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Sexual Activity Questionnaire

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Sexual Activity Questionnaire

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Sexual activity occurs on a particular occasion as a result of individual and dyadic processes (see Byers & Heinlein, 1989, Figure 1). The Sexual Activity Questionnaire (SAQ) assesses the frequency of each step of the sequence of behaviors leading up to and during sexual interactions, as well as the specific behaviors used to initiate sexual activity and to respond to a sexual initiation. The SAQ has been used with married and cohabiting partners (Byers & Heinlein, 1989) and with dating partners (O’Sullivan & Byers, 1992). The term sexual activity includes all activities that the subjects experience as sexual, from holding hands to kissing to sexual intercourse. The SAQ could be easily adapted for use by same-sex couples.

Description

The SAQ is administered as a self-monitoring measure. At the end of each day, or as soon after a sexual interaction as possible, participants indicate (a) whether sexual activity had been initiated on that day, and, if so, by the man or by the woman; (b) if sexual activity was initiated, whether the noninitiator’s first response was interest or disinterest in engaging in sexual activity at that time; and (c) if sexual activity was not initiated by either partner, whether the respondent had considered initiating sexual activity. When used with dating, rather than cohabiting, partners, respondents first indicate on each day whether they had been on a “date” (defined as any social situation in which the person was with a member of the other sex).

Participants then provide detailed information about one or more of the sexual initiations that occurred that week. For example, participants can be asked to describe the first sexual initiation by the man and/or by the woman (O’Sullivan & Byers, 1992), the first sexual initiation to which the partner responded positively (if any), and/or the first sexual initiation to which the partner responded negatively (if any; Byers & Heinlein, 1989). For the specified situation(s), respondents indicate the verbal and nonverbal behaviors used to initiate the sexual activity and to respond to the sexual initiation, as well as where the couple was and what they were doing when the initiation occurred. Respondents also indicate, from a list of 22 behaviors, those used by the initiator to demonstrate a desire for sexual activities. For the situation in which the partner initially was not interested in engaging in sexual activity, respondents indicate the reason(s) for the disinterest, how long the disagreement continued, how the disagreement was resolved, and they rate how satisfied they were with their own and their partner’s parts in resolving the disagreement. They also indicate whether they engaged in sexual activity at that time and, if so, why the initially disinterested person decided to engage in the activity. For the situation in which the partner was initially interested in engaging in the sexual activity, respondents indicate how satisfied they were with the way sex was initiated.

For those situations in which sexual activity resulted from the initiation, respondents indicate the types of sexual activities that resulted and their duration. They also rate how enjoyable the sexual interaction was for themselves and for their partner. Using an open-ended format, respondents are given the opportunity to provide additional information about the interaction they had described. Finally, they rate their confidence in the accuracy of their responses.

Dating partners are asked to provide information about their dating partner that is not included on the marital/cohabiting form. Questions assess their relationship with their dating partner (type of relationship, number of previous dates), their romantic interest in their date, and their perception of their date’s romantic interest in them before they went on the date, and their own and their date’s romantic interest at the end of the evening.

Response Mode and Timing

The SAQ takes approximately 10 minutes to complete. Most of the questions are objective. However, participants describe their activities and location at the time of the sexual initiation. Activities are coded for whether the partners are actively interacting. Location is coded as to whether the initiation occurred in a bedroom, other room in the house, or elsewhere. In addition, respondents describe the words and behaviors used to initiate sexual activity and to respond to a partner’s initiation. The categories used to code descriptions of verbal initiations are no verbal initiation, indirect (ambiguous) statement, statement of feelings, and direct statement. Nonverbal initiations are coded as no nonverbal initiation, nonsexual touching or suggestive look, kissing, and sexual fondling. The checklist of 22 initiation behaviors is collapsed into five categories: direct verbal initiation, ambiguous verbal cues, physical contact, sexual cues, and suggestive movements and actions.

