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AUTHOR Carducci, Bernardo J.  
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ABSTRACT

A systematic relationship between self-report and perceived sexuality ratings seems to be more characteristic of males than of females. To further investigate this phenomena, male (N=48) and female (N=82) subjects, from 17 to 79 years old, provided self-report sexuality ratings and perceived sexuality ratings of male and female target groups of three different ages: 18-25; 34-45; and 65-75 years. A systematic relationship between self-report and perceived sexuality ratings was more characteristic of male than of female subjects. Females' self-report and perceived sexuality ratings were generally unrelated. The findings suggest that one possible explanation for this general sex difference may be subjects' tendency to label a sexually-related task as more masculine than feminine; males may be more willing to use their own personal sexuality ratings as a basis for their perceived ratings. (Author/JAC)

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CROSS-GENDER AND CROSS-GENERATIONAL PERCEPTIONS OF SEXUALITY

BERNARDO J. CARDUCCI

INDIANA UNIVERSITY SOUTHEAST

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## Abstract

The purpose of the present study was to further examine the relationship between self-report and perceived sexuality ratings by systematically considering both the age and sex of the subject and the age and sex of the target group. Male ( $n = 48$ ) and female ( $n = 82$ ) subjects, from 17 to 79 years old, provided self-report sexuality ratings and perceived sexuality ratings of male and female target groups of three different ages: 18-25; 35-45; and 65-75 years. A systematic relationship between self-report and perceived sexuality ratings was found to be more characteristic of male than of female subjects. The results indicated that the males' self-report sexuality ratings were significantly positively correlated with their perceived sexuality ratings. The results also indicated that the females' self-report sexuality measures were not correlated with their perceived sexuality ratings. The results were interpreted as corroborating and extending the generalizability of previous research in perceptions of sexuality. Suggestions for future research are also presented.

## CROSS-GENDER AND CROSS-GENERATIONAL PERCEPTIONS OF SEXUALITY

Previous research investigating perceptions of sexuality has attempted to assess the extent to which self-report ratings of sexuality are systematically related to (correlated with) the individual's perceived sexuality ratings of others. The results of this research indicate that males' self-report ratings of sexuality tend to be systematically related to their perceived sexuality ratings of others. On the other hand, females' self-report sexuality ratings tend to be unrelated to their perceived sexuality ratings of others. This general sex difference in perceptions of sexuality has been observed by researchers investigating the perception of sexual experience (Carducci, 1980) and the perception of erotic arousal in others (Griffitt, 1973; Veitch & Griffitt, 1980).

While the results of the above studies do indicate that a systematic relationship between self-report and perceived sexuality ratings does seem to be more characteristic of male subjects than of female subjects, the degree of generalizability of these results is rather limited. A major limitation of these results is that the self-report ratings obtained in these previous studies refer only to the self-report sexuality ratings of a specific group of young adults (viz., college students). Thus, the previous results do not necessarily reflect the extent to which males and females of different age groups might differ in their perceived sexuality ratings of others. In a similar manner, a second limitation of the above research is that the perceived sexuality ratings obtained refer only to college students' perceptions of their same- and opposite-sex peers (viz., other college students). Thus, the results of the previous research do not indicate the

extent to which self-report sexuality ratings of males and females of various age groups are differentially related to their perceived sexuality ratings of members of the same and opposite sex outside their own age group.

The purpose of the present study was to further examine the relationship between self-report and perceived sexuality ratings by systematically considering both the age and sex of the subject and the age and sex of the target group. To the extent that the results of the previous research in this area might be generalized to subject and target groups of different ages, it was expected that a systematic relationship between self-report and perceived sexuality ratings would be more characteristic of male subjects of different ages than female subjects of different ages.

### Method

#### Subjects

The subjects in the present study were 48 males and 82 females subdivided into three age groups: Young (age 17-25), middle-age (age 28-48), and elderly (age 51-79). The young group consisted of 22 male and 29 female undergraduates (mean age = 20.12 years). The subjects in the middle-age group consisted of 13 males and 31 females (mean age = 40.39 years). The subjects in the elderly group consisted of 13 males and 22 females (mean age = 67.37 years).

