

Moral Foundations Predict Adult Mating Desire

David Njus, Betsy Fawcett, and Jillian Hazlett
Luther College

According to Sexual Strategies Theory (Buss & Schmitt, 1993) there are evolutionary-based differences in male/female mating preferences: because less parental investment is necessary for men, they are more likely to use short-term mating strategies, while women are more likely to pursue long-term mating strategies where the quality and quantity of their mate's resources are of greater importance.

Graham, Nosek, Haidt, Iyer, Koleva, and Ditto (2011) discuss another variable with evolved origins—five psychological foundations of morality—care/harm, fairness/reciprocity, ingroup/loyalty, authority/respect, and purity/sanctity. Though they have an evolutionary basis, the foundations are modifiable, and can vary across culture or even subculture. Graham et al. also report sex differences on some of the foundations, with women scoring higher than men on care, fairness, and purity.

Relating Sexual Strategies Theory to Moral Foundations Theory, Tjossem, Njus, Kochendorfer, and Kampa (2014) found evidence in a college sample that the purity foundation was negatively related to the number of sexual partners desired and willingness to engage in intercourse with a prospective mate. The present research examines the relationship between sexual attitudes and moral foundations in a non-student sample.

Method

Participants and Procedure

We collected data from 840 U.S. citizens online through Amazon Mechanical Turk, who were paid \$.50 each for participation. After eliminating respondents who did not pass the lie scale or whose answers were not realistic (e.g., wanting 9 billion sexual partners over the course of the lifespan), we had 385 female and 344 male participants. They ranged in age from 20-50 years ($\bar{X} = 32.7$; $Md = 31$), and were mostly white (84.6%), Black/African-American (7.3%), Hispanic/Latino (5.5%), or Asian (5.5%).

Participants completed a series of questions based on the research presented by Buss and Schmitt (1993). Participants were asked: 1) how many sexual partners they wanted over periods of time ranging from the next month through their lifetime, and 2) how likely they would be to have intercourse with a desirable person whom they had known for time periods ranging from 5 years to 1 hour.

Participants also completed the MFQ30 (Moral Foundations Questionnaire; Graham, Haidt, & Nosek, 2009), which has two sections that tap participants' positions on 5 moral foundations: care/harm, fairness/reciprocity, ingroup/loyalty, authority/respect, and purity/sanctity. Participants were asked to decide the extent that certain considerations (e.g., whether or not someone suffered emotionally) were relevant to their thinking about whether behaviors were right or wrong. The second section asked participants to indicate agreement or disagreement (0 = strongly disagree, 6=strongly agree) with moral statements (e.g., "Compassion for those who are suffering is the most crucial virtue").

Results

A principal components analysis conducted on a previous data set with the sexual attitudes scale revealed two clear factors—number of sexual partners desired in the next month, 6 months, and year (*partners wanted in short term*) and partners wanted in the next 3, 4, 5, 10, 20, and 30 years and lifetime (*partners wanted in long term*). Another principal components analysis conducted on the willingness to have sex after having known a partner for a period of time also revealed two clear factors—willingness to have intercourse after having known for one month or less (*known short time*) and willingness after having known 3 months or longer (*known long time*).

Sex Differences on Sexual Strategies

Males reported wanting more sexual partners than females in both the short-term and the long term (see Table 1). Men were also more willing than were women to have intercourse after having known a partner in both the short-term and the long term.

Sex Differences on Moral Foundations

There were no differences between men and women on the fairness/reciprocity, ingroup/loyalty, authority/respect or purity/sanctity foundations (see Table 1). Women scored higher than men on the care/harm moral foundation.

Relationship Between Moral Foundations and Sexual Attitudes

Correlation coefficients (see Table 2) revealed that purity, authority, and ingroup foundation scores were negatively related to willingness to have intercourse in both the short-term and long-term for both men and women. Authority and purity were also negatively related to number of sexual partners desired in the short and long-term for both men and women. The care/harm and fairness/reciprocity foundations were not strongly or consistently related to the sexual attitude variables, though for men, care/harm was negatively correlated with partners desired in the long-term and willingness to have intercourse in the short-term.

Discussion

Consistent with Sexual Strategies Theory and with past research (e.g., Buss & Schmitt, 1993; Schmitt et al., 2003) men reported wanting more sexual partners than did women, and showed a greater willingness to engage in intercourse sooner after having met a potential mate. Also consistent with past research (e.g., Graham et al., 2011), female subjects were higher than males in care/harm foundation scores, though women were not higher on the fairness/reciprocity or purity/sanctity foundations as previous research has found.

Our data also suggest that moral foundations relate to mating desire similarly for men and women: it is primarily the purity, loyalty, and authority foundations (referred to by Graham et al., 2009, as group *binding foundations*) and not care and fairness (the *individualizing foundations* emphasized in the post-Enlightenment Western philosophical tradition) that are most strongly and consistently related to mating desire for both men and women.

This study provides evidence that sexual behavior attitudes vary not only as a function of sex, but also as a function of individual differences in the emphasis both men and women place on moral foundations, particularly the group binding foundations.

References

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Table 1. Means and Standard Deviations for Men and Women on Moral Foundations and Mating Desire Variables

	<u>Men (n=344)</u>		<u>Women (n=385)</u>			
	<u>Mean_a</u>	<u>St. Dev.</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>St. Dev.</u>	<i>t</i>	<i>d</i>
<u>Moral Foundation</u>						
Care/Harm	4.38	.78	4.77	.69	7.05***	.52
Fairness	4.51	.73	4.58	.63	1.41	--
In-Group	3.49	.89	3.43	.88	.99	--
Authority	3.74	.90	3.78	.90	.67	--
Purity	3.13	1.23	3.29	1.23	1.79	--
<u>Partners Desired</u>						
Short-Term	3.84	13.66	1.23	1.64	6.78***	.50
Long-Term	67.68	436.83	3.38	11.31	7.61***	.56
<u>Sexual Willingness</u>						
Known Short-Time	.36	2.12	-1.45	1.65	12.79***	.95
Known Long-Time	2.15	1.40	1.37	1.80	6.56***	.49

Note: Moral foundations scores have a possible range of 0-30. Sexual willingness scores have a possible range of -3 to 3. Due to skewness, *t*-tests on partners desired were performed on the inverse of raw scores. **p* < .05 ** *p* < .01 ****p* < .001

Table 2. Zero-Order Correlations Between Moral Foundations and Mating Desire Variables for Women and Men

<u>Moral Foundation</u>	<u>Number Partners Desired</u>		<u>Number Partners Desired</u>		<u>Willingness to Have Intercourse</u>		<u>Willingness to Have Intercourse</u>	
	<u>Short Term</u>		<u>Long Term</u>		<u>Known Short Time</u>		<u>Known Long Time</u>	
	<u>Women</u>	<u>Men</u>	<u>Women</u>	<u>Men</u>	<u>Women</u>	<u>Men</u>	<u>Women</u>	<u>Men</u>
<u>Care/Harm</u>	-.05	-.09	.00	-.15*	-.05	-.21**	.05	.01
<u>Fairness</u>	-.11	-.05	.00	-.01	-.07	.03	.01	.16*
<u>In-Group</u>	-.15*	-.08	-.12	-.23**	-.26***	-.24***	-.16**	-.14*
<u>Authority</u>	-.12	-.02	-.20**	-.25***	-.35***	-.25***	-.34***	-.14*
<u>Purity</u>	-.24***	-.13	-.28*	-.29***	-.45***	-.44***	-.43***	-.33***

Note: **p* < .05 ***p* < .01 ****p* < .001;
All correlation coefficients adjusted for unreliability of measures.