



Articles

A Brief History of Attempts to Measure Sexual Motives

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Abstract

Artists, creative writers, and musicians have long been interested in the complex motives that spark passionate love, sexual desire, and sexual behavior. Recently, scholars from a variety of disciplines have begun to investigate two questions: “Why do men and women choose to engage in sexual liaisons?” “Why do they avoid such encounters?” Theories abound. Many theorists have complained that there exists a paucity of scales designed to measure the plethora of motives that prompt people to seek out or to avoid sexual activities. In fact, this observation is incorrect. Many such scales of documented reliability and validity do exist. The reason that few scholars are familiar with these scales is that they were developed by psychometricians from a variety of disciplines and are scattered about in an assortment of journals, college libraries, and researchers’ desk drawers, thus making them difficult to identify and locate. This paper will attempt to provide a compendium of all known sexual motives scales, hoping that this will encourage scholars to take a multidisciplinary approach in developing typologies of sexual motives and/or in conducting their own research into the nature of sexual motives.

Keywords: sexual motives, measurement, scales

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Recently, scholars from a variety of disciplines—such as cultural psychology, feminist and gender studies, “Queer” studies, social psychology, social history, sociology, philosophy, the neurosciences, biology, sexology, and the like—have become interested in passionate love, sexual desire, and sexual behavior. Recently, they have begun to speculate about such profound questions as: “What motivates young men and women to choose to engage in sexual activities?” “What motivates them to avoid such activities?” Theories abound, but sparse data exists to address these questions.

Until recently, American sexologists generally assumed that young people engage in sexual activities for one of three reasons (the Big Three): love, a desire for pleasure, and/or a desire to procreate (DeLamater & MacCorkquodale, 1979; Hatfield & Rapson, 2006; Meston & Buss, 2007). Take a foray into the worlds of culture, art, and literature, however, and suddenly one becomes aware of how narrow the perspective of the Western scientist has been. There are a multitude of reasons why men and women might wish to engage in sexual activities. As Levin (1994) observed:

Coitus is undertaken not only for pleasure and procreation but also to degrade, control and dominate, to punish and hurt, to overcome loneliness or boredom, to rebel against authority, to establish one’s sexuality, or one’s achieving sexual competence (adulthood), or to show that sexual access was possible (to “score”), for duty, for adventure, to obtain favours such as a better position or role in life, or even for livelihood. (p. 125).

Historians such as D'Emilio and Freedman (1997) have pointed out that throughout history, people have assigned very different meanings to passionate love and sexual activity. Historically, the dominant metaphors have been religious, medical, romantic, or commercial. During the Catholic Church's domination of Europe (which lasted for several centuries) procreation was the only sanctioned motive for sexual activity (Hatfield & Rapson, 1993; Soble, 2009). Vatican City may still press for that definition of "legitimate" sexuality, but most modern-day observant Catholics now ignore their strictures (Hatfield & Rapson, 1993; Rapson, 2007).

Over the past decades, Hatfield and Rapson (2006) have asked University of Hawai'i students to list the reasons why they and their friends engage in sexual relations. They provided a surprising array of motives why they and their friends engage in sex. "I wanted to get closer to God." "I loved her." "I wanted to thank him for all he's done for me." "My friends kept teasing me, calling me: 'SIFM: Saving it for marriage.'" "I was furious at my boyfriend and I thought: I'll show that SOB." "It's a wife's duty—like it or not."

Among the sexual motives informants mentioned were indeed the Big Three that scholars have so much studied—love, a desire for pleasure and eroticism, and the hope of procreation. But the informants mentioned an impressive array of other reasons as well—among them a desire for self-esteem, status, spiritual transcendence, duty, conformity, kindness, conquest /power (people can, of course, also *withhold* sex in the hopes of attaining power), submission to others, vengeance (a desire to conquer, degrade, and punish), curiosity, money, to make up after a fight ("make-up sex"), to make someone jealous, attain health and long life (Yin and Yang), stress reduction, to save the World, political revolt, relaxation/help in getting to sleep. . . and so on.

The Variety of Sexual Motives

A Definition of Sexual Motives

Tang, Bensman, and Hatfield (2012) defined "sexual motives" as: "The conscious and subjective reasons that men and women give for participating in sexual activities" (p. 286). Sexual activities will be defined as romantic kissing, French kissing, petting (touching of breasts and /or genitals), oral sex, manual sex, penile-vaginal intercourse, and/or anal sex.

Cultural theorists and social historians provide evidence as to the variety of motives that have motivated people to seek out or avoid sexual activity in different cultures and different historical eras.

