

Females' Quality of Sex: Exploratory Analysis and Modeling of Factors Affecting the Quality of Women's Sex Experience

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This study applied a mixed model to investigate the factors influencing the quality of married Iranian women's sex experience. The study was conducted using an exploratory mixed method design. The statistical population in the qualitative phase was experts, authorities, and sex therapists working in this field, which were selected through a purposeful sampling taking into account their expertise, practical experience, and teaching. Saturation was obtained after interviewing 11 experts in examining the factors affecting the quality of women's sexual intercourse. In the quantitative phase, using convenience sampling method, 385 married women from district 5 of Tehran were selected and participated in the study. In the qualitative phase, exploratory analysis of the interviews regarding the influential factors affecting the quality of women's sex, 191 codes were identified and by categorizing and axing, 46 markers and 5 main factors were obtained. Thematic analysis on semi-structured interviews showed that 5 categories including physical appearance and diversity seeking, personality factors, individual-social factors, mental and physical health, and communication skills influence the women's quality of sex. In the quantitative phase, a 46-item questionnaire with five subscales was designed based on the 5-factor conceptual model proposed in the qualitative phase, and administered with the sample of married Iranian women. Results showed that the designed conceptual model fits the data well and that the designed model can be used to improve the quality of married Iranian women's sex experience.

Keywords: Women's Quality of Sex, Mixed Method Study, Marital Satisfaction

Love is an important criterion in determining the continuity and quality of couples' relationship; and a healthy and secure attachment plays a significant role in couples' relationship (Eder et al, 2021; McWilliams and Billy, 2010). Sex is the most exceptional material manifestation of a couple's love and emotional connection (Flynn et al, 2016; Jovanovic et al, 2020) and it, thus, directly affects -

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marital satisfaction, mental health, and the continuity of couples' marriage; in the other words, high levels of couple's sexual satisfaction leads to significantly greater feelings of understanding, satisfaction and calmness, so, the quality of sex has a direct and reciprocal relationship with the quality of marital life (Forbes et al., 2017). That a sexual relationship is not merely physical is evident from the fact that the romantic interactions and love enhance the quality of and satisfaction from having sex. Put differently, having sex without expressing love and its manifestations, quickly turns into a repeated habit, resulting in a decrease in the quality of both sexual intercourse and marital life (Smith et al, 2019).



Couples' romantic relationship is an integral element of the family system. Therefore, the quality and the stability of the romantic relationship affects couples' health and well-being (Miller et al, 2013); It, also, plays a role in determining the quality of family members' interactions including that of parents and children (McCoy et al, 2013; Lucier-Greer, 2018). As such, marital conflict and consequently the low quality of sex experience cause an important risk factor for mental and physical health of the family members (Fincham & Beach, 2010; Effati Daryani et al, 2021; Zhang et al, 2020).

In the same vein, disorders associated with this conflict and the poor quality of relationships can include substance or drugs abuse (Homish & Leonard, 2007; La Flair et al, 2012), increasing stress, anxiety, functional disorders, and depression (Mc Shall & Johnson, 2015), immunodeficiency disorders, wounds, chronic skin diseases, obesity, cancer, and respiratory and cardiovascular disease (Proulx, Helmes & Buehler, 2007; Sapolsky, 2003; Jiannine, 2018; Poggiogalle et al, 2014). Further, the implications for mental health can include lower levels of self-esteem, and other problems in different dimensions (Lucier-Greer et al, 2018; Swall et al, 2020). Therefore, the quality of sexual relationship is a fundamental and constitutive element in maintaining the physical and psychological health of the couples and it is, thus, necessary to help the family structure in a healthy environment by following up and examining couples' sexual quality (Zhang et al, 2020).

Undoubtedly, tracking the problems that are related to sex appeal and sexual intercourse as well as finding ways to improve quality of sex was the purpose of the current study which involved two phases: first drawing on the ideas of experts' and specialists in this field and touching upon the lived experiences of couples in their sexual intercourses. Accordingly, the basic aim of this research was shedding theoretical and operational light on women's quality of sex and improving the quality of

sex and concomitantly the quality of life among Iranian couples.

