

Sexual Satisfaction During Stressful Times: The Role of Sexual Motivation

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This study examined whether stress negatively relates to sexual satisfaction in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic by way of influencing which type of sexual motivation individuals might have for engaging in sexual relations. Participants ($N = 162$) completed measures of perceived stress, motivations for engaging in sex, and sexual satisfaction in romantic relationships. Results revealed that participants experiencing higher levels of stress experienced lower sexual satisfaction and were more strongly motivated by avoidance-oriented reasons for engaging in sexual relations. Being more motivated to engage in sexual activity for coping reasons coincided with lesser sexual satisfaction. Conversely, those who were more strongly motivated by approach-oriented reasons for engaging in sexual activity reported greater sexual satisfaction. No support was found for sexual motivation as a mediator of the relation between stress and sexual satisfaction.

Keywords: stress, approach and avoidance sexual motivation, sexual satisfaction, coping, intimacy

Cette étude a examiné si le stress est négativement relié à la satisfaction sexuelle dans le contexte de la pandémie COVID-19 en influençant le type de motivation sexuelle que les individus peuvent ressentir afin d'avoir des relations sexuelles. Les participants ($N = 162$) ont complété des mesures de stress, de motivations sexuelles, et de satisfaction sexuelle dans les relations romantiques. Les résultats ont révélé que les participants présentant des niveaux de stress plus élevés éprouvaient une moindre satisfaction sexuelle et étaient davantage motivés par des raisons d'évitement pour avoir des rapports sexuels. Le fait d'être plus motivé à avoir des relations sexuelles pour des raisons d'adaptation coïncide avec une moindre satisfaction sexuelle. Inversement, ceux plus fortement motivés par des raisons d'approche pour avoir des relations sexuelles ont présenté une plus grande satisfaction sexuelle. La motivation sexuelle comme médiateur entre la relation entre le stress et la satisfaction sexuelle n'a pas été démontrée.

Mots-clés : stress, motivation sexuelle d'approche et d'évitement, satisfaction sexuelle, adaptation, intimité

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused significant challenges in people's lives. One of those challenges has been maintaining healthy intimate and sexual relationships in the face of growing economic, employment, and mental health instability. Such instability is known to have a profound impact on couples' relationship well-being (Karney & Bradbury, 1995). While the full impact of COVID-19 on couples' relationships and sexual well-being is not yet known, preliminary research indicates that people are experiencing increased levels of stress (Manchia et al., 2022) along with declining levels of sexual satisfaction since the start of the pandemic (Lehmiller et al., 2020; Panzeri et al., 2020; Yuksel & Ozgor, 2020). Given that close relationships are deeply connected to the emotional and physical well-being of

both partners, it is important to elucidate the factors that enhance or hinder relationships and sexual satisfaction during these stressful times. One reason why stress might negatively impact sexual satisfaction relates to sexual motivation. That is, the reasons that motivate individuals to engage in sex with their partner. One model for understanding sexual motivation is the *approach-avoidance model* (Elliot & Covington, 2001; Impett et al., 2005). Researchers have found that engaging in sex to promote a positive outcome (approach motives) is related to enhanced sexual satisfaction, whereas engaging in sex to avoid a negative outcome (avoidance motives) is related to less sexual satisfaction and greater relationship conflict (Cooper et al., 2011; Impett et al., 2005; Muise et al., 2017). No research has yet explored how stress might influence individuals' sexual motivation and, in turn, their sexual satisfaction, leaving a gap in both the stress and sexuality literature. Hence, the goal of this study is to examine whether stress negatively relates to sexual satisfaction by way of impacting the

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type of approach or avoidance sexual motivation individuals have for engaging in sex during the pandemic.

Stress and Sexual Satisfaction

In light of the coronavirus pandemic and its associated stressors, stress researchers have been increasingly interested in the impact of stress on intimate relationships. Stress is a physical or psychological response to real or imagined threats (Selye, 1974), and it can be examined as a dyadic phenomenon. That is, stress can affect both partners within a romantic relationship regardless of where it originates from (Bodenmann, 2005). For example, stress can originate from outside the relationship (e.g., stress from a global pandemic) and spill over into the relationship to generate stress within the relationship (e.g., decreasing effective communication) (Randall & Bodenmann, 2009; 2017). That said, if people in romantic relationships fail to effectively cope with their stress, then over time this can lead to a deterioration in relationship satisfaction, and, ultimately, the dissolution of the relationship (Randall & Bodenmann, 2017).

