

## **Reiss Premarital Sexual Permissiveness Scale--Short Form**

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### **Purpose**

This scale measures the level of premarital sexual permissiveness that an individual accepts. The scale allows one to precisely place a respondent on the cumulative, low to high, scale of permissiveness. This newer short form of my scale focuses on only the measures of coital permissiveness and consists of just 4 questions (Reiss, 1989, Schwartz & Reiss, 1995).

### **Description**

The short form scale and the original form are Guttman scales, i.e., they produce a ladder from low to high permissiveness (Reiss, 1967, 1989, Schwartz & Reiss, 1995). The original form consisted of a twelve question scale asking about the person's acceptance of kissing, petting, and intercourse in relationships involving no affection, strong affection, love, or engagement (Reiss, 1964, Hample & Ruppel, 1974). That scale met all Guttman Scale criteria in both a nationally representative sample and several regional samples. It has been tested in a number of other countries (Stillerman, & Shapiro, 1979, Huang, & Uba, 1992, Sprecher & Hatfield, 1996). It led to the development of the "Autonomy theory" explaining changes in premarital sexuality (Reiss, 1965, 1967, Weis & Slosnerick, 1981, Weis, et.al., 1992, Weis, 1998, Crawford and Popp, 2003). I would add here that my use of the term "premarital" does not involve any assumption that everyone will marry but rather it indicates that the scale focuses on attitudes towards sexual behavior of young unmarried people.

In 1989 I composed a revision consisting of a simple four item scale that used three of the original coital questions and added a fourth question (Reiss, 1989). The fourth question was added because the old scale lacked a "moderate" affection category. The focus on only coital relationships in this newer short form scale derived from the fact that our culture had changed from a minority of young people accepting premarital intercourse to a majority of young people accepting and having premarital intercourse (Reiss, 2006). This short version has been tested both in the U. S. and in Sweden and found to meet all Guttman scaling requirements (Schwartz & Reiss, 1995). Although this scale focuses on heterosexual penile/vaginal intercourse, a similar scale measuring the role of affection in same gender sexual relations could be devised. Doing that could produce some very interesting comparisons.

### **Response Mode and Timing**

The short form of the Premarital Permissiveness Scale offers three degrees of agreement and three degrees of disagreement with each question (See Exhibit). The four questions take only a couple of minutes for almost everyone to answer.

### **Scoring**

Since Guttman scaling has been proven to work on both the old form and this newer short form of the scale, respondents could simply be scored by dichotomizing their answers into agree or disagree and assigning one point for each question to which they agreed. . Dichotomizing each question's answers would yield a total permissiveness scale score for each respondent ranging from a low of zero to a high of four. But keep the six choices in each question asked because it does make the respondent feel that they can more accurately express their feelings on the questions and some researchers may want to use all six categories.

### **Reliability**

Reliability is indicated in that both the original and the short form of the scale always met Guttman Scale criteria such as the coefficient of reproducibility and the coefficient of scalability. This held up in this country and other industrialized countries (Reiss & Miller, 1979; Walsh, et.al., 1976; Whitbeck, et.al., 1994, Schwartz & Reiss, 1995).

## Validity

Construct validity was established by finding the expected differences between parents and college students, whites and blacks, and males and females (Reiss, 1967, Schwartz & Reiss, 1995, Crawford & Popp, 2003, Liao & Tu, 2006). In the short form the results fit precisely what was expected when comparing Swedish and American college students, e.g., Swedish students were much more acceptant of Question 4 than were American students.

## Other Information

In the last five decades my premarital permissiveness scale in one form or the other has been widely used. For research today I would recommend using the newer short form of the scale. It incorporates the theoretical structure of the original scale and three of its four questions are from the coital part of that scale. It can be compared to earlier results with confidence that it is measuring the same thing as the original. I give my permission to use this scale in any research project but I would ask that you let me know your results.

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## Exhibit

### *Reiss Premarital Sexual Permissiveness Scale (Short Form)\**

The following four questions concern your personal attitude regarding premarital sexual intercourse. First decide whether you agree or disagree with the view expressed, then indicate the level of your agreement or disagreement by circling the answer that best expresses your view. The six choices below follow each question.

Agree: Strongly Moderately Slightly

Disagree: Strongly Moderately Slightly

1. I believe that premarital sexual intercourse is acceptable if one is in a love relationship.
2. I believe that premarital sexual intercourse is acceptable if one is in a relationship involving strong affection.
3. I believe that premarital sexual intercourse is acceptable if one is in a relationship involving moderate affection.
4. I believe that premarital sexual intercourse is acceptable even if one is in a relationship without much affection.

\*The wording presented above asks what is acceptable for “one” and that term includes both the respondent and others. If you wished to know only what the respondent believes is acceptable for her or him self, then you could change the wording of each question to a more personalized form. For example change Question 1 to read: “...acceptable if I am in a love relationship.” It would be interesting to compare the two different wordings of this scale to see what differences, if any, would be found. My own testing of this with students found very little difference.