The Moderating Function of Sexual Sanctification on the Relation between Sexual and Relationship Satisfaction among Men and Women

**Abstract**

 The proposed study focuses on the possible moderating function of sexual sanctification on the association between sexual and relationship satisfaction. Past research on sanctification has focused on the direct association between domain sanctification and domain satisfaction. The proposed study examines the purported moderation function of sanctification. At higher levels of sexual sanctification, the well-known positive association between sexual and relationship satisfaction is expected to be stronger in comparison with lower levels of sanctification. An online questionnaire including measures of sexual and relationship satisfaction, sexual sanctification, social desirability, religious behavior, and demographic items will be administered to a sample consisting of 650 men and 650 women residing in Israel, married for at least a year, and identifying as being Jewish. The sample will include individuals identifying as being Religious, Traditional-Religious, Traditional-Secular, and Secular in equal proportions. The SPSS macro PROCESS (Hayes, 2017) will be used to test for the moderation effect separately for men and for women. In these analyses, age, social desirability, and religiousness will be controlled for.

Keywords: sanctification, sexual satisfaction, relationship satisfaction

Pargament and Mahoney (2005) defined sanctification as “a process through which aspects of life are perceived as having divine character and significance” (p. 183). In recent years sanctification research has focused on a wide range of life domains such as parent-child relationships (Brelsford, 2013; Brelsford et al., 2020), work (Carrol et al., 2014), forgiveness (Davis et al., 2012), the body (Jacobson et al., 2016), and dreams (Phillips & Pargament, 2002). A number of studies have focused on the sanctification of marriage (e.g., Mahoney et al., 1999; Padgett et al., 2019) and on the sanctification of sexual relations (e.g., Murray-Swank et al., 2005; Hanna‐Walker & Busby, 2021).

Most of the research focusing on sanctification in general, and on sexual sanctification in particular, has examined the direct associations between sanctification and other variables, often satisfaction with the domain being studied. For example, Walker et al. (2008) found a positive association between the sanctification of work and overall job satisfaction; Mahoney et al. (2005) reported a positive association between body sanctification and satisfaction with one’s body. Regarding the sanctification of sexuality, Murray-Swank et al. (2005) reported positive associations between sexual sanctification and premarital sexual behavior and sexual satisfaction in a sample of college students. Hanna‐Walker and Busby (2021) found that sexual sanctification was positively associated with harmonious and obsessive passion both for men and for women. Hernandez et al. (2011) reported that sexual sanctification predicted greater marital satisfaction, sexual satisfaction, sexual intimacy, and spiritual intimacy in a sample of newlyweds even after controlling for overall religiousness. Although these studies were cross-sectional, and therefore causality could not be determined, the theoretical approach in the field of sanctification research is that the perception of a life domain as being sanctified leads to enhanced satisfaction with that domain.

Some studies have examined sexual sanctification as a *mediator* of the association between religiousness and positive aspects of sexuality. For example, Leonhardt, Busby et al. (2020) found that religiousness was indirectly associated with sexual satisfaction through sexual sanctification for both women and men (see also Leonhardt et al., 2021). Surprisingly, the possible *moderating* function of sanctification in general, and of sexual sanctification in particular, has not been the focus of much empirical research. Indeed, a digital search of the research literature for sanctification as a moderator located only a single doctoral study (Backus, 2013) where sanctification of work was examined as a possible moderator of the relation between work stress and health outcomes. Backus hypothesized that in addition to a positive direct contribution to the health of workers, work sanctification should have a buffering effect on the negative influences of work stress on workers’ health. She reported mixed findings as to the hypothesized moderating effect of sanctification.

The present study will attempt to address this research void and to shed additional light on the possible moderating function of sanctification. Specifically, the possible moderating effect of sexual sanctification on the association between sexual satisfaction and relationship satisfaction will be tested. However, before discussing the purported moderating effect of sanctification, several issues concerning sanctification should be addressed. The first issue is the above-mentioned theoretical assumption of the directionality of the association between sanctification and other variables. The second is the relation between sanctification and religiousness – are sanctification and religiousness independent constructs or may sanctification be a component of religiousness. The third issue is the question of the validity of the construct and measure of sanctification, developed and used on mostly Christian samples, for use with adherents to other religious beliefs such as Judaism.

