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Sexual Beliefs Scale

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Coercion

We developed the Sexual Beliefs Scale (SBS) to measure five beliefs related to rape: the beliefs (a) that women often indicate unwillingness to engage in sex when they are actually willing (the Token Refusal, or TR, subscale); (b) that if a woman “leads a man on,” behaving as if she is willing to engage in sex when in fact she is not, then the man is justified in forcing her (the Leading On Justifies Force, or LOJF, subscale); (c) that women enjoy force in sexual situations (the Women Like Force, or WLF, subscale); (d) that men should dominate women in sexual situations (the Men Should Dominate, or MSD, subscale); and (e) that women have a right to refuse sex at any point, at which time men should stop their sexual advances (the No Means Stop, or NMS, subscale). There were existing measures of rape-related beliefs that yielded one global score (e.g., Burt’s Rape Myth Acceptance Scale, 1980) or that measured one belief (e.g., Burt’s Adversarial Sexual Beliefs Scale, 1980), but we could find no scales that yielded separate scores for different beliefs.

Description

The short form of the SBS is a 20-item scale consisting of five 4-item subscales; the long form is a 40-item scale consisting of five 8-item subscales. Each item is rated on a 4-point scale, from Disagree Strongly (0) to Agree Strongly.

Sexual Beliefs Scale

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8. My partner pressured me to have sex with him against my will.
9. My partner initiated sex with me when I was unaware (for example, I was asleep, drunk, or on medication) and continued against my will.
10. My partner threatened to physically force me to have sex with him.
11. My partner physically forced me to have sex with him.
12. My partner made me feel obligated to have sex with him.
13. My partner hinted that he would have sex with another woman if I did not have sex with him.
14. My partner threatened to have sex with another woman if I did not have sex with him.
15. My partner told me that other couples have sex more than we do, to make me feel like I should have sex with him.
16. My partner hinted that he might pursue a long-term relationship with another woman if I did not have sex with him.
17. My partner threatened to pursue a long-term relationship with another woman if I did not have sex with him.
18. My partner hinted that if I were truly committed to him I would have sex with him.
19. My partner told me that if I were truly committed to him I would have sex with him.
20. My partner hinted that if I loved him I would have sex with him.
21. My partner told me that if I loved him I would have sex with him.
22. My partner threatened violence against me if I did not have sex with him.
23. My partner threatened violence against someone or something I care about if I did not have sex with him.
24. My partner hinted that other women were interested in a relationship with him, so that I would have sex with him.
25. My partner told me that other women were interested in a relationship with him, so that I would have sex with him.
26. My partner hinted that other women were interested in having sex with him, so that I would have sex with him.
27. My partner told me that other women were interested in having sex with him, so that I would have sex with him.
28. My partner hinted that other women were willing to have sex with him, so that I would have sex with him.
29. My partner told me that other women were willing to have sex with him, so that I would have sex with him.
30. My partner hinted that it was my obligation or duty to have sex with him.
31. My partner told me that it was my obligation or duty to have sex with him.
32. My partner hinted that I was cheating on him, in an effort to get me to have sex with him.
33. My partner accused me of cheating on him, in an effort to get me to have sex with him.
34. My partner and I had sex, even though I did not want to.

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(3). Many respondents found the long form repetitious, and correlations between the short and long forms were high, ranging from .96 to .98 for the five subscales. Thus, we recommend the short form for most purposes.

Response Mode and Timing
The SBS can be administered using numerous formats (e.g., as a paper-and-pencil questionnaire or online questionnaire). The short form requires less than 5 minutes to complete; the long form requires less than 10 minutes.

Scoring
Items on each subscale are summed, yielding five subscale scores ranging from 0 to 12 (short form) or from 0 to 24 (long form). Higher scores reflect greater agreement with the belief measured by the subscale.

Reliability
For a sample of 337 male and female undergraduates, Cronbach’s alphas for the short and long forms, respectively, were as follows: TR, .71 and .84; LOJF, .90 and .92; WLF, .92 and .95; MSD, .85 and .93; NMS, .94 and .96. In other samples, Milhausen, McBride, and Jun (2006) found alphas for the five subscales ranging from .62 to .86, with a median of .80 (N = 261). Dill, Brown, and Collins (2008) found alphas ranging from .71 (TR) to .94 (NMS); the alpha for the 20-item composite was .83 (N = 180).

Validity
Muehlenhard and Hollabaugh (1988) found that women who had engaged in token refusal of sexual intercourse—indicating no but meaning yes—scored higher than other women on the TR subscale, indicating that they regarded token refusal as a widespread behavior.

Muehlenhard and MacNaughton (1988) compared women whose LOJF scores fell at the lowest, middle, and highest 15% of the distribution. Compared with low-LOJF women, high-LOJF women rated a hypothetical rape victim as more responsible for the rape, rated the rape as more justified, and so forth. Medium- and high-LOJF women were more likely than low-LOJF women to report engaging in unwanted intercourse because a man had become so aroused that they felt it was useless to stop him; perhaps they believed that they had “led him on” and thus were obligated to satisfy him.

