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Why don't you share your satisfaction with me?

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Abstract

Background: Healthy spousal communication of marital and sexual expectations is one of the most important factors to improve the quality of sexual relations in marriage.

Objectives: This paper has attempted to explore women's expectations of men for having pleasurable sex in a monogamous and steady sexual relationship within the context of Iran.

Methods: In this qualitative study, 20 interviews were conducted in Tehran from December 2013 to May 2014. Participants were recruited using purposive sampling, face-to-face, in-depth, and semistructured interviews. The collected data were analyzed using qualitative conventional content analysis. The research was designed with regard to Lincoln and Guba's four major rigor criteria in qualitative investigation.

Results: Women's expectations for having enjoyable sex were classified in two areas: (1) marital components and (2) sexual components. Marital components included romantic relationships, attention, respect and admiration, appreciation, man's loyalty, and having compatibility. Sexual components included enough sexual skills, good sexual function, and commitment to equity in sex.

Conclusions: This research helps to identify women's expectations for having a gratifying sexual relationship and thus contributes to enhanced sexual satisfaction, as well as marital stability and continuity.

KEYWORDS

marital relationship, negotiating, personal satisfaction, sexual activities

1 | BACKGROUND

Sex needs to be a part of most marriages if a long-term committed relationship is to be joyful.¹ Differences in desire and expectations can have a profound impact on the couple's ability to obtain a sexually satisfying relationship.² The expectations that are held greatly affect the overall experience of a couple's shared sexual satisfaction.³ Meeting the sexual expectations is of such importance that male partners of nonorgasmic women have been found to be much less accurate in estimating their partner's sexual preferences.⁴ Due to gender socialization, each gender has different expectations regarding the appropriate sexual behavior within a marriage.³ Women's appraisals of their spouses may, consequently, reflect expectations regarding what husbands can and should do.⁵

Sexual happiness is more dependent on the quality of the relationship than on the woman's own sexuality.⁶ Because marital and sexual satisfaction are bidirectionally positively associated with one another,⁷ sexual happiness is dependent on the quality of the marital

relationship too. Also, these researchers demonstrated the role of the frequency of sex in changes in relationship and sexual satisfaction. Further, increased sexual satisfaction is achieved through the increased closeness and intimacy with one's partner that comes from sharing private information.⁸ A fundamental requirement for a sustainable and healthy sexual relationship is the ability of both partners to communicate what they like and what they dislike.⁶ Hence, communicating about sexual expectations and preferences is elemental to the development and maintenance of satisfying sexual relationships. But what about communicating with the husband about marital expectations?

Since in previous research, sexual satisfaction played an important role in marital stability of Iranian women,⁹ and sex for Iranian women is "a means to achieve marital satisfaction,"¹⁰ it seems marital relationships have a great impact on women's sexual pleasure. If this is correct, then women should share their marital expectations with their partners, as well as sexual preferences. It seems that if women identify and meet marital and sexual expectations, the frequency of sex will increase, and this will result in an increase in sexual satisfaction.

Other studies in Iran show the role of the frequency of sex in women's sexual satisfaction.¹¹ The effect of the emotional bond on sexual satisfaction is significant,¹² but it does not show what Iranian married women expect from their husbands in order to have a pleasurable sexual relationship. The knowledge gained from this study contributes to understanding women's expectations of men in a monogamous and permanent relationship. The absence of similar studies indicates that less attention has been paid to these aspects of sexual behavior. The purpose of this study is to explore women's expectations of men for having pleasurable sex in a monogamous and steady sexual relationship within the context of Iran.

2 | METHODS

Approval for the study was obtained from the Office for the Protection of Research Subjects at Tehran University of Medical Sciences. The researcher conducted 20 interviews in Tehran from December 2013 to May 2014. The participants were recruited using the purposive sampling method, so people were selected according to the aims of the research. Purposeful sampling was used in terms of selecting information-rich cases for an in-depth study. Categories such as age, gender, status, role or function in organization, stated philosophy, or ideology may serve as starting points.

