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THE ASSOCIATION BETWEEN BODY IMAGE, SEXUAL SATISFACTION, AND
RELATIONSHIP SATISFACTION IN ADULTS

A Thesis
Presented to
The Faculty of the Department of Psychology
Western Kentucky University
Bowling Green, Kentucky

In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Masters of Arts

By
Hannah Krisher

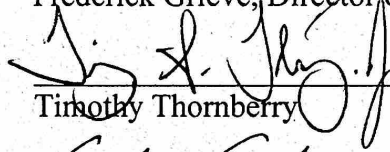
August 2020

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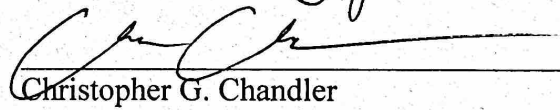
Date Recommended July 22, 2020



Frederick Grieve, Director of Thesis



Timothy Thornberry



Christopher G. Chandler



8/13/20

Associate Provost for Research and Graduate Education

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

My thesis would still just be an intimidating idea without Dr. Rick Grieve's belief in me as a student and researcher. Thank you for your unwavering support and encouragement of me for almost three years now. I am most appreciative of your patience and time investment, as this process has required a lot of both. Your patience showed me that you were confident in my abilities to complete this project, despite any personal setbacks I brought to the table. The time you invested in this project is a testament to your invaluable role as a professor and thesis director. I will always appreciate that Dr. Grieve chaired my thesis project.

I would also like to thank my thesis committee members, Dr. Tim Thornberry and Dr. Chris Chandler. Thank you, Dr. Thornberry, for happily agreeing to be on this committee. You provided materials that aided in my research process, responded promptly to any communications, and challenged me as a critical thinker. Thank you, Dr. Chandler, for sharing your personal experiences as a past WKU Clinical Psychology student to help encourage me to finally make large strides of progress on my thesis. You showed me firsthand how this process is possible and rewarding. I appreciate both of you for your patience, promptness, and commitment to this project.

Another person who deserves ample gratitude is Leigh Ann Mathis, who was my internship supervisor. Leigh Ann, thank you for allowing me to learn from you and for trusting me to help make a difference in clients' lives. Thank you for checking in on me even after our internship experience was over, and for reminding me that I can accomplish difficult tasks.

Next, I want to thank my peer, Riley Cotterman, for sharing her knowledge of Qualtrics, MTurk, and data cleaning with me. You spent several hours helping me upload my study online and sat with me while I anxiously collected the data, which were both things that reaped you little benefit. Thank you, Riley, for your help, but more so for your friendship. I also want to thank my classmate and friend, Hannah Turner, for her confidence in me and her cheerful, uplifting demeanor that overpowered my doubts and pessimistic thoughts. You are a wonderful role model, friend, and supporter.

I am forever thankful to my family for their excitement for me and support of me as I approach the next phase in my life. Thank you to my parents who firmly pushed me to set thesis goals that would benefit my future, while also gracefully accepting the emotions that accompanied this process. Next, I want to thank my sisters who shared words of encouragement and confidence with me on a weekly basis. To my entire family: you all remind me that we can do anything!

Lastly, I want to thank Landon for his commitment to me over the course of graduate school, and especially during thesis completion. Landon, thank you so much for reminding me why my work is important when I lose sight of the end goal. Thank you for being patient with me and for loving me despite seeing the worst sides of me. Whether I needed to talk, needed to be alone to work, or needed a mental break, we figured it out together. I will always remember and appreciate our office workdays, our thesis chats at dinner, and our small celebrations of victory along the way. I love you and thank you!

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THE ASSOCIATION BETWEEN BODY IMAGE, SEXUAL SATISFACTION, AND RELATIONSHIP SATISFACTION IN ADULTS

Hannah Krisher

August 2020

55 Pages

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The purpose of this thesis was to determine whether body image and sexual satisfaction predict romantic relationship satisfaction. The 198 participants completed measures assessing for the predictor and outcome variables. They completed the Body Assessment Scale (BAS; Lorenzen et al., 2004), Index of Sexual Satisfaction (ISS; Hudson, 1998; Hudson et al., 1981), and the Relationship Assessment Scale (RAS; Hendrick, 1988) via a Qualtrics questionnaire. Participants accessed the study online through Amazon's Mechanical Turk (MTurk) database and completion took approximately 10 to 20 minutes. Results suggested that body image and sexual satisfaction significantly and positively predicted relationship satisfaction. The findings from this study can be used to inform healthcare professionals about the etiology, prevention, and treatment of mental health concerns regarding body image, self-esteem, sexual satisfaction, and interpersonal relationships in adults.

Chapter I

Introduction

Experiencing concern with one's body image is not a recent issue. During the last 50 years, body image dissatisfaction has worsened, and has been most commonly studied in samples of adult women (Muth & Cash, 1997). Various social pressures in the form of media, advertising, and a growing number of diet programs have negatively impacted women's appraisals of their bodies (Hoyt & Kogan, 2001; Muth & Cash, 1997; van den Brink et al., 2018). Because these social pressures can lead to negative body image appraisals, there is also the possibility that eating disorders will develop as individuals attempt to gain a sense of control over the issue. Not only has the media's depiction of ideal thinness negatively impacted women, the more recently popular depiction of the ideal muscular male body has negatively impacted samples of men as well (Lorenzen et al., 2004). The issue of body image dissatisfaction has long been studied in women, but now that there is evidence to suggest that men equally experience discontent after viewing images of muscular men in the media, there is even more reason to further study the topic in hopes of reducing the risk of mental health concerns, such as the development of eating disorders and body dysmorphia (Lorenzen et al., 2004).

Along with the concerning information regarding body image dissatisfaction is the issue pertaining to high national divorce rates and romantic relationship dissolution. Divorce and lack of exposure to parental intimacy can pose psychological risks, such as increased depressive symptoms and reduced relationship satisfaction, for both children of divorce and divorcees themselves (Chun et al., 2016). There is past evidence to suggest that body image is associated with relationship satisfaction (Hoyt & Kogan, 2001), and

that sexual satisfaction plays a role in this relationship (Meltzer & McNulty, 2010; van den Brink et al., 2018). With this previous knowledge, the relevant issues pertaining to body image, sexual satisfaction, and relationship satisfaction will be discussed.

Relevant Issues

Body Image Concerns

The first issue relevant to the context of this literature review pertains to body image dissatisfaction. In their sample of 309 adolescents, Prabhu and D’Cunha (2018) found that a majority of males and females between ages 14 and 19 were dissatisfied with their body image. There were no gender differences in the level of dissatisfaction present, with 49% of females and 51% of males reporting body image dissatisfaction. However, the desire to be thinner was more common in females than in males. Further, the majority of male participants who reported body image dissatisfaction indicated that they desired a larger, stronger physique (Prabhu & D’Cunha, 2018). Additional findings suggested that a negative body image appraisal is associated with increased mental health problems, such as low self-esteem, increased risk of eating disorder symptoms such as restrictive dieting, and increased stress (Prabhu & D’Cunha, 2018). These mental health concerns are variables that can also influence one’s relationship satisfaction (Sciangula & Morry, 2009). The researchers argued that it is necessary for healthcare professionals to be knowledgeable in this area to help reduce the harmful effects that negative body image can have on one’s mental health (Prabhu & D’Cunha, 2018).

The participants recruited in Prabhu and D’Cunha’s (2018) research consisted of a sample of adolescents in the Dakshina Kannada district in India, showing how far the issue of body image dissatisfaction spreads. Using a more westernized sample of

participants, Grieve et al. (2006) recruited a sample of 284 college students, and found that, similar to the adolescent sample, an alarming percentage of participants (45% females, 38% men) were dissatisfied with their body image, and numerous participants reported that they engaged in unhealthy weight loss behaviors, such as skipping meals and using food substitutes. Again, this group of researchers found no gender differences between how satisfied females and males were with their body image (Grieve et al., 2006), which contrasts somewhat to previous findings that suggest that women are more likely than men to be dissatisfied with their body images (Hoyt & Kogan, 2001).

