

Attitude Towards Sex Among College Students.

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Abstract: This study explores gender differences in sexual attitudes among college students in Gulbarga, India, utilizing Hendrick and Hendrick's (1985) Sexual Attitudes Scale. The investigation focuses on five dimensions: Sexual Permissiveness, Sexual Responsibility, Sexual Communion, Sexual Instrumentality, and Sexual Conventionality. A sample of 240 college students (120 males and 120 females) from both upper and middle socio-economic backgrounds was surveyed. Results indicate significant gender differences in Sexual Permissiveness, Sexual Communion, and Sexual Conventionality. Males exhibited higher Sexual Permissiveness and more traditional views on Sexual Conventionality, whereas females showed higher Sexual Responsibility and idealism in Sexual Communion. The study contextualizes these findings within socio-cultural frameworks and compares them with international research to understand the influence of cultural and familial norms on sexual attitudes.

Keywords: sex attitudes, college students.

INTRODUCTION

Sexuality refers to a set of beliefs, values, and behaviors that define one as a sexual being (Olson and DeFrain, 1994). Since the legitimization of sex research in 1948, investigators have explored aspects of sexuality such as sexual permissiveness, premarital sexuality, contraception, specific sexual practices, and the like. Sexual permissiveness or the extent to which 'people go sexually' was linked to premarital sexual behavior, further associated with a positive evaluation of self and body image. D'Augelli and D'Augelli (1977) developed a cognitive-developmental model for understanding premarital sexual behavior as an aspect of relationships and associated it with moral reasoning. Although different developmental, familial, and societal forces influence premarital sexuality, sexual permissiveness, and sexual attitudes in general, a unified theory has never developed due to the multidimensional nature of sexual attitudes and behavior and the variable that thereby influence it.

Sexuality is woven into the fabric of many close relationships: it is sanctioned in marriage, often explored on dating, and is an intricate part of other

committed romantic relationships. The past decade saw a marked increase in scholarly interest in sexuality within a relational context (Christopher and Sprecher, 2000). The quality and quantity of sexual encounters appeared associated with feelings of love for the partner, especially an erotic type of love. Sexual intimacy was found to be a weaker predictor of love or of general relationship quality than other forms of intimacy, such as the degree of affection expressed and supportive communication (Sprecher, Metts, Burleson, Hatfield, and Thompson, 1995). Attitude toward premarital sex appear to be less restrictive than attitudes a decade earlier (Klassen, 1989), with a difference between male and female attitudes regarding the decrease in sex restrictiveness over the years.

Reiss' twelve-item scale was a popular sexual attitude scale to assess premarital sexual permissiveness (Reiss, 1964). However, the scale tapped relatively few sexual behaviors and was found to be inadequate. Hendrick and Hendrick developed a measure to tap a range of attitudes and values associated with sexuality, such as abortion and birth control. From a variety of various sexual attitudes including sexual avoidance (guilt associated with sex), sexual control (practicality and planning of sexual practices) and sexual power (sexual desire linked to a sense of superiority), the scale retained attitudes towards sexual permissiveness (acceptance of casual sex), sexual responsibility (responsibility for sexual acts like birth control to communication), sexual communion (sexual experience being viewed as idealistic, mystical and the closest form of interaction between partners), sexual conventionality (dealing with attitudes toward 'typical' and 'atypical' sexual practices) and sexual instrumentality (sexuality with a focus on individual pleasure) (Hendrick and Hendrick, 1985).

Attitudes toward sex, love, and marriage are significantly related to premarital and extramarital sexual behavior (Weis et al, 1986). Dating outcomes could be predicted based on current heterosexual relationships and relationship attitudes in young adults (Surra and Hughes, 1997). Changes in the

commitment processes in the development of premarital relationships are related to beliefs about the relationship coupled with the level of interactions between the partners (Surra and Hughes, 1997).

