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Sexual Excitation/Sexual Inhibition Inventory for Women and Men

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The Sexual Excitation/Sexual Inhibition Inventory for Women and Men (SESII-W/M) was developed to assess propensity for sexual excitation (SE) and sexual inhibition (SI) in response to a broad range of stimuli and sexual situations in both women and men.

Description

The theoretical model underlying the SESII-W/M is the dual control model of sexual response (Bancroft, 1999; Bancroft, Graham, Janssen, & Sanders, 2009; Bancroft & Janssen, 2000). The model suggests that sexual arousal depends upon the relative activation of SE and SI, separate and independent systems (Bancroft, 1999; Bancroft & Janssen, 2000).

Two questionnaires assessing propensity for SE and SI were developed prior to the SESII-W/M. The Sexual Inhibition/Sexual Excitation Scales (SIS/SES; Janssen, Vorst, Finn, & Bancroft, 2002) were developed for men; however, because the SIS/SES was thought to lack factors that could be particularly important to women’s sexual arousal, the Sexual Excitation/Sexual Inhibition Inventory for Women (SESII-W; Graham, Sanders, & Milhausen, 2006) was developed based on qualitative data from focus groups of women (Graham, Sanders, Milhausen, & McBride, 2004). Many of the issues raised by women in the focus groups seemed also relevant for men’s arousal (e.g., self-esteem, negative mood, emotional connection to a partner, context for sexual encounter). Indeed, results from a recent focus group study of men suggest that these factors can facilitate or interfere with men’s sexual arousal (Janssen, McBride, Yarber, Hill, & Butler, 2008).

Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was conducted on the original SESII-W items, using a sample of 530 undergraduate and graduate men and women randomly selected from a list of 4,000 students attending a large, midwestern university (Milhausen, Graham, Sanders, Yarber, & Maitland, in press). EFA identified eight factors, but two factors comprised only two items and were thus removed from the confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) model. The final six-factor solution includes the following: Inhibitory Cognitions (the potential for arousal to be disrupted by worries or negative thoughts about sexual functioning and performance), Relationship Importance (reflecting the need for sex to occur within a specific relationship context), Arousalability (the tendency to become sexually aroused in a variety of situations), Partner Characteristics and Behaviors (the tendency for a partner’s personality or behavior to enhance arousal), Setting (Unusual or Unconcealed; the tendency for arousal to be increased by the possibility of being seen or having sex in a novel situation), and Dyadic Elements of the Sexual Interaction (the tendency for negative partner dynamics during the sexual interaction to inhibit sexual arousal). Twenty of the 30 items on the SESII-W/M are also found on the SESII-W, and five of the factors (Inhibitory Cognitions, Relationship Importance, Arousalability, Partner Characteristics and Behaviors, and Setting [Unusual/Unconcealed]) are highly similar to factors on the SESII-W.

The questionnaire is appropriate for use with women and men of different sexual orientations and varying degrees of sexual experience, and can be completed by persons who are not in a current sexual relationship.

Response Mode and Timing

The response format is a 4-point, Likert-type rating scale, from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree. For full instructions, see the Exhibit. Items should be scrambled so that items on a subscale do not appear together. The questionnaire typically takes between 10 and 15 minutes to complete.

Scoring

Items are scored in the following way: 1 = Strongly Disagree; 2 = Disagree; 3 = Agree; 4 = Strongly Agree. Items denoted with an asterisk should be reverse coded. Using the items coded as indicated above, a mean score is then generated for each of the subscales.

Reliability

Reliability and validity were assessed with a sample of men and women recruited from distance education classes at a Canadian university. The subscales had Cronbach’s alphas between .66 and .76, with an average of .73. Test-retest

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reliability correlations ranged from $r = .66$ to $r = .82$, with a mean correlation of .76 (Milhausen et al., in press).

**Validity**

Convergent and discriminant validity was demonstrated and the pattern of correlations generally matched those based on the SESII-W (Graham et al., 2006). Most correlations between the SESII-W/M factors and the Behavioral Inhibition/Behavioral Activation Scales (BIS/BAS; Carver & White, 1994), the Sexual Opinion Survey (SOS; Fisher, 1998) and the Sexual Sensation Seeking Scale (SSSS; Kalichman & Rompa, 1995) were low to moderate and in the expected direction. No correlation was found between the Social Desirability Scale (SDSR; Hayes, Hayashi, & Stewart, 1989) and any of the SESII-W/M scales (Milhausen et al., in press).

