ACCURACY OF PARTNER PERCEPTION AND RELATIONSHIP SATISFACTION:

INVESTIGATING MASTURBATORY HABITS

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Research has demonstrated that the accuracy of an individual’s perception of his or her partner is generally positively related to the individual’s romantic relationship satisfaction. However, when perceiving negative or conflictual messages from a partner, an individual’s accuracy of perception is negatively associated with his or her romantic relationship satisfaction. Researchers have suggested that poor accuracy in perceiving negative messages might diffuse the negative intention in a way that is less impactful to the relationship. The present study was designed to investigate accuracy in the perception of sexual topics, specifically masturbatory habits. A sample of 93 married couples (186 individuals) responded to questions about (a) their own masturbatory behaviors and (b) their perception of their partners’ masturbatory behaviors to determine the accuracy of each partner’s perception of his or her partner. The association between accuracy and romantic and sexual relationship satisfaction was explored, along with one potential moderating variable: attitudes toward masturbation. Perceived reason for masturbating, perceived target of arousal during masturbation, and partner’s actual reason for masturbating all positively predicted an individual’s relationship satisfaction. Partner’s actual openness about masturbatory behaviors moderated the association between accuracy of partner perception of openness about masturbation and both relationship and sexual satisfaction. When partners were more open about masturbation, accuracy was a stronger positive predictor of relationship and sexual satisfaction than when partners were less open about masturbation. Results, limitations, areas for future research, and clinical implications are discussed.
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

In the United States approximately 95% of adults age 65 or older have been married at least once (Tamborini, 2007). Of those who enter into first marriages, nearly 50% will divorce; the divorce rate for subsequent marriages is even higher (Hurley, 2005). Couples with higher relationship satisfaction are less likely to divorce (Devine & Forehand, 1995). For married couples, relationship satisfaction is positively related to physical (South & Krueger, 2013) and psychological health (Whisman, 2007); while negative relational interactions predict lower levels of work satisfaction (Sandberg, Harper, Hill, Miller, Yorgason, & Day, 2013). Relationship satisfaction is also negatively associated with the occurrence of substance use disorders (Whisman, 2007) and extramarital affairs (Owen, Rhoades, & Stanley, 2013).

Dissatisfied couples who choose to divorce may experience lower mental and physical health than individuals who stay married (Amato, 2000). When divorce occurs in a family with children, there is evidence of lower psychological well-being and academic achievement in children of divorced parents (Amato, 2010). However, there is also research suggesting there may be variables that moderate this relationship (e.g., parents’ relationship satisfaction prior to the divorce; Strohschein, 2005). Thus, regardless of whether dissatisfied couples choose to remain married or seek divorce, relationship satisfaction during the marriage has several important psychological and physical implications for the adults as well as the children when present. It is important to understand what variables contribute to relationship satisfaction and differentiate those with high verses low levels of relationship satisfaction.

There are several important areas that have shown to be related to relationship satisfaction in married couples. One area of particular interest for the current dissertation project
is the accuracy of partner perception (i.e., the level of accuracy of beliefs that individuals hold about their partner’s thoughts, behaviors, and feelings; Kenny & Acitelli, 2001). Previous literature has demonstrated a variety of ways in which the accuracy of partner perception could be positively or negatively related to relationship satisfaction, varying largely as a result of the area of accuracy being assessed. Specifically, accuracy of partner perception is generally positively related to relationship satisfaction; however, when accurately perceiving a partner’s thoughts, feelings, or behaviors could lead to negative feelings in the perceiving spouse, it may be beneficial for the spouse to inaccurately perceive the spouse’s thoughts, feelings, or behaviors. One area that may bring up a great deal of tension and/or pleasure for many couples is sexuality. Despite the high level of emotionality often associated with sexuality, the research on accuracy of partner perception has not yet ventured into the sexual component of romantic relationships.

One area of sexuality that is underrepresented in the literature on relationship satisfaction is masturbation. Historically, this has been a difficult topic for many individuals, and even researchers or professionals, to discuss. This could explain why there is so little research on this topic, but it also suggests an even greater need to explore partner perception regarding masturbation given the high level of emotionality, as well as the variety of beliefs and values held about masturbation. If spouses are able to discuss their masturbatory habits openly, this could indicate greater openness, trust, or vulnerability in their marriage, which could have positive implications for their relationship satisfaction. However, partners could also have different beliefs regarding masturbation. In these cases, not discussing masturbation or not knowing what a partner believes or practices could be a way of avoiding conflict in the marriage. Given the void in the current literature, this topic needs to be explored in order to better
understand the ways in which perception of a partner’s masturbatory habits and its accuracy are related to relationship satisfaction.

The purpose of this dissertation is to explore the association between (a) accuracy of partner perceptions, particularly related to masturbatory habits, and (b) relationship satisfaction. Specifically, in Chapter 2, I review the empirical literature on the association between the accuracy of partner perception and relationship satisfaction. In Chapters 3 and 4, I present my proposed dissertation study that explores an individual’s perception of a spouse’s masturbatory habits, its accuracy, and the association between accuracy and relationship satisfaction. Specifically, in Chapter 3, I provide a statement of the problem that reviews the rationale for my study. In Chapter 4, I present the methodology for my empirical study, including my hypotheses and planned analyses. In Chapter 5, I present the analyses and results for each hypothesis. In Chapter 6, I discuss the findings in the context of the extant literature, including clinical implications, limitations of the present study, and areas for future research.
CHAPTER 2
REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Accuracy of Partner Perception and Relationship Satisfaction:
A Qualitative Review of the Literature

Introduction

In the United States, 50% of first marriages end in divorce with still higher proportions of divorce in subsequent marriages (Hurley, 2005). Relationship satisfaction is positively related to several important constructs including physical (South & Krueger, 2013) and mental health (Whisman, 2007). Yucel and Gassanov (2010) demonstrated that 23% of married women and 18% of married men remain in their marriages despite being reportedly unsatisfied. Over the past several years, research has begun to examine differing qualities between those who experience a high level of relationship satisfaction and those who experience a low level of relationship satisfaction. Positive predictors of relationship satisfaction include: (a) commitment (Owen, Rhoades & Stanley, 2013), (b) sexual satisfaction (Mark & Murray, 2012), (c) secure attachment style (Hadden, Smith, & Webster, 2014), and (d) attraction to spouse (Mark & Herbenick, 2014). Having a better understanding of these characteristics will allow researchers to better predict which couples will be more or less satisfied in their relationships. Additionally, this information may be useful in helping to improve marital relationship satisfaction if included in interventions.

One area that may be related to relationship satisfaction is the accuracy of an individual’s perception of one’s partner. Accurate perceptions could be related to greater relationship satisfaction due to an increased awareness of the partner’s needs and desires, which in turn could result in an increased opportunity to meet those needs, as well as a potential decrease in conflict
when needs are not met or meaning is not conveyed or understood. This is not to say that couples with accurate perceptions of one another will always agree; instead, they will be better able to utilize communication and conflict resolution strategies during their disagreements, which will inevitably occur. In support of this theorizing, Driver, Tabares, Shapiro and Gottman (2012) demonstrated that there were no differences between satisfied and unsatisfied couples in the amount of time they fought. Instead, what differentiated satisfied and unsatisfied couples is how they fight with one another. “Fighting fair” (Bach & Wyden, 1969) is a commonly used phrase referring to the basic principles of good communication and conflict resolution (i.e. no name calling, using “I” statements, not bringing up past significant others, etc.). Accurate perceptions of one another can be seen as both an impetus for and consequence of good communication.

There are many ways for couples to learn about one another (e.g., observation, experience, open dialogue). This increased knowledge facilitates an individual’s greater understanding of his or her partner, allowing the individual to better predict his or her partner’s thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. There is a breadth of literature examining constructs that are related to the accuracy of such predictions (e.g., anxious attachment style, Tucker & Anders, 1999) as well as different areas in which an individual can accurately predict his or her partner’s behavior, thoughts, and feelings (e.g., meaning of nonverbal communication, Koerner, & Fitzpatrick, 2002; empathic accuracy, Haugen, Welsh, & McNulty, 2008).

If accurate partner perceptions are related to positive relationship outcomes, inaccurate partner perceptions may be related to negative relationship outcomes. There are a several potential reasons for inaccurate perceptions of one’s partner: (a) disconnection from one another, (b) lying, (c) withholding, and (d) lack of partner awareness; all of which are negatively related
to relationships satisfaction. Inaccurate perceptions of one’s partner could also conceivably lead to these negative relationship outcomes, creating a cyclical pattern of negative relationship characteristics leading to inaccurate perceptions, which in turn lead to even greater levels of negative relationship outcomes.

Although there is theory and research supporting a positive association between accuracy of partner perception and relationship satisfaction, there is also support for a positive association between relationship satisfaction and constructs in direct opposition to accuracy of partner perception. For example, some researchers have argued that perceiving one’s partner as similar to oneself (an egocentric bias) is likely to be positively associated with relationship satisfaction regardless of whether or not that perception of similarity is accurate (Newark, Woody, & Ziff, 1977). While many researchers have viewed these as conflicting hypotheses, Lou and Snider (2009) found that both accuracy of partner perception and a similarity bias positively predict relationship satisfaction even when controlling for the effects of the other variable. Thus, both accuracy of perception and similarity could positive predict relationship satisfaction for different reasons. Accuracy of perception may align more closely with increased intimacy and better communication; whereas the similarly bias may align more closely with possible benefits associated with egocentrism.

A second reason why accuracy may not necessarily be associated with higher levels of relationship satisfaction is that it may be beneficial for individuals to have a positivity bias (i.e., viewing one’s partner more positively than he or she really is) when perceiving characteristics about romantic partners (Murray, Holmes, Bellavia, Griffin, & Dolderman, 2002). Viewing a partner more positively could strengthen one’s satisfaction with the relationship by increasing positive feelings and desire for the partner in the perceiver. Viewing a partner with a positive
bias could also be a consequence of high relationship satisfaction in order to reduce cognitive dissonance that could arise if an individual is highly satisfied but views his or her partner in an average or negative light. Similarly to the positivity bias, Sillars (1985) theorized that accurately understanding the private thoughts and feelings of another individual (i.e., empathic accuracy) could be detrimental when those private thoughts and feelings may negatively impact a relationship (e.g., irreconcilable differences, hurtful thoughts). In such instances, a less accurate perception of one’s partner could be related to higher levels of relationship satisfaction; in such cases, inaccuracy would serve to protect an individual from the truth when it could be detrimental to the relationship.

The present literature review seeks to better understand the association between accuracy of partner perceptions and relationship satisfaction. Overall, I hypothesize that there will be a positive association between accuracy of partner perception and relationship satisfaction. Based on the findings related to the positivity bias and negatively valenced thoughts and feelings discussed above, I further hypothesize that this association will be moderated by the valence of perceived content. Specifically, for positive or neutrally charged content, I hypothesize that the association between accuracy of partner perception and relationship satisfaction will be positive; however, for negatively charged content, I hypothesize that the association between accuracy of partner perception and relationship satisfaction will be negative. In addition to these two primary hypotheses, I will examine the extent to which gender moderates the association between accuracy of partner perceptions and relationship satisfaction. This research question is exploratory in nature, as I do not have a specific hypothesis.
Method

I conducted a literature review search for articles examining perceptual accuracy in couples and relationship satisfaction. To identify articles examining this relationship, I conducted searches on PsycInfo and ProQuest Dissertations and Theses using relationship satisfaction or (marital) adjustment and accuracy couple(s) or accuracy of perceptions. This initial search yielded 57 unique articles or theses/dissertations. In order for a study to be included in this literature review it had to meet the following criteria: (a) is an empirical study, (b) reports a direct relationship between perceptual accuracy of partners in a romantic relationship and relationship satisfaction, and (c) is written in English or an English translation is available. Twenty-five studies met these criteria and are subsequently included in this literature review.

Results

The results section is divided into several sections. First, I describe the methods used to study the association between accuracy of partner perceptions and relationship satisfaction, including the study designs, description of participants, and the measures used. Second, I summarize the empirical findings on the association between accuracy of partner perceptions and relationship satisfaction.

Study Design

The 25 studies included in this literature review primarily utilized cross-sectional designs. Most studies \( (n = 22) \) were cross sectional with only a few \( (n = 3) \) utilizing a longitudinal design. When a longitudinal design was used, either relationship satisfaction was tested as a predictor of accuracy or accuracy was tested as a predictor of later relationship satisfaction. No studies included in this literature review used an experimental design.
Description of Participants

The 25 studies included in this literature review included 2024 heterosexual romantic couples for whom both the male and female partners were willing to participate in the study; one study examined an additional comparative group of 20 heterosexual friend couplets. The majority of studies specifically examined married couples \( (n = 11) \) or a combination of married and cohabitating couples \( (n = 4) \). Of these 15 studies, 3 included couples who were married but seeking divorce. Other studies looked exclusively at dating couples \( (n = 4) \) or a range of dating, cohabitating and married couples \( (n = 4) \). Finally, two studies used samples of engaged couples. For the 22 of 25 studies that reported age, the mean age was 30.63 years. Few studies provided information about race/ethnicity of the participants. Of these studies, most participants were Caucasian.

Measures of Relationship Satisfaction

There were two measures of relationship satisfaction that were used most consistently across studies: the Locke-Wallace Marital Adjustment Test (MAT; Locke-Wallace, 1959) or Short Form Test (MAT; Locke & Wallace, 1987) and Spanier’s Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS) (Spanier, 1976). Five studies used the MAT, six studies used the DAS, and two studies used both to assess for marital/dyadic adjustment. Two studies used the Quality of Marriage Index (QMI; Norton, 1983), and additional measures were used one time each (e.g., Relationship Satisfaction Scale, RSS, Levesque, 1993). The remaining studies either used a measure of relationship satisfaction created for their study or combined items from various exiting measures.

Measures of Accuracy of Partner Perceptions

Several aspects of partner perceptions were assessed in this literature. Specifically, researchers studied the perceptual accuracy of (a) empathy, (b) relational variables, (c)
communication, and (d) personality. Three additional studies did not look at these topics and instead studied intimate partner violence, “mind-reading” abilities (in the context of partnered games), and partner’s grieving.

The primary methods utilized to investigate the accuracy of couple perceptions were written questionnaires and review of video recordings. When written questionnaires were used, participants were typically asked to first complete a survey from his or her own perspective and second from the perceptive of his or her partner. In some instances, participants were more specifically directed to respond by guessing what his or her partner responded when completing the same survey. When video recordings were used, participants were video recorded engaging in a discussion, interaction or task with one another. They were then asked separately from one another to view the recordings and record (on paper) their thoughts/feelings at different moments or answer questionnaires assessing relevant variables. Next, participants were asked to view the same recording but complete the written task about their spouse rather than about themselves. In both written surveys and video recordings, accuracy scores were created by finding the absolute difference between partners’ reports on each item, generally resulting in the creation of a total or average discrepancy score to indicate the level of accuracy of each partner or the couple as a whole.

Empirical Findings on the Association between Accuracy of Partner Perception and Relationship Satisfaction

I now summarize the empirical findings on the association between accuracy of partner perceptions and relationship satisfaction. I organize this section by reviewing results in five areas of partner perceptions: (a) empathy (Table 1), (b) relational variables (Table 2), (c) communication (Table 3), (d) personality (Table 4), and (e) other (Table 5). In each area, I
review (a) the main effect for the relationship between accuracy of partner perceptions and relationship satisfaction and (b) potential moderator variables that influence this relationship.

**Empathic accuracy.** Empathic accuracy is the ability of an individual to accurately predict what his or her partner is feeling, and sometimes thinking, in a given moment; this is often evaluated during periods involving some level of distress. Seven studies examined empathic accuracy. The majority of these studies did so by utilizing a record and review procedure of an interaction or discussion the couple had with one another. Participants first reported their own thoughts and feelings at different moments in the video discussion/interaction and then reported the thoughts and feelings each participant thought his or her partner had at those same moments in the video. Overall, the majority of studies found a positive association between empathic accuracy and relationship satisfaction. Specifically, four studies found a positive association, two studies found no association, and one study found a negative association.

Gender was identified as a potential moderator of this association. Specifically, two studies explored gender differences in the association between empathic accuracy and relationship satisfaction. Although the designs of these studies were different, results indicated that men’s empathic accuracy might be beneficial for women’s relationship satisfaction, whereas women’s empathic accuracy might be less beneficial for their own relationship satisfaction. Specifically, one study (Mueller and Fiebert, 1988) found that women’s empathic accuracy was negatively associated with their relationship satisfaction but for men this relationship was not significant. Asking the question a different way, one study (Thomas & Fletcher, 2003) explored the association between empathic accuracy and relationship satisfaction of one’s partner. They
found that men’s empathic accuracy positively predicted women’s relationship satisfaction but the reverse was not significant.

There was also evidence that the level of conflict in the relationship moderated the association between empathic accuracy and relationship satisfaction. Two studies found that the association between empathic accuracy and relationship satisfaction was not significant. These two studies differed from the others in that there was a higher level of conflict between couples in both studies. Specifically, Dalton (2005) used a sample of distressed couples seeking counseling (some of whom were separated at the time of the study) and Drwal (2003) utilized the Relationship Problems Scale (RPS; Riggs, 1993) to structure the couples’ discussions on areas in which they had the most disagreement. These findings suggest that in situations where conflict is very high, empathic accuracy may not have as big an influence on relationship satisfaction.

