

**Conflict and Agreement in Sex Attitudes  
of Hispanic Male and Female  
College Students**

*by Russell Eisenman  
University of Texas-Pan American*

**Research Report No. 42**  
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## **Abstract**

Research by Eisenman and Dantzker (2003, 2006) has suggested that male and female Hispanic college students may have sex attitudes that lead to conflict between the sexes. Findings are presented here from 330 university students which show possible areas of conflict and also areas of agreement. The results mostly supported evolutionary psychology theory, with 23 of the 38 sex attitude items showing statistically significant sex differences, and mostly in the expected direction. In addition, 19 of the 38 items showed statistically significant differences between Hispanics and non-Hispanics. However, for both comparisons, all of the differences were relatively small. Overall, there was more agreement than disagreement with the sex attitude items. Implications are discussed.

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Russell Eisenman is an Associate Professor of Psychology with the University of Texas-Pan American. His latest book, *Creativity, Mental Illness and Crime*, consists of articles centering on his time working as a psychologist in a prison treatment program for youthful offenders, mental illness and creativity, drug use in the U.S., the effects of sex education, drug education and drug availability in schools, and the death penalty.

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# Conflict and Agreement in Sex Attitudes of Hispanic Male and Female College Students

Possible conflict between Hispanic males and females in sex attitudes was found by Eisenman and Dantzker (2003). Further evidence was found by Eisenman and Dantzker (2006) and some of the results of that study are discussed here, along with additional insights.

Sex attitudes were studied in 330 university students from 10 undergraduate classes at the University of Texas-Pan American (UTPA), a Hispanic-serving university in deep South Texas, near the Mexican border (Eisenman & Dantzker, 2006). UTPA has more Mexican-American students than any other university in the United States. Males ( $n=131$ ) and females ( $n=199$ ) rated their level of agreement to 38 items on a 1-to-5 scale of a revised sexuality questionnaire developed by M. L. Dantzker and Russell Eisenman.

## Evolutionary Psychology Theory

In recent years, evolutionary psychology theory has emerged as an interesting and important theory, especially useful in understanding sexual behavior of males and females (Barkow, Cosmides & Tooby, 1992; Buss, 1989, 1999; Eisenman, 2003, 2006). According to the theory, men and women have evolved different motivations due to their different biological realities. Men are motivated, ideally, to impregnate as many women as possible, in order to spread their genes to future generations. Men are thus attracted to women with youth, health, and beauty. Since women become pregnant and cannot become pregnant again for nine months, a different strategy is needed. Women are thus attracted to men with money, status, and power, and are less interested in many sexual affairs, although they are not necessarily always monogamous. Women are also often attracted to men who will take care of them and their babies, whereas men put more emphasis on sexual intercourse *per se* as a major goal. These different motivations should lead to very different behaviors, at least at times.

## Method

The revised 38-item sex attitudes test devised by M. L. Dantzker and R. Eisenman (Dantzker & Eisenman, 2005) was administered to 330 university students in 10 undergraduate classes at the University of Texas-Pan American, a Hispanic serving university that has the highest number of Mexican American students of any college in the United States. Males ( $n=131$ ) and females ( $n=199$ ) rated their level of agreement to 38 items on a 1-to-5 scale, on the sexuality questionnaire. There were 286 self-identified Hispanic students and 44 self-identified non-Hispanic students in the sample. We used t-tests to look for differences in mean scores (with the scores being the 1-to-5 ratings of each attitude item).

## Results

### *Hispanic Males Compared to Hispanic Females*

Of the 38 sex attitude questions, 23 showed statistically significant differences on t-test results between men and women. There were 10 items in which Hispanic males scored significantly higher (more agreement with the item) than did Hispanic females, and 13 items where Hispanic females scored higher (more agreement with item) than Hispanic males. The mean ratings of the 1-to-5 scale were as follows for the various human sex attitude questions, with  $1=strong\ disagreement$  and  $5=strong\ agreement$ , with the mid-point  $3=doesn't\ matter$ . The results are shown in Table 1.

