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An Investigation of Correlates to Compliant Sex in College Students

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Compliant sex occurs when an individual agrees to participate in unwanted sexual activity that does not involve coercion from one's partner (Vannier & O'Sullivan, 2010). The purpose of this project was to contribute to the body of research on engaging in undesired sex through an investigation of potential psychosocial correlates. There were four main hypotheses: (1) Approximately one-third of the sample will endorse having consented to unwanted sex; (2) There will be significant gender differences observed in compliant sex engagement, with more women reporting having engaged in compliant sex; (3) Sexually compliant women will endorse approach motives statistically more strongly than sexually compliant men; and (4) Fourteen psychosocial variables – some previously identified in the literature and others not – were examined in relation to compliant sex; out of those that are correlated, relationship satisfaction and sexual assertiveness refusal will have the strongest significant association with compliant sex engagement. Of the four hypotheses, only the fourth one was partially supported.

Please see the corresponding poster for further details of the research project.

An investigation of correlates to compliant sex in college students

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Introduction

- Compliant sex occurs when an individual agrees to participate in unwanted sexual activity that does not involve coercion from one's partner (Vannier & O'Sullivan, 2010).
- Previous research has found that consenting to unwanted sexual activity is prevalent, with some studies reporting over one-third to as high as sixty percent of their participants engaging in undesired sex (O'Sullivan & Allgeier, 1998; Kennett, Humphreys, & Bramley, 2013).
- Both men and women consent to unwanted sex, with women usually complying more frequently (Impett & Peplau, 2003; Vannier & O'Sullivan, 2010).
- Compliant sex has been reported as more unexpected, less pleasing, and associated with decreased relationship satisfaction (Vannier & O'Sullivan, 2010; Kennett, Humphreys, & Bramley, 2013).

Methods

Participants

- 381 college students, at least 18 years old and enrolled in an undergraduate psychology course, completed an online Survey Monkey questionnaire
- Gender: 70.9% women, 28.6% men, and .5% transgender
- Mean age: 18.55 (SD=1.28) years
- Race: 6% Asian, 4.7% Black/African American, .3% Native American or Alaskan Native, .5% Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, 4.7% Multiracial, 78.7% White/European/Middle Eastern, 5% Other
- Sexual Orientation: 91.6% Heterosexual, 1.8% Homosexual, 2.9% Bisexual, 1.3% Asexual, 1% Undecided/Questioning, 1.3% Other

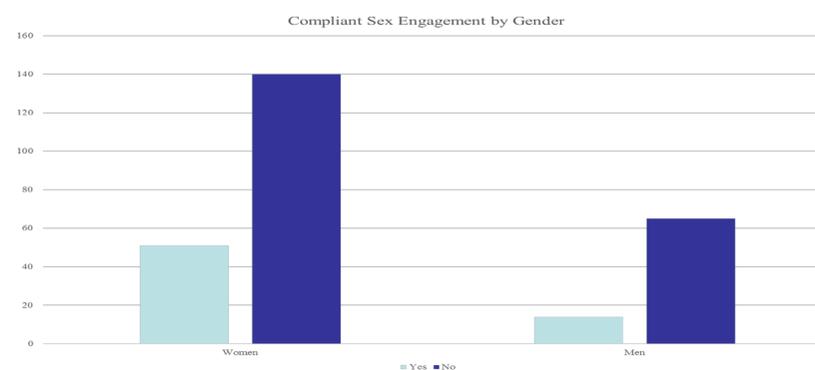
Measures

- Demographics
- Compliant sex experience questions
- Sexual Compliance Scale – Sexual Motives
- Relationship Assessment Scale (RAS)
- Sexual Relationship Power Scale – Decision-Making Dominance Subscale
- Dependency and Insecurity in Romantic Relationships
- Investment Model Scales – Investment Size Global Items + Commitment Level Subscales
- Psychosexual Functioning Scale – Psychosexual Attitudes
- Sexual Assertiveness Scales: Initiation, Refusal, Information Communication, Sexual Communication for Preferences, Contraception/STD Prevention
- Revised Conflict Tactics Scales (CTS2) – Psychological Aggression and Physical Assault Scale Items
- Multidimensional Body-Self Relations Questionnaire – Appearance Evaluation Subscale

