

Doctoral Dissertation Defense



Presented by
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*“Sexual and Affectionate Behaviors in
Adult Romantic Relationships”*

**Monday, June 12, 2023
10:00 a.m. via WebEx**



Advisory Committee

Major Advisor: Eva Lefkowitz, HDFS

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Abstract

Adults frequently engage in physical behaviors (both sexual and affectionate) in romantic relationships; these behaviors are associated with numerous positive outcomes such as life happiness and fulfilling relationships. Physical behaviors in romantic relationships are also related to many relationship problems, and thus understanding the individual and relational correlates of adults' physical behaviors has important implications for clinicians who work with individuals and couples. In this dissertation, I explored adults' physical behaviors in committed romantic relationships with a primarily LGBTQ+ sample.

In Paper 1, I explored the association of adults' individual and relational factors with their physical behaviors. I used structural equation modeling to examine how adults' desire, desire discrepancies, and communication quality relate to adults' sexual and affectionate behaviors. Adults' desire and communication quality were associated with adults' sexual and affectionate behaviors. However, adults' desire discrepancies were associated with physical behaviors in the bivariate but not the multivariate model.

In Paper 2, I used a person-centered approach to identify profiles of adults' physical behaviors, explore profiles differed by couple gender configuration, and examine how adults' satisfaction differed by profile membership. The latent profile analysis resulted in a four-profile solution: Kissing and Hugging Only, Affection-Focused Behaviors, All But Anal Behaviors, and Comprehensive Physical Behaviors. Profiles generally did not differ by couple gender configuration. In contrast, adults' satisfaction varied by profile, and adults in the Kissing and Hugging Only profile tended to be the least sexually and relationally satisfied.

In Paper 3, I used thematic qualitative analysis to examine how adults with different types

of sexual and affectionate desire discrepancies tried to resolve their discrepancies, and how effective they perceived their strategies. Adults primarily resolved sexual and affectionate desire discrepancies in similar manners, such as by engaging in communication, choosing alternative behaviors, or doing nothing. Perceived strategy effectiveness differed based on whether adults thought their discrepancies were problematic or not.

Overall, this dissertation advances our understanding of what factors matter for adults' physical behaviors and how these behaviors are associated with sexual and relationship satisfaction. The results also suggest how clinicians might support positive behaviors and satisfaction in adults' romantic relationships.