Because researchers are concerned about the development of eating disorders and other mental health concerns, it is important to understand how body image dissatisfaction can escalate from a level of normative discontent to a potentially life-threatening diagnosis. Many researchers believe that perfectionistic personality traits play a predictive role in the development of eating disorders, and that perfectionism is a multifaceted concept, with one facet being socially prescribed perfectionism (SPP; Hewitt & Flett, 1991). SPP occurs when an individual believes that his or her social environment is expecting him or her to conform to unattainable standards, often involving his or her physical appearance (Hewitt & Flett, 1991). According to Dawson and Thornberry's (2018) model of anorexic symptom development, they argued that SPP is one variable that leads to the development of harmful eating practices. In addition to SPP, individuals can also experience thin ideal internalization (TII) as a result of adopting the socially prescribed ideals of thinness and engaging in behaviors, such as excessive dieting or exercising, to obtain the ideal body (Dawson & Thornberry, 2018). Once an individual experiences SPP and TII, and these two factors are paired together with body

dissatisfaction (BD), they are more likely to develop symptoms of an eating disorder than those who are satisfied with their body image and those who have a realistic understanding of social standards (Dawson & Thornberry, 2018).

Divorce Rates

Another relevant issue is divorce. Generational changes in the variables associated with divorce motivate researchers to conduct further studies regarding additional reasons why romantic relationships dissolve, aside from variables such as religious affiliation, income, and geographical location (Mullins et al., 2012).

Some researchers have analyzed hypotheses suggesting that one's body mass index (BMI) is related to his or her marital status and the country's national divorce rate (Schneider & Grimps, 2013). They found that married individuals between ages 40 and 64 were heavier than those who were single or never married. Schneider and Grimps (2013) predicted that, when the national divorce rate is high and there is a higher risk of relationship dissolution, individuals will be more likely to exhibit a lower BMI than when divorce rate is lower, which highlights the importance of physical attractiveness as a global criterion for entering the dating world. The results were somewhat consistent with predictions, with the relationship between body weight and marriage length depending on divorce trends of specific countries. Researchers suggested that further information should be obtained regarding body image and divorce dynamics to help reduce the risk of increased relationship dissolution (Schneider & Grimps, 2013).

Self-Esteem and Relationship Theories

In addition to the issues of body image concern and high national divorce rates, another troubling statistic is that overweight women are less likely to be involved in a

romantic relationship than women within the normal or underweight range, usually as a result of lower self-esteem (Lorenzo et al., 2018). Being a member of a healthy romantic relationship was found to increase feelings of security and reduce feelings of anxiety (Davila et al., 2017). Following this logic, individuals who struggle with low self-esteem, such as the overweight women in Lorenzo et al.'s (2018) study, could psychologically benefit from a healthy romantic relationship. Scholars claim that BMI and bodily appraisals are important components of an individual's overall self-esteem (Sciangula & Morry, 2009), and if professionals can intervene in ways to promote a healthy BMI, body positivity, and self-esteem, individuals may be more likely to be confident in developing and maintaining a romantic relationship (Sciangula & Morry, 2009).

If an individual is confident enough in him or herself to pursue a romantic relationship, he or she will often utilize strategies to minimize the possibility of a negative experience. One commonly utilized strategy is known as the interdependence theory, which suggests that relationship quality is internally calculated by analyzing the costs and benefits of the relationship. A quality relationship is characterized by a low cost to reward ratio, with the rewards exceeding one's subjective expectations of the relationship (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959; van den Brink et al., 2018). Often times, if individuals struggle with body image concerns or low self-esteem, and they believe that the costs (i.e., risk of rejection) will overpower the rewards of the relationship, they will not pursue the relationship (Sciangula & Morry, 2009).

A similar approach that individuals employ when attempting to engage in a relationship is the risk regulation model. The risk regulation model claims that individuals with higher levels of global self-esteem are more likely than those with lower

levels of global self-esteem to engage in risky behaviors (i.e., vulnerable self-disclosure, sexual intimacy) necessary to maintain the relationship (Murray et al., 2006). The model suggests that fear of rejection and lower self-esteem can hinder interpersonal relationship satisfaction, while higher self-esteem can promote relationship development. Individuals who are more confident that their partners will continue to accept them and commit to them are more likely than others with low confidence to experience relationship satisfaction (Melzer & McNulty, 2010). Because individuals often times unknowingly incorporate the interdependence theory and risk regulation model into their decision-making process, it is important that they understand that their body image appraisal affects their self-esteem (Prabhu & D’Cunha, 2018), and that high self-esteem can prevent feelings of rejection, and promote the development of relationships (Sciangula & Morry, 2009).

Once individuals have sufficient self-esteem to engage in a fulfilling relationship, however, there are still issues pertaining to body image, a component of global self-esteem (Prabhu & D’Cunha, 2018), and relationship satisfaction (Friedman & Dixon, 1999). Researchers suggested that there is a positive association between marital problems and body image dissatisfaction, indicating that an increase in marital problems is related to an increase in body image concerns (Friedman & Dixon, 1999). Sciangula and Morry (2009) researched a similar topic but analyzed the variables in the opposite direction. They found that individuals with lower self-esteem experience more relationship dissatisfaction (Sciangula & Morry, 2009), and suggested that the constructs of self-esteem and perceived regard predict relationship satisfaction. This research highlights the issue that one’s marital satisfaction can impact his or her own body image

appraisal (Friedman & Dixon, 1999) and that one's self-esteem can impact his or her relationship satisfaction (Sciangula & Morry, 2009), which are topics that mental health professionals can address with their clients. The fact that these two studies show that a complex relationship between the variables exists, and cannot determine directionality, shows the need for future research in the area.

Body Image

One's body image encompasses both psychological and physiological components, including one's attitude toward his or her body, the body shape and size, and individual, internal appraisals (i.e., my hips are too wide) regarding one's physical body parts (Cash & Pruzinsky, 2002). As evidenced by the multifaceted definition, body image is a complex topic, and it is necessary to consider an individual's personal weight concern, physical condition, and perceived sexual attractiveness when assessing for body image concerns (Pujols et al., 2010).

Media and Body Image

There are numerous variables that negatively impact several components of one's body image. One of the most commonly studied variables associated with negative body image is the portrayal of impractical female and male physiques in the media (Green & Pritchard, 2003). Green and Pritchard (2003) conducted a study in which 139 adult participants, ranging in age from 19 to 69, completed measures that assessed for various predictors of body image dissatisfaction. They found that media influence significantly predicted body image dissatisfaction in their sample of females, but not in their sample of males. These results contrast findings from Lorenzen et al. (2004) and Robl and Mulgrew (2016), who found that males' body satisfaction is also negatively influenced by viewing

idealized images in the media. These discrepant findings could be a result of the different measures used to analyze media influence on participants' body image. For instance, in Green and Pritchard's (2003) study, they collected self-report data on media influence using a 10-item questionnaire, whereas both Robl and Mulgrew (2016) and Lorenzen et al. (2004) exposed their participants to idealized images in the media and then collected self-report data regarding body image.

Robl and Mulgrew (2016) recruited 103 male participants and randomly assigned them to three conditions in which participants viewed short music video clips containing various images. The control group viewed clips of scenery, and the realistic group viewed clips that consisted of both highly attractive and muscular men, as well as a mixture of scenery and images of averagely attractive men. Lastly, the concentrated group viewed only clips of highly attractive and muscular men. Robl and Mulgrew (2016) found that the men in both the realistic and concentrated condition experienced higher levels of body dissatisfaction than those in the control condition, showing that just the simple viewing of idealized images in the media can also influence male body image.

Social Pressures and Body Image

Additionally, researchers concluded that both women and men's body dissatisfaction is predicted by age, self-esteem, and family pressures (Green & Pritchard, 2003). It was noted that family pressure, in the form of weight-related comments, was the variable that influenced body image concern the most in both genders. Negative family pressure, especially from a significant other, can increase the likelihood of older adults developing a negative self-esteem and body image dissatisfaction (Green & Pritchard, 2003).

Fortunately, other researchers (Sheets & Ajmere, 2004) claimed that weight-related comments (i.e., being told to lose or gain weight) were not associated with one's self-evaluations in their sample of 554 college-age participants. These discrepant findings could possibly be attributed to a difference in the age of participants, since Green and Pritchard's (2003) participants had a mean age of 42 years old, and Sheets and Ajmere's (2004) study had a mean age of 19 years old. In this context of weight-related comments, perhaps younger individuals are more immune to familial pressures than older individuals. These findings provide hope that if healthcare professionals can work with individuals and couples before body image concerns are detrimental, individuals can receive the necessary resources they need to combat the effects of negative weight-related comments in adulthood (Sheets & Ajmere, 2004).

