

Altered states of consciousness during sex

The term 'altered states of consciousness' usually means states of 'absorption' or 'absorbed states'. Some call them trance. They are characterized by loss of the usual sense of self, time, and space, as a result of intense attentional focus (or absorption) in the environment, in feelings, in physical sensations, or in creations of imagination. In absorption, we feel ourselves as if in a flow with thoughts different than usual or no thoughts at all. Sometimes memories of things long past come to consciousness or exhilarating new ideas emerge. Time can pass very quickly and hardly be felt, if felt at all. Or time is perceived, but as if it had come to stillness, in which we think that we have all the time in the world. Surrounding space may look distanced, and we can get easily and pleasantly distracted from what happens around us. On occasions, space is felt close and things in it acquire a different meaning; we can see things in an entirely new view.

Sexual desire can be an absorbed state. When you are with your beloved one, you are so focused on him or her that time and space change, and even you feel changed to a point that poetic images, like 'being in heaven' make sense. Absorption happens during sex, when there is deep attention to sensations, reduced awareness of surrounding space, and loss or acceleration of time. However, absorption during sex is not always felt with the same intensity. The aim of our study was to investigate whether greater intensity of absorption during sex enhances sexual pleasure. We asked 116 heterosexual Portuguese men and women to think about their last sexual relation, and to rate how intensely they felt their body, time and surrounding space, and how quickly they perceived time passing. They also reported how much desire and satisfaction they felt, if an orgasm happened, and during which sexual behavior it was attained.

According to our findings, men and women do not differ in the intensity of absorption during sex, but absorption was more closely connected to female desire, satisfaction and orgasm than was the case for men. For women, higher desire and satisfaction went hand in hand with stronger attention on the body and almost complete loss of time awareness. In addition, we found that female intercourse orgasms were rather connected with absorption, but noncoital sex orgasms were not. One interpretation for the findings is that, because the vagina is less sensitive than the clitoris, a more intense absorption focused on vaginal sensations is necessary to trigger coital orgasm.

In men, satisfaction, desire, and orgasm, were somewhat less connected to absorption, which fits the notion that absorbed states enhance the pleasure of many men, but they are not as important for male arousal and orgasm, as they are for women.

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Publication

[Altered states of consciousness are related to higher sexual responsiveness.](#)

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Conscious Cogn. 2016 May