Western University
Scholarship@Western

Undergraduate Honors Theses   Psychology Department

4-2017

The Influence of Discrepant Sexual Ideals on Relationship Dissolution

Samantha Medd
Western University, smedd@uwo.ca

Follow this and additional works at: https://ir.lib.uwo.ca/psychd_uht

Part of the Social Psychology Commons

The Influence of Discrepant Sexual Ideals on Relationship Dissolution

Samantha M. Medd

Honors Psychology Thesis
Department of Psychology
University of Western Ontario
London, Ontario, CANADA
April 2017

Thesis Advisors: Lorne Campbell, Ph.D., Rhonda Balzarini

Abstract

While a plethora of research exists on relationships ideals and sex, and how these factors affect important relationship outcomes (i.e. relationship dissolution), there has yet to be an investigation into the existence or importance of sexual ideals. The current study seeks to assess whether sexual ideals affect important relationship outcomes. Specifically, will a greater mismatch in sexual ideals result in a higher likelihood of perceived relationship dissolution? It was predicted that couples that exhibit less of a match in their sexual ideals would be more likely to perceive their relationship to dissolve, and it was further predicted that this effect would be moderated by individuals' implicit theory of relationships. To assess such, 207 romantic couples completed a Sexual Ideals Questionnaire, the Destiny and Growth Belief Questionnaire, and the Marital Status Inventory-Brief in order to investigate the effect of mismatched sexual ideals on relationship outcomes. It was predicted that those who hold growth beliefs would be less affected by a mismatch in sexual ideals than those who hold destiny beliefs. Using a linear-mixed model, it was found that a mismatch in sexual ideals did significantly predict a higher likelihood of perceived relationship dissolution, however this effect was not significantly moderated by implicit relationship beliefs.

Acknowledgments

The Influence of Discrepant Sexual Ideals on Relationship Dissolution

The relationship ideals that individuals hold have been demonstrated to be important in predicting relationship outcomes, such as satisfaction and longevity (Fletcher, Simpson, Thomas, & Giles, 1999). Sex and sexual satisfaction also influence relationship satisfaction and longevity (Call, Sprecher, & Schwartz, 1995; Donnelly, 1993; Edwards & Booth, 1994), however, there has yet to be an investigation into the existence of sexual ideals and how these ideals affect relationships. This study aims to address this gap in the research and investigate how sexual ideals are involved in predicting relationship dissolution in romantic couples. This study will also address implicit relationship theories, which are also known to affect important relationship outcomes (Knee, 1998; Knee, Nanayakkara, Vietor, Neighbors, & Patrick, 2001). Sexual destiny and sexual growth beliefs (Maxwell et al., 2017) will be examined for how they affect the relationship between sexual ideals and relationship dissolution.

Relationship Ideals

A relationship ideal is defined as 'a mental image of someone or something that serves as a standard of excellence and is highly desirable' (Tran, Simpson, & Fletcher, 2008). Thibault and Kelley (1959) took the first look at relationship ideals, developing what is known as Interdependence Theory. This theory examines the contrast between what people believe they deserve in a relationship and the perceived level of awards derived from the relationship (Thibault & Kelley, 1959). This suggested that individuals make comparisons between what they have and what they would ideally like to have. Extensive research has been conducted since Interdependence Theory, in the fields of Social and Evolutionary Psychology, to better understand relationship ideals and how they affect important relationship outcomes.

Research examining the ideal traits of a relationship suggested that consistency between ideals and related assessments of the current relationship is correlated with a more positive evaluation of the current relationship (Fletcher et al., 1999; Campbell, Simpson, Kashy, & Fletcher, 2001). Discrepancies between one's relationship ideals and their evaluation of their spouse have been related to lower marital well-being after one and two years of marriage (Ruvolo & Veroff, 1997). Relationship ideals serve two basic kinds of function, an evaluative function and a regulatory function, and large discrepancies between relationship ideals and reality can result in either evaluative changes or regulative changes (Fletcher et al., 1999). Evaluative changes would be exhibited by either changing the views of one's relationship to line up with one's ideal, or adjusting one's ideal standards to match one's perceptions of the relationship. Regulative changes would be exhibited by either leaving the relationship, or engineering change in the relationship so that it moves closer to the ideal (Fletcher et al., 1999).

Recently, researchers studied participants' relationship statuses over time, to target and assess individuals who formed new romantic relationships. The self-evaluations of participants' new romantic partners were evaluated to determine if individuals enter new relationships with others who possess the traits and qualities that correspond to their preferences. It was found that relationship ideals do in fact predict relationship outcomes, such that individuals were more likely to form relationships with someone who possesses their ideal partner qualities (Campbell, Chin, & Stanton, 2016).

Importance of Sex

Sex plays an important role in the quality of romantic relationships (Impett, Muise, & Peragine, 2013), as sexual satisfaction is positively linked with the development and maintenance of ongoing relationships. Additionally, marital satisfaction is linked with sexual

satisfaction, and unhappy marriages are associated with lower sexual frequency (Call, Sprecher, & Schwartz, 1995). Interestingly, it has also been found that sexual inactivity is correlated with unhappiness in marriages as well as with an increased likelihood of separation (Donnelly, 1993). It is evident that sex is an important aspect of relationships in terms of formation, development, maintenance, and dissolution. But how do our ideals for sex influence how we perceive our relationships?

Destiny and Growth Beliefs

While we know that sex is important in relationships, could it be more important to some individuals based on their implicit orientations towards relationships? Implicit relationship beliefs are characterized by destiny and growth orientations. A destiny belief orientation suggests that a negative relationship situation will be unlikely to change later in the relationship. Individuals who are high in this type of belief use relevant and readily available information to determine compatibility and potential future success of the relationship. These individuals value finding an ideal compatible partner, believing there is only one person meant for them, such as a soul mate. Individuals with a destiny belief are more likely to terminate a relationship in threat contexts due to their dichotomous thinking style (Knee, 1998; Knee, Nanayakkara, Vietor, Neighbors, & Patrick, 2001; Knee, Patrick, & Lonsbary, 2003).

