.005
(13)	Being whipped or spanked	2.61 (1.88)	2.63 (1.62)	0.23 (0.83)	0.15 (0.36)	0.005	0.005
(14)	Taking someone's clothes off	1.84 (1.52)	2.70 (1.59)	1.60 (1.45)	3.30 (1.43)	NS	0.01*
(15)	Having your clothes taken off	2.26 (1.74)	2.90 (1.55)	1.77 (1.50)	3.56 (1.31)	NS	0.01*
(16)	Making love elsewhere than bedroom (e.g. kitchen, bathroom)	2.67 (1.64)	3.23 (1.27)	2.00 (1.74)	3.41 (1.08)	0.025	NS
(17)	Being excited by materials or clothing (e.g. rubber, leather etc.)	2.69 (1.77)	3.28 (1.66)	0.25 (0.51)	0.56 (0.93)	0.005	0.005
(18)	Hurting a partner	1.61 (1.69)	2.10 (1.87)	0.46 (1.15)	0.41 (1.01)	0.005	0.005
(19)	Being hurt by a partner	2.23 (1.80)	2.29 (1.68)	0.40 (0.74)	0.59 (1.18)	0.005	0.005
(20)	Mate-swapping	0.81 (1.20)	0.84 (1.19)	0.42 (1.10)	0.07 (0.38)	NS	0.005
(21)	Activities concerned with urination, etc.	1.08 (1.42)	1.40 (1.63)	0.17 (0.83)	0.04 (0.19)	0.005	0.005
(22)	Being tied up	2.89 (1.71)	2.67 (1.54)	0.30 (1.17)	0.15 (0.46)	0.005	0.005
(23)	Tying someone up	2.16 (1.72)	2.44 (1.76)	0.27 (0.92)	0.04 (0.19)	0.005	0.005
(24)	Having incestuous sexual relations	0.48 (1.18)	0.20 (0.61)	0.17 (0.83)	0.00 (0.00)	NS	0.025
(25)	Exposing oneself provocatively	2.20 (1.77)	2.32 (1.50)	0.92 (1.38)	1.14 (1.68)	0.005	0.005
(26)	Transvestism (wearing clothes of the opposite sex)	0.60 (1.32)	0.69 (1.27)	0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)	0.005	0.005
(27)	Being promiscuous	1.69 (1.79)	1.85 (1.62)	1.06 (1.23)	1.07 (1.44)	0.025	0.01
(28)	Having sex with someone much younger than yourself	1.15 (1.57)	1.14 (1.62)	0.69 (1.08)	0.78 (1.34)	NS	NS
(29)	Having sex with someone much older than yourself	1.25 (1.69)	1.58 (1.57)	0.42 (0.73)	0.74 (1.29)	0.005	0.005
(30)	Being much sought after by the opposite sex	2.45 (1.87)	2.45 (1.73)	1.75 (1.38)	2.85 (1.68)	0.025	NS
(31)	Being seduced as an 'innocent'	1.66 (1.88)	1.15 (1.39)	0.63 (1.23)	0.67 (1.14)	0.005	0.025
(32)	Seducing an 'innocent'	1.15 (1.51)	0.91 (1.27)	0.54 (0.95)	0.41 (1.08)	0.01	0.025
(33)	Being embarrassed by failure of sexual performance	0.17 (0.07)	0.52 (0.82)	0.19 (0.55)	1.11 (1.31)	NS	0.005*
(34)	Using objects for stimulation (e.g. vibrators, candles)	2.16 (1.78)	3.01 (1.62)	0.52 (0.87)	1.30 (1.61)	0.005	0.005
(35)	Being masturbated to orgasm by a partner	2.47 (1.66)	3.39 (1.46)	1.69 (1.72)	3.33 (1.66)	0.005	NS
(36)	Looking at obscene pictures or films	1.85 (1.70)	3.14 (1.38)	0.75 (1.04)	1.81 (1.47)	0.005	0.005
(37)	Kissing passionately	2.46 (1.91)	3.62 (1.31)	2.10 (1.86)	4.30 (1.27)	NS	0.025*
Fantasy summation:		Experimental		Control			
	Intimate themes (1, 2, 9, 10, 14, 15, 16, 35, 37):		18.74		15.20		
	Exploratory themes (4, 5, 8, 20, 24, 27, 30, 31, 32):		14.11		4.44		
	Impersonal themes (3, 11, 17, 21, 28, 29, 33, 34, 36):		14.60		2.36		
	Sadomasochistic themes (6, 7, 12, 13, 18, 19, 22, 23, 25, 26):		16.09		3.29		
	Total:		63.54		25.29		

