

# The Link of Sexual Sensation Seeking to Acceptance of Cybersex, Multiple Sexual Partners, and One-Night Stands Among Taiwanese College Students

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## ABSTRACT

**Background:** Young people in Taiwan have become more liberal and active toward sex. Despite heavy investments of money, time, and effort, sexual education programs have generally lagged expectations.

**Purpose:** Personality traits such as sexual sensation seeking are found to be significantly associated with risky sexual behaviors. This study, therefore, attempts to explore the link of sexual sensation seeking to acceptance by Taiwanese college students of cybersex, multiple sexual partners, and one-night stands.

**Methods:** A cross-sectional study was conducted using the multistage cluster sampling method. Five hundred sixteen students recruited from eight universities/colleges in Taiwan participated in this study, and 507 completed the self-report questionnaire. The valid response rate was 98.26%.

**Results:** The results reveal that high-sexual-sensation seekers were more likely than low-sexual-sensation seekers to accept cybersex, multiple sexual partners, and one-night stands.

**Conclusions/Implications for Practice:** This study suggests that the designers of campus-based health prevention campaigns should target campaign messages on high-sexual-sensation seekers using novel, thrilling, and complex messages to achieve safe sex educational campaign goals.

## KEY WORDS:

sexual sensation seeking, cybersex, multiple sexual partners, one-night stands

## Introduction

Taiwanese studies indicate that attitudes among young Taiwanese toward sex have become more liberal (Sun, 2004) and that young Taiwanese have a higher prevalence of risky sexual behaviors now than in the past (Hsieh et al., 2010). Because sex education in Taiwan is implemented in a top-down manner (Liang, 2010), heavy investments of money, time, and effort have been made on sexual education programs that encourage young people to adopt safer sexual behaviors. However, the effectiveness of these programs has generally lagged expectations. Yeh (2002) thus concluded that interventions to reduce sexual risks among youth in Taiwan should be tailored to the preferences and characteristics of specific subgroups. Yeh's conclusion is consistent with the suggestion proposed by scholars in the United States (e.g., Hawkins, Kreuter, Resnicow, Fishbein, & Dijkstra, 2008) that tailoring messages to meet individuals' needs offers a good possibility of maximizing the effectiveness of health campaigns.

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Among various individual-level characteristics, scholars in the United States found that personality traits such as sexual sensation seeking (SSS) had a significant influence on the sexual behavior of youth (Oshri, Tubman, Morgan-Lopez, Saavedra, & Csizmadia, 2013). Therefore, it is vital to set up personality-based sexual education programs and develop creative ways of educating young people to engage in safer sexual behaviors.

Researchers (e.g., Roberti, 2004) found a close correlation between SSS and sex hormones. In the United States, Zimmerman et al. (2007) adopted sexual sensation-seeking target techniques to design a mass media campaign that would be persuasive to high sensation seekers. They found that the intensive, televised safer sex public service announcement campaign helped young adults adopt safer sex beliefs and behaviors. In Taiwan, nurses are requested to provide sexual education while more and more interventions in relation to sexual behaviors have been designed to target the young generation. However, few Taiwanese studies in the field of nursing have investigated the influence of SSS on sexual behavior. Because sensation seeking generally peaks at a young age and diminishes in adulthood (Steinberg et al., 2008), this investigation focuses on Taiwanese college students. The study attempts to explore the relationship between SSS and the acceptance of cybersex, multiple sexual partners, and one-night stands. It is hoped that the study findings provide nurses with valuable insights into developing interventions to promote healthy sexual behavior among Taiwanese college students.

## Literature Review

### ***Sexual sensation seeking***

Sensation seeking as a personality trait refers to the seeking of varied, novel, complex, and intense sensations and experiences as well as the willingness to take physical, social, legal, and financial risks for the sake of such experiences. Sensation-seeking individuals tend to perform behaviors that increase the amount of stimulation they experience. Such behaviors involve seeking arousal, and the activities to fulfill the preferred arousal vary according to the amount of risk that sensation seekers are willing to take (Joseph, Liu, Jiang, Lynam, & Kelly, 2009).

