

Predictive Variables of Sexual Satisfaction

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Abstract

Introduction: *Sexual fantasies are defined as any erotic image or sexual thought of a person when he/she is awake. It may be an elaborated story or a transient thought about a sexual activity (Hicks & Leitenberg, 2001). Previous researches showed that sexual fantasies can be found in most people (more than 95% of the population) and they represent an integrating part of human sexuality (Leitenberg & Henning, 1995).*

Objectives: *In this research we aimed to underline the predictive role in the context of using sexual stimuli in sexual satisfaction, to underline an existing relation between sexual satisfaction and sexual fantasies in the context of controlling the covariant variables: relationship duration and religion.*

Methods: *Sexual behavior scale, sexual fantasy scale, anamnesis, sexual satisfaction scale.*

Results: *The obtained results show that the use of sexual stimuli represents a significant predictor for sexual satisfaction, while a high level of religiosity represents an inhibitor for sexual fantasies. Moreover, a longer relationship and the use of sexual fantasies have a significant effect upon sexual satisfaction.*

Conclusions: *In general, the results obtained suggest the fact that subjects are happier with their sexual life when they use a series of sexual stimuli. In this study, religiosity seems to be a predictor for sexual satisfaction in the context of neutralizing the sexual fantasies, although the results of other researches on this topic are contradictory.*

Keywords: *prediction, sexual fantasies, sexual stimulus, religion*

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I. Introduction

Sexual fantasies are defined as any erotic image or sexual thought of a person when he/she is awake. It may be an elaborated story or a transient thought about a sexual activity (Hicks & Leitenberg, 2001). Sexual fantasies cannot be criticized from the outside and they are devoid of feelings of embarrassment and control. They allow the release of repressed sexual desires and support the experiencing of desires through images, rather than through actions considered taboo. Fantasies do not refer only to the partner, but may include strangers, individuals of the same gender, group sex, violent sex or persons invested with power. Thoughts of this kind have no limits. In fantasy, people are free to make room for desires and impulses in a way that could not be accepted in real life (Wilson, 1997).

There are three types of fantasies that extend beyond normal or everyday life scenarios. The first scenario refers to fantasies about deceased persons. Usually, these images include strangers, unusual partners and atypical positions. The second scenario includes fantasies with animals. The third type of atypical fantasy includes images with rape, kidnapping, slaveries etc.

Previous researches show that sexual fantasies are present in most people (over 95% of the population) and they represent an integrating part of human sexuality (Leitenberg & Henning, 1995).

Fantasies can be the result of the memory of past events or the result of imaginary experiences.

They can also occur spontaneously, deliberately or can be triggered by thoughts, feelings or sensory stimuli. They may occur beyond the sexual activity, within self-satisfying sexual activities or may develop during the sexual activities with the partner.

There is a set of empirical evidence on gender differences in the frequency and content of sexual fantasies. Existing researches argue that, in a certain period of time, men have more fantasies than women (Person, Terestman, Myers, Goldberg & Salvadori, 1989). Also, these studies argue that the content of men's fantasies is more varied than women's (Leitenberg & Henning, 1995).

According to Doskoch (1995), men think about sex 7.2 times a day on the average, while women tend to think about it 4.5 times a day on the average. According to the survey conducted by Wilson (1997) in Great Britain, men tend to have sexual fantasies on sexual relationships with several people to a greater extent than women, with a ratio of 4.2 to 1. Also, men think about sexual relationships with strangers to a greater extent (33%), while women have this trend in a percentage of 25%. One aspect, on which there is some equity, is represented by sexual fantasies involving celebrities, with a ratio of 16% for men and 17% women. As far as fantasies with people of the same gender are concerned, women have a tendency of 19%, while men tend to have such fantasies at a rate of 12%.

