A Qualitative Exploration of Men’s Experiences of Sexual Desire in Heterosexual Long-Term Relationships

by

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ABSTRACT

A QUALITATIVE EXPLORATION OF MEN’S EXPERIENCES OF SEXUAL DESIRE IN HETEROSEXUAL LONG-TERM RELATIONSHIPS

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Much has been assumed, yet little empirically understood, about men’s sexual desire. The objectives of the current study were to: a) explore, and expand on, the phenomenon of men’s sexual desire, b) gain insight into men’s experiences of sexual desire within, and outside of, their long-term relationships, and c) determine the degree to which men’s experiences of sexual desire correspond to, or deviate from, traditional theories of men’s sexual desire (i.e., Evolutionary Theory, Sexual Script Theory, and Masculinity Theory). Thirty semi-structured interviews with men between the ages of 30 and 65, in long-term heterosexual relationships were included. Analysis was conducted using Grounded Theory Methodology from the constructionist perspective.

It was determined that men’s sexual desire was largely relational in nature. Factors determined to elicit sexual desire were: a) Feeling Desired, b) Feeling Sexy, Attractive and Desirable, c) Cognitions and Moods, d) Visual Sexual Cues, e) Exciting and Unexpected Sexual Encounters, f) Context of the Sexual Encounter, and g) Intimate Communication. Factors determined to inhibit sexual desire were: a) Physical Ailments and Negative Health Characteristics, b) Life Pressures and Stresses, c) Sexual Abuse, d) Less Emphasis on and Effort Invested in Sexual Encounters, e) Rejection, f) Partner
not Equally Engaged in Sexual Activity, and g) Lack of Emotional Connection with Partner.

Sexual desire was also described as occurring extra-relationally, albeit in different ways (i.e., more fleeting, less emotional). Men described their desire for other women as natural and biological, but also indicated that acting on these feelings could, or should, be controlled. Some participants described having high and constant levels of sexual desire. However, most men indicated that their sexual desire was sometimes feigned in order to appear more masculine or reduce the chance of upsetting their female partner. This was due to a felt social pressure to demonstrate certain actions and behaviours that were consistent with traditional sexual scripts and norms. The findings from this study suggest that men’s sexual desire is more complex and relational than previous theoretical models and past research suggest. Implications for researchers and therapists are discussed.
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I am struck by the bravery of those who are willing to share a part of themselves and their histories to help us all learn more about ourselves. This study would not have been possible without the openness and vulnerability of all the men who offered to share their stories and experiences.

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Chapter One: Literature Review

Defining Sexual Desire

The word desire is synonymous with wish, want, crave, need, and hunger, while alternative expressions for sexual desire include libido, passion, lust, sexual appetite, and sexual drive. Suggested definitions of sexual desire have included: “the sum of the forces that incline us toward and away from sexual behavior” (Levine, 2003, p. 279), or the “sexual motivation” that is often experienced as a craving or urge to experience sexual activity or sexual pleasure (Baumeister, Catanese & Vohs, 2001, p. 244). However, sexual desire can be experienced without leading to sexual activity and sexual activity can occur without feelings of desire, thereby calling these proposed definitions into question. Further, words such as “crave” and “urge” imply that desire is experienced in a strong, intense way, which does not allow for experiences of sexual desire that may be less powerful or are receptive in nature (Basson, 2001a; 2001b).

Limited research has investigated how men experience sexual desire (Brotto, 2010a). One recent qualitative study determined that men define and experience sexual desire in different ways (Mitchell, Wellings & Graham, 2012). Some men in Mitchell and colleagues’ (2012) study reported that sexual desire is the interest in engaging in sexual activity that occurs in the mind; whereas other men indicated desire was experienced in the mind and genitals (i.e., an interest to engage in sexual activity accompanied by blood flow and sensation in the penis). Further, men in this study described their sexual desire as being motivational (i.e., a drive towards sexual activity) and responsive (i.e., a receptive interest in sex after initiation; Mitchell et al., 2012),
supporting previous suggestions that desire is not always a spontaneous, intense experience (Basson, 2001a).

Research on men’s sexual desire is quite limited, especially when contrasted with the abundance of literature on women’s sexual desire (Brotto, 2010a). Consequently, in order to capture as much detail as possible about how men might experience sexual desire, the following literature review considers research that refers to “sexual desire,” “sexual drive,” “sexual interest,” and “sexual motivation.”

**Theoretical Considerations**

Various theories describe the ways men experience, or should experience, sexual desire. These theories include: Evolutionary Theory (Buss, 1995; Buss, 1998; Hatfield, Luckhurst, & Rapson, 2010; McCabe & Cummins, 1997; Stewart-Williams & Thomas, 2013), Sexual Script Theory (Frith & Kitzinger, 2001; Masters, Casey, Wells & Morrison, 2012; Simon & Gagnon, 1986; 2003), and Masculinity Theory (Courtenay, 2000; Kimmel, 2005; Seal & Ehrhardt, 2003; Wiederman, 2012). Although the aforementioned theories span various epistemological perspectives (e.g., biological, social constructionist), they arrive at similar conclusions. Specifically, Evolutionary Theory tends to suggest that men *inherently* have high sexual desire that is relatively impermeable to external factors while Sexual Script Theory and Masculinity Theory suggests that men *should* demonstrate high levels of desire in order to abide by social norms and expectations.

**Evolutionary Theory**

According to Evolutionary Theory, males’ and females’ desire for sexual activity has evolved over the course of history in order to enhance the survival of their offspring
Men’s Sexual Desire

(Buss, 1995; Buss, 1998; McCabe & Cummins, 1997; Stewart-Williams & Thomas, 2013). Parental investment, defined as the time, energy, and effort expended to help ensure the survival and reproduction of one’s offspring, is proposed to be especially influential to males’ and females’ mating practices (Buss, 1998; Stewart-Williams & Thomas, 2013). Females’ minimum parental investment is considerably larger than that of males’ (McCabe & Cummins, 1997). In order to pass on one’s genes, a female must engage in a sexual encounter and carry a fetus in her womb for nine months. In comparison, a male only must engage in the sexual encounter (McCabe & Cummins, 1997). Further, while females are impregnated and cannot continue to procreate with other males, males could conceivably attempt to procreate with an unlimited number of other females in order to continue passing on their genes (Buss, 1998).

As a result of their respective minimum parental investment, it has been proposed by evolutionary theorists that men and women have evolved to desire sexual encounters that will maximize their potential to procreate (Buss, 1995; 1998; Stewart-Williams & Thomas, 2013). Historically, females would have been more likely to see the survival of her offspring by procreating with a male partner who could help her care and provide for their offspring. Consequently females would be more likely to desire sex in the context of a relationship with a male who appears to be invested and committed to her (Buss, 1995; 1998; MacDonald, 1992). On the other hand, it has been argued that males increase their chance of producing several offspring by engaging in short-term mating strategies with multiple females without having to invest the time and effort into the raising the child (Buss, 1995; 1998).
Some evolutionary theorists also posit that men have evolved to experience high levels of sexual desire in order to increase their interest in procreating with multiple females without commitment, to desire women who are easily available, and to (at least theoretically) engage in casual sex with any female in any circumstance (Hatfield et al., 2010; MacDonald, 1992). Further, some supporters of Evolutionary Theory suggest that, in order to make procreation more likely, male sexual desire is influenced by surface level characteristics (i.e., physical appearance: young, healthy, waist-to-hip ratio), which indicate a female is fertile (Hatfield et al., 2010).

Notably, other evolutionary theorists suggest men and women are more similar than different with regards to mating strategies (Stewart-Williams & Thomas, 2013). Rather than dichotomizing males as “competitors” and females as “choosers,” some evolutionary theorists suggest that both males and females are actively involved in courting one another. From this perspective, it is argued that offspring are best cared for by a pair-bonding strategy (i.e., a long-term committed partnership; Stewart-Williams & Thomas, 2013). Within a pair-bonding partnership, males and females are proposed to engage in sexual monogamy (Stewart-Williams & Thomas, 2013). As such, according to some evolutionary theorists, it may be that men have evolved to experience sexual desire within the context of a committed, long-term relationship.

**Sexual Script Theory**

As a reaction to Evolutionary Theory, which often treats sexuality as an unchanging constant and biologically rooted, Sexual Script Theory emerged (Simon & Gagnon, 1986; 2003). Sexual Script Theory suggests that sexual behaviour is, instead, a result of social constructions about appropriate sexual behaviours for men and women.
across the lifespan (Simon & Gagnon, 1986; 2003). Sexual scripts act as framework that dictate how men and women should feel (Simon & Gagnon, 1986), understand (Masters et al., 2012) and behave (Wiederman, 2005) in a particular sexual situation. Once established, it is proposed that there is little deviation from the formulated script (Simon & Gagnon, 1986).

Scripts are shared beliefs about sexual behaviour that are experienced at a cultural, interpersonal, and intrapsychic (or intrapersonal) level (Simon & Gagnon, 1986; 2003). Culturally, they are comprised of a collective of established norms about appropriate sexual behaviour and expressions of one’s sexuality. These norms are found to change, at least to a degree, over the course of time (Masters et al., 2012; Milhausen & Herold, 1999). At the interpersonal level, these norms are learned and reinforced through social interactions. At the intrapsychic level, knowledge of socially, sexually appropriate behaviour is experienced at the individual level and contributes to a person’s understanding of their sexual identity (McCormick, 2010).

Sexual scripts are theorized to develop at a very young age, such as when adults react to children’s personal exploration of their genitalia (Masters et al., 2012; Wiederman, 2005). For example, because males are able to easily view and touch their genitalia, they are not discouraged from exploring their bodies in the same way that women are (Wiederman, 2005). Men are also required to handle their genitalia while urinating, reinforcing the acceptability of regularly touching their genitalia (Wiederman, 2005). Further, as women are able to become pregnant, they tend to receive messages to act as “gatekeepers” and protect their bodies from men’s advancements. Because men are unable to become pregnant, they are encouraged to be freer with their sexuality and
Men’s Sexual Desire

initiate sexual activity (Wiederman, 2005). These messages are first received at the cultural level, and then it is proposed that men begin to internalize shared cognitions about how they are to experience sexuality. These cognitions may influence their future sexual beliefs and behaviours (Masters et al., 2012).

Sexual Script Theory does not suggest that men are innately born with more desire than women. Rather, the social norms, which dictate how men and women should express their desire, encourage men to embrace their desires and act upon them while women learn to repress these feelings (Masters et al., 2012; Wiederman, 2005). Sexual scripts for men, at least in the Western world, dictate that men should always be the initiator of sexual activity, that they are the ones to desire sex (not to be desirable), to push to the next level of physical intimacy, and that they are required to be highly sexually skilled in order to impress their female partner (Wiederman, 2005). According to Sexual Script Theory, men are also thought to prefer recreational or casual sex, to value sex as simply an act rather than a means to a relationship, to want “no-strings attached” sex, and to seek out multiple partners (Masters et al., 2012; Wiederman, 2005). From a young age, and through their adolescent and adult lives, men are positively reinforced to seek out multiple female partners, express high desire, and initiate sexual activity. Thus, Sexual Script Theory posits that men are ultimately “groomed” by social norms to experience and express higher levels of sexual desire.

Masculinity Theory

Masculinity Theory stems from, and is related to, Sexual Script Theory (Kimmel, 2005; Masters et al., 2012). Masculinity Theory is a social constructionist perspective that acknowledges a collective social ruling regarding how men should act and behave,
specifically regarding their sexuality (Masters et al., 2012). Although there is some
evidence that the sexual gender divide is closing (Hyde, 2005; 2007), men who are
influenced by ideals of masculinity are more likely to behave in accordance with norms
prescribed to men (Masters et al., 2012).

Masculinity was previously considered a static trait such that men were either
masculine or they were not (Mankowski & Maton, 2010). Currently, however,
masculinity is viewed in relation to others and something that must be continuously
proven (Kimmel, 2005). Perhaps one of the most salient aspects of proving one’s
masculinity involves publically demonstrating that one is not feminine and not
homosexual (Kimmel, 2005). Specifically, Masculinity Theory posits that men should be
tough and aggressive, suppress emotions, distance themselves emotionally from other
men, and strive for competition, success and power (Brannon, 1976 as cited in
Mankowski & Maton, 2010).

With regards to sexual desire, Masculinity Theory posits that low sexual desire is
considered a feminine characteristic, so men should avoid demonstrating anything other
than a high level of interest in sexual activity (Masters et al., 2012). Rather, men are
encouraged to follow society’s normative discourse of men’s sexuality, which suggests
men should always be ready for, and interested in, sexual activity (Courtenay, 2000). Sex
within the context of Masculinity Theory includes the following criteria: “pursuit of
pleasure for its own sake, the increased attention to orgasm, the multiplication of sexual
partners, the universal interest in sexual experimentation, and the separation of sexual
behavior from love” (Kimmel, 2005, p. 3). A masculine approach to sex also prescribes
sexual activity with multiple sexual partners while sexual inexperience or failure to
actively pursue courtship with women is stigmatized (Kimmel, 2005; Seal & Ehrhardt, 2003). Failing to initiate sexual activity or show a strong interest in women can call into question a man’s masculinity and sexual orientation (Seal & Ehrhardt, 2003; Wiederman, 2005).

It has been suggested that the construct of “masculinity” simultaneously privileges and damages men (Mankowski & Maton, 2010). Specifically, while men who achieve masculinity, even temporarily, are praised and rewarded, the process of obtaining masculinity can be a grueling, never-ending battle to demonstrate an unhealthy ideal of manhood (Kimmel, 2005; Mankowski & Maton, 2010). Notably, although Masculinity Theory is generally discussed in relation to heterosexual men who do not want to appear homosexual, many gay men are equally affected by pressure to live up to standards of masculinity and similarly attempt to prove that they do not identify with negative stereotypes about being “sissy” (Kimmel, 2005).

**Summary of Theories**

Regardless of epistemology, each of the aforementioned theories proposes that men should experience high levels of sexual desire. Evolutionary Theory posits that men’s sexual desire has evolved to be inherently high in order to increase their interest in procreating with multiple females and pass on their genes (Buss, 1995; Buss, 1998; McCabe & Cummins, 1997). On the other hand, Social Script Theory and Masculinity Theory suggest that, rather than sexual desire being an inherent characteristic, men are encouraged to participate within cultural norms which dictate they demonstrate characteristics of having high sexual desire (Kimmel, 2005; Mankowski & Maton, 2010; Masters et al., 2012; Seal & Ehrhardt, 2003; Wiederman, 2005).
Research Suggesting Men Have High Sexual Desire

Research generally supports the aforementioned theories, suggesting that men’s sexual desire is high and impervious to external factors. Specifically, it has been demonstrated that: men have higher levels of sexual desire than women (Baumesiter et al., 2001; Levine, 2002; 2003), men’s desire remains high despite increasing relationship duration (Klusmann, 2002; Murray & Milhausen, 2012a), men’s desire is mainly physical, rather than emotional or relational, in nature (Meston & Buss, 2007), men actively participate in traditional male sexual scripts (Masters et al., 2012), and relatively few men report experiencing problematic low sexual desire (Brotto, 2010a; Rosen, 2000).

Men Have Higher Sexual Desire Than Women

It is widely found that men’s sexual desire is higher than women’s (Levine, 2002; 2003). In a review article on men’s and women’s sexual drive (defined as sexual motivation towards sexual activity and sexual pleasure), Baumeister and colleagues (2001) concluded that men have a higher sexual drive than women when measured in a wide variety of ways. Across all of the studies the authors reviewed, men reported a higher frequency of masturbation, more sexual fantasies, and an increased likelihood of initiating sexual activity compared with their female counterparts (Baumeister et al., 2001). Men also reported desiring a wider variety of sexual acts and partners, a higher preferred number of sexual partners over their lifetime, and that they were more willing to make sacrifices in other areas of their life to obtain sexual activity (Baumeister et al., 2001). The authors further concluded that there were no exceptions to this finding: women did not rank higher on any measurement of sexual drive compared with men (Baumeister et al., 2001).
Relationship Duration

Researchers have also determined that men’s sexual desire remains high despite increasing relationship length, at least among younger, college-educated samples (Klusmann, 2002; Murray & Milhausen, 2012a). Klusmann (2002) investigated the perceived changes in desire for sexual activity and desire for tenderness at various relationship lengths among 1865 German students between the ages of 19 to 32. He found that over the course of a relationship, women’s perceptions of their male partner’s desire for tenderness decreased but their perceptions of their male partner’s desire for sex remained the same at each of the following relationship durations: less than one year, one to three years, and over three years (Klusmann, 2002). This finding was contrasted by male participants’ perspectives, who reported that their female partners’ sexual desire decreased while their need for tenderness increased (Klusmann, 2002). Similarly, in a study of college-aged students (18-25 years old) in relationships ranging from 1 month to 10 years, women reported lower levels of sexual desire the longer the length of their relationship, whereas men reported high desire regardless of their relationship length (Murray & Milhausen, 2012a).

Reasons for Sex

In their 2007 study, Meston and Buss demonstrated that men and women have numerous reasons for engaging in sex. In fact, in their study of undergraduate students’ explanations for having sex in the past, the researchers developed a list of 237 unique reasons that men and women have sex (Meston & Buss, 2007). When investigating potential gender differences, the researchers determined that men and women significantly differed in their endorsement of 127 of the 237 reasons for engaging in
sexual activity. Specifically, male participants were significantly more likely to report engaging in sexual activity for physical reasons (e.g., “the person had a desirable body”), simply because the opportunity presented itself (e.g., “the person was available”), for reputation purposes (e.g., “I wanted to brag to my friends about my conquests”), and for utilitarian purposes (e.g., “I wanted to improve my sexual skills”). These gender differences suggest that men, more than women, might experience high sexual desire in order to increase their ability to obtain multiple new sexual partners and to increase their chance at reproducing by being attracted to physical attributes which indicate fertility. Although 20 of the top 25 frequently cited reasons for having sex were identical between men and women, the authors concluded that the specific gender differences offered support for Evolutionary Theory.

**Sexual Scripts**

Some research focusing on men’s endorsement of traditional sexual scripts also supports the aforementioned theories. For example, in a qualitative study of a culturally diverse group of young (18-25) heterosexual men’s (and women’s) endorsement of sexual scripts, Masters and colleagues (2012) found that the majority of men endorsed sexual scripts that were in line with traditional masculine roles. Specifically, of the 26 men interviewed, they determined that 16 men (61.5%) described experiences that conformed to characteristics of traditional gender roles (Masters et al., 2012). The endorsement of traditional male gender roles included the following characteristics: desiring sex without being desired, having high sexual desire, initiating sexual activity, feeling pressure to be sexually skilled, preferring recreational sex, valuing sex over relationships, seeking multiple partners, and wanting “no-strings attached” sex (Masters
et al., 2012). It is noteworthy that 10 of the men in this study (38.5%) did not actively endorse traditional male sexual scripts. However, the researchers noted that those men departing from the norm displayed some unease and uncertainty about not meeting cultural expectations, demonstrating the prevalence and power of sexual scripts at the cultural level (Masters et al., 2012).

**Hypoactive Sexual Desire Disorder in Men**

Lori Brotto, a member of the Sexual and Gender Identity Disorders Workgroup in the fifth edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5; American Psychiatric Association, 2013), recently summarized the literature on both men’s and women’s low sexual desire in order to recommend changes to the DSM-IV diagnosis of Hypoactive Sexual Desire Disorder (HSDD; Brotto, 2010a; 2010b). Based on the findings from research on women’s sexual desire, Brotto made a number of recommendations about ways that women’s sexual desire disorder should be adjusted to better reflect women’s experiences (Brotto, 2010b). These included a conceptual change to reflect the considerable overlap in women’s sexual desire and women’s sexual arousal disorders, the addition of more stringent diagnostic criteria, and a proposal to include specifiers that should be noted when making a diagnosis (e.g., cultural factors, relationship factors; Brotto, 2010b). In contrast, in her review article on men’s sexual desire, Brotto conceded that there was not adequate research on men’s experiences of sexual desire to warrant changes to the diagnosis (Brotto, 2010a).

The limited research on men’s experiences with HSDD may be due, in part, to the lower number of men who report experiencing problematic low sexual desire when compared to women (Brotto, 2010a; Rosen, 2000). The results from epidemiological
studies on low sexual desire vary considerably (Brotto, 2010b) however the trend that relatively fewer men (when compared to women) report low sexual desire is consistent. Although some studies show that approximately 30% of women report having problematic low sexual desire (Rosen, 2000), it has been estimated that approximately 8% (Traeen, Martinussen, Oberg & Kavli, 2007) to 15% (Rosen, 2000) of men may find their low sexual desire to be troubling. Further, it has been proposed that a diagnosis of HSDD in men should not imply that men do not continue to experience sexual desire; rather the problem tends to be that men no longer desire to have sexual encounters with their current romantic partner (McCarthy & Ginsberg, 2012). Low desire in men has been explained as an attempt at concealing atypical arousal patterns, compulsive masturbation to pornography, repressed issues regarding ones sexual orientation, and a history of sexual trauma (McCarthy & Ginsberg, 2012). Other factors associated with low sexual desire in men include: restrictive attitudes toward sexuality, a lack of erotic thoughts during sexual encounters, concerns about erections, sadness and shame (Carvalho & Nobre, 2011). Thus, the fact that fewer men report experiencing low sexual desire and the fact that those who do often find their desire can increase with a new sexual partner, supports theoretical assumptions that men tend to have high, unproblematic, sexual desire.

**Alternative Discourses of Men’s Sexual Desire**

Some of the previously mentioned research focused on the differences between men’s and women’s sexual desire. Concluding that men have higher levels of sexual desire than women *on average* contributes to the creation of the false dichotomy that men have high desire and women have low desire. Yet, research on gender similarities and
Men’s Sexual Desire

differences has concluded that there are more within gender differences than between
gender differences (Hyde, 2005; 2007). Further, there are also some research findings
that suggest men’s sexual desire may be more complex than traditional theories suggest.
Specifically, the literature surrounding men’s engagement in sexual compliance (Beck,
Bozman, & Qualtrough, 1991; Vannier & O’Sullivan, 2010), men’s desired departure
from traditional male sexual scripts (Dworkin & O’Sullivan, 2005; Masters et al., 2012);
and men’s experiences of sexual desire within the context of a relationship (Davies, Katz,
& Jackson, 1999; Mark & Murray, 2012) suggest that men’s desire is not always high
and impermeable to external factors nor divorced from the relationship context.

**Sexual Compliance**

The phenomenon of individuals engaging in sexual activity without sexual desire
has been explored in various ways over the last few decades (e.g., Basson, 2000; 2001a;
2002; Beck et al., 1991; Impett & Peplau, 2002; 2003; Muehlenhard, 2011; Muehlenhard
compliance refers to the act of *willingly* engaging in sexual activity without feeling desire
(Vannier & O’Sullivan, 2010). The construct is entirely separate from “token resistance”
saying no to sex when one really means yes; Muehlenhard, 2011) and instances where
an individual is forced into sexual intercourse without consent, as in the case of rape
(Impept & Peplau, 2002). Rather, sexual compliance acknowledges that in a partnership it
is rare for both individuals to always feel sexual desire at the same time (Baumeister et
al., 2001; Vannier & O’Sullivan, 2010). As a result, one may engage in sexual activity
with a partner, completely willingly and in order to make one’s partner happy, but
without feeling sexual desire oneself (Vannier & O’Sullivan, 2010).
Although desire is often conceptualized as desire for sexual activity or release of sexual tension, some researchers and theorists suggest that desire may be experienced as a desire for intimacy and closeness to one’s partner (Weingarten, 1991). Rosemary Basson proposed that some women engage in sexual activities without feeling sexual desire and includes this finding as a component of her proposed model of sexual response (described further under Human Sexual Response Models; Basson, 2000; 2001a; 2001b; 2002). However, it appears that sexual compliance, especially in a committed partnership is also fairly common among men (Impett & Peplau, 2003; Vannier & O’Sullivan, 2010). In one qualitative study of 63 young adults, researchers interviewed men and women about instances of sexual compliance in the context of committed heterosexual relationships (Vannier & O’Sullivan, 2010). Over a three-week period, almost half (46%) of participants reported at least one experience of sexual compliance with 17.2% of all sexual activity rated as sexually compliant. While there was no gender difference in the frequency reports of sexual compliance, men (but not women) also reported initiating sexual activity even when they themselves were not feeling desire (Vannier & O’Sullivan, 2010). Men indicated that they engaged in sexual compliance because they did not want to hurt their female partner’s feelings. Some men reported doing so in the hopes that their partner might be more likely to reciprocate the gesture at a later point in time (Vannier & O’Sullivan, 2010). These findings suggest that men do not always experience sexual desire when engaging in sexual activity, and thus, that men’s sexual desire is not always high, or higher than their female partner’s, at least in the context of a partnered relationship. The findings also suggest that outward, observable actions (i.e., frequency of engaging in sexual activity, initiating sex) are not
always representative of men’s internal experiences. Thus, studies that have used sexual initiation as a measurement of sexual desire (e.g., Baumeister et al., 2001) may be drawing incorrect conclusions about men’s experiences.