Results

- 24% (n=65) of the sample reported they had consented to unwanted sex
- 26.7% (n=51) of women and 17.7% (n=14) of men reported they had engaged in compliant sex
 - However, a Pearson's chi-square test did not demonstrate statistically significant gender differences in relation to compliant sex engagement, $\chi^2(1, N=270) = 2.47, p=.116$.
- An independent samples t-test was conducted to compare gender and sexual motives for engagement in compliant sex (approach/avoidance). There was a statistically significant difference between women (M=4.80, SD=1.66) and men (M=5.48, SD= 1.54) in their endorsement of approach motives, $t(186)=-2.60, p=.010$. In comparison to women, men tended to rate more highly the importance of approach motives as reason for complying with unwanted sex.
- 7 of the 14 independent variables were significantly correlated with consenting to unwanted sex. Relationship satisfaction, dependency, psychosexual attitudes, sexual assertiveness refusal, and sexual assertiveness sexual communication for preferences were positively associated with compliant sex, while insecurity and intimate partner violence were negatively associated.
- In a 13 variable logistic regression, two variables were significant – sexual assertiveness refusal (OR=1.85, 95% CI [1.199-2.863], $p=.005$) and sexual assertiveness information communication (OR=.64, 95% CI [.445-.912], $p=.014$). The higher one's assertiveness in refusing unwanted sex, the more likely one was to never have engaged in compliant sex. Counterintuitively, the higher one's assertiveness in discussing their partner's sexual risk, the more likely one was to have complied with unwanted sex.

Variable	B	S.E.	Wald	Sig.	Exp(B)
Rela. Power	.006	.526	.000	.990	1.006
Dependency	.323	.251	1.655	.198	1.381
Insecurity	-.101	.187	.291	.590	.904
Investment	-0.36	.113	.101	.751	.965
Commitment	-.031	.170	.034	.854	.969
Psychosexual	.007	.283	.001	.979	1.007
SASInitiation	.006	.268	.000	.983	1.006
SASRefusal	.617	.222	7.710	.005	1.853
SASInfoC	-.451	.183	6.062	.014	.637
SASSexC	.415	.226	3.381	.066	1.514
SASContra	-.133	.183	.530	.466	.875
IPV	-.698	.564	1.532	.216	.498
Body Satisfaction	.001	.177	.000	.994	1.001



Conclusions

Discussion

- Almost one quarter of participants reported engaging in compliant sex (approximately 27% of women and 18% of men).
- There were no gender differences in compliant sex engagement. This is contrary to previous findings and could suggest that young men and women are more equal in terms of this sexual behavior
- The results suggest that a desire to enhance and maintain a relationship is a stronger motivation for men to consent to unwanted sex than for women. This contradicts social stereotypes and could suggest that men accommodate sexually for the good of their relationship.
- Compliant sex engagement correlated with half of the independent variables. Since the association was small, it appears other factors would account more significantly for consenting to unwanted sex.
- The variable of sexual assertiveness information communication was intriguingly not correlated to compliant sex engagement by itself but became significant when run in the logistic regression model. Furthermore, the direction of its relationship to compliant sex was unexpected.
- The results raise two important clinical implications: (1) Prevalence of unwanted sex in young people could be reduced by implementing interventions to increase sexual assertiveness in refusing undesired activity, and (2) since higher relationship satisfaction was associated with never having consented to unwanted sex, it may be beneficial to develop interventions that reduce or prevent compliance.

Limitations

- Not a representative population sample
- Retrospective study
- Young people may not be aware of, or understand, the concept of compliant sex.

Future Directions

- Future studies should examine married and long-term committed couples.
- Future research should provide focus upon LGBTIQ populations.
- Future studies should assess the degree to which young people have awareness of compliant sex and are concerned about it.
- Future research should investigate the variable of sexual assertiveness information communication, as the results were unexpected.