



2017-03-01

# The Relationship Between Relational Aggression and Sexual Satisfaction: Investigating the Mediating Role of Attachment Behaviors

Melece Vida Meservy  
*Brigham Young University*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/etd>

 Part of the [Marriage and Family Therapy and Counseling Commons](#)

---

## BYU ScholarsArchive Citation

Meservy, Melece Vida, "The Relationship Between Relational Aggression and Sexual Satisfaction: Investigating the Mediating Role of Attachment Behaviors" (2017). *All Theses and Dissertations*. 6679.

<https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/etd/6679>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by BYU ScholarsArchive. It has been accepted for inclusion in All Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of BYU ScholarsArchive. For more information, please contact [scholarsarchive@byu.edu](mailto:scholarsarchive@byu.edu), [ellen\\_amatangelo@byu.edu](mailto:ellen_amatangelo@byu.edu).

The Relationship Between Relational Aggression and Sexual Satisfaction:  
Investigating the Mediating Role of Attachment Behaviors

Melece Vida Meservy

A thesis submitted to the faculty of  
Brigham Young University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Science

Jonathan Sandberg, Chair  
Angela Bradford  
Shayne Anderson

School of Family Life  
Brigham Young University

Copyright © 2017 Melece Vida Meservy

All Rights Reserved

## ABSTRACT

### The Relationship Between Relational Aggression and Sexual Satisfaction: Investigating the Mediating Role of Attachment Behaviors

Melece Vida Meservy  
School of Family Life, BYU  
Master of Science

The purpose of this study was to investigate the relationship between relational aggression and sexual satisfaction, as well as the mediating role of attachment on this relationship. Data came from the Relationship Evaluation Survey (RELATE) comprised of the matched-pair responses of 797 couples in serious dating, engaged, or married relationships. Results showed the greater the perceived relational aggression the lower the sexual satisfaction for both self and partner, regardless of gender. Additionally, it appears a more satisfying sexual relationship can occur when an individual experiences a secure attachment base and can feel confident that his/her relationship is safe. For both genders, the more relationally aggressive behaviors reported, the lower the reports of secure attachment behaviors. Implications for clinicians and future research are discussed.

Keywords: couples, sexual satisfaction, sexual intimacy, relational aggression, attachment behaviors

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT .....	ii
LIST OF TABLES .....	v
LIST OF FIGURES .....	vi
Literature Review.....	3
Attachment Theory .....	3
Sexual Satisfaction .....	4
Relational Aggression.....	5
Relational Aggression and Sexual Satisfaction .....	7
Attachment Security, Sexual Satisfaction, and Relational Aggression .....	7
Attachment Behaviors .....	8
The Current Study .....	10
Method .....	10
Participants .....	10
Procedure .....	11
Measures.....	11
Sexual satisfaction.....	12
Relational aggression .....	12
Attachment. ....	13
Control variables. ....	14
Analytic Strategy .....	14

Results.....	15
Full Model .....	15
Direct paths. ....	15
Indirect Paths.....	15
Discussion.....	17
Clinical Implications.....	19
Study Limitations .....	21
Conclusion.....	22
References.....	23
Table 1. <i>Correlations and Descriptive Statistics (N = 797)</i> .....	31
M.....	31
SD.....	31
Figure 1. <i>Fitted Model</i> .....	32

## LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. <i>Correlations and Descriptive Statistics (N = 797)</i> .....	31
---	----

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. *Fitted Model* ..... 32

The Relationship Between Relational Aggression and Sexual Satisfaction:  
Investigating the Mediating Role of Attachment Behaviors

Stable and successful marriages have a beneficial impact on both individuals and society. Married individuals in relationships have significantly better quality of life, lower instances of suicide and depression, and better finances than divorced or unmarried adults of the same age group (Amato, 2000; Evans & Kelley, 2004; Gray & Vanderhart, 2000; Krivo & Kaufman, 2004; Page & Stevens, 2005; Yan et al., 2011). One important characteristic of strong marriages is sexual satisfaction for both spouses. Poor sexual satisfaction puts couples at a higher risk for divorce, while high levels of sexual satisfaction have been associated with marital happiness and success for both partners (Dzara, 2010; Sevene et al., 2009; Shakerian et al., 2014; Trudel & Goldfarb, 2010; Yucel & Gassanov, 2010).

Relational dynamics (i.e. how the couple interacts) are strong predictors of sexual satisfaction. For example, Henderson-King and Veroff (1994) found that relationship tension had a statistically significant negative relationship to sexual satisfaction, while being positively related to relationship turmoil. Additionally, Verhulst and Heiman (1988) also report that distress, conflict, and/or dissatisfaction in non-sexual aspects of marriage notably lower levels of sexual desire, enjoyment, and marital satisfaction for both partners.

One area of emerging research investigates relational aggression and its association with marital happiness. Relational aggression, predominantly researched in regards to childhood relationship interactions, includes behaviors such as actively withdrawing interaction, confrontation, threatening to dissolve relationships, or ignoring/excluding another unless certain demands are met (Carroll et al., 2010; Nelson et al., 2008). Findings indicating that relational aggression trajectories are dynamically associated with maladjustment, suggest that relational

aggression may be conceptualized as a maladaptive coping mechanism to stressors (Murray-Close, Ostrov, & Crick, 2007; Sullivan et al., 2010).

Because relational dynamics in marriage are clear predictors of sexual satisfaction, relational aggression may be related to lower levels of sexual satisfaction. Indeed, research has indicated that the presence of relational aggression in romantic relationships is linked with higher levels of depressive and anxious symptoms in both partners (Carroll et al., 2010), while depressive and anxious symptoms can significantly impact sexual satisfaction (Laurent & Simons, 2009).

A second area that contributes to sexual satisfaction is attachment. Secure attachment impacts marriages in more ways than just increasing marital happiness and satisfaction; more securely attached couples have been found to experience more satisfying and heightened sexual interactions than their insecurely attached partners (Birnbaum et al., 2006; Hazan & Ziefman, 1994; Simpson, 1990). In contrast, couples who experience more insecure attachment are likely to report more conflict, communication difficulties, and more negative feelings towards sex (Birnbaum et al., 2006; Davis et al., 2006).

This relationship between sexual behaviors and attachment styles and needs is significant as many researchers label sexuality as an adult attachment behavior. Sexuality and sexual behavior both seek to fulfill needs for safety, security, and affection (Belsky, Steinberg, & Draper, 1991; Draper & Harpending, 1982). Sexual behavior typically plays a significant role in facilitating the development of attachment bonds between partners, particularly in the early stages of relationship development (Furrow, Johnson, & Bradley, 2011; Hazan & Zeifman, 1994). As relational aggression undermines the safety of secure attachment behaviors, it is

possible that the presence of relational aggression in marriage would decrease sexual satisfaction by way of injuring the attachment security needed for satisfaction sexual intimacy.