Muehlenhard, Andrews, and Beal (1996) compared men with high LOJF scores (LOJF men), men with low LOJF but high TR scores (TR men), and men with low LOJF and TR scores (Low-Myth men). LOJF men scored higher than TR men, and both scored higher than Low-Myth men, on self-rated likelihood of attempting intercourse with a woman after she said no. When asked to assume that she really had meant no, TR men no longer differed significantly from Low-Myth men, suggesting that TR men really had not believed her refusal; in contrast, LOJF men still scored significantly higher than Low-Myth men. The distinct pattern for each group illustrates the value of measuring these beliefs separately.

Jones and Muehlenhard (1990) investigated the effects of a classroom lecture aimed at decreasing rape-supportive beliefs. Four weeks later, students who had received the lecture scored significantly lower than students in control classes on the TR, LOJF, WLF, and MSD subscales (as well as on Burt’s Rape Myth Acceptance, Adversarial Sexual Beliefs, and Acceptance of Interpersonal Violence scales, 1980). The two groups did not differ significantly on the NMS subscale; even the control group had high NMS scores. Assessing another sexual assault prevention program, Milhausen et al. (2006) found significant pre- to posttest decreases on the WLF and TR subscales. Paradoxically, scores on the NMS subscale also decreased slightly but significantly.

Dill et al. (2008) found that SBS composite scores correlated significantly with exposure to violent video games (r = .24, p < .001). The correlation was even higher for exposure to first-person shooter games (r = .26, p < .0001).

Finally, consistent with numerous studies showing that men endorse rape-supportive beliefs more strongly than women do, Milhausen et al. (2006) found that men scored higher than women on all the SBS subscales except the NMS subscale. Similarly, Dill et al. (2008) found that men scored higher than women on the 20-item composite.

In summary, numerous studies support the validity of the SBS. The No Means Stop subscale, however, seems less useful than the others. Some respondents endorsed NMS items, agreeing that women have the right to say no at any point, but also endorsed items agreeing that no often means yes and that women who “lead men on” deserve to be forced. Similar patterns have been found in other studies (e.g., Goodchilds & Zellman, 1984); some respondents state that forced intercourse is never justified and that forced intercourse is justified in some circumstances.

References


## Exhibit

**Sexual Beliefs Scale**

Below is a list of statements regarding sexual attitudes. Using the scale below, indicate how much you agree or disagree with each statement. There are no right or wrong answers, only opinions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Disagree Strongly</th>
<th>Disagree Mildly</th>
<th>Agree Mildly</th>
<th>Agree Strongly</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*M* 1. Guys should dominate girls in bed.

*N* 2. Even if a man really wants sex, he shouldn’t do it if the girl doesn’t want to.

*L* 3. Girls who are teases deserve what they get.

*W* 4. By being dominated, girls get sexually aroused.

*W* 5. A little force really turns a girl on.

*N* 6. It’s a girl’s right to refuse sex at any time.

*T* 7. Girls usually say No even when they mean Yes.

*L* 8. When a girl gets a guy obviously aroused and then says No, he has the right to force sex on her.

*W* 9. Girls really want to be manhandled.

*M* 10. Men should decide what should happen during sex.

*L* 11. A man is justified in forcing a woman to have sex if she leads him on.

*M* 12. A man’s masculinity should be proven in sexual situations.

*T* 13. Girls generally want to be talked into having sex.

*W* 14. Girls think it is exciting when guys use a little force on them.

*N* 15. A guy should respect a girl’s wishes if she says No.

*M* 16. The man should be the one who dictates what happens during sex.

*T* 17. Girls say No so that guys don’t lose respect for them.


*L* 19. A girl who leads a guy to believe she wants sex when she really doesn’t deserves whatever happens.

*T* 20. Women often say No because they don’t want men to think they’re easy.

*N* 21. When girls say No, guys should stop.

*M* 22. During sex, guys should be in control.

*L* 23. When a girl toys with a guy, she deserves whatever happens to her.

*T* 24. Girls just say No so as not to look promiscuous.

*N* 25. At any point, a woman always has the right to say No.

*M* 26. Guys should have the power in sexual situations.

*W* 27. Women really get turned on by men who let them know who’s boss.

*T* 28. Girls just say No to make it seem like they’re nice girls.

*L* 29. Girls who tease guys should be taught a lesson.

*M* 30. The man should be in control of the sexual situation.

*L* 31. Girls who act like they want sex deserve it when the guy follows through.

*N* 32. Even if a man is aroused, he doesn’t have the right to force himself on a woman.

*L* 33. Girls who lead guys on deserve what they get.

*N* 34. If a woman says No, a man has no right to continue.

*M* 35. Men should exercise their authority over women in sexual situations.

*T* 36. When girls say No, they often mean Yes.

*W* 37. It really arouses girls when guys dominate them in bed.

*N* 38. If a girl doesn’t want sex, the guy has no right to do it.

*T* 39. Girls who act seductively really want sex, even if they don’t admit it.

*W* 40. Girls like it when guys are a little rough with them.


*These items are on the short form.