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Exploring Reasons Why Men and Women Refrain from Sex Despite Desire

Alessandra Lanti
University of Nevada, Las Vegas, lantia@unlv.nevada.edu

EXPLORING REASONS WHY MEN AND WOMEN REFRAIN FROM SEX DESPITE DESIRE

By

Alessandra Lanti

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Marta Meana, Ph.D., Committee Chair

Michelle G. Carro, Ph.D., Committee Member

Stephen D. Benning, Ph.D., Committee Member

Barbara G. Brents, Ph.D., Graduate College Representative

Tom Piechota, Ph.D., Interim Vice President for Research &
Dean of the Graduate College

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ABSTRACT

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By

Alessandra Lanti

Dr. Marta Meana, Examination Committee Chair
Professor of Psychology
University of Nevada, Las Vegas

Sexual behavior has been found to be an unreliable referent for sexual desire. Numerous studies have found that sexual activity is motivated by a range of non-desire related factors, from the promotion of intimacy to the seeking of new experiences. Sexual desire may also be an unreliable predictor of sexual activity. There is a dearth of research, however, on the reasons why individuals choose not to have sex despite the presence of desire for a willing partner. The main aim of this study is to qualitatively investigate the reasons why people refrain from sex when they feel desire for a willing partner. A secondary aim is to investigate differences in the reasons generated depending on whether desire is defined amorphously, physiologically or subjectively. The ultimate aim for future study is the construction and validation of the Bigger Than Desire Questionnaire (BTDQ) that will serve as a quantitative investigation of these reasons. In order to truly understand the sexual desire-sexual activity relationship, it is important to understand both why people have sex without desire and why people refrain from having sex despite desire.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Desire has proven to be the most elusive aspect of the sexual response cycle. It is ultimately a subjective experience that is not well-understood, either as an independent phenomenon or in its relationship to other constructs or behaviors. Unlike the other two components of the sexual response, arousal and orgasm, desire has no reliable physiological referent, especially in women, for whom genital arousal often occurs in the absence of desire (Chivers, Seto, Lalumiere, Laan, & Grimbos, 2010).

Desire has thus been primarily studied via the self-report of its experience and by the observation or self-report of behavior. Self-report of either internal states or behavior is problematic, especially in the socio-culturally sensitive area of sexuality, because it is subject to the pressures of social desirability, not to mention recall difficulties and other biases. Sexual behavior is not much more reliable an indicator of desire, as research has repeatedly shown that people have sex for many reasons, only one of which is desire (Hill, 1997; Hill & Preston, 1996; Impett & Peplau, 2002, 2003; Meston & Buss, 2007). From the promotion of intimacy to the seeking of new experiences, individuals choose to have sex for emotional and instrumental reasons in the absence of desire. Keeping this in mind, the use of sexual frequency as a measure of desire can theoretically result in its overestimation.

On the other hand, what about desire that does not lead to sex? Although nowhere near as voluminous as the literature on the non-desire reasons for having sex, there are some studies suggesting that sexual desire does not always result in sexual action and

that desire is often an insufficient criterion for sexual activity, especially for women (Baumeister, Catanese, & Vohs, 2001; Graham, Sanders, Milhausen, & McBride, 2004; Hill, 1997; Regan & Berscheid, 1996). Therefore, the other side of the desire-behavior coin is that the use of sexual activity as a measure of desire can also theoretically result in the underestimation of desire.

Instead of a linear trajectory from desire to sex as suggested by Kaplan (1974), we theorized that two interacting processes may precede sex: sexual desire and the incentive value of actually engaging in sex, given a situational context and set of circumstances. The incentive value of sex in any given instance may include the fulfillment of desire but there is also likely to be an appraisal and evaluation of costs and benefits associated with a particular sexual action. Assessing the incentive value of sex is theorized to be a more conscious and deliberate process than the experience of sexual desire, thus the two processes are likely to be at least partly orthogonal, although some overlap would be expected. Very intense desire might override a mildly negative incentive appraisal while a very negative incentive appraisal might override a moderate level of desire.

Teasing apart the incentive value of sex and sexual desire may be important to our understanding of what leads men and women to have sex or not. Expanding our understanding of the incentive value of sex may also be of particular relevance to the study of sex differences in sexual behavior and the relationship of that behavior to desire. Finally, this knowledge could be useful in addressing the difficulties of individuals distressed by their levels of desire or struggling with desire discrepancies within long-term relationships.

In summary, research has investigated non-desire reasons for having sex (Meston & Buss, 2007) but has barely considered reasons why people choose not to have sex when desire is present. Meston & Buss' (2007) study reported 237 reasons why people have sex, and only a handful of these were related to desire and pleasure. Perhaps there is an equally large number of reasons why people choose not to have sex with an attractive and willing partner despite experiencing significant sexual desire.

The following literature review will address attempts to define desire, as well as review and discuss the limitations of using behavior as a referent for desire and the utility of teasing apart sexual desire from the incentive value of sex. Finally, the aims and methods for a qualitative study investigating reasons why people decide against having sex when sexual desire for a willing and available partner is present will be proposed. This study is envisioned as the first step in the ultimately quantitative attempt to de-couple sexual desire from sexual activity alternately from previous efforts that were focused on non-desire reasons for having sex. In order to truly understand the sexual desire-sexual activity relationship, it is important to understand both why people have sex without desire and why people refrain from having sex despite desire.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Attempts to Define Sexual Desire

Over 40 years ago, Masters and Johnson (1966) described the human sexual response as consisting of 4 phases: excitement, plateau, orgasm and resolution. Noticeably absent was the construct of sexual desire as a precursor to arousal. Their emphasis on physiology clearly left undetected the motivational state that might lead one to seek out stimuli that would result in arousal. A few years later, Helen Kaplan (1974) added desire to the sexual response cycle and folded Masters and Johnson's plateau phase into the excitement phase to result in her tri-phasic sexual response model consisting of desire, excitement, and orgasm.

Although the introduction of the construct of desire to the conceptualization of the sexual response was widely accepted as a natural development, the construct of sexual desire remains to this day the most difficult to define aspect of sexual function. In the absence of a clear operationalization, sexual desire has consequently become fertile ground for competing theories, ideological stances, and, more recently, a great deal of public and media attention (Meana, 2010).

Because sexual desire does not appear to have any reliable physiological manifestations, attempts to define it have focused primarily on cognitive and behavioral referents. Levine (1987) proposed that "sexual desire is the psychological energy that precedes and accompanies arousal and tends to produce sexual behavior" (p. 36). Later, in a revised characterization of desire, Levine (2003) described it as "the sum of the

forces that lean us toward and push us away from sexual behavior" (p. 280). Levine thus maintained sexual action as the presumed final and only aim of desire. Along the same lines, Pfaus (2006) described sexual desire as the: “presence of desire for, and fantasy about, sexual activity” (p. 465), however, in this circular 'definition,' the word "desire" remains undefined. Regan and Berscheid (1999) referred to desire as a “a psychological state subjectively experienced by the individual as an awareness that he or she wants or wishes to attain a (presumably pleasurable) sexual goal that is currently unattainable" (p. 15). Kavanagh, Andrade and May (2005) investigated mainly the desire for drugs but suggested that their research was equally applicable to all forms of desire. They defined desire as: "an affectively charged cognitive event in which an object or activity that is associated with pleasure or relief of discomfort is in focal attention. In humans it can be referred to as a conscious wish or urge to gain pleasure" (p. 447). All definitions assert the power of desire to predict behavior and all refer to a strong cognitive component.

These definitions notwithstanding, the literature on desire, especially in the case of women, does not support supposed cognitive referents of desire as strong predictors of behavior. The association between fantasies and sexual desire has not been empirically demonstrated very often and has produced mixed findings at all ages. Cutler, Garcia and McCoy (1987) interviewed 155 perimenopausal women and found the frequency of sexual fantasies to be an unclear gauge of sexual desire. In a study that included assessing cues used by subjects to discern their levels of sexual interest, sexual dreams and fantasies appeared to be only one element of a larger pattern of indicators of sexual desire that included: frequency of intercourse, frequency of masturbation,

number of sexual contacts not ending in intercourse, and genital arousal. This study was done by administering a sexual desire questionnaire to 144 college students, ages 18 to 54, the average age was 26.9 years (Beck, Bozman, & Qualtrough, 1991). Purifoy, Grodsky, and Giambra (1992) did find that the frequency of sexual daydreaming varied with self-reported sexual desire and behavior and that sexual daydreaming, desire, and behavior were negatively correlated with age and sexual attitudes. The sample in their study consisted of 117 women comprising three age groups: 26 to 39 years (M=33.3), 40 to 55 years (M=47.9), and 56 to 78 years (M=64.9). Results showed that sexual daydreaming is less frequent in the older age groups. Brotto, Heiman and Tolman (2009) endeavored to clarify how mid-aged women define their experiences of sexual desire using in-depth interviews and exploration of narrative descriptions of sexual desire. Their study found that, when describing arousal, women rarely mentioned sexual fantasies. Fantasies have thus not emerged as a spontaneous trigger for, or indicator of desire for young or older women; rather women appeared to use fantasies to create or enhance arousal. In short, the relationship between fantasies and sexual desire appears to be complex and not easily quantified.

Subjective arousal, which is generally defined as the mental and emotional experience of being "turned on," is another cognitive referent that appears to have an unreliable relationship to behavior and to physiological arousal. In both men and women there is a discordance between subjective sexual arousal/desire and physiological signs of sexual

arousal, although this discordance is much greater in women. In a meta-analysis of the sexual psychophysiology research investigating self-reported and genital arousal in men

and women, Chivers, et al. (2010) found a statistically significant gender difference in the agreement between subjective and physiological sexual arousal; with men (r = .66) demonstrating higher subjective-genital agreement than women (r = .26). Age appeared a mediator of this relationship in men only. Older men seemed to have a higher concordance rate between physical and subjective arousal but this was not found in women.

So, although one would think that desire should be linked to arousal and consequently to sexual behavior, this meta-analysis of 132 peer reviewed laboratory studies published between 1969 and 2007, shows that physiological arousal can and does happen without subjective arousal or any phenomenon that we could reasonably call desire. In addition, there appears to be a sex difference in the specificity of sexual arousal. Regardless of their sexual orientation or subjective reports of arousal, women have shown genital arousal to both male and female sexual stimuli. In contrast, men's genital arousal appears to be much more category specific; triggered almost exclusively by their erotic targets (women for heterosexual men and men for heterosexual women) (Chivers, Rieger, Latty, & Bailey, 2004). In another study, Chivers, Seto and Blanchard (2007) investigated the hypothesis that women genitally respond more readily to the activity performed by the actors in a sexual film regardless of gender, while men respond to the gender of the actors performing the activity. As predicted, results showed that men responded genitally to the gender of the actors, while women responded genitally to the explicitness of the sexual activity. In fact, women's genital responses were surprisingly *unspecific*, with genital vasocongestion occurring to male and female stimuli and even to animal (bonobo) copulation.

Our inability to reliably link desire with either cognitive referents or physiological processes has led some theorists and researchers to posit that, despite Kaplan's assertion to the contrary, maybe desire and arousal are not entirely separate entities. Basson (2001) proposed a circular female sexual response cycle in which women may progress from a neutral, non-sexual state and to a sexually aroused state via the presentation of competent sexual stimuli. That is, they may feel desire only after physical arousal is instantiated. Janssen (2007) also argued that desire may arise from the awareness of feelings of sexual arousal in the body and not the other way around. Therefore, sexual desire may not precede sexual arousal, but rather be a direct consequence of the awareness of sexual arousal. Laan and Both (2008) proposed a model of incentive motivation to explain sexual desire and sexual dysfunction. This model presupposes that sexual stimuli in the environment activate a sexual response system in the brain which generates arousal and, consequently, desire.

This latter conflagration of desire and arousal is supported by the self-report of women, some of whom confirm the order proposed by the Basson model (arousal and then desire) and appear to have difficulty distinguishing between subjective arousal and desire. In a qualitative study involving 80 women between the ages of 18 and 84 (M = 34.3), Graham, et al., (2004) found that sometimes desire preceded arousal and other times it followed it. Several women in that study also reported that they could not clearly differentiate between subjective arousal and desire. Similarly, in in-depth interviews about sexual desire with mid-age women, Brotto, et al., (2009) found that a number of them expressed confusion about the distinction between subjective arousal and desire and often asked for explanations.

