The Meaning of My Sexual Self

ANNIE LAURA COTTEN,1 Central Connecticut State University

Whereas measures have been developed for assessing sexual self-schemas as cognitive representations of one’s self view (Andersen & Cyranowski, 1994; Andersen, Cyranowski, & Espindle, 1999) and for associations between sexual self-concept and self-efficacy (Rostosky, Dekhtyar, Cupp, & Anderman, 2008), a measure for the meaning of the sexual self has been lacking. Using the technique of Osgood, Suci, and Tannenbaum (1957) for the measurement of meaning, bipolar adjectives were determined for measuring “my sexual self.”

Description

The scale’s development was a continuation from previous dissertation research that included 125 college students who responded to 18 bipolar choices, nine of which determined the three dimensions of meanings: evaluation, potency, and activity. Students were also given the Bem Sex-Role Inventory (BSRI; Bem, 1974) for comparison. The hypothesis for that research was significantly confirmed; the more androgynous, the more positive were the responses on the meaning of “my sexual self” (Cotten-Huston, 1981). Participants rated the bipolar adjectives on a scale from 1 (Most Positive) to 7 (Least Positive).

Bipolar adjectives were derived from eight business and psychology class responses to the question of what bipolar adjective pairs respondents would use to evaluate each of the three dimensions. For sexual evaluation meanings, most frequent responses were good-bad, valuable-worthless, and honest-dishonest. Most frequent adjective pairs for sexual activity meanings were assertive-nonassertive, involved-uninvolved, and flexible-rigid. For most frequent meanings of sexual-self potency, the most frequent adjective pairs were together-alone, loved-unloved, and strong-weak. Within each dimension, other suggested adjective pairs were included for a total of 18 bipolar choices that were rotated from left to right, so that on every other adjective pair the order of numbers was reversed to avoid rater bias. The design included demographic variables for age, gender, lifestyle, religiosity, and sexual experience, which were included on a separate page.

Research was conducted with a larger sample to examine in particular the construct of the semantic measure and, again, any associations with masculinity and femininity trait responses from the BSRI (Bem, 1974). Androgyny and undifferentiated scores were not computed; however, the masculinity and femininity traits were included along with demographic variables. There were 294 participants, ages 17–87, divided into three age groups: 17–25; 26–55; 56–87. Participants in the age group 17–55 were undergraduates and graduate students at Central Connecticut State University. Those over age 55 were Elderhostelers enrolled in programs at the University from diverse geographical regions of the country. The measure was suitable for all adult-age groups.

Response Mode and Timing

Participants included those who wished to assist in research about the meaning of “my sexual self.” Instructions included a one-sentence request to circle the number that came closest to how they felt about their sexual selves. Most participants completed the measure in 30 minutes.

Other Information

Statistical collaboration was provided by the Biostatistics Laboratory, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

References


1Address correspondence to Annie Laura Cotten, 5 Melstone Turn, Durham, NC 27707; e-mail: anniecotten@nc.rr.com
Exhibit

The Meaning of My Sexual Self

Please circle the number which comes closest to the way you feel about your sexual self.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
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</table>

Bad
Happy
Clean
Dishonest
Valuable
Unpleasant
Fair
Sick
Flexible
Submissive
Relaxed
Fragmented
Loved
Uninvolved
Active
Weak
Objective

Comments you wish to make about your sexual self:

Sexual Self-Concept Inventory

Lucia F. O’Sullivan,1 University of New Brunswick
Heino F. L. Meyer-Bahlburg, New York State Psychiatric Institute
Ian McKeague, Columbia University

This measure was designed to assess the gender-specific sexual self-concepts of early adolescent girls based on extensive formative work with ethnically diverse samples. Respondents complete 34 items assessing three dimensions of sexual self-concepts. Details regarding this measure can be found in O’Sullivan, Meyer-Bahlburg, & McKeague (2006).

Description

The Sexual Self-Concept Inventory (SSCI) is a 34-item instrument comprising three scales that are shown to be distinct and reliable dimensions of early adolescent girls’ sexual self-concepts. These scales assess Sexual Arousability, Sexual Agency, and Negative Sexual Affect. Sexual Arousability reflects sexual responsiveness, whereas Sexual Agency incorporates items relating to sexual curiosity. Negative Sexual Affect addresses sexual anxiety as well as some concerns relating to sexual monitoring. The measure was developed following extensive formative work using both qualitative and quantitative methods with samples of ethnically diverse, urban, early adolescent girls (12–14 years of age). The formative data were used to generate an item pool using the exact wording from transcripts of girls’ interviews and focus groups to help ensure item comprehension and authenticity amongst the target population. Principal components analytic procedures were used to ascertain the instrument’s factor structures.

1Address correspondence to Lucia F. O’Sullivan, Department of Psychology, 38 Dineen Drive, Keirstead Hall, Rm. 216, University of New Brunswick, Fredericton, New Brunswick, Canada E3B 5A3; e-mail: osulliv@unb.ca