

Development of a Measure of Sexual Regrets: The Sexual Regret Scale

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Abstract

A 10-item scale was developed to assess regrets after sexual encounters; the Sexual Regret Scale. A global measure of sexual regret along with two subscales (Emotional Sexual Regret and Self-Judgment Sexual Regret) emerged with good psychometrics. Scale implications are discussed.

Introduction

The experience of regret is a common occurrence in individuals. Regret may be defined "...as a negative, cognitively based emotion....experience[d] when realizing or imagining that our present situation would have been better had we acted differently" (Zeelenberg, 1999, pg. 325). Thus, regret is the negative afterthought and affect after a decision has been made and finalized. Negative affect associated with regret may include emotions such as guilt, ambivalence, and anxiety (see Oswalt, Cameron, & Koob, 2005, for brief review). Because regret is anchored by individuals' decisions in terms of action, the experience of regret can occur due to actions taken, or omission of actions.

Here, we focus on sexual regret due to actions taken (not omission). Further, we look at regret from a *Cognitive Dissonance* perspective (e.g., Festinger, 1954); when choices and actions are made that are incongruent with self cognitive beliefs, tension and other unpleasant psychological states are experienced. Thus, regret is experienced as an internal label for this negative affect state.

Research on sexual regret has noted a tendency for women to experience sexual regret after casual sex, while for men sexual regret is more likely experienced as a form of missed sexual opportunity (Galperin et al., 2013). The number of sexual partners is also a predictor of sexual regret (Oswalt et al., 2005).

The current study evaluates a new 10-item measure, the Sexual Regret Scale (SRS), to assess regret as a form of dissonance after sexual encounters. Thus, sexual regret after an action (not inaction) is directly being assessed. No formal measure of sexual regret is available, though assessment of the construct has been undertaken using other methods (e.g., Eshbaugh & Gute, 2008; Galperin et al., 2013). General measures of regret have been noted by various researchers, including Brehaut et al. (2003), and Sweeney and colleagues (Sweeney, Hausknecht, & Soutar, 2000).



Method

Participants

Participants were 72 sexually active students enrolled in introductory Psychology courses at California State University, Fullerton.

Measures

Sexual regret. The Sexual Regret Scale (SRS) was constructed based on a regret measure by Sweeney et al. (2000), which utilized Cognitive Dissonance theory in its construction. The Sweeney et al. measure consisted of 22 items noting emotion, wisdom, and concern issues associated with decision outcomes. For the current study, we rewrote items in the emotion and concern domains (which we relabeled self-judgment) to focus on sexual regret, yielding a 10-item measure (see Table 1).

Validation measures. Although the main focus of the current study was the psychometric properties of the SRS, we utilized a number of established scales and general information items in the sexuality domain to help validate the SRS (both resulting subscales and global measure).

Validation measures included:

- Self-Esteem (Rosenberg, 1965)
- Attachment (Hazan & Shaver, 1987)
- Trait Anxiety (Bieling et al., 1998)
- Sexual Awareness (Snell et al., 1991)
- Sexual Self-Consciousness (van Lankveld et al., 2008)
- Sexual Desire (Spector et al., 1996)
- Need for Sexual Intimacy (Marelich, & Lundquist, 2008)
- Sociosexuality (Penke & Asendorpf, 2008)
- Friends with Benefits (Johnson, Marelich, & Longbottom, 2007)
- Depression (Beck et al., 1996)
- Sexual Risk Taking (Turchik & Garske, 2009)
- Alcohol use (Babor et al., 2001)
- Demographics

Procedure

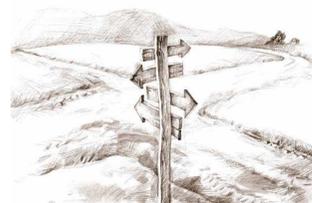
College students from California State University, Fullerton, were recruited and assessed through self-report paper/pencil techniques. The study announcement was posted on an online research database (SONA system) run by the Department of Psychology to recruit participants. Students who chose to participate arrived at a predetermined room/time and were asked to place a check next to their name on a sign in sheet to indicate they showed for the study to receive course credit. After participants read the consent form, they completed the survey which consisted of various questionnaires to assess sexual practices and risk taking behaviors. Once finished with the survey, participants were debriefed and thanked for their participation.

Analyses

Exploratory factor analysis, correlations, and mean-comparisons were undertaken.

Table 1

Sexual Regret Scale (SRS)						
(Marelich, Wright, Ziegler, & Henry, 2016)						
Directions: For the next set of items, we want you to think for a moment about your recent sexual experiences. With these experiences in mind, please use the following scale to rate how much you agree or disagree with each item:						
A	B	C	D	E	F	G
Disagree						Agree
Strongly						Strongly
Thinking about my recent sexual experiences...						
___	1. I experienced some psychological discomfort the day after having sex.					
___	2. I felt disappointed with myself the day after having sex.					
___	3. I resented having sex.					
___	4. I felt angry with myself the day after having sex.					
___	5. I felt depressed the day after having sex.					
___	6. I recognized that after my sexual experience(s), I may not have needed to have sex.					
___	7. I recognized that after my sexual experience(s), I had regrets about having sex with that/those individual(s).					
___	8. I wondered if I had been fooled.					
___	9. I wondered if I had been lied to.					
___	10. I wondered whether there was something wrong with what I had agreed to.					
[Note: No items are reverse coded. Item scores A-G are numerically coded 1-7 when calculating scale scores for a mean-average scale score. Items 1-7 are Emotional Sexual regret items, while items 8-10 are Self-Judgment sexual regret items. Subscales (Emotional and Self-Judgment sexual regret) may be used along with a global Sexual Regret score.]						