Researchers are not only concerned with negative weight-related comments, but also analyze the implications of cat-calling, whistling, and sexual gestures on women's body image. Meltzer and McNulty (2014) indicated that past research has heavily documented the significant link between this sexualized communication from strangers and women's self-esteem, anxiety levels, and body image appraisals (see Frederickson & Roberts, 1997). When women believe that they are only valued for their physical body, they often times believe that others strictly view them as sexual objects, rather than worthy human beings (Meltzer & McNulty, 2014). When this viewpoint is adopted, it is known as objectification. Furthermore, self-objectification occurs when an individual repeatedly monitors his or her body and develops a persistent awareness of his or her physical appearance (van den Brink et al., 2018). The practice of objectification and self-objectification has posed risks for females in the past, and could possibly generalize to

males, given the increased reports of body image dissatisfaction also prevalent in male samples (van den Brink et al., 2018). Self-objectification heightens the possibility of developing disordered eating practices, body image dissatisfaction, and other negative outcomes (Meltzer & McNulty, 2014). It is important to understand the impacts of objectification to reduce the likelihood that individuals experience body image concerns as a result.

Dating Status and Body Image

One variable that does not harm an individual's bodily appraisal is his or her dating status. Hoyt and Kogan (2001) conducted research in which 288 college students participated in a study measuring body satisfaction and relationship satisfaction. Additional information was collected from the participants, including height, weight, and dating status. Results showed that, overall, women were more dissatisfied with their bodies than men, and that men were more dissatisfied with their relationships and sex life than women (Hoyt & Kogan, 2001). Furthermore, results suggested that one's dating status (i.e., single, dating, married) did not influence satisfaction with his or her body image. These findings provide positive information for this field of study, showing that single, dating, and married individuals are equally pleased and displeased with their body image, and that simply being in a relationship does not increase or decrease one's body image (Hoyt & Kogan, 2001).

Hoyt and Kogan (2001) continued their study by suggesting that, although college students' dating status did not influence their body image, their satisfaction with their current relationship and sex life influenced body image. There was a significant relationship between sexual satisfaction and body image, suggesting that individuals who

experience more sexual satisfaction also report higher body image confidence. Additionally, there was a significant association between one's current dating satisfaction and his or her body image, suggesting that college-age individuals who were more unhappy with their current relationship were more dissatisfied with their body image (Hoyt & Kogan, 2001). This is similar to earlier findings provided by Friedman and Dixon (1999), who also claimed that marital status was not a significant predictor of body image concerns. These researchers further found that, in their sample of 16,357 adult participants, there was a significant relationship between marital satisfaction and body image satisfaction. The results provided in these two similar studies conducted on different age groups suggests that relationship satisfaction has an important, established association with body image satisfaction for people of many ages (Friedman & Dixon, 1999; Hoyt & Kogan, 2001).

Body Mass Index and Body Image

In addition to the results already provided by Hoyt and Kogan (2001), their post hoc analyses revealed an interesting finding regarding the relationship between one's BMI and body image satisfaction. They originally predicted that obese and overweight individuals would be more dissatisfied with their body image than normal or underweight individuals. Findings supported portions of the hypothesis. First, they found that underweight participants were not more satisfied with their body image than those who were normal or overweight. Furthermore, it was found that individuals who were classified as obese were the most dissatisfied with their body image, followed by overweight and underweight participants (Hoyt & Kogan, 2001). These findings suggest that, although some individuals have an underweight BMI, they still experience body

image dissatisfaction comparable to those who are overweight. These results affirm that body image is a personal appraisal of oneself, often times independent of one's actual weight. This personal appraisal, if negative, can lead to a host of dangerous mental health concerns (Hoyt & Kogan, 2001).

Sexual Satisfaction

Within the context of a romantic relationship, sexual satisfaction is an important component of a long-lasting, committed, and loving relationship between intimate partners (Sprecher, 2002). Just like other variables of interest, there are numerous factors that can affect one's sexual satisfaction.

Sexual Functioning and Sexual Satisfaction

Most practically, Pujols et al. (2010) found that sexual functioning is significantly related to sexual satisfaction. Fundamentally, the higher the sexual functioning (i.e., ease of orgasm, low pain), the higher the sexual satisfaction. This group of researchers collected data from a sample of 154 adult women, who were between 18 and 49 years of age, regarding their sexual satisfaction, body image, and sexual functioning, and provided insightful results. Multiple regression analyses revealed that, even when sexual functioning is held constant, women who experienced more body image confidence and fewer body-related distracted thoughts during sex experienced higher sexual satisfaction than women who experienced frequent distracting thoughts and struggled with their body image (Pujols et al., 2010). Similar findings were noted in a sample of 166 adult men. Researchers found that, in their sample of participants ranging from 19 to 75 years old, decreased sexual functioning resulted in reduced frequency of sexual intercourse, as well as decreased sexual satisfaction (Stephenson et al., 2018).

Body Image and Sexual Satisfaction

Similar to the findings mentioned above regarding body image confidence as a predictor of sexual satisfaction, van den Brink et al. (2018) concluded that, according to the risk regulation model, body image concerns can influence one's propensity to engage in behaviors that enhance relationship satisfaction, such as sexual intercourse. They posit that body image dissatisfaction can distract individuals from focusing on the intimate moment itself, and, rather, focus on their negative body-related appraisals, which reduces their sexual satisfaction. van den Brink et al. (2018) reached these conclusions by analyzing self-report measures of body image, sexual satisfaction, perceived relationship quality, and relationship duration from 151 Dutch adult couples engaged in a heterosexual relationship for at least six months.

Self-Expansion and Sexual Satisfaction

Self-expansion theory postulates that individuals are intrinsically driven to engage in novel tasks and activities with the purpose of expanding their skill set and worldly perspectives (Muisse et al., 2019). Individuals engage in self-expansion in many settings, including within the context of romantic relationships. Muise et al. (2019) argued that, if people engage in self-expanding activities, they appear increasingly interesting and desirable to their partners. The researchers designed a study in which they determined that engaging in self-expanding activities enhances one's sexual satisfaction and overall relationship satisfaction.

The study was a 21-day experience study involving 122 couples, between the ages of 19 and 67, who had been together for at least two years. Participants were e-mailed a survey each day for 21 days, and were instructed to complete the survey before bedtime.

Muise et al. (2019) instructed participants to fill out daily surveys measuring their self-expansion, sexual desire, and relationship satisfaction. Participants also answered a single item asking if they had engaged in sexual intercourse that day. If participants reported that they engaged in sexual intercourse on a certain day, they also completed a brief measure assessing their sexual satisfaction for that day. After utilizing a multilevel modeling technique, researchers concluded that higher levels of self-expansion were associated with higher levels of sexual desire in both members of the relationship (Muise et al., 2019). The higher the sexual desire of the couple, the more likely it was that they engaged in sexual intercourse that day. When couples experienced higher sexual desire as a result of self-expansion, they also experienced higher relationship satisfaction, showing that sexual desire is a critical, mediating component in the relationship between self-expansion and relationship satisfaction (Muise et al., 2019). The researchers were able to determine directionality in this study by conducting a lagged day analyses, in which they found that self-expansion one day predicted sexual desire and relationship satisfaction for the next day. The opposite relationship was not significant, meaning that relationship satisfaction one day did not predict self-expansion the next day (Muise et al., 2019).

In an additional study conducted by Muise et al. (2019) within the same publication, it was found that, after three months, self-expansion was no longer associated with relationship satisfaction. However, self-expansion was still associated with sexual desire and sexual satisfaction, revealing the importance of sexual desire and sexual satisfaction within the context of romantic relationships (Muise et al., 2019). Since self-expansion was no longer associated with relationship satisfaction after three

months, this indicates that there are other factors outside of self-expansion and sexual satisfaction that influence relationship satisfaction.

Relationship Satisfaction

Similar to body image and sexual satisfaction, there are many variables that can negatively impact people's satisfaction with their romantic relationship. In the past, researchers have examined numerous factors that influence relationship satisfaction, such as financial stress (Totenhagen et al., 2018), negative affect (Sadikaj et al., 2017), and one's level of trait mindfulness (Barnes et al., 2007). Relationships can be described using many adjectives, but a quality relationship is characterized by high levels of intimacy, satisfaction, trust, commitment, love, and passion (Fletcher et al., 2000).

