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Saying Yes When You Mean No: A Phenomenological Analysis of Consensual Unwanted Sexual Activity

Samantha C. Litzinger
University of Tennessee - Knoxville

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To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Samantha C. Litzinger entitled "Saying Yes When You Mean No: A Phenomenological Analysis of Consensual Unwanted Sexual Activity." I have examined the final electronic copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, with a major in Psychology.

Howard R. Pollio, Major Professor

We have read this dissertation and recommend its acceptance:

Kristina Gordon, Cheryl Travis, Julia Malia

Accepted for the Council:

Carolyn R. Hodges

Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School

(Original signatures are on file with official student records.)

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A PHENOMENOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF
CONSENSUAL UNWANTED SEXUAL ACTIVITY**

A Dissertation

Presented for the

Doctor of Philosophy

Degree

The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Samantha C. Litzinger

August 2007

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DEDICATION

To Lance...for carte blanche

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

An old West African proverb states: It takes a village to raise a child. In this child's case, there is no truer statement. My family, mentors, research colleagues, and very good friends have all carefully looked after me during the many years required to complete this dissertation.

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the study was to conduct a phenomenological analysis of the experience of consensual unwanted sexual activity (CUSA). College men and women (N=10) in relationships ranging from casual to committed who were enrolled at a university in the southeastern United States were interviewed about experiences of CUSA. Interviews were conducted in person with participants who were asked to answer the following research question: “Describe a time in which you did not want to participate in some sexual activity, but you decided to anyway.” Interview transcripts were analyzed using phenomenological research methods in the context of an interpretive research group, as well as by the author alone (Pollio, Henley, & Thompson, 1997). Analysis of interview data rendered a unique structure of the experience of consensual unwanted sexual activity (CUSA). The structure of CUSA is characterized by themes of *Focus*, *Expectation*, and *Outcome*, which emerged as figural against the ground of the interpersonal relationship in which CUSA occurred. These three themes are interrelated parts of an experiential gestalt. When an individual engages in CUSA, there is a minimization of focus on the desires of the self, in favor of a focus on the desires of the other, often to the exclusion of one’s full presence in the interaction (*Focus*). Engaging in CUSA involves the use of social rules, gender roles, and standards for reciprocation (*Expectation*). An individual engages in CUSA to bring about various desired outcomes and/or to avoid undesired outcomes; however, engaging in CUSA often results in unexpected outcomes (*Outcome*).

Findings suggest that CUSA may be experienced differently in committed relationships than in casual ones. In satisfied committed relationships, engaging in CUSA may be harmless or even adaptive, akin to other sacrifices made for the good of a relationship. In casual relationships, however, engaging in CUSA may result in negative outcomes such as regret and resentment. This study demonstrates the importance of context (the interpersonal relationship) to the experience of CUSA. Results suggest that the experience of CUSA might be *gendered*-- experienced similarly by men and women yet informed in complementary ways by rules dictating masculinity and femininity.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Conceptual Definition

Consensual unwanted sexual activity, or CUSA (O'Sullivan & Allgeier, 1998), is a newly elucidated concept that describes an important subset of intimate interactions. A Psych-INFO search (8/30/05) revealed only seven published studies that included the terms consensual and unwanted sexual, demonstrating that few studies have explored experiences of sexual activities that are simultaneously consensual and unwanted. In defining CUSA, O'Sullivan and Allgeier (1998) wrote:

Consensual sexual participation in unwanted sexual activity refers to situations in which a person freely consents to sexual activity with a partner without experiencing a concomitant desire for the initiated sexual activity. In a sense, they feigned sexual desire or interest. Participation by both partners is consensual, but unwanted or undesired for at least one partner. (p. 234)

O'Sullivan and Allgeier (1998) also defined, for research purposes, which activities are to be incorporated and which are to be excluded.

We are looking for a specific dating scenario. We are looking for the scenario in which your partner initiates some type of sexual activity in which, for whatever reason, you don't want to do, but you don't communicate that to your partner and you decide to engage in the behavior anyway. We are not talking about situations in which your partner pressures or forces you to participate. By definition, your partner does not even know that you don't want to. We are also not talking about when you tease your partner and tell him or her "no" when you really want to engage in the activity. What we *are* talking about—your partner initiates a sexual activity, you don't want to engage in it, you engage in it anyway without letting your partner know that you didn't want to. Remember, our definition of sexual activity is not just intercourse, but any kind of sexual activity. (p. 238)

Although this definition is lengthy, it is relevant to include for purposes of conceptual clarity as I was concerned in this study *only* with consensual unwanted sexual

activity (CUSA) and not with other types of coerced sexual activity (either through physical force or psychological pressures). I was also not concerned with what has been termed token resistance, a situation in which a partner says “no” when he or she actually means “yes” (Muehlenhard & Hollabaugh, 1988; Shotland & Hunter, 1995).

The umbrella term sexual coercion includes instances in which an individual is coerced, through verbal persuasion, physical force or psychological manipulation to participate in a sexual activity when he or she does not wish to do so. In instances of sexual coercion or purely unwanted sex, *consent is not granted*. In these cases, one partner may be attempting to coerce the other partner, who may be attempting *to refuse*. The topic investigated here differs from various forms of sexual coercion in at least one significant way. In instances of CUSA, the initiating partner may be attempting to coerce the other partner, but the participant *willingly chooses* to continue to participate in the sexual activity despite not wanting to do so (O’Sullivan & Allgeier, 1998). The choice to willingly participate is the central difference between CUSA and sexual coercion.

Another term that has emerged in the limited literature describing CUSA is compliant sexual behavior (CSB). Similar in its conceptual infancy to CUSA, there are only three published studies noted in Psych-INFO (08/30/05) exploring this phenomenon. Shotland and Hunter (1995) defined the term when studying token resistance and compliant sexual behaviors. They state that CSB occurs when “*women agree to unwanted sexual intercourse and may originate from sexual pressure from their dates and a desire to preserve their relationships*” (p. 228). Other researchers have suggested that “sexual compliance refers to situations in which a person indicates, ‘yes’ to a sexually interested partner when, for any number of reasons, he or she does not really want to

engage in sex” (Impett & Peplau, 2003, p. 88). Due to the great similarity between CUSA and CSB, the terms often are used interchangeably (Impett & Peplau, 2002; O’Sullivan & Allgeier, 1998; Sprecher, Hatfield, Cortese, Potapova, & Levitskaya, 1994, Walker, 1997).

Although CUSA and CSB are similar in describing situations in which individuals do not wish to engage in some sexual activity but consent to it anyway, there are three main differences to be noted (See Table 1). These differences concern (a) the behaviors that qualify, (b) the presence of pressure, and (c) whether the phenomenon is viewed as gendered. With respect to behaviors, Shotland and Hunter (1995) referred specifically to compliant sexual *intercourse* (CSA), whereas O’Sullivan and Allgeier (1998) were concerned with *any type of sexual activity* (CUSA). O’Sullivan and Allgeier (1998) also noted that CUSA does not *necessarily* specify times in which an individual pressured or forced his or her partner into sexual activity, whereas in defining CSB, the presence of

Table 1

Classification of Terms Related to Consensual Unwanted Sexual Activity

Researchers	Behavior Present	Presence of Pressure?	Gendered?
Shotland and Hunter (CSB)	Complaint intercourse	Interconnected	Yes Women
O’Sullivan and Allgeier (CUSA)	Compliant sexual activity	Not necessarily present	No Men/women
Impett and Peplau (CSB)	Compliant sexual behavior	Not necessarily present	Yes Women

partner pressure (or a desire to please one's partner) were seen as interconnected aspects of the interaction (Shotland & Hunter, 1995). Although it has been demonstrated that both men and women experience CUSA/CSB, Shotland and Hunter (1995) and Impett and Peplau (2002) both described and examined CSB as an experience that is particularly more likely to be experienced by women, whereas O'Sullivan and Allgeier (1998) did not classify the experience as gendered.

Throughout this study, I use the term *consensual unwanted sexual activity*—CUSA—to describe situations in which an individual does not wish to engage in a particular sexual activity but *consents* to do so anyway. Echoing O'Sullivan and Allgeier (1998), CUSA refers to a spectrum of sexual behaviors and not merely intercourse. Further, I am concerned primarily with exploring the experience of the consenting or complying partner rather than that of the initiating or pressuring partner. Lastly, although the focus of this study was on the consenting partner, it is acknowledged that various types of pressures exerted upon women (and men) may make it extremely difficult, if not impossible in some situations, for them to refrain from providing consent. The issue of one's ability to provide consent freely, as well as the ways in which consent is understood and granted, will be addressed later at length.

Literature Review

Now that relevant conceptual definitions have been provided and the topic of the current investigation identified, it is important to summarize past research on CUSA. The research conducted on this topic has yielded prevalence rates for CUSA among college men and women (O'Sullivan & Allgeier, 1998; Shotland & Hunter, 1995; Sprecher,

Hatfield, Cortese, Potapova, & Levitskaya, 1994; Walker, 2001). Sprecher et al. (1994) surveyed students from five different universities ($N = 1519$) and found that 35% of college men and 55% of college women reported having consented to unwanted sex (Sprecher et al., 1994). Shotland and Hunter (1995), in another large-scale undergraduate study, found that 38% of their sample reported having engaged in compliant sex. O'Sullivan and Allgeier (1998) found in their diary study that over a third of their sample of college students (38%) reported participating in CUSA during a recent 2-week period. Finally, Walker (2001) conducted an exploratory dissertation study and found that high percentages of women and men in college reported that they had consented to either oral sex or sexual intercourse that they did not want (women = 67% and men = 79%).

In addition to prevalence rates, researchers also have begun to investigate the reasons individuals participate in CUSA. O'Sullivan and Allgeier (1998) found in their study of undergraduate women and men in committed relationships that participants engaged in CUSA "to satisfy a partner's needs, to promote intimacy, and to avoid relationship tension" (p. 234). Further, they noted that, although most participants endorsed positive results of engaging in CUSA, many also reported experiencing some negative emotional feelings. In another study of college women and men, Muehlenard and Cook (1988) asked participants to identify reasons for participating in CUSA from a list of 51 possibilities. The two most commonly selected reasons were "enticement (e.g., The other person was trying to turn you on by touching you) and altruism (e.g., You wanted to satisfy your partner's needs)" (p. Impett and Peplau, 2003, p. 92). Muehlenard and Cook (1988) also found gender differences in reasons participants engaged in CUSA, with more men participating in unwanted petting or intercourse to gain sexual experience

(51% vs. 34%), to impress peers (25% vs. 9%), and to gain popularity (12% vs. 6%). Further, more women than men reported participating in CUSA for altruistic reasons (62% vs. 54%) or out of fear their partner would end the relationship (32% vs. 17%). Impett and Peplau (2003) summarized the results of Muehlenard and Cook's (1988) gendered results succinctly: "In general college men were more concerned than women with how they would appear to their friends, whereas women were more concerned than men with the welfare of their partner or the future of their relationship" (p. 92).

The few other studies conducted on CUSA have been conducted with female participants only. This is the case, in part, due to the commonly held belief that CUSA is a primarily feminine experience. Shotland and Hunter (1995) utilized hypothetical dating scenarios and asked college women ($N = 378$) questions about engaging in compliant sexual behavior (CSB). These authors asked participants to select all relevant reasons for participating in CSB from a list of 18 reasons and found that the women in their study reported they would participate in compliant sexual activities primarily to maintain their romantic relationships. Over 50% of the sample reported engaging in compliant sex "to avoid disappointing a partner, not wanting to lead a partner on, not wanting to stop an aroused partner, not wanting a partner to think that she did not want sex, and not wanting to destroy the mood" (Impett & Peplau, 2003, p. 93). Further, 40% of the participants in Shotland and Hunter's (1995) study endorsed engaging in CSB because they had engaged in sexual activity with the partner on a previous occasion, and 21% reported they complied out of fear of losing their partners.

Impett and Peplau (2002) conducted a study similar to Shotland and Hunter's (1995) of ethnically diverse college women in current dating relationships ($N = 125$).

Participants answered questions about their willingness to engage in CUSA in a hypothetical dating scenario and completed self-report measures of attachment style, commitment to their current relationship, and perceptions of their partner's commitment. These researchers found attachment style and commitment perceptions to be related to women's willingness to engage in CUSA, with more anxious women reporting being more willing to consent to unwanted sex. Impett and Peplau noted that these women reported doing so to avoid relationship conflict or loss of interest from a partner.

Limitations of Past Research

The studies described above detail some of the prevalence rates and correlates of CUSA, but there are a number of limitations to this research. First of all, most of the studies completed were conducted with college students who were either in committed relationships or were asked to answer questions about experiencing CUSA within this context (dating relationships). There are only two studies that asked participants to endorse participation in CUSA that did not either ask participants to answer questions based upon hypothetical dating relationships or select participants who were currently in dating relationships: Sprecher et al. (1994) surveyed college students, and Muehlenard and Cook (1988) surveyed single participants. However, neither research team attempted to gather relational or contextual information relevant to participation in CUSA. To date, there has been no exploration of CUSA in casual relationships or settings, despite its likely occurrence in these settings. Another limitation of current research, noted by Impett and Peplau (2003), is that different research groups have generated idiosyncratic lists of reasons for participating in unwanted sex, which makes it hard to compare results

across studies. In addition, Muehlenhard and Peterson (2005) pointed out that researchers exploring CUSA have divided sexual experiences into dichotomous categories of “unwanted” or “wanted”; these researchers suggested that this practice has limited our exploration of complex feelings such as ambivalence about participating in sexual activity. Further, much of the research approaches the study of CUSA as something predominantly experienced by women despite similar prevalence rates evidenced among college men. Lastly, all of the studies conducted to date have utilized primarily quantitative methodologies and self-report measures. To date, there has been no in-depth qualitative inquiry into the experience of CUSA as described by the consenting individuals themselves.

One study conducted by O’Sullivan, Byers and Finkelman (1998) explored the prevalence rates of sexual coercion as well as the *meaning* ascribed to such coercive experiences by men and women. These meanings were investigated by asking participants, in open-ended questionnaire format, about the circumstances surrounding their experiences of sexual coercion. Their inquiry targeted questions about the presence or use of alcohol and assessed individual reactions to the sexual coercion experience (behavioral and emotional). These authors found, not surprisingly, that alcohol and drugs frequently accompanied participants’ experiences of sexual coercion.

O’Sullivan et al.’s (1998) study examined sexual coercive experiences, not CUSA. Thus, there has been no exploration into the *meaning* of consenting to unwanted sexual activity. In describing the need for more in-depth studies of sexual coercion, O’Sullivan et al. (1998) argued that “comparisons of prevalence rates alone may obscure important differences in the phenomenology of sexually coercive incidents for men and

women” (p. 177). They also noted “it is the meaning or phenomenology of men’s and women’s experiences of sexual coercion that provides the most valid index of this social problem” (p. 179). Their suggestions, although applied specifically to sexual coercion, are equally if not even more applicable to the exploration of CUSA, particularly because even less is known about this phenomenon than about sexual coercion in general.

O’Sullivan and Allgeier (1998) and Impett and Peplau (2005) both acknowledged the need for in-depth qualitative interviews to gain a greater understanding of the meaning that women and men ascribe to experiences of sexual coercion, although they were not included in their studies. I was particularly interested in expanding the current research on CUSA by initiating an in-depth qualitative exploration of the concept in order to arrive at a greater understanding of its meaning. O’Sullivan and Allgeier (1998) noted that a study of this type would be useful in generating information for prevention efforts and also would enable researchers to assess the impact of these episodes on the psychological, emotional, and physical well-being of individuals. For these reasons, it seems timely and valuable to conduct a qualitative analysis of this newly elucidated and prevalent phenomenon experienced by college women and men.

Current Investigation

The current investigation was designed to serve as a first step toward the future development and implementation of interventions aimed at assisting individuals to be more assertive in situations in which they otherwise would consent to unwanted sexual activities. In keeping with standard research procedures, however, the development of such interventions must necessarily follow a thorough empirical investigation including,

but not limited to, an exploration of CUSA. Researchers, specifically within the field of sex education and rape-prevention, have noted that we must first understand a behavior and its underlying *meaning* before we can develop effective interventions (cited in S. Walker, p. 159 by Amaro, 1996; Brooks-Gunn & Furstenburg, 1989; Lonsway, 1996).

The focus of the present study is to conduct an in-depth qualitative exploration concerning college students' experiences of consenting to sexual activities in which they do not wish to engage (CUSA) and to attempt to understand what meaning such experiences hold for them psychologically, emotionally, and perhaps even physically. The current study examines CUSA in the context of all types of relationships (from casual to committed) because explorations into CUSA to date have examined this experience only within longer term dating relationships or have failed to include relationship context at all in their investigations.

The Meaning of Giving Consent

Although the previous discussion primarily concerned sexual matters, CUSA has implications for other areas of psychology. Rather than limit the scope of inquiry solely to sexual sequelae, I believe it is important to explore also the concept of consent. The personal meaning and form of consent appears central to the experience of CUSA. To this end, empirical and theoretical scholarship pertaining to consent need to be addressed.

Consenting to participate in sexual activity is a crucial component of CUSA. Aside from a few dissertations on the topic of sexual consent, two recent books authored by philosophers, a newsletter from the Sexuality Information and Education Council for the United States (SIECUS), and the Sexual Offense Policy at Antioch College, very little

formal scholarship has developed around this important topic. Despite this poverty of research, it is important to review the work that has been conducted regarding what it means to consent to sex.

Finkelhor (1979) suggested, in the provocatively titled article, “What’s Wrong With Sex Between Adults and Children?,” that if we as a society legitimize all sex that is consensual, then sex between adults and children may be seen as potentially legitimate. This unusual assertion is made because children often *appear* to give consent to adults’ sexual advances. Finkelhor asked, “If we say that sex is permissible where consent is present, doesn’t this legitimize much adult-child sex?” After playing devil’s advocate, however, he then argued that children are, in fact, unable to give consent to participating in sexual activity with adults because they do not fully appreciate what it is to which they are consenting. He explained that children are unable “truly” to consent to sex with adults and defends this claim, developing the concept of “true consent.” He noted that, “for true consent to occur, a person must know what it is that he or she is consenting to *and* a person must be free to say yes or no” (p. 694). He also noted that children are neither able to appreciate fully the sexual act, nor are they truly free (due to dependence upon adults for basic needs) to say yes or no.

Muehlenhard (1995/1996) summarized Finkelhor’s and other authors’ work on the topic of consent in a review for the SIECUS annual newsletter. She documented three spheres in which psychology has addressed issues of consent: (a) research participation (e.g., informed consent), (b) sexual behavior involving individuals with limited mental capacity (e.g., whether individuals with developmental disabilities have the ability to provide consent to participate in sexual activity), and lastly, (c) sexual behavior within

relationships of unequal power (e.g., therapist/patient relationships, professor/student relationships). Across these spheres, Muehlenhard (1995/1996) delineated two requirements for sexual consent: (a) it requires knowledge, and (b) it must be given *freely*.

Muehlenhard (1995/1996) expanded on the idea that consent requires knowledge by describing examples of instances in which individuals are required to receive certain information before they are asked to provide “consent.” For example, before receiving mental health or medical treatment, it is federally mandated that individuals be given information regarding privacy rights. Along similar lines, the American Psychological Association (APA) requires researchers to provide participants with information about the nature of the research as well as an explanation of potential risks and benefits that might result from participation before the participants are asked to consent. In both cases, *informed* consent is required. One might extend the “consent requires knowledge” requirement to the sexual arena by applying it to sexual health disclosures. Whereas it might be deemed thoughtful or even morally expected to disclose one’s sexual health status to a new partner before engaging in sexual activity, in the current socio-sexual milieu, providing one’s partner with this type of information is not *required*.

To apply this requirement more specifically to CUSA, it might be that if an individual engages in unwanted sexual activity, he/she might also be likely to engage in sexual activity that is in some other way unwanted, (e.g., without desired contraception). Not having the knowledge of a partner’s sexual health status or engaging in unsafe, unwanted sexual activity might place the individual at heightened risk for acquiring a sexually transmitted infection (Blythe, Fortenberry, Temkit, Tu, & Orr, 2006). Given

such potential consequences of consenting to unwanted sexual activity, it seems imperative that we understand more fully the ways in which consent can be provided.