Results

Exploratory Factor Analysis

An exploratory factor analysis was performed on the SRS items. Principal axis factoring was applied (see Gorsuch, 1983) with a varimax (orthogonal) rotation. Although our sample size may be considered small for factor analysis (N of less than 100), the KMO was strong with a value of .84 with good extracted communalities (see below).

Overall, a two-factor solution was deemed appropriate based on a screeplot of eigenvalues, and sense of the resulting loadings. The total extracted factor variance was 69%, with over 39% accounted for by the first factor (labeled "Emotional Sexual Regret") after rotation, and over 29% accounted for by the second factor (labeled "Self-Judgment Sexual Regret"). Extracted communalities for all 10 items ranged from .39 to .97, with an average extracted communality of .69 suggesting a fair population estimation even with our small sample (MacCallum, Widaman, Zhang, & Hong, 1999).

Table 2 contains the extracted communalities, factor loadings, and eigenvalues. Factor loadings for the 7 items addressing Emotional Sexual Regret ranged from .54 to .87, while those addressing Self-Judgment Sexual Regret ranged from .80 to .97. Confirmatory factor analysis and bootstrap analyses are pending.

Reliabilities

Cronbach's alpha for the global measure was .92. For the Emotional Sexual Regret subscale, alpha was .91, and for Self-Judgment Sexual Regret, alpha was .92.

Exploratory Validation

For the global measure of Sexual Regret, those higher in sexual regret were less sexually assertive ($r = -.23, p = .05$), showed less sexual desire ($r = -.35, p < .01$), had a lower need for sex ($r = -.23, p < .05$), and were less likely to be open to "friends with benefits" relationships ($r = -.28, p = .01$). No gender differences were noted for global sexual regret. No association was noted between sexual regret and number of sexual partners or experience with a one-night stand.

For the Emotional Sexual Regret subscale, those higher in emotional sexual regret showed less sexual desire ($r = -.38, p < .01$), had a lower need for sexual affiliation ($r = -.23, p = .05$), and lower global need for sexual intimacy ($r = -.23, p = .05$). No gender differences were noted. No association was noted between emotional sexual regret and number of sexual partners or experience with a one-night stand.

For the Self-Judgment Sexual Regret subscale, those higher in self-judgment sexual regret reported lower self-esteem ($r = -.34, p < .01$), higher levels of depression ($r = .29, p = .01$) and trait anxiety ($r = -.33, p < .01$), higher levels of sexual monitoring ($r = .23, p = .05$), higher levels of need for sexual dominance ($r = -.31, p < .01$), and were less likely to be open to "friends with benefits" relationships ($r = -.33, p < .01$). Those with an anxious-ambivalent attachment style were more likely to report higher levels of self-judgment sexual regret than individuals with an avoidant attachment style ($p < .05$). No gender differences were noted. No association was noted between self-judgment sexual regret and number of sexual partners or experience with a one-night stand.

Table 2: Rotated factor loadings sorted by size, extracted communalities (h2), and percent variance for principal axis factoring extraction with Varimax rotation on Sexual Regret Scale items

Item # and Text	Emotional Sexual Regret	Self-Judgment Sexual Regret	h ²
3. I resented having sex.	0.87	0.26	0.82
2. I felt disappointed with myself the day after having sex.	0.85	0.22	0.77
4. I felt angry with myself the day after having sex.	0.85	0.32	0.82
5. I felt depressed the day after having sex.	0.75	0.00	0.56
7. I recognized that after my sexual experience(s), I had regrets about having sex with that/those individual(s).	0.64	0.42	0.58
6. I recognized that after my sexual experience(s), I may not have needed to have sex.	0.57	0.46	0.53
1. I experienced some psychological discomfort the day after having sex.	0.54	0.32	0.39
9. I wondered if I had been lied to.	0.17	0.97	0.97
10. I wondered whether there was something wrong with what I had agreed to.	0.36	0.82	0.79
8. I wondered if I had been fooled.	0.17	0.80	0.66
Percent Variance (after rotation)	39.10	29.49	

Discussion

Regret is a common occurrence across the human experience. Here, we investigated a new measure of sexual regret, the Sexual Regret Scale (SRS), based on Cognitive Dissonance theory. Overall, the measure showed good psychometrics, and preliminary validation shows promise.

As noted earlier, the focus of the current measure was on sexual regret due to actions taken (not omission). Although past research has shown women to be more likely to report sexual regret due to actions taken, here no such difference was noted. In addition, some research has suggested those more sexually active were more likely to report sexual regret -- here, we were unable to confirm this finding.

However, in terms of sexual drive and desire, we did reveal important findings that are in concert with the theoretical framework adopted. Whether we look at the global measure of sexual regret or subscales, it appears those who have lower levels of sexual drive and desire were more likely to report sexual regret. This suggests individuals' sense of self and their actions may have led to an incongruent and negative affect state, thus generating sexual regret.

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