**Accuracy of perception of relational variables.** Eight studies examined accuracy of partner perceptions of relational variables including: (a) satisfaction/security with one’s relationship/partner, (b) partner’s needs, and (c) beliefs/feelings about one’s relationship/partner. Six studies examined these variables exclusively through the use of written questionnaires; two studies utilized a video record and review procedure. Each of the eight studies found significant results, but the results were mixed. Four studies reported a positive association between accuracy of partner perception of relational variables and relationship satisfaction and the other four studies reported a negative correlation between accuracy of partner perception of relational variables and relationship satisfaction.

Gender was identified as a potential moderator of this association. Of the five studies that examined gender differences, four studies found that gender moderated this association and one study found that gender was not a significant moderator. In general, for men, the association
between accuracy of partner perception of relational variables and relationship satisfaction was mostly not significant with four studies reporting non-significant findings and one reporting a negative association. For example, Overall, Fletcher, and Kenny (2012) found a non-significant correlation between men’s accuracy in perceiving their partner’s regard and men’s relationship satisfaction. The findings for women are mixed. Two studies reported non-significant findings, two studies reported a negative association, and one study reported a positive association. For example, Rowan, Compton, and Rust (1995) found that the association between perception accuracy for the partner’s relationship satisfaction was positively associated with one’s own relationship satisfaction for women, but was not significant for men.

**Accuracy of perception of partners’ communication.** Five studies examined the accuracy of partner perception of communication. These studies examined three different forms of communication: (a) verbal cues, (b) nonverbal cues and (c) conflict resolution styles. Conflict resolution styles were operationalized as whether a participant engaged in conflict, positive problem solving, withdrawal or compliance. These studies involved in-lab video record and review procedures, at home videotaping, and an emotional expressiveness task guided by a researcher in the lab. The results of these studies are mixed. Two studies found a positive association between accuracy of partner perception and relationship satisfaction, two studies found a negative association, and one study did not find a significant association.

There was also evidence that gender moderated the association between accurate perception of communication and relationship satisfaction. The two studies that reported a significant negative association reported this finding only for female participants; for male participants, this association was non-significant.
The valence of the perceived content moderated the association between accurate perception of communication and relationship satisfaction. The two studies in which a negative association was reported found this association to be significant only when perceiving a partner’s level of conflict intention or negative messages. The remaining studies, which found significant positive and non-significant associations, did not limit interactions to negative feelings or messages. Instead, they included a range of positive, negative and, in some cases, neutral feelings and messages. These findings suggest that when the valence of the perceived content is negative, there may be a negative association between accuracy of partner perception of communication and relationship satisfaction; however when the communication is not limited to negative messages, there may be a positive association between accuracy of partner perception of communication and relationship satisfaction.

Since these two studies providing evidence for gender as a possible moderator are the same two studies described above as providing evidence for valence as a moderator of the association between accuracy of partner perception of communication and relationship satisfaction, it is possible that a three-way interaction is present. Specifically, when examining the accuracy of partner perception of only negative or conflictual content, research shows that for women this relationship is negatively associated with relationship satisfaction but for men it is not significantly associated with relationship satisfaction.

**Accuracy of perception of partner’s personality.** Four studies examined the association between accuracy of perception of a partner’s personality and relationship satisfaction. All of these studies used a written survey of personality; however, each utilized a different measurement of personality. Overall, most studies reported a significant positive association between accuracy in perception of partner’s personality and relationship satisfaction.
Specifically, three studies reported significant positive association and one study reported a non-significant association.

Gender was found to moderate the association between accurate perception of partner’s personality and relationship satisfaction. Specifically, two studies found significant results only when examining the association between the accuracy of the female partner in perceiving the male partner’s personality. This was positively correlated with her own relationship satisfaction, her partner’s relationship satisfaction, and overall dyadic adjustment. In these studies, the accuracy of the male partner was not significantly correlated with relationship satisfaction. These results provide some evidence that female’s accuracy of perception of partner’s personality is more strongly related to relationship satisfaction than male’s accuracy of perception of his partner’s personality.

Accuracy of perception of partner in other areas. Three studies included in this literature review examined accuracy in areas other than the four broad categories previously identified. These studies explored (a) perception of the occurrence of intimate partner violence, (b) perception of partner’s grief following a miscarriage, and (c) perception of partner’s choices in a structured game. These three studies used questionnaires and, in the case of the latter, an interactive game. Two of the studies found non-significant results. However, the study examining partner perceptions of the occurrence intimate partner violence perpetrated by male veterans found a significant negative correlation between wives’ accuracy and wives’ own relationship satisfaction; specifically, wives who reported less IPV than their partners reported had higher levels of relationship satisfaction. Since correlations between husband’s accuracy and relationship satisfaction were not provided, it is unclear whether a gender difference is present. However, this finding could support the idea that accuracy in perceptions of negatively
charged relationship constructs could in fact be negatively associated with relationship satisfaction.

**Summary.** Overall, there was a significant positive relationship between accuracy of partner perceptions and relationship satisfaction. Specifically, thirteen studies reported a positive relationship, eight studies reported a negative relationship, and six studies reported a non-significant relationship. This positive relationship appears most consistent when examining empathic accuracy and accuracy of perception of partner’s personality. The results examining the accuracy of partner perception of relational variables and communication were largely mixed.

There was also evidence for two moderator variables of the association between accuracy of partner perception and relationship satisfaction. First, there was some evidence that gender moderated this association. Specifically, a significant association between accuracy and relationship satisfaction was most likely when examining the accuracy of female partners’ perceptions. Only two of the eleven studies examining gender differences found significant results when exploring the relationship between accuracy of partner perception and relationship satisfaction in males. Eight of these same studies reported significant findings when examining this same relationship in women; specifically, these significant correlations in female subsamples were largely negative (3 positive, 5 negative, and 2 non-significant).

Second, the valence of the perception (positive or negative) may moderate the association between accuracy of partner perception and relationship satisfaction. Specifically, accurate perception of positive relational content appears to be more strongly related to relationship satisfaction than accurate perception of negative content. In fact, when the perceived content is negative, there is some evidence that women who are less accurate in their perceptions of their
husbands’ negative communication messages have higher levels of relationship satisfaction. There is insufficient research in the other three areas to draw conclusions about the moderating role of valence on the association between accuracy of partner perceptions and relationship satisfaction in those specific areas.

**Discussion**

The current literature on accuracy of partner perception and relationship satisfaction is primarily focused in four main areas: empathic accuracy, relational variables, communication, and personality. There appears to be some difference in the associations between accuracy of perception and relationship satisfaction when using different variables as a focus/measure of accuracy. The most consistent evidence for a positive associations between accuracy of partner perception and relationship satisfaction are in two areas: (a) empathic accuracy and (b) perception of partner’s personality. These two areas may have different mechanisms for their connections with more positive relationships. Empathic accuracy may be more closely linked to deeper emotional intimacy between partners, whereas one’s perception of a partner’s personality could be more closely linked to an objective knowing of the partner’s characteristics and tendencies. In sum, there is strong evidence for a positive association between accuracy of partner perception of each other and relationship satisfaction.

When examining the accuracy of partner perception of relational variables and communication, the current literature is mixed on the association between the two aforementioned areas of perceptual accuracy and relationship satisfaction. For partner perception of communication, there is evidence for positive, negative, and non-significant associations between accuracy and relationship satisfaction. This area appears to be largely moderated by the valence of what is being communicated. Specifically, accurate perceptions of
positive or neutral messages were associated with higher levels of relationship satisfaction, whereas accurate perceptions of negative messages were associated with lower levels of relationship satisfaction. When the target of perceptual accuracy is a relational variable, significant associations were found between accuracy and relationship satisfaction; however, in half the studies this association was positive and in half this association was negative.

Across all four areas of perceptual targets, there was evidence for gender differences. Specifically, analyses generally revealed non-significant findings for men and largely mixed, but primarily negative associations between perceptual accuracy and relationship satisfaction for women. These findings suggest perceptual accuracy may more strongly predict women’s relationship satisfaction than men’s. Perhaps women place a higher value on understanding and accurately perceiving one’s partner than do men.

There are several limitations of this literature review. The literature on accuracy of partner perception and relationship satisfaction examines several different areas of accuracy, dividing the literature into smaller groups with less data per topic area. Therefore, it is more difficult to draw conclusions from areas with fewer studies. Also, the majority of studies used cross-sectional research designs. Therefore, causal conclusions cannot be derived from the current literature.

There are several limitations to generalizability of these findings as a result of the kinds of samples used in the studies included in this literature review. First, studies used different sample types (e.g., dating, cohabitating, married) so findings across different groups may not generalize to different types of samples. Second, all studies included in this literature review examined heterosexual couples, so findings may not generalize to sexual minority couples.
Third, all studies used samples of mostly Caucasian participants. Therefore, generalizability outside of heterosexual Caucasian couples is limited.

Based on the findings from the present literature review, there are several important implications for counseling. First, in general, accurate perceptions of one’s partner appear to be a good thing. Counseling interventions with couples could explore issues related to communication and perceptions of one’s partner, to help partners perceive each other accurately. Second, when deciding whether to implement interventions in couple counseling to increase accurate perceptions in partners, the valence (i.e., positive or negative information) of the perceived content should be considered. There was some evidence that accurately perceiving positive information was associated with higher relationship satisfaction, but accurately perceiving negative information was associated with lower relationship satisfaction. There may be certain situations in which it is more helpful to have some degree of inaccuracy or a positivity bias when perceiving one’s partner. Deciphering when increased accuracy in perception could be related to better or worse clinical outcomes will require clinical judgment, but the moderating effect of valence on the association between accuracy and relationship satisfaction can provide a beginning framework from which to start. Third, counselors could consider whether men and women might place more or less importance on accurate perceptions of one’s partner. Based on the results of this literature review, accurate perceptions may be more important for women than men. Fourth, in couple’s counseling it is important to obtain both partners’ perceptions of the other (as well as each partner’s self-report) to determine the level of accuracy and gather a more well-rounded clinical picture of relational functioning. Finally, for couples struggling with differences in perceptions, it may be helpful to implement interventions to increase awareness, acceptance of differences, or viewing the partner positively in spite of differences.
While there is some understanding of the important role of accuracy of partner perception in the current literature, more research is needed to better understand whether these associations remain constant across different types of relationships. Additionally, research should further investigate other areas of partner perception outside of the primary four addressed in the current literature. Future research could also explore the contexts in which (a) having an accurate perception of one’s partner and (b) viewing the partner more positively would be more helpful, in regard to relationship satisfaction. Future research should also examine accuracy of perceptions and relationship satisfaction in sexual and racial ethnic minority couples. Such research would generate a more complete understanding of the role of accuracy of partner perception in relational wellbeing.
CHAPTER 3

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Ninety-five percent of adults age 65 or older in the United States have been married at least once (Tamborini, 2007). Nearly 50% of first marriages and an even higher proportion of subsequent marriages end in divorce (Hurley, 2005). This means that about 50% of Americans are getting divorced at least once in their lives. Families in which divorce occurs often experience a short-term and sometimes long-term adjustment period with negative psychological ramifications. For example, dissatisfied couples who choose to divorce may experience lower mental and physical health than individuals who stay married (Amato, 2000). When divorce occurs in a family with children, there is evidence of lower psychological well-being and academic achievement in children of divorced parents (Amato, 2010). However, there is further research to suggest the relationship between divorce and negative outcomes in children is moderated by variables such as parents’ relationship satisfaction prior to the divorce (Strohschein, 2005).

Yucel and Gassanov (2010) demonstrated that 23% of married women and 18% of married men remain in their marriages despite being reportedly unsatisfied. For married couples, relationship satisfaction is positively related to physical (South & Krueger, 2013) and psychological health (Whisman, 2007), as well as work satisfaction (Sandberg, Harper, Hill, Miller, Yorgason, & Day, 2013). Relationship satisfaction is negatively associated with the occurrence of substance use disorders (Whisman, 2007) and extramarital involvement (Owen, Rhoades, & Stanley, 2013). Therefore, for both dissatisfied couples who choose to remain married and for those who seek divorce, relationship satisfaction during the marriage has several important psychological and physical implications for the individuals and children, when
present. It is important to understand what variables contribute to relationship satisfaction and differentiate those with high verses low levels of relationship satisfaction.

Accuracy of partner perception has been theorized to be a positive predictor of relationship satisfaction due to the heightened intimacy and improved communication associated with greater accuracy. Previous literature has demonstrated a variety of ways in which accuracy of partner perception could be positively or negatively related to relationship satisfaction varying largely as a result of the area of accuracy being assessed (See Chapter 2). This literature has primarily explored increased intimacy and better communication as the positive underlying marital variables related to accuracy of perceptions and relationship satisfaction. However, the benefits of accurate perceptions may depend on the type of information perceived. When accurately perceiving a partner’s thoughts, feelings, or behaviors could lead to negative feelings in the perceiving spouse, it may be beneficial for the spouse to inaccurately perceive the spouse’s thoughts, feelings, or behaviors. One area in which a great deal of tension and/or pleasure lies for many couples is sexuality. Despite the high level of emotionality often associated with sexuality, the research on accuracy of partner perception has not yet explored the sexual component of romantic relationships.

Certain aspects of sexuality have been found to be positively associated with relationship satisfaction, including (a) sexual satisfaction and (b) frequency of penile-vaginal intercourse. The literature on the association between masturbation and relationship satisfaction is less conclusive. Across studies, there is evidence for positive, negative, and non-significant associations between masturbation frequency and relationship satisfaction (e.g., Brody & Costa, 2009; Dube, 2010). Ramos (2013) found evidence for two variables that may moderate this relationship: (a) target of masturbation and (b) openness with partner about masturbation.
However, this research focused on actual masturbatory habits but did not explore perceptions of partner’s masturbatory habits.

If spouses are openly discussing their masturbatory habits, one of the most private areas of sexuality in our culture, this could indicate greater openness, trust, or vulnerability in their marriage, which could have positive implications for couples’ relationship/sexual satisfaction. However, spouses could also have different beliefs or values regarding masturbation; thus, not discussing masturbation or not knowing what a partner believes or practices could be a way of avoiding conflict in the marriage and have positive implications. Given the void in the current literature, this topic should be explored in order to better understand the ways in which perceptions of partner’s masturbatory habits and its accuracy are related to relationship/sexual satisfaction.

The purpose of the present study was to investigate the role of partner perceptions and accuracy of partner perceptions of masturbatory habits in predicting relationship and sexual satisfaction in a sample of married couples. I had two main research questions and hypotheses. First, in regard to partner perception of masturbation habits, I hypothesized that an individual’s perceptions of his or her partner’s masturbatory habits (i.e., reason for masturbating, target of masturbation, and openness about masturbation) would moderate the association between perceived masturbation frequency and relationship/sexual satisfaction. Specifically, I hypothesized that for individuals who perceive that their partners (a) masturbate for positive or neutral relationship reasons, (b) masturbate with the partner as the target of masturbation, and (c) are open about their masturbation habits, the association between perceived masturbation frequency and relationship/sexual satisfaction would be more positive than for individuals who
perceive that their partners (a) masturbate for negative relationship reasons, (b) masturbate with pornography as the target of masturbation, and (c) are not open about their masturbation habits.

Second, in regard to accuracy of partner perception of masturbation habits, I hypothesized that for individuals whose partners masturbate with a high frequency, the association between accurate perception of partner’s masturbatory habits and relationship satisfaction would be moderated by one’s attitudes toward masturbation. Specifically, if individuals have a positive attitude toward masturbation, accuracy of partner perception of masturbation would be positively correlated with relationship satisfaction. However, if individuals have a negative attitude toward masturbation, accuracy of partner perception of masturbation would be negatively correlated with relationship satisfaction. I further hypothesized that for individuals whose partners masturbate with a low frequency, the association between accuracy of perception of partner’s masturbation frequency and relationship satisfaction would be positive regardless of the individual’s attitudes toward masturbation.
CHAPTER 4

METHOD

Participants

The sample consisted of 186 participants (i.e., 93 heterosexual married couples). The age of participants ranged from 18 to 71 years old ($M = 37.98$, $SD = 13.31$). The length of marriage ranged from one month to 48 years ($M = 11.93$ years, $SD = 11.17$ years). For 78.5% of participants the current marriage was their first marriage. Of the 21.5% of participants for whom the current marriage was not their first marriage, the majority had been married one previous time (17.7%). The remaining participants were married two (3.2%) or three (0.5%) previous times. The majority of participants were Caucasian (69.9%); the remaining participants were Hispanic (12.9%), Black/African American (8.1%), American Indian/Alaskan Native (1.6%), Asian (1.6%), and Multiracial (5.9%). Ninety-five percent of participants identified as heterosexual (95.2%) with the remaining participant identifying as bisexual (3.8%) or “other” (1.1%). Participants who identified as other self-reported a “heteroflexible” or “heteroflexible/bisexual” sexual orientation. For further demographic information, see Table 6.