Individuals who have a growth belief orientation tend to assume that relationships can be maintained through effort, and problems can be overcome. An individual high in this belief acknowledges that problems and disagreements are unstable and can be managed as they occur; that problems will fluctuate over the course of the relationship and such is a normal part of being in a relationship. These individuals are more likely to stay in relationships, and take more of a friendship approach to love (Knee, 1998; Knee et al., 2001; Knee, Patrick, & Lonsbary, 2003).

Examining the differences between these two beliefs, it is evident that perceiving limitations in one's relationship can have different consequences depending on one's implicit theory of relationships.

Sexpectations

The concept of destiny and growth beliefs and their importance in shaping relationship outcomes has recently been connected to the importance of sex. Jessica Maxwell and colleagues (2017) developed a version of the beliefs scale to assess how these implicit relationship theories are related to sexual satisfaction. This research suggests that individuals high in sexual destiny beliefs believe that sexual satisfaction is attained through finding a compatible sexual partner, whereas individuals high in sexual growth beliefs believe that sexual satisfaction is attained through hard work and effort in the sexual relationship (Maxwell et al., 2017). The latter individuals experience higher relationship and sexual satisfaction and have partners who are more satisfied (Maxwell et al., 2017). This is the first evidence to suggest that implicit theories impact sexual relationships, suggesting that implicit theories of relationships may be important to sexual ideals.

Relationship Dissolution

The concepts of relationship ideals, destiny and growth beliefs, and the importance of sex can evidently be brought together in the formation of an important relationship question, 'are you going to break up?' Research on relationship dissolution can guide us in understanding the important relationship predictors leading to a separation. According to Interdependence Theory, people develop a sense of the costs and benefits they feel they deserve in a relationship, evaluate their relationship based on this comparison, and make important relationship decisions based on this analysis, such as leaving the relationship (Kelley & Thibault, 1978; Thibault & Kelley,

1959). This suggests that individuals make comparisons between what they have and what they feel they want and deserve. Higher ideal-perception consistency has been found to be associated with higher perceived quality of relationships (Fletcher, Simpson, & Thomas, 2000), suggesting that couples that perceive their partners to match their relationship ideals experience more satisfaction in their relationships. These higher levels of ideal-perception consistency predicted lower rates of relationship dissolution (Fletcher et al., 2000). It has also been demonstrated that relationships characterized by low commitment are more likely to move toward enacting leave behaviours, such as deciding to dissolve the relationship, initiating dissolution, or suggesting dissolution (VanderDrift, Agnew, & Wilson, 2009).

In terms of sexual satisfaction, it has been found that sexual inactivity is correlated with unhappiness in marriages, as well as an increased likelihood of separation (Donnelly, 1993). Sexual involvement in the relationship has also been demonstrated to be predictive of relationship longevity (Simpson 1987; Sprecher & Fehr, 1998). Since sex is likely to increase commitment to the relationship, relationships that are sexual in nature should be less susceptible to dissolution. Furthermore, couples that reported having had sex over a three-month period were more likely to persist (Simpson, 1987), suggesting that sex in the relationship may be one important indicator to the perseverance of the relationship overtime. However, it is unclear how matching sexual ideals may impact and contribute to relationship maintenance and longevity.

Sexual Ideals

As sexual satisfaction is positively linked with relationship satisfaction, and negatively linked to relationship dissolution (Call, Sprecher, & Schwartz, 1995; Donnelly, 1993; Edwards & Booth, 1994), it is possible that discordance in sexual ideals and preferences may be a contributing factor to relationship discord and dissolution consideration and that the negative

implications of such may depend on one's implicit beliefs about relationships. More than half of

couples have rated their sex life as being a six out of ten, and 40% of couples have admitted to

considering leaving their partner (Daily Mail Reporter, 2010), while 9.4% and 11.6% of

previously married men and women, respectively, have cited sexual difficulties as the reason for

leaving their marriage (Duffy, 2017). Clearly, sexual satisfaction is important in relationships,

and opening up the communication of sexual desires in couples is necessary. It is my goal to

expand this field of research by examining individual's ideals regarding their sexual

relationships.

In a series of studies, researchers at Western University have been attempting to identify,

assess, and understand sexual ideals. In the first study, the researchers had participants list their

ideals for a sexual relationship, to identify the specific behaviours, partner traits, and

characteristics of the sexual encounters that people consider sexually ideal. In the second study,

approximately 1000 participants were asked to describe their ideal sexual relationships by

indicating the relative importance of each sexual ideal identified in Study 1. Study 2 will provide

important descriptive data concerning the most and least common sexual ideals, and will be used

to identify a subset of common and non-redundant sexual ideals that can be used in following

studies.

Current Study

Based on the previous research, it is evident that sexual dissatisfaction is related to

relationship dissolution (Call, Sprecher, & Schwartz, 1995; Donnelly, 1993; Edwards & Booth,

1994). However, it is important to determine if the desire to dissolve a relationship (e.g., leave

behaviour) is due to a mismatch in sexual ideals, which likely represents a host of other

discrepancies (e.g. in sexual attitudes, porn use, etc.). If this is the case, research can focus on

targeting this, alleviating the discrepancy, and making partners more aware of each other's ideals, in order to prevent relationship dissolution due to sexual ideal discrepancies.

