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Honors Thesis

SEXUAL BELIEFS IN COUPLE RELATIONSHIPS: EXPLORING THE PATHWAYS
OF MINDFULNESS, COMMUNICATION, AND SEXUAL FUNCTIONING ON
SEXUAL PASSION AND SATISFACTION

by
Sierra Moore

Submitted to Brigham Young University in Partial Fulfillment of graduation
requirements for University Honors

Family, Home, and Social Sciences Department
Brigham Young University
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Advisor: Dean M. Busby

Honors Coordinator: Mark Butler

ABSTRACT

SEXUAL BELIEFS IN COUPLE RELATIONSHIPS: EXPLORING THE PATHWAYS OF MINDFULNESS, COMMUNICATION, AND SEXUAL FUNCTIONING ON SEXUAL PASSION AND SATISFACTION

Sierra Moore

Family, Home, and Social Sciences Department

Bachelor of Family Life: Family Studies

In this study I examined the understudied area of sexual beliefs. Two central types of sexual beliefs, growth and destiny, have been found in past research to be differentially associated with sexual and relationship outcomes; however, past research has not explored these beliefs with dyadic data nor considered common intervening variables that might be pathways through which beliefs influence outcomes. Consequently, I used dyadic data to analyze how couples' specific sexual beliefs (growth and destiny) influenced their sexual mindfulness, communication, and functioning within their couple relationships and how all of these variables influenced sexual satisfaction and sexual passion in a national sample of dyadic data from 962 sexually active individuals (481 heterosexual couples) who had been in a committed relationship for at least two years. To explore the pathways through which sexual beliefs might influence outcomes, I analyzed an actor/partner structural equation model with distinguishable dyads. I found that while sexual growth and destiny beliefs had a significant impact on sexual mindfulness, communication, and functioning for both partners, once these intervening variables were

introduced in the model, sexual beliefs had no direct effect on sexual satisfaction and harmonious sexual passion. Because growth beliefs had strong associations with sexual communication, it may be beneficial to help couples identify their implicit beliefs and encourage the development of sexual growth beliefs.

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Introduction

Researchers have examined the ways in which individuals' implicit beliefs affect various realms, including memory (Plaks & Chasteen, 2013), intelligence (Blackwell et al., 2007), academic achievement (Blackwell et al., 2007; Robins & Pals, 2002), social and moral cognition (Bohns et al., 2015; Plaks, 2017), basic perception processes (Molden et al., 2006), self-regulation (Burnette et al., 2013), emotional regulation (Tamir et al., 2007), willpower (Job et al., 2010), aggression (Yeager et al., 2013), personality (Chiu et al., 1997), and health choices (Yeager et al., 2013). Various research also suggests that these implicit beliefs affect relational processes and outcomes (Blackwell et al., 2007; Bohns et al., 2015; Burnette & Franiuk, 2010; Burnette et al., 2013; Chiu et al., 1997; Franiuk et al., 2003; Job et al., 2010; Knee, 1998; Knee et al., 2003; Molden et al., 2006; Plaks, 2017; Plaks & Chasteen, 2013; Robins & Pals, 2002; Ruvolo & Rotondo, 1998; Tamir et al., 2007; Yeager et al., 2013). It is important to investigate beliefs about maintaining sexual satisfaction in addition to beliefs about maintaining relationship satisfaction (relationship implicit theories) because although sexual and relationship satisfaction are related, they are distinct constructs that can provide us with different insights. However, there is a significant gap in the research in regard to individuals' implicit beliefs about sexuality, or sexual beliefs. The few articles that have examined sexual beliefs (Maxwell et al., 2017; Muise et al., 2018) or how implicit beliefs can affect sexuality (Bohns et al., 2015; Sutherland & Rehman, 2018) have found that they impact the couple relationship in a variety of ways, including associations with sexual satisfaction and sexual passion (Hannah-Walker & Busby, 2021).

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As mentioned previously, very little research exists surrounding the topic of sexual beliefs. Maxwell's article was the earliest research to examine individuals' implicit beliefs about how to maintain sexual satisfaction in the context of long-term romantic relationships (i.e., a satisfying sexual relationship is the result of effort and resolution of differences versus the result of natural sexual compatibility; Maxwell et al., 2017). Besides Muise's follow-up analysis of Maxwell's initial research about sexual beliefs, only one other article has been written in regard to sexual beliefs (Maxwell et al., 2017; Muise et al., 2018; Hannah-Walker & Busby, 2021). Maxwell's research found associations between sexual beliefs and sexual satisfaction, as well as passionate and companionate love, coming to the conclusion that high levels of sexual growth beliefs were associated with higher levels of sexual satisfaction, while high levels of sexual destiny beliefs were linked to experiencing more volatile relationship quality (Maxwell et al., 2017). Hannah-Walker and Busby's (2021) research found that sexual growth beliefs were related to higher levels of harmonious sexual passion, whereas sexual destiny beliefs were not related to harmonious sexual passion.

