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Need for Sexual Intimacy Scale

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The Need for Sexual Intimacy Scale (NSIS) was developed to look specifically at motivations for sexual intimacy, including the needs for sex, affiliation, and dominance. It is intended to complement existing sexuality measures that focus on sexual desires and drives for sexual intercourse, in that it addresses additional aspects of sexual motivations often overlooked (e.g., affiliation and dominance). In application, the NSIS may be used as part of a larger battery of assessment scales addressing sexual health, as individuals with strong sexual intimacy motivations are more likely to engage in risky sexual behaviors that may lead to increased exposure to sexually transmitted diseases (such individuals could then be targeted for primary prevention efforts). The scale may also be used with general or college populations for research on issues surrounding intimate and close relationships.

Description

The scale consists of 22 items that are divided into three subscales: need for sex, need for affiliation, and need for dominance. These needs come from Murray (1938) and were chosen based on their relationship with issues surrounding sexual intimacy. According to Murray, the need for sex addresses the formation and progression of sexual relationships and sexual intercourse. The need for affiliation concerns one's need for affection and to be close to others, whereas the need for dominance focuses on controlling and influencing one's environment (and those in the environment) through persuasion and seduction. Of the 22 items in the NSIS, 8 address the need for sex, 9 address the need for affiliation, and 5 refer to the need for dominance. The items are rated on a 5-point scale, with responses ranging from 1 (Disagree Definitely) to 5 (Agree Definitely). The compilation of the 22 items and 3 subscales was determined through exploratory factor analyses utilizing principal axis factoring, and confirmed through confirmatory factor analysis.

Response Mode and Timing

Respondents are to fill in the blank next to each item with a number that corresponds to the 5-point scale. The measure requires 5 minutes to complete.

Scoring

A separate score is generated for each of the three subscales. Although a second-order factor analysis suggests the possibility of a viable total score measure (see Marelich & Lundquist, 2008), no psychometrics for a total score are available at this time. Scores for items corresponding to a given subscale are summed and divided by the total number of items in that subscale to produce a mean score. As illustrated in the Exhibit, Items 1–8 correspond to the need for sex, Items 9–17 correspond to the need for affiliation, and Items 18–22 correspond to the need for dominance. Item 14 should be reverse coded, and is marked with an “R” in the Exhibit. For each subscale, higher mean scores indicate higher needs. When originally assessed, items were randomly arranged across subscales, and this remains the current recommendation when using the scale.

Reliability

Principal axis factoring was performed on the final 22 items, utilizing an oblique rotation to allow the resulting factors to correlate. The number of factors was determined through a parallel analysis, scree plot inspection, and the interpretability of the factor solution. All items had sufficient pattern matrix loadings on at least one of the three factors, and two of the factors (sex and dominance) correlated at .39. The three factors reflect the three needs subscales.

Internal consistency reliabilities were .88 for need for sex, .82 for need for affiliation, and .74 for need for dominance. Test-retest reliabilities are not available.

Validity

Confirmatory factor analysis was performed on the 22-item solution obtained from the principal axis factor analysis. The factor structure was confirmed with good fit. In addition, a second-order factor analysis was found to fit the data well, suggesting that the three resulting subscales reflect a broader need for sexual intimacy construct. Construct and criterion validity were assessed by looking at the significant associations of each subscale with a series of 21 items addressing sexual communication and behaviors, attitudes toward relationships, and demographics.

Need for Sex

Individuals with a higher need for sex had higher numbers of sexual partners, had higher numbers of one-night stands, were more likely to dominate their partners sexually, reported using condoms less often, and used intoxicants during sexual encounters more often. They also had a harder time talking with their partners about safe sex,
were more likely to lie about HIV testing, and reported that the most important aspect of a relationship was sex. Men tended to report higher needs for sex compared to women.

**Need for Affiliation**

Individuals higher in need for affiliation report being consumed with thoughts of their partners more frequently, were less likely to misinform their partners about being HIV tested, were more truthful when revealing information about the number of sexual partners they have had, and report that being in a relationship was something they need. Women tended to report higher need for affiliation than men.

**Need for Dominance**

Individuals higher in need for dominance showed a preference for dominating partners in a sexual manner. In addition, they report using condoms less often, and in circumstances where condoms were not available were less likely to be turned away by a sexual partner for sex. Individuals higher on this measure were more likely to ask partners about their past sexual experiences, report that being in a relationship is something they needed, and that sex was an important aspect of relationships. No gender differences were noted.

**Other Information**

It is important when administering this measure that items are presented in a random order and mixed between subscales in order to avoid response bias.

**References**


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**Exhibit**

**Need for Sexual Intimacy Scale**

*Directions:* The next few items address things we may “need” in life. Some say we “need” many things in order to survive (e.g., food, shelter, etc.). Below we have presented a series of items and would like you to rate each item as to how much you agree or disagree with them as things you may “need.” The term “partner” below refers to a sexual partner (e.g., dating partner, boyfriend/girlfriend, long-term partner/spouse). Please read each statement carefully, and then fill in the blank (___) with a number that corresponds to the scale description.

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I need . . .

1. To have more sex.
2. Sex every day.
3. To have an orgasm every day.
4. To let myself go sexually with someone.
5. Sex every couple of days.
6. Someone who is “great in bed.”
7. Sex with a lot of partners.
8. To take control of my partner when we are intimate.
9. A partner who loves me.
10. Somebody to love.
11. Companionship.
13. Complete trust in the people I am intimate with.
14. Nobody special in my life. [R]
15. Somebody to hold my hand.
16. A few really good friends.
17. Someone to sleep next to me.
18. My partner to tell me where they are at all times.
19. Control over my partner.
20. My partner to give me what I want (such as financial support, clothes, a car).
21. A partner I can manipulate.
22. The ability to order my partner to have sex with me if I want to.