Nazem Nia et al. (2020) showed that modifying and improving rational schemas and thinking problems plays a role in sexual functioning and self-efficacy of women. Ostovar et al. (2020) considered positive thinking and the sense of humor as factors affecting the quality of marital and sexual life.

In a study, Wiebe et al. (2017) concluded that emotion-oriented therapy helped couples by facilitating the creation of secure attachment bonds to achieve stability in marital satisfaction. Firoozi et al. (2016) showed that there is a significant correlation between the personality dimension of neuroticism, extraversion, agreeableness, and conscientiousness and sexual self-esteem and sex quality. Allen and Robson (2020) emphasized the role of sexual trends and their connection with personality traits; in the same vein, Sayeh Miri et al. (2020) showed that there is a correlation between marital satisfaction, sexual satisfaction, and personality traits. Jiannine (2018) and Poggiogalle et al. (2014) similarly stressed the significance of physical structure in the quality of sexual intercourse. On a similar note, Panahi et al (2021) pointed to the circumstances, education, and other associated variables as factors influencing the quality of sex. In this regard, Potki (2017) has considered the effectiveness of childhood health and cognitive skills in adults' quality of sexual life. Likewise, Ostovar et al. (2020) considered positivity and the sense of humor as factors affecting the quality of both marital and sexual life.

In summary, the above mentioned research demonstrates the role of cognitive factors, attachment styles, personality, physical structure, education and mental health status in one's childhood on the quality of sex. Current study explores to find and propose an explanatory model describing the important influences on married Iranian women's quality of sex.

Method

The present study was conducted by using a mixed (qualitative and quantitative) exploratory design. In order to identify the main categories affecting the quality of married Iranian women's sexual intercourse. A thematic analysis approach was used in qualitative phase, and in quantitative phase, by using correlational study and structural equation modeling, factors affecting the quality of sex experience were examined.

Participants

The statistical population in the qualitative phase included experts, authorities, and sex therapists, and the population in the quantitative phase included married Iranian women with university degrees living in Tehran. Therefore, the sample in this research consisted of two groups. For the qualitative phase, experts and sex therapists were selected by using purposeful sampling method tapping expertise criteria, experience in treating and teaching about sexual disorders where theoretical saturation was obtained after interviewing 11 experts, and for the quantitative phase, 385 married Iranian women with university education in District 5 of Tehran were selected through convenience sampling method.

To determine the sample size in the quantitative phase, Cochran's formula was used, and the required number of participants was estimated to be 385:

$$n = \frac{(1/96)^2(0/5)(1-0/5)}{(0/5)(1-0/5)} \approx 385$$

Measurement Instruments

Females' Quality of Sex Scale (FQS). FQS is a researcher-made scale prepared by the authors in this study according to the results of qualitative phase and was explored in quantitative phases in the current study. The psychometric properties of FQS is presented in the next sections (also see Appendix 1 for a complete Persian version of the FQS).

Procedures and Data Analysis

Different qualitative and quantitative data analysis methods were used in this mixed method study. In the qualitative phase the results of interviews with 11 experts and sex therapists were gathered and converted into texts, and were analyzed by using thematic analysis method. To identify the themes affecting the married women's quality of sex, 191 open codes were identified based on the interviews with the experts. These were then classified into 46 indicators and 5 main themes (see Table 1).

According to the main 5 themes identified in the qualitative phase (see table 1), a 46-item questionnaire was designed and sent to the experts to judge its content validity (see Appendix 1). To calculate content validity index (CVI), the authors used the S-CVI/Ave approach (see table 2). The finally revised 46-item scale then is answered by 385 participants and Cronbach's alpha's and inter-correlations between subscales were calculated by using IBM SPSS 26 (see table 2).

Based on the responses of the 385 participants, the authors also ran a structural equation model (SEM) by using IBM AMOS 22 software to statistically confirm the effects of the designed 5 themes on married Iranian women's quality of sex.

Results

Table 1 shows the results of thematic analysis on the factors affecting the quality of the married Iranian women's sex experience.

As it can be seen in Table 2, FQS showed acceptable CVI as well as good to excellent Cronbach's alpha coefficients.