**Sexual Initiation**

Although theories have been proposed which stipulate the ways in which men and women should interact during a sexual encounter, not all men and women abide by these scripts. Taking the approach that many men may not adhere to prescribed gender roles regarding sexual initiation, Dworkin and O’Sullivan (2005) interviewed men about their engagement in, and preference for, various patterns of sexual initiation. In common with much of the research on men’s sexual desire, participants were a college-aged sample. The findings from this study suggested that while male-dominated sexual initiation is the most common pattern of initiation, the majority of the men reporting this script (72.2%) indicated a preference for more egalitarian pattern (i.e., equal amounts of initiation between the male and female partner; Dworkin & O’Sullivan, 2011). Men who wanted a more egalitarian pattern of sexual initiation indicated that they found initiating regularly was too demanding, and they rejected the idea of a dichotomous male/female script (Dworkin & O’Sullivan, 2011). Further, some men reported that they wanted to be seen as an object of desire, in contrast to previous findings which have found men prefer to see their partner as an object of desire (Masters et al., 2012). It appears that creating space for a dialogue that diverts from traditional norms allows for a different picture of men’s sexual desire experiences to emerge.
Desire Discrepancies

Although much of the research on men’s sexual desire has found that men have higher levels of sexual desire than women on average, research at the dyadic level in heterosexual couples appears to tell a different story (e.g., Davies et al., 1999; Mark & Murray, 2012). Desire discrepancy describes the relative differences in desire for sexual activity between partners (Zilbergeld & Ellison, 1980). Based on the theoretical assumptions previously discussed, it could be presumed that in a heterosexual relationship, men would have higher levels of desire than their female counterparts. In contrast, in one study of 72 undergraduate, heterosexual couples in relationship lengths of 26.9 months on average, men and women were equally likely to be the individual in the relationship with lower levels of desire (Davies et al., 1999). Specifically, although roughly half (48.6%) of the couples reported experiencing no desire discrepancy, when desire discrepancy was present it was almost evenly split between women (23.6%) and men (27.8%) having lower desire (Davies et al., 1999). Similarly, in a more recent study of desire discrepancy in a similar sample (133 heterosexual, college-aged couples in relationship lengths of 4.32 years on average) it was also found that men were no more likely to have the higher level of sexual desire than their female partner (Mark & Murray, 2012).

Dyadic analyses, and research on desire discrepancies, provide the relationship context that individual-level focused research cannot address. Although much of the research on men’s desire indicates that men, on average, experience high levels of sexual desire (Baumeister et al., 2001), when put in the context of men’s relationships with his
female partner, it becomes apparent that not all men have higher desire than their female counterparts.

**Methodological Critiques of Men’s Sexual Desire Research**

There are a number of methodological critiques regarding how research on men’s sexual desire has been conducted. The samples used in most of the previous studies were based on college-aged men between the ages of 18 and 25 (e.g., Davies et al., 1999; Dworkin & O’Sullivan, 2005; Klusmann, 2002; Mark & Murray, 2012; Masters et al., 2012; Meston & Buss, 2007; Milhausen & Herold, 1999; Murray & Milhausen, 2012a; Vannier & O’Sullivan, 2010). This sample provides a skewed understanding of men’s sexual desire based on age, and the resulting conclusions may not be applicable to older men or men who are not university-educated. Men outside of this age range are virtually absent in the current male sexual desire literature (Brotto, 2010a).

Further, many studies have used quantitative scales that leave room for various interpretations. For example, the Brief Male Sexual Function Inventory (O’Leary et al., 1995) measures sexual desire through the following two questions: “During the past 30 days, on how many days have you felt sexual desire” (with responses including none, only a few, some, most, and almost every day) and “During the past 30 days, how would you rate your level of sexual drive” (with responses including none at all, low, medium, medium-high, high; O’Leary et al., 1995). These questions do not provide information regarding whether men are responding within the context of their relationship or whether sexual desire reporting is non-partner specific (Murray & Milhausen, 2012a). The questions also do not distinguish between what might be considered “sexual tension” versus the desire for sex with one’s partner. Thus, research using ambiguously worded
scales may be drawing incorrect conclusions about men’s experiences (Murray & Milhausen, 2012a).

Finally, the emerging qualitative studies conducted on men’s sexual desire have begun to show more complex patterns of sexual desire (e.g., Vannier & O'Sullivan, 2010; Masters et al., 2012). This suggests that qualitative methods may provide an opportunity to better understand men’s experiences by asking men open-ended questions about their sexuality that provides space for variation from traditional gender-role scripts and masculine expectations.

**Theoretical Critique**

The theories addressed previously represent a dichotomy in the current understanding of men’s sexual desire. Specifically, the aforementioned theories suggest that sexual desire is *either* biological (Buss, 1995; Buss, 1998; McCabe & Cummins, 1997) or socially constructed (Kimmel, 2005; Mankowski & Maton, 2010; Masters et al., 2012; Seal & Ehrhardt, 2003; Wiederman, 2005). In contrast, the “dialectic method” suggests that *both* theoretical arguments must be considered and combined in order to better address the complexities of human experience (Bloch, 1983). Specific to men’s sexual desire, a dialectic approach would suggest that men’s desire might be both biological and socially constructed. A theory that addresses this dialectic approach, such as the biopsychosocial model (Carvalho & Nobre, 2011) may be of value in explaining men’s sexual desire.

Biopsychosocial models (which address the biological, psychological, and social components of human behaviour) have been previously applied to women’s sexual desire. The New View Campaign, which challenges medical involvement with women’s
sexual problems, suggests that women’s sexual desire is impacted by biological, relational, interpersonal and cultural variables (Tiefer 2001). This model, however, has not been used to explain or describe men’s sexual desire to the same extent. Notably, two recently published studies of men’s sexuality investigated biopsychosocial correlates of erectile dysfunction (Martin et al., 2012) and of sexual desire (Carvalho & Nobre, 2011). A biopsychosocial model may help situate and give a guiding framework to these newer findings on men’s sexual desire.

**Human Sexual Response Models**

The theories and research noted above explicitly describe men’s experiences of sexual desire. However, assumptions about men’s experiences of sexual desire have also developed in more implicit ways. The Human Sexual Response Cycle provides a description of how men and women respond to, and progress through, a sexual encounter and provides a platform from which to understand how desire is experienced. Masters and Johnson proposed the original Human Sexual Response Cycle (HSRC) in 1966. While the HSRC has been slightly adjusted over time in order to more accurately capture women’s experiences, there has been little consideration of whether or not the HSRC is representative of men’s experiences (Janssen, McBride, Yarber, Hill & Butler, 2008). Research on women’s sexual desire suggests that two components of the HSRC (desire and arousal) are more closely related than originally thought (Brotto, Heiman, & Tolman, 2009; Graham, Sanders, Milhausen, & McBride, 2006) and that women’s sexual desire is contextual, responsive, and relational in nature (Basson, 2000; 2001a). Whether the advancements made in understanding women’s sexual desire can be extended to better explain men’s desire requires further research.
The Original Human Sexual Response Cycle

Upon observing men and women engaging in partnered and solo sexual activities in their laboratory, Masters and Johnson (1966) documented physiological stages that occurred during sexual stimulation; their model contained the following four stages: excitement, plateau, orgasm, and resolution. As long as “sufficient stimulation” was present, men and women were theorized to progress through each of these stages (Masters & Johnson, 1966). Notably, there were two variations in the female orgasm phase of the cycle, including the possibility of experiencing multiple orgasms and the possibility of having no orgasm at all (Masters & Johnson, 1966). Men and women were also found to differ in the resolution phase. After engaging in sexual activity women are physically able to engage in sex immediately afterward, whereas men are unable to obtain an erection for a period of time after having sex (Masters & Johnson, 1966).

Slightly over a decade later, in 1977, Helen Singer Kaplan expanded on Masters and Johnson’s (1966) model by introducing the concept of sexual desire. Through her clinical experience, Kaplan determined that individuals were being misdiagnosed with arousal and orgasmic problems when in actuality their lack of interest in engaging in sexual activity was the underlying problem (Kaplan, 1977). Consequently, Kaplan developed a tri-phasic model comprised of desire, excitement, and orgasm. Kaplan described desire as an “appetite or drive” that is experienced through the brain rather than the genitals, such as with arousal and orgasm (Kaplan, 1979). She proposed that each of these three stages were independent and thus set the stage for sexual desire to be recognized as its own unique phase in human sexual response. The Masters and Johnson
(1966) and Kaplan (1977) sexual response models comprise what is known as the traditional human sexual response cycle: desire, arousal, orgasm, and resolution.

**Critiques of the Traditional HSRC**

While the traditional HSRC has been considered the definitive model of human sexual response, it has also been the focus of a number of critiques (e.g., Andersen & Cyranowski, 1995; Basson, 2000; Basson, 2001a; 2001b; 2002; Levin, 2008; Tiefer, 1991; Wood, Koch, & Mansfield, 2006). Primarily, those who have criticized the HSRC have argued that it focuses on physiological changes while not sufficiently addressing psychological components such as perceived relationship satisfaction and the appropriateness of the sexual situation (Basson, 2001a; Levine, 2002; Tiefer, 1991). This seminal work on the HSRC falls within Pepper’s mechanistic world-view and takes a reductionist perspective on sexual response (Goldhaber, 2000). This world-view posits that only primary qualities (those which can be observed) should be studied. Aspects there are considered “secondary qualities” such as beliefs, dreams (and desires), although believed to exist, are considered irrelevant to research interests (Goldhaber, 2000) and do not appear in this original model of human sexual response.

However, these critiques are largely from scholars who argue that the traditional HSRC is a “male-based model” (Tiefer, 1991) that was inappropriately applied to women. For example, in the HSRC, male erection is equated with female vaginal lubrication even though men regularly demonstrate higher agreement between self-reported arousal and erections than women do between self-reported arousal and genital response (Chivers, Seto, Lalumiere, Laan, & Grimbos, 2010). Other critiques include the suggestion that the traditional HSRC ignores the variety in women’s sexual responses (Wood et al., 2006).
Further, information derived from women and used to construct the HSRC was gathered from a select group of women who were willing to be viewed in a laboratory while engaging in sexual activity and were required to be orgasmic (Masters & Johnson, 1966). Critics have suggested that these women’s sexual responses would not be generalizable, as many women do not experience orgasms regularly, or at all (Tiefer, 1991).

While there is validity in these critiques, there has not been a corresponding critique of whether the original HSRC adequately represents men’s experiences nor whether a model developed almost 50 years ago is applicable to men’s experiences today (Janssen et al., 2008). For example, as previously noted, the results obtained based on the sample of women who participated in the Masters and Johnson (1966) study are questionable given their lack of generalizability to a broader group of women (Tiefer, 1991). Yet whether the findings based on the men who participated in research to date are generalizable to a broader population has not been investigated. It may be that men who experienced difficulties obtaining and maintaining an erection or who ejaculated very early in intercourse would not have felt comfortable performing under such experimental conditions, thus also giving a potentially skewed version of men’s “normal” sexual response. Further, the men who participated in Masters and Johnson’s laboratory study were also, likely, a particular subset of men comfortable enough to be viewed while engaging in sexual activity that may not represent the average male’s experiences. Whether or not men endorse this model holds considerable implications for our understanding of men’s sexual response.
An Alternative Female Sexual Response Cycle

The original HSRC is considered to be relatively useful for understanding men’s sexual desire (Basson, 2000, p. 52). However, these above-mentioned criticisms, as they pertained to women, led to a call for a new model for women that included psychological components, acknowledged individual variations, and focused on the context of a relationship (Tiefer, 1991). In response to these criticisms, Rosemary Basson proposed an alternative model of women’s sexual response, specifically focusing on the complexity of sexual desire. Her model was based on clinical experience with women rather than empirical research data. Basson included four key issues related to sexual desire in her model: (a) women’s sexual desire is not only a spontaneous hunger for sexual activity, (b) desire can occur at any point during a sexual encounter and is not strictly experienced at the beginning of a sexual encounter, (c) sexual desire may not occur at all, and (d) situational cues play an important role in the ability to experience sexual desire (Basson, 2000). This model was proposed to be especially relevant for women in long-term monogamous relationships when feelings of spontaneous desire tend to decrease due to fatigue, monotony, and boredom (Basson, 2000).

Unlike the traditional HSRC, Basson’s model takes a contextualist approach to understanding and conceptualizing sexual desire (Goldhaber, 2000). Basson suggested that situation and context play a critical role in how women experience desire, such that desire may be experienced in a romantic setting but perhaps not when other life stressors are more demanding (e.g., taking care of children, work demands, etc.; Basson, 2000). Basson (2000) also argued that desire is experienced differently for each woman. Finally, she suggested that a number of factors including age, relationship length, and the addition
of children will affect how often and how intensely sexual desire is experienced (Basson, 2000).

**An Alternative Human Sexual Response Cycle?**

Following her seminal paper on women’s sexual response (Basson, 2000), Basson proposed an alternative model of sexual response that included psychological and biological factors, for both women and men (2001b). Although the approach of this model is gender inclusive, Basson acknowledged that her motivation for proposing a new model was based on her discoveries of women’s complexities through her clinical experience (Basson, 2000; Basson, 2001b). Further, Basson frequently makes reference to elements that impact both male and female sexual desire, followed by a female-specific example (e.g., suggesting fatigue from *young motherhood* can negatively impact sexual desire). Thus while the model was suggested to be applicable to men and women’s experiences, it may be a female-based model that men were “molded” into. Notable, since previously noted feminist critics suggested that the Masters and Johnson’s HSRC attempted to fit women’s experiences into a male-based model (Tiefer, 1991).

Although there was an attempt to extend Basson’s model to men (2001b), subsequent researchers also focused on the extent to which it applies to women only. Specifically, Sand and Fisher (2007) asked 133 female nurses in the United States which of the three proposed human sexual response models (Masters and Johnson, Kaplan, Basson) was most applicable to their experiences of sexual response. They found that approximately the same proportion of women (~30%) endorsed each of the three options as best fitting their sexual response with none of the models garnering the preponderance of support. It was later demonstrated that women who had scores suggesting lower sexual
functioning, according to the Female Sexual Function Index (FSFI; Rosen et al., 2000) were significantly more likely to indicate that the Basson model accurately captured their experiences of sexual desire, whereas women who had higher FSFI scores (suggesting better sexual functioning) were significantly more likely to endorse Masters and Johnson’s or Kaplan’s models (Sand & Fisher, 2007). However, to date, no study has asked men whether the proposed sexual response cycles accurately fit their experiences, making it difficult to establish a theoretical platform from which to better understand men’s experiences.

The Relationship Between Sexual Desire and Arousal

Although sexual desire and sexual arousal were considered independent constructs in the traditional HSRC, recent findings suggest that women’s sexual desire and subjective sexual arousal are closely related (Brotto et al., 2009; Graham et al., 2004; Mitchell et al., 2012). Therefore, in order to arrive at a more comprehensive understanding of women’s sexual desire, the literature on women’s sexual arousal should be consulted. In one prominent study on women’s sexual arousal, researchers conducted nine focus groups with 80 women between the ages of 18-84, over half of whom were in a committed, monogamous relationship (Graham et al., 2004). The authors determined that arousal was impacted by various factors including: feelings about one’s body, concern about reputation, unwanted pregnancy, feeling desired by a partner, feeling accepted by a partner, partners’ style of approach and initiation, and negative mood (Graham et al., 2004). Many of these same factors were also evident in a qualitative study of factors which impacted young women’s sexual desire in longer-term relationships.
(Murray & Milhausen, 2012b), further suggesting that desire and arousal are highly correlated.

Because research on the subject is limited, it remains unclear as to whether sexual desire and arousal are as closely intertwined in men as they are reported to be among women (Brotto, 2010a). Typically, research has found that subjective arousal and genital response in men are highly correlated (Chivers et al., 2010). However, a separate review of men’s arousal suggested that men’s arousal and sexual desire are also closely connected (Janssen, 2011; Mitchell et al., 2012). Specifically, in one noteworthy qualitative study on men’s sexual arousal, conducted with 50 men between the ages of 18-70, researchers found that men had a difficult time separating the constructs of desire and arousal (Janssen et al., 2008). Thus, it is possible that research on men’s sexual arousal could elucidate our understanding of men’s sexual desire.

In the Janssen et al. (2008) study, a number of factors were described as impacting men’s sexual arousal. Specifically, the researchers found that some factors which increased sexual arousal in men were in line with traditional male sexual scripts and Evolutionary Theory, including men’s reported arousal to the physical and sexual appearance of their partner as well as when viewing erotica (Janssen et al., 2008). However, men’s arousal was also positively impacted by a number of partner-related factors that are traditionally considered more typical of women’s experiences, including: their partner’s level of sexual desire and arousal and whether they were feeling emotionally connected to their partner (Janssen et al., 2008). The findings from this qualitative study on men’s sexual arousal could indicate that partner-related factors also influence men’s desire, if arousal and desire are as closely connected as suggested
Men’s Sexual Desire (Janssen et al., 2008; Mitchell et al., 2012). It also suggests that situational and contextual factors are important considerations when studying men’s desire and arousal. Finally, this study is an example of the more complex picture that emerges of men’s experiences when qualitative methodology is utilized.

**Study Rationale**

Women’s sexual desire has been studied extensively in order to better understand and capture women’s complex experiences. Definitions of desire have been critiqued and reconstructed (Brotto, 2010b) and new nomenclature and diagnostic criteria for the DSM-5 was proposed based on studies that suggest that sexual desire and arousal are closely linked (e.g., Graham et al., 2004). Additionally, more complex theories for understanding women’s sexual desire have been proposed (e.g., Basson, 2000) and feminist theorists have pointed to oppressing social norms that reduce women’s sexual desire experiences (e.g., Tiefer, 2001). Yet, there is no framework to conceptualize men’s potentially complex experience of their sexuality.

Research on men’s sexual desire has almost entirely focused on university-aged men or men in later life seeking treatment for sexual problems (Brotto, 2010a). In fact, a majority of the studies described above focused on men between the ages of 18-25 who were university students (e.g., Davies et al., 1999; Dworkin & O’Sullivan, 2005; Mark & Murray, 2012; Masters et al., 2012; Meston & Buss, 2007; Milhausen & Herold, 1999; Murray & Milhausen, 2012a; Klusmann, 2002; Vannier & O’Sullivan, 2010), making it difficult to determine whether the findings would also be applicable to middle-aged men. Thus, an exploration of men’s experiences outside of a college-aged sample is needed.
Additionally, there is evidence to suggest that men’s sexual desire may be experienced differently within the context of a long-term relationship versus outside of a relationship or at the beginning of a new relationship. Specifically, Evolutionary Theory posits that men’s sexual desire remains high in order to increase their likelihood of procreating with multiple, new female partners (Buss, 1995; 1998; McCabe & Cummins, 1997). Thus, it could be that men in a long-term relationship maintain high sexual desire in response to sexual cues outside of a relationship (e.g., new women, sexually explicit material) and this is what is being captured in quantitative scales suggesting men have high desire (Murray & Milhausen, 2012a). It is possible that within the context of a relationship, men’s sexual desire decreases if needs for novelty and variety are not being met. Focusing on men who are in long-term relationships provides the opportunity to inquire about experiences of sexual desire both within, and outside, of their relationship.

The purpose of the current study was to better understand the way middle-aged men in committed, long-term heterosexual relationships experience and understand their sexual desire. The objectives of the study were to: a) explore, and expand on, the phenomenon of men’s sexual desire, b) gain insight into men’s experiences of sexual desire within, and outside of, their long-term relationships, and c) determine the degree to which men’s experiences of sexual desire correspond to, or deviate from, traditional theories of men’s sexual desire. The specific research questions were as follows:

1) What factors elicit men’s sexual desire in the context of their long-term relationships, or their desire for individual sexual pleasure in general?

2) What factors inhibit men’s sexual desire in the context of their long-term relationships, or their desire for individual sexual pleasure in general?
3) How might experiences of sexual desire within one’s relationship differ from non-partner specific experiences of sexual desire?

4) To what degree do men’s descriptions of sexual desire support, or deviate from, traditional masculinity norms and sexual scripts?
Chapter Two: Method

Grounded Theory Methodology

Data collected in the study were analyzed using grounded theory methodology (GTM). Grounded Theory was proposed in 1967 by Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss as a “systematic way to gather and analyze data for the purposes of generating theory” (Daly, 2007, p. 101). Definitions of “theory” differ depending on one’s epistemological viewpoint. Traditionally, the positivist definition of theory refers to deterministic explanations and universal, generalizable predictions of behaviour (Charmaz, 2006). In contrast, interpretivist definitions suggest that theory is abstract and interpretive, based on the researchers understanding of what is occurring within the data (Charmaz, 2006). Interpretivist theory emphasizes the value in understanding a phenomenon and gives priority to showing patterns and connections, rather than prediction and linear reasoning (Charmaz, 2006). The proposed study used an interpretivist definition of theory generation, which was conducted under the constructionist grounded theory perspective.

GTM is particularly relevant for studies that explore areas that are under-examined to produce theory generation (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The demographic chosen for the present study has not, to date, been a focus within sexual desire research, making GTM an appropriate methodological fit. In addition, unlike Thematic Analysis, GTM moves beyond describing data to explaining the findings (Daly, 2007). GTM was chosen to analyze the data in the present study in order to generate theory about men’s experience of sexual desire and the possible factors that impact men’s desire within and outside of their long-term relationships.
When grounded theory was first proposed, it was aligned with positivist traditions and took an objectivist perspective (Charmaz, 2006). Objectivist theorists assume that collected data represents objective facts about a knowable world. Further, an unbiased researcher using unbiased measures is believed to have access to this reality (Charmaz, 2006; Daly, 2007). Objectivist grounded theory does not consider social context, the influence of the researcher, nor the interaction between the researcher and participant when analyzing data (Charmaz, 2006). In contrast, constructionist grounded theory views the data and analysis as developing from a shared experience and relationship between the researcher and participants. The analysis, in other words, is a social construction influenced by the dynamics of the interview process as well as the contextual situation (i.e., time, place, culture; Charmaz, 2006). The latter form of theory is emergent, assumes multiple realities, sees facts and values as inherently linked and “truth” as provisional (Charmaz, 2006).

I, the primary researcher, work within a social constructionist epistemology, which views “truths” and “facts” as socially constructed phenomenon (Daly, 2007). As a result, I believe that I had an influence on the findings that were created throughout the analysis of my interviews with the study participants. The most salient issue embarking on the proposed study was the gender discrepancy between the participants (identifying as male) and myself (identifying as female). As a female in my late twenties with a background in women’s sexual desire research, I approached this study with certain understandings of sexual desire as a result of growing up, and living, as a woman. My lack of identification with men’s experiences may have made it difficult for me to fully understand men’s descriptions of their sexual desire from an “outsider” perspective (Allen, 2004; Labaree,
2002). Alternatively, my lack of identification with the participants’ gender may have provided an advantage as I may have been free from potential biases that arise from having too close of an affiliation with the participants (Allen, 2004; Labaree, 2002).

Participants

Sample Size

Unlike quantitative research that is more likely to utilize large and random samples to represent the population, qualitative research uses smaller samples to provide a more detailed and in-depth description of participants’ experiences (Daly, 2007). Samples for qualitative research, specifically with GTM, are determined by reaching saturation (Charmaz, 2006). Charmaz defines saturation as the point when “gathering fresh data no longer sparks new theoretical insights, nor reveals new properties of [one’s] core theoretical categories” (2006, p. 113). As saturation is theoretical by nature, it requires the judgment of the researcher to determine if, and when, saturation has been reached (Daly, 2007). It was determined that saturation had been reached at slightly over 20 interviews. However, due to the recent suggestion that at least 25 to 30 participants be included in grounded theory methodology and in-depth interview studies (Dworkin, 2012), a sample of 30 men was included to ensure the current study met the rigorous criteria set by experts in the sexuality research community.

Recruitment

Participants were recruited from two Prairie cities in Canada: Saskatoon, Saskatchewan and Winnipeg, Manitoba. The primary form of recruitment was electronic based through the website Kijiji (see Appendix A). As a result, this increased the region of recruitment to include men in towns surrounding Saskatoon (such as Prince Albert and
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Kindersley) and Winnipeg (such as Brandon and Steinbach). In addition, posters and flyers (see Appendix B) were placed in the downtown core in each of the aforementioned cities. For example flyers were placed in coffee shops (e.g., Broadway Roastery, Second Cup), grocery stores (e.g., Sobey’s, Marketplace Co-op), and downtown retail shops (e.g., Vinyl Exchange, Outer Limits).

Selective sampling refers to the generation of a sample that is not random, but rather one that fits the criteria set out by the researchers (Draucker, Martsolf, Ross, & Rusk, 2010); this approach is particularly common in GTM. Selective sampling was used for the current study in which the researchers determined relevant characteristics and experience with the phenomenon to be explored (Daly, 2007).

**Inclusion Criteria**

Age, relationship status, sexual orientation, and English-language comprehension were the domains for eligibility in the current study. Men who were between the ages of 30 and 65 were eligible to participate. Men were required to be at least 30 years old for several reasons. First, the vast majority of research on men’s sexual desire has been conducted on men who are college students, often between the ages of 18 and 25 (Brotto, 2010a). Men who are outside this age range have been largely ignored in the research to date. As sexual desire has been found to decrease with age (Levine, 2002; 2003) it is likely that older men do not have the same experiences as men who are younger.

Secondly, age 30 represents a widely understood and accepted transition into adulthood (Arnett, 2000; Lowe, Dillon, Rhodes & Zwiebach, 2012). Emerging adulthood is a recently proposed developmental stage that is growing in recognition in the western world (Arnett, 2000). Individuals who are considered to be emerging adults primarily
range in age from 18 to 25, although individuals up until the age of 29 may still be included in this developmental life stage (Arnett, 2000). Once individuals turn 30 years old, they typically have achieved the hallmarks of adulthood, including a marriage partner, children, and a career (Arnett, 2000). Notably, the markers of adulthood and subjective identification with this life stage are difficult to determine as life stages and developmental milestones are varied (Lowe et al., 2012). Yet, by using a 30 year-old minimum age for eligibility, it was hoped we would facilitate the generation of a sample of men with more traditionally considered adult characteristics (Arnett, 2000).

The upper limit for men’s age was 65 years old. It has been well documented that sexual desire decreases as individuals age (Levine, 2002) and men tend to experience a marked drop of testosterone after 65 years old (Morales, 2003). Further, the cutoff of 65 years of age has been used in previous studies of men’s sexual desire (e.g., Helgason et al., 1996; Traeen, Martinussen, Oberg & Kavli, 2007) in which men over the age of 65 were considered “elderly.” Using the same cutoff of 65 years old would allow the study findings to be compared with those of past research.

