

COMPONENTS OF SEXUAL SATISFACTION AS IDENTIFIED BY EMERGING ADULTS

by

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## **Abstract**

**Background and Objectives:** Presented are the preliminary findings of an examination of sexual satisfaction as identified by college students. The goal of the present research is to examine how sexually active, heterosexual emerging adults rated the importance of various factors to sexual satisfaction during partnered sexual activity. **Method:** Self-reported, anonymous electronic surveys were administered to a convenience sample of 2151 undergraduate students in a required personal health class. **Results:** The majority of both males and females indicated that all but one of the 27 satisfaction factors presented were “somewhat important” or “important” to their own satisfaction during partnered sexual activity, but differences are identified.

**Conclusions:** Positive and sexually satisfying experience are critical foundational components for sexually healthy adults. This data may inform sexual health curricula that satisfaction is an important component to incorporate into education.

## **Introduction**

The World Health Organization (WHO) revised its widely cited definition of sexual health to include “having *pleasurable* and safe sexual experiences” (WHO, 2006). Sexuality researchers and educators agree and have urged the incorporation of the concepts of desire, pleasure, and satisfaction in comprehensive sex education (Allen, 2007; Allen & Carmody, 2012; World Association for Sexual Health, 2019). *Facing Facts: Sexual Health for America’s Adolescents*, the National Commission on Adolescent Sexual Health concluded that a key developmental task of adolescence is to achieve a healthy sense of sexuality and that sex education should adopt a positive approach that helps adolescents develop a sexual identity (Haffner, 1995). Higgins et al. (2011) conducted research that solicited participant personal

assessment of overall sexual satisfaction without examination of event-specific determinants of that personal assessment. The goal of the present research was to examine how sexually active, heterosexual emerging adults rated the importance of various factors related to sexual satisfaction during partnered sexual activity.

## **Methods**

This research will aim to collect data about emerging adults' thoughts on sexual pleasure. The population consists of undergraduates, who were 25 years old or younger at a large southeastern university. To explore this population's insight, a survey was administered through Qualtrics for extra credit survey in a health class, using a researcher-developed instrument included demographic items (age, sex, race, class standing) and items about relationship status, sexual orientation, sexual history, and masturbation comfort. The participant demographics are detailed in *Figure 1.0 Sex*, *Figure 1.1 Race*, *Figure 1.2 Relationship Status*, *Figure 1.3 Sex Partners*. A five-point Likert scale was utilized, and respondents rated a list of 27 items in terms of how important they were to sexual satisfaction during sexual activity with a partner. Twenty-Seven sexual satisfaction items were chosen after a conducting focus groups with 80 students from a sophomore level sexual health class and reviewing other relevant instruments and findings in the literature (Kleinplatz et al., 2009; Štulhofer, Buško & Brouillard, 2011). For the newly developed sexual satisfaction items, the Cronbach Alpha was .947 (.98 for females and .978 for males). Preliminary research findings were presented at the Research Creative Achievement Week and State of North Carolina Undergraduate Research and Creativity Symposium.

<b>Participants</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Sex</b>	
Female	35.1%
Male	64.7%

*Figure 1.0 Sex*

<b>Participants</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Race</b>	
White (Non-Hispanic)	67.8%
Black (Non-Hispanic)	18.8%
Hispanic or Latino	5.6%
Asian or Pacific Islander	3.5%
American Indian or Alaskan Native	1.3%
Other	3.0%

*Figure 1.1 Race*

<b>Participants</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Relationship Status</b>	
Single	49.0%
Exclusive Relationship	40.3%
Complicated Relationship Status	9.8%
Other	0.9%

*Figure 1.2 Relationship Status*

<b>Participants</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Number of Sex Partners</b>	
0-3 Partners	86.3%
4-7 Partners	10.3%
8-12 Partners	2.0%
>12 Partners	1.4%

*Figure 1.3 Sex Partners*

## **Results**

The results are detailed in *Figure 2.0: Results*. The results that majority (>50%) for “Very Unimportant” were “We have Anal Sex”. There were no items that were >50% for “Mostly Unimportant”, “Somewhat Important”, or “Important”. The items that >50% of respondents deemed as “Very Important” were: “I feel desire for my partner”; My partner expresses desire for me”; “My partner is focused and “into it””; “I am comfortable with my partner (It’s not awkward)”; “My partner expresses his/her satisfaction during sex”; “My partner is concerned about my satisfaction”; “I have an emotional connection to my partner”; “I (or my partner) do not

experience unwanted physical discomfort or pain”; “My partner (or I am) able to obtain and maintain an erection”; “We have vaginal intercourse”.