The conceptualization of sexual desire is also shaped and rendered more complex by gender differences. Men consistently report a higher sex drive than do women. Across many different studies and measures, men also think more about sex, experience more frequent and varied sexual fantasies, want more sex, desire more partners, masturbate more, like more varied sexual practices, are less willing to forgo sex, are more willing to give up resources for sex, initiate sex more often, and refuse sex less often than women (Baumeister, et al., 2001). Women also perceive men's sex drive to be stronger and it appears that men and women define the goals of sexual desire differently. Women tend to define the goals of sexual desire as relational and emotional, while men tend to view sexual behavior as the goal of sexual desire (Regan & Berscheid, 1996). In women, there is a marked tendency for sexual desire to wane with duration of partnership, while this is not as true in men (Klusmann, 2002). Women report low desire more frequently than men in many large scale surveys including the National Health and Social Life Survey (NHSLS), The National Survey of Sexual Attitudes and Lifestyles (NATSAL), and the Global Study of Sexual Attitudes and Behaviors (GSSAB). In the NHSLS, 1749 women and 1410 men between the ages of 18 and 59 were surveyed in the United States. Therein, 27-32% of sexually active women and 13-17% of men reported lack of interest in sex during the prior year (Laumann, Paik, & Rosen,1999). In the NATSAL, 40.6% of women surveyed reported low desire as opposed to 17.1% of men (Mercer et al., 2003). The GSSAB found a prevalence of 26-43% for lack of sexual desire among sexually active 40-80 year old women from 29 countries compared to 13-28% in men (Laumann et al., 2005).

For a considerable number of women, this perceived lack of sexual interest appears to be problematic. Hypoactive Sexual Desire Disorder (HSDD) - the absence or deficiency of sexual fantasies and desire for sexual activity accompanied with distress, as categorized in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM-IV; American Psychiatric Association, 1994) - is the most common presenting sexual complaint in women. In fact, the reported prevalence rate for Hypoactive Sexual Desire Disorder (HSDD) has been reported to be as high as 30 - 40% (Basson, 2007). This high rate of HSDD prevalence and desire complaints in women has sparked some controversy among researchers and theorists who are now questioning whether we are simply comparing women's desire to men's and coming up with a distorted figure that pathologizes women (Basson, 2000; Tiefer, 1991, 2001; Wood, Koch & Mansfield, 2006).

The gender differences in sexual desire that are consistently found in the literature may be in part related to a gender difference in the extent to which desire actually predicts behavior. Could it be that behavior is a better referent for desire in men than it is in women? There are a least two possibilities at work here. First, it could be that the experience of sexual desire does not compel women to sexual behavior as much as it does men. Women may be choosing not to have sex despite being turned on for a variety of reasons ranging from reputation to safety concerns (Graham, et al., 2004). Second, it could be that sexual behavior in women does not necessarily signal sexual desire. We know that there are a multitude of reasons why humans engage in sexual intercourse that have nothing to do with desire for sex (Meston & Buss, 2007), such as relationship maintenance (Impett, Gable, & Peplau, 2005).

Almost all definitions of sexual desire reviewed here are inextricably linked to behavior, but this link may be a miscalculation. Everaerd, Laan, Both and Spiering (2001) are the first to have proposed a definition that introduces the idea that desire may not always have behavior as its goal. They defined it as "the subjective experience of being attracted to or pushed towards objects or behaviors with potential rewarding effects. Desire seems to be about the promise of satisfaction, maybe through sexual action, but it is as much about hope, expectation, longing and craving. Without these there would be no desire" (p. 96). Participants in Regan and Berscheid's (1996) study also gave definitions of desire that were not necessarily tied to behavior. Typical definitions of sexual desire included:

> *Sexual desire is the longing to be emotionally intimate and to express love for another person. (p.116)*
>
> *I believe sexual desire to be an inner emotion. (p. 115)*
>
> *Sexual desire is the wanting to have sex or intercourse with partner or partners. It does not imply that it is the act of sex but it is just the thoughts and emotions going on in one's head when thinking about sex with a person of the opposite sex. (p. 115)*

In this study, Regan and Berscheid concluded that men and women conceptualize desire as more of a psychological experience rather than a behavioral sexual event. In particular, women view desire as representative of a more romantic and emotional experience than do men.

In order to investigate the link between desire and behavior in men and women, it will first be necessary to review in detail the literature on behavioral referents for desire. Is the relationship between sexual desire and sexual behavior as strong as some definitions would suggest or are there important qualifiers?

Problematic Nature of Behavior as a Referent for Sexual Desire

The use of behavior as a simple referent for sexual desire is problematic for at least two reasons. The first relates to the fact that people have sex for many reasons unrelated to desire. Historically, it has been presumed that the reasons why people have sex are mainly biological and fairly simple: to reproduce, to release sexual tension and to experience pleasure. More recent research, however, suggests that the motivating forces behind sexual action are much more numerous and psychologically complex.

The second reason relates to the fact that individuals may refrain from having sex despite experiencing desire for an attractive and willing partner for any number of instrumental reasons. Much less research has been conducted on this second complication in establishing the nature of the link between sexual desire and sexual activity.

The idea that sexual activity may serve a number of purposes other than sexual release or pleasure is hardly new. Levine (1987) theorized that reasons for having sex may span a wide range of motivators, in addition to the ones that scientists originally proposed. Some of these motivators may involve self-regulation or the relief of negative emotions; some may involve partner regulation such as pleasing him or her; some may be more mutual, such as an erotic or affectionate response to each other; yet others may be purely instrumental, such as to reduce suspicion of an extra-marital affair.

In a study about sexual motives and the goals of sexual desire, Hill and Preston (1996) theorized the existence of eight distinct incentives hypothesized to motivate

sexual behavior. Their research provided evidence that a number of different factors, other than basic reproductive drive and the pursuit of pleasure, serve as sexual motivators. The additional incentives focused more on the social aspects of sexual interaction. Hill and Preston hypothesized eight sexual motives derived from a factor analysis of the results of a study in which 612 introductory psychology students were administered the Affective and Motivational Orientation Related to Erotic Arousal Questionnaire (AMORE), a measure designed to assess the degree to which subjects endorsed various sexual incentives. The final version of the questionnaire comprised eight motives : (1) feeling valued by one's partner, (2) expressing value for one's partner, (3) obtaining relief from stress or negative psychological states, (4) providing nurturance through sexual interaction to improve a partner's psychological condition, (5) enhancing feelings of personal power, (6) experiencing the power of one's partner, (7) experiencing pleasure, and (8) procreating. The revised questionnaire was administered to a second group of 586 psychology students in a second study (Hill & Preston, 1996) in an attempt to confirm the first factor analysis solution. This study, as well as a third one (Hill & Preston, 1996) provided support for the aforementioned types of sexual motives.

In addition, results indicated that 70% percent of the men versus 43.1% of the women endorsed that sexual activity was the aim of sexual desire. Significantly more men than women in that study endorsed that sexual incentive is aimed at a physical goal, while many more women believed that sexual activity is often incentivized by something other than the physical rewards of sex. Since the afore-mentioned study was conducted on introductory psychology students with an average age of 23 years, it is

plausible to posit that older adults may endorse a slightly different pattern of sexual motives. Although, the aforementioned eight sexual motives are more directly related to specific goals associated with sexual action than they are to the fulfillment of sexual desire, they do illustrate that behavior that might appear to indicate sexual desire may actually relate to other types of desire (e.g., the desire to soothe a partner or the desire to feel more valued) (Hill & Preston, 1997). Similarly, in an earlier large study of 4,000 households in the San Francisco City area investigating a wide range of sexual behaviors, attitudes and beliefs (Leigh, 1989), results indicated that men gave more importance to pleasure, pleasing one's partner, conquest, and relief of tension as reasons for having sex than did women. Women attached more importance to emotional closeness. The median age of this sample was 35, ranging from 18 to 76 years old.

Hatfield and Rapson (2006) asked students at the University of Hawaii to list reasons why they and their friends have sex. The student participants in this study provided a surprisingly large number of reasons for engaging in sexual activity including the common ones: love, desire for pleasure and procreation. However, they also provided an array of other reasons such as: desire for self-esteem, status, spiritual transcendence, duty, conformity, kindness, conquest/power, submission to others, vengeance, curiosity, money, to make up after a fight, to make someone jealous, attain health and long life, stress reduction, to save the world, political revolt, relaxation, help going to sleep, and many more.

Similarly, Meston and Buss (2007) asked 444 psychology students (M age = 19) at the University of Texas to list all the reasons they thought themselves and other people engaged in sexual intercourse. The 715 reasons that were reported were

reviewed and collapsed into 237 distinct reasons ranging from the trivial (e.g., *I was bored*) to the profound (e.g., *I wanted to get closer to God*) . These 237 reasons comprised the Why Have Sex? (YSEX?) questionnaire, with each item presented as a short descriptive statement to which respondents could rate the likelihood that a given reason had or would lead them to have sex. In a second study, Meston and Buss (2007) then administered the YSEX? questionnaire to 1,549 undergraduate student participants. A factor analysis of the data revealed several major motivators for sex that were interpreted into 4 broad factors: Physical, Emotional, Goal Attainment, and Insecurity. Within each of these major factors, numerous sub-factors were contained. The Physical factor consisted of the sub-factors of : Stress Reduction (e.g., *I wanted to release tension*), Pleasure (e.g., *It feels good*), Physical Desirability (e.g., *The person had beautiful eyes*), and Experience Seeking (e.g., *I wanted the adventure*). The Goal Attainment factor comprised Resources (e.g., *I wanted to get a promotion*), Social Status (e.g., *I wanted to impress friends*), Revenge (e.g., *I wanted to get even with someone*), and Utilitarian (e.g., *I wanted to burn calories*). The Emotional factor included Love and Commitment (e.g., *I desired emotional closeness*), and Expression (e.g., *I wanted to say "I'm sorry"*). Lastly, the Insecurity factor consisted of Self-Esteem Boost (e.g., *I wanted to feel powerful*), Duty/Pressure (e.g., *I felt obligated to*) and Mate Guarding (e.g., *I wanted to get my partner to stay with me*).

Results of the study indicated that the most frequently endorsed reasons for having sex were characterized by nine major themes: 1) pure attraction; 2) experiencing physical pleasure; 3) expression of love; 4) having sex because of feeling desired by the other; 5) having sex to escalate the depth of the relationship; 6) curiosity or seeking new

experiences; 7) marking a special occasion or celebration; 8) mere opportunity; 9) sex happening due to seemingly uncontrollable circumstances. The most frequently endorsed reason by both men and women alike was physical attraction. Some gender differences were found with men showing significantly greater endorsement of having sex due to desirability (physical attributes) of the partner and simply because the opportunity presented itself. Men reported having sex to achieve physical pleasure, as a way to improve their social status ("bragging"), and for utilitarian reasons more than did women. Women exceeded men on only 3 of the 237 items: "*I wanted to feel feminine*"; "*I wanted to express my love for the person*"; "*I realized that I was in love*." In general, however, men and women were remarkably similar in their reasons for having intercourse. Twenty of the top 25 reasons given were identical for both genders and there were no gender differences in the Emotional factor.

In an attempt to gain insight into the motivations of older population and investigate the extent to which age mediates the reasons why people have sex, Meston, Hamilton and Harte (2009) subsequently administered the YSEX? questionnaire to three groups of premenopausal women: women aged 18-22 years, 23-30 years and 31-45 years. Results showed that women in the oldest category (aged 31-45 years) reported higher proportions of having sex for each of the subfactor reasons than did one or both of the other, younger groups. These findings suggest that when older women engage in sex, their underlying sexual motivations may be relatively diverse and greater in quantity. However, in all age groups (18-45 years) women reported having sex primarily for pleasure, love and commitment. The top 25 reasons for having sex were virtually identical across age groups.

Even though arousal may occur in many of the sexual situations that are precipitated by reasons unrelated to desire or once the activity is initiated, desire is not the primary impetus that leads to the sexual behavior and it is presumed that some of these goals could be achieved by means other than having sex. Cooper, Shapiro and Powers (1998) investigated self-generated reasons for having sex from 178 adolescents and young adults by posing them the following open-ended question:

"*Think about a time when you had an opportunity to have sex and decided to do so. What were some of the reasons you decided to have sex*?"

The 335 responses that participants generated were reviewed and categorized into four categories: 1) use of sex to escape, avoid, minimize negative emotions or threats to self-esteem; 2) use of sex to enhance positive emotions or experience; 3) use of sex to escape, avoid, minimize negative social experience; 4) use of sex to enhance social connections. The four categories were derived from motivation theories based on the distinction between behaviors that involve the pursuit of positive or pleasurable experiences and behaviors that involve the avoidance or escape of negative or painful experiences, as well as whether a social or individual goal is sought. Results showed that intimacy (e.g.,: to strengthen an emotional bond) and enhancement (e.g., for pleasure and enjoyment) motivations were the most common reasons for having sex. Aversive motivations were the least common. Men endorsed enhancement reasons for sex more than did women and women endorsed intimacy reasons more than did men.