Procedure

Participants were recruited from local businesses in the community including: (a) coffee shops, (b) retail stores, (c) restaurants, (d) child care facilities, and (e) two large public universities. Participants came to the university for approximately two hours to participate in the study and were compensated $20 ($40 per couple) for their time. First, participants read through an informed consent form prior to beginning the study, and indicated their consent (see appendix B). If participants agreed to participate, they first identified areas of ongoing disagreement with their spouse (see Appendix A) and had a discussion regarding either an issue they both identified
as an area of ongoing disagreement or a topic from their combined lists that they selected together as facilitated by the researcher. They were then asked to respond to a series of questionnaires regarding their personal, sexual, and relationship histories (see Appendix A). The questionnaires were administered in the order in which they are listed in the following section. After completing the questionnaires, participants were debriefed, compensated, and given the contact information of the researcher should they have any questions or concerns.

Measures

Demographics

A demographics questionnaire constructed for this study was used to obtain information regarding participants’ age, ethnicity, religious affiliation, sex, gender, sexual orientation, and marital status.

Relationship Experience

An 11-item relationship experience questionnaire constructed for the present study was administered in order to obtain information regarding participants’ current and past romantic and platonic relationships. Participants were asked to endorse whether or not they currently or have previously had a romantic relationship. Participants were also asked to indicate the length of each relationship when applicable.

Relationship Quality

Relationship quality was measured using the Perceived Relationship Quality Components (PRQC; Fletcher, Simpson, & Thomas 2000). The PRQC is an 18-item questionnaire that measures six components of relationship quality (i.e., satisfaction, commitment, intimacy, trust, passion, and love) by having participants respond to a series of items about their romantic relationship (e.g., “How dedicated are you to your relationship?”). Participants rated each item
on a 7-point rating scale from 1 = *not at all* to 7 = *extremely*. The PRQC is shown to have good factor validity with the confirmatory fit index above .90 (Fletcher, Simpson, & Thomas, 2000), which is considered to be sufficiently high to evidence a good fit with previously validated measures (Bentler & Wu, 1995). The PRQC is also shown to have good internal consistency with alphas ranging from .85 to .88 (Fletcher, Simpson, & Thomas, 2000). For the present study, the average of the total scale score was used. High scores indicate higher relationship satisfaction. For the current sample, the Cronbach’s alpha coefficient was .95 (95% CI = .94 - .96).

**Sexual Satisfaction**

Sexual Satisfaction was measured using the Index of Sexual Satisfaction (ISS; Hudson, 1988). The ISS is a 25-item questionnaire that assesses how satisfied participants are with their current sexual relationship with their partner (e.g., “My sex life is monotonous”). Participants responded to each item on a scale of 1 = *rarely or none of the time* to 5 = *most or all of the time*. The ISS has been found to have evidence for internal consistency, with alphas ranging from .91 to .93 as well as good test-retest reliability of .93 (Hudson, et. al, 1981). The ISS also has been shown to have evidence for discriminant validity as the scale was successfully used to distinguish a group of participants clinical assessed as having sex problems from those assessed as not having sex problems (Hudson, et. al., 1981). For the present study, the average of the total scale score was used. High scores indicate higher sexual satisfaction. For the current sample, the Cronbach’s alpha coefficient was .87 (95% CI = .84 - .90).

**Communication**

Communication was measured using the Relationship Dynamics Scale (RDS; Stanley & Markman, 1997). The RDS consists of seven questions to which participants responded using a
three point scale with $1 = \text{almost never or never}$, $2 = \text{once in a while}$, and $3 = \text{frequently}$. Questions address the ways in which an individual and his or her partner behave when they are communicating with one another (e.g., “My partner criticizes or belittles my opinions, feelings, or desires”). Items were reverse coded and averaged for an overall communication score. Scores on the RDS range from one to three with higher scores indicating better communication. The RSD has been found to have good internal consistency, with alpha of .81 (Ripley, 1999). There has also been evidence of good criterion validity with marital happiness and consideration of divorce as the target criteria (Stanley & Markman, 1997). For the current sample, the Cronbach’s alpha coefficient was .86 (95% CI = .82 - .89).

**Attitudes Toward Masturbation**

Attitudes toward masturbation were measured using the 30-item Negative Attitudes Toward Masturbation Inventory (Abramson & Mosher, 1975). Participants responded to each item on a scale from $1 = \text{strongly disagree}$ to $5 = \text{strongly agree}$. Twenty items assessed negative attitudes towards masturbation (e.g., “When I masturbate, I am disgusted with myself”); ten items assessed positive attitudes towards masturbation (e.g., “Masturbation is a normal sexual outlet”). Items assessing negative attitudes were reverse coded such that higher scores indicate more positive attitudes toward masturbation and lower scores indicate more negative attitudes towards masturbation. For this study, the average of the total scale score was used. The Negative Attitude Towards Masturbation Inventory has been found to have good internal consistency, with a split-half reliability coefficient of .75 (Abramson & Mosher, 1975). For the current sample, the Cronbach’s alpha coefficient was .96 (95% CI = .95 - .97).
Masturbation

A forty-four-item masturbation questionnaire constructed for the present study was administered to obtain information regarding (a) participants’ masturbatory habits, (b) the frequency of specific objects of arousal used when masturbating, (c) reasons for masturbating, (d) openness about masturbation with one’s romantic partner, and (e) masturbation guilt. This measure was created based upon constructs that were theorized to be related to masturbation habits in my review of the literature. Each item was evaluated by one Ph.D. level psychologist and two doctoral students in counseling psychology for clarity and face validity. Changes to item content and structure were made accordingly. For each of the eight open-ended items, participants were either asked to give an approximate numeric frequency or to describe stimuli, fantasies, reasons for masturbating, and relational interactions with masturbation. For each of the remaining thirty-seven items assessing reason for masturbating, object of arousal during masturbation, openness with partner about masturbation, and guilt for masturbating, participants indicated their frequency by using a rating scale from 1 = never to 5 = always.

Masturbation frequency. Masturbation frequency was assessed by asking participants to provide numeric responses to three items assessing personal masturbation frequency, “On average, how many times a day/week/month do you masturbate?” In the current sample, participants provided responses from zero to four for daily frequency, zero to 26 for weekly frequency, and zero to 80 for monthly frequency; however outliers more than three standard deviations about the means were adjusted to 1.70, 8.75, and 31.26 for daily, weekly, and monthly masturbation frequency respectively. In the current sample, participants’ reports of daily masturbation were correlated with weekly masturbation, $r = .72, p < .001$, and monthly masturbation, $r = .71, p < .001$. Monthly and weekly masturbation frequency were also
significantly associated, \( r = .98, p < .001 \). Weekly masturbation frequency was used for the analyses of masturbation frequency in this project.

**Reason for masturbating.** Reason for masturbating was assessed with twelve items on the masturbation questionnaire addressing the reasons that participants are choosing to masturbate when they do so (e.g., “How often do you masturbate because you are not attracted to your partner?”). For each of these items, participants responded from 1 = *never* to 5 = *always*. Three of these twelve items assess relationship neutral reasons for masturbating (e.g., “How often do you masturbate because you and your partner are not in the same place?”). The remaining nine items assess masturbating for anti-relationship reasons (e.g., “How often do you masturbate because your partner is not willing to pleasure you in the way that you would like to be pleased?”). This scale has been shown to have evidence for internal consistency with Cronbach’s alpha coefficient = .81 (Ramos, 2013). For the current study, I reverse coded the nine items assessing for the occurrence of anti-relationship reasons and averaged them with the three items assessing relationship neutral reasons for masturbating to create a reason for masturbating score. Higher scores indicate more pro-relationship reasons for masturbating. For the current sample, the Cronbach’s alpha coefficient was .97 (95% CI = .97 - .98).

**Object of arousal.** Object of arousal during masturbation was assessed using nine items on the masturbation questionnaire. These nine items assess whether the participant is masturbating with a neutral, pro, or anti-relationship source of arousal. Masturbating with a relationship neutral source of arousal was conceptualized as masturbating with neither a visual nor imagined stimulus as indicated by participant’s response to the item (e.g., “When masturbating, how often do you do so without any visual or imagined stimuli?”). Masturbating with a pro-relationship source of arousal was assessed using four items (e.g., “When
masturbating, how often do you fantasize about your partner?”). Masturbating with an anti-relationship source of arousal was assessed using four items (e.g., “When masturbating, how often do you view pornography or other erotic materials (of someone other than your partner)?”). For each of these nine items, participants responded from 1 = never to 5 = always. For the present study, I created a masturbation target score by reverse coding the four items assessing for anti-relationship objects of arousal and averaging those with the four items assessing pro-relationship object of arousal during masturbation. Higher scores indicated a more pro-relationship target of masturbation. For the current sample, the Cronbach’s alpha coefficient was .96 (95% CI = .96 - .97).

**Openness with partner about masturbation.** Openness with partner about masturbation was assessed using six items on the masturbation questionnaire. These items assessed the extent to which participants communicate with their partners regarding their masturbatory habits (e.g., “When masturbating, how often do you feel that you should not tell your partner you have done so?”). For each of these six items, participants responded from 1 = never to 5 = always. I created an openness score by averaging six items (three of which were reversed coded) assessing for openness with partner about masturbation. Higher scores indicate higher levels of openness with one’s partner about masturbation. This scale was shown to have good internal consistency with Cronbach’s alpha coefficient = .90 (Ramos, 2013). For the current sample, the Cronbach’s alpha coefficient was .93 (95% CI = .91 - .94).

**Guilt from masturbation.** Guilt from masturbation was assessed using seven items from the masturbation questionnaire. These items assessed how often participants feel guilty for masturbating after they masturbate (e.g., “After masturbing, how often do you feel badly that your masturbated?”). For each of these five items, participants responded from 1 = never to 5 =
always. I created a masturbation guilt score by averaging the seven items assessing for masturbation guilt. Higher scores indicate higher levels of guilt about masturbation. This scale was shown to have good internal consistency with Cronbach’s alpha coefficient = .98 (Ramos, 2013). For the current sample, the Cronbach’s alpha coefficient was .99 (95% CI = .99 - .99).

**Perception of Partner’s Masturbatory Habits.**

A thirty-eight-item questionnaire was created by altering the wording of items from the Masturbation Questionnaire. The items were modified to ask participants to provide their best estimates of their partner’s behaviors, thoughts, and feelings regarding masturbation. The items assess participants’ perceptions of their partners’ frequency of masturbation, perceptions of why their partners masturbate, their partners’ objects of arousal during masturbation, their partners’ experience of guilt for masturbating, and how open their partners are with the participants regarding their masturbatory habits. Participants responded to each item on a scale from 1 = never to 5 = always or by selecting “N/A.”

**Perceived masturbation frequency.** Perceived masturbation frequency was assessed by asking participants to provide numeric responses to three items assessing beliefs about their partner’s masturbation frequency, “On average, how many times a day/week/month does your partner masturbate?” In the current sample, participants provided responses from zero to four for daily frequency, zero to eight for weekly frequency, and zero to fifty for monthly frequency; however outliers more than three standard deviations about the means were adjusted to 1.74, 5.26, and 23.80 for daily, weekly, and monthly perceived masturbation frequency respectively. In the current sample, participants’ reports of daily masturbation was correlated with weekly masturbation, \(r = .71, p < .001\), and monthly masturbation, \(r = .64, p < .001\). Monthly and weekly masturbation frequency was significantly associated, \(r = .93, p < .001\). Perceived weekly
masturbation frequency will be used for the analyses of perception of masturbation frequency in this project.

**Perceived reason for masturbating.** Reason for masturbating was assessed with twelve items on the Perception of Partner’s Masturbatory Habits Questionnaire addressing the reasons that participants believe their partners are choosing to masturbate when they do so (e.g. “How often does your husband/wife masturbate because he/she is not attracted to you?”). For each of these items, participants responded from 1 = *never* to 5 = *always* or by selecting “N/A.” Three of these twelve items assess relationship neutral reasons for masturbating (e.g. “How often does your husband/wife masturbate because you and your partner are not in the same place?”). The remaining nine items assess masturbating for anti-relationship reasons (e.g., “How often does your husband/wife masturbate because you are not willing to pleasure your partner in the way that he/she would like to be pleasured?”). For this study, I reverse coded the nine items assessing for the occurrence of anti-relationship reasons for masturbating and averaged these items with the three items assessing pro-relationship reasons for masturbating to create a perceived reason for partner masturbating score. Higher scores indicate more pro-relationship perceived reasons for masturbating. For the current sample, the Cronbach’s alpha coefficient was .98 (95% CI = .97 - .98).

**Perceived object of arousal.** Object of arousal during masturbation was assessed using nine items on the Perception of Partner’s Masturbatory Habits Questionnaire. These nine items assess whether the participant believes their partner is masturbating with a neutral, pro, or anti-relationship source of arousal. Masturbating with a relationship neutral source of arousal was conceptualized as masturbating with neither a visual nor imagined stimulus as indicated by participant’s response to the item (e.g., “When masturbating, how often does your husband/wife
do so without any visual or imagined stimuli?”). Masturbating with a pro-relationship source of arousal was assessed with four items (e.g., “When masturbating, how often does your husband/wife fantasize about you?”). Masturbating with an anti-relationship source of arousal was assessed with four items (e.g., “When masturbating, how often does your husband/wife view pornography or other erotic materials (of someone other than you)?”). For each of these nine items, participants responded from 1 = never to 5 = always or selected “N/A.” For the present study, I created a perceived masturbation target score by reverse coding the four items assessing for frequency of ant-relationship target of arousal and averaging them with the four items assessing for pro-relationship target of arousal during masturbation. Higher scores indicated a more pro-relationship perceived targets of masturbation. For the current sample, the Cronbach’s alpha coefficient was .96 (95% CI = .96 - .97).

**Perceived openness about masturbation.** Perceived openness with partner about masturbation was assessed using six items on the Perception of Partner’s Masturbatory Habits Questionnaire. These items assessed the extent to which participants believe their partners communicate with them regarding their masturbatory habits (e.g., “When masturbating, how often does your husband/wife feel that he/she should not tell you that he/she has done so?”). For each of these six items, participants responded from 1 = never to 5 = always or by selecting “N/A.” I created a perceived openness score by averaging six items (three of which were reversed coded) assessing for perceived openness with partner about masturbation. Higher scores indicate higher levels of perceived openness with one’s partner about masturbation. For the current sample, the Cronbach’s alpha coefficient was .93 (95% CI = .91 - .95).

**Perceived masturbation guilt.** Perceived guilt from masturbation was assessed using seven items from the Perception of Partner’s Masturbatory Habits Questionnaire. These items
assess how often participants believe their partners feel guilty for masturbating after they masturbate (e.g., “After masturbating, how often does your husband/wife feel badly that he/she masturbated?”). For each of these five items, participants responded from 1 = never to 5 = always or by selecting “N/A.” I created a masturbation guilt score by averaging the seven items assessing for masturbation guilt. Higher scores indicate higher levels of perceived guilt about masturbation. For the current sample, the Cronbach’s alpha coefficient was .98 (95% CI = .98 -.99).

**Couple Agreement Regarding Spouse’s Perceived and Actual Masturbatory Habits.**

Items on the Masturbation Scale were compared with spouse’s responses on the Perception of Partner’s Masturbatory Habits Questionnaire in order to create an index of partner agreement. Each item was compared between partners within a single couple. First, participant A’s response to a given item was subtracted from the response the spouse of participant A gave when asked to estimate participant A’s behavior, thought, or feeling on the parallel item on the Perception of Partner’s Masturbatory Habits Questionnaire. Second, I calculated the absolute value of the difference obtained from the previous calculation to compute the couple’s agreement score on that particular item. Items were reverse coded (i.e., 0 = 5, 1 = 4, 2 = 3, 3 = 2, 4 = 1, 5 = 0) such that high scores indicate more agreement between spouse’s actual behaviors and those perceived by his or her partner. Finally, agreement items for a particular construct (e.g., reason for masturbating) were averaged to create a total agreement score for each construct. Agreement scores were calculated for the following constructs: masturbation frequency, reason for masturbating, object of arousal when masturbating, openness about masturbation, and masturbation guilt.
Hypotheses and Planned Analyses

Hypotheses—Perception of Spouse’s Behavior

Hypothesis #1

**Statement.** There will be a negative association between perceived masturbation frequency and (a) romantic relationship satisfaction and (b) sexual satisfaction.

**Justification.** Sexual intimacy is an important part of a romantic relationship (Birnie, 2009). If an individual believes his or her partner is meeting his or her sexual intimacy needs outside of their relationship (i.e., through solitary masturbation), the individual could interpret this in several ways. For example, a partner meeting his or her sexual needs independently could be interpreted as a direct negative statement regarding the partner’s attractiveness or ability to please. An individual could also view partner masturbation as the partner drawing away from him/her and the relationship rather than connecting with shared closeness or physical intimacy. This could be considered devaluing the relationship. Leary (2001) identified perceived devaluing of a relationship as a primary feature of relational hurt that occurs within a couple.