**Directionality of Sanctification**

As mentioned above, the theoretical approach in the field of sanctification research is that the perception of a life domain as being sanctified influences other aspects of that domain and leads to enhanced satisfaction with that domain. Of course, there is the possibility that satisfaction with a domain could lead to an increase in the perception of the sacred qualities of that domain. Although only an experimental manipulation of sanctification could provide direct conclusive evidence for the assumed influence of sanctification on other variables such as satisfaction, there are several empirical findings and theoretical issues that do provide support for this notion.

 In a longitudinal study, Hernandez-Kane and Mahoney (2018) examined the associations between sexual sanctification at the onset of marriage and sexual frequency and satisfaction after one year of marriage and found that sexual sanctification positively predicted both of these aspects of sexuality even after controlling for initial levels of these variables. Such findings do provide some support for the purported influence of sanctification on outcome variables.

 Additional studies, while not directly addressing the issue of directionality, do provide support for the independent existence of sanctification, in contrast to conceptualizing sanctification as resulting from satisfaction or other variables. First, some researchers have conceptualized sanctification as being a component or a dimension of spirituality. For example, Elkins et al. (1988) developed a multi-dimensional model of spirituality. Based on a review of religious, philosophical, and psychological texts, as well as on in-depth interviews with spiritual individuals, Elkins et al. identified nine dimensions of spirituality. Their multi-dimensional model of spirituality was later validated by a panel of religious experts representing a variety of religious beliefs as well as empirically in the development of the Spiritual Orientation Inventory (see Lazar, 2020a). One aspect of spirituality identified by Elkins et al. was named “Sacredness of Life” and included a feeling of awe towards all parts of life, both holy and secular, and a belief that these aspects of life are holy. Elkins et al.’s findings provide support for sanctification as an independent construct. An additional study that provides support for the independent existence of sanctification was performed by Pargament et al. (2005). They examined the “dark side” of sanctification and found that in the case of a loss in a certain domain, sanctification was associated with *negative* outcomes rather than with positive outcomes. These findings are not consistent with the claim that sanctification is a result of satisfaction. Finally, in an ongoing study focusing on the universality vs. domain specificity of sanctification, preliminary results indicate that at least for some individuals, sanctification is a more general worldview that is not dependent on a particular life domain. Such a finding also seems to provide support that sanctification is not dependent on or a product of satisfaction.

 Taken together, these sources do provide support for the idea that sanctification is an independent construct that may indeed influence other constructs such as satisfaction. Therefore, this theoretical approach of directionality will be adopted in the current study as well. In the case of sexuality, perception of sexual relations as being more holy should result in a higher level of sexual satisfaction that if they are perceived to be less sanctified.

**Sanctification and Religiousness**

Is sanctification simply a particular aspect of religiousness? May research focusing on sanctification essentially be using a proxy measure of religiousness? Not surprisingly, several studies have reported medium to large correlations between various measures of sanctification and of religiousness. Davis et al. (2018) reported a correlation of .76 between religious commitment and the sanctification of marriage on a sample of Evangelical women. Lazar and Eliyahu (2017) reported correlations between religious fundamentalism with non-theistic (*r* = .49) and theistic (r = .61) sexual sanctification on a sample of religious Israeli Jews. Lazar and Stein(2019) reported correlations ranging between .38 to .63 between theistic and non-theistic sexual sanctification and three measures of religiousness (religious beliefs, religious practices, and religious fundamentalism) on a sample of Israeli religious and secular Jews. While these findings do indicate that sanctification and religiousness are positively associated, there are number of empirical findings, as well as theoretical approaches, that support the notion that sanctification and religiousness are two separate, albeit related, constructs. First, Mahoney et al. (1999) presented a theoretical distinction between theistic sanctification and non-theistic sanctification. Theistic sanctification, the perception of a manifestation of God in a life domain, is indeed strongly related to religiousness. However, non-theistic sanctification, which is the perception of sacred qualities in a life domain independent from belief about divine entities, is theoretically independent from religiousness. Some researchers (e.g., Hernandez et al., 2011), due to the high correlation between these two dimensions of sanctification, recommended to collapse these two dimensions into a singe sanctification score. However, other researchers (e.g., Lazar & Eliyahu, 2017; Lazar & Stein, 2019) reported differential correlations for theistic and nontheistic sanctification with other variables. In addition, sanctification measures have been used successfully on samples of individuals identifying as being secular (e.g., Lazar & Stein, 2019). Finally, in the abovementioned studies, whereas sexual sanctification was significantly correlated with sexual and relationship satisfaction, religiousness was not. Taken together these claims and findings lead to the conclusion that while sanctification and religiousness are most definitely associated and are compatible constructs, sanctification is not simply an aspect of religiousness but appears to be an independent construct. In any case, to examine sanctification in a more exact manner, in this study steps will be taken to control for religiousness as detailed in the methodology section.

