



An investment model of sociosexuality, relationship satisfaction, and commitment: Evidence from dating, engaged, and newlywed couples



Gregory D. Webster^{a,*}, Jean-Philippe Laurenceau^b, C. Veronica Smith^c, Amanda L. Mahaffey^d, Angela D. Bryan^e, Amy B. Brunell^f

^aUniversity of Florida, USA

^bUniversity of Delaware, USA

^cUniversity of Mississippi, USA

^dInstituto Universitário de Lisboa, Portugal

^eUniversity of Colorado Boulder, USA

^fThe Ohio State University at Mansfield, USA

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Available online 25 February 2015

Keywords:

Romantic relationships

Sociosexuality

Actor–partner interdependence model

Investment model

Moderated mediation

Satisfaction

Commitment

ABSTRACT

Using an investment model (Rusbult, 1980, 1983) of sociosexual attitudes (SOI-A), we examined SOI-A's association with relationship outcomes using actor–partner interdependence models (APIMs) of over 400 dating, engaged, and newlywed couples. Men's SOI-A negatively related to both men's (actor effect) and women's (partner effect) relationship satisfaction. This actor effect persisted after controlling for men's and women's relationship commitment, and was stronger (more negative) among dating couples (vs. engaged or newlywed couples) and couples with shorter relationship durations. Moderated-mediation APIMs suggested that (a) both actor-effect satisfaction–commitment associations were more positive in couples dating for 6 months and (b) men's relationship satisfaction mediated the link between men's SOI-A and men's relationship commitment, but only in couples dating for 6 months.

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1. Introduction

Sociosexuality describes individual differences in people's attitudes and behaviors regarding casual sex with multiple partners (Simpson & Gangestad, 1991). People with *unrestricted* sociosexual orientations are comfortable having sex without commitment, whereas people with *restricted* sociosexual orientations feel that relationship commitment is necessary for sexual activity. Sociosexually restricted people often pursue (serial) monogamy, whereas more unrestricted people are comfortable with multiple partners. The present study examines how sociosexuality relates to relationship satisfaction and commitment in romantic couples reflecting various relationship types (dating, engaged, and newlywed) and durations. We begin by examining how sociosexuality relates to satisfaction and commitment in couples within the theoretical framework of the investment model (Rusbult, 1980, 1983).

1.1. An investment model of sociosexuality

Drawing on interdependence theory (Kelley & Thibaut, 1978), the investment model of commitment processes posits that people seek to maximize rewards and minimize costs in relationships (Rusbult, 1980, 1983). Specifically, relationship commitment can be viewed as a function of a person's investment in the relationship (e.g., time), rewards (e.g., satisfaction), and perceived available alternatives (e.g., sociosexual attitudes). This theoretical foundation can be expanded to couples, and to include relationship satisfaction as a mediator linking commitment to investment, alternatives, or personality (Lennon, Stewart, & Ledermann, 2013; Smith et al., 2014). It can even be expanded further to include moderators such as measures of investment (e.g., relationship duration). Because the investment model provides an organized theoretical framework to examine sociosexuality's role in commitment processes, our hypotheses reflect sociosexuality's link to satisfaction, how satisfaction mediates sociosexuality's link to commitment, and how relationship type (e.g., dating, engaged, or newlywed couples) and duration may moderate these links. Because sociosexuality can be decomposed into behavioral and

* Corresponding author at: P.O. Box 112250, Department of Psychology, University of Florida, Gainesville, FL 32611-2250, USA. Fax: +1 352 392 7985.

attitudinal components (Webster & Bryan, 2007), and because its behavioral items may be irrelevant to committed couples (e.g., expected number of sex partners in next five years), we focused on sociosexual attitudes (vs. behaviors).

1.1.1. Sociosexuality and satisfaction

Prior research on individuals (vs. couples) has found that those with sexually unrestricted orientations had relationships marked by less love, investment, and commitment, even after controlling for relationship duration (Simpson & Gangestad, 1991). Intrinsic motivation for being in relationships partially mediated the link between unrestricted sociosexuality and relationship commitment; people with unrestricted orientations had lower intrinsic motives, which in turn related negatively to relationship commitment (Jones, 1998). A daily social interaction study also found that unrestricted (vs. restricted) participants had more negative interactions with their romantic partners, reported lower sexual interest in them, and rated them as less physically attractive (Hebl & Kashy, 1995).