LITERATURE REVIEW

The study of sexual attitudes and behavior has focused on constructs such as sexual permissiveness, premarital sexuality, contraception, and specific sexual practices. Sexual Permissiveness refers to the extent to which people will go sexually and has been closely related with premarital sexuality. Jurich and Jurich in 1974 found both religious and gender differences in premarital sexual standards and demonstrated a strong relation between cognitive moral development and such standards.

Brody (1996) investigated the political and religious correlates of sexual behavior in 344 German college students, aged 19-40 years. Religiousness and political interest were assessed on a five-point rating scale and a questionnaire was developed to assess sexual behavior and experiences. Intense religious belief and right party-political viewpoint were found to be significantly correlated with fewer sexual partners, diminished interest in oral sex, and less frequent masturbation.

In another study assessing religion and sexual attitudes and behavior (Pluhar, Frongillo, Stycos, and Dempster-McClain, 1998), a representative survey of 606 college students was assessed with a multidimensional measure of religion. Religious affiliation, religiosity (defined as strength of beliefs and religious service attendance), negative attitude to premarital sex and student perceptions of the influence of religion on sexual behaviors were significantly correlated with lowered probability of engaging in sexual intercourse. Religiosity and religious affiliation were significant in distinguishing the contraceptive methods used by sexually active college students.

Knox, Sturdivant, and Zusman (2001) studied college student attitudes towards sexual intimacy, in understanding the conditions under which they were willing to have sexual intercourse and their definition of its intimacy. Ninety-nine college students, with a mean age of 19 years completed a survey. Results indicated that males were significantly more likely than females to report that they were willing to have sexual intercourse with someone they had known for three hours, with two different persons within six hours, with someone they did not love or having a

good relationship with. The number of current partners correlated with the degree of willingness to have sexual intercourse with someone unknown.

Agostinelli and Seal (1998) examined whether biases of perceived risk of negative outcome from sexual behavior would operate when one rated themselves and others. A sample of 240 college students was asked to rate their own, close friend and typical college student's attitudes regarding casual sex on ratings of permissiveness and responsibility. Results indicated that individuals with unrestricted socio-sexual orientations were more likely to attribute more permissive and less responsible attitudes to self and friend, especially in males. These effects were not present when rating the typical college student.

Among studies on non-western cultures, a South African study assessed the attitudes of university students towards premarital sex (Mayekiso, 1994). The sample consisted of 90 South African University students (aged 16-35 years; 45 male, 45 female). Using the Sexual Attitude Inventory, a positive attitude of both males and females toward premarital sex was found with no significant gender-related differences.

Lihong, Yabing and Bowei (2001) studied contemporary college students' view of sex of in China. 1,130 college students (544 males and 586 females) (520 urban students and 610 rural students) from 3 colleges or universities in Hangzhou, China, were investigated with the Mental Status. Investigation Scale for College Students. The attitudes towards sex, purpose of sex, sexuality, illegal sex, and chastity were studied for gender and residential differences. The results show that their view of sex tends to be more open, but retained some conventionality. Some gender differences were reported with no great differences between urban and rural subjects.

METHODOLOGY

The sexual Attitudes Scale (Hendrick and Hendrick, 1985) assesses Sexual Permissiveness (29 items), Sexual Responsibility, Sexual Communion, Sexual Instrumentality, and Sexual Conventionality used to collect data. A survey design was used. The sample was to be selected from the college student population, studying in the second and third year of graduate degree level from four colleges in Gulbarga, two upper and two middle socio-economic status colleges, decided based on the fee structure. The age range was

selected as between 18 to 22 years. The initial plan was to obtain a minimum sample size of two hundred (one hundred male and one hundred female) college students, who speak English and were willing to participate in the study. The final sample obtained

using the above criteria was 240 (120 males and 120 females).

