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## **Dating and Sexual Satisfaction: The Roles of Demographics, Self-perceptions and Sexual Attitudes**

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## Dating and Sexual Satisfaction: The Roles of Demographics, Self-perceptions and Sexual Attitudes

### Abstract

The purpose of this study was to explore how levels of satisfaction with dating relationship and levels of satisfaction with sexual experiences vary based on demographic variables including age, religiosity, and political beliefs. This study also examined how dating and sexual satisfaction relate to sexual attitudes, self perceptions, and relationship anxiety and avoidance. There were 230 participants; 115 heterosexual couples who completed self-report questionnaires and in person interviews with research assistants. The average age of participants was 21.6 and 80% of participants were college students. Results indicated that age was positively correlated with dating satisfaction. Religiosity was negatively correlated with sexual satisfaction and political affiliation had no relation to dating or sexual satisfaction. With regards to sexual attitudes, sexual satisfaction was positively correlated with positive attitudes towards birth control, attitudes connecting intimacy and sexual intercourse, and sexual permissive attitudes. Regarding self perceptions, dating satisfaction was positively correlated with synthesis of one's sexual identity. Also, for women, self-ratings of physical attractiveness were positively correlated with sexual satisfaction. Dating satisfaction for both genders was negatively correlated with anxiety and avoidance in relationships. Also, for women, sexual satisfaction was negatively correlated with relationship avoidance. Lastly, results indicated that dating satisfaction was positively correlated with sexual satisfaction. These results suggest that a positive self view is important in sexual satisfaction. When females view themselves as more physically attractive and are less avoidant in their relationships, they tend to be more sexually satisfied. Politics played no role in sexual satisfaction, however, religion did, suggesting that the more religious a person is the less sexually satisfied they are. In our study, the older the participant, the more satisfied they were with their dating relationships. This could mean that as people age we find what we want and stick with it. And lastly our study shows that relationship anxiety and avoidance are not conducive for dating satisfaction.

# Dating and Sexual Satisfaction in Relation to Self Perception, Sexual Identity, Anxiety, and Demographics

## ABSTRACT

This study explores how satisfaction levels with dating relationships and sexual experiences vary based on demographic variables. The study examines how dating and sexual satisfaction relate to sexual attitudes, self perceptions, and relationship anxiety avoidance. Results indicated that positive correlations exist between dating satisfaction and age, dating satisfaction and synthesis of sexual identity, sexual satisfaction and positive attitudes towards birth control, attitudes connecting sexual intercourse with intimacy, dating satisfaction and sexual satisfaction, and women's self-rated physical attractiveness and sexual satisfaction. Negative correlations were found between religiosity and sexual satisfaction, dating satisfaction and relationship anxiety and avoidance, and women's sexual satisfaction and relationship anxiety and avoidance. Lastly, political affiliation was unrelated to dating or sexual satisfaction.

## INTRODUCTION

Romantic relationships can be an important part of life; however, it may be the quality of those romantic relationships that is most significant. So what variables may influence relationships to create a healthy and happy relationship? In this study we examined how relationships and sexual satisfaction are affected by demographic variables. Furthermore, we examined how dating and sexual satisfaction relate to sexual attitudes, self perceptions, and relationship anxiety and avoidance.

Prior research suggests that when women have higher levels of social anxiety, they also experience a lower relationship quality (Cuming, 2010), so being happy and secure in other interpersonal relationships may help you to create more positive romantic relationships. Another study found that when individuals described themselves and their partners, they were more likely to describe themselves as satisfied if they used phrases with ideas of warmth, generosity, and cooperativeness (Luckey, 1964). Having a positive view of yourself and your partner is also important to overall satisfaction. For women, a positive body image may also be an important fact. Pujols, et al. found a significant positive relationship between sexual satisfaction and body image (Pujols, et al, 2010). In this study we seek to find how demographic variables, sexual attitudes, and self perceptions influence sexual and relationship satisfaction. We also looked at gender differences in relationship anxiety and avoidance.

## METHODS

This study had a total of 230 participants, comprised of 115 heterosexual couples (115 men and 115 women). 198 participants identified as exclusively heterosexual, but all were current members of a heterosexual relationship. The average age of participants was 21.6 and the majority of participants were college students, 80%. Psychology 101 students self selected through the Internet program, Experimentrix, in order to participate in the study, and gain required class research participation credits.