	Men	Women
He/she thinks about sex once or more times a day	54%	19%
He/she imagines sexual relationships with multiple partners	32%	8%
He/she has fantasies during self-satisfying sexual activities	81%	43%
He/she focuses on feelings or emotions	19%	57%
The first fantasy was inspired by a relationship	6%	31%
The first fantasy was inspired by an older person such as a teacher / professor	27%	7%

(Doskoch, 1995)

Table 1 - Differences regarding sexual fantasies depending on gender

Sexual fantasies begin at an early age, for most people between the ages of 11 and 13. In one study, 57% of the boys and 42% of the girls aged 14-15 said they were thinking about sex five minutes before starting the study and only 19% of the men and 12% of the women aged 56-64 thought about sex in the same time span (Doskoch, 1995). These data may indicate that sexual fantasies are vital at all levels of human development starting from puberty, but their frequency tends to decrease with age and gained experience.

In turn, Wilson (1997) studied how the sexual fantasies are affected by age. The majority of fantasies

remain stable in terms of frequency and consistency between 17 and 57 years of age and the differences only appear in the sexual fantasies regarding group sexual activities. In men, this kind of fantasy is very frequent between 28 and 37 years old and begins to diminish after this threshold. In women, this kind of fantasy is not very common, but there is a significant decrease after 38-40 years old from case to case. The frequency of fantasies about people invested with power is lower in women along with aging, while the interest in fantasies with strangers or persons of the same gender remains constant regardless of age. A

possible explanation for the differences concerning the ups and downs of fantasies depending on gender could be offered by hormonal changes.

According to recent studies, violent fantasies are also normal. These fantasies may vary from imagining beatings to tying someone. Although most people give a positive connotation to violent fantasies, they depend heavily on the person from the fantasy. For example, the fantasy of being hit by Brad Pitt or Angelina Jolie can be seen as positive, while the generated image of being hit by a teacher may be less pleasant. Both types of fantasies contain violent images, but the person makes the difference (apud. C.C. Miranda & Medeiros, 2004).

According to a study conducted by Hicks and Leitenberg (2001), 98% of men and 80% of women had sexual fantasies with other people than their partner, two months before the study. These percentages are valid regardless of the marital status.

Gagnon and Simon (1977) argue that understanding sexual behaviors is important in order to apprehend sexuality and what it correlates with. Very few studies have investigated the specificity of the sexual behaviors and their influence on the level of sexual satisfaction. Davidson (1985) stated that the oral stimulation of the partner, the use of sexual material (explicit films), the use of sexual fantasies or practiced techniques are correlated with sexual satisfaction. Santilla and collaborators (2008) stated that certain sexual desires, self-satisfying sexual activities or sexual fantasies can have a negative impact on the sexual satisfaction of the partner.

In addition to sexual behaviors, non-sexual aspects may, in turn, influence the individual's sexual satisfaction (Barrientos & Paez, 2006). A particular variable of this study is the influence of religiosity. Within a study, it was observed that a high level of religiosity was negatively correlated with experimenting different sexual techniques, the frequency of intercourse and permissive sexual attitudes (Beck, Cole & Hammond, 1991).

The frequency of participation in religious events of one of the partners has a strong influence on the sexual attitudes and behaviors of the other partner (Thornton & Camburn, 1989). The high level of religiosity and the participation in religious events is a significant predictor for lower involvement in sexual activities (Mahoney, 1980). In addition, the low level of religiosity is associated with a liberal and permissive sexual view and a higher level of sexual activity (Thornton & Camburn, 1989). A rigid and strict religious attitude has a negative impact on the sexual satisfaction. These individuals report high levels of guilt or more sexual dysfunctions (Purcell, 1984). One explanation for these results can be given by the fact that most religions consider that sexual activities are performed in order to procreate and not to obtain pleasure (Davidson, Darling, & Norton, 1995).

II. Research objectives and hypotheses

In this research, we aimed to underline the predictive role in the context of using sexual stimuli on sexual satisfaction, to underline an existing relation between sexual satisfaction and sexual fantasies in the context of controlling the covariant variables: relationship duration and religion.