Muehlenhard's assertion that consent is meaningless unless freely given is also relevant to CUSA. It is somewhat unclear, however, just what is meant by the term *freely given*. Muehlenhard provided the example of unequal relationships in which an individual is unable to freely give consent due to negative consequences that might result from not complying. Examples of such relationships include those between therapist and patient or teacher and student. Muehlenhard also noted common social practices connected to gender role socialization in our culture that might make it difficult for an individual to freely choose between consenting and refusing sexual activity. Muehlenhard (1995/1996) listed several factors that might serve to limit "true freedom" to consent to sexual activity. These include economic dependence (where sexual refusal might result in an end to the relationship and thus threaten the livelihood of the refusing partner), the idea that sexual behavior and a relationship go hand-in-hand (where sexual refusal would be seen as somehow "abnormal"), the idea that there are cultural rewards and societal influences that encourage heterosexual relationships, and lastly, legal and cultural discourses regarding appropriate sexual practices (where sexual refusal somehow violates the standard for what may be expected in heterosexual relationships). Muehlenhard (1995/1996) argued that such socio-cultural factors impinge on our sexual freedom. As Walker (2001) noted, such socio-cultural influences leave individuals with the sole "choice" of acquiescing to unwanted sexual behavior (p. 22).

White, Bondurant, and Travis (2000) noted that social and cultural forces greatly affect our sexuality and sexual decision-making. These authors proposed that "sexuality

is interactive and contextual; as such, it requires a social account” (p. 12). They noted that each “person is intimately and intricately bound within social, cultural, and historical forces” (p. 16). These forces, in turn, affect the choices individuals feel free (or *not* free, oftentimes) to make. Many of these socio-cultural forces have great impact upon decisions regarding sexual consent. Kurth, Spiller, and Travis (2000) described the ways in which power and sexual scripts influence sexual harassment. Much of this discussion can be extended into the arena of sexual *consent*.

Kurth et al. (2000) emphasized the importance of sexual scripts in affecting a variety of sexual behaviors. Sexual scripts include “cognitive, learned, and social features of sexuality” (p. 329) and are often thought of as blueprints for guiding our own and others’ behaviors and cognitions. Sexual scripts also have been said to include “the rules, expectations, and sanctions governing these acts” (p. 329). To summarize, sexual scripts refer to a society’s cultural and social values that define correct or “normal” sexual behavior. These sexual scripts are created from social norms and prior social interaction, and it is commonly believed that sexual scripts are learned in childhood and reinforced through later social interactions. Thus, these scripts are maintained via pathways that include “social learning, socialization, and social exchange” (p. 329). In this understanding, acceptable behaviors are reinforced and unacceptable behaviors, or those contrary to expectable scripts, are punished. Examples of sexual scripts include male as sexual initiator and female as discourager, or woman as sexual object. Thus, in sexual encounters, social sexual scripts shape an individual’s behavior to varying degrees.

Kurth et al. (2000) further suggested that if people follow the rules or norms for a given (sexual) situation, the scripted behavior of the interaction may go unnoticed. They

further proposed that problems occur when there is a difference in the way different individuals conceive of appropriate behavior. Thus, in a situation such as CUSA, it might be that the male believes it is his role (per the male initiator sexual script) to initiate and to expect the female to acquiesce (per the female as passive sexual participant script). The female in the situation may not wish to engage in sexual activity with her male partner, yet may find herself acquiescing despite her wish to say no, possibly as a consequence of the social and cultural expectations she has internalized.

Gavey (2005) provided a case example of a young girl who consented to unwanted sexual activity repeatedly with a boyfriend. She explained her decision to do so by saying that she went along with this unpleasant sex “because it was really important to me to be seen as normal” (p. 138). Gavey (2005) commented about this young woman’s experience as follows:

What is telling about an example like this is what it shows us about the cultural conditions of possibility for unwanted sex. A sexually exploitative arrangement was consented to because it was considered normal, and not automatically culturally deviant. Clearly this raises questions about the notion of consent as an adequate standard for ethical sexual engagement (p. 139).

Clearly, socially constructed sexual scripts further complicate our understanding of what it means to *freely* provide sexual consent.

Given these considerations, one may ask whether it is possible for anyone to provide consent freely, without being motivated or influenced by socially constructed sexual scripts? Wertheimer (2005) suggests that an individual’s preferences can be seen as “false in terms of their substance or their authenticity (or autonomy)” (p. 228). Further he suggested that:

with respect to sexual relations, let us say that B’s consent is rooted in false preferences if (1) she inappropriately sacrifices her interests for the sake of others

or (2) her interests are excessively identified with the interests of others or (3) her preferences are not authentic or autonomous. What follows? Joan McGregor says that if a woman's choices fail to promote her good, it is evidence that she is choosing without her 'full faculties' and that her consent is not legitimate. (p. 228)

As is evidenced by this statement, issues of consent with regard to sexual activity are extremely complex. It seems unlikely that we will be able to deconstruct these situations and definitively articulate what might be conceived of as *truly free* consent at this time. What we can do is understand more clearly *how* individuals have been found to provide sexual consent. Researchers have found that, behaviorally, the act of providing consent to sex is frequently absent, even in consensual encounters. Hall (1998) noted, in his study of college students, that very often, the sexual behavior that occurred between students happened without expressed consent. Further, Hickman and Muehlenhard (1999) found in a study of nearly 400 undergraduates that both women and men most often reported demonstrating sexual consent by making *no response*. Clearly, consent to participate in sexual activity often appears to be indistinguishable or misinterpreted, especially because what appears to be a standard "yes" response is often a non-response.

To address the frequent misinterpretation that occurs around sexual consent behaviors, students and administrators at Antioch College in Ohio implemented a Sexual Offenses Policy on their campus in 1990. The policy was intended to eliminate the ambiguity surrounding sexual consent practices, and required all members of the Antioch community to obtain verbal consent from sexual partners before engaging in sexual activity and subsequently at "each new level of physical and/or sexual behavior in any given interaction, regardless of who initiates it" (Antioch College, 1996, p. 2-Appendix A-1). This policy was seen as controversial, labor intensive, and awkward, and it was

even the subject of ridicule during a comedy routine on *Saturday Night Live*. Despite being widely criticized, however, the stated purpose of the policy, according to then college president Alan Guskin, was “to get students actually talking about sex to reduce sexual misinterpretations and possibly sexual coercion.” Guskin emphasized that in sexual situations, students should assume a “no” until they have heard a clear and verbally articulated “yes” (Humphreys & Herold, 2003). The following is an excerpt from the online *Antioch Survival Guide* describing the policy:

This spirit is about a fully affirmative YES. Not an ambiguous yes, or a “well-not-really-but-ok-I-guess yes,” certainly not a “silent-no ‘yes,’” or an “ouch” or “yuck-but-I’m-afraid-to-hurt-your-feelings yes.” This is about YES, UM HUM, ABSOLUTELY, YIPPEE YAHOO YES! Being with someone who you are sure REALLY WANTS to be with you. Being with someone who you are sure YOU REALLY WANT to be with. THAT is EXCITING, is EROTIC, is DEEP, is GREAT, is YES! That is consent. That is the Spirit of the policy.

Other theorists have suggested that it is impossible to categorize consent in the ways in which Antioch has attempted. Wildavsky (1993) suggested that the distinction between voluntary and involuntary action “is not carved in stone, but is a social construct, subject to bargaining between affected interests” (p. 51). He provided evidence for his claim by documenting social shifts that have taken place, often at the urging of feminists, toward reevaluating the nature and timing of sexual consent. He noted that, in decades past, there was no term available for what is now aptly called *spousal rape*, but rather a woman, when married, was thought to be providing her sexual consent for life.

Gavey (2005) similarly cited advice from a marriage manual written in 1961: “A woman should never turn down her husband on appropriate occasions simply because she has no yearning of her own for sex or because she is tired or sleepy, or indeed for any reason short of genuine disability” (John Eichenlaub, M.D., as cited in Gavey, 2005, p.

1). It may be that messages contained in these types of documents in turn are internalized by individuals as guides to sexual behaviors, such that consenting becomes less a choice than a matter of following a set of rules for appropriate behavior.

Wildavsky (1993) further suggested that, since the advent of the sexual revolution, feminists have made great strides in helping to discriminate between what is considered voluntary versus involuntary, such that women are now better able to assert their desires more freely in the context of their relationships with others. Despite these advances, however, it appears obvious from the prevalence rates for CUSA that individuals (both female and male) frequently continue to engage in sexual activity even when they have unexpressed reservations. Gavey (2005), echoing what others have noticed, suggested that “everyday taken-for-granted normative forms of heterosexuality work as a ‘cultural scaffolding’ for rape” (p. 2). She clarified her belief that the problem “lies in the way heterosexual sex is patterned and scripted in ways that permit far too much ambiguity over distinctions between what is rape and what is *just sex*”. Gavey defined this “cultural scaffolding” as “the discourses of sex and gender that produce forms of heterosex that set up preconditions for rape—women’s passive, acquiescing sexuality and men’s forthright, urgent pursuit of sexual ‘release’” (p. 3). Although Gavey’s statements are quite strong, she has suggested that our societal beliefs about men and women place women at risk for passively agreeing to unwanted sex because of social forces determining the normalcy or the necessity of consenting. Gavey’s views, although somewhat strong, appear relevant to keep in mind in exploring the social factors contributing to women’s or men’s sexual consent.

Phenomenological Research Methods

Phenomenological research methodology of the type used in the present study developed from existential-phenomenological psychology. The term existential-phenomenology originally coined by Heidegger (1927/1962) and later redefined by Merleau-Ponty (1945/1962), is a combination of two philosophies, “one concerned with a certain perspective on human existence and the other with a certain mode of investigating that existence” (Pollio, Henley, & Thompson, 1997, p. 4). These authors noted that the aim of both existentialism and phenomenology is “a rigorous description of human life as it is lived and reflected upon in all of its first-person concreteness, urgency, and ambiguity” (p. 4). For existential-phenomenology, “the world is to be lived and described, not explained” (p. 5). Thus, the goal of existential-phenomenological psychology is to explore the “essence, structure, or form, of both human experience and human behavior as revealed through essentially descriptive techniques” (Valle, King, & Halling, 1989, p. 6).

von Eckartsberg (1998) described the goal of existential-phenomenological psychology as:

attempting to account for the fullness of human life by reconceiving psychology on properly human grounds. The model for the natural sciences, appropriate as it is for such fields as physics and chemistry, is nevertheless of limited usefulness when it comes to the study of the meaningful character of lived experience.” (p. 4)

Many phenomenologists would concur with this statement and, beginning with Giorgi in 1970, several existential-phenomenologists have set aside the typical methods employed within natural science psychology and have opted to use methods they believe to be more appropriate to the task of reflecting human experience. von Eckartsberg (1998) provided a detailed description of this human science approach.

The human science approach recognizes that our privileged access to meanings is not by way of numbers but rather through perception, cognition, and language. Insofar as everyday human activity can be shown to be continuously informed and shaped by how we understand others and ourselves and by the meanings and situations we find ourselves in, this is a most significant point. It indicates that the way for psychology to comprehend human behavior and experience as it is actually lived in everyday social settings is to begin by soliciting accounts of our actual experience in such settings. (p. 4)

Then von Eckartsberg (1998) suggested that, rather than trying to “quantify or abstract from everyday experience in the style of natural sciences,” existential-phenomenological inquiry should begin by “more carefully attending to the actual living of the experience” (p. 4). Pollio, Henley, and Thompson (1997) added that “one conclusion that existential-phenomenology teaches us about human experience is that it is not a static thing; rather, it is more accurately described as a sensibly changing perspectival relatedness to the conditions, possibilities, and constraints of the world” (p. 29). Thus, the most adequate way of approaching the study of human experience is through methods specifically appropriate to such exploration.

Pollio, Henley, and Thompson (1997) also noted that the method most appropriate to generate an adequate description of human experience is that of a dialogue in which “one member of a dialogic pair, normally called the investigator, assumes a respectful position, *vis-à-vis* the real expert, the subject, or more appropriately the co-researcher” (p. 29). Thus, a core component of phenomenological interviewing is the centrality of dialogue between a participant and the interviewer. The phenomenological interview often is referred to as a conversation (Mishler, 1986). This approach is quite different from traditional survey interviewing in which the participant’s role is to answer a predetermined set of questions.

Schafer (1983) utilized a unique metaphor in describing the process of psychotherapy and the relationship between a psychoanalyst and his or her patient: “seasoned and hardy co-explorers.” This metaphor aptly describes a phenomenological dialogue and the relationship between interviewer and participant. Although the interviewer asks the initial question, the participant always is considered the expert on his/her experience, and it is the primary role of the interviewer to assist the participant in offering his/her unique experience-based description of the phenomenon of interest. The focus of a phenomenological interview is always on the participant’s experience of the given phenomenon as it emerges in the context of a dialogue between researcher and participant.

Polkinghorne (1989) described further distinctions between the methods employed in phenomenological (or human science) research and those typically employed in quantitative natural and/or social science research. He pointed out that phenomenological methods focus specifically on descriptions of first-person experience as described by individuals who have had that particular experience, whereas natural science methods try to describe *objective* phenomena. Pollio, Henley and Thompson (1997) suggested that the questions, statements, and summaries utilized in a phenomenological interview are not to confirm hypotheses but instead evoke descriptions. Silverstein, Auerbach, and Levant (2006) note similarly about qualitative research that it is “ ‘hypothesis generating’ (building theory rather than testing theory), whereas quantitative research is ‘hypothesis testing’ ”(p. 352). Quantitative research explores relationships between independent and dependent variables and may ask whether one variable influences another in a particular way or to what extent some

population experiences a particular phenomenon. Silverstein et al. (2006) pointed out that, in qualitative research, “although the researcher has a specific research question in mind, he or she does not specify the relevant variables. The research goal is to discover the appropriate variables” (p. 352).

Silverstein et al.’s, (2006) description of qualitative research aptly describes phenomenological research as well. It does not try to predict relationships, explore correlations or causative influences, or attempt to garner information about the generalizability of results. Instead, phenomenological methods seek to describe and understand the *structure* and *meaning* of an experience as described by individuals who have experienced it. Polkinghorne (1989) elaborated on what is meant by the term *structure*:

The aim of phenomenological inquiry is to reveal and unravel the structures, logic, and interrelationships that obtain in the phenomenon under inspection. Data analysis is the core stage of research efforts in phenomenological psychology. Its purpose is to derive from the collection of protocols, with their naïve descriptions of specific examples of the experience under consideration, a description of the essential features of that experience. The researcher must glean from the examples an accurate essential description of their contents and the particular structural relationship that coheres the elements into a unified experience. (pp. 50-51)

Polkinghorne (1989) described differences between quantitative and phenomenological methods by suggesting that phenomenological research methods employ an entirely “different map” from that used by quantitative researchers. Whereas natural and social science strategies seek to minimize bias and observe what is believed to be *objectively* present, phenomenological methods seek to locate other important “landmarks” such as the nature and structure of human experience. Polkinghorne noted that these methods are not antithetical to one another and instead proposed that they simply produce different information.

Further, phenomenological methods are concerned with answering the question of “what?” rather than “why?” For example, during a phenomenological interview, the question, “Why do you think you did that?” would infrequently, if ever, be posed. Rather, an invitation resembling “Tell me what you were aware of” would be employed instead. This second type of approach is thought to enable the participant to elaborate on his/her experience freely, without the interviewer imposing his/her own sense of a causal structure.

Many social science disciplines, including psychology, both strive to explore connections and causal pathways among variables as well and to inquire about which variables have a particular impact on one another over time. The goal of traditional psychological research is to apply the results of one study to a larger population in order to generalize the findings. A potential criticism of qualitative methods in general and phenomenological methods in particular is that the results of a given study are not directly generalizable to the larger population. Phenomenological research methods by definition are interested in description and not in the representativeness of any given study. However, Sandelowski (1997) noted, “The single most important factor contributing to the failure to take findings of qualitative studies seriously is the frequently cited but false charge that they are not generalizable” (p. 127). Although Sandelowski suggested that findings of qualitative studies often are inaccurately described as not generalizable, it is more accurate to say that phenomenological researchers consider concerns about generalizability somewhat irrelevant. Thomas and Pollio (2002) presented a response from Polkinghorne (1989) that addresses this issue: “The purpose of the phenomenological research is to describe the structure of experience, not to describe the

characteristics of the group who have had that experience” (p. 48). Silverstein et al. (2006) noted somewhat differently that, following one type of qualitative analysis (grounded theory), findings are “presumed to be local—that is, relevant to the participants of the specific study rather than universal” (p. 352).

Phenomenological researchers hold this same understanding. Pollio, Henley, and Thompson (1997) suggested that thematic descriptions, such as those resulting from phenomenological dialogic procedures, are designed to improve the researcher’s interpretive vision, rather than to describe the characteristics of a particular population. When looking through the lens of quantitative methods, generalizability remains an important aim of an investigation and one that makes sense for the purposes of extending the information learned from one sample to a population to whom it might apply. When examining a question through the qualitative lens of phenomenological inquiry, however, a core goal of thorough investigation is for a researcher to demonstrate a more complete understanding of the phenomenon of interest through the use of rigorous methods. Silverstein et al. (2006) suggested that concerns about representativeness are actually inappropriate criteria for evaluating a qualitative study and suggested that

the aim of qualitative research is to develop transferable theories, rather than generalizable ones. Transferability requires that the researcher provide detailed information about the researcher, the participants, the context, and the dynamic interaction between researcher and participants. This information allows the reader to infer how a single study’s findings and interpretations may, or may not, transfer to the reader’s context. (p. 352)

Again, the comments of Silverstein et al. apply not merely to qualitative methods in general, but to phenomenological methods in particular.

It is important to note, however, that some phenomenologists might argue that the structure generated from phenomenological data analysis, if done properly, could yield a

structure that could be universally applied. This is a bold claim that seemingly few empirical researchers would make. In contrast, Thomas and Pollio (2002) noted that researchers utilizing qualitative methodologies often take an apologetic tone regarding the validity of their work--in part, due to criticisms leveled at the reliability and the validity of the method and, as a result, the data. These criticisms may be adequately addressed by taking into account and providing information about the redundancy of themes across interviews (even in the case of only a few interviews) and also may be confirmed by the reader him or herself. Thomas and Pollio (2002) note that phenomenological generalizability, different from the type of generalizability achieved using quantitative methodology, may be achieved by the readers of the research report. They suggest, "When and if a description rings true (to the reader), each specific reader who derives insight from the results of a phenomenological study may be thought to extend its generalizability" (p. 42).

Churchill and Wertz (2001) point out that it is not expected that a researcher's description of some phenomenon will be the only "true" description of that phenomenon. Instead, they suggested that "verifiability of phenomenological findings depends on whether another researcher can assume the perspective of the present investigator, review the original protocol data, and see that the proposed insights fully illuminate the situations under study" (p. 259). Thus, there is great emphasis placed on the repetition of themes in a phenomenological study. In fact, as the investigator observes themes that begin to repeat among her interview texts, she can begin to think about concluding data collection as she may have interviewed enough participants to achieve an intelligible structure.

Phenomenological methods enable us to obtain and explore descriptions of experiences as told by those who have lived them. The descriptions, which emerge as the research dialogue unfolds, may arguably be more helpful in obtaining a full understanding of a particular psychological phenomenon than methods that calculate rates of a particular occurrence in a particular population or its impact on other phenomena. Thus, while it is quite useful to learn about prevalence rates and correlates of CUSA, it seems equally valuable to explore core components of the experience so as to more fully understand it. Whereas much of quantitative psychology is concerned with relationships among variables of interest--in “what brings about what”--or in what is affected by something else, phenomenology in contrast is primarily concerned with how things appear to some person and with the meanings held by him or her.

Thus, there are many differences between qualitative, and specifically phenomenological, methodology and more traditional natural science methods. An appropriate next step may be to describe the benefits and drawbacks of using a phenomenological method in examining psychological phenomena and, in particular, using this type of methodology to explore CUSA. Pollio, Graves, and Arfken (2006) suggested that, when beginning a research project, it is important to ask two questions: “What am I studying?” and “What is the most reasonable way of studying it?” (p. 33). Although many topics of study might lend themselves to both quantitative and qualitative inquiry, one that would lend itself, in particular, to phenomenological exploration would seem to be a topic that has been satisfactorily explored using quantitative methods but for which there has been no in-depth qualitative inquiry conducted into the experienced *meaning* of that phenomenon. Because phenomenological methods focus not only on the

structure of an experience or on the description of *types* of objectively observable behaviors, but also on the *meaning* of an experience to the individual describing it (Polkinghorne, 1989), this would seem to allow a useful type of study to unravel a topic such as CUSA.