Body Mass Index and Relationship Satisfaction

Research suggests that heavier women experienced less satisfaction within their romantic relationships than women with a lower BMI and were less likely to be involved in a dating relationship. Results also suggested that smaller men experienced less relationship satisfaction than men with a higher BMI (Sheets & Ajmere, 2005). These findings are consistent with other researchers (Grieve et al., 2006; Prabhu & d'Cunha, 2018), who suggested that females make attempts to gain a thinner physique, while males personally prefer a larger physique (Grieve et al., 2006; Prabhu & d'Cunha, 2018).

It was also suggested that body mass index (BMI) is significantly related to relationship satisfaction within the context of peer relationships (Hoyt & Kogan, 2001). The researchers hypothesized that individuals who were overweight would be more dissatisfied with their peer relationships than individuals who were in the normal weight range. Results suggested that, consistent with predictions, normal weight college-age

individuals were more satisfied with their peer relationships than those who were over or underweight (Hoyt & Kogan, 2001).

Self-Esteem and Relationship Satisfaction

In addition to BMI influencing relationship satisfaction in the context of both romantic and peer relationships, self-esteem can also be an influential factor. Sciangula and Morry (2009) were interested in examining whether self-esteem positively predicted romantic relationship satisfaction. In order to test their prediction, 191 undergraduate psychology students were recruited to complete a 10-item self-esteem scale and a seven-item Relationship Assessment Scale. The researchers then conducted a regression analysis, which produced results that supported their hypothesis. Based on Sciangula and Morry's (2009) results, the higher one's self-esteem, the higher his or her relationship satisfaction. These findings are relevant in the clinical field to help practitioners understand that self-esteem indeed influences individual relationship satisfaction reports. Sciangula and Morry (2009) also found that, in their sample of participants, relationship status predicted relationship satisfaction. It was previously noted that relationship status does not predict one's body image satisfaction (Hoyt & Kogan, 2001), but in this study, whether one was dating, engaged, or married influenced his or her relationship satisfaction. Individuals who were engaged or married reported higher levels of relationship satisfaction than those who were only dating (Sciangula & Morry, 2009).

A high self-esteem can benefit individuals in many ways, including within the context of their romantic relationships. When individuals do not struggle with self-esteem concerns, they may be more inclined than those with low self-esteem to engage in behaviors that are deemed self-expanding (Muisse et al., 2019). Regardless of the intensity

of the activity, self-expanding activities encourage individuals to develop their perspectives and to engage in worldly experiences. Not only can engaging in self-expanding activities promote one's sexual satisfaction, it can positively influence one's relationship satisfaction through both partner's increased sexual desire and sexual satisfaction (Muise et al., 2019).

Physical Affection and Relationship Satisfaction

Just like all couples have a subjective appraisal of what they believe are relationship-enhancing and self-expanding behaviors, within the context of each unique relationship comes various levels of affection given, preferred, and received by each partner. Gullede et al. (2003) were interested in studying college students' preferences for various types of physical affection (PA) and their relationship satisfaction as a result of receiving PA. One unique component of this study is that sexual intimacy was omitted from the measures. It was predicted that individuals who engage in more PA would be more satisfied in their relationships than those who engage in less PA. It was also hypothesized that PA would aid in conflict resolution between couples. Researchers included seven different types of PA (i.e., holding hands, massaging, kissing on the face, kissing on the lips, stroking, caressing, cuddling), and instructed participants to rank their most preferred type of PA to their least favorite. Next, participants responded to a seven-point Likert scale that measured their opinions concerning PA. Lastly, the participants reported how often they believed that they engaged in each type of PA with their partner each week (Gullede et al., 2003).

Results supported the researchers' hypotheses. Five out of the seven forms of PA were significantly associated with relationship satisfaction. Of the seven forms of PA

listed above, only caressing and holding hands were not associated with relationship satisfaction. Furthermore, the amount of PA was also associated with easier conflict resolution (Gulledge et al., 2003). These results show the importance of implementing PA into relationships, and one thing to consider is that giving and receiving forms of affection requires self-esteem (Sciangula & Morry, 2009) and the confidence to engage in relationship-enhancing behaviors (van den Brink et al., 2018). Because one's relationship satisfaction is predicted by PA, it is important to help individuals reach a level of confidence in which they feel comfortable giving and receiving affection.

Social Support and Relationship Satisfaction

Another form of affection given and received by individuals within a romantic relationship is support provided in emotional and informational ways (Lorenzo et al., 2018). Again, developing an intimate connection to another human being requires the confidence to be vulnerable and engage in the necessary behaviors to be a supportive and loving partner. It is important that individuals have sufficient confidence in their interpersonal abilities so that they can provide their partners with physical affection (Gulledge et al., 2003) and emotional support (Lorenzo et al., 2018). Overall, individuals who are provided with an overprovision of social support from their significant other report higher levels of relationship satisfaction than those whose social support preferences are not met. Lorenzo et al. (2018) were interested in determining whether individuals' preferences for social support were associated with their relationship satisfaction. The two types of social support analyzed in this study were emotional support and informational support. Lorenzo et al. (2018) predicted that an underprovision of social support would be associated with lower levels of relationship

satisfaction. Data collected and analyzed from 114 newlywedded heterosexual couples revealed gender differences in the type of social support preferred. The wives in the study reported that they preferred more of both emotional and informational support, and husbands indicated that they preferred more emotional support (Lorenzo et al., 2018).

Further results did not entirely support the hypothesis. An underprovision of emotional support was not necessarily related to lower relationship satisfaction, because people's preference for emotional support did not influence their relationship satisfaction. There was, however, a significant relationship between emotional support and relationship satisfaction for both genders, suggesting that the more emotional support given and received, the higher the relationship satisfaction, regardless of preferences (Lorenzo et al., 2018). Results also revealed that the wives in this study reported higher relationship satisfaction when they received higher levels of informational support. There was no relationship between informational support and relationship satisfaction for the husbands in this study, indicating that the perceived value of informational support varies across gender (Lorenzo et al., 2018). These findings suggest that if an individual in a romantic relationship is struggling with a personal concern, such as body image dissatisfaction, there are positive implications of providing emotional and informational support to buffer against the potential relationship problems.

Sexual Satisfaction and Relationship Satisfaction

In addition to BMI, self-esteem, and various forms of support, a woman's subjective appraisal of her sexual attractiveness also predicts relationship satisfaction. In their study, Meltzer and McNulty (2010) were interested in determining whether women's body image predicted husband and wife marital satisfaction. They predicted

that increased sexual frequency and sexual satisfaction would mediate the relationship between wives' perceived sexual attractiveness and marital satisfaction in both partners. They collected data from 53 newlywedded couples, who had a mean age of 24.85 years old, who completed self-report measures assessing for frequency of sexual intercourse, sexual satisfaction, and marital satisfaction (Melzer & McNulty, 2010). The wives in the study completed additional demographic measures and a body esteem measure. The researchers were particularly interested in determining which of the three specific subscales of the Body Esteem Scale (BES; see Franzoi & Shields, 1984) predicted marital satisfaction the best.

Results from multiple regression analyses revealed that, out of the Sexual Attractiveness, Weight Concern, and Physical Condition subscales, wives' perceived sexual attractiveness was the only subscale that significantly predicted wives' and husbands' marital satisfaction. These results suggest that, when women feel sexually appealing to partners, they will be more inclined to engage in more frequent sexual intercourse, which is associated with higher levels of sexual satisfaction for both partners. Results reveal that both body image and sexual satisfaction are important components in the context of romantic relationship. Ultimately, Meltzer and McNulty (2010) concluded that both sexual frequency and sexual satisfaction mediated the relationship between wives' body image appraisals and wives' and husbands' marital satisfaction.

Another study conducted by van den Brink et al. (2018) produced very similar results. Because of the results revealed in Meltzer & McNulty's (2010) research, this group of researchers wanted to extend previous findings by including both members of the couple and adopting a dyadic approach. They collected data from 151 Dutch couples,

with a mean age of 23.14 years old. They predicted that sexual satisfaction would again mediate the relationship between body image and relationship quality. After conducting analyses utilizing actor-partner interdependence models, the researchers concluded that, before accounting for sexual satisfaction, there was a relationship between body image and couples' relationship satisfaction. Once sexual satisfaction was added to the model as a mediator, the relationship between the predictor and outcome variables was no longer significant, suggesting that sexual satisfaction indeed mediates the relationship. van den Brink et al. (2018) also found that one actor's body image and sexual satisfaction predicted his or her own relationship satisfaction, but did not predict his or her partner's relationship satisfaction. There were no gender differences in their findings. These results show that, within both genders, it is important to promote healthy body image appraisals and sexual practices, so that there is a higher likelihood of relationship satisfaction for both members in the relationship (van den Brink et al., 2018).

