

## The Development of the Sexual Satisfaction and Frustration Inventory for Women

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**ABSTRACT.** The only known measure of sexual frustration, to the researchers' knowledge, is a non-peer reviewed 4-item scale. Thus, the main purpose of the present studies was the construction of a more comprehensive sexual frustration measure that assesses both conditions producing sexual frustration and ways people cope with it. Our pilot study results were surprising. First, a sexual satisfaction scale was developed because the items reflected satisfaction rather than frustration. Second, men's data were unusable due to impression management. In the subsequent studies, items were developed to measure sexual frustration using all female participants. Based on the results of these studies, the Sexual Satisfaction and Frustration Inventory for Women was created. Four factors of frustration emerged: Expectations, Insecurity, Infidelity, and Self-Pleasure. These 4 factors were subjected to a confirmatory factor analysis that resulted in a good fit for the 4-factor model compared to the 1- and 2-factor models. The same 4 factors emerged from the CFA. Expectations and Insecurity emerged from the prompt "I am sexually frustrated when," and appear to produce sexual frustration. The other factors, Self-Pleasure and Infidelity, emerged from the prompt "When I am sexually frustrated, I..." and appear to be strategies for coping with sexual frustration. Sexual frustration predictor and coping mechanism factors showed evidence of convergent and discriminant validity. Only Expectations and Insecurity correlated with sexual satisfaction, both negatively. This suggests that satisfaction is not necessarily the inverse of frustration, despite that our sexual satisfaction scale was meant to be a sexual frustration scale. Implications and directions for future research will be discussed.

**Keywords:** sexual frustration, satisfaction, needs frustration, self-determination theory



Diversity badge earned for conducting research focusing on aspects of diversity.

Shifting economic and social experiences have been related to decreased sexual activity over the last two decades, and a recent meta-analysis (Delcea et al., 2021) suggested that this trend may be multinational. Although reasons for decreased sexual activity are uncertain, a reasonable conclusion is that sexual frustration is likely to result if, as has been hypothesized, external variables such as extended work hours and lack of

access to suitable partners are driving this decrease. Sexual frustration results in dissonance between the desire for sex and the lack of sex, and frustration has been long linked to aggression. Both dissonance and frustration are unpleasant emotional experiences with likely negative psychological consequences; we therefore created this scale to examine sexual frustration as an important psychological construct with important implications for relationships.

Few studies have examined sexual frustration. According to Stuger (2012), sexual frustration is “triggered by multiple forms of dissonance between the absence or lack of sexual reward and the (un)conscious motivation to obtain these sexual rewards” (p. 168). Wright (2012) created the only sexual frustration scale to our knowledge, and the scale focuses narrowly on desired frequency and quality of sexual activity. Wright found that most participants in her study reported some degree of sexual frustration. Specifically, participants who reported less sex during the past week reported more sexual frustration. Seehuus and Rellini (2013) found that sexual satisfaction was negatively related to sexually permissive behaviors, and Davison et al. (2009) found that sexual satisfaction was related to general health in women. Thus, sexual satisfaction seems to be important to relationship quality, but little is known about the effects of and coping mechanisms for sexual frustration.

More recently, research has noted that economic and social experiences have influenced sexual activity (Gleason et al., 2021). Additionally, sexual behavior decreased among U.S. adults between 2000 and 2018, predominantly among younger U.S. men. Lack of cohabitation was implicated as a factor in the decrease. A seven-study meta-analysis (Delcea et al., 2021) included three studies from the United States, and one each from China, Turkey, Italy, and the United Kingdom. Studies were conducted between March and April 2020 ( $n = 6,929$ ). Results showed a decrease in sexual activity during the period included in the analysis. Given these changes in sexual activity, we sought to measure sexual frustration in women and developed a scale in order to do so.

### Sexual Satisfaction and Dissatisfaction

Extensive research has examined factors related to sexual satisfaction in women. For example, Jamali et al. (2018) found that sexual satisfaction was positively related to self-esteem and negatively related to stress. Additionally, Smith et al. (2011) stated that men and women who were dissatisfied with sexual frequency in their relationship also reported low relationship and sexual satisfaction. Partner initiation and communication are strong predictors of sexual satisfaction in women (Bridges et al., 2004). Research has also indicated that sexual satisfaction is predictive of well-being, mental health, and physical health in women in same-sex as well as heterosexual relationships (Holmberg et al., 2010). In a more recent study, Roels and Janssen (2020) found that both sexual communication and frequency were significantly related to sexual satisfaction in a group of young, heterosexual couples. Finally, Ebrahimkhani et al. (2019) found that sexual satisfaction, sexual esteem, and sexual consciousness (i.e., thinking about sexual

issues) were predictive of overall marital satisfaction.