The participants were also required to be in long-term relationships, as previous studies have found more complex patterns of men’s sexual desire tend to occur within the context of a relationship (e.g., Mark & Murray, 2012; Masters et al., 2012; Vannier & O’Sullivan, 2010). Further, previous studies on men’s sexual desire that used standardized scales, such as the Brief Male Sexual Function Inventory (O’Leary et al., 1995), included questions about men’s sexual desire that did not specify whether men should answer about desire within the context of their relationship or at a non-partner specific level (Murray & Milhausen, 2012a). Thus, interviewing men who are in long-
term relationships allows for the exploration of potential differences between desire experienced within, and outside of, their relationship.

Men were required to be in a long-term relationship for a minimum of 2.5 years (30 months) as research suggests that passionate love, associated with high levels of sexual desire, gives way to companionate love around this time (Hatfield & Walster, 1978). It has been proposed that men in long-term relationships may be less likely to be driven by high sexual desire that is usually present in the beginning of a relationship (Hatfield & Sprecher, 1986; Sprecher & Regan, 1998) and may describe more complex and varied experiences of sexual desire. A decrease in sexual desire may be due, in part, to a romantic relationship moving from a passionate love to a companionate love stage (Hatfield & Sprecher, 1986). Passionate love is characterized by high levels of sexual desire for one’s partner (Sprecher & Regan, 1998). Companionate love, on the other hand, is described as friendship-type love characterized by affection and tenderness with less emphasis on eroticism (Sprecher & Regan, 1998). Often this transition occurs between 6 and 30 months into a monogamous relationship (Hatfield & Sprecher, 1986).

Finally, men in this study were required to identify as heterosexual, as there is some indication that gay and bisexual men may abide by different sexual scripts than heterosexual men. For example, Sexual Script Theory suggests that straight men do not view themselves as objects of sexual desire (Wiederman, 2005). Gay men, however, are more likely to experience self-sexual objectification (Kozak, Frankenhauser & Roberts, 2009). In addition, while homosexual men and heterosexual men are found to be more similar than different in their experiences of sexual desire (Holmberg & Blair, 2009) there are additional social challenges which impact how gay men interpret and express
their desire including stigmatization and negative stereotypes (Pope, Wierzalis, Barret & Rankins, 2007). Thus, while gay and bisexual men’s experiences and understandings of their sexual desire is of equal importance to that of straight men, past research suggests that the separate exploration of gay, bisexual and straight men in this particular area may be of value.

It was expected that men who are over the age of 30, and younger than 65, would vary on a number of characteristics. Specifically, it was assumed that male participants would have different relationship compositions (e.g., in a long-term partnership, married, remarried, etc.) and family structures (e.g., no children, pregnant, one or more children). It was also expected that participants would vary in terms of their level of education, ethnicity and religious/spiritual background. The potential variations within these demographics were considered to richen the understanding of men’s experiences within the previously outlined inclusion criteria. As the primary investigator is English-speaking, however, men who did not speak English were unable to participate in the proposed study.

**Participant Demographics**

Due to a computer program malfunction, the first five participants data (i.e., demographic questionnaire, audio interview, and interview transcript) were erased and were impossible to retrieve. As a result, a total of 35 interviews were conducted but only 30 of those interviews were included in the analysis and reported on below. The interviews that were deleted were retrospectively considered as a pilot study. They allowed for refinement of the study interview questions and provided an opportunity for
the interviewer to practice in terms of interview delivery and in developing prompts to interview questions.

Participants’ ages spanned the full range of the study criteria, from 30 to 65 years old, with an average age of 41.43 years old. The length of men’s relationships ranged from 2 years, 11 months to 39 years, 4 months (mean was 13 years, 4 months). Regarding relationship status, 25 men reported being married, 3 being in common-law relationships and 2 seriously dating their current partner only. The majority of men in this study reported having children. Twenty-three men reported having one or more children, 6 no children, and 1 participant’s female partner was pregnant at the time of the study.

Men in this study were recruited from two prairie cities in Canada. Sixteen men lived in Winnipeg and the surrounding area, and 14 men were from Saskatoon and the surrounding area. There was little variation in the reported ethnicity of men. The majority of men were Caucasian (N = 25), while 3 men identified as Aboriginal or Metis, and 2 men identified as South East Asian. There was a range of educational backgrounds among the study sample. Regarding the highest level of education obtained, 4 men reported having a high school diploma, 4 men had some college education, 8 men had a college diploma, 1 participant had some undergraduate education, 7 men had an undergraduate degree, 5 men had a graduate degree, and 1 participant had some postgraduate education.

The participants varied in their religious beliefs. When asked to what extent religiousness was part of their beliefs, 14 men reported “not at all,” 5 men reported “a little bit,” 7 men reported “somewhat,” 2 men reported “a lot” and 1 participant reported “very much.” One participant did not respond to this question. When asked to what extent
spirituality was part of their beliefs, 7 men reported “not at all,” 5 men reported “a little bit,” 10 men reported “somewhat,” 5 reported “very much,” and 2 reported “a lot.” One participant did not respond to this question.

Participants reported having good health overall. However, there was a range including 4 men who reported “poor” health, 5 men “satisfactory” health, 16 “good” health, 5 “very good” health and 1 participant did not respond to this question. The slight majority of men (N = 17) were not taking any medication. However, 13 participants reported taking medications for health issues that ranged from anxiety and depression to pain.

The view that sex was important was largely endorsed, with 19 of the men reporting sex was “very important,” 9 reporting it was “somewhat important,” and only 2 men indicating that sex was “neither important nor unimportant.” When evaluating their body image, the men felt somewhat neutral about their physical appearance. The slight majority of men reported feeling “moderately attractive” (N = 16). Of the other participants, 6 men reported feeling “very attractive,” 5 feeling “not at all attractive,” 2 feeling “slightly attractive,” and 1 feeling “completely attractive.”

**Procedure**

The sample was recruited through Internet sources (see Appendix A) and community organizations/businesses using posters (see Appendix B) as previously outlined. Potential participants contacted the primary investigator through email to indicate their interest in the study. A screening questionnaire (see Appendix C) sent to potential participants to complete by email ensured that all inclusion criteria were met. Upon meeting study criteria, men were contacted again, by email, to set up an
appointment for their interview. Interviews were conducted in private, enclosed rooms in public buildings to ensure privacy and anonymity of the participants and the safety of the interviewer. Specifically, interviews were conducted in private study rooms in public libraries Saskatoon, Saskatchewan and Winnipeg, Manitoba.

Participants arrived at the pre-arranged study room. Participants were greeted by the primary researcher and were asked to read and sign the study consent form (see Appendix D). Men provided their real names on the consent form; however, these names were removed for transcribing purposes and pseudonyms were used when presenting the results. Once consent was obtained, the men responded to a brief demographics questionnaire (see Appendix E) and were interviewed using semi-structured questions (see Appendix F). Following the interview, participants were debriefed, asked their thoughts about the study questions and whether they had any questions themselves. For their participation in the study, participants received a $10 gift card redeemable at various establishments in the region (e.g., Second Cup, Chapter’s Book Store, etc.).

**Semi-Structured Interviews**

Semi-structured interviews were expected to take approximately one hour, and lasted a mean time of 54 minutes. Structured interviews have a rigid, pre-determined set of responses, and unstructured interviews tend to be more exploratory and in-depth (Daly, 2007). Semi-structured interviews, in contrast, allow the researcher to prepare some questions and also allow for a variety of follow-up questions to accommodate participants’ responses (Fontana & Frey, 1994). Semi-structured interviews have some noteworthy advantages. They allow the researcher to stay focused on the key research questions, they serve as a reference point for interviewers so that they can concentrate on
what respondents are saying, and they can facilitate analysis by creating general domains for data to be developed (Daly, 2007). Thus, semi-structured interviews serve as a point of reference which helps the interviewer maintain focus while also allowing for flexibility in the conversation as it unfolds differently for each individual (Daly, 2007).

One potential limitation when using interviews is social desirability bias. One-on-one interviews may increase social desirability with the participant potentially wanting to please the interviewer or avoid their judgment (Fontana & Frey, 1994). This is of particular concern when questions are surrounding sensitive topics such as questions of a sexual nature (Hosseini & Armacost, 1993). Although a legitimate concern when conducting this study, social desirability might have been partially avoided through the non-random sampling approach. Likely men who did not feel comfortable disclosing personal sexual information did not participate in this research. During the interviews, every effort was made to validate for respondents that men have various levels of sexual desire and that there were no right or wrong answers to the interview questions. Hopefully, this ameliorated any feelings of discomfort surrounding participants’ ability to discuss their sexual desire and help to ensure honest answers.

A second potential concern surrounding interviews in the present study was the gender of the primary researcher and that of the participants. I, the primary researcher, am female and the participants were males. Although there may be concerns of this interview process (e.g., would I be able to fully appreciate men’s experiences, would men feel comfortable talking to a woman about their sexual desire, etc.), research has shown that men do in fact respond well to being interviewed by a female (Bancroft, 1997). Further, when asked about their experience being interviewed by a female, most men in
the current study reported that this dynamic made them feel more comfortable about the interview process. As previously outlined, however, the mixed-sex interview may have brought about different conversations that would have arisen with a matched-sex interviewee and interviewer (Daly, 2007).

**Interview Guide**

The interview guide was a list of questions that ask participants about their romantic relationship, their sexual desire, and what factors in their relationship and personal life affect their sexual desire (see Appendix F). Because the current study was exploratory in nature, the interview guide was limited to 6-7 main questions with some example follow up questions (Daly, 2007). To help establish rapport between the interviewer and participant (Charmaz, 2006; Fontana & Frey, 1994), the interview began with some neutral questions regarding the men’s demographic background and romantic relationship before addressing the questions addressing sexual desire. As the interviews were semi-structured, many of the follow-up questions were determined at the time of the interview, such as asking the respondent to expand on an idea, asking for clarification or following up on relevant comments.

In order to reach saturation, theoretical sampling was utilized. Theoretical sampling occurs after preliminary categories are created. It is the process in which interview questions are adapted in order to help flesh out a category (Charmaz, 2006). The current study interview guide was adjusted slightly throughout the process of interviewing participants in order to thicken and fill in gaps of the created categories (Charmaz, 2006). Specifically, dissertation committee consultations were held five times throughout the interview and analysis process (at 3, 10, 15, 25 and 30 interviews,
respectively). At each of the consultations, we discussed and questioned the emerging categories developed by the primary researcher. When questions about the emerging categories could not be answered using the current data, we determined additional questions that could ask more directly about those gaps in our understanding of men’s experiences. For example, we determined that although the majority of men described never saying no to sex, we were unsure about what assumptions and beliefs might be behind men’s experience of “pressure.” The later interviews included questions about men’s perceptions of what their female partner might feel, or how they might react, if they said no to their sexual advances. This ultimately helped elucidate men’s perceived pressures around saying yes to their female partner’s sexual advances.

Data Analysis

Constructionist GTM stresses the importance of theoretical sensitivity, or the process of becoming acquainted with the existing literature before analysis begins (Charmaz, 2006; Daly, 2007; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). This process allows researchers to become more acquainted with the phenomena of study and focus interview questions appropriately in order to help steer the researcher towards an understanding of the reality surrounding the topic (Charmaz, 2006). For this study, an extensive literature review was conducted on sexual desire literature, focusing on men’s experiences and theoretical propositions. In addition, I have previously conducted research on women’s experiences of sexual desire (e.g., Mark & Murray, 2012; Murray & Milhausen, 2012a; Murray & Milhausen, 2012b; Murray, Milhausen & Sutherland, 2014; Murray Sutherland & Milhausen, 2012). As a result I have been sensitized to potentially relevant constructs within the female sexuality literature, thereby influencing my understanding of the
current sexual desire literature in general. This knowledge, and these experiences, guided the development of the research questions for the current study, as well as the interview questions.

Analysis for GTM includes the simultaneous collection of data and the data analysis (Charmaz, 2006; Daly, 2007). As the first interviews were conducted and transcribed the data analysis process was commenced. The preliminary analysis guided how the following interviews were conducted, and interview questions were adjusted to reflect the categories that began to emerge (Charmaz, 2006). The description of GTM analysis that follows, therefore, was not a linear process (Charmaz, 2006).

The primary researcher works within a social constructionist epistemology, which views “truths” and “facts” as socially constructed phenomenon (Daly, 2007). As a result, I believe that, as a researcher, I had an influence on the findings that were created throughout the analysis of my interviews with the participants. Consequently, throughout the process of coding and constant comparison, memo writing was particularly important (Charmaz, 2003; 2006; Daly, 2007). Memo writing is a major component of GTM analysis and functions as an intermediate step between coding and the first draft of the completed analysis. Most simply, memo writing is the process of keeping track of one’s thoughts regarding the data throughout the analysis (Daly, 2007). Memo writing can help keep the researcher focused on the analysis by documenting thoughts throughout the process and aids in a reflection of biases and thoughts as they emerge (Charmaz, 2003). As part of the analysis I kept notes that aided me in defining codes and categories in increasing detail, comparing data, codes and categories, and identifying gaps in the analysis (Charmaz, 2006).
The prominent component of GTM is coding. Coding, broadly, refers to describing or defining what is happening in the data. More specifically, coding can be defined as “naming segments of data with a label that simultaneously categorize, summarize, and account for each piece of data” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 43). Coding is the first step in moving beyond participants’ words and towards making analytic interpretations (Charmaz, 2006). All forms of coding are typically done line-by-line and through constant comparison between different participants and incidences (Charmaz, 2002). Line-by-line coding encourages analysis to occur at a micro level, having researchers provide codes or descriptions for nearly every line of text. Although the amount of text analyzed is considered arbitrary, this practice of thoroughly coding small amounts of data helps keep researchers focused on minute details of participants’ stories and focused on the data (Charmaz, 2006).

Coding data occurred through four distinct phases: initial coding (also called open-coding), focused coding, axial coding, and theoretical coding (Charmaz, 2006; LaRossa, 2005). Open coding refers to selecting words or phrases to describe the data (Daly, 2007). This stage is intended to be a way to “open up” and examine the data by trying out different meaningful labels (Daly, 2007). The use of code names at this stage attempted to portray meaning and actions in the participants’ stories (Charmaz, 2006). This stage of coding is suggested to stick closely to the data and not yet focus on interpretation (Charmaz, 2006).

Focused coding follows open-coding and is more directive, selective and conceptual (Charmaz, 2006). This stage of coding determines which codes created during the open-coding process are the most significant, meaningful, and make the most analytic
sense to categorize data (Charmaz, 2006). At this stage some codes were considered
significant in terms of addressing the current study questions, while other codes were
determined to fall outside the scope of the current study (e.g., men’s descriptions of
women’s sexual desire) or to not have enough substance to hold as a separate category
(e.g., one participant’s description of worry that sexual desire would decrease with age).
Axial coding follows focused coding and consists of intense analysis done around one
category at a time (Charmaz, 2006). To begin the process of arriving at an interpretivist
theoretical explanation, axial coding requires making connections between categories and
within a category (Daly, 2007). Axial coding consists of bringing pieces of the data, or
codes, back together into a coherent whole and should provide a broader explanation for
behaviour (Charmaz, 2006). At this stage, some similar ideas were absorbed by larger
themes. For example, previously coded categories of “receiving compliments” and
“women’s interest in sex” were combined to create a larger theme of men’s desire to feel
desired.

During the last stage of coding, theoretical coding, we condensed the categories and
decided on the main story underlying the analysis (Charmaz, 2002). This stage of coding
requires identifying the core or central category that exists within all the categories (Daly,
2007). The core category acts as an explanation for the data and can generate a central
explanation that relates to all other categories in some way (Daly, 2007). As will be
outlined below in the results and discussion, the core, underlying category of the current
study was the finding that men’s sexual desire was more relational and complex than
much of the previous theories and research have suggested.
According to GTM, the stories that are created should aim to be comprehensible and compelling (Daly, 2007). A substantive theory should be linked closely to everyday reality, saturated, plausible, explanatory, integrated, parsimonious, generative and not overly simplified (Daly, 2007). The categories that told the underlying story of the data collected in the current study were selected to address the specific study questions previously outlined. Specifically, the categories presented in the following results section represent the key factors that elicited and inhibited sexual desire within the context of men’s sexual desire, the differences between how sexual desire is experienced within and external to relationships, and perceived pressures and impacts of masculinity norms and sexual scripts.
Chapter 3: Results

Eliciting Factors

The first research question was: “What factors elicit men’s sexual desire in the context of their long-term relationships, or their desire for individual sexual pleasure in general?” The following themes were generated to capture men’s experience of higher levels of sexual desire: a) Feeling Desired, b) Feeling Sexy, Attractive and Desirable c) Cognitions and Moods, d) Visual Sexual Cues, e) Exciting and Unexpected Sexual Encounters, f) Context of the Sexual Encounter and g) Intimate Communication.

During the coding and analysis of the interview data, it was determined that men’s sexual desire was highly related to their interactions with their intimate partners. Although no theme directly captured “partner factors” or “relationship factors,” men’s perception of relational intimacy (Oliphant & Kuczynski, 2011; Weingarten, 1991) was a recurring thread among many of the themes and sub-themes below. Weingarten (1991) proposed that intimacy “occurs when people share meaning or co-create meaning and are able to coordinate their actions to reflect their mutual meaning-making” (p. 286). In contrast, “refraining from meaning-making and providing, imposing, rejecting, and misunderstanding meaning are associated with non-intimate interaction” (Weingarten, 1991, p. 286). When men described factors that facilitated their sexual desire, they often spoke about experiences that indicated a perception of, or desire for, co-creation of meaning with their partners. Specifically, factors which facilitated men’s sexual desire were often related to a shared understanding of a moment or interaction and equal involvement, or mutuality, during a sexual encounter. It is proposed that among men in
this sample, sexual desire was experienced largely within a relational context and positively impacted by intimate interactions with their female partners.

**Feeling Desired**

The need to feel desired by one’s female partner was described by almost all participants as having the largest impact on their experience of sexual desire. Feeling desired was almost exclusively discussed within the context of the men’s relationships. Specifically, men described the importance of feeling that their female partner desired them. One man stated: “she understands that’s important to me, to feel that I’m very desirable to her. Like, particularly to her” (Craig, 33). Some men felt there was a socially held belief that women want or need to feel desired while men ‘do the wanting.’ However, men in this study described the desire to be desired as being a universal need among both men and women. As another man described:

> I think it’s a basic human need. I don’t think you can distinguish between men and women. There’s a lot that’s done in terms of societal norms, but I think the reality is everyone wants to be desired. Everyone wants to be connected. From a man’s point of view, from my point of view, there is a very strong connection and a need to be wanted…there has to be a connection, there has to be a need to be wanted to the point where you feel as though they need you as much as you need them. (Cody, 65)

Participants described feeling desired by one’s female partner as reassurance that their partner did enjoy their shared sexual activity. Men suggested that their own desire to engage in sexual activity was enhanced when they perceived their partner as being interested in being intimate, and in particular, intimate with them. In other words, when men were reassured of the mutual nature of the sexual encounter - that both partners appeared equally interested in being with one another - this led to an increase in their...

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1 No participants’ given names were used in this document. All names were assigned pseudonyms. The number notates the participants’ age.
Men’s Sexual Desire

sexual desire. One participant articulated the impact of his wife’s apparent lack of interest in sex with him on his sense of self-confidence:

It would give me the confidence that she wanted to be with me sexually. And she felt good about it. And then I would feel great. And then if we don’t have sex for two or three days, or in our case, three or four years, then I don’t have any of that confidence. (Larry, 63)

Men in this study not only discussed the importance of feeling desired, they also described the ways in which their female partner was able to express their desire in a way that made them feel wanted. Within this theme three sub-themes were developed to represent ways that men described feeling desired. Men described feeling desired when Receiving Compliments, Perceiving Partner’s Interest in Sex and Having their Female Partner Initiate Sexual Activity.

Receiving Compliments

A few participants indicated that when they received compliments from their partners (or women in general), they felt desired. Men perceived compliments about their attractiveness or overall worthiness as a sexual partner to be the most meaningful. For example, when asked about the most memorable experience of sexual desire he had experienced in the last year, one participant shared a memory of when he was grocery shopping with his wife when she later told him that he had caught her (and her friend’s) eye among the other men in the crowd. He said:

There was one specific time where she had indicated she had seen me at a farmers market amongst a whole bunch of people, and just the way I was dressed and the other person commented that she thought I looked very hot. And not hot in the sense of being warm. And this was in the summer time. And I hadn’t heard a positive comment or a compliment in a long time. So that triggered for me that there was a noticeable comment. There was a reflection that I was desired. (Cody, 65)
Another male participant described a similar experience of memorable, heightened sexual desire when he overheard two women at work talking about his desirable attributes, not only sexually, but also as a partner in general. Although, in this example, the compliments came from women outside of his relationship, the participant described the experience as one that increased his desire to be with his wife, because he had confidence that he was worth desiring. He said:

It would have to be a couple times when I got a compliment or something at work. It didn’t even increase my sexual desire for that person at all. But that in and of itself seemed very empowering. Kind of like, knowing that someone else had a physical attraction towards me built up that sexual desire. And it was almost like I wanted to go home and say “honey I’m home!” kind of thing. Just feel that empowerment. (Carl, 31)

The same participant expanded upon what it was like to receive compliments, suggesting that, while women appear to receive compliments all the time, men also would enjoy receiving this attention but less often receive it. He said:

[Women] get adored quite a bit more to the point where they feel very, sometimes feel extra good about themselves. And start feeling like very sexual beings because they get these compliments and getting the little “woo-hoos” or whatever. And most men don’t get that very often. And when they do, it’s pretty darn good. (Carl, 31)

Receiving compliments was one way that men described experiencing the feeling of being desired. However, few men discussed receiving compliments from their female partners. More often, men expressed that they wished they received compliments more frequently in their relationships.

**Perceiving Partner’s Interest In Sex**

Most men in this study discussed the need to feel their partner wanted to engage in sexual activity with them, as opposed to just going through the motions of sex or wishing that sexual activity would end. One participant stated: “I want to have sex with
someone who desires me. I don’t want someone who says, well the show comes on in ten minutes, get it over with” (Hudson, 30). Participants indicated that it was important to their experience of feeling desired to know that their female partner was interested in engaging in sexual activity with them and was an equal partner during their sexual encounter. Another participant shared: “if I think you’re reluctantly going along with me, it doesn’t make me feel like you’re participating. I need you to participate for me to feel wanted, loved, desired” (Tony, 52). Perceiving a partner’s sexual interest was described as having a very positive impact on participants’ sexual desire. As another man stated: “I enjoy the sexual part of a marriage or relationship. So I think when you find someone ahead of the game, showing interest, and it excites you even more. So it spikes the desire” (Warren, 59).

Most men in this study said that perceiving their female partner was in the mood for sex could put them in the mood for sexual activity themselves. As one participant simply stated: “if my wife wants to have sex, then I’m in the mood for it” (Hudson, 30). Other men reported that their female partner being in the mood for sex had such a strong, positive impact on their desire, that it could outweigh certain inhibitors of desire such as feeling tired or not being in the mood (discussed further in Question Two). For example, a participant described: “if I’m not particularly in the mood one night, and she is, then that would definitely increase my desire” (Brian, 40). A third participant expanded: “it would be kind of revitalizing. If I was tired already, and someone, not someone, but my wife, is interested in me having, well she’s really into me tonight. That’s awesome” (Tyson, 33).
Men almost unanimously indicated that they had no interest in having sex with a woman that was not an equal, interested, and enthusiastic partner. They described having a strong increase in sexual desire when their female partner showed an interest in having sex with them. When their partners appeared to be interested in having sex, men described feeling more desired, more confident, and reassured that their interest in shared sexual activity was mutual.

**Having Female Partner Initiate Sexual Activity**

Receiving compliments and being able to perceive a partner’s genuine interest in engaging in sexual activity were described as very important to several participants’ experiences of sexual desire. However, the majority of men in the study indicated that the most significant evidence of their partner’s desire for them was when she initiated sexual activity. This action appeared to be the ultimate expression, or reassurance, of a shared interest in engaging in sexual activity. As one man put it: “it’s one thing for your partner to say they want you. But to have them physically initiate and do it is another” (Tim, 32). Another participant stated that all that it would take for him to get in the mood for sex would be for his wife to initiate sexual activity. He said: “if she does initiate it or suggest it, absolutely that’s great. She wants to have sex. It doesn’t take me long if she’s in that kind of mood” (Richard, 51). Similarly, another participant stated: “if my partner wanted to initiate something I’d be right there. It doesn’t take a lot for me” (Owen, 59).

Feeling tired was described as being an inhibitor of sexual desire for many men, unless a female initiated sexual activity. In that case, a man who wasn’t particularly in the mood for sex could quickly become interested if his wife initiated sex. As one participant said: “it doesn’t matter how tired I am, if she initiates I’m there” (Jack, 54). Even
physical ailments such as feeling sick or having a headache were described as being diminished when a female partner made a move towards engaging in sex. A third participant indicated: “my stomach is kind of sore, I’m not feeling well, I have a headache, things like that. And I’ve thought to myself ‘I’ll say no.’ And then she’ll reach over and it’s like…maybe my headache isn’t so bad” (Ryan, 34).

Having a female partner initiate sexual activity was described as exciting for a few interconnected reasons. First, it was described as being a rare occurrence, which made it seem more exciting, new, and different (another eliciting sexual desire factor described below). Second, when a partner initiated, it also allayed men’s fears about rejection. This quote highlights the connection between initiation and fear of rejection:

It’s very exciting when all of the sudden she wants it. When she’s making the motions for it, and she is asking for it, and she is actually the one who initiates everything. Um, that is so far and few between with her that, yeah, it’s exciting. When I’m not the one who has to do all the work. When I’m not the one who has to worry about getting rejected. (Scott, 42)

Overall, the desire to be desired was the most critical, common, and significant elicitor of sexual desire described by men in this study. Men expressed that when they sexually desired their female partners, their desire was strongly enhanced when they perceived or were reassured of her shared interest in engaging in sexual activity. Receiving compliments from women, and female partners showing an interest in sex, were contributing factors, but a female partner initiating sexual activity was by far the most important component to men feeling sexual desire.