The purpose of this study, therefore, is to investigate the relationship between relational aggression and sexual satisfaction and to determine if attachment may mediate that relationship.

## **Literature Review**

### **Attachment Theory**

Attachment theory, as initially proposed by John Bowlby (1973), will serve as the theoretical framework for this study. The theory states that within all human beings there exists a “regulatory system that functions to prioritize relationship promotion goals [that] better afford the person a continued sense of assurance or safety in the relationship” (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007, p. 538). Furthermore, strong relational bonds can be formed when loved ones (i.e. parental figures, family members, peers, and romantic partners) are consistently available and are willing to provide social acceptance, support, help, or protection (Hazan & Shaver, 1994; Leder, 2004; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007).

Attachment theory is relevant to the variables in this study because secure attachment can heighten sexual experiences, it can also be injured by relationship trauma, such as infidelity, intimate partner violence, and other moments of perceived abandonment or betrayal. These attachment injuries are understood as threats to the relationship, and partners respond as if their safety and security are in jeopardy (Johnson, 2003). Therefore, attachment theory provides a framework by which to understand the potential relationship between relational aggression and sexual satisfaction.

### **Sexual Satisfaction**

Research indicates that mutual sexual satisfaction of both partners is an important element of strong and happy marriages, whereas poor sexual satisfaction of one or both partners increases the likelihood of distress and divorce. Longitudinal research by Yeh et al. (2006) found that couples satisfied with their sexual relationship tended to report better marital quality, satisfaction and happiness with their marriages. Additional research suggests that improving sexual functioning for both spouses significantly enhances marital functioning (Trudel & Goldfarb, 2010).

In addition to research showing the positive effects of sexual satisfaction, the existing literature also suggests that sexual problems in marriage can be highly predictive of divorce and/or unhappy marriages. Sevene et al. (2009) indicate that sexual problems for either spouse have a notable impact on quality of life and relationships, with separation and divorce becoming significantly more likely in couples with unresolved sexual issues. Additional research indicates that sexual problems and low sexual satisfaction increases the instances of marital infidelity for both spouses, a factor that significantly reduces marital satisfaction and increases the likelihood for divorce (Yucel & Gassanov, 2010).

While the influence of sexual satisfaction on overall relationship satisfaction is clear, additional research highlights the reciprocity of this relationship wherein relationship satisfaction influences sexual satisfaction. For example, Henderson-King and Veroff (1994) found that relationship tension had a statistically significant negative association with sexual satisfaction, while being positively related to relationship turmoil. Additionally, Verhulst and Heiman (1988) also report that distress, conflict, and/or dissatisfaction in non-sexual aspects of marriage notably lower levels of sexual desire, enjoyment, and marital satisfaction for both partners.

The extent to which the impact of sexual satisfaction on marital happiness transcends gender is unclear. One investigation by Dzara (2010) found that the influence of marital sexuality on marital conflict and dissolution was more dependent on the husband's sexual satisfaction than the wife's from the beginning of the marriage; namely poor sexual satisfaction for the husband within the first year increased the likelihood of divorce by the five-year mark. However, a study of women seeking divorce in Indian courts found sexual satisfaction to have a significant negative effect on marital problems, suggesting that low sexual satisfaction is not uniquely problematic for husbands only (Shakerian et al., 2014). Whether or not there is a clear consensus on the degree to which each gender's sexual satisfaction impacts marital success, these studies point to the strong relationship between sexual satisfaction and marital happiness and stability for both genders, emphasizing the need to ensure sexual satisfaction within marriages (Henderson-King & Veroff, 1994).

As previously stated, many studies have supported the concept that relationship turmoil, including conflict, resentment, stonewalling or forms of aggression, impact sexual satisfaction (Henderson-King & Veroff, 1994; Verhulst and Heiman, 1988). One such form of turmoil includes relational aggression between partners.

### **Relational Aggression**

Relational aggression is defined as behaviors intended to hurt or harm others through the manipulation of interpersonal relationships (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995). Although relational aggression has previously been predominantly researched in regards to childhood relationship interactions, expanding research has been aimed at investigating relational aggression in the context of romantic relationships under the name romantic relational aggression (Murray-Close, 2011).

Romantic relational aggression comprises of socially manipulative behaviors aimed specifically at a romantic partner, including giving the “silent treatment” or intentionally excluding a partner from social activities with the shared social group (Linder, Crick, & Collins, 2002). While some romantic relational aggression behaviors, such as threatening to end the relationship in order to intentionally hurt a romantic partner, also fit the definition of psychological aggression, psychological aggression is a much broader concept which includes additional aggressive behaviors such as verbal insults, threats or derogatory language (Jouriles et al., 2009; Linder, Crick, & Collins, 2002). Romantic relational aggression differs from other definitions of verbal or emotional abuse because of its focus on exclusion and intent to damage interpersonal relationships with those other than the romantic partner (Linder, Crick, & Collins, 2002).

Previous research has established the detrimental nature of romantic relational aggression. Both perpetrators and victims of romantic relational aggression exhibit a number of adjustment problems, including internalizing and externalizing problems (Bagner et al., 2007; Coyne et al., 2010; Murray-Close et al., 2010; Schad et al., 2008) and low-quality romantic relationships (Linder, Crick, & Collins, 2002).

Linder, Crick, and Collins (2002) investigated the impact of relational aggression on relationship quality in romantic relationships and found that, regardless of gender, relational aggression appears to be associated with poorer perceptions of relationship quality. Individuals who report using relational aggression in their committed relationships describe feeling less trusting, more frustrated and are likely to be jealous of their partners. Such experiences lend themselves to establishing relationships high in conflict and low in stability. Linder and colleagues (2002) findings are consistent with the literature stating that individuals who use

relational aggression in their close relationships have a desire for high levels of closeness and exclusivity in these relationships.

### **Relational Aggression and Sexual Satisfaction**

As stated previously, there are a number of factors that contribute to increased or decreased sexual satisfaction in marriage, including how partners respond to stress in general and specifically stress related to sexual functioning. Relational dynamics are strong predictors of sexual satisfaction; in particular relationship tension has a statistically significant negative association with sexual satisfaction, while being positively related to relationship turmoil (Henderson-King & Veroff, 1994). Additionally, Verhulst and Heiman (1988) also report that distress, conflict, and/or dissatisfaction in non-sexual aspects of marriage notably lower levels of sexual desire, enjoyment, and sexual satisfaction for both partners.

However, although the research is clear that relational functioning has an influence on sexual satisfaction, with tension and turmoil being negatively associated with satisfaction, no research was found that tested specifically the association between relational aggression and sexual satisfaction. This study attempts to fill that gap.