Face-to-face, in-depth, and semistructured interviews were conducted in a private setting, considering the preference of participants. The inclusion criteria were (a) being married, (b) having at least 12 months marriage experience, (c) living in Tehran, and (d) living with husband. Eligible participants who provided written consent were interviewed. They ranged in age from 19 to 76 years and had different socioeconomic status, occupational backgrounds, and educational levels. They had between 12 months and 45 years of marriage experience. The interview was semistructured because the guided interview has a specific framework. Each interview began with a general question about the participant's sexual experience. Then the interviewer gradually moved to those aspects more directly related to the research inquiry. For example, one of the questions we used was as follows: In sexual or marital life what does your husband do to ensure you have a sense of sexual satisfaction? After initial responses, probes and reflective statements were used to encourage experiential specificity, for instance, "Can you tell me more about that?"¹³ Interviews lasted 90 min, on average. The conversations were audio-taped with the permission of the participants. No new information was gained during the last three interviews, at which time the data were considered to be saturated. The data collected were immediately transcribed verbatim and analyzed using qualitative conventional content analysis. Content analysis is a subjective interpretation of the content of textual data using a process of systematic classification.¹⁴ Through an iterative process and careful inspection and constant comparison of the data, themes and categories emerge mainly through inductive reasoning.¹⁵ The interviewer translated participants' words into English language, and to ensure an accurate translation and interpretation, it was revised by a native editor.

The research was designed with regard to Lincoln and Guba's four major rigor criteria in qualitative investigation: true value, applicability, consistency, and neutrality.¹⁶ To enhance the true value and applicability, the researcher established the interview guide. The transcriptions were also checked frequently for accuracy, and the chief investigator reviewed and discussed the entire interview coding to ensure consistency. To increase interviewer reliability and consistency, only one researcher collected, translated, and analyzed the data. All interviews were then coded independently by the principal researcher and the research assistant. More than 80% of the codes were consistent between the two researchers. For each interview, the outcomes were discussed and revisions were agreed upon by members of the research team. The chief investigator also carefully reviewed the entire interview coding to confirm consistency.

3 | RESULTS

Women's expectations of men for a pleasurable sexual relationship were classified in two areas: (1) marital components and (2) sexual components. The categories and subcategories of women's expectations of sex are listed in Table 1.

3.1 | Marital components

Marital components are the aspects of conjugal relationships that cause, in addition to enjoying the sexual relationship, a strengthening of the emotional connection shared between partners. At this point, it is worth noting that this paper only evaluates the features of men's marital role that affect their partner's sexual satisfaction.

On the importance of married life, a 28-year-old participant said, "It is not just a sexual relationship, it is living with another person who is with you every night and every day, you have a sexual relationship for just one hour. When you like your husband, and your living condition, sex is affected and can be joyful..."

A 58-year-old participant said, "I think 10% of a marital relationship is sex, but this 10% could complete the remaining 90%. If you have good sex, just this 10% could solve many problems and other difficulties can be handled..."

This category consists of six subcategories that are listed below.

I. Romantic relationships: In our participants' views, sexual satisfaction occurs in romantic relationships. In this regard, a 46-year-old participant said, "He should not ruin our romantic life by his imprudent words and bad manners. He should make an attempt to increase our interest and love. He can say I love you, or buy me flowers."

A 29-year-old participant said, "Life will become ordinary very soon...full of problems...in the confusion of problems we forget that we love each other... So we should constantly remind ourselves of this love..."

