



Newlywed Couples' Own and Partner Sexual Disgust Sensitivities Interact to Predict Their Marital Satisfaction Through Their Sexual Satisfaction

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Abstract

Sex is integral to maintaining a satisfying long-term romantic relationship such as marriage. It is thus important to identify the factors that promote sexual satisfaction in these relationships. To this end, we examined the extent to which a crucial evolved individual difference—sexual disgust sensitivity—impacts people's sexual satisfaction and relationship satisfaction. Using a two-year longitudinal study of 102 newlywed couples (204 individuals), we demonstrated that, rather than exerting main effects, the interaction of both couple members' sexual disgust sensitivities was indirectly associated with marital satisfaction through sexual satisfaction. People whose partners' sexual disgust sensitivities were relatively similar (versus dissimilar) to their own maintained higher levels of sexual satisfaction across the first two years of marriage, which was associated with similarly elevated marital satisfaction. Not only do these findings highlight the importance of integrating evolutionary perspectives and relationship science, they underscore the value of conducting dyadic research to examine the unique intersection of both couple members' characteristics for people's relationship outcomes.

Keywords Sexual disgust sensitivity · Sexual satisfaction · Relationship satisfaction · Evolutionary perspectives

Introduction

Long-term romantic relationships are among the most important relationships in people's lives. Not only do they play a critical role in reproduction (Symons, 1979; Trivers, 1972), they are strongly associated with people's physical and mental health (Holt-Lunstad, Smith, & Layton, 2010; Liu & Umberson, 2008; Proulx, Helms, & Buehler, 2007; Robles, Slatcher, Trombello, & McGinn, 2014). For example, people who are satisfied (versus dissatisfied) with their long-term relationships have a lower mortality risk (House, Landis, & Umberson, 1988). Nevertheless, it is inherently difficult to maintain satisfying long-term relationships such as marriage, evidenced by the fact that marital satisfaction tends to decline

over time (Meltzer, McNulty, Jackson, & Karney, 2014; Van Laningham, Johnson, & Amato, 2001), and divorce rates in many Western countries fall between 30 and 50% (Amato & James, 2010; Schoen & Canudas-Romo, 2006).

One way that people may successfully buffer against such declining relationship satisfaction (Byers, 2005; Impett, Muise, & Peragine, 2014; Sprecher & Cate, 2004) is to maintain satisfying sexual relationships with their partners. Not only does sexual satisfaction promote long-term pair bonding (Meltzer et al., 2017), recent research suggests it can offset declines in relationship satisfaction over time (McNulty, Wenner, & Fisher, 2016; Yeh, Lorenz, Wickrama, Conger, & Elder, 2006). Indeed, two independent, longitudinal studies of newlywed couples demonstrated that spouses who reported higher (versus lower) sexual satisfaction at a given assessment reported higher marital satisfaction six months later, controlling for their marital satisfaction at that given assessment (McNulty et al., 2016). Accordingly, developing a better understanding of the factors that impact long-term couples' sexual satisfaction may help to improve their overall relationship functioning.

In doing so, it is likely beneficial to consider each couple members' individual differences. Indeed, the

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vulnerability-stress-adaptation model of relationships (Karney & Bradbury, 1995) posits that people's enduring vulnerabilities, or individual differences, impact their relationship outcomes, such as their sexual and relationship satisfaction. Drawing from evolutionary perspectives (see Tybur, Lieberman, & Griskevicius, 2009), there is reason to suspect that couple members' sexual disgust sensitivities, or their tendencies to experience disgust in response to biologically suboptimal sexual partners and behaviors, may be one notable individual difference that impacts their perceived sexual quality in their long-term relationships. Not only is sexual disgust antithetical to sexual arousal (de Jong, van Overveld, & Borg, 2013; Koukounas & McCabe, 1997), people's sexual disgust sensitivities predict their willingness to engage in various sexual behaviors (de Jong et al., 2013; Rempel & Baumgartner, 2003). It is thus possible that people's sexual disgust sensitivities negatively impact their sexual satisfaction with their partner, which may have negative implications for their relationship satisfaction.

The goal of the current research was to examine this possibility. In pursuit of this goal, the remainder of this introduction is divided into three sections. The first section describes theoretical and empirical work suggesting that sexual disgust sensitivity may negatively impact people's sexual satisfaction and long-term relationship satisfaction. The second section highlights the interdependence inherent to long-term relationships and, in doing so, raises the possibility that each couple member's sexual disgust sensitivity may interact to predict his or her sexual and relationship satisfaction. The third section summarizes the present research, which drew upon data from a two-year, longitudinal study of newlywed couples to examine the associations between (a) people's own sexual disgust sensitivities, (b) their partners' sexual disgust sensitivities, (c) their sexual satisfaction, and (d) their marital satisfaction.

Sexual Disgust Sensitivity in the Context of Long-Term Relationships

As noted, sexual disgust is an evolved emotion that functions to motivate people to avoid biologically suboptimal partners (e.g., kin, physically unattractive mates), fitness-reducing sexual behaviors (e.g., promiscuity), and reproductively risky sexual situations (e.g., one-night stands) (Tybur et al., 2009). Given there are individual differences in the extent to which such partners, behaviors, and situations are reproductively threatening (Al-Shawaf, Lewis, & Buss, 2015; Curtis, Aunger, & Rabie, 2004), people differ in the extent to which such stimuli elicit disgust responses. For example, people higher (versus lower) in disease vulnerability report higher sexual disgust sensitivities (Tybur et al., 2009). Likewise, risky sexual situations such as one-night stands are more costly for women than for men and thus women display higher sexual disgust sensitivities than do men (Curtis et al.,

2004; Haidt, MacCauley, & Rozin, 1994; Sevi, Aral, & Eskenazi, 2018; Tybur et al., 2009, 2011).

An adaptationist perspective further posits that these individual differences in sexual disgust sensitivity facilitate differences in people's sexual motivations, expectations, and behaviors. Empirical evidence supports this idea. For instance, people higher (versus lower) in sexual disgust sensitivity report lower sexual desire and stronger inhibition of sexual arousal (de Jong et al., 2013) as well as fewer sexual partners (Al-Shawaf et al., 2015; O'Shea, DeBruine, & Jones, 2019) and reduced enjoyment of sexual variety (O'Shea et al., 2019; Rempel & Baumgartner, 2003; also see Morandini et al., 2019; Timmers, Bossio, & Chivers, 2018).

