

Sexual motivation and satisfaction in monogamous and consensual non- monogamous re...



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Introduction

Reading mass media articles is the way in which the general population often learns about psychological research. Aspects of romantic relationships are popular topics for these articles; however, they often feature unfounded claims and rarely share results from academic studies. One new area of research that is being discussed frequently in mass media is consensual non-monogamy. Open relationships, in which each partner agrees to engage in multiple sexual or romantic relationships, are becoming more prevalent in North America. Approximately four percent of the population is in a non-monogamous relationship, however, a stigma still surrounds the topic. This style of relationship is often viewed as immoral or less satisfying than monogamous pairings, although research has often shown otherwise (“Open Relationships Just As Satisfying,” 2018). As research on consensual non-monogamous relationships is a relatively new field and there are few published studies, it is important that the media is representing this work accurately in order to increase knowledge and reduce stigma.

The mass media article “Open Relationships Just as Satisfying as Monogamous Ones, Study Reveals” published on phys.org discusses relationship satisfaction in monogamous and consensual non-monogamous relationships. The author makes two major claims based on the results of a study by Jessica Wood at the University of Guelph, “Reasons for Sex and Relational Outcomes in Consensually Non-Monogamous and Monogamous Relationships.” The primary claim being that individuals in both monogamous and consensual non-monogamous relationship structures experiences similar levels of psychological well being and sexual satisfaction. <https://assignbuster.com/sexual-motivation-and-satisfaction-in-monogamous-and-consensual-non-monogamous-relationships/>

The secondary claim of the article is that sexual motivation is closely related to relationship satisfaction, where individuals with intrinsic motives for engaging in sexual behaviour are more satisfied with their partner (“Open Relationships Just As Satisfying,” 2018).

In the academic article, Wood and colleagues incorporate three exploratory questions and made hypotheses based on the Self-Determination Theory, which emphasizes the importance of psychological needs to relational well being and distinguishes between autonomous and controlled motivations (Wood, Desmarais, Burleigh, Milhausen, 2018). They hypothesized that self-determined motives will be positively related to sexual need satisfaction and to relationship and sexual satisfaction, that sexual need satisfaction will be positively related to relationship and sexual satisfaction, and that sexual need satisfaction will mediate the relationship between self-determined sexual motivation and relationship/sexual satisfaction (Wood et al., 2018). A total of 348 participants were included in the study, 206 monogamous individuals and 142 consensual non-monogamous individuals, who completed a survey that assessed relationship agreements, sexual motives, need satisfaction, relationship satisfaction, and sexual satisfaction (Wood et al., 2018).

The claims made within the mass media article reflect the results of the academic article, however, they leave out some critical information. The researchers conducted two moderated mediational analyses to determine whether associations between sexual motives, need fulfilment, and relationship outcomes were affected by the structure of the relationship. It was found that relational structure did not have a significant impact on the <https://assignbuster.com/sexual-motivation-and-satisfaction-in-monogamous-and-consensual-non-monogamous-relationships/>

association between self-determined motives and relationship satisfaction, through sexual need fulfilment or the indirect link between sexual motives and sexual satisfaction (Wood et al., 2018). In addition, using an analysis of covariance the researchers found no significant differences between consensual non-monogamous and monogamous participants in reported levels of relationship satisfaction (Wood et al., 2018). These two results provide evidence for the mass media article's claim that individuals experience the same levels of satisfaction regardless of the relationship structure. It was further discovered that self-determined sexual motives had an indirect impact on relationship satisfaction through the effect on sexual need satisfaction but no significant direct link was observed between the two variables. Similarly, the association between sexual motives and sexual satisfaction are mediated by sexual need satisfaction and no direct impact was observed (Wood et al., 2018). These findings support the mass media article's claim that sexual motivation is related to relationship satisfaction and that individuals with intrinsic motives are more satisfied.

