

## Right or Flawed: Relationship Obsessions and Sexual Satisfaction

Guy Doron, PhD,\* Moran Mizrahi, PhD,\* Ohad Szepsenwol, PhD,\* and Danny Derby, PhD<sup>†</sup>

\*School of Psychology, Interdisciplinary Center (IDC), Herzliya, Israel; <sup>†</sup>Cognetica—The Israeli Center for Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, Tel Aviv, Israel

DOI: 10.1111/jsm.12616

### ABSTRACT

**Introduction.** Relationship obsessive–compulsive disorder (ROCD) is marked by the presence of obsessions and compulsions focusing on romantic relationships. ROCD symptoms were previously linked with decreased relationship quality and might interfere with sexual functioning.

**Aim.** The study aims to examine the association between ROCD symptoms and sexual satisfaction.

**Methods.** Participants completed an online survey assessing ROCD symptoms and relationship and sexual satisfaction levels. Depression, general worry, obsessive–compulsive disorder (OCD) symptoms, and attachment orientation were also measured.

**Main Outcome Measure.** The main outcome measures were self reported relationship satisfaction and sexual satisfaction.

**Results.** ROCD symptoms were associated with decreased sexual satisfaction over and above symptoms of depression, general worry, OCD, and attachment orientation. The link between ROCD symptoms and sexual satisfaction was mediated by relationship satisfaction.

**Conclusions.** Identifying and addressing ROCD symptoms may be important for treatment of sexual functioning. **Doron G, Mizrahi M, Szepsenwol O, and Derby D. Right or flawed: Relationship obsessions and sexual satisfaction. J Sex Med 2014;11:2218–2224.**

**Key Words.** Sexual Functioning; Obsessive Compulsive Disorder; Relationships; Relationship Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (ROCD); Relationship Satisfaction; Sexual Satisfaction

### Introduction

Obsessive–compulsive disorder (OCD) is a disabling and prevalent disorder with a variety of clinical presentations and obsession themes [1–3]. It involves unwanted and disturbing intrusive thoughts, images, or impulses (obsessions), and repetitive behaviors or mental acts (compulsions), aimed at reducing distress or preventing the occurrence of feared events associated with the intrusions [4,5]. OCD has been associated with severe personal and dyadic consequences including sexual dysfunction [4,6]. One theme of OCD that has gained recent attention is relationship OCD [ROCD; 7–9]. In ROCD, the focus of obsessive–compulsive (OC) symptoms is the relationship or

relationship partner. ROCD symptoms have been previously linked with poor relationship functioning and mood [7,8]. Sex, however, is considered to be one of the building blocks of romantic relationships [10]. The focus of the present research, therefore, was to evaluate the link between ROCD symptoms and sexual functioning.

### ROCD Forms and Manifestations

Two presentations of ROCD have been identified: (i) *relationship-centered* [7], in which the focus of intrusions is the relationship itself (e.g., “is this the right relationship?”); and (ii) *partner-focused* [8], in which the focus of intrusions is perceived deficits of one’s romantic partner (e.g., “is he beautiful

enough?”). ROCD obsessions often manifest in thoughts (e.g., “is he the right one?”) or images (e.g., of a current or previous romantic partners), but may also occur in the form of urges (e.g., to leave one’s current partner). Compulsive behaviors in ROCD include, but are not limited to, repeated checking of one’s own feelings and thoughts toward the partner or the relationship, comparing partner’s characteristics or behaviors to others’, reassurance seeking, and self-reassurance [11].

ROCD symptoms are often ego-dystonic, in that they contradict the subjective experience of the relationship (e.g., “I love her, but I can’t stop questioning my feelings”) or personal values (e.g., “appearance should not be important in selecting a relationship partner”). Such intrusions are perceived as unacceptable and unwanted, and often bring about feelings of guilt and shame regarding their occurrence and/or content [11]. Moreover, because they tend to focus on one’s emotions about his current or past relationships, and not on future relationships, relationship-related intrusions are different from general worries, in both content and form [11].

#### *ROCD, Relationship Satisfaction, and Sexual Satisfaction*

ROCD symptoms are particularly detrimental for relationship quality and stability. Repeated monitoring of one’s feelings toward a romantic partner or doubting the “rightness” of one’s relationship may destabilize emotional bonds, escalate existing relational fears and doubts, and result in increased relationship distress [7,11]. Moreover, ROCD clients’ constant preoccupation with the perceived flaws of their romantic partner may impede idealized perceptions of the relationship and/or partner [8,11]. Such idealized perceptions are considered as an important predictor of positive relational outcomes, such as greater satisfaction, less conflict, and enhanced relationship stability [12–15]. Furthermore, like other OCD symptoms, ROCD symptoms might be a source of relationship conflicts, bringing about negative responses from one’s romantic partner [7,8].

Two studies conducted on nonclinical samples have found the expected relationship between ROCD symptoms and poor relationship satisfaction. In one study, relationship-centered OC symptoms were associated with relationship dissatisfaction, even when controlling for common OCD symptoms, mood symptoms, low self-esteem, attachment anxiety and avoidance, and

relationship ambivalence [7]. In another study, partner-focused OC symptoms were associated with relationship dissatisfaction, even when controlling for relationship-centered symptoms in addition to all the other controls mentioned above. In fact, both partner-focused and relationship-centered OC symptoms had their own unique statistical contribution to relationship dissatisfaction, suggesting somewhat divergent causal paths [8].

Poor relationship satisfaction, as often experienced by ROCD clients, may easily hamper sexual satisfaction. Although sex may provide grounds for positive relational experiences (e.g., see review by Mikulincer & Shaver [16]), ROCD clients might channel their relational doubts and dissatisfaction into the sexual realm and suffer from conflicting, joyless, and disappointing sexual encounters. In line with this view, robust findings show that low relationship satisfaction is often associated with low sexual satisfaction, among men and women, and within different stages of romantic relationships (see review by Sprecher & Cate [17]). Moreover, sexual satisfaction and related subjective measures of sexuality (e.g., sexual intimacy) were also found to be positively associated with other indicators of relationship quality, including love [18] and commitment [19].

Taken together, these findings suggest that ROCD symptoms are associated with poor relationship satisfaction. Relational doubts and dissatisfaction might intrude on sexual experiences with one’s partner, interfere with erotic pleasure, and result in low sexual satisfaction. Hence, ROCD symptoms are likely to be indirectly associated with poor sexual satisfaction.

#### **Aims**

The aim of the present research was to examine the hypothesis that ROCD symptoms (relationship-centered and partner-focused) would be associated with lower sexual satisfaction and that this association would be mediated by decreased relationship satisfaction.

#### **Method**

##### *Participants*

The sample consisted of 157 Israelis from the general population (71 women) who were recruited via Midgam.com, an Israeli online survey platform analogous to other survey platforms

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/4269758>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/4269758>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)