Measures of sexual satisfaction vary from more complex to single-item scales (Mark et al., 2014). The Index of Sexual Satisfaction (ISS, Hudson et al., 1981) measures the extent of sexual dissatisfaction in a relationship, and it is scored so that high numbers reflect lower sexual satisfaction. This 25-item measure includes relationship satisfaction as well as sexual satisfaction due to its focus on treatment progress. Thus, although valuable for its treatment-assessment purpose, it intentionally confounds sexual and relationship satisfaction for its applied purposes. Another commonly used scale, the Global Measure of Sexual Satisfaction (GMSEX; Lawrance & Byers, 1995) is more recent than the ISS and attempts to capture both positive and negative aspects of an individual’s sexual relationship through a subjective lens. It also includes an affective reaction to the participant’s subjective evaluation of positive and negative aspects of sexuality in the relationship. The New Sexual Satisfaction Scale (NSSS-S; Slulhofer et al., 2010) is even more recent and is a short form of the original NSSS, which uniquely uses an individual, interpersonal, and behavioral lens through which participants evaluate their sexual relationships. The original included five broad dimensions that ultimately broke down to two subscales: an ego-focused and a partner- and activity-focused factor, still measuring a very broad construct. The NSSS-S is unidimensional and made up of 12 items that use a 1–5 Likert-type response scale, from 1 (*not at all satisfied*) to 5 (*extremely satisfied*). Psychometrically, the GMSEX appears to be the most reliable and valid and is especially appropriate for clinical settings and other settings that focus on treatment gains over time. Several good sexual satisfaction scales are in use, including both global and very specific single-item measures. Our measure of sexual satisfaction materialized in an attempt to measure frustration and provides a single-factor assessment of individuals’ self-reflected overall positivity with the quality and frequency of sex, and similarity of partner’s sexual attitude and preferences. Sexual dissatisfaction has largely been measured by these same (and similar) measures, which assess both satisfaction and dissatisfaction. Our sexual satisfaction scale is most appropriate for nonclinical populations, such as college students or cohabitating couples, and focuses on positivity.

### Need Frustration and Self-Determination Theory

The need for intimacy, sex, and emotional involvement are all important aspects of an intimate relationship (Drigotas & Rusbult, 1992; Le & Farrell, 2009). Recent research has examined the relationship between need frustration, conflict, and dissatisfaction in romantic couples (Vanhee et al., 2018). Couples have needs that they desire to be

fulfilled, including sexual fulfillment, and failure to meet these needs can result in strains on the relationship. Lack of sexual fulfillment, as with other blocked goals, could lead to frustration in the relationship.

Self-determination theory is also applicable to understanding sexual frustration in romantic relationships. According to Deci and Ryan (2000), the three universal needs include the need for autonomy, the need for competence, and the need for relatedness. According to self-determination theory, partners can either support or frustrate each other's needs (Vanhee et al., 2018). Partners who are loving and caring to each other can satisfy their need for relatedness. However, the need for relatedness can be frustrated if partners are cold, rejecting, or distant to each other (Vanhee et al., 2018). Relational needs can be frustrated when partners feel rejected or abandoned by their partners (La Guardia & Patrick, 2008). Sexual frustration could result from the romantic relationships' inability to meet the partners' need for relatedness.

### Sexual Excitation and Sexual Inhibition

According to Carpenter et al. (2008), sexual functioning and related behaviors can be significant health concerns; therefore, an understanding of sexual functioning is necessary for the improved treatment of sexual problems, as well as understanding "normative" sexuality in terms of trends in frequency or satisfaction. Sexual frustration is one potential sexual problem that couples and individuals may face. According to Bancroft and Janssen (2000), the dual control model of sexual response proposes two independent systems that influence sexual arousal: Sexual inhibition, or the inhibitory system, is viewed as avoiding threats related to sexual encounters, and excitation, or the excitatory system, includes factors related to sexual arousal (Carpenter et al., 2008). Bancroft et al. (2009) found that men score higher on excitation whereas women score higher on inhibition. The authors also noted that sexual excitation and inhibition are related to sexual aggression, infidelity, and sexual risk taking in both men and women. Both men and women demonstrate excitation and inhibition sexual systems, although sometimes for different functions (e.g., concern for consequences like pregnancy, measured by the Sexual Inhibition Scale-1 [SIS-1]; concern for performance failure, measured by Sexual Inhibition Scale-2 [SIS-2]). Literature has shown a considerable variability among individuals on these sexual dimensions, and that women and men are more similar than different (Carpenter et al., 2008). For the purposes of this study, we used the three-factor (i. e., Sexual Excitation Scale, Sexual Inhibition Scale-1, and Sexual Inhibition Scale-2) scale reflecting

overlapping factor structures for women (Carpenter et al., 2008) for validation purposes.