**Feeling Sexy, Attractive, and Desirable**

Separate from how one’s female partner made them feel, a minority of men in this study described the need to feel that they were attractive, sexy and worthy of being
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involved in a sexual encounter. This was a feeling they experienced internally, connected to their own self-esteem and feelings of self-worth, rather than one they experienced as a result of their partner’s words or actions. One participant described that as he aged, he had felt less attractive as a result of having less time to take care of his physical appearance. When asked about an ideal experience of sexual desire, he said that it would include how he felt about himself, rather than how his wife perceived his attractiveness:

If we’re talking about sexual desire in an ideal setting, I’m also feeling quite confident and attractive, right? Because I find, since we’ve had kids and I’m not taking care of myself as much as I used to, and I’ve gained a bit of weight and all that stuff that comes along with turning forty, I find it’s not as rich an experience as it used to be when I was going to university and lifting weights and eating well and I was active. So I felt sexy. (Robert, 40)

Another participant expressed that it was important to feel good about himself in order to be in the mood for sex. He said:

I think it’s important to be comfortable with who you are. And if you want to be a really confident sexual partner I think that’s also important. Because I think that exudes a lot of confidence when it comes to sex and I think it makes for better sex. (Carl, 31)

Men also described the importance of feeling attractive and sexy in the sense that if they did not feel this way, they were not interested in having sex. For example, having a cold or feeling tired were described by two men as being times they would feel less sexy and attractive and, thus, not in the mood for sex. One participant said: “if you’re not feeling well or if you have a cold you obviously don’t feel like being intimate because I don’t think you feel attractive” (Tony, 52). And another stated:

I feel less sexy when I’m tired…if I’m in an in between states of tiredness, I’ll feel, although my sex drive is still there, I will feel that I’m undesirable. And I’ll feel I will feel less sexy even knowing that sexual feelings are still around. I’ll feel like I wouldn’t be able to do a good job of having sex anyway. (Joshua, 33)
Men were not impervious to experiencing insecurities with regards to their body image, as some societal norms might suggest. Although less common, some men described feeling that if they were having a less confident day, comparing their body to other men or considering how they perceived their overall masculinity, they felt less desire. The following participant described a circumstance in which he did not feel desire:

When I’m having a really down day, low confidence, that’s when it really hits me…you know? Even in terms of body image. It’s sort of the same message, but more about personal, not necessarily about relationships, but it's all connected. Those messages that you’re not big enough, you’re not sexy enough, you’re not top dog enough. (Tim, 32)

Some men described the need to feel confident, sexy and attractive in order to feel sexual desire themselves. Notably, the need to feel sexy and attractive was a less prevalent theme than many other eliciting factors.

**Cognitions and Moods**

Men in this study described various cognitions and moods that facilitated their sexual desire. These included experiencing Fantasizing and Remembering Past Sexual Events, Anticipating Future Sexual Events, and Feeling Relaxed.

**Fantasizing and Remembering Past Sexual Events**

A large number of men in the study indicated that fantasies were closely linked to their experience of desire. In fact, many men used the word “fantasy” as they were defining how they experienced, or understood the concept of, sexual desire. Some men indicated that they would suddenly find themselves in the middle of a fantasy, often through daydreaming, that would turn into sexual desire. One participant described the sudden way a fantasy would lead to sexual desire and manifest as an erection:
You find yourself walking along and you do start thinking about sex. And you’re just walking down the street and a fantasy runs through your head. Or more so these days remembering a past sexual scenario. But just walking along and then you’re like, oh sorry, like half erect or whatever it is. (Joseph, 37)

Another participant indicated that he often experienced fantasies during a deep sleep. He described finding himself dreaming about something sexual and then awaking to find he was beginning to initiate sexual activity with his wife. He described this as a way of acting out what he had spontaneously began fantasizing about:

The ones where desire is most strong, and we’ve talked about it for both of us, when it happens we’re sleeping. So I wake up and realize I’m taking her clothes off already. And it’s just some continuation of a dream. And obviously the dream is fueled some type of desire that actually ends up being tactile…Usually I’ll dream about having some type of encounter with her, or even another person…usually it’s that what’s fuelling it. (Justin, 30)

However, one participant talked about fantasies with some trepidation. He expressed worries that fantasies could get out of hand. He thought that people could focus too deeply on fantasies and be unable to enjoy the more day-to-day experiences of desire:

I guess fantasies, I’ve always wondered about. Because I know people who have great fantasies and have all of their fantasies and they want more of something kinkier or crazier and it keeps building and then it hits a point where they feel really lackluster about sex. (Michael, 33)

For other men in this study, past memories of being sexually intimate with their current or past partner were described differently than fantasies. Fantasies for these men were described as events that had never happened or would likely never happen. Memories, on the other hand, were pleasant experiences of recounting past sexual encounters with their female partners or past sexual partners. The effects of having an erotic memory or a fantasy, however, were described the same as they both elicited feelings of sexual desire. When asked about what might trigger the experience of sexual
desire, one participant responded: “just thinking about her, or something like that, at that
time. Something that had happened in the past with her” (Scott, 42).

Notably, fantasies and sexual memories were not only discussed as something that
spontaneously came about. A minority of participants described conjuring up sexual
imagery when they wanted to experience sexual pleasure, specifically in regards to
preparing for masturbation. The following participant explained: “if I ever want to
entertain myself sexually, if I think to myself, I’m horny, I want to think about sexual
things, I generally think about my wife and sessions we’ve already had. Particularly good
sessions” (Ryan, 34).

Men in this study described having memories of past enjoyable sexual encounters
with their female partners and fantasies of less realistic sexual encounters. Men described
spontaneously experiencing sexual memories and fantasies, as well as being able to
conjure up sexual memories and fantasies to stimulate further sexual desire.

**Anticipation of a Sexual Event**

Participants in this study explained that it was not always possible to engage in
sexual activity with a partner when desire was experienced. Sometimes this was because
sexual desire was experienced first thing in the morning but the duties of the day needed
tending to and sex was described as having to wait. For a few men in this study, waiting
until the end of the day when they could be with their female partners was described as
being a fun way to let desire build in anticipation of a nighttime encounter. As one
participant stated: “in the morning you’re waiting until the end of the night when you can
be alone, basically. And [desire] is pretty persistent” (Justin, 30).
Other men discussed slightly longer periods of time when anticipating sexual activity. For example, when one partner was out of town for business related endeavors, there was excitement to see one another again. One participant described that even if he was taking care of his biological need for sexual release through masturbation, the desire to be with his partner still grew as they were apart. As he described:

It builds up over time, even if you’re still releasing yourself daily, or whatever the case may be. I think the build up over time still happens. And then the closer it gets to the date, so the plane ride there, you experience it more intensely and because you can like, see the light at the end of the tunnel. (Brian, 40)

He continued to share:

If you have any time before an event, the more time you’ve got to think about it the more you’re thinking about what it’s going to be like. And the more time with that comes the build up. …so the more you think about it, it engages that side of you, of course. So the more you think about it at this level, so then you know, starts spiraling up from there. (Brian, 40)

Another participant described his wife’s physical disabilities and the inability for any activity between the two of them to be spontaneous. However, putting sexual activity on the calendar and waiting until the moment where they could be sexually active allowed for desire to build. He said:

My partner and I notice things about each other that are very cute, sexy, romantic, fun. And they kind of percolate through the day, or sometimes through multiple days if that evening isn’t very good. Until the next time that we can actually have time to really have sex. And that will, I find myself, as we approach a time and I can sort of see it coming on the calendar because we know how our life works, I can feel it rising like a slow boil. (Joshua, 33)

Experiencing increased sexual desire in anticipation of a future sexual event required some knowledge that the sexual event was going to come into fruition.

Anticipating a future sexual event was described as eliciting sexual desire for a minority of men in this study.
**Feeling Relaxed**

Being in a relaxed state of mind was described as important to being able to feel and embrace sexual desire by about one fifth of men in this study. A state of relaxation was described as a mental feeling, when men could put down their guards and enjoy the sexual moment. Feeling relaxed was often described as following a prolonged time of being busy or experiencing cognitive distractions from life stressors. Moving from a state of distracting stress to relaxation was described as facilitating intimacy and sexual desire. It allowed men to feel present and to be able to connect with their female partners. For example, when recounting a particularly positive experience of sexual desire, one participant stated: “we were relaxed. Work wasn’t on our minds. Cleaning up wasn’t on our mind…there was nothing else to stress, nothing else from life leaked in” (Joseph, 37).

Another participant described the stresses and strains he and his family experienced when moving from a small town to a bigger city. He shared that it took some time to get his children settled into school, to organize their new home, and to find employment. After all that was taken care of, and he and the family could breathe, he described having one of his most memorable experiences of sexual desire:

> We moved from a small community where everybody knew us, we knew everybody. And it was hard on our family when we first moved here. It was a shock. And once, I think it was when we were all feeling moved in and comfortable where we were, we felt okay, we’re relaxed, everyone is looked after, everyone is happy. So I think that’s what turned into that little excitement. (Daniel, 38)

A third participant recounted a more extreme example of when he felt relaxed after immigrating to Canada. He indicated that he had previously lived in a country where there was regular violence and civil unrest. He described having lower sexual desire in his home country because of the associated stress and lack of safety. However, he
indicated he had noticed in the last month he had been in Canada he felt more relaxed and as a result had more sexual desire and was engaging in more sexual activity with his wife:

In our country we really disliked how everything goes. Country, people, stress, everything, about being safe and stable. And when the field changes here, we feel more relaxed, less you know, thinking about how to protect myself. And actually during this month, we had more frequent sex than we normally have. (Kyle, 38)

Feeling relaxed was often described as following a state of stress, strain, and cognitive distractions. In a relaxed state, men described being able to connect more intimately with their partners and, as a result, experienced higher desire.

**Visual Sexual Cues**

When men in this study were asked about times when they noticed a peak in sexual desire, or about factors that might bring about the experience of sexual desire, at least two-thirds described responding to physical, sexual cues. As one participant stated: “men are very visual. So if you see a very attractive woman, or scantily clad, of course there is attraction there” (Richard, 51). Some men talked about general attributes of women that would catch their eye and spark feelings of desire. For example, the following participant described finding he could experience sexual desire just by seeing a woman with the type of silhouette he was drawn to: “sometimes it’s as simple as seeing someone with the body type you like. So for example, I like curvy women. If I see a woman who is curvy, right away I’ll feel sexual desire” (Justin, 30). Other men described that noticing attractive women, in general, could spark their desire, as the attraction turned into curiosity about them in a sexual way:

You see beautiful women. I wonder what they look like naked. That sort of thing. When I see women, some dress provocatively on purpose. Or because they’re comfortable. But it’s attractive to men to view that. So the thoughts start triggering in my head…the desire can kick up at anytime. (Tony, 52)
Another participant described that his sexual desire could be triggered when he saw women who were well dressed, or dressed in a provoking manner. He stated: “I mean if I see an attractive woman walking down the street or on the beach or something, yeah, you feel sexual desire. If someone is dressed very classy, or nicely, provocatively or something, yeah it happens” (Thomas, 55).

Participants indicated that physical attributes of women they were not involved with could spark their desire. However, it was just as common for men to describe the physical sexual attributes of their partners that facilitated desire. For example, one participant described in detail the parts of his female partner’s body that could get him thinking about sex. He said: “I really like the physical shape of her. She has big hips and butt and down to her thighs. And it is the most perfectly drawn line. It defines a large shape but it looks really good” (Joshua, 33). Another man said it was his wife’s legs and calves that when exposed turned him on: “I like it when she cleans…I think when she is working, I guess I find it attractive when you can see her leg muscles or her calves. I find it really attractive” (Daniel, 38). Other men were more vague about the details of what exactly turned them on about their partner’s appearance, but said that simply being naked or getting naked was a sexual cue that spurred on desire. One participant said: “it’s usually something physical. Like if she’s changing or she’s naked” (Michael, 33) and another said: “I’m excited just if she undoes her bra. Just seeing her I’m excited” (Richard, 51).

Men reported responding to visual sexual cues, both related to their partner’s appearance and related to the appearance of other women. Salient visual sexual cues that
men described as having increased their sexual desire typically included a degree of bare skin or “suggestive” clothing.

**Exciting and Unexpected Sexual Encounters**

Many men in this study spoke about various characteristics of their sexual encounters that were important to their ability to feel sexual desire. Nearly all men in this study described liking sexual encounters that had some variety and that were relatively unplanned or unexpected. This included having New and Different Experiences and Being Spontaneous.

**New and Different Experiences**

Male participants in this study frequently described their preference for sexual experiences that were new and different. At the beginning of a relationship when men were still discovering “unknowns” about their partner and the sexual relationship, sexual desire was described as being at its peak for most men. In fact, the majority of male participants spontaneously discussed the notion of a “honeymoon” period at the start of a relationship, where desire was high, frequent and intense. As one man stated, being with a new female partner was new and exciting: “this might sound a bit crude, but for, certainly for guys, there is nothing as exciting as new flesh” (Joseph, 37). In order to maintain sexual desire in a long-term relationship, or return to the honeymoon feeling, some “spice” was required to keep desire alive. Another participant, after recalling a particularly positive experience of desire with his wife, noted that it was the fact it was so new and different that made it exciting. He said this was something he wanted more of, in a longer-term relationship of over 14 years:

> We had the house to ourselves and we got started in the bedroom, and it kind of went all over the place. It went into the kitchen, it actually went outside into the
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backyard. And it, that’s the first time it’s ever happened. And I’ve always, like, that’s one of the best memories with her, and that’s when it’s totally different. So I don’t know. Maybe I want something a little more different. We’ve been together for 14 years. (Daniel, 38)

Being on vacation, or away from the house, was described by a few men as also having a positive impact on their desire. For example, it was not uncommon for participants to describe their best sexual desire experience occurring at a “hotel” (Richard, 51) or while “camping” (Craig, 33). Another participant said that being on vacation in the States brought about higher levels of desire because of the different landscape and being outdoors. He stated: “when I went down to Florida for a vacation. Just the ocean I found to be very nice. Lots of fresh air” (Jeffery, 43).

Some men talked about making an effort to have sex in different locations or taking the time to go on vacations in order to bring back a sense of “newness” to their relationship. Sex in these contexts was described as being different and exciting. One participant stated: “just because you’re not at home, you’re doing something different. Which would increase the desire” (Jeffery, 43). Another participant described how going on a trip brought back the feelings of lust that he associated with the first few months of dating:

You get a hotel room or you go somewhere on a trip. Our trips are always good that way. We always go and do things that are different. It almost feels like the honeymoon phase again. Kind of like you’re dating, going to a new city. (Richard, 51)

Other men indicated that having sex in different spaces or places allowed them to access a different part of themselves. In other words, they could take on a different persona, escape the realities of their day-to-day lives, and “let go.” One participant shared:

So it’s like spice, like anything we’re doing something different. And I think, then, while you’re doing it, your personalities are different because it’s coming
from a new space. So it’s probably bringing up new things and different emotions. There is a fresh take on what’s happening. (Michael, 33)

Interestingly, some men described that while their ideal sexual desire experience might include elements that are currently new and different, if those things were to happen more often, they too might lose some of their appeal. One man indicated that it facilitated his desire when his wife surprised him with wearing lingerie. Yet, he also considered that if this were to happen all the time, it could be less exciting. He stated: “when she dresses up. I don’t know. Maybe if she dressed up more regularly it wouldn’t be the same” (Jack, 54).

Overall men reminisced about the first few months of a relationship when sex was fresh, new and exciting. They described that their desire peaked whenever they were engaging in sexual activity that felt different and out of the ordinary.

**Spontaneity**

Although some men described how the anticipation of a sexual event could facilitate their sexual desire some of the time, several men also described feeling higher sexual desire when a sexual encounter was perceived as spontaneous. After describing in detail the very planned way that sexual encounters tended to happen between he and his wife, one participant was asked what sexual desire might look like in an ideal context. His response was: “probably more spontaneous. Without thinking and planning so much” (Kyle, 38). Other men indicated that having a routine to their sex life would reduce their sexual desire: “I honestly don’t think if I was with someone who wanted Tuesdays at 8:00pm, Thursdays at 6:00pm, I honestly think that would destroy my sexual drive entirely” (Brian, 40).
Spontaneity was partially related to the previously described theme of female partner initiation. A sexual act felt spontaneous in some instances because the participants were not expecting their partner to initiate. The element of surprise was described as being important. One man said: “it almost feels more exciting, more stimulating. More, ah, yeah, it just feels better. Surprise and excitement.” (Thomas, 55). Another participant, after discussing the impact of his female partner initiating sexual activity, expanded by saying that it was not just that she initiated, but that it was unexpected which made his desire peak: “we were just talking about records or something like that. And, we were sitting in separate lawn chairs, and holding hands and looking at each other. Very spontaneous, which, yeah, that’s the best” (Craig, 33).

Participants also described that a sexual event could occur spontaneously, and, in some ways, surprise both partners. Participants described a sexual event taking place that just “happened” rather than being initiated by the man or woman. For example, one man described having sex with his wife in a different part of the house that just naturally happened with an exchanged, knowing look:

There was some spontaneity to it which was fun. Because we can’t do it in our own bed because we co-sleep. We can, but it’s like, she’s always sleeping so we don’t want to wake her up, that kind of thing. So part of it was having sex in a different room, which was kind of exciting. (Tim, 32)

Many participants described sexual encounters that occurred in new or different places, and that were spontaneous, as facilitating their desire. Notably, sexual events that were described as spontaneous required that both the male participant and his partner had a shared interest in, or openness to, sexual activity in a narrow window of time. In other words, what men described as spontaneous interactions required a closely coordinated
and co-constructed meaning within the relationship in order for a sexual event to unfold, seemingly, seamlessly.

**Context of the Sexual Encounter**

A number of factors related to situational or environmental cues were discussed by some men in this study as having a positive impact on their sexual desire. These included the Consumption of Alcohol, Having Privacy and Romantic Settings, such as going on a date.

**Consumption of Alcohol**

A minority of men in this study indicated that alcohol was involved with heightened experiences of desire. For some men, “having a drink” (Richard, 51) or “a couple bottles of wine” (Craig, 33) was simply one of many factors which could facilitate a positive sexual encounter. Others described alcohol as part of the romancing before leading to sexual activity. For example, one participant stated: “I like to have a glass of wine and set the mood a little bit” (Thomas, 55). When asked to explain the relevance of drinking wine, the same participant responded: “alcohol can, well for one thing you’ll get more inhibited and you’ll feel definitely more sexual desire” (Thomas, 55).

On the other hand, too much consumption of alcohol was described as having a negative impact on the ability to feel desire or have an interest in sex. For example, one man described the fine line between alcohol as a stimulant and alcohol as a depressant. He said: “things start to get amorous after a glass or two [of wine]. After a bottle, that’s too much” (Warren, 59).

Although the consumption of alcohol was not discussed in great detail by participants in this study, it was often included as a detail of a memorable sexual
Men often described that having a little bit of alcohol helped set the mood or made them feel more relaxed, but too much alcohol could reduce desire.

**Having Privacy/Enough Time for Desire to Build**

Several participants, who were parents of young children, raised privacy as critical to their experience of desire. Participants described private, intimate time with their partners while their children were out of the house as facilitating desire. Many stories of memorable experiences of sexual desire began with a statement such as “we were home alone” (Daniel, 38). One participant expanded on how having privacy was important in order for him to feel desire:

> The two most memorable experiences we’ve had was when the kids weren’t home. The kids were at the in-laws. Then we had a little more free rein of the house. Just having sex a few times in a row. Which was really fun. And generally we don’t do that because of the kids and restrictions, and my sister in law sometimes lives with us. (Ryan, 34)

Some men indicated that having time within a sexual encounter, to take it in and enjoy the moment, increased their sexual desire, something only possible when romantic partners had privacy or time to themselves. One man described the many benefits of having a whole night with his wife, when they did not feel rushed and could take their time enjoying one another’s company. Spending their night together offered the opportunity to connect in several ways, helping intimacy build and sexual desire grow:

> The most positive sexual experiences are when we have complete privacy and no chance of interruption. I don’t mean, in our bedroom so much…but I’m thinking of when we know that we just have each other the whole day or whole evening. Because the kids are gone, doing something. Those are when we have the most fun. Because we have the most time. You can have a drink, you can watch a movie, you can have a meal, you can talk. It becomes a whole evening. I mean when you’re busy it’s never as enjoyable when you’re rushing anything. When you take the time it’s always more enjoyable. When you take time. When you have a big window of time. Those are the most fun times for me. (Richard, 51)
The aspects which allowed for desire to build during a sexual encounter were not often described as sexual, but rather romantic. The participant above shared that spending time with his wife allowed him to enjoy the moment. The following participant similarly described that being near his partner for an extended period of time would allow the desire to build, rather than when things felt rushed. He stated:

Whenever we spend the whole day being together doing something, that’s when you feel really attracted to each other. Because, it kind of persists. So to answer the question succinctly, it persists again with my wife and when we’re together for a long time. (Justin, 30)

Experiencing privacy and the time for desire to build was not discussed as something that happened by chance. Men described the intention required, on each partner’s behalf, for making time to connect.

**Romantic Situations**

Engaging in something romantic and intimate with one’s sexual partner was described as being part of a positive sexual experience for men. For example, going on dates was described as often making men more likely to feel sexual desire. One man described: “I’d be more sexually interested if we went to the movies, out for dinner, a pleasant evening” (Jeffery, 43). Other positive memories of sexual desire included:

A nice candle light dinner, maybe a bottle of wine…maybe watch like she says a girly movie or something, a ‘chick flick’ and yeah, cuddling on the couch, both getting into that feeling, groove, vibe. And then from there, taking it into the bedroom. (Thomas, 55)

In fact, when asked what an ideal sexual desire experience would look like, one participant responded: “it would be like, you’re out for a nice dinner, you know, she’s dressed nice. That sort of thing. You just have a nice evening in that way. That’s my ideal. We kind of go on a date” (Steven, 41).
The location of a sexual event was often described to provide context to a positive sexual experience. Overall, however, men did not spend as much time describing the location as having a large impact on their desire, more so being one of many factors involved in a memorable sexual encounter.

**Intimate Communication**

Communication within one’s relationship was conceptualized in various ways for men in this study. Although this theme was only discussed in detail by about half of the participants, the men who found that communication related to their experience of desire described it as having a large, positive impact. Communication was described by some men as being necessary to feeling sexual desire, the other side of the coin from simply visual, physical stimulation. As one man put it: “sexual desire from the men’s side is two-fold. The first is visual. And two is mental or intelligence. The intelligence of the person and how you connect and talk and laugh together and communicate” (Tony, 52). Other men indicated that engaging in communication with their partner led to a deeper connection and understanding of one another. This increased level of intimacy could often lead to sexual activity. One participant said: “we haven’t talked in a while. So let’s put the kids to bed and let’s just climb into bed and let’s just talk. But it’s not uncommon for connecting with talking, you know, that we become intimate physically with each other” (Robert, 40).

For some men, intimate communication sparked closeness and could sometimes lead to sex. One man stated that having an intimate conversation about something that had previously caused tension in the relationship made him feel more emotionally connected to his partner and led to a more memorable experience of sexual desire:
We were having a conversation. I’m a musician and we were having a conversation about my music. Because my band is on hiatus right now, which is a stress to me. Or it’s, I feel a sense of loss. But she also, we were talking a lot about my music and we were getting in deep into what I play, and how I play, and what she thinks I should do with myself as far as music goes…Her being so interested in something that has caused some friction in our relationship, like validating it. (Craig, 33)

Other men indicated that they knew communication about sexual activities and interests was important to their experience of sexual desire, but that they did not feel that they were able to have this in their current relationship because their wife was less comfortable discussing their sexual activities. One man recounted the loss of communication in his relationship and the negative role it played on his experience of desire:

I think the healthy thing of a sexual relationship is when people can talk about sex. My wife can’t talk about sex. Okay? So I feel at a loss sometimes, because I say, what can I do for you? I feel at a loss because I never get a response of what can I do for you? So for me sex is communication. It’s not just physical intercourse. It’s communicating while you’re having the intercourse, and fun, and talking about, what can I do? And I think once you start asking the other partner what they want, it embellishes the relationship. And it gives the other partner the feeling of acceptance and love and belonging and desire. If you never ask those questions, it’s kind of like you’re detached. You know? And then it just becomes a sexual act, a biological act, and then there’s no connection. (Cody, 65)

Some men also talked about their ability to speak openly with their female partners about desire and attractions outside of relationship. The ability to have these conversations seemed to fuel their desire, as it allowed for more open experiences of desire. The following two examples help illustrate this point:

We’re actually open enough to talk in our own relationship when we talk about someone we saw dressed sexily or we’re watching a show where some celebrity did something that was really hot. And we discuss that with each other. (Joshua, 33)

When we see an attractive male or female on TV, type of thing, like teasingly we’ll talk together about it…When I say, oh look at her, she’s got nice legs, or
she’s got pretty eyes, a nice smile. Like recently we watch all these, *So You Think You Can Dance* or *The Voice* and just sit there and we’ll talk about their physical features. Both her and I. So I think that helps at the end of the day. It keeps our heart racing a little bit. (Daniel, 38)

Communication, whether of a sexual or intimate nature, was described by approximately half the men in this study as having a positive impact on their sexual desire. Men described communication as making them feel more connected to their partners, which fuelled intimacy and could often lead to sexual activity.
Inhibiting Factors

The second research question was: “What factors inhibit men’s sexual desire in the context of their long-term relationships, or their desire for individual sexual pleasure in general?” Overall, male participants were less emotive about factors that might limit their experience of desire than they were about factors that heightened their level of desire. The following themes were generated to capture men’s experience of inhibited sexual desire:

a) Physical Ailments and Negative Health Characteristics, b) Life Pressures and Stresses, c) Sexual Abuse, d) Less Emphasis on and Effort Invested in Sexual Encounters, e) Rejection, f) Partner Not Equally Engaged in Sexual Activity, and g) Lack of Emotional Connection with Partner. Each of these themes and their associated sub-themes are described below.