Sexual Beliefs

Sexual beliefs are people's implicit beliefs about sexuality and how to maintain sexual satisfaction within relationships. Implicit beliefs are essentially people's basic notions and understanding of themselves and the world (Dweck et al., 2009; Plaks, 2017). As the terminology suggests, implicit beliefs are generally unrecognizable to the holder; because these ideas are underlying or subconscious, people are predominantly unaware of how they impact their thoughts and behaviors (Plaks, 2017). In the area of relationships, a "growth" (Knee, 1998; Knee et al., 2003) or "work-it-out" (Franiuk et al., 2003; Burnette

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& Franiuk, 2010) belief suggests that relationships can be changed and improved through intention and effort, while a “destiny” (Knee, 1998; Knee et al., 2003) or “soulmate” (Franiuk et al., 2003; Burnette & Franiuk, 2010) belief indicates that partner compatibility is the most salient determinant of relationship satisfaction. Maxwell and colleagues conceptualized sexual growth and destiny beliefs in order to explain how implicit beliefs relate to the realm of sexuality (Maxwell et al., 2017); this is important because although sexual and relationship satisfaction are related, they are distinct constructs that can provide different insights. A sexual growth belief suggests that sexual relationships are molded and maintained through purpose and effort, while a sexual destiny belief indicates that if a sexual relationship is “right” or “meant to be,” it should usually be easy and satisfying due to high natural compatibility (Maxwell et al., 2017). It is important to note that unlike other implicit beliefs that are related to sexuality (Bóthe et al., 2017), attraction (Bohns et al., 2015), and desire (Sutherland & Rehman, 2018), sexual growth and destiny beliefs are viewed as two separate, orthogonal dimensions, and not as opposing ends of a spectrum (Maxwell et al., 2017).

Although sexual growth and destiny beliefs are relatively novel constructs, research suggests that they are linked with many important relationship processes (Maxwell et al., 2017; Muise et al., 2018). Growth and destiny beliefs are associated with variables such as overall sexual and relationship satisfaction, personality traits of conscientiousness or openness, compatibility, levels of attachment-related anxiety and avoidance, types of sexual passion (Hannah-Walker & Busby, 2021), companionate love, number of daily disagreements, daily positive sexual experiences, daily levels of relationship quality, the importance of sex to each partner, and willingness to make

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sexual accommodations (Maxwell et al., 2017). Individuals with stronger sexual growth beliefs reported higher levels of sexual satisfaction, higher quality relationships, and feeling more connected and desired during sex (Maxwell et al., 2017). For individuals with high sexual growth beliefs, sexual disagreements in the couple relationship had no impact on the positive association between sexual growth beliefs and relationship quality (Maxwell et al., 2017). On the other hand, sexual disagreements had a much more negative impact on those with high sexual destiny beliefs; these individuals reported lower relationship quality and described their sexual experiences as frustrating and disappointing (Maxwell et al., 2017). These results suggest that sexual growth and destiny beliefs can have a significant influence on relationships.

However, there is currently little information about the mechanisms through which sexual growth and destiny beliefs may influence sexual outcomes such as sexual satisfaction and harmonious sexual passion (passion for sex that is in harmony with other desires and aspects of an individual's personality). Based on the existing research in the sexual area, it is possible that sexual mindfulness, sexual communication, and sexual functioning may be important pathways through which sexual beliefs influence sexual outcomes.

Sexual Mindfulness, Sexual Communication, and Sexual Functioning

Sexual Mindfulness. Mindfulness is a state of being conscious or aware of something. Being mindful in regard to oneself includes focusing on the present moment and accepting one's own bodily sensations, thoughts, and feelings; this kind of mindfulness is often used as a therapeutic technique (Zhang et al., 2019). Sexual mindfulness means "remaining aware and non-judgmental during sexual experiences"

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(Leavitt et al., 2020), and requires that the individual is attentive to their emotions and feelings of pleasure, allowing themselves to surrender typical feelings of self-judgement (Lazaridou & Kalogianni, 2013; Leavitt et al., 2019; Newcombe & Weaver, 2016).

Because sexual mindfulness includes letting go of self-judgment during the sexual experience, and sexual anxiety and low sexual self-esteem are associated with lower levels of sexual satisfaction (Brassard et al., 2015), sexual mindfulness is associated with an improvement in sexual functioning and overall sexual satisfaction (Khaddouma et al., 2015; Kozlowski, 2013).

The literature regarding sexual mindfulness suggests that couples who practice mindfulness experience higher overall sexual satisfaction, which is then correlated with an increase in relationship satisfaction (Khaddouma et al., 2015; Kozlowski, 2013; Leavitt et al., 2019). Leavitt et al.'s (2020) experimental research indicated that practicing sexual mindfulness was associated with improvement in individual, romantic, and sexual well-being. These results suggest that mindfulness may not only increase the sexual well-being of an individual, but also might increase couples' overall relationship satisfaction (Brassard et al., 2015; Khaddouma et al., 2015; Kozlowski, 2013). No research has been conducted yet in regard to the association of sexual growth and destiny beliefs with sexual mindfulness; however, they may be related as a sexual growth belief system emphasizes a non-judgmental approach when considering one's partner.