Different categories are used to code descriptions of negative and positive responses to initiations. For negative responses to initiations, the verbal responses are coded as no verbal response, verbal refusal without reason, refusal with physical reason, refusal indicating that there was not time, and refusal with a mood-related reason. The nonver-

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Bal responses are coded as no physical response, positive response to a lower level of sexual activity only, stopping or not responding to the partner’s sexual advances, and moving away. For positive responses to initiations, the verbal responses are coded as no verbal response, agreement or invitation, and request for clarification. The nonverbal responses are coded as follows: no nonverbal response, initiated sexual activity, and continued sexual interaction. Alternately, ratings of positive and negative responses to initiations can be combined.

Reliability

The SAQ has good reliability. Byers and Heinlein (1989) found a mean interrater agreement for the open-ended questions of .86. In general, respondents were moderately or very sure that their responses were accurate ($M = 5.5$ on a 6-point scale). Eno (1994) found the average agreement between spouses from 36 couples to be .75 for initiations and .90 for responses to initiations. O’Sullivan and Byers (1992) found an average interrater agreement of .87 and an average confidence rating of 5.2, demonstrating good reliability with dating couples.

Validity

There is support for the validity of some aspects of the SAQ. Byers and Heinlein (1989) found that younger individuals, individuals newer to their relationships, and those who reported greater marital and sexual satisfaction reported more initiations. When the number of initiations was controlled, more negative responses were associated with men and women who experienced less sexual pleasure, lower sexual satisfaction, and lower dyadic adjustment. Those individuals who had been in the relationship longer, and who reported less sexual pleasure for the woman and less sexual satisfaction, reported considering initiating sex despite not doing so more often. Eno (1994) found significant positive correlations between retrospective measures of the frequency of sexual initiations and positive responses in the week before self-monitoring and self-monitoring measures of these behaviors, ($M = .71$). O’Sullivan and Byers (1992) found that respondents who had dated more frequently in the month before the study or who were in steady dating relationships reported more sexual initiations.

References


### Exhibit

**Sexual Activity Questionnaire (Married/Cohabitng Version)**

*Instructions:* We are interested in learning more about how couples initiate sexual activities, and how their partners respond to these initiations. By initiation of sexual activities, we mean any word and/or action that one person uses to indicate his or her interest in engaging in sexual activities, at a point in time when the couple is not engaging in any sexual activities. Notice that we are interested in initiations, whether or not any sexual activity results from the initiation. For example, one person may initiate sexual interactions by complimenting his or her partner on his or her looks or using a code phrase that the partner knows indicates sexual interest. Other examples of initiations would be if one person moved closer to their partner or if one person loosened or removed some of his or her own or the partner’s clothing. We are interested in the initiation of all levels of sexual activity from kissing (if you consider it a sexual activity and not an expression of affection) to intercourse.

Please complete the attached questionnaire on a daily basis for one week. It is divided into 3 parts.

**Part I.** Part I of the questionnaire asks you to indicate, for each day of that particular week, whether either you or your partner initiated sexual activity. You are also asked to indicate for each “initiation” who initiated the sexual activity, and whether the noninitiator’s first response was interest or disinterest in sex. By first response we mean the first thing he or she said or did in response to the initiation. In some cases, the noninitiator’s first response might not be the same as their response a few seconds or minutes later. If sexual activity was not initiated by either partner on that day, please indicate whether you considered initiating and your reasons for not doing so. Further instructions for filling out this part of the questionnaire are on the questionnaire itself.

**Part II.** Fill in Part II of the questionnaire (the blue sheets) for the first occasion (if any) in that week on which sex was initiated, and the noninitiator’s first response was that he or she was not interested. If no such initiation occurred in your relationship that week, leave this part of the questionnaire blank.

**Part III.** Fill in Part III of the questionnaire (the yellow sheets) for the first occasion (if any) in that week on which sex was initiated, and...
the noninitiator’s first response was that he or she was interested in sex—that is, when both partners were interested from the outset. If no such initiation occurred that week, leave this part of the questionnaire blank.

Since it is easy to forget the specifics of any particular communication or interaction, it is important that you complete Parts II and III of the questionnaire as soon as possible after the initiation occurs. Try to be as accurate as possible in completing the questionnaire.