Cultural Perspectives

Cultures differ markedly in what are considered to be "appropriate" reasons for seeking out (or abstaining from) sexual activities (see Francoeur, 1999-2002; Hatfield & Rapson, 2005; Jankowiak, 1995, and Tang et al., 2012, for a summary of this research). The Silwa, in Aswan, Egypt, for example, disapproved of young men and women even talking about sex, much less engaging in it (Ammar, 1954). Marriage was the only legitimate justification for sex. In a few Polynesian societies, things were very different. Marshall (1971) conducted field research in Mangaia, in the Cook Islands. He found that in Mangaia, although romantic love (as a reason for sex) was relatively rare, young people commonly engaged in a great deal of casual sexual activity. Pleasure was thought to be the appropriate motive for sex.

Why do young people avoid sex? In some cultures (particularly fundamentalist religious societies), premarital sex is a serious offense, generally punishable by death. If a society punishes young people with severe parental

censure, peer group ridicule—or at the extreme, one’s being stoned to death or consigned to the terrors of eternal torture for sexual activity—men and women will be strongly motivated to avoid sex for these reasons.

Historical Perspectives

Passionate love, sexual desire, and sexual activity are as old as humankind. For example, tribal storytellers in 2000 BCE spun the Sumerian love fable of Inanna and Dumuzi (Wolkstein, 1991). The world literature abounds in stories of lovers caught up in a sea of passion and violence: Daphnis and Chloe (Greek myths), Shiva and Sati (Indian), Hinemoa and Tutanekai (Maori), Emperor Ai and Dong Xian (Chinese), and the VhaVhenda lover who was turned into a crocodile (African).

Love and sexual desire may always have existed, but social historians agree that in different historical eras, people’s sexual attitudes, motives for participating in (or avoiding) sexual activities, and hence their sexual behavior varied greatly (D’Emilio & Freedman, 1997; Hatfield & Rapson, 1993, 2005; Shorter, 2005; Soble, 2009; Stone, 1977). Among the reasons powerful political and religious authorities, as well as people themselves, have cited as appropriate motivations for engaging in sex include: the pursuit of beauty, pleasure, and virtue (Clarke, 1998; Martial, 86 A.D./1993; Plato, 1970; Shorter, 2005; Soble, 2009), duty, satisfying family obligations, pleasure (both heterosexual and homoerotic), and procreation. They describe darker motives as well: the display of power (Wood, 1998), enjoying the spoils of war, consorting with “godlike” men and women and thus attaining a higher social status (Hemming, 1978), securing food or goods, appeasing violent slave owners and occupiers, and the like (see Hatfield & Rapson, 1993; Shorter, 2005; Soble, 2009).

In different eras, men and women have also been motivated to *avoid* sex for a plethora of reasons. During the middle ages, for example, the Roman Catholic Church taught that sexual desire (whether in marriage or outside of marriage) was a sin—and the wages of sin were death. Augustine (1874) warned that if married couples participated in sex for pleasure (not merely procreation) the wife was a harlot and the husband was the wife’s adulterous lover. In that era, most Roman Catholic couples assumed that the only legitimate motive for sexual activity was a desire for procreation.

Perhaps there wasn’t as much temptation to have sex (to celebrate beauty or for the sheer pleasure of it) in past eras as today. At the beginning of the Early Modern period, Stone (1977) pointed out that in England young men and women rarely encountered anyone who was very sexually appealing or who had enough energy to be interested in sex. People’s hair was filled with lice. They had bad breath and rotting teeth. They rarely washed. Their skin crawled with eczema, scabs, running sores, oozing ulcers, and other disfiguring skin diseases. Women suffered from gynecological problems—vaginal infections, ulcers, tumors, and bleeding, which made sexual intercourse uncomfortable, painful, or impossible. Men and women who engaged in sexual relations were likely to catch any number of venereal diseases. (James Boswell, the 18th century biographer, contracted gonorrhea at least 17 times). Also, people generally had little energy to “squander” on sex. Darnton (1984) described French peasant life in the 16th and 17th century this way:

Men labored from dawn to dusk, scratching the soil on scattered strips of land with plows like those of the Romans and hacking at their grain with primitive sickles, in order to leave enough stubble for communal grazing. Women married late—at age twenty-five to twenty-seven—and gave birth to only five or six children, of whom only two or three survived to adulthood. Great masses of people lived in a state of chronic malnutrition, subsisting mainly on porridge made of bread and water with some occasional, home grown vegetables thrown in. They ate meat only a few times a year, on feast days or after autumn

slaughtering if they did not have enough silage to feed the livestock over the winter. They often failed to get the two pounds of bread (2,000 calories) a day that they needed to keep up their health, and so they had little protection against the combined effects of grain shortage and disease (p. 24).

In addition, sexual encounters could come at a high cost: pregnancy, disease, disgrace, or even death (Darnton, 1984; Hatfield & Rapson, 1993; Stone, 1977).

