

## Abstract

Women's Sexual Fantasies in Context: The Emotional Content of Sexual Fantasies, Psychological and Interpersonal Distress, and Satisfaction in Romantic Relationships

by

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Background: Psychoanalytic thinkers propose that aspects of an individual's sexual fantasies are related to her internal representations of self and significant others and her overall psychological and interpersonal functioning. The present study aims to elucidate the significance of sexual fantasies with respect to women's emotional and interpersonal lives. The study evaluated a model, which hypothesized that internal representations of self and others (e.g. attachment security, maturity of object relations) along with psychological and interpersonal factors would predict both the emotional content (guilt, fear, affection) of written sexual fantasy narratives, and overall romantic satisfaction in heterosexual women. The study also hypothesized that the emotional content of sexual fantasies would mediate the relationship between internal representations of self/other and romantic satisfaction. Methods: Five hundred and thirty four women completed self-report questionnaires online. Subsequently, the sexual fantasies of 20 women (10 with higher levels of psychological and interpersonal distress, 10 with lower levels of psychological and interpersonal distress) were qualitatively examined and compared with respect to differences in their emotional and thematic content.

Results: The hypotheses were partially supported: women with more attachment anxiety, as well as more psychological symptoms and interpersonal difficulties, had more negative emotional reactions to their fantasies, were less satisfied with their current romantic relationship and reported less frequent sexual activity and orgasm with their current partner. Confirmatory factor analyses lead to revisions of the theoretical model. Respecification of the study model found that psychological and interpersonal distress mediated the relationship between negative emotional reactivity to sexual fantasy and lower romantic satisfaction, and between negative emotional reactivity to fantasy and less frequent sexual activity with current partner. Conclusions: Current findings suggest links between women's negative emotional reactivity to their sexual fantasies and lower satisfaction with both the emotional and sexual components of their current romantic relationship. The mediation model suggests that this relationship is explained by each of these factors association with psychological and interpersonal distress.