### Purpose of Current Studies

An initial pilot survey study including 283 women and 176 men attempted to create a scale measuring sexual frustration, but instead ended up creating a scale of sexual satisfaction. The sexual satisfaction subscale included 11 items ( $\alpha = .91$ ). Factor loadings ranged from .50 to .84, indicating that this was a reliable factor. Unfortunately, the scale for sexual frustration was unsatisfactory. Thus, new items were written, and Study 1 was launched.

### Study 1

The purpose of Study 1 was to develop new items to measure sexual frustration following the unsuccessful pilot version. We predicted that two factors would measure sexual frustration, based on responses to prompts asking (a) "I am sexually frustrated when..." eliciting factors contributing to sexual frustration and (b) "When I am sexually frustrated, I..." eliciting responses to frustration. These factors were expected to positively correlate with Wright's (2012) measure of sexual frustration as well as with each other. The two predicted factors were "causes to sexual frustration" and "reactions to frustration." Additionally, we collected data in Study 2 to examine the confirmatory factor analysis for the sexual satisfaction scale developed in Study 1.

### Method

#### Participants

Participants included 250 women and 76 men with the mean age of 28 ( $SD = 9.61$ ). Participants were recruited through Facebook and in psychology courses at a small, private university in the southeast. Most (55.2%) of the sample self-identified as European American with 18% African American and 15.2% Hispanic. The remaining 12% reported other. Additionally, 71% of the sample was in a romantic relationship, and 81% of the sample was heterosexual, 10% were bisexual, 3.7% were gay or lesbian, and 4% were asexual. The rest of the sample (1.3%) chose not to disclose their sexual orientation.

#### Materials and Procedure

After receiving approval from the Institutional Review Board, participants responded to an online questionnaire through Qualtrics that included an implied consent form, a demographic measure, and Hendrick et al.'s (1998) Love and Relationship Biography, which assessed length of relationship, relationship status, and living arrangements. Janssen et al.'s (2002) Sexual Inhibition (SIS-1;  $\alpha = .70$  and SIS-2;  $\alpha = .73$ ), and Sexual

Excitation Scales ( $\alpha = .82$ ). The SIS-1 measures inhibition due to performance failure (e.g., “When I have a distracting thought, I easily lose my erection”), whereas SIS-2 measures inhibition due to threat of performance consequences (e.g., “If there is a risk of an unwanted pregnancy, I am unlikely to get sexually aroused”). A sample item for the Sexual Excitation Scale is “When I think of an attractive person, I easily become sexually aroused.” Wright’s (2012) Sexual Frustration Scale ( $\alpha = .84$ ) is a four-item scale that includes items such as “How sexually frustrated do you currently feel?” Finally, the Sexual Satisfaction Scale ( $\alpha = .89$ ) that was developed in the pilot study was included. Sample items from this scale include “I initiate sexual activity with my partner” and “I am sexually satisfied.” The reported alphas were calculated in the current study.

To measure sexual frustration, we developed 15 items with the goal of measuring causes of frustration and 16 items to measure reactions to frustration. The

causes items began with “I am sexually frustrated when” whereas the reaction items began with “When I am sexually frustrated, I...” Sample items include “I expect too much from my partner sexually,” “I feel uncomfortable with my body,” and “I have the urge to cheat.”

**Results**

The data were subjected to an Exploratory Factor Analysis using oblimin rotation because the factors were expected to correlate and, desiring a simple structure (Thurstone, 1935), we did not wish to constrain the analysis (Cattell, 1978). The Exploratory Factor Analysis was run separately for men and women. For women, results indicated that four factors emerged (see Table 1). Sixteen items were removed due to their low factor loadings ( $< .40$ ; Stevens, 1992) or their loading on more than one factor. Sample items that were excluded are “I am sexually frustrated when the children are always around,” “I am sexually frustrated when I have relational/