It is not surprising then, given the vastly different social and material conditions that have prevailed through history, that men's and women's motives for engaging in (or avoiding sex) have varied greatly, too.

What about today? – When searching for information on modern day men's and women's sexual motives, we discovered a surprising fact. Research on sexual motives generally followed a peculiar scenario. Young scholars would point out that people possess far more complex motives for engaging in sexual activities than the “Big Three” suggests. They would lament the fact that there existed such a paucity of research on these additional motives. Unable to find any reliable and valid scales to assess these diverse motives, they would set out to design just such a battery of scales. They would work for several years (usually on a dissertation—published or unpublished) so that such research could be conducted. Then, the scale crafted, they would disappear from sight—becoming clinicians, teachers, or researchers who went on to explore other interests. Apparently the terrible effort of designing a test battery caused them to burn out.

What we decided to do in this paper was to assemble all these motives in a kind of encyclopedia. The first set of scales we will present will consist of carefully crafted scales that measure a battery of sexual motives. (Almost uniformly, these measures possess impressive reliability and validity). Then we will cite numerous “one-shot” measures, crafted for a single study or two. (Alas, these measures generally do not include information as to their reliability or validity). It is our hope that this compendium will allow researchers to skip the stage of scale development and leap-frog right into (1) developing theoretically and empirically based taxonomies of sexual motives, (2) conducting psychometric studies to compare the motives, (3) conducting research exploring the nature of people's motives to participate (and avoid) sexual activity, and (4) studying the consequences of such motives on actual sexual behavior—as well-thought-out or risky though that activity it might be.

Scales Designed to Measure Sexual Motives

Procedure for Identifying Sexual Motives Scales

Our first task was to collect all the measures of sexual motives (and motives to avoid sex) that we could find. In order to do this, we engaged in the following bits of detective work. We first contacted pioneers in love and sex research as well as scholars who were currently conducting research on sexual attraction, sexual desire, mating, sexual motives, and sexual behavior, and asked them for leads. Our next step was to contact scholars who had attempted to construct such scales and to ask for up-to-date information about the construction of their scales and information as to their scales' reliability and validity. (Naturally, given the time span of our survey, a few of these psychometricians were deceased, ill, or otherwise unavailable). We also conducted computer searches of the terms: “sexual attraction” “sexual desire,” “sexual motives,” “approach and avoidance sexual motives,” “sexual abstinence,” “sexual avoidance,” and so forth, utilizing the PsycINFO database (American Psychological Association, 1967-2009) and MEDLINE (National Library of Medicine, 1966-2009), browsers such as Safari, Explorer, and Netscape, and search engines such as Google and GoogleScholar, to find anything we could on the assessment of sexual motives. In the end, we were able to identify 85 potential measures.

We then read the original articles introducing the scales, studies by the few scholars who had utilized these scales in research, and supplementary publications dealing with these measures. This allowed us to narrow our list of measures to those that actually attempted to measure the cognitive, emotional, or behavioral indicants of people's motives to engage in sex (or to avoid it), rather than some related construct. Finally, we constructed a list of these measures, and wrote to the original authors, their collaborators, and secondary users of the scale, asking:

- Do you know the name of any scholars who have developed measures of motives to pursue (or avoid) sex that we have omitted from our list?
- Have we used the appropriate name for *your* scale? (Scholars often used slightly different names at different times).
- Where can we find the latest version(s) of your scale? (Please indicate cost if applicable).
- Have we correctly described what YOU hoped to measure with your scale?
- Where can scholars find up-to-date information on the reliability and validity of your scale?

When all was said and done, we were able to identify 36 scales designed to assess people's motives to engage in sex and 16 scales designed to measure their motives in avoiding sexual encounters. We suspect additional scales may exist, but we have been unable to find them.

Scales Designed to Measure Motives to Pursue Sex

American researchers have constructed several scales¹ designed to assess young people's motives to approach sexual activity. (Readers will note that all but one of these scales were developed by Western researchers. There are also few scales designed to assess married couples' motives: it is just more or less assumed [simplistically] that the nature of marriage involves sexual activity. Motives for the middle-aged and the elderly have also been insufficiently studied). Here is the list we assembled (in chronological order).