**Planned Analysis.** The data are grouped (individuals nested within couples). Thus, I will use a two-level multilevel model with individuals (level 1) and couples (level 2). I also will include a random intercept at the couple level to allow for couples’ relationship and sexual satisfaction to be correlated. For this analysis, I will use two multilevel modeling regressions with (a) relationship satisfaction and (b) sexual satisfaction as the dependent variables and perceived masturbation frequency as the independent variable.

Hypothesis #2

**Statement.** The reason a person perceives his or her partner to be masturbating will moderate the association between perceived masturbation frequency and (a) romantic
relationship satisfaction and (b) sexual satisfaction. Specifically, if participants believe their partners are masturbating for reasons that pull them away from their relationships (i.e., not being interested in their partners or partners not being interested in them), there will be a negative association between perceived masturbation frequency and relationship/sexual satisfaction. However, if participants believe their partners are masturbation for a relationship positive reason (i.e., aroused from fantasizing about partners), there will be a positive association between perceived masturbation frequency and romantic relationship/sexual satisfaction.

**Justification.** If an individual perceives his or her partner to be masturbating for a pro-relationship reason, this could be viewed as relationship strengthening. However, if the individual perceives his or her partner to be masturbating for an anti-relationship reason, this could be a perceived as a direct transgression against the individual. Vangelisti (2001) conceptualized such a transgression as constituting relational hurt feelings. If an individual is viewing him/herself as a victim in his or her partner’s masturbatory habits (e.g., the unwanted partner, the unattractive partner, the forgotten partner), there could be a higher degree of negative feelings regarding their romantic and sexual relationship, particularly if the partner believes the spouse is masturbating more frequently.

**Planned Analysis.** The data are grouped (individuals nested within couples). Thus, I will use a two-level multilevel model with individuals (level 1) and couples (level 2). I also will include a random intercept at the couple level to allow for couples’ relationship/sexual satisfaction to be correlated. For this analysis, I will center the continuous predictor (perceived masturbation frequency) and moderator (perceived reason for masturbating) variables to reduce multicollinearity. Next, I will create a product term with the centered predictor variable (perceived masturbation frequency) and centered moderator variable (perceived reason for
masturbating). I will then conduct two multilevel modeling hierarchical regressions with relationship/sexual satisfaction as the dependent variables and the centered predictor variable (perceived masturbation frequency) and centered moderating variable (perceived reason for masturbation) entered in step one. In step two of the multilevel modeling hierarchical regression, I will enter the newly created product term. Next, I will examine the product term to determine if the interaction is significant. If the interaction is significant, I will graph the interaction and conduct simple slopes analyses to determine the nature of the interaction, as outlined by Aiken and West (1991).

**Hypothesis #3**

**Statement.** The perceived object of arousal when masturbating will moderate the association between perceived masturbation frequency and (a) relationship satisfaction and (b) sexual satisfaction. Specifically, if participants believe their spouses are masturbating with objects of arousal that are pro-relationship (e.g., fantasizing about his or her partner or viewing erotic images/videos of his or her partner), there will be a positive association between masturbation frequency and relationship/sexual satisfaction. However, if participants believe their spouses are masturbating with objects of arousal that are anti-relationship (e.g., fantasizing about someone other than his or her partner or viewing pornography or other erotic materials of someone other than his or her partner), there will be a negative association between masturbation frequency and romantic relationship/sexual satisfaction.

**Justification.** If an individual believes his or her partner is masturbating with the individual as their source of arousal during masturbation, the implicit message may be that the partner finds the individual attractive. Bale and Archer (2013) found that self-perceived attractiveness was positively related to not only self-esteem but also relationship confidence.
Both constructs have positive implications for relationship and sexual satisfaction. However, if an individual believes his or her partner is masturbating with someone other than the individual as their source of arousal, this could be seen as infidelity (Woollard, 2010). Therefore, the more an individual believes his or her partner is masturbating with sources of arousal other than the individual, the lower the individual’s reported relationship and sexual satisfaction will be.

**Planned Analysis.** The data are grouped (individuals nested within couples). Thus, I will use a two-level multilevel model with individuals (level 1) and couples (level 2). I also will include a random intercept at the couple level to allow for couples’ relationship/sexual satisfaction to be correlated. For this analysis, I will center the continuous predictor (perceived masturbation frequency) and moderator (perceived object of arousal) variables to reduce multicollinearity. Next, I will create a product term with the centered predictor variable (perceived masturbation frequency) and centered moderator variable (perceived object of arousal). I will then conduct two multilevel modeling hierarchical regressions with relationship/sexual satisfaction as the dependent variables and the centered predictor variable (perceived masturbation frequency) and centered moderating variable (perceived object of arousal) entered in step one. In step two of the multilevel modeling hierarchical regression, I will enter the newly created product term. Next, I will examine the product term to determine if the interaction is significant. If the interaction is significant, I will graph the interaction and conduct simple slopes analyses to determine the nature of the interaction, as outlined by Aiken and West (1991).

**Hypothesis #4**

**Statement.** Perceived openness with one’s romantic partner about masturbation will moderate the association between perceived masturbation frequency and (a) relationship
satisfaction and (b) sexual satisfaction. Specifically, if there is less perceived openness with one’s partner about masturbating, there will be a negative association between perceived masturbation frequency and relationship/sexual satisfaction. However, if there is more perceived openness with one’s partner about masturbation, there will be a positive association between perceived masturbation frequency and relationship/sexual satisfaction.

**Justification.** Openness can be equated to honesty in several important ways. If openness is low, an individual could consider his or her partner to be lying by omission. This directly jeopardizes trust in the relationship as it introduces perceived secrecy into the relationship. Likewise, if an individual perceives his or her partner as being open with the individual regarding personal masturbatory habits, the habits themselves become less threatening. Rather than the partner’s masturbation habits being a source of relationship tension, they may become something the couple can openly discuss with one another in such a way that may actually serve to enhance rather than disrupt the relationship and associated relationship satisfaction. This same theoretical understanding is extended to sexual satisfaction.

**Planned Analysis.** The data are grouped (individuals nested within couples). Thus, I will use a two-level multilevel model with individuals (level 1) and couples (level 2). I also will include a random intercept at the couple level to allow for couples’ relationship/sexual satisfaction to be correlated. For this analysis, I will center the continuous predictor (perceived masturbation frequency) and moderator (perceived openness with partner) variables to reduce multicollinearity. Next, I will create a product term with the centered predictor variable (perceived masturbation frequency) and centered moderator variable (perceived openness with partner). I will then conduct two multilevel modeling hierarchical regressions with relationship/sexual satisfaction as the dependent variables and the centered predictor variable
(perceived masturbation frequency) and centered moderating variable (perceived openness with partner) entered in step one. In step two of the multilevel modeling hierarchical regression, I will enter the newly created product term. Next, I will examine the product term to determine if the interaction is significant. If the interaction is significant, I will graph the interaction and conduct simple slopes analyses to determine the nature of the interaction, as outlined by Aiken and West (1991).

**Hypothesis #5**

**Statement.** Perceived masturbation guilt will moderate the association between perceived masturbation frequency and (a) romantic relationship satisfaction and (b) sexual satisfaction. Specifically, for participants who perceive higher levels of guilt in their partners, there will be a non-significant association between perceived masturbation frequency and relationship/sexual satisfaction. However, for participants who perceive lower levels of guilt in their partners, there will be a negative association between perceived masturbation frequency and relationship/sexual satisfaction.

**Justification.** While there are several aspects of masturbation that could be negatively related to relationship satisfaction, perceived guilt may not be one of them. If an individual is internalizing some of the more negative aspects of their perceptions of his or her partner’s masturbatory behaviors, believing the partner experiences guilt from masturbating may actually be associated with higher relationship satisfaction. If an individual is experiencing guilt, there is some aspect of the partner’s behavior that is incongruent with the partner’s beliefs, values, or desired behaviors. If an individual recognizes that dissonance and subsequent guilt in his or her partner, then the individual is actually seeing the partner as an ally in both viewing negative aspects of masturbation as harmful or negatively influencing their relationship. The individual
may be more compassionate and less upset with his or her partner if the individual perceives the partner as feeling guilty for having masturbated. Thus, higher levels of perceived guilt could be accompanied by higher levels of relationship/sexual satisfaction.

**Planned Analysis.** The data are grouped (individuals nested within couples). Thus, I will use a two-level multilevel model with individuals (level 1) and couples (level 2). I also will include a random intercept at the couple level to allow for couples’ relationship/sexual satisfaction to be correlated. For this analysis, I will center the continuous predictor (perceived masturbation frequency) and moderator (perceived guilt) variables to reduce multicollinearity. Next, I will create a product term with the centered predictor variable (perceived masturbation frequency) and centered moderator variable (perceived masturbation guilt). I will then conduct two multilevel modeling hierarchical regressions with relationship/sexual satisfaction as the dependent variable and the centered predictor variable (perceived masturbation frequency) and centered moderating variable (perceived guilt) entered in step one. In step two of the multilevel modeling hierarchical regression, I will enter the newly created product term. Next, I will examine the product term to determine if the interaction is significant. If the interaction is significant, I will graph the interaction and conduct simple slope analyses to determine the nature of the interaction, as outlined by Aiken and West (1991).

**Hypotheses—Couple Agreement**

**Hypothesis #6**

**Statement.** Length of the marriage and communication will positively predict accuracy of perception of partner’s masturbatory habits (frequency, reason for masturbating, target of masturbation, openness about masturbation, and maturation guilt).
**Justification.** Research examining the relationship between length of relationship and accurate perceptions has reported mixed findings (Swann & Gill, 1997; Carroll, 1972). Couples that have been married longer may have more accurate perceptions about their partners’ masturbation habits because they have had more experience and more time to observe and discuss these issues with one another. Furthermore, individuals who have high levels of communication may have an easier time discussing sensitive topics such as masturbation. Therefore, individuals who have longer marriages and higher levels of communication are likely to be more accurate in predicting their partners’ masturbatory habits.

**Planned analysis.** The data are grouped (individuals nested within couples). Thus, I will use a two-level multilevel model with individuals (level 1) and couples (level 2). I also will include a random intercept at the couple level to allow for spouses’ levels of accuracy to be correlated within each couple. For these analyses, I will use a series of multilevel modeling regressions with accuracy of partner’s masturbatory habits as the dependent variable and length of marriage and communication as the independent variables.

**Hypothesis #7**

**Statement.** There will be a three-way interaction between partner frequency of masturbation, attitude toward masturbation, and couple agreement on partner’s masturbation frequency in predicting (a) relationship satisfaction and (b) sexual satisfaction. Specifically, for individuals whose partners have a high frequency of masturbation, attitudes toward masturbation will moderate the association between couple agreement and relationship/sexual satisfaction. For individuals with positive attitudes toward masturbation, couple agreement will be positively associated with relationship/sexual satisfaction. For individuals with negative attitudes toward masturbation, couple agreement will be negatively associated with relationship/sexual
satisfaction. However, for individuals whose partners have a low frequency of masturbation, there will be a positive association between couple agreement and relationship/sexual satisfaction regardless of attitudes toward masturbation.

**Justification.** There are mixed findings in the current literature regarding the overall relationship between masturbation frequency and relationship satisfaction. One possible reason is that masturbation means different things to different people in unique relationships with one another. In addition to simply examining the correlation between masturbation frequency and relationship satisfaction, it may be important to investigate couple agreement about masturbation frequency. Higher levels of couple agreement are generally associated with greater relationship satisfaction; however this is not necessarily true when the valence of the target of agreement is negative. Therefore if the perceiving partner has a negative view of masturbation, and his or her partner is masturbating with a high frequency, accuracy could be negatively related to relationship satisfaction. However if the perceiving partner has a more positive view of masturbation, accuracy could be more indicative of positive relationship characteristics (e.g., attunement).

**Planned Analysis.** The data are grouped (individuals nested within couples). Thus, I will use a two-level multilevel model with individuals (level 1) and couples (level 2). I also will include a random intercept at the couple level to allow for couples’ relationship/sexual satisfaction to be correlated. For this analysis, I will center the continuous predictor (couple agreement) and moderator (masturbation frequency and attitudes toward masturbation) variables to reduce multicollinearity. Next, I will create (a) three distinct two-way product terms with the centered predictor variable (couple agreement) and centered moderator variables (masturbation frequency and attitude towards masturbation) and (b) one three-way product term (couple
agreement, masturbation frequency, and attitudes toward masturbation). I will then conduct two multilevel modeling hierarchical regressions with relationship/sexual satisfaction as the dependent variables and the centered predictor variable (couple agreement) and centered moderator variables (masturbation frequency and attitudes toward masturbation) in step one. In step two of the multilevel modeling hierarchical regression, I will enter the three two-way product terms. In step three of the multilevel modeling hierarchical regression, I will enter the one three-way product term. Next, I will examine the product terms to determine if an interaction is significant. If one of the interactions is significant, I will graph the interaction(s) and conduct simple slopes analyses to determine the nature of the interaction(s), as outlined by Aiken and West (1991).

**Hypothesis #8**

**Statement.** For each masturbation variable (e.g., reason, target, openness, and guilt), the partner’s actual level of the variable will moderate the association between accuracy of partner perception and (a) relationship satisfaction and (b) sexual satisfaction. Specifically I hypothesize that for individuals whose partners actually masturbate with ‘pro-relationship/high’ reason, target, openness, and guilt, there will be a positive association between accuracy of perception of these constructs and relationship/sexual satisfaction. However, for individuals whose partners actually masturbate with ‘anti-relationship/low’ reason, target, openness and guilt, there will be a negative association between accuracy of partner perception and relationship/sexual satisfaction.

**Justification.** The current literation on accuracy of partner perception and relationship satisfaction is mixed. In general, there appears to be a positive correlation between accuracy and relationship satisfaction due to the increased closeness and intimacy between partners; however, accuracy has been shown to be negatively associated with relationship satisfaction when the
valence of the perceived quality is negative. Therefore, when an individual’s partner is masturbating with an anti-relationship target or reason or with low levels of openness or guilt, this could be perceived as hurting one’s relationship, and the relationship between accuracy and relationship/sexual satisfaction would be negative. In contrast, when an individual’s partner is masturbating with a pro-relationship target or reason, or with high levels of openness or guilt, this could be perceived as helping one’s relationship, and the relationship between accuracy and relationship/sexual satisfaction would be positive.

Planned Analysis. Since the data are grouped (individuals nested within couples), I will use a two-level multilevel model with individuals (level 1) and couples (level 2) to test this hypothesis. I will also include a random intercept at the couple level to allow for couples’ relationship and sexual satisfaction to be correlated. For this analysis, I will center the continuous predictor (accuracy of perceived reason, target, openness, and guilt) and moderator (partner’s actual reason, target, openness, and guilt) variables to reduce multicollinearity. Next, I will create a product term with the centered predictor variable (accuracy of perceived reason, target, openness, and guilt) and centered moderator variable (partner’s actual reason, target, openness, and guilt). I will then conduct eight multilevel modeling hierarchical regressions with relationship/sexual satisfaction as the dependent variables and the centered predictor variable (accuracy of perceived reason, target, openness, and guilt) and centered moderating variable (partner’s actual reason, target, openness, and guilt) in step one. In step two of the multilevel modeling hierarchical regressions, I will enter the newly created product term. Next, I will examine the product terms to determine if an interaction is significant. If one of the interactions is significant, I will graph the interaction(s) and conduct simple slope analyses to determine the nature of the interaction(s), as outlined by Aiken and West (1991).
CHAPTER 5

RESULTS

Testing Assumptions and Descriptive Statistics

Prior to running analyses, I checked for missing data, outliers, and normality. There was a small amount of missing data (less than 5% per variable). For participants who were missing no more than 15% of the items on a particular scale, I calculated the average for that participant using the completed items. Outliers were defined as values greater than three standard deviations above the mean or less than three standard deviations below the mean. There was a small amount of outliers among some variables (less than 3% per variable). Outliers were adjusted to three standard deviations above (or below) the mean in order to retain the participant’s high (or low) value but not allow the outliers to disproportionately affect the analyses. Normality was evaluated by checking for skewness and kurtosis of each variable. Only three variables had skewness greater than 1.5 or less than -1.5 (actual and perception of partner’s masturbation frequency and length of marriage). A square root transformation of the data did not meaningfully reduce skewness or kurtosis so the data was left in its original form to maintain the external validity of results. Means, standard deviations, and intercorrelations for the study variables are listed in Tables 7 and 8.

Participants were able to accurately predict their partners’ masturbation frequencies. Participants’ weekly masturbation frequency was positively correlated with their partner’s perceived weekly masturbation frequency, \( r(184) = .48, p < .001 \). On average, participants perceived their partners’ masturbation frequencies within 0.24 of their daily frequency, 0.84 of their weekly frequency, and 3.25 of their monthly frequency. More participants were able to accurately predict daily masturbation frequency (76.88%), than weekly masturbation frequency
(51.61%), or monthly masturbation frequency (36.02%). Overall, participants were able to predict their spouses’ responses with a moderate level of accuracy in reason for masturbation, $M = 3.65, SD = 1.38$, target of masturbation, $M = 3.58, SD = 1.33$, openness about masturbation, $M = 3.67, SD = 0.97$, and masturbation guilt, $M = 3.98, SD = 1.10$. Agreement scores of 5 would indicate complete agreement, and agreement scores of 0 would indicate complete disagreement.