**TABLE 1**

**Items and Factor Loadings for Sexual Frustration in Women in Study 1**

	Factor 1 Expectations $\alpha = .90$	Factor 2 Insecurity $\alpha = .89$	Factor 2 Infidelity $\alpha = .87$	Factor 2 Self-Pleasure $\alpha = .79$
My partner is not as experienced as I would like.	.63	.19	.31	.37
My partner has sexual performance problems.	.74	.40	.22	.39
My partner does not meet my expectations.	.85	.24	.39	.40
I expect too much from my partner sexually.	.74	.43	.33	.43
I feel insecure.	.38	.86	.19	.30
I feel undesirable.	.37	.86	.09	.22
I feel uncomfortable with my body.	.33	.84	.01	.19
I blame myself for feeling frustrated.	.38	.68	.25	.26
I cheat on my spouse/partner.	.23	.13	.87	.28
I have the urge to cheat.	.34	.17	.87	.30
I enter into friends with benefits relationships.	.30	.21	.73	.42
I have hook-ups to feel better.	.34	.22	.68	.37
I masturbate to relieve my frustration.	.41	.21	.21	.84
I use toys/vibrators.	.34	.20	.30	.72
I use porn to relieve my frustration.	.26	.12	.35	.67

**TABLE 2**

**Items and Factor Loadings for Men in Study 1**

	Factor 1 $\alpha = .88$	Factor 2 $\alpha = .71$
I feel insecure.	.97	-.08
I feel undesirable.	.96	-.12
I feel uncomfortable with my body.	.93	-.14
I blame myself for feeling frustrated.	.53	.20
I feel sexually insecure.	.44	.26
When my partner does not meet my needs.	-.08	.75
When I expect too much from my partner sexually.	-.00	.70
When my partner has sexual performance problems.	-.07	.70
When my partner does not properly please me in bed.	-.13	.68
When my partner does not want to have sex.	-.12	.68
When I have not been intimate in awhile.	.03	.64
When I do not get alone time with my partner.	.08	.63
I have mood swings.	.19	.54
I have relationship/marital issues with my partner.	.04	.52
I masturbate to relieve my frustration.	.08	.48
I watch porn to relieve my frustration.	.03	.48
I take my frustration out on other people.	.16	.46
I am not satisfied with the relationship.	.02	.44
When my partner is not as experienced as I would like.	-.08	.42
I cheat on my spouses/partner.	-.00	-.04
I enter into friends with benefits relationships.	.12	-.06
I have hook-ups to feel better.	-.03	-.01
I have urge to cheat.	-.14	.27

marital problems with my partner,” and “When I am sexually frustrated, I read erotic literature to relieve my frustration.” Cronbach’s alphas were calculated for each of the four factors. Factor loadings and reliabilities are in Table 1.

For men, the results were confusing and unreliable. Specifically, the Exploratory Factor Analysis revealed three noncohesive factors with weak loadings and appeared to reflect impression management. The results of the Exploratory Factor Analysis for men is located in Table 2. Given the unsuccessful analysis of men’s self-reported sexual frustration data, we decided that future work would need to focus on getting men comfortable with reporting on their sexual frustration. Therefore, the remainder of the analyses in Study 1 focused on women.

Correlations were also calculated between the variables and are displayed in Table 3. These correlations included the women’s data only. The four sexual frustration factors share small to moderate positive correlations with Wright’s (2012) sexual frustration scale. As expected, the four sexual frustration factors were also significantly related to each other. Contrary to prediction, sexual frustration was unrelated to sexual satisfaction. The cut-off for factor loadings was .40 or higher (Stevens, 1992).

Additionally, the sexual satisfaction items developed in Study 1 were examined through a confirmatory factor analysis using EQS 6.4 for Windows. The model showed an acceptable value for the Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR; .07), which should be less than .10 (Kline, 2005). According to Kline, the Comparative Fit Index (CFI) should be greater than .90. In this present study, the CFI was .86, which was below the cut-off. The Root Mean Square of Approximation (RMSEA) also did not show acceptable fit given the cut-off value proposed by Kline.

## Discussion

The researchers predicted that a two-factor solution would emerge resulting in the factors of “causes of frustration” and “reactions to frustration.” Sixteen items were removed because of low factor loadings or due to loading on more than one factor, leaving a total of 15 items in the scale. The EFA revealed four factors for the all-female participants in the study. One factor seemed to measure causes of frustration related to expectations. The other three factors seemed to measure reactions to frustration (Insecurity, Infidelity, Self-Pleasure). Interestingly, none of the sexual frustration factors were negatively related to sexual satisfaction as one might predict. Although the CFA for relationship satisfaction was imperfect, it should be mentioned that we expected sexual satisfaction to correlate significantly (negatively) with sexual frustration. On the face of it, satisfaction seems the conceptual opposite of frustration. At this point, it is possible that the measurement problems with the sexual satisfaction scale (CFI < .90) explain the lack of correlation, and we address this surprising lack of relationship between sexual satisfaction and frustration in Study 2. The purpose of Study 2 was to conduct a confirmatory factor analysis on the sexual frustration items that remained in Study 1.