**Sanctification and Judaism**

As is the case with most measures in the field of the psychology of religion and spirituality, measures of sanctification have been developed and used with predominantly Christian samples (see Lazar, 2020b). Indeed, regarding sexual sanctification research Hernandez et al. (2014) recommended that “Research is needed that extends to more diverse samples than primarily Caucasian, Christian samples from the Midwest” (p. 440). Therefore, the validity and applicability of the concept of sanctification in general, and sexual sanctification in particular, for individuals adhering to other religious traditions, such as Judaism, cannot be taken for granted.

However, examination of classical and modern Jewish sources leads to the conclusion that sanctification appears to be a basic Jewish approach to life’s various domains. Maimonides, the great 12th century Jewish philosopher and codifier, authored “The Eight Chapters”, an eight-chapter introduction to the Tractate of the Jewish Oral Law called Ethics of the Fathers. In the fifth chapter of this work, Maimonides stresses that all aspects of an individual’s life should be focused on the attainment of knowledge of the Divine. Therefore, all actions, conducts, and deeds, including “eating, drinking, cohabiting, sleeping, waking, moving about, and resting” should all be performed with the obtaining of this goal in mind. Maimonides concludes this chapter by saying that “This saying is found among their precepts (in this tractate), and is, ‘Let all thy deeds be done for the sake of God’”. In a similar manner, in Maimonides’ encyclopedic codification of Jewish law, the “Mishneh Torah” he writes that “A person should direct his heart and the totality of his behavior to one goal, becoming aware of God, blessed be He. The [way] he rests, rises, and speaks should all be directed to this end. ….. Similarly, when he eats, drinks, and engages in intimate relations, he should not intend to do these things solely for pleasure…. Rather, he should have the intent that his body be whole and strong, in order for his inner soul to be upright so that [it will be able] to know God….Thus, whoever walks in such a path all his days will be serving God constantly; even in the midst of his business dealings, even during intercourse for his intent in all matters is to fulfill his needs so that his body be whole to serve God,” (Laws of Knowledge, Chapter 3).

In a similar manner, in the universally accepted codification of Jewish law, the Shulchan Aruch, Section 231of Orah Hayim is intitled “That all of one's intentions be for the sake of Heaven”. Focusing on various bodily pleasures, the Shulchan Aruch determines that “his intent should not be for his pleasure, but rather for the service of the Creator, may He be blessed; as it is written (Proverbs 3:6), ‘In all of your ways, know Him.’ And the Sages said, ‘Let all of your actions be for the sake of Heaven.’ As even optional things – such as eating, drinking, walking, sitting, getting up, sexual relations, and conversation – all of them should be for the service of your Creator …. And one who acts like this will be serving his Creator constantly.” In this manner, all life domains can be considered holy as they are part of serving God.