### **Attachment Security, Sexual Satisfaction, and Relational Aggression**

Similar to the reciprocal relationship between marital and sexual satisfaction, there is evidence that attachment is both predictive of and influenced by sexual satisfaction. Clymer et al. (2006) revealed that the more ambivalent attachment an individual has towards his/her partner, the less sexual satisfaction s/he experiences in the relationship.

Research by Hazan and Ziefman (1994) was the first notable study to investigate the successful integration of attachment, care giving, and sex. The study found that establishing connections within romantic relationships happens in stages. While the attraction phase, or

beginning of a romantic relationship, establishes the initial sexual connection, it is the following phases that elicit caregiving and attachment connections. Therefore, partners who feel secure in their care giving and attachment have heightened sexual experiences when compared to relationships devoid of deeper connections (Hazan & Ziefman, 1994). This concept is supported by research from Trompeter, Bettencourt and Barrett-Connor (2012). Their study of sexual experiences and attitudes of healthy community-dwelling older women found that emotional closeness during sex was most significantly associated with heightened arousal, lubrication, and orgasm while biological interventions such as estrogen therapy were not.

The research on attachment and relational aggression suggests that couples with greater attachment insecurity also report increased levels of relational aggression (Wilson, 2011). Furthermore, research has indicated couples with higher levels of relational aggression more frequently use insecure attachment language when describing their relationships (Goldstein, Chesir-Teran, & McFaul, 2008). Due to the relationship between relational aggression and attachment security, and secure attachment and sexual satisfaction, it may be that attachment serves a mediating role between relational aggression and sexual satisfaction.

### **Attachment Behaviors**

As mentioned previously, attachment needs represent an inborn drive to seek and develop connections which provide that security and relationship safety (Van Ijzendoorn & Sagi-Schwartz, 2008). In order to manage the experience of isolation, loss, or abandonment, individuals typically respond to an unavailable attachment figure with either distancing (avoidance) or hyper-vigilant (anxiety) behaviors (Johnson, 2003; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007).

Although the study of attachment styles focuses on the feelings or beliefs of the individual regarding their romantic relationships and whether or not their attachment needs are

sufficiently met, the study of attachment behaviors focuses on specific actions taken by partners in their relationships that influence attachment security (Sandberg, Bradford, & Brown, 2015; Sandberg, Busby, Johnson, & Yoshida, 2012). In fact, research suggests that attachment behaviors are measurable within a couple relationship (Sandberg, Busby, Johnson, & Yoshida, 2012) and that secure attachment behaviors may serve as a buffer against relationship turmoil (Knapp et al., 2015; Oka et al., 2014; Sandberg, Novak, Davis, & Busby, 2016).

Furthermore, researchers have determined that attachment security within couple relationships can change regardless of individual attachment styles, even in cases with previously damaging attachment experiences or traumas (Johnson, 2004). Couples who utilize healthy attachment behaviors experience more positive relational outcomes including greater measures of happiness, partner friendliness, support, relationship satisfaction, intimacy, and trust, than those who display less healthy attachment behaviors (Alexandrov, Cowan, & Cowan, 2005; Hazan & Shaver 1987; Kirkpatrick & Davis 1994; Mikulincer 1998; Ng & Smith 2006; Sandberg, Novak, Davis, & Busby, 2016).

Research has indicated a number of ways that attachment is associated with other marital processes and outcomes, as well as supported the ways attachment behaviors influence the development and integration of adaptive strategies within couple relationships (Knapp, Norton, & Sandberg, 2015). Therefore, in this study attachment behaviors are used in the analysis as potential mediators between the relationship of relational aggression and sexual satisfaction, asserting that secure attachment bond and behavior can positively influence relationship self-regulation processes, despite the presence of maladaptive coping mechanisms to relational stress such as relational aggression.

## **The Current Study**

Despite the groundwork laid by previous research, the existent literature provides limited data regarding the effects of relational aggression on sexual satisfaction. Knowing that sexual satisfaction can be strengthened by secure attachment and that relational aggression directly attacks individual attachment needs, the purpose of this study is to investigate the influence of relational aggression on sexual satisfaction. Furthermore, drawing on the findings of Knapp, Norton, and Sandberg (2015) that established using therapeutic models that strengthen attachment within couple relationships can be an effective mediator, this study will investigate the mediating impact of attachment behaviors on the relationship between relational aggression and sexual satisfaction. This paper will attempt to address the following research questions:

1. Does relational aggression in heterosexual dating, engaged, and married relationships negatively affect sexual satisfaction?
2. Does secure attachment mediate the relationship between relational aggression and sexual satisfaction?

## **Method**

### **Participants**

Data from this project come from the Relationship Evaluation (RELATE) data set (see [www.relate-institute.org](http://www.relate-institute.org)), which comprises of the matched-pair responses of 797 couples in serious dating, engaged, or married relationships. Due to the limited number of homosexual respondents, only heterosexual couples were selected, and thereby results of this study may not be representative of homosexual couples. The average participant is in their 30's (34.04 years, SD = 11.51, Range = 18-72 for males; 31.71 years, SD = 10.73, Range 18-71 for females), Caucasian (83.2% of males and 82.9% of females) and has completed higher education (55% of males report having an associates, bachelor's, or graduate degree, 39% report having some college completed; 61% of females report having an associates, bachelor's, or graduate degree,

37% report having some college completed). The majority of couples have been together between 5-10 years with a range of 0-3 months to over 40 years. Just over half of the participants (55%) are childless. This sample represents a highly educated and religious group (52% of participants report being Latter-day Saint (Mormon), with Protestant (17%) and Catholic (10%) being the next most represented religious, and 12% reporting no religious affiliation) that may vary from the general population in attitudes and practices. The gross yearly income median was in between \$40,000 and \$60,000, for male participants and under \$20,000 for women under, with an income range of <\$20,000, \$300,000+.

### **Procedure**

This study uses secondary data collected from 2009-2011 using the RELATE questionnaire (Holman et al., 1997). The RELATE questionnaire, containing several subscales, was developed in 1997 and has been found to have statistically significant test-retest reliability internal consistent reliability, and content, construct and concurrent validity (Busby, Holman, & Taniguchi, 2001).

The RELATE questionnaire is an online multidimensional measure consisting of more than 300 items. Participants may choose to receive a printout (also viewable online) showing an evaluation of their responses which is to be interpreted by the couples themselves. The data are collected online after participants are referred to or seek out the website. The cost of RELATE is \$20 per person to receive access to the extensive evaluation of responses. Couples access the assessment online at <http://www.relate-institute.org> and are referred by therapeutic professionals, professors, researchers, and various forms of advertising.