As outlined in Question One, the factors that were determined to facilitate men’s sexual desire were often related to men’s perception of, or desire for, co-creation of meaning with their partners (Weingarten, 1991). Many of the factors that were described as inhibitors of sexual desire suggested a lack of mutuality and intimacy, such as experiencing rejection, having disagreements and experiencing a lack of connection with one’s partner. Therefore, it is similarly proposed that men’s sexual desire was experienced largely within a relational context, inhibited by non-intimate interactions with their female partners.

Physical Ailments and Negative Health Characteristics

Most frequently, when asked about experiences of inhibited sexual desire, the first factor discussed by men in this study, and in some case the only factor discussed, was related to physical limitations. The factors comprising this theme included Feeling
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Sick/Having a Cold, Chronic Medical Illnesses and Medications, Being Physically Exhausted, and Increasing Age.

**Feeling Sick/Having a Cold**

Feeling sick or having a cold was brought up by many participants as a quick response to the question, “when might you feel less sexual desire?” It was not uncommon for male participants to simply respond to the question by stating: “if I’m not feeling well” (John, 52). Others used feeling ill as the *only* reason they would not be in the mood for sexual activity. The following participant described rarely being uninterested in sex, suggesting that serious illness would be the only factor to reduce his desire. He said: “the only time that would happen would be if you’re in a place where you’re extremely ill or bed-ridden” (Cody, 65). Other men found it difficult to fathom the idea of not having desire or saying no to a sexual encounter. In that sense, not being in the mood for sex, or not having desire was described as a theoretical or hypothetical situation rather than a reality; as one man described: “I suppose, I guess… if there was a time I was sick for a long period of time?” (John, 52).

Men were often quick to indicate that feeling sick would be a reason for saying no to sex or having less sexual desire. In a minority of cases, this was the only reason men provided for having decreased desire.

**Chronic Medical Illnesses and Medications**

Like physical ailments, having a chronic medical illness or taking medications were also described by a minority of men as having a negative impact on their ability to feel desire. For example, when one participant with a history of chronic back pain was asked if he would ever say no to sexual advances from his wife, he responded: “I very
rarely say no. And if I do, it’s usually because I have a headache or am in a lot of pain” (Scott, 42).

Taking medications for medical illness were also described as having a negative impact on sexual desire for a minority of participants in this study. One participant described his difficult experience taking anti-depressant medication. He said: “sexual desire is tied to different medications. So I think that plays a big role…for me that’s been one of the biggest frustrations of my sexual life has easily been medications, hands down” (Brian, 40). Another participant shared similar concerns with medications for his anxiety and depression. He stated:

Another time I may not feel desire is, I’ve had to take various medications for anxiety and depression. And they can mess you up in terms of your sexual desire. SSRIs have a way of changing males’ sexual response…There is this strange and really annoying feeling where you can still get and maintain erections, but you don’t feel them in the same way. And you just sort of feel like all the feelings are on mute. (Joshua, 33)

There were only a few men who openly discussed the impact that medications and chronic illness had on their desire. However, these men described these as having a significant negative impact on their desire.

**Being Physical Exhausted**

Depending on the context, feeling tired might be considered either a physical or mental experience. However, men in this study discussed feeling tired as something that occurred after working very hard, or for a long period of time, rather than feeling emotionally exhausted from something mentally draining. Feeling physically exhausted was described as dampening the experience of sexual desire by half the men in this study. For example, one participant stated: “when I’m really, really tired. Um, the more physically exhausted I am, the less likely I am to feel sexual desire” (Joshua, 33).
Another participant said that he would not be in the mood for sexual activity after working long hours at the office, and sometimes after a long day, all he could manage was to cuddle with his wife:

There were times, and this is mostly when I worked 14 or 16 hour days sometimes, I would come home and she would be presenting herself to me, and I would just say, no I’m tired. And we would spend the night cuddling. (Mark, 51)

Men in this study often expanded on why certain circumstances would make them tired and prevent sex from being on their minds. One man stated:

If you’re really over tired, if you just drove all night to get home from a trip, or something, if you were flying. You come home, you don’t feel like being intimate with someone because you’re physically tired or, you know, not ready. (Tony, 52)

Another participant expressed that he was sometimes conflicted when he started to feel some desire when he was tired. On the one hand, he described having an interest in sex, but the anticipation of further exhaustion the next day would often outweigh his interest in being intimate with his wife. He stated:

It could also be just exhaustion, right? Like, I’m still on night duty. So if the kids make a squawk or something during the night, I get up and lay down with him or whatever. But I’m also the guy getting up at 6am with them, 6:30am going to work. And it takes a toll. And there are times where, you know, I would like to be sexual with you right now, but my mind clicks in and it’s like, you’re exhausted now and if you guys stay up fooling around all night, do you know what tomorrow is going to be like? (Robert, 40)

Feeling tired or exhausted was described by the majority of men in this study as a time they may not feel sexual interest. Similar to feeling sick, this factor was often brought up as the first thing (and sometimes the only thing) that came to male participants’ minds when asked when they may not feel desire.
**Increasing Age**

Most men in this study indicated that as they aged they experienced a decrease in sexual desire. There seemed to be a common understanding that during one’s teenage years changes in hormones heightened men’s level of desire. However, over time men described their interest in sex as being less strong and less important. As one participant stated: “all teenage boys, it’s what I tried to protect my girls from, I’ve been there before and they are looking for one thing…and as you get older it becomes a secondary or third, it gets put on the back burner” (Mark, 51).

Men of various ages spoke about starting to notice a decrease in their interest in sex. Some were vague about the timing and simply said: “I think as you get older you have less desire” (Jeffrey, 43). The following participant indicated he noticed a drop in his interest in sex and that he was not expecting it to happen at this age, or ever. He said: “I never ever thought I would lose that desire, but it really, it’s I’m losing that desire. It’s just not that interesting to me anymore” (Daniel, 38). Most often it was men in their forties who, upon reflection, believed the decrease had occurred more recently. One 46 year-old participant stated: “for a long period of time in my life it appeared to be very strong. For the last while it’s reducing” (William, 46). And another participant expanded:

I’m 40 now and I would say in the last couple years I have noticed the urgency has dropped off for sure. Which is maybe a little depressing, but it’s happening so what can you do? But when I was definitely younger and I would say up to 35, the desire would still be a daily occurrence, even a couple of times a day. Now I can go two or three days and it’s whatever. It has nothing to do with my wife and her attractiveness or anything… I think it’s just getting older. (Brian, 40)

Notably, increasing age was not an inevitable cause of decreased desire. There were several participants in their fifties and sixties who expressed having no change in desire over the course of their lives. However, most men in this study indicated that they
experienced a heightened level of sexual desire during their teenage/early-adult years and a noticeable decrease later in life, most often occurring in their fourth decade.

**Life Pressures and Stresses**

A number of men reported that various life pressures and stresses could decrease or inhibit their feelings of sexual desire. When these factors were discussed, the impact was described as a stronger negative influence on their ability to feel desire than the above described physical ailment factors. Factors that made up this theme included Raising and Taking Care of Children, Having a Busy Life, and Stress.

**Raising and Taking Care of Children**

The majority of men who participated in this study were fathers. While some men had children who were adults and had moved out of the home, others were fathers of younger children who required more immediate and consistent care. These men described various ways that having children negatively impacted their sexual desire. One participant described that having children consumed a lot of time and left little room for himself and his relationship. The culmination of child-rearing demands resulted in lower sexual frequency and less sexual desire:

> Having one child: challenge. Having two: bigger challenge, right? It’s challenging enough to raise two kids, but at least there is one of us for each child. But you add a third one, and now we’re totally outnumbered. Always. Which means at any point somebody isn’t getting what they need. And then how do you find time for yourself? When you’ve added that much more responsibility to your life. (Robert, 40)

Another participant indicated that it was not just the demands of childrearing that decreased his desire, but he described being unable to feel desire if his children were at home. In Question One, it was determined that having privacy was important for some men in order to experience desire. The following participant described how the
uncertainty about having privacy during a sexual encounter when his children were home killed his sexual desire. He indicated that the thought of them walking in and seeing him in the middle of a sexual act was too big of a risk and reduced his desire altogether. He said:

The only time that would be an issue, is sometimes on a Saturday or whatever, my wife will get frisky and she’ll want to sneak away and do it. And, you know, as soon as I hear one of the kids, I lose all desire. And not because of them, but because of them coming in or them interrupting. The idea of that horrifies me. (Justin, 30)

Another participant reflected on the fact that his relationship with his ex-wife had become lackluster, and determined this was due to having children. He recalled that after giving birth, her focus turned away from him and sex and toward the children; consequently, his sexual desire waned. He said:

My partner wanted the kids more than I did. And it has been a challenge in that, I guess, I really enjoyed the physical part of the relationship very much at first. And as the kids come along, her focus shifted to the kids and, I felt, away from me. And the fun in many ways of life, including sexually, went down considerably. (John, 52)

Having young children had various ways of negatively impacting men’s sexual desire. Less time to spend with one’s partner, discomfort with being sexual when children were near, and the advent of children shifting attention away from one’s intimate relationship were all described.

**Having a Busy Life**

Having young children was only one of the many factors men in this study discussed when describing how a busy life negatively impacted their sexual desire. Working long hours and having more responsibilities with increased age were also described as reducing desire by one third of participants. One participant stated that his
sexual desire subsided slightly as more responsibilities come into his life. He said: “we age, we have children, we have responsibilities, so there are other things that kick in. And that desire doesn’t disappear, it’s just subdued a little bit” (Owen, 59)

Demands of the day were described as being more time sensitive, such that there was simply no time to experience desire. One participant recounted what a typical day for him could be like, and the lack of time to think about sex. He said:

Usually when there is no desire is usually when I have a lot of other stuff in front of me. And it could be, like I’m sort of finding, as a life coach, it could be, its twenty after five, I’ve got to grab some supper and then I have class at 6. And my son’s just gone to the bathroom on the toilet and needs me to come wipe his bum and my other son is…you know? So when there is no desire it is usually because there is a whole lot of other stuff that is stacked up in front of me preventing me from getting there. (Robert, 40)

Another participant warned of the consequences of letting himself get too caught up in daily responsibilities instead of making the necessary time for sex and romance. He described that a busy life could make it feel like sexual desire was no longer present, but it really was there, if he gave himself time to tap into it:

If you get too focused on what you have to do to get through the day, like make sure you’ve got the meals organized, get to work, do what you have to do, things like that. That, um, you start to put everything immediate in getting in the day ahead of things that make you feel the pleasant desire and romance type feelings that you can start not noticing them. Sort of like you’re not having them anymore. (Joshua, 33)

Having a busy life was described as being something most people have to deal with and embrace. As such, finding time to stay intimate and keep one’s sex life important was paramount. One participant stated:

It’s a huge amount of responsibility and leaves no time for anything else. So that was, we went from not having, not a super active sex life, to nothing for a few months. Or like, half a year almost...no a few months. So that was just another challenge, you know? But also, life can get busy so you need to bolster that relationship to a renewed drive to stay close like that. (Tim, 32)
Most men in this study indicated that they still had regular experiences of sexual desire. However, having a busy life made it less likely that those feelings could be embraced. As a result, men described feeling as though their sexual desire, without attention and focus, had decreased.

**Stress**

When considering what negatively impacted sexual desire, a slight majority of men in this study described feeling stressed from life pressures. Stress was sometimes a result of having a long, demanding day at work. For example, one participant shared: “now that we’re busier, with jobs and stuff, a little more stress comes with that. And there is no doubt in my mind, I am sure stress dampens desire” (Brian, 40). Stress was also described as something situational, rather than general. In that sense, it was during times of high stress when men would notice a decrease in desire. One man expressed: “I’ve noticed at some points in my life if I’m really stressed, that is gone. There is no sexual desire. It’s not like anything’s missing. It’s just not where my mind is at” (Tim, 32).

However, other men discussed the experience of stress as much more consuming. For example, pressures of life could sometimes weigh down on men so heavily that it dominated much of their thoughts and left little room to focus on sex. One participant shared his concerns about being able to afford raising a third child after recently discovering his wife was pregnant:

The older I get, especially at night before I go to bed, I get these thoughts that I’m getting older. I’m 38 and there is a lot of stress. Did I accomplish everything I needed to accomplish? That’s a lot in my head now. (Daniel, 38)

Only one participant indicated that stress had a positive impact on his sexual desire, in that it motivated them towards sexual activity as a way of reducing those
feelings. He said: “more stress can actually increase my sexual desire. Like I try to distract. It’s something I think about to block out all of that other stuff, or a calming thing” (Hudson, 30). Overall, however, stress was much more likely to be described as having a negative impact on men’s desire.

**Sexual Abuse**

The experience of sexual abuse was described as having a profoundly negative impact on one’s ability to feel sexual desire. There was a small minority of men who disclosed experiencing sexual abuse in their past. In addition, some male participants’ reported that their female partner had been sexually abused. When either partner in the relationship had a history of sexual abuse, men reported that the trauma associated with the abuse had the potential to inhibit their sexual desire.

**Men’s History of Sexual Abuse**

There were two participants who described experiencing sexual abuse earlier in their lives and the negative impact it had on their desire. Although sexual trauma was not described as always having an impact on their desire, when memories of being abused surfaced or triggers were experienced, there was no mental space left for sexual desire.

One participant stated:

Another time I didn’t feel sexual desire was when I was reprocessing the traumatic experience from when I was a teenager. I got abused at a summer camp. The… it was a profoundly unsexy time. Sex was sort of conflated with being really afraid or feeling really ashamed and feeling that I deserved to be victimized. That messed everything up. (Joshua, 33)

Another participant also indicated that when he recalled his experience of sexual abuse, he was unable to think about sexual desire at all. He said: “obviously dealing with trauma, going through that, rehashing those memories, remembering those memories, the
last thing I wanted to think about was sex….the emotional betrayal and dealing with a tone of shame. It’s not a sexy thing” (Tim, 32).

Although only two men in this study described experiencing sexual abuse, sexual abuse was described unequivocally by these men as negatively impacting their experience of sexual desire.

**Partner’s History of Sexual Abuse**

Although few men in this study disclosed their own sexual abuse history, it was slightly more common for men to indicate that their female partner had experienced sexual abuse in her past. A partner’s sexual abuse history was described as having a significant impact on men’s desire as well. As one participant said: “my wife had some issues when she was growing …I don’t think are fully resolved. And they do impact on us. She was essentially raped and abused” (Cody, 65). Further, some men described not wanting to initiate sexual activity with their wife because she had previously been abused and they were afraid of triggering memories of those experiences. Not initiating sex led to less sexual activity, which in turn was described as reducing desire, overall, among these men. One participant stated: “I don’t initiate very often because I just assume it’s going to be a no, and in my mind, because of her past, I don’t want to push it too much” (Jack, 54).

A female partner’s past abuse was described as having a significant impact on male participants’ experience of desire. Not only were certain explicit boundaries regarding sexual activity discussed during the study interviews, a minority of men talked about their own private concerns regarding how their desire for sex might negatively impact their female partner.
Less Emphasis On, and Effort Invested in, Sexual Encounters

Most men in this study described that when they (and their partner) put less emphasis and effort into their sexual encounters, their sexual desire dampened.

Decreased Frequency of Sexual Activity and Monotony and Routine were described as contributing to, or reflecting, one’s sex life as being less important.

Decreased Frequency of Sexual Activity

The frequency of partnered sexual activity with their partner was described by a quarter of male participants as having an impact on their level of desire. Specifically, if sexual frequency had decreased, some men reported losing some of their interest in sex. One participant shared that, when sexual activity decreased, he found he thought about sex less because it seemed unlikely that acting on those feelings would be possible. He said: “I think just the lack of physical activity, it just reminded me that I don’t go looking for it as much because I know it’s not coming” (Jack, 54). Another participant described the difference between having regular sex with his wife that kept the relationship feeling passionate and romantic versus going longer periods of time without sex where he began to view her more as a friend. When there were longer periods of sexual inactivity, he indicated it became more difficult to go back into the romantic, sexual frame of mind. He stated: “sometimes there have been times where we go longer without having sex. And once it stretches into the longer than a full week it starts to get harder and harder to switch back” (Joshua, 33). A third participant described that going a long time without having sex could impact him in one of two ways. He might experience increased desire because there was a need for release. However, if enough time had gone by without sex it seemed to lose importance or slip his mind all together:
If it’s been a really long time, my desire it will either go up or it will go down. Because you haven’t had it in a while. And then you do it’s so good you want to have it again. So there is a split. There is the desire to have it because it’s been a while, and then it’s been so long it doesn’t matter right at the moment, too busy. (Hudson, 30)

A few men in this study indicated that although an increased amount of time between sexual encounters might increase their need to experience physical release, if too much time occurred between sexual encounters, they adapted and described feeling sexual desire less often and less intensely.

**Monotony and Routine**

When men were asked about factors that elicited their sexual desire (Research Question One), participants frequently noted keeping things new, different, and exciting was important. On the other hand, over half of the men in the current study described that their desire decreased when sexual encounters began to feel routine, predictable, and monotonous. One man captured the difference between finding things new and exciting and feeling his sex life had fallen into a slump:

Sometimes it’s different when you have, when I have a partner who is the same all the time. There are some things that are the same, same routine. And, sometimes adventure is more exciting. And, ah, and sometimes the same, the same, can be not as exciting. (John, 52)

Another man simply stated: “once you get into a routine, certainly desire will go down over time” (Jeffery, 43). A third participant expanded that being in a sexual routine symbolized something larger than needing something new and different. For him this represented a feeling that there was a lack of effort being put into one’s relationship overall which made him feel underappreciated. He said: “people get in a rut and they take each other for granted to some degree and it becomes, you know, the sex can become
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jaded. Because how many times can you make love, have sex, with someone over and over again?” (Tony, 52)

Many men in this study described that monotonous or routine sex would decrease their desire. Not only did routine sex become less exciting but it also symbolized that neither partner was putting as much effort into a sexual encounter. This had a detrimental effect on men’s ability to feel high levels of desire to engage in sexual activity.

**Rejection**

As previously discussed in relation to Question One, feeling desired was by far the most common and most influential factor that men described as having a positive influence on their sexual desire. On the other hand, the experience of rejection, when men initiated sexual activity and were turned down, was described by nearly every participant in this study as having a deeply negative impact on their desire. For some men, rejection was enough to kill desire in the moment. As one participant described:

> If she doesn’t want me, that she somehow is not interested in me, I totally, maybe it offends me somewhere inside. I don’t feel this, extremely being offended, being traumatized, but maybe some how subconsciously that’s how it happens…I know she is not interested in me and she doesn’t like me. Doesn’t want me. It’s like forget it. I don’t feel it anymore. (Kyle, 38)

Other men described the longer-term impact rejection had on their sexual desire. For some, having their sexual advances rejected regularly decreased their confidence and self-esteem (two factors discussed as eliciting sexual desire in Question One). One participant described the spiraling questions he began to ask himself when his wife turned down his sexual advances:

> When you’re the guy and you’re always the one to make the moves all the time, and your partner’s always the one saying “no, no, no” you start getting very aware, not aware, but depressed and wondering whether or not something is going on. Whether or not it’s you. (Scott, 42)
The feeling of being constantly rejected was described as something that would make men initiate less, as a result of not thinking about sex as much. In that sense, being rejected decreased frequency of sexual encounters and, as a result, fed into less desire for men. One participant stated: “I’m usually a very positive person, but when it comes to sex and stuff like that, it’s tough to stay positive or imagine [sex] when you’re always getting rejected. So it’s easier not to think about it” (Scott, 42).

Another participant similarly said:

  It is frustration, it’s upsetting, annoying at times. Just…it’s been so less frequent lately that it gets frustrating. And eventually it makes you not want to try anymore, or less frequently. Yeah, that’s what is ending up happening. She’s not as interested in it anymore and it’s making me feel that way too. (Thomas, 55)

Rejection was discussed by most men in this study as having a intensely negative effect on their sexual desire. Rejection was perceived as not only impacting men’s desire for sex, but it also led to doubts or concerns about the degree to which their wife cared for them.

**Partner Not Equally Engaged in Sexual Activity**

Men indicated that they wanted to know that their partner was equally interested in engaging in sexual activity with them. However, when they felt that their partner was not equally interested in their sex life or in a specific sexual encounter, their desire decreased. Specifically, men described that their Partner’s Lower Level of Sexual Desire and Partner’s Lack of Confidence dampened their sexual desire.

**Partner’s Lower Level of Sexual Desire**

Men often described having higher sexual desire than their female partners. They also felt that it was their wife or girlfriend who was able to control the frequency of
sexual activity. In that sense, engaging in sex was perceived to only happen when their female partner was in the mood. As one participant put it: “just because I feel desire don’t mean that she does” (William, 46). Men described that this resulted in a lower frequency of sexual activity than they would like and it also negatively impacted their desire. One participant reported that even though he wanted to engage in sex more frequently than his wife did, putting pressure on her to have sex when he was in the mood was seen as stressful from his wife’s perspective. As a result, he chose to put his desires lower down on his priority list. He described that, although he still felt desire, he was able to decrease the presence it had in his life:

    With the stresses in both of our lives, we’re helping each other get through some of these times. And one of the ways we can do that, we cannot add stress by becoming demanding or selfish or just kind of keeping in mind the other person. So it’s easier for me to put those desires a bit on the backburner if it is going to impact her and the stress level she is feeling. (William, 46)

Similarly, a third participant indicated that he adapted his higher sexual needs to meet his partners’ lower level of desire. He described that it was not only his preference related to sexual frequency that changed, but also his overall level of sexual desire:

    Her interests started to wane somewhat and then I just adapted. So if it were my choice I’d still have sex everyday. But she just wasn’t into it so much and I wasn’t going to force her, obviously. So my pattern of interaction changed as well. And then my desire did too. (Justin, 30)

No participant in this study described feeling that their female partner had higher sexual desire than they did. Almost all men described having higher desire than their partners’. As a result they found their sexual desire was dampened because their partner showed less interest in engaging in sexual activity.
Partner’s Lack of Confidence

A smaller number of men in this study described an ability to pick up on their female partner’s level of confidence. They described being drawn to her when she felt good about herself but when her confidence was lower it decreased their level of desire for her. One participant noticed his wife’s decreased confidence regarding her body image after having children. Although he acknowledged that she had in fact gained weight, he still found her attractive. However, it was her own negative perception of her body that diminished his desire. He said:

She was always physically attractive. And recently, our kid that we have together, her weight has always been a bit of an issue. And it’s played a little role in the way her and I would be physically, I guess. So when I don’t see that confidence, because she does have confidence even though she’s concerned about her weight. Now she’s losing confidence and she acts like she’s losing confidence. And that’s, I think a little bit why I don’t think about her a lot sexually. (Daniel, 38)

Another participant shared a similar sentiment, that it was not his wife’s physical appearance that affected his desire, but how she felt about her body. He stated:

I’m a bit of a health nut. And I don’t feel nearly as much sexual desire if my partner is not confident. They don’t have to be in amazing shape. But I want them to at least feel confident and do good things for themselves and their body. And for me, it’s sometimes hard to have that sexual desire if that’s not there. (Carl, 31)

He also described being turned off if he felt that his wife was trying to hide parts of her body during sex. He expressed that it was important for him to feel that his wife was fully present during their sexual activity. There was something vulnerable he appreciated about giving one’s whole self to the other person. Thus, if he noticed she started covering up parts of her body, his desire would diminish. He said:

Sex is something that’s extremely intimate and it’s, you know, you want it to be kind of, you want each other to completely give each other to themselves. So I find if you’re not confident, they’re always holding back. Or, you know, I don’t want in the middle of sex to hear “I want to leave my shirt on”. If you want to
leave your shirt on because you want to leave your shirt on, that’s fine. But if it’s because you’re very self-conscious and you’re not self-confident in yourself, I don’t respect that. If that’s the case, that’s one thing. But if you’re not doing something about it and complaining about it...then that to me is my number one killer of desire. (Carl, 31)

Not one participant in this study described being physically unattracted to their female partner. In fact, in relation to Question One, most men reported many physical attributes they found arousing about their female partners’ appearance, including simply seeing her naked. However, men did indicate that if their partner displayed a lack of confidence in her own physical appearance, this had a detrimental impact on their ability to feel desire.

**Lack of Emotional Connection with Partner**

Most men in this study described emotional connection within a relationship as central to their experience of desire. However, when emotional connection with their female partner was lacking, such as during an argument, men’s sexual desire decreased. One participant explained:

> If our emotional connection is under a bit of strain and we’re disagreeing about something that can’t be solved quickly because we’re working it out. My desire to have sex with her will go down. I want to feel like we’re on the same page. And sometimes that can’t be resolved terribly quickly. (Joshua, 33)

In response to a question about circumstances within his relationship that were detrimental to his experience of desire, another participant shared arguments and misunderstandings would decrease his desire. He said: “I guess with a partner, um, a lot of frustration, or I guess misunderstandings, or when we’re not connecting at all” (John, 52). Further, although almost all men in this study indicated they would not want to say no to sex if their wife initiated sexual activity, one participant expressed that he would say no if he felt he and his wife were not on the same page or connected. He said: “me
saying no has only happened a couple of times, just because of my frustration and anger towards her at the time” (Scott, 42).

Most men in this study reported that they were unable to separate their sexual desire for their partner from the degree of emotional connection they felt with her. They described difficulties in separating physical from emotional aspects of their relationships. In order to have a physical connection through sexual activity, a certain level of emotional availability and connectedness was deemed important by most participants.
Relational and Non-Relational Sexual Desire

The third research question was: “How might experiences of sexual desire within one’s relationship differ from non-partner specific experiences of sexual desire?” As previously noted, male participants primarily discussed the ways desire was experienced for their female partners within the context of their relationships. As presented in the Eliciting Factors and Inhibiting Factors sections, men described a number of factors that affected their desire that were related to the intimacy and connection they felt, or did not feel, with their partner (i.e., feeling desired by one’s partner, emotional closeness with one’s partner, experiencing rejection, as well as an effort to mutually coordinate desires and situations). However, most men also described experiencing some sexual desire at an extra-dyadic level (i.e., feeling desire for women who were not their partner) and at an individual level (i.e., a need for physical release through masturbation and/or pornography). Men’s experience of sexual desire outside of their relationships is described below.