According to the interpersonal exchange model of sexual satisfaction (Lawrance & Byers, 1995), such sexual motivations, expectations, and behaviors are key components of people's sexual exchanges in long-term romantic relationships that ultimately impact their sexual satisfaction. Indeed, recent research has demonstrated that people who report heightened (versus dampened) sexual motivations also report heightened sexual satisfaction (Gewirtz-Meydan & Finzi-Dottan, 2018). Likewise, people who engage in less sexual variety in their long-term relationships report lower sexual satisfaction than people who engage in more sexual variety (Frederick, Lever, Gillespie, & Garcia, 2017). It thus seems reasonable to predict that, in the context of long-term relationships, people's sexual disgust sensitivities may undermine their sexual satisfaction such that those with higher (versus lower) sexual disgust sensitivities report lower sexual satisfaction.

Moreover, given that sex is integral to long-term romantic relationships (Byers, 2005; Impett et al., 2014; Meltzer et al., 2017; Sprecher & Cate, 2004), and given that maintaining a satisfying sex life can help buffer people against declines in relationship satisfaction (McNulty et al., 2016), it also seems reasonable to expect individuals' sexual disgust sensitivity to indirectly predict their relationship satisfaction through their sexual satisfaction. That is, we might expect people with higher (versus lower) sexual disgust sensitivities to report lower relationship satisfaction through their reduced sexual satisfaction. Nevertheless, we are not aware of any prior research that has examined these possibilities. Thus, the goal of the current paper was to examine the associations between people's sexual disgust sensitivity, sexual satisfaction, and relationship satisfaction in the context of long-term relationships.

Considering the Interdependent Nature of Long-Term Relationships

Long-term romantic relationships are inherently interdependent (Kelley & Thibaut, 1978). It is thus important to consider not only the role that people's own sexual disgust sensitivities

may play for their own sexual satisfaction, but also the unique impact their partners' sexual disgust sensitivities may have on their own sexual satisfaction. Indeed, empirical evidence demonstrates that people's partners' traits uniquely impact their own sexual and relationship outcomes (Butzer & Campbell, 2008; French, Altgelt, & Meltzer, 2019; Muise, Impett, & Desmarais, 2013; Theiss, 2011; Velten, Brailovskaia, & Margraf, 2019; Velten & Margraf, 2017). For example, people's partners' personality traits impact their own extra-pair sexual behavior independent of their own personality traits (Altgelt, Reyes, French, Meltzer, & McNulty, 2018). Likewise, people's partners' sexual goals impact their own sexual satisfaction independent of their own sexual goals (Muise et al., 2013). Accordingly, we examined the unique associations between people's own and their partners' sexual disgust sensitivities and their own sexual satisfaction and relationship satisfaction.

Perhaps most importantly, however, each couple member's unique qualities can intersect to influence each person's relationship outcomes (see Finkel, Simpson, & Eastwick, 2017). Thus, independent of exerting main effects, it is immensely important to consider the interactive effect of both couple members' sexual disgust sensitivities for each couple member's sexual and relationship satisfaction (Kenny & Kashy, 2011). Theoretical models of similarity and satisfaction (Burleson & Denton, 1992; Davis, 1981) posit that similarities among couple members facilitate rewarding interactions that reinforce feelings of satisfaction (for evidence in the context of sexual attitudes, preferences, and traits, see Cupach & Metts, 1995; Lykins, Janssen, Newhouse, Heiman, & Rafaeli, 2012; Purnine & Carey, 1999). Accordingly, people who endorse similar (versus dissimilar) levels of sexual disgust sensitivity as their partner— independent of each couple member's absolute level of sexual disgust sensitivity—may experience more satisfying sexual relationships and thus report higher relationship satisfaction. We thus additionally examined the dyadic interaction between both couple members' sexual disgust sensitivities for each couple member's sexual satisfaction and relationship satisfaction.

Overview of the Present Research

The present study utilized a two-year, longitudinal study of newlywed couples to examine the extent to which couple members' sexual disgust sensitivities—their tendencies to experience disgust in response to reproductively risky sexual partners and behaviors—may influence their sexual and marital satisfaction. It is worth noting that there are at least two benefits to using a sample of newlywed couples to examine these associations. First, given that newlyweds experience significant changes in both sexual and relationship satisfaction (McNulty et al., 2016), they are an ideal

sample in which to account for meaningful variance in both types of satisfaction. Second, to our knowledge, no research has examined the implications of sexual disgust sensitivity for marital outcomes and thus the current study addresses this gap.

We used this longitudinal study of newlywed couples to examine the extent to which people's own and/or their partner's sexual disgust sensitivities predicted their sexual satisfaction trajectories (i.e., their sexual satisfaction at the start of their marriages and their changes in sexual satisfaction) over the first two years of marriage (Aim 1). Given that sexual disgust sensitivity can reduce people's sexual motivations, expectations, and behaviors, which are crucial for sexual satisfaction (Lawrance & Byers, 1995), we predicted that those with higher (versus lower) sexual disgust sensitivities and/or those whose partners reported higher (versus lower) sexual disgust sensitivities would report lower sexual satisfaction. Taking into account the interdependent nature of long-term relationships, we further examined the extent to which the similarity between couple members' sexual disgust sensitivities (i.e., the interaction) predicted each couple member's sexual satisfaction trajectory (Aim 2). Drawing from theoretical models of similarity and satisfaction (Burleson & Denton, 1992; Davis, 1981), we predicted that people whose partners reported similar (versus dissimilar) sexual disgust sensitivities to their own would report higher sexual satisfaction. Finally, given that sexual satisfaction can protect and maintain relationship satisfaction (McNulty et al., 2016), we also examined the possibility that people's own sexual disgust sensitivities, their partners' sexual disgust sensitivities, and/or the similarity between couple members' sexual disgust sensitivities may indirectly impact their marital satisfaction through their sexual satisfaction (Aim 3). Of note, to ensure any primary associations emerged independent of (a) the two other types of disgust sensitivity (i.e., own and partner pathogen disgust sensitivity and moral disgust sensitivity), (b) motivations to engage in casual sex (i.e., own and partner sociosexual orientations; Simpson & Gangestad, 1991), (c) participants' biological sex, (d) whether participants had been previously married, and (e) couples' relationship length prior to marriage, we assessed and controlled for each of these potential covariates in follow-up robustness analyses.

Method

Participants

Participants were 104 newlywed couples (99 heterosexual couples, 5 same-sex female couples) living in northern Florida. We recruited participants using Facebook

advertisements and flyers posted around the community. Eligibility was based on the broader study and required that all participants (a) were married for less than four months, (b) were at least 18 years of age, and (c) spoke English (to ensure comprehension of the questionnaires).¹ We initially additionally required that both couple members were not previously married, but recruitment was slower than anticipated and thus we dropped this eligibility criterion four months into recruitment. Data collection was initially planned for 12 months but was extended three additional months to increase sample size. In total, 323 couples responded to our advertisements. Of those, 163 couples were ineligible and an additional 56 couples chose not to participate; the remaining 104 couples comprised our total sample. Both couple members of one heterosexual couple and the husband of a second heterosexual couple failed to complete the sexual disgust sensitivity measure; we thus excluded both couples from the current analyses, resulting in a final sample of 102 couples (204 individuals). A sensitivity analysis that accounted for repeated assessments [sexual satisfaction: intraclass correlation coefficient (ICC) = .61; see Snijders & Bosker, 2011) and the dyadic nature of our data (sexual satisfaction: ICC = .95; see Finkel, Eastwick, & Reis, 2015) indicated that our effective sample size of 159 allowed us to detect an effect as small as effect-size $r = .22$ with power = .80.