Although phenomenological methods appear well suited to exploring psychological phenomena, particularly those that have been well explored quantitatively, there exist several limitations inherent in the method. As discussed above, phenomenological studies cannot provide us with findings that would be, in the more traditional sense, generalizable to a specific population. For instance, from the present study, it will be impossible to determine prevalence rates of CUSA within the setting examined. Further, phenomenological methodologies utilize the dialogic method, which may be better suited to some participants than others. Individuals who have difficulty with social interactions or who feel uncomfortable talking with people they do not know well or on topics that are sensitive in nature may find it difficult to feel at ease with the researcher. As opposed to pencil-and-paper or online questionnaires, which enable individuals to endorse sensitive items relatively anonymously, the interview situation utilized in phenomenological studies places individuals in the position of having to speak face to face with one another about potentially sensitive/private topics that may make them uncomfortable, uneasy, or even distressed.

Another potential limitation of using the phenomenological method is the researcher's bias regarding his/her chosen topic. Josselson (2004) suggested in her discussion of different types of qualitative inquiry that, although researchers often argue that having personal experience with their topic of study may benefit them in the

interpretation of their participants' experiences, "issues of overidentification with participants under study may become problematic." (p. 11). She cautioned researchers engaged in qualitative inquiry that "researchers have to be scrupulous that the meanings they *discover* in their interview material are indeed *faithful* to the meanings of their participants and that they haven't simply substituted their own" (p. 11). Thus, it is possible that phenomenological researchers, despite the best of intentions, may be unable to hold their own beliefs in abeyance, and may, either willingly or unwillingly, direct the interview along a particular path or direct the thematic analysis in a particular direction. These are important limitations for phenomenological researchers to take into consideration and to try to address in their design and implementation if the analysis is to be sufficiently rigorous.

As described, previous researchers have begun to identify prevalence rates and correlates of consenting to unwanted sexual activity. As a result, some of the limitations of phenomenological methodology have been addressed via quantitative inquiries dealing with CUSA. Further discussion of phenomenological methods as applied to the current investigation is included in a description of this study's procedures. Because all methods bring certain limitations, it remains timely and important to conduct this phenomenological exploration, specifically with an eye directed towards garnering a fuller and richer understanding of the structure and meaning of the experience of CUSA.

CHAPTER II

METHODS

What follows is a step-by-step description of the methods and procedures used in the current research study. Following a description of the each step, an explanation of that step and its relevance for studying psychological phenomenon in general is provided and discussed.

Selection of a Sample

For the present study, college students were identified as an appropriate participant pool. Although college students seem over-utilized in psychological research, this group was particularly appropriate for the current investigation for two reasons: (a) Coercive or “consensual unwanted sexual activity” (CUSA) is highly prevalent in this age-group (Walker, 1997), and (b) college students frequently consume high quantities of alcohol, a condition that consistently has been found to be related to unwanted sexual experiences (Noel, Biglan, Berendt, Ochs, & Metzler, 1993). For example, researchers have found that, when college students, particularly women, drink alcohol and find themselves in sexually coercive situations, they often are coerced into engaging in high-risk sexual behaviors (Biglan, Noell, Ochs, Smokowski, & Metzler, 1995).

Sample selection in a phenomenological study is an important step in the research process and poses numerous challenges. Pollio, Graves, and Arfken (2006) noted that there are two primary criteria for selecting participants: (a) An individual must have

experienced the phenomenon of interest, and (b) he/she must be willing to talk about it in an interview. Pollio, Graves, and Arfken detailed typical recruitment techniques aimed at securing participants, including “newspaper articles, posters and flyers, professional and community intermediaries (such as psychologists in a clinic or presidents of civic clubs), and word-of-mouth (e.g. snowball sampling, where one interviewee tells the researcher of other individuals and identifies customary gathering places)” (p. 4). Because only two criteria must be met for participation, the researcher often is left with a choice about which participants to sample. Kracker (2006), for instance, chose to study the experience of using mindfulness meditation techniques in psychoanalytic psychotherapy sessions. In selecting her sample, she interviewed only psychoanalytically oriented practitioners who had at least 5 years experience utilizing mindfulness-based meditation. For her, it was important to survey a very specific group of participants tailored to the topic of interest. For other researchers, such as Graves (2007), who studied the more general topic of face-to-face conflict, sampling procedures were extended to include a more diverse group of participants. Again, what is important is that the participants selected have familiarity with the experience and are interested in speaking about it to someone else.

Participant Recruitment

Given the personal nature of CUSA, it was important to ensure participants’ anonymity. I created an advertisement, presented in Appendix A-2 that described in detail the nature of the study and offers extra credit for participation. These advertisements were posted on Psychology course websites and sent as emails to students enrolled in Psychology courses at varying levels (from introductory to advanced courses). To obtain

interested participants from disciplines outside Psychology, advertisements were also posted in buildings on campus such as the University Center, the Women's Center, the Library, and residence halls. These individuals could not be offered extra credit for participating because no arrangements were made with professors from disciplines outside Psychology. As a result, the advertisement was modified to exclude reference to extra credit.

The sign-up sheets typically accompanying both extra-credit and non-credit recruitment procedures were omitted to ensure participants' confidentiality. In both advertisements, a detailed description of the CUSA phenomenon was provided along with the interviewer's contact information. Exclusionary information also was provided to explicitly describe the topic of interest and to preclude individuals from participating without knowing what was meant by the term consensual unwanted sexual activity. Extreme care was taken to be specific about the nature of the study to ensure that interested individuals did not come for an interview to describe experiences of forced sexual coercion such as rape, childhood sexual/physical abuse, or other such situations. This clarification was provided to protect individuals from needless distress and to ensure that participants would come to be interviewed only if they had experienced CUSA specifically.

In addition to advertisements posted on course websites and in buildings at the University of Tennessee, reminders were given in psychology classes about opportunities to participate in the study. These reminders contained the principal investigator's e-mail address and telephone number and invited interested students to contact her. Participants were *never* asked to sign their names or to provide any identifying information to anyone

other than the primary investigator. Interested individuals were encouraged to contact the author either via e-mail or telephone, at their convenience, and in a setting in which they felt comfortable. All participants were reminded in the advertisement that all contact with the principal investigator would be strictly confidential.

Given the personal nature of many phenomenological inquiries, it is imperative that participants not suffer any consequences, social or otherwise, as a result of participation. Thomas and Pollio (2002) noted the almost sacred nature of guarding participants' safety when conducting these inquiries. As Pollio, Graves, and Arfken (2006) noted, exploring phenomena of interest in vulnerable populations can be challenging and requires the utmost regard for ensuring participant safety. They described a study of homeless abused women, conducted by Anderson in 1996, in which she recruited participants at a local café that served as a "safe place." Pollio, Graves, and Arfken insisted that attention be paid to preserving the safety of participants and urging interviewees to make special arrangements if necessary. For example, they described the practice of obtaining verbal consent during interview recordings with abused women to reduce the chance that an abuser would discover participation by finding written documentation.

The Question

Due to a lack of conceptual clarity that exists among researchers and lay people alike about what constitutes consensual unwanted sexual activity, it was an arduous yet crucial task to develop an appropriate interview question for the present study. The paragraph below (taken from the advertisement in Appendix A-2) was adapted from

O’Sullivan and Allgeier’s (1998) definition of “consensual unwanted sexual activity” and was used to describe the topic of inquiry to interested individuals. Additional caveats were also added, in coordination with feedback from other researchers as well as from the Institutional Review Board, to preclude participants from speaking about experiences outside the realm of “consensual unwanted sexual activity.”

I will ask you to describe a specific incident in which a sexual partner initiated some type of sexual activity and which, for whatever reason, you did not want to do it but you did not communicate to this partner that you were not interested, and you decided to engage in the activity anyway. I am *not* referring to situations in which someone pressured you or forced you to participate. By definition, this person did not even know that you did not want to do this. I am also *not* referring to situations when you teased a sexual partner and told him or her "no" when you really did want to engage in the activity. I am also *not* referring to situations that could be considered child abuse.

In addition to ensuring that individuals speak only about *consensual unwanted sexual activity* (and not other types of nonconsensual sexual activity), it was important that it be made clear that the participant *chose* to engage in it (or consented to it). Various ways of wording the opening question were explored and one version that showed promise was “Describe a time in which you didn’t want to participate in sexual activity, and you *went along with it* anyway.” This question seemed to provide most of what was warranted for the study, except for one thing: It is possible that individuals who experienced child abuse or rape might still fall into this category, because the necessary consensual or volitional aspect is absent from the question. Thus, after further discussions with several research colleagues about the most appropriate wording, the following question was settled upon:

“Can you describe a time when you didn’t want to participate in sexual activity but you *decided* to anyway?”

The addition of the word *decided* is significant because it makes clear that this inquiry is directed toward exploring an activity that an individual did not *want* to participate in but for which *they made a decision or choice to participate* despite an unexpressed disinterest in doing so. Thus, the question was meant to enable individuals to explore and describe “deciding to do something” they did not want to do. The use of the word “decided” is integral to the question and seems to further distinguish it from others that might evoke experiences of child abuse or rape.

Determining the wording of the question to be asked in a phenomenological study is an important task. It is imperative to phrase the question in such a way to be inclusive with regard to individuals’ experiences and yet exclusive enough not to solicit experiences that would better fit into a different category of experience. Thomas and Pollio (2002) make clear that the questions chosen have an impact upon the answers given. Thus, they suggest that it is important for participants to have the freedom to answer in any way they choose. Thomas and Pollio (2002) endorse using open-ended rather than close-ended questions and suggest that phenomenological questions should not elicit either a quick response or an answer that is already known. These authors also note that a phenomenological question is not intended to generate theoretical or conceptual answers from participants. For this reason, “why questions” are generally not used as they encourage individuals to think about reasons for their actions rather than describe experiences of the phenomenon.

The Bracketing Interview

After the research question was decided upon, the next step was to conduct a bracketing interview. This interview is essential to the success of a phenomenological study and consists of the principal investigator being asked her own research question in the manner that she will later use with participants. For the current study, a senior female member of the University of Tennessee Phenomenology Research Group conducted the bracketing interview. The interviewer took notes during the interview, audio taped it, and provided the primary researcher with copies of the tapes and her notes following the conclusion of the interview. I then transcribed the interview, which was next analyzed in the University of Tennessee Phenomenology Research Group.

From this bracketing analysis, the following themes emerged as figural to the investigator's understanding of *consensual unwanted sexual activity*. First, there repeatedly emerged a social component in consenting to unwanted sexual activity; that in order to "be cool," in the eyes of others, one goes along with sexual activities even in absence of the desire to do so. Second, a feeling of ambivalence about sexual activity or a lack of awareness of one's own desires, was related to consenting to unwanted sexual activity. Third, an individual's sense of obligation to please another also emerged as figural, such that if someone had done something nice for her, she felt it was expected that she, too, do something nice in return. Fourth, a relational component repeatedly emerged; I felt that it was part and parcel of certain types of relationships (from friendships to romantic engagements) to respond to others' desires to maintain stability in the relationship. Fifth, there appeared to be a temporal component; that is, when one does something once, he or she may be setting up expectations for subsequent incidences. A

final theme that emerged from the bracketing interview was that I hold a belief that CUSA was a gendered experience. For example, it is a socially constructed belief that women are supposed to please men, and, as such, it may be that women compromise themselves to please them. This desire to please may take many forms, but often might result in the decision to engage in sexual activity without a concomitant desire to do so.

The bracketing interview in phenomenological studies is undertaken to assist the experimenter in realizing his or her own expectations, preconceptions, or assumptions about the phenomenon of interest. Researchers often have preconceived notions about the phenomenon of interest and it is of utmost importance that they become aware of these assumptions in order to keep them from having an impact on the analysis. Because each researcher brings his/her own set of assumptions to the study of his/her phenomenon of interest, it is important that he/she attempt to uncover and explore these assumptions before undertaking the study.

Colaizzi (1978) suggested that researchers ask when beginning their work, “Why am I involved with this phenomenon?” and “how might the constituents of my unique personality condition my selection of this particular phenomenon to investigate?” (p. 55). To encourage research participants to be as free as possible to describe their own experiences and to make meaning of these experiences, it is extremely important that the investigator not attempt to structure or sculpt a participant’s responses to fit a preconceived understanding of the experience. The purpose of the bracketing interview is not to eliminate the investigator’s preconceptions or beliefs but rather to help to “suspend the taken-for-granted natural attitude of daily life” as Husserl suggested (1913/1931, as cited in Thomas & Pollio, 2002, p. 32). Although it is impossible for an individual to

remove his/her own preconceptions, the aim of bracketing is to bring those preconceptions into awareness. Thomas and Pollio (2002) suggested that “it is not possible or even desirable, for a researcher to be completely free of suppositions” and further noted that “bracketed material is temporarily suspended, not banished, repeatedly thrusting itself into awareness throughout the course of the study” (p. 33).

Conducting Interviews

The current study consisted of conducting phenomenological interviews with 10 late adolescent female and male college students who had had the experience of consenting to unwanted sexual activity and who were willing to talk about it. Interviews took place either in a room designed for interviewing research participants or for conducting psychotherapy, both of which were furnished to create an atmosphere of comfort and privacy. Participants signed informed consent forms (Appendix A-3), created pseudonyms for themselves, completed participant information forms (Appendix A-4), and were informed that their interviews would be taped, transcribed, and analyzed in the context of an interpretive research group. Participants also were informed that the transcriptions would be retained for the duration of the study plus 10 years at which time they would be destroyed. Participants were able to ask any questions they might have had prior to the start of the interview.

As was the case in the current study, phenomenological interviews are typically recorded using standard recording equipment. Before the interview begins, participants are typically asked to sign an informed consent form that detailed the risks and benefits of participating in this particular type of study. They were also asked to create a

pseudonym for themselves; if they did not wish to create one, the investigator assigned one. This pseudonym serves as an anonymous way for the individual to be identified during data analysis and to protect the identity of participants should excerpts from their texts be included in the final written report.

During a phenomenological interview it is important to ensure that the participant feels comfortable. The phenomenological interview can be described in the following way:

Unlike a structured interview, the flow of the dialogue is controlled by the participant and the interviewer's role is to ensure that each experience is discussed in detail. The give-and-take that defines a good interview is helped along by a stance of respect and openness to a participant's report. The reciprocal influence that is necessarily present, and considered a source of error in other contexts, thus becomes an area of connection and possibility. (Pollio et al., 2004, p. 5)

Although the excerpt above seems to imply a non-directive stance, this is only partially correct. It may be necessary at times during the interview for the researcher to bring a participant back to the initial interview question or to return the focus of discussion to the participant's *experience* should he/she stray from this focus. For example, if the topic of study is the experience of sadness, and the participant speaks about the ways in which he/she conceptualizes sadness in general, it would be warranted for the interviewer to ask the participant to describe a specific time when he/she experienced feeling sadness. The researcher then tries to elicit a complete description of a particular experience as articulated by the participant. To ensure that the participant has had an opportunity to say everything he/she wishes, it is imperative, before moving on to another experience, that the interviewer ask, "Is there anything else you would like to say?" or "Is there anything else that stands out to you about that experience?" (Thomas & Pollio, 2002).

Post-Interview Procedures

Following requests from the Institutional Review Board to protect participants' emotional and psychological well-being, the investigator developed a set of standard post-interview questions (Appendix A-5). These questions were asked of each participant informally following the interview to assess for current level of distress and to provide an opportunity to refer participants to counseling services if needed. Participants were asked questions about their experience of the interview and whether they were distressed during it. If the participant experienced distress, he/she was asked to talk about those feelings, should he/she wish to, with the interviewer. Lastly, all participants, regardless of their answers to the post-interview questions, were given information about referrals to the UT Psychological Clinic and/or Counseling Center at the conclusion of the interview (Appendix A-6).

Due to the sensitive, personal nature of phenomenological questions, precaution is taken throughout the investigation to ensure participants' safety. Although it is quite common for interviewees to have emotional reactions during the course of the interview which are even, at times, unexpected, it is not the intent of the researcher to ask participants to reveal traumatic or emotionally challenging information that could re-traumatize the individual. As Thomas and Pollio (2002) pointed out, Pennebaker's research on disclosing thoughts and feelings about life changing events has repeatedly yielded found empirical evidence that such disclosure may be beneficial to health and well-being (Pennebaker, 1990). These authors pointed out that Pennebaker's findings should serve to allay the fears of potential participants and Institutional Review Boards

who are concerned that participants may suffer negative consequences by participating in interview studies.

Data Transcription and Preparation

In this study, I conducted all 10 interviews. Two of the interviews were transcribed by advanced undergraduate research assistants who signed confidentiality agreements. I transcribed the remaining eight interviews, and my own bracketing interview. Audiotapes were labeled only with a participant's pseudonym and stored in a locked box to maintain confidentiality.

Transcribing audio recordings of interviews into text forms the body of transcripts to be analyzed in a phenomenological study (Thompson & Pollio, 2002). Analyses can either be done in the context of an interpretive research group, by the author alone, or by some combination of both.

Analysis in the Context of an Interpretive Research Group

In this study, two groups were utilized for data interpretation. The original interpretive research group, which will be referred to as the Tennessee Group, consisted of graduate students and professors from a variety of disciplines including psychology and political science. The second group, referred to as the New York Group, was similar in composition to the Tennessee group, and was created to serve two goals: to maintain the standards of current analyses, and to prevent me, as the primary researcher, from becoming too isolated, which might compromise my ability to interpret the interviews in a rigorous way. To form the New York group, individuals who were either current

graduate students or recent graduates known to me were contacted and solicited for participation. Individuals were offered the opportunity to utilize the group as a work group for their own research/work projects, but no other incentives were used to obtain group members' participation. Group members were allowed to participate only if they were willing to make a written commitment to attend the group on a weekly basis throughout the duration of analysis (one semester). The New York group was comprised of individuals in the following fields: clinical psychology, experimental psychology, human development, and film studies.

Because there were two groups who analyzed this research, it seems important to detail the chronology of that analysis and to make clear which interviews were analyzed by which group. Before I left for internship, my bracketing interview and two interview transcripts were analyzed in the context of the Tennessee group. Following the creation of the New York group, my bracketing interview and five interview transcripts were analyzed in the context of this group. To examine whether the two interpretive groups were conducting similar analyses, two interviews that were analyzed in the New York group were also analyzed by the Tennessee group during visits I made to campus. The remaining three interviews were analyzed by the researcher alone. Thus, four interviews were analyzed by the Tennessee Group, five by the New York Group, and three were analyzed independently by me.

Overall, the Tennessee and the New York groups identified similar themes during data analysis. For example, when analyzing Dave's interview, both groups stopped and spent time analyzing exactly the same phrase, *appealing to others' desires*, noting its importance as a meaning unit and/or potential theme. In addition, both groups noted that

a particular participant failed to take any responsibility for her actions in her CUSA experience. Further, both groups chose to focus on a particular participant's use of the word "No" at one point in her interaction with her sexual partner. Group members in both the New York group and the Tennessee group identified this as somewhat different from other interviews and wondered if this participant's experience would still be categorized as CUSA because the individual did, at least once, indicate that she did not wish to engage in sexual activity with her partner. In the end, although the content of the conversations developed differently within the groups, the conclusion reached in both groups was that this interview should be treated as CUSA because the participant herself identified the experience as simultaneously consensual and unwanted.

One difference between the two groups was that Howard Pollio led the Tennessee group, whereas I led the New York group. Dr. Pollio often pointed out important or relevant meaning units that stood out to him, whereas in my role as both group leader and researcher, I tried to enable group members to identify and pursue thematic components while remaining mostly as neutral observer, taking notes on group members' articulations. This is similar to the role I took in the Tennessee group when initial interview transcripts were analyzed in the group. Because part of the goal of the group is to keep me from seeing the data in a way consistent with my hopefully continually bracketed expectations, this seemed an appropriate approach to take in leading the New York Group. I did, however, take on a more active role in moving the group members along once any and all comments that members wanted to share had been articulated and discussed.

Conducting data analysis in a group setting is unique to University of Tennessee's Phenomenological Research Group. Once interviews have been transcribed, the next step is to bring interview texts for analysis to the interpretive research group. This group is made up of individuals from varying disciplines and provides the interviewer with support during the difficult task of beginning to organize and interpret qualitative data. Further, the interpretive group has often already thematized the researcher's bracketing interview and, therefore, is often able to point out when the researcher's own assumptions emerged in the interviews. These assumptions usually surface in the form of leading questions posed by the interviewer to the participant. As Pollio, Graves, and Arfken (2006) note, members of this group are interested in pointing out an interviewer's leading questions and in seeking counterexamples and contradictions to his/her theoretical claims regarding the topic. Often, when there is concern as to whether a particular theme is present in the interview or is a theoretical assumption of the researcher, the question, "Can you show me where in the text you find that?" is utilized. Members of the interpretive group maintain a respectful, yet critical tone in challenging proposed thematic interpretations until all members of the group agree that a given interpretation is supported in the text.

