

How to Keep the Sexual Spark Alive?

The Role of Sexual Assertiveness in Heterosexual Relationships

Michèle Borgmann & Stefanie Gonin-Spahn

Department of Health Psychology and Behavioral Medicine, Institute of Psychology, University of Bern, Switzerland

Background

The sexual spark typically reaches its peak in the early stages of a relationship and decreases over time [1,2]. Since sexuality remains an important factor in romantic relationships, the question is how to keep the sexual spark alive.

Sexual assertiveness could be a factor that promotes the sexual spark in romantic relationships, since it is associated with greater sexual functioning and satisfaction [3,4].

Sexual assertiveness involves per definition an interpersonal interaction. However, previous studies have mainly focused on individual rather than couple's level. To fill this research gap, a dyadic format was adopted.

Aim

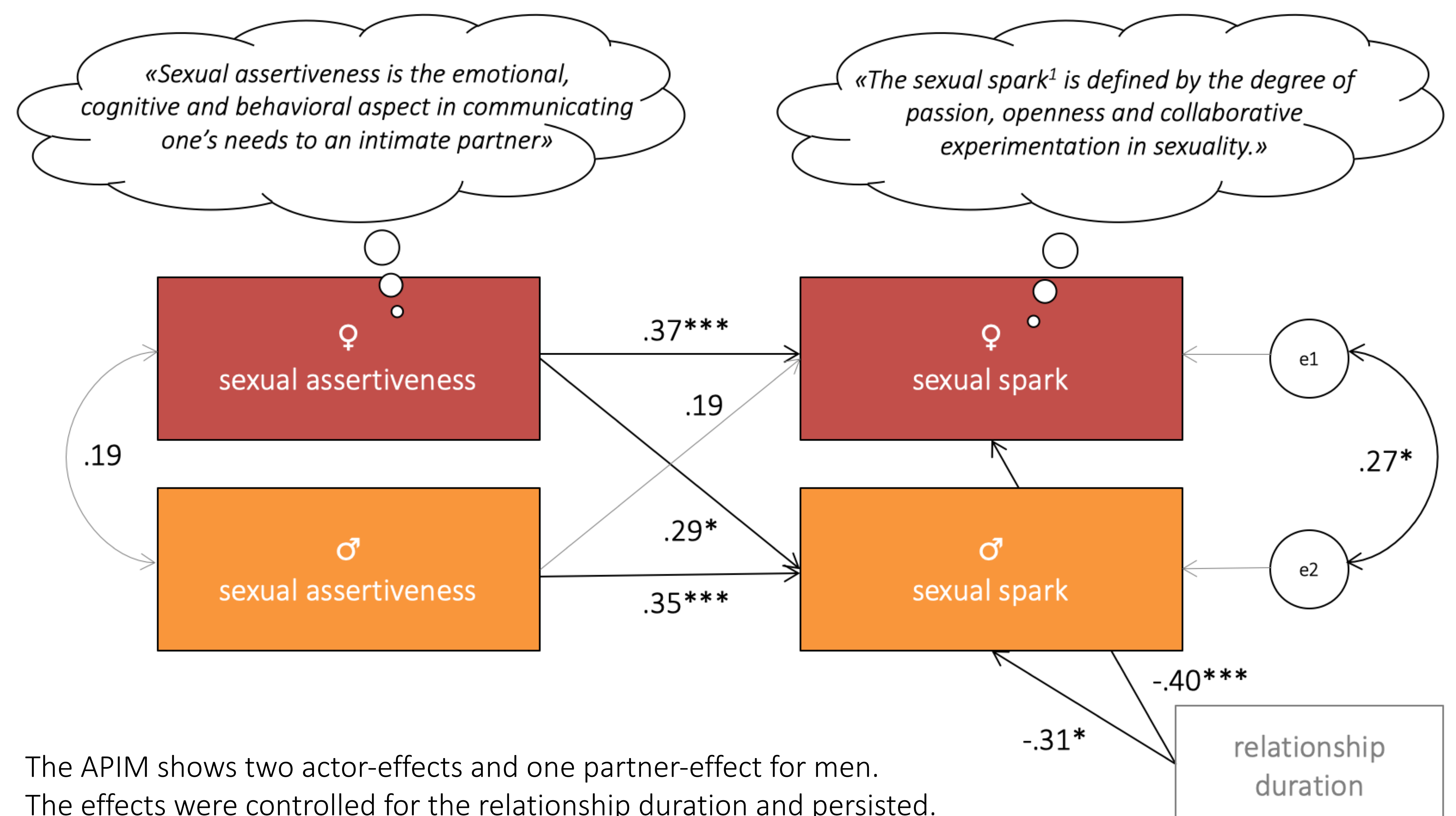
The aim of this study is to investigate the effect of women's and men's sexual assertiveness on their perceived sexual spark in a romantic relationship.