In accordance with these objectives, we intend to verify the following assumptions: the use of sexual stimuli is a significant predictor for sexual satisfaction; the use of sexual fantasies is a predictor for sexual satisfaction in the context of controlling covariant variables such as relationship duration and the level of religiosity.

Participants

For this research, we used a group of 125 people, aged 24-36 ($M = 29.51$, $SD = 3.86$), of which 60 men and 65 women. Regarding the relationship duration, subjects have been involved in relationships for at least two years and not more than 14 years ($M = 6.87$, $SD = 3.54$). We can see that 73 subjects are married, and 52 are not married.

The religious orientation of the subjects was surveyed using the open question: „What is your religion?“ Thus, 62 subjects are Orthodox Christians, 30 are Roman Catholics, 10 are Greek Catholics, 7 are Muslim and 16 said they were atheists.

	Male	Female
Orthodox	25	37
Roman Catholic	19	11
Religion Greek Catholic	3	7
Muslim	4	3
Atheist	9	7

Table 2 - Religious group by gender

III. Method

Before applying the questionnaires necessary for testing the hypotheses, we applied Kinsey's Scale to identify heterosexual, asexual or homosexual behaviors of the subjects.

We used a scale for sexual gratification in order to assess the subjects' sexual satisfaction scale. The scale is a personal concept and contains 18 items divided into two subscales: sexual activity regarding oneself and the partner. Items are scored on a five-step Likert scale, where 1 = dissatisfied, 2 = poorly satisfied, 3 = moderately satisfied, 4 = very satisfied and 5 = extremely satisfied. We conducted a pilot test to validate this questionnaire and obtained an index of

internal consistency Cronbach alpha of 0.89 (inf lim 95% = 0.82; sup lim 95% = 0.93). For the scale regarding oneself, the Cronbach alpha index is 0.87 (inf lim 95% = 0.78; sup lim 95% = 0.92) and for the partner's sexual activity scale, the Cronbach alpha index is 0.89 (inf lim 95% = 0.81; sup lim 95% = 0.94).

To check the manner in which the newly proposed items were grouped into the two scales, we used the confirmatory factor analysis. The value of Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin index (0.96) and the significance level of the Bartlett's Test of Sphericity (21334.661; $p < 0.05$) suggest the existence of one or more common factors which justify the application of a factor reduction procedure.

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure Sampling Adequacy	0.93
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity approx. Chi-Square	19334.492
Sig	.000

Table 3 - KMO and Bartlett's Test

After applying the factor analysis procedure, we notice that the 18 items are grouped into four factors, and only two manage to reach the selection criterion (Eigenvalue = 1). The variance explained by each factor is distributed as it follows: factor 1 - 32.70% and factor 2 - 30.94%. Together, these two

factors explain 63.64% of the variance of the analyzed values. After applying the factor rotation procedure, we see that the observed variance is redistributed as it follows: factor 1 - 37.26% and factor 2 - 33.81%. The loading degree of items is included in Table 4.

Factors	Items	Factor loading
Oneself	14 My focus during sex	0.82
	6 Sexual functioning	0.82
	13 My mood at the end of the intercourse	0.79
	1 Sexual arousal intensity	0.79
	5 Frequency of orgasms	0.76
	3 Emotional opening during sex	0.72
	10 Quality of orgasm	0.69
	15 Sexual reaction to my partner	0.57
	18 The pleasure I generate to my partner	0.53
	Sexual activity of the partner	11 The balance between what I offer and what I get during sex
4 Partner's orgasm		0.80
2 Frequency of sexual activities		0.75
7 Variety of sexual activities		0.71
12 Emotional opening of the partner during sex		0.66
16 My partner satisfies my sexual needs		0.63
8 Initiative of the partner for sexual activities		0.59
9 Availability of the partner		0.58
17 Creativity of the partner during sex		0.56