Perceived Valuation and Relationship Satisfaction

In another intricate study that was conducted by Meltzer and McNulty (2014), the goal was to explore the role of a romantic partner's body evaluation, commitment level, and evaluation of non-physical qualities about his or her partner and how this affects each gender's relationship satisfaction (Meltzer & McNulty, 2014). Meltzer and McNulty (2014) published an in-depth study, with the purpose of providing information regarding even more variables influencing relationship satisfaction, in addition to body image and sexual satisfaction (Meltzer & McNulty, 2010). In their first study, the researchers wanted to determine whether the extent to which women think their partner values them for their bodies and non-physical qualities and their partner's level of commitment affect

their relationship satisfaction. The 108 participants were first-year undergraduate Psychology students who were currently engaged in romantic relationships. It was predicted that women who believe that their boyfriends value their bodies would experience higher relationship satisfaction only when their boyfriends were also committed partners and valued them for their nonphysical characteristics. Further, it was predicted that they would experience lower levels of relationship satisfaction when they did not believe that their boyfriends value them for nonphysical qualities or were not committed (Meltzer & McNulty, 2014).

To assess for perceived body valuation, nonphysical valuation, and level of partner commitment, the researchers developed one-item Likert scale measures that were all high in face validity. In order to measure relationship satisfaction, the researchers assessed global relationship satisfaction using the Semantic Differential (SMD), which is a 15-item measure depicting various sets of contrasting adjectives (i.e., *good – bad*) that allows respondents to evaluate their relationship using a 7-point Likert scale (Meltzer & McNulty, 2014). To see if there was an effect of all of these variables on relationship satisfaction, the researchers regressed women's relationship satisfaction onto their scores of perceived body valuation, nonphysical valuation, and partner commitment level. Results of the regression analysis revealed that, as predicted, women experienced higher levels of relationship satisfaction when they believed their partners valued their bodies but also believed that they were in a committed relationship and valued for nonphysical qualities. Ultimately, body valuation is an influential component of women's relationship satisfaction, but it is not sufficient on its own to ensure women's overall happiness in their relationships (Meltzer & McNulty, 2014).

To include results concerning men's relationship satisfaction, the researchers replicated their first study, except with male participants. Unlike the first study, though, there were no predictions made concerning men's relationship satisfaction, and the research was mainly exploratory. The research question remained the same and aimed to determine whether the degree that men think their partner values them for their bodies and non-physical qualities and their partners' levels of commitment affects their relationship satisfaction. The 40 male participants were once again first-year Psychology students. Just like the first study, the male students completed the SMD to assess for relationship satisfaction and the one-item questionnaires pertaining to all other variables: perceived body valuation, nonphysical valuation, and commitment level (Meltzer & McNulty, 2014).

Another regression analysis was completed to examine the interactive effects of these variables, and results surprisingly revealed that men who perceived high levels of body valuation actually experienced less relationship satisfaction when they were less valued for their nonphysical qualities. This result could be explained by the proposition that objectification theory also applies to men and that men simply feel like sex objects when they are not valued for other qualities as well (Meltzer & McNulty, 2014). In essence, men are similar to women in that they prefer to be valued in a nonphysical manner in order to experience the greatest amount of relationship satisfaction. Unlike women, however, men do not experience differing degrees of relationship satisfaction when their partner is committed or uncommitted (Meltzer & McNulty, 2014).

These findings demonstrate that not only does body image, self-esteem, BMI, social support, and sexual satisfaction affect relationship satisfaction, but so do other

interactive variables. Meltzer and McNulty's (2014) study adds more data to the present research regarding relationship satisfaction and its numerous influences.

Limitations of Existing Research

Although an abundance of literature described above provides insight into the topics of body image, sexual satisfaction, and relationship satisfaction, there are areas that merit further study and investigation. For example, several of the aforementioned studies provide findings relevant to adolescent and college-age samples, and their findings cannot be generalized to samples of the broader population (Hoyt & Kogan, 2001; Prabhu & D'Cunha, 2018). Due to researchers often using a convenience sample of college students, there is a need for research collecting data from individuals in other age groups, such as older adults. Some researchers (Meltzer & McNulty, 2010; van den Brink et al., 2018) included participants who were in their mid-20s, but also recommended that future studies incorporate participants who are well into their adulthood experience.

Another limitation that exists within the currently published literature, especially within the topics of body image and sexual satisfaction, is the widespread use of female research participants. Several researchers in the past have been more interested in female, as compared to male, perspectives regarding body image, since women are historically more dissatisfied with their body image than men (Ackard et al., 2000). Because females are more commonly studied within this research topic, it is necessary for future researchers to include males within their sample and to make specific predictions regarding gender differences (Meltzer & McNulty, 2010; Pujols et al., 2010). In addition to the sparse number of male participants compared to female participants in previous

research, some scholars have only included heterosexual individuals in their samples of participants. Researchers recommend recruiting a more representative sample of the population, including individuals of all sexual orientations (van den Brink et al., 2018).

In addition to the literature gaps pertaining to the age of participants and the use of both male and female participants, there are gaps in the literature regarding other methods utilized. For instance, some of the studies reviewed did not use measures that included previously established psychometric properties, such as reliability or validity coefficients. Rather than include measures with questionable psychometric properties, researchers suggest incorporating psychometrically sound and previously published measures into future studies (Ackard et al., 2000; Friedman & Dixon, 1999).

Furthermore, some researchers chose to include single-item measures that were high in face validity. Researchers suggest that using multiple-item comprehensive measures will provide more valid and reliable findings (Meltzer & McNulty, 2014; van den Brink et al., 2018).

Rationale for the Current Study

Because psychological well-being is positively associated with healthy functioning within romantic relationships (Davila et al., 2017), it is important for healthcare professionals to consider the factors that influence mental health. Individual psychological well-being is a complex construct, and can certainly encompass variables such as body image appraisals and sexual satisfaction (van den Brink et al., 2018). As described previously, some researchers posit that individuals who have higher body esteem are more likely than those with lower body esteem to engage in relationship-enhancing behaviors, such as sexual intercourse. Researchers have also suggested that

increased frequency of sexual intercourse and sexual satisfaction are necessary components of relationship satisfaction (Meltzer & McNulty, 2010; van den Brink et al., 2018). Therefore, individuals who have positive body image appraisals could indirectly be more likely to experience relationship satisfaction through the pathways of high body esteem and sexual satisfaction (Meltzer & McNulty, 2010; van den Brink et al., 2018).

The current study is designed to analyze the relationship between three variables: body image, sexual satisfaction, and relationship satisfaction. Ultimately, the goal of the current study is to determine whether body image satisfaction and sexual satisfaction predict romantic relationship satisfaction. It is hypothesized that body image satisfaction and sexual satisfaction will work together to positively predict relationship satisfaction. Further, it is hypothesized that sexual satisfaction will mediate the association between body image satisfaction and relationship satisfaction. To fill gaps in the existing literature, the present study will incorporate previously published psychometrically sound measures for all variables, will incorporate adult men into the study, and will analyze an older sample of the adult population.

Chapter II

Methods

Participants

All volunteer participants were recruited from Amazon's Mechanical Turk (MTurk) database. The current study aimed to recruit 200 participants, and ultimately analyzed data from 198 participants ($N = 198$) after two participants failed to complete sufficient survey material.

Participants' ages ranged from age 25 to 70 ($M = 34.68$, $SD = 10.54$), and their relationship lengths ranged from 3 months to 500 months ($M = 67.54$, $SD = 97.77$). Participants' overall BMI was calculated and exhibited wide variability ($M = 25.4$, $SD = 9.41$). A majority of participants reported that they were married (56%), but others indicated that they were dating (34%) and engaged (10%). There was also ethnic variability in the sample, with participants identifying as African American (4%), Asian American (21%), White/Non-Hispanic (38%), White/Hispanic (27%), and Other (10%). The sample was highly educated, with a majority of participants having obtained a bachelor's degree (60%). Further, a portion of the sample earned a high school diploma (8%), associate degree (10%), master's degree (20%), and doctorate (2%). Lastly, there was impressive variability in the sexual orientation of the sample, with participants identifying as heterosexual (76%), homosexual (5%), and bisexual (19%). Table 1 displays participants' demographic characteristics and the number of participants (n) who fell into each category.

