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Conflict

Sexual Situation Questionnaire

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The Sexual Situation Questionnaire (SSQ) measures behavior during interactions in which heterosexual dating partners disagree about the level of sexual intimacy in which they desire to engage (Byers & Lewis, 1988; O’Sullivan & Byers, 1993; O’Sullivan & Byers, 1996). It also assesses coercive and noncoercive behaviors individuals use to influence a reluctant partner to engage in the disputed sexual activity. Parallel forms measure disagreement situations in which the male or the female is the reluctant partner and differ only in the pronouns used to designate the initiating and the reluctant partner. The term sexual activity is defined to include all activities that the subjects experience as sexual, ranging from holding hands and kissing to sexual intercourse. Dating is defined broadly as any social situation in which the respondent was with a member of the other sex, even if it was not part of what they would consider to be a true date. The SSQ could easily be adapted to assess same-sex sexual interactions.

Description

The SSQ can be administered retrospectively (O’Sullivan & Byers, 1993, 1996) or as a self-monitoring device (Byers & Lewis, 1988). The self-monitoring version requires participants to keep a daily record of whether they had been on a date, whether the date involved sexual activity, and whether they and their partner differed about the desired level of sexual activity. The retrospective version requires participants to indicate whether they have ever experienced the designated type of disagreement situation (i.e., a disagreement situation in which the woman desired the higher level of sexual activity or a disagreement situation in which the man desired the higher level of sexual activity). There are male and female versions of each questionnaire.

Respondents who report having experienced such an interaction then complete a 19-item questionnaire assessing characteristics of the first (self-monitoring) or most recent (retrospective) incident. Questions assess their relationship with their dating partner (i.e., type of relationship, number of previous dates, romantic interest in their partner), where they were at the time of the disagreement, the disputed level of sexual activity, whether they had engaged in the disputed sexual activity with that partner on a previous occasion, and the consensual sexual activities preceding the disagreement (if any). Respondents also provide the reasons why the reluctant partner did not want to engage in the initiated sexual activity. Respondents provide detailed information regarding the communication about the disputed sexual activity by reporting the verbal and/or nonverbal behaviors used by (a) the man or woman to indicate his or her desire to engage in the sexual activity (i.e., initiation behaviors), (b) the reluctant partner to indicate unwillingness to engage in the initiated sexual activity (i.e., response behaviors), and, (c) the initiator in response to the noninitiating partner’s reluctance (i.e., influence behaviors). Respondents rate how clearly the initiator had indicated a desire for the sexual activity and how clearly the partner had indicated reluctance. Respondents also indicate, from a list of 34 possible influence strategies, those strategies (if any) used to influence the reluctant partner to engage in the unwanted sexual activity. For each strategy endorsed, respondents indicate whether the impact on the reluctant partner was positive (i.e., pleasing), negative (i.e., displeasing), or neutral (i.e., neither pleasing nor displeasing). Respondents indicate whether they had engaged in the disputed level of sexual activity following the disagreement, and how clearly the reluctant partner indicated reluctance. They rate the amount of romantic interest felt toward their dating partner both before and after the disagreement. 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.

Response Mode and Timing

The SSQ takes approximately 10 minutes to complete. The format is primarily multiple choice. Five items are open-ended: location of incident, reasons for reluctance to engage in the disputed level of sexual activity, and the verbal and nonverbal components of the disagreement. Location was rated as occurring in a bedroom or not in a bedroom. The following categories are used to rate reasons for reluctance to engage in the sexual activity: unknown, timing in relationship, inappropriate relationship, situational (wrong time or location), moral beliefs, physical reasons, and mood. Verbal initiation behavior is categorized as no verbal initiation, indirect verbal initiation, or direct verbal initiation. Nonverbal initiation is categorized as no nonverbal initiation, suggestive look or action, kissing or sexual fondling, or coercion using physical tactics. Responses can be rated categorically (O’Sullivan & Byers, 1993, 1996) or on two definiteness scales (Byers & Lewis, 1988). Categories for verbal responses are no verbal response, refusal without reason, refusal with situational reason, and refusal with personal reason. Categories for nonverbal responses are no nonverbal response, no

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resistance, passive acceptance, physical counteraction, or nonsexual touch. The verbal definiteness scale consists of the following 4-point scale: no physical refusal, blocked or did not perform sexual activity, moved away or pushed partner away, and got up or slapped. Similarly, influence behaviors can be rated categorically (O’Sullivan & Byers, 1993, 1996) or on a compliance scale (Byers & Lewis, 1988). The categories for influence behaviors are compliance using no influence behaviors, compliance using influence behaviors, or noncompliance. Alternately, compliance is scored on a 5-point scale consisting of: stopped without questioning, stopped and asked for clarification, stopped and attempted to persuade partner, stopped and expressed displeasure or anger, and continued unwanted advances.