- [Paul Anthony Nelson \(1978\)](#). *Sexual Motives Scale*. Nelson's battery was designed to measure five major reasons for engaging in sexual behavior: (1) love and affection, (2) pleasure, (3) conformity, (4) recognition-competition, and (5) power (dominance and submission). The desire to procreate did not appear to be a common motive for young people's sexual activity. For information on the scale's reliability and validity see [Nelson \(1978\)](#).
- [John DeLamater and Patricia MacCorquodale \(1979\)](#). *Sexual Motives Scale*. On the basis of a content analysis, three types of motives were measured: person centered, partner centered, and couple centered. For information on the scale's reliability and validity see [DeLamater and MacCorquodale \(1979\)](#).
- [Barbara Critchlow Leigh \(1989\)](#). *Sexual Motives Scale*. Designed to measure seven motives: to express emotional closeness, pure pleasure, to make a conquest, to relieve sexual tension, to please a partner, because a partner wants it, and to reproduce. For information on the scale's reliability and validity, see [Bensman, Hatfield, & Doumas \(submitted\)](#); [Leigh \(1989\)](#).
- [Craig Hill and Leslie K. Preston \(1996\)](#). *The AMORE Inventory of Sexual Motives*. The AMORE inventory assesses eight motives: love and intimacy, a yearning to be valued by the partner, proving how much you value him/her; providing nurturance, displaying your power, celebrating your partner's power, relief from stress, and a desire to procreate. In this sample, "procreation" was never given as a reason for engaging in sexual activity. For information on this scale's reliability and validity, see [Hill and Preston \(1996\)](#) and [Hill \(2011\)](#).
- [M. Lynne Cooper, C. Shapiro, and A. M. Powers \(1998\)](#). *Motivations for Sex and Risky Behavior*. Proposes that people seek sex to pursue a relatively small number of goals, and that these can be classified as approach versus avoidance motivation and self/internal versus social focus. Designed to measure six motives: one Social approval motive (intimacy), one Self-focused or Intrapersonal Approach Motive (enhancement), two Self-focused or Intrapersonal Aversive Motives (self-affirmation and coping), and two

Social Aversive Motives (peer pressure and partner approval) motives. For information on reliability and validity see Cooper, Shapiro, and Powers (1998); Cooper and Talley (2010).

- J. L. Horowitz (2002). *The Sexual Motives Scale*. Designed to measure nine motives: love, pleasure, dominance, submission, pragmatism (which contain one item each on stress reduction, exercise, and exploration), obligation (duty and role fulfillment), pleasing partner, compliance, and procreation. For information on the scale's reliability and validity see Horowitz (2002).
- James R. Browning (2004). *The Comprehensive Sexual Motives Inventory Catalogue (COSMIC)*. The COSMIC is designed to measure 18 sexual motives: spirituality, love, pleasure, recognition/self-affirmation, experimentation/exploration, dominance/possession, submission, stress reduction, safety/protection, rebellion, revenge/jealousy induction, peer conformity, role fulfillment, partner pleasing, making amends, pressured compliance, financial gain, and procreation. For information on the scale's reliability and validity see Browning (2004).
- Z. D. Peterson and C. L. Muehlenhard (2005/published 2011). *Sexual Wanting Questionnaire*. The questionnaire assesses sexual wanting, taking into account the following: (1) sex can be desired to varying degrees; (2) sex can be desired for various reasons; (3) there is a difference between desiring sex versus desiring its consequences, and (4) there is a difference between wanting sex versus consenting to sex. For information on the scale's reliability and validity see Peterson and Muehlenhard (2011).
- Cindy M. Meston and David M. Buss (2007). *Why Have Sex (YSEX?)*. The authors assembled 237 reasons why college men and women have sex—ranging from “I wanted to feel closer to God” to “I was drunk.” On the basis of these responses, they constructed a taxonomy consisting of four major factors and 13 sub-factors. These included: Emotional (Love and commitment and expression of gratitude), Physical (pleasure, sexual chemistry, experience seeking, and stress reduction), Goal attainment (social status, resources, revenge, and utilitarian goals), and Insecurity (self-esteem boost, duty/pressure, and mate guarding). For information on the scale's reliability and validity see Meston and Buss (2007).
- Tom J. Tiegs, Paul B. Perrin, Perry W. Kaly, and Martin Heesacker (2007). *Beliefs about Sex*. Designed to assess four factors. Two of them are positive (personally and physically pleasurable and beneficial to the self-in-representation) and two are negative (personally costly and sex as a violation of social injunctions). For information on the reliability and validity of the scale, see Tiegs et al. (2007).
- Skyler Hawk, Nu Tang, and Elaine Hatfield (see Tang et al., 2012). *The Sexual Motives Scale*. In a desire to create a comprehensive scale, appropriate for both China and the United States, the authors adapted a number of previous scales and created a few new subscales designed to assess missing motives—such as Satisfying the partner and Maintaining the relationship (which are common motives in China and certain American subgroups). The resulting scale includes: spiritual transcendence, a need for affection, enhancement of self-concept, peer acceptance, reputation enhancement, partner novelty, exploring sexual activities, cheer up when depressed, drive-reduction, pressure from partner, appeasement, retribution, making up after a fight, fostering jealousy, duty, satisfying the partner, maintaining the relationships, and sex as currency. Four of these subscales (pleasure, stress reduction, satisfying the partner, and maintaining the relationship) were translated into Chinese. For information on the scales' reliability and validity see Tang (2011).