## Study 2

Study 2 served two main purposes. First, we collected data on the Sexual Frustration Scale so that a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) could be conducted. Second, we examined the relationships between the sexual frustration factors, Wright’s (2012) Sexual Frustration Scale, and sexual inhibition and excitation. We predicted that the four-factor solution would provide the best fit and that the four factors would be positively related to each other as well as positively related to Wright’s measure of sexual frustration. Finally, we predicted that the factors Expectations, Insecurity, and Infidelity would be negatively related to sexual satisfaction, whereas Self-Pleasure would be positively related to sexual excitation. We further predicted that sexual frustration would be higher among those with high excitation, as any interruptions or other obstacles might be particularly frustrating during easier/more frequent excitation. Inhibition 1 and 2, on the other hand, were expected to be uncorrelated with frustration, as inhibition generally serves to reduce sexual drive; thus, sexual frustration is less relevant. However, it is an empirical question whether inhibition from fears of performance failure (ISI-1) or inhibition from fears of consequences of sex (ISI-2) correlate differently with sexual frustration in women.

**TABLE 3**

**Correlations Between Sexual Frustration, Sexual Satisfaction, Sexual Excitation, and Inhibition for Women in Study 1**

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Wright’s Sexual Frustration Scale	-								
2. Expectations	.45**	-							
3. Insecurity	.31**	.36**	-						
4. Infidelity	.24**	.41**	.24**	-					
5. Self-Pleasure	.40**	.45**	.22**	.39**	-				
6. Sexual Satisfaction	.05	.02	.08	.01	.10	-			
7. Sexual Inhibition 1	.34**	.37**	.32**	.21**	.30**	-.09	-		
8. Sexual Inhibition 2	.03	-.03	.14*	-.10	-.02	.05	.28**	-	
9. Sexual Excitation	.51**	.49**	.33**	.44**	.50**	.15*	.52**	-.05	-

**Method**

**Participants**

Participants were recruited through Facebook and in psychology courses at a small, private university in the southeast United States. Participants included 181 women with a mean age of 27.22 (*SD* = 8.42). Most of the sample was European American (70%) with 11.6% Hispanic, 7.7% African American, 4% Caribbean, and 4% Asian American. Additionally, 73% were currently involved in a romantic relationship, and 70% reported that this was a sexual relationship. Most of the sample was heterosexual (91%), and 5.5% of the sample was bisexual, 1.7% were gay or lesbian, and 0.9% were asexual.

**Materials and Procedure**

After receiving approval from the Institutional Review Board, participants responded to an online questionnaire through Qualtrics that included an implied consent form, a demographics measure, the Love and Relationship Biography (e.g., Hendrick et al., 1998), Janssen et al.'s (2002) Sexual Inhibition (SIS-1;  $\alpha = .69$  and SIS-2;  $\alpha = .70$ ) and Sexual Excitation Scales ( $\alpha = .78$ ), Wright's (2012) Sexual Frustration Scale ( $\alpha = .84$ ), and the Sexual Satisfaction Scale ( $\alpha = .87$ ) that was developed in the pilot study and Study 1. The reported alphas were calculated in the current study. As previously mentioned, we developed 15 items with the goal of measuring causes of frustration and 16 items were developed to measure reactions to frustration. However, the exploratory factor analysis in the previous study revealed four factors with 14 items: Expectations, Insecurity, Infidelity, and Self-Pleasure. Thus, participants also responded to the 14 items measuring sexual frustration.

**Results**

A factor analysis using oblimin rotation was calculated to examine the factor loadings associated with the four factors. Additionally, Cronbach's alphas were calculated for each factor. All four factors showed acceptable reliability. The results are in Table 4.

Three models were tested using confirmatory factor analysis, performed using EQS-6.4 for Windows. The four-factor model showed acceptable values for SRMR, which should be less than .10 as well as the RMSEA, which should be between .05 and .08 for acceptable fit (Kline, 2005). Additionally, the CFI was greater than .90, which indicates good fit (Kline, 2005). The results of the CFA are in Table 5.

Correlations were calculated between the four sexual frustration factors, sexual satisfaction, Wright's (2012) measure of sexual frustration, and the measures of sexual excitation and inhibition. There were small correlations

between the new sexual frustration subscales and Wright's measure of sexual frustration. In line with predictions, sexual satisfaction was negatively and significantly correlated with all the sexual frustration factors except Infidelity unlike in Study 1. Also, as predicted, Self-Pleasure as a response to sexual frustration was positively related to sexual excitation. The results are in Table 6.