Reliability and Validity

The SSQ has good reliability. The mean interrater agreement for open-ended questions was .87 (range .83 to 1.0) (O’Sullivan & Byers, 1993, 1996) and .85 (range .71 to 1.00; Byers & Lewis, 1988).

Respondents’ mean confidence ratings of 5.1 (O’Sullivan & Byers, 1993) and 5.2 (O’Sullivan & Byers, 1996; Byers & Lewis, 1988)) on a 6-point scale provide evidence for the validity of the responses. Men have been found to rate themselves as less likely to comply with women’s refusal of their sexual advances in response to less definite than to more definite verbal responses, providing evidence for the validity of the definiteness scale. More traditional men have been found to be less compliant in their responses to a woman’s refusal of their sexual advances, providing evidence for the validity of the compliance scale.

References


Exhibit

Sexual Situation Questionnaire for Men (Reluctant Woman Version)³

Instructions: We are interested in learning more about communication in dating situations in which you, a man, wished to engage in a higher level of sexual activity than your date, a woman, wanted to engage in at that time. For example, you may have wanted to kiss a woman when she did not wish to kiss you. Another example would be if you wanted to have intercourse and your date only wanted to go as far as sexual fondling. Notice that we are interested in communication about all levels of sexual activity from holding hands and kissing to intercourse. And, while we use the term “date,” we are interested in any sexual situation that you are in with a member of the other sex, even if it is not part of what you may consider to be a true “date.” Also, when we use the term “disagreement,” we are referring to those situations in which you indicate a desire to engage in a higher level of sexual activity than a woman wanted—even if she later changed her mind and engaged in the sexual activity anyway or she was convinced to engage in the sexual activity some other way. In other words, the term “disagreement” means that you and your date differed in the level of sexual activity desired. It does not imply that you argued or fought about this issue.

1. Have you ever been on a date where you wanted to engage in a higher level of sexual activity than your date, a woman, did? __
   _____ Yes    _____ No
   If No, then you do not need to complete the rest of the questionnaire.
   If Yes, please complete the rest of the questionnaire for the most recent time that this occurred.

2. How long ago was the most recent time that you wanted to engage in a higher level of sexual activity than your date did?
   ___________ (specify number and whether it was days, weeks, or months).

3. Prior to the disagreement, how many previous dates had you and this woman had together? _______

4. What type of relationship did you have with your date prior to the disagreement?
   ___________ first date
   ___________ casual date
   ___________ steady date

5. Where were you and your date at the time of the disagreement?

6. The sexual activity that you wished to engage in but your date did not wish to engage in was: (check all that apply)
   ___________ hugging
   ___________ a kiss
   ___________ necking
   ___________ you fondling or kissing your date’s breasts
   ___________ you fondling your date’s genitals

Conflict

_____ your date fondling your genitals
_____ oral sex (male to female)
_____ oral sex (female to male)
_____ intercourse
_____ anal sex
_____ other (please specify) _____________________________

7. Why did your date not wish to engage in this sexual activity?

________________________________________________________

8. Had you ever engaged in this sexual activity before with this woman?

_____ Yes  _____ No

9. The sexual activity (or activities) that you and your date were engaging in immediately prior to the disagreement was (were): (check as many as apply)

_____ no sexual activity
_____ hugging
_____ a kiss
_____ necking
_____ you fondling or kissing your date’s breasts
_____ your date fondling your genitals
_____ your date fondling her genitals
_____ oral sex (male to female)
_____ oral sex (female to male)
_____ intercourse
_____ anal sex
_____ other (please specify) ______________________________

10. How clearly did you indicate to your date that you wanted to engage in the higher level of sexual activity that you specified in Question 6?