Sexual Communication. Sexual communication is generally defined as the extent to which partners can express their sexual preferences. Individuals that practice higher levels of sexual communication are more likely to express their sexual desires and initiate their preferred sexual behaviors (Kislev, 2020). Research indicates that sexual

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communication is associated with enhanced sexual and relationship satisfaction (Merwin & Rosen, 2019) and other related factors including improved mental and social well-being, lower levels of lacking sexual interest (Denes et al., 2020), and higher levels of emotional availability, vulnerability, partner awareness (La France, 2019), sexual frequency (Roels & Janssen, 2020), and perceived partner value (Birnbaum et al., 2016; Frederick et al., 2016). Sexual communication is also associated with maintenance of sexual passion within relationships (Frederick et al., 2016). No research has been conducted yet in regard to the association of sexual growth and destiny beliefs with sexual communication and I suspect that sexual communication will be a central mechanism through which growth and destiny beliefs are expressed in a couple relationship.

Sexual Functioning. Sexual functioning is the body's physiological response during various stages of the sexual response cycle; it includes the body's reactions as it moves through phases of desire, arousal, and orgasm. Sexual functioning has been evaluated using an actor-partner interdependence model and has been associated with higher levels of sexual satisfaction (Pascoal et al., 2018). More problems with sexual functioning—or higher levels of sexual dysfunction—have been negatively correlated with positive sexual experiences and with sexual and relationship satisfaction (Witting et al., 2008). Sexual dysfunction is also associated with higher levels of depression and post-traumatic stress disorder, and poorer health (Garneau-Fournier, 2018). While some implicit beliefs have been associated with areas of sexual functioning (Bohns et al., 2015; Sutherland & Rehman, 2018), no research has yet been conducted on the associations of sexual growth and destiny beliefs with sexual functioning specifically, but I suspect that

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growth-oriented beliefs may give couples a better capacity to address challenges with sexual functioning.

Sexual Satisfaction and Harmonious Sexual Passion

Sexual satisfaction is the ongoing emotional and physical experience of feeling sexually satisfied. Research has consistently shown that facets of relational satisfaction and sexual satisfaction are interconnected in a variety of ways (Byers, 2010; McNulty, 2016; Schmiedeberg & Schröder, 2016). Furthermore, changes in sexual satisfaction as well as relational sexual distress tend to predict changes in overall marital satisfaction (Byers, 2010; McNulty, 2016; Schmiedeberg & Schröder, 2016). Thus, understanding sexual satisfaction and the variables that affect sexual satisfaction is important in helping us to understand and predict relational satisfaction.

Passion is a strong inclination toward an activity or relationship. Sexual passion is divided into three distinct types: harmonious, obsessive, and inhibited (Busby et al., 2019; Philippe et al., 2019)—but I will only be focusing on harmonious sexual passion throughout this research. Based on the theoretical assumptions of self-determination theory (SDT; Deci & Ryan, 2008; Ryan & Deci, 2000), sexual passion accounts for the origin of individuals' control in regard to their levels of connection, participation, and preoccupation with sex (Busby et al., 2019; Philippe et al., 2019). As Hannah-Walker & Busby (2021) explained, “For harmonious sexual passion, the origin of individuals' control lies within themselves (i.e., intrinsically controlled; Deci & Ryan, 2008; Philippe et al., 2019). In other words, individuals experience harmonious sexual passion when they have *personally* made a choice to incorporate and internalize certain norms, values, and scripts of sexuality as a part of their identity. This harmonious passion for sex is in

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balance with other passions and areas of their life.” Harmonious sexual passion is associated with a variety of sexual factors, including sexual satisfaction (Busby et al., 2020), but its connection with sexual growth and destiny beliefs has been examined in just one research study so far (Hannah-Walker & Busby, 2021). While Hannah-Walker and Busby (2021) found that men and women's sexual growth beliefs predicted their own and their partner's harmonious sexual passion, in this study I seek to examine the mechanisms through which sexual growth and destiny beliefs might influence individuals' and partners' harmonious sexual passion and sexual satisfaction.

Additional Considerations

Important control variables that are common to sexuality research that will be incorporated in this study include relationship length and race (Hannah-Walker & Busby, 2021). Only one study so far has considered sexual beliefs with dyadic data using an Actor-Partner Interdependence Model (APIM: Hannah-Walker & Busby, 2021). This strength allows me to explore whether or not both the individual's beliefs (actor) and the partner's beliefs will influence the mechanisms that were previously delineated.

Current Study

As noted through the review of the literature, there is a significant need to conduct further research related to the pathways through which implicit beliefs may influence sexual outcomes in relationships. Although several researchers have touched upon this area (Bohns et al., 2015; Bőthe et al., 2017; Carswell & Finkel, 2018; Maxwell et al., 2017; Sutherland & Rehman, 2018), further knowledge and research in this realm might help facilitate understanding more about relational functioning and how to achieve sexual satisfaction in romantic relationships. Understanding implicit theories and how they

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affect human functioning can aid researchers and therapists in their ability to provide service and help individuals in their ability to achieve happiness.

I propose that promising possible pathways through which individuals' sexual growth and destiny beliefs may influence sexual outcomes include sexual mindfulness, sexual communication, and sexual functioning. To explore my proposal, I will use structural equation modeling (SEM) to evaluate the model illustrated in Figure 1. Based on available research, my hypotheses are as follows:

H1: Higher levels of sexual growth beliefs of actors and partners will be positively associated with actor/partner sexual mindfulness, sexual communication, sexual functioning, sexual satisfaction, and harmonious sexual passion.

