

Motivations for Sex and Risky Sexual Behavior Among Adolescents and Young Adults: A Functional Perspective

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The implications of a functionalist perspective for understanding sexual risk taking are explored. Key motivational dimensions thought to underlie human behavior (viz., approach vs. avoidance, autonomy vs. relatedness) were used to identify 4 broad domains of sexual motivations and to develop a measure of specific motives within each of these domains. Data from both college student and community samples are used to demonstrate the psychometric adequacy of these scales and to show that having sex for different reasons predicts distinctive patterns of sexual risk taking both cross-sectionally and longitudinally; that selection into specific types of sexual relationships partially mediates these effects; and that these needs may be differentially expressed, or even suppressed, depending on relationship context. Results provide strong support for the functionalist perspective on behavior and indicate that an adequate understanding of sexual risk-taking behavior must take into account the various needs and goals that such behavior can serve.

Cooper, M.L., Shapiro, C.M., & Powers, A.M. (1998). Motivations for sex and sexual behavior among adolescents and young adults: A functional perspective. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, *75*, 1528-1558. Lead article.