### **Measures**

**Sexual satisfaction.** Researchers frequently discuss how to most accurately measure sexual satisfaction. Researchers like Renaud et al., (1997) and Young et al., (1998) have argued that reports of sexual satisfaction are a demonstration of the balance between positive perceptions of sexual satisfaction and the lack thereof. This study, therefore, used the sexual satisfaction scale variables from the RELATE relationship measure that allow participants to respond to both through two items. The first item, sex problems, originates from the problem areas checklist and is based on a five point Likert scale, labeled “intimacy/sexuality,” ranging from 1 (“never a problem”) to 5 (“very often a problem”). The second part of the satisfaction variable was from the relationship satisfaction section using a five point Likert scale ranging from 1 (“very dissatisfied”) to 5 (“very satisfied”). The item was titled “the physical intimacy you experience.” These items have been found to be valid in accurately recording sexual satisfaction (Strait, Sandberg, Larson, & Harper, 2015). We used self report scores to record sexual satisfaction. The two items were summed to create a total score as had been done previously (Strait et al., 2015). The minimum potential score for sexual satisfaction was 6, with a maximum potential score of 30. The Cronbach’s alpha for this scale was .86 for male respondents, and .84 for female.

**Relational aggression.** Relational aggression was measured using the items from the Couples Relational Aggression and Victimization Scale (CRAVIS) developed and found statistically valid by Nelson and Carroll (2006). Participants responded to seven items on a Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (“Never”) to 5 (“Very often”). Both male and female responses were collected for self and perception of partner, with higher scores indicating more frequent behaviors of relational aggression. The minimum potential score of relational aggression was 7, with a maximum potential score of 30.

Research on reporting topics such as intimate partner violence has found partner reports to be less biased (Oka et al., 2014; Cui et al., 2005; Sugarman & Hotaling, 1997), possibly due to the likelihood of aggressive partners to misrepresent their own acts of aggression (Whiting, Oka, & Fife, 2012). Thus, only partner reports of relational aggression were used for our analyses. Items for partner scores of this measure included statements such as, “My partner has threatened to end our relationship in order to get me to do what he/she wanted,” “My partner has spread rumors or negative information about me to be mean,” and “My partner has gone behind my back and shared private information about me with other people.” This measure has been used in previous research (Oka et al., 2014). The Cronbach’s alpha for this scale was .85 for male respondents, and .86 for female.

**Attachment.** In the current study, our focus is on attachment behaviors that support secure attachment and relationship satisfaction (Sandberg, Busby, Johnson, & Yoshida, 2012). These behaviors were measured by the Brief Accessibility Responsiveness and Engagement Scale which consists of six items for both self and partner (BARE, Sandberg, et al, 2016). Responses on the BARE were reported using a Likert scale rating from 1 (Never/Rarely) to 5 (Almost Always). Items included statements such as: “I am rarely available to my partner,” “I listen when my partner shares her/his deepest feelings,” and “It is hard for me to confide in my partner.” Higher scores demonstrated more attachment behaviors. For this study, the three subscales, accessibility, responsiveness and engagement were summed for a total score. This measure has displayed good reliability and construct validity in previous tests. Tests of concurrent validity have indicated that the BARE subscales are significantly correlated with common relationship outcomes, such as relationship satisfaction, stability, and communication, and that the scale is able to discriminate between high and low satisfaction groups and high and

low relationship stability groups (Sandberg, Busby, Johnson, & Yoshida, 2012). The minimum potential score for attachment behaviors was 7, with the maximum potential score of 35. The Cronbach's alpha for this scale was .87 for male respondents, and .91 for female.

**Control variables.** Because length of relationship, religion, and income have been shown to impact marital variables (Jose & Alfons, 2007) these were included as controls. All control variables were taken from the Relate measure and were self reported by participants. Because of the high number of one specific religious group, religion variables were dummy coded with individuals who marked LDS coded as 1 and all others as 0.

### **Analytic Strategy**

The data for this project were analyzed using an Actor-Partner Independence Model (APIM; Kashy & Kenny, 2000). This approach is appropriate because of the non-independent nature of the data. The perceptions of sexual satisfaction, attachment behaviors, and relational aggression of one partner are likely to impact those of the other partner. As a result, traditional research methods are insufficient for analyzing couple level data. The APIM assumes there are two levels of data (individual and couple) and offers a solution for issues regarding non-independence, by analyzing actor effects (e.g., the effect of the participant's attachment behaviors on his/her own sexual satisfaction) and partner effects (e.g., the effect of the spouse's attachment behaviors on the participant's sexual satisfaction) in the same model. A Sobel's test analysis was used to test for mediation (see Preacher and Leonardelli, 2006).

For this study, relational aggression is the primary predictor variable and sexual satisfaction is the main outcome. Attachment behaviors are conceptualized as a potential mediating variable. Length of relationship, religion, and income were added as control variables because of their theoretical links to marital functioning. Fewer than 2% of the total number of

responses consisted of missing items and therefore were omitted from the analysis using the listwise deletion (LD) method (Enders, 2010; Higgins & Green, 2011).

## Results

Means and standard deviations for all key variables and bivariate correlation results are found in Table 1.

### Full Model

The model showed acceptable fit for the data:  $\chi^2 = 47.97$ ,  $df = 13$ ,  $p < .001$ , CFI = .990, TLI = .970, RMSEA = .069. Forty-two percent of the variance in sexual satisfaction was predicted by the variables in the model for females, and 46% for the males (See figure 1).

**Direct paths.** To test for direct effects without attachment behaviors as a mediator, an APIM with both actor and partner effects for both genders was performed with only relational aggression as a predictor and sexual satisfaction as the outcome, with control variables. In the model, female relational aggression as perceived by partner was significantly and negatively associated with male sexual satisfaction ( $\beta = -.37$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $SE = .05$ ) and her sexual satisfaction ( $\beta = -.16$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $SE = .05$ ), while male relational aggression as perceived by partner was significantly and negatively associated with her satisfaction ( $\beta = -.30$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $SE = .05$ ) and his sexual satisfaction ( $\beta = -.01$ ,  $p < .05$ ,  $SE = .05$ ), meaning the greater the perceived relational aggression the lower the sexual satisfaction for both self and partner, and men and women.

*Indirect Paths.* When adding attachment behaviors for both men and women, female relational aggression as perceived by partner, was significantly and negatively associated with her own attachment behavior ( $\beta = -.21$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $SE = .04$ ) and her partner's attachment behavior ( $\beta = -.50$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $SE = .03$ ). Likewise, male relational aggression as perceived by partner was

negatively and significantly associated with his own ( $\beta = -.12, p < .01, SE = .03$ ) and his partner's attachment behavior ( $\beta = -.45, p < .001, SE = .04$ ). These results suggest as relational aggression increases, attachment behaviors decrease for both actor and partner, as well as both genders.

