

## SEX AND THE FIVE FACTOR MODEL OF PERSONALITY

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## ABSTRACT

This study examined the links between personality and sexual knowledge, sexual behavior, and sexual adjustment in a sample of 501 university undergraduate students. Personality was assessed using the revised NEO Personality Inventory (NEO-PIR) and sexuality was assessed using the Derogatis Sexual Functioning Inventory (DSFI) and the Sociosexual Orientation Inventory (SOI). In a series of regression analyses, relations between the five factors of personality (extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism, openness) and each dimension of sexuality were examined. Agreeableness was the most consistent predictor of sexual behavior for both males and females. Across gender, openness predicted sexual attitudes and knowledge, and neuroticism was the strongest predictor of sexual adjustment. A number of sex differences were also noted. For example, social dominance predicted nonvirginity status and lifetime number of partners for males but not females. By contrast, self-ratings of attractiveness were strongly associated with nonvirginity status in females but not males. Ethnicity (Asian status) was a strong predictor of most dimensions of sexuality in females only.

## PURPOSE

With a few exceptions, studies of personality and sexual behavior typically examine a small range of traits per study. Because measures of putatively different traits are often highly intercorrelated, this lack of comprehensive trait assessment makes it difficult to organize and integrate findings across studies. It is difficult to know, for example, if sexual correlates of "assertiveness" are equivalent to those of "dominance", or "extraversion".

The present study is the first to assess personality and sexuality in a large, university undergraduate sample using a multivariate trait model with a strong claim to comprehensiveness: the Five Factor Model (FFM, measured here with the NEO-PIR). This model represents an emerging consensus among trait psychologists that five broad factors provide an adequate framework within which to summarize, organize and interpret interrelationships among virtually all personality traits. The FFM may therefore provide a suitable model for comprehensive evaluation of personality and sexuality.

## METHOD

### **Subjects**

501 University of British Columbia undergraduate volunteers (283 females) completed the study in exchange for course credit. Age of subjects ranged from 17 to 59, with a median of 19.0. Ethnic composition was 62% Caucasian, 38% Asian.

### **Measures**

Revised NEO Personality Inventory (NEO-PIR). The NEO-PIR (Costa & McCrae, 1992) is a 240-item questionnaire that provides comprehensive assessment of five broad personality factors, extraversion (E), agreeableness (A), conscientiousness (C), neuroticism (N), and openness to experience (O). The NEO-PIR measures six specific facets for each factor with brief, balanced, 8-item scales, for a total assessment of 30 traits.

Sociosexual Orientation Inventory (SOI). The SOI (Simpson & Gangestad, 1991) measures a small number of sexual behaviors and attitudes thought to reflect the extent to which individuals possess a restricted versus an unrestricted orientation toward engaging in uncommitted sex.

The Derogatis Sexual Functioning Inventory (DSFI). The DSFI is designed to assess current levels of sexual functioning. Eight subtests (information, experience, drive, attitudes, symptoms, affects, gender role, fantasy) constitute an overall Sexual Functioning Inventory score (SFI) and one item (satisfaction rating of present sexual relationship) constitutes a Global Sexual Satisfaction Index (GSSI).

### **Procedure**

Subjects completed the NEO-PIR at home. The SOI and DSFI were completed one week later in a confidential, laboratory setting.

## SEXUAL KNOWLEDGE\*

- Imaginative, intellectually curious, and open-minded women and men possessed more accurate sexual knowledge than persons less open to experience.
- Men who reported high levels of anxiety, depression, feelings of helplessness, and social self-consciousness were less informed on sexual matters than well-adjusted males.
- Asian females were somewhat less knowledgeable about sex than non Asian females.

\*The above findings were all statistically significant at  $p < .01$ .

## SEXUAL KNOWLEDGE

		Standardized regression weights (betas)									
	n	Age	Ethn. <sup>1</sup>	E	A	C	N	O	Mult R	Adj R <sup>2</sup>	F Ratio
Men	201	.08	-.01	-.03	-.13*	-.16*	-.31***	.34***	.46	.18	7.66***
Women	264	.00	-.32***	.09	-.04	.01	-.06	.30***	.56	.29	17.18***

Note: \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$ . <sup>1</sup>Ethnicity coded Asian (1), Caucasian (0). Labels are extraversion (E), agreeableness (A), conscientiousness (C), neuroticism (N), openness to experience (O).

