The Social Organization of Sex

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http://www.iastate.edu/~soc.134
The social organization of sex

✔ Conducting survey research
  • Sampling — importance of having a random sample
  • Selecting indicators
    ✔ Indicator: measurable event, characteristic, or behavior commonly thought to reflect a particular concept (p. 68)

✔ What best explains sexual behavior?
  • Sexual instincts
  • Sexual scripts
    ✔ Sexual behavior is shaped by norms and values, social networks, and social institutions — like any other social behavior
Sex surveys (sampling)

✓ Kinsey: institutional populations, snowball sampling
✓ Magazine surveys: biased samples, low response rates
✓ National Health and Social Life Survey (1992)
  ✓ Randomly sampled 4,369 people
  ✓ 3,432 were interviewed (78.6% response rate)
  ✓ Finding supports importance of sexual scripts

Who are our sex partners?

Percentage of Partnerships in Which the Two Partners Are Similar in Social Characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Similarity</th>
<th>Type of Partnership</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Marriage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Racial/ethnic</td>
<td>93%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>78%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational</td>
<td>82%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious</td>
<td>72%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Why are our sex partners like us?

1. Useful to you
   ✓ Easier to share lives
   ✓ Equal social status = equal power in relationship
   ✓ Facilitates intimacy

2. Useful to your social network (stakeholders)
   ✓ Parents
   ✓ Friends
   ✓ Professionals, moral entrepreneurs, etc.
   ✓ Changing stakeholders, e.g., colleges

3. We meet people in our networks

Who introduced partners?

Non-cohabitating/last < 1 month
- Mutual friends (37%)
- Family (3%)
- Coworker/classmate/neighbor (9%)
- Self-introduction (47%)
- Other (3%)

Married couples
- Mutual friends (35%)
- Family (15%)
- Coworker/classmate/neighbor (13%)
- Self-introduction (32%)
- Other (2%)


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Number of sexual partners

- Average number of sexual partners has increased
  - Over 50: a third have had five or more sexual partners
  - 30-50: half have had five or more sexual partners
- Rates of unfaithfulness in marriage are low
  - 5% of married persons had > 1 partner in past year
- More time spent sexually active but unmarried
  - Earlier first intercourse (18 to 17-1/2 over 30 years)
  - Later marriage
  - More frequent divorce

Sex partners in past 12 months

**Men**
- 1 (67%)
- 2-4 (18%)
- 0 (10%)
- 5+ (5%)

**Women**
- 1 (75%)
- 0 (14%)
- 2-4 (10%)
- 5+ (2%)

Sex partners since age 18

Men
- 1 (20%)
- 2-4 (21%)
- 5-10 (23%)
- 10-20 (16%)
- 21+ (17%)
- 0 (3%)

Women
- 2-4 (36%)
- 5-10 (20%)
- 1 (31%)
- 10-20 (6%)
- 21+ (3%)
- 0 (3%)

Frequency of sex in past 12 months