Conversely, partner reports of attachment behaviors were significantly and positively associated with one's own sexual satisfaction for both females ( $\beta = .41, p < .001, SE = .05$ ) and males ( $\beta = .49, p < .001, SE = .06$ ), and at a partner level for only males' attachment and females' sexual satisfaction ( $\beta = .18, p < .001, SE = .06$ ). This suggests that higher attachment scores are related to higher sexual satisfaction at the actor level for both partners and only for female (attachment behaviors) and male (sexual satisfaction) associations at the partner level.

In order to determine if attachment served as a mediator, a Sobel's test (Preacher & Leonardelli, 2006) was conducted for all possible mediating effects, at both a partner and actor level. For the association between female relational aggression and male sexual satisfaction, female attachment did not mediate the relationship. Likewise, for the association between male relational aggression and male sexual satisfaction, female attachment did not mediate the relationship. In all other associations between relational aggression and sexual satisfaction, attachment behaviors did significantly mediate the relationship (See Table 1). We will list first the actor effects and then all partner effects for all mediation models. For the association between female relational aggression and female sexual satisfaction, female attachment was shown to significantly mediate the relationship ( $z = -4.66; p < .001$ ). The association between male relational aggression and male sexual satisfaction was also mediated by male attachment behavior ( $z = -2.95; p = .003$ ).

For the actor effects, the association between female relational aggression and female sexual satisfaction was mediated by male attachment behavior ( $z = -3.83; p < .001$ ), as was the relationship between female relational aggression and male sexual satisfaction ( $z = -8.39; p < .001$ ). Female attachment behaviors were found to mediate the association between male relational aggression and female sexual satisfaction ( $z = -7.08; p < .001$ ). Lastly, the relationship between male relational aggression and female sexual satisfaction was mediated by male attachment behavior ( $z = -2.43; p < 0.05$ ).

Regarding control variables, religion was not related to sexual satisfaction for men and women in the study, neither was length of relationship for women. However, length of relationship was significantly related to sexual satisfaction for men ( $\beta = -.15, p < .001$ ) as was couple income for both females ( $\beta = -.16, p < .001$ ) for males ( $\beta = -.14, p < .001$ ) in the sample, meaning the longer a couple has been married the less sexual satisfaction the male partner reports. Additionally, the higher the level of couple income, the lower the sexual satisfaction for both spouses.

## Discussion

Research Question #1. *Does relational aggression in dating, engaged, and married relationships negatively affect sexual satisfaction?*

The basic results of this study confirm previous research that states the presence of relational aggression is adversely related to romantic relationships (Carroll et. al, 2010). Specific to this study, the greater the perceived relational aggression the lower the sexual satisfaction for both self and partner, regardless of gender. Although there has been no specific research on the relationship of relational aggression and sexual satisfaction, previous research suggests aggression in general is bad for sexual satisfaction, as reported previously by Verhulst and

Heiman (1988) who state conflict in non-sexual aspects of marriage notably lower levels of sexual desire and enjoyment. Also, research by Katz and Mhyr (2008) found that verbal sexual coercion by a partner is negatively associated with relationship satisfaction, sexual functioning, and sexual satisfaction.

Perhaps the reason relational aggression is bad for sexual satisfaction is due to its potential to be used by an individual to exert influence, power, or control over a partner by withdrawing sex or physical affection until demands are met. Similar to the power influenced by verbal sexual coercion studied by Katz and Mhyr (2008), an individual may wield power over her/his partner through use of relational aggression.

Research question #2. *Can secure attachment behaviors mediate the influence of relational aggression on sexual satisfaction?*

The basic results of this study support previous research indicating that secure attachment behaviors increase sexual satisfaction. The attachment behavior model can be used to explain sexuality and its relationship to attachment—when an individual experiences a secure attachment and feels confident that their relationship is a safe haven, an increase in ratings of satisfaction in sexual relationships seems to occur (Birnbaum et al., 2006; Furrow, Johnson, & Bradley, 2011; Péloquin et al., 2014).

It may be that, as relational aggression tends to undermine relationship security, the more a partner perceives a threat to safety through relationally aggressive behaviors, the less safe, and therefore less satisfied, s/he feels in their sexual engagement. Relational aggression seems to negatively impact sexual satisfaction by way of destabilizing secure attachment behaviors and weakening a partner's sense of attachment security. Therefore, secure attachment behaviors may

be a mechanism by which relational aggression is related to sexual satisfaction by lessening the sense of security and safety required to experience heightened sexual satisfaction.

Attachment behaviors did mediate the relationship between relational aggression and sexual satisfaction for all paths, both male and female for self and partner, with only two exceptions: the association between female relational aggression and male sexual satisfaction and the association between male relational aggression and male sexual satisfaction, both through female attachment behaviors. This unique finding may be related to previous findings that suggest male sexual satisfaction can be less related to non-sexual connection in the relationship than female sexual satisfaction (McNulty & Fisher, 2008; Stephenson, Ahrold, & Meston, 2011), although additional research is needed to better understand these findings.

Although previous research suggests attachment can mediate the negative impact of family of origin problems, communication, and even relational aggression on relationship satisfaction (Knapp, Norton, & Sandberg, 2015; Oka et al., 2014), no studies have focused on sexual satisfaction and attachment behaviors and relational aggression. The findings provide additional support suggesting that attachment behaviors may be the mechanism by which relationship adversities negatively influence relationship quality, across a number of domains. A growing number of studies continue to support the idea that attachment behaviors are key to understanding relationship quality (e.g., Sandberg, Bradford, & Brown, in press).

### **Clinical Implications**

The findings provide insight to therapists working with couples on at least two fronts. First, relational aggression is detrimental to relationship functioning (Oka, et al, 2014). Specifically for this study, when therapists work with couples to improve sexual functioning, they may wish to assess for relational aggression. Although the literature on the impact of

relational aggression on couples is growing (Carroll et al, 2010), no studies could be found which address relational aggression from a clinical “how to” perspective. Nevertheless, we continue to suggest that helping clients address needs for closeness and connection in direct (constructive dialogue) instead of indirect ways (relational coercion) may be beneficial for therapists (Oka, et al, 2014).

In addition, our findings indicate that engaging individuals or couples in attachment building activities or establishing adaptive attachment behaviors may prove useful for increasing sexual satisfaction. A number of models seek to build connections and safe interaction in couple relationships and can be used by therapists to increase this experience in romantic relationships, such models include Gottman, Integrative Behavioral Couple Therapy, and Emotionally Focused Therapy (Dimidjian, Martell, & Christensen, 2002; Woolley, & Johnson, 2005; Gottman, 2008).