At baseline, these 97 husbands and 107 wives were on average 31.84 (SD = 10.68) and 29.94 (SD = 9.52) years of age, respectively, and completed on average 15.89 (SD = 2.91) and 15.98 (SD = 2.55) years of education, respectively. Most husbands (66%) and wives (58%) were employed full time, though 16% of husbands and 20% of wives were full-time students. Husbands and wives reported a mean personal income of US\$34,803 (SD = \$23,262) and US\$31,812 (SD = \$43,626) annually, respectively. The majority of husbands (79%) and wives (73%) self-identified as Caucasian, 11% of husbands and 12% wives self-identified as African American, 4% of husbands and 7% of wives self-identified as Hispanic or Latinx, 1% of wives self-identified as Asian, and 4% of husbands and 7% of wives self-identified as another race or more than one race. Thirteen husbands and 9 wives self-reported they had been previously married. Couples on

average were together 45.76 (SD = 37.09) months prior to marriage, and 29.3% self-reported they had at least one child.

Procedure

After enrolling in the study, each couple member completed a packet of questionnaires online via Qualtrics.com or through the mail. These questionnaires included a consent form approved by the local human-subjects review board; measures assessing both couple members' disgust sensitivities, sexual satisfaction, marital satisfaction, sociosexuality (to be used as a covariate), and demographic information (including their biological sex, whether they had been previously married, and their relationship length prior to marriage, which we used as covariates); additional measures beyond the scope of the current analyses; and a letter instructing couple members to complete their questionnaires independently of each other. We compensated couples \$100 for completing these baseline questionnaires and attending a corresponding laboratory session that is beyond the scope of the current analyses.

At approximately 4-month intervals across the subsequent two years (for a total of seven assessments), we re-contacted couples and again mailed packets of questionnaires that included measures of sexual satisfaction and marital satisfaction, other measures beyond the scope of these analyses, and a letter reminding spouses to complete their questionnaires independently. Couples received \$25 for completing each follow-up assessment. Notably, our attrition was quite low; 97% of participants completed at least one follow-up assessment, and 75% of participants completed all follow-up assessments.

Measures²

Sexual Disgust Sensitivity

At baseline, we assessed each couple member's sexual disgust sensitivity using the sexual disgust sensitivity subscale of the Three-Domain Disgust Scale (TDDS; Tybur et al., 2009). This subscale consists of seven items that require participants to indicate their level of disgust toward various sexual concepts, acts, and situations (e.g., "watching a pornographic video"), using a 7-point scale (1 = not at all disgusting; 7 = extremely disgusting). We averaged participants' responses; higher scores reflect higher sexual disgust sensitivity. Participants also completed the pathogen disgust sensitivity and moral disgust sensitivity subscales of the TDDS, which we used as covariates in follow-up robustness analyses. Internal consistency of all three subscales was

¹ Four previously published papers have drawn from this broader longitudinal study (Du et al., 2020; French et al., 2019; French & Meltzer, 2020; Hicks et al., 2021). Du et al. (2020) used one measure of marital satisfaction (the semantic differential) to illustrate and compare multiple Bayesian synthesis approaches. French et al. (2019) examined the associations between both couple members' sociosexual orientations, marital satisfaction, and dissolution. French and Meltzer (2020) examined the extent to which a given woman's changes in hormonal contraceptive use relative to her use at relationship formation is associated with her sexual satisfaction. Finally, Hicks et al. (2021) examined the extent to which people are able to explicitly report their implicitly assessed partner evaluations.

² We provide all measures on the OSF: https://osf.io/bstf3/?view_only=355462d11c3748e2936cb272d5ac2d77.

high (for sexual disgust: husbands' $\alpha = .86$, wives' $\alpha = .79$; for pathogen disgust: husbands' $\alpha = .82$, wives' $\alpha = .66$; for moral disgust: husbands' $\alpha = .89$, wives' $\alpha = .81$).³

Sexual Satisfaction

At all assessments, we assessed each couple member's sexual satisfaction using the Index of Sexual Satisfaction (Hudson, 1998), which required participants to report the frequency with which 25 statements characterize their sexual relationship with their partner (e.g., "I think that our sex is wonderful") using a 7-point scale ($1 =$ none of the time; $7 =$ all of the time). We reverse scored appropriate items and then averaged across all items to form an index of sexual satisfaction at each assessment; higher scores reflect higher sexual satisfaction. Internal consistency was high (across all assessments, husbands' and wives' $\alpha s \geq .94$).

Marital Satisfaction

At all assessments, we assessed each couple member's marital satisfaction using three measures. The first measure was the Quality of Marriage Index (Norton, 1983), which is a 6-item scale assessing participants' agreement or disagreement with general statements about the quality of their marriage (e.g., "we have a good marriage")—five items use a 7-point scale ($1 =$ very strong disagreement; $7 =$ very strong agreement) whereas one item uses a 10-point scale ($1 =$ very unhappy; $10 =$ perfectly happy). The second measure was a version of the semantic differential (Osgood, Suci, & Tannenbaum, 1957) that required participants to rate their perceptions of their marriage on 7-point scales anchored between 15 pairs of opposing adjectives (e.g., pleasant—unpleasant). The third measure was the Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale (Schumm et al., 1986), which is a 3-item measure assessing participants' agreement or disagreement with general statements about their marriage (e.g., "how satisfied are you with your relationship with your spouse?") using a 7-point scale ($1 =$ not at all satisfied; $7 =$ extremely satisfied). Not surprisingly, these measures were highly correlated (all $r s \geq .87$). Thus, to be most comprehensive, and to minimize the likelihood that results are specific to one measure, we created a composite satisfaction index for each participant by standardizing their scores across all assessments and averaging those standardized scores; higher scores reflect higher marital

satisfaction.⁴ Internal consistency for each measure was high (across all assessments, husbands' and wives' $\alpha s \geq .89$).