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## RESULTS

### RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN DEMOGRAPHICS AND SEXUAL AND DATING SATISFACTION BY GENDER.

There was no significant relationship between sexual satisfaction and age for men ( $r = .11, p = .26$ ) or for women ( $r = -.12, p = .22$ ). There also was no significant correlation between dating satisfaction and religiosity for men ( $r = .09, p = .33$ ) or women ( $r = .01, p = .93$ ). Political affiliation was also not associated with dating satisfaction for either men ( $r = .00, p = 1.00$ ) or women ( $r = .03, p = .76$ ). There was not a significant correlation between men's sexual satisfaction and religiosity ( $r = -.02, p = .86$ ), or political affiliation ( $r = -.10, p = .92$ ). There is a not a significant correlation between men's dating satisfaction and age ( $r = -.05, p = .59$ ) or political affiliation ( $r = .00, p = 1.00$ ). There was a significant relationship for women between sexual satisfaction and religiosity ( $r = -.25, p = .01$ ), and between dating satisfaction and age ( $r = .348, p < .001$ ). For women, a negative correlation existed between sexual satisfaction and political affiliation ( $r = -.228, p = .02$ ). Relationship satisfaction was marginally positively correlated with positive attitudes towards birth control for women ( $r = .12, p = .19$ ), but not for men ( $r = .15, p = .00$ ). Relationship satisfaction was not correlated with sexual communion scores for either men ( $r = .08, p = .37$ ) or women ( $r = .14, p = .13$ ). Relationship satisfaction was marginally negatively correlated with sexual permissive attitudes for women ( $r = -.18, p = .06$ ) but not for men ( $r = -.08, p = .42$ ).

### SEXUAL ATTITUDES

Sexual satisfaction was marginally positively correlated with positive attitudes towards birth control for women ( $r = .17, p = .07$ ), but not for men ( $r = .15, p = .11$ ). Sexual satisfaction was positively correlated with communion scores for both men ( $r = .22, p = .02$ ) and women ( $r = .24, p = .01$ ). Sexual satisfaction was not correlated with sexual permissiveness for either men ( $r = .08, p = .41$ ) or women ( $r = .13, p = .18$ ).

### SELF-PERCEPTIONS AND SEXUAL IDENTITY

There was a marginally significant positive correlation between dating satisfaction and sexual identity synthesis for men ( $r = .16, p = .08$ ) but not for women ( $r = .12, p = .22$ ). Physical attractiveness was not associated with dating satisfaction for either men ( $r = .04, p = .65$ ) or women ( $r = .11, p = .26$ ). There was a positive correlation between sexual satisfaction and synthesis of one's sexual identity for both men ( $r = .25, p = .01$ ) and women ( $r = .19, p = .05$ ). For women, self-ratings of physical attractiveness were positively correlated with sexual satisfaction ( $r = .19, p = .05$ ), but not for men ( $r = .05, p = .57$ ).

### RELATIONSHIP ANXIETY AND AVOIDANCE IN RELATION TO SEXUAL SATISFACTION AND RELATIONSHIP SATISFACTION.

Dating satisfaction was negatively correlated with relationship anxiety for both men ( $r = -.23, p = .01$ ) and women ( $r = -.21, p = .03$ ). Dating satisfaction was also negatively correlated with relationship avoidance for both men ( $r = -.34, p = .00$ ) and women ( $r = -.39, p = .00$ ). Sexual satisfaction was not correlated with relationship anxiety for either men ( $r = .02, p = .82$ ) or women ( $r = -.07, p = .49$ ). Sexual satisfaction was negatively correlated with relationship avoidance for women ( $r = -.21, p = .03$ ) but not for men ( $r = -.08, p = .38$ ).

## DISCUSSION

The results of this study indicated that sexual satisfaction is not affected by age and that dating satisfaction was not affected by religiosity or political affiliation for both genders. Political affiliation and religion did not affect men's sexual satisfaction. Age and political affiliation did not affect men's dating satisfaction. However women's sexual satisfaction was affected by religiosity, this could be caused by societal attitudes about sex that come from religious views (Davidson, et al., 1995). Political affiliation also affected women's sexual satisfaction; liberal women reported greater sexual satisfaction.

Communication between partners is an important factor in sexual satisfaction for both men and women. It seems that positive attitudes towards birth control affect women's relationship and sexual satisfaction, but not men's. Relationship satisfaction was marginally negatively correlated with sexual permissive attitudes for women, but not for men. Sexual satisfaction was not correlated with sexual permissiveness for either men or women. Sexual satisfaction positively correlated with synthesis of one's sexual identity for both genders.

Physical attractiveness does not affect dating satisfaction for either men or women. Relationship anxiety negatively affects relationship satisfaction but not sexual satisfaction for both men and women. Sexual satisfaction was negatively correlated with relationship avoidance for women but not for men. When women are more satisfied with themselves, they are satisfied with their relationship and desire a relationship rather than avoiding intimacy. Dating satisfaction for both genders negatively correlated with anxiety and avoidance in relationships. This supports previous research done by Cuming and Rapee (2010).

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		Sexual Satisfaction	Romantic/Dating Satisfaction	Age	Religion	Political Affiliation	Birth Control	Communion	Permissiveness	MoSEIC synthesis integration	Physically Attractive	Anxiety Experiences	Avoidance Experiences
Sexual Satisfaction	M	1.00	.36***	.11	-.02	-.01	.15	.22*	.08	.25**	.05	.02	-.08
	F	1.00	.42***	-.12	-.25***	-.23*	.17+	.24*	.13	.19*	.19*	-.07	-.21*
Romantic/Dating Satisfaction	M	.36***	1.00	-.5	.09	.00	.158+	.08	-.08	.16+	.04	-.23*	-.34***
	F	.42***	1.00	-.35***	.02	.03	.12	.14	-.18+	.12	.11	-.21*	-.39***

+  $p < .10$ , \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$