Although the mass media article's claims are not unfounded, they leave out some critical information. It is mentioned within the academic article that this is a quasi-causal mediational framework on correlational data and that it is possible that the associations work in opposite directions (Wood et al., 2018), however, the mass media article does not mention this. In the short paragraph they dedicate to this finding the data is presented as though it is a causal relationship. A major detail that the author leaves out is the fact that these variables are mediated by sexual need fulfilment. Another issue with the academic article is the lack of diversity in the participants. Although

there was a range of genders, ethnicities, and education levels, the majority of the participants were white, cisgender individuals with post-secondary education. The mass media article fails to acknowledge that without better representation of other populations these results may not generalize to all individuals. The final issue that the mass media article ignores is that this study only addresses motives and satisfaction with an individual's primary partner in consensual non-monogamous relationships. While there may be similar results between monogamous pairings and primary partners within open relationships, this study does not examine relationship and sexual satisfaction with secondary partners and it cannot be concluded that these associations work in the same ways. Overall, the claims made by the mass media article are accurate but are simplified and do not address concerns with the study.

Literature Review

The study “Reasons for Sex and Relational Outcomes in Consensually Non-Monogamous and Monogamous Relationships” (Wood et al., 2018) is the first to compare the relationship between sexual motives, need fulfilment, and satisfaction in multiple relationship structures. The two important areas of research to consider when discussing this topic are sexual motives in relation to satisfaction and consensual non-monogamy as a whole.

Sexual Motivation

A popular topic in relationship literature is sexual motivation and the impact it has on satisfaction. However, much of this work reflects only monogamous couples. Wood and colleagues (2018) used self-determination theory as a <https://assignbuster.com/sexual-motivation-and-satisfaction-in-monogamous-and-consensual-non-monogamous-relationships/>

framework for their research on how sexual motives relate to need fulfilment and relationship outcomes in both monogamous and consensual non-monogamous relationships. Sexual motives can be separated into intrinsic and extrinsic motivations, where intrinsic motivations relate to more self-determined motives. Intrinsic motives include having sex because it is pleasurable or other internal reasons, while extrinsic motives include having sex to avoid upsetting a partner or other external reasons (Wood et al., 2018). Self-determination theory posits that engaging in sexual behaviour for self-determined motives leads to greater satisfaction and engaging in sexual behaviour for extrinsic reasons will negatively impact the relationships over time.

An alternate way to separate sexual motivations is to define them as approach and avoidance motives. An individual is engaging in sex for approach motives when they seek to obtain positive outcomes from the behaviour (Impett, Peplau, & Gable, 2005). Alternatively, an individual is engaging in sex for avoidance motives when they are trying to avoid negative outcomes from the behaviour (Impett et al., 2018). A study by Impett and colleagues (2005) examined how these motives for engaging in sexual behaviour related to personal well-being and overall relationship quality. The researchers had dating couples complete a two-week daily experience study in order to assess how the relationship between the variable in each member of the relationship. As expected, the results indicate that engaging in sexual behaviour for approach goals is positively associated with well-being while engaging in sexual behaviour for avoidance goals is negatively associated with well-being (Impett et al., 2018). The

perception of a partner's motives were also related to well-being where perceptions of approach goals were associated with greater relationship satisfaction and perception of avoidance goals were associated with less satisfaction (Impett et al., 2018). Based on a follow up survey one month after the original data was collected, it was also found that avoidance motives were negatively associated with relationship satisfaction over time (Impett et al., 2018). An interesting finding to note is that it sexual desire was not associated with well-being, which contradicts the results of a 2013 study by Muise, Impett, and Desmarais.