Additional Covariates

Prior work has demonstrated that sexual disgust sensitivity is associated with sociosexuality (Sevi et al., 2018), which is associated with people's sexual and marital satisfaction (French et al., 2019). Thus, to ensure that any associations that may arise between sexual disgust sensitivity and participants' sexual and marital satisfaction are not due to shared variance with sociosexuality, we assessed their sociosexuality and controlled for it in follow-up robustness analyses. Specifically, at baseline, each couple member completed the revised Sociosexual Orientation Inventory (Penke & Asendorpf, 2008), which is a 9-item measure assessing people's sociosexual behaviors (e.g., "With how many different partners have you had sexual intercourse on one and only one occasion?"), attitudes (e.g., "Prior to getting married, I believed that sex without love is ok"), and desires (e.g., "How often do you experience sexual arousal when you are in contact with someone other than your spouse?") that we modified for use with newlyweds (see French et al., 2019). Participants provided open-ended numerical responses to the items assessing their sociosexual behaviors, and they used 9-point scales to indicate the frequency with which they experienced sociosexual desires ($1 =$ never; $9 =$ at least once a day) as well as their agreement with sociosexual attitudes ($1 =$ strongly disagree; $9 =$ strongly agree). We computed participants' global sociosexual orientations using the guidelines suggested by Penke and Asendorpf (2008); higher scores reflect increased motivations to pursue uncommitted sex. Internal consistency was high (husbands' and wives' $\alpha s \geq .83$). Two husbands and one wife failed to complete this measure.

Prior work has also demonstrated that women typically endorse higher levels of sexual disgust sensitivity than do men (e.g., Tybur et al., 2009). Thus, to ensure that any associations that may arise between sexual disgust sensitivity and people's sexual and marital satisfaction are not due to women's tendencies to experience higher sexual disgust, we controlled for participants' biological sex in follow-up robustness analyses. We additionally explored whether our predicted associations differed across men and women.

Finally, given that previous marital experiences as well as the length of couples' relationships prior to marriage can impact individuals' sexual and marital satisfaction (Altgelt & Meltzer, 2021; Mirecki, Chou, Elliott, & Schneider, 2013), we also assessed (a) whether participants had been previously married and (b) couples' relationship length prior to marriage and controlled for each in follow-up robustness analyses.

³ We additionally calculated McDonald's omega reliability coefficients for all multi-item scales; these coefficients were nearly identical to the Cronbach's alpha coefficients.

⁴ It is worth noting that identical results emerged in our primary analyses when we used each individual measure of marital satisfaction separately.

Specifically, participants indicated whether they had been previously married, which we coded such that $-1 =$ “not previously married” ($n = 170$) and $1 =$ “previously married” ($n = 34$). Both couple members independently reported the length of their relationships prior to marriage; not surprisingly, couple members’ reports were highly correlated, $r = .98, p < .001$, and thus, we averaged their responses to form a couple-level estimate of their relationship length prior to marriage.⁵

Statistical Analyses⁶

To account for the nested nature of our data (repeated assessments were nested within people and people were nested within dyads), we used the mixed-model function in SPSS Version 26 to estimate dyad-indistinguishable (given the five same-sex female couples; see Kenny, Kashy, & Cook, 2006) growth-curve models for all primary analyses.⁷ We first examined the extent to which each couple member’s sexual disgust sensitivity was associated with their own initial sexual satisfaction and/or changes in sexual satisfaction over time by estimating the following model:

$$Y_{ri}(\text{Sexual Satisfaction}) = \pi_{0i}(\text{Intercept}) + \pi_{1i}(\text{Time}) + \pi_{2i}(\text{Time} \times \text{Time}) + b_{3i}(\text{Own Sexual Disgust Sensitivity}) + b_{4i}(\text{Partner Sexual Disgust Sensitivity}) + b_{5i}(\text{Time} \times \text{Own Sexual Disgust Sensitivity}) + b_{6i}(\text{Time} \times \text{Partner Sexual Disgust Sensitivity}) + e_{ri},$$

where we (a) coded Time, which represented wave of assessment, such that baseline was 0 (and thus the Intercept represented individuals’ initial sexual satisfaction), (b) standardized own and partner sexual disgust sensitivity, (c) controlled for Time \times Time to account for the fact that, in this sample, linear declines in sexual satisfaction leveled off over time, (d) allowed the Intercept, Time, and Time \times Time estimates to vary randomly across people (direct tests confirmed this maximal model was the best fitting model; see Matuschek, Kliegel, Vasishth, Baayen, & Bates, 2017), and (e) used restricted maximum likelihood estimation.⁸ We followed recommendations by Cohen, Cohen, West, and Aiken (2013) to remove any nonsignificant interactions from the

model before interpreting results, and we decomposed any significant interactions by identifying the regions of significance of the simple effects, following the recommendations described by Preacher, Curran, and Bauer (2006) to use the Johnson–Neyman method (Johnson & Neyman, 1936).

We then examined the extent to which both couple members’ sexual disgust sensitivities interacted to predict each couple member’s initial sexual satisfaction and/or changes in sexual satisfaction over time by re-estimating Eq. (1) but additionally including the Own Sexual Disgust Sensitivity \times Partner Sexual Disgust Sensitivity interaction and the Time \times Own Sexual Disgust Sensitivity \times Partner Sexual Disgust Sensitivity interaction. Again, we removed any nonsignificant interactions from the model before interpreting results, and we decomposed any significant interactions. To explore the robustness of any associations that emerged across these two models, we conducted a series of follow-up robustness analyses that additionally controlled for (a) the other two disgust sensitivity domains (i.e., own and partner pathogen and moral disgust sensitivities), (b) own and partner sociosexual orientations, (c) participants’ biological sex, (d) whether participants were previously married, and (e) couples’ relationship length prior to marriage; we additionally explored whether participants’ biological sex moderated any associations.

Finally, we examined the extent to which any associations that emerged from these two models indirectly predicted people’s marital satisfaction through their sexual satisfaction by following the procedures recommended by Tofighi and MacKinnon (2011), which involved further examining the association between people’s sexual satisfaction and their marital satisfaction, controlling for couple members’ sexual disgust sensitivities. Specifically, we estimated the following model:

$$Y_{ri}(\text{Marital Satisfaction}) = \pi_{0i}(\text{Intercept}) + \pi_{1i}(\text{Time}) + \pi_{2i}(\text{Time} \times \text{Time}) + \pi_{3i}(\text{Sexual Satisfaction}) + b_{4i}(\text{Own Sexual Disgust Sensitivity}) + b_{5i}(\text{Partner Sexual Disgust Sensitivity}) + b_{6i}(\text{Own Sexual Disgust Sensitivity} \times \text{Partner Sexual Disgust Sensitivity}) + e_{ri},$$

where we (a) coded Time such that baseline was 0, (b) standardized Sexual Satisfaction, Own Sexual Disgust Sensitivity, and Partner Sexual Disgust Sensitivity, (c) allowed the Intercept, Time, and Sexual Satisfaction estimates to vary randomly across individuals (direct tests confirmed this maximal model was the best fitting model; see Matuschek et al., 2017), and (d) used restricted maximum likelihood estimation.⁹ We then used the RMediation package available

⁵ The results remained unchanged in analyses using partners’ individual reports of relationship length prior to marriage.