At the present time, probably the most popular measure of Sexual Motives is that of Cooper et al. (1998). In a recent review article, Cooper, Barber, and Zhaoyang (in press), reviews the voluminous research that Cooper and her colleagues have conducted to link sexual motives to sexual attitudes, feelings, and behavior. (See also Cooper, Agocha, & Sheldon, 2000; Cooper et al., 2006; Cooper, Talley, Sheldon, Levitt, & Barber, 2008; Cooper et al., in press; Cooper & Talley, 2010).

For a tabular description of the preceding scales, for use in comparing and selecting scales, see Table 1.

Table 1

Measures of Motives to Pursue Sex

Author and Name of Scale	Types of Motives	Psychometric Properties
Nelson (1978) <i>Sexual Motives Scale</i>	Love and affection; pleasure; conformity; recognition-competition; power.	Nelson (1978)
DeLamater & MacCorquodale (1979) <i>Sexual Motives Scale</i>	Person centered; partner centered, couple centered.	DeLamater & MacCorquodale (1979)
Leigh (1989) <i>Sexual Motives Scale</i>	To express emotional closeness, pure pleasure, to make a conquest, to relieve sexual tension, to please a partner, because a partner wants it, and to reproduce.	Bensman et al. (submitted); Leigh (1989).
Hill & Preston (1996) <i>The AMORE Inventory of Sexual Motives</i>	Love and intimacy, a yearning to be valued by the partner, proving how much you value him/her; providing nurturance, displaying your power, celebrating your partner's power, relief from stress, and a desire to procreate.	Hill & Preston (1996); Hill (2011).
Cooper, Shapiro, & Powers (1998) <i>Motivations for Sex and Risky Behavior</i>	Designed to measure six motives: one Social approval motive (intimacy), one Self-focused or Intrapersonal Approach Motive (enhancement), two Self-focused or Intrapersonal Aversive Motives (self-affirmation and coping), and two Social Aversive Motives (peer pressure and partner approval) motives.	Cooper et al. (1998); Cooper & Talley (2010)
Horowitz (2002) <i>The Sexual Motives Scale</i>	Love, pleasure, dominance, submission, pragmatism (which contain one item each on stress reduction, exercise, and exploration), obligation (duty and role fulfillment), pleasing partner, compliance, and procreation.	Horowitz (2002)
Browning (2004) <i>The Comprehensive Sexual Motives Inventory Catalogue (COSMIC)</i>	The COSMIC is designed to measure 18 sexual motives: spirituality, love, pleasure, recognition/self-affirmation, experimentation/exploration, dominance/possession, submission, stress reduction, safety/protection, rebellion, revenge/jealousy induction, peer conformity, role fulfillment, partner pleasing, making amends, pressured compliance, financial gain, and procreation.	Browning (2004)
Muehlenhard & Peterson (2005); Peterson & Muehlenhard (2011) <i>Sexual Wanting Questionnaire</i>	The questionnaire assesses sexual wanting, taking into account the following: (1) sex can be desired to varying degrees; (2) sex can be desired for various reasons; (3) there is a difference between desiring sex versus desiring it's consequences, and (4) there is a difference between wanting sex versus consenting to sex.	Muehlenhard & Peterson (2005); Peterson & Muehlenhard (2011)
Meston & Buss (2007) <i>Why Have Sex (YSEX?)</i>	They list 237 reasons why people have sex. On the basis of these responses, they constructed a taxonomy consisting of four major factors and 13 sub-factors. These included: Emotional (Love and commitment and expression of gratitude), Physical (pleasure, sexual chemistry, experience seeking, and stress reduction), Goal attainment (social status, resources, revenge, and utilitarian goals), and Insecurity (self-esteem boost, duty/pressure, and mate guarding).	Meston & Buss (2007)
Tiegs, Perrin, Kaly, & Heesacker (2007) <i>Beliefs About Sex</i>	Designed to assess four factors. Two of them are positive (personally and physically pleasurable and beneficial to the self-in-relationship) and two are negative (personally costly and sex as a violation of social injunctions).	Tiegs et al., (2007)
Hawk, Tang, & Hatfield (see Tang et al., 2012)	Spiritual transcendence, a need for affection, enhancement of self-concept, peer acceptance, reputation enhancement, partner	Tang (2011); Tang et al. (2012)

Author and Name of Scale	Types of Motives	Psychometric Properties
<i>The Sexual Motives Scale</i>	novelty, exploring sexual activities, cheer up when depressed, drive-reduction, pressure from partner, appeasement, retribution, making up after a fight, fostering jealousy, duty, satisfying the partner, maintaining the relationships, and sex as currency.	