**Other Information**

In the validation study, men’s and women’s scores on the subscales were significantly different at $p < .001$ (Milhausen et al., in press); effect sizes were moderate and very large (Hyde, 2005). Women scored higher on Inhibitory Cognitions, Relationship Importance, Partner Characteristics and Behaviors, and Dyadic Elements of the Sexual Interaction. Men scored higher on Arousalability and Setting (Unusual or Unconcealed; Milhausen et al., in press).

The SESII-W/M will likely be a useful measure in investigations in which propensity for sexual inhibition and excitation in response to specific situations or stimuli must be measured identically for men and women. Researchers are encouraged to use the SESII-W/M for this purpose. The authors would appreciate receiving information about the results obtained with the measure.

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**References**


**Exhibit**

*Sexual Excitation/Sexual Inhibition Inventory for Women and Men*

The next set of items asks about things that might affect your sexual arousal. Other ways that we refer to sexual arousal are feeling “turned on,” “sexually excited,” and “being in a sexual mood.” Men and women describe their sexual arousal in terms of genital changes (being “hard,” being “wet,” tingling sensations, feelings of warmth, etc.). Men and women also mention non-genital sensations (increased heart rate, temperature changes, skin sensitivity, etc.) or feelings (anticipation, feeling “open,” etc.).

We are interested in what would be the most typical reaction for you now. You might read a statement that you feel is not applicable to you, or a statement that refers to a situation that may have occurred in the past but is not likely to occur now. In such cases please indicate how you think you would respond, if you were in that situation. Some of the questions sound very similar, but are different; please read each question carefully and then mark the response which indicates your answer. Don’t think too long before answering. Please give your first reaction to each question.*
Inhibitory Cognitions
Sometimes I have so many worries that I am unable to get aroused.
If I feel that I am expected to respond sexually, I have difficulty getting aroused.
Sometimes I feel so “shy” or self-conscious during sex that I cannot become fully aroused.
If I think about whether I will have an orgasm, it is much harder for me to become aroused.
If I am worried about taking too long to become aroused, this can interfere with my arousal.
When I am having sex, I have to focus on my own sexual feelings in order to stay aroused.
If I am concerned about being a good lover, I am less likely to become aroused.
Unless things are “just right” it is difficult for me to become sexually aroused.

Relationship Importance
It would be hard for me to become sexually aroused with someone who is involved with another person.
I really need to trust a partner to become fully aroused.
If I am very sexually attracted to someone, I don’t need to be in a relationship with that person to become sexually aroused.*
If I think that I am being used sexually it completely turns me off.
If I think that a partner might hurt me emotionally, I put the brakes on sexually.

Arousalability
When I think about someone I find sexually attractive, I easily become sexually aroused.
I think about sex a lot when I am bored.
Sometimes I am so attracted to someone, I cannot stop myself from becoming sexually aroused.
Just talking about sex is enough to put me in a sexual mood.
Just being physically close with a partner is enough to turn me on.

Partner Characteristics and Behaviors
Someone doing something that shows he/she is intelligent turns me on.
Seeing a partner doing something that shows his/her talent can make me very sexually aroused.
If I see a partner interacting well with others, I am more easily sexually aroused.
If a partner surprises me by doing chores, it sparks my sexual interest.
I find it arousing when a partner does something nice for me.

Setting (Unusual or Unconcealed)
If it is possible someone might see or hear us having sex, it is more difficult for me to get aroused.*
I get really turned on if I think I may get caught while having sex.
I find it harder to get sexually aroused if other people are nearby.*
Having sex in a different setting than usual is a real turn-on for me.

Dyadic Elements of the Sexual Interaction
While having sex, it really decreases my arousal if my partner is not sensitive to the signals I am giving.
If interferes with my arousal if there is not a balance of giving and receiving pleasure during sex.
If I am uncertain how my partner feels about me, it is harder for me to get aroused.

*The response choices for each question are: 1 Strongly Disagree; 2 Disagree; 3 Agree; 4 Strongly Agree.
*Items should be reverse coded when scoring.