

# 'Controlling' partners suffer more conflict with sexual desire

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People who feel secure in in their relationship with their partner have a more satisfactory sex life and are more able to be sensitive in the affection they give. However, people who are insecure, who tend towards anxiety or avoidance and are compulsive or controlling in their affection experience more conflict in their sexual desire and are less happy in their relationships, according to a study by the University of the Basque Country.

"Our results show that insecure people (anxious-ambivalent) tend to be compulsive in their care for their partners, while people prone to avoidance tend to be controlling and to exhibit greater [conflict](#) in their [sexual desire](#)", Javier Gómez Zapiain, a professor of the psychology of sexuality at the University of the Basque Country and lead author of the study, tells SINC.

Gómez Zapiain's research group studied the level of conflict in people's erotic desire, their degree of satisfaction with their sexual life and other factors related with sexual behaviour and care, based on a sample of 211 long-term couples in the Basque Country. They distributed individual questionnaires at random among various groups of professionals from the education, healthcare, public services and private business sectors.

"The objective of this study was to study the [relationship](#) between three essential relationships in human conduct – sexual, affective and caring behaviour. We tried to obtain empirical evidence that harmony between these three systems contributes to the quality of a couple's relationship",

explains Gómez Zapiain.

The respondents were divided into two large groups according to their affective model – secure and insecure. The insecure people were then subdivided into anxious and ambivalent types.

"Anxious people react by clinging to their partner and caring for them compulsively, while avoidant types react by evading their relationship. Their philosophy is that 'it's better not to have than to have and to lose'. These people also have more problems in the area of intimacy", the researcher explains.

Out of all the respondents, 116 were women and 95 men, aged between 20 and 65, with an average age of 37.36. Some 44.3% of these people were single, while 46.7% were married, 4.9% in a relationship and 4.1% divorced. Out of the sample, 88.7% described themselves as heterosexual, 5.6% homosexual and 5.6% bisexual.

Out of the whole sample, 89.5% had a stable partner at the time of the study, with the average length of their relationships being 13.52 years. "It was very important for us that the people taking part should have an affective bond within a couple that had existed stably for a minimum period of time", adds Gómez Zapiain.

## **The most conflict-ridden couples – anxious vs. avoidant**

The combination of different styles of [affection](#) in a couple can explain the degree of conflict within it. "Each partner must have the ability to support the other when they are feeling down and need emotional support. Similarly, they must be able to place themselves in what we call a 'position of dependency', in other words they must be able to recognise

their own need for support and to express this in times of [anxiety](#)", the expert explains.

An individual who is psychologically healthy can change flexibly from one position to another. The experts hypothesise that people who display security in their affection are able to do this, but that insecure types (anxious-ambivalent or avoidant) are clearly incapable.

"It is very interesting, from the perspective of a couple, to see how styles of affection combine within the [relationship](#). The most explosive combination occurs when one of the partners in the couple is anxious and the other avoidant. This combination has more likelihood of ending up with the couple seeking help, or even breaking up", says Gómez Zapiain.

### **More information:**

Gómez-Zapiain, J., Ortiz Barón, M. J., y Gómez Lope, J. (2011). Experiencia sexual, estilos de apego y tipos de cuidados en las relaciones de pareja. *Anales de Psicología*, 27(2), 447-456.

Gómez-Zapiain, J., Ortiz Barón, M. J., y Gómez Lope, J. (2011). Capacidad para aportar y solicitar apoyo emocional en las relaciones de pareja en relación con los perfiles de apego. *Anales de Psicología*, 27(3).

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