Clinicians may find that using Emotionally Focused Therapy (EFT), as it is the only empirically supported attachment based model of couples’ therapy (Wiebe & Johnson, 2016), to be an effective modality for increasing sexual satisfaction for couples. The purpose of EFT is to co-construct a bond to meet the attachment, caregiving, and sexual needs. An EFT informed therapist may help couples create emotional safety and relationship security as an essential first step in restoring physical and sexual intimacy (Johnson & Zuccarini, 2011). The EFT model has been applied specifically to sexual issues and consists of three stages: placing sexual interactions in the context of the cycle, creating new cycles of emotional-sexual engagement and the “sexual softening event,” and consolidation and building on couple eroticism (Johnson & Zuccarini, 2011).

Within these stages, the EFT therapist works to identify and externalize the couple's negative demand and withdraw cycles inciting the relational distress, and to explore conflicts

within the context of the cycle specific to sexual complaints. In-session sexual "softening" can be encouraged by the EFT therapist helping clients express fears and needs regarding sexual intimacy in order to increase levels of emotional safety. Finally, consolidation and building on couple eroticism is best achieved by helping spouses create a joint story of their relationship problems and recovery that includes the sexual aspect of their connection and behaves as a framework for the couple's future recovery (Johnson & Zuccarini, 2011).

### **Study Limitations**

The current study contains various limitations that stress the need for future research. The sample in this study is a self-selected group of couples who completed the RELATE assessment as a paid-for, online tool to use in benefitting their marriage. Due to the nature of the sampling methods, many low-income couples, couples without access to online resources, and highly distressed or hopeless couples may have been excluded from the sample. Additionally, most of the respondents are Caucasian, which does not allow appropriate ethnic representation or generalization of the results. These limitations make generalizing the findings of this study to a widespread population difficult.

Future pathways for this research may include wider parameters in sampling, to collect data from a more ethnically diverse sample, and to collect from a sample of clinically distressed couples. Additionally, longitudinal research drawing upon actual observed, coded behavior from therapy sessions or intake interviews, rather than the current Likert scale questions, would provide a more in-depth understanding of the presence or extent of relational aggression in the relationships, as well as the current status of sexual satisfaction. Another limitation is that the data collected is cross-sectional thereby, this study is limited by the fact that it was carried out at

only one time point and can give no indication of the sequence of events. Thus, it is impossible to infer causality, only that a relationship exists between the variables used.

Furthermore, this study represented collective data from dating, engaged, and married couples without investigating the potential differences between the three groups. It is likely that relationally aggressive behaviors are less frequent in dating relationships where attachment security is still low, while more present in married or engaged couples where attachment security may be more established. Further research may provide better insight into the nuances of relational aggression, sexual satisfaction, and attachment behaviors in each of these three groups.

### **Conclusion**

The present study has examined attachment behaviors as a mediator between relational aggression and sexual satisfaction in married couples. Overall, the analyzed model highlighted a significant negative relationship between relational aggression and sexual satisfaction, as well as suggesting a significant and highly clinically relevant mediating influence of attachment behaviors on this relationship. The study adds to a growing body of research which suggests attachment behaviors may serve as the mechanism through which relational dynamics influence romantic relationship quality.

### References

- Alexandrov, E. O., Cowan, P. A., & Cowan, C. P. (2005). Couple attachment and the quality of marital relationships: Method and concept in the validation of the new couple attachment interview and coding system. *Attachment and Human Development, 7*, 123–152.  
doi:10.1080/14616730500155170.
- Amato, P. R. (2000). The consequences of divorce for adults and children. *Journal of Marriage and Family, 62*(4), 1269-1287.
- Birnbaum, G. E., Reis, H. T., Mikulincer, M., Gillath, O., & Orpaz, A. (2006). When sex is more than just sex: Attachment orientations, sexual experience, and relationship quality. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 91*(5), 929.
- Busby, D. M., Holman, T. B., & Taniguchi, N. (2001). RELATE: Relationship Evaluation of the Individual, Family, Cultural, and Couple Contexts. *Family Relations, 50*(4), 308-316.
- Carroll, J. S., Nelson, D. A., Yorgason, J. B., Harper, J. M., Ashton, R. H., & Jensen, A. C. (2010). Relational aggression in marriage. *Aggressive Behavior, 36*(5), 315-329.
- Clymer, S. R., Ray, R. E., Trepper, T. S., & Pierce, K. A. (2006). The relationship among romantic attachment style, conflict resolution style and sexual satisfaction. *Journal of Couple & Relationship Therapy, 5*(1), 71-89.
- Crick, N. R., & Grotpeter, J. K. (1995). Relational aggression, gender, and social-psychological adjustment. *Child Development, 66*(3), 710-722.
- Cui, M., Lorenz, F. O., Conger, R. D., Melby, J. N., & Bryant, C. M. (2005). Observer, self, and partner reports of hostile behaviors in romantic relationships. *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy, 67*, 1169–1181.

- Dimidjian, S., Martell, C. R., & Christensen, A. (2002). Integrative behavioral couple therapy. In A. S. Gurman & N. S. Jacobson (Eds.), *Clinical handbook of couple therapy* (3rd ed., pp. 251–277). New York: Guilford Press.
- Dzara, K. (2010). Assessing the effect of marital sexuality on marital disruption. *Social Science Research, 39*(5), 715-724.
- Enders, C. K. (2010). *Applied missing data analysis*. New York: Guilford Press.
- Evans, M. D. R., & Kelley, J. (2004). Effect of family structure on life satisfaction: Australian evidence. *Social Indicators Research, 69*(3), 303-349.
- Furrow, J., Johnson, S. M., & Bradley, B. (Eds.). (2011). *The emotionally focused casebook: New directions in treating couples*. New York: Routledge.
- Goldstein, S. E., Chesir-Teran, D., & McFaul, A. (2008). Profiles and correlates of relational aggression in young adults' romantic relationships. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence, 37*(3), 251-265.
- Gottman, J. M., & Gottman, J. S. (2008). Gottman method couple therapy. In A. S. Gurman (Ed.), *Clinical handbook of couple therapy* (4th ed., pp. 138–164). New York: Guilford Press.
- Gray, J. S., & Vanderhart, M. J. (2000). On the determination of wages: Does marriage matter? In L. J. Waite (Ed.), *The ties that bind: Perspectives on marriage and cohabitation* (pp. 356-367). New York: Aldine.
- Hazan, C., & Shaver, P. (1987). Romantic love conceptualized as an attachment process. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 52*(3), 511.
- Hazan, C., & Shaver, P. R. (1994). Attachment as an organizational framework for research on close relationships. *Psychological Inquiry, 5*(1), 1-22.