**TABLE 1. SEX ATTITUDES OF HISPANIC MALES VS. HISPANIC FEMALES**

ATTITUDE	MEANS	
	<i>Males</i>	<i>Females</i>
(1) Premarital sex is acceptable for males.	3.39	3.09
(2) Premarital sex is acceptable for females.	3.13	2.82
(3) Oral sex before marriage is acceptable.	3.54	2.76**
(4) Oral sex is deviant behavior and should never be practiced.	2.07	2.48**
(5) Females should be virgins at the time of their marriage.	2.99	3.11
(6) Males should be virgins at the time of their marriage.	2.77	2.99
(7) A male should have some type of sexual experiences prior to being married.	3.18	2.53**
(8) A female should have some type of sexual experience prior to being married.	2.95	2.46**
(9) People should first live together prior to getting married.	3.21	2.93
(10) While growing up my parent(s) told me that premarital intercourse was unacceptable...	3.20	4.00**
(11) While growing up my parent(s) told me that any type of sexual behavior before marriage is unacceptable.	3.15	3.89**
(12) Sex should only occur with a person you love.	3.28	4.15**
(13) Sex and love are two different emotions.	4.22	4.11
(14) I always practice safe sex.	4.05	4.41**
(15) Any type of homosexual behavior is wrong.	3.31	2.67**
(16) Being bi-sexual is acceptable.	2.69	2.68
(17) Forcing a person to have sex is ok if it's your spouse.	1.58	1.40
(18) Having sex with an intoxicated person is rape.	3.49	3.53
(19) Once I get sexually aroused I usually have to have sex.	2.13	1.78**
(20) Being married shouldn't stop a person from having sex with someone other than a spouse.	1.96	1.39**
(21) Clubs that promote all "nude" dancing should not be allowed to exist.	2.23	3.14**
(22) "Topless Clubs" are acceptable places for adult entertainment.	3.60	2.69**
(23) Magazines like Playboy" are demeaning to women.	2.40	3.47**
(24) Magazines like "Playboy" are pornographic material and should not be published.	2.19	3.27**
(25) Pornographic materials cause males to become sexually aggressive.	2.59	3.29**
(26) Pornographic materials have no affect on females' sexual behavior.	2.53	2.37
(27) Kissing should only take place between committed intimate partners.	2.28	2.56
(28) Kissing always leads to other sexual behaviors.	2.25	2.25
(29) It is the female's duty to take precautions against pregnancy.	2.40	2.45
(30) Condoms interfere with the pleasures of sex.	3.05	2.30**
(31) Masturbation is enjoyable.	3.62	3.09**
(32) Masturbation is wrong.	2.53	2.88*
(33) I would be jealous if my partner had sexual intercourse with someone else.	4.32	4.53
(34) Adultery of any kind should illegal.	2.95	3.55**
(35) I would be jealous if my partner got emotionally involved with someone else.	4.33	4.44
(36) Sexual activities between two people of the same gender should be illegal.	2.96	2.64
(37) Anyone over 18 years of age should never have sex with someone under 18 years of age.	3.04	3.52**
(38) Prostitution should be legalized in all states.	2.73	1.94**

\*The difference between the means was statistically significant at .05.

\*\*The difference between the means was statistically significant at .01.

**Comparing Hispanics and Non-Hispanics**

Since it may be that Hispanic culture is, in many ways, a conservative, religious one (often Catholic, or other conservative religions), it is important to know if Hispanic and non-Hispanic students disagree, or basically have the same sex attitudes. This next listing shows the attitudinal differences by ethnicity, i. e., Hispanic (males and females) vs. non-Hispanic (males and females). There were 19

statistically significant differences. In 10 instances, Hispanics agreed more with the sex attitude question, while in nine (9) instances non-Hispanics showed statistically greater agreement with a sex attitude item. The mean ratings of the 1-to-5 scale for Hispanics and non-Hispanics were as follows for the various human sex attitude questions, with 1=strong disagreement and 5=strong agreement, with the mid-point 3=doesn't matter. The results for this comparison are in Table 2.