That sociosexuality should be negatively linked to relationship satisfaction in couples is logical; people who report desiring multiple sex partners may feel unsatisfied within romantic relationships. Nevertheless, this association remains untested in romantic couples and unexplored in an investment model framework. A key component of the investment model is perceived available alternatives (Rusbult, 1980, 1983), which describes the extent to which a partner's needs can be fulfilled by another romantic partner, friend, family member, or even the self (Rusbult, Martz, & Agnew, 1998). Perceived available alternatives is a broad construct that includes whether others might meet one's needs for sexuality, intimacy, companionship, security, and emotional involvement (Rusbult et al., 1998). Because sociosexual attitudes relate to meeting sexual needs, and because sexual needs are merely one facet of perceived available alternatives (Rusbult et al., 1998), understanding how sociosexual attitudes relate to relationship satisfaction independent of other facets can provide novel insights into whether sexual attitudes alone relate to commitment processes. Thus, examining sociosexual attitudes in this context can advance theory on the investment model. Further, we expect that having unrestricted sociosexual attitudes will be detrimental to relationship satisfaction and commitment in romantic couples.

1.1.2. Sociosexuality and commitment

Although prior research on *individuals* in romantic relationships (i.e., studying one partner but not the other) has shown sociosexuality negatively relates to relationship commitment (Foster, Shrira, & Campbell, 2006), this link remains unexamined in *romantic couples* (i.e., at the dyadic level; studying both partners simultaneously). Given that relationship satisfaction and commitment are positively correlated in couples (e.g., Brunell & Webster, 2013; Smith et al., 2014), we expected sociosexual attitudes to relate negatively to commitment in couples. Examining these associations in both partners simultaneously is important not only methodologically, but also theoretically, because it allows for testing novel partner effects—where one partner's sociosexual attitudes can relate to the other partner's commitment.

1.1.3. Moderation, mediation, and moderated mediation

Key to Rusbult's (1980, 1983) model, investment can take multiple forms. We examine relationship type (dating vs. engaged/newlywed) and duration (time in relationship) as investment measures that moderated other associations. Regarding moderation, we believe that the investments people have made in relationships (time, engagement/marriage) should help buffer the negative associations between sociosexual attitudes and relationship satisfaction (i.e., investment \times sociosexual attitudes interactions).

Alternatively, relationships *lacking* investment should produce the *most negative* links between sociosexuality and satisfaction. Regarding mediation, we believe that relationship satisfaction should mediate the direct link between sociosexual attitudes and commitment, at average levels of investment (for the average relationship type and at the average duration). People with unrestricted attitudes should be less satisfied with their relationships, and consequently feel less committed. Because of the importance of investment in Rusbult's model, it stands to reason that relationship type and duration may also moderate mediation pathways in such models (i.e., mediated moderation; see Muller, Judd, & Yzerbyt, 2005; Preacher, Rucker, & Hayes, 2007); however, given the complexity of such a model, we remained agnostic regarding what specific paths might be influenced. Nevertheless, these moderation and mediation predictions are largely consistent with the investment model of commitment processes because they integrate its components (investment, rewards, and perceived available alternatives) while extending them to the novel domain of sociosexuality and positing investment as a moderator.

1.2. The present study

Given our theoretical rationale from the investment model, our present study of heterosexual romantic couples had four aims. First, we predicted that sociosexual attitudes would negatively associate with relationship satisfaction, even after controlling for relationship commitment. Second, we expected that relationship type (dating vs. engaged/newlywed) and duration would moderate the sociosexual attitudes–relationship satisfaction link; greater investment should partially buffer this negative association. Third, we hypothesized that relationship satisfaction would mediate the sociosexual attitudes–relationship commitment link for the average couple (e.g., Smith et al., 2014). Fourth, on an exploratory basis, we examined a moderated-mediation-based investment model. Although men typically report higher sociosexuality scores than women (e.g., Schmitt, 2005), we remained agnostic regarding gender differences in our predictions.

The present research has the potential to advance theory on at least two novel fronts: partner effects and moderation effects. First, because our data were dyadic, we tested—though made no specific predictions regarding—partner effects, which link one partner's sociosexual attitudes with the other partner's relationship outcomes. If detected, significant partner effects would highlight the dynamic nature of sociosexuality in romantic couples, suggesting that one partner's attitudes about casual sex related to the other's relationship satisfaction or commitment. Second, because most—but certainly not all—investment model studies examine only a single type of relationship with limited durations (e.g., undergraduates dating for 3–36 months), our multi-sample approach, which includes dating, engaged, and newlywed couples, is uniquely suited to test for cross-sectional differences in commitment both within (relationship duration) and between (relationship type) samples. Because of sample limitations, testing such cross-sectional moderation in investment model studies is rare; the present data allowed us to explore new theoretical ground.

2. Method

Integrative data analysis (IDA; Curran & Hussong, 2009) describes a framework for primary or secondary analyses of aggregated data from multiple studies, samples, or data sets. Using this approach, we combined four archival samples—dating couples (two), engaged couples, and newlyweds—to examine relationships between couples' sociosexual attitudes and their relationship

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