II. Attention: In our participant's views, sex for women is more satisfying when the woman is the center of the man's attention in the

TABLE 1 The categories and subcategories of women's expectations women's expectations for having a pleasurable sex

Subcategory (level2)	Subcategory (level1)	Category	Theme
	(I) Romantic relationships	Marital components	Women's expectations for having a pleasurable sex
	(II) Attention		
	(III) Respect and admiration		
	(IV) Appreciation		
	(V) Loyalty		
	(VI) Compatibility		
The ability of woman's preparation	(I) Enough sexual skills	Sexual components	
To express emotions and communication			
Sexual responsibility and Safe Sex			
Attention to woman's orgasm			
Sexual desire, excitement, and erection	(II) Good sexual function		
Ejaculation			
Conventional sexual behavior	(II) Commitment to equity in sex		
Mutuality			

marital life. In this regard, a 26-year-old participant said, "He makes sex more fun for me and asks me if I like it, he pays attention to me during sex; I notice that I'm really important to him and my satisfaction is important too. Rather than sex, his approval makes me content".

A 28-year-old participant said, "When my husband has a desire for sex he comes to me. He doesn't pay attention to my mood or my fatigue or his behavior that might have upset me during the day..."

III. Respect and admiration: In our participant's views, sex for women is enjoyable if she is respected by her husband in the marital life. In this regard, a 29-year-old participant said, "When I wake up and see he prepared breakfast I become really happy. When he opens the door for me, his behavior shows his respect for me. A husband's approval and admiration are very important."

A 24-year-old participant said, "I expect my husband to express his approval for my competency in the presence of others...especially his mother and sister I love this behavior."

IV. Appreciation: Focusing on some parts of the interviews, we found that men's gratitude in married life is a core element for women in case of pleasant sex. In this case, a 32-year-old participant said, "When sex comes to an end, love and respect and everything else is finished. Then he does whatever wants in life, he doesn't care about me, he doesn't even consult me...this kind of behavior bothers me. At night he will be nice again and I will be his dear too..."

A 59-year-old participant said, "I have endured a lot of suffering in our Married life ...I would like my husband to be thankful and express his appreciation..."

V. Loyalty: In our participant's views a man's loyalty in married life is important for women in case of sexual satisfaction. In this regard, a 36-year-old participant said: "When a couple decides to marry, they

belong to each other. They must leave the past in the past. I say my God is one and my husband is one too. My husband should be mine in every aspect, not just in sex."

"My husband is a loyal and chaste man. This is an important factor for my life."

VI. Compatibility: In women's views, compatibility in married life creates a more gratifying sex life. In this regard, a 39-year-old participant said, "I wish my husband would try to understand me a little bit, he thinks what he says is right. I wish he cared about my sexual desires... I back down from my wishes; I think occasionally, he should do what I like..."

A 24-year-old participant said, "We always struggle with each other... We agree about nothing, even when to have sex... I wish he understood me..."

3.2 | Sexual components

In addition to the expectations of women in married life, women seek a satisfactory sex life. With respect to women's views, we have categorized what makes sex acceptable in the sexual components. The sexual components contain three subcategories: enough sexual skills, good sexual function, and commitment to equity in sex.

I. Enough sexual skills: It refers to the man's skills that enable him to sexually satisfy the woman. Five subcategories are listed in level 2 that have been mentioned in the following sentences.

The ability of woman's preparation: The woman's preparation is important before sex and women expect men to pay attention to it. In this regard, a 45-year-old participant said, "Some men are ingenious and know what women need in sex. They recognize what their wives like during sex and do the same things. Its chance...but my husband doesn't know how to arouse me."

A 23-year-old participant said too, "I don't like to see him hurried in sex. I wish he was more patient during sex and put me in the mood for sex."

To express emotions and communication: In our participant's views, if a man does not express his emotions during sex, it will not be a pleasant experience for the woman. In this regard, a 36-year-old participant said, "I would love it if he would express his affection to me in a way that I like. We have sex in a pretty ordinary manner; intercourse is not everything in sex. Touching, kissing, and paying attention are more important than intercourse. Many words are spoken during love making that enhance intimacy."

Sexual responsibility and safe sex: It refers to men's body hygiene considering sexually transmitted diseases in sex. In this regard, a 46-year-old participant said, "A man must be responsible for his health as well as his wife's health. He should at least take a shower before sex, if he is worried about his partner becoming pregnant; he should use a condom for prevention... I always have to take pills!"