Thus, for most items, an individual’s perception was between 1 and 1.5 points (out of 5) of his or her partner’s self-report. A within subject analysis of variance provided evidence for differences in participants’ abilities to accurately predict each of these four areas of masturbatory habits (reason, target, openness, and guilt). Mauchly’s test of sphericity found that the assumption for sphericity was not met, $p < .001$. Thus, the Greenhouse-Geisser correction was used. There were significant differences on accuracy of the four areas of masturbatory habits, $F(2.47, 456.14) = 8.33, p < .001$. Post-hoc tests using a Bonferroni correction showed that participants were able to predict their spouses’ masturbation guilt more accurately than they could predict their spouses’ reasons for masturbation, Mean Difference = .33, $p = .011$, targets of masturbation, Mean Difference = .40, $p < .001$, or openness about masturbation, Mean Difference = .32, $p = .002$. No other significant differences in participants’ abilities to accurately predict different aspects of their partners’ masturbatory behaviors were identified.

In general, the masturbation variables examined in this project were highly correlated with one another. Individual’s own reason for masturbating was positively correlated with both target of masturbation ($r = .86, p < .001$) and his or her openness about masturbation ($r = .74, p < .001$). Openness about masturbation and target of masturbation were also positively correlated with one another ($r = .71, p < .001$). These findings suggest that the more pro-relationship individuals’ reasons for masturbating and targets of masturbation are, the more open individuals
are with their partners about their masturbatory habits. Likewise, individuals who are less open
with their partners about their masturbatory habits tend to be masturbating with more anti-
relationship reasons for masturbating and masturbation targets. These same positive associations
were also evidences in individuals’ perceptions of their partners’ masturbatory habits.
Perception of partner’s reason for masturbating was positively correlated with perception of
partner’s masturbation target ($r = .83, p < .001$) and perception of partner’s openness about
masturbation ($r = .76, p < .001$). Perception of partner’s openness about masturbation and
perceptions of partner’s masturbation target were also positive correlated ($r = .76, p < .001$).

Across all variables assessed, there were two significant differences between men and
women’s average scores. On average, men masturbated more frequently than women, $t(161.46)
= 3.64, p < .001$; however there was not a significant difference in men and women’s perceptions
of one another’s masturbation frequency, $t(184) = 1.47, p = .144$. Despite masturbating with less
frequency, women were more open with their partners about their masturbation habits than men,
$t(120) = 2.18, p = .031$. There were no other significant differences between male and female
reports on the remaining variables assessed in this project.

Across the whole sample, relationship and sexual satisfaction were positively associated
with reason for masturbating, target of masturbation, and openness about masturbation.
However, several important gender differences were found. In general, when examining female
participants, these masturbatory behaviors predicted relationship but not sexual satisfaction.
When examining male participants, these masturbatory behaviors predicted both relationship and
sexual satisfaction. Also, when examining the perceived masturbation variables, the correlations
between perceived masturbation target, reason, and openness and relationship satisfaction were
stronger for women than for men. The correlations between perceived masturbation target,
reason, and openness and sexual satisfaction were mostly similar between men and women, with
the exception of perceived masturbation openness, which has a stronger correlation with sexual
satisfaction in men than women. In sum, for women, their own and their perceptions of their
partners’ masturbatory behaviors appear to be closely associated with relationship satisfaction,
whereas for men, their own masturbatory behaviors appear to be associated with both
relationship and sexual satisfaction, and their perceptions of their partners’ masturbatory
behaviors seem to be not as strong a predictor of relationship and sexual satisfaction, with the
exception of perceived openness about masturbation.

Testing Hypotheses

General Data Analysis Strategy

The data are grouped (individuals nested within couples), so for each of these analyses, I
used a two-level multilevel model with individuals (level 1) nested within couples (level 2). I
also included a random intercept at the couple level to allow for couples’ relationship and sexual
satisfaction to be correlated. For the moderation analyses, I first centered the predictor and
moderator variables. Next, I created a product term with the centered predictor variable and
centered moderator variable. I then conducted a multilevel modeling hierarchical regression
analysis, entering the centered predictor and moderator variables in step one and the newly
created product term in step two.

Hypotheses—Perception of Masturbation Behavior

Hypothesis 1 was that there would be a negative association between perceived
masturbation frequency and (a) romantic relationship satisfaction and (b) sexual satisfaction. I
tested this hypothesis by running two multilevel modeling regressions with relationship
satisfaction and sexual satisfaction as the dependent variables and perceived masturbation
frequency as the independent variable. This hypothesis was not supported. Perceived masturbation frequency did not significantly predict relationship satisfaction, $B = .06, SE(B) = 0.05, t(181.15) = 1.27, p = .205$. Also, perceived masturbation frequency did not significantly predict sexual satisfaction, $B = -.04, SE(B) = 0.03, t(174.91) = 1.23, p = .219$. As a follow-up analysis, I examined these regressions including only the 107 participants who reported perceiving their partners to masturbate at least one time per month. In these analyses, perceived masturbation frequency was a significant negative predictor of sexual satisfaction, $B = -.07, SE(B) = 0.03, t(100.18) = 2.03, p = .045$, but did not significantly predict relationship satisfaction, $B = .05, SE(B) = 0.05, t(77.46) = 0.87, p = .385$. For only those who perceive their partners to masturbate at least once a month, the more the individual perceives his/her partner to masturbate, the lower the individual’s sexual satisfaction is.

**Hypothesis 2** was that the reason a person perceives his or her partner to be masturbating would moderate the association between perceived masturbation frequency and romantic (a) relationship satisfaction and (b) sexual satisfaction. Specifically, I hypothesized that if participants believe their partners are masturbating for reasons that pull them away from their relationships (i.e., not being interested in their partners or partners not being interested in them), there would be a negative association between perceived masturbation frequency and relationship/sexual satisfaction. However, if participants believe their partners are masturbating for a relationship positive reason (i.e., aroused from fantasizing about his or her partner), there would be a positive association between perceived masturbation frequency and romantic/sexual relationship satisfaction. To test this hypothesis, I included only the 96 participants who reported that their partners masturbated at least once a month and responded to the perceived masturbation reason items. I then conducted two multilevel modeling hierarchical regressions.
with relationship/sexual satisfaction as the dependent variables, perceived masturbation frequency as the predictor variable, and perceived reason for masturbating as the moderator variable.

**Hypothesis 2: Relationship satisfaction.** This hypothesis was not supported. In step one, perception of partner’s masturbation frequency was not a significant predictor of relationship satisfaction, $B = -.02, SE(B) = 0.05, t(69.50) = 0.41, p = .685$, but perception of partner’s reason for masturbating was a significant predictor, $B = .62, SE(B) = 0.14, t(77.69) = 4.39, p < .001$. This indicates that perceiving one’s partner to be masturbating for more pro-relationship reasons was associated with higher levels of relationship satisfaction. In the second step, the interaction between perception of partner’s reason for masturbating and perception of partner’s masturbation frequency was not significant, $B = -.09, SE(B) = 0.08, t(51.91) = 1.06, p = .293$.

**Hypothesis 2: Sexual satisfaction.** This hypothesis was not supported. In step one, both perception of partner’s masturbation frequency, $B = -.09, SE(B) = 0.03, t(91.61) = 3.15, p = .002$, and perception of partner’s reason for masturbating, $B = .67, SE(B) = 0.08, t(91.61) = 8.81, p < .001$, were significant predictors of sexual satisfaction. This indicates that perceiving one’s partner to masturbate with a lower frequency and to be masturbating for more pro-relationship reasons were associated with higher levels of sexual satisfaction. In the second step, the interaction between perception of partner’s reason for masturbating and perception of partner’s masturbation frequency was not significant, $B = .09, SE(B) = 0.05, t(84.85) = 1.67, p = .100$. Since the interaction was approaching significance, I graphed the interaction (see Figure 1) and conducted simple slope analyses to determine the nature of the interaction, as outlined by Aiken and West (1991). Consistent with my hypothesis, the association between perceived
masturbation frequency and sexual satisfaction was more negative for participants who reported their partners were masturbating for anti-relationship reasons than for participants who reported their partners were masturbating for pro-relationship reasons. Specifically, for participants who perceived their partners to have more anti-relationship reasons for masturbating, there was a significant negative association between perceived masturbation frequency and sexual satisfaction, $B = -.13$, $SE(B) = 0.04$, $t(91.04) = 3.13$, $p = .002$. However, for participants who perceived their partners to have more pro-relationship reasons for masturbating, perceived masturbation frequency did not significantly predict sexual satisfaction, $B = -.05$, $SE(B) = 0.03$, $t(91.70) = 1.49$, $p = .139$.

**Hypothesis 3** was that the perceived object of arousal when masturbating would moderate the association between perceived masturbation frequency and (a) relationship satisfaction and (b) sexual satisfaction. Specifically, I hypothesized that if participants believe their spouses are masturbating with objects of arousal that are pro-relationship (e.g., fantasizing about their partners or viewing erotic images/videos of their partners), there would be a positive association between masturbation frequency and relationship/sexual satisfaction. However, if participants believe their spouses are masturbating with objects of arousal that are anti-relationship (e.g., fantasizing about someone other than their partners or viewing pornography or other erotic materials of someone other than their partners), there would be a negative association between masturbation frequency and romantic relationship/sexual satisfaction. To test this hypothesis, I included only the 88 participants who reported that their partner masturbated at least once a month and responded to the perceived masturbation target items. I conducted two multilevel modeling hierarchical regressions with relationship/sexual satisfaction
as the dependent variables, perceived masturbation frequency as the predictor variable, and perceived object of arousal as the moderator variable.

**Hypothesis 3: Relationship satisfaction.** This hypothesis was not supported. In step one, perception of partner’s masturbation frequency did not significantly predict relationship satisfaction, $B = .01$, $SE(B) = 0.01$, $t(71.93) = 0.76$, $p = .452$; however, perception of partner’s object of arousal during masturbation was a significant positive predictor of sexual satisfaction, $B = .40$, $SE(B) = 0.11$, $t(63.42) = 3.68$, $p < .001$. This indicates that perceiving the partner to masturbation with a more pro-relationship object of arousal was associated with higher levels of relationship satisfaction. In step two, the interaction of perceived target and frequency of masturbation was not significant, $B = -.03$, $SE(B) = 0.02$, $t(31.87) = 1.41$, $p = .169$.

**Hypothesis 3: Sexual satisfaction.** This hypothesis was not supported. Namely, the interaction was significant but in the opposite direction as I hypothesized. In step one, neither perception of partner’s masturbation frequency, $B = -.07$, $SE(B) = 0.04$, $t(87.64) = 1.82$, $p = .072$, nor perception of a partner’s object of arousal during masturbation, $B = .08$, $SE(B) = 0.08$, $t(85.36) = 1.08$, $p = .281$, were significant predictors of sexual satisfaction. In step two, the interaction of perceived target and frequency of masturbation was significant, $B = -.13$, $SE(B) = 0.06$, $t(60.21) = 2.16$, $p = .035$. Since the interaction was significant, I graphed the interaction (see Figure 2) and conducted simple slope analyses to determine the nature of the interaction, as outlined by Aiken and West (1991). Contrary to my hypothesis, the association between perceived masturbation frequency and sexual satisfaction was more positive for participants who reported their partners were masturbating with anti-relationship targets than for participants who reported their partners were masturbating with pro-relationship targets. Specifically, for participants who perceived their partners to have more pro-relationship objects of arousal, there
was a significant negative association between perceived masturbation frequency and sexual satisfaction, \( B = -.26, SE(B) = 0.11, t(65.68) = 2.40, p = .019 \). However, for participants who perceived their partners to have more anti-relationship objects of arousal, masturbation frequency did not significantly predict sexual satisfaction, \( B = .11, SE(B) = 0.08, t(68.12) = 1.40, p = .166 \).

**Hypothesis 4** was that perceived openness with one’s romantic partner about masturbation would moderate the association between perceived masturbation frequency and (a) relationship satisfaction and (b) sexual satisfaction. Specifically, I hypothesized that if there is less perceived openness with partner about masturbating, there would be a negative association between perceived masturbation frequency and relationship/sexual satisfaction. However, if there is more perceived openness with partner about masturbation, there would be a positive association between perceived masturbation frequency and relationship/sexual satisfaction. To test this hypothesis, I included only the 96 participants who reported that their partner masturbated at least once a month and responded to the perceived masturbation openness items. I conducted two multilevel modeling hierarchical regressions with relationship/sexual satisfaction as the dependent variables, perceived masturbation frequency as the predictor variable, and perceived openness as the moderator variable.

**Hypothesis 4: Relationship satisfaction.** This hypothesis was not supported. In step one, neither perceived masturbation frequency, \( B = .07, SE(B) = 0.05, t(60.20) = 1.33, p = .189 \), nor perceived openness about masturbation, \( B = .15, SE(B) = 0.08, t(88.55) = 1.80, p = .075 \), was a significant predictor of relationship satisfaction, although there was a trend for higher levels of perceived openness to be associated with higher levels of relationship satisfaction. In step two, the interaction of perceived frequency of masturbation and perceived openness about masturbation was not significant, \( B = -.08, SE(B) = 0.05, t(39.14) = 1.71, p = .095 \). However,
since the interaction was approaching significance, I graphed the interaction (see Figure 3) and conducted simple slope analyses to determine the nature of the interaction, as outlined by Aiken and West (1991). Contrary to my hypothesis, the association between perceived masturbation frequency and relationship satisfaction was more positive for participants who reported their partners were less open about masturbation than for participants who reported their partners were more open about masturbation. Specifically, for participants who perceived their partners to be less open, there was a significant positive association between perceived masturbation frequency and relationship satisfaction, $B = .15, SE(B) = 0.07, t(59.09) = 2.08, p = .042$. However, for participants who perceived their partners to be more open about masturbation, masturbation frequency did not significantly predict relationship satisfaction, $B = -.01, SE(B) = 0.07, t(41.26) = 0.14, p = .887$.

**Hypothesis 4: Sexual satisfaction.** This hypothesis was not supported. In step one, perceived masturbation frequency, $B = -.07, SE(B) = 0.04, t(87.06) = 1.92, p = .058$ was not a significant predictor of sexual satisfaction, although there was a trend for perceived masturbation frequency to be negatively associated with sexual satisfaction. Perceived openness about masturbation was a significant positive predictor of sexual satisfaction, $B = .15, SE(B) = 0.05, t(95.97) = 2.82, p = .006$. Higher levels of perceived openness were associated with higher levels of sexual satisfaction. In step two, the interaction of perceived frequency of masturbation and perceived openness about masturbation was not significant, $B = -.00, SE(B) = 0.03, t(63.86) = 0.10, p = .922$.

**Hypothesis 5** was that perceived guilt would moderate the association between perceived masturbation frequency and (a) romantic relationship satisfaction and (b) sexual satisfaction. Specifically, I hypothesized that for participants who perceive higher levels of guilt in their
partners, there would be a non-significant association between perceived masturbation frequency and relationship/sexual satisfaction. However, for participants who perceive lower levels of guilt in their partners, there would be a negative association between perceived masturbation frequency and relationship/sexual satisfaction. To test this hypothesis, I included only the 92 participants who reported that their partner masturbated at least once a month and responded to the perceived masturbation guilt items. I conducted two multilevel modeling hierarchical regressions with relationship/sexual satisfaction as the dependent variables, perceived masturbation frequency as the predictor variable, and perceived guilt as the moderator variable.

**Hypothesis 5: Relationship satisfaction.** This hypothesis was not supported. In step one, perceived masturbation frequency was not significantly associated with relationship satisfaction, $B = -.07, SE(B) = 0.04, t(90.79) = 1.92, p = .058$; however, there was a trend for perceived masturbation frequency to be negatively correlated with relationship satisfaction. Perceived masturbation guilt was a significant negative predictor of relationship satisfaction, $B = -.15, SE(B) = 0.05, t(85.34) = 2.83, p = .006$. Higher levels of the perceived guilt were associated with lower levels of relationship satisfaction. In step two, the interaction of perceived masturbation frequency and perceived masturbation guilt was not significant, $B = -.05, SE(B) = 0.04, t(91.14) = 1.36, p = .176$.

**Hypothesis 5: Sexual satisfaction.** This hypothesis was not supported. In step one, perceived masturbation frequency did not significantly predict sexual satisfaction, $B = .01, SE(B) = 0.05, t(69.52) = 0.27, p = .787$; however, perceived masturbation guilt was a significant negative predictor of sexual satisfaction, $B = -.18, SE(B) = 0.08, t(91.78) = 2.12, p = .037$. Higher perceptions of masturbation guilt were associated with lower levels of sexual satisfaction.
In step two, the interaction of perceived masturbation frequency and perceived masturbation
guilt was not significant, $B = .01$, $SE(B) = .06$, $t(87.30) = 0.20$, $p = .846$.