**TABLE 2. SEX ATTITUDES OF HISPANIC MALES VS. NONHISPANICS**

ATTITUDE	MEANS	
	<i>Hispanic</i>	<i>NonHispanic</i>
(1) Premarital sex is acceptable for males.	3.19	3.59
(2) Premarital sex is acceptable for females.	2.93	3.41
(3) Oral sex before marriage is acceptable.	3.03	3.59*
(4) Oral sex is deviant behavior and should never be practiced.	2.34	2.03
(5) Females should be virgins at the time of their marriage.	3.07	2.81
(6) Males should be virgins at the time of their marriage.	2.91	2.52
(7) A male should have some type of sexual experiences prior to being married.	2.76	2.94
(8) A female should have some type of sexual experience prior to being married.	2.63	2.66
(9) People should first live together prior to getting married.	3.03	3.41
(10) While growing up my parent(s) told me that premarital intercourse was unacceptable...	3.72	3.66
(11) While growing up my parent(s) told me that any type of sexual behavior before marriage is unacceptable.	3.62	3.50
(12) Sex should only occur with a person you love.	3.84	3.56
(13) Sex and love are two different emotions.	4.15	4.13
(14) I always practice safe sex.	4.28	3.75**
(15) Any type of homosexual behavior is wrong.	2.90	2.53
(16) Being bi-sexual is acceptable.	2.69	3.56**
(17) Forcing a person to have sex is ok if it's your spouse.	1.47	1.35
(18) Having sex with an intoxicated person is rape.	3.52	2.94*
(19) Once I get sexually aroused I usually have to have sex.	1.90	1.72
(20) Being married shouldn't stop a person from having sex with someone other than a spouse.	1.59	2.00
(21) Clubs that promote all "nude" dancing should not be allowed to exist.	2.82	2.41
(22) "Topless Clubs" are acceptable places for adult entertainment.	3.01	3.41
(23) Magazines like <i>Playboy</i> are demeaning to women.	3.09	3.13
(24) Magazines like <i>Playboy</i> are pornographic material and should not be published.	2.88	2.44
(25) Pornographic materials cause males to become sexually aggressive.	3.04	2.84
(26) Pornographic materials have no affect on females' sexual behavior.	2.43	2.23
(27) Kissing should only take place between committed intimate partners.	2.46	2.55
(28) Kissing always leads to other sexual behaviors.	2.25	2.39
(29) It is the female's duty to take precautions against pregnancy.	2.43	2.13
(30) Condoms interfere with the pleasures of sex.	2.56	2.70
(31) Masturbation is enjoyable.	3.28	3.65
(32) Masturbation is wrong.	2.76	2.26*
(33) I would be jealous if my partner had sexual intercourse with someone else.	4.46	4.26
(34) Adultery of any kind should illegal.	3.34	2.74*
(35) I would be jealous if my partner got emotionally involved with someone else.	4.40	4.40
(36) Sexual activities between two people of the same gender should be illegal.	2.75	2.23*
(37) Anyone over 18 years of age should never have sex with someone under 18 years of age.	3.35	2.81*
(38) Prostitution should be legalized in all states.	2.22	2.65

\*The difference between the means was statistically significant at .05.

\*\*The difference between the means was statistically significant at .01.

## Discussion

### *Men's Attitudes*

The results show important areas of conflict in sex attitudes between Hispanic males and females. The males seem to endorse a life of freedom, at least for themselves. They are, however, anti-homosexuality, thus ruling out homosexuality for themselves. Probably, the vast majority are heterosexual and do not see this as a loss of any kind. They seem to want to have fun, and want

things to be legal that will give them fun. They do not like the limitations of pleasure from condoms, and this makes me wonder if they would often have sexual intercourse without using condoms. If so, they are putting themselves and their partners at high risk of sexually transmitted diseases (Fierros-Gonzalez & Brown, 2002). Also, there is some evidence that people who engage in risky sexual behaviors also are more likely to engage in problem drinking and drug usage (Fleuridas, Creevy, & Vela, 1997). Overall, the men could be said to have permissive, liberal attitudes about sex.

## Women's Attitudes

In contrast to the men, the women have more restrictive attitudes about sex, and favor censorship of certain sexual things, such as nude dancing or *Playboy* magazine. Their anti-oral sex attitude is particularly interesting, since most all professionals see oral sex as a natural part of a healthy sexual relationship. Part of the women's negative attitudes toward sex seems to relate to their upbringing, as shown by two items about what their parents told them about sex.

Thus, you have males who seem fun-seeking and willing to do lots of sexual things, and women who seem much more restrictive or conservative regarding sex. This would be expected to lead to conflicts between the men and the women, with each side seeing the other as strange with regard to attitudes and behavior regarding human sexuality. In the case of a couple or potential couple, the male and female would have to negotiate their differences about sex, before being able to have a successful relationship. Even a well-negotiated or well-functioning relationship might face future conflict, as when the male starts reading sex magazines or wants oral sex and the woman sees these things as unacceptable.

It is possible that some of the conflict is more apparent than real. That would be the case if men and women have been socialized to think they are supposed to hold certain attitudes, but if their actual real-life behaviors are less rigid than what they say. Attitudes in Mexico have, historically, been changing from conservatism and male dominance to more liberalism and greater freedom for women (Corona-Vargas & Corona-Vargas, 2007). Possibly, my subjects may be showing, in part, the historical, stereotyped teachings of what males and females are supposed to think, but may be more flexible in their everyday life. In other words, their attitudes and behavior may reflect a combination of traditional teachings and more modern viewpoints.

## Agreement Between Males and Females

While the obvious differences between the sex attitudes of males and females point to possible conflict between the sexes, there is also some evidence of agreement. On the one hand, there are all the attitude items on which they did not disagree to a statistically significant extent. But, even more revealing, perhaps, is that even when there were statistical differences, the differences were relatively small. Thus, the statistical differences were large enough to reach statistical significance, but small enough to indicate that there was lots of agreement between the Hispanic men and women. It was typically the case that men and women felt slightly different about some item, but not overwhelmingly different, even in the instances where statistical significance was obtained.