⁶ We provide all syntax and outputs on the OSF: https://osf.io/bstf3/?view_only=355462d11c3748e2936cb272d5ac2d77.

⁷ Analyses using only the heterosexual couples (i.e., excluding the five same-sex couples) revealed no associations were moderated by participants’ biological sex, supporting our use of indistinguishable models.

⁸ Analyses demonstrated that a model including Time \times Time fit the data better than a model not including Time \times Time, $\chi^2(1) = 4.16, p = .041$.

⁹ Analyses demonstrated this model fit the data no better than a model that included the quadratic estimate of Time, $\chi^2(1) = 0.004, p = .950$; we thus excluded the quadratic estimate.

in R (Tofghi & MacKinnon, 2011) to multiply any significant associations between the predictors (i.e., couple members' sexual disgust sensitivities) and the proposed mediator (i.e., sexual satisfaction) by the association between the proposed mediator and the outcome (i.e., marital satisfaction), which estimates the indirect association between couple members' sexual disgust sensitivities and people's marital satisfaction through their sexual satisfaction.

It is worth noting that the simultaneous assessment of sexual and marital satisfaction allows for the equally plausible alternative interpretation that couple members' sexual disgust sensitivities indirectly predicts people's sexual satisfaction through their marital satisfaction. To test this alternative model, we thus conducted an additional exploratory analysis. Specifically, we re-estimated Eq. (2) but excluded people's sexual satisfaction.

Results

Descriptive Statistics and Preliminary Analyses

Prior to testing our hypotheses, we examined the descriptive statistics for our baseline key variables and covariates. These are presented in Table 1, and a few results are worth highlighting. First, couple members on average reported sexual disgust sensitivities that fell near the midpoint (3.5) of the scale. Wives on average reported higher disgust sensitivities on all three domains and more restricted sociosexual orientations than did husbands, though there was considerable variability in both husbands' and wives' scores. Second, both couple members reported relatively high sexual and marital satisfaction at baseline that did not differ. Nevertheless, there was again variability in these reports.

Next, we examined the bivariate correlations among our baseline key variables and covariates. The results of these analyses are presented in Table 2, and, again, a few results are worth highlighting. First, perhaps somewhat surprisingly, participants' sexual disgust sensitivities were not significantly associated with their own baseline sexual or marital satisfaction. Second, participants' sexual disgust sensitivities were correlated with their moral and pathogen disgust sensitivities. Third, couple members' sexual disgust sensitivities were negatively associated with their sociosexual orientations. Finally, couple members' sexual and marital satisfaction at baseline were positively correlated.

Do Participants' Own and/or Their Partners' Sexual Disgust Sensitivity Predict Their Sexual Satisfaction?

The results of our first model examining the associations between people's own sexual disgust sensitivity, their partners' sexual disgust sensitivity, and their trajectories of sexual satisfaction demonstrated that neither couple member's sexual disgust sensitivity was associated with changes in sexual satisfaction over time (own: $p = .901$; partner: $p = .990$); thus, we removed their interactions with Time. The results of this revised model (presented in the top half of Table 3) revealed that, inconsistent with predictions, neither couple member's sexual disgust sensitivity was associated with their initial sexual satisfaction. That is, we did not detect associations between either couple member's sexual disgust sensitivity and their sexual satisfaction at the start of marriage or changes in their sexual satisfaction across the first two years of marriage. A follow-up robustness analysis revealed that these results remained unchanged when we additionally controlled for

Table 1 Descriptive statistics for all variables at baseline

	Husbands				Wives				Sex Differences		
	<i>M</i>	SE	Range	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	SE	Range	<i>N</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
Sexual Disgust	3.07	0.13	1.00–6.57	97	4.11	0.13	1.43–6.71	107	7.92	104.20	< .001
Sexual Satisfaction	5.96	0.08	2.96–6.96	97	5.90	0.08	2.76–7.00	107	– 0.95	103.33	.343
Marital Satisfaction	0.34	0.06	– 2.58–0.89	97	0.23	0.06	– 1.69–0.89	107	– 1.68	105.18	.096
Pathogen Disgust	4.58	0.10	1.00–7.00	97	5.14	0.10	3.14–7.00	107	4.24	107.71	< .001
Moral Disgust	5.18	0.12	1.00–7.00	96	5.68	0.11	2.29–7.00	107	3.00	110.64	.003
Sociosexuality	3.46	0.16	1.00–7.67	95	3.02	0.16	1.00–6.56	106	– 2.62	102.63	.010
Previously Married	– 0.59	0.07	– 1.00–1.00	97	– 0.74	0.07	– 1.00–1.00	107	– 2.35	103.04	.021

Range is the observed range in these data. Sex differences that have a $p < .05$ are bolded. SEs are reported because descriptive statistics were drawn from mixed modeling (given the nested nature of the data). We did not include couple's relationship length prior to marriage given that we averaged across both couple members' estimates; nevertheless, couples reported being together an average of 45.76 months (SE = 37.09) prior to marriage, ranging from 1.50 months to 204.00 months

Table 2 Zero-order correlations for all variables at baseline

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
(1) Sexual Disgust Sensitivity	–							
(2) Baseline Sexual Satisfaction	–.004	–						
(3) Baseline Marital Satisfaction	–.025	.471***	–					
(4) Pathogen Disgust Sensitivity	.376***	–.130	–.152*	–				
(5) Moral Disgust Sensitivity	.400***	.201**	.134	.350***	–			
(6) Sociosexuality	–.592***	–.140	–.110	–.078	–.297***	–		
(7) Previously Married	–.057	.271**	.125	–.019	.121	.069	–	
(8) Couple’s Relationship Length	–.065	–.247**	–.010	.035	–.115	.091	–.224*	–

To determine significance levels of these bivariate correlations (given the nested nature of the data), we used Griffin and Gonzalez’s (1995) recommendations for estimating the “effective sample size,” adjusted for dependent observations, and the corresponding Z-test

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

(a) own and partner pathogen and moral disgust sensitivities, (b) own and partner sociosexual orientations, (c) participants’ biological sex, (d) whether participants had been previously married, and (e) couples’ relationship length prior to marriage (own: $p = .158$; partner: $p = .771$). A second follow-up analysis demonstrated that participants’ biological sex did not moderate either nonsignificant association (own: $p = .461$; partner: $p = .900$).

Do Both Couple Members’ Sexual Disgust Sensitivities Interact to Predict Each Couple Member’s Sexual Satisfaction?