Table 1
Participant Demographic Characteristics

Characteristic	<i>n</i> (%)
Gender	
Male	99 (50)
Female	99 (50)
Marital Status	
Dating	67 (34)
Engaged	19 (10)
Married	110 (56)
Sexual Orientation	
Heterosexual	151 (76)
Homosexual	10 (5)
Bisexual	37 (19)
Highest Education Level	
High School Diploma	16 (8)
Associate degree	20 (10)
Bachelor's Degree	118 (60)
Master's Degree	40 (20)
Doctorate	4 (2)
Race/Ethnicity	
African American	8 (4)
Asian American	42 (21)
White/Hispanic	53 (27)
White/Non-Hispanic	75 (38)
Other	20 (10)
Body Mass Index	
Underweight	13 (7)
Normal Weight	150 (76)
Obese	35 (8)

Design and Data Analysis

The design for this study was a cross-sectional survey methodology and the statistical analysis used to conduct the study was a hierarchical model of regression. The multiple linear regression was conducted using the IBM SPSS Statistics platform. The independent variables under study were body image satisfaction, which was measured by scores on the Body Assessment Scale (Lorenzen et al., 2004), and sexual satisfaction,

which was measured by scores on the Index of Sexual Satisfaction (ISS; Hudson, 1998). The dependent variable under study was romantic relationship satisfaction, which was assessed using the Relationship Assessment Scale (Hendrick, 1988; Vaughn & Baier, 1999).

Measures

Demographics

Participants' demographic data such as age, gender, race, sexual orientation, educational level, and relationship length was collected by using a self-report questionnaire. See Appendix A.

Body Assessment Scale

To measure participants' levels of body satisfaction, participants completed the Body Assessment Scale (BAS; Lorenzen et al., 2004). The BAS is a 25-item scale that was developed to measure overall global body satisfaction by focusing on individuals' current satisfaction with various parts of their body (i.e., legs, stomach). Participants are asked to rate their satisfaction of specific body parts using a five-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*strongly negative*) to 5 (*strongly positive*). Higher total scores indicate greater global body satisfaction. The BAS has been found to have a strong internal consistency reliability coefficient of .94 (Lorenzen et al., 2004). See Appendix B.

Index of Sexual Satisfaction

The Index of Sexual Satisfaction (ISS; Hudson et al., 1981) was used to assess participants' level of sexual satisfaction within their romantic relationship with their partners. The ISS is a 25-item measure, and participants indicate the extent to which the items portray their current level of satisfaction with their sexual relationship. Items are

answered with a seven-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*none of the time*) to 7 (*all of the time*). The higher the ISS score, the more likely it is that participants experience a clinically significant concern associated with their sex life. Scores below 30 (± 5) are normal and suggest sexual satisfaction. Higher scores suggest that there is possibility of a clinically significant sexual concern. Scores above 70 indicate significant sexual stress and possible violence within the sexual relationship. A sample item on the ISS is, “Our sex life is monotonous” (Hudson, 1998). The ISS has been found to have strong internal consistency reliability coefficients of .93 for males, and .96 for females (Hudson, 1998; Meltzer & McNulty, 2010). See Appendix C.

Relationship Assessment Scale

The Relationship Assessment Scale (RAS; Hendrick, 1988; Vaughn & Baier, 1999) was used to assess participants’ relationship satisfaction with their romantic partner. The RAS is a seven-item scale used to measure general relationship satisfaction. Participants will answer each item on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*low*) to 5 (*high*). The higher the RAS score, the more satisfied the participant is with his/her relationship. A sample item on the RAS asks participants, “How much do you love your partner?” (Hendrick, 1988; Vaughn & Baier, 1999). The RAS has been shown to have high internal consistency ($\alpha = .91$) as well as strong concurrent validity with the Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS; Spanier, 1976), which measures marital quality, adjustment, and satisfaction. See Appendix D.

Procedures

Participants accessed the study via the online MTurk database. Participants were invited to partake in an online study analyzing “various factors that impact romantic relationships,” and the study was completed during one sitting and entirely online. Participants were not required to be Mechanical Turk Masters (MTMs), who are individuals considered to be Amazon’s most quality workers (Lovett et al., 2018). All participants were presented with an implied consent document (See Appendix E), where confidentiality and anonymity were emphasized. After reading the implied consent and agreeing to participate in the study, participants were allowed to continue to the questionnaire if they met two inclusion criteria. Participants were required to be 25 years or older and in a romantic relationship lasting three months or longer.

Next, participants completed a demographic questionnaire and reported on basic demographic features such as age, gender, race, educational level, sexual orientation, and relationship length. Next, they completed the self-report measures assessing for body image satisfaction, sexual satisfaction, and relationship satisfaction. The BAS, ISS, and RAS were counterbalanced to avoid order effects and the study took participants approximately 10 to 20 minutes to complete. Participants were debriefed (See Appendix F) and compensated 50 cents for their participation.

Chapter III

Results

Preliminary Analyses

Participants responded to the BAS, ISS, and RAS. Scores were summed to determine participants' total body assessment score, index of sexual satisfaction score, and relationship satisfaction scores. Participant scores on the BAS ranged from a score of 25 to 125 ($M = 87.66$, $SD = 21.26$), with a possible range of 25 to 125. Scores on the ISS ranged from a score of 4 to 75 ($M = 34.374$, $SD = 16.89$), with a possible range of 0 to 100, with lower scores indicating greater sexual satisfaction, and higher scores indicating a greater likelihood of a clinically significant problem within the sexual relationship. Lastly, participant scores on the RAS ranged from 8 to 35 ($M = 26.81$, $SD = 16.89$), with a possible range of 7 to 35. Cronbach's alpha values were also calculated for each measure using the current sample of participants. Table 2 displays the aforementioned descriptive statistics pertaining to the three measures.

Table 2
BAS, ISS, and RAS Descriptive Statistics

	Cronbach's Alpha	Absolute Minimum	Absolute Maximum	Minimum	Maximum	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
BAS	.97	25	125	25	125	87.66	21.26
ISS	.92	0	100	4	75	34.37	16.89
RAS	.84	7	35	8	35	26.81	5.64

Note. BAS = Body Assessment Scale; ISS = Index of Sexual Satisfaction; RAS = Relationship Assessment Scale; Absolute Minimum = the lowest possible score that a participant can score on a given measure; Absolute Maximum = the highest possible score that a participant can score on a given measure.

Hypothesis Testing

A hierarchical model of regression was used to predict romantic relationship satisfaction from level of body image satisfaction and sexual satisfaction. It was predicted that sexual satisfaction would mediate the relationship between body image and relationship satisfaction. Table 3 displays the descriptive statistics and Table 4 contains the results of the regression. Body image was placed into Block 1, because it is believed that it is a precursor to sexual satisfaction, which was placed into Block 2. For clarity purposes, sexual satisfaction is depicted in the following tables as “Sexual Concern,” due to the opposite direction of the scores, where lower scores indicate greater satisfaction. Results indicated that the combined predictors accounted for a significant proportion of variance, where 65% of the variance in relationship satisfaction was related to body image and sexual satisfaction, $F(2,195) = 182.96, p < .001$.

Table 3
Relationship Satisfaction, Body Assessment, and Sexual Concern Correlations and Descriptive Statistics

	1	2	3
1. Relationship Satisfaction	---	.22**	-.79**
2. Body Image		---	-.04
3. Sexual Concern			---
<i>N</i>	198	198	198
<i>M</i>	26.81	87.66	34.37
<i>SD</i>	5.64	21.26	16.89

Note. ** denotes significant correlations $< .01$.