Because high sensation seekers need more stimulation to maintain an optimal level of arousal than low sensation seekers (Rosenbloom, 2003), Mashegoane, Moalusi, Ngoepe, and Peltzer (2002) defined SSS as “the inclination to engage in adventurous and optimally stimulating sexual behavior” (p. 476). Noar, Zimmerman, Palmgreen, Lustria, and Horosewski (2006) thus concluded that sexual sensation seekers were individuals who had high needs for novel and thrilling sexual experiences and the drive for such needs led sexual sensation seekers to engage in risky sexual behaviors.

### ***Sexual sensation seeking and sexual behavior***

SSS is a personality trait shown to be associated with risk-taking behaviors. Typically, the literature shows that SSS is

a significant predictor of having cybersex, multiple sexual partners, and one-night stands. For example, Horvath, Beadnell, and Bowen (2006) sought to determine the influence of SSS on online sex. Their study found that SSS moderated the relationship between Internet use and cybersex. In their investigation of the relationship between SSS and multiple sexual partners, Boyle, Murray, and Boekeloo (2002) also found that the likelihood of participants having multiple sexual partners was influenced by whether they had a sexual-sensation-seeking personality. Later on, Gullette and Lyons (2005) surveyed college students to identify the relationship among SSS, compulsivity, and sexual behavior with a high risk of transmitting sexually transmitted diseases (STDs). Their findings were consistent with those of Gullette and Lyons, indicating that participants with a strong drive to seek sexual sensation preferred multiple sexual partners. Similar to the findings regarding the relationship between SSS, cybersex, and multiple sexual partners, Weldon’s (2002) survey of 141 sexually experienced young women in the United States found that sexual sensation seekers were more likely to engage in one-night stands than non-sexual sensation seekers.

Because various studies have identified a positive and significant relationship between SSS and risk-taking behaviors, Noar et al. (2006) examined an integrated model that fused personality characteristics with more traditional social-cognitive variables from health behavior theories and tested this model using structural equation modeling techniques in two independent samples of young adults in the United States. The findings of their study supported the notion that personality dimensions such as SSS were related to and, perhaps, influenced attitudes toward condoms, normative beliefs about condom use, and confidence in being able to use condoms in challenging situations (condom self-efficacy). They also concluded that SSS could be one of the variables used to target messages aimed at increasing safer sexual behaviors.

Given that existing psychosocial theories regarding risky sexual behavior have thus far not included SSS (Noar et al., 2006), the findings of the above study imply that SSS resembles a generator arousing individual curiosity regarding sex. Individuals with a strong sexual-sensation-seeking personality will have higher intention to accept or engage in risky sexual behavior than other individuals.

### ***Research hypothesis***

Concerning the relationship between SSS and risky sexual behavior, this investigation hypothesized that high-sexual-sensation seekers (HSSSs) are more likely to accept cybersex, multiple sexual partners, and one-night stands than low-sexual-sensation seekers (LSSSs).

## Methods

### **Design, Sample, and Setting**

The multistage cluster sampling method was used to randomly sample two universities/colleges from each of Taiwan’s

four regions (East Taiwan, North Taiwan, Central Taiwan, and South Taiwan). Five classes of all of the general classes at the eight sampled universities were then randomly selected.

Two research assistants distributed the self-administered questionnaire in the five selected classes between April 11 and May 15, 2007. Five hundred sixteen students volunteered to participate, and 507 successfully completed the structured questionnaire during class. The valid response rate was 98.26%.

To fulfill the requirement of the institutional review board, two professors drawn from the communication and nursing fields independently vetted the content of the questionnaire to assure that the study questions did not conflict with or violate the privacy of participants. After obtaining consent from class instructors, research assistants informed participants about the study purpose. All participants completed informed consent before receiving the questionnaire. The survey then took place in an assembly setting that complied with all ethical regulations. The study was anonymous, with no personal identifiers collected. All research teammates were instructed about confidentiality requirements with regard to accessing data.