## SEXUAL BEHAVIOR & ATTITUDES\*

- Trait measures of dominance were strongly associated with nonvirgin status and lifetime number of partners in males only.
- Self-ratings of physical attractiveness strongly predicted nonvirgin status in females only.
- Openness was associated with sexual fantasy and attitudes; imaginative, emotionally sensitive men and women experienced a wide variety of sexual fantasies and held liberal attitudes toward sex.
- The strongest predictor of the DSFI fantasy total score was agreeableness; kind, deferential, obliging men and women experienced a narrower range of fantasies than disagreeable men and women.
- Men with sexually liberal attitudes tended to be unconscientious, extraverted and disagreeable; women with sexually liberal attitudes tended to be nonneurotic and disagreeable.
- Disagreeable men and women were more likely to have had sexual intercourse and with a greater number of partners than agreeable men and women.
- Nonvirgins of both sexes were more likely to be calculating, stubborn and arrogant in their interpersonal behavior than virgins.
- Neuroticism predicted sexual inexperience in males only; timid, unassertive, anxious men were less sexually experienced than emotionally stable men.
- Disorganized, selfish, and easily distracted men and women were more sexually promiscuous than conscientious, agreeable, introverted individuals.
- Consistently, ethnicity was predictive of sexual experience and attitudes for females only; Asian females reported considerably less sexual experience and more conservative sexual attitudes than Caucasian women.

\*The above findings were all statistically significant at  $p < .01$ .

SEXUAL BEHAVIOR

		Standardized regression weights (betas)							Mult R	Adj R <sup>2</sup>	F Ratio
n	Age	Ethn. <sup>1</sup>	E	A	C	N	O				
<i>Nonvirgin status</i>											
Men	201	.21**	-.01	.12	-.25***	-.06	-.19**	.02	.40	.13	5.35***
Women	264	.18**	-.31***	.14*	-.15**	-.10	-.09	.02	.44	.17	8.99***
<i>Frequency of kissing &amp; petting (DSFI)</i>											
Men	201	.22***	.03	.18*	-.29***	-.12	-.18*	.02	.44	.16	6.82***
Women	264	.07	-.24***	.21**	-.13*	.01	-.04	-.06	.36	.11	5.77***
<i>Sociosexual Style Inventory summary score (promiscuous behavior and attitude)</i>											
Men	155	.11	-.15*	.27**	-.24**	-.23**	-.05	.03	.45	.16	5.57***
Women	195	.12	-.38***	.24***	-.28***	-.21**	-.09	.12	.62	.36	17.22***
<i>Lifetime number of partners (intercourse)</i>											
Men	130	.26**	.09	.22*	-.25**	-.04	-.12	.09	.46	.17	5.12***
Women	156	.28***	-.27***	.13	-.16*	-.03	.02	.11	.50	.22	7.61***

Note: \*p<.05, \*\*p<.01, \*\*\*p<.001. <sup>1</sup>Ethnicity coded Asian (1), Caucasian (0). Labels are extraversion (E), agreeableness (A), conscientiousness (C), neuroticism (N), openness to experience (O).

SEXUAL BEHAVIOR: Effects of dominance, impulsiveness, and self-rated attractiveness  
Standardized regression weights (betas)

	n	Age	Ethn. <sup>1</sup>	DOM	ATTR	IMPL	Mult R	Adj R <sup>2</sup>	F Ratio
<i>Nonvirgin status</i>									
Men	189	.18*	-.01	.28***	.00	.17*	.39	.13	6.45***
Women	249	.12*	-.19**	.00	.34***	.16**	.51	.25	17.26***
<i>Reported lifetime number of partners (intercourse)</i>									
Men	120	.17*	.13	.30**	.20*	.24**	.54	.26	9.58***
Women	152	.23**	-.17	.00	.32***	.21**	.54	.27	12.01***

SEXUAL FANTASY & ATTITUDE  
Standardized regression weights (betas)

	n	Age	Ethn. <sup>1</sup>	E	A	C	N	O	Mult R	Adj R <sup>2</sup>	F Ratio
<i>Total number of fantasies endorsed (DSFI)</i>											
Men	201	.03	-.06	.16*	-.24***	-.10	.05	.20**	.37	.11	4.55***
Women	264	.15**	-.29***	.07	-.20***	-.13*	-.08	.13*	.44	.17	8.89***
<i>DSFI Sexual Attitudes total score (liberal)</i>											
Men	202	.01	-.00	.18**	-.19**	-.19**	-.10	.37***	.50	.22	9.66***
Women	269	.08	-.28***	.08	-.19***	-.10	-.17**	.29***	.53	.26	14.92***