Definitions:

**Sexual Activity**: Any activity of a sexual (as opposed to purely affectionate) nature. Thus, this can include anything from kissing and touching to sexual intercourse. “SEX” is not necessarily intercourse.

**Initiation**: Any communication (verbal or nonverbal) of a “desire” to participate in sexual activity. Sexual activity may or may not follow.

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**Sexual Initiation Questionnaire**

**Part I.** For each day of the week, please indicate the following (see Instruction Sheet for definitions):

(a) Whether sexual activity was initiated.

(b) If sexual activity was initiated, indicate whether it was initiated by you or by your partner (male or female). Then indicate what the first response was of the noninitiator. That is, if sex was initiated by you, indicate what your partner’s first response was; if sex was initiated by your partner, indicate what your first response was.

(c) If neither you nor your partner initiated sex on that day, indicate if you considered initiating sex but did not do so. If you did change your mind, indicate the reasons for doing so.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date and day of week</th>
<th>Was sex initiated?</th>
<th>By whom?</th>
<th>Noninitiator’s first response</th>
<th>Did you consider initiating?</th>
<th>If yes, why didn’t you initiate?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>__________</td>
<td>___ yes</td>
<td>___ woman</td>
<td>___ interested</td>
<td>___ yes</td>
<td>_______________________________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>__________</td>
<td>___ no</td>
<td>___ man</td>
<td>___ uninterested</td>
<td>___ no</td>
<td>_______________________________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>__________</td>
<td>___ yes</td>
<td>___ woman</td>
<td>___ interested</td>
<td>___ yes</td>
<td>_______________________________</td>
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<td>__________</td>
<td>___ no</td>
<td>___ man</td>
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<td>__________</td>
<td>___ yes</td>
<td>___ woman</td>
<td>___ interested</td>
<td>___ yes</td>
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<tr>
<td>__________</td>
<td>___ no</td>
<td>___ man</td>
<td>___ uninterested</td>
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<td>__________</td>
<td>___ yes</td>
<td>___ woman</td>
<td>___ interested</td>
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<td>__________</td>
<td>___ yes</td>
<td>___ woman</td>
<td>___ interested</td>
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<td>___ man</td>
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<td>___ yes</td>
<td>___ woman</td>
<td>___ interested</td>
<td>___ yes</td>
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<tr>
<td>__________</td>
<td>___ no</td>
<td>___ man</td>
<td>___ uninterested</td>
<td>___ no</td>
<td>_______________________________</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The first of these days on which either you or your partner initiated sex and found that the noninitiator was initially not interested was __________ (write in day of the week). Please fill in Part II of the questionnaire on the blue paper for this occasion.

The first of these days on which either you or your partner initiated sex and found that the noninitiator was initially interested __________ (write in day of the week). Please fill in Part III of the questionnaire on the yellow paper for this occasion.

**Part II.** Complete Questions 1–14 (blue paper) if either you or your partner initiated sexual activity and the first response of the noninitiator was that he or she was not interested.

1. At the time of the initiation, where were you and your partner (e.g., in the kitchen of our home)? ______________________________

2. Briefly describe the main thing(s) you and your partner were doing prior to the initiation (e.g., reading, talking). ______________________________

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3. The noninitiator indicated a desire for sexual activity by
   saying: ________________________________________________________________
   doing: __________________________________________________________________

4. The noninitiator responded to the initiator’s initial advances by:
   saying: __________________________________________________________________
   doing: __________________________________________________________________

5. The initiator then responded to this reaction by:
   saying: __________________________________________________________________
   doing: __________________________________________________________________

6. How long did the disagreement continue? _____________ minutes

7. How was the disagreement resolved? _________________________________________

8. (a) How satisfied are you with how sexual activity was initiated?
   ______ very satisfied
   ______ satisfied
   ______ neutral
   ______ dissatisfied
   ______ very satisfied
   (b) Why? _______________________________________________________________