The major purpose of this study is to examine whether romantic partners match in their sexual ideals (are in concordance with one another), and to determine what this matching means for their relationship and sexual satisfaction. More specifically, the current study will investigate if a mismatch in sexual ideals in romantic couples predicts a higher likelihood of perceived relationship dissolution. Assuming sexual ideals do predict the likelihood of perceived dissolution, this study will also investigate if destiny and growth beliefs moderate this effect.

Because it has been demonstrated that a mismatch in relationship ideals is predictive of negative relationship outcomes (Fletcher et al., 2000; Ruvolo & Veroff, 1997), and sex is an important aspect of relationship satisfaction (Impett et al., 2013; Call et al., 1995; Donnelly, 1993), it is predicted that a greater mismatch in sexual ideals in romantic couples will result in a higher likelihood of perceived relationship dissolution, because mismatched ideals should be an indicator of negative relationship evaluations. Implicit relationship theories have been demonstrated to influence relationship longevity, suggesting that individuals who have a destiny belief orientation are more likely to terminate a relationship (Knee, 1998; Knee et al., 2001). A recent investigation has linked sex with implicit relationship theories, demonstrating the importance that destiny and growth beliefs have on sexual relationships (Maxwell et al., 2017). If a greater mismatch in sexual ideals predicts a higher likelihood of perceived relationship dissolution, it is anticipated that sexual destiny and growth beliefs will moderate this effect, such that those high in growth beliefs will be less affected by mismatched sexual ideals and those high in destiny beliefs will be more negatively affected by mismatched sexual ideals.

Method

Participants

207 couples (414 individuals) participated in this study. There were an equal number of male and female participants (207 males, 207 females), as all couples were in heterosexual relationships. The sample was largely married (88.4%), Caucasian (males: 83.6%; females 85.5%) and monogamous (males: 88.9%; females: 88.9%). The average age (M_{males} = 47.14 years; $M_{females}$ = 44.47 years), and the average relationship length (M_{males} = 17.32 years; $M_{females}$ = 17.31 years) of the sample indicate a tendency towards middle-age.

Procedure

Participants were recruited from Qualtrics Panel, an online crowdsourcing platform that is commonly used for psychological research. Qualtrics located respondents who were eligible for the survey and provided each couple with the opportunity to participate. Eligible individuals were required to be at least 18 years of age, speak English fluently, and have an active Qualtrics Panel account. Eligible individuals were required to be involved in a romantic relationship of at least four months, and both individuals in the relationship had to be willing to participate. Whether a participant qualified based on these inclusion criteria was determined through their responses to the demographic questionnaire (see Appendix A) and through a screening process conducted through Qualtrics Panel (the survey provider and agency that was responsible for collecting the data).

All participants and their partners were directed to the same Qualtrics survey and a unique code was used to identify the couples in order to link partners' data in each dyad. No identifying information was collected or stored in the survey, thus the linking ID was done anonymously via the Qualtrics survey. Interested participants followed a link to a webpage, which presented the Letter of Information (see Appendix B) and asked them if they were willing to consent to

participate in the study. Informed consent was received from each participant digitally (each participant indicated they read the consent form and agreed to take part before proceeding). Participants were informed that participation in the study may involve exposure to sensitive questions, instructed to conduct the study in a private place, and were told that they may choose not to participate or may opt out of the study at any time.

Participants were told that the purpose of the study was to better understand their sexual ideals and to assess the influence that sexual ideals have on relationships. Participants were first asked to fill out a questionnaire assessing demographic information. Then, participants were asked to build a mental picture of their ideal sexual partner. Responding to a list of 30 ideal traits, participants were asked to indicate how important each trait is to their concept of an ideal sexual partner, and to then rate the extent to which they believed their partner met this ideal. Participants were then asked about their perceptions of their partners' ideals and the extent to which they believed they met their partners' ideals. In all cases, participants were presented with a subset of items (30 items) that were common and non-redundant. Next, participants responded to a series of measures meant to examine relationship outcomes (e.g., satisfaction, perceived likelihood of relationship dissolution) and potential moderators (e.g., implicit theories of relationships, motivations for sex). Attention and instruction checks were also included throughout the survey to ensure participants were paying attention and understood the instructions. Once all questionnaires were complete, participants were forwarded to a debriefing page (see Appendix C) where they were provided with debriefing information and were compensated $1.54 (USD) for taking part in the study (full details of the method can be found here: https://osf.io/tbhqu/). Only the measures of implicit theories of relationships (i.e., destiny and growth beliefs), perceived relationship dissolution, and the sexual ideals ratings for each

individual partner were analyzed in the study. The remaining items were included for other

purposes (see https://osf.io/gvvgc/).

A total of 2,050 participants accessed the online study, and of those, 1,638 were removed

for failing to meet the inclusion criteria, failing the attention checks, for careless responding, or

for not having their partner also complete the survey. After the launch of the survey, data

collection took approximately two weeks to complete and was facilitated by Qualtrics Panel.

Measures

Matched **Sexual Ideals.** In previous studies, sexual ideal items were generated and rated

for importance. For the current study, 30 non-redundant items were selected to assess the degree

of match between partners' sexual ideals. Participants were asked to indicate the importance of

30 items such as, "My ideal sexual partner is my preferred gender" and "My ideal sexual

encounter would involve dirty talk" using a 7-point Likert-like scale ranging from very

unimportant to very important ($\alpha = .795$) (See Appendix D; Current Researchers, 2016). The

absolute difference between the partners' importance ratings were averaged to create scores that

ranged from 10 ("no mismatch") to 79 ("extreme mismatch").

Sexpectations. The short version of the Sexpections Scale (Maxwell et al., 2017) was

used to assess participants' implicit theories about sexual relationships. This scale assesses

sexual expectations related to destiny, that is, the importance of compatibility and the belief in

soul mates, and growth, the belief that relationships can be maintained and improved over time.