In one-on-one, semi-structured clinical interviews about sexual desire with 28 adolescents, Tolman (1994) found that of the girls who said they experienced sexual

desire, two-thirds struggled with a disconnect between what they felt and what they did. Some girls engaged in sexual activity when they didn't feel desire:

> *R: I just did it because he wanted it, and I was always like tryin' to please him...(p.329)*

Eyre and Millstein (1999) asked high school students in Northern California between the ages of 16 and 20 what were some reasons they could think of to have sex and not to have sex. They identified a core set of reasons adolescents have sex that seemed to be stable across gender and ethnic lines, including loving the partner, believing that the "*time is right*," and condom availability. Boys/men indicated sexual arousal and opportunity as reasons for sex more than did girls/women. Participants produced a range of partner attributes that were considered reasons to want to have sex, including physical appearance, communication, intelligence, and sense of humor. Again, these studies were conducted with very young samples and it is expected that what motivates men and women to engage in sexual activities changes across the lifespan as individuals gain more sexual experiences, form more committed relationships, and undergo life changes that indubitably impact sexuality such as having children, raising a family, and focusing on career goals.

Consenting to unwanted or undesired sex is one very common form of the uncoupling of desire and sexual activity. In a survey study of 1,519 unmarried college students from 3 different countries (970 from the U.S., 327 from Russia, and 222 from Japan), 55% of American women, 32% of Russian women and 27% of Japanese women reported that they had consented to unwanted sex (Sprecher, Hatfield, Cortese & Potapova, 1994). In another study, more than one third of 80 male and 80 female American college students in committed relationships reported consenting to having sex

when they did not want to, during a period of two weeks (O'Sullivan & Allgeier, 1998). When asked the reasons for engaging in unwanted consensual sex, an ethnically diverse sample of 125 college women in Impett and Peplau's (2002) study cited the following reasons: satisfy a partner's needs, promote intimacy in the relationship, avoid rejecting a partner, and avoid tension in the relationship.

Participating in undesired sexual activity for the sake of relationship maintenance is a practice that both men and women engage in, although women are twice as likely as men to comply to sexual requests when they are not in the mood (Impett & Peplau, 2003). Carlson (1976) found that 84% of wives and 64% of husbands reported that they often complied with sexual requests that they did not desire. Along the same lines, Impett, et al., (2005) researched actual sacrifices made in intimate relationships and identified several sacrifice categories. They asked 45 male and 77 female undergraduates at the University of California, Los Angeles to recall as many instances of sacrifice in their dating relationships as possible. Sacrifice was defined as both doing something unwanted and giving up something wanted. Abundant space was provided to allow participants to write open-ended descriptions of their sacrifice. After analyzing the responses, a coding scheme was developed to classify the narrative descriptions of sacrifices into a smaller number of distinct categories. Some of the categories included sex-interactions such as "*wearing things he finds sexy*" and "*having sex when I don't want to*." Topics in the categories of sex interactions and intimacy were listed by 25% and 10% of participants, respectively.

Results of these studies clearly demonstrate that desire for actual intercourse or for physical pleasure is only one of the many objectives of sexual action. Furthermore,

a pattern appears to emerge such that women seem to be more motivated toward sexual activity for relational and emotional reasons, while men seem to be more motivated to sexual activity for its intrinsic physical rewards.

In a study of mid-age women with and without arousal difficulties, Brotto, et al., (2009), identified enhanced intimacy as one of the most important "goals" of sexual desire, as opposed to intercourse or sexual activity. Similarly, Regan and Berscheid (1996), in a survey of 142 University students found that when asked to generate goals of sexual desire, 43.1% of the 58 women who responded, cited sexual activity; 34.5% cited love or emotional intimacy; 32.8% mentioned physical contact or closeness; 12.1% cited romance or a romantic relationship, and 12.2% mentioned sexual satisfaction or pleasure. Of the 60 men that responded, 70% cited sexual activity as the goal of sexual desire; 13.3% cited love or emotional intimacy; 10% talked about "being with another;" 5% cited a physical or sexual relationship, and 5% mentioned physical contact or closeness. Similarly, Carroll, Volk, and Hyde (1985), tested the hypothesis that there are differences between men and women's motives for participating in sexual behavior. Most women in a sample of 249 college students responded that their motives for sexual action included love, commitment, and emotion, while men's motives were more focused on pleasure, fun, and physical need.

Gender differences aside, it seems fairly clear that one direction of the relationship between sexual activity and sexual desire is not particularly robust. Individuals appear to have sex for many reasons that have little to do with sexual desire. In other words, sexual activity does not necessarily, or maybe even commonly, indicate the presence of sexual desire, at least for one partner. But what if we examine the

sex/sexual desire relationship from the opposite direction? Is sexual desire a good predictor of sexual activity? This is a little researched area, although most people are easily capable of recalling instances when they refrained from sexual activity despite having desire and a sufficiently attractive and willing partner.

In a focus group study of 80 women with a mean age of 34.3 and an age range between 18 and 84, Graham et al., (2004), found that, for some women, sex was not worth the cost of having it. One of the recurring issues in the younger age groups was the need that many women felt to "put on the breaks" in situations in which they had concerns regarding possible negative consequences of their sexual behavior. Some of the given reasons for abstaining despite desire were: being in a current relationship, being concerned about their reputation, being worried about their safety, being concerned about pregnancy, lack of trust in the potential partner, and thinking that the person may be "inappropriate." Women spoke of their ability to turn their arousal on and off at will:

> *P: There's so much control...it's like you can almost [say] yeah, I'm interested but no, maybe not, and then you completely forget about it if it's not really that interesting to you. It's almost like you can turn it off and on if you want to. [18-24 group] (p. 532-533)*

In the same study, other arousal enhancers and inhibitors that may affect sexual behaviors were identified and they included: feelings about one's body, feeling "accepted" by a partner, unwanted pregnancy/contraception and sexually transmitted diseases, feeling desired versus feeling used by a partner, style of approach/initiation, timing and negative mood.

In Tolman's (1994) study of adolescent girls, many reported not having sex when they in fact felt desire:

> *M: It's so confusing, 'cause you have to like say no, you have to be the one to say no, but why should you be the one to, cause I mean maybe you're enjoying it and you shouldn't have to say no or anything. But if you don't, maybe the guy'll just keep going and going, and you can't do that, because then you would be a slut... (p.333)*

Concerns about reputation, fear of male violence or abandonment, a sense of having to adhere to cultural norms, and a desire to please their partners seemed to influence these adolescent girls' decisions about sexual behavior more than did desire. In Eyre and Millstein's (1999) study of high school students, reasons reported for not engaging in sexual activity included "*no condom*," "*person has sex with too many people*," and "*not ready for sex*."

In a study of token resistance, or the practice of saying "no" to sex when actually meaning "yes," Muehlenhard and Hollanbaugh (1988) asked 610 female introductory psychology students from Texas A&M University to recall how many times they had been in three situations. The first situation involved the woman wanting to have sex with a willing partner but saying "no" to sex for some reason and meaning it. In the second situation she indicated "no" and meant "maybe." In the third situation, she indicated "no" but meant "yes." Thirty-nine percent of participants had engaged in token resistance. Token resistance has been attributed to three major factors: practical reasons (e.g., fear of appearing promiscuous or uncertainty about a partner's feelings), physical, emotional or moral inhibition-related reasons (e.g., moral concerns), and manipulative reasons (e.g., desire to be in control, playing "hard to get"). More interestingly, 85.2% reported saying "no" when they really did mean no, even though in a way they wanted to have sex, and 68.5% reported saying "no" when they meant "maybe." Unfortunately for our purposes, reasons for saying no in the latter two scenarios were not analyzed as

the authors were mainly interested in token resistance. Nonetheless, this study made it clear that young women sometimes refrain from sex when they desire it.

On the other end of the age spectrum, older adults may also refrain from sex despite having sexual desire. Ill-heath, a partner's sexual dysfunction, cultural norms equating sexual expression with youth, lack of available partners, or difficulty lubricating can create substantial problems for individuals who still have a robust sexual desire; while the advent of Viagra and other PD-5 inhibitors may force back into action women who were happily retired from the conjugal bed (Carpenter, Nathanson & Kim, 2009). In fact, using data from 1,035 sexually-active heterosexual adults, aged 49-59 years, who participated in the National Health and Social Life Survey (NHSLS), Carpenter et al., (2009) explored the social factors contributing to women and men's lower levels of sexual satisfaction as a function of age. For men, health and sexual problems appeared to diminish sexual satisfaction insofar as they impacted sexual practices, while for women, the effects of sexual problems and health remained independent and women overall reported lower levels of physical pleasure at older ages, especially after age 56. This finding is consistent with other studies that have indicated that sexual satisfaction begins to decline in late middle age, especially among women (Edward & Booth, 1994; Laumann, Gagnon, Michael, & Michaels, 1994). Biological factors, such as cardiovascular disease, hypertension, diabetes, arthritis and specific sexual dysfunctions have an indisputable effect on sexual activity on the elderly. Nevertheless, there is also the impact of psycho-social factors such as boredom with the relationship, widowhood, body-image, self-esteem, retirement, diminished income, partner availability and mental illness (Kontula & Haavio-Mannila, 2009).

Given the above literature review, it appears that behavior has limited utility as a referent for sexual desire. Individuals engage in sexual behavior for many reasons unrelated to sexual desire and, inversely, sexual desire itself may not be as strong a predictor of sexual behavior as one might assume. The robustness of the relationship between behavior and desire may also differ between men and women, such that for women this relationship may be a more tenuous one. A third variable may in fact be mediating the relationship between sexual desire and behavior – the incentive value of sex; the estimated (positive or negative) consequences or outcomes of a given sexual action. It is likely that desire and the incentive value of sex have some relationship to each other, but teasing them apart may be important to our understanding of what leads men and women to have sex or not. The incentive value of sex may also be of particular relevance to the study of sex differences in sexual behavior and the relationship of that behavior to desire.

Distinguishing Desire from Incentive Value of Sex

As indicated by the aforementioned literature, behavior is not a reliable referent for sexual desire and sexual desire is not a reliable predictor of sexual behavior. In fact, individuals engage in sexual behaviors for a myriad of reasons unrelated to sexual desire (Carlson 1976; Carpenter, et al., 2009; Cooper, et al.,1998; Eyre & Millstein, 1999; Hill & Preston, 1996, 1997; Impett, et al., 2005; Impett & Peplau, 2002, 2003; Leigh, 1989; Levine, 1987; Meston & Buss, 2007; Sprecher, et al., 1994; O'Sullivan & Allgeier, 1998; Tolman, 1994). The much less researched question is the extent to, and

conditions under which individuals refrain from sexual activity despite having desire and a sufficiently attractive and willing partner, although there is some evidence that this happens quite frequently also (Graham et al., 2004; Leigh, 1989; Muehlenhard & Hollabaugh, 1988). The link between sexual behavior and desire also appears to be even more complex for women, in whom the association seems to be even weaker than it is for men (Brotto et al., 2009; Carroll et al., 1985; Regan & Berscheid, 1996).

One potential explanation for the relative instability of the relationship between sexual desire and sexual activity, especially in women, is that the relationship may be consistently mediated by a third process/variable: the evaluation of costs and benefits associated with having sex, which we will henceforth refer to as the incentive value of sex. In other words, individuals are likely to engage in a calculated estimation of the positive or negative consequences of having sex, even in the presence of desire. It is also likely that desire and the incentive value of sex may overlap (e.g., the more desire, the more positive the assessment of incentives or the higher the likelihood that concerns may be overridden), but there are theoretical reasons to posit that they may also have some independence. For example, assessing the incentive value of sex would be a more conscious and deliberate process than the experience of sexual desire. The extent to which one influences the other is likely to vary across individuals, age, and gender, although currently these questions have not been subjected to empirical investigation.