The interpretive process of phenomenological research consists of relating some part of a text to the whole of that text (Pollio, Graves, & Arfken, 2006). This process is undertaken in two parts, with the initial step being to read the interview transcript aloud within the interpretive group. As the interview is read aloud, members of the group frequently stop to comment on parts of the text that stand out to them as significant. The parts that group members comment upon are frequently called "meaning units" and serve

as the basis for themes (Thomas & Pollio, 2002). Thematic analysis takes place in the context of the group until the researcher is prepared to continue the analysis on his/her own. Sometimes after one or two interview transcripts have been analyzed in the interpretive group, the researcher is able to interpret the majority of the remaining interviews on his/her own (Pollio, Henley, & Thompson, 1997). Whenever possible, however, it is preferable to analyze as many transcripts as possible in the group setting.

Developing a Thematic Structure

The current study's thematic structure was created by utilizing steps created Thomas and Pollio (2002) and detailed in Figure 1 (Adapted from Pollio, H. R., Henley, T., Thompson, C. B., 1997, *The phenomenology of everyday life*. New York: Cambridge University Press. Reprinted by permission of authors.) The thematic structure created using these methods will be rendered in the result section. Below is a detailed explanation of the analysis process that I, as the primary researcher, undertook in the current study.

Deciding what is thematic, according to Thomas and Pollio (2002), is not a matter of quantifying frequencies of particular phrases, but rather is more connected to thinking about "specific words and the meaning of those words in the context in which they were uttered and their relationship to the participant's narrative as a whole" (p. 37). Thomas and Pollio make clear what is meant by the term "theme," describing it in the following way: "The word 'theme' is used to mean patterns of description that repetitively recur as important aspects of a participant's description of his/her experience" (p. 37). At the end of the analysis for each transcript, the interpretive group summarizes themes that emerge during that session. The process of further "thematizing" takes place in two parts.

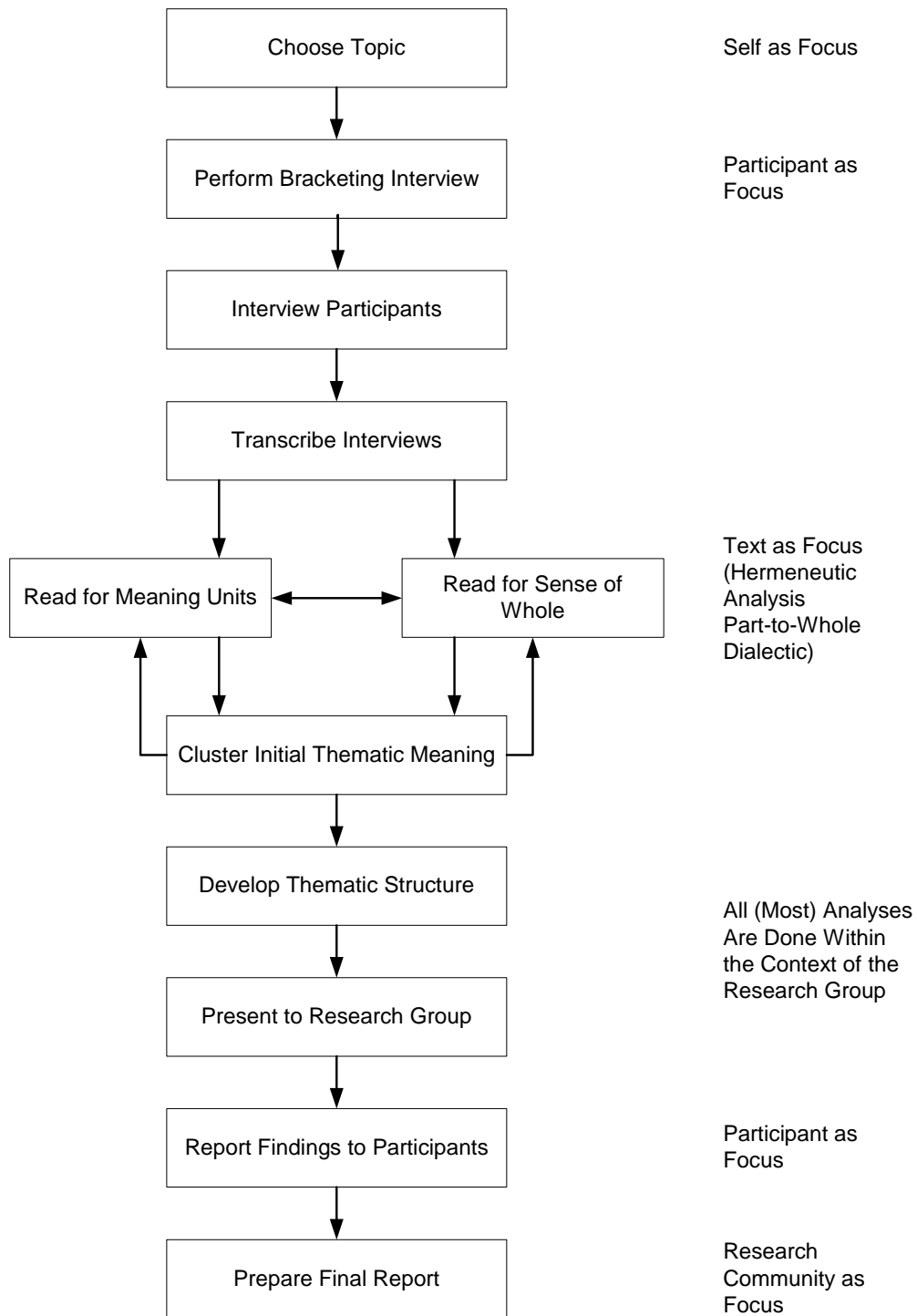


Figure 1

Summary of Steps in Conducting an Existential-Phenomenological Study

The first part consists of exploring individual texts for meaning units (as described above) and often takes place in the interpretive group. The second part is undertaken after all of the individual interviews have been analyzed. During this second step, the researcher explores all themes. Once the researcher has isolated themes that are present across interviews, it then becomes important to return to the interpretive group to ask whether the themes the researcher has selected as relevant are supported in the data of individual texts. The interpretive group assists in determining whether the themes identified by the researcher offer a useful picture of the phenomena of interest. Once agreement is reached concerning these global themes across interview texts, the final development of thematic structure may be rendered.

An important penultimate step in the phenomenological research process occurs after the author and the interpretive group have together articulated the thematic structure of the interviews, which applies both within and across interviews. A literature review of relevant themes is undertaken and placed in context of current findings. Finally, if there is insufficient redundancy among women's and men's experiences if CUSA further analyses will be conducted to explore similarities as well as differences in themes of women and men's experiences of CUSA.

Reporting Findings

For the current study, the researcher attempted to contact all study participants in order to share findings of the current study. Those who responded met with the researcher in person to discuss findings of the current research. Contacting study participants and presenting the phenomenon's structure to them, as was done in the current study, is a

unique aspect of phenomenological research and serves as the next to final step in the phenomenological process. The newly developed thematic structure is typically presented to participants, who are asked to discuss whether this accurately captures their experience. If it does, then the project can be considered nearly complete. Typically there is a supportive response (Pollio, Graves, & Arfken, 2006); when there is not, participants are asked to generate an alternate wording or interpretation, until the participant and the researcher are both satisfied with the resulting structure. It is sometimes the case, however, that participants have difficulty seeing their own experiences as part of a larger pattern. As a consequence, the participant's evaluation is not the "final word" (Pollio, Graves, & Arfken, 2006). In the case in which significant differences still exist between researcher and participant, it is necessary to engage in a new dialogue so that a structure that can be agreed upon by both can be developed. Thus, it may be necessary to conduct an additional interview. In this interview, the researcher must remain open to new descriptions of the experience and exhibit a stance of equality between him/herself and the participant.

CHAPTER III

RESULTS

The goal of this investigation was to describe the experience of consenting to unwanted sexual activity. This description will be described in terms of figure-ground relationships in which recurring themes emerged as figural against a particular ground or context. This section consists of two parts. First, a quantitative summary of results is provided to enable the reader to gain a sense of the range of sexual activities engaged in, the frequency with which participants engaged in them, the types of relationships in which CUSA occurred, and the associated contexts in which these took place. This information is presented in Table 3. Second, an articulation of emergent themes and grounds will be presented together with textual examples serving to illustrate the various themes.

Categorization of Experiences

Table 2 is organized into five columns. The **Activities** column lists the types of activities engaged in by participants, the **Frequency** column lists how often those activities were consented to, and the **Relationship** column delineates the type of relationships in which participants consented to unwanted sexual behaviors. The **Context** column lists relevant information, such as location and interpersonal circumstances surrounding experiences of CUSA. Finally, the **Participant** column lists participants by name, age, and sex.

Table 2
Range of Activities, Frequencies, Relationships, Context, and Participants

Activity	Frequency	Relationship	Context (Reported by Participant)	Participants (N = 10)
Kissing/Oral Sex	Habitual	Committed	When he's tired, when he's doing other things	Dexter: 18-yr-old male
Intercourse	Singular	Committed	To undue damage of first sexual relationship	Layla: 19-yr-old female
Intercourse	Singular	Committed	When he needed to study	Dave: 28-yr-old male
Intercourse	Habitual	Committed	To make life easier, keep the peace	Carly: 41-yr-old female
Intercourse	Singular	Committed	When her boyfriend got back from trip	Homer: 19-yr-old female
Intercourse	Singular	Committed	She was tired, former boyfriend was persistent	Homer: 19-yr-old female
Oral sex	Habitual	Committed	With girlfriend, wondered if it was right/wrong?	Spanky: 21-yr-old male
Manual Sex	Singular	Committed	She kept falling asleep, he was waking her	Sarah: 22-yr-old female
Oral Sex	Singular	Committed	She had given oral sex, asked him to reciprocate	John: 19-yr-old male
Intercourse	Singular	Committed	In car, to be a good girlfriend	LeeAnn: 18-yr-old female
Intercourse	Habitual	Committed	To get what she wants	LeeAnn: 18-yr-old female
Intercourse	Singular	Not Committed	In car to get him to return to her	LeeAnn: 18-yr-old female
Intercourse	Singular	Not Committed	After she had ended casual relationship	Layla: 19-yr-old female
Intercourse	Singular	Not Committed	A woman he had met at bar	Dave: 28-yr-old male*
Intercourse	Singular	Not Committed	He was pressuring her, she ran out of ideas	Lee: 18-yr-old female*
Intercourse	Habitual	Not Committed	During first or second dates, on NY's Eve	Carly: 41-yr-old female*
Oral Sex	Singular	Not Committed	Experience during 1 st overnight date	Spanky: 21-yr-old male*
Kissing/Fondling	Singular	Not Committed	During Spring Break, she tried to "lose" him	Sarah: 22-yr-old female*

*Alcohol used by one or both participants

In examining Table 2, a few clarifications seem necessary. In the **Participant** column (far right), participant names are listed alongside their age and sex ($N = 10$). These names are pseudonyms chosen by participants for the current study and bear no resemblance to their actual names. Participant names that are listed more than once in this column indicate that these individuals described more than one experience of CUSA, although each experience described is listed separately.

Categorizing most participant experiences into this format was straightforward since participants often described a singular CUSA experience clearly. Categorizing some experiences was more difficult since participants described multiple CUSA experiences and these descriptions sometimes overlapped with one another in a variety of ways. As such, the present representation of the data, although useful for descriptive purposes, does not capture participant experiences in their complexity. Excerpts from individual interviews are provided later in this section to enhance the summary information provided here, and present a more complete picture of individual experiences of CUSA.

As listed in Table 2, participants engaged in a broad array of sexual activities from kissing to intercourse and did so in various types of relationships ranging from casual one-night relationships to longer-term committed ones, and, in one case, within a marital relationship. Across participants there some variability with regard to the activity consented to, the type of relationship in which that experience occurred, and the overall description of the experience.

The **Relationship** column lists experiences that occurred in committed relationships (committed: $N=11$) and those that occurred outside committed relationships

(not committed: N=7). If participants made reference to a relationship partner as a “boyfriend/girlfriend” or “husband” the relationship was classified as committed. If these terms were not used, and/or other defining terms such as “friend” or “date” were used, the relationship was categorized as not committed. Grouping experiences as taking place in committed or not committed relationships was suggested by the data as differences were noted in regard to these relationship categories. There were eleven episodes of CUSA in committed relationships and seven in non-committed relationships. The types of activities described ranged from kissing, fondling (above and below waist), and oral sex to sexual intercourse. Relationship types included casual one-night relationships, friendships, committed dating relationships, and marriage.

As can be seen in the **Context** column of Table 2, in committed relationships, individuals often consented to unwanted sexual activity when they were engaged in or were intending to do something other than engage in sexual activity. This was not true for non committed relationships. For example, many of the participants in committed relationships spoke about being tired because they had been working, studying, or playing music for many hours. They engaged in CUSA when their partners initiated sexual activity, which sometimes involved interrupting the consenting partner’s chosen activity. For participants not in committed relationships, CUSA experiences occurred in the context of interactions such as on a date, during a conversation, or while away on vacation. These experiences were described less as interruption to the consenting partner’s other chosen activities, and seem better characterized as the focal event in the interaction between the two individuals.

CUSA sometimes occurred in situations in which alcohol was consumed, either by the participant or his/her partner. There were five instances of CUSA that included the presence of alcohol. Of some note, all five experiences of CUSA involving alcohol took place in the context of more casual relationships, rather than in more committed ones. Of those five experiences, three included experiences in which both the participant and the sexual partner had been drinking alcohol, with the remaining two experiences consisting only of the initiating partner's use of alcohol.

Emergent Thematic Structure

Phenomenological analysis yielded three themes, all of which have sub-themes. These three themes stood out against the ground of interpersonal relationships from which experiences of consenting to unwanted sexual activity came into view. Three major themes define an episode of CUSA: *Focus, Expectation, and Outcome*. The *Theme of Focus* refers to a diminishing of self-focus and concomitant increasing of other-focus; the *Theme of Expectation* describes an awareness of socio-culturally dictated rules, gender roles, and standards for relationship reciprocation; and the *Theme of Outcome* describes CUSA a *means to an end* which sometimes resulted in an unexpected outcomes.

Themes and sub-themes of the experience of CUSA are presented in Table 3. In Table 3, CUSA is characterized by a fading of focus on the self, in terms of a desire to participate in some sexual activity. It is also characterized by an increased focus on the desires of an important other, often to the exclusion of a fully present self in the experience. The focus on the other is related to the individual's use of rules and roles,

Table 3

Emergent Themes and Subthemes of Consensual Unwanted Sexual Activity

Theme	Participant's Words	Conceptual Labels
Focus	"Just a distant third"	Self-sacrifice
	"Waiting for it to end"	Self as absent
Expectation	"You are supposed to . . ."	Norms
	a. "You're supposed to kiss and have sex"	Rules
	b. "Men aren't supposed to do that, it means they're weak"	Roles
	c: "I wanted to return the favor"	Reciprocations
Outcome	"Means to an End"	Instrumental
	a. "It sounds silly but you're thinking that maybe if I have sex with her then she'll leave me alone"	Create wanted outcome
	b. "You figure you gotta do it at least every now and then . . . or someone's gonna get mad"	Avoid unwanted outcome
	c. "I wonder if I should have done that?"	Unexpected outcome

Note: Ground: Interpersonal Relationship

both expectations dictated by social others and the larger social world regarding acceptable ways of interacting in relationships. Further, individuals are guided toward pleasing others by employing a socially sanctioned transactional, or reciprocal approach with their partners. Lastly, CUSA is an activity that individuals choose in order to achieve certain relational or other outcomes. As one participant described it, it is a “means to an end.” Despite the seemingly planful nature of CUSA to bring about some desired outcome, there are often unexpected outcomes experienced by individuals such as lingering questions about themselves, their relationships, and sexuality in general.

A schematic diagram of the thematic structure of the experience of CUSA is presented in Figure 2. Although it appears somewhat simplistic, it offers an important way of conveying results of a phenomenological investigation. The figure presents CUSA’s thematic structure as a triangle consisting of three major themes presented against a background of interpersonal relationship. As such it is meant to communicate the Gestalt of the experience of CUSA and to emphasize the interrelationships among major themes. Beier and Pollio (1994) describe such relationships in their investigation of the experience of being in a role.

The three themes are not to be construed as separate events but interrelated aspects of a more comprehensive experiential gestalt. Considering any one theme inevitably implicated the other two, and no theme was any more central to the role experience than any other. (p. 12)

Beier and Pollio presented a well-articulated description of interactions among thematic components of an experience, that can be directly applied to the present study’s themes defining the experience of CUSA. CUSA is a human experience; thus, it presents a dynamic Gestalt. The experience is not stable, but is categorized by continuous

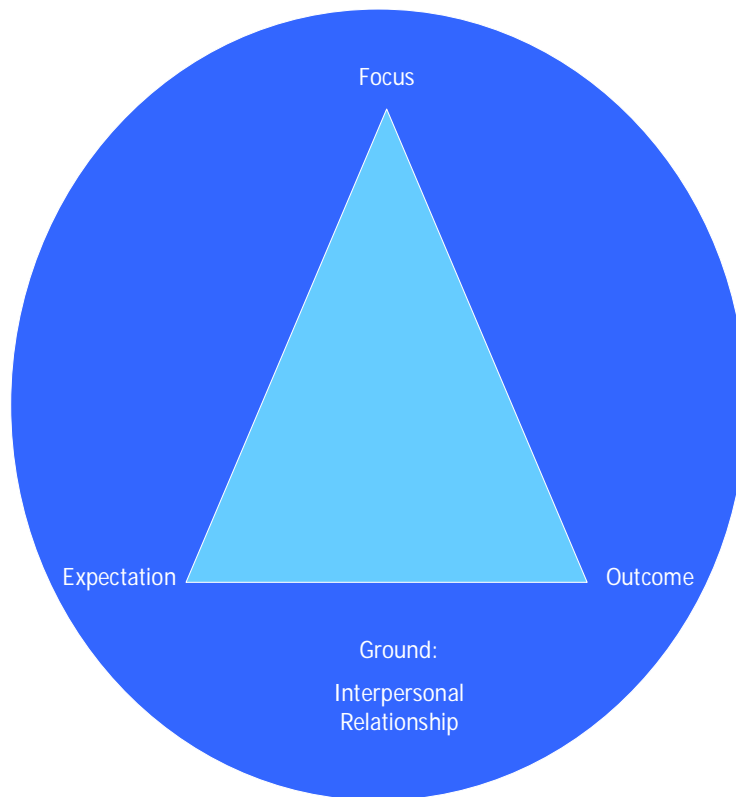


Figure 2

Schematic Diagram of Thematic Structure

movement among themes. The three themes in combination characterize the experience of CUSA, various components may be more relevant at a certain point in the experience, and this emphasis may shift as the individual moves through the experience. For example, in the beginning of an experience of CUSA, the *Theme of Focus* and the *Theme of Expectation* may be most salient; afterwards, the *Theme of Outcome* may emerge as salient. Similarly, the *Theme of Outcome* is often figural following the experience of CUSA. At this time, there might also be a return to an individual's self-sacrificing patterns or to a withdrawal of the self characteristic of the *Theme of Focus* aspect of the experience. Examples of interrelationships among CUSA themes will be presented using textual samples from participant interviews.

The three major themes comprising the experience of consenting to unwanted sexual activity will now be considered in greater detail and textual examples provided to help the reader evaluate on his/her own whether these themes adequately capture this experience (See Table 3). Substantial excerpts will be provided to help clarify participant experiences. Using participants' own words will also convey some of the uniqueness frequently obscured by attempts to identify common aspects of different experiences. It is hoped that these excerpts will help the reader understand participant experiences in sufficient detail to permit an evaluation of the major themes and their attendant sub-themes.

Theme of Focus

Participants described a minimization of focus on themselves and/or their own desires and an increase in focus on accommodating the desires of the other. In focusing on the other, participants described often failing to be fully present to the sexual experience.