The results of the model examining the association between the interaction of both couple members’ sexual disgust sensitivities and the trajectories of each couple member’s sexual satisfaction revealed that none of the interactions involving

Time reached statistical significance (all $ps \geq .333$); thus, we removed these interactions with Time. The results of this revised model (presented in the bottom half of Table 3) demonstrated that, consistent with predictions, the interaction between both couple members’ sexual disgust sensitivities was associated with each couple member’s initial sexual satisfaction. A regions of significance test revealed that own sexual disgust sensitivity was significantly negatively associated with initial sexual satisfaction among people whose partners’ sexual disgust sensitivities were 1.42 SDs lower than the sample mean, but significantly positively associated with initial sexual satisfaction among people whose partners’ sexual disgust sensitivities were 0.56 SDs higher than the sample mean (see Fig. 1). That is, consistent with our predictions, people with low sexual disgust sensitivities were most sexually satisfied at the start of their marriages to the extent that their partners had similarly low sexual disgust

Table 3 Associations between people’s own sexual disgust sensitivity, their partner’s sexual disgust sensitivity, and their initial sexual satisfaction

	<i>b</i>	CI _{95%}	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>	Effect-size <i>r</i>
Intercept	5.911	[5.764: 6.057]	100.41	< .001	–
Time	– 0.127	[– 0.191: – 0.063]	92.21	< .001	.38
Time × Time	0.009	[– 0.001: 0.018]	89.69	.071	.19
Own SDS	0.039	[– 0.054: 0.131]	126.72	.410	.07
Partner SDS	0.024	[– 0.068: 0.117]	126.47	.602	.05
Intercept	5.858	[5.708: 6.008]	100.69	< .001	–
Time	– 0.127	[– 0.191: – 0.063]	92.12	< .001	.38
Time × Time	0.009	[– 0.001: 0.018]	89.64	.070	.19
Own SDS	0.010	[– 0.083: 0.103]	124.13	.830	.02
Partner SDS	– 0.004	[– 0.098: 0.089]	124.33	.925	.01
Own SDS × Partner SDS	0.166	[0.034: 0.297]	100.71	.014	.24

Time × Time = the quadratic estimate of time. We report unstandardized coefficients and have bolded associations that are $p < .05$. Effect-size $r = \sqrt{\frac{t^2}{t^2 + df}}$
 SDS Sexual Disgust Sensitivity

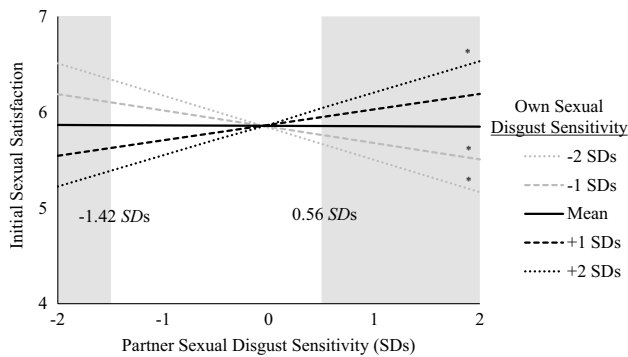


Fig. 1 Association between people's own sexual disgust sensitivity, their partners' sexual disgust sensitivity, and their own sexual satisfaction at the start of marriage. Sexual satisfaction ranges from 1 to 7. The regions of significance are highlighted in gray: The interaction is significant when partners endorsed sexual disgust sensitivities that were more than 1.42 standard deviations (SDs) below the sample mean or 0.56 SDs above the sample mean. Simple slopes of own sexual disgust sensitivity that are statistically significant are indicated with asterisks. * $p < .05$

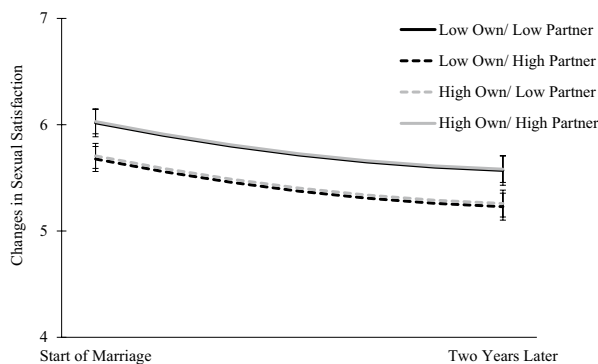


Fig. 2 Association between people's own sexual disgust sensitivity, their partner's sexual disgust sensitivity, and their own sexual satisfaction at the start of marriage and two years later. Sexual satisfaction ranges from 1 to 7. Error bars represent standard errors

sensitivities whereas people with relatively high sexual disgust sensitivities were most sexually satisfied at the start of their marriages to the extent that their partners had similarly high sexual disgust sensitivities.

As a reminder, the key interactive association between both couple members' sexual disgust sensitivities and each couple member's sexual satisfaction did not change over time, suggesting this association remained across the first two years of marriage. Indeed, as can be seen in Fig. 2, people whose partners had relatively similar (versus dissimilar) sexual disgust sensitivities as their own remained more sexually satisfied across the first two years of marriage.

A follow-up robustness analysis revealed that the interactive effect of own and partner sexual disgust sensitivities remained significant when we controlled for (a) own and

partner pathogen and moral disgust sensitivities (and their corresponding interactions), (b) own and partner sociosexual orientations (and their interaction), (c) participants' biological sex, (d) whether participants had been previously married, and (e) couples' relationship length prior to marriage, $b = 0.20$, $CI_{95\%} [0.06: 0.35]$, $t(86.79) = 2.76$, $p = .007$, effect-size $r = .28$ [of note, in this controlled model, the interactive effects of own and partner pathogen and moral disgust sensitivities were unassociated with participants' sexual satisfaction (pathogen: $p = .548$; moral: $p = .318$)]. A second follow-up analysis revealed that biological sex did not further moderate the interactive effect of own and partner sexual disgust sensitivity ($p = .906$).

Is the Interaction Between Both Couple Members' Sexual Disgust Sensitivities Associated With Each Couple Member's Marital Satisfaction Through Their Sexual Satisfaction?

As noted, the results from the first step in the mediational analysis (i.e., the association between the interaction of own and partner sexual disgust sensitivity and sexual satisfaction) emerged as significant ($p = .014$, effect-size $r = .24$). The results from the second step of the mediational analysis revealed that people's sexual satisfaction was positively associated with their marital satisfaction, $b = 0.49$, $CI_{95\%} [0.41: 0.58]$, $t(72.47) = 11.57$, $p < .001$, effect-size $r = .80$, suggesting that those who reported elevated sexual satisfaction at the start of marriage also reported elevated marital satisfaction at the start of marriage, controlling for both couple members' sexual disgust sensitivities and their interaction.¹⁰ A follow-up robustness analysis revealed that this association remained unchanged when we controlled for (a) own and partner pathogen and moral disgust sensitivities (and their corresponding interactions), (b) own and partner sociosexual orientations (and their interaction), (c) participants' biological sex, (d) whether participants had been previously married, and (e) couples' relationship length prior to marriage, $b = 0.49$, $CI_{95\%} [0.40: 0.58]$, $t(73.99) = 10.95$, $p < .001$, effect-size $r = .78$. A second follow-up analysis demonstrated that participants' biological sex did not moderate the association ($p = .234$).

