Handbook of Sexuality-Related Measures

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Attitudes Toward Women’s Genitals Scale

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43. Being promiscuous.
44. Having sex with someone much younger than myself.
45. Having sex with someone much older than myself.
46. Being much sought after by the opposite sex.
47. Being seduced as an “innocent.”
48. Seducing an “innocent.”
49. Being embarrassed by failure of sexual performance.
50. Having sex with someone of a different race.
51. Using objects for stimulation (e.g. vibrator, candles).
52. Being masturbated to orgasm by a partner.
53. Looking at obscene pictures or films.
54. Kissing passionately.
55. While engaging in a sexual act with my partner I have had sexual thoughts of saying something to my partner that I know would upset him/her.
56. While engaging in a sexual act with my partner I have had sexual thoughts of doing something to my partner that I know would upset him/her.
57. Any other sexual thought not listed above. (SPECIFY):

Note. Items 11, 22, 27, 30, 39, and 48 constitute the Sexual Dominance Subscale. Items 5, 6, 10, 19, 20, 23, 26, 31, 34, and 47 constitute the Sexual Submission Subscale.

Attitudes Toward Women’s Genitals Scale

DEBRA HERBENICK, Indiana University

Women’s sexual and sexual health behaviors may be influenced by a range of factors including their perceptions of female genitals, such as whether vaginas are clean or dirty, attractive or unattractive, or whether they smell or taste pleasant. As an example, women who believe that vaginas generally smell bad or are “dirty” may avoid receiving cunnilingus or may avoid annual pelvic exams. The Attitudes Toward Women’s Genitals Scale (ATWGS) was designed with the intent to measure individuals’ perceptions of women’s genitals (Herbenick, 2006) rather than genital self-image, a concept that relates to how one perceives one’s own genitals, which is measured by other scales.

Description

The ATWGS is a 10-item measure composed of statements with which respondents are asked to indicate their agreement or disagreement. The scale was developed in multiple stages. In Phase One, nine brief pilot surveys were completed by 370 women and men in order to elicit perceptions of women’s genitals using open-ended and closed-ended items. These data, in combination with a review of literature related to women’s genitals, were examined for common themes. A total of 14 themes were found: genital appearance, vaginal birth, size in relation to function, menstruation, hygiene, pubic hair, smell, taste, communication, femininity, “looking” (e.g., either looking at oneself or allowing another to look), wetness, touching, and oral sex. Based on these themes, 101 items were written by the author and informed by feedback from a team of experts in the areas of gender studies, medicine, public health, psychology, and women’s sexuality. The items were then administered as part of a larger survey to 604 undergraduate and graduate students (362 women, 242 men; mean age = 20.0) and, through an iterative process involving the use of reliability analysis, the scale was reduced to 10 items.

Further research is recommended in order to understand the scale properties among other adult populations and clinical samples. The ATWGS may be particularly well suited for use in research that purports to understand how educational curricula or interventions can help to change attitudes toward women’s genitals over time. It may also be a useful measure among clinical samples of women who have experienced a change in their genital appearance or function, such as in samples of women with vulvar cancer or lichen sclerosus.

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Response Mode and Timing
Respondents are asked to read a series of 10 statements and to indicate their agreement or disagreement using the response options of Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Agree, or Strongly Agree. Time to completion is typically less than 5 minutes.

Scoring
ATWGS scores are calculated by summing the scores of Items 1, 2, 4, 7, 9, and 10 (1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Agree, 4 = Strongly Agree) with the reverse-coded scores from Items 3, 5, 6, and 8. A higher score indicates more positive attitudes toward women’s genitals.

Reliability
Cronbach’s alpha for the scale was .85 among women, .82 among men, and .86 for the genders combined. Corrected item-to-total correlations exceeded .38 for each item (Herbenick, 2009). The temporal stability of the ATWGS over a 2-week period for a group of 16 women and men was .93 (p < .001).

Validity
The ATWGS correlated with the 5-item Sexual Opinion Survey (Fisher, 1998), r = .43, p < .001, lending support for the convergent validity of the ATWGS (Herbenick, 2009). In addition, the ATWGS exhibited evidence of predictive capacity in that women who had experienced a gynecological exam, who had received cunnilingus three or more times, who had examined their genitals three or more times, or who had used a vibrator scored significantly higher on the ATWGS than women who had not. Men who had performed oral sex on a woman three or more times scored higher on the ATWGS, indicating more positive attitudes toward women’s genitals, than men who had not.

Gender Differences
In the initial testing of the scale, men scored significantly higher on the ATWGS, on average, than women (29.77 vs. 26.48, p < .001). Further research is recommended to understand the stability and consistency of these gender differences.

References

Exhibit

**Attitudes Toward Women’s Genitals Scale**

The following items are about people’s feelings and beliefs related to women’s genitals (both the vulva and the vagina). The word *vulva* refers to a woman’s external genitals (the parts that one can see from the outside such as the clitoris, pubic mound and vaginal lips). The word *vagina* refers to the inside part, also called the birth canal.

Please mark an “X” in the box to indicate how strongly you agree or disagree with each statement.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Women’s genitals are beautiful.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Women should feel proud of their genitals.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Women’s genitals smell bad.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>I wish more people could appreciate the beauty of women’s genitals.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>In general, women’s genitals probably taste disgusting.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Women’s genitals are ugly.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>I wish our society was more open about women’s genitals.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Women’s genitals are dirty.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>I feel positively toward women’s genitals.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>I can see how some people would think that women’s genitals feel good to touch.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>