Theme of Focus - Subtheme A: Self-Sacrifice

When participants described experiences of consenting to unwanted sexual activity, they often minimized the importance of their own desires in favor of focusing on and meeting the desires of the other. One participant noted: "I'm not thinking about myself. I just think about what everybody else wants or needs, I'm trying to make my parents happy, I'm trying to make my girlfriend happy, and I'm just a distant third" (Dexter, 18-year-old male, line #22). Another participant noted similarly: "I guess mainly that it isn't my choice...that sometimes it isn't something that I want to do...I'm appealing to someone else's desires" (Dave, 28-year-old male, line #31).

Many participants described sacrificing their own desires to engage in CUSA despite acknowledging (to themselves at least) that they did not want to do so. Some participants sacrificed their own desires even in the face of negative experiences: "I told him that I wanted to (have intercourse) when the truth was I was telling myself that, but the truth is like, I had this panicky feeling inside of me saying that I don't want to" (Layla, 19-year-old female, line #67). Sacrificing one's desires was not necessarily accompanied by a negative component. One participant described participating in CUSA when her partner returned from an out of town trip and did not describe any negative

emotions about the experience: “He came in from Texas, he um, he wanted to (have intercourse) just cause it had been like a long time since he was out of town, and I didn’t, but I did it anyways” (Homer, 19-year-old female, line #16). Although the experiences described involved self-sacrifice, some experiences described by participants were negative whereas others turned out to be either neutral or positive.

Some participants minimized their own desires and focused on their *partner’s* desires, as in the previous excerpt, whereas other participants similarly minimized the importance of their own desires, but, instead of focusing on a *partner’s* desires, focused on *other significant others* in their lives. This focus on important significant others is illustrated in one participant’s words: “I guess the thing about my friends, I guess that was the main thing. What are *they* gonna think if I do this (perform oral sex on girlfriend)?” (John, 19 -year-old male, line #520). Another participant was concerned about her sexual partner’s friends: “I didn’t really want to but I felt like if I just said back off or whatever that it would just be bad because I would see them (his friends) all the time and I know all of their friends so it would just be weird” (Sarah, 22-year-old female, line #12). Other participants were focused on parental or other authority figures in their lives. One participant, Spanky, a 21-year-old male, was focused on what his parents or other close relatives might think about his sexual activity. After talking to his cousin about an experience of CUSA, Spanky stated the following:

It made me feel like I needed to think about what I was doing, but at the same time, he (participant’s cousin) kind of agrees with what I did, it’s just that I gotta be careful about what I do in the future. And after that I just sat there thinking for a little while, like okay, that’s my cousin, I look up to him a lot and now that I have told him all this, I trust him to death but, would he tell my parents this, that, and the other? I was kinda scared about...I know my parents would not like what I was doing, and it just became one of those things that I think they wouldn’t, they’d be like you’re old enough to make your own decisions but they’d be

disappointed in what I did. And that was sort of the fear there. (Spanky, 21- -year-old male, line # 338)

Whether focusing on one's partner, one's own or one's partner's friends, or on other important figures such as family members, participating in CUSA includes a minimization of an individual's desires in favor of a strong focus on important others and their desires and opinions. Notably this focus did not necessarily occur *before* participants engaged in CUSA. Often participants spoke about important others after they participated in CUSA. That is, the desires of important others emerged as significant for some participants in assisting them with the decision to participate in CUSA whereas in other instances, the focus on important others occurred after participants had engaged in CUSA.

Theme of Focus - Subtheme B: Self as Absent

In addition to a reduced focus on one's own desires in favor of those of the other, many participants described impatience and/or a lack of full presence during their experience of CUSA. One participant noted that when she engaged in CUSA her mind was often elsewhere: "Sometimes you think of other things, or other people, to maybe make it a little more enjoyable or something" (Carly, 41-year-old female, line #28). Another participant described being distracted by sounds and nearby activity during her experience of CUSA. Lee, an 18-year-old female, reported, "I wasn't really paying attention to him the whole time he was doing it. The dog was outside the door and his tags were jingling, and people were coming up the stairs, and the lights were going on and off" (line #70).

While these thoughts of other things or distractions seem fairly benign, some participants described not being fully present in more negative ways. One participant noted that because he did not desire the sexual activity, his focus was elsewhere (Dave, 28-year-old male, line # 11): “You go through the motions, there’s not a whole lot of passion say on my side...it’s like a, let’s get it over with attitude” (line #48). Homer, a 19-year-old female noted: “I guess I just kinda pretended...I was annoyed that it took him so long. I just wanted it to end” (line #56). She also stated, “I’m like gosh, please get it over with. Not like I hate this, just like, especially if my mind is preoccupied, I’m just like, I’m thinking inside that I need to go do something else that I need to do, or have to do, or stuff like that” (line # 227). Despite not seeming fully present or interested in the sexual activity, however, most participants did not endorse severe negative emotional consequences associated with this impatience or distracted presence during CUSA.

One participant, however, did acknowledge more strikingly negative effects of *Theme of Focus: Subtheme B: Self as Absent* part of the CUSA experience. Notably one of the two female participants in the study who acknowledged to the interviewer having been a victim of a past rape experience reported having some seemingly intense negative experiences as a result of participating in CUSA. In her particular situation, Layla decided to participate in CUSA as a way to move beyond difficulties she experienced with intimacy that developed following the rape:

So I tell him, okay I’m ready, and he was like, are you sure? And he asked me are you sure and I told him yes and um, so we have sex and I just felt so numb and I think he could tell but not really (laughs)...I mean I faked my orgasm and so to him it was this really beautiful thing the first time we were together, and to me it was just completely hollow. And after that I kind of felt sort of distant from him. (line # 135)

As described above, Layla's experience of CUSA resulted in her feeling numb and hollow during sex and distanced from her partner afterwards. Importantly, later in the interview Layla described ending the relationship with her boyfriend, in part due to this experience and to the couple's difficulty in communicating with one another about it.

To summarize, the *Theme of Focus*, which includes two sub-themes: *Self-Sacrifice and Self as Absent*, describes a shift in focus from the self to the other which occurs in CUSA. Participants described prioritizing the desires of others over their own, and in so doing, participated in sexual activity in which they often did not appear to be fully present or engaged.

Theme of Expectation

Participants appear to decide to engage in sexual activity in the absence of a desire to do so by referencing societal expectations for normal or appropriate behavior. In this regard, they described a set of general social rules governing relationship-appropriate behaviors, a set of roles determining societally-sanctioned gender-specific behaviors appropriate for sexual relationships, as well as a golden rule with regard to reciprocation in relationships.

Theme of Expectation - Subtheme A: Rules

Participants described making decisions about CUSA using words such as *should* and *supposed to*. They noted that one *should* engage in CUSA because this is the kind of behavior "I *should* be engaging in" as an individual in a long-term relationship. Homer, a 19-year-old female noted, "You're supposed to kiss and have sex" (when you're in a

relationship) (line # 31). Another female participant, Carly, a 41-year-old female participant, and the only married participant in the study, reported that she felt it was part and parcel of the requirements of being in a marital relationship: “If you’re married, I mean its part of what you’re supposed to be doing” (line #47). Dave, a 28-year-old male student talked about feeling that participating in CUSA was part of engaging in the college experience. He reports being unsure of why he participated in CUSA and noted that:

I asked myself what am I doing? Or you know, I really don’t care about this person, it doesn’t really matter. You know, um, a lot of times I’m in those situations, the way I tend to get through them is sort of, you know, you’re into the old, the old college thought that you know you go to college, sow your oats, and you know have a good time and things like that. I guess that’s kind of how I, I don’t know, make it acceptable to me at the time. (line #121)

Participants justified engaging in CUSA by stating they were following a set of rules for normal relationship behavior. Some participants called upon rules that had been passed down to them. These can be identified more directly as *moral* rules. Spanky, a 21-year-old male noted, “I’ve got a grandmother who’s pretty religious and she said, don’t do anything where you wouldn’t want Jesus to come down at the end of the world and see you doin’ it” (line #136).

In addition to moral rules, some participants tried to employ (assumed) cultural rules to guide their behavior. Sarah, a 21-year-old female student who was born and raised in a middle-eastern country until age 16 when she and her family moved to America noted making decisions based on her expectations of American girls:

When you’re in the US you always have, like, datings that are open, like everybody knows about them and everything like that, but where I’m from you hide, you hide a lot of things, and um you don’t always hear about all kinds of couples, you don’t always see lots of reality TV shows about like boyfriends and girlfriends and people, you know, interacting, so maybe that’s why I try to

compare myself to other couples, to see like how much sex I'm supposed to have or, you know, what's normal, what's not normal? (Sarah, 21-year-old female, lines # 888-894)

Notably, there was no consistent pattern identified in the data with regard to whether the rules invoked by participants made it more or less likely that they would participate in CUSA. To be more specific, in many cases speaking about appropriate rules for sexual behavior did result in participants deciding to engage in CUSA; in other cases, this was not the case. Some participants described going against social rules. Regardless, the description of socially dictated rules is what stood out as thematic across the various interviews. For example, one female participant described believing the following: "I was thinking, every other couple would have done this" (Sarah, 21-year-old female, line #1156). In her case, she described thinking about a particular rule and this resulted in her deciding to participate in CUSA but regretting it later. Another participant, John, a 19-year-old male, described being aware of a social prohibition against a particular sexual behavior which he described as being the reason he didn't want to engage in the activity. However, in the context of his long term relationship with his girlfriend, he opted to participate in the activity to please her, despite knowing that it would have been against his friends' rules. The excerpt below from John's interview illustrates this well:

John: And then I was like, aw forget it, you know, it's not that big a deal if they (his friends) find out, they're still my friends, I don't think they're gonna...

Interviewer: So you're having this battle with yourself?

John: Right.

Interviewer: Do I do it, do I not, and on the not side is what your friends would think of you if they knew?

John: Right.

Interviewer: But somehow you got to the “Well I don’t care, I’m gonna go ahead and do it.”
Or ?

John: Right.

Interviewer: Do you know how?

John: It was more about how she would feel and just trying to please her (his girlfriend)... that outweighed them I guess. (lines #520-526)

This excerpt demonstrates the ways socially dictated rules affected one participant’s feelings about participating in CUSA. It also serves to highlight the importance of John’s significant other in making his decision to engage in sexual activity. Part of the reason he did not want to engage in the sexual activity was because of his friends’ sanctions against it (*Theme of Expectation: Subtheme A: Rules*); however, John ultimately decided to engage in the behavior because he focused on the desires of his significant other. This excerpt is an example of both the *Theme of Expectation: Subtheme A: Rules* and also that of *Theme of Focus: Subtheme A: Self-Sacrifice*. The excerpt also illustrates the shift that occurs when an individual decides to focus on the desires of another despite initially not wanting to because of social rules dictated by his friends. Lastly, this excerpt demonstrates well the triangular thematic structure and the movement that occurs during the course of the experience of CUSA. At first the *Theme of Expectation* was more figural for John, but then, the desires of the other, or the *Theme of Focus*, became more figural at the time of his decision to engage in CUSA with his partner. Following his experience of CUSA, it seems likely that the *Theme of Outcome* would emerge as figural.

Theme of Expectation - Subtheme B: Roles

In describing experiences of CUSA, participants frequently described *role* sanctioned expectations for appropriate behavior for men and women. Participants used these expectations either to defend their hesitation about engaging in CUSA or to explain their choice to engage in the activity despite not having any desire to do so. For example, Carly, a 41-year-old married female noted, “If a guy is happier or feels like he’s getting more sex and is happier, then things are just a lot more peaceful and easygoing” (line #147). Another participant explained her reasoning for participating in CUSA with her boyfriend by noting clear gender differences between men and women:

It’s pretty much the whole thing, that yeah guys are more sexual, you hear it all the time, that, ‘oh we have to have sex and if we don’t have sex, blah blah blah, and it’s something for them to be proud of...to have sex. And I think it’s kind of like there are certain needs for them (guys), and I have to meet, like, some of the requirements, and that’s why I’ll go...Well, we haven’t done anything in a week, so I should do stuff now, even maybe if I don’t want to. (Sarah, lines # 945-951)

In this sample from Sarah’s interview, two Subthemes defining the *Theme of Expectation* are easily identified: *Roles and Rules*. Sarah is noting gender role differences between men and women that create for her a valid reason for participating in CUSA (because men need sex more than women and it is at least partly her role as girlfriend, to provide it). Also illustrated is the *Theme of Expectation: Subtheme A: Rules*, as Sarah suggests that as a result of acknowledging that guys have certain needs for sex, she then makes a statement about feeling as if she *should* engage in CUSA in accordance with socially dictated rules for romantic relationships.

Other participants described various gender role expectations to rationalize why they did not want to participate in CUSA. One participant in a long-term committed relationship described an expectation, apparently shared among men, which contributed

to his disinterest in participating in this particular sexual activity. He noted, “For a guy to do that to a girl (give her oral sex) is kind of demeaning” (John, 19-year-old male, line #41). Another male participant invoked the sexual script that men are always interested in having sex and acknowledged that this role expectation, although not held by the participant, still affected his thinking and subsequent behavior:

Women that I’ve had experiences with think that a guy will just sleep with any girl, just throw her in front of him and he’s in....I’ve gotten verbally upset at girls at work where they’re like, you know, take me home or whatever, and I kind of ask, ‘What makes you think I would take you home? Do you think just because I’m a man I would take you home?’ So I think there’s that expectation there. (Dave, 28-year-old male, line #664)

A female participant acknowledged this same sexual script. Homer, a 19-year-old female stated, “Sex is real essential to guys, kinda takes priority all of the time, even if they’re running thirty minutes late, they’ll still do it just cause it’s that intense to them” (line # 762). Interestingly in the interviews conducted, while both men and women described role expectations, women frequently affirmed sexual scripts about men, such as the ones noted above, and men often disconfirmed the validity of these sexual scripts. Fewer sexual scripts were discussed with regard to women’s role in the relationships, other than women feeling as if their lives were made easier if they chose to meet role expectations of a female in a relationship whose job it is to please her partner. Although described as a traditionally female script, male participants seemed to feel similar pressures to please their partners. Men in the study may have also felt this way because they were aware of needing to live up to the expectation of the male sexual script as always ready for sex. What repeatedly emerged as figural across interviews was participants’ use of gender norms to guide their decision-making.

Theme of Expectation - Subtheme C: Reciprocation

The third Subtheme of the *Theme of Expectation* seemed to suggest an expectation of equality within relationships, even in the most casual ones. Participants used a variety of terms to indicate an ideal of reciprocation in relationships and often talked about feeling obligated, about not wanting to change a previously agreed upon mutual plan, about *duty* to the relationship, and about “returning the favor.” Carly noted, “After you’re married for a while or whatever, sometimes it becomes more of an obligation...it’s your wifely duties” (line #65). Another participant felt a sense of obligation in one instance because her partner had just helped her with her homework: “I did feel like I owe him because he helped me and I owed him for that. I do definitely feel a lot of times like I owe him (Sarah, line #766). She later clarified that she did not necessarily feel she owed her partner sex but explained she felt she owed him something: “A favor maybe, I don’t necessarily think that I owe him sex but I think that maybe I owe him if he does a favor for me, and if that’s the favor he wants from me, I could do it” (Sarah, line #791). Other participants noted their desire to act in accordance with rules of reciprocation in order to maintain an agreement made between the two members of the couple. Homer, a 19-year-old female stated, “It’s not something I have to do, it’s just something that me and him do (always engage in sexual activity when either partner initiates it) and I didn’t wanna like, back, I don’t wanna like back out on my deal” (line #80). Another participant described wanting to give to his partner what she had given him (oral sex). John noted that he participated in CUSA, “just to return the favor...just you know, not making her feel uncomfortable and you know...doing it for her, too” (line #129).

One might think that reciprocation might be more likely to occur within the context of committed relationships. Standards for keeping relationship interactions balanced were also identified in the interviews of participants who described more casual sexual episodes. One participant described feeling obligated to participate in CUSA because a friend of hers had done several nice things for her while she and her classmates were on a Spring Break trip. Sarah, a 21-year-old female reported, “He likes you and he’s been so nice to you and like, he buys you a drink, and you’re just like oh, I should kiss him in return” (line #335-338). Another female participant remarked similarly about a first date she went on, suggesting that because her date had paid attention to her and exerted effort that she owed him something in return. Participants seemed to feel a sense of obligation to reciprocate when their dates or partners have done something for them. Although many times this expectation for reciprocation involved sexual activities, this was not always the case. A more explicit example of the reciprocation that accompanies CUSA is illustrated in the interview excerpt below:

Well when I got back from Spring Break, he was back in Galveston and I was like I’ll give you a blow job if you buy me flowers. Apparently he was driving back from the flower shop, cause he said, “Do you know what I’m looking at right now? Tulips.” And I said... I’ll be right there. (LeeAnn, 18-year-old female, line # 23)

This excerpt, the reciprocation was made explicit and was agreed upon by both partners in a way that the participant described as mutually gratifying; although LeeAnn may not have wanted to engage in oral sex at that time, she offered it to her partner on the condition that he provide her with something in return. Although this excerpt is specific, expectations for reciprocations were often less clearly articulated and many participants

described more subtle or implicit expectations to maintain balance within the relationship.

To summarize, the *Theme of Expectation* consisted of three sub-themes: *Rules, Roles, and Reciprocations*. All three sub-themes, whether based on societal rules, gender roles, or standards for relationship reciprocations, appear to categorize some of the reasons individuals find themselves engaging in CUSA. Further, they add to the *Theme of Focus* by extending the influence of significant others to the greater social context from which we derive cues about how to direct our behavior in relationships.

Theme of Outcome

Participants described not wanting to participate in the sexual activity but deciding to anyway in order to achieve various goals. In this context they consented to unwanted sexual activity itself, although they also various additional outcomes, often times unrelated to the sexual activity itself.

Theme of Outcome - Subtheme A: Create Wanted Outcome

Participants often spoke of engaging in CUSA to please a partner or to bring about some desired outcome. One participant talked about engaging in CUSA despite being very tired after a musical performance. He chose to engage in CUSA despite feeling tired, “just to make her happy” (Dexter, 18-year-old male, line #112). Another participant made clear she was not aroused but decided to have sex with her partner, “I didn’t wanna have sex, I wasn’t in the mood, I wasn’t horny, but I realized that if I had sex with him right then it would work in my favor later on (LeeAnn, 18-year-old female,

line #37). She described engaging in that sexual activity at that time so that her ex-boyfriend would come back to her. She stated, “I wanted to do it so, just for the underlying reason of I wanted him to come back, I wanted him to love me. But no, I didn’t wanna have sex” (lines #6-7). Another participant, Carly, noted that by engaging in CUSA, it contributed to a better home life for her: If you do it more often they’re happier, that just keeps things easier, easy going” (line # 131). Another participant talked about engaging in CUSA to bring about what might seem an unexpectedly positive outcome. Dave, a 28-year-old male, discussed his reasons for engaging in CUSA: “It sounds silly but you’re thinking that maybe if you I have sex with her then she’ll leave me alone” (line #747). Other participants described engaging in CUSA because it was what their partners desired. One participant describes well the differing motivations for participating in CUSA in different types of relationships:

For me, when I have sex with one night stands, it’s to make me feel better about myself because in the morning I think, ooh look, that guy wanted me, I had sex with him, and I’m better than a girlfriend because he wanted just my body so I must be really great. With a boyfriend, uh, for me to have sex with them, in the beginning its I really wanna have sex with you because I really like you, you’re fun, but after the relationship gets old, it’s I wanna have sex with you because I want something or because I want you to stop pouting cause it makes me mad or we’re in a fight and I don’t wanna be in trouble anymore, or I want flowers or something like that. (LeeAnn, 18-year-old female, lines # 7-15)

Theme of Outcome - Subtheme B: Avoid Unwanted Outcome

Participants also described experiences in which they engaged in sexual activity to avoid a negative or unwanted consequence. Individuals reported engaging in CUSA, for example, to keep from hurting their partners’ feelings. One participant, Dexter, noted that he participates in CUSA to avoid making his girlfriend feel bad; “She gets so upset if

I don't really want to...she thinks something's wrong with her, or thinks she doesn't look good enough that day" (lines #116-117). Many participants discussed participating in CUSA to avoid relationship tension. Carly reported, "You figure you gotta do it at least every now and then or every so often, or someone's gonna get mad" (line #114). She also stated, "I would say most of the time if you give in, it's just a matter of not wanting to be bothered or hassled, or I mean, you just don't wanna deal with any of the pressure, or any grief. So it's just easier to go ahead instead of not" (line #182).

Other participants noted that participating in CUSA was easier than having the conversation that would ensue from saying no. The interview excerpt below illustrates this attitude.

Homer: Cause he'll be like, well honey, don't you always like to have sex? And I'll be like, well yeah, but blah blah blah, and I don't wanna explain all that, it's just easier...