Previous research has shown that stress can negatively impact relationship satisfaction, and, more specifically, sexual satisfaction. Sexual satisfaction refers to the subjective evaluation and ensuing affective response of the positive and negative aspects of one's sexual relationship with another (Byers et al., 1998). Specifically, high sexual satisfaction is characterized by positive feelings about one's sexuality (e.g., pleasure) and one's sexual relationship (e.g., feeling close to one's sexual partner) (Pascoal et al., 2014). Sexual satisfaction is intimately connected with relationship satisfaction (Byers, 2005), and changes in one are often associated with changes in the other (Byers, 2005; Sprecher, 2002). Hence, partners experiencing stress that affects both people within the romantic relationship usually report less sexual satisfaction (Randall & Bodenmann, 2017). This decline has been linked to spending less quality time together and having a lower libido (Bodenmann et al., 2007); engaging in less sexual activity due to exhaustion and tiredness (Bodenmann et al., 2006); experiencing impaired sexual functioning (Bodenmann et al., 2006); and experiencing greater dyadic conflict (Randall & Bodenmann, 2009). This results in poorer personal, sexual, and relationship well-being, as individuals who are less sexually satisfied report lower quality of life, worse overall health, and poorer relationship quality than individuals with greater sexual satisfaction (Davison et al., 2009; Sprecher, 2002).

Recent research saw increased levels of stress (Manchia et al., 2022) and a concurrent decline in individuals' sexual satisfaction during the pandemic

(Lehmiller et al., 2020; Panzeri et al., 2020; Yuksel & Ozgor, 2020). However, neither that research nor prior research on stress and sexual satisfaction, in general, has addressed the reasons behind this decline. Although it has been well established that stress negatively impacts sexual satisfaction (Bodenmann, 1995; 2000; Bodenmann et al., 2006; 2007; Randall & Bodenmann, 2009), there has yet to be an exploration of the potential mechanism underlying this relationship. One potential reason that stress might have an impact on an important predictor of sexual satisfaction is one's motivations for engaging in sex with a romantic partner.

Sexual Motivation and Sexual Satisfaction

Sexual motivation refers to a person's motive or reason for engaging in sexual relations, and it is inextricably linked to the quality of relationships and feelings of sexual and relationship satisfaction (Impett et al., 2005; Muise et al., 2013). Even though the pursuit of sexual pleasure stands as the most obvious reason for engaging in sexual activity, researchers have found a breadth of sexual motives that extend far beyond hedonism (Impett et al., 2005). For instance, some other motivations for engaging in sex with one's romantic partner include, but are not limited to, the desire to enhance intimacy, to please one's partner, to cope with negative mood, to avoid relationship conflict, and to prevent losing one's partner (Impett & Peplau, 2002; 2003; Impett et al., 2005; Leigh, 1989). The type of motive that lies behind one's reason for engaging in sex can thus engender drastically different consequences.

Whilst certain sexual encounters can act as a powerful force to sustain and enhance romantic relationships, others can go so far as to trigger dyadic conflict, emotional distress, and personal dissatisfaction (Impett et al., 2005; Laumann et al., 1994). One factor that accounts for this disparity in outcomes is the motivational system at play; that is, either approach or avoidance motivations (Cooper et al., 2011; Impett et al., 2005; Muise et al., 2017; Muise et al., 2013). Generally speaking, the approach-avoidance framework posits that individuals are either motivated to behave in ways that will promote or enhance a positive end state or reward (i.e., approach motives) or motivated to behave in a way that will prevent or avoid a negative end state or punishment (i.e., avoidance motives) (Carver et al., 2000; Carver & White, 1994; Elliot & Covington, 2001; Impett et al., 2005). Within the realm of relationships and sexuality, approach motives are those that focus on the obtainment or enhancement of positive outcomes (e.g., intimacy) whereas avoidance motives are those that focus on the eschewal or minimization of negative

outcomes or states (e.g., coping) (Cooper et al., 2011; Impett et al., 2005).