Table 1

Results of Qualitative Phase: Applying Thematic Analysis Regarding The Factors Characterizing Women's Quality of Sex Experience

Main Themes	Sub-Themes	Sub-Themes Repetition
Physical Factors and Diversification	Facial beauty; Fitness; Appearance; Clothing and Dress Style; Facial expressions; Place Diversity of Sex; Position Diversity of Sex; Maintaining a Schedule for Sexual Intercourse; Beauty of the Environment; Body Attractiveness	39
Personality Factors	Expressing Feelings and Sociability; Flexibility and Agreeableness; Sensation Seeking; Divergent and Creative Thinking; Optimism and Positivism	23
Personal-Social Factors	Level of Education; Job Position; Having Free Time; Income; Recreation; Gender Appropriate Behavior; Level of Sex Desire and Fantasies; Social and Family Relationships; Marital Adjustment; Emotional Intimacy; Common Language; Number of Children; Place and Size of the Residence; Religious Beliefs and Religiosity	34
Mental and Physical Health	Love-Making Skills; Lack of Stress; Lack of Depression; Lack of Other Comorbid Mental Disorders; Physical Health; Motivation to Have Sex; Sexual Health; Lack of Decreased Sexual Libido	43
Communication Skills	Foreplay Skills; Self-Esteem; Self-Confidence; Mutual Respect in the Relationship; Verbal and Communication Skills; Cognitive Skills; Emotional Skills; Self-Motivation for Sex (Lack of Coercion)	33

Table 2

Results of CVI and Chronbach's Alpha Analyses for the Five Subscales of FQS

Subscales	Construct Validity	Cronbach's Alpha
Personality factors	0.501	0.747
Physical factors and diversification	0.513	0.881
Personal-social factors	0.682	0.793
Mental and physical health	0.623	0.825
Communication skills	0.584	0.811

Table 3

Correlation Matrix of the Five Sub-Scales of FQS

Components	1	2	3	4
1-Personality factors	1			
2- Physical factors and diversification	0.53**	1		
3- Personal-social factors	0.80**	0.76**	1	
4- Mental and physical health	0.69**	0.58**	0.73**	1
5- Communication skills	0.72**	0.54**	0.76**	0.70**

Note: **: Statistically significant at $p \leq 0.01$

The results of Pearson correlation between the variables showed that there is a significant correlation between all the proposed components.

Since the correlation coefficients of the variables were significant, it was possible to use the-

structural equation modeling method. The structural equation modeling method was used to evaluate the identified variables' relationship with married Iranian women's quality of sex.