It is not difficult, however, to speculate as to the partial independence of sexual desire and the incentive value of sex, especially in regard to women for whom sex may represent higher risk. Sometimes motives other than the fulfillment of desire may be judged to be more important and consequently hijack desire completely. In Graham et

al.'s (2004) study, young women reported prioritizing their reputation or their safety over physical pleasure. This de-incentivization of sex in relation to other more strongly desired outcomes may also be facilitated in women by their more tenuous sex drive. A weaker sex drive may simply be less resistant to and more easily dominated by other motives. Based on previous research (Graham et al, 2004; Leigh 1989; Muehlenhard & Hollabaugh, 1988), some of the values that appear to have the potential to supersede sexual desire in terms of incentive value for women are safety, body image, reputation, protection against pregnancy, and relational concerns. Thus, sex seems to be no different from many other aspects of life in which individuals sometimes engage in activities they don't like for the purpose of achieving some ulterior goal or refrain from engaging in activities they like in order to avoid some aversive consequence or in order to achieve some other more valued goal.

Non-sexuality related research suggests that the control of emotions, motivation and behavior are regulated by a combination of external stimuli and internal cognitive events (Carver, 2005; Metcalfe & Mischel, 1999; Strack & Deutsch, 2004). These triggers sometimes act in unison, and sometimes they pull in opposing directions (Toates, 1995, 1998, 2006). Behavior then arises from a combination of direct controls, such as the physically present stimuli and indirect controls, such as the meanings attached to interactions, memories, common-sense, and the evaluation of consequences and outcomes (incentive value). For example, Strack and Deutsch (2004) proposed a two-system model to explain social behavior as the result of the joint or conflicting function of a reflective and an impulsive cognitive process. The reflective system generates decisions based on knowledge, values, attitudes, reflection, judgment and the

ability to make inferences about the future. In this system, behavior is the result of a rational evaluation of the viability and desirability of the outcome of the considered action. Conversely, the impulsive system generates decisions based on external or internal stimuli that are unrelated to rational considerations. These two systems may work synergistically or antagonistically to one another. Compared to other species, humans seem to have a particularly good capacity to use indirect controls (reflective system), especially women (McClure, Laibson, Loewenstein, & Cohen, 2004; Toates, 2009).

One does not, however, need to identify the reflective avoidance of undesired consequences of having sex or the attainment of goals more highly valued than sex to explain why desire may not lead to sexual behavior. In some cases, it may be simpler than all that. It may be that liking something and behaving in a fashion that communicates that positive valence may not necessarily mean that the individual actually wants it. In other words, liking sex does not necessarily mean wanting sex, just like liking chocolate cake does not necessarily mean wanting chocolate cake.

There is a body of literature that supports the idea of two distinct systems in the brain associated with *liking* and *wanting*. Berridge and Robinson (1998) proposed that liking represents the affective response to a stimulus, while wanting represents the tendency to approach the stimulus. They showed that manipulation of the dopamine system in rats affects the *wanting* but not the *liking* of a stimulus. Based on previous studies that show that dopamine antagonists reduce goal-directed or consummatory behavior, Berridge and Robinson demonstrated that dopamine depleted rats were still

able to make hedonic evaluations, that is, to "like" the rewards, but they failed to "want" the rewards they "liked."

This model can be applied to sexual motivation and sexual behavior, where one could want sex without actually liking it or like it without putting much effort into seeking it out. This dissociation of wanting and liking appears to take place in the brain. The amygdala processes both positive and negative affective information. Activation of the amygdala by positive, arousing stimuli seems to reflect the psychological state of wanting (incentive motivation) whereas intense pleasure (liking) seems to deactivate the amygdala. In fact, declines in amygdala activity are strongly associated with extremely pleasurable stimuli capable of producing a highly rewarding condition that could be compared to a consummation experience such as sex (Toates, 2009; Zald, 2003). It is possible then that for some individuals, liking is enough to produce the experience of consummation, making further action to pursue the "liked" goal unnecessary.

This literature supports Meana's (2010) contention that the experience of sexual desire may sometimes be its own reward or goal, especially for women. There are a number of studies in which women report that being desired is arousing (Brotto et al., 2009; Graham et al., 2004) and that neither sex, nor intercourse, nor orgasm are necessarily the goal of sexual desire (Brotto et al., 2009; Regan & Berscheid, 1996). It is possible that sometimes the feeling of desire is a sufficient reward, at least for women. Animal motivation models indicate that appetitive behaviors generally lead to consummatory behaviors (Pfaus, 2006), but there is also animal research that supports the rewarding nature of evoking desire in potential mates by acting desirous. In the proceptive phase, female rats are in control and pace the frequency of an interested

mate's mounts by darting and hopping around him. These desire-communicating behaviors have been shown to be rewarding (as evidenced by the conditioning of place preference in cages) to the female rat, quite apart from intromission. Interestingly, intervals between intromissions increase the likelihood of conception (Bancroft, 2009).

Recent neuroimaging research focused on the orbitofrontal cortex have made it possible to study the saliency of reward, punishment, expected reward, expected punishment, and even the subjective pleasantness of a reward. This body of research is increasing our understanding of the quality of pleasure and emotional experience and subsequent decision making. It has also indicated that different regions of the orbitofrontal cortex correspond to the *liking* and the *wanting* aspects of reward. Biologically based theories of personality posit that distinct aversive and appetitive motivational systems control emotions and behaviors. The appetitive system, also called the behavioral approach system, when engaged by incentive cues produces approach behaviors and positive affect. Neurobiological models highlight the cortical and subcortical areas of the brain involved in this system's functioning and in particular the selective firing of dopamine by neurons in the ventral tegmental area of the midbrain to the nucleus accumbens during the anticipation of reward. Another region of the brain, specifically the mesial prefrontal cortex is activated only after a reward has already been received. These findings also suggest that distinct anatomical regions of the brain are responsible for anticipation of reward (approach system, wanting) and reward outcomes (Carver, 2005).

Different incentives also appear to be associated with different brain chemicals. Fisher (2000) proposed a model of sexual motivation composed of three primary

emotional systems for mating, reproduction, and parenting. Each emotional system corresponds to distinct brain pathways with the sex drive primarily associated with estrogens and androgens; attraction associated primarily with high levels of catecholamines, dopamines and norepinephrine, and low levels of serotonin; and attachment associated primarily with the neuropeptides, oxytocin and vasopressin. These three systems can act independently of one another such that we can feel sexual desire towards individuals to whom we are not emotionally attached or we can have no sexual desire towards someone for whom we feel deep emotional attachment. Conflicts between these emotional systems may conflict with personally held values and beliefs systems (Diamond, 2004; Fisher, 2000). Therefore, our brain chemicals may influence sexual behavior depending on our motivation, contextual factors, and which particular incentive we are seeking at the time.

Hill (1997) makes a distinction between sexual desire and sexual motivation. He argues that the value an individual places on incentives influences the motivational state. Also, motivational processes may be triggered or heightened by the presence, accessibility, relevance and situational factors of the incentives, while alternately they may be diminished by the absence, inaccessibility, irrelevance and situational factors of such incentives. Individuals who place stronger value on a particular incentive are more likely to initiate action towards consummation or attainment of the sexual goal. In a study of 330 introductory psychology students who were given the afore-mentioned AMORE questionnaire, the eight dispositional sexual motives were strongly and independently related to sexual behavior, after controlling for global sexual desire (Hill,

1997). Hill concluded by commenting on the weak link between global sexual desire and sexual behavior:

"The linkage of specific desirable partner attributes and sexual situations with different sexual motives suggests that the construct of global sexual desire has limited utility, both conceptually and in terms of accurately predicting behavior. The multidimensional perspective of sexual motives, in contrast, provides a more inclusive and accurate characterization of the various motivational functions and goals served by different sexual behavior patterns." (p. 150)

Again, the inadequacy of sexual desire as a predictor of sexual behavior and the limitations of making such a simplistic connection is highlighted. The investigation of what motivates an individual's sexual behavior must encompass biology, cultural values, individual differences, situational factors, the nature of the relationship, and the potential cost-benefit of sexual choices. Specifically in regards to women, research must take care not to confuse their behavioral choices in regards to sex with their experience of sexual desire. When women refrain from having sex, they may be privileging a reward more highly valued than the fulfillment of sexual desire, or they may be avoiding an outcome more aversive than foregoing the fulfillment of sexual desire. Assuming that sex drive is the most significant explanation for sexual behavior may be ill-conceived because it ignores contextual factors that may be important to some types of motivation (Wallen, 2001). Although sexual desire and sexual behavior are related, it is clear that, especially for women, many other factors contribute to the decision to have sex; and that what turns women on and what they value may often not align (Meana, 2010). It is therefore imperative to distinguish between desire and the incentive value of sex if we want to understand human sexual motivation, and perhaps more pointedly that of women.

CHAPTER 3

AIMS OF THE STUDY

The primary aim of this study was to collect reasons why people refrain from sex when they feel desire for a willing partner (or if the participant never had such an experience, he/she was asked to imagine what others would do in that situation), so as to generate items for the future construction of a questionnaire that will investigate the question quantitatively. The question is of theoretical interest because it has the potential to illuminate the complex desire-behavior relationship and the partial orthogonality of sexual desire and behavior. If we can tease apart sexual desire from disincentives or incentives more highly valued than the fulfillment of desire, this may further our understanding of the reasons why desire and behavior are not always aligned, especially in women.

Since the constructs of sexual desire and arousal are ambiguous and women seem to have difficulty distinguishing one from the other, a secondary aim is to explore differences in the reasons generated depending on whether desire is defined amorphously, physiologically, or subjectively. A tertiary aim of the study is to investigate gender differences in the frequency and nature of the reasons individuals generate (either from experience or their imagination) for refraining from sex when desire for a willing partner is experienced. This analysis will, of course, only be preliminary as qualitative data will provide a limited amount of information.

Ultimately, the goal in a future study will be the construction and validation of the Bigger Than Desire Questionnaire (BTDQ), which will consist of the items generated in this study and serve as a quantitative investigation of reasons for foregoing sex despite desire. At that point, more sophisticated analyses of age and gender as mediators will be possible, as well as the exploration of the relationship of reasons to a host of other possibly associated constructs such as sexual function and relationship adjustment.

As afore-mentioned, uncovering the reasons why men and women refrain from sex despite the presence of desire may be an important step in understanding the sexual desire-sexual behavior relationship. The potential discovery of gender differences may also help elucidate the large differences in sex drive reported in the literature. On the other hand, we may find that men refrain from sex more often and for more varied reasons than the current characterizations of male sexuality as an unthinking and unstoppable force would indicate. Additionally, this knowledge might be helpful in attenuating the rampant diagnosis of HSDD in women and the pathologizing of what might be normal levels of sexual desire. Including the concept of the incentive value of sex in diagnostic considerations may be helpful in this regard. Furthermore, incorporating the incentive value of sex in treatment initiatives for both men and women distressed by their levels of desire may be clinically useful. The problem for some of these individuals may lie in their incentive evaluations rather than in desire itself. These appraisals could then be investigated and targeted in therapy. Finally, de-coupling sexual desire from sexual behavior may promote the use of sexual desire as a dependent variable in sexuality research, in contrast to its more habitual and inaccurate

inference from behavior. This may be particularly important for women as the experience of desire may be its own reward more often that it is for men.

The nature of this study is exploratory and thus we have some expectations based on existing literature, but no firm hypotheses. We expect that men and women will generate varied reasons why they decided not to have sex when they felt sexual desire or imagined someone would. Although we do not apriori expect major differences in responses between the three questions (amorphous definition of desire/arousal, subjective definition of desire/arousal, and physical definition of desire/arousal), there could be slight differences between the responses generated by the "physiological arousal" question and the other two questions. The theoretical basis for this expectation is that women may have difficulty determining when and if they are physiologically aroused and therefore may not be able to access incidents during which they refrained from sex while being "physiologically aroused."

CHAPTER 4

METHOD

Participants

Participants were 684 psychology students and community volunteers recruited through the UNLV subject pool, word-of-mouth, and snowball techniques. Eighty participants were eliminated due to missing or un-interpretable data leaving a final number of 604 valid participants. The majority of the participants were female (74.7%), heterosexual (90%), and identified a current religious affiliation (67.6%). In terms of ethnicity/race, 50.3% reported being European American/Caucasian and 100% reported at least some college education. Attempts were made to recruit participants of different ages, but due to the large college population that responded to the UNLV subject pool recruitment ad, the average age of our participants was 23.16 (SD = 10.03) with a range from 18 to 77 years. Seventy-nine percent of participants were under 25 years old (inclusion criterion was over 18 years of age). Only 23.6% of participants reported never having had sex in their lifetime and the average age at the time of first sexual experience was 16.45 (SD = 2.19). Participants were evenly represented as far as relationship status and income. See Table 1 for detailed demographic characteristics of participants.

Materials

Socio-demographic questionnaire. Participants were computer-administered a brief socio-demographic questionnaire that inquired about age, gender, sexual orientation, whether they have had sex (and at what age) in their lifetime, relationship

status, education level, household income, religious affiliation and race/ethnicity (Appendix 1).