Research has shown that those who are motivated by approach-oriented reasons for engaging in sex with their partners experience greater relationship well-being (e.g., closeness, satisfaction, and fun), more positive emotions, greater satisfaction with life, more positive sexual experiences, and less dyadic conflict (Cooper et al., 2011; Impett et al., 2005; Impett & Tolman, 2006; Muise et al., 2017; Muise et al., 2013; Sanchez et al., 2011). In addition, sexual experiences that are more strongly motivated by approach-oriented reasons, such as to express love for one's partner or because it feels pleasurable, have been tied to subsequent feelings of passion, love, and excitement (Impett, 2005), just as intimacy and enhancement motives have been strongly associated with more frequent sexual activity, more positive feelings about sex, and greater sexual satisfaction (Cooper et al., 1998; Cooper et al., 2011; Patrick et al., 2011).

In contrast, research has shown that those who are motivated by avoidance-oriented reasons for engaging in sex experience less relationship satisfaction, more negative feelings about sex, greater dyadic conflict, more negative emotions, and less sexual satisfaction (Cooper et al., 1998; Cooper et al., 2008; Cooper et al., 2011; Impett et al., 2005; Muise et al., 2013; Sanchez et al., 2011). In addition, sexual experiences that are more strongly motivated by avoidance-oriented reasons, such as to cope with one's own negative emotions or to avoid relationship conflict, at best, may provide temporary relief, and at worst, may trigger the negative outcome(s) (e.g., shame, anger, and fear) that one was initially trying to avoid (Downey et al., 1998; Impett et al., 2005; Muise et al., 2017). Hence, as demonstrated by a study by Muise and colleagues (2013), individuals who more frequently had sex motivated by avoidance goals reported less sexual satisfaction over time as well as partners who felt less committed to maintaining the relationship and who felt less sexually satisfied.

In sum, sexual motivation is intimately connected with relationship and sexual satisfaction, given that sexual approach motives are associated with higher sexual desire and satisfaction for both partners in the dyad, and sexual avoidance motives are associated with the opposite outcome (Muise et al., 2017). The existing research has yet to explore how stress might influence individuals' sexual motivation and, in turn, their sexual satisfaction. Hence, filling this gap in the literature would be a novel contribution that would enhance our knowledge of the factors that might impact the type of approach or avoidance motives motivating individuals to have sex with their romantic partners.

Stress and Sexual Motivation

Although the extant literature on stress and motivation does not specifically address stress relation with sexual motivation, there is evidence to support that such a relationship could exist. For instance, researchers examining approach-avoidance motivation in personality found that approach temperaments were characterized by extraversion, positive emotionality, and a behavioural activation system, which is related to sensitivity to reward and approach motivation (Elliot & Thrash, 2002). Avoidance temperaments were characterized by neuroticism, negative emotionality, and a behavioural inhibition system, which is related to sensitivity to punishment and avoidance motivation (Elliot & Thrash, 2002). Neuroticism is the Big Five personality trait denoting hyperreactivity to stress, greater negative appraisals, less effective coping strategies, and more frequent and intense negative reactions to stressful stimuli (Bolger & Zuckerman, 1995; Vollrath, 2001; Lahey, 2009). Hence, neuroticism being a critical component of avoidance temperaments seems to suggest a potential link between stress and avoidance motivation.

In the presence of stressors, avoidance-oriented people seek to avoid dealing with the unpleasant feelings associated with the stressors through denial, escape, and/or distancing (Hofmann & Hay, 2018). While avoidance can be beneficial in the short-term (e.g., early on in a traumatic episode) (Hofmann & Hay, 2018), research shows that this behavior can generate problems in people's romantic relationships in the longer term (e.g., by less communication with their partners about their stress and negative affect, and by perceiving their partner as less supportive) (Kuster et al., 2017). Additionally, in contrast to approach-oriented people, avoidance-oriented people receive poorer ratings from their partners regarding their stress communication (Kuster et al., 2017) and ability to cope with stress as a couple (Falconier & Kuhn, 2019). Partners of approach-oriented people also report experiencing fewer problems in their relationship and more coping with stress as a couple (Kuster et al., 2017).