Participants were asked to indicate their agreement to five destiny belief statements (e.g., "A

couple is either destined to have a satisfying sex life or they are not") and five growth belief

statements (e.g., "Communicating about sexual issues can bring partners closer together") on a 7-

point Likert-like scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree (destiny $\alpha = .867$; growth

α = .845). Items were averaged to create a sexual growth and destiny score, each ranging from 1 (low destiny/growth) to 7 (high destiny/growth).

Marital Status Inventory-Brief. The brief version of the Marital Status Inventory (Whisman, Snyder, & Beach, 1997) was used to assess participants' likelihood of perceived relationship dissolution. This scale assesses individuals' relationship discord and dissolution consideration. Participants were asked to indicate their agreement to ten statements regarding relationship discord (e.g., "I get pretty discouraged about our relationship sometimes") on a dichotomous (true/false) scale (α = .879). Items were summed to create a dissolution score, ranging from 0 (higher likelihood of perceived relationship dissolution) to 10 (lower likelihood of perceived relationship dissolution).

Attention and instruction checks. Participants responded to two attention check questions scattered throughout the survey to ensure they were not carelessly responding (e.g. "Please select 'agree'"). Any participant who did not select the correct answer was excluded from analyses. Participants also responded to three items at the end of the survey to assess their attention and understanding of the instructions. More specifically, participants were asked to (1) indicate the type of relationship they provided their ideal preferences for, choosing between four different types of relationships (friendship, familial, sexual, or romantic), and to respond "yes" or "no" to the following questions: "Knowing the amount of attention you paid to this survey, would you recommend we use your data?", and "Did you share information with your partner about your ideals, or ask them about their ideals before/while you were completing this study?" (See Appendix E). Participants who failed to indicate that the relationship in question was sexual, who suggested that we do not use their data, or informed us that they discussed their answers with their partners, were excluded from analyses.

Planned Analyses

A linear mixed modeling (LMM) approach was used to analyze the data. We first assessed the relationship between sexual ideals and perceived relationship dissolution. In this model, level one consisted of the IV, ideal discrepancies between each partner, as a between-dyad factor. Absolute differences were calculated between participants' ideals and their partners' actual corresponding ideals to create an ideal discrepancy score (mean aggregated across ideals with higher scores indicating greater actual discrepancy/higher mismatch). The ideal discrepancy score served as the independent variable predicting likelihood of perceived relationship dissolution and all participants were nested in couples. Level two consisted of the DV, likelihood of perceived relationship dissolution. Partners were scored on their answers to the true or false questions, and higher scores indicated a lower likelihood of perceived dissolution.

Next, to assess whether destiny and growth beliefs moderate the relationship between mismatched ideals and likelihood of perceived relationship dissolution, another LMM was conducted, with centered destiny and growth scores as within-dyad factors. Interaction terms were created by separately multiplying mismatched ideals by mean aggregates of destiny and growth beliefs to create two interaction variables (destiny x mismatched ideals and growth x mismatched ideals). The interactions and main effects (destiny, growth, sexual ideal difference) were entered into the LMM. In these models, destiny and growth beliefs were partner-level (level 1) covariates while the sexual ideal discrepancies were entered as a dyad-level (level 2) covariate.

Results

Summary statistics for the focal measures under study can be found in Table 1. Significant correlations exist between couples' degree of mismatch in sexual ideals and their

Table 1.

Summary of the Correlations, Means, and Standard Deviations of the Focal Variables

	1	2	3	4
Degree of mismatch in Sexual Ideals (1)				
Destiny beliefs (2)	-.109*			
Growth beliefs (3)	-.087	.002		
Perceived relationship dissolution (4)	-.295**	-.073	.216**	
M	34.72	3.47	6.05	1.70
SD	14.17	1.42	0.83	0.31

Notes:

* signifies significant correlations $p < .05$; ** signifies significant correlations, $p < .01$

likelihood of perceived relationship dissolution ($r = -.30$, $p = .000$), between couples' growth

beliefs and their likelihood of perceived dissolution ($r = .22$, $p = .000$), and between couples'

degree of mismatch in sexual ideals and their destiny beliefs ($r = -.11$, $p = .027$).

In the proposed initial LMM, likelihood of perceived relationship dissolution was

predicted by mismatched sexual ideals. As predicted, mismatched sexual ideals significantly

predicted the perception of relationship dissolution: $b = -.089$, $t(204) = -4.62$, $p = .000$. However,

in the LMM assessing the predicted moderated effect of destiny beliefs and growth beliefs, no

significant effects emerged. Specifically, destiny beliefs did not significantly predict the

perception of relationship dissolution: $b = -.016$, $t(375.63) = -1.40$, $n.s.$, nor did growth beliefs: b

$= .009$, $t(305.18) = .662$, $n.s.$ Similarly, a mismatch in sexual ideals did not significantly interact

with destiny beliefs $b = -.015$, $t(352.99) = -1.19$, $n.s.$ (See Figure 1a), nor with growth beliefs: b

$= -.003$, $t(289.32) = -.260$, $n.s.$ (See Figure 1b).

Discussion

The results of this study support the first prediction. Specifically, couples that exhibited a

mismatch in their sexual ideals were more likely to perceive their relationship to dissolve. This is

an interesting and important finding, suggesting that the discordance in sexually intimate

preferences in a relationship plays a role in the perception of the demise of said relationship.