#### Procedure

The experimental sessions were conducted by a male experimenter in mixed-sex groups ranging in size from 4 to 15. Prior to their actual participation in the study, all of the subjects were told that this study was concerned with how people see themselves and how they see other people of different age groups. In addition, all of the subjects were informed beforehand that the study would require them to provide some personal information about

themselves. However, it was made very clear to all the subjects that their names would not appear on any of the forms used to collect this personal information. It was emphasized that the anonymity of each person would be maintained throughout the entire study. The subjects were also informed that they were free to terminate their participation at anytime during the experimental session. Finally, after answering any questions raised by the subjects, each subject was asked to sign an informed consent statement, which stated that the subject understood the conditions under which he or she was participating.

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Insert Table 1 about here  
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After collecting the informed consent statements, each subject was given a copy of the "Impression Index". The subjects' responses on the impression index were used to obtain the self-report and perceived sexuality ratings. The impression index consisted of a series of items to be answered on 7-point scales (see Table 1). To assess self-report and perceived sexuality ratings, the subjects were instructed to complete the impression index under seven different instructional sets. For the self-report instructional set, the subjects were asked to complete the impression index for themselves. The subjects' responses under this instructional set were combined to form a self-report measure of sexuality ranging from 11 (low self-report rating of sexuality) to 77 (high self-report rating of sexuality).

To assess perceived sexuality, the subjects were asked to complete the impression index under the remaining six instructional sets. For these six instructional sets, the subjects were asked to indicate their impressions of

male and female target groups of three different age groups: Young (18-25 years old), middle-age (35-45 years old) and elderly (65-75 years old). The subjects' responses to the impression index under each of the six different instructional sets were combined to form a separate measure of perceived sexuality for each target group, ranging from 11 (low perceived sexuality rating) to 77 (high perceived sexuality rating).

In an attempt to control for possible order effects, the order of presenting the seven different instructional sets was balanced throughout the experiment.

### Results and Discussion

To examine the extent to which a systematic relationship between self-report and perceived sexuality ratings is more characteristic of male than of female subjects, separate correlational analyses were conducted on the male and female data. In addition, to further investigate the extent to which self-report and perceived sexuality ratings are related for different age groups, the correlations between male and female subjects' self-report sexuality ratings and their perceived ratings of the six different target groups were calculated within each of the three subject age groups.

#### Male Subjects

As can be seen in the first and second rows of Table 2, the self-report sexuality ratings of the young- and middle-age subject groups were systematically related to (correlated with) their perceived sexuality ratings of the young- and middle-age- male and female target groups. However, their self-report sexuality ratings were not related to their perceived sexuality ratings of the elderly-male and female target groups. An inspection of the third row of Table 2 indicates that the self-report sexuality ratings of the elderly-male

subjects were systematically related to their perceived sexuality ratings of the middle-age- and elderly- male and female subject groups. However, the self-report sexuality ratings of the elderly-male subjects were not related to their perceived sexuality ratings of the young- male and female target groups.

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Insert Table 2 about here  
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#### Female Subjects

The first row of Table 3 indicates that the self-report sexuality ratings of the young-female subjects were systematically related to their perceived sexuality ratings of the elderly-female target group. As can be seen in the second row, the self-report sexuality ratings of the middle-age females were systematically related to their perceived sexuality ratings of the young-female, middle-age-male, and middle-age-female target groups. Finally, the third row of Table 3 indicates that the self-report sexuality ratings of the elderly females were systematically related to their perceived sexuality ratings of the elderly-female target group.

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Insert Table 3 about here  
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The results of the present study serve to corroborate and extend the generalizability of previous research investigating perceptions of sexuality. The results summarized in Table 2 indicate that the self-report sexuality ratings of male subjects of different ages were generally systematically



related to (positively correlated with) their perceived sexuality ratings of others. The results presented in Table 3 indicate that the female subjects' self-report and perceived sexuality ratings were generally unrelated. Thus, consistent with previous research investigating perceptions of sexuality, the present study also indicates that a systematic relationship between self-report and perceived sexuality ratings seems to be more characteristic of male than of female subjects.