Table 4 - Factor analysis for final items

We adapted the Sexual Behavior Scale questionnaire in order to assess the level of sexual stimuli use (Ashdown, Hackathorn, & Clark, 2011). This scale contains 10 items, scored on a five-step Likert scale, where 1 = never and 5 = very often. The Cronbach alpha index of internal consistency for this scale is 0.80 (inf lim 95% = 0.56; sup lim 95% = 0.94). Subjects were asked to respond to the 10 items concerning the use of sexual stimuli in their relationships at that time. For example: „Do you usually watch movies with explicit content with your partner?“ „Do you read literature for information to improve your sex life?“

We made up a list of 25 possible imaginary activities that could stimulate the subjects in order to investigate the frequency of sexual fantasies. This list was designed after the model used by Wilson (1997). Subjects were asked to score each statement on a five-step Likert scale, where 1 = never and 5 = very often. The Cronbach alpha index of internal consistency for these situations is 0.82 (inf lim 95% = 0.77; sup lim 95% = 0.92). Some of the statements included in this study are: „sex with a famous person“, „sex with someone inexperienced“, „sex with a stranger of the opposite gender“ or „sex with multiple persons of the opposite gender.“

To assess the level of religiosity, we made up a questionnaire according to the model developed by Gorsuch and Venable (1983). This questionnaire contains 22 items and the subject was asked to answer with yes or no. For example: „After you pray do you feel more pleased than before?“, „I often pray“ or „Religion is important to me because it answers some questions about the meaning of life.“ The Cronbach alpha index of internal consistency for this scale is 0.77 (inf lim 95% = 0.63; sup lim 95% = 0.87).

The historical background was used to find demographic information about the subjects: gender, age, marital status, relationship duration and religion.

Variables

The variables used in this study are the use of sexual fantasies, the sexual satisfaction level, the religiosity level, the use of sexual stimuli and the relationship duration. In the first hypothesis, the use of sexual stimuli is the independent variable and the dependent variable is the sexual satisfaction. In the second hypothesis, the independent variable is the use of sexual fantasies and the dependent variable is the level of sexual satisfaction, while the level of religiosity and the relationship duration are control variables.

Procedure

The study was conducted over a period of 10 months. Participants were selected through the snowball method; they were asked to participate in a study on human sexuality and to fill in a set of questionnaires that included intimate statements. Also, subjects were asked to fill in the questionnaires in a space where there were no external influences.

IV. Results

Following the application of the Kinsey scale we can see that 93 subjects have exclusively heterosexual behaviors and 32 subjects behave predominantly heterosexual, while homosexual behaviors appeared only incidentally.

In the first part of the results interpretation, we will perform an analysis of the differences in the variables investigated, depending on the subjects' gender. Thus, at the level of sexual satisfaction, we found that a mean of 70.95 was found for the entire group of subjects (inf lim 95% = 69.62, sup lim 95% = 71.99, SD = 5.84). At the level of sexual stimuli use, there was a mean of 28.19 (inf lim 95% = 27.32, sup lim 95% = 29.06, SD = 4.91). At the level of frequency of using sexual fantasies, subjects scored a mean of 77.35 (inf lim 95% = 75.66, sup lim 95% = 79.05, SD = 9.56). Regarding the level of religiosity, subjects scored a mean of 9.72 (inf lim 95% = 8.81, sup lim 95% = 10.63, SD = 5.14).

	Men	Women	Significance
Sexual Satisfaction	71.78	70.18	p > 0.05
Sexual stimuli	29.80	26.98	p < 0.05
Sexual fantasies	79.20	75.35	p < 0.05
Religiosity	9.13	10.26	p > 0.05

Table 5 - Gender Differences

The results obtained indicate significant differences between men and women at the level of sexual stimuli use and the frequency of sexual fantasies. At the level of sexual satisfaction and religiosity, we did not find significant differences between the two groups of subjects. Thus, we can see that in terms of sexual satisfaction perception, both men and women appear to be at equal levels of satisfaction, the expectations from the partner being generally similar, regardless of gender. However, a thorough analysis of each item allows us, for example, to note that women have higher scores on items related to the pleasure they generate to their partner and the focus during sexual intercourse, but they have lower scores on items related to the satisfaction of sexual needs by the partner and their emotional openness.

These results may indicate that for women, the emotional involvement and willingness of the partner seem to be the most important. At the same time, men

have higher scores on the intensity of sexual arousing and sexual functioning and lower scores can be noticed at the level of items related to the sexual activity frequency and in terms of the partner's availability. These differences observed in some items seem to correlate with the evolutionary theories that support the desire for stability and involvement of women with their partner and the men's tendency to get into as many sexual acts, without making large investments. Also, these results seem to correlate with the observed differences in the frequency of occurrence of some types of fantasies, results that we will present in Table 6.

Next, we will present some differences observed between men and women in the frequency of certain types of fantasies. As noted in the above-mentioned results, although men seem to have a significantly higher tendency to imagine certain situations, at the level of fantasies, women have a significantly higher frequency of occurrence.

Type of fantasy	Higher frequency
Sex with a stranger of the opposite gender	Men
Sex with one's own partner	Women
Sex with multiple partners	Men
Sexual activity with someone of the same gender	Women
Sex with a famous person	Women
Sex with an inexperienced partner	Men
Sex with an older partner	Women

Table 6 - Gender differences in the incidence of sexual fantasies

To understand better the studied phenomenon, we performed an analysis of the data mentioned above, using the variable control of marital status. Thus, we see that the gender of the subject has a significant effect on the sexual stimuli use ($F = 8.42$; $p < 0.05$; $\eta^2 = 0.65$) and the marital status (married vs. unmarried) also has a significant effect ($F = 8.51$; $p < 0.05$; $\eta^2 = 0.66$). However, the two factors, taken together, have a significant effect on the use of sexual stimuli ($F = 0.32$; $p > 0.05$; $\eta^2 = 0.03$). This result can be explained by the fact that, whether they are married or not, men show a

stronger tendency to use such stimuli as compared to women. Another aspect that can be discussed is that married people use sexual stimuli more than unmarried persons. One of the reasons for this phenomenon could be generated by the stronger intimacy and trust between the two married partners.

A second explanation could be determined by the routine between the two partners, but it would also be interesting to discuss the effect of the relationship duration.

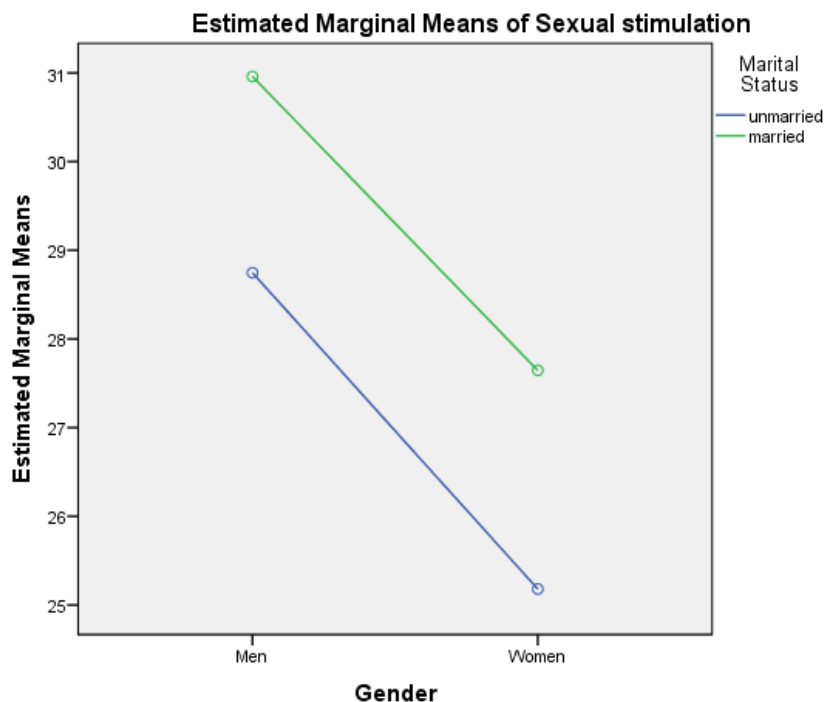


Chart 1 – Use of sexual stimuli according to gender and marital status

In terms of sexual fantasies frequency, we see that the gender of the subject has a significant effect on the use of fantasies ($F = 7.83$; $p < 0.05$; $\eta^2 = 0.30$), while the marital status (married vs. unmarried), in turn, has no significant effect ($F = 0.01$; $p < 0.05$; $\eta^2 = 0.00$). Also, the two factors, taken together, have a significant effect on the use of sexual fantasies ($F = 0.40$; $p > 0.05$; $\eta^2 = 0.03$). This result can be explained by the fact that, regardless if they are married or not, both men and

women have an equally accentuated tendency to imagine such situations. This result is consistent with what we mentioned in the theory, namely, both for men and women it is normal to have such fantasies, but men show a higher frequency. From Chart 2 we can observe that married women have a higher frequency of sexual fantasies, compared to unmarried ones, but in men the ratio is reversed, single people have a higher frequency of using fantasies than married ones.

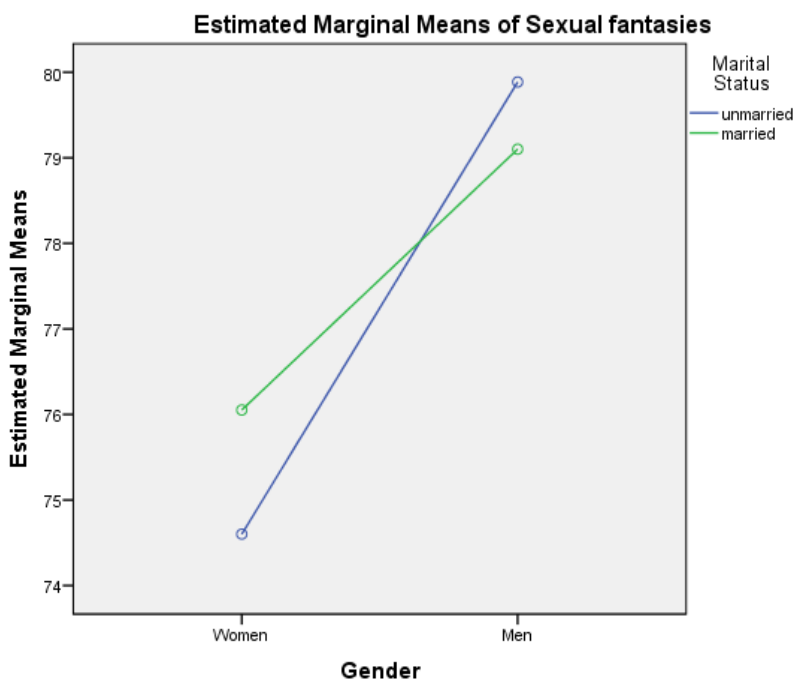


Chart 2 - Frequency of sexual fantasies according to gender and marital status

In the first hypothesis, we tested the predictive role of the sexual stimuli use on the sexual satisfaction in a couple and for this purpose we used the linear regression analysis. The results obtained indicate that the hypothesis stated by us is confirmed, namely sexual stimuli represent an important element in achieving the

highest sexual satisfaction possible. Analyzing the results presented in Table 7, we see that the power of prediction is 0.68, and the proportion of predicted values which is related to the combined variability of factors is 0.47.

R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	F Change	Sig F Change
0.68	0.46	0.43	30.21	p <0.05

Table 7 - Regression analysis coefficients

In the second hypothesis, we will use the partial correlation in order to emphasize an existing relation between sexual satisfaction and sexual fantasies, in the context of covariant variables control of the relationship duration and religiosity.

The results obtained indicate that there is a significant correlation between sexual fantasies and the level of sexual satisfaction (0.54).

The covariant variable „relationship duration” correlates with both sexual fantasies (0.47) and sexual satisfaction (0.35). At the same time, the level of religiosity correlates with both sexual satisfaction (0.49) and sexual fantasies (0.40). After excluding the effect of the relationship duration and of the religiosity level, the correlation between sexual satisfaction and sexual fantasies is 0.46.

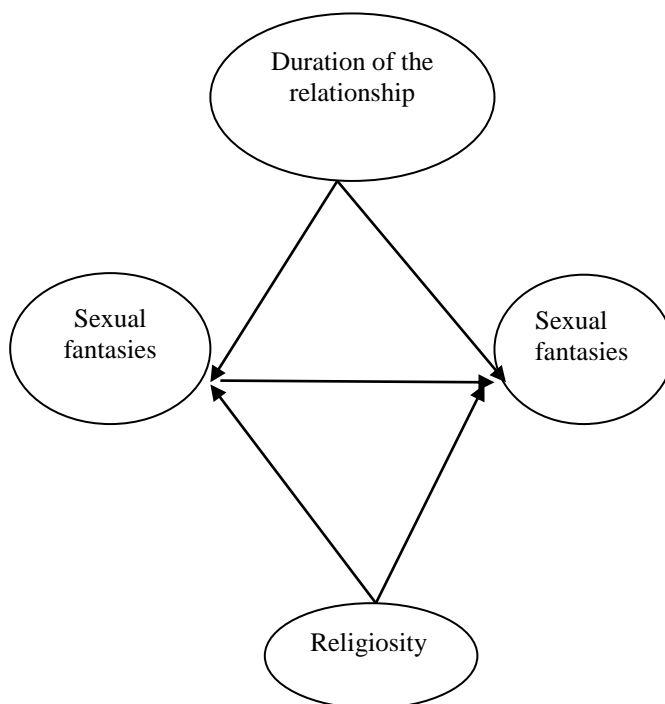


Chart 3 – Semi-partial correlation

V. Discussion

Sexual satisfaction is a complex concept and it can be approached from several perspectives. Many aspects related to the person's sexual behavior (frequency of sexual acts, expectations, sexual stimuli) may influence sexual satisfaction. In this study, we examined the relationship between the use of sexual stimuli, the frequency of sexual fantasies and the

sexual satisfaction within the couple, at the same time monitoring the control of the relationship duration and the level of religiosity. Byers and McNeil (2006) found that men's attitudes oriented towards understanding women's sexual preferences are a predictor for their sexual satisfaction.

Also, couples with a longer relationship share their impressions about each other and thus can predict

their sexual expectations (Miller & Byers, 2004). We can say that private discussions between partners can be an important source for obtaining sexual confidence, intimacy and emotional support, for both men and women (Barrientos & Paez, 2006).

Along with the results obtained, it is important to remember a number of limitations that this study has. One aspect that could generate a source of error is the selection of the sample. It has been made up mainly of young people, the maximum age being 36 years old. Thus, we have neglected an important stage of human development and sexuality - maturity. This limit is also highlighted by the fact that existing research states that, with age, the sexual fantasies content changes. Another limitation lies in the fact that although we have considered the level of religiosity, we have neglected the subjects' religion. It is well known that depending on religion, issues related to sexuality are dealt with more or less openly. Also, an important source of error can be generated by the subjects' voluntary participation. In these circumstances, one may expect the sample to include people who have a positive attitude towards sexual topics, increasing their willingness to answer such questions. Thus, the probability of including persons satisfied with their sexual life in the sample increased.

VI. Conclusions

The results obtained allowed us to notice that there are no significant differences between men and women at the level of sexual satisfaction, regardless of gender. The subjects were satisfied with their sexual life. Also, no significant differences were observed depending on the subjects' gender and religiosity. However, we have seen that men have a significantly higher level of sexual stimuli use and frequency of sexual fantasies than women.

As expected, the use of sexual stimuli is a significant predictor for an increased sexual satisfaction. Also, the frequency of sexual fantasies can explain the level of sexual satisfaction, using the control of the relationship duration and the religiosity level.

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