Previous research suggests that dissatisfaction with sex is a contributing factor to the dissolution

of relationships (Donnelly, 1993; Simpson 1987; Sprecher & Fehr, 1998), and the current

findings suggest that this perception of leaving the relationship may be at least partially

explained by a mismatch in sexual ideals. Using this information, researchers and clinicians

could set up interventions to target this discordance and make partners more aware of each

other's ideals. This could therefore prevent relationship dissolution due to sexual displeasure.
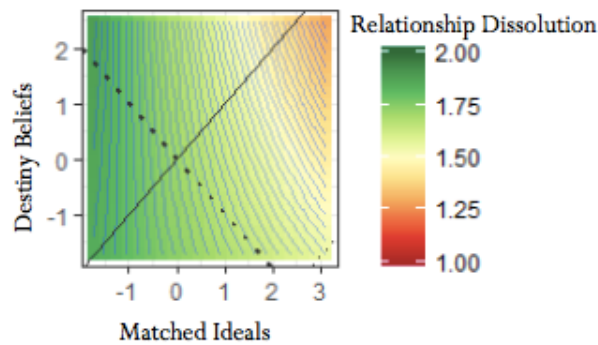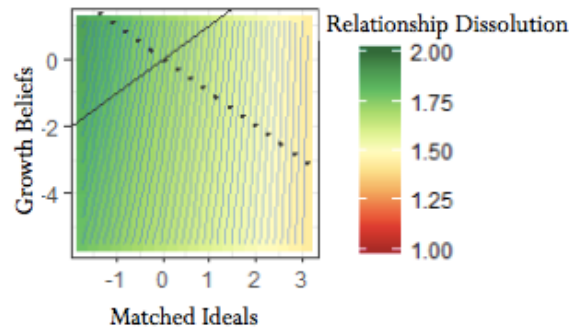
Figure 1a   Figure 1b

Figure 1. Figure 1a depicts mismatched sexual ideals and destiny beliefs predicting the likelihood of perceived relationship dissolution. Figure 1b depicts mismatched sexual ideals and growth beliefs predicting the likelihood of relationship dissolution.

Notes:

A greater score on Relationship Dissolution indicates a lower likelihood of perceived relationship dissolution; a greater score on Matched Ideals indicates a higher degree of mismatch in partners' sexual ideals.

The results of this study do not support the second prediction. Specifically, sexual growth and sexual destiny beliefs do not impact the effect that a mismatch in sexual ideals has on perceived relationship dissolution. More specifically, partners who do not share similar sexual ideals may be more inclined to leave a relationship in the future, irrespective of their implicit relationship theories. This finding is surprising considering the rationale behind destiny and growth beliefs. It seems intuitive that individuals who believe that relationships develop over time and require effort to sustain would perceive a mismatch in sexual ideals as a temporary problem that could improve with work, while those who endorse destiny beliefs would perceive a mismatch as a major warning sign or indicator that a relationship is not meant to be, therefore leading them to be more inclined to leave a relationship when a mismatch exists.

A limitation to consider as contributing to the absence of a moderating effect could be the nature of the independent variable. This study analyzed the discordance between partners' actual ratings of their sexual ideals, assessing whether partners were matched in the importance placed on each ideal. This simple dynamic does not consider how individuals perceive their partner to be meeting their ideals, and how they perceive themselves to be meeting their partners' ideals. Just because partners may not share similar ideals does not necessarily mean they are not putting in the effort to meet each other's ideals, or that they are even aware of the mismatch. Previous research suggests that perceptions of mismatch may matter more than actual mismatch (Kelley & Burgoon, 1991; Sternberg & Barnes, 1985), thus future research should assess perceptions of sexual ideal discrepancies versus actual mismatches in ideals as it is possible that the effect of perceptions of sexual ideals on the likelihood of perceived dissolution would be more significantly influenced by the moderation of destiny and growth beliefs.

Another limitation to this research is the assessment of measures at one time only. While the current measures predict dissolution consideration and a likelihood of dissolution, they do not necessarily predict actual dissolution. Following couples longitudinally could allow for the measurement of the actual prevalence of relationship dissolution due to a mismatch in sexual ideals, as well as the assessment of how destiny and growth beliefs impact the stay or go decisions of participants based on their mismatch. This would provide increased support for the dissolution and sexpectations measures as predictors of future dissolution, allowing researchers and clinicians to target these areas of discrepancy to hopefully prevent discord and dissolution.

The current study explored the effects of a mismatch in sexual ideals on the likelihood of relationship dissolution in romantic couples. Due to previous research demonstrating the importance of relationship ideals, implicit relationship theories, and sex on relationship outcomes, it was predicted that couples not exhibiting matching sexual ideals would be more likely to perceive dissolution, and that the relationship between sexual ideals and dissolution would be moderated by implicit relationship theories (i.e., sexpectations). It was found that couples with discrepant sexual ideals perceived a greater likelihood of relationship dissolution, but this effect was not significantly influenced by destiny and growth beliefs. Understanding the reasons behind these discrepancies (e.g., poor communication) can contribute to the creation of relationship interventions to alleviate the negative impact of discrepant sexual ideals on romantic relationships.

References

Call, V., Sprecher, S., & Schwartz, P. (1995). The incidence and frequency of marital sex in a

   national sample. *Journal of Marriage and Family, 57*(3), 639-652.

Campbell, L., Chin, K. & Stanton, S.C.E., (2016). Initial evidence that individuals form new

   relationships with partners that more closely match their ideal preferences. *Collabra, 2*(1), 2.

Campbell, L., Simpson, J. A., Kashy, D. A., & Fletcher, G. J. O. (2001). Ideal standards, the self,

   and flexibility of ideals in close relationships. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin,

   27*(4), 447-462.

Daily Mail Reporter. (2010, May 31). Six out of 10 couples 'unhappy in their relationship. *Daily

   Mail Online*. Retrieved from http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1282851/Six-10-

   couples-unhappy-relationship.html

Donnelly, D. A. (1993). Sexually inactive marriages. *Journal of Sex Research, 30*(2), 171-179.

