

# Self-silencing & Emotional Intimacy in Romantic Relationships

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## Background

Self-silencing was originally conceptualized as women stifling their own perspectives in order to preserve intimacy in a relationship and is strongly associated with increased rates of depression. Recent research suggests that men may self-silence as well. Though self-silencing is intended to protect intimacy, it typically does the opposite and may diminish intimacy and connection in relationships.



## Hypothesis

Self-silencing will be negatively associated with relationship and sexual satisfaction with an indirect effect of decreased emotional intimacy. Does this differ for men and women? What subscales of self-silencing account for differences between men & women?

## Methods

**Participants:** Sample of 421 individuals in long term (at least 2 years) sexual relationships. Data was collected using online surveys through the Mturk platform.

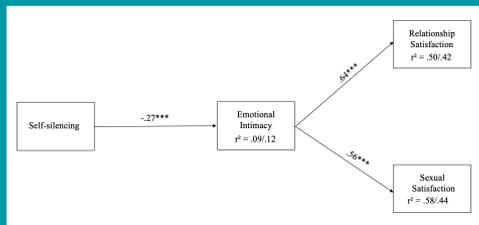
Means: age = 36.44 years, income = \$40-60k, 77% White, 51% women

### Measures:

- Silencing the Self Scale
- Emotional Intimacy Scale
- Couple Satisfaction Index
- New Sexual Satisfaction Scale

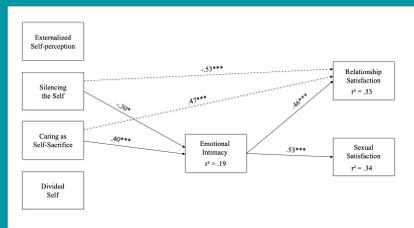
**Analysis:** two models were estimated using structural equation modeling. The first estimated the association between self-silencing and relationship satisfaction and sexual satisfaction using emotional intimacy as a mediator.

The second followed the same model but broke the self-silencing variable into four subscales and considered gender differences in the model.

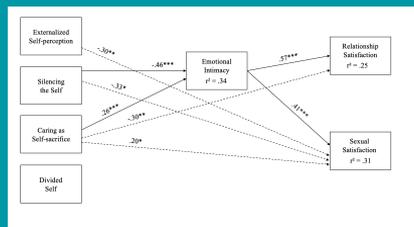


Men's r-squared values shown first.

## Men:



## Women:



## Results

Self-silencing was associated with decreased relationship and sexual satisfaction for men and women, and this was fully mediated by emotional intimacy. The caring as self-sacrifice subscale was associated with several positive outcomes in relationships, but the silencing the self scale diminished emotional intimacy and relationship satisfaction for men. For women, the silencing the self subscale and the externalized self-perception were associated with decreases in sexual satisfaction.

## Discussion

Silencing one's thoughts or perspectives with the intention of preserving intimacy in a relationship may actually decrease emotional intimacy and satisfaction in romantic and sexual relationships. Though it's possible that this is occurring in different ways for men and women (e.g., may be comparable to anxious attachment styles for women and avoidant attachment styles for men), the outcomes are similar.

In examining the subscales of self-silencing individually, more differences between men and women are seen, with decreases in sexual satisfaction more likely for women and decreases in relationship satisfaction for men. Additionally, externalized self-perception played a greater role in outcomes for women. It is important to note that the caring as self-sacrifice subscale was positively associated with intimacy and satisfaction in relationships.



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