9. (a) Overall, how satisfied are you with how the disagreement was resolved?
   ______ very satisfied
   ______ satisfied
   ______ neutral
   ______ dissatisfied
   ______ very satisfied
   (b) Why? _______________________________________________________________

10. What behaviors did the initiator use to demonstrate a desire for sexual activities? (Check all that apply.)
    ______ asked directly
    ______ used some code words
    ______ used pet names
    ______ used more eye contact
    ______ massaged or stroked
    ______ snuggled or cuddled
    ______ kissed date
    ______ shared a drink
    ______ moved closer
    ______ talked about the relationship
    ______ used “suggestive” body movements or postures
    ______ others: ____________________________________________________________

11. If you did engage in sexual activities at that time,
    (a) Why did the person who was initially not interested decide to have sex? _________________
        _______________________________________________________________________

    (b) Which behaviors did you and your partner engage in at that time (check all that apply)?
        ______ hugging, cuddling
        ______ kissing
        ______ necking
        ______ fondling or kissing breast
        ______ fondling woman’s genitals
        ______ fondling man’s genitals
Behavior

_____ oral-genital stimulation
_____ coitus
_____ other (please specify) ________________________________________________

(c) About how long did you and your partner spend in sexual activity at that time? ___________ minutes

(d) How enjoyable was this occasion of love-making for you?
   _____ extremely unpleasant
   _____ moderately unpleasant
   _____ slightly unpleasant
   _____ slightly pleasant
   _____ moderately pleasant
   _____ extremely pleasant

(e) How enjoyable do you think this occasion of love-making was for your partner?
   _____ extremely unpleasant
   _____ moderately unpleasant
   _____ slightly unpleasant
   _____ slightly pleasant
   _____ moderately pleasant
   _____ extremely pleasant

12. If you did not engage in sexual activity at that time,
   (a) was sex initiated again later that day?
      ___ yes  ___ no
   (b) If yes, by whom?  ___ the man    ____ the woman    ____ mutual consent

13. If there is any additional information that would help us to understand the situation that you described above, please provide it.
    ________________________________________________________________

14. How confident are you that your responses are accurate?
   _____ very unsure
   _____ moderately unsure
   _____ slightly unsure
   _____ slightly sure
   _____ moderately sure
   _____ very sure

Part III. Complete Questions 15–25 (yellow paper) if either you or your partner initiated sexual activity and the first response of the noninitiator was that he or she was interested.

15. At the time of the initiation, where were you and your partner (e.g., in the kitchen of our home)? ________________________

16. Briefly describe the main thing(s) you and your partner were doing prior to the initiation (e.g., reading, talking).________

17. The initiator indicated a desire for sexual activity by:
       saying: ___________________________________________________________________
       doing: __________________________________________________________________

18. The noninitiator responded to the initiator’s initial advances by:
       saying: __________________________________________________________________
       doing: __________________________________________________________________

19. (a) How satisfied are you with how sexual activity was initiated?
       _____ very satisfied
       _____ satisfied
       _____ neutral
       _____ dissatisfied
       _____ very dissatisfied

(b) Why? _________________________________________________________________
20. What behaviors did the initiator use to demonstrate a desire for sexual activities? (Check all that apply.)

- asked directly
- used some code words with which the man was familiar
- used pet names
- used more eye contact
- touched her date
- massaged or stroked
- snuggled or cuddled
- kissed date
- shared a drink
- moved closer
- talked about the relationship
- used "suggestive" body movements or postures
- others: ____________________________________________________________
- removed or loosened clothing
- played with man's hair
- lay down
- changed tone of voice
- made indirect talk of sex
- set mood atmosphere (music, lighting, etc.)
- played games or light "rough-housing"
- made compliments
- used some force
- allowed hand to wander
- looked at sexual material

21. Did you and your partner engage in sexual activity at that time?

- yes  
- no

22. If you did have sex at that time,
   (a) which sexual behaviors did you and your partner engage in (check all that apply)?