1. Criterion Variable: Relationship Satisfaction
2. Predictor Variable: Body Image
3. Predictor Variable: Sexual Satisfaction

Table 4
Relationship Satisfaction Predicted by Body Image Satisfaction and Sexual Satisfaction

Predictor	R^2	b	SE	β
Step 1	.05**			
Constant		21.67	1.67	
Body Image		.06	.02	.22
Step 2	.60**			
Constant		31.38	1.14	
Body Image		.05	.01	.19
Sexual Concern		-.26	.01	-.78
Total R^2	.65**			

Note. ** denotes significance $< .01$

Relationship satisfaction was positively predicted by body image $t(195) = 4.44, p < .001$, and was negatively predicted by sexual concerns $t(195) = -18.40, p < .001$. As body image satisfaction increased, relationship satisfaction also increased. Furthermore, as sexual concerns decreased, relationship satisfaction increased. When sexual satisfaction was added into the hierarchical model, body image remained a significant predictor of relationship satisfaction, therefore indicating that sexual satisfaction did not mediate the association between body image and relationship satisfaction. Mediation occurs when the significant association between the first predictor variable and the outcome variable no longer exists after the second predictor is added into the model. The two predictors together accounted for a larger proportion of variance (65%) than just body image (5%) or sexual satisfaction (60%) alone. In summary, because the two predictor variables were not significantly correlated, they are both independent contributors to relationship satisfaction. Ultimately, as body image increases and sexual concerns decrease, relationship satisfaction increases.

Chapter IV

Discussion

Previous research suggests that healthily functioning romantic relationships have positive implications for individuals' psychological well-being, such as lower levels of anxiety and depression, as well as improved competency with decision-making (Davila et al., 2017). Because individuals from numerous demographic backgrounds seek psychological services for a host of reasons, including concerns regarding interpersonal relationships, the present study was designed to analyze relevant factors that impact romantic relationship satisfaction in adults. It was hypothesized that body image, as measured by the Body Assessment Scale (Lorenzen et al., 2004), would positively predict relationship satisfaction, as measured by the Relationship Assessment Scale (Hendrick, 1988; Vaughn & Baier, 1999). Further, it was hypothesized that sexual satisfaction, as measured by the Index of Sexual Satisfaction (Hudson et al., 1981), would also positively predict relationship satisfaction. Lastly, it was predicted that sexual satisfaction would mediate the association between body image and relationship satisfaction.

Results supported the first hypothesis, and body image positively predicted relationship satisfaction. Overall, participants were satisfied with their body image, as they scored, on average, above the split-scale mean, given the minimum possible score of 25 and the maximum possible score of 125. These findings are in-line with widely-cited previous research conducted by Friedman et al. (1999), who found that there is a positive association between body image and marital satisfaction, with individuals who were more satisfied in their marriages reporting higher body image satisfaction than those who reported lower marital satisfaction. Furthermore, in a sample of college-age participants,

it was suggested that a similar relationship exists. Hoyt and Kogan (2001) found that individuals who reported greater relationship satisfaction reported higher body image satisfaction than those who reported lower relationship satisfaction. Although causality and directionality cannot be assumed given the correlational nature of these studies, there is preexisting and current data to suggest a significant association between body image and relationship satisfaction in samples of the population ranging from dating college-age participants (Hoyt & Kogan, 2001) to married adults (Friedman et al., 1999) to the current study, which incorporated participants all over the age of 25.

Results of the present study also supported the second hypothesis, which stated that sexual satisfaction would predict relationship satisfaction. Within the context of romantic relationships, sexual functioning and satisfaction has been plentifully studied. Similar to past findings, which suggested that increased sexual satisfaction is associated with relationship satisfaction (Meltzer & McNulty, 2010; van den Brink et al., 2018), results of the current study added more evidence to the literature to support this claim. Ultimately, the current study's results show that healthy sexual practice is a predictor of romantic relationship satisfaction in this adult sample.

Results did not support the last hypothesis, which predicted that sexual satisfaction would mediate the relationship between body image and relationship satisfaction. Sexual satisfaction has been a popularly studied variable when examining romantic relationships, and it has commonly been analyzed as a mediating variable between the constructs of body image and relationship satisfaction (Meltzer & McNulty, 2010; van den Brink et al., 2018), and between self-expansion and relationship satisfaction (Muisse et al., 2018). Because sexual satisfaction has played a mediating role

in previous research, it was predicted that it would again mediate the relationship between body image and relationship satisfaction.

Although both body image and sexual satisfaction indeed predicted relationship satisfaction, sexual satisfaction did not mediate this association. Both predictors were independent contributors to relationship satisfaction because body image remained a significant predictor of relationship satisfaction, even after sexual satisfaction was added to the model. These findings contrast previous work conducted by Meltzer and McNulty (2010), who found that wives' perceived sexual attractiveness, a component of body esteem, predicted relationship satisfaction through the variables of sexual satisfaction and sexual frequency. Once sexual satisfaction and sexual frequency were accounted for, wives' body esteem no longer predicted relationship satisfaction, showing that the sexual components subsumed the first model and mediated the relationship between wives' body esteem and relationship satisfaction (Meltzer & McNulty, 2010).

Similar to these findings, van den Brink et al. (2018) concluded that individuals who report higher body image also report higher sexual satisfaction, and therefore higher relationship satisfaction than individuals who report lower body image. The association between body image and relationship satisfaction was no longer significant after accounting for sexual satisfaction in both male and female participants (van den Brink et al., 2018). There could be a host of reasons why the results of the current study did not have similar findings in regard to the mediating variable. For instance, differences in the measures used could influence findings, as well as the sample of the population analyzed. Both Meltzer and McNulty (2010) and van den Brink et al. (2018) analyzed younger samples of adults with mean ages of 25.8 years old and 23.1 years old, respectively;

whereas, the current study had a higher mean age of participants ($M = 34.68$, $SD = 10.54$).

The difference in age groups could suggest that, as individuals get older, sexual satisfaction is still important for relationship satisfaction, but it does not mediate the association between body image and relationship satisfaction, suggesting that older individuals are inclined to engage in relationship-enhancing behaviors, such as sexual intercourse, despite their bodily appraisals. This rationale makes sense, when considering findings from Schneider and Grimps (2013), who found that married individuals exhibited a higher BMI than individuals who were single or never married. They also noted that, even after holding participants' age constant, participants' BMI slightly increased with each year of marriage. They theorized that, as years progress and the likelihood of divorce decreases, individuals invest less time in obtaining the ideal body image (Schneider & Grimps, 2013). Perhaps, once individuals reach a certain level of trust and commitment to their partner, which are components of a quality relationship (Fletcher et al., 2000), they are confident in their partner's acceptance of them and proceed with relationship-enhancing behaviors (van den Brink et al., 2018) despite body image concerns.

Although the results from the present study indicated that there is a significant, positive relationship between the predictor and criterion variables, there were some limitations worth noting. For instance, MTurk was utilized as a convenience sampling technique, and individuals who regularly participate in online research may have personality traits that differ from others who do not actively engage in the furthering of academic research. For instance, this sample of individuals was highly educated, and the

current findings may not generalize to another sample of the population with different demographic characteristics. However, this possible limitation was considered, and research suggests that MTurk not only reaches a wider geographical pool of participants that is more representative of the national population as a whole, but that MTurk workers provide reliable, high-quality responses that are comparable to responses collected in the laboratory setting (Lovett et al., 2018).

Another possible limitation could be the simplistic linear regression design. While it is not possible to determine causality in quasi-experimental designs, a more in-depth statistical analysis could help identify other pathways to relationship satisfaction or any confounding variables, such as BMI. Future researchers should consider replicating the current study and making unique predictions using other statistical models. Cross-sectional and longitudinal designs are required to answer certain research questions pertaining to the directionality of the variables. The current study included individuals who identified as homosexual and bisexual, which was not a common occurrence in previous literature. However, no specific predictions were made about this population, and future researchers should consider collecting data regarding factors that could uniquely influence LGBTQ relationships.

Along with the limitations, there are also notable strengths about the current study, and gaps in the literature which the current study helped fill. For instance, previous researchers utilized single-item measures, which are not as reliable as comprehensive, previously-established study measures (Meltzer & McNulty, 2010; van den Brink et al., 2018). To enhance the quality of research in this area, the current study utilized psychometrically-sound comprehensive measures to assess for all variables. Past

researchers also called for a need of older adult participants (Hoyt & Kogan, 2001; Meltzer & McNulty, 2010; van den Brink et al., 2018), and the current study took this into consideration when requiring that participants must be 25 years or older. In addition, the current study included both male and female participants, because evidence suggests that men also experience body image concerns at a similar level to females (Grieve et al., 2006), which could impact other areas of functioning, such as sexual intercourse or relationship satisfaction.

