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Attitudes Toward Unconventional Sex Scale

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The Attitudes Toward Unconventional Sex Scale (ATUSS) was developed to assess a general disposition to engage in unconventional sexual practices. In contrast to the two existing measures of conventional sex (Hendrick & Hendrick, 1987; Purnine, Carey, & Jorgensen, 1996), which confound general tendencies toward unconventional sex with specific unconventional behaviors, the ATUSS contains only global items assessing individuals’ general preferences for unconventional sex. Accordingly, the ATUSS can be used to determine the extent to which a general tendency toward unconventional sex predicts specific behaviors that may or may not be unconventional, without concern that item overlap may lead to spurious associations (see Fincham & Bradbury, 1987).

Description

The 5-item ATUSS assesses the extent to which individuals perceive that they enjoy sexual behaviors that deviate from traditional, conventional sexual practices. Items are rated on a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 7 (Strongly Agree).

Response Mode and Timing

The ATUSS can be administered in either paper-pencil or computerized response formats. Respondents should be instructed to choose the Likert rating that best describes their current attitudes or beliefs and assured that there are no “right or wrong” sexual attitudes. The ATUSS takes less than 2 minutes to complete.

Scoring

Items are coded such that higher scores indicate more unconventional sexual preferences. A total ATUSS score is computed by summing all scores (possible range = 5–35, see Exhibit).

Reliability

The ATUSS demonstrated high internal consistency in both a sample of 204 undergraduate college students (α = .80 for males; α = .76 for females) and a sample of 36 recently married couples (α = .86 for husbands; α = .70 for wives).

Validity

The ATUSS also demonstrated predictive validity in both samples. Specifically, in the sample of 204 undergraduate college students, scores on the ATUSS were strongly associated with enjoyment of various unconventional sexual behaviors, such as anal sex (r = .39), dominant/submissive sex (r = .58), and sex in unique places (r = .59). Likewise, in the sample of 36 recently married couples, scores on the ATUSS were strongly associated with enjoyment of anal sex (r = .61 for husbands; r = .42 for wives), dominant/submissive sex (r = .76 for husbands; r = .60 for wives), and sex in unique places (r = .62 for husbands; r = .39 for wives). Notably, husbands (M = 19.39, SD = 6.79) reported more unconventional preferences than wives (M = 15.39, SD = 4.74), t(35) = 3.94, p < .001, though husbands’ and wives’ unconventional sexual preferences were highly correlated (r = .48). In contrast, although male undergraduates (M = 20.18, SD = 6.50) reported slightly more unconventional preferences than female undergraduates (M = 19.13, SD = 5.65), that difference was not statistically significant, t(202) = 1.23, p = .22.

Other Information

The ATUSS may be useful in determining whether a general disposition toward unconventional sex is a risk factor for negative sexual outcomes (e.g., sexually transmitted infections, unwanted pregnancy). The ATUSS may also be useful in determining the distal sources of unconventional sexual preferences (e.g., personality, previous sexual experiences). Finally, the ATUSS may be useful in determining whether particular levels or combinations of unconventional sexual preferences are beneficial or harmful for relationships. For example, partners may be more satisfied to the extent that both prefer unconventional sex, or to the extent that they both prefer conventional sex, or to the extent that the male is more conventional than the female, or to the extent that the female is more conventional than the male.

References


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Assessing Multiple Facets of Attraction to Women and Men

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This measure is designed to provide an assessment of both the frequency and the intensity of an individual’s attractions to women and men. The measure is written so that it can be administered to either women or men, thereby yielding estimates of same-sex and other-sex attractions (depending on the gender of the respondent). All of the items are phrased with respect to “woman” and “man,” instead of “same-sex” and “other-sex.” The items are not designed to be aggregated into a single scale. Rather, the intent is to provide a more detailed, nuanced assessment of an individual’s pattern of sexual and emotional feelings than that which is provided by global measures such as the Kinsey scale. Depending on the specific research questions being asked, and the population being studied, different items (and combinations of items) may prove meaningful. Modifications of this scale have been administered in Diamond (1998, 2000, 2003, 2005, 2008a, 2008b).

Description

Items 1–3 assess the relative frequency of same-sex and opposite-sex attractions and fantasies (similar to the Kinsey scale), but they use a different response format than the Kinsey scale. Specifically, respondents are prompted to provide a number between 0 and 100 to represent the degree to which they are more frequently attracted to women versus men. The 0%-to-100% response format has been found to be more intuitive and easier to understand than the Kinsey scale items. For example, whereas respondents need to be given a specific operational definition for each different number on the Kinsey scale, most individuals intuitively understand the distinctions between, for example, “75%” and “95%.” Note that physical and emotional attractions are assessed separately, and operational definitions are provided for each type.

In contrast to the items assessing relative frequency, Items 4, 7, and 10 (for women) and 14, 17, and 20 (for men) provide information on the overall frequency of attractions and fantasies. This is useful for differentiating between (for example) a woman who experiences 90% of her physical attractions for men, but experiences such attractions less than once a month, versus a woman who experiences 90% of her attractions for men, and experiences such attractions every single day.

Depending on the research question at hand, researchers might consider averaging together the responses assessing frequency of attractions and fantasy, but are advised to carefully examine the correlations between attraction-fantasy items (and in particular, to examine scatterplots) before doing so. In my own research on women, I have found tremendous interindividual variation in the degree to which women’s attractions correspond to their sexual fantasies, perhaps because some women feel self-conscious about engaging in sexual fantasy. When such discrepancies are observed, it is advisable to analyze attraction and fantasy as separate constructs.

Items 5, 6, 8 and 9 (for women) and 15, 16, 18, and 19 (for men) are designed to assess the breadth of an individual’s attractions. In other words, respondents only capable of experiencing same-sex attractions for one specific individual (and, perhaps, someone that they are currently involved with) or do respondents experience them

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