**Hypotheses—Couple Agreement**

**Hypothesis 6** was that the length of the marriage and quality of communication would
positively predict accuracy of perception of partner’s masturbatory habits (frequency, reason for
masturbating, target of masturbation, openness about masturbation, and maturation guilt). For
this analysis, I ran a series of multilevel modeling regressions with accuracy of partner’s
masturbatory habits as the dependent variable and length of marriage and communication as the
independent variables.

This hypothesis was not supported. Contrary to my hypothesis, length of marriage was a
significant negative predictor of accuracy of partner perception of reason for masturbating, $B = -
.02$, $SE(B) = 0.01$, $t(99.55) = 2.14$, $p = .035$. Also, length of marriage did not predict accuracy of
partner perception of frequency of masturbation, $B = .00$, $SE(B) = 0.01$, $t(101.54) = 0.731$, $p =
.466$, target of masturbation, $B = -.01$, $SE(B) = .01$, $t(99.94) = 1.28$, $p = .204$, openness about
masturbation, $B = -.00$, $SE(B) = .01$, $t(102.50) = 0.58$, $p = .564$, or masturbation guilt, $B = -.01$,
$SE(B) = .01$, $t(101.92) = 1.08$, $p = .283$. Additionally, communication did not significantly
predict accuracy of partner perception of masturbation frequency, $B = .16$, $SE(B) = .18$, $t(178.55)$
$= 0.89$, $p = .377$, reason for masturbating, $B = .06$, $SE(B) = 0.20$, $t(167.10) = 0.31$, $p = .761$,
target of masturbation, $B = .15$, $SE(B) = 0.19$, $t(169.51) = 0.77$, $p = .442$, openness about
masturbation, $B = .16$, $SE(B) = 0.14$, $t(181.74) = 1.15$, $p = .251$, or masturbation guilt, $B = -.09$,
$SE(B) = 0.16$, $t(179.79) = 0.59$, $p = .556$.

**Hypothesis 7** was that there would be a three-way interaction between partner frequency
of masturbation, attitudes toward masturbation, and couple agreement on partner’s masturbation
frequency in predicting (a) relationship satisfaction and (b) sexual satisfaction. Specifically, for individuals whose partners have a high frequency of masturbation, attitudes toward masturbation would moderate the association between couple agreement and relationship/sexual satisfaction. For individuals with positive attitudes toward masturbation, couple agreement would be positively associated with relationship/sexual satisfaction. For individuals with negative attitudes toward masturbation, couple agreement would be negatively associated with relationship/sexual satisfaction. However, for individuals whose partners have a low frequency of masturbation, there would be a positive association between couple agreement and relationship satisfaction regardless of attitudes toward masturbation. For this analysis, I centered the continuous predictor (couple agreement) and moderator (masturbation frequency and attitude towards masturbation) variables to reduce multicollinearity. Next, I created (a) three distinct two-way product terms with the centered predictor variable (couple agreement) and centered moderator variables (masturbation frequency and attitude towards masturbation) and (b) one three-way product terms (couple agreement, masturbation frequency, and attitudes toward masturbation). I then conducted two multilevel modeling hierarchical regressions with relationship/sexual satisfaction as the dependent variables and the centered predictor variable (couple agreement) and centered moderator variables (masturbation frequency and attitudes toward masturbation) in step one. In step two of the multilevel modeling hierarchical regressions, I entered the three two-way product terms. In step three of the multilevel modeling hierarchical regressions, I entered the one three-way product term.

**Hypothesis 7: Relationship satisfaction.** This hypothesis was not supported. In step one, attitudes toward masturbation, $B = 0.07, \ SE(B) = 0.10, t(183.83) = 0.71, p = .481$, accuracy of perceived masturbation frequency, $B = -0.02, \ SE(B) = 0.08, t(158.98) = 0.29, p = .776$, and
partner masturbation frequency, \( B = 0.07, SE(B) = 0.06, t(155.60) = 1.06, p = .290 \) did not significantly predict relationship satisfaction. In step two, the interactions between attitudes toward masturbation and partner masturbation frequency, \( B = -0.04, SE(B) = 0.08, t(161.56) = 0.51, p = .612 \), partner masturbation frequency and accuracy of perceived masturbation frequency, \( B = 0.01, SE(B) = 0.03, t(150.30) = 0.31, p = .760 \), and accuracy of perceived masturbation frequency and attitudes towards masturbation, \( B = -0.06, SE(B) = 0.10, t(149.47) = 0.55, p = .580 \), were not significant. In step three, the three-way interaction was not significant, \( B = -.00, SE(B) = 0.03, t(158.40) = 0.13, p = .896 \).

**Hypothesis 7: Sexual satisfaction.** This hypothesis was not supported. Specifically, in step one, attitudes toward masturbation, \( B = 0.06, SE(B) = 0.06, t(182.03) = 1.00, p = .318 \), accuracy of perceived masturbation frequency, \( B = 0.01, SE(B) = 0.05, t(152.71) = 0.285, p = .776 \), and partner’s actual masturbation frequency, \( B = -0.03, SE(B) = 0.04, t(149.31) = 0.71, p = .480 \), did not significantly predict sexual satisfaction. In step two, the interactions between attitudes toward masturbation and partner masturbation frequency, \( B = 0.00, SE(B) = 0.05, t(154.63) = 02, p = .981 \), accuracy of perceived masturbation frequency and attitudes toward masturbation, \( B = -0.03, SE(B) = 0.06, t(142.66) = 0.54, p = .593 \), and partner masturbation frequency and accuracy of perceived masturbation frequency, \( B = -0.03, SE(B) = 0.02, t(144.12) = 1.72, p = .088 \), were not significant. In step three, the three-way interaction was not significant, \( B = 0.02, SE(B) = 0.02, t(151.44) = 1.27, p = .205 \).

**Hypothesis 8** was that for each masturbation variable (e.g., reason, target, openness, and guilt), the partner’s actual level of the variable would moderate the association between accuracy of perception and (a) relationship satisfaction and (b) sexual satisfaction. Specifically I hypothesized that for individuals whose partners actually masturbated with ‘pro-
relationship/high’ reason, target, openness, and guilt there would be a positive association between accuracy of perception and relationship/sexual satisfaction. However, for individuals whose partners actually masturbate with ‘anti-relationship/low’ reason, target, openness and guilt, there would be a negative association between accuracy of partner perception and relationship/sexual satisfaction. I conducted eight multilevel modeling hierarchical regressions with (a) relationship satisfaction and (b) sexual satisfaction as the dependent variables, perceived reason, target, openness and guilt as predictor variables, and partner’s actual reason, target, openness and guilt as moderator variables.

**Relationship satisfaction.** For reason for masturbating, this hypothesis was not supported. In step one, accuracy of perception was not a significant predictor of relationship satisfaction, $B = -.02$, $SE(B) = 0.04$, $t(167.28) = 0.40$, $p = .692$; however, the partner’s actual reason for masturbating was a significant positive predictor of relationship satisfaction, $B = .07$, $SE(B) = 0.04$, $t(185.59) = 2.03$, $p = .044$. If partners had more pro-relationship reasons for masturbating, this was associated with higher levels of relationship satisfaction. In step two, the interaction of actual reason and accuracy of perception of partner’s reason for masturbating was not significant, $B = -.02$, $SE(B) = 0.02$, $t(163.61) = 1.04$, $p = .300$.

For target of masturbation, this hypothesis was not supported. In step one, neither accuracy of perception, $B = -.01$, $SE(B) = 0.05$, $t(176.44) = 0.28$, $p = .780$, nor partner’s actual target of masturbation, $B = .01$, $SE(B) = 0.04$, $t(179.91) = 0.36$, $p = .717$, was a significant predictor of relationship satisfaction. In step two, the interaction of actual target and accuracy of perception of partner’s target of masturbation was not significant, $B = .04$, $SE(B) = 0.02$, $t(151.97) = 1.67$, $p = .097$. Since the interaction approached significance, I graphed the interaction (see Figure 4) and conducted simple slopes analyses as outlined but Aiken and West.
(1991). The association between accuracy and relationship satisfaction was more positive when pro-relationship targets were used; however, neither of the simple slopes was significant. When the actual target of masturbation was more pro-relationship, there was not a significant association between accuracy and relationship satisfaction, $B = .04$, $SE(B) = 0.06$, $t(166.56) = 0.76$, $p = .451$. When the actual target of masturbation was more anti-relationship there was not a significant association between accuracy and relationship satisfaction, $B = -.07$, $SE(B) = 0.05$, $t(171.10) = 1.27$, $p = .204$.

For openness about masturbation, this hypothesis was supported. In step one, neither accuracy of perception, $B = .02$, $SE(B) = 0.06$, $t(181.03) = 0.34$, $p = .734$, nor partner’s actual openness about masturbation, $B = .04$, $SE(B) = 0.04$, $t(185.84) = 0.89$, $p = .374$, was a significant predictor of relationship satisfaction. In step two, the interaction of actual openness and accuracy of perception of partner’s openness about masturbation was significant, $B = .12$, $SE(B) = 0.03$, $t(158.94) = 3.79$, $p < .001$. Since the interaction was significant, I graphed the interaction (see Figure 5) and conducted simple slopes analyses to determine the nature of the interaction, as outlined by Aiken and West (1991). For participants whose partners were more open about their masturbatory habits, there was a significant positive association between accuracy of perception of partner’s openness and relationship satisfaction, $B = .19$, $SE(B) = 0.09$, $t(178.54) = 2.20$, $p = .029$. However, for participants whose partners were less open with them about their masturbatory habits, there was a significant negative association between accuracy of perceived openness and relationship satisfaction, $B = -.15$, $SE(B) = .17$, $t(167.44) = 2.29$, $p = .023$.

For masturbation guilt, this hypothesis was not supported. In step one, neither accuracy of perception, $B = -.03$, $SE(B) = 0.06$, $t(177.53) = -0.49$, $p = .627$, nor partner’s actual masturbation guilt, $B = .01$, $SE(B) = 0.05$, $t(176.60) = 0.32$, $p = .749$, was a significant predictor
of relationship satisfaction. In step two, the interaction of actual and accuracy of perception of partner’s masturbation guilt was not significant, \( B = .01, \ SE(B) = 0.03, t(145.22) = 0.31, p = .754. \)

**Sexual satisfaction.** For reason for masturbating, this hypothesis was not supported. In step one, neither accuracy of perception, \( B = -.00, \ SE(B) = 0.03, t(158.42) = 0.01, p = .994, \) nor partner’s actual reason for masturbating, \( B = .04, \ SE(B) = 0.02, t(182.86) = 1.60, p = .111, \) was a significant predictor of sexual satisfaction. In step two, the interaction of actual reason and accuracy of perception of partner’s reason for masturbating was not significant, \( B = .01, \ SE(B) = 0.01, t(155.97) = 0.79, p = .429. \)

For target of masturbation, this hypothesis was not supported. In step one, neither accuracy of perception, \( B = -.03, \ SE(B) = 0.03, t(168.07) = 1.02, p = .309, \) nor partner’s actual target of masturbation, \( B = .02, \ SE(B) = 0.02, t(172.98) = 0.83, p = .409, \) was a significant predictor of sexual satisfaction. In step two, the interaction of actual target and accuracy of perception of partner’s target of masturbation was not significant, \( B = .02, \ SE(B) = 0.01, t(143.30) = 1.37, p = .172. \)

For openness about masturbation, this hypothesis was supported. In step one, neither accuracy of perception, \( B = -.01, \ SE(B) = 0.04, t(174.62) = 0.32, p = .750, \) nor partner’s actual openness about masturbation, \( B = .01, \ SE(B) = 0.03, t(185.45) = 0.46, p = .649, \) was a significant predictor of sexual satisfaction. In step two, the interaction of actual openness and accuracy of perception of partner’s openness about masturbation was significant, \( B = .07, \ SE(B) = 0.02, t(153.77) = 3.70, p < .001. \) Since the interaction was significant, I graphed the interaction (see Figure 6) and conducted simple slope analyses to determine the nature of the interaction, as outlined by Aiken and West (1991). For participants whose partners were more open regarding
their masturbatory habits, there was a trend toward a positive association between accuracy of perceived openness about masturbation and sexual satisfaction, $B = .09$, $SE(B) = 0.06$, $t(172.41) = 1.67$, $p = .097$. However, for participants whose partners were less open about their masturbatory habits, there was a significant negative association between accuracy of perceived openness about masturbation and relationship satisfaction, $B = -.12$, $SE(B) = 0.04$, $t(160.14) = 2.86$, $p = .005$.

For masturbation guilt, this hypothesis was not supported. In step one, neither accuracy of perception, $B = .00$, $SE(B) = 0.04$, $t(172.61) = 0.08$, $p = .935$, nor partner’s actual masturbation guilt, $B = .02$, $SE(B) = 0.03$, $t(171.74) = 0.67$, $p = .503$, was a significant predictor of sexual satisfaction. In step two, the interaction of actual guilt and accuracy of perception of partner’s masturbation guilt was not significant, $B = .02$, $SE(B) = 0.02$, $t(140.72) = 1.43$, $p = .154$. 
Previous literature has shown mostly positive associations between accuracy of partner perception and romantic relationship satisfaction. However, there is evidence of some areas in which this association may not be significant or positive. For example, this association may be negative when the object of perception is negatively charged, and the association may vary between men and women. This dissertation project was designed to extend the current literature on accuracy of partner perception to masturbatory habits. Furthermore, the study examined perception and accuracy in predicting sexual as well as relationship satisfaction in married couples. To examine perceptions of masturbatory habits as predictors of relationship and sexual satisfaction, husband and wife participants responded to self-report inventories assessing participant’s own relationship and sexual satisfaction and both their own and their perceptions of their partners’ masturbatory habits. Accuracy was assessed by reverse coding the absolute value of the difference between a participant’s perception of his or her partner and his or her spouse’s reported actual behavior.

In general, participants were able to predict their partner’s masturbation habits with a moderate level of accuracy. This was an unexpected finding as accuracy has typically been linked to communication and intimacy, and masturbation has historically been a rarely discussed topic. However, this level of accuracy is somewhat consistent with past evidence for individuals’ abilities to accurately perceive romantic partners (Kenny & Acitelli, 2001).

There was evidence for some differences between men and women. In general, men reported higher frequencies of masturbation; whereas women report higher levels of openness with their partner about their masturbatory habits. Men masturbating with a higher frequency
than women is consistent with past findings on the sexual habits of males and females (e.g., Petersen & Hyde, 2011). The finding that women were more open about masturbatory habits than men was contrary to previous literature identifying the stronger social taboo of masturbation by women and subsequent underreporting of masturbatory behaviors (Alexander & Fisher, 2003). It is possible that the specific assessment in this project of openness with one’s partner, as opposed to openness in general, may have contributed to this unexpected gender difference. It may be that women are more open to their partners about their masturbation habits than they are generally. It is also possible that masturbation could hold different meanings inside and outside the context of a committed romantic relationship for men and women. Other gender differences related to the pattern of correlations between masturbatory behavior, relationship satisfaction, and sexual satisfaction. Specifically, the correlations between masturbatory behaviors tended to be more strongly associated with relationship satisfaction than sexual satisfaction in women; but approximately equally correlated to relationship and sexual satisfaction in men. Perceptions of partners’ masturbatory behaviors were also more strongly associated with relationship satisfaction for women than men.

Overall, perception of masturbation frequency was not significantly associated with relationship satisfaction. However, for those individuals who perceived their partners to masturbate, perceived masturbation frequency was negatively associated with sexual satisfaction. Moreover, perceptions of some masturbatory behaviors (e.g., reason for masturbating, openness about masturbation) were positively associated with relationship/sexual satisfaction. Results indicate that perceived masturbation frequency may not be as meaningful in predicting relationship and sexual satisfaction as the context within which the masturbation is perceived to occur. In the past, findings were conflicted on the association between masturbation frequency
and relationship satisfaction, and the studies that reported a significant association reported small effect sizes (e.g., Brody & Costa, 2009; Dube, 2010). The findings of the present study could be viewed as an extension of those findings. In this study, perceived masturbation frequency did not have a consistent relationship with relationship or sexual satisfaction; however, aspects related to the masturbation behavior (e.g., reason for masturbating, target of masturbation, openness about masturbation) were significantly associated with relationship/sexual satisfaction, evidencing the complexity of the association depending on the relationship and context within which the masturbation occurs.

For most of the masturbation variables (i.e., reason for masturbating, target of masturbation, openness about masturbation), more pro-relationship perceptions (i.e., pro-relationship reason and target, more openness) were generally associated with higher relationship and sexual satisfaction. Interestingly, perceptions of masturbation guilt were negatively related to sexual satisfaction. I had hypothesized that perceptions of guilt might be positively related to relationship/sexual satisfaction, because perceptions of guilt might indicate the partner was feeling bad for his or her behavior, and perhaps increase feelings of empathy or connection. This was not found; instead, perceptions of guilt were negatively related to sexual satisfaction. It may be that guilt makes it difficult for individuals to connect sexually with their partners, thus lowering sexual satisfaction.