The abovementioned sources did not state directly that various life domains themselves are holy or sanctified. However, Cohen (2006) identified two different “visions” of sanctification in the Jewish tradition. The first is the separation and distinction of the holy from the secular. For example, the Jewish *Shabbat* in contrast to the six days of the week or sexual relations within the framework of marriage in contrast to such relations between individuals who are not married. Cohen notes that much ritual effort is invested in making these distinctions such as preparing for the *Shabbat* and lighting candles or the ritually detailed wedding ceremony. The second type of sanctification that Cohen identified was described by him as elevating or improving. Cohen focuses on the second type of sanctification regarding non-ritual Jewish law (*halacha*) in the field of damages and compensation. In Cohen’s words, “The critical point is that such sanctification — as with much of the sanctification in our world — is to be found not by separating off from ordinary life, but by going through it” (pp. 52-53). In a similar manner, applying this distinction to the above-mentioned sources that stress how an individual can serve God through all aspects of life leads to the conclusion that these aspects are indeed sanctified.

The sanctification of sexuality in Judaism in particular has been the focus of a number of scholarly works. For example, Gardner (2002) claimed that according to the Jewish tradition, as well as the Christian tradition, sexual relations between wife and husband are considered to be a true experience of the divine. In their discussion of classical Jewish sexuality, Ribner and Kleinplatz (2007) state that sexuality and sexual desire are considered to be holy and seen as a Divine gift. They explain that the Biblical reference to sexual relations using the verb “to know” conveys the Jewish approach to the domain of sexuality as a physical, emotional, and spiritual joining that creates sanctity, illuminates the emanations of God, and “transcending bodily experience and touching the ineffable,” (p. 449). They point out that the Rabbinical recommendation to have sexual relations on Friday night, i.e., on the Jewish Sabbath, “focus on a parallel between the sanctity of the Sabbath and the sanctity of marital intimacy, and between the spiritual and physical joys of the Sabbath and those of sexual union,” (p. 449). Thy conclude that “Sexual connection provides an opportunity for spirituality and transcendence. When approached with the appropriate intent, it can mean intimate contact with the partner and a glimpse of the heavenly,” and in this way to “deepen their knowledge of themselves, one another, and the sacred in the universe,” (p. 449).

There are also some empirical findings that support the validity of sanctification for Jewish individuals. Lazar and Eliyahu (2017) examined the moderating effects of gender, religiousness, and spiritual intimacy on the association between sexual sanctification and sexual and relationship satisfaction on a sample of Jewish married individuals. Lazar and Stein (2019) also focused on sexual sanctification and sexual and marital satisfaction among a sample of Jewish adults. In both studies, the measures of sanctification used demonstrated good reliability and the direct associations between sexual sanctification and sexual and relationship satisfaction were similar to those reported in previous studies on samples of Christian samples.

In summary, on the basis of traditional Jewish sources, modern scholastic sources, and empirical studies, sanctification in general, and sexual sanctification in particular, appears to be consistent with the Jewish tradition and valid for use with Jewish research samples. After having established that sanctification may indeed influence outcome variables, that sanctification is an independent construct from religiousness, and that sanctification measures are valid for use with research on Jewish samples, the association between sexual and relationship satisfaction and the purported moderating role of sanctification on this association will now be discussed.

**Sexual and Relationship Satisfaction**

Lawrence and Byers (1995) defined sexual satisfaction as ‘‘an affective response arising from one’s subjective evaluation of the positive and negative dimensions associated with one’s sexual relationship’’ (p. 268). In many studies, the association between sexual satisfaction and relationship satisfaction1, conceptualized by most researchers as two distinct constructs, has emerged as a positive and statistically significant association. Indeed, literature reviews (e.g., Christopher & Sprecher, 2000; Karney & Bradbury, 1995) have led to the conclusion that sexual satisfaction is perhaps the most important contributor to relationship satisfaction. Although, as can be expected, most of the research in this area is correlational, many researchers have proposed a causal association between sexual and marital satisfaction. While researchers (e.g., Byers, 2001) have theorized that relationship satisfaction contributes to, or allows for, sexual satisfaction, most researchers have theorized that sexual satisfaction contributes to relationship satisfaction (for a more detailed discussion of these issues see Lazar, 2017). For example, Henderson-King and Veroff (1994) theorized that sexual satisfaction reflects feelings of sexual adequacy and competency which contribute to relationship satisfaction; McCarthy (2003) claimed that sexual satisfaction positively contributes to dyadic intimacy which in turn contributes to satisfaction with the relationship. While not providing conclusive support for directionality, some longitudinal studies have provided support for the notion that sexual satisfaction influences relationship satisfaction. Based on five data waves over a period of 11 years, Yeh et al. (2006) found that previous sexual satisfaction predicted future relationship satisfaction even after controlling for previous levels of relationship satisfaction. More recently, on the basis of two 8-wave longitudinal studies, McNulty et al. (2016) reported that sexual satisfaction predicted changes in overall marital satisfaction among a sample of couples in the first four-five years of marriage. The abovementioned empirical findings and theoretical claims are the basis for the present study’s first prediction:

Prediction 1*: Sexual satisfaction will be positively associated with relationship satisfaction.*

**Sexual Sanctification as a Moderator**

 As mentioned above, the possibility that sanctification may have a moderating function on the association between other variables has not been the focus of empirical studies on sanctification. It is theorized here that the sanctification of the sexual aspect of a dyadic relationship may moderate the association between sexual satisfaction and relationship satisfaction. The basis for the purported moderating function of sexual sanctification is the understanding that if the sexual aspect of the dyadic relationship is perceived as being less legitimate, e.g., sinful or “dirty”, then satisfaction derived from this aspect will contribute less to the satisfaction with the overall relationship. In contrast, if the sexual aspect is perceived as being more legitimate, e.g., holy and sanctified, then satisfaction with this aspect would be expected to have a greater contribution to satisfaction with the overall relationship.

 Davidson et al. (1995) claimed that conservative social attitudes about sexuality, based on the outlook that sexual desires and sexual pleasure should be restrained, continue to be widespread. Indeed, the large number of studies in the research literature focusing on sexual guilt and shame (e.g., Ali-Faisal, 2018; Gravel et al. 2011; Thorpe et al. 2021; Wyatt & Dunn, 1991) indicate how salient this outlook on sexuality is. Accordingly, it may be expected that individuals who perceive human sexuality as being taboo, the contribution of sexual satisfaction to relationship satisfaction may be limited. However, Dollahite et al. (2004) suggested that sexual and marital sanctification may diminish or even eradicate such negative feelings about sexuality. If sexuality is perceived as being sanctified, this would assumedly enhance the legitimacy of this domain and the positive contribution of “legitimate” sexual satisfaction to relationship satisfaction would then be expected to be enhanced. This argument leads to the study’s second prediction:

Prediction 2: *Sexual sanctification will moderate the association between sexual satisfaction and relationship satisfaction where at higher levels of sexual sanctification this association will be stronger in comparison to lower levels of sexual sanctification*.

The predicted moderating effect of sexual sanctification is presented in Figure 1.

Sexual
Sanctification

Relationship
Satisfaction

Sexual
Satisfaction

Figure 1: Hypothesized moderation effect of sexual sanctification on the association between sexual and relationship satisfaction.

**Social Desirability**

King (2022) reviewed the influence of social desirability in studies focusing on various aspects sexuality. One component of social desirability is self-deception where the respondent has an overly positive self-impression. An additional component is impression management which consists of a conscious misreport in order to make a more positive impression on the other. King concluded that both under-reporting and over-reporting – depending on the specific aspect of sexuality – is as common as in other fields even in anonymous internet-based self-reports and recommended including a measure of social desirability in survey studies focusing on sexuality. Therefore, an accepted measure of social desirability will be included in the proposed study.

**The Current Study**

A large majority of studies in the field of the psychology of religion have been based on predominantly North American Christian samples. The proposed study will be based on a sample of Israeli Jews. Judaism is considered to be an orthopraxic religion meaning that while the basis for the religion is belief, Judaism is a lifestyle religion and religious behavioral codes regulate all aspects of life including the sexual domain. In Israeli society, almost all individuals who are Jewish by the religious law (*halacha*) identify as being Jewish even if they identify as being secular and agnostic. Social research in Israel consistently shows that secular Israeli Jews do regularly perform some (or many) religious ritualistic behaviors, in particular those connected with various life events such as birth (e.g., circumcision), maturity (e.g., Bar Mitzvah), marriage (e.g., religious wedding ceremonies), and death (e.g., traditional mourning practices). Therefore, such a sample seems to be particularly suitable for a study focusing on nontheistic sanctification in the domain of sexuality. The interested reader is directed to Lazar (2020b) for a more detailed and in-depth discussion of the implications for research in the field of the psychology of religion and spirituality on non-Christian samples, and in particular on Jewish samples.