Note: \*p<.05, \*\*p<.01, \*\*\*p<.001. <sup>1</sup>Ethnicity coded Asian (1), Caucasian (0). Labels are social dominance composite of NEO-PIR facets (DOM), impulsiveness composite of NEO-PIR facets (IMPL), physical attractiveness composite of DSFI self-ratings (ATTR), NEO-PIR domain measures of extraversion (E), agreeableness (A), conscientiousness (C), neuroticism (N), openness to experience (O).

## SEXUAL ADJUSTMENT\*

- According to the DSFI Sexual Functioning Index (SFI), sexually dysfunctional men tended to be agreeable, anxious, and conservative.
- Sexually dysfunctional women tended to be anxious and conservative.
- None of the Big Five domains significantly predicted self-reported ratings of sexual satisfaction.
- Among individuals who were currently dating, the older males were more satisfied with their sexual relationships than younger males. The reverse was true for females; the older females were less satisfied with their current sexual relationship than younger females.

\*The above findings were all statistically significant at  $p < .01$ .

### SEXUAL ADJUSTMENT

		Standardized regression weights (betas)							Mult R	Adj R <sup>2</sup>	F Ratio
	n	Age	Ethn. <sup>1</sup>	E	A	C	N	O			
<i>DSFI Sexual Functioning Total Score (SFI)</i>											
Men	63	.07	-.15	.01	-.27*	.02	-.37**	.36**	.59	.28	4.83***
Women	103	-.06	-.34**	.07	-.09	.02	-.36***	.20*	.63	.36	9.85***
<i>DSFI Global Sexual Satisfaction (GSSI)</i>											
Men	58	.15	-.00	-.00	.20	.03	.07	.20	.36	.02	1.20
Women	100	-.22*	-.22*	-.02	.15	.06	-.20	.10	.44	.13	3.36**
<i>DSFI Sexual Satisfaction Subscale (10 items)</i>											
Men	62	.14	.06	.00	.17	-.11	-.08	.15	.31	.01	.94
Women	103	-.09	-.07	.12	.04	-.01	-.20	.10	.35	.06	2.03

**Note:** \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$ . <sup>1</sup>Ethnicity coded Asian (1), Caucasian (0). Labels are extraversion (E), agreeableness (A), conscientiousness (C), neuroticism (N), openness to experience (O).



## DISCUSSION

The present findings for the Big Five dimension of **agreeableness** are consistent with prior research in which dominance feeling (Maslow, 1942), psychoticism (Eysenck, 1976), and lack of constraint (Gangestad & Simpson, 1990) predict more frequent, varied, precocious, and promiscuous sexual behavior.

**Conscientiousness** was only weakly and inconsistently predictive of sexual activity. A distinction suggested by McCrae & Costa (1987) between proactive (e.g., achievement-striving) and inhibitive (e.g., dutifulness) forms of conscientiousness may, however, be important in understanding the sociosexual implication of this Big Five dimension. These two aspects may relate to sexual behavior in opposite directions: proactive conscientiousness is associated with dominance, and inhibitive conscientiousness is inversely associated with impulsivity. In the present study, dominance and impulsivity were correlated with sexual behavior in the same direction. Effects for **extraversion** were somewhat weaker than predicted. Preliminary analyses suggest that dominant and impulsive, but not affiliative, aspects of extraversion are associated with sexual behavior. The inhibitory effects of **neuroticism** on male sexual experience are also consistent with previous findings implicating dominance or social potency in sexual behavior: the facets of neuroticism most related to sexual experience are those most associated with dominance. In conclusion, previously reported personality correlates of sexual behavior may be interpreted within the Five Factor model. Higher order sociosexuality-related dimensions of personality, such as those proposed by Maslow (1942), Eysenck (1976), and Gangestad & Simpson (1990) may be usefully interpreted as alternative rotations or combinations of four of the Big Five factors: agreeableness, extraversion, conscientiousness and neuroticism. The remaining FFM dimension, **openness**, was strongly associated with cognitive aspects of sexuality - attitudes and knowledge.

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