The BTDQ item-generating questions. Participants were then randomly presented with one of the following three versions of the open-ended question:

Version 1 (amorphous): *"Have you ever been really turned on by someone who was willing to have sex with you and yet you decided NOT to have sex with them? If so, what were the reasons why you decided against having sex despite such circumstances? Please, list as many reasons as you can remember. If you have never personally encountered such a situation, list reasons why you think someone else might decide NOT to have sex, even when they are turned on by an attractive and willing other person. "*

Version 2 (physical): *"Have you ever been really physically aroused sexually (Women: i.e. wet, lubricated, tingling sensation, swelling. Men: i.e. tingling sensation, erect – partially or completely, had a hard-on.) by someone who was willing to have sex with you and yet you decided NOT to have sex with them? If so, what were the reasons why you decided against having sex despite such circumstances? Please, list as many reasons as you can remember. If you have never personally encountered such a situation, list reasons why you think someone else might decide NOT to have sex, even when they are physically aroused sexually by an attractive and willing other person. "*

Version 3 (mental/emotional): *"Have you ever been really mentally and emotionally aroused sexually by someone who was willing to have sex with you and yet you decided NOT to have sex with them? If so, what were the reasons why you decided against having sex despite such circumstances? Please, list as many reasons as you can*

remember. If you have never personally encountered such a situation, list reasons why you think someone else might decide NOT to have sex, even when they are mentally and emotionally aroused sexually by an attractive and willing other person. "

Procedure

Participants were 684 psychology students and community volunteers recruited through the UNLV subject pool, word-of-mouth, and snowball techniques. The University of Nevada Las Vegas Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved this study in August of 2011 before any participants were run. Individuals who agreed to participate were given a password and link to access the consent and study questionnaires. Upon entering the link into a browser, participants were presented with the informed consent that emphasized the confidential nature of the data solicited and their right to withdraw from the study at any time. After reviewing the consent form and upon agreeing to participate by clicking "Proceed," they were presented with the study demographic questionnaire and one of the three versions of the study's question, such that 1/3 of participants received Version 1, 1/3 received Version 2 and 1/3 received Version 3. The assignment of the question's versions to participants was executed randomly via a feature available from Survey Monkey software. Survey Monkey software then recorded all data points and allowed participants to write short narrative answers. Upon completion of the socio-demographic questionnaire and the narrative responses to the study question, participants were prompted to close the browser window.

Data Analysis

The lists of reasons generated by participants for not having sex despite desire were extracted from Survey Monkey. Two independent investigators reviewed the data and all explicitly stated reasons were pulled out and an effort was made to avoid interpretations, assumptions, or "reading between the lines." Responses that were ambiguous, incomplete, or that indicated that the person had not understood the question were excluded (N = 29). There were also 51 missing responses leaving the final number of valid participants' responses to 604. Two raters then independently organized the reasons into themes. Rater 1 organized the reasons into 65 themes while Rater 2 organized the reasons into 44 themes. The discrepancy in the number of themes between the two raters is explained by the fact that Rater 2 collapsed reasons into broader themes while Rater 1 used more stringent criteria for what constituted a theme. The raters met to discuss agreed-upon themes and found that Rater 1's identified themes were easily collapsible into Rater 2's broader theme categories. Inter-rater agreement on which items belonged in which of the 44 agreed upon themes was calculated as 93% by a third co-investigator. The independent raters then met to settle on a further collapsing of the 44 themes and their final wording which resulted in 13 themes. At that time they also examined all items once again and determined which of the 13 themes they belonged in. Rater agreement on which items belonged into the final 13 categories was calculated by a third co-investigator and ranged from 93% to 98% across categories. See Figure 1 for a step-by-step depiction of the aforementioned process.

Descriptive analyses were used to characterize the data in terms of the most and least frequently appearing reasons for not having sex despite desire overall and by

gender. Rather than count how many times each participant provided a reason in any one category, participants were coded categorically as having endorsed a specific theme or not. Theme endorsement for not having sex despite desire was then analyzed as a function of 1) question type; 2) gender; 3) question by gender, and 4) age group, using chi-square tests of significance.

CHAPTER 5

RESULTS

Theme-Categories of Reasons for not Having Sex Despite Desire

Thirteen final theme categories were identified characterizing the reasons given by participants for not having sex despite desire, either in their experience or in their imagination. These categories were: 1) Values; 2) Safety/Risk; 3) Protecting/Respecting Existing Relationships; 4) Securing Relationships; 5) Physical/Structural Impediments; 6) Desired Person Deficits; 7) Fear of Social/Self-judgment; 8) Negative Emotions; 9) Personal Deficits; 10) Relationship Avoidance; 11) Performance Anxiety; 12) Relationship Control; 13) Fear of Negative Sexual Experience.

The Values theme integrated sub-categories of reasons given by participants that related to religion, morality, and personal principles. Included in this theme were reasons associated with the desire or moral imperative to postpone sex until marriage, the necessity to practice abstinence, placing high value on virginity (e.g., "I didn't want to lose my virginity"), the wish to limit one's number of sex partners, parental and family influences, discomfort with age discrepancy (e.g., "she was too young"), the desire to wait until one felt ready for sex or knew the desired person better (e.g., "I've only started talking to him for a week"), and a general sense that sex didn't "feel right" or was not "worth it." This category was the most highly endorsed by both women and men, with 56% of participants indicating it as the most common cluster of reasons to refrain from sex despite desire (N = 338).

The Safety/Risk category included all reasons associated with fear of pregnancy or of contracting a sexually transmitted disease. In this theme were integrated all reasons given that related to unavailability of birth control (e.g., "There was no condom") or fear of contracting a sexually transmitted disease or of becoming pregnant even when using protection such as condoms (e.g., "I was afraid of getting pregnant even with protection"). This theme was the second most highly endorsed with 39.2% of participants giving this cluster of reasons as a deterrent to sexual activity despite the desire to engage in it (N = 237).

The third theme, Protecting/Respecting Existing Relationships was comprised of sub-categories related to relationship status of the self or of the desired person that could pose an obstacle to the sexual encounter. Examples include being married or being in a committed, monogamous relationship (e.g., "I was married at the time and didn't want to cheat"); desired person being married or in a committed, monogamous relationship; not wanting to hurt current partner by having an extra-marital affair and risking being found out; or fearing the consequences of being caught with someone else by partner. Also included in this category were individuals' attempts to protect existing relationships such as friendships, professional relationships, or relationships with someone who had been a partner in the past. Examples included: not wanting to hurt a best friend by having sex with his/her current partner or love interest despite opportunity (e.g., "my best friend, a war buddy, had feelings for this woman"); not wanting to get involved with someone at work; or wanting to protect the feelings of an ex-partner who may still be romantically attached. This theme was the third most highly endorsed (N = 192, 31.8%).

The Securing Relationships theme integrated reasons for refusing sex despite desire based on participants' wish for a more committed relationship rather than a casual sexual encounter or for relationship maintenance/promotion purposes. This category included responses that indicated fear of being used just for sex by the desired person, fear of hurt or rejection after the sexual act, being uninterested in a "one night stand," wanting to wait for someone who had serious intentions (e.g., "I choose from now on to not have sex until I'm in a really serious committed relationship"), wanting to wait to see *if* someone had serious intentions, attempting to keep the desired person interested by delaying the sexual encounter (e.g. ,"I wanted the feeling to last"), and the need to keep the "mystery" alive for the purpose of relationship maintenance. This theme was the fourth most highly endorsed with 31.3% of participants giving this cluster of reasons as a deterrent to sexual activity (N = 189).

The category Physical/Structural Impediments integrated all reasons given by participants for refusing sex despite desire based on practical and logistical problems, such as lack of an adequate location to have sex (e.g., "Did not have anywhere to go to - I was living with my parents at the time"), time constraints, fatigue, physical illness/inability or unwillingness to have sex due to drug or alcohol intoxication. Examples include: not feeling comfortable having sex in a public place, not having enough time or having other, more important things that needed to be accomplished, being too tired after a long day at work, being physically limited due to injury or illness, or being incapacitated due to substance abuse (e.g., "I was too drunk"). This theme was the fifth most highly endorsed (N = 138, 22.8%).

Desired Person Deficits comprised reasons for refusing to have sex based on the desired person's perceived deficits, even though arousal may be or have been present. Some of the desired person deficits that participants listed included: sexual or relationship history of the desired person (e.g., "he was a 'player'"), fear that desired person may be unsafe or untrustworthy (e.g., "I did not trust the nature of the woman"), hygiene problems such as unpleasant smells or grooming issues (e.g., "he was dirty!"), desired person was the wrong gender (e.g., "It was a woman and I was disturbed about my being desirous for a woman"), desired person exerted too much pressure on the individual to have sex (e.g., "he was too pushy") or desired person was not up to standards in a variety of dimensions such as education, social status, and intelligence. This theme ranked sixth in the order of most highly endorsed with 21.2% of participants' endorsement (N = 128).

The Fear of Social /Self-judgment theme integrated participant responses that related to the reluctance to engage in sexual behaviors due to fear of negative judgment from self or others, as well as general reputation concerns. Some of these concerns included distrust towards partner regarding his/her discretion, worries that colleagues, family or friends would find out and disapprove (e.g., "It may affect my reputation"), fear of being judged by the desired person for being "easy," self-control and self-judgment issues, guilt and shame, fear of regret, or loss of self-respect (e.g., "not sure I'd feel good about myself afterwards"). Twenty one percent of participants endorsed this theme (N = 127).

The Negative Emotions category represented all reasons based on a variety of overall negative emotional states including nervousness, fear, anxiety, embarrassment, post-traumatic stress disorder symptoms or a history of trauma, confusion, stress and

feelings of vulnerability and emotional discomfort (e.g., "I was nervous"). Some of these reasons were associated with a resurgence of traumatic symptoms due to a history of sexual abuse. Others were generally related to a lack of relationship experience and fear of the unknown or stress unrelated to the sexual encounter that affected the person's emotional state (e.g., "I was too stressed out"). This theme was endorsed by 16.4% of participants (N = 99).

The Personal Deficits theme integrated body image anxiety, personal hygiene, and undergarment concerns. It comprised reasons such as worry about one's appearance in the nude, having a menstrual period and feeling embarrassed by it, wearing the wrong type of underwear (not perceived as "sexy"), and not having showered. As far as body image concerns, many people indicated weight problems as one of the primary reasons why they held back or did not want to be seen naked (e.g., "I felt fat"). Some expressed concerns about not feeling sexy and a variety of issues related to the idea of what feeling or looking sexy meant such as: wearing sexy lingerie or underwear, smelling clean, having shaved or waxed, having showered, not feeling bloated, not having had a large meal just before the sexual encounter, and being properly groomed in general. This theme was endorsed by 12.1% of participants (N = 73).

The Relationship Avoidance theme included reasons aimed at avoiding any type of emotional entanglement or relationship involvement and fear of generating false expectations of what might occur after the sexual act. Examples include: fear that desired person would misinterpret sexual interest for relationship interest, being sexually attracted without desiring any type of emotional involvement (e.g., "Not wanting to cuddle afterward and not having a good exit strategy"), looking for a "one night stand"

without follow up investment and knowing that desired person would not be happy with such an arrangement. This theme was endorsed by 9.1% of participants (N = 55).

Performance Anxiety integrated all reasons given that related to lack of confidence and insecurity about the ability to perform sexually or satisfy the desired person's sexual needs. This category included reasons such as fear of appearing inexperienced or unskilled (e.g., "don't want to be terrible at it"), perception that one should know more about sex than one actually does, concerns about partner's judgment of one's sexual abilities and performance, fear of being unable to perform physically due to premature ejaculation or erectile dysfunction and wanting to avoid resulting embarrassment. Six percent of participants endorsed this theme (N = 36).

Relationship Control integrated reasons that were based on attempts to control, manipulate or gain power in the relationship. This category comprised reasons for refusing sex because of anger at the partner for causes unrelated to the sexual encounter or for revenge and/or pride. For example, being upset at partner after a fight (e.g., "I was angry at him"), not wanting partner to think that she/he had been "forgiven" after an argument, exercising revenge on partner for hurt suffered or gaining the upper hand in the relationship by using sex as a reward (e.g., "I was playing 'hard to get'"). This cluster of reasons was not commonly cited as a deterrent to sexual activity and only 4.1% of participants endorsed it (N = 25).

