

HOW MANY SEXUAL PARTNERS IS "TOO MANY"? : GENDERED PERCEPTIONS & RELATIONSHIP INTEREST BASED ON NUMBER OF PREVIOUS SEXUAL PARTNERS

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BACKGROUND

Research suggests that men and women hold differing perspectives regarding how many previous sexual partners they consider appropriate (Regan, 2008). While changing societal norms and values afford women enhanced sexual freedom, women must still manage their reputations and actions to not be perceived as "too easy" and to be considered as a potential romantic or long-term dating partner (Reid et al., 2011). Men are not similarly socially sanctioned. In addition to sexual history, one's mate value, or characteristics which impacts their abilities to find, attract and retain a mate over their life span (Fisher, Cox, Bennett & Gavric, 2008), may interact with sexual history to impact mate preferences and selection.

PURPOSE

The current research aimed to investigate how perceptions, along with the willingness to engage in various relationships with someone, change respective to the number of previous sexual partners someone has had, and find their mate value.

RESULTS

A MANOVA was conducted to determine the impact of target individual's sexual history, mate value, and gender on evaluations and relationship interest. Main effects emerged, however, no significant interaction effects emerged.

Target Gender: Women were evaluated more positively and desired more for all relationship types compared to men.

Mate Value: Those high in mate value are evaluated more positively and desired more for all relationship types compared to those low in mate value. Mate value appeared to strongly drive both evaluations and relationship interest.

Sexual History: Data indicate that those with higher numbers of previous sexual partners were evaluated more negatively than those with fewer numbers of sexual partners, with the exception of male virgins, who were evaluated less positively than men with one previous sexual partner, but not met with 12 previous sexual partners. Targets with higher numbers of previous sexual partners were also desired slightly less for long-term relationships, even when their mate value was high.

TAKE HOME MESSAGE

Overall, results do not suggest the emergence of the sexual double standard, but rather suggest that as numbers of sexual partners increase, evaluations of both men and women decrease (outside of male virgins). Sexual history also did not appear to largely impact relationship interest as people reported similar willingness to engage in relationships with various targets regardless of their number of previous sexual partners. Mate value, however, did appear to be an important consideration for relationship interest with individuals reporting greater interest in those with high (compared to low) mate value.

METHODS

Non-romantically involved participants (n=563) from the US (median age = 33) completed an online survey through MTurk. Participants read 1 of 12 vignettes about a hypothetical interaction with a target person, which included the person's gender, mate value (high or low), and number of previous sexual partners (0, 1 or 12). Participants reported willingness to engage in casual sex, a short-term dating relationship, and an exclusive/long-term dating relationship with the person. Participants also rated their perception of the individual's values, likability, success, and intelligence.