- hugging, cuddling
- kissing
- necking
- fondling or kissing breast
- fondling woman's genitals
- fondling man's genitals
- oral-genital stimulation
- coitus
- others (please specify) _______________________________

   (b) About how long did you and your partner spend in sexual activity at that time?

- _______ minutes

   (c) How enjoyable was this occasion of love-making for you?

- extremely unpleasant
- moderately unpleasant
- slightly unpleasant
- slightly pleasant
- moderately pleasant
- extremely pleasant

   (d) How enjoyable do you think this occasion of love-making was for your partner?

- extremely unpleasant
- moderately unpleasant
- slightly unpleasant
- slightly pleasant
- moderately pleasant
- extremely pleasant

23. If you did not engage in sexual activity at that time,
   (a) was sex initiated again later that day?

- yes  
- no

   (b) If yes, by whom?  

- the man  
- the woman  
- mutual consent

24. If there is any additional information that would help us to understand the situation that you described above, please provide it. ____________________________________________________________
25. **How confident are you that your responses are accurate?**

- **very unsure**
- **moderately unsure**
- **slightly unsure**
- **slightly sure**
- **moderately sure**
- **very sure**

*This version of the questionnaire is designed to be completed by cohabiting partners. The questionnaire can be modified for use by dating couples.*

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**Cowart–Pollack Scale of Sexual Experience**

*Debra Cowart-Steckler,* University of Mary Washington  
*Robert H. Pollack,* University of Georgia

The Cowart–Pollack Scale of Sexual Experience consists of two checklists of heterosexual activities: one for men and another for women. It was developed to assess the sexual experience of an individual or group of individuals in research, therapy, or the classroom.

### Description

The checklists comprise a wide range of sexual activities for men and women, including oral contacts, masturbation, various intercourse positions, anal intercourse, and bondage. The female scale consists of 30 sexual activities. They range from “your nude breast felt by male” to “anal intercourse.” The male scale consists of 31 sexual activities, ranging from “feeling female’s nude breast” to “bondage.”

Initially, the sexual experience scales consisted of 47 items drawn from previous studies (Bentler, 1968a, 1968b; Zuckerman, 1973). These 47-item scales were distributed to 153 men and 226 women during a group-testing session. After completion, the items were ordered from most to least frequent according to the percentages of subjects who reported that they had engaged in such behavior. In accordance with the Cornell technique of Guttman scaling with two response categories, the top and bottom 10% of the items were discarded. This procedure yielded the present scales.

Investigations of the range of heterosexual experiences have shown a predictable sequence of experiences for men and women (Cowart & Pollack, 1979; Cowart-Steckler, 1984). These experiences can be described using the Cornell technique of Guttman scaling in which the behaviors are ordered from most frequent to least frequent (Guttman, 1947). Guttman scaling assumes that an individual who experiences a less frequent behavior previously has experienced the more common behavior (Edwards, 1957). Applying the Guttman scaling technique to sexual experiences suggests that heterosexual relationships progress through similar sequences of experiences. An individual who responds to this scale, then, can be compared to the normative sample and the level of sexual experience can be ascertained.

The Cowart–Pollack scale has been standardized using a college-aged sample (aged 18 to 21) and, therefore, is appropriate for people in that age group. Distributing the questionnaire to people of different ages may yield a different ordering in the sequence of behaviors.

### Response Mode and Timing

When the scale is used in research, therapy, or to assess one’s level of sexual experience, the items are ordered randomly. Respondents indicate that they have or have not experienced each behavior by circling *yes* or *no* in answer to the question “Have you experienced the following?” The scale usually requires an average of 10 minutes for completion.

### Scoring

No scoring per se is required. A comparison between the ordering of the respondent’s experiences and the norms established by the Cowart–Pollack scale will give an accurate indication of the respondent’s level of sexual experience.

### Reliability and Validity

The Cowart–Pollack scale has been distributed twice to large groups of college-aged individuals. In 1979 (Cowart & Pollack, 1979), the 31-item scale for men and the 30-item scale for women were administered in a group-testing situation to 199 men and 213 women. The coefficient of