Of the 507 participants, 210 (41.4%) were men, and 297 (58.6%) were women. In terms of level of education, 99 (19.5%) were freshmen, 102 (20.1%) were sophomores, 186 (36.7%) were juniors, 115 (22.7%) were seniors, and 5 (1.0%) had studied at a university for longer than 4 years but had not yet received a BA degree. The average age of the participants was 20.96 ( $SD = 1.64$ ) years. Table 1 shows the demographics of the sample.

## Measures

### ***Sexual sensation seeking***

SSS was measured using a validated scale (coefficient alpha = .83) by Noar et al. (2006). Participants were asked how strongly they agreed or disagreed with 11 items such as “I like wild ‘uninhibited’ sexual encounters” and “The physical sensations are the most important thing about having sex.” A 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (“strongly disagree”) to 5 (“strongly agree”) was used to assess participant

answers. The coefficient alpha for the scale was .89, and the 11 items on the scale were added and divided by 11 to obtain a composite measure of SSS.

Because earlier studies (e.g., Fishbein, Henderson, Barrett, Hennessy, & Martin, 2005; Gullette & Lyons, 2005; Weisskirch & Murphy, 2004) reported gender differences in sensation seeking (men scored considerably higher than women in total sensation seeking), a median split (taking gender into account; median<sub>male</sub> = 2.91, median<sub>female</sub> = 2.36) was used for the composite sensation-seeking variable to separate the sample into two groups. Individuals above the median were considered HSSSs, whereas those below the median were classified as LSSSs.

### ***Acceptance of cybersex***

Cybersex is defined as “two or more people engaging in simulated sex talk while online for/to sexual pleasure” (Ross, Mansson, Daneback, & Tikkanen, 2005, p. 132). Acceptance of cybersex, therefore, was measured by asking participants to respond to the question—“How likely is it that you can accept having cybersex?”—using a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (“strongly unlikely”) to 5 (“strongly likely”);  $M = 1.72$ ,  $SD = 0.90$ ).

### ***Acceptance of multiple sexual partners***

“Multiple sexual partners” is defined as an individual having sex with more than one person over a specified time, regardless of whether the partnerships are sequential or overlapping (Mo, Wong, & Merrick, 2007). Participants were asked to assess their acceptance of multiple sexual partners by responding to the question—“How likely is it that you can accept having multiple sexual partners?”—using a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (“strongly unlikely”) to 5 (“strongly likely”);  $M = 1.75$ ,  $SD = 0.92$ ).

### ***Acceptance of one-night stands***

A one-night stand is a single sexual encounter with another person conducted without expectations of further relations (Bancroft et al., 2004). Participants were asked to answer the question—“How likely is it that you can accept having one-night stands?”—using a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (“strongly unlikely”) to 5 (“strongly likely”);  $M = 2.18$ ,  $SD = 1.08$ ).

## Data Analysis

The study data were analyzed using SPSS for Windows version 14.0. An independent-sample *t* test was used to test the research hypothesis. In this investigation, a  $p < .05$  was considered statistically significant.

## Results

A sample of 507 undergraduate students was obtained to determine if SSS was related to acceptance of cybersex, multiple sexual partners, and one-night stands. Table 2 represents the

**TABLE 1.**  
***Participant Demographics***

	<i>n</i>	%
Gender		
Male	210	41.4
Female	297	58.6
Year		
Freshman	99	19.5
Sophomore	102	20.1
Junior	186	36.7
Senior	120	23.7