Duffy, Judith. (2017, April 1). It's definitely you: study reveals the real reasons why

   relationships break down. *The Herald*. Retrieved from

   http://www.heraldscotland.com/news/15197901.It__39_s_definitely_you__new_study_reveal

   s_the_real_reasons_why_relationships_break_down/#comments-anchor

Edwards, J. N., & Booth, A. (1994). Sexuality, marriage, and well-being: The middle years. In

   A. S. Rossi (Ed.), *Sexuality across the life course* (pp. 233-259, Chapter xvii, 418 Pages)

   University of Chicago Press, Chicago, IL.

Fletcher, G. J. O., Simpson, J. A., & Thomas, G. (2000). Ideals, perceptions, and evaluations in

   early relationship development. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 79*(6), 933-

   940.

Fletcher, G. J. O., Simpson, J. A., Thomas, G., & Giles, L. (1999). Ideals in intimate

relationships. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 76*(1), 72-89.

Impett, E. A., Muise, A., & Peragine, D. (2013). Sexuality in the context of relationships. In L.

Diamond & D. Tolman (Eds.), APA handbook of sexuality and psychology (Vol. 1, pp. 269-

316). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

Kelley, D. L., & Burgoon, J. K. (1991). Understanding marital satisfaction and couple type as

functions of relational expectations. *Human Communication Research, 18*(1), 40-69.

Kelley, H. H., & Thibaut, J. E. (1978). *Interpersonal relations: A theory of interdependence.*

New York: Wiley.

Knee, C. R. (1998). Implicit theories of relationships: Assessment and prediction of romantic

relationship initiation, coping, and longevity. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology,

74*(2), 360–370.

Knee, C. R., Patrick, H., & Lonsbary, C. (2003). Implicit theories of relationships: Orientation

toward evaluation and cultivation. *Personality and Social Psychology Review, 7*(1), 41–55.

Knee, C. R., Nanayakkara, A., Vietor, N. A., Neighbors, C., & Patrick, H. (2001). Implicit

theories of relationships: Who cares if romantic partners are less than ideal? *Personality and

Social Psychology Bulletin, 27*(7), 808-819.

Maxwell, J. A., Muise, A., MacDonald, G., Day, L. C., Rosen, N. O., & Impett, E. A. (2017).

How implicit theories of sexuality shape sexual and relationship well-being. *Journal of

Personality and Social Psychology, 112*(2), 238-279.

Ruvolo, Ann; Veroff, Joseph (1997). "For Better or for Worse: Real-Ideal Discrepancies and the

Marital Well-Being of Newlyweds." Journal of Social and Personal Relationships 14(2): 223-

242.

Simpson, J. A. (1987). The dissolution of romantic relationships: Factors involved in

relationship stability and emotional distress. *Journal of Personality and Social

Psychology*, *53*(4), 683-692.

Sprecher, S., & Fehr, B. (1998). The dissolution of close relationships. In J. H.Harvey (Ed.),

Perspectives on loss (pp. 99–112). Philadelphia, PA: Brunner/Mazel.

Sternberg, R. J., & Barnes, M. L. (1985). Real and ideal others in romantic relationships: Is four

a crowd? *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 49*(6), 1586-1608.

Thibaut, J. W., & Kelley, H. H. (1959). The social psychology of groups. New York: Wiley

Tran, S., Simpson, J. A., & Fletcher, G. J. O. (2008). The role of ideal standards in relationship

initiation processes. In S. Sprecher, A. Wenzel & J. Harvey (Eds.), *Handbook of relationship

initiation.* (pp. 487-498) Psychology Press, New York, NY.

VanderDrift, L. E., Agnew, C. R., & Wilson, J. E. (2009). Nonmarital romantic relationship

commitment and leave behavior: The mediating role of dissolution consideration. *Personality

and Social Psychology Bulletin*, *35*(9), 1220–1232.

Whisman, M. A., Snyder, D. K., & Beach, S. R. H. (2009). Screening for marital and

relationship discord. *Journal of Family Psychology, 23*(2), 247-254.

Appendix A

Demographic Questionnaire (Questions developed by current researchers)

Please provide some basic information about yourself. This information will be used for statistical purposes only and will be treated confidentially.

What is your age?
_____ Years (e.g. 18, 40, etc.)

What is your gender?
○ Male
○ Female
○ If you feel that your gender cannot be represented by one of the above check boxes we invite you to write in how you identify your gender in the space provided here:
  _____

Do you have an exclusive preference for the gender of your ideal sexual partner?
○ Yes, I am only sexually attracted to males
○ Yes, I am only sexually attracted to females
○ No, I have no exclusive preference
○ If you feel that the gender of your ideal sexual partner cannot be represented by one of the above check boxes, we invite you to write in how you identify their gender in the space provided here: _____

What is your race?
○ American Indian or Alaskan Native
○ Asian
○ Black or African American
○ White or Caucasian
○ Hispanic or Latino
○ Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
○ If you feel that your race cannot be represented by one of the above check boxes we invite you to write in how you identify your race in the space provided here:
  _____

Are you fluent in English?
○ Yes
○ No

What is your relationship status?
- ○ Single
- ○ Casually dating
- ○ Seriously dating
- ○ Engaged
- ○ Married
- ○ Divorced
- ○ Widowed
- ○ If you feel that your relationship status cannot be represented by one of the above check boxes we invite you to write in how you identify your relationship status in the space provided here: _____

How long have you been in a relationship with your current romantic partner? (e.g., 2.5 years would be 2 Years, 6 Months):
_____ Years
_____ Months

Do you currently live with your partner?
- ○ Yes, I live with my partner
- ○ No, I do not live with my partner
- ○ I am not in a relationship