Non-Committed Interpersonal Sexual Desire

Most men in this study reported noticing physically attractive women outside of their relationship. Unlike desire in committed relationships, this was desire that was not constrained by the history, responsibilities, projected future and need to coordinate behaviors, moods, and goals within a close relational partnership. This desire was described by the men as reflecting a biological urge that was fleeting and controllable. For some men, attraction towards other women was described as triggering feelings of sexual desire. However, sexual desire was described differently when it was experienced for one’s female partner versus for other women. This difference was described by men
as being a result of a two-level conceptualization of sexual desire: a natural, instinctual, bodily reaction versus a need to connect and intimately coordinate with someone deeply cared about. Sexual desire that was experienced extra-relationally was described as consisting of only the first level, whereas relational sexual desire consisted of both. As a result, the experience of sexual desire outside of one’s relationship was described as being something Natural, Biological, and Uncontrollable. This experience of sexual desire was also described as Fleeting, and Something to be Controlled.

**Desire as Natural, Biological, and Uncontrollable**

The experience of sexual desire as a “biological urge” was described by many men in this study as occurring in the body rather than the mind. As one man described: “it’s just more of that visceral reaction, almost animalistic” (Justin, 30).

Some participants described this more carnal level of desire as a chemical response that existed separately from one’s cognitive feelings and emotions. One participant explained: “I say chemically because I think there is that element of attraction which is a chemical response. Which has nothing to do with one’s feelings or thoughts or anything else” (Owen, 59). Others described the experience as being caused by hormones:

> Anytime I exert lots of energy my hormones tend to peak and I get that horny sensation where you just want to have sex because of the hormones rather than having the desire. It is a desire, but it is done through hormones tricking yourself to mentally think that you want to have sex. (James, 37)

This visceral level of desire was described as being “normal and natural” (Kyle, 38) by many men in this study but was also described as something that not all men wanted to experience. As one man described, sometimes he could experience this level of desire
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without wanting to feel it. He said: “you can get forced into feeling some desire. Whether you want to or not. I guess there is always some sort of pheromone or hormone, that kind of thing can trigger it” (James, 37). Similarly, another participant explained that he wished he could only experience desire within the context of his relationship, but that this was unrealistic and out of his perceived control. He said:

It would just be great if your body could just find one person incredibly attractive and you got an instant hard on whenever you saw them. And you were happy that way forever. But that’s like saying I wish I had the perfect job where I could do whatever I want and get paid tons of money. It’s a fantasy. (Joseph, 37)

Men’s description of sexual desire having two levels was very prevalent during the interviews in this study. Bodily experiences of desire were described as being more primal in nature and could not be controlled with respect to when and how they were experienced. However, as later discussed, experiencing desire did not mean that men necessarily had any intention of acting on those desires.

Desire and Attraction

Many men talked about being attracted to other women outside of their relationship. Sometimes an attraction to other women was described early on during an interview when men defined sexual desire in global terms rather than relational terms. In other words, some men described desire as a relationally unconstrained, biological urge. For example, one man responded: “sexual desire, I guess, is to gravitate…to be attracted to the opposite sex” (Tyson, 33). Another participant similarly stated: “if I see an attractive woman walking down the street or on the beach or something, yeah you feel desire” (Thomas, 55). Sexual desire was often described
as being triggered by various sexual cues in one’s environment that encouraged men to begin thinking about sexual activity. The following participant explained:

Sexual desire to be, I’d have to say, is anything that is going to get you turned on. It doesn’t have to just be with a partner it could be with anything else that you’re doing. It could be, you know, even people watching can turn into sexual desire. Anything that whets your appetite. (Carl, 31)

The definitions of “attraction” and “sexual desire” could be considered quite differently. However, many men in this study described the two constructs similarly, or indicated that attraction could easily develop into feelings of sexual desire. As one participant said: “the attraction will turn into sexual desire, I find quite often. If I see someone you know that I find attractive, my mind might wonder. It might not even necessarily be with that person. It might just wander into something sexual” (Carl, 31).

Upon noticing attractive women, men described their thoughts progressing past an appreciation of their beauty. For example, one man said his thoughts quickly went from attraction to considering what the woman would look like without clothes on. He stated: “you see beautiful women. I wonder what they look like naked” (Tony, 52). Another participant expanded on this experience. He said: “you see something, you consider them attractive and you imagine having sex with them. Or you could potentially image a scenario where you’re having sex with them. Or you file them away and masturbate to them later on” (Joseph, 37).

Attraction to other women was described as a trigger that led to sexual desire for many men in this study. Men described that what might begin as an initial attraction could quickly turn into more sexual thoughts and fantasies about what it might be like to engage in sexual activities with these women. Again, this experience was most often described as occurring at the first level of desire, the biological, bodily interest in sex.
that was not always wanted or invited. However, other men actively used imagery of attractive women to generate some further sexual thoughts and fantasies. In both cases, these experiences were described as remaining solely within one’s mind.

**External-Dyadic Desire as Fleeting**

As previously discussed in relation the Eliciting Factors, men described having more memorable and intense sexual desire when there was time for the desire to build during a sexual encounter. In contrast, when men noticed attractive women in passing, they described briefly feeling desire but said that the desire did not have time to develop into anything significant. One participant explained:

> Obviously I am attracted to other women. But I find that’s a lot more fleeting. So I may see someone I find really attractive and it feels really intense. But then it goes away because it’s not something that’s enduring. (Justin, 30)

Another participant stated that if he met and talked to a woman who he thought was attractive, it wasn’t something that lasted past that interaction. He said: “I don’t find myself ever, you know, five or six days later, going back to that conversation. And oh yeah I wonder if…yeah it’s in the moment, it happens and then it’s over” (Robert, 40).

A couple of participants used the analogy of desiring other women to wanting a cigarette or wanting to test-drive a new car. In other words, the experience was likened to a craving or curiosity that was considered a nice idea rather than a reality that they wanted to act upon. As one participant explained, noticing women outside of his relationship was similar to craving a cigarette as an ex-smoker; it could be strong for a moment but would not last. He said:

> I think it is more fleeting, more just a mental thought. You see someone and that trigger goes off. It’s like being an ex-smoker. I quit smoking years ago and so it’s like, the thought it would be nice to have a smoke. But as fast as you can think about it, it’s gone. It’s not a lingering thing. (Warren, 59)
And another participant noted that the experience of desire for other women was simply a curiosity rather than something he wanted to follow through with:

Sometimes you just wonder ‘what if’ kind of thing. Maybe this is a bad analogy, I don’t know, but when you see a sports car and you wonder what it would be like to drive it. And I think that’s kind of something I do in a way. I mean, it’s all innocent. It’s never anything more than just a quick thought. (Carl, 31)

Experiencing desire outside of one’s relationship was described as common and natural. Yet, because the interactions with women who might spark desire were brief and passing, men said that the desire did not have time to build or be felt as intensely as it was in their relationship with their partners.

**Extra-Dyadic Desire Can Be Controlled**

Given that all men in this study reported being in monogamous relationships, experiencing desire outside of their relationship, while considered natural, posed some difficulties. For example, some men described a battle between having natural, biological desires that did not fit into a monogamous relationship, yet wanting to stay committed to their female partners. One participant explained feeling caught between these two realities: “the biological urge is telling you to do one thing and the society and relationship is telling you to do something else” (Brian, 40). Other men expressed some confusion regarding whether bodily experiences of desire should be appreciated and listened to (in the same way one might listen to one’s stomach for signs of hunger) or if they should be quashed. As one participant stated:

I do have those moral battles sometimes. Like which is right? Like are these desires happening so when… It’s the whole human will. Do we just be weak and follow them? Or is there something great about when we have them and don’t have to act on them? (Michael, 33)
Other participants also considered the idea of having desires outside of one’s relationship as being normal but not socially acceptable. Monogamy was described as something that humans socially decided on, but men indicated that it did not mean their desires to have sex with multiple women would subside:

You choose whether to act on those impulses, right? That’s the difference we have. And other species choose. There are other species that are monogamous. Of course the feelings are always there. You can’t be a species on this planet which wants to procreate and extend your genetic code without being attracted to the female form. (Richard, 51)

Similarly, another man described the changes from being a younger teenage man with desires that were experienced broadly, to deciding to marry one person and trying to contain all of his desires in his relationship. Although a monogamous relationship was described as being exactly what this participant wanted, he still described this as being a “challenge.” He stated:

When the hormones kick in as a young teenager, the desire, the lust, the whatever, is kind of all over the map…and then I guess for myself it’s then the channelings that into a structural foundation. Which in our case was through marriage. So that was the channel for the expression of the sexual desire and then of course, the challenge within that is to kind of keep it there. (Owen, 59)

Some participants described the differences between a biological urge and one’s “moral code.” For some men they said this was an easy decision for them; no matter how strong desires were, they could always be controlled. As one man stated: “even if my wife goes away for one year, even if I need to control my feelings, then I think I can. It’s not like sex is controlling me. I can control my sex, my desire” (Vihaan, 33). However, others acknowledged that even if they were able to value their morals over sexual desires, they knew not all men found it so easy. Another participant said: “for some people, your morals and your desire may not be balanced. So you may have a
stronger desire than where your moral compass may be” (Tyson, 33). Finally, another man described an example of the conflicted conversations he had with himself once he found his biological urges had turned into desires that part of himself wished to act upon. Although, in the end, he found it was an easy decision to reject desires for other women because he loved his wife, when he was experiencing desire more intensely he described this as being more of a battle. He stated:

Even in situations when I’ve worked with someone or been around someone I’m attracted to, even had some chemistry, it comes to weighing the pros and cons. And I’m thinking, yes my desire is telling me it would be nice to have sex with this woman. But then again, future me won’t love this woman and then there is guilt and then unrequited love. And is all of this worth it for 10 minutes of pleasure? So that’s why it’s a battle and the feelings are so strong at first. But it’s not a battle because you can talk yourself off the ledge. It’s a pretty obvious decision. (Justin, 30)

Attraction to other women, however, was not something men in this study described as wanting to turn into anything physically sexual. As one participant shared, although he noticed beautiful women who sparked the interest, he never had any intention of turning those thoughts into action:

You can be walking down the hall and you can just do a turn like that, and there is a girl, well women now, there is a young student and you just go, oh my god. And that’s the desire. It’s never meant to be executed. There is no malice. There is nothing other than, wow. Now it will just be fleeting. It disappears. It’s not necessarily going to act itself out at home. (Owen, 59)

Men were very clear that sexual desire experienced for women outside of their relationships was not to be acted upon. In that sense, men described that other women were noticed as part of men’s primal urge to want to procreate. They might notice attractive women, fantasize about them in some form of sexual encounter, but the experience would be fleeting and, at least as far as men in this study described, never be acted upon.
Individual Level Sexual Desire

Many men described experiencing sexual desire at the individual level. This can be contrasted with both desire in a committed relationship and desire experienced for someone outside of a relationship (i.e., an attractive stranger, someone from a movie or magazine) in that the experiential biological aspect of desire does not require a social partner. Related to the individual experience of desire, about a third of men discussed engaging in Masturbating and about a fifth of male participants described watching Pornography. Engaging in these behaviours was most often described as a result of wanting to satisfy the biological level of desire through obtaining physical release.

Masturbation

The majority of men in this study discussed their engagement in masturbation while in committed, long-term partnerships. However, only one third expanded on their experiences with masturbation. Some men spoke about the importance of masturbation, as it allowed them to tap into a different side of their sexuality than they could experience with their female partners. None of the men stated, however, that they preferred masturbation to having sex with their female partners. Nonetheless, some men, described masturbation as being an equally important component in their sexual life as it fulfilled different needs. One participant indicated that he would masturbate in response to a more biological drive for sexual release, because masturbation was less work and resulted in a quicker outcome:

Sometimes when you’re tired or hungry or your blood sugars are low in my case, you’d like to cum without doing any work for it. And it’s a selfish thing, but I couldn’t say I always want one thing over the other because I don’t. Sometimes I’d rather one, sometimes I’d rather the other. And where they both
have their uses, one is more a function than merely physical release and getting off. (Joseph, 37)

Another participant indicated that masturbation was an important part of his sexuality and something that he needed even if his wife was interested in having sex every day. He discussed the importance of taking the time to connect with himself intimately. He said:

Even if my wife was as sexual as me and wanted to have sex every single day, I still guarantee I’d still have to find time for masturbation. I find it’s an important part. As weird as it sounds…again the way sex is like with a partner where you’re opening up and being completely vulnerable, you’re kind of doing that with yourself. (Carl, 31)

The same participant expanded by describing masturbation as filling a role that sex with his partner could not. Specifically, he indicated that masturbation allowed for him to experience certain fantasies that he might not be able to fulfill in reality:

Masturbation…that’s how you live any fantasy you cannot really have. So if you can’t make a fantasy come to life, you can make it come to life through masturbation. That’s more, you know, that’s the raw side I guess. And more again, more just the taboo things you can’t do. And you can’t actually make happen. So to me they’re very two different. Like sex with my wife and masturbation I find are two very different things. And that’s why I think I need to have both regardless. (Carl, 31)

Other men in this study acknowledged masturbating but indicated it was not something that they desired to do. Rather, it was something they resorted to if their desire to be with their wife could not be satisfied; as one participant stated: “if I had the choice, I would be having sex more and masturbating less” (Jack, 54). Some men indicated that if they were masturbating because their female partner was uninterested in sex at the time, masturbating in tandem or in the presence of their female partner would be preferable to masturbating alone. One participant commented:
I would prefer, even if I was masturbating, that my wife was there. It would be, there is a physical connection or a mental connection with someone else makes it more pleasurable for me. So I would rank, then, masturbation as not as much fun as anything you could do with somebody else. So I wouldn’t particularly have the desire to go masturbate. More likely because my wife is not interested or not there. (Hudson, 30)

Masturbation was also described as a strategy employed by some men in order to experience sexual release on their own between sexual encounters with their female partner. This was often described by men who felt they had higher desire than their partners. These men indicated that masturbating would help them release a physical urge for sex while they waited for their wife to be in the mood, consequently reducing their experience of rejection. As one man described:

I’ve actually found that masturbating has actually helped our relationship. Me personally. That way I don’t need to pressure my wife to give me that sexual relief. Then I can just keep her comfortable and take care of her. That’s how I’ve kind of tried to remedy that…versus always asking. (Tyson, 33)

However, other men indicated that they did not believe that masturbating served the same need as having sex with their partner. In that sense, masturbating took care of a need for physical release but did not satisfy the urge to connect with their partner, which continued to linger even after masturbation had occurred:

The fulfillment that comes when you’re with another person is deeper than it is when you’re just by yourself. At least for me. If you’re by yourself you might get that physical release, but it doesn’t satisfy the overall urge. So even if you met your own physical needs daily, or two or three times a week, or whatever, it doesn’t take care of the longer-term one building up because there is not someone else involved. (Brian, 40)

There was a small minority of men in this study who reported being celibate, or almost celibate (e.g., having sex one or twice a year; no sexual activity for five years prior to the interview, etc.). For these men, masturbation was a difficult topic to discuss, as it was not an activity they wanted to engage in and, as a result, doing so
led to some frustration. These men described continuing to feel desire and felt that masturbation was their only option to experience release. Engaging in masturbation, rather than being experienced as satisfying or meaningful, was described as fulfilling an immediate need but making these men feel worse overall. One participant likened masturbating when he wanted sex to eating cake when one is depressed. He described masturbation as satisfying a temporary void but not in the way he preferred:

I will use erotica and masturbation. I can only do it for so long and then I have to take a break because I think it’s the idea of wanting to be touched, wanting to touch skin... it’s satisfying for a few seconds and then it’s like eating a chocolate cake when you’re depressed. It feels good while you’re eating it but then you feel crappy at the end, because it’s not the chocolate cake you really want. (Larry, 63)

When men were engaging in somewhat regular sexual activity, masturbating was described in more positive terms: as a method of self-exploration or an alternative to partnered sexual encounters that required less time and effort. However, for men who felt they had to rely on masturbation more than they wanted to (i.e., those that would strongly prefer sexual activity with their partner) masturbation was described as a way to experience a physical release that did not provide much satisfaction.

**Pornography**

Few men in this study discussed using or desiring to engage with pornography. Those that did talk about pornography often did not elaborate on the role it had in their sex lives. It was unclear whether this was due to a lack of comfort with the topic or to a lack of perceived relevance of pornography to men’s experience of sexual desire. However, watching pornography was something that a few men in this study described as part of their regular sexual routine. One participant stated that even though his sexual desire was lower recently (for reasons
related to health and difficulties in his relationship), he still wanted to watch, and masturbate to, pornography. In fact, he described watching pornography as a typical or regular part of any man’s sex life. He stated:

I don’t have a massive huge sex drive at the moment. Still masturbating, still watching porn. And if I see a movie start, I don’t see a lot of movies, but if there is a nude scene in it, I’m probably going to get on the internet that night and look at porn. I don’t know if that’s distasteful or not. It’s just a guy’s sex life. (Joseph, 37)

This description was not the norm in this study, however. Most men discussed watching pornography from time to time, but did not identify their motivation for watching to be related to sexual desire. For example, one participant said he might look at pornography once in a while, but he was not sexually interested in the female performers. He described feeling confused about what his attraction to pornography was. He stated: “if she is maybe at work, maybe sometimes [I watch] once in a month or two months. But it’s not desire. Not that I want to have sex with them, but I want to…I have no idea. But I will watch sometimes” (Vihaan, 33). Another participant similarly described that although there was something sexually appealing about pornography, he did not in any way consider desire to be part of the experience; as he described:

As far as like, seeing pornographic images or movies or whatever, typically for me it would be seeing other people engaging in sex, which can be arousing. But it’s not really those people. There is a distinction there…There is nothing particular about, there are attractive bodies and things like that. But there is a step to desiring them sexually. So if I just see someone I thought was attractive, that doesn’t mean I inherently want to have sex with them. (Hudson, 30)

One participant reported that he did watch pornography from time to time to help with masturbation when he was not getting the response from his wife that he
needed. However, he said it was not ultimately what he wants to be doing and described often feeling guilty afterward:

My wife has caught me with pornography. Not because I did it a lot or anything, but because when there was a 6, 7 week of abstinence because there is no connection, no initiating, there is basically rejection. I tried the masturbation thing, but it really doesn’t work for me unless there is a partner. So that’s why I would sometimes go to see if pornography would do anything. And it really doesn’t. It creates more guilt for me. (Cody, 65)

Further, pornography was described by one participant as being a turnoff because it did not include the element of a sexual experience that was most crucial to his desire, an emotional connection. He said he might be an outlier, but expressed that he did not enjoy watching pornography:

This is one of the things that I was worried I’d be an outlier. Because pornography really hasn’t interested me. I actually find it kind of gross. Since it isn’t relational. I’ve had the two amalgamate, or I’ve had the two come together so tightly now that I can’t experience anything sexual without intimacy also being there. So if I see two people having sex, I’m like oh well, okay? I’m almost an objective observer of it. Like it’s a mammal or whatever. I’m not going to lie, there is some stimulation but not enough I would go seek it out. Unless it is someone I love or an expressed love it doesn’t really interest me. (Justin, 30)

In general, when men in this study described using pornography they did not expand a great deal about the role it played in their sexual desire. This resulted in some difficulties when creating themes to capture men’s experiences. Overall, pornography was not described as being an important part of men’s sexuality nor as something the majority of men in this study actually enjoyed watching. However, for a small minority of men, watching pornography was a way to satisfy sexual urges they could not fulfill in their relationship.
Masculine Norms & Sexual Scripts

Research Question Four was: “To what degree do men’s descriptions of sexual desire support, or deviate from, traditional masculinity norms and sexual scripts?” Conceptually this question concerned the cultural context of sexual desire and it was analyzed in two ways. First, at various points throughout the interviews men described their experiences of desire in ways that indirectly addressed theoretical propositions about men’s sexuality. Second, men were directly asked about their awareness of any social/masculine scripts regarding men’s sexual desire and whether or not they abided by these “rules.” Close to half of the men in this study reported experiencing sexual desire that was, in some ways, in keeping with sexual scripts related to men’s sexual desire being high and unwavering. However, most men also described an awareness of social pressures to portray or feign a high interest in sexual activity, as well as the damaging impact of societal expectations regarding male sexuality and a wish to deviate from traditional sexual scripts.

Support For Theoretical Masculine Norms

There were various ways that men described their experience of sexual desire that indirectly supported theoretical stereotypes about men having consistently high levels of sexual desire. Specifically, some men reported experiencing High and Constant Levels of Sexual Desire and the majority of men described Never Saying No to a Sexual Opportunity with a woman.

High and Constant Levels of Sexual Desire

When describing their sexual desire, some men in this study indicated they experienced desire in a high and constant capacity. It was not uncommon for men to
describe their desire as “strong” or discuss their high interest in sexual activity repeatedly during the interview. For example, one participant simply stated: “I’m probably of a fairly high level of desire. I love being intimate” (Tony, 52). Another participant said that he often found himself thinking about sex, even when there were no opportunities to engage in sexual activity. He said: “I think about [sex] multiple times a day. Even days when you’re not having sex at all I’m still constantly thinking about it” (Brian, 40). Some participants explained that their sexual desire had started strong as a teenager and remained steady later into life. One participant in his early-sixties indicated his desire was still as strong and constant as the earlier years of his life. He said: “I think for me it’s been very consistent all the way through. I’ve always had a very strong drive” (Larry, 63).

Some men, when talking about their strong sexual desire, described that they believed their experience fit into the “normal” male experience. When asked to describe his sexual desire, one participant in his early thirties discussed men’s sexual desire generally, and indicated that he felt similarly to “most guys.” He said: “my level of desire, in my opinion, has always been, it’s pretty high. I have a pretty high sex drive I think. But I think most guys do” (Ryan, 34). Another participant suggested that all men experience fairly high levels of desire: “for me, male sexual desire is a strong desire that is pretty much constant” (Hudson, 30). Further, when men described their high desire, they sometimes used their female partner’s lower desire as a comparison. For example, one participant indicated that he had never been in a relationship with a woman who had higher desire than he did. He said: “I’ve never met a woman who wanted to have sex more often. I think usually it’s been the reverse probably. I’d be the
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one to encourage that more myself” (John, 52). A minority of men described their high desire in biological, evolutionary terms. The following participant indicated that he felt all men had evolved to experience a higher level of sexual desire in order to pass on their genes. He said:

I’m pretty much ready all the time. So maybe men, maybe we do have less biological system and maybe out in the wild we’re like animals and stuff. Males will have multiple partners to provide for babies or whatever. So it could be a long, evolved system, a long system that we have to be ready when it’s time. (Michael, 33)

Whether men talked about their own sexual desire in isolation, the ways that their high desire fit with their perception of the “normal” male experience, or how their desire was higher than their female partners, over a third of men in this study identified or described their experience of sexual desire as being high and “constant.”

Never Say No to Sexual Activity

During the interviews, men were asked whether it would be acceptable to say no to sexual activity or if they could remember a time where they had said no to sex with a woman. Overall, men struggled to answer this question, often because they indicated they could not recall a time they said no to sex. Sometimes men responded to this question by simply stating that if sex was available, they would say yes. One participant stated: “if it’s there, you’ll probably take it” (Mark, 51). Another made a comparison between himself and his wife. He said that while she’ll turn down sex, he would very rarely do so: “she is 99% of the time saying no. I very rarely say no” (Scott, 42). A third male participant expanded, indicating that he felt it was not in men’s “nature” to turn down a sexual opportunity. He said:

I think it’s how guys are built. Their metabolism or whatever. Just how in general how it’s perceived. Guys will not say no as often as the ladies will…”
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More of a guy thing, no matter what we’ll say yes… A guy will more like, in general again, will not say no. It’s not in their habit, their nature. Again that red-blooded Canadian boy just wouldn’t… would more likely not say no. (Thomas, 55)

In fact, the realization for one participant that he was not sure he could say no to a woman’s sexual advances translated into some fear about what might happen should a woman outside of his relationship initiate sexual activity with him. He said:

There is something that’s hitting there… like would I be able to say no to a pretty young female in a strip club? Would I say no to her? And I don’t know if I could say no. That’s why it hit me. Because that’s scary to think about. (Daniel, 38)

A majority of men in this study said they would not turn down an opportunity to have sex. A few men described that their inability to say no to sex was biological, ingrained and inevitable.