Muise and colleagues also examine the relationship between sexual goals and sexual and relational satisfaction using approach and avoidance motivation to describe the reasons why individuals engage in sexual behaviour. Three separate studies were conducted to analyze the specific effects that pursuing sex for approach or avoidance goals has on satisfaction. In the first study participants read hypothetical scenarios where an individual engaged in sex for either approach or avoidance motives and rated that individual's relationship satisfaction, sexual satisfaction, and level of desire (Muise et al., 2018). The results of these ratings indicate that sexual desire mediates the association between sexual goals and relationship and sexual satisfaction (Muise et al., 2018). The second and third studies involved dyadic daily experience studies of short-term (study 2) and long-term (study 3) couples. The results from these studies indicate approach goals lead to greater satisfaction and avoidance goals lead to lower satisfaction, through their relationships with sexual desire (Muise et al., 2018). In addition, a 4-month follow up of the third study also indicated that

frequently having sex for avoidance goals was negatively related to relationships satisfaction over time (Muise et al., 2018), which supports the findings of Impett and colleagues (2005). Overall, this study provides support for the theory that sexual desire mediates the relationship between sexual motives and satisfaction.

A study by Stephenson and colleagues (2010) analyzed a range of sexual motivations to discover which were related to sexual satisfaction and whether gender differences exist between them. In contrast to approach and avoidance motives, this study examines a wider range of sexual motives by using the YSEX? Questionnaire, however, the items chosen from this survey best-matched items used to measure approach and avoidance motivation in Impett's 2005 study (Stephenson, Ahrold, & Meston, 2010). Undergraduate students completed this questionnaire, which assessed their sexual satisfaction, sexual motives, and other covariates. The results suggest that for women, the motives related to sexual satisfaction include love/commitment, self-esteem, expression, pleasure, resources, and experience seeking while for men the motives were love/commitment, self-esteem, and resources (Stephenson et al., 2010). Compared to the approach and avoidance theory, it found that the categories presented in the YSEX? questionnaire better accounts for variance in satisfaction ratings (Stephenson et al., 2010). This study provides an alternate measure of sexual motivation and suggests that sexual motivation and satisfaction may operate differently in men and women.

Research on the relationship between sexual motives and sexual and relationship satisfaction is a growing area with some conflicting results. <https://assignbuster.com/sexual-motivation-and-satisfaction-in-monogamous-and-consensual-non-monogamous-relationships/>

Multiple studies have suggested that there is, in fact, a mediator between these two variables but disagree on what that mediator is. Within the discussed research there has been support for both sexual desire and sexual need fulfilment being the mediating factor. It is possible that there may be more than one mediator that has an affect on sexual motives and satisfaction; however, more research needs to be conducted to determine if this is the case. One agree of this research that has consistent results is the fact that certain motives have a positive effect on sexual and relationship satisfaction while other motives have a negative effect. The idea that intrinsic and approach goals are positively associated with satisfaction and that extrinsic and avoidance goals are negatively associated with satisfaction has much support. Overall, it appears that sexual motives have a definite (direct or indirect) effect on sexual and relationship satisfaction but it is unclear which mediating factors are involved.

Consensual Non-Monogamy

Research on consensual non-monogamous relationships is a relatively new field of study. Previously, research on non-monogamy has assessed the attitudes people hold towards those types of relationships. In general, people hold negative beliefs about non-monogamous relationships; however, these relationships may be a stable and valid alternative to monogamy (Wood et al., 2018). Research regarding sexual satisfaction has focused primarily on monogamous relationships and while these individuals often report engaging in sex for intrinsic reasons, it is possible that there may be differences in consensual non-monogamous individuals as there is a greater emphasis placed on sex in these relationships (Wood et al., 2018). Wood and <https://assignbuster.com/sexual-motivation-and-satisfaction-in-monogamous-and-consensual-non-monogamous-relationships/>

colleagues designed their study to examine the mechanisms that affect need fulfilment and relationship satisfaction as well as how these mechanisms and satisfaction differ for monogamous and consensual non-monogamous relationships (Wood et al., 2018). Applying the SDT perspective to both monogamous and consensual non-monogamous relationships allowed the researchers to compare the difference in sexual motives and examine how that impacts overall satisfaction (Wood et al., 2018).