_____ extremely clearly
_____ moderately clearly
_____ somewhat clearly
_____ somewhat unclearly
_____ moderately unclearly
_____ extremely unclearly

11. What did you say and/or do to indicate that you wanted to engage in the higher level of sexual activity that you specified in Question 6? (Please write the exact words you used [if any] and/or describe the actions that you used [if any] to indicate that you wanted to engage in the sexual activity.)

I said:  ___________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________

I did:  ____________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________

12. How clearly did your date indicate that she did not want to engage in this sexual activity?

_____ extremely clearly
_____ moderately clearly
_____ somewhat clearly
_____ somewhat unclearly
_____ moderately unclearly
_____ extremely unclearly

13. What did she say and/or do to indicate that she did not want to engage in this sexual activity? (Please write the exact words she used [if any] and/or describe the actions that she used [if any] to indicate that she did not want to engage in the sexual activity.)

She said:  _________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________

She did:  _________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________

14. How did you respond after she had indicated that she did not want to engage in this sexual activity? (Please write the exact words you used [if any] and/or describe the actions that you used [if any] after she had indicated that she did not want to engage in the sexual activity.)

I said:  ___________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________
I did: ____________________________________________________

15. Did you and your date end up engaging in the sexual activity that you had disagreed upon?
   Yes, then _____
   Yes, later on that date _____
   No, not on that date _____

16. Please indicate which of the following behaviors you used (if any) in attempting to influence your date to engage in the higher level of sexual activity once she had indicated that she did not want to by placing a check mark in the left hand column below.
   Then, for each behavior you used, indicate the impact of the behavior on your date at that time. Use a “P” if the impact of the behavior was positive or pleasing to your date, a “D” if the impact of the behavior was negative or displeasing, or an “N” if the impact of the behavior was neutral. (Check as many behaviors as occurred.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Did you use this?</th>
<th>Impact on woman (P, D, or N)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>asked her if she found you sexually attractive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>pouted, sulked, or refused to talk</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>told her that you were too sexually aroused to stop</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>said things to her that you did not really mean (e.g., told her that you loved her and you do not)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>talked about your real feelings toward her (e.g., told her that you loved her and you do)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>threats (e.g. to end the date, end the relationship or tell others)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>discontinued all sexual activity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>complimented her on her body or sexuality</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>made negative comments (e.g. about her sexuality, her personality, her appearance or the relationship)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>pinched, poked her</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>tickled her</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>pleaded</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>tried to reason with her</td>
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<td></td>
<td>bargained, negotiated, or suggested a compromise</td>
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<td></td>
<td>took off or loosened clothing</td>
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<td></td>
<td>flirted</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>pretended to become disinterested in the sexual activity that you had wanted to engage in previously</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>cried</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>grabbed her or used some other form of physical pressure</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>touched, stroked her</td>
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<td></td>
<td>tried to get her drunk, stoned</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>started an argument</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>made positive comments about her appearance</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>made positive comments about her personality</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>made positive comments about the relationship</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>told her how enjoyable it would be</td>
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<td></td>
<td>made her feel guilty</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>used humor</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>moved away from her</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>made her jealous (e.g., flirted with someone else)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ignored refusal and engaged in the higher level of sexual activity anyway</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>asked her why she didn’t want to do it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>put on clothing, music that you hoped she would find arousing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>danced, moved seductively</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>made positive comments about your date</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>other (please specify) __________________</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

17. At the time when you wanted to engage in the higher level of sexual activity than your date did, how pleasurable was it being with your date?
   _____ extremely unpleasant
   _____ moderately unpleasant
The purpose of the Sexual Consent Scale, Revised (SCS-R; Humphreys, 2004; Humphreys & Brousseau, 2009; Humphreys & Herold, 2007) is to assess attitudes and behaviors about the negotiation of sexual consent between sexual partners. This scale was normed on heterosexual undergraduate students at three universities.

**Description**

The SCS was initially developed using semistructured focus group interviews with university students to gain an initial understanding of the key themes regarding sexual consent negotiations. These themes were then translated into Likert-type items for the quantitative survey. Use of focus group interviews with university students to gain an initial understanding of the key themes regarding sexual consent negotiations. These themes were then translated into Likert-type items for the quantitative survey.

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