 The results of the proposed study may be of theoretical, research, and practical significance. As pointed out above, although sanctification has been the focus of a growing number of empirical studies, almost no investigations have focused on the possible moderating functions of sanctification in general and of sexual sanctification in particular. If sanctification is found to moderate the association between sexual and relationship satisfaction, this would deepen our understanding as to what sanctification is and how it works. This would also open the door to additional studies on the moderating function of sanctification in other life domains in order to determine if the moderating function of sanctification is particular to the domain of sexuality or if it is a more universal aspect of sanctification. An additional contribution of the proposed study is that the sample consists of Israeli Jews. As mentioned above, the vast majority of the research in the field of the psychology of religion and spirituality has been based on predominantly or exclusively North American Christian samples. Studies based on Jewish samples in general and on Israeli Jewish samples are greatly underrepresented in the research literature. Finally, the results of the proposed study may be of practical importance. Among the Orthodox Jewish community, since sexual relations are prohibited before marriage, pre-marital counseling is common. Knowledge as to the role of sexual sanctification in the relation between sexual satisfaction and relationship satisfaction may be incorporated into the pre-marital counseling sessions.

**Gender Considerations**

Several studies focusing on sexuality and on religion-related constructs have performed data analysis separately for men and for women. Leonhardt, Busby, et al. (2020) examined a model including sexual guilt, sexual sanctification, and sexual satisfaction, and preferred this strategy due to well-documented differences between men and women concerning both sexual matters and religious issues. Litzinger and Gordon (2005) examined the associations between dyadic communication, sexual and marital satisfaction separately for the men and women in their sample. The proposed study will also adopt this strategy and all analyses will be run separately for a sample of women and for a sample of men.

**Methods**

**Sample**

A sample of 6502 women and a sample of 650 men will participate in the study. All research participants will be Jewish individuals residing in Israel. In addition, the sample will include approximately equal proportions of individuals identifying as being “Religious” (*Dati*), “Traditional - Religious” (*Mesorati noteh ledati*), “Traditional – Secular” (*Mesorati noteh lahiloni*), and Secular (*Hiloni*). These groups of religious identification among the Jewish population in Israel are accepted in social research and are used by the Israeli National Board of Statistics.

Data inclusion criterion are:

1. Age of 18 years or older.

2. Being in a marital relationship for a period of at least one year.

3. Identifying as being Jewish and heterosexual (to minimize extraneous variance).

4. Providing informed consent to participate in the study.

Data exclusion criterion are incomplete filling-out of the research instruments or demographic information. Specifically, for each scale used in the study, 100% of the scale items must be completed. If as a result of data exclusion the number of participants in either sample will be less than the sample size calculated by the power analysis, i.e., *N* = 614, additional research participants will be recruited to achieve the required sample size.

**Measures**

*Sexual satisfaction*. Sexual satisfaction will be assessed by the Global Measure of Sexual Satisfaction (GMSEX: Lawrance & Byers, 1995). This measure of overall sexual satisfaction consists of five 7-point bipolar items (Good-Bad, Pleasant-Unpleasant, Positive-Negative, Satisfying-Unsatisfying, and Valuable-Worthless) focusing on the individual’s sexual relationship with her or his partner. Scale score will be calculated by averaging responses of the five items where a higher score indicates a higher level of sexual satisfaction. Lawrance and Byers (1995) reported high internal consistency (*α* = .96).

*Relationship satisfaction*. Relationship satisfaction will be assessed by the 16-item version of the Couples Satisfaction Index(CSI 16: Funk & Rogge, 2007). This measure of overall relationship satisfaction consists of ten items (e.g., “In general, how often do you think that things between you and your partner are going well”) where respondents are requested to rate each item on a six or seven-point Likert scale (0 – *extremely unhappy, always disagree* to 5/6 – *perfect, all of the time*) and six six-point bipolar items (e.g., boring – interesting, empty – full). Scale score will be calculated by averaging responses to the 16 items where a higher score indicates a higher level of relationship satisfaction. Funk and Rogge reported high internal consistency (*α* = .98).

