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ABSTRACT

While literature exists about the benefits of yoga through mindfulness, and on mindfulness and sex, little is known about the use of yoga as an intervention to promote healthy female sexuality. This study will explore the efficaciousness of yoga in reducing sexual shame. Data from 60 female participants will be collected via surveys. Using statistical analyses, changes in participants levels of sexual shame and sexual enjoyment will be examined as impacted by weekly yoga practice with an emphasis on body awareness, relaxation, and body positivity. We hypothesize a negative correlation between a weekly yoga practice and feelings of sexual shame and a positive correlation between a weekly yoga practice and feelings of sexual enjoyment.

INTRODUCTION

- Healthy female sexual functioning, enjoyment, and the impacts of sexual shame on women and their relationships is an oft overlooked topic (Kyle, 2013).
- Women's sexual satisfaction and functioning is impacted by feelings of shame stemming from learned negative beliefs about one's body and sexuality which can hinder sexual desire, the ability to become or stay aroused, and can limit satisfaction and intimacy (Talmadge & Wallace, 1991; Kyle, 2013)
- Recent pop culture and academic works have begun to explore the female experience of sexual shame and impacts of sexual shame on sexual functioning and enjoyment in greater depth (See Sellers, 2017; Klein, 2018; Kyle, 2013; Isom, 2019; Nagoski, 2018).
- Sex therapy tackles this issue by targeting the negative beliefs about sexuality that women learn from their family and culture and replacing these with positive messages. This often means increasing self-esteem and creating a positive body image through mindfulness and body focused interventions (Brotto & Heiman, 2007).
- Mindfulness has shown promising results in limiting distracting thoughts and improving sexual satisfaction in women (Brotto, Basson & Luria, 2008) and is a key aspect of yoga, which uses breathing and meditation exercises to improve physical and mental health.
- Yoga has been implicated in sexual fulfillment and pleasure (Brotto, Krychman, & Jacobson, 2008) yet, there is little empirical research on the link between yoga and its impact on sexual functioning (Brotto, Mehak, & Kit, 2009).
- The goal of this study is to further explore the efficacy of yoga as an intervention to reduce women's experience of sexual shame and promote healthy sexual functioning and sexual enjoyment.

PRIMARY AIM & HYPOTHESES

RQ1: Is yoga efficacious in reducing sexual shame?

RQ2: Does a weekly yoga practice increase sexual enjoyment for women who have identified as having sexual shame?

H1: Women who identify as experiencing sexual shame will report a decrease in feelings of shame following institution of weekly yoga practice

H2: Women who identify as experiencing sexual shame will report an increase in sexual enjoyment following institution of weekly yoga practice

METHODS

Participants

- **Sample size:** 60. This sample size was selected based on typical yoga class size and the idea of running two 30-person classes for the duration of the study.
- **Population:** 18-35-year-old females who report being in a sexually active relationship and report feelings of sexual shame.
- **Sampling Procedure:** Recruitment through advertisement (through student media at local universities and through local Marriage and Family Therapy practices including those with couple and sex therapy specializations) and interview to confirm experience of shame through use of sex assessment/sex history and Kyle Inventory of Sexual Shame (2013)

Procedures

- **Design:** Participants will take part in a 60 min yoga practice every week for the duration of eight weeks. The practice will focus on using breathing and mindfulness techniques to increase body awareness, relaxation, and body positivity.
- Participants will be given the choice to opt out of any pose if it becomes overwhelming or triggering but will be asked to stay in the room and practice ujjayi breathing until they are ready to rejoin the practice or the session is over.
- **Data Collection:** The participants will complete several measures at the beginning of the study which will be used as a baseline. The same measures will be given to the participants at the end of the study and then again three months after the end of the study to assess efficacy of the intervention.

MEASURES

Sex history/assessment

- For this study we will operationalize shame according to the definition adopted by Kyle (2013) and adapted from Brené Brown's definition (Brown, 2007) in developing the Kyle Inventory of Sexual Shame (KISS) (Kyle, 2012): "the intensely painful feeling or experience of believing we are flawed and therefore unworthy of acceptance and belonging due to our current or past sexual thoughts, experiences, or behaviors."
- As part of the assessment, participants will complete the KISS measure – a 25-item questionnaire to assess participants' feelings about their current and past sexual thoughts and behaviors. This will be used again for post-test and follow-up (H1).

Female Sexual Function Index (FSFI)

- This is a 19-item measure (Rosen et al., 2000) exploring five domains of female sexual function: desire/arousal, lubrication, orgasm, satisfaction, and pain rated on a 6-point Likert scale. This measure will be used to establish a baseline for each participant as well as track changes in sexual function over the course of the study and three months post study (H2).

Dissociative Experiences During Sexual Behavior Questionnaire

- This measure (Hansen et al., 2012) includes 15 items on dissociative feelings during sexual behavior that are reported via retrospective recall. This measure will be used to track changes in attention to present moment and body awareness (mindfulness) during sexual encounters (H1).

RESULTS

- For each of our measures we will use the difference in pre and post test scores for individuals as well as the average difference in those scores across participants.
- We plan to analyze our data using repeated measure t-tests to explore the average pre- and post-test scores of our participants on the different measures and evaluate if there is a statistically significant difference in the data collected to identify if yoga is efficacious in reducing feelings of sexual shame and increasing feelings of sexual enjoyment.
- Additionally we will use a point-biserial correlation to measure and describe the relationship between our variables, for example: the relationship between yoga and sexual shame and between yoga and feelings of sexual enjoyment.

DISCUSSION

This study strives to understand the impact that a weekly yoga practice may have on feelings of sexual shame and sexual enjoyment in women. This research will deepen our understanding of women's sexual health and can widen the pool of effective interventions clinicians have to help clients build a positive outlook on their sexuality. Not only will supporting sexual health in women have positive effects on self-esteem and body image, but it can improve relationship satisfaction and mental health in general. The findings of this study will hopefully encourage other researchers to see the importance of women's sexual health and to explore other innovative interventions for the treatment of sexual shame. Future research may look to replicate this data to further prove the efficacy of yoga as a valid treatment for sexual shame or seek to understand how this somatic intervention could improve sexual functioning for both sexes when used as a couple's therapy.