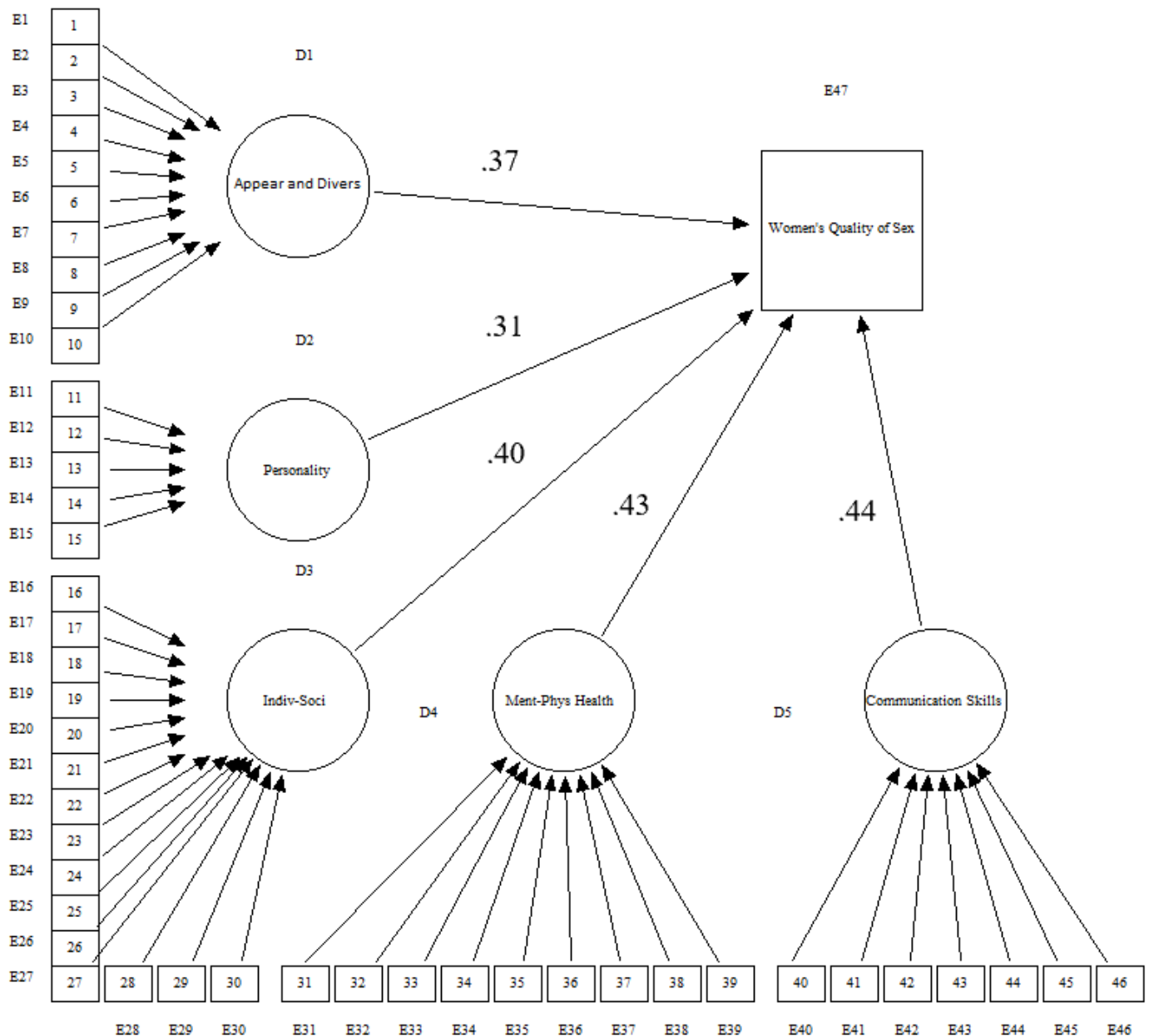


Figure 1. Diagram of the Proposed Conceptual Model and the Results of SEM Analysis

Note: Appear = Appearance; Divers = Diversification;
Indiv-Soci = Individual Social Factors; Ment-Phys Health = Mental Physical Health

Table 4
Statistical Significance of the Standardized Path Coefficients

Paths	Standardized Coefficient (β)	<i>T</i> values	<i>p</i>
Personality factors → quality of sex	0.31	5.11	0.0001
Physical factors and diversification → quality of sex	0.47	10.47	0.0001
Personal-social factors → quality of sex	0.40	7.94	0.0001
Mental and physical health → quality of sex	0.43	9.01	0.0001
Communication skills → quality of sex	0.44	9.39	0.0001

According to the results of Figure 1 and Table 4 above, all the five factors had statistically significant direct path coefficients towards the quality of sex. The proposed model fit the data well with goodness of fit indices as follows: RMSEA = 0.018, CFI = 0.91, GFI = 0.93, AGFI = 0.93, χ^2/DF = 1.287.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to explore and model the factors influencing the quality of married Iranian women's sexual intercourse in a mixed quantitative and qualitative study. Results revealed that according to experts, 5 main factors, namely, personality factors, appearance and diversification of the sexual intercourse, mental and physical health, personal and social factors, and communication skills were effective on married Iranian women's quality of sexual intercourse.

Also, modeling the factors affecting the quality of sex showed that the proposed model had a good fit with the data and it can be used to predict married women's sexual satisfaction. The results of the current study are in line with Ostovar et al.'s (2020) in terms of communication skills. The research by Webb et al. (2017) also showed that individual-social factors and personality factors are effective in the quality of sexual relations. Furthermore, the results of the present study were in congruence with the findings of Firoozji et al. (2016), Allen and Robson (2020), Sayeh Miri et al. (2020) all investigating the effects of personality traits on the quality of women's sex. Poggiogalle et al. (2014) also showed that physical and mental health plays an essential role in the quality of sex

and marital satisfaction. Quality of sex designates a person's mental evaluation of the positive and negative aspects of sex and his or her subsequent emotional response to this evaluation (Najimi et al., 2021).