Miscellaneous Measures of Motives to Pursue Sex

In addition to the scholars who have devised full-fledged test batteries designed to assess a variety of sexual motives, many researchers have attempted to assess just a motive or two (see Table 2). These include:

Table 2

Miscellaneous Measures of Motives to Pursue Sex

Motives to Pursue Sex	Psychometric Properties
Love and affection	Carroll, Volk, & Hyde (1985); Neubeck (1974); Quadagno (2011); Sprague & Quadagno (1989)
Attraction to another	Meston & Buss (2007)
Intimacy	Basson (2000); Mitchell (1972); Quadagno, (2011). Basson (2000) proposed that women often engage in sex for the “spin-offs” they receive—benefits such as emotional closeness, bonding, commitment, love, affection, acceptance, tolerance, and closeness.
Physical release	Quadagno (2011)
Anxiety reduction	Neubeck (1974)
Boredom	Neubeck (1974)
Desiring to feel desired	Meston & Buss (2007)
Desiring to belong	Mitchell (1972)
Duty	Neubeck (1974)
Turn a short-term alliance into a long-term commitment	Buss (2003)
Prevent partner from leaving	Quadagno (2011)
Pure pleasure and lust	Meston & Buss (2007); Neubeck (1974)
Prestige, status, and reputation	Buss (2003)
The time is right	Eyre & Millstein (1999)
Curiosity	Meston & Buss (2007); Nelson (1978)
Sexual variety	Symons (1979)
Improve sexual skills	Greiling & Buss (2000)
Power and control: Dominance or submission	Mitchell (1972); Quadagno (2011)
Revenge	Greiling & Buss (2000); Neubeck (1974)
Financial profit (prostitution)	Burley & Symanski (1981)
Exchange of resources: Sex can be exchanged for favors, special privileges, a preferred job, or indeed any resource	Buss (2003); Hill & Hurtado (1996)

Motives to Pursue Sex	Psychometric Properties
I saw the opportunity and I took it	Meston & Buss (2007)
Rebellion	Mitchell (1972)
Celebrating a special occasion	Meston & Buss (2007)
Mate guarding: satisfying your partner so they don't stray or warning potential mate poachers that a partner is taken	Buss & Shackelford (1997); Schmitt et al. (2003, 2004); Schmitt & Buss (2001)
Procreation	Leigh (1989)
Whatever!	Meston & Buss (2007)

In an extensive review of possible sexual motives, [Meston and Buss \(2007\)](#) provided a list of relatively rare (but interesting) reasons people give for having sex. These included a desire to wreak vengeance on a date or mate (e.g., “I was mad at my girlfriend, so I had sex with someone else”), a desire to harm a rival (“I wanted to make him pay so I slept with his girlfriend,”) or a stranger (“I wanted to make someone else suffer herpes or AIDS”). Some (infrequently) mentioned using sex to get a job, a promotion, money, drugs, or gifts. Interestingly, [Browning \(2004\)](#) discovered that men confessed to having sex for financial reasons more often than did women! Still others in the [Meston and Buss \(2007\)](#) survey reported (infrequently) that they used sex to enhance social status (“I wanted to be popular”), out of a sense of duty, or because they were pressured to do so. Finally some used sex to get rid of a headache or menstrual cramps.

Why Men and Women May be Motivated to Avoid Sex

It is not surprising that many people are hesitant to get involved in sexual relationships. [Hatfield \(1984\)](#) pointed out that—in spite of popular exhortations to seek out intimacy or fulfilling sex lives—people who are hesitant to embark on intimate relationships are not necessarily “neurotic” or “irrational.” Adventurers must be cautious. Not all casual sex partners are kind and loving—whatever their fame or social status. When asked about his tumultuous romantic relationships, the fighter Mike Tyson complained that he had been “done wrong” by “stupid bitches.” When asked about Desiree Washington, “Kid Dynamite” complained: “No, I didn’t rape that slimy bitch.” Why then had Washington railroaded him?

“Just a lying, reptilian, monstrous young lady,” Tyson said, shaking his head in dismay. “I just hate her guts. She put me in that state where, I don’t know, I really wish I did know. Now I really do want to rape her and her fuckin’ mama” ([Remnick, 2006](#), p. 1).

For Tyson, who once said: “I like to hurt women when I make love to them. I like to hear them scream with pain, to see them bleed. It gives me pleasure” ([Remnick, 2006](#), p. 430), power and vengeance are obviously motives for sexual activity in general and rape in particular.

