
CONVERGENCE TOWARD A SINGLE SEXUAL STANDARD?

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Male and female participants in a "computer dating" study completed a sexual experience questionnaire as well as attitudinal and experiential questionnaires. The degree of a participant's sexual experience was found to be related to interpersonal attraction, physical attractiveness, dating experience, and attitudes regarding religious, moral, and political issues. The sexual experiences for both sexes were demonstrated to be cumulative and follow a fixed pattern but the sequence of sexual experiences differed for males and females.

Keywords: sexual standards, sexual experience, attraction, gender differences.

Although many psychological theorists have stressed the importance of sexuality as a major determinant of human behavior, there exists a scarcity of data regarding the interrelationships between sexual behavior and other aspects of personality functioning. Evidence is beginning to accumulate that the frequency of sexual behavior and the types of sexual encounters experienced are related to a wide variety of factors. Among these are degree of religiosity (Curran et al., 1973; Jackson & Potkay, 1973; Sutker & Kilpatrick, 1973), liberal attitudes (Curran et al., 1973; De Young et al., 1973), personality variables (Eysenck, 1971), female career orientation (DeYoung et al., 1973), marital happiness (Reevy, 1972), marital orgasm (Kinsey et al., 1953), physical attractiveness (Curran et al., 1973), and dating experience (Curran et al., 1973; Lewis, 1973). This study was undertaken, in part, to explore the relationship between college students' sexual experiences and certain attitudinal, experiential and somatic factors.

In the last decade, Americans have experienced great changes in their sexual mores. Recently, Hunt (1974, p. 85) has confirmed the widely held belief that, since the time of Kinsey and his coworkers' surveys (1948, 1953), "there have been dramatic increases in the frequencies with which most Americans engage in various sexual activities and in the number of persons who include formerly forbidden techniques in their sexual repertoire". This increase in sexual behavior appears to be especially true for females (Hunt, 1974) who are reaching closer parity with males with regard to certain sexual behaviors such as premarital sex and oral sex.

Interestingly, there are some data (Curran et al., 1973) to indicate close similarity in percentages of male and female participation in "more advanced" types of sexual behavior

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such as ventral-dorsal intercourse and oral sex to orgasm. However, for “less advanced” forms of sexual behavior such as manual and oral manipulation of the female’s breast, significantly more males than females reported experiencing these activities. Curran et al. (1973) offered a “commitment” hypothesis to explain this data. There is some evidence (Lewis, 1973) to indicate that females are more willing to engage in sexual behavior if they are in love, while males are less sexually aggressive if they are in love. Perhaps most women are willing to cross a “certain line” with regard to sexual behavior only with a steady partner; hence, the concordance for the “more advanced” sexual behaviors. The reported greater percentage of males engaging in the “less advanced” forms of sexual behavior might be a function of their selection of females who will participate in those behaviors on a less intimate basis. If, indeed, females are experiencing a sexual liberation, and commitment is of lesser importance to females than a decade ago as suggested by Bell and Chaskes (1970), then one would expect to find greater concordance between the sexes for even the “less advanced” types of sexual behavior. The exploration of this hypothesis was the second goal of this study.

METHOD

The participants consisted of 88 males and 76 female students from a large, relatively conservative mid-western university. All participants had originally participated in a “computer dating” study, and had volunteered after the study to complete a questionnaire regarding their sexual experiences. The Heterosexual Behavior Scale (Bentler, 1968a, 1968b) was used to assess a participant’s degree of sexual experience. These scales consist of 21 items which are answered either *yes* or *no*, and have been shown (Bentler, 1968a, 1968b) to possess high internal consistency and certain Guttman (1950) scale properties. A participant’s degree of sexual experience is computed on the Heterosexual Behavior Scale by summing the number of *yes* responses. Bentler’s data (1968a, 1968b) on his scales indicate that sexual experiences are cumulative and that they possess a fixed pattern. That is, it appears that few males or females have experienced actual coitus without first experiencing the stages of light and heavy petting.

The attitudinal, experiential and somatic variables were obtained during the process of the “computer dating” study. As part of the procedure for the “computer dating” study, participants were administered a questionnaire (Measure for Dating Purposes) devised by the author. This questionnaire consisted of general attitudinal items on moral and political issues, as well as items regarding a participant’s previous dating experiences.

Participants’ responses to this questionnaire were factor analyzed by a varimax program and items with high loadings on attitudinal issues and dating experiences were utilized in the computation of a participant’s scores on those variables.