Many common health conditions such as diabetes, hypertension, coronary heart disease, cancer, anxiety and depression and their treatments are associated with impaired sex quality and functioning (Flynn et al., 2016).

The quality of sex directly relates to the quality of life and marital satisfaction. Studies show that sexual dissatisfaction can be a possible explanation for many cases of divorces and separations (Orgilés et al., 2015; Shah Hosseini et al., 2014).

The cultural considerations are also of fundamental importance. This study examined cultural effects by conducting a mixed study in Iran. In this regard, studies have shown that factors as diverse as religious tendencies, cultural norms and economic status are all related to the quality of sexual intercourse (Firoozjai et al., 2021).

In the individual context, personality flexibility, extraversion and openness to new experiences play an role in improving the quality of sex (Chen & Zheng, 2021).

And finally, in terms of communication skills, mental health mechanisms and the ability to communicate play may relate to the quality the couples' relationship (Benoit et al., 2021). In conclusion, the authors belief that sexual satisfaction is achieved through a multidimensional mechanism and by considering dimensions at different levels.

Limitations

One of the limitations of the present study was that many variables that supposed to influence the quality of sex such as environmental conditions, marital differences, and the participants' age could not be controlled in this study. It was also difficult to find professionals who could rely on their expertise in the field of quality of sex. Also, it should be noted that the present study was conducted on married Iranian women and caution should be exercised in generalizing these findings to other groups.

Author Note:

The authors thank all participants who patiently participated in our study.

Statements:

There is no conflict of interest. This study was approved by the scientific and ethical committee of the department of psychology of Islamic Azad University, Isfahan Branch. All the participants read and approved the informed consent forms.

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Appendix 1
Persian Version of FQS

FQS					
<p>دستورالعمل: این پرسشنامه جهت انجام پژوهش تهیه گردیده و هدف محقق از این مطالعه «ارائه مدلی از عوامل اثر گذار بر کیفیت رابطه جنسی زوجین» می باشد. بنابراین پاسخ های دقیق و با تامل شما، اینجانب را در اجرای این تحقیق یاری خواهد نمود. بدیهی است پرسشنامه بدون نام بوده و پاسخ های شما تنها در راستای اهداف پژوهشی تحقیق حاضر مورد استفاده قرار خواهد گرفت.</p> <p>سن: _____ تحصیلات: _____ شغل: _____ مدت ازدواج: _____</p>					
سوالات	کاملاً مخالفم	مخالفم	نمی دانم	موافقم	کاملاً موافقم
عوامل ظاهری و تنوع خواهی					
۱					آراستگی چهره خیلی در جذابیت رابطه جنسی نقش دارد
۲					تناسب اندام یک مساله مهم برای افراد در رابطه جنسی است
۳					ظاهر آراسته و مرتب فرد را به رابطه جنسی متمایل می کند
۴					نوع لباس پوشیدن خیلی در هیجان اولیه و کیفیت رابطه نقش دارد
۵					حین رابطه جنسی، تغییرات چهره ای و احساس رضایت، کیفیت رابطه رو بالا میبرد
۶					تنوع مکانی، در کیفیت رابطه جنسی نقش مهمی دارد
۷					تنوع پوزیشن، در کیفیت رابطه جنسی نقش مهمی دارد
۸					داشتن رابطه جنسی مداوم و با برنامه بر کیفیت رابطه جنسی اثر می گذارد.
۹					جذاب سازی محیط، در کیفیت رابطه جنسی نقش مهمی دارد
۱۰					جذابیت اندام جنسی در کیفیت رابطه جنسی نقش مهمی دارد
عوامل شخصیتی					
۱۱					ابراز گری و خوش مشربی بر کیفیت رابطه جنسی و هیجانش اثر مثبت دارد
۱۲					انعطاف پذیری و همراهی شریک جنسی در کیفیت رابطه جنسی نقش مهمی دارد
۱۳					اینکه شریک جنسی (همسر) فردی هیجان خواه و اهل سفر و گردش باشد در کیفیت رابطه جنسی اثر گذار است
۱۴					خلاقیات شخصیتی در کیفیت رابطه جنسی نقش مهمی دارد
۱۵					مثبت اندیشی بر رابطه جنسی و کیفیت آن اثر دارد
عوامل فردی - اجتماعی					
۱۶					تحصیلات مرد و زن بر کیفیت رابطه جنسی نقش مهمی دارد
۱۷					موقعیت شغلی بر کیفیت رابطه جنسی نقش مهمی دارد
۱۸					زمان بیکاری زوجین بر کیفیت رابطه جنسی نقش مهمی دارد