TABLE 4				
Items and Factor Loadings for Sexual Frustration in Women in Study 2				
	Factor 1 Expectations $\alpha = .71$	Factor 2 Insecurity $\alpha = .88$	Factor 2 Infidelity $\alpha = .70$	Factor 2 Self-Pleasure $\alpha = .76$
I am sexually frustrated when...				
My partner is not as experienced as I would like.	.53	.19	.07	.06
My partner has sexual performance problems.	.61	.26	-.08	.01
I expect too much from my partner sexually.	.70	.36	-.25	.11
I feel insecure.	-.08	.94	-.01	-.15
I feel undesirable.	.05	.82	-.12	-.14
I feel uncomfortable with my body.	-.15	.82	-.11	-.21
I blame myself for feeling frustrated.	-.10	.53	-.04	-.13
When I am sexually frustrated, I... I cheat on my spouse/partner.	.06	.21	.84	.07
I have the urge to cheat.	.25	.26	.59	.15
I enter into friends with benefits relationships.	.04	.24	.43	.27
I have hook-ups to feel better.	-.01	.24	.41	.12
I masturbate to relieve my frustration.	-.07	.20	-.08	.92
I use toys/vibrators.	-.07	.21	-.00	.56
I watch porn to relieve my frustration.	-.09	.27	-.01	.63

TABLE 5				
Confirmatory Factor Analysis of the Sexual Frustration Inventory for Women in Study 2				
	RMSEA	CFI	SRMR	$\chi^2$ (df)
One Factor	.29	.50	.16	506.29 (77)
Two Factor	.18	.61	.15	409.06 (76)
Four Factor	.08	.91	.07	150.08 (71)

Note. RMSEA = Root Mean Square of Approximation; CFI = Comparative Fit Index; SRMR = Standardized Root Mean Square Residual.

### General Discussion

The initial purpose of the present studies was to develop a current and more extensive measure of sexual frustration for both men and women than exists in the literature today. Sexual frustration is an important variable and requires a valid and reliable measure we can use to examine it. The final scale includes two sets of subscales that reflect two different aspects of sexual frustration, and demonstrates convergent and discriminant validity. The first two factors, Expectations and Insecurity, appear to explain the scenarios or personal perceptions that lead to sexual frustration, whereas the second two factors, Infidelity and Self-Pleasure, capture ways women respond to, or cope with, their sexual frustration. In this way, the scale differs importantly from Wright's (2012) scale, which focuses exclusively on the current or recent experience of sexual frustration, whereas this new measure evaluates scenarios leading up to sexual frustration as well as coping mechanisms for dealing with sexual frustration.

In the pilot study, the sexual satisfaction scale was developed and inspired the creation of items in Study 1 that focused on sexual frustration predictors and responses. Study 1 developed the sexual frustration scale for women using an exploratory factor analysis and tested correlations for validity purposes and also provided a CFA for the sexual satisfaction scale. Study 2 presented a confirmatory factor analysis of the items for sexual frustration that recreated the same four-factor structure as the EFA in Study 1 and demonstrated good fit. Like in Study 1, the same correlates were included to examine scale validity in Study 2.

Expectations materialized as a predictor or "cause" of sexual frustration in which women's sexual desires are not met by their partners. A second "casual" factor leading to sexual frustration was Insecurity. This factor

represents women's own self-criticism or discomfort with their bodies or sexuality as contributing to sexual frustration. Note that we are not making any causal claims by using the word "cause" but, rather, that it was a response to the reasons why women are frustrated. Self-Pleasure involved masturbation as a coping mechanism for sexual frustration, whereas Infidelity served as another form of reducing frustrating arousal. The results thus suggest that women who experience sexual frustration may choose behavioral coping to assuage their frustration by cheating on their partner (or at least considering it) or relying on self-pleasure. We feel that this new sexual frustration scale provides a more comprehensive measure of sexual frustration, incorporating both reasons for sexual frustration and ways women commonly deal with it.

### Sexual Frustration's Relationships With Other Variables

In our pilot study, a measure of sexual frustration was attempted, but the remaining items did not result in a clear measure of sexual frustration and made more conceptual sense as sexual satisfaction. Because the sexual satisfaction scale emerged as a byproduct of conceptually reversed items from the attempted frustration scale, it may be that the very general sexual satisfaction measure was unrelated to the specific predictors and responses to sexual frustration in the frustration measure. Our single-factor multifaceted sexual satisfaction scale involves an individual's overall assessment of satisfaction with openness and compatibility sexually with one's partner, having a desired frequency of sex, and enjoying sex overall, but also specifically experiencing orgasm. Sexual satisfaction as measured by our scale, then, involves several broad "approach" facets, which may be somewhat independent of sexual frustration. There may be more to being sexually satisfied than the avoidance of sexual frustration. Satisfaction could mean fulfillment of one's desires, whereas frustration could be seen as the prevention of fulfillment. In this way, the two should be negatively correlated. If, however, the meaning of satisfaction differs based on individual levels of homeostatic excitation, sexual satisfaction may not have to be met if frustration is kept at bay. Perhaps those higher in excitation are more invested in most aspects of sexuality, reflected by sexual excitation's strong positive correlations with nearly all the variables in the study, including sexual frustration, although most weakly (but significantly) with sexual satisfaction. Sexual excitation may play an interesting role in the balancing act between sexual satisfaction and frustration.