<b>Please rate the following in terms of how important they are to your sexual satisfaction during sexual activity with a partner...</b>	<b>Very Unimportant</b>	<b>Mostly Unimportant</b>	<b>Somewhat Important</b>	<b>Important</b>	<b>Very Important</b>
<b>I feel desire for my partner.</b>	3.0%	1.3%	7.7%	21.4%	66.6%
<b>My partner expresses desire for me.</b>	2.7%	1.1%	7.4%	19.1%	69.7%
<b>I experience orgasms.</b>	2.6%	6.2%	26.5%	33.7%	31.0%
<b>We spend time kissing/touching/car essing before intercourse.</b>	1.9%	3.4%	16.2%	33.6%	44.9%
<b>We spend time kissing/touching/car essing after intercourse.</b>	3.7%	10.9%	25.4%	30.4%	29.6%
<b>My partner gives me oral sex.</b>	7.5%	18.0%	30.7%	22.7%	21.2%
<b>I give my partner oral sex.</b>	11.5%	20.7%	31.8%	21.2%	14.8%
<b>My partner is “romantic”.</b>	3.1%	6.8%	23.8%	34.8%	31.3%
<b>My partner communicates with me about what he/she wants.</b>	2.3%	2.2%	14.2%	31.5%	49.9%
<b>My partner is willing to try different/new activities, positions, etc.</b>	2.4%	4.7%	20.6%	35.3%	36.9%

<b>My partner is focused and “into it”.</b>	2.2%	1.9%	8.2%	29.7%	58.0%
<b>I am comfortable with my partner (It’s not awkward).</b>	2.1%	1.7%	6.6%	19.7%	69.9%
<b>My partner expresses his/her satisfaction during sex.</b>	1.9%	2.3%	10.2%	33.0%	52.6%
<b>My partner expressed how much he/she loves/likes me.</b>	2.8%	5.3%	14.6%	29.7%	47.6%
<b>I am sober (or not too drunk/high).</b>	5.1%	12.4%	26.5%	24.4%	31.6%
<b>My partner is sober (or not too drunk/high).</b>	4.4%	11.3%	24.9%	26.2%	33.2%
<b>I have input on what we do during sex.</b>	2.2%	3.3%	16.0%	36.1%	42.4%
<b>I am (or my partner is) lubricated enough.</b>	2.2%	3.8%	14.0%	33.1%	46.9%
<b>My partner is concerned about my satisfaction.</b>	2.1%	2.8%	10.5%	33.6%	51.0%
<b>I have an emotional connection to my partner.</b>	3.1%	5.1%	14.1%	27.3%	50.3%
<b>My partner has “skills” (knows how to sexually satisfy me).</b>	2.1%	2.6%	15.3%	35.1%	44.8%
<b>I (or my partner) do not experience unwanted physical discomfort or pain.</b>	2.4%	2.6%	9.4%	26.3%	59.3%
<b>My partner (or I am) able to obtain and maintain an erection.</b>	2.3%	1.8%	9.0%	31.1%	55.9%
<b>My partner doesn’t (or I don’t)</b>	3.3%	5.1%	21.7%	36.2%	33.7%

<b>ejaculate too quickly.</b>					
<b>We have vaginal intercourse.</b>	2.6%	3.0%	12.1%	29.7%	52.6%
<b>We have anal intercourse.</b>	60.9%	13.1%	11.1%	7.8%	7.1%

*Figure 2.0 Results*

**Conclusion**

Findings revealed notable differences between four main demographical categories, males, females, respondents with 1-3 partners and respondents with >12 partners. The significant higher means for males included “I experience orgasm(s)” (.000); “My partner gives me oral sex” (.000); “I give my partner oral sex” (.002); “We have anal intercourse (.000). The significant higher means for females included all items EXCEPT: “I experience orgasm(s)” (.000); “My partner gives me oral sex” (.000); “I give my partner oral sex” (.002); “We have anal intercourse (.000); “My partner is willing to try different/new activities, positions etc.”. Respondents with 1-3 partners had the following items with significantly higher means: “I feel desire for my partner” (.006); “We spend time kissing/touching/caressing before intercourse” (.014); “My partner is romantic” (.030); “My partner expresses how much he/she loves/likes me.” (.002); “I am sober/not too drunk or high” (.000); “My partner is sober/not too drunk or high” (.000); “I have an emotional connection to my partner” (.000). For respondents with >12 partners, “We have anal intercourse” (.003) and “My partner gives me oral sex” (.002) had significantly higher means. This data concludes that some items that were deemed “Very Important” did not show in the significantly higher mean data. This confirms the need and necessity for sexual satisfaction education to be implemented within health education.

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