Fear of Negative Sexual Experience brought together reasons associated with negative expectations from the sexual experience such as painful or boring sex (e.g., "bad kisser, had no moves") and concerns about male partner's genital size (either too small or too large). Examples include fear of being physically hurt during the sexual act either by

aggressive or clumsy partners, genital pain sensitivity or fear of excessively large penis' sizes. Another aspect of this theme related to the expectations of "bad" sex or sex that is better in the imagination rather than in reality. Concerns about partner performance, not wanting to "ruin" the fantasy (e.g., "afraid it was not going to be as I expected") or previous knowledge of partner's inexperience or poor sexual skills were included in this theme category. This theme was the least cited by participants and only 3.8% endorsed it (N = 23).

See Table 2 for an illustration of how the independent raters arrived at the final categories with examples of participants' responses assigned to each category.

Responses as a Function of Question Type

Responses did not appear to vary much as a function of question type. Only one category, Negative Emotions, varied as a function of question type χ^2 (2, N = 604) = 9.07, $p < .01$ such that 22.27% of the participants who were asked Version 3 of the question (emotional/mental arousal) gave reasons that aligned with the Negative Emotions category as opposed to 14.2% of the participants who were asked Version 1 (turned on) and 12% of the participants who were asked Version 2 (physical arousal).

Responses as a Function of Gender

A t test was used to test gender differences in the number of categories endorsed. Women gave reasons that aligned with a greater number of categories than did men (women: M = 2.82, SD = 1.45; men M = 2.53, SD = 1.44), t (602) = 2.171, $p < .05$. Women's top three themes for not having sex despite desire were Values (61%), Safety/Risk (37.3%), and Securing Relationship (35.9%). Men's top reasons were

Safety/Risk (45.1%), Values (41.2%), and Protecting/Respecting Existing Relationships (37.9%).

Statistically significant gender differences were found in the frequency of endorsement of six of the 13 categories. Women were more likely than men to endorse Values, χ^2 (1, N = 604) = 18.17, $p < .001$, Fear of Social/Self-judgment, χ^2 (1, N = 604) = 17.40, $p < .001$, Securing Relationships, χ^2 (1, N = 604) = 17.74, $p < .001$ and Personal Deficits, χ^2 (1, N = 604) = 10.88, $p < .001$, while men were significantly more likely to endorse Relationship Avoidance, χ^2 (1, N = 604) = 8.70, $p < .01$ and Performance Anxiety ,χ^2 (1, N = 604) = 3.72, $p = .05$.

Responses as a function of question type and gender

The frequency of theme endorsement was also analyzed as a function of question type and gender. Women's responses did not vary as a function of question type. Question type seemed to have more of an effect on men, as they endorsed the category of Fear of Social/Self-judgment more frequently when asked question Version 1 (turned on) χ^2 (2, N = 153) = 8.19, $p = .02$, Desired Person Deficits and Safety/Risk more often when asked question Version 2 (physically aroused) χ^2 (2, N = 153) = 6.26, $p < .05$; χ^2 (2, N = 154) = 6.18, $p < .05$, and Negative Emotions when asked question Version 3 (emotional/mental arousal) χ^2 (2, N = 153) = 7.47, $p < .05$.

Responses as a function of age group

Since most of the participants (79.2%) were under 25 years of age, two age groups were created that divided participants into those who were under 25 years old and those 25 and older. Chi-square analyses were then conducted to determine if there were differences in the endorsement of categories as a function of age group. Participants

under 25 years of age endorsed the categories of Values χ^2 (1, N = 602) = 20.18, p < .001 more than older participants, while older participants were more likely to endorse Protecting/Respecting Existing Relationships χ^2 (1, N = 602) = 36.79, p < .001, Relationship Avoidance χ^2 (1, N = 602) = 11.85, p < .001 and Relationship Control χ^2 (1, N = 602) = 5.87, p = .01.

See Table 3 for category endorsement as a function of question type, gender and overall.

CHAPTER 6

DISCUSSION

The distal aim of this study was to collect reasons why people refrain from sex when they feel desire for a willing partner (or think others do or they would given the opportunity), so as to generate items for the future construction of a questionnaire that will investigate the question quantitatively. The proximal aim was to analyze the data to identify consistent themes and variation in these themes as a function of gender, age and how desire was defined in the question.

As expected, participants generated numerous and varied reasons why they decided to refrain from sex under such circumstances. Thirteen final themes were identified characterizing the reasons given by participants for not having sex despite desire, either in their experience or in their imagination. These themes were: 1) Values; 2) Safety/Risk; 3) Protecting/Respecting Existing Relationships; 4) Securing Relationships; 5) Physical/Structural Impediments; 6) Desired Person Deficits; 7) Fear of Social/Self-judgment; 8) Negative Emotions; 9) Personal Deficits; 10) Relationship Avoidance; 11) Performance Anxiety; 12) Relationship Control; 13) Fear of Negative Sexual Experience. The most frequently endorsed categories were Values, Safety/Risk and Protecting/Respecting Existing Relationships. The least frequently endorsed were Performance Anxiety, Relationship Control and Fear of Negative Sexual Experience. Significant differences in the endorsement of themes were found between men and women, younger and older participants, and depending on which desire definition was used.

Gender Differences: Do Women Have More Reasons for Saying 'No' to Sex?

Overall, women endorsed more themes than did men, suggesting that women may more commonly engage in a cost-benefit evaluation of sexual activity and decide against having sex. Women may have more reasons to say 'no' to sex despite desire because of higher costs associated with sex and/or because of higher benefits associated with other values with which sex may conflict. That sex is more costly for women is hardly a new contention. In fact, sex has been judged to represent a higher risk for women (even by women themselves) because of the risk of unwanted pregnancy, safety risks, potential reputation damage, discomfort or embarrassment about one's body, as well as attachment anxiety and relational concerns such as fear of being used just for sex (Graham et al., 2004; Leigh 1989; Muehlenhard & Hollabaugh, 1988; Stephenson & Meston, 2011; Wiederman, 2000). Men's sexual desire may be more commonly motivated by the gratification of the sexual activity itself, while female's sexual desire may be more extrinsically motivated, with aims that extend beyond the sexual act (Carroll et al., 1985; Reagan & Berscheid, 1996).

This dis-incentivization of sexual behavior in relation to other more strongly valued outcomes may also be facilitated in women by their less hardy sex drive (Baumaister et al., 2001). Women's desire may be more easily over-powered by other more strongly felt motives. If the sexual drive is not that strong, it is easier to override by a calculated estimation of the positive and negative consequences of having sex: the less forceful the desire, the more weight given to the potentially negative consequences of having sex.

Another reason why women may refrain from having sex is the contention that the experience of sexual desire may sometimes be its own reward or goal (Meana, 2010). There are a number of studies in which women report that being desired is arousing (Brotto, Heiman, & Tolman, 2009; Graham et al., 2004) and that neither sex, nor intercourse, nor orgasm are necessarily the goal of sexual desire (Brotto et al., 2009; Regan & Berscheid, 1996). It is possible that sometimes, for women, desiring and being desired may be sufficiently satisfying with no need to consummate that desire with a sexual act (McCall & Meston, 2006; Meana, 2010; Regan & Berscheid, 1996). Supportive of this view are some of our participants' responses, referring to wanting to keep the "mystery" or the "fantasy" alive and being afraid that the actual sex act would be anti-climatic compared to its anticipation.

Sexuality research suggests that gender roles restrict the sexual behavior of women and encourage that of men. This sexual double-standard contributes to the general suppression of female sexual expression. Sexual economics in Western societies positions women as the suppliers of sex and men as the consumers, making women the gatekeepers of sexuality by guarding virginity, initiating sex less than men and deciding when to dispense the sexual activity (Allgeier & Royster, 1991; Baumaister & Vohs, 2004; DeLamater, 1987; Leigh, 1989; Peplau, Rubin, & Hill, 1977). Considering that our Values theme integrated sub-categories that included "Don't know the person well enough," "Virginity issues" and "Limit number of sex partners," it is no surprise that this theme emerged as the most frequently endorsed by women. In fact, Patrick, Maggs and Abar (2007) found that women were more likely to rate ethical reasons such as "it's

morally wrong" as motives to avoid sex, but answered similarly to men in rating STDs and avoiding pregnancy as reasons not to have sex.

The second and third most prominent categories of reasons for refraining from sex despite desire for women were: Safety/Risk, and Securing Relationships. These results are aligned with existing literature suggesting that some of the motivators that appear to have the potential to supersede sexual desire in terms of incentive value for women are safety, protection against pregnancy, and relational aims such as ensuring that the person is emotionally involved before agreeing to have sex (Graham et al, 2004; Leigh 1989; Muehlenhard & Hollabaugh, 1988). Previous research also indicates that love and relationship concerns are primary female motivators for sexual activity over and above the physical rewards of sex which are more typically male motivators for sex (Brotto et al., 2009; Buss, 2003; Carroll et al., 1985; Graham et al., 2004; Hill & Preston, 1996; Leigh, 1989; Patrick et al., 2007). Indeed, women in our study were willing to forego sex when they felt that waiting would secure commitment by the prospective partner, that it would hold a partner's interest or when they felt that the emotional involvement was not the primary goal of the sex act. In other words, women, more than men, wanted to avoid casual sexual encounters. These results are consistent with findings by Cohen and Shotland (1996) that college women expect to be dating twice as long as men do before they engage in sexual intercourse for the first time.

Men's top three categories of reasons for refraining from sex when they felt or imagined feeling desire were: Safety/Risk, Values and Protecting/Respecting Existing Relationships. They thus shared two of their top three categories with women, even if the rank order differed. Men's main sexual deterrent was the possibility of contracting a

sexually transmitted disease or of becoming responsible for a pregnancy. According to existing literature men are more likely to engage in risky sexual behaviors, such as having sex with multiple partners and the use of alcohol before sex (Sprague & Quadagno, 1989; Tiegs, Perrin, Kaly, & Heesacker, 2007). In the Tiegs et al. study (2007), college men believed that negative consequences from sexual activity were dependent on the frequency of risky behavior. Perhaps the fact that men know that they often engage in risky sex makes safety concerns more prominent.

One way in which men in our study clearly differed from women was in their comfort with casual sex. Women refrained when there was no emotional involvement, but for men this was not a major sexual inhibitor. What seemed to concern men in our study was to preserve their existing relationship with a loved one who they did not want to betray, or with a friend or colleague with whom sex might risk a de-stabilizing rupture. Responses illustrated our male sample's preoccupation with the potential for damaging social relations by having sex with the wrong person. In other words, men also care about important relationships sufficiently to forego sex. They appeared to fear damaging established relationships, but they seemed more open than women to engaging in sex to form new ones or to engage in sex for the intrinsic pleasure of the sexual act itself. In regard to casual encounters, our results align with existing literature that suggests that men are more likely than women to endorse reasons for having sex that indicate experience seeking and mere opportunity as opposed to emotional closeness (Meston & Buss, 2007). For example, Bradshaw, Kahn, and Saville (2010) found that college men preferred hooking up while women preferred traditional dating.

Overall, women were more likely to endorse Fear of Social/Self-judgment, Securing Relationships and Personal Deficits for refraining from sex when they felt desire. Men were more likely to endorse Relationship Avoidance and Performance Anxiety. These results are supported by the current literature as women are consistently found to be more concerned about reputation (Graham et al., 2004; Meston & Buss, 2007 Tiegs et al., 2007) emotional involvement (Brotto et al., 2009; Carroll et al., 1985; Graham et al., 2004; Hill & Preston, 1996; Leigh, 1989; Patrick et al., 2007; Sprecher & Regan, 1996) and body image (La Rocque & Cioe, 2011; Meston & Buss, 2007). A number of studies have indicated that there still exists a sexual double standard such that women are derogated and men rewarded for sexual activity. Women are more likely to be labeled "sluts" for engaging in sexual activity or feel ashamed and regretful after a "one-nigh stand" (Graham et al., 2004; Grello, Welsh, & Harper, 2006; Meston & Buss, 2007; Paul & Hayes 2002; Smith, Mysak, & Michael, 2008). Women in our study often mentioned fear of the negative social ramifications or fear of post-sex shame and regret as a major deterrent to sexual activity.

Research has suggested that, for women, experiencing an emotional connection is completely or partially the goal of their desire. If intimacy and closeness with their partner is not experienced, it is more likely that women will refrain from sex. Carroll et al. (1985) found that women's motives for intercourse more often include love, commitment, and emotion when compared to men's. Along the same lines, Patrick et al. (2007) investigated reasons to have sex, personal goals and sexual behavior during the transition to college. They found that young women rated partner-focused reasons, which included the expression of love and intimacy as a sexual facilitator and not being in love

as a sexual inhibitor, as more important than did men. The women in our study also noted the perceived lack of love and commitment as reasons to not have sex as illustrated by responses such as: "I was not in love" or "I did not feel an emotional connection to the person."