While the participants were applying for the computer dating study, six undergraduates unobtrusively rated each participant on a 5-point scale for physical attractiveness. The mean of the judges’ ratings was taken as a measure of each participant’s “objective” physical attractiveness. In addition to these ratings, each participant rated himself (herself) during the

application period, and his or her dating partner after the date, on the same 5-point scale for physical attractiveness.

Participants were matched for their computer date on the basis of height, age, and physical attractiveness. Approximately two to three weeks after the initial application, participants were notified of their date's name, address, and phone number. It was the male's responsibility to arrange for the date and no restrictions were placed by the experimenter on the type of date that occurred. After the date, participants completed a Date Evaluation Scale which attempted to assess several dimensions of the dating experience including the amount of interpersonal attraction experienced toward the dating partner. The interpersonal attraction factor possesses good factorial and construct validity (Curran, 1973). A participant's attraction score was derived by summing the multiple choice responses of his or her dating partner.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 contains a summary of the correlations between a participant's degree of sexual experience and a participant's attitudinal values, dating experiences, physical attractiveness, and interpersonal attraction. The amount of interpersonal attraction a male felt for his date was significantly related to her degree of sexual experience. Significant relationships were found for both males and females between degree of sexual experience and various indicators of their physical attractiveness. Dating experience, dating anxiety, attitudes toward alcohol consumption, religious and moral issues, and politics (female only) also correlated significantly with degree of sexual experience. In general, the more sexually experienced participants may be characterized as better liked by their dating partner, better looking, having more dating experience, and feeling more comfortable about dating. In addition, they were more liberal on

TABLE 1
CORRELATES OF SEXUAL EXPERIENCE

	<i>Males</i>	<i>Females</i>
Interpersonal attraction (favorable)....	0.11	0.23*
Physical attraction (attractive)		
1. Objective	0.31**	0.18
2. Self-rating	0.24*	0.19
3. Dating rating....	0.17	0.30**
Dating experience (experienced)	0.59**	0.63**
Self-reported dating anxiety (anxious)	-0.35**	-0.40**
Attitude on consumption of alcoholic beverages (favorable)....	0.45**	0.37**
Attitude concerning religion and morality (liberal)....	0.30**	0.70**
Political attitudes (liberal)....	0.14	0.43**

Note: * $p < .05$, two-tailed; ** $p < .01$, two-tailed. The actual items used in the computation of a participant's score on the various attraction, attitudinal and experiential variables may be obtained from the author.

<i>Abbreviated Items</i>		<i>% Yes</i>	<i>Hierarchy</i>	<i>Hierarchy</i>	<i>% Yes</i>	<i>Hierarchy</i>	<i>Hierarchy</i>
		<i>responses</i>	<i>order</i>	<i>order</i>	<i>responses</i>	<i>order</i>	<i>order</i>
		<i>from</i>	<i>from</i>	<i>from</i>	<i>from</i>	<i>from</i>	<i>from</i>
		<i>present</i>	<i>present</i>	<i>Bentler's</i>	<i>present</i>	<i>present</i>	<i>Bentler's</i>
		<i>male</i>	<i>male</i>	<i>(1968a)</i>	<i>female</i>	<i>female</i>	<i>(1968a)</i>
		<i>sample</i>	<i>sample</i>	<i>sample</i>	<i>sample</i>	<i>sample</i>	<i>sample</i>
21	Mutual oral manipulation of genitals to mutual orgasm	13.6	21	21	12.0	21	21
20	Oral manipulation of male genitals to ejaculation	22.7	18	20	26.5	18.5	20
19	Sexual intercourse, ventral-dorsal	14.5	20	19	22.9	20	19
18	Mutual oral-genital manipulation	20.9	19	18	28.9	17.5	17
17	Oral manipulation of female genitals, by male	30.0	16.5	17	41.0	13.5	15
16	Oral manipulation of male genitals, by female	30.0	16.5	16	38.6	15	16
15	Mutual manual manipulation of genitals to mutual orgasm	30.9	14.5	15	26.5	18.5	18
14	Oral contact with male genitals, by female	30.6	14.5	14	42.2	11.5	13
13	Oral contact with female genitals, by male	31.8	13	13	42.2	11.5	12
12	Manual manipulation of male genitals to ejaculation, by female	37.3	12	12	41.0	13.5	11
11	Sexual intercourse, ventral-ventral	43.6	11	11	37.3	16	14
10	Manual manipulation of female genitals to massive secretions	49.1	10	10	50.6	9.5	10
9	Manual manipulation of male genitals, under clothes, by female	50.0	9	9	51.8	7.5	9
8	Manual manipulation of genitals	55.5	8	8	50.6	9.5	8
7	Manual manipulation of male genitals, over clothes, by female	57.3	7	7	51.8	7.5	7
6	Manual manipulation of female genitals, under clothes, by male	64.4	6	6	60.2	5	6
5	Kissing nipples of female breast	65.5	5	5	59.0	6	5
4	Manual manipulation of female genitals over clothes	76.4	3	4	67.5	3	4
3	Manual manipulation of female breasts, under clothes	75.5	4	3	66.3	4	3
2	Manual manipulation of female breasts, over clothes	82.7	2	2	71.1	2	2
1	One minute continuous lip kissing	86.4	1	1	89.2	1	1
<i>M =</i>		9.74		11.43		9.27	11.07
<i>SD =</i>		6.74		5.30		7.62	5.23
<i>Kendall's r =</i>			0.96			0.83	