Ultimately, these findings provide healthcare professionals with practical implications in the scope of clinical practice. With this knowledge, clinicians can explore issues related to body image or sexual satisfaction that could impede relationship satisfaction. Furthermore, healthcare providers can help clients address the underlying concerns within their relationship through techniques geared toward improving body image and sexual functioning.

Because engaging in healthy romantic relationships promotes healthy psychological functioning (Davila et al., 2017), the current study was valuable in the expansion of the body of research pertaining to this topic. If clients can develop accurate bodily appraisals and address these concerns, as well as address any sexual concerns, there is hope that these individuals can engage in satisfactory romantic relationships, and experience an overall improvement in their mental health.

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Appendix A
Demographics Questionnaire and Qualifying Items

1. Are you currently in a romantic relationship lasting three months or longer?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No

2. If you answered “yes” to the above item, how long (in months) have you been in this relationship? _____

3. Are you 25 years or older?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No

4. Age _____

5. Gender
 - a. Male
 - b. Female
 - c. Other _____

6. Height, in inches _____

7. Weight, in pounds _____

8. Race/Ethnicity
 - a. African American
 - b. Asian American
 - c. White, non-Hispanic
 - d. White, Hispanic
 - e. Middle Eastern
 - f. Other _____

9. Highest academic status achieved
 - a. Less than high school diploma
 - b. High school diploma
 - c. Associate’s Degree
 - d. Bachelor’s Degree
 - e. Master’s Degree
 - f. Doctorate
 - g. Other _____

10. Sexual Orientation
 - a. Heterosexual

- b. Homosexual
- c. Bisexual
- d. Other _____
- e. Prefer not to answer

Appendix B
Body Assessment Scale

Rate the following areas on a scale of 1 (*strongly negative*) to 5 (*strongly positive*).

1. _____ Weight
2. _____ Face
3. _____ Body shape
4. _____ Thighs
5. _____ Upper body strength
6. _____ Waist
7. _____ Reflexes
8. _____ Health
9. _____ Shoulders
10. _____ Physical stamina
11. _____ Agility
12. _____ Biceps
13. _____ Lower body strength
14. _____ Chest
15. _____ Chin
16. _____ Energy level
17. _____ Body build
18. _____ Physical coordination
19. _____ Buttocks
20. _____ Calves
21. _____ Stomach
22. _____ Physical condition
23. _____ Triceps
24. _____ Abdominal muscles
25. _____ Legs

Appendix C

Index of Sexual Satisfaction

This questionnaire is designed to measure the degree of satisfaction you have in the sexual relationship with your partner. It is not a test, so there are no right or wrong answers. Answer each item as carefully and as accurately (honestly) as you can by placing a number beside each one as follows.

- 1 = None of the time
- 2 = Very rarely
- 3 = A little of the time
- 4 = Some of the time
- 5 = A good part of the time
- 6 = Most of the time
- 7 = All of the time

1. _____ I feel that my partner enjoys our sex life.
2. _____ Our sex life is very exciting.
3. _____ Sex is fun for my partner and me.
4. _____ Sex with my partner has become a chore for me.
5. _____ I feel that our sex is dirty and disgusting.
6. _____ Our sex life is monotonous.
7. _____ When we have sex it is too rushed and hurriedly completed.
8. _____ I feel that my sex life is lacking in quality.
9. _____ My partner is sexually very exciting.
10. _____ I enjoy the sex techniques that my partner likes or uses.
11. _____ I feel that my partner wants too much sex from me.
12. _____ I think that our sex is wonderful.
13. _____ My partner dwells on sex too much.
14. _____ I try to avoid sexual contact with my partner.
15. _____ My partner is too rough or brutal when we have sex.
16. _____ My partner is a wonderful sex mate.
17. _____ I feel that sex is a normal function of our relationship.
18. _____ My partner does not want sex when I do.
19. _____ I feel that our sex life really adds a lot to our relationship.
20. _____ My partner seems to avoid sexual contact with me.
21. _____ It is easy for me to get sexually excited by my partner.
22. _____ I feel that my partner is sexually pleased with me.
23. _____ My partner is very sensitive to my sexual needs and desires.
24. _____ My partner does not satisfy me sexually.
25. _____ I feel that my sex life is boring.

Appendix D
Relationship Assessment Scale

Select the answer that best describes your belief regarding your current romantic relationship.

1. How well does your partner meet your needs?	1 Poorly	2	3 Average	4	5 Extremely Well
2. In general, how satisfied are you with your relationship?	1 Unsatisfied	2	3 Average	4	5 Extremely Satisfied
3. How good is your relationship compared to most?	1 Poor	2	3 Average	4	5 Excellent
4. How often do you wish you hadn't gotten in this relationship?	1 Never	2	3 Average	4	5 Very Often
5. To what extent has your relationship met your original expectations?	1 Hardly At All	2	3 Average	4	5 Completely
6. How much do you love your partner?	1 Not Much	2	3 Average	4	5 Very Much
7. How many problems are there in your relationship?	1 Very Few	2	3 Average	4	5 Very Many

Appendix E

Implied Consent Document



IMPLIED CONSENT DOCUMENT

Project Title: The Association Between Body Image, Sexual Satisfaction, and Relationship Satisfaction in Adults

Investigator: Hannah Krisher, WKU Clinical Psychology; Hannah.krisher550@topper.wku.edu

Advisor: Dr. Rick Grieve, WKU Department of Psychology; rick.grieve@wku.edu

You are being asked to participate in a project conducted through Western Kentucky University. The University requires that you give your agreement to participate in this project.

You must be 25 years old or older to participate in this research study, and you must currently also be in a romantic relationship lasting three months or longer to participate.

A basic explanation of the project is written below. Please read this explanation and email the researcher any questions you may have. If you then decide to participate in the project, please continue to the survey. You should keep a copy of this form for your records.

1. **Nature and Purpose of the Project:** The goal of the current project is to study various factors that impact romantic relationships.
2. **Explanation of Procedures:** To be included in the study, you must meet the following inclusion criteria:
 - You are at least 25 years of age.
 - You are currently in a romantic relationship lasting three months or longer.

If you do not meet these criteria, you will not be included in this study. Participants who meet the inclusion criteria will be presented with three self-report questionnaires. The questionnaires will take participants approximately 10 to 15 minutes. Lastly, participants will respond to a demographics questionnaire, requiring approximately three minutes.

3. **Discomfort and Risks:** With any form of online data collection, there are risks. The risks are minimal, and precautionary measures will be taken to avoid such risks. Please read the following before consenting to participate.
 - Amazon could link your worker ID (and associated personal information) with your survey responses. Make sure you have read Amazon's MTurk participant and privacy agreements to understand how your personal information may be used or disclosed.
 - Breach of confidentiality: There is a chance your data could be seen by someone who shouldn't have access to it. We're minimizing this risk in the following ways:
 - Data is anonymous.
 - All electronic data will be stored on a password-protected USB drive.

Some items may be personal or ask about sensitive topics, such as body weight and sexual satisfaction. You can skip items or quit the survey at any time.

4. **Benefits:** By participating in this study, you are aiding in the research process to help determine factors that influence romantic relationships. This information can be used in clinical practice to help clients maintain healthy, long-lasting relationships.

5. **Confidentiality:** No identifying information will be collected, and data will be discussed using statistical terms, such as means and standard deviations. Specific individual information will not be revealed. Records will be viewed, stored, and maintained in private, secure files only accessible by the P.I. and advising faculty for three years following the study, after which time they will be destroyed.

6. **Refusal/Withdrawal:** Refusal to participate in this study will have no effect on any future services you may be entitled to from the University. Anyone who agrees to participate in this study is free to withdraw from the study at any time with no penalty.

You understand also that it is not possible to identify all potential risks in an experimental procedure, and you believe that reasonable safeguards have been taken to minimize both the known and potential but unknown risks.

Your continued cooperation with the following research implies your consent.

THE DATED APPROVAL ON THIS CONSENT FORM INDICATES THAT
THIS PROJECT HAS BEEN REVIEWED AND APPROVED BY
THE WESTERN KENTUCKY UNIVERSITY INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
Robin Pyles, Human Protections Administrator
TELEPHONE: (270) 745-3360



Appendix F
Debriefing Statement

Thank you for your participation in this study. Your participation will aid in the understanding of factors that influence romantic relationships in adults. Please enter survey code "Western2020" into the box below the survey link upon completion.

Please contact the investigator, Hannah Krisher, at Hannah.Krisher550@topper.wku.edu with any questions.