

*Relationship Satisfaction and Children: Effects on Sexual Satisfaction in Married Couples*

Su Kuan Chung, Brigham Young University Hawaii, USA  
Alyxandra Stuehler, Brigham Young University Hawaii, USA  
Michelle Arellano, Brigham Young University Hawaii, USA  
Jared Peterson, Brigham Young University Hawaii, USA  
Kylie Arnold, Brigham Young University Hawaii, USA  
Ronald Miller, Brigham Young University Hawaii, USA  
Dean Busby, Brigham Young University Provo, USA

The Asian Conference on Psychology and the Behavioral Sciences 2016  
Official Conference Proceedings

**Abstract**

This study addresses the great importance of relationship satisfaction in regards to sexual satisfaction. 4000 participants were analyzed utilizing data from the Relate Assessment, which analyzes factors impacting marital satisfaction. Previous research suggests that both relationship satisfaction and sexual satisfaction decrease when a couple has children (Glenn & McLanahan, 1982). Analyses yielded supporting evidence that sexual satisfaction decreases as a couple has children ( $R^2 = -0.128$ ); however, this effect disappears and there is no longer any correlation when relationship satisfaction is controlled for ( $R^2 = 0.009$ ). These results suggest that sexual satisfaction is influenced more by relationship satisfaction than by the presence or absence of children in a relationship. Previous research also suggests that an individual's perceptions of their partner and their traits are more important than their perceptions of themselves (Cohen, Schulz, Weiss, & Waldinger, 2012). The results of this study support this research, adding that an individual's perceptions of their partner's personality ( $R^2 = .662$ ), measured on personality scales including maturity, kindness, flexibility, and organization, are of greater importance than their perceptions of themselves ( $R^2 = .465$ ) in regards to their own sexual satisfaction.

Keywords: Marriage, Children, Marital Satisfaction, Sexual Satisfaction

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## **Introduction**

Previous research has shown that children seem to have a negative impact on both relationship satisfaction and sexual satisfaction (Glenn & McLanahan, 1982). This leads to the question of whether or not the presence of children affects sexual satisfaction directly, or if relationship satisfaction is the intermediate variable which then affects sexual satisfaction given the interdependent nature of the two. For this reason, this study's first hypothesis was that relationship satisfaction, and not number of children, would be predictive of sexual satisfaction.

Another influencing variable on sexual satisfaction and marital satisfaction is a person's perception of him or herself. How a person perceives their own body image affects their sexual satisfaction; this is especially true for women, in which their perception of their own body image has been shown to affect not only their own, but both partners' marital satisfaction and sexual satisfaction (Meltzer & McNulty, 2012). In spite of the influence of one's own self-image, it has been found that an individual's perceptions of their partner and of their partner's personality traits has an even greater influence on their relationship satisfaction than their perceptions of themselves and their own traits (Cohen, Schulz, Weiss, & Waldinger, 2012). For this reason, the second hypothesis of this study was that a person's perception of their partner's personality (Based on the maturity, kindness, flexibility, and organization scales that were collected by the RELATE Institute) is more predictive of sexual satisfaction than their own self-reported personality.

## **Method**

### **Participants**

5097 Americans participated in this study (Holman, Busby, Doxey, Klein, & Loyer-Carlson, 1997). 3138 were females and 1959 were males. The age range was 18-79 (m= 30, SD= 9.89).

### **Materials and Procedure**

The data for this study was secondary data gathered from the RELATE Questionnaire, which is an online survey developed by the RELATE Institute at Brigham Young University - Provo (Holman et. al, 1997) The questionnaire provides a way to analyze potential strengths, weaknesses, and problem areas in a relationship, making it easier to identify and talk about these problems areas and improve relationships. A data set from this questionnaire was analyzed and various hypotheses were run utilizing the statistical analysis software Statistica (StatSoft, Inc., 2012) to come up with the results.