Which describes your current sexual orientation?
- ○ Heterosexual
- ○ Lesbian/Gay
- ○ Bisexual
- ○ If you feel that your sexual orientation cannot be represented by one of the above check boxes we invite you to write in how you identify your sexual orientation in the space provided here: _____

Is your romantic partner the:
- ○ same sex as you
- ○ opposite sex from you

Please indicate which of the following best fits your current sexual relationship status:
- ○ One-night stand
- ○ Booty-call relationships
- ○ Friends-with-benefits
- ○ Monogamous
- ○ Swingers
- ○ Polyamorous
- ○ Abstinent/Not currently engaging in a sexual relationship(s)
- ○ If you feel that your sexual relationship status cannot be represented by one of the above check boxes, we invite you to write in how you identify your sexual relationship status here:

_____

If you have more than one partner, please indicate below how long you have been in a relationship with your other partner(s):

Appendix B

Letter of Information (Developed by current researchers)
Project Title:
Sexual Ideals Study 3
Investigators:
Lorne Campbell, Ph.D., Department of Psychology, University of Western Ontario (Principal investigator)
Rhonda Balzarini, Ph. D. candidate, Department of Psychology, University of Western Ontario
Kiersten Dobson, Ph.D. candidate, Department of Psychology, University of Western Ontario
Taylor Kohut, Ph.D., Department of Psychology, University of Western Ontario
Samantha Medd, B.A. candidate, Department of Psychology, University of Western Ontario

LETTER OF INFORMATION

1. **Invitation to Participate**
   We invite you to participate in a research study that examines sexual ideals, conducted by Dr. Lorne Campbell, Rhonda Balzarini, Kiersten Dobson, Dr. Taylor Kohut, and Samantha Medd of the Department of Psychology at the University of Western Ontario.

2. **Purpose of this Letter**
   The purpose of this letter is to provide you with information in order to allow you to make an informed decision regarding participation in this research. Participation may involve exposure to sensitive questions, and it is advised that participants conduct the study in a private place. You have the option to decline to take part or to withdraw from the study at any time without threat of penalty.

3. **Purpose of this Study**
   The purpose of this study is to better understand couple's sexual ideals and preferences and to assess the influence that sexual ideals have on relationships.

4. **Inclusion Criteria**
   To be eligible for this research, both members of a couple must consent to participate, and participants must be able to speak and read English fluently, be at least 18 years or older, must be in a heterosexual relationship, and must be involved in a romantic relationship of at least 4 months duration.

5. **Exclusion Criteria**
   Individuals who are not involved in a romantic relationship of at least 4 months, have a romantic partner who cannot or does not consent to participate in this study, who do not speak English fluently, or who are not 18 years of age or older, are not eligible to participate in this study.

6. **Study Procedures**
   Participation in this study occurs online, and involves <u>anonymously</u> and <u>privately</u> answering a number of questions regarding sexual ideals. This study begins with a number of questions that gather background information, then asks about your ideal sexual relationship and your

perceptions of your partner's ideal sexual relationship. You and your partner's responses will be assigned a unique identifier (response ID) which will be used to link up your responses with your partners, though no identifying information will be collected or stored in our survey.

Both members of each couple must consent to take part in this study, but you will respond to the questionnaire separately and anonymously, and your responses will never be shown to each other.

This study will take approximately 30 minutes to complete and approximately 200 couples will participate in this research. Upon completion, you will be provided a detailed description and explanation of the study.

7. **Possible Risks and Harms**
Please be aware that certain questions are of a very personal nature and could potentially bring minor discomfort. If you experience discomfort for any reason, you are free to withdraw at any time. Additionally, if you experience discomfort and would like to talk with someone about any emotions that the study may have evoked, we recommend contacting a local mental well-being hotline.

8. **Possible Benefits**
You may not directly benefit from participating in this study, but your participation will contribute meaningfully to the body of knowledge in psychology, and will also benefit society by providing greater understanding of sexual ideals and their influence on relationships.

9. **Compensation**
You will receive $1.54 (US) for participating in this study. If you should choose to skip any questions you will still receive full compensation for your participation. Should you choose to withdraw from the study you will receive a pro-rated compensation. Specifically, this study has been divided into 14 questionnaires, and you will be compensated $.011 for each questionnaire of the survey that you initiate, regardless of the number of questions answered.

10. **Voluntary Participation**
Participation in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to participate, refuse to answer any questions, or withdraw from the study at any time. You do not waive any legal rights by consenting to this study.

11. **Confidentiality**
No identifiable information will be collected to ensure your anonymity will be protected. The de-identifiable data we collect will be accessible by the authorized investigators as well as the broader psychology scientific community. More specifically, the data will be posted on the Open Science Framework website (OSF; https://osf.io) so that data may be inspected and analyzed by other researchers. The data that will be shared on the OSF website will not contain any information that can identify you or your partner. If you choose to withdraw from this study before its completion, your data will be removed and deleted from our

database. If you choose to withdraw from the study after its completion, we may not be able to remove your data from the database because we are not collecting any information that would allow us to easily identify your particular responses in the database. Representatives of the University of Western Ontario Non-Medical Research Ethics Board may require access to your study-related records to monitor the conduct of this research.

12. Contacts for Further Information
After you complete this study you will receive a debriefing sheet explaining the nature of the research. If you would like any further information regarding this research project or your participation in the study, you may contact Dr. Lorne Campbell by email (lcampb23@uwo.ca) or Rhonda Balzarini by email (rbalzari@uwo.ca). If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant or the conduct of this study, you may contact the University of Western Ontario Office of Research Ethics by phone (519-661-3036) or email (ethics@uwo.ca).

13. Publication
If the results of the study are published your name will not be used. If you would like to receive a copy of any potential study results, you may contact Rhonda Balzarini by email (rbalzari@uwo.ca).