H2: Higher levels of sexual destiny beliefs by both actors and partners will be negatively associated with sexual mindfulness, sexual communication, sexual functioning, sexual satisfaction, and harmonious sexual passion.

Methods

Participants

The sample consisted of 962 sexually active individuals (i.e., 481 couples) (481 men, 481 women), from Bovitz Inc. (<http://bovitzinc.com/>). Because the analyses required distinguishable dyads based on gender, I removed transgender and same-sex individuals. The average relationship length, in months, was 134. The majority of the sample (68%) was married (either on their first marriage or were remarried), 31% were cohabitating, and 1% reported other (i.e., dating, never married, etc.). The average age was 40 ($SD = 12.16$). The majority of the sample was white (75%) with the next largest racial demographic being black (10%) followed by Latino (8%), Asian (3%), and the remaining

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4% reporting either biracial, American Indian, or other. For education, 25% reported being a high school graduate as the highest level of education they attained, followed by some college (24%), 2-year degree (15%), 4-year degree (22%), and the remaining 14% was divided between less than high school, master's degree, and doctorate. For income, around 50% of the sample reported \$20,000 - \$39,000 or lower as their personal yearly gross income; these percentages of income are slightly lower than the 2019 national averages (Statista, 2020).

Procedure

After receiving IRB approval, the data were collected using the company Bovitz Inc. (<http://bovitzinc.com/>). Bovitz collects data exclusively in the United States through individuals from their panels who answer their surveys (for more studies that used data from Bovitz, Druckman & Levendusky, 2018; Druckman & Levendusky, 2019). These individuals were asked if they had a partner who would also be interested in taking the survey. Originally the target was to gather a sample of 500 couples. To participate, couples were required to be in a committed relationship for at least two years and had to complete at least 80% of the survey. From Bovitz's panel, 975 couples attempted to sign up for the survey. Of these original couples 374 had unusable couple data due to at least one member of the dyad not consenting, failing to answer the question on gender (making it impossible to organize the data for distinguishable couples), or the second partner dropping out of the survey shortly after consenting, leaving 601 couples. After this, I also dropped 33 couples because they were in a same-sex relationship. I only used data from opposite-sex couples because previous research has observed sexual beliefs and passion having different associations that may be based on gender (see Leonhardt et al., 2020;

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Maxwell et al., 2017 for examples). An additional 87 couples were dropped because participants either failed an attention check question or completed less than 80% of the survey, leaving 481 distinguishable dyads.

Participants were instructed that they needed to be English speaking, and those who were interested were directed to a separate Web site (Qualtrics) to complete an online assessment. Before beginning the online survey, participants were asked to indicate informed consent and were instructed about their rights as a research participant. When both members of the dyad completed the survey, participants were thanked for their time and given compensation of \$8.00 per dyad and a Bovitz loyalty credit valued at 67¢.

Measures

Sexual Destiny and Growth Beliefs. Sexual destiny and growth beliefs were measured on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree*; 7 = *strongly agree*) with three items taken from the sexual destiny and sexual growth beliefs scale from Maxwell and colleagues (2017). The three items for sexual destiny beliefs were “Troubles in a sexual relationship signify a poor match between partners,” “An unsatisfying sex life suggests that the relationship was never meant to be,” and “Experiencing sexual problems is a sure sign that a couple is not sexually compatible.” The three items for sexual growth beliefs were “Communicating about sexual issues can bring partners close together,” “In order to maintain a good sexual relationship, a couple needs to exert time and energy,” and “Acknowledging each other’s differing sexual interests is important for a couple to enhance their sex life.” For both sexual destiny and growth beliefs, the Cronbach’s alpha

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was adequate for men (sexual destiny beliefs $\alpha = .81$; sexual growth beliefs $\alpha = .74$) and women (sexual destiny beliefs $\alpha = .84$; sexual growth beliefs $\alpha = .77$).

Sexual Mindfulness. Sexual mindfulness was measured using a 5-point Likert scale (1 = *never true*; 5 = *very often or always true*) with four items of sexual mindfulness taken from the sexual mindfulness scale from Leavitt and colleagues (2018). The four items were, “I pay attention to sexual sensations,” “I pay attention to how sex affects my thoughts and behavior,” “I can usually describe how I feel sexually at the moment in considerable detail,” and “I pay attention to my emotions during sex.” For women, the Cronbach’s alpha was $\alpha = .84$, and for men, the Cronbach’s alpha was $\alpha = .85$.

Sexual Communication. Sexual communication was measured using a 5-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly agree*; 5 = *strongly disagree*) with twelve items of sexual communication taken from the sexual communication satisfaction scale from Wheelless and colleagues (1984). The twelve items were, “I tell my partner when I am especially sexually satisfied,” “I am satisfied with my partner’s ability to communicate his/her sexual desires to me,” “I let my partner know things that I find pleasing during sex,” “I do not hesitate to let my partner know when I want to have sex with him/her,” “I tell my partner whether or not I am sexually satisfied,” “I am satisfied with the degree to which my partner and I discuss our sexual relationship,” “I am not afraid to show my partner what kind of sexual behavior I find satisfying,” “I would not hesitate to show my partner what is a sexual turn-on to me,” “My partner shows me what pleases him/her during sex,” “My partner tells me when he/she is sexually satisfied,” “I am pleased with the manner in which my partner and I communicate with each other after sex,” and “It is never hard for

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me to figure out if my partner is sexually satisfied.” For women, the Cronbach’s alpha was $\alpha = .91$, and for men, the Cronbach’s alpha was $\alpha = .93$.

