



Teaching Idea: Comparing the Sexual Attitudes of Men and Women using Natsal

Key idea: This teaching idea uses data from the National Survey of Sexual Attitudes and Lifestyles (Natsal) to compare men's and women's attitudes towards sex and create multi-item scales that represent these attitudes.



Keywords: Sex, Attitudes, Cross-Tab, Association, Chi-Square, Factor Analyses, Multi-Item Scales

Background

Existing research shows women are more sexually conservative than men, being less likely to engage in casual sex and thus having fewer sexual partners. These behaviours mirror their attitudes which are also shown to be less liberal than men's; women are shown to be less accepting of practices such as non-monogamy and one-night stands (Scott, 1993). A variety of attitude measures from the National Survey of Sexual Attitudes and Lifestyles can be used to explore this difference.

Research question: Do women have more conservative attitudes towards sex than men?

Data: SN 7799 National Survey of Sexual Attitudes and Lifestyles, 2010-2012

The National Survey of Sexual Attitudes and Lifestyles (Natsal) is a cross-sectional survey conducted in 1990, 2000 and 2010. The latest version of the questionnaire (2010) was completed by a representative sample of 16 to 74 year olds living in Britain; sample size=15,162. The survey was completed via face-to-face interviews though more sensitive questions were included in a self-completion section. It includes questions about the respondents' sexual health, their attitudes towards different aspects of sexual relationships, and their previous sexual experiences.

Variables of Interest

Variable	Name in dataset	Categories and codes	Categories to treat as missing
Gender	Rsex	Male(1); Female(2)	
Opinion about adultery	Rwadult	Always wrong (1); Mostly wrong (2); Sometimes wrong (3); Rarely wrong (4); Not wrong at all (5)	Don't know (8); Not answered (9)
Opinion about one night stands	Rwcasual	Always wrong (1); Mostly wrong (2); Sometimes wrong (3); Rarely wrong (4); Not wrong at all (5)	Don't know (8); Not answered (9)
Agreement with statement 'sex without love is OK'	Snnolov	Always wrong (1); Mostly wrong (2); Sometimes wrong (3); Rarely wrong (4); Not wrong at all (5)	Don't know (8); Not answered (9)
Agreement with statement 'there is too much sex in the media'	Snmedia	Always wrong (1); Mostly wrong (2); Sometimes wrong (3); Rarely wrong (4); Not wrong at all (5)	Don't know (8); Not answered (9)

Data Analysis

1. Produce cross-tabs and an appropriate graphical representation (e.g. clustered bar chart) for each of the dependent attitude variables shown in the above table (rwadult, rwcasual, snnolov, snmedia) and gender (rsex). Use chi-square test to measure significance of these associations.
2. Use factor analysis to explore whether any (or all) of the four attitude variables (rwadult, rwcasual, snnolov, snmedia) could be combined into a multi-item attitude scale.
3. Using the results from the factor analysis and the category codes of the variables, consider which one of the variables would need to be inversed if it were combined with the others into a single measure. Recode this variable (snnolov) accordingly.
4. Reproduce the factor analysis using your recoded variable (snnolov inversed) and save the scores as a new variable.
5. Compare the mean scores of men and women on the new multi-item attitude scale. Use the T-test to measure whether this difference is statistically significant.

Access the SPSS syntax commands for each of these exercises:

<https://ukdataservice.ac.uk/media/622451/syntaxcomparingsexualattitudes.pdf>

Example Results

Table 1: The percentage of men and women in the extreme categories of each attitude measure

	Men	Women
One night stands are always wrong	28.5%	40.1%
Adultery is always wrong	57.2%	65.0%
Strongly agree that sex without love is OK	14.4%	8.2%
Strongly agree that there is too much sex in the media	21.7%	29.9%

Table 2: Component matrix from factor analysis of four attitude measures

	Component 1
Opinion about one night stands	0.783
Opinion about adultery when married	0.511
Agreement that sex without love is OK	-0.768
Agreement that there is too much sex in the media	0.542

Further Ideas

1. Use earlier editions of Natsal (1990, 2000) to explore how the differences between the sexual attitudes of men and women have changed over time. In light of the increasing equality between men and women we might hypothesise that these differences are narrowing. N.B. The age range for each edition of the survey is different (1990: 16 to 59 years; 2000: 16 to 44 years; 2010: 16 to 74 years), to make valid comparisons only include 16 to 44 year olds from the 1990 and 2010 samples.
2. Using the newly created multi-item attitude scale as your dependent variable, use regression to measure the effect gender has on this attitude measure when controlling for other characteristics (e.g. religion, ethnicity, age).

Access the data: **SN 7799 National Survey of Sexual Attitudes and Lifestyles, 2010-2012**

References:

Scott, J. (1998) Changing Attitudes to Sexual Morality: A Cross-National Comparison. *Sociology* 32(4): 815-45.

