Factors That Affect the Formation of Sexual Self-Schemas in Women

Samantha Silber
Dr. Darryl Hill (Mentor)
Department of Psychology, College of Staten Island

INTRODUCTION
• The manner in which women think about themselves sexually can be defined as sexual self-schema (SSS)
• Though this concept has been researched extensively for what components contribute to general SSS as a whole, there is little research on how women’s sexual self-schema changes throughout their lives
• Women’s SSS are shaped by the perceptions of others, lifetime experiences which include age, gender, and romantic relationships

HYPOTHESES
1. There will be no association between age and SSS
2. Gender will have an impact on SSS
3. There will be an association between SSS and presence of a romantic relationship

METHODS
• 264 women ages 18–68 from the students, faculty, and staff at the College of Staten Island participated in this study
• Participants completed one demographics survey and 2 experimental surveys
  • The Sexual Self-Schema Scale (SSSS) measured how participants represent themselves sexually as well as their sexual self concepts
  • The Gender Attitude Inventory (GAI) identified participants thoughts and feelings about gender as well as sex
• Attention checks as controls were employed throughout all surveys in order to ensure that participants could not respond blindly and all responses were genuine
  • 72% of students failed the attention checks while 1% of faculty and staff did

RESULTS
• Hypothesis 1 was tested with a multivariate analysis of variance of age group X SSS subscale
  • Figure 1 shows the means of the SSS subscales across age groups; no differences were found, F (12,747) = 0.41, p = .999
• Hypothesis 2 was tested using correlated subscales of the GAI with the subscores of the SSSS and results are displayed on Table 2
  • Direct/outspoken negatively correlates significantly with the subscores of support for female sexual initiative and casual sex initiated by females
  • Loving/warm scores correlate negatively with female sexual initiative and support for women’s rights
  • Embarrassed/conservative positively correlates significantly with negative attitudes towards homosexuality, female sexual initiative, and casual sex initiated by females

DISCUSSION
• Hypothesis 3 was tested using a multivariate analysis of variance of relationship status X SSS score
  • This analysis was significant for relationship status; F (12,744) = 2.1, p = .016
  • A test of the simple effect of relationship status on the SSS scores on Figure 2, showed a significant effect for loving/warm; F(4, 320) = 2.8, p = .027, d = .76; and for embarrassed/conservative; F(4, 320) = 2.9, p = .021, d = .79

Table 2
Correlation Between Gender and Sexuality Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Female Superiority</th>
<th>Attitude Towards Traditional Stereotypes</th>
<th>Homosexuality</th>
<th>Female Sexual Initiative</th>
<th>Casual Sex Initiated by Females</th>
<th>Family Roles</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Direct/outspoken</td>
<td>-.095</td>
<td>- .096</td>
<td>-.041</td>
<td>-.149*</td>
<td>-.159*</td>
<td>.008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loving/warm</td>
<td>-.114</td>
<td>-.036</td>
<td>-.045</td>
<td>1.160*</td>
<td>.071</td>
<td>-.117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Embarrassed/conservative</td>
<td>.015</td>
<td>.065</td>
<td>.175**</td>
<td>.164**</td>
<td>.360**</td>
<td>.149**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Correlation is p < .05
**Correlation is p < .01

Figure 1
Sexual Self-Schema Scores by Age Group

Figure 2
Sexual Self-Schema Scores by Presence of a Romantic Relationship