That said, the absence of research on stress and sexual motivation leaves a gap in both the stress and sexuality literature in terms of empirical evidence. If stress influences the type of sexual motivation driving individuals to have sex with their romantic partner, and sexual motivation impacts individuals' sexual satisfaction, then sexual motivation could be the underlying mechanism mediating the relationship between stress and sexual satisfaction. Given that sexual satisfaction is closely tied to relationship satisfaction and well-being, understanding how stress and sexual motivation influence sexual satisfaction

has important implications for the well-being of individuals and couples.

Study Overview & Hypotheses

This novel study aimed to bridge the gap in the stress and sexuality literature by examining the relationship between stress, sexual motivation, and sexual satisfaction within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Specifically, the present study set out to test the hypothesis that stress may lead to more avoidant motivations for engaging in sex that, in turn, may lead to lower sexual satisfaction. A proposed reason that stress is associated with decreased sexual satisfaction is that, in the context of stress, people might have more avoidant-related motivations for engaging in sex. Avoidance motivations have been linked to lower relationship and sexual satisfaction (Gable & Impett, 2012; Impett et al., 2005; Muise et al., 2017). Therefore, participants experiencing higher levels of stress may employ more avoidance-oriented motives like coping, which may, in turn, lead to lower levels of sexual satisfaction. Conversely, if stress levels during the pandemic are low, then couples may engage in sex more for approach-oriented motives like intimacy, which in turn may account for higher levels of sexual satisfaction.

Method

Participants

One hundred and seventy-three participants who were enrolled in first- and second-year psychology courses and who reported being in a relationship were recruited from a large Canadian university via an online portal¹. Of those 173, 10 participants were excluded for taking less than 12 minutes to complete the survey and another was excluded for withholding consent. These exclusions resulted in a final sample of 162 participants ($M_{\text{age}} = 21.32$, $SD = 6.00$; 86.4% women, 13% men, 0.6% other). Participants reported their sexual orientation label as straight (80.9%), bisexual (11.1%), and gay or lesbian (3.1%). As for relationship length, participants reported being in a relationship for one to two years (32.7%), three to five years (17.9%), and one to three months (14.8%). Lastly, participants reported not being diagnosed with COVID-19 (98.1%), knowing someone who had been diagnosed with COVID-19 (38.9%), and being in close contact with a person at high risk of contracting COVID-19 (49.4%). Participants were allotted 0.5% course credit as compensation for participating in this study.

¹ This study was part of a larger project collaboration with the University of Sydney in which 357 participants were recruited. The research question relied on relationship status to test the study hypotheses and, as such, solely participants who reported being in a relationship were included in the analyses.

Procedure and Measures

The demographics questions assessed age, gender identity, sexual orientation labels, relationship status, relationship length, and COVID-19 status. Participants were then prompted to complete a variety of questionnaires, including those that assessed stress, sexual motivation, and sexual satisfaction in relationships during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Stress

Stress was assessed using the stress subscale of the *Depression, Anxiety, and Stress Scales* (DASS-21; Lovibond & Lovibond, 1995). This measure is comprised of 7 items (e.g., *I found myself getting agitated*) that measure the frequency with which participants experience stress on an average week using a four-point Likert scale (1 = *rarely*, 4 = *almost always*). The stress subscale had good internal reliability ($\alpha = 0.93$).

Sexual Motivation

Sexual motivation was assessed using the intimacy and coping subscales of the *Sex Motives Scales* (Cooper et al., 1998). The intimacy subscale is comprised of five items that measure the approach sexual motive of intimacy (e.g., *To make emotional connection*), whereas the coping subscale is comprised of five items that measure the avoidance sexual motive of coping (e.g., *To feel better when low*). Participants were asked to rate how often they personally engaged in sexual activity with their partner for intimacy or coping reasons using a five-point Likert scale (1 = *never/almost never*, 5 = *always/almost always*). Both the intimacy ($\alpha = .96$) and coping ($\alpha = .95$) subscales showed good internal reliability.