When examining couple agreement on masturbatory behaviors, a few main findings emerged. First, couple agreement was difficult to predict. Neither of the two variables included in the present study (i.e., length of marriage, communication) significantly predicted accuracy in perception of masturbatory frequency and behaviors as hypothesized. Previous literature on the association between relationship length and accuracy of partner perception is largely mixed (e.g.,
Swann & Gill, 1997; Carroll, 1972). It may be that the length of marriage is not an important factor in improving accuracy in perception. It may be that sexual topics such as masturbation are areas that partners either share with each other or not, irrespective of the duration of the relationship/marriage. Communication was hypothesized to positively predict accuracy because of the potential for increased conversations on masturbatory habits and safety associated with good communication; however, this was not supported. It may be that the measure of communication used in the present study, which evaluated general communication in the relationship, was not specific enough to assess communication about sexual topics such as masturbation.

Second, overall the accuracy of partner perception was not strongly related to relationship/sexual satisfaction. In most cases, the perceptions of the partner’s masturbation (as either pro-relationship or anti-relationship) were much stronger predictors of relationship/sexual satisfaction than accuracy. In regard to the overall hypothesis that accuracy would be positively related to relationship/sexual satisfaction when the valence of the variable perceived was positive, this was mostly not supported, with the exception of openness about masturbation. The partner’s actual openness about masturbation moderated the association between accuracy about openness and both relationship and sexual satisfaction, such that more positive associations were found when the partner’s actual openness was high. Past literature has reported somewhat mixed findings on the association between accuracy of partner perception and relationship satisfaction. Drwal (2003) has suggested that accuracy has benefits when the valence of the perceived variable is positive (e.g., pro-relationship target) but may not be beneficial when the valence of the perceived variable is negative (e.g., less openness about masturbation). My findings partially supported this theorizing (i.e., for openness regarding masturbation), but the more common
finding was that accuracy of masturbatory behavior did not meaningfully predict relationship and sexual satisfaction. It appears that accuracy (at least in the area of masturbatory behavior) may not influence relationship/sexual satisfaction as strongly as perceptions of masturbatory behavior as either pro-relationship or anti-relationship.

Limitations

The findings from the present study must be interpreted in light of several limitations. First, the participants in this dissertation project were mostly heterosexual individuals who were involved in heterosexual marriages. Therefore it is unclear the extent to which these findings generalize to non-married or sexual minority couples. The sample was also mostly Caucasian, so results may not generalize to racial or ethnic minority and biracial couples. The participants varied greatly in age and length of marriage so results are likely fairly representative of the population in regard to age.

Second, this study used a cross-sectional, correlational design. This design was used partly out of necessity, as many of the research questions and constructs studied are not amenable to experimental designs. While the findings do indicate meaningful associations between variables, they cannot be interpreted as having a causal relationship. Understanding how perception and accuracy of perception of partner’s masturbatory habits are associated with relationship and sexual satisfaction is an important first step in deepening our understanding of masturbation and relationship/sexual satisfaction.

Third, there were some limitations in the measures used. Although relationship satisfaction and accuracy of partner perception have been studied at length, the role of masturbation and sexuality in accuracy of partner perception has rarely been studied. Furthermore, there is very little research on masturbatory habits at all. Therefore, several of the
primary scales used in this study were designed for the purpose of this project or had been used in only one previous study. Thus, further research is needed to assess the validity and reliability of these scales.

**Areas for Future Research**

Based on the findings from the present study, there are several exciting areas for future research. First, future research should explore masturbatory habits in non-heterosexual and non-married couples to gain a more comprehensive understanding of masturbatory behaviors, accuracy of partner perception, and relationship/sexual satisfaction in a broader range of romantic relationships. Additionally, future research should explore these variables in racial and ethnic minority groups to identify between and within group differences that may exist. This could also be extended to biracial and non-traditional couples (e.g., polyamorous couples). Second, future research should explore the validity and reliability of the measures developed for this study. This is an area in which few measures have been developed so increasing the rigor of measurements used will raise the quality of future research. Third, future research should explore these variables over time to identify changes in both perception of partner’s behavior and partner’s actual behavior. Additionally, research should focus on events both external and internal to the relationship that may be associated with increases or decreases in accuracy of perception or the actual occurrence of a given behavior.

**Clinical Implications**

The results of this study can be used to inform clinical work with both individuals and couples presenting with relational or sexual distress. One main finding was that an individual’s perception of the frequency of his or her partner’s masturbation was not as strong a predictor of relationship or sexual satisfaction when compared to other aspects of the masturbation behavior,
such as the reason why the individual is masturbating, the target of arousal during masturbation, and openness with the partner about masturbation. If couples present to counseling with masturbation as an area of distress, counselors could encourage partners to discuss the reasons why they are masturbating or the targets used during masturbation. Individuals may not be aware of their own or their partner’s reasons for masturbating and target of arousal during masturbation. Open dialogue on the topic could lead to greater self-awareness and more pro-relationship intentionality in masturbatory behaviors.

Related to this suggestion to dialogue about aspects of masturbation that might be important to relationship and sexual satisfaction, openness about masturbation was one of the most influential variables identified in this dissertation project. A counselor could use therapy as an opportunity to address openness and assess for level of openness between partners. Facilitating conversations about masturbatory behaviors and beliefs could be an effective tool in couple therapy to prompt similar openness outside of the therapy room. However this intervention should be used judiciously in couple therapy as there is also evidence that inaccurately perceiving a partner’s low openness could be associated with higher relational and sexual satisfaction. In this case, bringing low openness to the forefront could cause at least temporary increases in relational or sexual distress. If this is deemed therapeutically beneficial by the counselor, the couple must have adequate coping mechanisms and resources prior to the unveiling of actual levels of openness about masturbation. Discussions of openness about masturbation could also be useful in individual therapy to increase insight and reflection on possible marital or sexual concerns.

In many cases, perception of one’s partner’s masturbatory behaviors was more meaningful than accuracy in predicting those behaviors. This is an important consideration in
couple therapy; particularly, if one spouse has an inaccurate negative view of his or her spouse’s masturbatory habits. Facilitating dialogue could clarify inaccurate perceptions that may be associated with lower relationship/sexual satisfaction. However, accuracy itself is not necessarily positively associated with relationship/sexual satisfaction, so increasing accuracy may not be beneficial if the perception was inaccurate, but positively biased. Individual sessions or brief assessment questionnaires could be used to gather information on actual, perceived, and accuracy in predicting masturbatory behaviors to inform clinician’s work. Specifically, if individuals have inaccurate positive views, it may not be therapeutically beneficial to explore the inaccuracy. However, if individual’s have inaccurately negative views, it could be therapeutically beneficial to explore perceptions and actual behaviors in session to increase accuracy. Additionally, if participants have accurate negative views of one another, exploring and changing masturbatory behaviors to be more pro-relationship could be therapeutically beneficial. Providing psychoeducation may help in guiding couples towards changed masturbatory behaviors.

Conclusion

The present study was designed to extend the current literature on accuracy of partner perception and relationship/sexual satisfaction. Specifically, this study sought to bridge this topic with the scarce literature on masturbation and relationship/sexual satisfaction. Masturbatory behavior, perception of partner’s masturbatory behavior, and accuracy of perception of partner’s masturbatory behavior were examined. Overall, perception of masturbation frequency and accuracy of perception were less important in predicting relationship satisfaction than aspects of the masturbation that communicated meaning about the relationship
(e.g., one’s reason for masturbating). Future research should continue to explore perceptions of masturbation behaviors and the meanings these behaviors communicate about the relationship.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study</th>
<th>Published</th>
<th>Number of Couples</th>
<th>Type of sample</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Target Construct</th>
<th>Measure of Accuracy</th>
<th>Measure of Relationship Satisfaction</th>
<th>General Findings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cohen, Schulz, Weiss &amp; Waldinger (2012)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>156</td>
<td>Committed couples together .4 to 30 years (M = 3.5yrs) 56% married</td>
<td>Male M = 38.3</td>
<td>Empathic accuracy</td>
<td>Record and review procedure of “high affect” moments</td>
<td>Locke-Wallace Marital Adjustment Test-Short Form (MAT; Locke &amp; Wallace, 1987)</td>
<td>There was a positive association between empathic accuracy and relationship satisfaction.</td>
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<td>Dalton (2005)</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Distressed married couples seeking couples therapy (2 of the couples were separated at the time of recruitment)</td>
<td>M = 43 years</td>
<td>Empathic accuracy</td>
<td>Dyadic Interaction Paradigm (Record &amp; Review Procedure)</td>
<td>DAS</td>
<td>Empathic accuracy was not significantly associated with relationship satisfaction.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drwal (2003)</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>Couples dating for 6-72 months (M = 14.6)</td>
<td>Male M = 19.4</td>
<td>Empathic accuracy</td>
<td>Record &amp; review of discussion on topic of disagreement identified on Relationship Problems Scale (RPS; Riggs, 1993)</td>
<td>General Relationship Satisfaction (GRS; Hendrick, 1988)</td>
<td>Overall, the findings were mixed. For neutral content there was not a significant association between accuracy and relationship satisfaction. For negative content, there was a negative association between accuracy and relationship satisfaction. For positive content there was a positive association between accuracy and relationship satisfaction.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study</td>
<td>Sample Description</td>
<td>Empathic Accuracy Measure</td>
<td>Relationship Measure</td>
<td>Findings</td>
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<td>Haugen, Welsh &amp; McNulty (2008)</td>
<td>Yes 204 Dating couples</td>
<td>Range: 14-22 years Median = 17 years</td>
<td>Video record and review</td>
<td>There was a positive association between empathic accuracy and relationship satisfaction.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Muelle &amp; Fiebert (1988)</td>
<td>Yes 60 20 Married couples, 20 dating couples &amp; 20 college students with opposite sex friend pairs</td>
<td>M = 32.4</td>
<td>Empathic accuracy</td>
<td>Across all three groups, there was a negative association between empathic accuracy and relationship satisfaction.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Thomas &amp; Fletcher (2003)</td>
<td>Yes 50 Premarital dating couples</td>
<td>Male M = 22.9 Female M = 21.7</td>
<td>Record and review procedure identifying own and spouses' thoughts and feelings</td>
<td>For married or dating women there was a positive association between empathic accuracy and relationship satisfaction.</td>
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<td>General relationship satisfaction, relationship happiness, love, relationship stability, commitment and conflict questionnaire (Fletcher &amp; Fitness, 1990)</td>
<td>Overall, there was a positive association between mind reading accuracy and relationship satisfaction.</td>
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<td>This association only reached significant for women.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Study</td>
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<td>Number of Couples</td>
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<tr>
<td>Christensen &amp; Wallace (1976)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>12 well-adjusted couples (never sought counseling or filed for divorce &amp; &gt;100 on MAT), 9 couples seeking counseling (&lt;100 on MAT) and 5 couples seeking divorce (&lt;100 on MAT)</td>
<td>Not reported</td>
<td>How rewarding certain marital interactions are to spouse</td>
<td>Marital Interaction Questionnaire</td>
<td>Locke-Wallace Marital Adjustment Test</td>
<td>Well-adjusted couples were significantly more accurate than those in counseling.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Margolin, Talovic &amp; Weinstein (1983)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>52 distressed couples &amp; 86 non-distressed couples (&gt;200 MAT or &gt;194 DAS)</td>
<td>Non-distressed couples M = 35.2 distressed couples M = 34.9</td>
<td>Change your partner would like in you</td>
<td>Areas of Change Questionnaire</td>
<td>Marital Adjustment Scale (Locke and Wallace, 1959) &amp; Dyadic Adjustment Scale (Spanier, 1976)</td>
<td>Overall, there was not a significant correlation between accuracy of partner’s perception and relationship satisfaction. For men, there was a negative association between accuracy of partner perception and relationship satisfaction.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Möller &amp; Van Zyl (1991).</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>Marred couple (M = 13.2 years)</td>
<td>Male M = 40.2 Female M = 37.4</td>
<td>Relational Beliefs</td>
<td>Relational Belief Inventory (RBI; Eidelson &amp; Epstein, 1982)</td>
<td>Dyadic Adjustment Scale</td>
<td>Findings were mixed. For females, there was a negative association between accuracy and relationship satisfaction. For men there was not a significant association.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study</td>
<td>Sample Size</td>
<td>Study Details</td>
<td>Research Instruments</td>
<td>Findings</td>
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<tr>
<td>Overall, Fletcher &amp; Kenny (2012)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>57 46% cohabitating or married &amp; 45% self-classified their relationship as serious</td>
<td>M = 21.0 Partner's regard for them</td>
<td>5 items assessing relationship satisfaction designed by Rusbult, Martz, and Agnew (1998)</td>
<td>Overall, the results were mixed. For women, there was a negative association between accuracy and relationship satisfaction. For men, there was not a significant association.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rowan, Compton &amp; Rust (1995)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>30 Couples married 1-33 years (M=8.8 years)</td>
<td>M = 32.98 Spouse’s Relationship Satisfaction</td>
<td>DAS</td>
<td>Overall, there was a positive association between accuracy and relationship satisfaction. This association only reached significance in predicting women’s relationship satisfaction.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tucker &amp; Anders (1999)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>61 Undergraduate couples dating for 1-50 months</td>
<td>Male M = 20.0 Female M = 19.3 Relationship love, commitment &amp; trust</td>
<td>Satisfaction with Dating Partner (Simpson, 1987)</td>
<td>Overall, the findings were mixed. There was a positive association between men’s relationship satisfaction and the accuracy of their perception of partner’s love. Women’s relationship satisfaction was negatively associated with the accuracy of their perceptions of their partner’s faith and dependability as well as how accurate their partner was at predicting their dependability. Associations between either partner’s accuracy of perception of commitment and relationship satisfaction were not significant.</td>
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Table 3. Communication

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<th>Study</th>
<th>Published</th>
<th>Number of Couples</th>
<th>Type of sample</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Target Construct</th>
<th>Measure of Accuracy</th>
<th>Measure of Relationship Satisfaction</th>
<th>General Findings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Connolly (1999)</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Married &amp; cohabitating couples</td>
<td>M = 32.38</td>
<td>Verbal Communication</td>
<td>Cloze Procedure (W. L. Taylor, 1953)</td>
<td>Dyadic Adjustment Scale</td>
<td>There was not a significant association between accuracy and relationship satisfaction.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Koerner &amp; Fitzpatrick (2002)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>Couples married 1 – 49 years (M = 12.7 years)</td>
<td>Male M = 38.9, Female M = 37.5</td>
<td>Affect through nonverbal cues</td>
<td>Standard content experimental method (Gottman &amp; Portfield, 1981; Kahn, 1970)</td>
<td>Spanier's Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS) (Spanier, 1976) Locke &amp; Wallace (1959) Short Marital Adjustment Test (S-MAT)</td>
<td>There was a negative association between accuracy and relationship satisfaction.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Noller &amp; Feeney (1994)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>Couples planning marriage within a month to 6 weeks of recruitment.</td>
<td>M = 23.7</td>
<td>Nonverbal accuracy</td>
<td>Standard content paradigm (Kah, 1970) &amp; The Marital Communication Scale</td>
<td>Quality Marriage Index (QMI; Norton, 1983)</td>
<td>Overall, there was a positive association between accuracy and relationship satisfaction. For wives, there was a negative association between accuracy of negative messages and relationship satisfaction.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Segrin, Hanzal &amp; Domschke (2009)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>194</td>
<td>First marriage &amp; married less than 5 years</td>
<td>Male M = 27.72, Female M = 26.04</td>
<td>Conflict resolution styles</td>
<td>32 item conflict resolution style inventory (CRSI; Kurdek, 1994)</td>
<td>Quality Marriage index (QMI; Norton, 1983)</td>
<td>Overall, accuracy was not significantly related to relationship satisfaction. Wives’ accuracy of perception of husband's conflict engagement was negatively correlated with relationship satisfaction.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study</td>
<td>Published</td>
<td>Number of Couples</td>
<td>Type of sample</td>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Target Construct</td>
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<td>Measure of Relationship Satisfaction</td>
<td>General Findings</td>
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<tr>
<td>Creamer &amp; Campbell (1988)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Married couples with range of distress levels</td>
<td>Male M = 34.25 Female M = 32.5</td>
<td>Personality</td>
<td>California Psychologic al Inventory (CPI) &amp; Insight Analysis Procedure (Megarge, 1972)</td>
<td>Spanier's Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS) (Spanier, 1976)</td>
<td>There was a positive association between accuracy and relationship satisfaction. This result reached significance for women but not for men.</td>
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<td>Decuyper, De Bolle &amp; De Fruyt (2012)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>191</td>
<td>42.9% married, 32.5% lived together, 24.6% did not cohabit, Mean relationship length = 127.05 months</td>
<td>Male M = 34.14 Female M = 32.7</td>
<td>Personality</td>
<td>Dutch version of the NEO – PI – R (Costa &amp; McCrae, 1992; Hoekstra, Ormel, &amp; DeFruyt, 1996)</td>
<td>Relationship Assessment Scale</td>
<td>Overall, there was a positive association between accuracy and relationship satisfaction. Accuracy was significantly associated with own and partner’s relationship satisfaction, except men’s accuracy was not significantly associated with men’s own relationship satisfaction.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Study</td>
<td>Sample Description</td>
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<td>Measures</td>
<td>Findings</td>
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<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>Luo &amp; Snider (2009)</td>
<td>Newlywed couples</td>
<td>288</td>
<td>Personality, affectivity, emotional expressiveness, and attachment style</td>
<td>Accuracy of partner perception was positively correlated with relationship satisfaction.</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Murstein &amp; Beck (1972)</td>
<td>Couples married for at least 1 year</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>Current &amp; ideal personality of self &amp; spouse</td>
<td>There was a positive association between accuracy and relationship satisfaction. For women, this reached significance on almost all scales assessed; for men it did not.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Udry (1967)</td>
<td>Engaged college student couples</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>Personality</td>
<td>There was not a significant association between accuracy and relationship satisfaction.</td>
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Table 5. Other target perceptions