Another study that compares both monogamous and non-monogamous individuals looks at how the structure of the relationship affects relationship quality (Seguin, Blais, Goyer, Adam, Lavoie, Rodrigue, & Magontier, 2016). A large sample of participants who were either in a monogamous, open, or polygamous relationship at the time of the study completed a questionnaire regarding relationship agreement, relationship quality, and relationship equity (Seguin et al., 2016). The results show that participants in each relationship agreement have high levels of relationship quality and equity, regardless of their gender or sexual orientation (Seguin et al., 2016). These findings are supported by the results of the study by Wood and colleagues who found that individuals in monogamous and consensual non-monogamous relationships experience similar levels of satisfaction. This study by Seguin and colleagues is significant because it is one of the first to examine relationship quality with a large sample ($n = 3463$) of both monogamous and non-monogamous individuals. Although it does not discuss the factors that contribute to relationship quality in satisfaction, it provides a framework for future research on the differences and similarities between alternative relationship structures.

Mitchell and colleagues (2014) examined need fulfilment in polyamorous relationships; specifically how need fulfilment in one relationship is related to relationship satisfaction in commitment in another romantic relationship. This study is unique because it focuses on two of the individual's partners rather than only one of the partners. The researchers proposed three models that could explain need fulfilment in polyamorous relationships: the additive model, the contrast model, and the compensation all model (Mitchell, Bartholomew, & Cobb, 2014). The additive model suggests that need fulfilment with one partner enhances relationship satisfaction with another partner, the contrast model suggests that need fulfilment with one partner is negatively related to relationship satisfaction with another partner, and the compensational model suggests that individuals compensate for low need fulfilment in one relationship by filling them with another (Mitchell et al., 2014). The results provide some evidence for the contrast model; need fulfilment with one partner was somewhat associated with lower satisfaction with the other partner (Mitchell et al., 2014). However, only 1% of the variance in satisfaction with a partner was predicted by need fulfilment with another partner and need fulfilment was consistently high with both partners across all participants (Mitchell et al., 2014). This study, again, is consistent with the findings of Wood and colleagues regarding relationship satisfaction in consensual non-monogamous relationships.

Aside from the 2018 study by Wood and colleagues, there has been little research on sexual motives of non-monogamous individuals and how these motives relate to sexual satisfaction. However, a good amount of research on polygamous relationships, in general, is emerging. This research is

important in reducing the stigma that surrounds the topic and providing the general public with important information about alternative relationship structures. The studies previously addressed have limitations that affect the generalizability of their findings. One major issue is the fact that most participants in these studies are cisgender, Caucasian, and well educated individuals. The research lacks diverse samples that allow the findings to generalize to other populations. Another issue with current non-monogamous research is that it often focuses on the relationship between an individual and their primary (and occasionally secondary) partner; this prevents researchers from drawing conclusions that represent all partners in these types of relationships. Overall, these studies make up a solid framework from which new research on consensual non-monogamy can expand.

Conclusion

The research conducted by Wood and colleagues (2018) builds on previous literature on both sexual motivation and consensual non-monogamy. It provides support for established theories, such as the idea that sexual motives impact sexual and relationship satisfaction and the idea that individuals in all relationship structures experience similar levels of well being. They also incorporate new ideas, suggesting that the mediating variable between sexual motives and satisfaction is sexual need fulfilment. The methods used in this study were appropriate as they used established, valid measures to collect and analyze data. However, this study is not generalizable to all populations as it focuses on mainly cisgender, Caucasian, and well-educated individuals. Further experimental research on this topic with a larger, diverse sample is required for more generalizable conclusions <https://assignbuster.com/sexual-motivation-and-satisfaction-in-monogamous-and-consensual-non-monogamous-relationships/>

to be made. Overall, the conclusions of this study are plausible but as the results are correlational in nature, no concrete conclusion can be drawn.

The mass media article that addresses this research provides accurate statements based on the results of the study. The article does a good job of representing this field of research as a whole as the claims made are representative of findings in all previously mentioned studies. Compared to other online sources publishing relationship related articles, phys. org has well written articles that reflect current literature. It appears that this website is publishing accurate content for their readers and is a good source for learning about current psychological findings.

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