Sex Differences in Sexual Self-Concept in a Hispanic College Population

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Introduction

- In 2000, about half of reported new cases of sexually transmitted diseases were diagnosed among those in the 15-24 age group (Weinstein, Berman, & Cates, 2004).
- Between 2007 and 2008, young adults reported the highest increase in Syphilis infections relative to other age groups (11.4 cases per 100,000) as well as a significant increase in rates of Chlamydia infections (10.7%) (Centers for Disease Control, 2009).
- Sexual self-concept refers to one’s positive and negative perceptions of one’s sexual-self (Rostosky, Dekhtyar, Cupp, & Anderman, 2008).
- Some constructs of sexual self-concept have been found to be associated with risky sexual behavior. For instance, low levels of self-efficacy are associated with high HIV risk behavior (Cerwinka, Isbell, & Hansen, 2000).
- Sex differences have also been noted with regard to sexual self-concept, such that male adolescents have reported lower sexual self-efficacy and self-esteem and greater sexual anxiety relative to females (Rostosky et al., 2008).
- Other constructs of sexual self-concept have not been well-studied.
- Past research has primarily focused on non-Hispanic White and African American populations (Rostosky et al., 2008; Salazar et al., 2004). Therefore, it is important to study sexual self-concept in a Hispanic young adult population.
- This study examined sex differences with regard to sexual self-concept in a Hispanic college population.
- It was hypothesized that sexual self-concept sex differences would be similar to what has been found in previous studies such that males will report higher levels of sexual anxiety and lower levels of sexual self-efficacy and sexual self-esteem.

Method

Participants
136 Hispanic college students on the U.S. / Mexico border
- Age M = 22.3 years (SD = 4.70)
- 61% female, 39% male
- 76.5% Mexican American, 14.7% Mexican National, 8.8% Other Hispanic
- 92.6% exclusively heterosexual

Measures
- Demographic questionnaire – Assesses typical background information.
- The Multidimensional Sexual Self-Concept Questionnaire (MSSCQ; Snell, 1998) – A 100 item scale that measures 20 psychological constructs related to human sexuality, where each sub-scale consists of five items.
- A 5-point Likert scale is used with each item being scored from 1 to 4; not at all characteristic of me to very characteristic of me.
- The items on each subscale are averaged, so that higher scores correspond to greater amounts of each tendency (0 – 4).
- The Cronbach alpha coefficients of the 20 subscales ranged from .72 to .94 indicating adequate internal consistency.

Procedure
- Participants were recruited at the Student Union on the UTEP campus.
- Informed consent was obtained.
- Questionnaires were completed on a laptop computer.
- Information submitted via computer was immediately electronically recorded via HTML script.
- Upon submitting each page of the electronic survey, data was saved to an on-line .txt file to maintain confidentiality.
- Participants were assigned a questionnaire number not linked to their name or consent form.
- Participants who completed the questionnaire received a $10 gift card and were offered the option of receiving a condom or dental dam.

Approach to Analyses
- Bonferroni corrected t-tests were used to assess sex differences of the 20 subscales of the MSSCQ (p < .0025).

Results

- Sex was significantly associated with several areas related to sexual self-concept.
- Males reported
  - Higher levels of sexual preoccupation t(131) = 3.982, p < .001
  - Higher levels of sexual motivation t(131) = 3.209, p = .002
- Females reported
  - Higher levels of motivation to avoid risky sex t(79.371) = -3.282, p = .002
  - Higher levels of fear of sex t(129.992) = -3.205, p = .002
- No sex differences were found with regard to other sexual self-concept constructs (e.g., sexual self-efficacy, sexual self-esteem, or sexual anxiety).

Table 1: Sex Differences and the Multidimensional Sexual Self-Concept Questionnaire

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sub-Scale</th>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Women</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sexual Anxiety</td>
<td>1.34</td>
<td>1.11</td>
<td>.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual Self-efficacy</td>
<td>2.70</td>
<td>2.31</td>
<td>.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual Consciousness</td>
<td>2.56</td>
<td>2.10</td>
<td>.90</td>
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<td>Motivation to Avoid</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Risky Sex*</td>
<td>2.70</td>
<td>3.47</td>
<td>.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chance/Luck Sexual Control</td>
<td>1.08</td>
<td>1.03</td>
<td>.83</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sexual Preoccupation*</td>
<td>1.54</td>
<td>1.03</td>
<td>.88</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sexual Assertiveness</td>
<td>2.28</td>
<td>2.47</td>
<td>.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual Optimism</td>
<td>2.96</td>
<td>3.14</td>
<td>.70</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sexual Problem Self Blame</td>
<td>2.41</td>
<td>2.21</td>
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<td>Sexual Monitoring</td>
<td>1.75</td>
<td>1.55</td>
<td>.01</td>
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<td>Sexual Motivation*</td>
<td>2.38</td>
<td>1.73</td>
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<td>Sexual Problem Management</td>
<td>2.85</td>
<td>2.85</td>
<td>.76</td>
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<td>Sexual Esteem</td>
<td>2.60</td>
<td>3.08</td>
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<td>Sexual Satisfaction</td>
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<td>2.94</td>
<td>.91</td>
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<td>Power-other Sexual Control</td>
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<td>1.07</td>
<td>.88</td>
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<td>Sexual Schemata</td>
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<td>2.88</td>
<td>.80</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fear of Sex*</td>
<td>1.09</td>
<td>1.27</td>
<td>1.31</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sexual Problem Prevention</td>
<td>2.82</td>
<td>3.09</td>
<td>.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual Depression</td>
<td>.74</td>
<td>.86</td>
<td>.68</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Discussion

- Some findings were inconsistent with previous studies (e.g., Rostosky et al., 2008) in terms of observed sexual self concept constructs:
  - No significant differences were observed between males and females on sexual self-efficacy, sexual self-esteem, or sexual self-anxiety.
  - There were novel findings particular to this study:
    - Males exhibited greater preoccupation and motivation, and females exhibited greater motivation to avoid risky sex and higher levels of fear.
  - Potential interpretations for inconsistencies and novel findings:
    - Past research (Rostosky et al., 2008) has assessed adolescents, while this study assessed college students. Therefore, it may be that during the formative period from adolescence to young adulthood, sexual self-concept can shift for both sexes (e.g., as a result of sexual development, sexual experiences or lack thereof).
    - Thus, current findings might be a unique function of the border Hispanic sample, suggesting that issues such as adherence to traditional gender roles or other specific and ethnocultural based constructs are somehow involved in the relationship between sex and self-concept. For example, the traditional cultural and gender role that women should remain virtuous may manifest itself in a woman’s sexual self-concept as a greater fear of sex. Men are not traditionally held to that same expectation and thus may exhibit less fear.
    - Future directions:
      - Future studies should consider assessing adolescents prospectively through young adulthood to capture a critical transition period in development.
      - Future studies should continue exploring these sexual self-concept in Hispanic groups (perhaps considering potential culturally based constructs) as well as in other underserved populations (e.g., other ethnocultural groups, GLBT groups).

Acknowledgements

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References