**TABLE 2.**  
**Descriptive Analysis of Items in Relation to Sexual Sensation Seeking**

Item	1 = Strongly Disagree		2 = Disagree		3 = Neither Disagree Nor Agree		4 = Agree		5 = Strongly Agree		M	SD
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%		
1. I like wild "uninhibited" sexual encounters.	30	5.9	113	22.3	218	43.0	112	22.1	34	6.7	3.01	0.98
2. The physical sensations are the most important thing about having sex.	23	4.5	89	17.6	174	34.3	178	35.1	43	8.5	3.25	0.99
3. I enjoy the sensation of intercourse without a condom.	85	16.8	138	27.3	193	38.1	69	13.6	21	4.2	2.61	1.05
4. My sexual partners probably think I am a "risk taker."	111	2.9	223	44.1	130	25.7	34	6.7	8	1.6	2.22	0.92
5. When it comes to sex, physical attraction is more important to me than how well I know the person.	112	22.2	213	42.2	126	25.0	44	8.7	10	2.0	2.26	0.92
6. I enjoy the company of "sensual" people.	83	16.4	171	33.8	198	39.1	47	9.3	7	1.4	2.45	0.92
7. I enjoy watching "X-rated" videos.	88	17.4	147	29.0	177	34.9	68	13.4	27	5.3	2.60	1.09
8. I have said things that were not exactly true to get a person to have sex with me.	246	48.6	188	37.2	55	10.9	15	3.0	2	0.4	1.69	0.81
9. I am interested in trying out new sexual experiences.	68	13.4	117	23.1	191	37.7	106	20.9	25	4.9	2.81	1.70
10. I feel like exploring my sexuality.	60	11.9	105	20.8	222	43.9	98	19.4	21	4.2	2.83	1.01
11. I like to have new and exciting sexual experiences and sensations.	70	13.9	113	22.4	187	37.0	110	21.8	25	5.0	2.82	1.08

descriptive analysis of all items in relation to the sexual-sensation-seeking scale. Also, the result of the independent-sample *t* test shows that male participants ( $M = 2.97, SD = 0.62$ ) scored higher than female participants ( $M = 2.37, SD = 0.62$ ) in terms of SSS.

Table 3 presents the results of the descriptive analysis of the acceptance of cybersex, multiple partners, and one-night stands. When asked "how likely is it that you can accept having cybersex?", 11.9% responded "strongly likely" or "likely," whereas 63.7% responded "strongly unlikely" and "unlikely." When asked about acceptance of multiple sexual partners, 4.2% responded that they were "strongly likely" or

"likely" to accept having multiple sexual partners; in contrast, 79.3% expressed that they were "strongly unlikely" or "unlikely" to do so. As to acceptance of one-night stands, 3.6% responded that they were "strongly likely" or "likely" to accept having one-night stands, whereas 80.7% responded that they were "strongly unlikely" or "unlikely" to do so. Table 4 also shows that male participants were more likely than female participants to accept cybersex, multiple sexual partners, and one-night stands.

Overall, this study examined the association of SSS with participant acceptance of cybersex, multiple sexual partners, and one-night stands. Independent-sample *t* test was used to test

**TABLE 3.**  
**Descriptive Analysis of Acceptance of Cybersex, Multiple Sexual Partners, and One-Night Stands**

Item	1 = Strongly Unlikely		2 = Unlikely		3 = Neither Unlikely Nor Likely		4 = Likely		5 = Strongly Likely		M	SD
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%		
Acceptance of cybersex	168	33.1	155	30.6	124	24.5	34	8.9	15	3.0	2.18	1.08
Acceptance of multiple sexual partners	257	50.7	145	28.6	84	16.6	15	3.0	6	1.2	1.75	0.92
Acceptance of one-night stands	262	51.7	147	29.0	80	15.8	12	2.4	6	1.2	1.72	0.90

**TABLE 4.****Mean Estimates of Acceptance of Cybersex, Multiple Sexual Partners, and One-Night Stands, by Gender (N = 507)**

Item	Male		Female		t Value
	M	SD	M	SD	
Acceptance of cybersex	2.73	1.11	1.79	0.87	10.75***
Acceptance of multiple sexual partners	2.17	1.04	1.46	0.68	9.35***
Acceptance of one-night stands	2.13	1.01	1.44	0.67	9.25***

\*\*\* $p < .001$ .

the research hypothesis. Results of the  $t$  test shown in Table 5 indicate that the study's HSSs were more likely than their low-seeker counterparts to accept cybersex ( $M_{\text{HSSs}} = 1.94$ ,  $M_{\text{LSSs}} = 1.49$ ;  $t(502.22) = -7.57$ ,  $p < .001$ , Hedge's  $g = .45$ ), multiple sexual partners ( $M_{\text{HSSs}} = 1.98$ ,  $M_{\text{LSSs}} = 1.51$ ;  $t(480.87) = -6.00$ ,  $p < .001$ , Hedge's  $g = .47$ ), and one-night stands ( $M_{\text{HSSs}} = 2.51$ ,  $M_{\text{LSSs}} = 1.82$ ;  $t(482.91) = -6.02$ ,  $p < .001$ , Hedge's  $g = .69$ ). Therefore, the research hypothesis was supported.