All significances are for a 1-tailed hypothesis.

*Trend opposite from that hypothesised (i.e. control women higher).

two groups similar. This finding is also consistent with that for variant men reported by Gosselin and Wilson (1980).

Finally, the correlations between personality variables and the specific fantasy and activity items set out in Table 5 are worthy of closer examination:

P seems to be associated in activity terms (and to some extent in fantasy) with an aggressive and impersonal pattern of behaviour, perhaps symbolic of the less pleasant aspects of chauvinist male

Table 3. Comparison between groups on general sexual situation

	Experimental group	Control group	Significance ($P <$)
(1) Relationship with steady partner	70%	81%	NS
(2) Satisfaction with steady partner	3.61 (1.34)	3.23 (1.20)	NS
(3) General satisfaction with sex life	3.83 (4.08)	3.15 (1.00)	NS
(4) Number of orgasms per week (0-8+)	3.51 (4.20)	2.48 (1.30)	NS
(5) Self-rating of sex drive	4.21 (5.08)	3.56 (0.80)	NS
(6) Number of past/present sexual partners (0-50)	ca 2.5	ca 6	0.01
(7) Permissiveness of upbringing	2.72 (4.23)	2.22 (1.00)	NS
(8) Self-rating of freedom from sexual inhibition	4.53 (3.98)	3.55 (1.00)	NS
(9) Frequency of corporal punishment in childhood	2.82 (4.19)	2.62 (1.00)	NS

sexuality. This pattern is especially interesting in that it is displayed in a sample of women, perhaps illustrating the influence of the high levels of testosterone believed to be associated with psychoticism (Eysenck & Eysenck, 1976; Ellis, 1986) rather than the inevitable result of being male.

E seems associated in both activity and fantasy terms with what one might call 'sex fun' items such as might be found in an expression of the *ludus* principle described by Lee (1976). The pattern seems to categorise well the sexual attributes of extraversion in a collection of harmless, outgoing sexual games.

N seems to relate mostly to submissiveness. However, since the N scale comprises a set of positively scored items it is possible that this correlation arises because of a general tendency in this group to endorse socially undesirable items. In this connection, it is worth noting that L, often regarded as being a measure of social conventionality, correlates negatively with 85% of all the WSFQ items, whether fantasy or activity. The low mean score of our s/m women on this scale is further confirmation of the disregard for conventional thought and behaviour that this type of woman possesses—a quality which doubtless additionally endears her to the partners in whose company she moves.

Our major finding that these s/m-oriented women show the high psychoticism, low neuroticism and high libido traditionally associated with a stereotypic 'male' image does not answer the question of how they came to be like this. It would be interesting to investigate the possibility that high levels of testosterone, especially during prenatal development, are involved, since these have been implicated in transsexual and lesbian women and women showing other 'macho' characteristics such as competitiveness and criminality (Wilson, 1989). This is not to say that the behaviour