## **Results**

The first hypothesis predicted that relationship satisfaction, and not number of children, would be predictive of sexual satisfaction. Therefore, analyses for the first hypothesis focused on exploring the association between sexual satisfaction, number of children, and relationship satisfaction. Two Pearson's Product-moment correlations were conducted to investigate the relationship between sexual satisfaction and number

of children, the second with the same variables, now controlling for relationship satisfaction via partial correlation analysis. When relationship satisfaction was not controlled for, a significant negative correlation was found between sexual satisfaction and number of children,  $r(3830) = -.12, p < .05$ . When relationship satisfaction was controlled through partial correlation analysis, the significance for the correlation between sexual satisfaction and number of children disappeared,  $r(3832) = -.009, p > .05$ .

The second hypothesis was that participants' perception of their partner's personality would be more predictive of one's sexual satisfaction than one's perception of their own personality. For this hypothesis, two multiple linear regressions were conducted to investigate the relationship between sexual satisfaction and personality: both participants' own personalities and their perception of their partner's personalities. A significant result with a small effect size was found between sexual satisfaction and participants' own personalities,  $F(4,3834) = 65.24, p < .01, R^2 = .06$ . The relationship between sexual satisfaction and partners' personalities was also found significant, but this time with a large effect size,  $F(4,3834) = 338.47, p < 0.01, R^2 = 0.261$ . It appears that participants' perceived perception of their partner's personality had approximately a four times larger effect on sexual satisfaction compared to their own personalities (refer to Table 1 and 2).

## **Discussion**

The results from the correlations generated supporting evidence for the first hypothesis, that the number of children would not be predictive of sexual satisfaction if relationship satisfaction were controlled for. Although the initial analysis revealed a significant negative correlation between the number of children and sexual satisfaction, as Glenn and McLanahan's 1982 study suggested, the significance was removed when the relationship satisfaction was controlled for in the second analysis. These results suggest that the influence of number of children on sexual satisfaction can be attributed to the much more influential factor of relationship satisfaction instead. This finding is consistent with the idea that sexual satisfaction and marital satisfaction are interdependent (Baorong & Jin, 2005).

The second hypothesis for this study dealt with personality perceptions in relation to sexual satisfaction. It was hypothesized that one's perception of their partner's personality would be more predictive of their sexual satisfaction than their perception of their own personality. The results supported this, with four times more of an effect on sexual satisfaction when dealing with partner's personality in comparison to one's own personality. These findings are consistent with Cohen, Schulz, Weiss, & Waldinger's 2012 study which found that one's perceptions of their partner's personality traits is more predictive of relationship satisfaction than their perceptions of their own personality traits. The current study suggests that this effect can be translated over to the sexual satisfaction dimension of relationships as well as the relationship satisfaction dimension.

For this study, there was no differentiation between married and unmarried couples, which could be expanded upon in future research by looking at potential differences between cohabiting relationships and marital relationships. It would also be

worthwhile to explore different personality measures aside from the ones which the research was confined to in the current study.

Though the evidence presented here is correlative only, the results provide supplementary information to the current research on sexual satisfaction. The implications of this study may be important, though, as it was found that sexual satisfaction is likely linked closest to relationship satisfaction, pointing to the importance of improving one in order to improve the other. In addition, it was found that one's perceptions of their partner are important in regards to sexual satisfaction, supporting the idea that one's positive perception of their partner may be more important than reality (Cohen, Schulz, Weiss, & Waldinger's 2012).

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Variable	Model		
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	<i>b</i>
Intercept	10.09**		
Maturity Scale	0.43**	0.047	0.16
Flexibility Scale	0.06	0.041	0.03
Organized Scale	0.24**	0.050	0.08
Kindness Scale	0.27**	0.045	0.11
R2		0.06	

*Table 1.* Summary of simple regression analyses for variables predicting personality versus sexual satisfaction

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ .

Variable	Model		
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	<i>b</i>
Intercept	3.82**		
Maturity Partner Scale	0.14**	0.036	0.06
Flexibility Partner Scale	0.28**	0.033	0.16
Organized Partner Scale	0.23**	0.038	0.09
Kindness Partner Scale	0.64**	0.037	0.32
R2		0.26	

*Table 2.* Summary of simple regression analyses for variables predicting partner's personality versus sexual satisfaction. \* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ .