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# Good lovin': the effects of stressors on sexual satisfaction among non-cohabitating, cohabiting, and married couples

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GOOD LOVIN': THE EFFECTS OF STRESSORS ON SEXUAL SATISFACTION  
AMONG NON-COHABITATING, COHABITATING, AND MARRIED COUPLES

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A Thesis

Presented To

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Cheney, Washington

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In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree

Masters of Science

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By

Wylie E. Rhoads

Spring 2013

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## Abstract

The negative relationship between stress and sexual satisfaction is one that has not been studied extensively when it comes to the differences between non-cohabitating, cohabitating, and married couples. It is important to understand how stress may affect sexual satisfaction in different groups so that each group can develop the proper coping mechanisms to defend against the damage stress can cause. The present study examined whether married couples would report more sexual satisfaction before and after a stress-induced priming task due to more effective coping strategies compared to non-cohabitating and cohabitating couples. Men and women in sexually active, monogamous relationships completed surveys about a self-report stress measure, sexual satisfaction, and individual and dyadic coping strategies. No significant difference was found for participants' self-reported sexual satisfaction or stress levels before and after a stress prime regardless of their living situation and coping abilities. Although not the original purpose of the study, we did find a correlation between individual coping and overall stress and between dyadic coping and sexual satisfaction. This highlights the importance for both individual and dyadic coping mechanisms in everyday relationships.

*Keywords:* sexual satisfaction; stress; coping strategies; non-cohabitating couples; cohabitating couples; married couples

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Good Lovin': The Effects of Stressors on Sexual Satisfaction Among Non-cohabitating,  
Cohabiting, and Married Couples

“So I approached you on the wall. I started off by sayin’ beautiful, and then I saw that you already had a man ‘cause I notice the ring on your hand. And I’m dancin’ with you even though it’s wrong, and I can’t help but notice you feelin’ it. And it’s really no use holdin’ out ‘cause I know it’s good love you need. I can give it to you, baby.” This song performed by the artist Slim (Leslie & Jackson, 2008) suggests how prominent sex is in most relationships. According to the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health, approximately 50% of young adult couples become sexually involved with their partner within their first month of dating (Busby, Carroll, & Willoughby, 2010). Past research has found low levels of sexual satisfaction to cause dissatisfaction within relationships (Bodenmann, Atkins, Schar, & Poffet, 2010). Although sex is a hot topic in our society, the research on different relationship types and sexual satisfaction is fairly scant within the literature. Very few individuals have investigated sexual satisfaction between non-cohabitating, cohabitating, and married couples and the additional variable of stress (Bodenmann et al., 2010). Most researchers discuss relationship satisfaction and how sexual satisfaction is considered and used as a subset or a measure (Gatzeva & Paik, 2011). However, few researchers solely investigated the impact stress has on sexual satisfaction in a relationship (e.g., Busby et al., 2010; Higgins, Trussell, Moore & Davidson, 2010). The present study investigates how the specific aspect of stress affects sexual satisfaction differently between non-cohabitating, cohabitating, and married couples.



The purpose of this study is to examine the difference in sexual satisfaction between sexually active married couples, sexually active cohabitating, and sexually active non-cohabitating couples. Bringing awareness to how stressors may have a negative effect on one's sexual satisfaction in their relationship is important because it can potentially help extend the life of the relationship (Bodenmann et al., 2010). There are always stressors within a relationship, but an excessive amount of stress can lead to dissatisfaction in many aspects of one's relationship, including sexual satisfaction (Lavner & Bradbury, 2010). However, if couples are aware of the stress that may be hindering their relationship, they can develop coping mechanisms to prevent the damage that the stressors may cause (Bodenmann et al., 2010). This, in turn, may lower divorce rates and assist in relationship longevity.

Specifically, we predict that married couples will report the same amount of sexual satisfaction both before and after a stress prime, due to more developed coping mechanisms that may buffer the effects of stress compared to non-cohabitating and cohabitating couples. We also predict that married couples would show a lower self-report for stress after the stress-prime compared to non-cohabitating and cohabitating couples, due to feeling more secure in their relationship. Additionally, we will explore how the different kinds of self-reported acute stressors (finances, children, etc.) negatively affect the sexual satisfaction of couples in non-cohabitating, cohabitating, and married couples. To better understand the different aspects of the current study, it is important to review and consider the effects of stress in a sexual relationship, how different coping mechanisms relate with stress, and past research on relationship satisfaction in relation to sexual satisfaction.

### **Stress and Sexual Satisfaction**

Research has shown that when couples experience more stress within their relationship they experience less sexual satisfaction (Bodenmann et al., 2010). Stress can take many forms. One study that assessed the association between sexual activity and daily stress explored how high levels of external stress (stress outside of close relation) and internal stress (stress within the close relation) were associated with lower levels of sexual activity, sexual pleasure, and sexual satisfaction (Bodenmann et al., 2010). The resulting decreases in sexual activity, sexual pleasure, and sexual satisfaction have been seen as being predictors for divorce (Bodenmann, Ledermann, & Bradbury, 2007).

Similarly, Karney, Story, and Bradbury (2005) demonstrated that marital quality and sexual satisfaction decrease when life events are interpreted as being stressful. In that study, researchers asked the participants to keep diaries that were given out a week at a time. Participants were asked to report their stressors (internal and external), relationship satisfaction, sexual satisfaction, and sexual activity. The study found that stress was negatively associated with the frequency of sexual activities, which, in turn, lowered one's sexual satisfaction. Sexual activities were also lower during the week due to more daily stress, and increased during the weekend and vacations when the daily stressors were seen as minimal. The study suggested that the less stress that a relationship has, the more relationship satisfaction, and specifically, sexual satisfaction one would experience (Bodenmann et al., 2010).

Other recent research has found that lack of relational stability and commitment can cause stress in a relationship and, consequently, decrease sexual satisfaction (Higgins, Trussell, Moore, & Davidson, 2010; Treas & Giesen, 2000). Individuals in

relationships with higher levels of commitment are associated with greater intimacy and less external stress, whereas individuals without high levels of commitment lack expectations about the relationship itself (Gatzeva & Paik, 2011). For example, young women in an uncommitted relationship may feel more regret and anxiety after their first sexual experience, leading to less sexual satisfaction in the future (Higgins et al., 2010). Treas and Giesen (2000) discussed how those who cohabit are considered to have less commitment compared to those who are married, and consequently have a greater risk for relational dissatisfaction or internal stress.

Thus, stress has a negative effect on sexual satisfaction. We propose that the more acute stress that is experienced, the lower the individual's sexual satisfaction will be.

#### **Ability to Cope and Sexual Satisfaction**

Coping strategies can alleviate stress, which may result in higher sexual satisfaction. Couples who possess positive coping mechanisms should show less stress effects on their sexual satisfaction (Bodenmann et al., 2010). Bodenmann et al. (2010) discussed that individual coping (relying on oneself to monitor well-being) is positively associated with sexual satisfaction. They also explored that dyadic coping, which was aimed at maintaining the individual well being of both self and partner, brought increased sexual satisfaction, intimacy, and reciprocal trust (Bodenmann et al., 2010). With dyadic coping, married couples experience greater intimacy and fewer arguments that remain unresolved compared to non-cohabitating and cohabitating couples (Gatzeva & Paik, 2011). For example, when both partners reported experiencing less time with their partner, decreased quality of communication, and a lack of self-disclosure, this led to

problems in dyadic coping and spouses experienced lower sexual satisfaction (Bodenmann et al., 2007).

According to past research, married couples seem to have the best coping mechanisms and less stress compared to non-cohabitating and cohabitating couples (Gunlicks-Stoessel & Powers, 2009). For example, couples in long-term relationships, such as married couples, may have more automatic and stable coping behaviors due to the history of shared and supported interactions with their partner (Gunlicks-Stoessel & Powers, 2009). Gunlicks-Stoessel and Powers (2009) discussed the importance of active coping strategies. The authors described active coping as a strategy in which a partner attempts to address and adjust a problem actively by planning, emotional processing, and problem solving. Gunlicks-Stoessel and Powers (2009) discussed that when romantic couples take part in active coping during a conflict, the couple is able to make a quicker emotional recovery. When couples have an active or dyadic coping strategy, it will help reduce their stress and increase sexual satisfaction (Bodenmann et al., 2010; Gunlicks-Stoessel & Powers, 2009).

It has been shown in past research that thinking about relationship stressors increases one's biological stress response and inducing an imagined stressor can potentially result in a negative evaluation of the relationship (Gunlicks-Stoessel & Powers, 2009), unless the individual has efficient coping skills. If an individual has proficient coping skills and partner support, their biological response to stress may also be lessened (Bodenmann et al., 2010). For example, married couples may have a decreased biological response to stress due to the automatic coping skills they have developed through their history of collective interaction patterns (Gunlicks-Stoessel &

Powers, 2009). Gunlicks-Stoessel and Powers (2009) described collective interaction patterns as reactions to stress that the couple found to be effective in conflict. The couples that used active coping strategies showed a lower level of cortisol (a hormone related to stress) during the conflict (Gunlicks-Stoessel & Powers, 2009; Spangler, Pekrun, Kramer, & Hofmann, 2002).

In conclusion, utilizing effective individual and dyadic coping mechanisms seems to be associated with lowering one's level of stress and increasing one's sexual satisfaction. Married couples may also have better coping mechanisms that would help them reduce stress and, in turn, increase their sexual satisfaction compared to non-cohabitating and cohabitating couples.

### **Group Differences in Sexual and Relationship Satisfaction**

Most research suggests sexual satisfaction as an important component of relationship satisfaction; however, different types of couples (non-cohabitating, cohabitating and married) show different amounts of relationship satisfaction and sexual satisfaction (Byers, 2005; Gatzeva & Paik, 2011). Married couples have been found to have more relationship and sexual satisfaction perhaps because there is generally greater trust in their relationship (Gatzeva & Paik, 2011). One study by Gatzeva and Paik (2011), defined high trust relationships as the relationships that have increased amounts of investments (children, finances, etc.) and commitments (marriage license, wedding rings, etc.). Trust was an important aspect in defining relationship and sexual satisfaction in this study. Gatzeva and Paik (2011) looked at how the threat or actual event of sexual concurrency (having more than one sexual partner at a time) accounted for the quality of the relationship between non-cohabitating, cohabitating, and married couples. Gatzeva

and Paik (2011) argues that people in high trust relationships (i.e., marriage) will usually ignore negative information such as suspected infidelity, while others in lower trust relationships, such as cohabitating couples, will seek out information to confirm their suspicions. Non-cohabitating couples did not experience stress or suspicion of infidelity as much as cohabitating couples because most lacked an expectation of sexual exclusivity within the relationship (Gatzeva & Paik, 2011). Gatzeva and Paik (2011) discovered that married couples do have an advantage of higher trust versus the cohabitating and non-cohabitating couples. The lower amount of stress and worry may help increase the amount of sexual satisfaction in the individual's relationship.

According to past research, relationship satisfaction must first develop in any type of relationship before sexual satisfaction; otherwise, stress may negatively affect an individual's sexual satisfaction (Busby, Carroll, & Willoughby, 2010). Married, cohabitating, and non-cohabitating couples' sexual satisfaction can be negatively affected by the timing of the first sexual act (Busby et al., 2010). Busby et al. (2010) discussed that married couples that reported more sexual satisfaction usually allowed relationship satisfaction to develop by abstaining from the first sexual act until much later into their relationship. The sexual restraint model states that when couples engage in sexual acts too early in a relationship, they may experience detrimental repercussions such as relational or marital stress and failure (Stanley, Rhodes & Markman, 2006). Busby et al. (2010) found that the longer a couple waited to become sexually involved, the more relationship satisfaction and sexual quality (and presumably less stress) the couple experienced. Early sexual involvement may negatively affect partners' commitment and communication with one another, potentially causing unneeded stress.

Other research has found that those in long-term relationships, such as married couples, experience increased levels of intimacy (increased sexual acts that then increase sexual satisfaction) and relationship satisfaction compared to non-cohabitating and cohabitating couples (Moore, McCabe & Brink, 2001). Married and cohabitating couples are more likely to have a mutual concern and responsiveness to one another's needs and desires, and can be seen to correlate with high sexual satisfaction in highly communal relationships, compared to non-cohabitating couples (Peck, Shaffer & Williamson, 2004).

These studies show that non-cohabitating, cohabitating, and married couples all have differing amounts of relationship and sexual satisfaction for varying reasons. The Peck et al. article (2004) found that high trust in married couples, communal relationship for both married and cohabitating couples, and appropriate sexual timing for all couples may increase the couples' sexual satisfaction. All of this research taken together suggests that sexual satisfaction is an important aspect of individuals' relationships that should be explored in more depth. Research is consistent in that more stress may significantly decrease one's sexual satisfaction. Coping strategies can alleviate stress in a relationship, potentially increasing a couple's sexual satisfaction. Given that there is limited data available about the relationship between stress and sexual satisfaction between married, cohabitating, and non-cohabitating couples, it is imperative that we take the time to look, with a more critical eye, at what research might be missing.

### **Current Research**

The focus of the current research examined whether participants would self-report more sexual satisfaction before or after experiencing stress, and how the participants' coping strategies may have prevented any damage from stress. The current research

involved having participants complete separate questionnaires based on relationship satisfaction, individual coping strategies, dyadic coping strategies, self-reported stress levels, and sexual satisfaction. Participants were asked to self-report their acute stress before and after a stress-induced priming task. The stress-induced priming task involved each individual to review a checklist that contained different items that may cause stress in a relationship. The participants then identified the items they felt were represented in their current relationship. Individuals that did not receive the stress-induced priming task were given a “neutral” checklist to review that contained items that were considered to not cause stress in a relationship. The participants were asked to identify which items were represented in their current relationship. All of the participants were then asked to self-report the amount of stress they felt. After the priming task was completed, the participants were asked to complete the sexual satisfaction questionnaire and self-report their current stress levels again.

We expected that the more acute stress an individual experienced during the stress prime as indicated by their self-report of their stress, the less sexual satisfaction they would self-report. However, we predicted that married couples would report the same amount of sexual satisfaction both before and after priming for relationship stress due to more efficient coping mechanisms compared to non-cohabitating and cohabitating couples. We also predicted that married couples would show a lower self-report for stress after the stress-prime compared to non-cohabitating and cohabitating couples, due to high trust and more perceived security in their relationship. Finally, it was hypothesized that different kinds of self-reported acute stressors (e.g., finances, children,



etc.) negatively affect the sexual satisfaction of couples in non-cohabitating, cohabitating, and married couples.

### **Method**

#### **Participants**

The participants consisted of 62 students at Eastern Washington University from various educational departments and majors who were able to receive extra credit in psychology courses for their participation. The pre-selection process included announcing that eligibility for the study required participants to be in a sexually active, monogamous relationship for at least three months, and their living situation must be either non-cohabitating, cohabitating, or married. Of the 62 participants, 38 participants reported their living situation status as non-cohabitating, 12 participants reported their living situation as cohabitating, and 12 participants reported their living situation status as married. Of the 62 participants, 38 were female participants and 24 were male participants. Of the 62 participants, 32 participants (male = 9; female = 23) participated in the experimental group. The other 30 participants (male = 15; female = 15) participated in the control group. In the experimental group, there were 18 non-cohabitating participants, 8 cohabitating participants, and 6 married participants.

#### **Design**

The design was a pre-test post-test design. Participants were randomly assigned to the experimental group (receiving the stress-induced priming task) or control group (receiving a non-stress-induced priming task). All participants were asked to complete a sexual satisfaction questionnaire and self-report the amount of stress they felt both before and after the priming task.

### **Materials and Procedure**

Participants were brought into a designated room in the psychology department at Eastern Washington University on an individual basis, where the experimenter explained that the study was investigating how individuals' living situation and stress level affected their relationship satisfaction. The experimenter then read the consent form aloud to the participant, which they signed if they felt fully informed of what they were to do in the experiment. The participants were then taken to another designated room where they completed a packet of several questionnaires. Once alone, the participants were then asked to complete a basic information form focusing on demographics (age, sex, relational status, length of relationship, onset of sexual activity in current relationship, living situation with partner).

### **Relationship Assessment Scale**

Next, they completed The Relationship Assessment Scale, a measure created by Hendrick et al. (1988) that assesses an individual's evaluation of their relationship satisfaction (RAS; as cited in Bodenmann, Atkins, Schar, & Poffet, 2010). The measure consists of seven items on a five point Likert scale from 1, *Not Satisfied*, to 5, *Very Satisfied* (e.g., "How good is your relationship compared to others?"; "How satisfied are you with your relationship?"). Cronbach's alpha for the RAS was .82 (Bodenmann, Atkins, Schar, & Poffet, 2010).

### **Individual Coping Questionnaire**

After the participant completed the RAS, they would then be asked to complete Bodenmann et al.'s (2001) Individual Coping Questionnaire (INCOPE; as cited in Bodenmann, Atkins, Schar, & Poffet, 2010). The INCOPE measures how efficient an

individual's coping strategies are. The scale consists of 20 items that are answered on a Likert scale from 1, *Never*, to 5, *Very Often*, and cover different strategies that are known to be used in everyday life (humor, active coping, blaming, etc.). Cronbach's alpha for the INCOPE was .72 (Bodenmann, Atkins, Schar, & Poffet, 2010).

### **Dyadic Coping Inventory**

The participants then filled out Bodenmann's et al. (2010) Dyadic Coping Inventory (DCI; as cited in Bodenmann, Atkins, Schar, & Poffet, 2010). This 37-item scale assesses how the participant communicates and perceives their partner's communication during a stressful situation. The questions are arranged on a five point Likert Scale from 0, *Never*, to 5, *Very Often* ("I tell my partner openly how I feel and that I would appreciate his/her support."; "My partner shows empathy and understanding to me."). Cronbach's alpha for the DCI was .95 (Bodenmann, Atkins, Schar, & Poffet, 2010).

### **Rewards/Costs Checklist**

Next, the participants completed Lawrance and Byer's (1992) Rewards/Costs Checklist (as cited in Lawrance & Byers; 1995). This checklist measures the participant's view of how rewarding or costly a sexual act or interaction with their partner is. The Rewards/Costs Checklist consists of 46 items on a nine point Likert scale ranging from 0, *Not At All Rewarding*, to 9, *extremely rewarding* ("Level of stress felt during sex?"; "Amount of fun experienced during sexual activities?"). Lower scores on the Checklist indicate that the sexual experience is more costly to the individual and high scores indicate that the sexual experience is more rewarding to the individual. The more rewarding the sexual experience is, the more sexual satisfaction the participant has.

### **Global Measure of Sexual Satisfaction**

Once the participants completed the Rewards/Costs Checklist, they were given Lawrance and Byer's (1995) Global Measure of Sexual Satisfaction questionnaire (GMSEX; as cited in Peck, Shaffer & Williamson, 2004). The GMSEX measures how participants rate their sexual relationship. The measure consists of five questions on a seven point bipolar range. The ranges include good-bad, pleasant-unpleasant, positive-negative, satisfying-unsatisfying, and valuable-worthless. Lower scores on the GMSEX indicate lower sexual satisfaction. Cronbach's alpha for the GMSEX was .90 (Peck, Shaffer & Williamson, 2004).

### **Stress Questionnaire**

After the participants completed the GMSEX, they were asked to complete a self-report measure created by the researcher assessing the amount of stress the participant was feeling at that given moment. The measure consists of one question ("How much stress are you feeling right now?") on a seven point Likert scale ranging from 0, *No Stress*, to 7, *Most Stress Ever Felt*.

The experimental group received the stress-induced priming task. The task prompted the participant to read through a list of 20 items and identify with a check mark which of the items they felt were weakening their relationship. The items listed were felt to be those that would cause stress to a relationship such as finances, children, infidelity, lack of support from their partner, and physical, mental, and emotional abuse. The control group was given a neutral priming task. This task was a list of neutral aspects that a relationship may potentially have. The participant was asked to check all of the boxes that applied to their current relationship. The items listed were felt to be those that would

not cause stress to a relationship such as common interests, similar friendships, and helpfulness.

Once the priming task was completed, the participants were asked to complete the same self-report stress measure created by the researcher. The participants were then asked to complete the same GMSEX questionnaire. After the participants had completed the post-test measures, they were debriefed and informed of the different resources available to them if they were experiencing any residual effects from the research. They were given a copy of the debrief form and the consent form to take with them.

## **Results**

### **Sexual Satisfaction Effects Between Different Groups**

A repeated measures ANCOVA was used to examine the difference between the participants' self-reported sexual satisfaction before and after a stress prime controlling for self-reported levels of coping strategies. No significant main effect emerged for participants' self-reported sexual satisfaction,  $F(1, 58) = 1.63, p = .21$ , for participants' living situation,  $F(2, 58) = 1.07, p = .35$ , or for the participants' coping strategies,  $F(1, 58) = .75, p = .39$ . No significant interaction effect was found between the participants' self-reported sexual satisfaction and their coping strategies,  $F(1, 58) = 1.81, p = .18$ , or between the different living situations and their self-reported sexual satisfaction,  $F(2, 58) = 0.09, p = .91$ . These results suggest that sexual satisfaction remained constant across all conditions as all participants reported similar amounts regardless of living situation and relationship type.

A Pearson Product-Moment correlation was also computed between the pre-test for sexual satisfaction and the posttest for sexual satisfaction between the different living

situations and conditions (experimental, control). For the non-cohabiting group, a correlation emerged between levels of relationship sexual satisfaction reported before and after the neutral prime,  $r = .97, p < .001$ . In contrast, the correlation between relationship sexual satisfaction before and after a stress prime was not significant,  $r = .44, p = .07$ , although it trended in that direction. This suggests that for the non-cohabiting group, individuals in the stress condition reported a decrease in their sexual satisfaction compared to individuals in the control condition. In the cohabiting group, a significant correlation was found between the pre and posttest of sexual satisfaction in the experimental group,  $r = .99, p < .001$ , and control group,  $r = 1.00, p < .001$ . In the married group, a similar pattern of correlations was found. Specifically, a significant association emerged between pre and posttest of sexual satisfaction for the experimental group,  $r = .98, p < .001$ , and the control group,  $r = 1.00, p < .001$ . This suggests that individuals in the two groups reported similar levels of sexual satisfaction regardless if they were exposed to stress or not.

Another correlation was conducted to explore the relationship between the participants' coping strategies and their pre and posttest self-reported sexual satisfaction. A significant correlation was found between the participants' dyadic coping strategies and their pre-test of sexual satisfaction,  $r(63) = .35, p < .01$ , and their post-test of sexual satisfaction,  $r(63) = .37, p < .01$ . This assumes that the stronger an individual's coping strategies are with their partner, the more sexual satisfaction they may experience. There was no significant correlation found between the participants' individual coping strategies and their pre and post self-reported sexual satisfaction.

### **Stress Effects Between Different Groups**

A repeated measure ANOVA was used to examine the difference in reported stress levels between groups. No significant main effect was found in the participants' self-reported stress level,  $F(1, 29) = 1.80, p = .19$ , or between the participants' living situations,  $F(2, 29) = .20, p = .82$ . This suggests that participants' reported level of stress remains similar before and after the stress prime and across different living situations. No significant interaction effect was found between the participants' stress level and their living situation,  $F(2, 29) = 0.01, p = .99$ . This suggests that participants in the current study reported similar amounts of stress before and after the stress primer regardless of living situation.

In addition to the above analysis, a correlation was conducted to examine the relationship between the participants' coping strategies and pre and post self-reported stress level. A significant correlation was found between the participants' individual coping strategies and their pre-test stress level,  $r(63) = -.35, p < .01$ , and their post-test stress level,  $r(63) = -.37, p < .001$ . This suggests that the stronger an individual's coping strategies, the less stress they may experience. However, there was no significant correlation found between the participants' dyadic coping strategies with their partner and the pre and post self-reported stress level.

### **Acute Stressors Condition Effects on All Groups**

To investigate endorsed acute stressors in the experimental groups (e.g. those that received the stress prime), a sum was calculated for each individual stressor. The stressors that accumulated at least 10 total endorsements by the participants were then totaled based on living situation. The total based on the living situation for each item was

then divided by the total amount of participants in that specific living situation to gain the average percentage.

There were four acute stressors that were endorsed and considered more stressful by the participants in the experimental group. The acute stressor endorsed the most by the participants was “Finances”. This stressor was endorsed the most by cohabitating couples (62.5%), followed by married couples (50.0%), and non-cohabitating couples (22.2%). The second most endorsed acute stressor was “Insecurity in Relationship”. Non-cohabitating couples (44.4%) identified this as a stressor to a higher degree than cohabitating couples (37.5%) and married couples (33.3%). The next stressor most commonly endorsed was “Communication”. Married couples endorsed this stressor with the most frequency (50.0%) and higher than non-cohabitating couples (27.8%) and cohabitating couples (12.5%). The final acute stressor most frequently endorsed by the participants was “Comparison to Past Romantic Partners,” which was identified by non-cohabitating and married couples at the same level (33.3%) and more than cohabitating couples (25.0%).

### **Supplemental Findings**

A correlational analysis was used to examine the relationships between the participants’ coping strategies and their relationship satisfaction. A significant correlation was found between the participants’ dyadic coping strategies and their reported relationship satisfaction,  $r(63) = .68, p < .001$ . This suggests that the stronger one’s coping skills are with their partner, the more relationship satisfaction the couple may experience. A significant correlation also emerged between the participants’ individual coping strategies and their reported relationship satisfaction,  $r(63) = .39, p <$



.01. This suggests that the stronger one's individual coping skills are, the more relationship satisfaction they may experience with their partner. In addition to the above analysis, a significant correlation was found between the participants' reported dyadic coping strategies and their reported individual coping strategies,  $r(63) = .44, p < .001$ . This suggests that as the stronger the participants' individual coping skills are, the stronger their coping strategies may be with their partner.

A correlation was used to examine the relationships between the participants' coping strategies and the reward or costs of their sexual activity. A significant correlation emerged between the participants' ability to cope with their partner and their self-reported rewards or cost of their relationship,  $r(63) = .52, p < .001$ . This suggests that the better that an individual's coping skills are with their partner, the more rewarding they reported their sexual activity to be. There was no significant correlation found between an individual's coping strategies and their self-reported rewards or cost of their sexual activity,  $r(63) = .17, p = .18$ .

A correlation was conducted to examine the relationship between the participants' reported sexual satisfaction, relationship satisfaction, and how rewarding their sexual activity may be. There was a significant correlation found between the participants' relationship satisfaction and their pre-test of sexual satisfaction,  $r(63) = .46, p < .001$ , and their post-test of sexual satisfaction,  $r(63) = .48, p < .001$ . This suggests that the more sexual satisfaction an individual experiences, the more relationship satisfaction they reported experiencing. A significant correlation also emerged between their ratings of risk and rewards and the stress identified before,  $r(63) = .57, p < .001$ , and after,  $r(63) = .57, p < .001$ , participants undertook the experiment. It can be assumed that the more

rewarding an individual's reported sexual activity is with their partner, the more reported sexual satisfaction they experience regardless of time. In addition, a significant correlation was found between the participants' relationship satisfaction and their reported rewards of their sexual activity,  $r(63) = .45, p < .001$ . This suggests that the more rewarding participants reported their sexual activity to be, the more reported relationship satisfaction they may experience.

### **Discussion**

The purpose of this study was to examine the effect of stress on sexual satisfaction between sexually active married couples, sexually active cohabitating, and sexually active non-cohabitating couples. It was predicted that married couples would report the same amount of sexual satisfaction before and after priming for relationship stress, due to more developed coping mechanisms. It was also predicted that married couples would show a lower self-report for stress after the stress-prime compared to non-cohabitating and cohabitating couples, due to feeling more secure in their relationship. Additionally, different kinds of self-reported acute stressors (finances, children, etc.) were explored to see which stressors had negatively affected the sexual satisfaction of couples in non-cohabitating, cohabitating, and married couples. These hypotheses were not supported with participants self-reporting no difference in their sexual satisfaction after they experienced a stress prime regardless of their living situation.

It was hypothesized that married couples would report the same amount of sexual satisfaction both before and after priming for relationship stress, due to more developed coping mechanisms. In the present study, we found no significant difference for participants' self-reported sexual satisfaction before and after a stress prime regardless of

their living situation. This effect did not change when the participants' coping strategies were taken into account. This was unexpected as past research has found that married couples seemed to have less stress and presumably more sexual satisfaction compared to non-cohabitating and cohabitating couples due to having more automatic and stable coping behaviors due to the history of shared and supported interactions with their partner (Gunlicks-Stoessel & Powers, 2009). However, in other research, it has been found that cohabitating individuals who report plans to marry their partner have qualitatively similar aspects of their relationships as married individuals (Brown & Booth, 1996). This suggests that there could potentially be no difference in the couples' sexual satisfaction between married and cohabitating couples. However, exploratory correlations found that non-cohabitating couples showed a change in sexual satisfaction after a stress prime was implemented. In comparison, non-cohabitating individuals in the control condition reported nearly identical amounts of sexual satisfactions. This pattern of results differs from married and cohabitating couples. It is unclear the reason behind these results and further research would be advantageous. Stressors put a strain on a relationship that in turn affects several kinds of satisfaction (e.g. relationship, sexual, emotional). Although, in the present study there were some differences in reported stressors, the majority of the stressors were similar across different living situations, which suggests that living situations may be more similar in their sexual satisfaction as well.

It was also hypothesized that married couples would show a lower self-report for stress after being exposed to a stressor compared to non-cohabitating and cohabitating couples, due to feeling more secure in their relationship. In the present study, we found

no significant difference in the participants' self-reported stress level before and after the stress prime regardless of the participants' living situation. This is incongruent with past research as Gunlicks-Stoessel and Powers (2009) found that married couples may have a decreased biological response to stress due to the automatic coping skills they have developed through their history of collective interaction patterns. Research has also found that married couples tended to have more relationship and sexual satisfaction perhaps because there is generally greater trust and presumably less stress in their relationship (Gatzeva & Paik, 2011). However, in other research, it has been found that individuals who are cohabitating with their partner or those who are married respond similarly to potential stressors in their relationship (e.g. children, prior unions; Brown & Booth, 1996). Therefore, it is conceivable for these two types of living situations to experience similar stress effects to their overall relationship quality.

Finally, it was hypothesized that different kinds of self-reported acute stressors (e.g., finances, children, etc.) negatively affect the sexual satisfaction of couples in non-cohabitating, cohabitating, and married couples. To evaluate this, a sum was calculated for each individual stressor. Only the stressors that accumulated at least 10 total endorsements by the participants were then totaled based on living situation, and then divided by the total amount of participants in that specific living situation to gain the average percentage. In the present study, we found four stressors that were endorsed by the participants in the experimental group that were considered to be an issue in the participants' current relationship. The most predominate stressors for those who identified with the non-cohabitating living situation were feelings about insecurity in their relationship and being compared to past romantic partners. It has been found that

non-cohabitating couples may not have as many investments, strong commitments, and as much trust compared to those in cohabitating and married living situations (Gatzeva & Paik, 2011). The most predominate stressor for those who identified with the cohabitating living situation was a concern about money. Other research has discovered that financial security, arguments regarding financial decisions, and perceived financial inequality are associated with those in cohabitating relationship ending the relationship with their partner, and possibly preventing from marrying them (Dew, 2011). The most predominate stressors for those in married living situations were communication and being compared to past romantic partners. Karney, Story, and Bradbury (2005) demonstrated that marital quality and sexual satisfaction decrease when aspects of life such as communication are considered as being stressful. For the second stressor, Brown and Booth (1996) discovered that in addition to children, previous unions with other individuals caused the most stress on married couples. The stress of comparison of the past union could be anything from sexual comparison to financial stability, to general relationship quality. Overall, the stressors identified as a prominent issue in all living situations negatively affect both the individuals' stress level and sexual satisfaction, which ultimately hinders their relationship quality as a whole.

Although the results did not support the primary hypotheses, supplementary analyses revealed interesting relationships. Specifically, the supplemental results discovered a relationship between the participants' dyadic coping strategies and their pre-test of sexual satisfaction and their post-test of sexual satisfaction. The stronger an individual's coping strategies are with their partner (dyadic coping), the more sexual satisfaction participants reported experiencing (Bodenmann et al., 2007). For example,

the more couples experience greater intimacy (e.g. emotional, physical, mental) the fewer arguments that may go unresolved due to proper dyadic coping strategies and active communication (Gatzeva & Paik, 2011; Gunlicks-Stoessel & Powers, 2009). In contrast, scores on the individual coping measure was not correlated with sexual satisfaction. This may be due to the relationship that found when individual's dyadic coping skills are efficient, the more rewarding they reported their sexual activity to be, which presumably includes overall sexual satisfaction.

Correlational analysis also revealed an association between the participants' reported individual coping strategies and their pre-test and post-test stress levels. That is, individuals with better individual coping mechanisms reported lower levels of stress after the stress prime. Unless an individual has efficient individual coping skills, they may experience more stress, specifically when stressors are related to their current romantic relationship (e.g. relationship uncertainty, lack of support from partner; Gunlicks-Stoessel & Powers, 2009). However, no relationship emerged between self-reported dyadic coping strategies and the pretest and posttest of one's self reported stress level. This may suggest that the stronger the participants' individual coping skills are, then the stronger their coping strategies may be with their partner.

The primary limitation for this study was the lack of participants that met the qualifications needed for this study. Eligibility for the study required participants to be in a sexually active, monogamous relationship for at least three months, and their living situation to be either non-cohabitating, cohabitating, or married. Of the 62 participants, 38 participants reported their living situation status as non-cohabitating, 12 participants reported their living situation as cohabitating, and 12 participants reported their living

situation status as married. In addition, the current study was conducted on a college campus and therefore not likely not representative of the general population. With 61% of the participants identifying with the non-cohabitating living situation, the data cannot confidently reveal if there was a difference between self-reported sexual satisfaction and self-reported stress between the three living situations. An explanation for this may be that the participants were students who still resided on the college campus where living is previously assigned in dormitories or apartments that do not include their significant other. For example, even if the non-cohabitating participants' significant other stays over night in their living space, the participants' may not identify their relationship as cohabitating since their significant other is not on included in a contract or a lease agreement. Although the primary hypotheses were not supported, supplementary correlational data suggest that there was an effect for those who identified as non-cohabitating. The non-cohabitating participants showed a difference in their self-reported pretest and posttest of sexual satisfaction after a neutral stress prime. Since the limitation could significantly change the findings, conducting this study in a community setting may be advantageous.

Another limitation to the present study may have been that the stressors used in the stress prime may not have had the desired effect to register a difference on the pretest and posttest of self-reported stress levels. Thus it is plausible that in this study, the stressors provided might not have covered additional stressors that the individual experiences in their current relationship, limiting the stress the participant may have felt. Due to the stress prime being created by the current researcher based off of several pieces of past research, there may have been other stressors that were not included. For

example, one participant wrote in “long distance relationship” at the bottom of the stress prime and identified it with a checkmark. Future research is encouraged to use open-ended interview format to identify stressors in their current relationship. In addition to the restriction of the stress prime items, the study was limited to self-report data and due to the sensitivity of the questions (e.g., sexual satisfaction, risk and reward of sex behavior) it is possible that participants provided social desirable responses. Future research using self-report data may consider having online survey’s to increase anonymity of the data.

Due to the lack of significant findings with the relationship between sexual satisfaction, stress, and living situation, it would be valuable to see if significance would arise if the study were to be conducted with more active participant and researcher involvement together. Future research should include a stressor that causes more immediate stress between the couple. This could be accomplished by asking couples for current stressors that they experience in their relationship. Future research is also encouraged to conduct a debriefing interview to discuss any effects the stress prime may have had on the individual’s sexual activity and overall sexual satisfaction. Allowing the participant to express how they felt after the stress prime would give the researchers specific data regarding the impact the stress prime had on the participant as well as provide descriptive data regarding the impact on sexual satisfaction.

Future research is also encouraged to pair self-report of stress with more objective measures of stress, such as biofeedback. Including biofeedback to record and measure the biological responses would reduce a social desirability response bias that may have occurred due to some questionnaires asking intimate questions. Data through this



mechanism may also give us access to measure overall arousal that may be interesting to the findings. Overall, with the current study results not supporting the hypotheses, it would be advantageous to replicate this study with more depth to provide future researchers with a more accurate picture of the relationship between sexual satisfaction, stress, and the different living situations.

### **Conclusion**

The practical implications from this research can be applied and beneficial to many relationships in peoples' lives. Understanding the elements related to an individuals' sexual satisfaction is necessary in identifying preventative mechanisms to improve ones' relationship and to increase the relationships potential longevity. Although not the original purpose of this study, it is important to be aware of how dyadic coping strategies may affect the amount one's sexual satisfaction and how individual coping strategies may affect the amount of stress someone may experience because it may potentially extend the life of romantic relationships. When an individual experiences high amounts of acute stress, their sexual activity may decrease, which presumably leads to lower sexual satisfaction and overall relationship satisfaction. If couples are aware of the importance of honing their strategies for life stressors, the individuals may approach their relationship and their partner in different ways. This could allow couples to experience life together in a more positive way and reduce the amounts of "break-ups" or divorces. It could also assist individuals when choosing whether they should start a relationship with someone or not by evaluating how they cope individually and if they will cope well with their potential partner. Overall, since relationships are a part of everyday existence and are vital to how we live our lives, it is important to understand how stress may affect

the way we treat each other and pursue our sexual satisfaction and overall relationship satisfaction in a more efficient and successful way.

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## Appendix A: List of Measures

- Relationship Assessment Scale:

Hendrick, S. S., Dicke, A., & Hendrick, C. (1998). The relationship assessment scale. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships, 15*(1), 137-142. doi:10.1177/0265407598151009
- Individual Coping Questionnaire:

Bodenmann, G., Cina, A., & Schwerzmann, S. (2001). Individuelle und dyadische copingressourcen bei depressiven. *Zeitschrift Für Klinische Psychologie Und Psychotherapie: Forschung Und Praxis, 30*(3), 194-203. doi:10.1026//1616-3443.30.3.194
- Dyadic Coping Inventory:

Bodenmann, G., Atkins, D. C., Schär, M., & Poffet, V. (2010). The association between daily stress and sexual activity. *Journal of Family Psychology, 24*(3), 271-279. doi:10.1037/a0019365
- Rewards/Costs Checklist:

Lawrance, K., & Byers, E. S. (1992). Development of the interpersonal exchange model of sexual satisfaction in long term relationships. *Canadian Journal of Human Sexuality, 1*(3), 123-128. Retrieved from <http://www.sieccan.org/cjhs.html>
- Global Measure of Sexual Satisfaction:

Lawrance, K., & Byers, E. (1995). Sexual satisfaction in long-term heterosexual relationships: The interpersonal exchange model of sexual



satisfaction. *Personal Relationships*, 2(4), 267-285. doi:10.1111/j.1475-6811.1995.tb00092.x

## Appendix B: Public Domain Measures

## Rewards and Costs Checklist

This questionnaire is designed to measure how rewarding or satisfying your sex life is with your current partner. Please answer honestly. There are no wrong answers.

Please mark on the answer sheet the number for each item which best answers that item for you:

|  |  |
|--|--|
| How comfortable you feel with your partner?  | 0.....1.....2.....3.....4.....5.....6.....7.....8.....9<br>not at all rewarding<br>extremely rewarding |
| How you feel about yourself during/after sex?  | 0.....1.....2.....3.....4.....5.....6.....7.....8.....9<br>not at all rewarding<br>extremely rewarding |
| Amount of fun experienced during sexual activities.  | 0.....1.....2.....3.....4.....5.....6.....7.....8.....9<br>not at all rewarding<br>extremely rewarding |
| Level of affection expressed during sex.   | 0.....1.....2.....3.....4.....5.....6.....7.....8.....9<br>not at all rewarding<br>extremely rewarding |
| How often you experience orgasm?   | 0.....1.....2.....3.....4.....5.....6.....7.....8.....9<br>not at all rewarding<br>extremely rewarding |
| Degree of privacy you have for sex.  | 0.....1.....2.....3.....4.....5.....6.....7.....8.....9<br>not at all rewarding<br>extremely rewarding |
| Degree to which you feel sexually aroused/excited.   | 0.....1.....2.....3.....4.....5.....6.....7.....8.....9<br>not at all rewarding<br>extremely rewarding |
| Degree of emotional intimacy (sharing feelings).   | 0.....1.....2.....3.....4.....5.....6.....7.....8.....9<br>not at all rewarding<br>extremely rewarding |
| How your partner physically treats you during sex?   | 0.....1.....2.....3.....4.....5.....6.....7.....8.....9<br>not at all rewarding<br>extremely rewarding |
| Physical sensations from caressing, hugging.   | 0.....1.....2.....3.....4.....5.....6.....7.....8.....9<br>not at all rewarding<br>extremely rewarding |
| Extent to which sexual interactions make you feel secure about total relationship with your partner. | 0.....1.....2.....3.....4.....5.....6.....7.....8.....9<br>not at all rewarding<br>extremely rewarding |
| Telling your partner that you enjoyed the interaction.   | 0.....1.....2.....3.....4.....5.....6.....7.....8.....9<br>not at all rewarding<br>extremely rewarding |

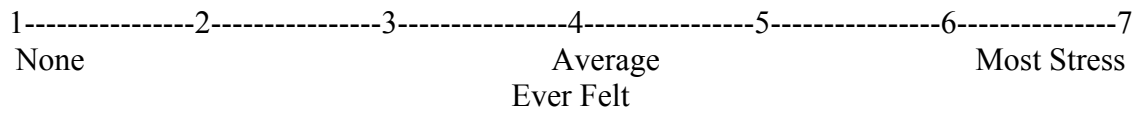
|   |  |
|---|--|
| Degree of consideration your partner shows for you.         | 0.....1.....2.....3.....4.....5.....6.....7.....8.....9<br>not at all rewarding<br>extremely rewarding |
| Partner telling you she/he enjoyed the interaction.         | 0.....1.....2.....3.....4.....5.....6.....7.....8.....9<br>not at all rewarding<br>extremely rewarding |
| Pleasing your partner sexually.                             | 0.....1.....2.....3.....4.....5.....6.....7.....8.....9<br>not at all rewarding<br>extremely rewarding |
| Being with the same partner each time you have sex.         | 0.....1.....2.....3.....4.....5.....6.....7.....8.....9<br>not at all rewarding<br>extremely rewarding |
| How easily you reach orgasm.                                | 0.....1.....2.....3.....4.....5.....6.....7.....8.....9<br>not at all rewarding<br>extremely rewarding |
| Being naked/your partner seeing you naked.                  | 0.....1.....2.....3.....4.....5.....6.....7.....8.....9<br>not at all rewarding<br>extremely rewarding |
| Level of stress felt during sex.                            | 0.....1.....2.....3.....4.....5.....6.....7.....8.....9<br>not at all rewarding<br>extremely rewarding |
| Partner being naked/seeing your partner naked.              | 0.....1.....2.....3.....4.....5.....6.....7.....8.....9<br>not at all rewarding<br>extremely rewarding |
| Amount of foreplay before intercourse/orgasm.               | 0.....1.....2.....3.....4.....5.....6.....7.....8.....9<br>not at all rewarding<br>extremely rewarding |
| Extent to which you and your partner communicate about sex. | 0.....1.....2.....3.....4.....5.....6.....7.....8.....9<br>not at all rewarding<br>extremely rewarding |
| How your partner responds to your sexual advances.          | 0.....1.....2.....3.....4.....5.....6.....7.....8.....9<br>not at all rewarding<br>extremely rewarding |
| Amount of variety in sexual activities/locations/times.     | 0.....1.....2.....3.....4.....5.....6.....7.....8.....9<br>not at all rewarding<br>extremely rewarding |
| Amount of time spent engaging in sexual activities.         | 0.....1.....2.....3.....4.....5.....6.....7.....8.....9<br>not at all rewarding<br>extremely rewarding |
| Oral sex: You stimulate your partner.                       | 0.....1.....2.....3.....4.....5.....6.....7.....8.....9<br>not at all rewarding<br>extremely rewarding |
| Frequency of sexual activities.                             | 0.....1.....2.....3.....4.....5.....6.....7.....8.....9<br>not at all rewarding<br>extremely rewarding |

|  |  |
|--|--|
| Extent to which you “let your guard down”.   | 0.....1.....2.....3.....4.....5.....6.....7.....8.....9<br>not at all rewarding<br>extremely rewarding |
| Oral sex: Your partner stimulates you .  | 0.....1.....2.....3.....4.....5.....6.....7.....8.....9<br>not at all rewarding<br>extremely rewarding |
| Amount of spontaneity in your sex life.  | 0.....1.....2.....3.....4.....5.....6.....7.....8.....9<br>not at all rewarding<br>extremely rewarding |
| Level of power/control you feel during/after sex.  | 0.....1.....2.....3.....4.....5.....6.....7.....8.....9<br>not at all rewarding<br>extremely rewarding |
| Amount of after play after intercourse/orgasm.   | 0.....1.....2.....3.....4.....5.....6.....7.....8.....9<br>not at all rewarding<br>extremely rewarding |
| Who initiates sexual activities.   | 0.....1.....2.....3.....4.....5.....6.....7.....8.....9<br>not at all rewarding<br>extremely rewarding |
| Extent to which partner “lets his/her guard down”.   | 0.....1.....2.....3.....4.....5.....6.....7.....8.....9<br>not at all rewarding<br>extremely rewarding |
| Conceiving a child.  | 0.....1.....2.....3.....4.....5.....6.....7.....8.....9<br>not at all rewarding<br>extremely rewarding |
| Feelings of physical discomfort during/after sex.  | 0.....1.....2.....3.....4.....5.....6.....7.....8.....9<br>not at all rewarding<br>extremely rewarding |
| Method of birth control used by you/your partner.  | 0.....1.....2.....3.....4.....5.....6.....7.....8.....9<br>not at all rewarding<br>extremely rewarding |
| How partner influences/forces you to engage in certain sexual activities.                      | 0.....1.....2.....3.....4.....5.....6.....7.....8.....9<br>not at all rewarding<br>extremely rewarding |
| Risk of getting an STD from your partner.  | 0.....1.....2.....3.....4.....5.....6.....7.....8.....9<br>not at all rewarding<br>extremely rewarding |
| Extent to which your partner discusses your sex life with others.                              | 0.....1.....2.....3.....4.....5.....6.....7.....8.....9<br>not at all rewarding<br>extremely rewarding |
| Extent to which you and partner argue after sex.   | 0.....1.....2.....3.....4.....5.....6.....7.....8.....9<br>not at all rewarding<br>extremely rewarding |
| Degree to which your current sexual relationship interferes with other possible relationships. | 0.....1.....2.....3.....4.....5.....6.....7.....8.....9<br>not at all rewarding<br>extremely rewarding |
|  |  |

|  |  |
|--|--|
| Engaging in sexual activities that your partner dislikes but you enjoy.  | 0.....1.....2.....3.....4.....5.....6.....7.....8.....9<br>not at all rewarding<br>extremely rewarding |
| Having sex when you're not in the mood.                                  | 0.....1.....2.....3.....4.....5.....6.....7.....8.....9<br>not at all rewarding<br>extremely rewarding |
| Engaging in sexual activities that you dislike, but your partner enjoys. | 0.....1.....2.....3.....4.....5.....6.....7.....8.....9<br>not at all rewarding<br>extremely rewarding |
| Having sex when your partner is not in the mood.                         | 0.....1.....2.....3.....4.....5.....6.....7.....8.....9<br>not at all rewarding<br>extremely rewarding |
|  |  |

Stress Questionnaire

How much stress do you feel in this given moment?



## Stress Prime for the Experimental Condition

Which of these factors do you find to be putting stress on your current romantic relationship? Please check all of the boxes that apply to your current relationship.

|   |  |
|---|--|
| 1. Communication                          |  |
| 2. Loyalty                                |  |
| 3. Honesty                                |  |
| 4. Physical, Mental, Emotional Abuse      |  |
| 5. Cheating/Affair                        |  |
| 6. Unplanned Pregnancy                    |  |
| 7. Breaking Up/Getting a Divorce          |  |
| 8. Sexual Preferences                     |  |
| 9. One Night Stands                       |  |
| 10. Family Differences                    |  |
| 11. Children                              |  |
| 12. Housing                               |  |
| 13. Finances                              |  |
| 14. Religion                              |  |
| 15. Lack of Support from Partner          |  |
| 16. Secrets                               |  |
| 17. Insecurity in Relationship            |  |
| 18. Comparisons to Past Romantic Partners |  |
| 19. Debt                                  |  |
| 20. Partner's Past Sexual Experience      |  |

## Neutral Prime for the Control Condition

Which of these factors do you find in your current romantic relationship? Please check all of the boxes that apply to your current relationship.

|                                     |  |
|-------------------------------------|--|
| 1. Communication                    |  |
| 2. Common Interests                 |  |
| 3. Honesty                          |  |
| 4. Sharing                          |  |
| 5. Social                           |  |
| 6. Kind                             |  |
| 7. Helpful                          |  |
| 8. Similar Friendships              |  |
| 9. Trustworthy                      |  |
| 10. Common Background/Upbringing    |  |
| 11. Children                        |  |
| 12. Housing                         |  |
| 13. Family Support                  |  |
| 14. Religion                        |  |
| 15. Support from Partner            |  |
| 16. Good Body Language from Partner |  |
| 17. Sportsmanship                   |  |
| 18. Social Etiquette                |  |
| 19. Pleases Other                   |  |
| 20. Sense of Commitment             |  |



## VITA

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**Education**

- |   |                            |
|---|----------------------------|
| <p><b>Eastern Washington University</b><br/>Masters In Science in Pyschology with Clinical Emphasis<br/>Expected Graduation: June 15, 2013<br/>Cheney, WA</p>   | <p><b>2011-Present</b></p> |
| <p><b>Eastern Washington University</b><br/>B.A., Psychology<br/>Graduated March 19, 2011<br/>Post-Baccaluareate GPA: 3.98<br/>Cheney, WA</p>   | <p><b>2010-2011</b></p>    |
| <p><b>University of Montana</b><br/>B.A., Communication in Human Relationships, Minor in Psychology<br/>Graduated May 16, 2009 with Honors<br/>GPA: 3.65<br/>Missoula, MT</p>   | <p><b>2007-2009</b></p>    |
| <p><b>Eastern Washington University</b><br/>Running Start Program, Earned College Credit while in High School<br/>Cheney, WA</p>  | <p><b>2006-2007</b></p>    |
| <p><b>Distance Learning Program in High School</b><br/>Bellevue Community College<br/>Spokane Falls Community College<br/>Spokane Community College<br/>Earned College Credit Online while in High School<br/>Spokane, WA</p> | <p><b>2005-2006</b></p>    |