Social Pressures to Appear to Have High Desire

Although many men talked about their desire in ways that fit with theoretical stereotypes about men’s desire, it was slightly more common for men to talk about pressures to appear to have high interest in sexual activity at all times. In fact, there was some overlap between men who described their desire as high, and then later talked about social pressures to display a high interest in sex. Most men acknowledged social pressures regarding men’s sexuality and described being affected by these messages to some degree. Specifically, men talked about their Awareness of Social Pressures, feeling Pressure to Say Yes to Sexual Opportunities, and Pressure to Initiate Sexual Activity.
Awareness of Social Pressures

Men in this study described many of the social pressures they felt as men and how sexual scripts and expectations affected their display of sexual desire. Some men indicated being influenced by media, specifically music videos. One participant discussed the impact that these images have on some young men:

Look at the TV shows and the music videos, YouTube and stuff. Guys are supposed to be surrounded by women. Women aren’t supposed to have their clothes on around them. Even that message speaks to… all guys want is naked women all around them all the time, right? (Tim, 32)

Other men talked about being influenced by hearing other men talk about sexual conquests and experiences. One participant described comparing himself and his sexual experiences to sexual stories described by his peers. If he felt his experiences were less frequent or exciting than what his peers were experiencing, he would be more likely to initiate sex with his wife at home that night. He said:

Guys can listen to what’s going on at work, listen to their buddies claim what they did last night and everything else, and their thoughts are like…I should be doing that too…group mentality I guess. It seems to be the norm. And if you don’t have that norm you try to get to that norm. And like I said…it’s like he’s getting some so I better be getting some too. (Mark, 51)

However, participants suggested that men’s high and incessant interest in sex was a stereotype and men were not as simple as the media or other social norms might suggest. One man said: “the whole thing that men think about [sex] every seven and a half seconds is crap. I mean, we’d literally get nothing done. It’s just insane. Like we wouldn’t be able to cook anything proper. We’d depend on the microwave” (Joseph, 7). The following participant also suggested that stereotypes about men’s sexuality are incorrect and damaging. He stated that men are being “shortchanged” by society to appear or assumed to be much simpler than they really were. He said:
I think it’s more about the stereotype than it is about the norm. Because I think there is much that is not understood about men’s internal life. And I think in large part men are being shortchanged as being very simple creatures. And so I would use the word stereotypically as opposed to the norm because I don’t think norm, like anything I think men exist on a spectrum. So you can have hyper masculine men that need sex all the time and you can have much less masculine men who don’t need it as much, or aren’t defined by it. And there is going to be everything else in the middle. (Robert, 40)

Some men described knowing other men who they felt were influenced by these expectations, even if they felt they did not abide by the sexual scripts themselves. One participant said:

I think it’s just the whole masculinity thing. It’s guys not wanting to seem, almost, they think if they don’t want it all the time they’re somehow inferior or they’re not going to look like a masculine male in front of their buddies or potentially in front of women as well. They want to show that they’re like a young stallion or whatever. (Carl, 31)

Another participant acknowledged that he was frustrated by narrow stereotypes about men’s sexuality; something he was aware of but not something he abided by. He said:

I do feel a societal pressure that I, as a man, if I’m being a “real man,” should always want any sex that is available. And I should only say no to sex for two reasons. One is that I’m being honorable and the assumption is I actually want the sex but I’m choosing not to because it would be cheating. The other type is, you’re allowed to say no to sex if the person who is conventionally much less desirable than you. Which is another one I have trouble with because I am in a relationship with a severely physically disabled person. (Joshua, 33)

Similarly, another participant stated that sexual expectations influence behaviours among men he knows, although he did not acknowledge that he was directly affected by the same norms:

Men think that they’re supposed to be making comments to a girl when they pass by, so they do. And I get the impression that a lot of it is forced. I think so at least…they’re not as hopped up as they appear. But I think for men there is a role they need to fake desire that they don’t necessarily have or make comments they wouldn’t necessarily make. Especially maybe as they get older when they don’t necessarily feel those comments anymore, they still want to be manly so they still drink a 6 pack of beer and watch the playboy channel because they think they’re supposed to. (Brian, 40)
Men who reported an awareness of masculine norms and stereotypes often described these expectations as damaging and limiting. As one participant put it:

There is a strong stereotype on men that they should want every time and maybe be able to perform three times in one night and stuff like that. And I think this is stupid and makes them really suffer. Act unnaturally. But they do not realize it, they would never confess, admit it. They say no this is what I want. It’s stupid. (Kyle, 38)

Most men in this study expressed an awareness of expectations and norms around male sexuality that set forth acceptable ways for men to demonstrate their sexual desire. Specifically men reported being aware, and skeptical, of social pressures that prescribe men always demonstrate a high interest in sex.

**Pressure to Say Yes to Sexual Opportunities**

The majority of men in this study spoke about social pressures, and pressures within their relationship, to say yes to sex. Thus, being open to sexual encounters was sometimes a result of it being unacceptable to say no, rather than because of a high interest in sex. Many participants described a cultural expectation that men be constantly interested in sexual activity. As one participant described: “the culturally expected norm is that [men] always want it and they’re always ready for it” (Hudson, 30). Another participant noted that because men were perceived to want sex all the time, if they ever said no to sex it could look suspicious. He said: “they tell us men that we think about sex all the time, so when we have somebody instigating it from the outside, now is the time to take advantage. It’s allegedly what’s more foremost in your mind” (Warren, 59). A third participant also perceived that it would be problematic for him to say no to sexual activity because men normally initiate. He believed saying no could lead to his female partner questioning his masculinity: “because we’re always
complaining that we’re not getting enough sex, if they initiate it, and then all of the
sudden we’re saying no to them? Then it’s like what’s your problem? You’re not a real
man, type of thing” (Scott, 42). Out of desire to appear manly or “normal” to their
female partners, some men talked about feigning an interest in sex, or having sex
without desire, in order to keep up appearances. Another participant stated:

It’s keeping up appearances for my wife at least. Because to some extent I
think she buys into the stereotype that men are more sexually active or have
more sexual desire. So if I’m not doing that, I think she feels sexually
inadequate? So sometimes I’ll feign sexual desire even if I’m not into it just so
she feels good about herself. (Justin, 30)

Another participant discussed that if he said no to sexual activity his wife
might perceive something to be wrong and take it personally. He stated:

I think she would probably be upset. I think because she knows that my desire
level is a lot higher than hers, typically. That she would be upset. She would
think something is wrong. And she knows me, my personality, she knows this
about me. So she would think something weird is going on if I said no I don’t
want to. (Hudson, 30)

Other men talked further about worrying that if they said no to sex, this would offend
their female partners on some level. Because they wanted to make their wives happy or
at least to avoid causing any strain in the relationship, some men also reported saying
yes to sexual activity to avoid any negative consequences. As one participant stated:

My wife has very low self-esteem. She is very self-conscious about her body.
She’s a little overweight, I don’t care. So if I was to say no to her, it’s
happened before, so I know what happens. She thinks that she’s not
desirable, she’s not attractive or whatever. So it’s one of those things where I
have to think of her feelings. If I’m going to say no, what’s going to happen
to her, like, what her feeling is going to be like afterward. (Scott, 42)

A third participant also talked about his desire to make his wife happy. He said that if
he turned down her sexual advances it would hurt her feelings. Saying no to sex was
not worth upsetting her. He said:
It’s definitely tough to say no. Because I’ve always been a people pleaser in general. And so it’s tough to say no in general for me. But also because it’s your partner, your wife, and you want to make them happy. So yeah, anytime you say no you feel bad. I haven’t had to that very much. (Carl, 31)

Finally, some men talked about saying yes to sex as a more strategic way to avoid losing out on a future sexual opportunity. Saying no to a sexual advance at one point in time could be costly, as men could envision a future time when they want to have sex and their partner might not. As one participant described:

It’s not necessarily that we want to have sex all the time, but if it’s offered to us we’ll take it. I do think most men aren’t thinking about it all the time, but it’s offered the desire, it’s, they are always ready to go and it might be a cultural thing or, I don’t know, maybe we just don’t want to miss an opportunity. (Michael, 33)

Another man discussed a time when he had said no to sex and regretted it later. He said: “I regretted it after…because then I think she’ll say well you said no so it’s okay if I say no, it always seems like you have to work for it” (Steven, 41).

One man described that despite knowing and critically thinking about the masculine norms, he still found himself thinking about them when having sex with this wife:

Even in my own relationship when I say no to sex, and I do, it’s not always her, there is a part of me that feels guilty. Like, you know, if she wants to have sex and I don’t and I say no I feel guilty. Even though she doesn’t expect me to and she tries to stop me from feeling that way, I feel it anyway…that comes from a big social construct that says I should want to have sex with anyone that wants to have sex with me. (Joshua, 33)

Men felt pressure to say yes to sexual activity, and they sometimes said yes to sex because of this pressure rather than because their sexual interest was always high and consistent. Men also shared that they wanted to keep up appearances to their female partners by appearing to be a “real man,” one who was always wanting sex and saying yes to sexual advances.
Pressure to Initiate Sexual Activity

Although most men in this study described themselves as being the one in their relationship to initiate sexual activity, which, on the surface, suggested that they were interested in sex, some men reported feeling pressured to initiate sex for their partner’s sake. One participant said that if he didn’t initiate sex with his wife each night she would think something was wrong because it went against the norm. After describing that he would initiate sex with his wife every night, even if he wasn’t in the mood, he explained:

She’d notice if I wasn’t doing it that way. I almost have to do it to kind of keep up appearances to some extent. She would think something was wrong if I wasn’t desiring her…that I wasn’t acting like myself or I was upset with her. (Justin, 30)

The same participant went on to say that he wished this was not always the case and that he could go to bed without initiating activity. He stated: “for once I would like to not have to show interest” (Justin, 30). Another participant similarly stated that even when his female partner was the one who wanted to have sex, or suggested it in some subtle way, he was still expected to initiate. He described that this was confusing because he could not always pick up on her signals:

Even when she wants sex she’ll still expect me to initiate….I’ll get home and give her a kiss and she’d say ‘why didn’t we have sex in the morning? We can’t have it now’ and I’m like “well why didn’t you roll over and…if you really wanted sex why didn’t you let me know? (Ryan, 34)

Men indicated that they wished the pressure they experienced to initiate sex could be alleviated. In this sense, some men did say they might initiate sexual activity even when they were not feeling desire, perhaps giving the impression their desire was higher than it was experienced.
Chapter 4: Discussion

Summary of Findings

The objective of the current grounded theory research project was to develop an interpretivist, substantive theory to explain how men in long-term relationships experience sexual desire. Four questions guided the current study: 1) “What factors elicit men’s sexual desire in the context of their long-term relationships, or their desire for individual sexual pleasure in general?” 2) “What factors inhibit men’s sexual desire in the context of their long-term relationships, or their desire for individual sexual pleasure in general?” 3) “How might experiences of sexual desire within one’s relationship differ from non-partner specific experiences of sexual desire?” And finally, 4) “To what degree do men’s descriptions of sexual desire support, or deviate from, traditional masculinity norms and sexual scripts?” Thirty men between the ages of 30 and 65 in heterosexual relationships were interviewed. Grounded Theory Methodology from a constructionist perspective was used to analyze the data (Charmaz, 2006).

Participants experienced desire as largely relational in nature. Factors that elicited sexual desire were frequently related to interactions that suggested co-constructed meaning making between male participants and their female partners. In other words, sexual desire was higher when men perceived an interaction with their partners as mutual, connected, and intimate (Weingarten, 1991). Factors found to elicit sexual desire were: a) Feeling Desired, b) Feeling Sexy, Attractive and Desirable, c) Cognitions and Moods, d) Visual Sexual Cues, e) Exciting and Unexpected Sexual Encounters, f) Context of the Sexual Encounter, and g) Intimate Communication.
Conversely, factors that inhibited sexual desire suggested a lack of mutuality and intimacy within the relationship (Weingarten, 1991). Participants reported experiencing decreased, or absent, sexual desire during situations in which they and their female partners were not equally engaged in a sexual encounter. Factors inhibiting sexual desire were: a) Physical Ailments and Negative Health Characteristics, b) Life Pressures and Stresses, c) Sexual Abuse, d) Less Emphasis On and Effort Invested in Sexual Encounters, e) Rejection, f) Partner not Equally Engaged in Sexual Activity, and g) Lack of Emotional Connection with Partner.

Although men mostly discussed sexual desire in the context of their long-term relationships, they also acknowledged sexual desire occurred extra-relationally and at an individual level, albeit in different ways. Most men described experiencing sexual desire for women who were not their partners as fleeting and only physical in nature (i.e., there being no emotional connection). Experiencing sexual desire outside of their relationship did not imply men were interested in pursuing those feelings: extra-relational desire was described as something that should and could be controlled. At an individual level, some men described experiencing desire for private sexual release through pornography and masturbation. However, neither of these activities was discussed in great detail in this study. Men suggested their sexual desire was, preferably, directed towards activities with their female partners. Individual-level sexual activities (i.e., masturbation and pornography) were described as something most men engaged in when their partner was uninterested or unavailable.

About a third of participants described having high and constant levels of sexual desire and over half reported never turning down an opportunity to engage in a sexual
encounter. However, most men also indicated that their sexual desire was sometimes feigned in order to appear more masculine or reduce the chance of upsetting their female partner. In that sense, some men admitted that their sexual desire was not always high and constant, but rather sometimes appeared that way as a result of a perceived social pressure to demonstrate certain actions and behaviours that were consistent with traditional sexual scripts and norms. Many men were critical of these scripts and norms, indicating they wished they did not have to “play by the rules.” Other participants reported an awareness of male sexual norms but did not describe their own experiences as being affected by social scripts or pressures.

**Theoretical Evaluation**

Three theories were used to guide the current study: Evolutionary Theory (Buss, 1995; Buss, 1998; Hatfield et al., 2010; McCabe & Cummins, 1997; Stuart-Williams & Thomas, 2013), Sexual Script Theory (Frith & Kitzinger, 2001; Masters et al., 2012; Simon & Gagnon, 1986; 2003), and Masculinity Theory (Courtenay, 2000; Kimmel, 2005; Seal & Ehrhardt, 2003; Wiederman, 2012). These theories were selected as they were determined to be the only explicitly documented sexuality theories that pertained to, or addressed, men’s sexual desire. Evolutionary Theory generally suggests that men have an inherently high level of sexual desire that is relatively impermeable to external factors (Buss, 1995; Buss, 1998; Hatfield et al., 2010; McCabe & Cummins, 1997). Sexual Script Theory and Masculinity Theory suggest that men should demonstrate high levels of desire in order to abide by social norms and expectations (Courtenay, 2000; Frith & Kitzinger, 2001; Kimmel, 2005; Masters et al., 2012; Seal & Ehrhardt, 2003; Simon & Gagnon, 1986; 2003;
Wiederman, 2012). The findings here offer some support for, and also deviate from, these theoretical propositions.

**Evolutionary Theory**

Some evolutionary theorists posit that men have evolved to experience an inherently high level of sexual desire to increase their interest in procreating with multiple women (Hatfield et al., 2010; MacDonald, 1992). Despite many men describing their sexual desire as “high,” almost all men acknowledged a decrease in their level of sexual desire since the beginning of their relationship (i.e., the “honeymoon” phase). This suggests that, even if men continue to identify having relatively high levels of desire within their longer-term relationships, their experience of desire is not entirely impermeable to external or relational factors. Further, all men were able to describe times and situations in which they felt no sexual desire, indicating men’s sexual desire is not constant. Men’s descriptions of decreased desire over the course of a long-term relationship in the current study differed from previous quantitative research which has suggested that men’s sexual desire remains high as a relationship becomes long-term (e.g., Klusmann, 2002; Murray & Milhausen, 2012a). However, the present study differs from previous studies in terms of the age and relationship duration of the participants. Klusmann’s (2002) and Murray and Milhausen’s (2012a) studies were based on younger samples of college-aged students aged 18-32 and 18-25, respectively. It may be that younger men (under the age of 30) are less likely to experience a decrease in sexual desire as their relationship becomes long-term. Perhaps it is later, as life stressors and pressures culminate and the responsibilities of adulthood are felt (Arnett, 2000), that desire begins to decrease. It is
also possible that quantitative sexual desire scales used in past sexual desire studies (e.g., The Brief Male Sexual Function Index; O’Leary et al., 1995) are not able to fully capture variations in sexual desire, particularly as the aforementioned scale does not specify whether sexual desire is occurring within or outside of one’s romantic partnership.

Some evolutionary theorists suggest that men would be attracted to physical characteristics that indicate women are fertile and healthy (Hatfield et al., 2010). Past research that supports Evolutionary Theory has determined that, compared to women’s sexual desire, men’s desire is mainly physical, rather than emotional or relational, in nature (Meston & Buss, 2007). Many men in this study spoke about their desire being triggered by physical characteristics, such as women’s hips, legs, breasts, or simply seeing a woman naked. Physical cues were described as occurring both within and outside of men’s relationships. However, men’s descriptions of an emotional connection with their female partners were highlighted more often and in more detail as being central to their experience of desire. This suggests relational connections may be more significant factors in men’s experience of sexual desire than has previously been documented (e.g., Meston & Buss, 2007). It is noteworthy that while Meston and Buss’s (2007) study reported some significant gender differences for why humans have sex, men and women were found to have far more similarities than differences. Although women were significantly more likely to endorse emotional reasons for sex (i.e., “I wanted to express my love for the person”), and men were significantly more likely to endorse physical characteristics (i.e., “the person had a desirable body”), both men and women included relational intimacy in their top five reasons for having sex.
Men’s Sexual Desire

(i.e., “I wanted to show my affection to the person;” Meston & Buss, 2007). Further, many of the mean scores reported by men and women on the “Why Have Sex” scale (YSEX) in Meston and Buss’s (2007) study only represented a half-point differentiation on a five-point scale. Therefore, even though the gender differences found were significant, they may not be meaningful in terms of experience. As a result, focusing on gender differences may give the impression of a false dichotomy between men and women.

Some evolutionary theorists not only suggest that men have high desire, but more specifically posit that high desire developed in order to increase men’s interest in procreating with multiple women (Hatfield et al., 2010; MacDonald, 1992). Men in this study were quite forthcoming about their experience of sexual desire outside of their relationships. Feeling desire for other women was described as normal, natural and biological; an internal feeling or experience that could not be controlled. However, men indicated they could control whether or not to act on those desires. In other words, men described a natural urge to want to be with other women, but it was overridden by a moral or social code, which they adopted, that posited there was a larger benefit to being with only one woman. This finding may offer support for the sexually monogamous, pair-bonding mating strategy proposed by some evolutionary theorists (i.e., Stuart-Williams & Thomas, 2013). The findings may also suggest a desire to meet social standards and expectations may outweigh men’s evolutionarily developed interests in having sex with multiple females.

In summary, men in this study largely described their sexual desire in ways that deviated from the dominant discourse of Evolutionary Theory. The findings suggest
that theoretical propositions that focus on men’s desire being largely physical in nature do not adequately capture the more complex and relational aspects of men’s sexual desire. Instead the findings suggest men’s desire may be more relational in nature, in order to support a pair-bond relationship, which may help support their offspring (Stuart-Willams & Thomas, 2013).

Biopsychosocial theory, which proposes that biological influences interact with psychological and social factors, has previously been applied to sexual problems such as sex addiction (Samenow, 2010) and premature ejaculation (Mrdjenovich, Bischof & Menichello, 2004). It is proposed that a biopsychosocial model may be more appropriate lens for theorizing about men’s experiences of sexual desire (Carvalho & Nobre, 2011) than Evolutionary Theory alone. In this way, tenets of Sexual Script Theory and Masculinity Theory (and other theories more social in nature) could also be drawn upon to describe and explain influences upon men’s experiences of sexual desire.

**Sexual Script Theory & Masculinity Theory**

Sexual Script Theory and Masculinity Theory posit that rather than having an inherently high level of sexual desire, men are encouraged by society to express a high interest in sex in order to abide by social scripts and expectations. Specifically, Sexual Script Theory suggests that men should experience and express a high level of interest in sex to abide by social norms and expectations regarding sexual interactions, particularly through initiating sexual activity with female partners (Frith & Kitzinger, 2001; Masters et al., 2012; Simon & Gagnon, 1986; 2003). Previous research suggests that many men do, in fact, conform to characteristics of traditional sexually related gender roles (Masters et al., 2012). Men in the current study similarly acknowledged
that they felt it was expected they initiate sexual activity and show a high interest in
sex, even when they did not feel sexual desire. They described being concerned that if
they did not initiate sex, their female partner might think something was wrong or take
their lack of interest personally. As a result, men described initiating sexual activity
out of pressure or obligation, rather than because of their own need or interest.
Although sexual scripts appear to have wide social acceptance, findings from a
qualitative study of emerging adults between the ages of 18-25 also found that some
men expressed a desire to deviate from sexual script norms (Vannier & O’Sullivan,
2010). The current study included men between the ages of 30 and 65 years old and,
thus, not only support Vannier and O’Sullivan’s (2010) findings, but also expands on
them by suggesting the desire to deviate from social scripts among emerging
adulthood male participants is also present among an older sample of men.

Masculinity Theory posits that men should avoid demonstrating anything other
than a high level of interest in sexual activity (Masters et al., 2012), as failing to initiate
sexual activity or show a strong interest in women calls into question a man’s
masculinity and sexual orientation (Seal & Ehrhardt, 2003; Wiederman, 2005). True to
this proposition, most men in this study described being aware of masculinity norms
suggesting they should always be interested in sex and initiate sexual activity. Men
discussed expectations around men’s sexuality as damaging and something that limited
their true expression of sexual desire. In the context of long-term heterosexual
relationships, men did not express a worry that they would appear homosexual, but
rather that they might appear less “manly” in their female partner’s eyes. This supports
past research suggesting that masculinity norms can be harmful and difficult to abide
by, and also suggests that masculine norms may be changing over time (Masters et al., 2012; Seal & Ehrheardt, 2003).

Men in this study also spoke about experiences that indirectly deviated from masculine norms. Specifically men’s descriptions of rejection appear to be connected to the experience of vulnerability (often considered a “feminine” or “weak” characteristic; Brown, 2012; Masters et al., 2012). Brené Brown, a leading researcher of vulnerability and shame defines vulnerability as “uncertainty, risk and emotional exposure” (Brown, 2012, p. 34). Although men did not explicitly use the word “vulnerability” during their interviews, they described their emotional uncertainty when initiating sexual activity and worry over whether or not their female partner would accept their advances. When sexual advances were rejected, men described the experience negatively impacted their self-esteem and their perception of self. Brown (2012), in her book “Daring Greatly” suggests that there is vulnerability and risk when men initiate sexual activity and they can experience deep hurt when they perceive that their female partners are not responsive. However, the connection between men’s experience of rejection from sexual advances and vulnerability has not been empirically documented in previous sexuality research. Further research, which includes considering men as more vulnerable than masculine norms prescribe, would help advance our understanding of this phenomenon.

Men’s experience of vulnerability and reduced self-esteem when experiencing rejection may influence their approach when initiating sex, and thus, their female partner’s experience of desire and whether or not sex occurs. Female participants in previous studies have suggested that ineffective initiation strategies adopted by their
male partners decrease their sexual desire and arousal (e.g., Graham et al., 2004; Murray & Milhausen, 2012b). It may be that over time men who experience repeated rejection are more hesitant to initiate sexual activity directly. Their more subtle, and emotionally protective, forms of initiation may be a way to reduce the fear and impact of rejection. However, these initiation strategies may also be detrimental to their female partner’s experience of desire if women perceive them to be lazy or unromantic. Further research focusing on initiation and rejection in longer-term relationships could help elucidate the potential relationship between these two aspects related to initiation.

In summary, men in this study described their desire in ways that offered support for Masculinity Theory and Sexual Script Theory. Not only did men acknowledge an awareness of masculine norms and expectations around sexual scripts that impacted their expression and experience of sexual desire, they often indicated that they wanted to deviate from social, masculine expectations. Most men described feeling pressure to perform in certain “masculine” ways, particularly initiating sexual activity even if it was unwanted. Further, counter to current sexual script expectations, men expressed a desire to have their female partners initiate sex more often. These findings suggest that men sometimes express their sexual desire in ways that are dictated by social norms and expectations. The notion of men’s sexual desire being high and constant may be more socially constructed than innate.

**Relational Theories**

Theoretical lenses in sexuality research are often individual in nature (Weis, 1998). However, men in this study spoke largely about how their sexual desire was experienced in their relationship and impacted by relational intimacy. A relational,
intimate framework proposed by Weingarten (1991) and previously applied to parent-child relationships (Oliphant & Kuczynski, 2011) may be an appropriate theoretical lens to extend to sexual relationships. Among the current participants, when men described experiencing intimate, shared meaning-making interactions with their female partners, sexual desire was enhanced. On the other hand, when misunderstandings or lack of shared connection was experienced, sexual desire decreased.

Without a relational theoretical framework, some factors developed in the current study (and replicated in previous studies) could appear to be unrelated to intimate interactions with one’s partner; for example, sexual encounters that were described as “spontaneous.” Despite men’s descriptions of sexual encounters that just “happened,” spontaneous sexual activity actually requires the very closely constructed, mutual understanding of a moment transitioning from nonsexual to sexual. It necessitates two partners being aware of the other person’s subtle messages and being receptive to these cues at exactly the same time in order to feel no explicit effort was being exerted. Similarly, “romantic settings,” if considered a situational or contextual factor, imply that a couple was not involved in creating a romantic moment. In actuality, romance requires effort (e.g., dressing nicely, making a reservation for dinner, setting aside space, time and sometimes money, etc.) and agreement on both partners’ sides to partake and make romance a priority. Although romantic settings have previously been documented as a facilitator of sexual desire (Murray & Milhausen, 2012b) and sexual arousal (Graham et al., 2004), it has been considered a situational/contextual factor rather than a relational one. The current study suggests that relational theories help
describe sexuality in more accurate terms. Further, it would be of value to explore whether any additional relational theories (e.g., Attachment Theory; Bowlby, 1988) may contribute to the understanding, or interpretation, of men’s sexual desire.

Human Sexual Response Cycles

It is widely acknowledged that while the original HSRC proposed by Masters and Johnson in 1966 was revolutionary in terms of describing physiological changes during sex, it does not adequately address the psychological experience of sexual desire (Janssen et al., 2008). However, advancements made with regard to human sexual response (i.e., Kaplan, 1977; Basson, 2000; 2001a; 2001b) have largely focused on their applicability to women’s sexual desire without adequately addressing men’s experiences (Janssen et al., 2008). In a 2008 qualitative study of men’s sexual arousal, Janssen and colleagues determined that men experienced desire and arousal as overlapping constructs, and believed that traditional sexual response focused too much on the genitals rather than on men’s corresponding mental interest. In their study, the authors also determined a myriad of factors impacted men’s arousal (Janssen et al., 2008). As a result the authors concluded that the same arguments that helped expand human response models to better reflect women’s experiences could also be applied to men (Janssen et al., 2008). The current study adds support to the small body of literature suggesting that men’s sexual desire is complex and nuanced. It is not within the scope of the current study to suggest that one model of sexual response (e.g., Masters and Johnson, Kaplan or Basson) is more suitable for men than another. However, even in a smaller qualitative sample, men described their sexual desire in ways that offered support for (and deviated from) all three models, and there is likely
variability across men as there is for women (e.g., Sand & Fisher, 2007; Giles & McCabe, 2009).