Unlike Study 1, in Study 2 Sexual Inhibition-1 significantly and positively correlated with Wright's

**TABLE 6**

#### Correlations Between Sexual Frustration, Sexual Satisfaction, Sexual Excitation, and Inhibition for Women in Study 2

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Wright's Sexual Frustration Scale	-								
2. Expectations	.28**	-							
3. Insecurity	.30**	.23*	-						
4. Infidelity	.13	.13	.19*	-					
5. Self-Pleasure	.30**	.11	.10	.24**	-				
6. Sexual Satisfaction	-.24**	-.24**	-.32**	-.14	-.02	-			
7. Sexual Inhibition 1	.04	.14	.18*	-.07	.05	.28**	-		
8. Sexual Inhibition 2	-.07	-.08	.03	-.17*	-.12	.11	.40**	-	
9. Sexual Excitation	.21*	.18*	.13	.19*	.43**	.15	.13	-.01	-

frustration scale, and with all four of the sexual frustration subscales. Sexual inhibition, although initially predicted to be unrelated to sexual frustration due to associated reduced drive, may play an important role in women's sexual frustration, especially as it pertains to concerns about consequences of sex. Concerns about pregnancy or STIs may be related to frustration through holding back or denying oneself sexual activity to avoid harm. This relationship was only found in one of the two studies measuring SI, so further data is needed before we draw conclusions.

### **Convergent and Discriminant Validity**

Indicating convergent validity, the items predicting what leads to frustration, or "causes" negatively correlated with sexual satisfaction, as would be expected. However, the coping items are unrelated to sexual satisfaction, suggesting that, when women engage in infidelity and/or self-pleasure, they are less sexually frustrated, but not necessarily more satisfied. Wright's 4-item scale, focused primarily on frequency of sex and frequency of desired sex, negatively correlates with sexual frustration in the same direction and strength as the new scale, and is unidimensional. Therefore, the sexual frustration scale presented in this article is appropriate for more nuanced examinations into sexual frustration.

Surprisingly, only two of the sexual frustration subscales, Expectations and Insecurity, were significantly related to sexual satisfaction. Both were negatively related to sexual satisfaction as expected. These two factors were considered predictors of sexual frustration. Expectations as a "cause" of frustration should negatively correlate with sexual satisfaction, by definition, because women's expectations for satisfying sex are not being met. Further, Insecurity as a predictor for sexual frustration would also reflect lower sexual satisfaction. Negative feelings about oneself with respect to sexual frustration are likely quite inconsistent with a satisfying sex life. Thus, women who had higher expectations of their partner and/or who were insecure about their bodies or about sexuality, were more likely to be sexually dissatisfied. One might also assume that, with infidelity or self-pleasure, women are alleviating their frustration and therefore these reactions may serve as successful coping mechanisms for dealing with frustration. Nonsignificant or weak relationships with sexual excitement for infidelity and self-pleasure in Study 2 suggest that frustration alleviation is not related to how easily women are sexually excited. This set of findings suggests an intriguing relationship between precursors of sexual frustration, coping with frustration, and sexual satisfaction, which was also not reliably correlated with sexual excitement. Individual differences in excitability (excitation) appear

unrelated to sexual satisfaction, although they are related to sexual frustration. If women are getting their sexual needs met, perhaps it does not matter how easily (or with how much difficulty) they are sexually excited. Women high in sexual excitement, though, may be particularly vulnerable to becoming sexually frustrated.

### **Implications**

Women appear to experience sexual frustration, at least in part, due to unmet expectations regarding their partner. This suggests that women either have very high standards, do not communicate what they want effectively to their partners, or have partners who are not pleasing them. Ironically, insecurity with one's body or discomfort with one's sexuality is another "cause" of sexual frustration that may be related to sexual inhibition. We could consider this a Self-Expectations factor, in which women's judgments of their sexual worthiness may hinder their ability to enjoy sex. Insecurity was the only sexual frustration factor significantly positively correlated with sexual inhibition (SIS-1 in Study 2, but also SIS-1 in Study 1). Women's own insecurity may prevent them from having the open sexual experiences they wish due to emotional discomfort.