- Hazan, C., & Zeifman, D. (1994). Sex and the psychological tether. In K. Bartholomew & D. Perlman (Eds.), *Advance in personal relationships: Attachment processes in adulthood* (Vol. 5, pp. 151–177). London: Jessica Kingsley.
- Henderson-King, D. H., & Veroff, J. (1994). Sexual satisfaction and marital well-being in the first years of marriage. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships, 11*(4), 509-534.
- Higgins, J. P., & Green, S. (Eds.). (2011). *Cochrane handbook for systematic reviews of interventions* (Vol. 4). John Wiley & Sons.
- Holman, T. B., Busby, D. M., Doxey, C., Klein, D. M., & Loyer-Carlson, V. (1997). The relationship evaluation (RELATE). Provo, UT: RELATE Institute.
- Johnson, S. M. (2004). *The practice of emotionally focused couple therapy: Creating connection*. East Sussex: Brunner-Routledge.
- Johnson, S. M., & Whiffen, V. E. (Eds.). (2003). *Attachment processes in couple and family therapy*. New York: Guilford Press.
- Johnson, S. M., & Zuccarini, D. (2011). EFT for sexual issues: An integrated model of couple and sex therapy. In J. Furrow, B. Bradley, & S. Johnson (Eds.), *The emotionally focused casebook* (pp. 219–246). New York: Brunner Routledge.
- Jose, O., & Alfons, V. (2007). Do demographics affect marital satisfaction? *Journal of Sex & Marital Therapy, 33*(1), 73-85.
- Katz, J., & Myhr, L. (2008). Perceived conflict patterns and relationship quality associated with verbal sexual coercion by male dating partners. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence, 23*(6), 798-814.

- Kirkpatrick, L. A., & Davis, K. E. (1994). Attachment style, gender, and relationship stability: A longitudinal analysis. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *66*, 502–512. doi:10.1037/0022-3514.66.3.502.
- Krivo, L. J., & Kaufman, R. L. (2004). Housing and wealth inequality: Racial-ethnic differences in home equity in the United States. *Demography*, *41*(3), 585-605.
- Laurent, S. M., & Simons, A. D. (2009). Sexual dysfunction in depression and anxiety: Conceptualizing sexual dysfunction as part of an internalizing dimension. *Clinical Psychology Review*, *29*(7), 573-585.
- Leder, S. (2004). *Intimacy motivation: Testing a theory of romantic love*. (Unpublished master's thesis). Wake Forest University, Winston-Salem, NC.
- Linder, J. R., Crick, N. R., & Collins, W. A. (2002). Relational aggression and victimization in young adults' romantic relationships: Associations with perceptions of parent, peer, and romantic relationship quality. *Social Development*, *11*(1), 69-86.
- McNulty, J. K., & Fisher, T. D. (2008). Gender differences in response to sexual expectancies and changes in sexual frequency: A short-term longitudinal study of sexual satisfaction in newly married couples. *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, *37*(2), 229-240.
- Mikulincer, M. (1998). Attachment working models and the sense of trust: An exploration of interaction goals and affect regulation. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *74*(5), 1209–1224. doi:10.1037/0022-3514.74.5.1209.
- Mikulincer, M., & Shaver, P. R. (2007). Boosting attachment security to promote mental health, prosocial values, and inter-group tolerance. *Psychological Inquiry*, *18*(3), 139-156.
- Murray-Close, D., Ostrov, J. M., & Crick, N. R. (2007). A short-term longitudinal study of growth of relational aggression during middle childhood: Associations with gender,

- friendship intimacy, and internalizing problems. *Development and Psychopathology*, *19*(01), 187-203.
- Murray-Close, D. (2011). Autonomic reactivity and romantic relational aggression among female emerging adults: Moderating roles of social and cognitive risk. *International Journal of Psychophysiology*, *80*(1), 28-35.
- Nelson, D. A., & Carroll, J. S. (2006). Couples relational aggression and victimization scale (CRAViS). Provo, UT: RELATE Institute.
- Nelson, D. A., Springer, M. M., Nelson, L. J., & Bean, N. H. (2008). Normative beliefs regarding aggression in emerging adulthood. *Social Development*, *17*(3), 638-660.
- Ng, K., & Smith, S. D. (2006). The relationships between attachment theory and intergenerational family systems theory. *The Family Journal*, *14*(4), 430-440.  
doi:10.1177/1066480706290976.
- Oka, M., Sandberg, J. G., Bradford, A. B., & Brown, A. (2014). Insecure attachment behavior and partner violence: Incorporating couple perceptions of insecure attachment and relational aggression. *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy*, *40*(4), 412-429.
- Page, M. E., & Stevens, A. H. (2005). Understanding racial differences in the economic costs of growing up in a single-parent family. *Demography*, *42*(1), 75-90.
- Péloquin, K., Brassard, A., Lafontaine, M. F., & Shaver, P. R. (2014). Sexuality examined through the lens of attachment theory: Attachment, caregiving, and sexual satisfaction. *The Journal of Sex Research*, *51*(5), 561-576.
- Preacher, K. J., & Leonardelli, G. J. (2001). Calculation for the Sobel test: An interactive calculation tool for mediation tests [Computer software].

- Renaud, C., Byers, E. S., & Pan, S. (1997). Sexual and relationship satisfaction in mainland China. *Journal of Sex Research, 34*(4), 399-410.
- Sandberg, J. G., Bradford, A. B., & Brown, A. P. (2015). Differentiating between attachment styles and behaviors and their association with marital quality. *Family Process*. Advance online publication. doi:10.1111/famp.12186.
- Sandberg, J. G., Busby, D. M., Johnson, S. M., & Yoshida, K. (2012). The brief accessibility, responsiveness, and engagement (BARE) scale: A tool for measuring attachment behavior in couple relationships. *Family Process, 51*(4), 512-526.
- Sandberg, J. G., Novak, J. R., Davis, S. Y., & Busby, D. M. (2016). The brief accessibility, responsiveness, and engagement scale: A tool for measuring attachment behaviors in clinical couples. *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy, 42*(1), 106-122.
- Sevene, A., Akrouf, B., Galimard-Maisonneuve, E., Kutneh, M., Royer, P., & Sevène, M. (2009). Multiple sclerosis and sexuality: A complex model. *Sexologies, 18*(2), 86-90.
- Shakerian, A., Nazari, A. M., Masoomi, M., Ebrahimi, P., & Danai, S. (2014). Inspecting the relationship between sexual satisfaction and marital problems of divorce-asking women in Sanandaj City family courts. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences, 114*, 327-333.
- Simpson, J. A. (1990). Influence of attachment styles on romantic relationships. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 59*(5), 971.
- Strait, J. G., Sandberg, J. G., Larson, J. H., & Harper, J. M. (2015). The relationship between family of origin experiences and sexual satisfaction in married couples. *Journal of Family Therapy, 37*(3), 361-385.

