

# sex positivity scale

attitudes towards  
benefits of sex

non-judgmental  
attitudes towards others

A sex positive person  
"values sexual autonomy and  
all forms of consensual sexual  
activities as sources of pleasure  
and fulfillment, and rejects a view  
that sex and sexual pleasure are  
shameful, and respects diverse ways  
of expressing and experiencing  
sexuality and sexual pleasure."  
(Kaplan, 2014, p. 95)

populations

different  
sex acts

relationship  
types

## Sex Positive Attitudes of University Psychology Students

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### Sex Positivity Research

A personality trait and spectrum  
were created in terms of attitudes  
and emotions in favor (erotophilia)  
or less in favor (erotophobia) of  
one's sexuality (Fisher, et al., 1988).

Eighty Canadian mental health  
providers stated their reluctance in  
speaking about sexuality is due to:  
inadequate training; time  
constraints; capacity to provide  
information; and personal ethics  
and values (Oliver, et al., 2013).

University of Massachusetts  
Medical School implemented new  
courses for 66 third-year medical  
students on topics of LGBT  
sexual healthcare and adolescent  
sexuality. 95% reported the  
courses as highly effective and  
100% recommended the course  
(Ferrara, et al., 2003).

Positive psychology theorists  
purport that people can "choose  
for themselves what fulfillment  
will look like, and whether it  
takes the form of celibacy,  
monogamy, or promiscuity"  
(Woodford, 2013, p. 7).

### Rationale for Identifying as a Sex Positive Practitioner

Client concerns about sex and sexuality are often expressed in therapy. Despite competency trainings, research has eluded to institutional barriers and discomforts amongst professionals when discussing clients' diverse sexual practices (Gromer, 2014; Kingsberg, 2006). If therapists carry uninformed if not negative judgements, clients will suffer in case formulations, therapist uneasiness and continued referrals.

"Sex positivity" recently entered the health and human services lexicon to counteract institutional barriers. To date, minimal research has been conducted to even attempt a shifted view within therapist training institutions (McCarthy & Thestrup, 2008).

To assess growing sexual attitudes, the Sex Positivity Scale (SPS) was developed by Gromer (2014). In 36-questions of judging behavior of others (seven-point Likert scale of agreeableness), the global scale and two subscales resulted in excellent reliability in its maiden study (.96) with a call to replicate SPS in relevant samples.

### Study Design

Aim was to replicate SPS in a training psychology sample to gauge sexual attitudes as a first step to establish a sex positive therapist curriculum

The hypothesis was SPS scores of international psychology students would result in an average of disagree (3) to neither agree nor disagree (4).

In a convenient sample, psychology students were recruited via internal newsletters and scheduled psychology classes to complete a digital or paper questionnaire. SPS was replicated with a demographics portion and cultural indicators as informed by Ainley's et al., (2000) inclusivity categories. Inclusion criteria included enrollment as a psychology student, and in the fall 2016 semester at both academic levels. Other majors offered at Webster University fell under the exclusion criterion due to sex positivity relevance in future careers. Drop outs were defined as 50% completion.

55 participants (38 undergrads and 14 grads; 57% of target population), no drop outs. Females 85%, mean age was 22.6. 55% hetero, 29% LGBT (4% gay; 8% lesbian; 17% bisexual; and 16% did not specify). 17 languages of 32 countries were represented.

- Least agreeable: sexual bodily fluids (3.6)
- Highest attitude: sex brings romantic partners closer emotionally (6.6)
- Tied: gay men have emotionally rewarding sex lives (6.6) (lesbian relations lower (6.4))
- Between groups: no significant differences
- Graduates: lower in all non-judgment groups
- Benefits of sex scores: same

- Average SPS score: 5.8
- Graduates global SPS score: 5.1
- Undergrads global SPS score: 5.8
- Significant association: SPS and sexual orientation groups ( $\chi^2(3) = 7.891, p = .05$ )
- Non-judgment: LGBT 5 and above
- Non-judgment: 40% heteros 4 and below

About 70% of the sample used their second language for SPS judgments. With 80% under 25, SPS scores might change. Early adulthood is a time of self-growth and defining interpersonal and intrapsychic sexual scripts" (DeLamater & Hyde, 1998, p. 9). LGBT findings are linked to sexual scripts as they are intrinsically inclusive to others' sexual attitudes. Pro-influences on LGBT self-identities include sexual discovery, empathy, and community belonging (Riggle, et al., 2008).

Limitations were grad responses were not high enough to infer institutional effects and generalize comparisons. Cultural identity score was untested. Randomization was nonexistent. Over 15% did not specify sexual orientation.

The use of these first findings will be aimed towards a pilot program to teach training therapists about diverse populations, sex acts, and non-heterosexual relationships and sexuality for all future client needs.

The results superseded the hypothesis' attitude range by nearly two Likert points, which suggests that the student body was more agreeable with others' sex lives, yet grad SPS were less.