Exploring ways women deal with unmet expectations is warranted, as it is unclear whether partner communication would improve the alignment of their expectations with the reality of their sexual experience with their partner. A valid and reliable measure of sexual frustration will allow researchers to investigate reasons for frustration external to individual cognition or couple-level satisfaction or communication issues. Recent trends in decreasing sexual activity across several countries over the last two decades suggest that cultural pressure (Gleason et al., 2021) or even post-COVID re-entrance into society may contribute to sexual frustration (Delcea et al., 2021). Measuring self-reflected sexual frustration allows researchers to investigate exterior stressors, such as excessive work hours or time apart, that may not have an easy solution, such as having a productive conversation about their sexual relationship.

### **Limitations**

Although our sexual satisfaction and frustration scale demonstrates good psychometric properties, the scale is only appropriate for women. As a result of the pilot data, we realized societal pressures and expectations surrounding men's sexual activity and talent may inhibit their honesty about this issue. This is a fascinating point in its own right, but at present, we only have data for women's sexual frustration, which is a limitation of the studies. In addition, we relied on self-report in an online survey for these studies, and our studies are not

exempt from the typical limitations associated with those methods, including careless and inattentive responding, or dishonesty. Our samples were also mostly White and heterosexual; a more diverse sample would be optimal and would allow us to generalize to other groups.

The nature of this study was correlational and, therefore it should be noted that our “cause” of sexual frustration is a way to describe the prompt; we did not test causal relationships in these studies, although doing so in the future may be appropriate. Finally, we did not ask participants where they encountered the survey, so we were unable to compare college versus social media samples on a number of interesting variables. Although we did not make predictions based on participant recruitment location, we will measure it in future research to allow for such examinations.

### Future Research

Future directions with the women’s sexual frustration scale include further examining the relationship between sexual frustration and relationship satisfaction, as well as the moderating role of relationship conflict styles (Zacchilli et al., 2009). Perhaps the more open partners are with their communication, and the more they use positive conflict strategies, the more satisfied they are, even in the face of sexual frustration. Sexual frustration is clearly a point of conflict in a relationship and, if unresolved, it could exaggerate existing problems that likely co-occur with frustration, such as not having enough time alone together. We also plan to continue examining sexual excitation and inhibition in relation to the four sexual frustration factors. Both excitation and inhibition may moderate the relationship between satisfaction and frustration sexually.

Studies are in progress to examine sexual frustration in men, as well. Initial studies have shown that the four factors in women do not hold up for men (Zacchilli et al., 2018). Thus, further studies have been launched to develop items to measure frustration in men. Given the societal pressures on men’s virility (Peterson, 2015), it may be a considerably different set of items that explains men’s sexual frustration. It may be that an implicit association test (Greenwald et al., 1998), rather than a self-report scale, would be most appropriate for men. Ironically, women have traditionally been discouraged from communicating openly about sex (Reiss, 1967), and now that women have more sexual freedom, it appears men might feel intimidated communicating honestly about sex, especially when they are admitting they are frustrated by a lack of sexual activity. As women have been more allowed by societal norms to be open sexually, social expectations for men’s sexual promiscuity appear to have become so extreme as to be toxic in some social

circles (e. g., the manosphere; Ging, 2019). If women are frustrated by their unmet expectations for their male partners, men may have concern for insecurity when they are told they must have perfect bodies and be virtual sexual Olympians in order to attract women (Scaptura & Boyle, 2020). Further, men in particular have been found to be sensitive to how they respond to questions about sexual behavior (Fischer, 2007). For example, Fischer (2007) found that men increased their reported sexual prowess if a female (rather than male) researcher told them that, socially, women have become more promiscuous than men. Thus, men’s responses to questions about sexuality may be fluid depending on the circumstances surrounding how they are asked about it, even in a completely anonymous survey. Examining sexual excitation and sexual satisfaction in men may also shed light on differences between men’s and women’s experience of sexual frustration. Unlike women, are men perhaps more sexually satisfied by the ways they cope with sexual frustration—which are yet to be determined—because there is a positive relationship for men between excitation and sexual satisfaction? Research should examine the relationship between sexual excitation and satisfaction for both men and women, and we will continue to work to develop a scale of men’s sexual frustration.

Finally, additional validation for the scale is needed. Future research should include relationship satisfaction in addition to sexual satisfaction. Relationships between communication and conflict styles (Zacchilli et al., 2009), sexual satisfaction, sexual frustration, and overall relationship satisfaction will give us a better picture of the way these variables interact.

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