14. Consent
Please indicate your consent by clicking "I have read the letter of information and I agree to participate" at the bottom of the screen. If you select "I have read the letter of information and I DO NOT agree to participate," you will exit the survey.

Appendix C

Debriefing Form (Developed by current researchers)

Project Title:
Sexual Ideals Study 3
Investigators:
Lorne Campbell, Ph.D., Department of Psychology, University of Western Ontario (Principal investigator)
Rhonda Balzarini, Ph. D. candidate, Department of Psychology, University of Western Ontario
Kiersten Dobson, Ph. D. candidate, Department of Psychology, University of Western Ontario
Taylor Kohut, Ph.D., Department of Psychology, University of Western Ontario
Samantha Medd, B.A. candidate, Department of Psychology, University of Western Ontario

Debriefing Form

Thank you for participating in this research. You have made an important contribution to a developing body of knowledge in psychology. Now that your participation is complete, we can tell you more about the study you have just participated in.

The items that were presented to you during this survey were generated in a previous study where participants were asked to build a mental picture of their ideal sexual relationship and using words or phrases, describe the important characteristics of the sexual partner, sexual behaviors, and sexual encounter. A second study was conducted to acquire ratings for each of these items so that we could identify the items that were most commonly desired. In the current study, we asked you to identify what your ideals are and what your partner's ideals are, in addition to asking your partner the same questions. This will allow us to assess whether romantic partners make accurate judgements, that is, whether partners correctly identify each other's sexual ideals, and whether romantic partners overestimate or underestimate how important these sexual ideals are to each other.

Additionally, we asked you and your romantic partner to what extent you believed your partner met your ideals, and to what extent you believed you met theirs. This will allow us to assess whether romantic partners believe they are meeting each other's ideals, and how this impacts important relationship outcomes (e.g., relationship satisfaction, commitment, etc.).

Your responses and participation are much appreciated. Without your involvement, it would not be possible to conduct this research. Thank you.

If you have any further questions about this research you may contact Dr. Lorne Campbell by email (lcampb23@uwo.ca) or Rhonda Balzarini by email (rbalzari@uwo.ca). If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant or the conduct of this study, you may contact The Office of Research Ethics (519) 661-3036, email: ethics@uwo.ca.

Please print this letter for your future reference

Appendix D

Sexual Ideals Questionnaire- Self [No formal references, items developed by current researchers based on the results of Sexual Ideals (Study 1)]

Please build a mental picture of **your IDEAL sexual relationship**. Your ideal sexual relationship may or may not reflect your current sexual relationship with your partner.

Please use the items below, which refer to characteristics about sexual partners, sexual behaviors, and sexual encounters, to describe YOUR ideal sexual relationship to us.

Rate each of following items on a scale from -3 to +3, where **-3 = <u>very unimportant</u> in your ideal sexual relationship** and **+3 = <u>very important</u> in your ideal sexual relationship**.

Keep in mind that there are no right or wrong answers, we are simply interested in your opinion. Also, we are only interested in whether these factors apply to your ideal sexual relationships specifically, and not your experiences with relationships more broadly.

-3	-2	-1	0	1	2	3
Very Unimportant	**Unimportant**	**Somewhat Unimportant**	**Neutral**	**Somewhat important**	**Important**	**Very important**

1. Ideal sexual partner is my preferred gender
2. Ideal sexual partner is reciprocal (e.g. giving and receiving)
3. Ideal sexual partner is loving
4. Ideal sexual encounter feels safe
5. Ideal sexual partner is supportive
6. Ideal sexual encounter involves vaginal sex
7. Ideal sexual partner is monogamous
8. In love with my ideal sexual partner
9. Use protection (e.g. birth control, condoms) with ideal sexual partner
10. Engage in oral sex with ideal sexual partner
11. Go on dates with ideal sexual partner
12. Engage in sucking (non-genital) in ideal sexual encounter
13. Engage in nipple stimulation in ideal sexual encounter
14. Ideal sexual partner is family oriented
15. Ideal sexual partner is kinky
16. Ideal sexual encounter would involve being ejaculated on/in or ejaculating on/in my partner
17. Ideal sexual encounter would involve dirty talk
18. Ideal sexual encounter would involve showering together

19. Ideal sexual encounter would involve swallowing my partner's ejaculate OR my partner swallowing my ejaculate
20. Ideal sexual encounter would involve spanking
21. Ideal sexual encounter would involve hair pulling
22. Ideal sexual partner is my preferred ethnicity
23. Ideal sexual encounter occurs during my preferred time of the day
24. Ideal sexual partner identifies with my preferred religion
25. Ideal sexual encounter would involve bondage
26. Ideal sexual encounter would involve tickling
27. Ideal sexual encounter would involve anal sex
28. Ideal sexual partner is promiscuous
29. Ideal sexual partner has my preferred hair color
30. Ideal sexual encounter would involve choking

Appendix E

Attention and Instruction Checks (Questions developed by current researchers)

What do you think the purpose of this study is?
You were asked to indicate how important the provided items were to your idea of a particular type of relationship. What type of relationship was this?
○ Familial
○ Romantic
○ Sexual
○ Platonic

Were any of the items you were shown problematic or difficult to answer?
○ No
○ Yes (please explain) _____

Knowing the amount of attention you paid to this survey, would you recommend we use your data?
○ Yes
○ No

Did you share information with your partner about your ideals, or ask them about their ideals before/while you were completing the study?
○ Yes
○ No

Please select false
○ True
○ False

Please select agree
○ Strongly disagree
○ Disagree
○ Somewhat disagree
○ Neither agree nor disagree
○ Somewhat agree
○ Agree
○ Strongly agree