RESULTS

Table I: Means, Standard Deviations, and t -Values of The Subscale Scores on The Sexual Attitudes Scale For The Male And Female Groups (N=240)

FACTORS	SEX	MEAN	SD	t-VALUE
Sexual Permissiveness	Male	3.26	0.57	-11.17**
	Female	4.01	0.46	
Sexual Responsibility	Male	2.09	0.50	1.69 (NS)
	Female	1.98	0.49	
Sexual Communion	Male	2.13	0.69	-1.99*
	Female	2.31	0.72	
Sexual Instrumentality	Male	2.85	0.94	-0.79 (NS)
	Female	2.94	0.88	
Sexual Conventionality	Male	3.00	0.66	-2.57**
	Female	3.24	0.80	

NS = Not significant at the 0.01 and 0.01 levels.

* = Significant at $p \leq 0.05$ level

** = Significant at $p \leq 0.01$ level

The male and female groups *differ significantly* with regard to Sexual permissiveness, Sexual Communion and Sexual Conventionality.

For Sexual Permissiveness, the male and female samples differed significantly ($t = -11.17, p \leq 0.01$ level). The means indicate that the male sample (mean = 3.26) was more sexually permissive. Acceptance of casual sex, approval of casual sex without commitment and desire for sex with many partners can be attributed to the male sample. The female sample (mean = 4.01) showed more restrictiveness in this regard. With regard to Sexual Communion, the male and female group differed significantly ($t = -1.99, p \leq 0.05$ level). While both groups are indicative of high Sexual Communion, the means of the male group (mean = 2.13) and the female group (mean = 2.31) indicate that the male sample is more sexually idealistic. They tend to emphasize on sex as an intensive overwhelming experience, the closest form of communication, the merging of two souls and the ultimate in human interaction.

For Sexual Conventionality, the male and female groups differ significantly ($t = -2.57, p \leq 0.01$ level), with males (mean = 3.00) being more sexually

conventional than females (mean = 3.24). The male group was more conventional with regard to individual preferences of ‘normality’ and ‘abnormality’ in connection with issues of masturbation, homosexuality and the use of ‘sex toys’ during lovemaking.

Trends indicated by differences in mean scores of the male and female groups (while not statistically significant) suggest males to show more Sexual Instrumentality. Though statistically significant differences are present only for the sub-scales of Sexual permissiveness, sexual communication and Sexual Conventionality, males show lower scores on all scales except for the Sexual Responsibility scale where the female sample shows lower scores.

Regarding Sexual Instrumentality, the male and female groups do not differ significantly, with both groups showing a low to moderate degree of Sexual Instrumentality ($t = -0.79$). Both groups, especially males, (means = 2.85 and 2.94) show an almost equal degree of focus on one’s own sexual pleasure, with a self-centered physical orientation to sex.

For Sexual Responsibility, no significant difference emerged between the two groups ($t = 1.69$). The mean for the male group was 2.09 and that of the female group 1.98 indicating that the two groups were almost equal on the variable of Sexual Responsibility, with

the female group showing higher responsibility. This was indicative of a high level of sexual responsibility in specific sexual acts ranging from birth control to adolescent pregnancy.

Gender differences revealed the male group to be more sexually conventional sexually communistic and sexually permissive, as compared to females. The findings are supported in several research findings. Various longitudinal studies indicate that while there seems to be continual liberalisations in sexual attitudes for males and females, fewer males are found to be endorsing promiscuity – indicative of more idealism and conventionality (Robinson et al, 1991; Peplau, 1977). Eastern studies among college students in China (Lihong et al, 2001) indicated a more open view to sexuality, with some conventionality retained. McKelvey et al (1999) reported that lower sexual knowledge was related to negative attitudes to issues of homosexuality and masturbation and could be predicted on the basis of socio-demographic variables such as religiosity. Aggarwal and Sharma's research among Indian medical undergraduate students reveal only 41.8% of the sample to consider homosexuality to be normal, with only 20% being able to communicate with teachers and parents about sex and 84.1% of the sample favoring the school level commencement of sexual educational classes (Aggarwal and Sharma, 2000). With the present sample's male socio-demographic profile being more suggestive of joint familial lower income group, their exposure to sexual knowledge may have been limited, possibly resulting in higher sexual conventionality. Regarding Sexual Permissiveness, in Hendrick's original study (1985) men were found to be more sexually permissive while women emerged as sexually responsible, idealistic and conventional. Researchers Knox, Sturdivant and Zusman (2001) found that American male college students were more likely than females to report that they were willing to have sexual intercourse with someone they had known for three hours as well as with someone they did not love, suggestive of a high sexual permissiveness in males. The number of current partners correlated with the willingness to have sexual intercourse with someone unknown.