Sexual Functioning. Sexual functioning was measured using a 5-point Likert scale, with different scale items for each question. For men, seven items of sexual functioning were used, and for women eight items of sexual functioning were used, both taken from the changes in sexual functioning questionnaire from Clayton and colleagues (1997) and altered to be more applicable to my sample of couples. The seven items for men were, “How much pleasure or enjoyment do you get from fantasizing about sex?” with the scale (1 = *no enjoyment*; 5 = *great amount of enjoyment or pleasure*), “How often do you have an erection related or unrelated to sexual activity?” with the scale (1 = *never*; 5 = *everyday*), “Do you get an erection easily?” with the scale (1 = *never*; 5 = *always*), “Are you able to maintain an erection?” with the scale (1 = *never*; 5 = *always*), “How often do you have an ejaculation?” with the scale (1 = *never*; 5 = *everyday*), “Are you able to ejaculate when you want to?” with the scale (1 = *never*; 5 = *always*), and “How much pleasure or enjoyment do you get from your orgasms?” with the scale (1 = *no enjoyment*; 5 = *great amount of enjoyment or pleasure*). The eight items for women were, “How often do you become sexually aroused?” “Are you easily aroused?” “Do you have adequate vaginal lubrication during sexual activity?” “How often do you become aroused and then lose interest?” “Are you able to orgasm when you want to?” with all five items using the scale (1 = *never*; 5 = *always*), then “Do you experience (Mark all that apply),” “Early orgasm,” “Multiple orgasm[s],” with the previous two items using the scale (1 = *no*; 2 = *yes*), and finally, “How much pleasure or enjoyment do you get from your orgasms?” using the scale (1 = *no enjoyment*; 5 = *great amount of enjoyment*

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or pleasure). For women, the Cronbach's alpha was $\alpha = .73$, and for men, the Cronbach's alpha was $\alpha = .71$.

Sexual Satisfaction in Relationships. To measure sexual satisfaction, I used the Global Measure of Sexual Satisfaction (GMSEX) (Lawrance & Byers, 1995), asking partners, "In general, how would you describe your sexual relationship with your partner?" Participants responded to this question by selecting one of two answers on five different scales. The scales were, "Good – Bad," "Pleasant – Unpleasant," "Positive – Negative," "Satisfying – Unsatisfying," and "Valuable – Worthless." For women, the Cronbach's alpha was $\alpha = .92$, and for men, the Cronbach's alpha was $\alpha = .91$.

Harmonious Sexual Passion in Relationships. I used Busby et al.'s (2019) Triadic Model for sexual passion to measure harmonious passion on a 5-point scale (1 = *never*; 5 = *very often*). Three items were taken from Busby et al.'s (2019) scale to measure harmonious sexual passion, with partners responding to "My sexual interests are well integrated into my relationship with my partner," "Excitement about sexual activities with my partner is balanced with the rest of my life," and "The sexual activities that I am excited about, in my relationship with my partner, are in harmony with other things that are a part of me." For harmonious sexual passion, the Cronbach's alpha was .89 for men and women.

Controls. I controlled for relationship length and race because the variables of interest, particularly sexual passion, are significantly associated with these variables (Frederick et al., 2016; Leonhardt et al., 2020ac; Maxwell et al., 2018). Race was dichotomized so that participants were either White (0) or non-White (1). Relationship

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length was measured with an open-ended question, “How long have you been in a committed sexual relationship?” measured in months.

Data Analysis Plan

In the study, I used dyadic data to analyze a structural equation model (SEM) illustrating how couples’ specific sexual beliefs (growth and destiny) influenced their sexual mindfulness, communication, and functioning within their couple relationships and how all of these variables influenced sexual satisfaction and sexual passion.

Results

In general, the fit statistics were acceptable, except the chi-square as it is normally significant (χ^2 df (2920); 23420.977; $p > \chi^2 = 0.000$) with a larger sample, and likely due to the complexity of the model the TLI (.86) and CFI (.87) were slightly below the suggested range of a .90. However, the RMSEA was within range at 0.048 as was the SRMR at 0.081. For the measurement model all factor loadings were above .40.

