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The Impact of Differentiation of Self and Spirituality on Sexual Satisfaction By: Jaime D. Goff

This article is about examining the relationship between differentiation of self, spirituality, and sexual satisfaction. The purpose of this article as stated in the introduction, is to avoid feelings of anxiety in sexual encounters. "According to traditional sex therapy theories and models, sexual dysfunction and dissatisfaction occur primarily as a result of anxiety", the author is trying to accomplish an effective way to prevent this in current relationships. Goff believes, spirituality is a possible factor to reach sexual satisfaction and wants to support this link with her study. She states that "clinical interest in spirituality has been growing in recent years", this is being recommended by many mental health professionals, because it is believed that aside from treatment for mental and emotional problems, there is a significant link between spirituality and sexual satisfaction. The purpose of the study is "to determine if differentiation of self and spirituality are predictive of sexual satisfaction among community and clinical samples".

In her article, Goff includes information given by other people that have conducted studies and completed research relating to this topic. Kaplan, Masters, Johnson, and Schnarch agree that anxiety plays a huge role in sexuality. In fact Schnarch defines differentiation as "the ability to soothe your own anxiety and to resist being infected with other people's anxiety," connecting anxiety and differentiation as well. Schnarch's goal is to enhance intimacy in sexual relationships. His quantum model of sexual arousal supports the idea that higher differentiation

allows people to have more profound sexual experiences. He also agrees that spirituality plays a part in these experiences. Schnarch explains that, “at the limits of their sexual potential, humans are capable of bringing high meaning to sex and integrating sexuality and spirituality in mutually enhancing ways”. A different study by Macknee, also supports the link of spirituality and sexuality. “His findings indicated that pecks of sexual and spiritual connection were much broader and more holistic than the discrete experience of an orgasm” Macknee (2002).

The author identifies four hypotheses that support positive correlation between differentiation of self, spirituality, and sexual satisfaction. For this study, 164 participants from clinical and non-clinical samples are chosen. The clinical sample includes 131 participants, while the non-clinical sample includes 33. Generally the participants are adult clients from a university-based clinic in the Southwestern United States. The age of participants ranged from 18-64, 78% were identified as caucasian, 37.8% were male and 62.2% were female. Participants were asked to identify themselves as single, first-time married, divorced, remarried, or in a committed relationship. They were also asked to identify themselves in terms of religiosity, the majority identified religiously. The study consisted of completing The Differentiation of Self Inventory (DSI), the Pinney Sexual Satisfaction Inventory(PSSI), and finally the Miller Measure of Spirituality (MMS). The DSI focuses on adults, their significant relationships, and relations with family. The PSSI focuses on the behavioral and relational aspects of sexuality, and finally the MMS is a broad measure of spirituality.

As a result, it was discovered that there was a significant link between differentiation of self and sexual satisfaction, but not spirituality and sexual satisfaction, supporting hypothesis one and partially four, but not hypothesis two or three. The hypothesis that differentiation and

spiritually would be significantly predictors of sexual satisfaction was partially supported because the results indicated that spirituality was most significant for women. Many other discoveries were listed including that non-clinical sample had greater levels of differentiation and sexual satisfaction than the clinical sample, men were identified as more differentiated than women, and that differentiation of self is a significant predictor of sexual satisfaction. Unlike differentiation of self, it was noticed that spirituality added little to the power of the models and results in this study.

Goff's study had a few flaws and areas that required future research. Firstly, there were problems with the methods used in the study. The "PSSI may not capture participants experiences of their sexual potential", thus making it slightly unreliable. There were validity problems with the FWO subscale of the DSI, weakening its effectiveness, and the MMS was too broad, as opposed to focusing on a specific belief system. The choice of participants was biased because the non-clinical sample had less clients compared to the clinical sample; in amount, there was a 98 difference. Little diversity was promoted in this study, given that 78% of the population was caucasian, more women were selected than men, and all participants were from the same university located in the Southwestern United States. The author collected no identifying information and participants in the clinical group were not screened for participation in the study based on their presenting problems. Participants were asked to identify if they were single, first-time married, divorced, and so on. The participants identified as single and divorced should not have participated in this study, because the topic involved sexual satisfaction in a relationship; something these clients could not relate to at the moment. For future studies there should be more diversity and less bias factors. The same amount of participants for each

predictor should be selected and more significant difference on sexual satisfaction should be included. Goff's study was well organized and her hypotheses were relevantly put together. She defined important terms and used an appropriate amount of information from other researchers. However, the results in this study were not as strong or accurate as expected. Goff's article left gaps and questions that could have been prevented if she chose more effective methods as opposed to the PSSI, DSI, and MMS.

Goff's article allowed me to think about sexual satisfaction and encounters through a Christian lens. Due to the way sexual intercourse is seen and treated in today's society, I have forgotten that it was created by God to be good. After all, sex is a human need and helps us reproduce. This article reminded me that spirituality should play a role in sexuality, especially during this time where sex is such an addictive and toxic activity. We see a lot of sexual transmitted diseases, teenage pregnancies, unhealthy relationships, infidelity and addiction because sexual intercourse is often approached incorrectly. Goff attempts to discover if spirituality can restore sexual encounters and better the experience of sexual satisfaction for current relationships. Her thinking is justified by others including Schnarch. Although the study found spirituality to have little power, I believe there is a link between sexual satisfaction and spirituality, it is just not appreciated or enhanced in today's society. More studies should be made to support this claim because "future research utilizing measures that more specifically capture the Christian experience of spirituality may yield different results". Goff's article has given me a better understanding of the possible relationship between differentiation of self, spirituality, and sexual satisfaction.