## Discussion

On the basis of the descriptive statistics shown in Table 2, it is clear that most of the mean scores for factors in the sensation-seeking scale were below 3.00 (the average score). This means that most participants self-reported as LSSs. Therefore, it is unsurprising that the statistics in Table 3 showed that most participants did not accept cybersex, multiple sexual partners, or one-night stands. The results may reflect cultural differences regarding sex and adventure taking. In Taiwan, talking about sex used to be a taboo (Yeh, 2002), which may motivate most young people to more strictly control their intentions related to sexual risk taking.

In addition, the results showed that male participants scored higher than female participants in terms of SSS. This finding is consistent with that of Gullette and Lyons (2005) and indicates that gender difference is significantly correlated with SSS.

There were also gender differences in terms of acceptance of cybersex, multiple sexual partners, and one-night stands. This study found men more likely than women to accept cybersex, multiple sexual partners, and one-night stands. These differences should be addressed fully in interventions promoting safer sexual behaviors that are tailored to specific gender audiences.

As for the link between SSS and the three sexual behaviors covered in the study, analysis of the data revealed that HSSs were more likely than LSSs to accept cybersex, multiple sexual partners, and one-night stands. This finding makes sense given that HSSs have higher needs for novel and thrilling experiences (Joseph et al., 2009).

Concerning the significant relationship between SSS and readiness to accept cybersex, one possible explanation may relate to the anonymity afforded by the Internet. Communicating online makes it easy to remain anonymous while also maintaining many elements of face-to-face communication (e.g., responses in real time, the capability to use avatars and other visual elements; Weisskirch & Murphy, 2004). More importantly, anonymity allows sexual sensation seekers to be bound less by normal constraints and rules of social interaction (Bonebrake, 2002) when soliciting for virtual sex. The Internet thus becomes a sexual outlet for HSSs who fear that their activities may incur social sanctions.

Chiou (2007) found that degree of anonymity considerably increased sexual self-disclosure intention among Taiwanese adolescents. Accordingly, high sensation seekers experiencing apprehension regarding face-to-face communications may have

**TABLE 5.****Mean Estimates of Acceptance of Cybersex, Multiple Sexual Partners, and One-Night Stands, by Sexual-Sensation-Seeker Type (N = 507)**

Item	High Sexual Sensation Seekers		Low Sexual Sensation Seekers		t Value
	M	SD	M	SD	
Acceptance of cybersex	2.51	1.10	1.82	0.94	-7.56***
Acceptance of multiple sexual partners	1.98	1.00	1.51	0.74	-6.00***
Acceptance of one-night stands	1.94	0.98	1.49	0.72	-6.01***

\*\*\* $p < .001$ .

stronger intentions than low sensation seekers to select the Internet as a venue for sexual risk taking.

This study found evidence of a significant positive association between SSS and acceptance of multiple sexual partners. This was consistent with the work of Joseph et al. (2009), which found that the preference for varied, novel, complex, and intense sensations and experiences among high sensation seekers may be satisfied by having multiple sexual partners. Although having multiple sexual partners increases an individual's chances of infection from STDs, HSSs are willing to engage in this practice in spite of the higher health risk. Unsurprisingly, HSSs are more likely than LSSs to accept multiple sexual partners.

