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Self-expansion during couples vacations linked to sexual intimacy and passion post-vacation

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Proceedings of the Australian and New Zealand Association for Leisure Studies (ANZALS) 30th Anniversary Conference

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Self-expansion during couples vacations linked to sexual intimacy and passion post-vacation

Moji Shahvali (Breda University of Applied Sciences), John Coffey (Arizona State University), Ondrej Mitas (Breda University of Applied Sciences) & Macel Bastiaansen (Breda University of Applied Sciences)

Research shows that core family leisure, rituals, and frequent connection moments during our day-to-day lives are necessary for a well-functioning romantic relationship, but so are challenging and novel experiences away from the routine. Based on the self-expansion model, novel and self-expanding activities would help maintain a relationship and keep the spark alive. This can especially be the case if the novel joint experiences are stretched over a longer period, like in a vacation setting. There is not much empirical evidence supporting this hypothesis, and self-expansion has been mostly documented during very short lab-based experiences such as a 10-minute novel conversation. Using two datasets, we examined the link between extended vacation experiences of romantic partners and different markers of their relationship quality. More specifically, we measured the amount of novelty, growth, and self-expansion experienced by partners, individually, during their joint or shared vacations over the past year. We developed and tested 2 scales for this matter. We expected that such experiences of partners would be linked to different aspects of their relationship quality. Over two hundred American cohabiting couples were recruited via MTurk and were asked to take one survey per partner. These were couples who were living with each other for some time with no kids in the house, ranging from 1 to 50 years. We found compelling support for our hypothesis. Higher self-expansion experienced during joint vacations - and surprisingly not individual vacations - was significantly linked to higher physical intimacy at the end of the year, as one important domain of romantic passion. That meant more sex, touching, and more affection between partners at the time of data collection following those vacations. As romantic relationships age, novel tourism experiences as a part of the leisure portfolio of couples can help keep the love and passion alive. We propose certain leisure activities as a methodological extension of self-expansion that extends beyond lab studies or singular self-expanding activities.

Keywords: *couple vacations; couples; joint leisure; romantic passion; self-expansion*