*Sexual sanctification*. Sexual sanctification will be assessed by the Sacred Qualities of Sexual Intercourse subscale from the Sanctification of Sexual Intercourse Scale (Murray-Swank et al., 2005). This scale consists of ten adjectives (e.g., sacred, holy). Respondents are requested to indicate on a seven-point Likert scale (*1 – does not describe at all* to *7 – very closely describes*) the degree to which each adjective describes the individual’s domain of sexual intercourse. Scale score will be calculated by averaging responses of the ten items where a higher score indicates a higher level of sexual sanctification. Murray-Swank et al. (2005) reported high internal consistency (*α* = .90).

*Religiousness -* Religiousness will be assessed by the behavioral scale of Index of Religiousness(Ben-Meir & Kedem 1979).This scale was developed to measure the level of religious ritual behavior among Jewish respondents and consists of a list of 18 Jewish religious rituals (e.g., Do you keep kosher all year long?; Do you light Hanukkah candles?). Respondents are requested to indicate the frequency that they take part in or perform these rituals on a five-point Likert scale (*1 - never or almost never* to 5 *– always or almost always*). Scale score will be calculated by averaging responses of the 18 items where a higher score indicates a higher level of religious behavior. This scale has been used for research in Israel, e.g., Vilchinsky and Kravetz (2005), who reported an acceptable level of internal consistency (*α* = .95).

*Social desirability*. Social desirability will be assessed by the Marlowe-Crowne Social Desirability Scale **(**Crowne & Marlowe, 1960). This scale consists of 33 statements (e.g., I never hesitate to go out of my way to help someone in trouble). Respondents are requested to indicate if each statement is true or false regarding themselves where a higher score indicates a higher level of social desirability. Crowne and Marlowe (1960) reported an acceptable level of internal consistency (*α* = .88).

*Demographics.* Demographic items will include age, gender, religious group identity (Religious, Traditional – Religious, Traditional – Secular, Secular), sexual orientation, personal status, relationship duration, education level and work status.

**Procedure**

 After receiving approval from the institutional ethics board, a local internet panel provider will be used to recruit research participants. They will be informed that the study includes various matters – including intimate sexual matters – and that they should therefore carefully consider their agreement to participate in the study. After preliminary agreement to participate in the study, prospective participants will receive a detailed informed consent form. Individuals who indicate their consent will then be directed to an anonymous Qualtrics-powered online questionnaire. The order of the items within each scale and the order of the scales presented will be randomized excepting for the demographic items which will be presented at the end of questionnaire.

**Analysis Pipeline**

All data analysis will be performed using SPSS software.

1. According to the data exclusion criteria stated above, research participants with incomplete data for any of the scales included in the study will be excluded from the data set. If necessary, additional research participants will be recruited to achieve the required sample size of 614 women and 614 women.

2. All research measures will be calculated by averaging relevant scale items.

3. Scale averages, *SD*s, ranges, Cronbach alpha coefficients, and Pearson correlations between all study variables will be calculated and presented.

4. Prediction 1 will be tested with regression analysis in which sexual satisfaction is the predictor and relationship satisfaction is the criterion. A statistically significant positive association will indicate support for Prediction 1.

5. Prediction 2 will be tested using the SPSS macro Process v.3.4 (Hayes, 2017) model 1 with mean centering for continuous variables that define products, a confidence level of 95/99, and 20000 bootstrap samples. A statistically significant interaction term, i.e., the lower and upper confidence intervals do not contain a value of 0 between them, will indicate a moderation effect, and provide support for Prediction 2. Analysis of simple slopes will then be conducted in order to probe the interaction. Specifically, the effect of sexual satisfaction on relationship satisfaction will be calculated at three levels of sexual sanctification (16th, 50th, and 84th percentiles).

  6. Prediction 2 will be tested with no covariates and with age as a covariate. Age has been associated with sexual and marital satisfaction in previous research (e.g., Jose & Alfons, 2007; also see Tavakol et al., 2017). Results both with and without the covariate will be reported.