Sexual Satisfaction

Sexual satisfaction in relationships was assessed using the *Global Measure of Sexual Satisfaction* (GMSEX; Lawrance & Byers, 1998). This measure assesses participants' overall ratings of their satisfaction with their sexual relationships using five seven-point bipolar scales ranging from *very good* to *very bad*, *very pleasant* to *very unpleasant*, *very negative* to *very positive*, *very satisfying* to *very unsatisfying*, and *very valuable* to *very worthless*. Participants were asked to indicate which number best described their sexual relationship. The items yielded high internal consistency ($\alpha = .94$).

Following the completion of the questionnaires, participants were redirected to a debriefing form. In order to conduct this research, ethics clearance was granted by the Psychology Research Ethics Board at the host University.

SEXUAL SATISFACTION, STRESS, & SEXUAL MOTIVES

Results

The means, standard deviations, and correlations for stress, sexual motivation (intimacy and coping), and sexual satisfaction are found in Table 1.

The present study assessed a multiple mediation model with coping and intimacy sexual motives simultaneously mediating the relationship between stress and sexual satisfaction (mediation summary is presented in Figure 1). The double mediation analysis was conducted using Model 4 of the PROCESS macro with robust standard errors (using bias corrected confidence intervals calculated using 5000 bootstrapped samples; see Hayes, 2022). The direct effect of stress on sexual satisfaction in the presence of the mediators was significant, $b = -0.33$, $SE = .12$, $p = .004$. However, the indirect effect of stress on sexual satisfaction through coping sexual motive was not significant, $b = -0.07$, $SE = .05$, 95% $CI [-0.17, 0.02]$. Additionally, the indirect effect of stress on sexual satisfaction through intimacy sexual motive was not significant either, $b = 0.03$, $SE = .04$, 95% $CI [-0.05, 0.11]$. As such, the partial mediation between stress and sexual satisfaction via coping and intimacy sexual motives could not be established.

Discussion

Prior to this study, research had been conducted exploring the individual effects of stress and approach-avoidance sexual goals on relationship quality, though none had yet bridged the gap between stress, sexual motivation, and sexual satisfaction. Given that romantic relationships are intimately connected with the emotional and physical well-being of both partners, elucidating the factors that promote or hinder relationship and sexual satisfaction is critical. Hence, this study aimed to examine the relationship between stress, approach-avoidance sexual motivation, and sexual satisfaction. Specifically, it was argued that individuals who feel highly stressed during the pandemic may feel less sexually satisfied due to engaging in sex with their partners more so to cope with stress (avoidance motive) rather than to experience intimacy (approach motive).

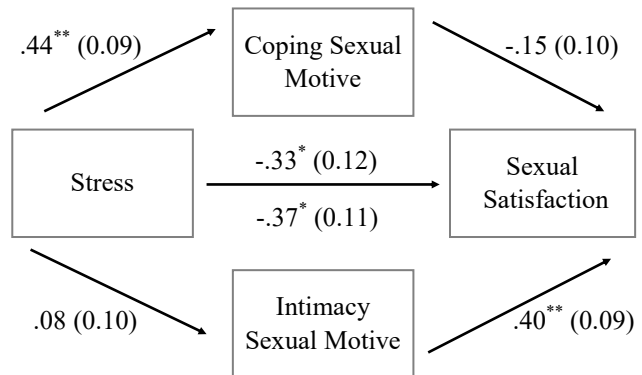
Table 1
Descriptive Statistics and Correlations for Study Variables

	<i>M</i> (rating scale)	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4
1. Stress	2.22 (1-4)	.91	—			
2. Intimacy Sexual Motive	4.02 (1-5)	1.13	.08	—		
3. Coping Sexual Motive	1.87 (1-5)	1.08	.37***	.18*	—	
4. Sexual Satisfaction	5.82 (1-7)	1.32	-.25**	.29***	-.17*	—