Multiplying this association together with the association between the interaction of both couple members' sexual disgust sensitivities and people's initial sexual satisfaction

¹⁰ We additionally conducted a lagged analysis to examine whether participants' sexual satisfaction at any given assessment was associated with their marital satisfaction at the next assessment (i.e., four months later), controlling for their marital satisfaction at the same assessment as well as both couple members' sexual disgust sensitivities and their interaction; it was not ($p = .239$).

revealed a significant indirect effect, $b = 0.09$, $SE = 0.04$, $CI_{95\%} [0.02; 0.16]$. Consistent with predictions, people whose partners' sexual disgust sensitivities were relatively similar (versus dissimilar) to their own reported elevated sexual satisfaction, which was associated with elevated marital satisfaction.

Alternative Mediation Model

The results of the alternative mediational model revealed that the Own Sexual Disgust Sensitivity \times Partner Sexual Disgust Sensitivity interaction was not significantly associated with individuals' marital satisfaction, $b = 0.02$, $CI_{95\%} [-0.09; 0.13]$, $t(100.48) = 0.34$, $p = .732$. We thus were able to rule out this alternative model.

Discussion

Maintaining satisfying long-term romantic relationships—although inherently difficult to do—has important implications for people's physical and mental health (Holt-Lunstad et al., 2010; Liu & Umberson, 2008; Robles et al., 2014). Given that a satisfying sexual relationship can help couples to maintain a fulfilling long-term relationship (McNulty et al., 2016; Yeh et al., 2006), we sought to understand the individual differences that can promote or undermine sexual satisfaction. Drawing from evolutionary perspectives (see Tybur et al., 2009), we expected that people's own and/or their partners' sexual disgust sensitivities may be notable individual differences that impact their sexual satisfaction and, in turn, their relationship satisfaction.

Data from a two-year, longitudinal sample of newlywed couples provided support for this possibility. Perhaps somewhat surprisingly and inconsistent with our predictions, neither own nor partner sexual disgust sensitivities were directly associated with people's own sexual satisfaction at the start of marriage or their changes in sexual satisfaction over time. It is possible that this unexpected finding is due to the interdependent nature of sexual satisfaction (see Mark & Murray, 2012); in the context of long-term relationships, sexual processes and outcomes not only depend on people's own qualities, preferences, and behaviors but also on their partners' qualities, preferences, and behaviors (see Kelley & Thibaut, 1978). Although some work has demonstrated that own and partner qualities exert main effects, other research has demonstrated interactive effects (e.g., Kohut, Balzarini, Fisher, & Campbell, 2018; Mark & Murray, 2012). One recent study, for example, revealed that partner pornography use was unassociated with people's ease of sexual communication but the interaction of couple members' pornography use was positively associated with their sexual communication (Kohut et al., 2018). Consistent with such recent research, our

predictions, and theoretical models of similarity and satisfaction (Burlinson & Denton, 1992; Davis, 1981), people whose partners' sexual disgust sensitivities were relatively similar (versus dissimilar) to their own reported higher sexual satisfaction at the start of their marriages that remained relatively higher across the subsequent two years of marriage. Notably, this interactive effect was unique to couple members' sexual disgust sensitivities (i.e., it did not extend to couple members' pathogen or moral disgust sensitivities), and it emerged independently of own and partner sociosexual orientations (a notable correlate of sexual disgust sensitivity), participants' biological sex, whether participants had been previously married, and couples' relationship length prior to marriage.

Mediation analyses further revealed that the interaction of couple members' sexual disgust sensitivities was indirectly associated with each couple member's marital satisfaction through his or her sexual satisfaction. That is, people whose partners' sexual disgust sensitivities were relatively similar (versus dissimilar) to their own maintained higher marital satisfaction across the first two years of marriage that was due, at least in part, to their elevated sexual satisfaction. Importantly, we ruled out the possibility that marital satisfaction mediated the association between couple members' sexual disgust sensitivities and sexual satisfaction. Of note, the lack of a direct association between couple members' sexual disgust sensitivities and marital satisfaction suggests potential suppressor variables at play (see MacKinnon, Krull, & Lockwood, 2000); future research should examine this possibility.

Theoretical and Practical Implications

The current findings have several theoretical and practical implications. First, these findings join other research (e.g., Altgelt & Meltzer, 2019; Buss & Shackelford, 1997; French et al., 2019) in highlighting the utility of drawing from evolutionary perspectives to inform long-term relationship processes. Given that most human reproduction occurs in the context of long-term relationships (Martin, Hamilton, Ventura, Osterman, & Mathews, 2013), relationship scientists benefit from considering the role that individual differences in people's reproductively relevant behaviors, motivations, and preferences play in their long-term relationship processes and outcomes. As others have argued (e.g., Durante, Eastwick, Finkel, Gangestad, & Simpson, 2016), such an approach promises to produce novel empirical questions that advance relationship science. In the current research, only evolutionary perspectives could have been used to predict that people's motivations to avoid fitness-reducing sexual situations and behaviors likely impact their long-term relationships; likewise, only relationship science could have been used to predict that similarities in such motivations across couple members enhance relationship functioning. Future research may continue to benefit from integrating these

literatures to develop and test novel research questions. For example, life history theory—a prominent evolutionary-based theory positing that people’s life history strategies predict their reproductive outcomes (see Ellis, Figueredo, Brumbach, & Schlomer, 2009)—may be helpful in developing novel research questions regarding long-term couples’ frequency of sex and sexual satisfaction.

Second, these findings underscore the value of conducting dyadic research to examine the unique intersection of both couple members’ characteristics for each couple member’s relationship outcomes (also see Finkel et al., 2017). Long-term relationships are inherently interdependent such that each couple member possesses unique personal qualities (e.g., motivations, goals) that interact to shape the joint relationship environment. Importantly, the distinct patterns of these interactions have the ability to either strengthen or undermine crucial relationship outcomes such as sexual functioning and relationship satisfaction. Supporting this idea, the current findings join other research (e.g., Garcia & Markey, 2007; Lykins, Janssen, Newhouse, Heiman, & Rafaeli, 2012) to highlight that some individual differences are not inherently positive or negative for people’s relationship outcomes, but rather depend on their partners’ individual differences. Indeed, the association between people’s own sexual disgust sensitivity and their sexual satisfaction depended on their partners’ sexual disgust sensitivity. It is of course worth noting that the complexity of the dynamics reported here would have been undetectable in a sample comprising only one couple member.