Interviewer: It's just easier to do it, than explain it?

Homer: It's only 20 minutes out of my life to do it! (laughs)

Interviewer: So it's kinda a short amount of time for a.....benefit?

Homer: Yeah instead of possibly hurting his feelings, I could hurt his feelings, I could, I'd have to explain it, and then, I just don't wanna do all that.

Interviewer: Have you done that before?

Homer: What?

Interviewer: Where you've had to explain it and you have hurt his feelings?

Homer: Yeah, I've done that a time or two...when I've been like, I'm really not in the mood blah blah, but then I go ahead and do it anyways, I don't know if it hurts his feelings..seems like it would hurt his feelings.

In this excerpt, Homer seems to engage in CUSA in part to avoid having a conversation with her partner about it and in part to avoid hurting her partner's feelings. Notably,

however, it seems clear that she is not altogether sure how it would make her partner feel for her to say no, but makes a guess that it would hurt his feelings and as a result engages in CUSA to avoid that possibility. Thus, participants engaged in CUSA to bring about either a desired outcome or to avoid an unwanted one. Sometimes participants endorsed engaging in CUSA both to bring about a desired outcome and to avoid a negative one simultaneously. What emerged as consistently figural was the goal-directed or instrumental nature of CUSA. A group member from the Tennessee phenomenological research group summarized accurately that participants were not saying yes to sexual activity, they were saying yes to the outcome of that activity.

Theme of Outcome - Subtheme C: Unexpected Outcome

Despite planning for a particular outcome--whether to please a partner or to avoid relationship tension--participating in CUSA often left individuals with unexpected feelings and lingering reflections about their experiences. They reported becoming very curious about their experiences, and spontaneously reported a sort of internal struggle about whether or not they should have engaged in CUSA and whether important others in their lives would have made similar choices. One participant articulated this reflective experience clearly: “Afterwards I kind of rethought about it and said, I should have thought more clearly and acted on my initial instincts and just stopped it, and I didn’t” (Dave, 28-year-old male, line #24). For some participants this reflection included feelings of regret. Somewhat differently, other participants described having questions about themselves following CUSA. Spanky, a 21-year-old male, described having many questions and unanticipated feelings that followed participating in what seemed to be

physically wanted sexual activity. He noted, “It’s not the act itself that really scared me, it wasn’t the pleasure part or anything like that, it was, is this right or wrong?” (*Theme of Expectation: Subtheme A: Rules*) (lines #177-179).

Another participant similarly wondered whether he should have engaged in CUSA with his partner:

Well during I didn’t think anything about it. I did it. But afterwards I was kinda thinking, maybe I shouldn’t have done that or maybe I’m glad I did it for her, but in terms of me, and what other people are gonna think about me, maybe I shouldn’t have done that. (John, 19-year-old male, line #151)

This excerpt conveys the questioning that occurred for many participants following participation in CUSA. This segment of John’s interview also contains remnants of other themes as well, such as the *Themes of Outcome and Focus*. John is glad that he participated in CUSA for his partner because it was pleasing to her, an outcome he desired (*Theme of Outcome: Subtheme A: Create Wanted Outcome*). Simultaneously, he acknowledges a return to the focus on important *others* in his life, his peers, and again mentions wondering what his peers will think of him for participating in this activity (*Theme of Focus*). Coincidentally there was an unexpected positive outcome that John later articulates: “I guess afterwards, also I thought, um, after doing this, she’ll definitely want to have sex afterwards... I guess afterwards it would kinda get her in the mood, I guess...it’s kinda like having another weapon in the arsenal” (lines #363-371).

Other unexpected outcomes were less positive and many (although certainly not all) participants described negative emotions resulting from participating in CUSA. In one case, a negative health outcome resulted from a participant’s experience with CUSA. Below are two excerpts that demonstrate negative unexpected outcomes of CUSA:

I was kind of half-expecting (pause) that this was gonna be great. Not fully expecting it, but you know a big part of me was (expecting it), and so I think that made me feel very anxious, like, as things are sort of going on...like, this isn't turning out to be something great. It just kinda made me feel very very confused. Confused about the decision I made and bits of regret, and then all the other times it was like once I made the decision that one time, that goes for all other times now. Ya know, like the decision has to, or doesn't have to be made anymore because this is how-this is how it is-and um, we deal with the disappointment and the numbness and knowing that there's-this is not a healthy part of a relationship, but you just continue to do it, just hoping that it will turn into that. (Layla, 19-year-old female, lines #628-640)

I felt like I had done wrong to have sex with him, because it's kinda like the whole scab wound, like, yeah your scab hurts but if you leave it alone it will heal quicker, and I had gone and had sex with him, so it was more like opening the wound again, so I would hurt more, instead of just going to the movies with him and then going home or even just not seeing him that day would have hurt less than having sex with him. I still had sex with him just so I could hold him and feel him and pretend that he still loved me. (LeeAnn, 18-year-old female, lines #23-29)

Layla's excerpt details clearly that she had expected, despite not wanting to participate in the sexual activity, that the sexual experience might be great (and in her case, had hopes that engaging in CUSA would help her get beyond intimacy issues that resulted from a past sexual abuse experience). As can be readily identified in the excerpt, she was left with feelings of anxiety, confusion and numbness. The second excerpt from LeeAnn's interview is also quite moving. It illustrates an example of feeling conflicted about engaging in CUSA. Earlier in this participant's interview, she had described not wanting to have sex with this partner but feeling like it might work in her favor later on as she felt that her having sex with him might increase the chances that he would desire a more committed relationship. Thus, LeeAnn participated in CUSA to bring about a desired outcome (*Theme of Outcome: Subtheme A: Create Wanted Outcome*) but found herself left with unexpected emotional pain instead (*Theme of Outcome: Subtheme C: Unexpected Outcome*). Another female participant ended up with physical consequences

of participating in CUSA. Lee decided to engage in CUSA although she knew that her potential sexual partner had a sexually transmitted disease. She described consenting to engage in unwanted sexual activity because she felt that she “ran out of ideas” to explain why she did not want to do so. She reported feeling a myriad of unexpected feelings following her experience of CUSA, in part, as a result of acquiring the infection. “I was annoyed and pissed and in pain. I was annoyed because it took so long, I was mad because it took so long, and I was mad because I was hurting” (Lee, 18-year-old female, line #234).

To summarize, the *Theme of Outcome* consists of three themes all of whose focal point is the consequence of engaging in CUSA. Participants described participating in CUSA as a “means to an end” either as a way to bring about wanted outcomes or to avoid unwanted ones. Participants were consenting, in a way, to the achievement of certain aims, and did what they believed necessary to meet those goals. Participants, however, were often left with unexpected emotions and questions surrounding the sexual experience. These outcomes were experienced as largely harmless (and even beneficial) to some participants serving to bring tolerable self-reflective questions. For others, these unexpected outcomes were more negative and were sometimes experienced as distressing.

Alcohol

Although not thematic, the use of alcohol was mentioned by five participants, interestingly all within experiences that occurred in relatively casual sexual encounters.

One participant described both partners as intoxicated during CUSA and linked alcohol to her inability to say no despite having no interest in participating in the sexual activity.

Sarah: Yeah, just kinda just pretty much get rid of him or get out of the situation because I really didn't want to have anything to do with him.

Interviewer: So in order to do that, it sounds like for a while you kinda kissed back, or?

Sarah: Yeah, I was drunk, too, so I did kiss back, but it was kinda like when you, um, it was kinda like I was thinking about it as I was kissing back..kinda deal..and then I was just trying to get rid of him. (line #'s 64-71)

Another participant described alcohol as both contributing to his engaging in CUSA and to questioning it later. Spanky, an 18-year-old male participant also described using alcohol in the context of a first over night date, which he suggests resulted in him participating in sexual activity he later questioned whether he had fully wanted.

It's hard, I mean it's something that you feel strong about, it's something that well now going into a different environment, it can seem a little different, especially with things like alcohol and things that distort things, and by no means do I say that alcohol can make you think differently but I think that alcohol can help give you some self confidence and let's you think in a certain way that you might not think about in general (I: mmmhmm), and just being in that environment it pushes me toward the side when it's like hey let's do it again, then hey, why did I do that, you know? (lines #166-172)

Another participant, Carly also described very briefly finding herself in situations in which she participated in CUSA in part due to the loosening of her own self-imposed restrictions. She stated, "Well, one, um, situation, that it comes up with a lot, and has for me, is when you're at a party and people are drinking. Where you may have preset determined values before you start drinking but once you start drinking things happen and everything goes out the window" (lines #793-796). Notably, however, of the five participants who mentioned alcohol, two of them described episodes of CUSA in which their partners were intoxicated but they were sober. It is interesting that these participants

engaged in CUSA in a context in which their partners' judgment may have been compromised.

Yeah, I went to the bar, worked all night (as bartender). I was exhausted. And uh, I was propositioned I guess you could say. (I: mm hmm). And I went ahead and followed through with it. Um, once I agreed, from the time that I agreed to the time that I got home, my mind had changed...because I felt, I was questioning whether this was something genuine or if this was the alcohol talking on their part, or what it was. (I: mm hmm). So I went ahead and went through with it, and the next day, not during the act but the next day, I felt like, I guess what I explained before, just sort of being used, and what it meant. I didn't feel like I was over analyzing it, but I was just reacting to the behavior of the girl that I was with. It kind of seemed insignificant. (Dave, 28-year-old male, lines #93-101)

I was thinking, I was trying to think of how I could get out of it without hurting his feelings, because I knew that if I just got up and was like No!, then he'd get really mad, you know, especially when you're drunk, you, kind of, not that I was scared of him getting mad, but at the time I did kinda still like him, I didn't know what to do, I guess I'm just a pushover, but, I was like, well, he has a condom, I was rationalizing, I was like, well, he has a condom, maybe it'll be okay. (Lee, 18-year-old female, lines #59-64)

In summary, alcohol was consumed in five experiences of CUSA. Interestingly, it was only mentioned in experiences of CUSA occurring outside of committed relationships. There may be a tendency to assume that alcohol lowered the consenting participants' inhibitions and made it more likely they would consent to activities they normally would not. This was not the only trend observed in the current study. Two participants, who had not been drinking themselves, consented to engage in unwanted sexual activity with partners who had been drinking.

CHAPTER IV

DISCUSSION

In this chapter, a general statement of the consensual unwanted sexual activity (CUSA) experience will be presented and then a corresponding list of themes and sub-themes will be provided for review. CUSA's thematic elements will be related to the current psychological literature, and the present section is meant to connect present findings with what is known about both CUSA themes and the interrelationships among these themes as they relate to the phenomenon as a whole. Emergent themes from the present study and conceptually similar topics from the psychology literature, and particularly the CUSA literature, will be discussed. Throughout this discussion, suggestions for future research will be offered as they relate to current findings. Finally, strengths and limitations of the current study, and clinical implications will be provided.

Thematic Description of CUSA Experiences

When an individual consents to engage in unwanted sexual activity he or she minimizes the focus on him or herself and focuses instead on accommodating the other's desires. In focusing on the other, the individual fails to be fully present to the experience and seems preoccupied with a set of general expectations about relationships. The individual considers rules for what one *should* do or *is supposed to do* in the context of his/her relationship (whatever type). He or she is also aware of and guided by gender role expectations that may either inhibit or support the activity. The individual participates in

CUSA to offer reciprocation to a partner, sometimes for sexual activities previously performed, but more often for unrelated tasks completed or gifts given at other times. Frequently, the individual participates in CUSA to bring about various outcomes. The person may have a goal in mind other than sexual pleasure; he or she might want to bring about a positive outcome, for example, making the partner happy, or avoiding a negative outcome, such as making the partner angry.

Often, however, outcomes are achieved that were not unexpected. Participating in CUSA may result in an individual experiencing some unexpected feelings, leading him or her to wonder about whether or not he/she should have engaged in the activity in the first place. There is also a reflective re-analysis following participation in CUSA and the individual's concerns about self, other, and social world are not silenced by participation; rather these concerns emerge as figural as he or she questions the choice that was made. This reflective phase seems to occur even in the absence of an interview which, in this context, asked the participants to describe and reflect on specific life experiences of CUSA. This is a common experience: it occurs for women and men, in long-term relationships and casual encounters, involves a myriad of sexual activities across all levels of sexual experience and in a variety of contexts. As a reminder, major themes comprising the experience of consensual unwanted sexual activity are presented in Figure 3.

CUSA Themes and Relevant Prior Psychological Research

The current study's themes and sub-themes represent interconnected parts of the experiential gestalt defining CUSA, and the organization of this discussion reflects

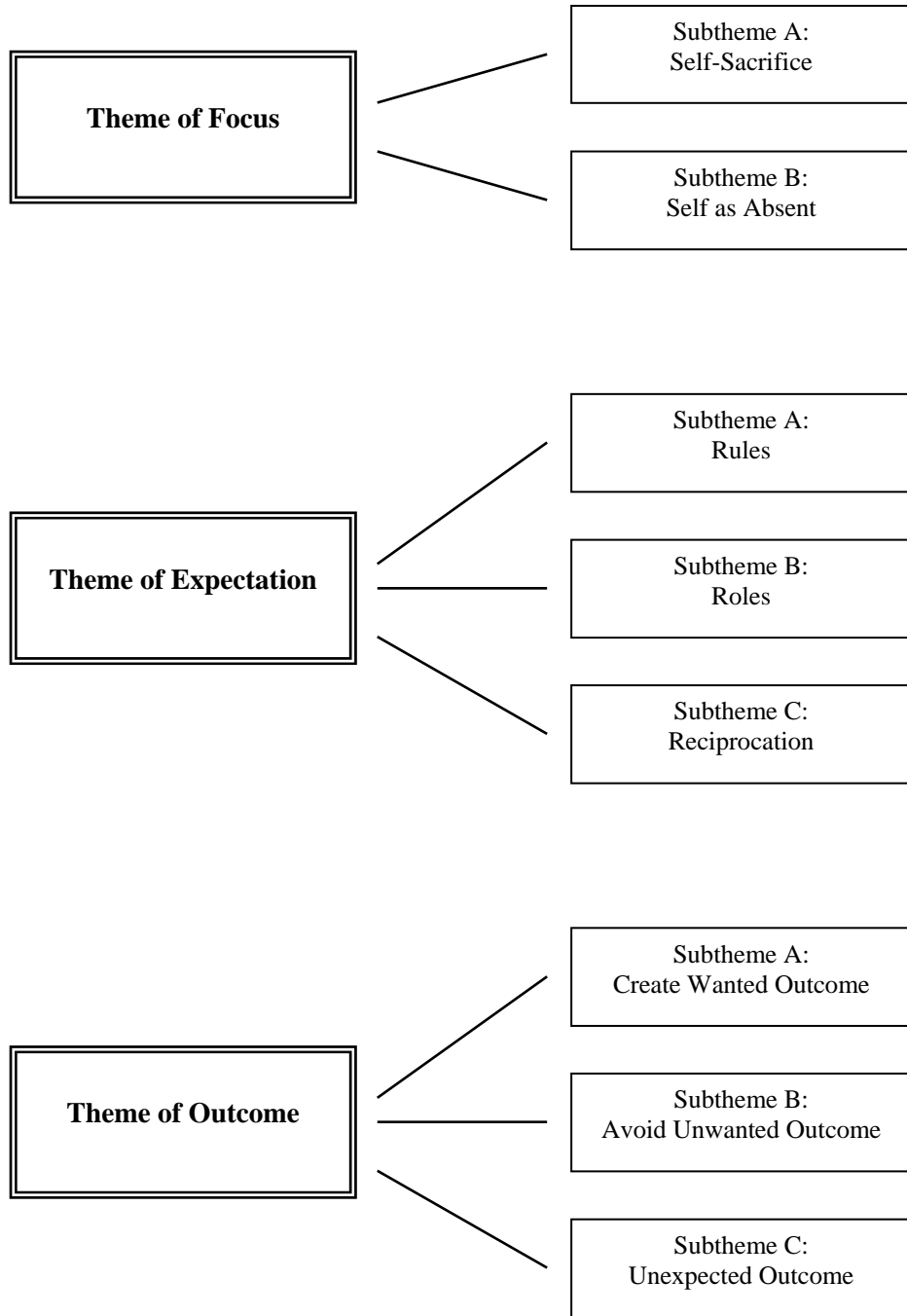


Figure 3

Themes of the Experience of CUSA

interrelationships among themes. Therefore, prior literature will not be presented as it relates to each theme individually. Such an approach would be limiting since the major aspects of CUSA are not experienced in isolation, but are instead interrelated parts of a complex gestalt. This section is organized to highlight thematic connections and to suggest meaningful correspondences among CUSA themes and topics in the psychological literature.

A core theme is the minimization of the focus on the desires of the self in favor of a focus on the desires of the other. An individual focuses on the desires of some other, often sacrificing his/her own wishes to give in to the other. Conceptual variations of this theme have been discussed in the psychological literature, and at least five different and equally complex terms have been used to describe the phenomenon. The terms sociotropy (Beck, 1983), unmitigated communion (Helgeson & Fritz, 1998), codependency (Springer, Britt, & Schlenker, 1998), silencing the self (Jack, 1999), and false-self (Winnicott, 1965) all describe ways of relating to others that involve sacrificing one's own needs to accommodate another's. These ways of relating to others involve, in various ways, compromising one's own needs for those of another, and have been found to be related to various difficulties such as depression, dependency, and low self-esteem (Helgeson, 1994; Helgeson & Fritz, 1998; Peselow, Robins, Sanfilipo, Block, & Fieve, 1992; Springer, Britt, & Schlenker, 1998).

The term *silencing the self* is one that appears most conceptually similar to the current *Theme of Focus* and, in particular, *Subtheme A: Self-Sacrifice*. The term *silencing the self* was originally coined by Jack (1999) and emerged out of her work with depressed female patients whom she noted often engaged in self-sacrificing behaviors to preserve

important relationships. Jack and Dill (1992) developed a scale to measure the relationship between self-silencing and depression (Silencing the Self Scale-STSS) which is composed of four subscales that mirror the theme of *Focus*. The STSS scales include: “*Externalized self-perception* (judging oneself by external standards); *Care as Self-Sacrifice* (securing attachments by putting the needs of others before the self); *Silencing the Self* (inhibiting one’s self-expression and action to avoid conflict, possible loss, or retaliation); and the *Divided Self*, (presenting an outer self that does not express personal, authentic thoughts or feelings; the experience of inner division).

Researchers have found relationships among *silencing the self* and depressive symptoms in samples of men and women (Page, Stevens, & Galvin, 1996). In addition, Thompson (1995) unexpectedly found that although men self-silenced more than women, women’s and not men’s self-silencing scores (as measured by the STSS) were related to poorer relationship satisfaction for themselves and their relationship partners. Similarly, Widman, Welsh, McNulty, and Little (2006) found adolescent girls’ self-silencing behaviors to be related to relationship satisfaction, communication, and reported contraceptive use. Widman et al. (2006) reported, “Adolescent girls, but not boys, who used more self-silencing strategies reported lower sexual communication, and this association led to reduced contraceptive use” (p. 897). Widman et al. (2006) also found that girls who self-silenced were more likely to adhere to traditional gender roles encouraging women to acquiesce in romantic relationships.

Although these research findings apply primarily to women’s self-silencing behaviors, these results suggest there may be a relationship in current study findings among the *Theme of Focus: Subtheme A: Self-Sacrifice* and the *Theme of Expectation:*

Subtheme B: Roles; individuals who self-silence (or sacrifice the self) may also feel pressure (implicit or explicit) to live up to particular gender role expectations. This relationship is observed in participants' reported aspects of self-sacrifice, and is related to gender role expectations that are utilized to justify participating in CUSA. Contrary to published quantitative findings, which have demonstrated such relationships only in women, current findings indicate that sub-themes of *Self-Sacrifice* and *Roles* are interconnected in both men and women.

Incongruent with research findings which link self-sacrifice to negative consequences, at least in women, other researchers have found that sacrificing one's own desires to please another, such as one's partner, may be adaptive, particularly when the individuals are involved in long-term committed relationships. Marital researchers have suggested that sacrificing for one's partner might heighten commitment levels and relationship satisfaction (Stanley & Markman, 1992). Other researchers have suggested that sacrifice may also be connected to reciprocation in relationships (VanLange, Rusbult, Drigotas, Arriaga, Witcher, & Cox, 1997). These researchers suggest that, "an act of sacrifice enhances the probability that one's partner will reciprocate such acts in future noncorrespondent situations. In the context of a generally loving and committed relationship, few individuals are likely to take a 'free ride,' responding to a partner's sacrifice with exploitation" (p. 1375).

