Attitudes Toward Sexuality Scale

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The Attitudes Toward Sexuality Scale (ATSS) was developed to allow the comparison of the sexual attitudes of adolescents between the ages of 12 and 20 and their parents. An instrument was needed that was brief, simplistic, and nonoffensive in order to facilitate its use with younger adolescents and yet still be valid for adults. To this end, items from Calderwood’s Checklist of Attitudes Toward Human Sexuality (1971) were modified and an objective scoring system was added. The result was a brief, general sexual attitudes measure that is equally appropriate for adolescents and adults (Fisher & Hall, 1988).

Description

The ATSS consists of 13 statements related to topics such as nudity, abortion, contraception, premarital sex, pornography, prostitution, homosexuality, and sexually transmitted diseases. The 5-point Likert response format ranges from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree. The original scale contained 14 items, but one of the items contributed so little to the total score variance that it was dropped from the scale. Several of the terms used in the scale have dropped out of usage since its development. The exhibit indicates the newer terminology that researchers would likely wish to use, with the original terms indicated in brackets.

Response Mode and Timing

Respondents indicate the degree of their agreement/disagreement with the statement by circling the number on the response scale that most closely reflects their reaction. The ATSS requires no more than 5 minutes to complete.

Scoring

Items 1, 4, 5, 7, 8, 11, and 13 are reverse scored by assigning a score of 1 if 5 was marked, a score of 2 if 4 was marked, etc. Then the number of points is totaled. Scores can range from 13 to 65, with lower scores indicating greater conservatism about sexual matters and higher scores indicating greater permissiveness about sexual matters.

Reliability

For a sample of 35 early adolescents (ages 12–14), the Cronbach alpha coefficient was .76. Among 47 middle adolescents (ages 15–17), the alpha was .65, and for a group of 59 late adolescents (18–20 years old) the alpha was .80. The alpha for the total group of adolescents was .75. Among 141 parents (ages 31–66), the alpha was .84. The test-retest reliability coefficient, using an independent sample of 22 college students between the ages of 18 and 28 over a 1-month time period, was .90.

Validity

In a sample of college students between the ages of 18 and 28 (Fisher & Hall, 1988), the ATSS correlated highly with the Heterosexual Relations (Liberalism) scale of the Sexual Knowledge and Attitudes Test (SKAT; Lief & Reed, 1972), \( r(42) = .83 \). The ATSS was also correlated with the Abortion scale, \( r(42) = .70 \), the Autoeroticism scale \( r(42) = .54 \), and the Sexual Myths scale, \( r(42) = .59 \).

In studies of adolescents and their parents (Fisher, 1986; Fisher & Hall, 1988), age was negatively correlated with the ATSS score, \( r(280) = −.18 \), although, for the young and middle adolescents combined, age was positively related to the ATSS score, \( r(82) = .37 \). Amount of education was found to be significantly correlated with the total scale score for the adult subjects, \( r(139) = .20 \). Religiosity, as measured by church attendance, was significantly correlated to ATSS scores for the middle adolescents, \( r(45) = −.32 \); the older adolescents, \( r(57) = −.44 \); and the adults, \( r(139) = −.41 \), such that people who regularly attended church tended to be more conservative in their sexual attitudes. Chia (2006) reported that adolescents with more permissive scores on a slightly modified version of the ATSS were significantly more likely to report having experienced sexual intercourse, having experienced it at an earlier age, and having experienced it in more casual situations.

As has been found on other measures of sexual attitudes, males generally indicate more permissive sexual attitudes on the ATSS than females. In more recent research with this measure, sex difference was mixed, with Fisher (2007) reporting a significant sex difference, but no sex differences found in other studies with similar samples (Alexander & Fisher, 2003; Fisher, 2009).

Other Information

Richard G. Hall assisted with the initial development of this scale.

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References


Lief, H. I., & Reed, D. M. (1972). *Sex Knowledge and Attitude Test*. Philadelphia: Center for the Study of Sex Education in Medicine, University of Pennsylvania.

Exhibit

**Attitudes Toward Sexuality Scale**

For each of the following statements, please circle the response which best reflects your reaction to that statement.

1. Nudist camps should be made completely illegal.
   - 1. Strongly Disagree
   - 2. Somewhat Disagree
   - 3. Neutral
   - 4. Somewhat Agree
   - 5. Strongly Agree

2. Abortion should be made available whenever a woman feels it would be the best decision.

3. Information and advice about contraception (birth control) should be given to any individual who intends to have intercourse.

4. Parents should be informed if their children under the age of eighteen have visited a clinic to obtain a contraceptive device.

5. Our government should try harder to prevent the distribution of pornography.

6. Prostitution should be legalized.

7. Petting (a stimulating caress of any or all parts of the body) is immoral behavior unless the couple is married.

8. Premarital sexual intercourse for young people is unacceptable to me.

9. Sexual intercourse for unmarried young people is acceptable without affection existing if both partners agree.

10. Homosexual behavior is an acceptable variation in sexual orientation [original term: preference].

11. A person who catches a sexually transmitted [original term: venereal] disease is probably getting exactly what he/she deserves.

12. A person’s sexual behavior is his/her own business, and nobody should make value judgments about it.

13. Sexual intercourse should only occur between two people who are married to each other.

*The 5-point scale is repeated after each item.*