**Honors and Awards**

- Poster Presentation at the Washington State Association of School Psychologists** **2011**  
Screening for Emotional Well-Being with Content Analysis of Expressive Writing  
Timofeyev, D., Rhoads, W., Golden, F., Shaver, L.  
Received First Place for Group Poster in Student Poster Session  
Fall Conference, Vancouver, British Columbia

- Eastern Washington University Graduate Assistantship Scholarship** **2011-2012**  
 Eastern Washington University's Academic Success Center PLUS  
 Program Specialist
- Eastern Washington University Deans List** **2010-2011**  
 Eastern Washington University, Spring (2010), Fall (2010), Winter (2011)
- Graduated with Honors** **2009**  
 The University of Montana
- Western Undergraduate Exchange Scholarship** **2007-2009**  
 The University of Montana
- University of Montana Deans List** **2007-2009**  
 Fall (2007, 2008), Spring (2008, 2009)
- Member of the University of Montana Cheer Squad** **2007-2009**  
 Most Inspirational, 2007
- Spokane Lilac Festival Queen** **2007-2008**  
 The Ambassador For Spokane, accumulated over 500 hours of community service in the Spokane County, and spoke at many community events including the Mayor's Prayer Breakfast, a city council meeting, and many news stations. Other duties included working with local elementary schools about the importance of academics and community, as well as volunteering at local nursing homes and Veteran Hospitals by serving lunches and dinners to the residents.
- Spokane Lilac Festival Association Queen Scholarship** **2007-2008**  
 Spokane Lilac Festival Association  
 Scholarship applied for the first year of college
- Spokane Lilac Festival Association Royalty Scholarship** **2007-2008**  
 Spokane Lilac Festival Association  
 Scholarship applied for the first year of college

**Research****Good Lovin': The Effects of Stressors on Sexual Satisfaction Among Non-cohabitating, Cohabiting, and Married Couples** **2011-2013**

Responsible for the development of the research topic and hypotheses, conducting past review of academic articles, discovering and developing the methods used in the research, constructing the questionnaires, collection of data, and supervising and training three research assistants. Future duties include further data collection, completing the written assignment for the thesis, and attending and presenting my oral defense in June 2013. Expected Poster Presentation at the Eastern Washington University Spring Symposium in 2013.

**Investigation Of Journaling with Middle School Students** **2010-2011**

Responsible for scoring, data entry and analysis with acceptability measures, measure students engagement with the intervention, coded student outcomes, including anxiety, depression, and resiliency. Other duties include developing a rubric to code the level of emotional expression in the journals. Presented our findings at the Eastern Washington University Spring Symposium in 2011. Principle Investigator: Susan Ruby, PhD

**Trainings and Certifications****Infant And Adolescent Mental Health Conference** **2013**

Certificate received for completion of 13 hour training focused on the Neuro-Relational Framework (NRF) for assessment, diagnosis, and intervention using video- based case studies to understand intervention from the NRF point of view, Assessment of individual development across multiple domains, Therapeutic behaviors to treat the impact of neglect and abuse on child development, The 4 brain systems, Forms of attachment can lead to difficult behavior, The core elements of early brain development.

**Children's Home Society Child Specialist Training** **2012-2013**

42 hours of training received from Suzanne Apelskog, MS, LMHC, CMHS

Crisis Response Training

Physical and Sexual Abuse Training (featuring Shannon Dunkins, MS, LMHC, NCC)

Parenting Training

Behavioral and Feeling Interventions

Sandplay Therapy

Play Therapy

Art Therapy

**Administration and Interpretation of Assessments** **2012-2013**

Training and Certification in general cognitive, personality, and behavior assessment administration, interpretation, and presentation. Focused experience with WAIS-IV, MMPI-2, and WMS-2.

**Compassion Focused Therapy** **2012**

Primary Presenter: Russell Kolts, PhD. Certificate received from The Inland Northwest Compassionate Mind Center for completion of 6 hours of training focused on the introduction to Compassion Focused Therapy, theories of Compassion Focused Therapy, and how to use Compassion Focused Therapy and Mindfulness in treatment.

**Eating Disorder Training in Children and Adolescents** **2012**

Certificate received for completion of 4 hours of training focused on Eating Disorders and Treatment from The Moore Center and Antioch University, Seattle

**Trauma Focused-Cognitive Behavioral Therapy** **2012**

Certificate received for completion for 10 hours of training from Medical University of South Carolina, <http://fcbt.musc.edu/>

**Other Activities****Member of the Spokane Wolfpack Cheerleading Squad** **2013-Present**

Support and foster crowd spirit and involvement for the Semi-Professional Spokane Wolfpack Football Team. Duties include attending all practices, home games, community service functions, and conducting oneself as an ambassador of the program. Required ability to learn numerous dances, cheers, stunts, and routines.

**Mentor High School Female Students** **2011-Present**

Meeting on a regular with a group of young women to discuss issues of the heart, relational issues, and academic issues.

**Sponsoring a Child Through World Vision** **2007-Present**

Sponsoring a young girl from Uganda, helping provide food, medicine, and education for her and her family, sending letters back and forth learning about each others lives and cultures.

**“Teaming Up” Program** **2010-2012**

Volunteered at Hoover Elementary in Yakima, WA  
Spoke with students about the importance of team work, school spirit, and balancing athletics and academics.

**Mini Cheerleading Camp** **2009-2012**

Freeman Elementary and Middle School

Developing advertisement, in charge of publicity and organization, and material for the clinic.

Teaching students the basic skills of cheerleading, school spirit, and community service.

**Eastern Washington University Satori Program** **2010**

Teacher's Assistant for a Psychophysiology Class. Assisted with educating junior high and high school students with the basics of psychophysiology, and demonstrated the basic functionings of a polygraph.

**Music Drama Day Camp Leader and Choreographer** **2009-2010**

Life Center Foursquare Church

Working with children 8-13 years old, taught children about the Bible, theater, and dance.

**Coaching Local Cheerleading Summer Camps****2007-2009**

Freeman High School, taught new material, school spirit, safety, and community service.

**Employment****Children's Home Society of Washington** **2012-2013**

Masters Level Intern and Child and Family Therapist to Wayne Rounseville, MSW, LMHC. Duties include providing individual and group therapy to children and families, co-facilitating curriculum based therapy for specialty groups the agency provides, and conducting weekly home visits to select consumers. Other duties include weekly meetings with the supervisor to discuss cases, case management with each consumer, constructing treatment plans, developing progress notes after each session, and completing all necessary paperwork in a timely manner.

**Easter Washington University's Academic Success Center** **2011-2012**

Graduate Assistant and PLUS Program Specialist to Michtell Colver, PLUS Program Director. Duties included supervision over the student tutors, mediating issues for both student employees and their students, directing training sessions, tutoring students in psychology, and data entry.

**Freeman High School Varsity Cheerleading Head Coach** **2009-2012**

Responsible for fostering school spirit, cheerleading skills, and community service. Other duties include advising student athletes, scheduling events, working with the school board, and managing the budget.

**Univeristy Recreation Center Front Desk Support****2010-2011**

Eastern Washington University Front Desk Supervisor at the Univeristy Recreation Center. Duties include providing excellent customer service to students and community members, data entry, cash handling, mediating staff issues, and scheduling employees.

**Riverview Bible Camp****2008**

Head Lifeguard for the waterfront and pool, belayed at the rockwall and high ropes course, prepared meals and snacks, worked with campers and staff of all ages in camp activities, and offered customer service 24 hours a day.