Table 4. Details of s/m situation amongst experimental group

		Percent of sample
(1) Does your sex life in general involve s/m activities	a) Only sometimes?	28
	b) Fairly often?	39
	c) Nearly always?	32
(2) In your s/m activities, do you prefer to be	a) Mostly or totally dominant?	41
	b) Mostly or totally submissive?	57
(3) Can you switch dominant/submissive roles	a) Very easily?	20
	b) Fairly easily?	43
	c) With difficulty or not at all?	37
(4) Is your sexual orientation	a) Totally or largely heterosexual?	56
	b) Totally or largely bisexual?	25
	c) Totally or largely lesbian?	16
(5) How long have you been in the s/m 'scene'?	a) Less than three years?	28
	b) Three to six years?	36
	c) More than six years?	34
(6) Do you take on your s/m role	a) Mostly for your own enjoyment?	26
	b) Equally for you and your partner's enjoyment?	64
	c) Mostly for your partner's enjoyment?	7
(7) What type of enjoyment do you get out of s/m? (Choose only the most important answer)	a) A sexual turn-on	53
	b) A mental 'high'	20
	c) A sense of power	20
	d) A thrill from your partner's enjoyment	6
(8) Deep down, do you agree with the feminist way of thinking	a) Not at all	13
	b) To a small extent	34
	c) To a great extent	37
	d) Totally	13

Table 5. Significant correlations between EPQ variables and WSFQ variables, experimental group

		Correlation	Significance ($P <$)	
P correlates with fantasies of	Seducing an 'innocent'	0.29	0.01	
	Sex with an older person	0.28	0.05	
	Hurting a partner	0.25	0.05	
	Participating in an orgy	0.25	0.05	
	and with the activities of	Seducing an 'innocent'	0.39	0.0005
		Being seduced as an 'innocent'	0.34	0.005
		Wearing male clothes	0.32	0.005
		Sex with a stranger or untried partner	0.31	0.005
		Hurting a partner	0.29	0.01
		Total activity output	0.29	0.01
		Sex with two other people	0.25	0.05
		Participating in an orgy	0.22	0.05
	E correlates with fantasies of	Receiving oral sex	0.36	0.001
Being seduced as an 'innocent'		0.25	0.05	
Undressing a partner		0.25	0.05	
Sex with two other people		0.23	0.05	
Total fantasy output		0.23	0.05	
Being excited by material or clothing		0.22	0.05	
Kissing passionately		0.21	0.05	
and with the activities of		Being much sought after by opposite sex	0.42	0.0005
		Undressing a partner	0.38	0.0005
		Being excited by material or clothing	0.36	0.001
		Total activity output	0.34	0.005
		Being undressed by a partner	0.30	0.005
		Looking at obscene pictures or films	0.28	0.01
	Watching others have sex	0.23	0.05	
	Being seduced as an 'innocent'	0.22	0.05	
	Having sex with a loved partner	0.21	0.05	
N correlates with fantasies of	Kissing passionately	0.32	0.005	
	Having sex with a loved partner	0.31	0.005	
	Total fantasy output	0.29	0.01	
	Giving oral sex	0.30	0.01	
	Being whipped or spanked	0.26	0.05	
	Being undressed by a partner	0.26	0.05	
	Hurting a partner	0.25	0.05	
	Undressing a partner	0.24	0.05	
	Being forced to do something	0.23	0.05	
	Seducing an 'innocent'	0.23	0.05	
	Being seduced as an 'innocent'	0.22	0.05	
	Being tied up	0.21	0.05	
	and with the activities of	Being hurt by a partner	0.25	0.05
		Being whipped or spanked	0.25	0.05
		Kissing passionately	0.24	0.05
		Being forced to do something	0.23	0.05
		Receiving corporal punishment in childhood	0.22	0.05
		Being excited by materials or clothing (i.e. being turned OFF by materials, etc.)	-0.22	0.05
			0.22	0.05

Given the large number of possible correlations in this table, some of the associations may have achieved significance by chance; nevertheless, the overall pattern seems consistent and meaningful.

of s/m women should be regarded as pathological, since there is a great range of sex hormone levels within as well as between normal men and women.

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