					درآمد و سطح رفاه بر کیفیت رابطه جنسی نقش مهمی دارد	۱۹
					تفریح و خوش گذرانی و گذراندن وقت در کیفیت رابطه جنسی اثر دارد	۲۰
					هر یک از زوجین باید رفتار متناسب با جنسیت خود داشته باشد	۲۱
					فانتزی های جنسی بر کیفیت رابطه جنسی نقش مهمی دارد	۲۲
					روابط اجتماعی و کیفیت روابط خانوادگی بر کیفیت رابطه جنسی نقش مهمی دارد	۲۳
					سازگاری زناشویی بر کیفیت رابطه جنسی اثر مهمی دارد	۲۴
					نزدیکی عاطفی زوجین بر کیفیت رابطه جنسی نقش مهمی دارد	۲۵
					حرف زدن روزانه و داشتن تعامل روزانه بر کیفیت رابطه جنسی نقش مهمی دارد	۲۶
					وجود فرزند بر کیفیت رابطه جنسی نقش مهمی دارد	۲۷
					تعداد زیاد فرزندان کیفیت رابطه جنسی را پایین می آورد	۲۸
					مساحت محل زندگی بر کیفیت رابطه جنسی نقش مهمی دارد	۲۹
					گرایش های مذهبی و نوع نگرش مذهبی بر رفتار جنسی و کیفیت رابطه جنسی اثر دارد	۳۰
سلامت روان و جسم						
					مهارت های عشق ورزی یک تکنیک مهم برای ارتقای کیفیت رابطه جنسی است	۳۱
					نبود استرس خیلی در رابطه جنسی و کیفیت آن نقش دارد	۳۲
					نداشتن مشکلات روانشناختی همچون افسردگی بر میزان و کیفیت روابط جنسی اثر دارد	۳۳
					نداشتن اختلالات روانی همراه، وسواس و احساس ناامنی همگی باعث بهتر شدن کیفیت رابطه جنسی میشود	۳۴
					سلامت جسمانی نقشی مهمی در کیفیت رابطه جنسی دارد	۳۵
					انگیزه برقراری رابطه، نقشی مهم در کیفیت رابطه جنسی دارد	۳۶
					داشتن احساس خوب از رابطه جنسی، پیش بینی کننده مهمی از کیفیت رابطه جنسی است	۳۷
					سلامت اعضای جنسی خیلی در انگیزه و کیفیت رابطه جنسی اثر گذار است	۳۸
					مشکل سرد مزاجی، کیفیت و انگیزش رابطه جنسی را پایین می آورد	۳۹
مهارت های ارتباطی						
					مهارت های پیش از رابطه، خیلی رابطه را گرم و کیفیت رابطه جنسی رو بالا می برد	۴۰
					داشتن عزت نفس و اعتماد به نفس پیش بینی کننده کیفیت و جذابیت رابطه جنسی است	۴۱
					هم حسی و همدلی پیش بینی کننده کیفیت و جذابیت رابطه جنسی است	۴۲
					احترام متقابل پیش بینی کننده کیفیت و جذابیت رابطه جنسی است	۴۳
					مهارت های کلامی، ابراز گری کلامی افراد را افزایش داده و کیفیت رابطه جنسی رو بالا می برد	۴۴
					درک هیجان خود و همسر، زمینه مهمی برای برقراری و وجود رابطه با کیفیت جنسی است	۴۵
					تمایل شخصی و نه اجبار برای رابطه جنسی و صمیمی بودن مساله ای مهم در کیفیت رابطه جنسی است	۴۶