For the *Entire Sample*, the Sexual Attitudes reveal high sexual responsibility (total sample mean = 2.04), and high sexual communion (total sample mean = 2.22). These findings can be understood in the prevalent socio-cultural background, with sexuality viewed conventionally and with the sample largely coming

from joint-nuclear families of a predominantly Hindu religion. Responsible and sexual communion was also seen among Anglo-Americans (Contreras and Hendrick, 1996). Religious beliefs were related to a lower probability of engaging in sexual intercourse (Pluhar et al, 1998). With the Indian joint family system, the degree of sexual responsibility and communion prevalent in the sample may be a socio-cultural product. Hovell et al (1994) regressed sexual behaviour on family variables and concluded that conservative maternal attitudes and the presence of dating rules (seen typically in the Indian scenario) exerted a moderating influence on the development of sexual behavior in adolescence by delaying it. Idealism was indicated in a survey study with 55% of women in ten cities in India, aged 20-40 years, (OUTLOOK, October 2002), preferring their future spouse not to be sexually experienced before marriage and 75% reporting good sex to be important to a relationship. However, Sachev (1998) found that female university students in Delhi were rejecting traditional sexual standards of premarital and non-procreative sex and to be highly ignorant of sexually related difficulties. Among associations between relationship profile items and love styles, Times in Love was correlated significantly with Sexual Permissiveness ($r = -0.30$, $p \leq 0.01$) in the present sample.

DISCUSSION

The study's findings reveal notable gender-based differences in sexual attitudes among the college student population in Gulbarga. Males demonstrated higher levels of Sexual Permissiveness, suggesting a greater acceptance of casual sex and a tendency to pursue multiple sexual partners. Conversely, females exhibited more restrictive attitudes toward casual sex, aligning with findings from Hendrick and Hendrick's original study and Knox, Sturdivant, and Zusman's research, which indicated that males generally report higher sexual permissiveness.

In terms of Sexual Communion, males were found to view sexual experience as a more intense and idealistic form of interaction compared to females. This aligns with previous studies that identified higher sexual idealism among males (Knox et al., 2001). Females, on the other hand, were more inclined towards viewing sexual experiences as forms of meaningful connection and communication.

The study also found that males were more sexually conventional, showing less openness towards atypical

sexual practices compared to females. This finding contrasts with some international studies that have found more liberal attitudes in males. The higher sexual conventionality among Indian male students might be influenced by socio-cultural and religious factors prevalent in the Indian context, such as conservative family values and religious beliefs. Despite these differences, both males and females showed high levels of Sexual Responsibility and Sexual Communion. This suggests a shared cultural emphasis on responsible sexual behavior and the significance of sexual intimacy within committed relationships, possibly reflecting traditional values prevalent in Indian society.

CONCLUSION

The study provides evidence that gender differences in sexual attitudes are pronounced among college students in Gulbarga, with males generally displaying higher Sexual Permissiveness and Sexual Conventionality, while females show greater Sexual Responsibility and idealism in Sexual Communion. These differences are influenced by cultural and socio-economic factors, as well as religious and familial norms. The findings contribute to a nuanced understanding of how sexual attitudes are shaped by gender and socio-cultural contexts.

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