Finally, the current findings have important practical implications. Specifically, these findings may help to inform people’s stay/leave decisions during the relationship-development process. Consistent with other work highlighting the importance of developing a long-term relationship with someone who possesses similar (versus dissimilar) attitudes, personality traits, and preferences for successful relationship outcomes (Cupach & Metts, 1995; Karney & Bradbury, 1995; Lykins et al., 2012; Purnine & Carey, 1999; but see Montoya, Horton, & Kirchner, 2008), this work highlights the importance of considering partner sexual disgust sensitivity. Moreover, the current findings may help to inform sexual interventions for established couples with disparate sexual disgust sensitivities. Simple awareness of their disparate sensitivities could help such couples to more clearly communicate their sexual wants, which may function to develop and employ sexual scripts that maximize positive sexual interactions and minimize negative sexual interactions (MacNeil & Byers, 2009).

Study Strengths and Limitations

Several strengths of the current research enhance our confidence in the results reported here. First, in contrast to using

newly formed or hypothetical relationships, the current study used participants who were all young, married couples for whom the measured processes and outcomes were important and real. Moreover, by collecting longitudinal data from both couple members, we were able to (a) examine dyadic effects and (b) demonstrate that the implications of couple members’ sexual disgust sensitivities for each couple member’s sexual and marital satisfaction that emerged at the start of marriage continued to impact those relationships across the first two years of marriage. Second, by demonstrating that the key effect was unique to couple members’ sexual disgust sensitivities and did not extend to their pathogen or moral disgust sensitivities, we provided evidence suggesting that the current findings are due to sexual concerns specifically as opposed to disease or morality concerns. Finally, we were able to demonstrate the robustness of our key effect by ruling out a sexuality-related confound (i.e., sociosexuality) and two relationship-related confounds (i.e., whether people had been previously married, couples’ relationship length prior to marriage).

Despite these strengths, however, several factors limit the interpretations of these findings until they can be replicated and extended. First, despite the longitudinal nature of the current study and the fact that we ruled out several potential confounds, all data presented here are correlational and thus cannot be used to infer causality. We were unable to account for other potential third variables that could account for the association demonstrated here and thus future research would benefit from doing so. Second, the effect sizes reported here were relatively small, which is not particularly surprising given the complexity inherent to interpersonal dynamics such as sexual and marital satisfaction. Third, whereas the homogeneity of our sample enhanced our confidence in the pattern of associations that emerge here, this homogeneity limited the generalizability to other samples (e.g., more established marriages, dating relationships, and consensually nonmonogamous relationships). Although there is not theoretical reason to suspect this effect is unique to the present sample (Tybur et al., 2009), future research may nevertheless benefit from examining if this effect emerges in other populations. Finally, in light of some work suggesting sexual disgust sensitivity is relatively stable over time (Al-Shawaf et al., 2015; Tybur et al., 2009), we assessed this individual difference at baseline only. Nevertheless, other scholars (Fleischman, Hamilton, Fessler, & Meston, 2015; Stevenson, Case, & Oaten, 2011) have argued that disgust sensitivity can vary within person; thus, future research may benefit from determining if within-person changes in people’s own and/or their partners’ sexual disgust sensitivity are associated with their long-term relationship outcomes over time.

Directions for Future Research

The current research also highlights at least two potentially fruitful avenues for future research. First, future research may benefit from examining the psychological and behavioral mechanisms of the key interactive association demonstrated here. Given that sexual disgust sensitivity impacts people's sexual motivations, expectations, and behaviors (Morandini et al., 2019; Rempel & Baumgartner, 2003), examining such processes as potential mechanisms may be promising.¹¹ For example, it is possible that similarity in couple members' sexual preferences may mediate the association between couple members' sexual disgust sensitivities and their sexual satisfaction. Given that sexual disgust sensitivity is associated with people's preferences for sexual variety (Morandini et al., 2019; Rempel & Baumgartner, 2003), and given that such preferences impact sexual satisfaction (Frederick et al., 2017; Haavio-Mannila & Kontula, 1997), similar (versus dissimilar) partner preferences may explain, at least in part, this association. Likewise, it is possible that people's sexual approach motives mediate the association between couple members' sexual disgust sensitivities and their sexual satisfaction. Sexual disgust sensitivity can function to inhibit sexual approach (de Jong et al., 2013; Tybur et al., 2009), which may reduce sexual satisfaction (Muisse et al., 2013). We did not assess people's sexual preferences or motivations in the current research and thus could not examine these potential mechanisms; nevertheless, future research may benefit from examining these and other potential mediators.

Second, future research may benefit from identifying protective factors that may buffer couples with disparate sexual disgust sensitivities from experiencing negative sexual and relationship outcomes. One potential protective factor may be people's willingness to self-disclose their sexual wants and concerns. To the extent that disparate sexual disgust sensitivities lead to increased sexual concerns and conflict, such willingness to engage in sexual self-disclosure may function to mitigate any associated declines in people's sexual satisfaction (MacNeil & Byers, 2009; Rehman, Rellini, & Fallis, 2011). Likewise, drawing from the vulnerability-stress-adaptation model (Karney & Bradbury, 1995) that posits stress can exacerbate the influence of individual vulnerabilities on relational outcomes, couples with disparate sexual disgust sensitivities may be able to maintain relatively high sexual and relationship satisfaction if they also maintain low stress.

¹¹ We had the data available to explore three possible mediators—people's sexual need fulfillment, people's sexual problems, and couples' frequency of sex. Nevertheless, none of these potential mediators were associated with the interaction of couple members' sexual disgust sensitivities. We provide these null results in Supplementary Materials. Additional analyses further revealed that these null associations did not differ across husbands and wives.

Consistent with such reasoning, recent work demonstrated that stress ameliorated the negative association between spouses' unrestricted sociosexuality and their marital satisfaction (French et al., 2019). Future research may benefit from examining these and other boundary conditions of the associations demonstrated here.

Conclusion

The current research highlights the integral role of satisfying sex for long-term relationship functioning and demonstrates the utility of examining predictors of people's sexual satisfaction. Drawing from evolutionary perspectives, we demonstrated that a crucial evolved individual difference (i.e., sexual disgust sensitivity) impacts people's ability to successfully maintain satisfying sexual relationships. Notably, rather than suggesting that those with high sexual disgust sensitivities are doomed in their marriages, the current findings suggest people may benefit from choosing partners with similarly high sexual disgust sensitivities.

Compliance with Ethical Standards

Conflict of interest The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

Ethical Approval This study was performed in line with the principles of the Declaration of Helsinki. Approval was granted by the Ethics Committee of Florida State University.

Informed consent Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

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