Female’s sexual growth beliefs had a significant direct effect on female sexual mindfulness ($\beta = .45, p < .01$), female sexual communication ($\beta = .27, p < .01$), and female sexual functioning ($\beta = .17, p < .05$). Furthermore, male’s sexual growth beliefs also had significant effects on a variety of mechanisms, including male sexual mindfulness ($\beta = .51, p < .01$), female sexual communication ($\beta = .20, p < .01$), male sexual communication ($\beta = .38, p < .01$), female sexual functioning ($\beta = .19, p < .05$), and male sexual functioning ($\beta = .32, p < .01$). Meanwhile, female’s sexual destiny beliefs only had direct effects on two variables: female sexual mindfulness ($\beta = .23, p < .01$) and female sexual functioning ($\beta = .22, p < .05$). Male sexual destiny beliefs had a significant direct effect on only one mechanism, male sexual functioning ($\beta = .19, p <$

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.05). Sexual growth and destiny beliefs did not have a direct effect on sexual satisfaction and harmony but significant indirect effects as noted in Table 2. In particular, sexual growth beliefs for females had significant indirect actor effects on both sexual satisfaction ($\beta = .16, p < .05$) and harmonious sexual passion ($\beta = .17, p < .05$), whereas male sexual growth beliefs had both significant actor ($\beta = .29, p < .01$) and partner effects ($\beta = .19, p < .05$) on sexual satisfaction and significant actor ($\beta = .32, p < .01$) and partner effects ($\beta = .19, p < .01$) on harmonious sexual passion.

Figure 2 illustrates all of the direct effects in the model. Of note, while the mechanism of female sexual mindfulness did not appear to have any significant effects on sexual satisfaction or passion for males and females, male sexual mindfulness had significant effects on both female ($\beta = .12, p < .05$) and male ($\beta = .14, p < .05$) harmonious sexual passion. Female sexual communication, however, did have significant effects on female sexual satisfaction ($\beta = .74, p < .01$) and female harmonious sexual passion ($\beta = .74, p < .01$). Male sexual communication had significant effects on male sexual satisfaction ($\beta = .55, p < .01$), female harmonious sexual passion ($\beta = .18, p < .05$), and male harmonious sexual passion ($\beta = .69, p < .01$). Female sexual functioning had direct effects on female sexual satisfaction ($\beta = .19, p < .01$) and female harmonious sexual passion ($\beta = .28, p < .01$). Finally, male sexual functioning had significant actor effects on male sexual satisfaction ($\beta = .24, p < .01$) and female sexual satisfaction ($\beta = .16, p < .01$).

Discussion

My first hypothesis was that higher levels of sexual growth beliefs of actors and partners would be positively associated with actor/partner sexual mindfulness, sexual

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communication, sexual functioning, sexual satisfaction, and harmonious sexual passion. Some of these hypotheses were supported, while others were not. I found that while sexual beliefs had a significant impact on sexual mindfulness, communication, and functioning for both partners, once these intervening variables were introduced in the model, sexual beliefs had no direct effect on sexual satisfaction and harmonious sexual passion, which is interesting as Maxwell et al.'s (2019) research found that sexual growth beliefs were significantly associated with sexual satisfaction. It appears that the intervening variables I selected fully mediated the relationship between beliefs and sexual outcomes. This is an important finding as it appears that the influence of beliefs is not so much on the outcomes as it is on the way that couples communicate, how they sexually function, and whether they are mindful.

In terms of more specific findings regarding beliefs and the mechanisms, I found that sexual growth beliefs for both males and females had significant actor effects on their own sexual mindfulness, communication, and functioning. The only partner effect for males was that their sexual growth beliefs were significantly associated with their partner's sexual communication and functioning. The lack of many partner effects for beliefs throughout the model may reflect the fact that beliefs that were measures are, by definition, internal and implicit, hence their associations may be largely restricted to the individual rather than the partner.

The previous results do not mean that sexual growth beliefs do not influence sexual outcomes, rather they indicate that their influence is indirect as illustrated in the results in Table 2. Sexual growth beliefs for females had a significant indirect effect on sexual satisfaction and harmonious sexual passion. Male sexual growth beliefs had both

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significant actor and partner indirect effects on both sexual satisfaction and harmonious sexual passion. This may indicate that females feel more satisfied when they know that their partner is focused on growing and developing the relationship—perhaps there is less stress associated with having to be the one and only “right” partner in these cases. There may be higher levels of harmonious sexual passion when sexual growth beliefs are high because while partners feel sexual passion, they are also focused on self-improvement and other areas of their lives, creating a healthy balance of sexual passion and other passions.

My second hypothesis was that higher levels of sexual destiny beliefs by both actors and partners would be negatively associated with sexual mindfulness, sexual communication, sexual functioning, sexual satisfaction, and harmonious sexual passion—my results did not support this hypothesis, which is in alignment with other research in this area as well (see Maxwell et al., 2019). However, contrary to expectations, sexual destiny beliefs for males had a significant but small direct effect on male sexual functioning, and only had two positive, small direct effects for females on their own sexual mindfulness and functioning. While unexpected, these effects suggest that perhaps having beliefs that a partner is sexually the “right one” may provide minor positive effects associated with sexual functioning perhaps as a result of higher levels of sexual attraction. In future research, measures of sexual attraction or desire should be included to test potential explanations for these findings in regard to sexual destiny beliefs.

Sexual mindfulness, communication, and functioning seem to be effective mechanisms between sexual growth and destiny beliefs and sexual satisfaction and harmonious passion for both males and females. Sexual communication and functioning

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for each partner had significant and large actor effects on sexual satisfaction and passion, and sexual mindfulness for males had significant actor effects on male harmonious sexual passion. The only partner effects on the sexual outcomes were that male's sexual mindfulness and communication were significantly associated with female's harmonious sexual passion, women's sexual functioning was significantly associated with men's harmonious passion, and male's sexual functioning was significantly associated with female's sexual satisfaction.