7. Religiousness and sanctification are highly correlated. Therefore, to examine the predicted moderating function of sanctification after controlling for religiousness, linear regression will be performed where the measure of religiousness included in the study will predict sanctification. The resulting unstandardized residual will then be used as the score for sanctification in the analyses described above for Prediction 2. This will be in addition to the analyses using the uncorrected (raw) sanctification score. This approach is preferrable in comparison to entering religiousness as a covariant since the issue is not the association between religiousness and the predicted variable, but of the association between religiousness and sanctification and the desire to examine the moderating function of sanctification after controlling for religiousness.

8. Social desirability will be dealt with using the detection and rejection method (McGuire, 2009). According to this method, data above a certain threshold of a response bias, in this case social desirability, is rejected. Since there are no established cutoff points of social desirability, in this study a score that is two *SD*s above the average will be rejected. However, since this method has been criticized (see Nederhof, 1985) all analyses will be performed both with all data and with data after rejecting research participants demonstrating a high level of social desirability.

**Outcome Neutral Tests**

To ensure that the obtained results of the study are indeed able to test the study’s predictions, several outcome neutral tests that are appropriate for a correlational study will be used:

1. Examination of data for a positive correlation between sexual satisfaction and relationship satisfaction. Although this is the association predicted in Prediction 1, since this association is well-established in the research literature it can be considered as an outcome neutral test for the predicted two-way interaction.

2. Examination of group differences on sexual sanctification by religious group identity. On the basis of research reported in the literature, more religious research participants are expected to score higher on this measure in comparison to less religious or secular research participants.

3. Examination of the data for ceiling effects - 20% or more for the maximum score on research measures. If such an effect is detected, then negative binomial regression will be used.

**Power**

To decide on an appropriate sample size, power analysis was performed using an equation-based approach (G\*Power 3.1.9.7). Sample size was determined according to the more stringent estimates (in most cases effect size for men). For all calculations, alpha was set to 0.05 and power was set to 0.90.

For Prediction 1, the association (bivariate correlation) between sexual and relationship satisfaction was set to 0.60. This estimate is based on a large number of reported correlations in the research literature on a wide variety of samples, for example: .57 among married Pakistani women (Bilal & Rasool, 2020), .64 among married Iranian women (Dehghani Champiri & Dehghani, 2020), .63 among a sample of Chinese women and men (Guo & Huang, 2005), .50 for women and .49 for men in a sample of married couples residing in a southern university town in the US (Litzinger & Gordon, 2005), and .75 for women and .50 for men in a small sample of recently married US couples (Meltzer & McNulty, 2010). This calculation resulted in a sample size of 24.

For Prediction 2, the moderation effect (*β*) was estimated to be .13. This estimate was based on similar studies reported in the literature. For example, in a study focusing on the association between dyadic communication and marital satisfaction among Jewish married couples in Israel, Lazar (2016) reported significant moderation effects of religiousness for both non-sexual (∆*R*2 = .02, *β* = -.13) and sexual (∆*R*2 = .02, *β* = -.15) communication. In a study on the moderating effects of religiousness and relationship duration on the association between sexual and marital satisfaction, Lazar (2017) reported significant moderation effects for religiousness (*β* = -.21) and for relationship duration (*β* =.13) where both interactions were entered together in the same step (∆*R*2 = .03). The power calculation was performed with one tested predictor (the 2-way interaction) and a total of four predictors (sexual satisfaction, sexual sanctification, the 2-way interaction term, with age as a covariate). An effect size (*f*2) of 0.017 was calculated based on the estimated beta of the mediation term. The resulting sample size was 614. Since the study will be based on separate samples of men and of women, two samples of 614 will be included in the study.

**Footnotes**

1. Some studies focusing on the association between sexual satisfaction and various aspects of dyadic relations were based on samples of married couples and therefore included measures of marital satisfaction. Other studies were based on samples of couples that were not married and therefore included measures of relationship satisfaction. In the present article, this distinction will not be addressed and therefore the more generic term of relationship satisfaction will be used exclusively.

2. Power analyses indicated a sample size of 614. The oversampling will compensate for participant drop-out and data quality issues.

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