Validation of the McCoy Female Sexuality Questionnaire in an Italian Sample

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This article presents the result of a study that translated into Italian and validated the McCoy Female Sexuality Questionnaire (MFSQ) on an Italian sample. The questionnaire was first administered to a sample of 240 Italian women (age range, 18–65 years) recruited from a gynecology clinic. A principal component analysis identified 2 factors: sexuality (9 items) and partnership (5 items). Both factors showed an adequate inter-item reliability (Cronbach’s α of .88 and .75, respectively). The validity of the Italian MFSQ was then tested by administering the questionnaire to a sample of 16 women with sexual dysfunction and 46 control women. Sexual dysfunction diagnoses were assessed through a semi-standardized interview based on the DSM-IV-TR diagnoses for Female Sexual Arousal Disorder, Female Orgasmic Disorder, Dyspareunia, and Hypoactive Sexual Desire Disorder. A discriminant validity test showed significant differences between women with and without female sexual dysfunction. These results indicate that the translated version of the MFSQ is a reliable and valid measure of sexual dysfunction among Italian women. The results also indicated a difference in factor structure between the Italian and the original version of the MFSQ, which warrants further investigation.

KEY WORDS: culture; psychometrics; female sexuality; assessment.

INTRODUCTION

The majority of the questionnaires currently used to assess sexuality in women have been developed and standardized on the U.S. population (for a review, see Davis, Yarber, Bauserman, Schreer, & Davis, 1998). When researchers from other countries decide to conduct a study on sexuality, these measures are translated into the target language and administered to the non-English speaking sample. Often, these studies do not provide complete psychometric information on the translated questionnaires (e.g., Nathorst-Böös & Hammar, 1997). The decision not to standardize and validate a translated questionnaire is based upon the assumption that the constructs of sexuality underlying the original questionnaire are unaffected by culture. The indifference toward the role of culture in sexuality is reflected in the low percentage (7.3%) of articles published in Archives of Sexual Behavior and Journal of Sex Research between 1971 and 1995 that considered ethnicity a relevant variable (Wiederman, Maynard, & Fretz, 1996). However, culture has been shown in the literature to impact sexual attitudes and sexual behaviors (e.g., Meston, Trapnell, & Gorzalka, 1998; Okazaki, 2002; Tsui, 1985). In particular, studies have shown that African American women report higher levels of sexual satisfaction compared to Caucasian women when socioeconomic status is controlled for (Cain, Johannes, & Avis, 2003; Henderson-King & Veroff, 1994; Oggins, Leber, & Veroff, 1993); Women from Hispanic, Anglo-American, and bicultural backgrounds reported a strong relation between passionate love and marital
satisfaction that was not observed in Caucasian couples (Contreras, Hendrick, & Hendrick, 1996). A study by Meston et al. (1998) found that differences in certain sexual attitudes between Canadians from Asian and from European ancestry diminished according to length of exposure to North American culture. Because significant differences in sexuality have been observed between subcultures that coexist in the same country, it is feasible that sexual differences may be even more salient in populations with different ethnic backgrounds, and living in different countries. Therefore, the lack of information on the psychometrics of translated questionnaires could be a serious limitation to our investigation of sexuality in different cultures.

The primary purpose of this study was to validate the McCoy Female Sexuality Questionnaire (MFSQ; McCoy & Matyas, 1996) for an Italian sample. The MFSQ was selected because of its extensive use among women from different cultures (French: Limouzin-Lamothe, Mairon, Joyce, & Le Gal, 1994; Swedish, Norwegian, and Danish: Nathorst-Böös & Hammar, 1997), and because of its wide use for the assessment of sexual functioning associated with hormonal fluctuation due to treatments (e.g., oral contraceptive or hormone replacement therapy) or natural biological rhythms (e.g., menopause). The focus on a questionnaire highly associated with biological aspects of sexuality was chosen in an attempt to tap into aspects of sexuality that may be less affected by cultural differences. The Danish, Norwegian, and Swedish translations of the MSFQ used only a portion (7–9) of the original 19 items, and have been used to compare results from women in the three different countries (Nathorst-Böös & Hammar, 1997). Unfortunately, researchers have not provided information on the rationale behind item selection. The selected items included questions about frequency of orgasm, pain, arousal, and sexual thoughts or fantasies. One of the questions that has been consistently eliminated from the translations pertains to the need for manual stimulation or stimulation of another type (mechanical vibrations) at the time of the orgasm.

**STUDY 1**

**Method**

**Participants**

The sample consisted of 245 Italian women, ages 18–65 years ($M = 36.31$, $SD = 12.7$), recruited from an obstetric and gynecology clinic in a middle-sized town in Italy. Potential participants were given a brief explanation of the study while in the waiting room prior to their gynecological visit. Women interested in the study returned the questionnaires completed, whereas women who refused to participate returned the questionnaires blank. Participants’ reasons to schedule appointments at the clinic included routine visits (approximately 58%), checkup visits for oral contraceptive treatment (approximately 20%), or visits for hormone replacement therapy (HRT; approximately 21%). Two percent ($n = 5$) of the participants did not return the completed questionnaire; therefore, the analysis was conducted on data from 240 participants.

A total of 80.4% of the participants ($n = 193$) reported coming from a medium social economic status, whereas 4.2% ($n = 10$) reported a medium-low to low status, and 19% ($n = 37$) reported medium-high to high status. Of the 240 women in the study, 50.8% ($n = 122$) were in a cohabiting sexual relationship, 45.8% ($n = 110$) were in a sexual relationship but did not cohabit, and 3.3% ($n = 8$) were not in a sexual relationship. Of the women without a partner, only one woman reported engaging in sexual activities during the prior month. Sexual activities were loosely defined as any sensual or sexual activity with a partner or alone, including kissing, petting, masturbation, and intercourse. Among women in a relationship, the average duration of the relationship was 11 years ($SD = 11.23$). Nineteen percent ($n = 46$) of the participants completed middle school education, 42.7% ($n = 102$) completed high school, and the remaining 38.1% ($n = 91$) completed college. A total of 206 (85.8%) women reported that they had engaged in some sexual activity with their partner during the preceding 4 weeks and only 19 (7.9%) women reported they masturbated during the previous 4 weeks. It should be noted that 67 (27.9%) women refused to answer the question about masturbation.

Only women who reported sexual activity in the previous 4 weeks were included in the analysis. This criterion is consistent with that used in a number of recent validation studies on sexuality questionnaires (for a review, see Meston & Derogatis, 2002). Although excluding women who have not been sexually active in the previous 4 weeks may limit the generalizability of the results, it is not possible to assess problems with sexual arousal and orgasm if the woman has not participated in sexual activities. Relying on memories of sexual activities that occurred more than 4 weeks prior to the interview can also be problematic given the lack of accuracy in recalling events that are far removed from the present. It is feasible that excluding women who have not engaged in sexual activities during the prior month may have selectively excluded women with low sexual desire. However, it should also be noted that frequency of sexual activities...