All sexual affairs involve risk. Most religions consider sex outside of marriage to be immoral ([Cubbins & Tanfer, 2000](#)). Men and women may worry that if they flout community prohibitions they may acquire a poor reputation or risk community and family reprisals (say, from family members intent on protecting the family honor or from jealous dates and mates). Or they may worry about unwanted pregnancies. Sexual encounters can rouse negative emotions such as guilt, shame, anger, regret, and disappointment ([Moore & Davidson, 1997](#); [Sawyer & Smith, 1996](#); [Tsui & Nicoladis, 2004](#))—especially if sex occurs in the context of coercion and abuse ([Jordan, Price, Telljohann, & Chesney 1998](#)). People contemplating sex may fear disease (contracting STDs and AIDS) if they engage in high-risk behavior—and they are right to be fearful. Casual sex with multiple partners, whether heterosexual

or homosexual, without adequate protection *is* associated with disease (Cubbins & Tanfer, 2000; Paul, McManus, & Hayes, 2000).

Many scholars have complained that there is a paucity of information as to why young people choose to refrain from sexual activity (Patrick, Maggs, & Abar, 2007). To remedy this problem, and to promote research, psychometricians have begun to develop scales designed to measure why men and women might choose to avoid or abstain from sexual activity. Here is a list of the scales we were able to find (in chronological order).

Scales Designed to Measure Motives to Avoid Sex

- **Elaine Hatfield (1984). *Fear of Intimacy Scale*.** The author identified six reasons why people might avoid sex and intimacy. These included such things as fear of (a) exposure, (b) abandonment, (c) angry attacks, (d) loss of control, (e) one's own destructive impulses, and (f) losing one's individuality or being engulfed. Paul and her colleagues (2000) developed a six-item scale designed to measure these motives. A 5-point Likert rating scale was used (1 = "not at all like me" to 5 = "extremely like me.") Each item was used individually to represent a different fear of intimacy. Researchers have found that young people who fear intimacy tend to seek out casual sexual relations ("one-night stands" or "hookups,") or to avoid sexual activity altogether—be it in casual or loving, intimate relationships (see Gentzler & Kerns, 2004; Grello, Welsh, & Harper, 2006; Paul et al., 2000).
- **Barbara Critchlow Leigh (1989). *Sexual Motives Scale*.** Designed to measure eight avoidance motives: fear of VD and AIDS, fear of pregnancy, fear of rejection, dislike using contraception, no opportunity, not interested, don't enjoy sex. For information on the scale's reliability and validity, see Leigh (1989).
- **Tom J. Tiegs, Paul B. Perrin, Perry W. Kaly, and Martin Heesacker (2007). *Beliefs about Sex Scale*.** The authors asked college students to complete a 160-item scale, describing a variety of potential reasons for seeking out or avoiding sex. Two of his scales were designed to assess students' motivations for avoiding sex. One measured "sex as personally costly" in terms of having negative emotional, psychological, or physical consequences. (Included were such items as: "God will punish me for having sex," "Having a one-night stand makes me feel cheap," and "I will get an STD by having sex.") Another assessed "sex as a violation of social injunctions," and included such items as: "I should be with my partner for a long time before I have sex." The authors found that while men experienced social pressure to have sex with a number of different partners, women were pressured to be the gatekeepers of sexuality. For information on the reliability and validity of the scale, (see Tiegs et al., 2007).
- **Z. D. Peterson and C. L. Muehlenhard (2005/published 2011). *Sexual Wanting Questionnaire*.** The questionnaire assesses sexual wanting, taking into account the following: (1) acknowledging that people can desire to avoid sex to varying degrees; (2) they can wish to avoid sex for various reasons; (3) there's a difference between a wish to avoid sex versus a desire to avoid its consequences, and (4) there's a difference between desiring to avoid sex versus not consenting to sex. For information on the scale's reliability and validity see Peterson and Muehlenhard (2011).

In Table 3 we provide a tabular description of these scales, for use by researchers who wish to compare or select scales.

Miscellaneous Measures of Motives for Avoiding Sex

In addition to the social psychologists who have devised full-fledged batteries to measure a variety of reasons why young people might choose to remain virgins or avoid casual sex, many other researchers have attempted to assess just a reason or two (see Table 4). These include:

Scholars find that all these fears tend to prevent young men and women from engaging in casual or more intimate relationships (Fenigstein & Preston, 2007; Herold & Mewhinney, 1993).

Table 3

Scales Designed to Measure Motives to Avoid Sex

Author and Name of Scale	Motives for Avoiding Sex	Psychometric Properties
Hatfield (1984) <i>Fear of Intimacy Scale</i>	The author identified six reasons why people might be motivated to avoid sex and intimacy. These included such things as fear of : exposure, abandonment, angry attacks, loss of control, one's own destructive impulses, and losing one's individuality or being engulfed.	Paul et al. (2000)
Leigh (1989) <i>Sexual Motives Scale</i>	Designed to measure eight avoidance motives: fear of VD and AIDS, fear of pregnancy, fear of rejection, dislike using contraception, no opportunity, not interested, don't enjoy sex.	Leigh (1989)
Tiegs, Perrin, Kaly, & Heesacker (2007) <i>Beliefs About Sex Scale</i>	Sex as personally costly (in terms of having negative emotional, psychological, or physical consequences) and sex as a violation of social injunctions.	Tiegs et al. (2007)
Muehlenhard & Peterson (2005); Peterson & Muehlenhard (2011) <i>Sexual Wanting Questionnaire</i>	The questionnaire assesses sexual wanting, taking into account the following: (1) acknowledging that people can desire to avoid sex to varying degrees; (2) they can wish to avoid sex for various reasons; (3) there's a difference between a wish to avoid sex versus a desire to avoid it's consequences, and (4) there's a difference between desiring to avoid sex versus not consenting to sex.	Muehlenhard & Peterson (2005); Peterson & Muehlenhard (2011)