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<th>Type of sample</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Target Construct</th>
<th>Measure of Accuracy</th>
<th>Measure of Relationship Satisfaction</th>
<th>General Findings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LaMotte, Taft, Weatherill, Scott &amp; Eckhardt (2014).</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>OIF/OEF combat veterans and their partners screened for presence of relational distress (83% married, 11% cohabitating for at least 6 months and 6% married but separated with either daily or monthly contact)</td>
<td>Male vets M = 39.98 Female partners M=38.85</td>
<td>Perception of the occurrence of intimate partner violence</td>
<td>Revised Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS2; Straus, Hamby, Boney-McCoy &amp; Sugerman, 1996)</td>
<td>Quality of Marriage Inventory (QMI; Norton, 1983)</td>
<td>Overall, there was a negative association between accuracy and relationships satisfaction. These results only look at wives’ relationship satisfaction &amp; were only true when wife reported less IPV than partner.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Siegel (1981)</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Married and cohabitating couples (M = 5.7 years)</td>
<td>Male M = 29 Female M = 28</td>
<td>Mind Reading Accuracy</td>
<td>Predicted partner’s response in game of moral dilemmas</td>
<td>Locke-Wallace Marital Adjustment Scale</td>
<td>There was not a significant association between accuracy and relationship satisfaction.</td>
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<td>Speraw (1991)</td>
<td>No</td>
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<td>Married couples who had a miscarriage before 16 weeks gestation within past 1 to 105 months</td>
<td>M = 33</td>
<td>Partner's grieving</td>
<td>The revised Kennell Mourning Scale (Peppers &amp; Knapp, 1980b)</td>
<td>Spanier's Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS; Spanier, 1976)</td>
<td>There was not a significant association between accuracy and relationship satisfaction.</td>
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Table 6

*Demographic Statistics*

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<td>50</td>
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<tr>
<td>Female</td>
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<td>50</td>
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<td>12.9</td>
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<tr>
<td>Not Hispanic or Latino</td>
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<td>87.1</td>
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<td>Black/African American</td>
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<td>Other</td>
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<td>Christian-Catholic</td>
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<tr>
<td>Christian-Protestant</td>
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<td>Christian-Other</td>
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Table 7

**Descriptive Statistics**

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<th>Variable</th>
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<th>Possible Range</th>
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<td>0.85</td>
<td>186</td>
<td>3.43–7.00</td>
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<td>0.84</td>
<td>93</td>
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<td>Sexual Satisfaction</td>
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<td>1.48–3.92</td>
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<td>2.93</td>
<td>0.57</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>1.48–3.92</td>
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<td>2.94</td>
<td>0.55</td>
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<td>122</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Masturbation Target</td>
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<td>Females</td>
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<td>Masturbation Guilt</td>
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a Significantly higher than opposite sex p < .05
b Significantly higher than opposite sex p < .01
Table 8. Correlations between main study variables – Whole sample.

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Note. Correlations below the bolded diagonal reflect associations between participant’s own variables. Correlations on and above the diagonal reflect associations between participant and spouse’s variables. * p < .05; ** p < .001.
Table 9. Correlations between main study variables – Males only.

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Note. Correlations below the bolded diagonal reflect associations between participant’s own variables. Correlations on and above the diagonal reflect associations between participant and spouse’s variables. * p < .05; ** p < .001.
Table 10. Correlations between main study variables – Females only.

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<td>13. Perceived Masturbation Openness</td>
<td>.27**</td>
<td>.16</td>
<td>.38**</td>
<td>.23</td>
<td>.19</td>
<td>.40**</td>
<td>.39**</td>
<td>.57**</td>
<td>.24**</td>
<td>.30**</td>
<td>.73**</td>
<td>.76**</td>
<td>.37**</td>
<td>.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Perceived Masturbation Guilt</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>-.09</td>
<td>-.09</td>
<td>-.12</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>.16</td>
<td>.16</td>
<td>.20</td>
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<td>.16</td>
<td>.37**</td>
<td>.35**</td>
<td>.51**</td>
<td>.24*</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Note. Correlations below the bolded diagonal reflect associations between participant’s own variables. Correlations on and above the diagonal reflect associations between participant and spouse’s variables. * p < .05; ** p < .001.
Table 11. Correlations between main study variables and accuracy – Whole sample.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
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<td>.21**</td>
<td>.45**</td>
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<td>-.01</td>
<td>-.07</td>
<td>-.14</td>
<td>-.12</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Sexual Satisfaction</td>
<td>.31**</td>
<td>.55*</td>
<td>.15**</td>
<td>.33**</td>
<td>-.04</td>
<td>.17*</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>.14*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Attitudes Toward Masturbation</td>
<td>.17*</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>.65**</td>
<td>.24**</td>
<td>-.32**</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>-.13</td>
<td>.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Communication</td>
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<td>.52**</td>
<td>.21**</td>
<td>.49**</td>
<td>-.06</td>
<td>-.04</td>
<td>-.04</td>
<td>-.08</td>
<td>.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Accuracy in Predicting Masturbation Frequency</td>
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<td>-.05</td>
<td>-.27**</td>
<td>-.07</td>
<td>.33**</td>
<td>-.09</td>
<td>-.12</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>-.10</td>
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<tr>
<td>6. Accuracy in Predicting Reason for Masturbation</td>
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<td>.08</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>-.04</td>
<td>-.09</td>
<td>.21**</td>
<td>.22**</td>
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<td>.25**</td>
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<td>7. Accuracy in Predicting Masturbation Target</td>
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<td>-.01</td>
<td>-.00</td>
<td>-.07</td>
<td>-.12</td>
<td>.80**</td>
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<td>.27**</td>
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<td>8. Accuracy in Predicting Masturbation Openness</td>
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<td>-.05</td>
<td>-.12</td>
<td>-.10</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.49**</td>
<td>.57**</td>
<td>.37**</td>
<td>.26**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Accuracy in Predicting Masturbation Guilt</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>-.10</td>
<td>.36**</td>
<td>.47**</td>
<td>.38**</td>
<td>.34**</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Note. Correlations below the bolded diagonal reflect associations between participant’s own variables. Correlations on and above the diagonal reflect associations between participant and spouse’s variables. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .001$. 

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Table 12. Correlations between main study variables and accuracy – Males only.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>.15</td>
<td>.49</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>-.08</td>
<td>-.19</td>
<td>.12</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Sexual Satisfaction</td>
<td>.66**</td>
<td>.55**</td>
<td>.17</td>
<td>.31**</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.16</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>-.18</td>
<td>.10</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Attitudes Toward Masturbation</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.65**</td>
<td>.23**</td>
<td>-.23*</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>-.10</td>
<td>.15</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Communication</td>
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<td>.55**</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>.50**</td>
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<td>-.05</td>
<td>-.09</td>
<td>-.22*</td>
<td>-.02</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Accuracy in Predicting Masturbation Frequency</td>
<td>-.10</td>
<td>-.05</td>
<td>-.30**</td>
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<td>.37**</td>
<td>-.13</td>
<td>-.09</td>
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<td>-.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Accuracy in Predicting Reason for Masturbation</td>
<td>-.08</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>.07</td>
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<td>-.09</td>
<td>.22*</td>
<td>.26*</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td>.32**</td>
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<tr>
<td>7. Accuracy in Predicting Masturbation Target</td>
<td>-.16</td>
<td>-.06</td>
<td>-.02</td>
<td>-.17</td>
<td>-.16</td>
<td>.76**</td>
<td>.22*</td>
<td>.21*</td>
<td>.32**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Accuracy in Predicting Masturbation Openness</td>
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<td>-.00</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>-.12</td>
<td>-.02</td>
<td>.56**</td>
<td>.67*</td>
<td>.38**</td>
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<tr>
<td>9. Accuracy in Predicting Masturbation Guilt</td>
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<td>.03</td>
<td>.20</td>
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<td>-.08</td>
<td>.35**</td>
<td>.54**</td>
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</table>

Note. Correlations below the bolded diagonal reflect associations between participant’s own variables. Correlations on and above the diagonal reflect associations between participant and spouse’s variables. * \( p < .05 \); ** \( p < .001 \).
Table 13. Correlations between main study variables and accuracy – Females only.

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Variable</th>
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<td>.27**</td>
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<td>.11</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Sexual Satisfaction</td>
<td>.57**</td>
<td>.55**</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>.34**</td>
<td>-.16</td>
<td>.19</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td>.26*</td>
<td>.19</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Attitudes Toward Masturbation</td>
<td>.27**</td>
<td>.19</td>
<td>.65**</td>
<td>.26*</td>
<td>-.45**</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>-.07</td>
<td>-.16</td>
<td>-.02</td>
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<td>4. Communication</td>
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<td>.49**</td>
<td>.33**</td>
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<td>-.14</td>
<td>-.03</td>
<td>.01</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Accuracy in Predicting Masturbation Frequency</td>
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<td>-.05</td>
<td>-.27**</td>
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<td>.37*</td>
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<td>-.16</td>
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<td>-.08</td>
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<tr>
<td>6. Accuracy in Predicting Reason for Masturbation</td>
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<td>.06</td>
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<td>-.13</td>
<td>.22*</td>
<td>.17</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Accuracy in Predicting Masturbation Target</td>
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<td>.05</td>
<td>.02</td>
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<td>-.09</td>
<td>.86**</td>
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<td>-.10</td>
<td>-.26*</td>
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<td>.04</td>
<td>.43**</td>
<td>.46**</td>
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<tr>
<td>9. Accuracy in Predicting Masturbation Guilt</td>
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<td>.39**</td>
<td>.40**</td>
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<td>.34**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Correlations below the bolded diagonal reflect associations between participant’s own variables. Correlations on and above the diagonal reflect associations between participant and spouse’s variables. * p < .05; ** p < .001.
Figure 1. Moderation of perceived reason for masturbation on the association between perceived masturbation frequency and sexual satisfaction.
Figure 2. Moderation of perceived target of masturbation on the association between perceived masturbation frequency and sexual satisfaction.
Figure 3. Moderation of perceived openness about masturbation on the association between perceived masturbation frequency and relationship satisfaction.
Figure 4. Moderation of actual masturbation target on the association between accuracy of perceived masturbation target and relationship satisfaction.
Figure 5. Moderation of partner openness about masturbation on the association between accuracy of perceived openness about masturbation and relationship satisfaction.
Figure 4. Moderation of partner openness about masturbation on the association between accuracy of perceived openness about masturbation and sexual satisfaction.
Demographic Questionnaire

Please circle the answer that best describes you.

1. What is your gender?
   Male
   Female
   Other: __________

2. What is your age? ______

3. What is your ethnicity?
   Hispanic or Latino
   Not Hispanic or Latino

4. What is your race?
   White
   Black/African American
   American Indian/Alaska Native
   Asian
   Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander
   Multiracial _________________
   Other _____________________

5. What is your current living situation?
   Alone
   With a partner
   With roommate (own bedroom)
   With a roommate (shared bedroom)

6. What is your sexual orientation?
   Heterosexual
   Bisexual
   Homosexual
   Other _____________________

7. What is your religious affiliation?
   Christian—Catholic
   Christian—Protestant
   Christian—Other
   Muslim
   Buddhist
Hindu
Jewish
Mormon
Atheist
Agnostic
None
Other ______________________

8. What is your marital status?
   Single
   Married
   Separated
   Divorced
   Widowed
   Other ________________

9. What is your current relationship status?
   Single
   Casual Dating Relationship
   Committed Dating Relationship
   Cohabitating Committed Relationship
   Married
   Other: ___________________

10. What is the gender of your current partner?
    Male
    Female
    Other: ___________________

11. How long have you been in your current relationship? ________________

12. Please estimate your current family annual income: ______________

13. Please estimate the family annual income in the household in which you grew up:
    __________

14. Do you have a physical disability? If so, please list:
    Yes: __________
    No
    If yes, does your disability affect your sexual functioning?
    Yes
    No
    N/A
15. In which country were you born? ___________________

16. In what OTHER countries have you lived for at least three months during your lifetime?
_______________________________________________________________________

17. What is your nationality? ______________________

18. What was your primary language growing up?
   English
   Other: ___________
   English and other:___________

19. What is your highest level of education?
   Less than HS diploma or GED
   HS diploma or GED
   Some college
   Associates degree
   Bachelor’s Degree
   Master’s degree
   Doctoral degree

20. What is your current occupation? ________________________

21. Were you married prior to your current marriage?
   Yes               No
   If yes, how many times were you married before your current marriage? _______

22. Do you have children from partners other than your current spouse?
   Yes               No
   If yes, how many children from previous partner(s)? _______
   From how many different partners? _______

23. Do you have children with your current spouse?
   Yes               No
   If yes, how many children? _______

24. Please provide the ages of your (or your spouse’s) children who live in your home at least half time. ______________________________________________________________
25. Use one of the following numbers to indicate your political views in the accompanying categories.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<th>Liberal (2)</th>
<th>Slightly liberal (3)</th>
<th>Middle of the road (4)</th>
<th>Slightly conservative (5)</th>
<th>Conservative (6)</th>
<th>Very conservative (7)</th>
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</thead>
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<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic issues</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social issues</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Relationship Experience Questionnaire

Please circle the response that best describes you.

Do you have at least one good friend?   Yes   No

How long is your longest friendship? ______________

Is it easier for you to make friends with

   Same sex persons

   Opposite sex persons

Have you ever been involved in a romantic relationship?   Yes   No

If yes,

Are you currently in a relationship?   Yes   No

   If yes, please indicate the length of your current relationship. ______________

   If no, please indicate the length of your most recent relationship. __________

Approximately how many romantic relationships have you had? _________

With whom have you had romantic relationship(s):

   Only same sex partners

   Only opposite sex partners

   Both same sex and opposite sex partners

Have you ever been unfaithful to a partner?   Yes   No

To your knowledge, has a partner ever been unfaithful to you?   Yes   No
APPENDIX B

INFORMED CONSENT NOTICE
Informed Consent Notice

Before agreeing to participate in this research study, it is important that you read and understand the following explanation of the purpose, benefits and risks of the study and how it will be conducted.

Title of Study: A Study of Married Couples

Principal Investigator: Joshua Hook, PhD, University of North Texas (UNT) Department of Psychology.

Purpose of the Study: You are being asked to participate in a research study which involves the examination of one’s relationship and sexual experiences. To participate in this study, you must currently be married and participate with your spouse.

Study Procedures: You will be asked to fill out a survey with various questionnaires as well as participate in a video taped conversation with your spouse. This process will take about 90 minutes of your time. In two months you will be contacted to complete an online survey which will take approximately 60 minutes of your times. In eight months, you will be contacted one final time to complete an online survey which will take about 30 minutes of your time.

Foreseeable Risks: There are no foreseeable risks of this study except for possible feelings of discomfort due to answering survey questions regarding attitudes, feelings, and experiences. If you do experience feelings of discomfort, you may contact the principal investigator who can refer you to services for counseling. You may also choose to stop participation at any point.

Benefits to the Subjects or Others: This study is not expected to be of any direct benefit to you but may contribute to the growing body of knowledge about experience and satisfaction with relationships and sexuality.

Compensation for Participants: As a couple, you will jointly receive $40 for part one, $30 for part two, and $20 for part three as compensation for your participation in this research study.

Procedures for Maintaining Confidentiality of Research Records: Your participation in this study will be confidential. Identifying information will be collected only for compensation purposes, and will be destroyed once compensation is given. The confidentiality of your individual data will be maintained in any publications or presentations regarding this study.

Questions about the Study: If you have any questions about the study, you may contact Dr. Joshua Hook at telephone number 940.369.8076.
**Review for the Protection of Participants:** This research study has been reviewed and approved by the UNT Institutional Review Board (IRB). The UNT IRB can be contacted at (940) 565-3940 with any questions regarding the rights of research subjects.

**Research Participants’ Rights:**

You have read or have had read to you all of the above and you confirm all of the following:

- You understand the possible benefits and the potential risks and/or discomforts of the study.
- You understand that you do not have to take part in this study, and your refusal to participate or your decision to withdraw will involve no penalty or loss of rights or benefits.
- You understand why the study is being conducted and how it will be performed.
- You understand your rights as a research participant and you voluntarily consent to participate in this study.

Name: ________________________________

Signature: ____________________________

Date: ________________________________
REFERENCES


Ripley, J. S. (1999). *The effects of marital social values on outcomes of forgiveness couples enrichment psychoeducational groups, or communication couples enrichment psychoeducational groups (doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses (AAT 304576672).*


