Handbook of Sexuality-Related Measures

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Publication details
https://www.routledgehandbooks.com/doi/10.4324/9781315881089.ch218
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Published online on: 12 Aug 2010

How to cite :- Israel M. Schwartz. 12 Aug 2010, First Coital Affective Reaction Scale from: Handbook of Sexuality-Related Measures Routledge
Accessed on: 12 Jul 2023
https://www.routledgehandbooks.com/doi/10.4324/9781315881089.ch218

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First Coital Affective Reaction Scale

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Research on premarital coital activity has generally focused on incidence, prevalence, and changing trends, with little attention given to the affective aspects of the experience. However, affective variables are an important component of human sexual behavior. The importance of assessing affect to facilitate a better understanding of the relationship between feelings (as predictors or consequences) and sexual behaviors, attitudes, and norms has been highlighted by the findings of several researchers (Byrne, Fisher, Lamberth, & Mitchell, 1974; Schwartz, 1993; Weis, 1983). Scales used by Byrne et al. (1974) and Weis (1983), in their assessment of affect, stimulated the development of the First Coital Affective Reaction Scale (FCARS). The scale was developed as part of a cross-cultural research project comparing first coital experiences of American and Swedish women from an affective, behavioral, and attitudinal perspective (Schwartz, 1993). This scale measures subjects’ (male or female) reported affective reactions to their first coital experience.

Description

The FCARS consists of 13 bipolar items, using a 7-point Likert format for the measurement of each item. Respondents answering Yes to the question “Have you ever had sexual intercourse (defined as penile-vaginal penetration)”? are asked to indicate the degree to which they had experienced the following feelings in reaction to their first coitus at the time that it occurred: confused, satisfied, anxious, guilty, romantic, pleasure, sorry, relieved, exploited, happy, embarrassed, excited, and fearful. The responses range from 1 (representing Not Experiencing the Feeling at all) to 7 (representing Strongly Experiencing the Feeling), with the numbers in between representing various gradations between these extremes. (To protect anonymity, two versions of the scale are provided to respondents. The respondents who have never engaged in sexual intercourse can complete a version asking about how they think they would feel during their first sexual intercourse. Thus far, only the version for coitally experienced participants has been used for analysis.)

In a cross-cultural study, the scale, included in a self-report anonymous questionnaire focusing on coital initiation and the circumstances surrounding the event, was administered to a sample of 217 female undergraduates drawn from institutions in the northeast, southeast, midwestern, and western regions of the United States (Schwartz, 1993). As part of the same study, the scale was administered to a sample of 186 female undergraduates from institutions in the northern, middle, and southern regions of Sweden. The entire questionnaire, including the FCARS, was translated into Swedish. A complete description of the translation procedure is provided in Schwartz’s article.

Response Mode and Timing

Respondents are asked to circle the number (1 to 7) in each item that most closely represents the way they felt. The scale takes approximately 2 minutes to complete, making it easy to include in questionnaires in which time and length are important considerations.

Scoring

Each scale item uses a 7-point Likert response format yielding a possible score range of 1 to 7. Items 2 (satisfied), 5 (romantic), 6 (pleasure), 8 (relieved), 10 (happy), and 12 (excited) are reversed in scoring so that on all items 1 represents a positive response and 7 represents a negative response. Thus, greater positive FCARS affect would be represented by a lower total score and greater negative affect would be represented by a higher total score. Items may be scored and looked at separately to assess the degree to which a specific affective reaction was experienced (e.g., guilt, exploitation, pleasure, confusion, etc.).

Reliability

Internal consistency of the scale was estimated using Cronbach’s alpha. The alpha coefficient with a sample of 217 female undergraduate students in the U.S. was .89 (Schwartz, 1993). With a sample of 186 female undergraduate students in Sweden (using the Swedish version of the scale), the alpha coefficient was .85. An unpublished pilot test of the research instrument used by Schwartz, with a sample of 37 female undergraduate students from a university in the New York metropolitan area, yielded an alpha coefficient of .87 for the FCARS.

Validity

For face validity the scale was reviewed by a panel of three sexuality experts. In addition, 10 of the participants in the pilot test were individually interviewed to get their opinions regarding format, readability, clarity, and

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possible bias. Recommendations were incorporated into the final version of the scale. The FCARS construct validity was supported by Schwartz’s (1993) findings of expected differences between the American and Swedish samples (greater negative affect among the American group) based on Christensen’s (1969) theoretical assertions. These findings were also consistent with Christensen’s earlier findings comparing Danish and American cultures (Christensen & Carpenter, 1962a, 1962b; Christensen & Gregg, 1970).

Other Information
The FCARS has recently been translated to Arabic and administered in modified version to Turkish university students (Askun & Ataca, 2007).

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Exhibit

First Coital Affective Reaction Scale

1. Have you ever had sexual intercourse (defined as penile-vaginal penetration)?
   a. ___ Yes    b. ___ No

(If your answer to this question is “Yes” then complete Question 2. If your answer to this question is “No” skip Question 2 and complete Question 3.)

2. Directions: The following items deal with your feelings about your first sexual intercourse. Please try to answer as accurately and honestly as possible. Please answer all items “a” through “m” by using a 7-point scale, in which “1” represents not experiencing the feeling at all, and “7” represents strongly experiencing the feeling, with the numbers in between representing various gradations between these extremes. Please circle the number in each item that most closely represents the way you felt.

What were your reactions to your first sexual intercourse at the time that it occurred? I felt:

a. Not at all Confused  1  2  3  4  5  6  7  Very Confused
b. Not at all Satisfied  1  2  3  4  5  6  7  Very Satisfied
c. Not at all Anxious  1  2  3  4  5  6  7  Very Anxious
d. Not at all Guilty  1  2  3  4  5  6  7  Very Guilty
e. Not at all Romantic  1  2  3  4  5  6  7  Very Romantic
f. No Pleasure at all  1  2  3  4  5  6  7  Much Pleasure
g. Not at all Sorry  1  2  3  4  5  6  7  Very Sorry
h. Not at all Relieved  1  2  3  4  5  6  7  Very Relieved

References
3. Directions: The following items deal with your anticipated reactions to your first sexual intercourse. Please answer all items “a” through “m” by using a 7-point scale, in which “1” represents not anticipating the feeling at all, and “7” represents strongly anticipating the feeling, with the numbers in between representing various gradations between these extremes. Please circle the number in each item that most closely represents the way you anticipate feeling.

How do you think you will react to your first sexual intercourse at the time that it occurs?

I anticipate feeling: (The 13 responses for Question 2 are repeated.)

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