The last finding of this study is that HSSs have higher acceptance of one-night stands than their low-seeker peers. In Taiwan, sex was until recent decades a taboo subject (Yeh, 2002). However, after the recent sexual revolution, one-night stands have emerged as a means of seeking sexual pleasure without the implied hindrance of beginning a serious and lasting relationship (Hsu, Chen, & Lin, 2003). HSSs are more likely to behave in ways that are not constrained by social norms, and one-night stands satisfy the desires of this group. For HSSs, the absence of long-term intimacy before engaging in a one-night stand satisfies not only his or her psychological need for novelty and curiosity but also the desire to ignore the consequences of having sex. These reasons may explain why HSSs are well disposed toward engaging in one-night stands.

### Limitations and Suggestions for Future Study

This study does not consider that individuals may have underestimated their acceptance of risky behavior on this self-reporting questionnaire because of concern over the security of submitted responses, modesty, or other reasons. Future investigations should consider using online surveys to collect data more privately. In addition, this study examined the influence of SSS on participants' acceptance of risky sexual behaviors. However, acceptance does not necessarily mean action. Future studies should explore the influence of personality traits on the actual sexual behavior of young people.

### Implications for Nursing

Our data suggest that effective prevention of risky sexual behaviors requires sensitivity to personality traits such as SSS. Those who are vulnerable to adopting or maintaining high-risk behaviors are an appropriate focus of intensified prevention efforts. The findings of this study provide new important insight for school nurses and health promotion campaign designers who are responsible to adopt effective ways of reaching individuals involved in high-risk sexual behavior. Obviously, HSSs are more likely than their low-sensation-seeking counterparts to engage in risky sexual behaviors such as cybersex, having multiple sexual partners, and one-night stands. Consequently, HSSs face an elevated risk of exposure to STDs

(Daneback, Ross, & Mansson, 2006). Prior studies (e.g., Noar et al., 2006) indicate that messages must be high in "message sensation value" to capture the attention and potentially influence the behavior of sexual sensation seekers. That is, personality characteristics may determine which kind of message is the most effective in any intervention campaign (Bancroft et al., 2004). Designers of campus-based safe sex campaigns should thus focus on HSSs and design safer sex education programs with accurate, novel, and unconventional messages (e.g., heavy metal music) as they attempt to minimize sexual risk taking among young people. Effective safe sex educational campaigns require that messages focus on reaching appropriate targets such as HSSs and adopt appropriate message styles.

Besides imparting appropriate sexual education messages to college students, it is further necessary to provide college students with thrilling but nonrisky activities (e.g., sports; Roberti, 2004). Offering stimulating but nonrisky activities to satisfy the psychological needs of HSSs for novelty, stimulation, and varied and unusual experiences will help reduce their propensity to engage in risky sexual behaviors.

### Conclusions

Most people take precautions to minimize risk. However, for sensation seekers, complexity, thrills, and risk are necessities (Miller & Quick, 2010). Under these circumstances, nurses who promote effective sexual education in school must consider not only educational theories and methods but also the personality traits of the young people they are trying to reach. In particular, nurses who conduct campus-based sexual education must make high sensation seekers a priority target and provide this group with sexual education messages that carry high perceived sensation-seeking values.

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# 台灣地區大學生的性刺激尋求與網路性愛、多重性伴侶及一夜情接受度之間的關聯性研究

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- 背景** 台灣地區的年輕人對於性這件事所抱持的態度愈來愈開放，性行為也愈來愈活躍；儘管投入大量金錢及時間於性教育，但效果卻有限。
- 目的** 本研究欲探討台灣地區大學生的性刺激尋求與其對網路性行為、多重性伴侶及一夜情之間是否存在顯著的關聯性。
- 方法** 此一橫斷面研究採用多階集群抽樣，最後共有來自8所大學的516位大學生參與研究，當中507位完成問卷調查，有效回收率為98.26%。
- 結果** 研究結果發現，相較於低性刺激尋求者，高性刺激尋求者比較能接受網路性行為、多重性伴侶及一夜情。
- 結論／實務應用** 本研究建議，大學校園健康促進活動規劃人員（例如校園護理人員）進行性教育時，應先鎖定高刺激尋求者，性教育的內容也應採用較新奇、刺激及較多元的訊息，藉此吸引目標對象的注意力，以提高性教育的效果。

**關鍵詞：**性刺激尋求、網路性行為、多重性伴侶、一夜情。

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