Note. * $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Figure 1

Associations Between Stress, Avoidance (Coping) and Approach (Intimacy) Sexual Motives, and Sexual Satisfaction



Note. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

As expected, participants experiencing high amounts of stress concurrently reported being less sexually satisfied. These findings are in line with the extant research demonstrating that stressors have a negative impact on sexual satisfaction (Bodenmann, 1995; 2000; Bodenmann et al., 2006; 2007; Randall & Bodenmann, 2009), whilst also adding to the growing body of literature examining sexuality within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Preliminary research has demonstrated increases in pandemic-related stress (Manchia et al., 2022), along with notable declines in the quality of couples' sex lives and sexual satisfaction during the pandemic (Cocci et al., 2020; Lehmler et al., 2020; Panzeri et al., 2020; Yuksel & Ozgor, 2020). This suggests that a rise in stress could translate into less sexual satisfaction, which may ultimately threaten the stability and quality of romantic relationships.

Second, it was hypothesized that a) increased stress might lead to more avoidant motivations for engaging in sexual activity, such as coping, which may lead to less sexual satisfaction, and b) lower stress levels might lead to more approach motivations for engaging in sexual activity, such as intimacy, which may result in greater sexual satisfaction.

Contrary to these hypotheses, neither coping nor intimacy sexual motives mediated the relationship between stress and sexual satisfaction. However, notable associations were found between sexual motivation, stress, and sexual satisfaction. For instance, participants who felt more stressed also felt motivated to have sex with their partners for more coping-related reasons. Although previous research has yet to establish a causal or relational link between stress and avoidance sexual motives, researchers have demonstrated that high stress increases the likelihood of engaging in avoidant coping (Hudd et al., 2000; Ickes et al., 2015). This study's finding that increased stress relates to more coping-related motives for having sex could reflect this propensity towards avoidant coping during times of high stress. Additionally, being more sexually motivated by coping-related reasons was also related to feeling less sexually satisfied. This is in line with existing research demonstrating that avoidance sexual motives are associated with less relationship and sexual satisfaction (Gable & Impett, 2012; Impett, Gable, & Peplau, 2005; Impett, Peplau, & Gable, 2005; Muise et al., 2017). Given that frequently having sex for avoidance-related reasons has been associated with partners feeling less committed to maintaining the relationship and less sexually satisfied (Muise et al., 2013), the increased stress of the pandemic and its association with coping sexual motives and diminished sexual satisfaction may be important factors to consider for preserving relationship and sexual well-being.

Conversely, participants who were more sexually motivated by intimacy-oriented reasons experienced more sexual satisfaction. This is in line with previous research demonstrating that those who are motivated by approach reasons for engaging in sex experience more positive feelings about sex and greater sexual satisfaction (Cooper et al., 2011; Cooper et al., 1998; Cooper et al., 2008; Patrick et al., 2011). A study by Impett (2005) tied this enhanced sexual satisfaction to greater feelings of passion, love, and excitement derived from having sex with one's partner due to strong approach-motivations, like intimacy. Notably, an association was also found between sexual motivations in this study, as participants who reported more coping sexual motives also reported more intimacy sexual motives. While it appears that sexual motives may not be mutually exclusive—as in one can be motivated both by approach and avoidance goals, like intimacy and coping, respectively—perhaps the strong motivation to deepen the intimacy with one's partner through sex can buffer the negative effects of also being motivated by coping in that same sexual encounter. Perhaps the difference between whether coping-motivated sex either provides relief from stress or triggers negative outcomes is that the former could

be conjoined with other approach motives like intimacy or hedonism. In contrast, the latter may be conjoined with other avoidance motives like insecurity or peer influence.

