SEX RESEARCH

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MEASURING SEX

- As sex researchers, we must decide how to measure the particular aspect of sexuality that we want to study.

- Possible Data Collection Methods:
  - Self-Reports
  - Behavioral Measures
  - Implicit Measures
  - Biological Measures
MEASURING SEX: SELF-REPORTS

- The most common method for measuring sexuality is self-reports, the participants are asked questions about their sexual behavior and attitudes about sexuality.

- Self-reports can be collected in a number of ways: paper questionnaires, interviews, and online.

- Examples of Self-Reports:
  - At what age did you begin masturbating?
  - Did you use a condom the last time you had sex?
Direct Observation: A behavioral measure, in which the scientist directly observes the behavior being studied.

Observing sexual interactions in different social settings (Sadomasochistic parties) or through laboratory studies (sexual intercourse and masturbation).
Eye-tracking: A behavioral measure, in which a device measures the participant’s point of gaze over time.

Occurs in a laboratory setting and the participant wears an eye-tracking device as they are shown pictures on a computer.

In one study, researchers tracked eye movements of adult men as they were shown photos of a front-posed naked woman... this could answer the following question:

Where do men look first?
A method used to measure implicit (implied) stereotypes is the Implicit Association Test (IAT).

Implicit Association Test: Measures an individual’s relative strength of association between different pairs of concepts.

The key to measuring these associations is reaction time, measured on a computer in milliseconds.

We typically react quickly to two concepts that we associate strongly, and more slowly to two concepts that we do not associate strongly.

For example: Researchers developed an IAT to measure attitudes about condom use.

   In one phase, participants pressed the left key if the word on the screen was related to condoms (Trojan, Latex) or pleasant, and the right key if the word was a type of tree or unpleasant.

   In the second phase, the pairings were reversed (the left key was pressed for condom words or unpleasant words and the right key for trees and pleasant words).

   This allowed the researchers to determine if participants had a stronger association between condoms and pleasant or between condoms and unpleasant.
Masters and Johnson (1966) pioneered the biological measurement of sexual response.

Genital Measures (of sexual response): assess arousal by using devices that measure the erection in males and vaginal changes in females.
**MEASURING SEX: BIOLOGICAL MEASURES**

- **Males:** Penile Plethysmography is used, in which a flexible loop is placed around the penis that measures changes in circumference.

- Can be used to measure a man’s sexual response to pictures in different categories, such as one gender versus another or different physical appearances.
Females: Vaginal Photoplethysmograph is used to measure blood flow to the vagina.
MEASURING SEX: BIOLOGICAL MEASURES

- MRI (magnetic resonance imaging) and fMRI (functional magnetic resonance imaging) are being used increasingly in sex research.

- Specifically, the fMRI looks at brain activity by measuring relative levels of blood flow...this allows scientists to measure the different in activity across regions of the brain when a person is looking at a sexual picture versus a borrowing picture.
Functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging

Involves a participant lying in a machine while thinking of something in particular, looking at erotic imagery, masturbating, or being sexually stimulated by someone else...also, what happens to the brain during orgasm.
Another biological measure that can be used is **pupil dilation**.

Our pupils dilate when we look at something that is especially interesting or arousing, or that puts a big load on our brain.

**Example:** Pupil dilation is sometimes used with sex offenders, specifically those aroused by the image of a child.

If we asked a sex offender about his interest in children using a self-report measure, he might lie about his illegal and taboo behavior.