Thus, VanLange et al. (1997) concur with Stanley and Markman's (1992) findings that sacrifice can enhance relationship satisfaction and commitment and suggest that sacrificing in a relationship may serve an important communicative function. VanLange et al. (1997) further note that sacrifice provides, "relatively unambiguous

evidence of the individual's prorelationship orientation" (p. 1376). Both Stanley and Markman (1992) and VanLange et al., (1997) support the idea that in the context of committed relationships, sacrificing for one's partner contributes to enhanced commitment, enhanced relationship satisfaction, and elicits reciprocation from one's partner.

Sprecher (1998) explored relationship reciprocation by applying a social exchange theory framework to sexual relationships. She described the tenets of social exchange theory in the following way: (a) Social behavior is series of exchanges; (b) individuals attempt to maximize their rewards and minimize their costs. (c) when individuals receive rewards from others, they feel obligated to reciprocate. Sprecher (1998) suggests that individuals act in accordance with these rules of social exchange in sexual relationships and adhere to standards of reciprocation that contribute to the couple's sexual satisfaction. She noted, "Relationships may be more satisfying when these specific behaviors (sexual ones) are rewarding, the sexual costs associated with these behaviors are low, and the exchange of these behaviors is equitable or equal" (p. 37). Sprecher also notes that when a relationship is inequitable, it may lead to relationship dissatisfaction, and perhaps indirectly, to extradyadic relationships or affairs. She even suggests that a partner may participate in an extradyadic relationship in order to restore a sense of equity to his or her current relationship. Reciprocation, therefore, may be integral to a satisfying and faithful relationship.

Sprecher's (1998) model and Van Lange et al.'s (1997) findings about the importance of reciprocation in relationships map directly on to the results regarding the *Theme of Expectation*, and in particular, *Subtheme C: Reciprocation*. In the current study,

all participants described a desire to maintain a sense of balance in their relationships, even those who engaged in CUSA in the most casual relationships. Some participants endorsed the fear that if they did not offer reciprocation (often in the form of CUSA), their partner might look elsewhere for sexual satisfaction, providing some evidence for Sprecher's hypothesis that relationship inequality might be a contributing factor to extradyadic relationships.

Overall, in the present study, engaging in self-sacrificing and reciprocating behaviors contributed to greater relationship satisfaction for some participants, although this varied greatly depending on the type of relationship. It seems reasonable that sacrificing for one's partner would lead to greater short term satisfaction, but it seems questionable whether this would have a lasting impact on long term satisfaction unless such behavior was reciprocated by the partner. In the current study, self-sacrifice was described by some participants as connected to the commitment level and to reciprocation in the relationship, such that participants often engaged in CUSA to please their partners and maintain equitable 'give and take' in their relationships.

Notably, however, participants in more casual relationships did not describe experiencing enhanced satisfaction as a result of sacrificing their own desires for the other. Contrary to findings suggesting positive connections among self-sacrifice, commitment, and reciprocation, participants who engaged in CUSA in casual contexts reported a sense of loss of self and tended to ruminate about their choices in a personally critical way. It therefore may be the type of relationship and/or commitment that adds value to sacrifice in relationships. It might also be that reciprocation offered in the context of long-term committed relationships carries more meaning than in more casual

settings. Committed partners don't mind sacrificing because they trust that their sacrifices will be reciprocated. In contrast, within relationships lacking in commitment, sacrificing oneself may mean, in some ways, a loss of self, as there exists no promise of partner reciprocation.

In the current study, sacrificing one's own desires and consenting to unwanted sexual activity, even in a committed relationship, did not seem to be overly positive for most participants. CUSA was, at best, a mixed experience about which almost all participants were ambivalent at some point and sometimes regretted, particularly if they engaged in CUSA outside of a committed relationship. One exception was a married participant who spoke about enjoying various rewards she receives from participating in CUSA, yet at the same time acknowledged feeling annoyance about what she felt obligated to do. It might be that within a committed relationship, if engaging in CUSA becomes habitual, even if reciprocated, or if it occurs in the context of dissatisfaction with the relational partner, it may contribute to negative outcomes such as the erosion of closeness and loss of desire for intimacy.

Research exploring motives for sacrifice contributes additional insight into the impact that sacrificing behaviors may have on individuals and their relationships. Impett, Gable, and Peplau (2005) explored the costs and benefits of daily sacrifice in a study of college-aged individuals in dating relationships and found that different motivations for sacrificing predicted different individual functioning and relationship outcomes. These authors applied an approach/avoidance framework to study sacrifice in relationships. They defined this framework in the following way: "Behaviors undertaken in the pursuit of positive or pleasurable experiences have been labeled approach motivated; those that

involve the avoidance of negative or painful outcomes have been termed avoidance motivated (e.g., Carver & White, 1994; Gray 1987, as cited in Impett and Peplau, 2003). These researchers found that approach motivations for sacrifice were positively associated with well-being and relationship quality, whereas avoidance motives for sacrifice were negatively associated with well-being and relationship quality. Their results suggest that it may not be the sacrifice itself that makes the impact, but the meaning of the sacrifice that makes a difference in terms of individual well-being and relationship functioning.

Impett, Peplau, and Gable (2005) also examined motivation for sexual activity from this perspective and found that participating in sex for approach motivations was associated with positive emotional reactions, whereas participating in sexual activity for avoidance motivations appeared to have less positive consequences. Specifically, consenting to sex for approach motives, such as to express love for a partner, was associated with “greater positive emotions, greater satisfaction with life, greater relationship well-being in terms of satisfaction, closeness, and fun, and less relationship conflict” (p. 478). Engaging in sexual activity for avoidance motivations, such as to keep a partner from getting angry, was associated with “more negative emotions, more relationship conflict, and less positive relationship well-being” (p. 478). These results support the notion that the meaning of the sacrifice contributes to its impact.

In the current study, participants’ reasons for engaging in CUSA seem to parallel these findings. The *Theme of Outcome*, which includes *Subtheme A: Create Desired Outcome* and *Subtheme B: Avoid Negative Outcome*, closely resembles Impett and Peplau’s (2005) approach-avoidance paradigm. An analysis of current data suggests that

individuals who participate in CUSA for what appear to be partner-pleasing reasons, such as to make their partners happy, seem less likely to talk about feeling regret about the experience afterwards. This was particularly true if they were satisfied in committed relationships. Conversely, individuals who engaged in CUSA to avoid the loss of a relationship, to avoid relationship tension, or to avoid making a partner angry reported more negative feelings following the experience. Overall, many of these latter individuals talked about wishing they had not consented to the activity. This was particularly true when they engaged in CUSA in casual relationships. It may be that there exists an interaction between level of relationship commitment and the meaning of the sacrifice that engaging in CUSA holds for participants. Consequently, those in committed relationships who participate in CUSA to bring about positive relationship outcomes, such as to demonstrate love for a partner, have a different and more positive experience than individuals who engage in CUSA in casual relationships to avoid negative consequences. For example, John, a male in a committed relationship, engaged in CUSA to please his partner, (*Subtheme A: Create Desired Outcome*) and although he ruminated after the sexual experience about his choice (*Subtheme C: Unexpected Outcome*), he reported being glad he engaged in the sexual behavior because it pleased his partner and contributed to enhanced relationship satisfaction. LeeAnn, on the other hand, who engaged in CUSA in an attempt to persuade a former boyfriend to change his mind about not wanting a committed relationship with her, (*Subtheme B: Avoid Unwanted Outcome*) reported feeling, "dirty" "very depressed" and "used" (LeeAnn, 18-year-old female, lines # 40-45). Such negative emotions as described by LeeAnn (*Subtheme C: Unexpected Outcome*) are easily distinguished from the more positive experience reported by John.

The results of the current study concur with recent research drawing from an analysis of the role of approach/avoidance motivations in sexual behavior. Considering the current qualitative findings in combination with Impett, Peplau, and Gable's (2005) findings leads to interesting possibilities for further investigation. Current findings suggest there might be at least two types of CUSA experiences: a) one that occurs in the context of committed relationships to enhance positive feelings and b) a second that occurs in the context of casual relationships in an attempt to avoid or move beyond unwanted negative feelings.

So when is it adaptive to engage in CUSA and when is it potentially harmful? From the current data it seems that engaging in CUSA in the context of committed and satisfied relationships for reasons that are meaningful to the enhancement or support of that intimate relationship appears largely harmless and may even be adaptive for relationship functioning. When CUSA is engaged in outside of the context of a committed relationship to stave off unwanted negative experiences or consequences, it appears linked more proximally with negative affect, a lowering in self-worth, and potentially eventual depressive symptoms.

It will be important for future research to explore in more depth some of these unexpected outcomes of engaging in CUSA and to explore participant experiences over time, both within and outside of committed relationships. Future studies should explore CUSA as one type of sacrifice to determine whether the types described above might be observed in a more traditional large scale quantitative investigation of CUSA. Investigating CUSA along with other types of relationship sacrifice would also enable researchers to investigate questions about whether there is anything unique to CUSA as

an unwanted *sexual* experience that distinguishes it from other types of relationship sacrifice such as complying with a partner's wishes outside the sexual arena.

Current Themes and Relevant CUSA Literature

Much of the research described above was not specifically CUSA focused. To inform future exploration of this phenomenon, it is important to examine research findings specific to CUSA and to relate these results to findings of the current study. These findings share three thematic components with O'Sullivan and Allgeier's (1998) exploration of CUSA, and two thematic components with Shotland and Goodstein's (1992) analysis of this phenomenon. O'Sullivan and Allgeier (1998) found that participants engaged in CUSA in order to achieve certain aims (please partner and avoid tension) which directly mirror the present study's *Theme of Outcome*. In addition, individuals who engaged in CUSA, according to both O'Sullivan and Allgeier (1998) and Shotland and Goodstein (1992) often do so out of a sense of obligation based on precedence. Although in the current study, precedence was nonthematic, obligation, in terms of maintaining balance in the relationship, did emerge as thematic (*Expectation: Subtheme C: Reciprocation*).

Some individuals in the current investigation who participated in CUSA reported dealing with unanticipated feelings about the experience (*Outcome: Subtheme C: Unexpected Outcome*). This finding of unexpected and often negative outcomes also directly mirrors O'Sullivan and Allgeier's (1998) participants' experiences of emotional discomfort following participation in CUSA. Specifically, these researchers found that, "Despite reports of positive outcomes, negative outcomes were associated with more than

one half of the interactions. The most frequently reported negative outcome was emotional discomfort, such as feeling uncomfortable about engaging in *meaningless sex* or feeling disappointed with oneself” (p. 242). When broken down by gender, 29% of college men and 35% of college women in their study reported experiencing emotional discomfort following CUSA. Overall, O’Sullivan and Allgeier (1998) report that CUSA was rated as pleasant by 64% of participants who reported they found it to be “slightly” to “extremely pleasant” with no significant differences between men and women in the number of either negative or positive experiences. Importantly, participants in this study were in committed relationships for a mean length of approximately one year and reported experiencing positive relationship outcomes such as increased intimacy as a result of participating in CUSA. Why might it be then, that in over half of their experiences and for over a third of participants, negative emotional experiences were reported along with positive experiences following CUSA? O’Sullivan and Allgeier (1998) suggest that participants may actually have *over* endorsed positive outcomes in order to compensate for dissonance they might have experienced about participating in unwanted sexual activity.

O’Sullivan and Allgeier’s (1998) findings with regard to outcomes of CUSA among couples in committed relationships seem to raise questions about the validity of the two hypothesized CUSA types delineated in the present study. Future hypothesis-driven research could be utilized to test these CUSA types and to explore whether, and under what circumstances, individual experiences of CUSA bring mostly positive, mostly negative, or mostly mixed emotional consequences. O’Sullivan and Allgeier’s findings seem to suggest that CUSA experiences, even those occurring in committed relationships,

may be best characterized not by positive or negative feelings alone, but by a combination of both positive and negative feelings.

Future investigations should explore this possibility and work toward identifying trends in CUSA across relationship contexts to understand under what circumstances engaging in CUSA leads to mostly positive outcomes and under what conditions it tends to lead to more negative ones. Although current findings suggest that those who engaged in CUSA in committed relationships report more positive outcomes and fewer negative ones than participants in casual relationships, phenomenological analysis can tell us little, if anything, about why this might be so. Future research should be aimed at exploring *why* this might be the case and whether there are exceptions to this trend, for instance among individuals who prefer not to engage in long-term committed relationships.

CUSA and Gender

Regarding gender differences in CUSA, O'Sullivan and Allgeier (1998) found similar rates of CUSA among college-age men and women, with slightly more women than men reporting CUSA. They noted, however, "we found few differences in men and women's reports of their experiences, including their reasons for engaging in unwanted sexual activity, contextual features, and outcomes" (p. 242). This finding also agrees with results of the present study, which is in contrast to other studies that describe CUSA as experienced more often by women than by men (Impett & Peplau, 2002; Walker, 1997). Results of this study's analysis provide support for O'Sullivan and Allgeier's findings and should be taken into account in future exploration of CUSA as experienced by women and men.

At the onset of this study, I believed CUSA to be a phenomenon experienced primarily by women. Even after heeding the suggestion from my advisor to sample both men and women in the investigation, I continued to anticipate finding significant differences in the experiences of CUSA as described by men and women. Throughout data collection and analysis, however, I bracketed those expectations to the best of my ability. Gender differences did not emerge as figural in the current findings; that is, men's and women's descriptions of CUSA were similar in terms of the situations in which CUSA occurred, the reasons for engaging in it, and the meaning it held. Although men and women described responding to social rules about behavior and relationships and appeared to be grappling with how to behave in ways consistent with gender-specific norms for sexual behaviors, differences did not emerge between the descriptions of CUSA experiences by men and women.

Researchers who have suggested that CUSA is more commonly experienced by women (Impett & Peplau, 2002/2003, Shotland & Hunter, 1995, and Walker, 1997), have suggested that this might occur because of societally based masculine and feminine gender roles which direct male and female sexual behavior. "Gender roles for women prescribe a reactive sexuality in which women's sexual response is a potential that is waiting to be released by the agentic action of her male partner" (Morokoff, 2000). A defining feature, if not *the* defining feature, of feminine sexuality appears to be women's compliance with men's desires. Walker (1997), for example, argues specifically that, girls' and women's consent to unwanted sexual activity is shaped by women's incorporation of sexual stereotypes about males and implicit internalized pressures to maintain heterosexual relationships and preserve feminine identity. Current findings

confirm the impact of feminine gender role expectations on women's decision to engage in CUSA in that participants often referred in their interviews to expectations about adhering to feminine roles in relationships. However, research on CUSA that demonstrates how women are influenced by feminine gender ideals neglects the experiences of men who may feel equally pressured to live up to masculine gender roles in their sexual relationships. Kimmel (2000) has bemoaned this emerging gap in current understanding of masculine gender studies and argues for the study of gendered phenomena as experienced by women and men alike.

When I use the term *gender*, then it is with the explicit intention of discussing both masculinity and femininity. But even these terms are inaccurate because they imply that there is simply one definition of masculinity and one definition of femininity. One of the important elements of social constructionist approach—especially if we intend to dislodge the notion that gender differences alone are decisive—is to explore the differences *among* men and *among* women, since, as it turns out, these are often more decisive than the differences between women and men. (p. 10)

Kimmel, among other researchers, argues that by investigating gender *differences* we might be missing differences which exist among men and among women, and suggests that we should approach the exploration of gendered phenomena as informed by norms of both masculinity and femininity. Other researchers such as Impett and Peplau (2002/2003), Shotland and Hunter (1995), and Walker (1997) have conducted valuable investigations and have advanced understanding of the CUSA experience, particularly with regard to the connection between engaging in CUSA and female gender role expectations. It seems equally valuable, then, for researchers to understand the link between masculine roles and men's participation in CUSA. The current study seems to indicate that men do feel similar pressures to adhere to expectations specific to the masculine gender role. For example, men in the current study described feeling obligated

to engage in sexual activity at all times, and to pursue sexual activity with interested partners even when they did not feel desirous—behaviors consistent with masculine gender role expectations.

Tolman (2003), well known for her exploration of adolescent girl's sexual desire (*Dilemmas of Desire*, 2002), has recently put forth a plan for a new model of adolescent sexual health which addresses the need to understand social forces that affect both feminine and masculine gender role expectations. She has suggested the creation of a model called *gender complementarity* which she hopes might assist with incorporating in developing an understanding of the complex relationships between gender and sexuality.

Gender complementarity is meant as a meaningful alternative to arguments about gender difference versus sameness. It means that ideologies of masculinity and femininity which infuse constructions of adolescent male and female sexuality fit together to reproduce particular and limited forms of sexuality that are deemed to be 'normal' all in the service of reproducing and sustaining heterosexual sexuality. For instance the notion that adolescent boys are sexual predators fits together with the notion that adolescent girls are supposed to be sexually passive. Both notions represent and reproduce compulsory heterosexuality. Conventional and condoned masculinity ideologies about boys are relevant to both boys and girls, and concomitantly, femininity ideologies about girls are relevant to both girls and boys. (p. 10)

Tolman's (2003) work seems to direct researchers and theorists to move away from evaluating only gender *differences*. Instead, she urges us to explore how phenomena of interest, such as CUSA, are experienced by men and women in complementary ways, informed both by gender role socialization and compulsory heterosexuality.

In the current study, men's and women's awareness of various social rules and gender roles for guiding their relationships seemed to affect their choices in similar ways, and appeared to have equal salience in men's and women's descriptions of their experiences. Although O'Sullivan and Allgeier (1998) initially predicted that

endorsement of traditional gender roles would be associated with participating in CUSA, this hypothesis was not supported in their analysis. The current investigation did find an awareness and endorsement of traditional gender role expectations to be thematically relevant in participants' experiences of CUSA. As discussed in regard to the *Theme of Expectation: Subtheme B: Roles*, participants described feeling a need to live up to expectations specific to their gender role. Carly, for instance, described feeling a need to live up to the role of a dutiful wife, and Sarah described wanting to conform to the role of a US girlfriend who engages in sufficient sexual activity to satisfy her (always) sexually interested male partner. Further, Dave spoke about being unable to turn down an intoxicated acquaintance because of gender role expectations that as a male he should always be sexually interested.

Shotland and Goodstein (1992) noted the influence of traditional gender role scripts in participant reports of CUSA. In their study of female and male college students in which participants were asked to respond to hypothetical dating scenarios, participants rated a man's refusal in sexual situations as less legitimate than a woman's. These authors noted that their participants endorsed sexual scripts that, "a male should always be ready for sex and that a male's refusal in some way violates social norms of masculinity" (p. 762). Contrary to research which identifies CUSA as particularly likely to be experienced by women (Impett and Peplau, 2002/2003, Shotland and Hunter, 1995, Walker, 1997), Shotland and Goodstein (1992) suggest that there may actually be *more* societal pressures exerted on men than on women to comply with unwanted sexual activity.

In the current study, all of the male participants reported being concerned with conforming to social pressures coming from peers, families, and society at large. These men often wondered how to make choices that felt like their own in the context of rules governing acceptable moral, socio-cultural, and gender-appropriate behavior for males. Several male participants spoke openly about feeling victimized by the rules and roles placed on them by the larger social world. Men in the current study reported feeling unable to make choices in line with their own desires when they were not interested in sexual activity. Similarly, the female participants reported feeling expected to follow rules and live up to feminine gender roles in their relationships. (*Theme of Expectation: Subtheme A: Rules and Subtheme B: Roles*) Women in the current study described being concerned with making sure their partners were pleased and voiced concerns about losing relationship partners if they failed to comply with requests for sexual activities.

It would be interesting to determine if these findings would be replicated in a larger longitudinal study of men and women in a variety of relationships, and among both heterosexual and homosexual individuals, to ascertain whether similar findings emerge with regard to the gendered experience of CUSA. Whereas the current findings failed to reveal gender *differences*, they do provide initial support for the experience of CUSA as a *gendered* phenomena; as a *gendered* experience, CUSA is informed and influenced by our society's conceptions of masculinity and femininity.

Unlike findings emerging from the present investigation, some researchers have found gender differences in the experiences of unwanted sexual activity. Muehlenard and Cook (1988) found in their study of college freshman that 46 % of women and 63% of men participated in unwanted sexual intercourse demonstrating that for sexual

intercourse, in particular, more college men than women reported consenting despite not desiring the activity. These researchers found for unwanted sexual *activity* that 98% of women and 94% of men had consented (N=993). These authors' findings suggest that nearly everyone in their study had participated in some type of CUSA, but that men were more likely than women to have consented to unwanted sexual *intercourse*.