- Stephenson, K. R., Ahrold, T. K., & Meston, C. M. (2011). The association between sexual motives and sexual satisfaction: Gender differences and categorical comparisons. *Archives of Sexual Behavior, 40*(3), 607-618.
- Sugarman, D. B., & Hotaling, G. T. (1997). Intimate violence and social desirability: A meta-analytic review. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence, 12*, 275–290.
- Sullivan, T. N., Helms, S. W., Kliewer, W., & Goodman, K. L. (2010). Associations between sadness and anger regulation coping, emotional expression, and physical and relational aggression among urban adolescents. *Social Development, 19*(1), 30-51.
- Trompeter, S. E., Bettencourt, R., & Barrett-Connor, E. (2012). Sexual activity and satisfaction in healthy community-dwelling older women. *The American Journal of Medicine, 125*(1), 37-43.
- Trudel, G., & Goldfarb, M. R. (2010). Marital and sexual functioning and dysfunctioning, depression and anxiety. *Sexologies, 19*(3), 137-142.
- Van IJzendoorn, M. H., & Sagi, A. (2008). Cross-cultural patterns of attachment: Universal and contextual dimensions. In J. Cassidy & P. R. Shaver (Eds.), *Handbook of attachment: Theory, research, and clinical applications* (2nd ed., pp. 880–905). New York: Guilford Press.
- Verhulst, J., & Heiman, J. R. (1988). A systems perspective on sexual desire. In Leiblum, S. R., Rosen, R. C. (Eds.), *Sexual desire disorders* (pp. 243-270). New York: Guilford Press.
- Whiting, J. B., Oka, M., & Fife, S. T. (2012). Appraisal distortions and intimate partner violence: Gender, power, and interaction. *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy, 38*, 133–149.
- Wiebe, S. A., & Johnson, S. M. (2016). A review of the research in emotionally focused therapy for couples. *Family Process, 55*(3), 390-407.

- Wilson, J. B. (2011). Exploring the influence of dyadic adult attachment on physical, sexual, and relational aggression within romantic relationships (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, OK.
- Woolley, S. R., & Johnson, S. M. (2005). Creating secure connections: Emotionally focused couples therapy. In Lebow, J. (Ed.), *Handbook of clinical family therapy*, (pp. 384-405). New York: John Wiley & Sons.
- Yan, X. Y., Huang, S. M., Huang, C. Q., Wu, W. H., & Qin, Y. (2011). Marital status and risk for late life depression: A meta-analysis of the published literature. *Journal of International Medical Research*, 39(4), 1142-1154.
- Yeh, H. C., Lorenz, F. O., Wickrama, K. A. S., Conger, R. D., & Elder Jr, G. H. (2006). Relationships among sexual satisfaction, marital quality, and marital instability at midlife. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 20(2), 339.
- Young, M., Denny, G., Luquis, R., & Young, T. (1998). Correlates of sexual satisfaction in marriage. *The Canadian Journal of Human Sexuality*, 7(2), 115.
- Yucel, D., & Gassanov, M. A. (2010). Exploring actor and partner correlates of sexual satisfaction among married couples. *Social Science Research*, 39(5), 725-738.

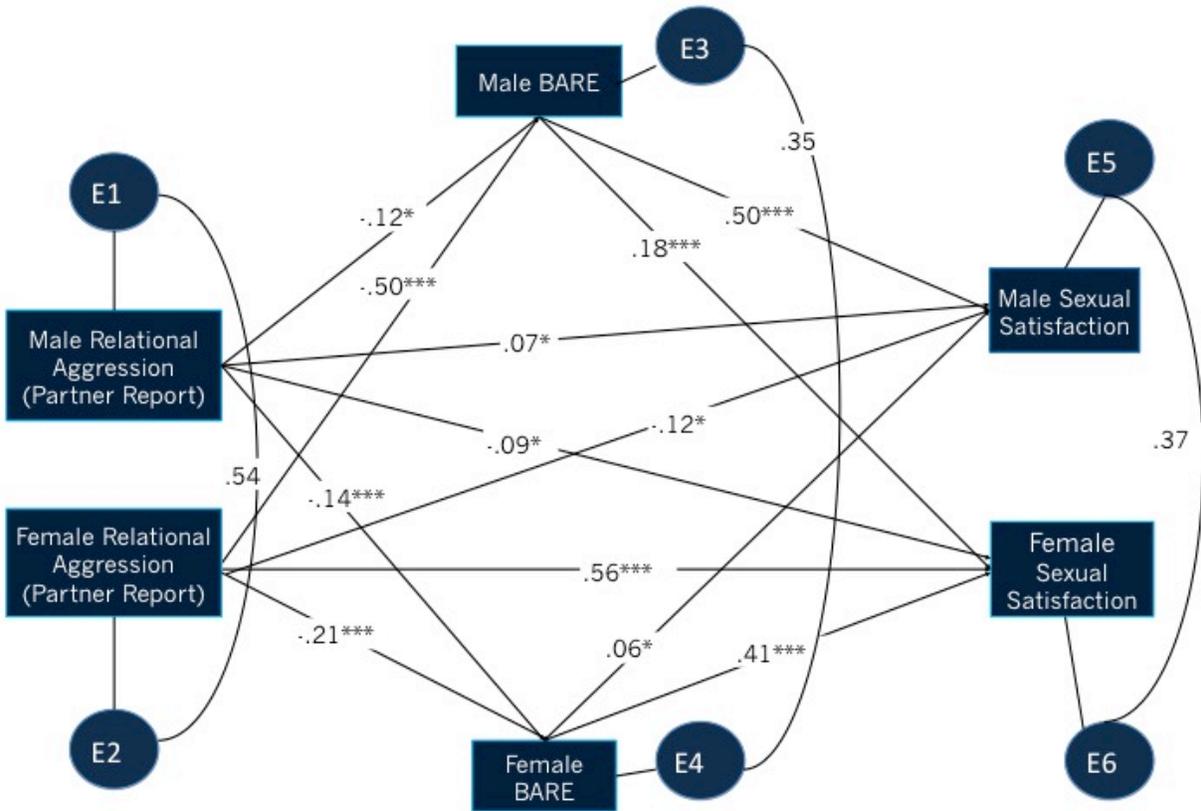
Table 1. *Correlations and Descriptive Statistics (N = 797)*

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Male sexual satisfaction	–					
2. Female sexual satisfaction	.48**	–				
3. Partner rated female BARE	.45**	-.61**	–			
4. Partner rated male BARE	.64**	.50**	.60**	–		
5. Partner rated female RA	-.45**	-.37**	-.49**	-.61**	–	
6. Partner rated male RA	-.33**	-.46**	-.62**	-.47**	.57**	–

\*\* $p < .01$ .

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6
M	20.9	21.8	23.0	23.9	12.4	11.2
<i>SD</i>	5.33	5.21	5.02	4.26	5.0	4.87
Range	6 – 30	6 – 30	7 – 30	7 – 30	7 – 35	7 – 35

Figure 1. *Fitted Model*



\*\*\* $p < .001$ , \* $p < .05$

*Coefficients are standardized*