**Similarities Between Men’s and Women’s Experiences of Sexual Desire**

It is frequently suggested that men and women experience desire in different ways, and research has tended to focus more on gender differences rather than similarities (e.g., Baumeister et al., 2001; Klusmann, 2002; Meston & Buss, 2007; Murray & Milhausen, 2012a). However, the ways in which the men in this study described their desire were similar to the ways women have described their experiences of desire and arousal in previous qualitative studies (e.g., Graham et al., 2004; Murray & Milhausen, 2012b) and fit well with previous theoretical conceptualizations used to understand the complexities of women’s sexual desire (Tiefer, 2001).

In 2001, The New View Campaign of Women’s Sexual Problems pioneered by Leonore Tiefer proposed that women’s sexual desire is impacted by socio-cultural, political or economic factors (e.g., lack of sex education, body image), partner and relationship factors (e.g., desire discrepancy, betrayal), psychological factors (e.g., sexual abuse), and medical factors (e.g., pregnancy, medications; Tiefer, 2001). The campaign primarily sought to put forth the notion that multiple factors, beyond the medical, impact women’s sexuality. Later, studies on women’s sexual desire and sexual arousal supported this model. Graham and colleagues’ (2004) similarly concluded that women’s sexual arousal was complex and impacted by a variety of factors including “self” (e.g., mood), “partner” (e.g., attraction), “relationship dynamics” (e.g., relationship quality), “hormones” (e.g., contraception), and “setting” (e.g., romance). In a recent study of factors that impacted sexual desire in emerging-adult women, Murray...
and Milhausen (2012b) determined that women’s sexual desire was impacted by factors that could be considered at four levels: individual (e.g., stress), partner-related (e.g., effective initiation), relational (e.g., intimate communication) and external (i.e., having privacy).

Although the current study did not present the precise themes previously noted, a number of components that impacted men’s desire were described. For example, men described their sexual desire as influenced by aspects of their own physical or mental wellbeing (e.g., feeling stressed or relaxed), their partner (e.g., feeling desired by their female partner), their relationship (e.g., emotional connection), external or contextual factors (e.g., having a busy life) and medical factors (e.g., medications and illnesses). Regardless of thematic labels, the conceptual similarities between the current study and previously mentioned studies suggests that Tiefer and colleagues (2001)’s propositions about women’s sexual desire being multi-faceted and complex are also relevant for men.

**Desire to be Desired**

One eliciting factor arising from the current study warrants additional exploration. It has been established in sexuality research that it is important to women’s experience of desire that they feel desired by their partner (Meana, 2010). This finding has been previously reported in young women in long-term relationships (e.g., Murray & Milhausen, 2012b) as well as in focus groups of women’s sexual arousal with participants ranging between the ages of 18 and 74 (Graham et al., 2004). There has only been one qualitative study conducted to date on men’s sexual arousal which also suggested that feeling desired is important to men’s arousal (Janssen et al., 2008).
A recently proposed theoretical framework for the desire to feel desired has been proposed, called the Object of Desire Self-Consciousness Theory (Bogaert & Brotto, 2014). The authors of this proposed theory suggest that it is a human experience to want to feel desired by another person. Yet, the authors posit that this is largely a female experience and is less applicable to men (Bogaert & Brotto, 2014). When Bogaert and Brotto briefly applied their theory to men, they suggested that feeling desired would be more about men’s resources (i.e., social status, finances) than men’s physical appearance (Bogaert & Brotto, 2014). However, men in the current study made frequent statements about the ways that feeling desired was very important to their ability to feel desire themselves. In fact, this was the most commonly expressed and noteworthy theme that was developed to describe factors that elicited men’s sexual desire. Men reported that receiving compliments about their appearance, awareness of their female partners’ equal interest in a sexual encounter, and their female partner initiating sexual activity were the biggest facilitators of their sexual desire. Despite this, most men acknowledged that feeling desired was a rare occurrence and was something they felt women were not aware was important to men. As men in this study indicated feeling desired was valuable to their experience of desire, it is suggested that the newly proposed Object of Desire Self Consciousness Theory (Bogaert & Brotto, 2014) might also be considered, adapted, and applied in relation to men’s experiences.

**Summary**

Evolutionary Theory (Buss, 1995; 1998; Hatfield et al., 2010; McCabe & Cummins, 1997; Stuart-Williams & Thomas, 2013) Sexual Script Theory (Frith &
Kitzinger, 2001; Masters et al., 2012; Simon & Gagnon, 1986; 2003), and Masculinity Theory (Courtenay, 2000; Kimmel, 2005; Seal & Ehrhardt, 2003; Wiederman, 2012) have provided useful frameworks for describing and interpreting some men’s experiences of sexual desire (e.g., Baumeister et al. 2001; Klusmann, 2002; Levine, 2002; 2003; Masters et al., 2012; Meston & Buss, 2007; Murray & Milhuasen, 2012a). However, in the current study, men’s experiences of sexual desire were determined to largely deviate from these theoretical propositions.

The dominant discourse of evolutionary theorists’ propositions did not lend themselves to explain the importance of relational closeness that positively impacted men’s desire among this sample, nor the complexity of factors eliciting and inhibiting men’s desire. Further, most men in this study, although acknowledging an innate and biological interest in sex, indicated that they expressed their sexual interest in a way that abided by social and cultural guidelines (i.e., containing sexual behaviours within the context of a relationship, feigning an interest in sexual activity when no desire was present). This finding, again, may offer support for a biopsychosocial approach to research on men’s sexual desire (Carvalho & Nobre, 2011).

Sexual Script Theory and Masculinity Theory more accurately captured the social construction of men’s sexual desire described by the participants. Yet, most men described feeling that current cultural norms and expectations were too limited and they expressed their wish to deviate from social prescriptions. This finding supports previous research that similarly concluded that norms and expectations do not fit for all men and may be changing over time (e.g., Dworkin & O’Sullivan, 2005; Masters et al., 2012; Vannier & O’Sullivan, 2010).
The aforementioned theories, and the corresponding research guided in part by their theoretical assumptions, have often focused on gender differences rather than similarities (e.g., Baumeister et al., 2001; Klusmann, 2002; Meston & Buss, 2007; Murray & Milhausen, 2012a). However, the current findings suggest there may be more similarities than differences in terms of the factors that elicit and inhibit sexual desire in men and women. Men in this study described their sexual desire as being affected by a multitude of factors which have been documented in past research on women’s sexual desire and sexual arousal (i.e., personal, partner, relationship, and situational factors; Graham et al., 2004; Murray & Milhausen, 2012b) Adopting the perspective that research on men and women’s sexual desire should be advanced simultaneously may be of value in future sexuality research. Further, existing theories may be modified to be more inclusive of both men’s and women’s experiences of desire (i.e., Object of Desire Self Consciousness Theory; Bogaert & Brotto, 2014).

**Strengths & Limitations**

This study had some notable strengths. First, there has been a dearth of research investigating men’s experiences of sexual desire (Brotto, 2010a). The findings here increase our understanding of how men in long-term relationships experience sexual desire and provide the building blocks for a theoretical explanation for the complexities of men’s sexual desire. As well, these findings indicate that men’s sexual desire is multi-faceted and complex, similar to previous conclusions that have been drawn regarding women’s sexual desire and sexual arousal (e.g., Graham et al., 2004; Murray & Milhausen, 2012b; Tiefer, 2001). The inclusion of questions addressing men’s experiences of extra-relational desire in this study was significant in highlighting an
important conceptual difference in the phenomenon of men’s sexual desire: namely, that
desire in the context of close relationship contexts may be experienced differently when
closely coordinating meaning with another person, considerations that may not be
relevant in extra-relational desire which appears to be more biologically motivated.

Another noteworthy strength of the current study is the sample. The sample size
of 30 participants meets the recently proposed rigorous sample size criteria for
qualitative studies in the field of sexuality research (Dworkin, 2012). Although
saturation was determined to have been reached at 20 interviews, including 30
interviews allowed for increased certainty of saturation and for additional depth and
richness to be explored in the study themes. Second, unlike many previous studies that
have often relied on the participation of undergraduate students, the current study
recruited a community sample of men aged 30 to 65 years old. As a result, the sample
not only differed from others more typical in sexuality research in terms of age, it was
also more diverse in terms of academic background, socio-economic status, and
relationship length. Additionally, the current study sample was recruited from two
prairie cities in Canada. A cross-sample analysis revealed that there were no notable
differences between the men interviewed in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan and the men
interviewed in Winnipeg, Manitoba. As such it suggests that the findings from the
current study may be somewhat generalizable rather than if the sample was recruited
entirely in one city.

However, some potential limitations warrant consideration. First, the gender
difference between the researcher and the interviewers may have led to different
findings than if the interviewer had been male. This is not inherently a limitation, as
past research has shown that men do respond well to being interviewed by a female (Bancroft, 1997). In fact, some men in the current study indicated that they only participated because there was a female researcher, suggesting this made them more comfortable. However, there may have been other motives for men’s participation (i.e., a desire to talk about sexually explicit ideas with a female interviewer), which may not have been present with a male interviewer. It is also of interest that men did not discuss pornography use in great detail in the current study nor their engagement in extra-relational sexual encounters. It may have been that pornography was not a relevant component of desire within this particular sample, or perhaps men were uncomfortable discussing their pornography use with a female interviewer. Men also were vague regarding the physical characteristics of women’s bodies that increased their sexual desire. It is possible men may have expanded further on this area with a male interviewer. Similarly, men may have been uncomfortable discussing extra-relational sex within the context of a one-hour interview with a female stranger.

There are also inherent lenses from which I view data that I have as a result of being a woman, working as a couple and family therapist, and having a history of researching women’s experience of sexual desire. It is possible that a researcher with a different gender identity and research/professional background would create different interview questions and themes. As a social-constructionist researcher I do not perceive this to be a limitation, but rather simply a consideration that a different interviewer or researcher may have arrived at, or created, alternate themes with a less relational focus.
It is notable that the men in this study were between the ages of 30 and 65 and in heterosexual long-term relationships that were described as sexually monogamous, recruited from two prairie provinces in Canada. It is possible that the sample of men in the current study, who responded to a study of men’s sexual desire in long-term relationships, may have been primed to discuss the relational aspects of their sexual desire and/or may have been men who are more in touch with their feelings and emotions. Further, this group of individuals clearly does not represent all men (i.e., men younger than 30, older than 65, bisexual and gay men, men in non-monogamous relationships, men not in relationships, etc.). Research on each of these groups is warranted, in order to understand where differences and similarities may lie. A greater focus on the ways men who were diverse in terms of background and other characteristics experience desire will enrich our understanding of male sexuality. A follow-up quantitative study could help determine how common the factors determined in the current study are to men of different ages, in different stages of relationships, or who are engaged in non-monogamous relationships, and so forth.

Implications

Much has been assumed, yet little empirically understood, about men’s sexual desire (Brotto, 2010b). Previous theoretical propositions about men’s sexuality are limited in their presumptions about men’s sexual desire being high and unwavering (Buss, 1995; 1998; Courtenay, 2000; Frith & Kitzinger, 2001; Hatfield et al., 2010; Kimmel, 2005; Masters et al., 2012; McCabe & Cummins, 1997; Seal & Ehrhardt, 2003; Simon & Gagnon, 1986; 2003; Wiederman, 2012). The current findings suggest that men’s sexual desire is more complex, nuanced, and relationally focused than
previously documented. These findings have significant implications for researchers and therapists.

For researchers, it is recommended that men’s experiences of sexual desire receive a greater focus in the literature (Brotto, 2010b). The original HSRC proposed by Masters and Johnson (1966) was criticized being male-based and incorporating female experiences (Tiefer, 1991). As gender-inequality criticisms grew in number, researchers began to focus on female sexuality while research on men’s sexuality (with the exception of sexual medicine research on erectile dysfunction and early ejaculation) was stunted (Brotto, 2010b). Although a shift was warranted, over time the focus became heavily weighted towards women at the expense of a full understanding of men’s experiences. As such, it is not suggested that advancements in women’s sexuality be halted or slowed. Rather, there is value in the sexuality field continuing exploration of men and women in tandem, working from the supposition that men and women may be more similar than different. This is particularly relevant with the recently proposed Object of Desire Self-Consciousness Theory (Bogaert & Brotto, 2014). This theoretical proposition, given the finding in the current study that it may be applicable to men, presents an opportunity to investigate male experiences using a new theoretical framework.

Given limited empirical research investigating the ways that men experience sexual desire, there is a value in promoting the development of more qualitative studies that can begin to create new theoretical understandings of men’s sexual desire. Quantitative studies also have value in expanding our understanding of men’s sexual desire. However, it is recommended that self-report measures be sufficiently sensitive
enough to pick up nuances in men’s experiences of sexual desire to better document potential changes. Also, because men in the current study were quite forthcoming about their awareness of masculinity norms and the pressure to appear as though their desire was higher than it truly was, researchers should be aware that some quantitative measures may be vulnerable to social desirability biases and therefore lack the ability to capture the difference between men’s true versus portrayed levels of sexual desire.

Therapists working with men in longer-term relationships might benefit from an increased awareness of men’s intimacy and relational nature of desire. Although it may appear that some men want sex frequently, and for an experience of physical release rather than emotional connection, there is a value in being aware of pressures to initiate versus actual interest. A focus on understanding and reducing pressure to initiate could help prevent men from being pigeon-holed into initiating all sexual activity as well as leave space for women to be more assertive in sexual encounters. It may also be helpful for therapists to consider the vulnerability that many men experience when initiating sex and the impact that regular rejection from a female partner may play on their self-esteem.

Finally, from this study it can be concluded that relational desire requires effort and coordination in order to promote connection and intimacy. Men in this study indicated numerous ways that they put effort into their sexual encounters (i.e., initiating sexual activity, saying yes to sexual opportunities to please their female partner). Men also described that they wanted to perceive effort from their partner (i.e., their partner being interested in a sexual encounter, their partner initiating a sexual event) and that they each be involved in creating romantic, intimate settings (i.e., going on a date,
having the kids out of the house, being on vacation or having time alone to not feel rushed, being equally engaged and relaxed in order to enjoy the moment, and feeling emotionally connected). Whether the conclusions drawn from the current study apply to a minority of men or, perhaps, some (or many) men in certain circumstances, it is important to consider that men’s sexual desire can be relational in nature and is impacted by many factors, suggesting a deeper complexity than has been previously documented.
References


Men’s Sexual Desire 147


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Appendix A: On-line Advertisement

Men in Long-Term Relationships Needed for Sexual Desire Study!

We are conducting a study affiliated with the University of Guelph about men’s sexual desire in long-term relationships. Come in for a 1-hour interview! You will receive a $10 gift card plus the opportunity to be part of exciting new research in human sexuality!

To Participate, You Must:
Be 30-65 years old
Be in a long-term relationship of at least 2.5 years (30 months) Have a female partner

Interested? Please contact Sarah Murray

This study is part of a PhD program requirement and has been cleared by the University of Guelph ethics board.
MEN NEEDED FOR
SEXUALITY & RELATIONSHIP STUDY

How do Men in Long-Term Relationships Experience Sexual Desire?
Participate in a 1-Hour Interview and Contribute to Exciting New
Research in Human Sexuality!

Eligibility Criteria:
- Aged 30 to 65
- In a heterosexual relationship for at least 2.5 years

Receive a $10 Gift Card!
Appendix C: Screening Questionnaire

Hi [insert participant’s name here],

Thank you for your interest in our Men’s Sexual Desire Study!

Below is a brief screening questionnaire for you to complete. Once you reply to this email, you will be able to put an "X" beside your response.

If you meet the study criteria, we would ask you to come in for approximately 1 to 1.5 hours to have an interview and complete a brief questionnaire. You will receive a $10 gift card for your participation. Interviews will be tape-recorded to aid with transcription but no identifying information will attach you to the tape recording. Interviews will take place at the Saskatoon (or Winnipeg) Public Library.

Please let me know if you have any questions.

Sarah Murray, MSc (PhD Candidate)
University of Guelph

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SCREENING QUESTIONNAIRE:

1. I identify
   as: Male
   Female
   Transgendered
   Other

2. What is your age? _______ years

3. How long have you been with your current partner? _______ years _______ months

4. I would describe myself as:
   Lesbian or gay
   Heterosexual
   Bisexual
   Queer
   Uncertain or questioning
   I choose not to label myself
   Other
Appendix D: Consent Form

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Men’s Sexual Desire Study

You are asked to participate in a research study conducted by Sarah Murray as part of a Doctoral Dissertation, from the Department of Family Relations and Applied Nutrition at the University of Guelph.

If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel free to contact:
- Sarah Murray (murrays@uoguelph.ca) Doctoral Candidate, University of Guelph; 306-241-0752
- Dr. Robin Milhausen (rmilhaus@uoguelph.ca), University of Guelph: 519-824-4120, ext. 54397

PURPOSE AND OVERVIEW
The main purpose of this project is to gain a better understanding of how a community sample of men in long-term relationships describe and experience sexual desire. We are interested in what facilitates experiences of desire as well as what might impede desire.

PROCEDURES
If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will be asked to attend a one to one and a half-hour interview relating to sexual desire. You will also be asked to complete a questionnaire that is expected to take approximately 10 minutes. This questionnaire will include demographic questions. You will participate in this research in a private room and your total time commitment will be less than two hours. If you wish to obtain information regarding the results of the study, please write your email address on the consent form. Results will become available in the fall of 2014.

POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS
Some people may be embarrassed or feel uncomfortable discussing their sexual desire and sexuality in general. However, you may stop filling out the questionnaire at any time, or skip questions during the interview if you do not feel comfortable answering them.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO PARTICIPANTS AND/OR TO SOCIETY
There are a number of benefits to participating in this study. Many people enjoy participating in social science research of this type. You will learn about the process of conducting research on male sexuality and sexual desire. You will also benefit by knowing that you are contributing to our understanding of men’s sexual desire.
PAYMENT FOR PARTICIPATION
You will receive a $10 gift card to a business establishment in the area (e.g., Second Cup, Chapter’s, etc.) You will still receive this gift card if you do not answer all questions during the interview or complete the questionnaire.

CONFIDENTIALITY
We cannot guarantee anonymity for persons participating in this project as you will be participating in an in-person interview with the primary researcher. However, every effort will be made to ensure confidentiality of any identifying information that is obtained in connection with this study.

The interview will be tape-recorded to assure accuracy of the content, and then transcribed. Pseudonyms will be used on the transcripts. A list of each participant’s assigned pseudonym will be kept on spreadsheet and saved on a password-protected computer only accessible to the primary researcher. All transcripts will be kept in a locked cabinet in a locked office. Study data (including transcripts) will also be saved on a password-protected computer.

PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL
You can choose whether to be in this study or not. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind. You may exercise the option of removing your data from the study in which case any audio recordings of your interview will be erased and eliminated from future analysis. You may also refuse to answer any questions you don’t want to answer, both in the interview or the questionnaire, and still remain in the study. If you complete the interview and questionnaire but would like to have your data removed from this study at a later time, email the principal investigators listed at the top of this information letter, and your statements will be removed from the transcript. The investigator may withdraw you from this research if circumstances arise that warrant doing so (e.g., deliberate falsification of information).

FURTHER RESOURCES
If participating in this study has raised issues for your about your sexual functioning or your relationship, you may choose to access the following resources:

Saskatoon Crisis Intervention Service
Available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year
(306) 933-6200

Family Service Saskatoon
102, 506 – 25th Street East
Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, S7K 4A7 (306) 244-0127
email: info@familyservice.sk.ca
RIGHTS OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS
You may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty. You are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies because of your participation in this research study. This study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through the University of Guelph Research Ethics Board. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant, contact:

Sandy Auld, Research Ethics Coordinator
University of Guelph, 437 University Centre, Guelph, ON N1G 2W1
Telephone: (519) 824-4120, ext. 56606, Fax: (519) 821-5236
E-mail: sauld@uoguelph.ca.

CONSENT
I have read the information provided for the “Men’s Sexual Desire Study” as described herein. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I agree to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

SIGNATURE OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANT

Name of Participant (please print)

Signature of Participant or Legal Representative ___________________________ Date __________

SIGNATURE OF WITNESS

Name of Witness (please print)

Signature of Witness ___________________________ Date __________

Email address: ___________________________ (required only if results of the study are desired)
Appendix E: Demographics Questionnaire

This questionnaire takes about 5-10 minutes to complete and asks about some background information.

If you take this opportunity to contribute information to this study, it is essential that you do so seriously and honestly. Your responses should represent only your own personal opinions and experiences. Every precaution has been taken to ensure that your responses remain private. This study has been approved by the University ethics committee for the protection of human subjects’ rights.

When answering the questions, place an “X” in only one box per question where appropriate.

1. My age is: ___________ years old

2. I identify as a (circle one):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Transgendered</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

3. My racial/ethnic background is (please circle all that apply):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aboriginal (Inuit, Metis, North American Indian)</th>
<th>Arab/West Asian (e.g. Armenian, Egyptian, Iranian, Lebanese, Moroccan)</th>
<th>Black (e.g. African, Haitian, Jamaican, Somali)</th>
<th>Chinese</th>
<th>Filipino</th>
<th>Japanese</th>
<th>Korean</th>
<th>Latin American</th>
<th>South Asian</th>
<th>South East Asian</th>
<th>White (Caucasian)</th>
<th>Other – Please specify</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

4. In what city/region you are currently living: ________________________________
5. My current relationship status is:

| Single (not dating anyone)                        |
| Casually dating one or more partners             |
| Seriously dating one or more people             |
| Seriously dating one person, casually involved with one or more others |
| Seriously dating one person                      |
| Engaged                                           |
| Married                                           |
| Common-law                                        |

6. For how long have you and your partner been in a relationship? (please indicate the number of years and/or months):

   _______ years ________ months

7. Are you currently living with your partner?

   Yes
   No

8. Do you and/or your partner have children?

   Yes
   No

9. If yes, how old are they? ________________________________

10. To what extent do you consider yourself a religious person?

    Not at all
    A little bit
    Somewhat
    A lot
    Very much
11. To what extent do you consider yourself a spiritual person?

| Not at all | A little bit | Somewhat | A lot | Very much |

12. How would you rate your overall physical health?

| Very poor | Poor | Satisfactory | Good | Very good |

13. Are you currently taking any prescription medications?

| Yes | No |

If so, please list them in the box below:

14. I would describe myself as:

| Gay | Heterosexual | Bisexual | Queer | Uncertain or questioning | I choose not to label myself | Other |
15. Overall, how important a part of your life is sexual activity? *(Please circle the most appropriate response):*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Options</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not at all important</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat unimportant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither important nor unimportant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat important</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very important</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

16. Overall, how sexually attractive do you feel your body is:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Options</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not at all sexually attractive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slightly sexually attractive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderately sexually attractive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very sexually attractive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completely sexually attractive</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix F: Interview Guide

1) Can you tell me about your relationship with your current romantic partner? When did you first meet? How long have you been together?

2) How would you define sexual desire? What does sexual desire mean to you at this stage in your life?
   a. Is it spontaneous? And/or, responsive to sexual stimuli?
   b. Can it vary in strength/intensity?
   c. Is it always acted upon?
   d. Is it present in every sexual encounter? Or can you have sex without desire?

3) What is the most memorable experience, in the past year, positive or negative, with sexual desire you have had?
   a. Get as much detail as possible surrounding the context, partner (if applicable), etc.

4) How does that compare with more typical experiences of sexual desire?
   a. Explore the differences and factors involved.

5) What would sexual desire look like in an ideal context?
   a. Explore the differences and factors involved.

6) You have discussed sexual desire in the context of your relationship (or as a more individual level experience), can desire also be experienced at an individual level (or at a relationship level)?

7) Can sexual desire be experienced differently for your romantic partner than in non-partner specific ways (i.e., can you experience sexual desire outside of your relationship)?
   a. In what ways?
   b. Or, how are they similar?

8) Is it okay for men to not have desire?
   a. Can you tell me about a time where you did not have sexual desire when you thought maybe you should?
   b. What do you think about other men’s sexual desire? What do you think impacts other men’s sexual desire?

9) Is there anything else that seems important to discuss, related to your experience of sexual desire before we end the interview?
Appendix G: List of Themes

Factors Eliciting Sexual Desire

**Feeling Desired**
- Receiving Compliments
- Perceiving Partner’s Interest in Sex
- Having Female Partner Initiate Sexual Activity

**Feeling Sexy, Attractive & Desirable**

**Cognitions & Moods**
- Fantasizing and Remembering Past Sexual Events
- Anticipation of a Sexual Event
- Feeling Relaxed

**Visual Sexual Cues**

**Exciting & Unexpected Sexual Encounters**
- New & Different Experiences
- Spontaneity

**Context of the Sexual Encounter**
- Consumption of Alcohol
- Having Privacy/Enough Time for Desire to Build Romantic Situations

**Intimate Communication**
Factors Inhibiting Sexual Desire

Physical Ailments & Negative Health Characteristics
- Feeling Sick/Having a Cold
- Chronic Medical Illnesses & Medications
- Being Physical Exhausted
- Increasing Age

Life Pressures & Stresses
- Raising & Taking Care of Children
- Having a Busy Life
- Stress

Sexual Abuse
- Men’s History of Sexual Abuse
- Partner’s History of Sexual Abuse

Less Emphasis On & Effort Invested in Sexual Encounters
- Decreased Frequency of Sexual Activity
- Monotony & Routine

Rejection

Partner Not Equally Engaged in Sexual Activity
- Partner’s Lower Level of Sexual Desire
- Partner’s Lack of Confidence

Lack of Emotional Connection with Partner
Themes Related to Relational Versus Non-Relational Desire

**Non-Committed Interpersonal Sexual Desire**
- Desire as Natural, Biological, and Uncontrollable
- Desire and Attraction
- External-Dyadic Desire as Fleeting
- Extra-Dyadic Desire Can Be
- Controlled

**Individual Level Sexual**
- **Desire** Masturbation
- Pornography
Themes Related To Masculine Norms & Social Scripts

Support For Theoretical Masculine Norms
   High and Constant Levels of Sexual
   Desire Never Say No to Sexual Activity

Social Pressures to Appear to Have High Desire
   Awareness of Social Pressures
   Pressure to Say Yes to Sexual Opportunities
   Pressure to Initiate Sexual Activity