Future research in this area should be done in an attempt to account for this general sex difference in perceptions of sexuality so consistently observed across the various studies. One possible explanation for this general sex difference might rely on the subjects' tendency to label a sexually-related task as being more masculine than feminine. If this is the case, it seems reasonable to assume that male subjects might be more willing to utilize their own personal (self-report) sexuality ratings as a basis for their perceived sexuality ratings. On the other hand, females may be less willing to utilize their own personal sexuality ratings on a task assumed to be masculine in nature. As a test of this possible explanation, future research might involve systematically varying the extent to which male and female subjects are lead to believe that the sexuality task is masculine, feminine, or neutral in nature.

References

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## TABLE 1

ITEMS AND INSTRUCTIONS<sup>a</sup> FOR THE IMPRESSION INDEX

Sexually Desirable \_\_\_\_\_ Sexually Undesirable

Romantic \_\_\_\_\_ Unromantic

Sexually Inactive \_\_\_\_\_ Sexually Active

Passionate \_\_\_\_\_ Impassionate

Sexually Unresponsive \_\_\_\_\_ Sexually Responsive

Sex is Exciting:

Not At All \_\_\_\_\_ Very Much So

Sex is Affectionately Touching (e.g., Hugging, Kissing, Holding Hands)

Very Much So \_\_\_\_\_ Not At All

Sex is for Physical Pleasure:

Not At All \_\_\_\_\_ Very Much So

Sex is Having Sexual Intercourse:

Very Much So \_\_\_\_\_ Not At All

Sex is for Emotional Pleasure (e.g., Expressing Affection):

Not At All \_\_\_\_\_ Very Much So

Sex is:

Very Important \_\_\_\_\_ Not At All Important

Note. Only one set of instructions was printed at the top of each impression index. Thus, the subject was asked to complete the impression index seven separate times.

Self-Report Sexuality Instructional Set: Please rate yourself along each dimension listed below by placing a mark in the space at that point on the line that best describes your self-rating. Do not skip any of the items.

Table 1 continued

Perceived Sexuality Instructional Set: Along each of the dimensions listed below, please indicate your general impressions of males (or females) in the age group ranging from 18 to 25 (35 to 45 or 65 to 75) years of age. Do not skip any of the items.

When indicating your general impressions of this specific age group, please do not respond in terms of a specific individual (e.g., a friend or a relative).

Note. For each of the six different perceived sexuality instructional sets, only the information for one specific sex and age target group appeared in the instructions.

Table 2

Correlations of Self-report Ratings of  
Sexuality with Perceived Ratings of  
Sexuality: Male Subjects

Subject Group	Target Group					
	Young		Middle		Elderly	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Young (22) <sup>a</sup>	.604****	.562****	.452**	.652****	.281	.271
Middle (13)	.715****	.620**	.417*	.503**	.120	-.067
Elderly (13)	-.082	.052	.649***	.759****	.919****	.744****

<sup>a</sup>Note. The number of subjects in each group is given in parentheses.

\* $p < .1$ , one-tailed test.

\*\* $p < .05$ , one-tailed test.

\*\*\* $p < .01$ , one-tailed test.

\*\*\*\* $p < .005$ , one-tailed test.

Table 3

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Correlations of Self-report Ratings of  
Sexuality with Perceived Ratings of  
Sexuality: Female Subjects

	Target Group					
	Young		Middle		Elderly	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Female Subject Group						
Young (29) <sup>a</sup>	.062	-.197	.157	-.302	.427*	.044
Middle (31)	.004	.395*	.404*	.426*	.262	.316
Elderly (22)	.252	.280	.214	.127	.299	.399*

<sup>a</sup>Note. The number of subjects in each group is given in parentheses.

\* $p < .05$ , one-tailed test.