It is interesting to note that the strongest associations found were between sexual growth beliefs and sexual mindfulness. Perhaps this strong association exists because sexual growth beliefs appear to have more influence on cognitive and feeling-based processes rather than specific sexual behaviors. It is likely that partners who believe that a relationship requires work and effort to evolve and improve would seek to be more mindful of the aspects of the relationship that are working well, as well as the aspects that are not functioning well. Because sexual communication is so strongly associated with outcomes of sexual satisfaction and passion, it is important to examine the factors that impact and encourage sexual communication. Thus, encouraging sexual growth beliefs within romantic relationships might help couples to foster sexual communication, leading to improved sexual satisfaction and passion.

There were several limitations to this study. The data were not longitudinal, which would help verify the directionality of associations in the model. The sample was also not representative, which makes the data less generalizable. Another limitation may be that I only considered sexual mindfulness, communication, and functioning as mechanisms between sexual growth and destiny beliefs and sexual satisfaction and passion—

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examining other mechanisms may alter the associations found here and would be a helpful concept to look at in future research. Even with these limitations, these findings are important as they help us to better understand the way that implicit sexual beliefs impact individuals and couples in a variety of ways. This research has shown that sexual growth and destiny beliefs may have important effects on many of the mechanisms that have been previously shown to impact sexual satisfaction and passion. Because growth beliefs had strong associations with sexual mindfulness and communication and indirect associations with sexual satisfaction and harmonious sexual passion, it may be beneficial to help couples identify their implicit beliefs and encourage the development of sexual growth beliefs.

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Table 1

Descriptive Statistics

<i>Variables</i>	<i>Women</i>		<i>Men</i>		<i>Range</i>
	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	
Sexual Destiny Beliefs	3.41	1.60	3.62	1.67	1-7
Sexual Growth Beliefs	5.90	1.02	5.83	1.02	1-7
Sexual Mindfulness	3.72	0.90	3.75	0.91	1-5
Sexual Communication	3.97	0.75	4.01	0.78	1-5
Sexual Functioning	3.56	0.61	4.54	1.29	0-6
Sexual Satisfaction	5.91	1.28	6.06	1.18	1-7
Harmonious Sexual Passion	3.80	0.96	3.89	0.93	1-5
Relationship Length	134.24	118.30			24-720
Percent					
Education					
2.3	4.6				
High School Graduate	22.6		28.2		
Some College	25.7		22.8		
2 Year Degree	16.2		14.5		
4 Year Degree	23.8		20.5		
Master's	7.5		7.7		
Doctorate	2.1		1.9		
Income					
None	3.7		12.0		
Under \$20,000	11.0		17.4		
\$20,000 – \$39,999	27.2		23.8		
\$40,000 - \$59,999	21.3		20.3		
\$60,000 - \$79,999	13.7		9.9		
\$80,000 - \$99,999	8.7		7.0		
\$100,000 - \$119,999	4.4		2.9		
\$120,000 - \$139,999	4.8		3.7		
\$140,000 - \$159,999	1.2		1.2		
\$160,000 - \$199,999	2.9		1.0		
\$200,000 - \$299,999	0.2		0.6		
\$300,000 or above	0.4		0.0		
Race					
African (Black)	9.7		11.0		
Asian	3.9		2.3		
White	75.6		72.7		
American Indian	1.0		0.6		
Latino	6.8		10.1		
Mixed/Biracial	2.3		2.7		

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Other

0.6

0.6

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$.

Table 2***The Effects of Sexual Growth and Destiny Beliefs***

	Mind(F)	Mind(M)	Comm(F)	Comm(M)	Funct(F)	Funct(M)	Satis(F)	Satis(M)	Passion(F)	Passion(M)
	Direct	Direct	Direct	Direct	Direct	Direct	Indirect	Indirect	Indirect	Indirect
Growth (F)	.45**	-.11	.27**	.12	.17*	-.03	.16*	.12	.17*	.08
Growth (M)	.00	.51**	.20**	.38*	.19*	.32**	.19*	.29**	.19**	.32**
Destiny (F)	.23**	.13	.06	.04	.22*	-.10	.03	.00	.06	.05
Destiny (M)	-.11	-.05	-.08	-.06	-.16	.19*	-.03	.01	-.05	-.0

Note. Mind(F) = Female Sexual Mindfulness, Mind(M) = Male Sexual Mindfulness, Comm(F) = Female Sexual Communication, Comm(M) = Male Sexual Communication, Funct(F) = Female Sexual Functioning, Funct(M) = Male Sexual Functioning, Satis(F) = Female Sexual Satisfaction, Satis(M) = Male Sexual Satisfaction, Passion(F) = Female Harmonious Sexual Passion, Passion(M) = Male Harmonious Sexual Passion, Growth (F) = Female Sexual Growth Beliefs, Growth (M) = Male Sexual Growth Beliefs, Destiny (F) = Female Sexual Destiny Beliefs, Destiny (M) = Male Sexual Destiny Beliefs.

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$.