Limitations

There are several notable limitations to this study. First, the majority of participants were women (86.4%) and straight (80.9%). Therefore, the findings may not be generalizable to participants of a different gender or sexual orientation. Second, although the correlational design of the study yielded some important associations, no causal inferences can be made from these findings (see Fielder et al., 2018). As such, future research should opt for an experimental approach in order to potentially establish causation amongst these variables. Establishing causation between stress, approach and avoidance sexual motives, and sexual satisfaction could inform the creation of new interventions aimed at enhancing couples' sexual well-being during stressful times. Third, whilst the majority of participants reported being in a relationship for one to two years (32.7%), other participants were in a relationship for three to five years (17.9%) and for one to three months (14.8%). The length of the relationship could have influenced sexual motivation, sexual satisfaction, or stress. For instance, newer relationships may be at an increased risk of being negatively impacted by stress but could also influence the reasons motivating individuals to have sex with their partners (e.g., hedonism, intimacy). In contrast, lengthier relationships may prove to be more resilient against stressors but could be experiencing less sexual satisfaction due to relationship boredom, which may also influence the reasons that are motivating individuals to have sex with their partners. In sum, the length of the relationship could influence couples' susceptibility and response to stress, their motives for engaging in sex, along with their sexual satisfaction in a number of ways. Hence, future research should assess or control for this variable to either confirm or rule out its impact.

Implications and Future Directions

This study adds to the growing body of research examining stress and sexuality during the COVID-19 pandemic. Past research had already established a negative association between stress and sexual satisfaction (Bodenmann, 1995; 2000; Bodenmann et al., 2006; 2007; Randall & Bodenmann, 2009). However, the majority of those studies were conducted amongst married couples and none had yet to explore sexual motivation as a possible mediator of this association. Establishing that high stress relates to diminished sexual satisfaction among undergraduate students is important given that empirical research has

consistently demonstrated that post-secondary students experience greater stress levels and mental health issues than the general population (Adalf et al., 2001; American College Health Association, 2013; Booth et al., 2015). With the added stress of the pandemic (Manchia et al., 2022), this population is at an increased risk of suffering on a personal, academic, and relational level. Finding ways to buffer the effects of stress on sexual satisfaction or to increase sexual satisfaction even in the face of stress could help alleviate distress amongst this population and preserve this aspect of their relationship and sexual well-being.

This study is also the first to establish a link between stress and the sexual motivation of coping. High stress levels among post-secondary students have been known to increase the likelihood of practicing avoidant coping (Hudd et al., 2000; Ickes et al., 2015), though no research had yet to examine this relation in the realm of sexuality. Since coping sexual motivation was also associated with lower sexual satisfaction, this presents another potential avenue for enhancing relationship and sexual well-being amongst individuals in romantic relationships. While coping and intimacy sexual motives weren't mutually exclusive, finding ways to increase the use of approach motives and decrease the use of avoidance motives could lead to greater relationship and sexual satisfaction. Hence, future research should examine this overlap in sexual motivations so as to gain a deeper understanding of how the interplay between approach-avoidance sexual motives could impact sexual satisfaction.

Lastly, in addition to potentially establishing causation, replicating these findings amongst a more diverse sample, assessing or controlling for length of relationship, and focusing more on stress and sexual motivation's impact on sexual satisfaction, future research should examine whether these findings also apply to single people. This study solely looked at individuals in romantic relationships, but it would be interesting to investigate whether single people's motivations for engaging in sex during the pandemic are different from people in a relationship's, and whether these motivations relate to their stress levels and sexual satisfaction in a similar or dissimilar way. For instance, although people in a relationship may employ more coping and intimacy sexual motives during stressful times, it would be interesting to see what reasons are motivating single people to potentially risk exposing themselves to COVID-19 in order to have sex, and whether these motives relate to their stress and sexual satisfaction in a positive or negative way.

Conclusion

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and its associated stressors can be seen across all areas of life, including the bedroom. Although this study did not

support the proposed hypotheses, it nevertheless provided support for the existence of associations between stress, approach and avoidance sexual goals, and sexual satisfaction. During times of high stress, greater attention should be paid to the reasons that are motivating individuals to have sex with their partner, as the relation between sexual motives and sexual satisfaction could have broader implications for couples' emotional, physical, and relationship well-being. More research is needed to further understand the interplay between stress, sexual motives, and sexual satisfaction, so as to uncover new ways of preserving and enhancing the quality of individuals' and couples' romantic and sexual relationships.

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