topics concerning alcohol, religion, and moral and political issues than the less sexually experienced participants.

Table 2 contains the percentage of males and females who answered "yes" to the 21 items on the Heterosexual Behavior Inventory. The percentage of affirmative responses for each item were ranked in order to determine if the pattern of sexual behavior experienced in this sample corresponded to Bentler's (1968a, 1968b) original sample. The degree of association between this sample's rank ordering and Bentler's rank ordering was calculated by Kendall's rank correlation coefficient (r). There was good agreement for both the male (Kendall's $r = 0.96$) and female (Kendall's $r = 0.83$) rank orderings, with only a few minor reversals.

An examination of Table 2 reveals some interesting differences between males and females in their order of sexual experiences. These differences are found on items 11 (intercourse ventral-ventral), 14 (fellatio), 15 (mutual manual manipulation to orgasm), and 17 (cunnilingus). Male participants indicated that they experienced coitus and mutual orgasm by manual manipulation earlier in their pattern of sexual experiences than did the females. Females, on the other hand, indicated that they had practiced fellatio and experienced cunnilingus earlier in their pattern of sexual experiences than did the male participants. In fact, the pattern for females seems to indicate that they experience cunnilingus and fellatio before experiencing coitus while for males the pattern is reversed. Similar patterns were found in studies conducted by Bentler (1968a, 1968b) and Curran et al. (1973). This pattern of sexual behavior by females might represent an attempt by them to enjoy mutual sexual satisfaction while technically remaining a virgin.

Table 2 also indicates a greater percentage of males than females experienced the "less advanced" forms of sexual behavior. However, beginning with item 9, an approximately equal or even greater number of females than males indicated that they had experienced the types of sexual behavior represented by the item from the Heterosexual Behavior Inventory. As mentioned above, Curran et al. (1973) have shown concordance between males and females for the "more advanced" types of sexual behavior measured by the Heterosexual Behavior Inventory. However, this parity was not reached until item 17 in the earlier study (Curran et al., 1973). The data from the present study then would appear to support a hypothesis that, with the waning of the "double standard", commitment to a relationship is becoming of less importance for females in deciding whether to engage in sexual activities. Wagner et al. (1973) have also presented some suggestive evidence that the sexual revolution has resulted in a convergence for males and females towards a single behavioral standard.

An alternate hypothesis to this interpretation is that the data may have been biased by the sampling procedures used. The participants had previously participated in a "computer dating" study and had volunteered to complete the Heterosexual Behavior Inventory after the study.

Volunteers might be more sexually experienced than nonvolunteers. Kaats and Davis (1971), however, demonstrated that, while there were differences between volunteers and nonvolunteers with regard to both their attitudes concerning sexual behavior and their experiences with "less advanced" types of sexual behavior, such as necking and petting, there were no differences between volunteers and nonvolunteers with respect to the more advanced types of sexual behavior such as coitus. The parity between male and female sexual behavior demonstrated in this study was largely for the "more advanced" types of sexual behavior and would, therefore, be more likely to be due to a real convergence toward a single sexual standard than to a volunteer sampling bias.

CONCLUSION

The data supported the hypothesis that male and female sexual experiences are cumulative and follow a fixed pattern. However, the sequence of sexual experience differs for males and females. Females are more apt than males to experience oral-genital activities before they experience coitus with the reverse being true for males. The widely held belief that the sexual revolution has had its greatest impact on female sexual activity also received some support. The percentage of females who had participated in the "more advanced" and "moderate" types of sexual behavior equaled and sometimes exceeded the percentage of males who had participated in such activities. The degree of a participant's sexual experience was also found to be related to interpersonal attraction, physical attractiveness, dating experience, and attitudes regarding religious, moral, and political issues.

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