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Sexual Satisfaction and Differentiation

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Abstract

Using questionnaires, self report, and partner report of spouse, this investigation examined the relationship between differentiation of self and sexual satisfaction of each partner for a sample size of 681. The data was collected from a large northwestern city and was part of the Flourishing Families Project. Actor and partner effects were both examined. Findings showed that both husbands and wives were impacted by both actor and partner effects of differentiation of self. The latent variable of differentiation of self measured the lack of differentiation, while the latent variable of sexual satisfaction measured the lack of sexual satisfaction within the relationship. Wife sexual satisfaction was predicted by the increase or decrease in husband and wife differentiation of self. Husband sexual satisfaction was also predicted by the increase or decrease of husband and wife differentiation of self. Overall, as the variables (differentiation of self) increased, the variables (sexual satisfaction) also increased.

Introduction

It has been noted by researchers that marital satisfaction and sexual satisfaction are positively associated (Perlman & Abramson, 1982; Young, Denny, Young, & Luquis, 2000). With lower levels of sexual satisfaction, there is an associated greater probability of sexual inactivity and separation (Donnelly, 1995). There is much relationship enhancement and psycho educational curriculum available that promotes the development of sexually satisfying relationships as a way to improve the overall relationship quality (Floyd, Markman, Kelly, Blumberg, & Stanley, 1995). Yeh, Lorenz, Wickrama, Conger, & Elder (2006) conducted research on the relationship among sexual satisfaction, marital quality, and marital instability at midlife. They analyzed the longitudinal data from 283 married couples to examine the sequences among these three constructs for both husbands and wives. The results supply support for the sequence of sexual satisfaction to marital quality, sexual satisfaction to marital instability, and marital quality to marital instability. Subsequently, higher levels of sexual satisfaction were shown to produce an increase in marital quality. Because of these and other such findings, it is important that a greater understanding be formulated as to the ways in which a couple's sexual relationship can be hindered. This current study aims to increase the awareness of causes for marital disaffection by examining how differentiation of self might reduce sexual satisfaction.

Lack of differentiation of self is the over-conjunction with one's family. Bowen describes differentiation of self as the degree to which one is able to balance (a) emotional and intellectual functioning and (b) intimacy and autonomy in relationships (Bowen, 1978). When an individual is differentiated, they are able to discriminate between their thoughts and feelings. These individuals have a degree of autonomy in their intimate relationships as well. When faced with a decision, they are able to make decisions based on their choice of intellect or emotion. In this way, the individual is the master of their decision process and not solely or primarily driven by intellect or emotion. Greater differentiation of self allows an individual to experience strong affect or logical reasoning (Skowron & Friedlander, 1998).

Hypothesis

The following were the hypotheses for this study:

- Husband and wife lack of differentiation will have a positive association with husband and wife lack of sexual satisfaction
- There will be actor and partner effects with the endogenous predictor variables of husband and wife differentiation of self
- As the variables husband and wife differentiation of self increases, the variables husband and wife sexual satisfaction will also increase
- Husband and wife sexual satisfaction will be correlated
- Husband and wife differentiation of self subscale of five observed variables will all significantly load onto the hypothetical construct of husband and wife differentiation of self
- Two observed variables on the differentiation of self subscale will be positively correlated, Diff4 and Diff5
- There will be good model fit

Results

This study showed that all of the hypotheses were correct. The diagram will show the significant paths as standardized in this model. Most of the error terms were left off of the diagram, but were included in the analysis. All regressions and factor loadings were found to be significant at the .05 level.

- As both husband and wife differentiation of self changed by one unit there was an associated, actor, .23 standard deviation change in husband and wife sexual satisfaction
- As husband and wife differentiation of self changed by one unit there was an associated, partner, .23 standard deviation change in husband and wife sexual satisfaction
- The correlation of husband and wife sexual satisfaction was correlated at the .05 level

- Differentiation of self subscales all significantly loaded onto their respective constructs at the .001 level
- Diff4 and Diff5 for both husband and wife were significantly correlated at the .001 level
- Model fit: Chi Square 259.840, significant at .001, DF 146, CFI .952, TLI .932; RMSEA .034

Conclusion

Our findings illustrate the following main points:

- This model had great model fit, with CFI above .95 and TLI being above .93 and RMSEA being below .04
- When one spouse has poor differentiation of self, they will have lower satisfaction in their sex life
- When one spouse has poor differentiation of self, their spouse will have lower satisfaction in their sex life
- Face validity for the differentiation of self subscales was found to be significant in creating the construct differentiation of self
- Two actor subscale observed variables, Diff4 and Diff5, were correlated with one another
- Correlating husband and wife variables of differentiation of self and sexual satisfaction was found significant
- Many of the observed variables for each spouse were correlated significantly with their partner's variables, possibly showing that the marital relationship accounted for some of this covariance

References