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Sexual Attitudes Scale and Brief Sexual Attitudes Scale

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SEXUAL ATTITUDES SCALE

The Sexual Attitudes Scale (SAS; Hendrick & Hendrick, 1987) was developed to broaden the assessment of sexual attitudes from a heavy reliance on sexual permissiveness to a more comprehensive and multidimensional approach. Although we viewed sexual attitudes as more than just permissiveness, we realized that permissiveness is extremely important and included it as a major aspect of our measurement of sexual attitudes. The SAS was also designed to assess attitudes generically, including maritally, premaritally, and for nonmarital couples. Finally, the scale was intended to be psychometrically sound and to complement rather than duplicate existing measures.

Description

Initial work on the SAS (Hendrick, Hendrick, Slapion-Foote, & Foote, 1985) involved item generation and reduction via principal components analysis (PCA) to a 58-item scale measuring Sexual Permissiveness, Sexual Responsibility, Sexual Communion, Sexual Instrumentality, and Sexual Conventionality. After additional sampling of nearly 1,400 university students from both Florida and Texas and extensive analyses employing PCA with Varimax rotation, 43 items across four factors were retained in a final scale (Hendrick & Hendrick, 1987). Given the nature of PCA, the factors were orthogonal, and the subscales were only modestly related. The subscales and number of items are as follows (the full scale is reproduced in the Exhibit): Permissiveness (21 items) measures a casual, open attitude toward sex. Sexual Practices (7 items) measures responsible (e.g., birth control) and tolerant (e.g., masturbation) sexual attitudes. Communion (9 items) presents sex as an ideal or “peak experience.” Finally, Sexual Instrumentality (6 items) reflects sex as a natural, biological, self-oriented aspect of life. The items are all written as statements and are in a Likert format with which the respondent rates his/her degree of agreement. As noted, the scale is appropriate for partnered couples of all types whose relationships have a sexual component.

Response Mode and Timing

Instructions for the SAS are included in the Exhibit. The items are rated on a 5-point basis in a Likert format, with 1 = strongly agree, 2 = moderately agree, 3 = neither agree nor disagree, 4 = moderately disagree, and 5 = strongly disagree.

Scoring

The lower the score, the greater the endorsement of a subscale, although direction of scoring can be reversed. Two

Note. Numbers in the answer space indicate the subscale the question is associated with, and the R is reversed scored. Contact David Hall at airsafel@comcast.net for a printable copy without scoring information. There is no copyright on this questionnaire.
items on the Permissiveness subscale are reverse-scored. The SAS can be completed typically in 10 minutes or less. Scores for a given subscale are represented by subscale mean scores (i.e., total the item scores and divide by the number of items). We have not found it useful to obtain a total score on the SAS, given that the subscales are relatively independent, representing different orientations toward sex (see following section).

Reliability
Reliability indices for the SAS are taken from Hendrick and Hendrick (1987); however, the scale has been used fairly widely for over 20 years and has been translated from English into a variety of languages. Reliability herein refers to internal consistency (Cronbach’s alpha), test-retest reliability, and intersubscale (i.e., intra SAS) correlations. Values were quite similar across two studies, with standardized alphas ranging from .71 for Sexual Practices to .94 for Permissiveness (Study I). Test-retest correlations (Study I only) ranged from .66 for Instrumentality to .88 for Permissiveness. Finally, intrascale correlations ranged from $r = .00$ between Permissiveness and Sexual Practices to $r = .44$ between Permissiveness and Instrumentality (Study II).

Validity
Initial criterion validity was demonstrated (Hendrick & Hendrick, 1987) by appropriate correlations between the SAS and measures such as the Reiss Male and Female Sexual Permissiveness Scales (Reiss, 1967) and the Revised Mosher Guilt Inventory (Green & Mosher, 1985). In other research (Hendrick & Hendrick, 1995), men reported themselves to be more permissive and instrumental in their sexual attitudes than women reported themselves to be. Relating these sexual attitudes to love attitudes for both women and men separately (see Hendrick & Hendrick, 1986, for a description of the Love Attitudes Scale), Permissiveness was positively related to game-playing love and negatively related to friendship love, practical love, and altruistic love. Sexual Practices was related inconsistently to love attitudes. Communion was positively related to passionate love, possessive love, and altruistic love. Instrumentality was positively related to game-playing love and negatively related to altruistic love.

The SAS has been used in a variety of studies: along with personality measures in a study of women with eating problems (Evans & Wertheim, 1998); to explore relationship infidelity and distress (Can, Mangum, & Wells, 2001); using the internet for casual dating (Peter & Valkenburg, 2007); predicting sexual experiences and attitudes from religious variables (Murray, Ciarrocchi, & Murray-Swank, 2007); comparing men who commit different types of sexual assault (Abbe, Parkhill, Clinton-Sherrod, & Zawacki, 2007); using sexual terms and personality terms to predict sex and relationships (Shafer, 2001); and examining religious and sexual attitudes of Irish youth (Grey & Swain, 1996). The SAS was also used in a study of French adults (Le Gall, Mullet, & Riviere Shafighi, 2002), wherein the scale performed well but was found to have a scale structure differing slightly from the original four-factor structure. Thus, the SAS is a solid and widely used scale, but some questions were raised about its factor structure. The Le Gall et al. findings and changes in language use and cohort influences over 2 decades prompted us to conduct a series of studies that resulted in the revision of the Sexual Attitudes Scale to the Brief Sexual Attitudes Scale, described below.

Other Information
The Sexual Attitudes Scale and the Brief Sexual Attitudes Scale are shown in the Exhibit, along with scoring instructions. The scales are in the public domain and free for research and clinical use. In the Exhibit, all 43 items in the SAS are shown; however, only the items in the BSAS are numbered.

**BRIEF SEXUAL ATTITUDES SCALE**

**Description**
The Brief Sexual Attitudes Scale (BSAS; Hendrick, Hendrick, & Reich, 2006) was developed because our recent research and that of others (e.g., Le Gall et al., 2002) indicated that the factor structure had shifted slightly. In addition, attitudes and language usage change rapidly in our technology-oriented society. Finally, all indices being equal, the briefer the measure, the greater its practicality for both research and clinical use. Based on data from three studies (two existing data sets and one prospective study), and analyses that included principal components analyses, confirmatory factor analyses (CFA), alphas, subscale intercorrelations, test-retest correlations, correlations with relevant measures, and assessment of gender differences, the 43-item SAS was refined into the 23-item BSAS. The final four scales include Permissiveness (10 items), Birth Control (3 items), Communion (5 items), and Instrumentality (5 items).

**Response Mode, Timing, and Scoring**
The response format for the BSAS is similar to that for the SAS, and completion time ranges from 5–10 minutes. Scoring is handled similarly to the SAS, using mean scores for the subscales and no overall scale score.

**Reliability and Validity**
In Studies 1 and 2, using existing data sets (Hendrick et al., 2006), the BSAS and SAS performed similarly, though CFA fit indices were significantly better for the BSAS. Gender differences and correlations with other measures (e.g., love attitudes, relationship satisfaction) were very similar. In
Attitudes

Study 3, the prospective study (Hendrick et al. 2006), the analytic strategy was similar to that for the previous two studies. CFA indices for the BSAS showed a Goodness of Fit Index (GFI) of .98, AGFI of .95, RMSEA of .05, CFI of .99, and χ²(21, 518) = 52.3 (Hendrick et al., 2006). The alphas were .95 for Permissiveness, .88 for Birth Control, .73 for Communion, and .77 for Instrumentality. Inter-subscale correlations were .20 or less except for one that was .40 (Permissiveness with Instrumentality). Test-retest correlations were .92 for Permissiveness, .57 for Birth Control, .86 for Communion, and .75 for Instrumentality. The BSAS subscales correlated as expected for the most part with love attitudes and with other relationship-oriented measures. Finally, gender differences were consistent with Studies I and II. Women “were less endorsing of Permissiveness and Instrumentality than were men, and the genders did not differ on Birth Control or Communion” (Hendrick et al., p. 84, 2006). The BSAS has been used in other published research (Hendrick & Hendrick, 2006), and the article has been cited by Rathus and colleagues (Rathus, Nevid, & Fichner-Rathus, 2008).

Other Information

As noted above, the Brief Sexual Attitudes Scale is readily available.

References


Exhibit

**Sexual Attitudes Scale and Brief Sexual Attitudes Scale**

Listed below are several statements that reflect different attitudes about sex. For each statement fill in the response on the answer sheet that indicates how much you agree or disagree with that statement. Some of the items refer to a specific sexual relationship, while others refer to general attitudes and beliefs about sex. Whenever possible, answer the questions with your current partner in mind. If you are not currently dating anyone, answer the questions with your most recent partner in mind. If you have never had a sexual relationship, answer in terms of what you think your responses would most likely be.

For each statement:

A = Strongly Agree with the Statement
B = Moderately Agree with the Statement
C = Neutral—Neither Agree nor Disagree
D = Moderately Disagree with the Statement
E = Strongly Disagree with the Statement

1. I do not need to be committed to a person to have sex with him/her.
2. Casual sex is acceptable.
3. I would like to have sex with many partners.
4. One-night stands are sometimes very enjoyable.

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5. It is okay to have ongoing sexual relationships with more than one person at a time.

P It is okay to manipulate someone into having sex as long as no future promises are made.

6. Sex as a simple exchange of favors is okay if both people agree to it.

7. The best sex is with no strings attached.

8. Life would have fewer problems if people could have sex more freely.

9. It is possible to enjoy sex with a person and not like that person very much.

P Sex is more fun with someone you don’t love.

P It is all right to pressure someone into having sex.

P Extensive premarital sexual experience is fine.

P Premarital affairs are all right as long as one’s partner doesn’t know about them.

P Sex for its own sake is perfectly all right.

P I would feel comfortable having intercourse with my partner in the presence of other people.

P Prostitution is acceptable.

10. It is okay for sex to be just good physical release.

P Sex without love is meaningless.

P People should at least be friends before they have sex together.

P In order for sex to be good, it must also be meaningful.

11. Birth control is part of responsible sexuality.

12. A woman should share responsibility for birth control.

13. A man should share responsibility for birth control.

SP Sex education is important for young people.

SP Using “sex toys” during lovemaking is acceptable.

SP Masturbation is all right.

SP Masturbating one’s partner during intercourse can increase the pleasure of sex.

C Sex gets better as a relationship progresses.

14. Sex is the closest form of communication between two people.

15. A sexual encounter between two people deeply in love is the ultimate human interaction.

C Orgasm is the greatest experience in the world.

16. At its best, sex seems to be the merging of two souls.

17. Sex is a very important part of life.

18. Sex is usually an intensive, almost overwhelming experience.

C During sexual intercourse, intense awareness of the partner is the best frame of mind.

C Sex is fundamentally good.

19. Sex is best when you let yourself go and focus on your own pleasure.

20. Sex is primarily the taking of pleasure from another person.

21. The main purpose of sex is to enjoy oneself.

22. Sex is primarily physical.

23. Sex is primarily a bodily function, like eating.

I Sex is mostly a game between males and females.

Note. Items included in the original SAS have a letter denoting their subscale and are not numbered. The BSAS includes the instructions shown at the top, which are the same as for the SAS. The items are administered in the order shown. For purposes of analyses, we have A = 1 and E = 5. (The scoring may be reversed, so that A = strongly disagree, etc.) P = Permissiveness; SP = Sexual Practices; C = Communion; I = Instrumentality. Items 1–10 = Permissiveness; 11–13 = Birth Control; 14–18 = Communion; 19–23 = Instrumentality.