Moreover, women in our study were concerned about their physical appearance and this concern impacted their decisions (real and imagined) of whether to have sex or not, more so than it did men. These results are consistent with existing literature that links sexual satisfaction, sexual desire and sexual functioning with body image such that negative body esteem, including sexual attractiveness and weight concerns, are negatively associated with self-reported measures of sexual desire, satisfaction and behavior, particularly in women (Ackard, Kearney-Cooke, & Peterson, 2000; Faith & Schare, 1993; Graham et al., 2004; Koch, Mansfield, Thurau, & Carey, 2005; La Rocque, & Cioe, 2011; Meana & Nunnik, 2006; Pujols, Meston & Seal, 2010; Seal, Bradford & Meston, 2009). Our study also provided support for Dove and Wiederman's (2000) contention that some women are socialized to believe that being physically attractive and providing their partners with an aesthetically pleasing visual is an important part of sexual performance .

While women worry about their looks, men seem to worry about their physical performance and the dreaded possibility of losing their erections (Rowland, 2012). In our study, men exceeded women in endorsing reasons related to performance anxiety, with several responses indicating inexperience as one of the primary culprits. Men were also invested in protecting their emotional independence and in avoiding relationship entanglements. These findings are consistent with existing literature that supports the

notion that, even though men are also interested in long term relationships, they often seek sexual encounters for the immediate rewarding value of the sexual pleasure itself (Carroll et al., 1985; Meston & Buss, 2007; Reagan & Berscheid, 1996).

Although research suggests that men and women's motives for participating in and avoiding sex often differ (Baumeister, et al., 2001), the ways in which gender affects reasons to have or avoid sex is complex and traditional views about gender differences may often be inaccurate. In our study, men and women had mostly similar concerns, although they appeared to weight them somewhat differently, as indicated by frequency counts in the prevalence of themes.

Do Definitions of Desire Matter and for Whom?

The ways in which we defined desire did not seem to matter much, as indicated by participants' responses. Whether the question used the terms "turned on," "physically aroused," or "mentally and emotionally aroused" to describe a state of desire, the majority of participants answered the question in similar ways. Only the Negative Emotions theme varied as a function of question type such that more participants who were asked Version 3 of the question (mentally and emotionally aroused) endorsed reasons in the Negative Emotion category. It is difficult to make sense of this particular finding. Perhaps the word "emotional" in this version of the question primed participants to think about emotions. Further research is needed to investigate the effects of definitions of desire on participants' responses.

When responses were analyzed as function of question type and gender it became clear that question type had no impact on women's responses. Indeed, it appears that for women, it does not matter how desire is defined. The existing literature supports these

results as women have difficulty distinguishing between physiological and subjective arousal (Brotto et al., 2009; Graham et al., 2004). This lack of differentiation in women has in fact led the Workgroup on Sexual Dysfunctions for the next edition of the DSM-5 to propose that desire and arousal disorders in women be combined into a single diagnostic category labeled Sexual Interest and Arousal Disorder (American Psychiatric Association, 2012; Brotto, 2010).

For men, the way the question was worded did, in fact, matter. Men endorsed the category of Fear of Social/Self-judgment more frequently when asked question Version 1 (turned on), Desired Person Deficits and Safety/Risk more often when asked question Version 2 (physically aroused), and Negative Emotions when asked question Version 3 (emotionally/mentally arousal). It is hard to make sense of why certain questions raised certain themes for men and not for women. Perhaps for some men the wording "turned on" had a more socially undesirable connotation of an uncontrollable urge and it may have primed concerns about social judgment and self-blame. The physical arousal wording may have primed immediate physical concerns about the consequences of sex and the attractiveness of their partner, especially because there were explicit references about genitals in the question. Lastly, thoughts about emotions may have been primed by the wording in version 3 of the question (emotionally/mentally arousal). However, further research would be needed to confirm these hypotheses.

Does Age Matter?

Younger participants endorsed more reasons in the Values category than did older participants. This finding is partly reflected in the demographic characteristics of our sample, as younger participants were more religious compared to older participants.

Younger individuals may also be under their parents' influence when it comes to religious beliefs and it is not until later in life that they begin to form their own belief system and possibly reject their parents' ideologies and prohibitions. Also, it makes sense that younger participants would be more concerned with moral dilemmas regarding virginity and sexual exploration as 23.6% of our sample had never had sex. Older participants endorsed Protecting/Respecting Existing Relationships, Relationship Avoidance and Relationship Control as clusters of reasons for refusing sex when they feel desire more so than did younger participants. The fact that older participants reported refraining from sex for a greater number and more diverse reasons compared to young people aligns with Meston et al.'s study (2009) in which older women engaged in sex for a greater number of motives than younger women. Although there is a dearth of research on sexual avoidance in general and especially in older populations, it would be reasonable to expect that reasons for refraining from sex would change over the life span, as individuals gain more sexual experience, form long-term relationships, give birth, raise children and focus on professional goals. Examining such patterns in different age cohorts may be an important direction for future research.

Limitations

The current study had a number of limitations that warrant consideration. A convenience sample of predominantly young, heterosexual, Caucasian, mostly religious and highly educated participants limits the applicability of these findings to more diverse samples. Presumably older, less educated, non religious and ethnically diverse adults are likely to have different reasons for refraining from sex in the presence of desire. For example, older participants may have concerns specifically related to aging, such as

health problems and the adherence to rigid scripts about age-appropriate sexuality. In addition, boredom or over-familiarity with long-term sexual relationships and changes in priorities such as social and professional demands and responsibilities may compete for the person's time for sexual opportunity. Our sample also had more women than men. Future research will need to make special efforts in targeting male participants and a more diverse population. Additionally, the current study relied on self-report data, which is potentially limited by social desirability and retrospective recall biases. Since potential sexual interaction are ubiquitous and a large range of factors influence sexual decision making, it may be difficult for people to accurately recall the exact reasons why they avoided having sex. Moreover, given that we had our participants also imagine reasons why they would not have sex if they found themselves in a situation where they were aroused and an attractive and willing person was available, we can not be certain that the reasons generated would actually prevent someone from having sex in real life. Nevertheless, one of the principal aims of this study was to generate as many reasons as possible for sexual avoidance for the future construction of the Bigger Than Desire Questionnaire (BTDQ) that will serve as a quantitative investigation of these reasons. At that time validation of the reasons that emerged in this qualitative study will be possible.

Another limitation of this study involved the large number of univariate tests of significance conducted without correction for Type I error. We did not impose corrections, such as the Bonferroni, because the tests of significance were largely exploratory. Again, the primary aim of the study was to collect as many reasons as possible for refraining from sex despite desire. This does caution us, however, not to over-interpret the group differences found.

Finally, our study did not define the meaning of "having sex" in the three versions of the question. There is some literature that suggests that ambiguous definitions of what may constitute sex may lead to indiosyncratic interpretations and miscommunication, especially in young adults (Hans & Kimberly, 2011; Peterson & Muehlenhard, 2007). In future research studies, it would be recommended to explicitly clarify the meaning of "sex" in order to reduce interpretative discrepancies.

Despite these weaknesses the current study provided initial evidence that people refrain from sex for a variety of reasons despite the experience of desire. This is further support for the notion that desire and behavior are not strongly associated, especially for women. Making assumptions about desire from behavioral indicators may be more problematic than usually assumed. The findings are also of clinical interest because the literature has had a tendency to pathologize women who appear to have lower desire than men, when in fact they may simply have a greater number of valid reasons for deciding that having sex is not in their best interest.

Future Research

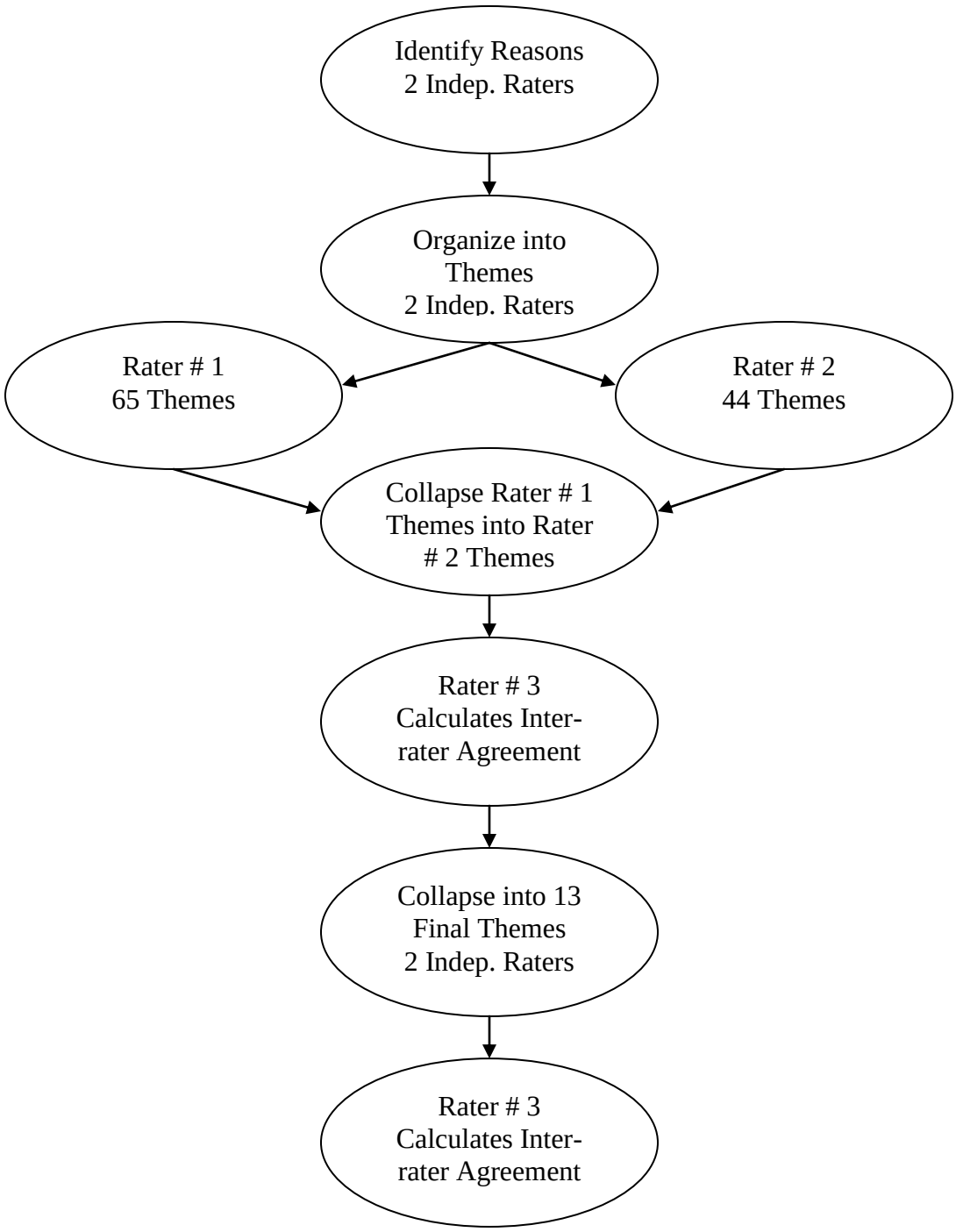
Conducting parallel studies in diverse cultures, socio-economic groups and different age cohorts is an important direction of future research. This study has also highlighted some possible priming effects occurring in men when desire definitions are varied in the questions. It would be interesting to explore this phenomenon further in an attempt to better understand it.

It would also be useful in future research to undertake quantitative investigations of reasons for foregoing sex despite desire so that more sophisticated analyses of age and gender as mediators can be investigated. Having a better sense of the relationship

between reasons for not having sex when desire is present to a host of other possibly associated constructs such as sexual function, relationship adjustment and perhaps personality characteristics may also be fruitful and important in understanding what motivates sexual behavior for both men and women.

