

De laatste jaren zijn in de sociale wetenschappen betrekkelijk grote voorde-  
ringen gemaakt op het gebied van de theorie van het meten. Met veel  
raffinement zijn daarbij tal van verfijningen tot ontwikkeling gebracht.

Op één gebied is echter nog weinig sophistication in dit opzicht merkbaar,  
nl. ten aanzien van het meten van sexe-verschillen. Onlangs hebben de  
Amerikanen Verling C. Troidahl en Roy E. Carter, Jr. de vinger op deze  
zwakke plek gelegd in hun artikel 'On the Measurement of "Sex"' in *The  
American Behavioral Scientist* van maart 1965.

Terecht stellen zij: 'How often have you seen researchers conclude that  
"there was no significant sex difference"? Anyone making such a statement  
should immediately see a flaw in his thinking. Everybody knows that sex  
makes a lot of difference, to almost everyone. Yet most researchers fall  
into the same fallacy. They arrive at questionable conclusions because  
they do not keep abreast of developments in measurement theory. Instead  
of operationalizing the variable "sex" in the careful manner they use to  
measure other variables, they uncritically adopt the method of having inter-  
viewers "field code" each respondent as either "male" or "female" at the  
completion of the interview' . . .

'Up to this point, "sex" has been treated as having the properties of the  
"nominal" level of measurement. This is surely the most prevalent belief,  
because "sex" is so often seen as a truly "discrete" dichotomy. This view-  
point becomes manifest when a researcher uses a point-biserial correlation  
coefficient, using "sex" as the dichotomous variable. This statistic requires  
the assumption that the two discrete categories (male and female) are each  
*perfectly* homogeneous, and are different from each other. Even casual  
observation of the sexes indicates that this assumption is preposterous. Al-  
though there may not be much overlap in characteristics between men and  
women, at least on many physiological characteristics, there is surely some  
heterogeneity within each sex. Thus, at a minimum, a "sex" distribution  
would be bimodal, with very little overlap between the modes. In this case  
the biserial correlation coefficient, which assumes the dichotomized  
variable could have been measured continuously, is more appropriate.'

Het is te hopen, dat meer onderzoekers — ook in Nederland — zich zul-  
len realiseren, dat — om de auteurs nog één keer te citeren — er een eind  
dient te komen aan 'the indiscriminate use of "handy" social-demographic  
schemes to grind out findings, a practice which leads to difficulty in the  
interpretation of findings because the particular *dimension* of the demo-  
graphic characteristic inducing a correlation may not be ascertained.'

J. E. E.