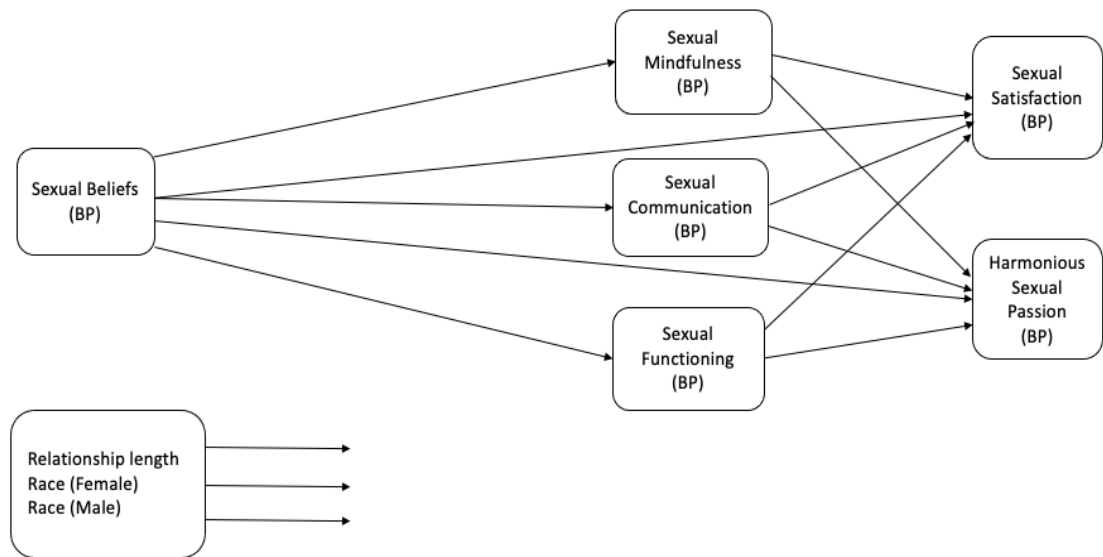
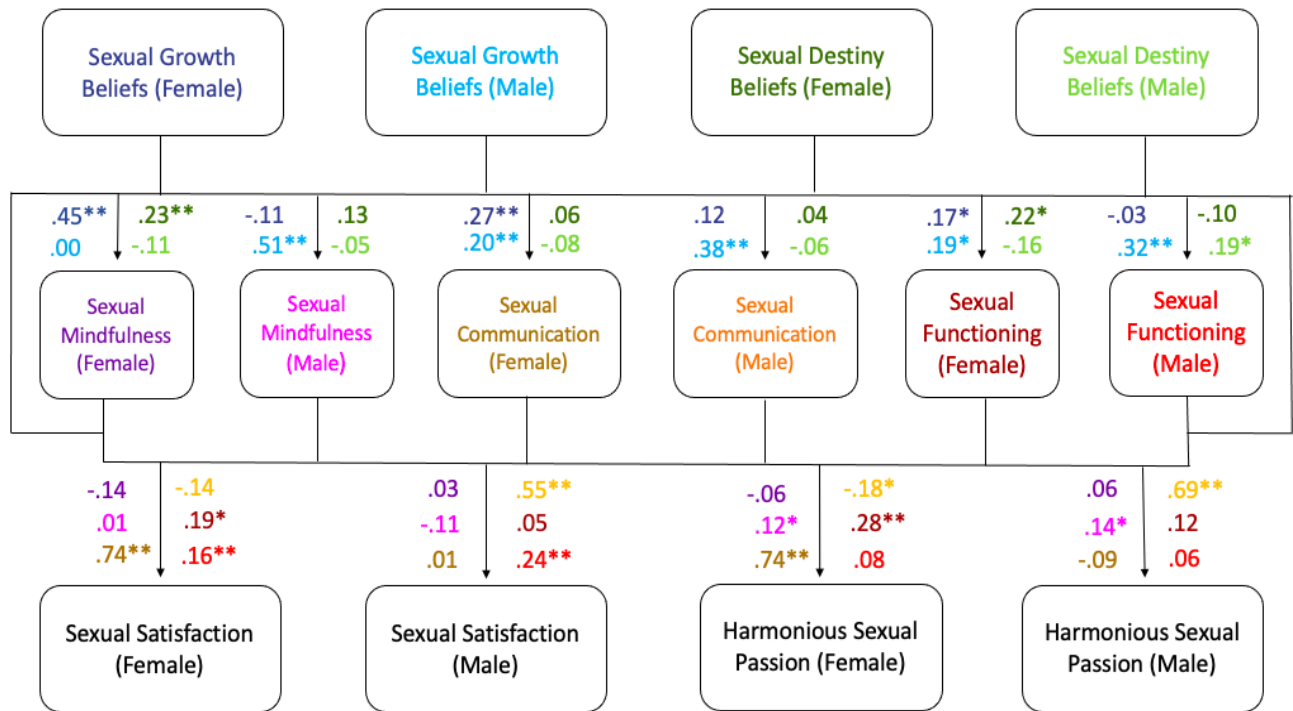
Figures**Figure 1***Conceptual Model of the Pathways for Sexual Beliefs**Note.* BP = Both Partners

Figure 2*Direct Effects*

Note. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$.