Attention to woman's orgasm: Although achieving orgasm is not important for women, the attention of men to their wife's orgasms is important for women. In this regard, a 56-year-old participant said, "I am never satisfied during sex. In this situation he does nothing; he will not go to a counselor. My sexual pleasure is not important for him."

And a 45-year-old participant said, "I experience orgasm late, but I let him have an orgasm. He says this time I'll have an orgasm, the next time is your turn, maybe the next time he will have an orgasm too, but it is not important for me. His attention to my pleasure is an important factor for me..."

II. Good sexual function: It refers to the proper physical functioning of male partner in sexual desire, excitement, and erection. Two subcategories are listed in level 2, one is sexual desire, excitement, and erection and the other is time of ejaculation.

Sexual desire: Good sexual desire in men delights women in terms of making them feel desirable. In this regard, a 44-year-old participant said, "My husband does not have a strong desire for sex, does not care about it. I would like us to come together for sex enthusiastically at least once a month. When he has no excitement for sex, I become disinclined, too. I'm so upset when my husband is not willing to have sex with me."

In time of ejaculation: In our participant's views, impolitic ejaculation is a factor for bad ending sex. A 56-year-old participant said, "He ejaculates so fast; he doesn't care about my satisfaction. When I complain, he just smiles..."

III. Commitment to equity in sex: It refers to the fairness of sex. Three subcategories are listed in level 2, which have been mentioned in the following sentences.

Conventional sexual behavior: Men's unconventional sexual demands make sex unpleasant for the wife. In this regard, a 30-year-old participant said, "Good men don't have bad habits in sex. My husband respects me a lot. He engages in conventional sexual behavior. Sex must be in a way that both of us enjoy it."

And a 34-year-old participant said too, "When I do not enjoy oral sex I can't do this for him."

Mutuality: Men's attention to the fulfillment of mutual needs is important for women. In this regard, a 50-year-old participant said, "Mutual needs of couples should be fulfilled during sex; it's not just for men to meet their needs."

A 34-year-old participant also said, "Pleasure must be mutual. In other words, both partners should be satisfied and enjoy it."

A 30-year-old participant said, "When he does everything for my pleasure and I enjoy it, I try to do everything that he enjoys, of course without any injury to myself."

The components of women's expectations in sex in Iranian married women's view are listed in Table 1.

4 | DISCUSSION

Iranian married women's expectations of their husbands for having good sex have been discussed in two areas: marital components and sexual components.

4.1 | Marital components

This consists of six subcategories: romantic relationships, attention, respect and admiration, appreciation, loyalty, and having compatibility. The persistence of love was mentioned as one of the most important factors that causes continuation of marriage. Furthermore, romance (courtship behaviors in nonsexual contexts) and creativity (need to create novelty and surprise in sexual activity) were two important items for achieving sexual satisfaction in Pascoal's research.¹⁷ The relational context was more important to women's sexual satisfaction than merely the physical aspect of being sexually satisfied. Romantic relationships, attention, respect and admiration, appreciation, man's loyalty, and having compatibility formed the relational context for women. If men behave arbitrarily in women's views, in the mentioned field, the wife and husband connection happens appropriately. Bridges, Lease, and Ellison argue that being connected to a partner was the most important predictor of women's sexual satisfaction.¹⁸ Also, this finding confirms McNulty's idea that any causal influence of relationship satisfaction on sexual satisfaction may be particularly strong among women.⁷ In addition, for women, these issues work as a daily stressor and higher levels of daily stress predict less sexual activity for maritally dissatisfied women.¹⁹

