Handbook of Sexuality-Related Measures

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Sexual Self-Concept Inventory

Publication details
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Published online on: 12 Aug 2010

Accessed on: 13 Jul 2023
### Exhibit

**The Meaning of My Sexual Self**

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

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</table>

Comments you wish to make about your sexual self:

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### 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.

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from which the three scales emerged.

**Response Mode and Timing**

Respondents indicate their degree of agreement with 34 items on a Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 6 (Strongly Agree). The questionnaire takes approximately 4 minutes to complete.

**Scoring**

Scores for each of the three SSCI scales are computed by summing the respective items: Sexual Arousability (17 items), Sexual Agency (10 items), and Negative Sexual Affect (7 items). There are no filler or reverse-scored items.

**Reliability**

Coefficient alphas for the three scales were .91 (Sexual Arousability), .76 (Sexual Agency), and .67 (Negative Sexual Affect). These coefficients are considered to be good to very good (DeVellis, 1991). Fifty participants were retested 3 weeks after the first administration of the instrument. The test-retest reliability coefficients for the three scales were also substantial: \( r = .68, p < .001 \) (Sexual Arousability); \( r = .69, p < .001 \) (Sexual Agency); and \( r = .67, p < .001 \) (Negative Sexual Affect). In addition, 162 girls were administered the SSCI on two occasions, 1 year apart, to examine how girls’ scores changed over the 1-year period. Test-retest coefficients were \( r = .59, p < .001 \) (Sexual Arousability); \( r = .84, p < .001 \) (Sexual Agency); and \( r = .69, p < .001 \) (Negative Sexual Affect), indicating stability in scores.

**Validity**

The construct validity of the SSCI was assessed using correlations between the scale scores and sexual self-esteem (Rosenthal, Moore, & Flynn, 1991) and abstinence attitudes (Miller, Norton, Fan, & Christopherson, 1998) using a sample of 180 girls. As expected, Sexual Arousability and Sexual Agency correlated positively with sexual self-esteem \( (r = .37 \) and \( .43, p < .001 \)), whereas Negative Sexual Affect correlated negatively with this scale \( (r = -.18, p < .05) \). Negative Sexual Affect was positively correlated with abstinence attitudes \( (r = .43, p < .001) \), whereas Sexual Arousability and Sexual Agency were negatively correlated with these attitudes \( (rs = -.44 \) and \( -.22, p < .001) \). As a test of discriminant validity, we assessed correlations of SSCI scale scores with parenting attitudes (Unger, Molina, & Teran, 2000), as girls frequently dissociate sexual experiences from reproduction (O’Sullivan & Meyer-Bahlburg, 2003). That is, scores on measures regarding the value that they place on parenting were expected to be unrelated to girls’ views of themselves as sexual people. As predicted, none of the three scales was significantly correlated with parenting attitudes \( (ps > .05) \). Sexual Arousability, but not Sexual Agency, was positively correlated with scores on a measure of perceived maternal approval of sexual activity \( (r = .23, p < .01) \) (Trebox & Busch-Rossnagel, 1990), and Negative Sexual Affect was negatively correlated with these ratings \( (r = -.20, p < .01) \). Girls with high Sexual Arousability and Sexual Agency had scores reflecting less disapproval/more approval \( (rs = .32 \) and \( .31, ps < .01) \) on a measure of perceived peer approval for sexual intercourse experience (Trebox & Busch-Rossnagel, 1990); Negative Sexual Affect was unrelated. Girls with higher Sexual Arousability and Sexual Agency perceived a greater proportion of their friends to have sexual intercourse experience \( (r = .24, p < .01 \) and \( r = .33, p < .001) \); Negative Sexual Affect was unrelated. Girls’ Sexual Arousability and Sexual Agency were positively correlated with future orientation \( (rs = .45 \) and \( .21, p < .01) \), whereas Negative Sexual Affect was negatively correlated with this variable \( (r = -.26, p < .001) \).

We also examined correlations between SSCI scores and sexual experience. Given that relatively few girls in this age range report sexual intercourse experience (Paikoff, 1995), we examined associations with intentions to engage in intercourse in the near future, as well as lifetime reports of having had a crush, having had a boyfriend, having been in love, having engaged in kissing, having engaged in breast fondling with a partner, having engaged in genital touching with a partner, having engaged in oral sex, and having engaged in vaginal intercourse. Girls with higher levels of sexual experience tended to have more positive sexual self-concepts (i.e., higher Sexual Arousability and Sexual Agency and lower Negative Sexual Affect). Participation in romantic activities and the range of lower-level sexual activities was positively correlated with Sexual Arousability scores (O’Sullivan et al., 2006). This was also true of Sexual Agency, although the associations were notably less strong, and only significant for participation in kissing and breast fondling. This pattern suggests that Sexual Arousability and Sexual Agency tap overlapping, but somewhat different, constructs. Girls who reported sexual intercourse experience (at least once in the past) tended to report higher Sexual Arousability scores. Girls’ reports of breast fondling, touching a penis, oral sex, and/or intercourse tended to be negatively and moderately correlated with scores for Negative Sexual Affect. (Note: Higher levels of sexual experiences were relatively uncommon among girls at these ages).

**References**


## Exhibit

### Sexual Self-Concept Inventory

The questions below are about your views about yourself and other people your age. Please read each statement carefully and then rate each statement according to how much you agree with it using a number from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 6 (Strongly Agree). An answer is correct to the extent it truly reflects how much you agree with it.

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<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
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</table>

**SEXUAL AROUSABILITY**

1. I sometimes think I’d like to try doing the sexual things my friends are doing with their boyfriends.
2. When I kiss a guy, I get hot.
3. I would really want to touch a boyfriend if we were left alone together.
4. I sometimes want to know how different types of sex feel.
5. If I’m going to see a guy I like, I like to dress sexy.
6. If a guy kisses me, I also want him to touch my body.
7. When I flirt with a guy, I like to feel him up.
8. Sometimes I dress sexy to get attention from guys.
9. If I were to kiss a guy, I’d get really turned on.
10. There are things about sex I want to try.
11. If a boy kisses me, my body feels good.
12. I enjoy talking about sex or talking sexy with boys I know really well.
13. If I were kissing and touching a guy, I would get hyped, real excited.
15. It’s okay to feel up on a guy.
16. I like it when a guy tells me I look good.
17. I think I’m ready to have sex.

**SEXUAL AGENCY**

1. Girls always wonder what sex is going to be like the first time.
2. I sometimes think about who I would want to have sex with.
3. When I decide to have sex with a guy, it will be because I wanted to have sex and not because he really wanted me to have sex with him.
4. Girls sometimes have sex because they’re curious and want to see what it’s like.
5. Sex is best with a guy you love.
6. I like to let a guy know when I like him.
7. If I have sex, my friends will want to know all about it.
8. If I had sex with a guy, I would be running the risk of being played (taken advantage of).
9. Flirting is fun and I am good at it.
10. If I have sex with a guy, I would worry that I could get my feelings really hurt.

**NEGATIVE SEXUAL AFFECT**

1. If I kiss a guy I don’t really know, I’m afraid of what people will think about me.
2. Sex is nasty.
3. Sex isn’t fun for girls my age.
4. I would be scared to be really alone with a boyfriend.
5. Some girls have sex just to be accepted or popular.
6. I think I am too young to have sex.
7. If I have sex, my friends will want to know all about it.