Table 4

Miscellaneous Measures of Motives for Avoiding Sex

Motives for Avoiding Sex	Psychometric Properties
Not in love	Sprecher & Regan (1996)
God will punish people for sex	Tiegs et al. (2007)
Personal beliefs	Sprecher & Regan (1996)
Premarital sex is immoral	Tiegs et al. (2007)
Sex can damage a person's status and reputation	Meston & Buss (2007)
Sex can make you feel cheap	Tiegs et al. (2007)
An avoidant attachment style	Davis et al. (2004)
Fear of rejection	Leigh (1989)
Too soon	Carroll et al. (1985)
No one available	Carroll et al. (1985)
Fear of pregnancy	Leigh (1989); Patrick et al. (2007); Peplau et al. (1977)
Fear of STDs and AIDS	Patrick et al. (2007); Tiegs et al. (2007)

Conclusions

Scholars from a variety of disciplines have begun to investigate passionate love, sexual desire, and sexual behavior. Theories abound as to the nature of the motives that spark people to seek out or avoid sexual behavior. Some researchers have complained that they have been handicapped by a paucity of psychometrically valid and

reliable scales designed to assess these constructs. It is hoped that this compendium will prove a valuable aid to subsequent multidisciplinary researchers who choose to investigate these topics.

What are the next steps for researchers, given this abundance of scales? Four things need to be done:

1. Theorists could attempt to develop a theoretically compelling taxonomy of sexual motives, based on the findings of the plethora of motives to pursue sex and motives to avoid sex that researchers have documented. Indeed, a few theorists have attempted to craft a comprehensive taxonomy. In their classic study, [DeLamater and MacCorquodale \(1979\)](#), for example, organized their list of sexual motives in terms of the target (self, partner, or relationship). Cooper and her colleagues (1998) categorized sexual motives into four quadrants that resulted from crossing two dimensions: appetitive versus aversive motives and self- versus social-focused motives. [Meston and Buss \(2007\)](#) organized their list of sexual motives into a set of four factors (emotional, physical, goal attainment, and insecurity). A theoretically compelling, comprehensive model would be of incalculable value. In addition to organizing all the motives that theorists have identified, it might help organize common and obscure motives and to identify categories of motives that may have been overlooked.
2. A critical analysis of the psychometric properties of the existing scales is needed. Many questions remain unaddressed: How were the many scale items derived? How clear are the items? On what populations were they tested? (Did anyone interview couples from various cultures? Ages? Heterosexual and homosexual?) How internally consistent are the various scales? How reliable and valid are they? How useful are they for predicting sexual attitudes, feelings, and behavior? It is hoped that the scholars would end with a recommendation as to which of the scales are best for which purposes.
3. Psychometricians need to conduct both meta-analyses and factor analyses in order to compare the similarities and differences in the existing scales. This would assist theorists in their attempt to conduct a new, more comprehensive, scale, which touches all the bases.
4. Psychometricians should attempt to assess the practical usefulness of the scales so that investigators can make an informed decision as to which scales would best suit their purposes. They need to know how the scales are administered, how long they take to complete, and how easy are they to score. To the extent possible, they should compare the scales as to reliability and validity.

These projects are well beyond the scope of this paper, of course. We are aware that these investigations, though valuable, will be both difficult and tremendously time consuming to complete. Given the current theoretical popularity of this topic and its practical importance—in predicting the progress of interpersonal relationships, the tendency of young people to engage in sexual activity—particularly psychologically and medically risky sex ([Hatfield, Luckhurst, & Rapson, 2011](#))—it would be well worth the time and effort.

Notes

1) All of the scales mentioned in this article have been filed with the Kinsey Institute. Contact: Dr. Liana Zhou, Chief Librarian, The Kinsey Institute for Research in Sex, Gender, and Reproduction, 401 Morrison Hall, Indiana University, Bloomington, IN 47405-2501. Email: zhoul@indiana.edu or www.kinseyinstitute.org. Researchers may also secure many of the most popular scales from elaine@hawaii.edu and (eventually) from an online site to be listed on www.elainehatfield.com

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