4.2 | Sexual components

Many participants in this study expected their husbands to recognize their sexual wishes and preferences, and by using effective techniques put them in the mood for sex. Initiating sex is overall the man's duty in the view of Iranian women, when a man could not initiate sex, it meant that a woman had to carry the burden of initiating sex, which she felt was not her duty. Additionally, the abrupt cessation of sexual activity was not pleasant for women, as they expect men to finish sex in a romantic manner. Male sexual appetite, excitement, erection, and

ejaculation were important factors of sexual relations in our participants' views. We agree that the male partner's sexual dysfunction causes a reduction in intimacy and sexual contact.²⁰ Also, male partner's sexual dysfunction causes decreased sexual satisfaction because of decrease in sex frequency.⁷ However, the man's ability to communicate verbally was also important for women. Although having an orgasm during sex does not play a major role in women's sexual satisfaction, the importance of a woman's orgasm for their partner is a part of the men's sexual responsibility. The participants in this study expected their husbands to be sexually responsible in this manner as well as committed to equity in sex. According to them, commitment to equity in sex refers to partners engaging in conventional sexual behavior, mutuality and safe sex. This means that they expected men to engage in sex free from any enforcement and injury in a way that could meet the sexual enjoyment of both parties as well as their needs. In this regard, an agreement on the use of unconventional sex for mutual pleasure was important for participants. Men's skills at the beginning, throughout, and ending of sex was important in Iranian women's views, similar to other women. Not rushing during sex caused more satisfaction in women, whereas more haste caused less satisfaction. When sex is in haste, duration of foreplay and intercourse is diminished. This obviously reduces sexual satisfaction. As Damjanovič has stated, one of the contextual factors reducing the arousal includes lack of time or extreme haste.²¹ Partners sharing sexual responsibility and engaging in conventional sex was an important factor for Iranian women, as Schwartz and Young reported, respect and fair treatment are the most important variables in sexual satisfaction.¹ Also, Haavio-Mannila and Kontula have reported that the use of limited sexual techniques is related to women's dissatisfaction.²² A relationship without coercion, discrimination, and violence is one of the chief principles of healthy sexual relations.²³ The World Health Organization in defining sexual health refers to the "equality and mutual respect in sex." In this study, engaging in conventional sex was viewed by the women as a symbol of equality and mutual respect.

Even though in another study in Iran problems in having orgasm during the last month had a negative association with women's sexual satisfaction,¹¹ having an orgasm by Iranian women was not focused on in this study. In contrast, participants expected their sexual pleasure and experiences of orgasm in their relationship to be important to men. This suggests that men's attention to women's satisfaction may be more important to women than having an orgasm.

5 | CONCLUSIONS

Iranian married women's expectations from their husbands for having a satisfying sexual experience is discussed in two areas: marital components and sexual components.

5.1 | The implications of the study in the practice

Paying too much attention to sexual components and neglecting the important role of a happy married life in women's sexual satisfaction is an essential aspect that should be addressed further. Before enter-

ing into sexual issues, counselors should solve the problems of married life, regardless of how trivial. These trivial problems will rob the married life of happiness. When counselors prepare couples for marriage, before sex education, they should teach couples about proper marital relationships. Furthermore, unconventional sex was another issue that needs to be made clear for couples in counseling sessions. Even occasional use of the unusual form of sex without mutual consent will diminish women's sexual satisfaction.

5.2 | The implications of the study in the research

This finding showed marital components in Iranian women that positively predicted changes in sexual satisfaction⁷ as well as sexual components.

5.3 | The implications of the study in the education

Clients, especially men, should be aware of factors affecting women's sexual satisfaction and their expectations of men. Also, the intersectional effects of marital components and male sexual function in women's sexual satisfaction should be considered by providers. They must plan treatment based on resolving both of them simultaneously.

6 | LIMITATIONS

This research was based on in-depth interviews with 20 married women in Iran and is not generalizable to the entire population. Although we have followed the tradition of qualitative research, and to ensure all themes identification, the maximum variation strategy was used,²⁴ a very wide range of participants in age (between 19 and 76 years) and marriage duration (between 1 and 47 years) were chosen. Also, in spite of a very wide range of participants in age and marriage duration, we acknowledge that implications might be value-laden and culture-bound. Another issue is that sexual matters are sensitive; therefore, it is possible that the participants did not tell the truth.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors report no actual and potential conflicts of interest.

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