

# Sexual Satisfaction and Commitment

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**Abstract.** The purpose of this study was to examine the mechanisms by which commitment is associated with sexual satisfaction. This study expanded on previous research to determine whether three pro-relationship sexual behaviors (disclosure, motivation to satisfy partner, and emotional bond) would explain a significant amount of variance in participants' sexual satisfaction and whether these variables mediated the association between commitment and sexual satisfaction.

A convenience sample was collected, consisting of 100 undergraduate female students. Participants completed a survey that included the following measures: Rusbult relationship satisfaction scale, The Global Measure of Sexual Satisfaction, Rusbult's commitment scale, and scales created by the researcher to assess the three pro-relationship sexual behaviors.

There was a statistically significant correlation between sexual satisfaction and relationship satisfaction ( $r=.70$ ) and between sexual satisfaction and commitment ( $r=.57$ ). Commitment was most highly correlated with emotional bond ( $r(100)=.70$ ), followed by motivation to satisfy partner ( $r(100)=.47$ ), and disclosure ( $r(100)=.36$ ). These results indicate that women who reported being more committed in their relationship also reported an increased use of the three pro-relationship sexual behaviors.

Commitment predicted a significant amount of sexual satisfaction variance ( $r^2=.34$ ). When sexual satisfaction was regressed on total pro-relationship sexual behaviors score, 44% of the variance in sexual satisfaction was accounted for. When commitment was added, only an additional 4% of variance was accounted for. Thus, the relationship between commitment and sexual satisfaction is almost completely mediated by the three pro-relationship sexual behavior scales. Overall the model accounted for 48% of the variance in sexual satisfaction. This research is important in treatment of sexual difficulties. Commitment is important to sexual satisfaction; the three pro-relationship sexual behaviors are especially important for sexual functioning.

## 1. Introduction

Female sexual dissatisfaction is a problem in American society. According to the 1999 National Health and Social Life Survey, forty-three percent of women have had problems in their sex lives at one time (1). As many as four in 10 American women experience some sort of sexual dissatisfaction in their lifetime (2). This study is about the quality of relationships and how that is related to sexual satisfaction. One aspect of quality is relationship satisfaction. In a 2000 study (3), "overall satisfaction with the relationship" had the highest correlation with sexual satisfaction, followed by "satisfaction with non-sexual aspects of the relationship." Couples who report high overall satisfaction with their relationship report more satisfying sexual relationships (4). Sexual satisfaction also enhances relationship satisfaction and a circular feedback loop influences both components of satisfaction (5). However, many experts fail to consider the relational component of female sexual dissatisfaction (6). The goal of this study is to further illustrate that women's sexual experiences cannot be separated from their feelings about the relationship in general and will provide support for a new paradigm to diagnose and treat female sexual difficulties, one that includes women's feelings about the relationship. This study will examine how relationship qualities (e.g. commitment, pro-relationship sexual behaviors) are correlated with sexual satisfaction to conceptualize relationship closeness.

## 2. Experiment, Results, Discussion, and Significance

Just as satisfaction increases commitment, strong commitment promotes behaviors that enhance satisfaction within the relationship. These relationship maintenance behaviors, specifically pro-relationship sexual behaviors, enhance sexual satisfaction. Individuals who are more sexually satisfied are more committed to staying in the relationship (7). Commitment may motivate individuals to disclose their sexual needs, to act on

their partners' needs and accommodate their partner's desires, and to experience an emotional connection through sexual activity. These pro-relationship sexual behaviors increase sexual satisfaction as both partners have their sexual needs met.

#### *Hypothesis*

- 1) There will be a positive association between sexual satisfaction and relationship satisfaction.
- 2) There will be a positive association between sexual satisfaction and commitment.
- 3) There will be a positive correlation between commitment and the following three pro-relationship sexual behaviors:
  - a) disclosure of personal sexual desires and frustrations to their partner.
  - b) motivation to accommodate the sexual desires of a partner.
  - c) experience of an emotional connection related to sexual activity.
- 4) These three pro-relationship sexual variables will mediate the relationship between commitment and sexual satisfaction.

A convenience sample was collected, consisting of 100 undergraduate students. All participants were heterosexual women who have been sexually involved with a primary partner for at least one year. Participants completed a survey that included the following measures: Rusbult's relationship satisfaction scale, The Global Measure of Sexual Satisfaction (GMSEX), Rusbult's commitment scale, and the shortened version of Sexual Opinion Survey (SOS). As there were no available measures to assess the three pro-relationship sexual behaviors of disclosure, motivation to accommodate partner, and emotional bond, scales were created using questions from available related scales, along with additional questions developed by the researcher.

There was a statistically significant correlation between sexual satisfaction and relationship satisfaction ( $r=.70$ ) and between sexual satisfaction and commitment ( $r=.57$ ). There was a significant positive correlation between commitment and the pro-relationship sexual behaviors. Commitment was most highly correlated with emotional bond ( $r(100)=.70$ ), followed by motivation to satisfy partner ( $r(100)=.47$ ), and disclosure ( $r(100)=.36$ ). The three pro-relationship sexual behavior scales were also correlated with one another. These results indicate that women who reported being more committed in their relationship also reported an increased use of the three pro-relationship sexual behaviors.

Commitment predicted a significant amount of sexual satisfaction variance ( $r^2=.34$ ). When sexual satisfaction was regressed on total pro-relationship sexual behaviors score, 44% of the variance in sexual satisfaction was accounted for. When commitment was added, only an additional 4% of variance was accounted for. Thus, the relationship between commitment and sexual satisfaction is almost completely mediated by the three pro-relationship sexual behavior scales. Commitment promotes the three pro-relationship sexual behaviors, as these behaviors follow from commitment and are the pathways through which commitment enhances sexual satisfaction. Overall the model accounted for 48% of the variance in participants' sexual satisfaction.

### **3. Conclusions**

This research is important in treatment of sexual difficulties. Commitment is important to sexual satisfaction; the three pro-relationship sexual behaviors are especially important for sexual functioning. Activities that increase pro-relationship sexual behaviors may enhance sexual satisfaction. This research provides support for examining pro-relationship sexual behaviors within a therapy context.

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