Thus, it could also be said that men and women tended to feel the same about the items, even when there were statistically significant differences. For example, in only two items was there as much as a one-point difference between men and women. While the amount of difference was limited by having scores range only from 1-5 (*1=strong disagreement, 5=strong agreement*), still the only two items that showed a difference of 1 or more were:

**Magazines like *Playboy* are  
demeaning to women**

and

**Magazines like *Playboy* are pornographic  
materials and should not be published.**

These items both had a difference of 1.07 and 1.08, respectively. The item "*Playboy*" demeans women" received a mean rating of 2.40 from men and 3.47 from women. Thus, both of the following statements are true: women are more likely than men to believe that *Playboy* demeans women **and** both men and women are not especially likely to believe that *Playboy* demeans women. Likewise, the item that "Magazines like *Playboy* are

pornographic materials” received a mean rating of 2.19 from men and 3.27 from women. Women are more likely to agree, but both are mostly disagreeing (men) or doesn’t matter (women), since women are near the midpoint of 3.0 which we labeled “doesn’t matter.” In an earlier study we had originally called the midpoint “not sure,” but many students crossed that out and wrote in “doesn’t matter” (Dantzker & Eisenman, 2005). So, we realized that a better name for the midpoint, at least with Hispanic students at University of Texas-Pan American, was “doesn’t matter.”

### **Hispanics vs. Non-Hispanics**

There were eight (8) statistically significant differences between Hispanics and non-Hispanics here, and several more in the Eisenman and Dantzker (2006) sample. Among the many findings, non-Hispanics were more likely to accept oral sex before marriage and being bisexual, while Hispanics tended to disapprove of many sexual behaviors in comparison to non-Hispanics. In general, compared to non-Hispanics, Hispanics come across as more conservative and restrictive regarding sexual practices.

The same point made about men vs. women can also be made about Hispanics vs. non-Hispanics. While there were many statistically significant differences, they are never large. So, it appears that Hispanics and non-Hispanics mostly agree about sex attitudes. Where there are differences the Hispanics come across as more restrictive, being somewhat against certain sex practices, at least more so than the non-Hispanics. But, there seems to be much agreement as far as the absolute means are concerned.

### **Sampling**

It should be kept in mind that the subjects were college students, mostly Mexican-Americans. Thus, it is possible that research with other samples would yield different results (e. g., older subjects, people who did not go to college, Mexicans as opposed to Mexican-Americans, or people from other Hispanic regions of the country, etc.).

### **Conclusions**

The results show many differences between Hispanic males and females and some differences between Hispanics and non-Hispanics. Generally, Hispanic males expressed more sexually permissive attitudes than Hispanic females, while non-Hispanics in general (gender not considered) expressed more sexually permissive attitudes than Hispanics in general (gender not considered). However, although there were many statistically significant differences, the amount of the differences tended to be small. Thus, there was much agreement, so it could be argued that Hispanic men and Hispanic women have much in common regarding sex attitudes, and the same is the case between Hispanics and non-Hispanics.

Overall, one could focus on the differences and say that many differences exist among Hispanic males and females that could result in problems between them. This is likely true for white, non-Hispanic men and women as well. However, the results show much agreement among the Hispanic men and women. Likewise, while there are a few areas of disagreement in human sexuality attitudes for Hispanics vs. non-Hispanics, they tend mostly to agree with one another. All the disagreements shown above are real, but they are not that great and there is also lots of agreement. So, the picture seems to be mostly one of agreement among participants rather than disagreement. While the disagreements should not be disregarded and future research could focus more intently on them, the reality of widespread agreement also needs to be appreciated.

The results both support evolutionary psychology theory and provide some problems for the theory. On the one hand, there were many statistically significant differences — especially the sex differences — that are consistent with the theory. Men seem to have a more permissive attitude about sex and women seemed to be somewhat more restrictive. The theory would predict this, although other theories, such as sex roles, could also predict it. On the other hand, the differences were small even when they were statistically significant.



Mostly, men and women agreed with one another, as did Hispanics and non-Hispanics. The disagreements were typically in instances where the participants had mostly the same attitude, but there might be slightly more agreement (or disagreement) between the two groups — males vs. females or Hispanics vs. non-Hispanics — regarding the degree of agreement/disagreement. Thus, the results, while showing some conflict mostly show agreement. The conflict is mostly consistent with evolutionary psychology expectations, but not as strong as one might have expected, given the emphasis in the theory on major differences between men and women.

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