Figure 1

Step-by-Step Depiction of Theme Generation



APPENDIX 1

Table 1

Demographic Characteristics of Participants (N =604)

Characteristic	*n*	%
Age at time of survey (N = 602, *M = 23.16 years, SD = 10.03)*		
18-24	477	79.2
25-35	68	11.3
36-45	17	2.8
46-55	19	3.2
55-77	21	3.5
Gender		
Male	153	25.3
Female	451	74.7
Ethnicity		
European-American/Caucasian	304	50.3
Hispanic-American	96	15.9
Asian/Pacific Islander-American	129	21.4
African-American	49	8.1
Native American	2	0.3
Other	24	4.0
Religion Raised (N = 598)		
Christian	187	31.3

Catholic Christian	214	35.8
Latter Day Saints	23	3.8
Jewish	25	4.2
Muslim	7	1.2
Hindu	1	0.2
Buddhist	17	2.8
No Religion	109	18.2
Other	15	2.5
Current Religion (N = 591)		
Christian	161	27.2
Catholic Christian	146	24.7
Latter Day Saints	17	2.9
Jewish	17	2.9
Muslim	4	0.7
Hindu	1	0.2
Buddhist	14	2.4
No Religion	191	32.3
Other	40	6.8
Education		
Some College	505	83.6
College Graduate	40	6.6
Graduate or Professional Degree	59	9.8
Household Income (N = 592)		

$20,000 or less	133	22.5
$20,000 - 49,999	179	30.2
$50,000 - 99,999	185	31.3
$100,00 or more	95	16.0
Sexual Orientation (N = 602)		
Heterosexual	542	90.0
Gay	16	2.7
Lesbian	5	0.8
Bisexual	39	6.5
Relationship Status (N = 602)		
Single not Dating	181	30.1
Single and Dating	132	21.9
Steady Partner	194	32.2
Cohabitating or Married	88	14.6
Widowed	1	0.2
Divorced	6	1.0
Ever Had Sex (N = 602)		
Yes	460	76.4
No	142	23.6
Age at First Sex (*M = 16.45 years, SD = 2.19)*		

Table 2

Documentation of discovery of 13 main categories

Final Category	Rater 1	Rater 2	Sample Responses
1. Values	Virginity issues	First time/Keep virginity	"I didn't want to lose my virginity"
	Religion/Moral Issues	Religion/Moral principles/Personal choice	"I didn't want to 'sin'"
	Limit number of sex partners	Don't want to be promiscuous	"because i wanted to limit my partners in life"
	Age issues/ Inappropriate	Too young or underage	"because i was too young"
	Don't know the person well/Too early	Too soon in the relationship/don't know the person well enough	"I've only started talking to him for a week"
	Parents/Family		"The reasons might involve the type of family where the person came from. I grew up in a very strict family"
	Wait until marriage		"personal belief that sex should not happen before marriage"
	Doesn't feel right		"The situation never felt right"
	Not worth it		
	Not ready for sex	Not ready	"I didn't feel ready"

	Abstinence/Celibacy Want it to be special		
2. Safety/Risk	Pregnancy STDs	No protection/ Afraid of STDs or pregnancy	"consequences (such as pregnancy or STD)" "There was no condom"
3. Protecting/ Respecting Existing Relationships	Relationship status	Already in a relationship/Don't want to cheat/Emotionally attached to someone else	"The first of which is that I am currently in a committed relationship. I may me attracted to a girl but half an hour of fun isn't worth the risk of losing my girlfriend"
	Ex	The other was a partner in the past	
	Protecting friendships	Person is friend of friend	"Because they were friends of someone i had once slept with"
	Professional issues	Work together	"I do not like to get involved with those who I work in a professional setting with"
	Protecting relationship with desired person In love with someone else Relationship status of desired person Protecting desired person	Jeopardize or worsen the relationship/friendship	"I didn't want to ruin the friendship"

4. Securing Relationships	Don't want to be used	Feel that they are going to be used just for sex/don't like one night stands	"I didn't feel an emotional connection with the person even though there was sexual chemistry"
	Wanting to keep fantasy	Afraid sex not what they expected	"I wanted the feeling to last"
	Hurt/rejection	Afraid of rejection or being abandoned afterwards	"fear of rejection afterwards"
	Don't want just sex/want a relationship	Not in a serious relationship with the person	"I choose for now on to not have sex until Im in a really serious committed relationship"
	Don't want to be part of a long list	Not emotional attachment or feelings	
		Wait for more commitment	"I wanted them to show me more how much they wanted me"
		Being valuable/keep mystery/afraid the other will loose interest	
5. Physical/ Structural Impediments	Fatigue	Tired/health problems	"I was definitely sexually aroused by my boyfriend, yet I decided not to because I was exhausted"
	Intoxication	Drugs	"May have been intoxicated at the time"
	Wrong location/ Circumstances	Not the right place/time/fear of being caught	"Did not have anywhere to go to - I was living with my parent's at the time"
	Physical inability/Illness		"had a leg injury i did not want to worsen"

	Wrong time/Time Constraints		"We had to study for a test"
6. Desired Person Deficits	Not right person	The person is not right/wait for the right person	"I wasn't sure that he was ""the one""
	Sexual/relationship history of desired person	The other person is promiscuous	"Because that person is a ""player""
	Approach problem/feeling pressured	Feeling rushed or pressured	"He was too pushy"
	Desired person not up to standards	Don't like something of the other person	"you have certain standards (favoritism) say the person is of a certain race"
	Wrong gender of desired person	Gender	"It was a woman and I was disturbed about my being desirous for a woman"
	Trust issues	Don't trust the person	"I didn't trust him"
	Desired person hygiene		"Funky vaginal odor"
7. Fear of Social/Self-judgment	Reputation	Reputation/ disapproval from others/ other's judgment	"It may affect my reputation"
	Self-worth/self-respect/ Guilt/Shame/Regret	Self-respect	"concern with opinions of close ones, want not to disappoint anyone including oneself"
	Self-control	Self-control	"not sure I'd feel good about myself afterwards"
	Don't want to be judged by desired person		"worry about being seen as easy"

	Don't want to feel easy/cheap		"Didn't want to feel slutty"
8. Negative Emotions	Fear of general consequences	Afraid of general consequences /affects future	"personal long-term goals"
	Nervousness/ Fear/Anxiety/ Embarrassment	Afraid, worried, nervous, embarrassed, anxiety, low knowledge	"Being afraid Scared"
	PTSD/ Trauma	Previous bad experience (abuse or trauma)	"History of Previous Abuse"
	Vulnerability	Afraid of being vulnerable	
	Uncomfortable	Feel uncomfortable	"i wasn't comfortable with that person"
	Stress		"preoccupation with other stressors"
	Negative expectations based on peer experiences		"My girlfriends had bad experiences with sex"
9. Personal Deficits	Body image concerns	Body image and hygiene	"I felt fat"
	Menstrual cycle	Period	"I was on my period"
	Fear of bleeding		"I didn't want to bleed again"
	Underwear issues		"I was wearing the wrong undergarments"
	Personal hygiene/grooming		"I was hairy "'down there'"
10. Relationship Avoidance	Fear of becoming emotionally attached	Afraid of more attachment/ being hurt	"didnt want to become emotionally attached"

	Do not want relationship/emotional entanglement	Don't want more commitment	"Fear of the other person mis-interpreting and thinking I was interested in a relationship"
11. Performance Anxiety	Performance anxiety	Worried about performance	"She was more experienced and that also scared me"
	Lack of confidence/insecure		"Your scared that you might not be able to do the job right"
12. Relationship Control	Anger	Being upset with the other person	"I was angry and thought that if I had sex he would think I had forgiven him"
	Control/manipulation/ punishment/power		"I have refused for partners asking me to rush or "just get it over with" sex"
13. Fear of Negative Sexual Experience	Boring/bad sex	Unpleasant, boring sex	"weren't likely to satisfy my needs sexually"
	Pain	Unpleasant, painful sex	"very painful"
	Genital size		"His penis was too big"

Table 3

Category endorsement as a function of question type and gender

	Turned On						Physically Aroused						Emotionally Aroused					
	Men (N = 44)		Women (N = 132)		All (N =176)		Men (N = 58)		Women (N = 150)		All (N = 208)		Men (N = 51)		Women (N =169)		All (N = 220)	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
1. Values	15	34.1	89	67.4	104	59.1	24	41.4	94	62.7	118	56.7	24	47.1	92	54.4	116	52.7
2. Safety/Risk	19	43.2	42	31.8	61	34.7	33	56.9	60	40.0	93	44.7	17	33.3	66	39.1	83	37.7
3. Protecting/ Resp. Existing Relationships	13	29.5	46	34.8	59	33.5	27	46.6	40	26.7	67	32.2	18	35.3	48	28.4	66	30.0
4. Securing Relationships	11	25.0	50	37.9	61	34.7	7	12.1	59	39.3	66	31.7	9	17.6	53	31.4	62	28.2
5. Physical/Structural Impediments	14	31.8	29	22.0	43	24.4	17	29.3	31	20.7	48	23.1	9	17.6	38	22.5	47	21.4
6. Desired Person Deficits	12	27.3	20	15.2	32	18.2	20	34.5	33	22.0	53	25.5	7	13.7	36	21.3	43	19.5
7. Fear of Social/Self-judgment	8	18.2	35	26.5	43	24.4	1	1.7	39	26.0	40	19.2	5	9.8	39	23.1	44	20.0
8. Negative Emotions	4	9.1	21	15.9	25	14.2	4	6.9	21	14.0	25	12.0	12	23.5	37	21.9	49	22.3
9. Personal Deficits	2	4.5	18	13.6	20	11.4	2	3.4	23	15.3	25	12.0	3	5.9	25	14.8	28	12.7

10. Relationship Avoidance	4	9.1	8	6.1	12	6.8	13	22.4	10	6.7	23	11.1	6	11.8	14	8.3	20	9.1
11. Performance Anxiety	4	9.1	7	5.3	11	6.2	4	6.9	6	4.0	10	4.8	6	11.8	9	5.3	15	6.8
12. Relationship Control	3	6.8	3	2.3	6	3.4	3	5.2	7	4.7	10	4.8	2	3.9	7	4.1	9	4.1
13. Fear of Negative Sexual Experience	2	4.5	5	3.8	7	4.0	1	1.7	5	3.3	6	2.9	2	3.9	8	4.7	10	4.5

APPENDIX 2

Socio-Demographic Questionnaire

Participation Number: _____ Date: _____

1. Age:_____

2. Gender: _____

3. With which of the following groups do you most identify? (Please check one)
   ____ European-American
   ____Hispanic-American/Latina-o/Chicana-o
   ____Asian-American
   ____African-American
   ____American Indian/Native-American
   ____Pacific Islander-American
   Other (Please specify):_____

4. Religion:
   ____Christian
   ____Catholic Christian
   ____Latter Day Saints
   ____Jewish
   ____Muslim
   ____Hindu
   ____Buddhist
   ____Agnostic
   ____Atheist
   ____Other (please specify)

5. Education:
   ____Some high school
   ____High school diploma
   ____Some college
   ____College Graduate
   ____Graduate or Professional Degree

6. Income:
   ____$20,000 or less
   ____$20,000 - 29,999
   ____$30,000 - 39,999
   ____$40,000 - 49,999
   ____$50,000 - 59,999
   ____$60,000 - 69,999
   ____$70,000 - 79,999

____$80,000 - 89,999
____$90,000 - 99,999
____$100,000 or more

7. Sexual Orientation:
____Heterosexual (Straight)
____Gay
____Lesbian
____Bisexual
____Transgender
____Other (please specify)

8. Relationship Status:
____Single/Never married
____Partnered
____Cohabitating or married
____Widowed
____Divorced

9. Have you ever had sexual intercourse in your lifetime? _____

10. If yes, how old were you when you first had sex?_____

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VITA

Graduate College
University of Nevada, Las Vegas

Alessandra Lanti

Degrees:

Associate in Arts, Liberal Arts, With Honors, 2004
Santa Monica College, California

Bachelor of Science, Psychology, Magna Cum Laude, 2008
University of Nevada, Las Vegas

Special Honors and Awards:

A.W.A.R.E. SMC Award, Santa Monica College, California, 2001
Dr. Anne K. Peters Memorial Award, Santa Monica College, California, 2002
Who's Who Among Students in American Universities and Colleges, UNLV, 2005
The National Dean's List, UNLV, 2005, 2006
UNLV Higher Achiever Grant-in-Aid, UNLV, 2006
The National Dean's List, Delegation on Diplomacy, UNLV, 2007
Living Memorial Scholarship Fund, UNLV, 2007
Bernard Osher Re-entry Scholarship Award, UNLV, 2007
Dean's Honor List, UNLV, 2007

Thesis Title: Exploring Reasons Why Men and Women Refrain from Sex Despite Desire

Thesis Examination Committee:

Chairperson, Dr. Marta Meana, Ph. D.
Committee Member, Dr. Cortney Warren, Ph. D.
Committee Member, Dr. Michelle Carro, Ph. D.
Committee Member, Dr. Barbara Brents, Ph.D
Committee Member, Dr. Stephen Benning, Ph.D.