Methods

- Between June 2018 and March 2019
- Online questionnaire about sexuality, relationships and well-being
- 60 heterosexual couples between 18 and 75 years (M=36, SD=13)

- An Actor-Partner Interdependence Model (APIM) was calculated to test actor effects (horizontal paths) and partner effects (vertical paths).
- The multidimensional sexuality questionnaire (MSQ) for sexual assertiveness [5] and the questionnaire of sexual experience in close relationships (FESP) for the sexual spark [2] were used to assess the two constructs.

Results



Discussion

How sexual assertiveness predicts the sexual spark in a relationship differs between women and men. If a woman can communicate her sexual needs in the relationship, both her and her partner will perceive their sexual spark as greater. Yet, if a man can communicate his needs in the relationship, only he will perceive the sexual spark as more intense.

One reason for this could be the stereotypical gender roles according to which sexual assertiveness is rather associated with male roles [6]. Sexual assertiveness is assumed to be normal for men and therefore has no special effect on women, whereas it is exciting for men when women say what they want, because historically this was not common practice for many centuries [7].

Through fostering sexual assertiveness – especially the women's – our results could be put into practice.

References

- Mark, K. P., & Lasso, J. A. (2018). Maintaining sexual desire in long-term relationships: A systematic review and conceptual model. *The Journal of Sex Research*, 55(4-5), 563-581.
- Irmer, J. V. (2008). Die Rolle des Sexuallebens in einer romantischen Partnerschaft für die Beziehungszufriedenheit: Der Fragebogen zum Erleben von Sexualität in engen Partnerschaften (FESP). *Zeitschrift A. D für Familienforschung*, 20(3), 229-246.
- Ménard, ., & Offman, A. (2009). The interrelationships between sexual self-esteem, sexual assertiveness and sexual satisfaction. *The Canadian Journal of Human Sexuality*, 18(1/2), 35.
- Leclerc, B., Bergeron, S., Brassard, A., Bélanger, C., Steben, M., & Lambert, B. (2015). Attachment, sexual assertiveness, and sexual outcomes in women with provoked vestibulodynia and their partners: A mediation model. *Archives of sexual behavior*, 44(6), 1561-1572.
- Snell, W. E., Fisher, T. D., & Walters, A. S. (1993). The Multidimensional Sexuality Questionnaire: An objective self-report measure of psychological tendencies associated with human sexuality. *Annals of Sex Research*, 6(1), 27-55.
- Greene, K., & Faulkner, S. L. (2005). Gender, belief in the sexual double standard, and sexual talk in heterosexual dating relationships. *Sex Roles*, 53(3-4), 239-251.
- Gagnon, J. H. (1990). The explicit and implicit use of the scripting perspective in sex research. *Annual review of sex research*, 1(1), 1-43.

Contact

M. Sc. Michèle Borgmann
Institute of Psychology
University of Bern
CH - 3012 Bern
Mail: michele.borgmann@psy.unibe.ch