A factor analysis of these data yielded thirteen "reasons" for participating in unwanted sexual activity and Muehlenard and Cook (1988) found seven sex differences in the reasons given for engaging in unwanted sexual activity. They note, "Many of men's reasons for unwanted intercourse relate to sex role expectations. Men are expected to want to have sex... Thus, it is understandable that men had experienced unwanted intercourse more often than women because of the peer pressure, inexperience, sex role concerns, and popularity factors" (p. 69). These authors found that the most common reason men reported they participated in unwanted sexual activity was social pressures related to the male stereotype; this finding is mirrored in the current study. Zilbergeld (1978), as cited in Muehlenard and Cook (1988), discussed the consequence for both sexes of adhering to these stereotypes: "Following sexual scripts makes it difficult for men and women to be honest and enjoy sex" (p. 70). With regard to women, Muehlenard and Cook (1988) reported that more women than men participated in unwanted sexual activity because of altruism, to avoid termination of relationship, because of partner's verbal coercion, and reluctance (nothing else to do, felt obligated, or wanted to make other feel attractive). Although Muehlenard and Cook (1988) describe their findings in terms of gender *differences*, they share evidence in common with the current investigation to suggest that an individual's decision to engage in CUSA is

informed by gender role expectations. These results, therefore, add further support for the notion that CUSA may be a gendered experience.

Sprecher, Hatfield, Cortese, Levtskaya (1994), who conducted the only cross-cultural investigation into unwanted sexual activity, collected data from college students in the US, Russia and Japan ($N=1519$). On the assumption that there might be sociocultural influences specifically affecting US women's decisions to engage in unwanted sexual activity. These researchers found that US women were more likely to consent to participate in unwanted sexual activity than women surveyed in other countries, noting that 55% of US women acknowledged consenting to unwanted sexual activity, followed by Russian women at 32% and Japanese women at 27%. There were no cultural prevalence differences observed for men.

These authors suggest that contemporary US women might be the most likely to participate in CUSA because they may feel caught between social constraints established prior to the sexual revolution and the enhanced sexual freedoms now available to American women. Sprecher et al. (1994) further suggest that American women are no longer able to use traditional excuses for saying no, because it is more acceptable for women to have sex today. At the same time, Sprecher and colleagues suggest that women may not have developed adequate ways of saying no or strategies for doing so since they can no longer fall back on socio-culturally dictated rules that maintain the need for women to refrain from sexual activity outside marriage. Conversely, Morokoff (2000) suggests that women who conform to traditional feminine gender role expectations to comply with sexual activity also are left with no real way to say *yes* to sexual activity either. She notes "There is no socially appropriate autonomous sexuality for women" (p.

302). It seems possible that Sprecher et al.'s (1994) estimates of US women might be inflated because there may be societal sanctions against women in this culture acknowledging wanting sex. Thus, changes in gender role expectations may contribute to women feeling confused about their wishes and desires. On the one hand it has become more acceptable for women to experience and act on their sexual desires, whereas on the other hand there are few examples of women in American society who have done so in socially approved ways. Michelle Fine's seminal work (1988) identifying the "missing discourse of desire"--which described the notable absence of any reference to sexual desire in girl's sex education programming--provides an ideal example of the lack of publicly available information about healthy female sexuality as one which includes desire. Tolman (2002) among others, have recently begun to address this issue by conducting research exploring female sexual desire and by working toward the creation of improved models of adolescent sexual health, however there is much work left to be done on this important issue.

In summary, regardless of how women and men are affected by sociocultural rules/roles, in the current qualitative findings, both men and women appear to be implicitly and explicitly aware of and guided by such rules and roles. Adherence to these "social forces" seems to make it difficult for both women and men to make affirmative choices. In the current study, many participants described feeling as if consenting to CUSA was not even a choice for them at all.

Freedom

Some participants in the current study, despite their best efforts, could not have made a different choice about engaging in unwanted sexual activity. In some instances, participants reported that “it just happened,” which describes a kind of passive acquiescence to sexual activity. Other participants described playing a more active role in engaging in CUSA, seeking out the unwanted activity to satisfy other aims. For still other participants, it seemed almost compulsive to participate in CUSA, and two participants even described it as similar to an addiction. For example, Spanky, a 21-year-old male, described initially not wanting to engage in a particular sexual activity due to moral constraints, but then found himself doing it every day. “Yeah it’s sort of like an addicting thing. I guess you could say cause once you start getting into it.... um, before class, after class, after dates, you name it” (lines #27-29). Another participant also likened participating in CUSA to an addiction. Layla, a 19-year-old female noted that she is a smoker, and reported that it is easy for her to say immediately after having a cigarette that she will quit smoking. She reported, however, that as time passes, it becomes much more likely that she will end up purchasing cigarettes. She compared this example to an experience of CUSA in which she had decided beforehand not to engage in sexual behavior but did anyway. An additional way CUSA was described by some participants occurred when he or she had decided beforehand not to engage in a particular activity, but then engaged in the activity anyway, sometimes in the heat of the moment. Several participants, mostly in casual relationships, engaged in CUSA in this way.

The notion that participants engaged in CUSA because they “couldn’t stop themselves” raises questions about whether they felt *free* to consent to sexual activity.

Issues of freedom and free will have been well explored in politics, philosophy and psychology resulting in literatures far too large to summarize in this context. However, it does seem important to highlight a few core issues related to concerns about freedom as they bear relevance to the current study's findings. Raymond (1991) summarizes a typical conceptualization of freedom:

Central to the tradition of Western liberal political theory has been the concept of freedom from coercion. For example, I cannot be free if you hold me at gunpoint and demand 'your money or your life.' In a sense one is said to be free if one is not being compelled to act in ways one would not otherwise choose to act. The absence of freedom might come in the form of natural constraints (I could not have the picnic because of the hurricane) or obstacles created by other persons (I could not elope because you blocked all the exits). (p. 293)

She goes on to suggest that the notion of *freedom from coercion* has been extended to include a broader array of experiences than those in which there only exists a lack of coercion. She notes: "...freedom means not simply the absence of naturally or artificially imposed obstacles (negative freedom) but also the positive power to act on the basis of one's desires" (p. 293). In the case of CUSA, it is reasonable to ask whether participants felt able to assert their desires in situations with their partners. Based on my analysis, the answer is no. Raymond suggests that such a lack of freedom is inevitable when she asks to what extent any of us are free, citing examples of the pervasiveness of advertising and its impact on the choices we make as consumers. She further remarks that sex role socialization might also limit our freedom in various ways, such as in developing our personalities. Raymond (1991) implicates socio-cultural forces in assisting, or, perhaps more aptly, in determining the choices all individuals make. Rich (1983) similarly notes in her discussion of "Compulsory Heterosexuality" that sociopolitical and cultural constraints dictate a variety of interactions that can occur between women and men, and

suggests that such social forces are so strong that individuals (in particular, women) are not able to make free choices concerning their sexual/relationship interactions. She notes poignantly:

Within the institution (patriarchy) exist, of course, qualitative difference of experience; but the absence of choice remains the great unacknowledged reality, and in the absence of choice, women will remain dependent on the chance or luck of particular relationships and will have no collective power to determine the meaning and place of sexuality in their lives. (p. 202)

Although Rich (1983) was writing in particular about women's lack of freedom and described the almost compulsive nature of women and men's pursuit of heterosexual relationships, her suggestion about the absence of choice seems to accurately describe the present set of CUSA experiences. Many participants described feeling an absence of choice about not engaging in CUSA. Although it is not suggested that these participants necessarily experienced this absence of choice as connected to societal constraints, they did describe feeling limits to their freedom similar to those described by Rich (1983).

Another way in which individuals may feel unfree to make choices consistent with their own desires is in the context of alcohol or drug use. Participation in CUSA in the context of alcohol or drug use raises important questions with regard to whether individuals were free to make the choices they did when they decided to engage in the behavior. Research on the effects of alcohol and intimate behavior has suggested that in sexual situations, alcohol is often perceived to be a sexual cue. Abbey et al. (1996) reported in a study investigating alcohol and its relationship to risk of sexual assault that, "Many men perceive alcohol as a sexual cue; thus alcohol increases the likelihood that friendliness will be misperceived as sexual intent and that a man will feel comfortable forcing sex after misperceiving a woman's cues (p. 163). It may be that alcohol sets the

stage for a misinterpretation of signals among partners and leads individuals to make choices they might not otherwise make. Similarly, other researchers have noted the impact of the drinking behavior of one partner on a potentially non-drinking partner's behavior.

[J]udgments of the woman's behavior, as well as some of the man's behavior and traits, depended on the man's alcohol consumption. In particular she was viewed as more responsive when the assailant had been drinking. Does this finding indicate that a woman is supposed to know better than to date a man who has been drinking? That if she does, she is indicating her willingness to have sex with him?" (Norris and Cubbins, 1992)

The question raised by Norris and Cubbins (1992) is somewhat disturbing but highlights the risk of alcohol consumption in creating an environment in which the stage is set for a potential misinterpretation of desire. Such a situation is easily translated into what is experienced as a lack of freedom to choose a desired outcome.

Alcohol is not only dangerous for the drinker but is also risky for a potential partner spending time with the individual who is drinking. Two participants in the current study engaged in CUSA in the context of alcohol use by their partner but had not been drinking themselves, thereby lending modest support for Norris and Cubbin's (1992) statement. Both of these individuals appeared less free not to engage in CUSA, in part, because their partners were somewhat intoxicated. Although this may appear counterintuitive, it seems in the current study to represent another form of constraint upon the individual. It may be that the sober partner complies with unwanted sexual activity in order to avoid unpredictable behavior on the part of the intoxicated partner. The possibility that the intoxicated partner might experience either intensified or less inhibited emotional reactions following a rejection may contribute to individual's decision to engage in CUSA with an impaired partner. It seems particularly important for future

studies of CUSA to explore in depth the ways in which alcohol and other substances might create a convenient context for “reducing” an individual’s freedom to make their own decisions. Given the association between alcohol use and reduced likelihood of contraceptive use (Biglan et al., 1995; Noel et al., 1993), this is a particularly important area of study.

A final way that individuals engaging in CUSA might have experienced a lack of freedom concerns their individual psychological functioning. That is, feeling constrained to certain choices and unfree to make other ones may be linked to a particular personality structure. In his book, *Neurotic Styles*, Shapiro (1965) describes a number of typologies which delineate what he calls “forms of functioning—ways of thinking, experiencing, and behaving” or “consistencies of individual style” (pps.3-4). Shapiro’s descriptions are not meant to describe psychopathology or to assist with diagnosis; rather they were developed for illustrative purposes from clinical experiences garnered over several years. His descriptions of individuals with *obsessive-compulsive* neurotic styles resemble very closely CUSA participants and current study results. Shapiro (1965) suggests that the obsessive-compulsive lives in a constant state of “volitional tension” characterized by a rigid adherence to whatever role the individual feels he “should” be playing at any given time.

Where, and how, does the obsessive-compulsive person derive these directives, commands, and pressures, the “shoulds” which he issues to himself and under which he then lives? Objectively there is no doubt that they come from him: *He* reminds himself of his “role,” contrives and invokes deadlines, issues his own commands. But notwithstanding that the authorship and responsibility for these commands and directives may, objectively, be solely his, he does not feel that they are his. He does not feel that he issues these directives wholly on his own authorship and by his own free choice. On the contrary, the obsessive-compulsive always feels that he is reminding himself of a compelling objective necessity,

some imperative or higher authority than his personal choice or wish, which he is obliged to serve. (p. 39)

Further, Shapiro explains how an obsessive-compulsive organizes his or her experiences in the world.

These external pressures or imperatives, which the obsessive-compulsive person endows with such compelling authority, take many forms. These people are keenly aware of various kinds of external expectation, of the threat of possible criticism, of the weight and direction of the authoritative opinion, of rules, regulations, and conventions, and perhaps above all, of a great assemblage of moral and quasi moral principles. They do not feel literally forced to comply with these, and they do not precisely submit to them. They recognize their authority and press themselves, for example, feel duty-bound, to comply with them. (pp. 39-40)

As a result of their particular style of being in the world, obsessive-compulsives do not, “feel like free men” (p. 40) and habitually see their lives laid out as a series of tasks that they view as not chosen, but “simply there.” It is easy to recognize similarities among these detailed descriptions of individuals characterized by obsessive-compulsive neurotic styles and the current study’s themes of *Focus*, *Expectation*, and *Outcome*.

Shapiro’s vivid description of the obsessive compulsive is characterized by a *focus* on the desires of the other (*Theme of Focus*). In addition, Shapiro depicts the obsessive compulsive as being fastidiously focused on both the expectations he perceives others have of him (*Theme of Expectation*), and on the need to achieve various outcomes by fulfilling his duties (*Theme of Outcome*). As Shapiro notes, however, obsessive-compulsives lack the awareness that it is their *own* internal expectations that they expend so much energy struggling to live up to in the course of their lives.

The idea that an individual’s lack of freedom (which results in participation in CUSA is self rather than socially imposed presents an interesting dilemma for future research. First, future CUSA explorations would benefit from evaluating personality

variables to determine if there might be a particular personality constellation which predisposes an individual to value compliance with the desires of important others over his or her own. To date, research conducted has identified anxious/ambivalent attachment as related to participation in CUSA (Impett & Peplau, 2003), although much more work needs to be done to learn about how individual dynamics affect an individual's feelings of freedom or lack thereof when faced with deciding whether or not to participate in CUSA.

Unique Findings of the Current Investigation

Findings of the present study suggest that engaging in CUSA involves a reduction in focus on one's own desires and an increase in focus on the desires of the other, resulting in the absence of the full self or full presence during the activity. Deciding whether to participate in CUSA involves an awareness of social rules, gender role expectations, and standards for reciprocation in relationships and the meaning of CUSA is often connected to wanting to bring about a desired outcome or to avoid an undesirable outcome, and often results in an unexpected outcome. Some of these findings are similar to results found in previous quantitative research on relationship variables in general and to results of CUSA studies specifically. However, the current study also produced unique findings. First, the *Theme of Focus: Subtheme B: Self as Absent*, describing an individual's experience of focusing on another to the exclusion of his or her fully present self appears to be a unique finding of the current investigation which emerged from the use of phenomenological interview procedures. It would be interesting to see if more

traditional, hypothesis-driven research or larger scale investigations would validate this finding obtained in the present study.

Also unique to the current investigation is that CUSA occurs in both casual and committed relationships, and that CUSA experienced in committed relationships may be different from CUSA experienced in casual relationships. The current study also suggests that CUSA is experienced by men and women in similar yet gendered ways. This finding should guide future CUSA research to focus less on differences between men and women in prevalence rates and reasons for participating in CUSA. Instead, this finding suggests that researchers should focus more explicitly on the CUSA experience itself and explore the ways in which gender role expectations and sexual scripts affect both men and women's engagements in CUSA. Importantly, research should be directed toward identifying the impact of these social and cultural influences on individuals' decisions to engage in unwanted sexual activity. It is important for researchers to continue to explore both the complexity of the lived experience of CUSA and the intervening context of the relationships in which it occurs.

Lastly, participants' descriptions of the unexpected consequences of participating in CUSA, (*Outcome: Subtheme C: Unexpected Outcome*) was another unique finding which provides important information about different consequences emerging from CUSA experiences depending on the type of relationship and the meaning of CUSA experience. The *Theme of Outcome* is indeed an important one to the overall experience of CUSA; it may be that the individual's authentic desires in the experience exist in the outcomes (F. Wertz, personal communication, April 13, 2007). Thus, although individuals do not have desire for the sexual activity, they do desire the outcomes of the

sexual behavior. Despite their desires for planned outcomes, often individuals are left with unexpected consequences, and these outcomes, good and/or bad, might guide an individual's subsequent participation in CUSA. As such, these unexpected outcomes merit further inquiry.

Strengths and Limitations

There are a number of strengths to the present study. This study was the first investigation to explore the meaning, or phenomenology, of the experience of CUSA. As such, it makes a contribution to the field as the first exclusively qualitative study to utilize an in-depth interview and phenomenological research methods. The use of these methods contributed substantially to the rigor of this qualitative investigation; in particular, the use of a group data analysis procedure enabled a thematic analysis that reduced the chances that the primary researcher identified themes based on her own interests or expectations about the experience. Another strength of the current study was that it included exploration of participant experiences occurring in a wide variety of relationships. This facilitated the collection of rich information not afforded by previous research. The experience of CUSA emerged as figural against the ground of interpersonal relationship; like other figure-ground relationships, CUSA (the figure) is inseparable from this interpersonal context (the ground). The themes of *Focus*, *Expectation*, and *Outcome* become figural in different interpersonal relationships; those relationships are altered by the interconnections among the themes of the experience of CUSA. Correspondingly, when the interpersonal relationship is the focal point, interrelationships among major

descriptive themes of the experience of CUSA are impacted by the relationship in which CUSA occurs.

Therefore, the findings of the current study provide unique information about the variety of relationship contexts in which CUSA occurs and the importance of these contexts in the overall experience. Given its conceptual infancy, current findings are poised to assist researchers in generating informed hypotheses and conducting more targeted exploration of this topic. Themes observed in the current investigation should be utilized to guide subsequent, more hypothesis-driven, and mixed-methods research on the topic.

Despite these strengths, there are a number of possible limitations. Although it is not the aim of phenomenological studies to generalize to larger populations, the participants in the current study were all college students and most of them were between the ages 18-22, which likely limited the range of experiences which were described. It would be interesting to see research exploring CUSA in samples of older married couples, in homosexual couples, and in casual relationships across differing age groups, as they might shed light on questions about potential types of CUSA experiences and possible outcomes connected to those types.

Although there are strengths unique to the phenomenological interview method, there are also inherent limitations to utilizing this type of interactive data collection. Sex is a sensitive topic to discuss even among close friends, and asking strangers to speak openly about sexual experiences about which they may feel embarrassed or ashamed may have censored their descriptions. During a face to face interview, it is possible that some co-researchers (or participants) may not have felt comfortable talking about a sensitive

topic such as their sexual decisions. It also might be the case that women in the study found it easier to describe their experiences to another woman, whereas male participants felt less comfortable. The use of a male participant/male interviewer might have garnered different, potentially more explicit information. Overall, descriptions given by male participants appeared to be at times more general than descriptions provided by female participants. At times male participants seemed to generalize about their experiences of CUSA and appeared to have more difficulty describing specific incidents; this may have been because they were uncomfortable acknowledging these experiences, either to themselves, and/or to a female interviewer. It is unclear whether using a male interviewer would have made them feel more comfortable, although such a situation may have yielded different information. Overall the female participants appeared to feel more at ease as evidenced by their being more readily able to elaborate on specific experiences rather than generalize. This difference might have emerged because females may have felt this interviewer, as a female, had an understanding of their experiences. It could also be that this researcher's perception of these differences is reflective of her own biases about CUSA as a feminine experience. It might also be that women are actually more comfortable describing engaging in CUSA than are men, in part, as a result of gender norms which, as previously discussed, sanction female compliance as normal but label male disinterest in sexual activity as deviant.

This finding might be a limitation of interview settings, in general, as participants are afforded a much higher degree of anonymity in research conditions that do not require in person interviews. However, participants' difficulty describing their experiences may also reveal something important about the CUSA phenomenon itself. Sacrificing one's

own needs for another and feeling “a distant third” may not only be something participants experience in the sexual arena, but may be a pervasive enough trait for some individuals such that they are unable to describe specific experiences. CUSA, among other types of self-sacrifice, might not simply be something *they do*, but it might be more pertinently *who they are*. As such, it may be that engaging in CUSA is one aspect of a particular personality constellation, such as a compliant or possibly dependent personality. As noted previously, exploring connections between personality features and participation in CUSA represents another area for future inquiry.

A final limitation of the current study concerns the use of the term “unwanted” in the term consensual *unwanted* sexual activity. Muehlenhard and Peterson (2005) suggest in their article, *Wanting and Not Wanting Sex: The Missing Discourse of Ambivalence*, that asking participants to describe sexual experiences dichotomized as either *wanted* or *unwanted* limits our investigations into and understanding of complex phenomena related to sexual desire. In attempting to make sense of some puzzling research findings from an earlier study on *token resistance* (wanting to engage in sex, but communicating disinterest to a partner), these researchers stumbled upon findings which forced them to take a closer look at how they had been thinking about this experience. These researchers added a qualitative component to one of their questionnaires to learn more about participants’ experiences. After asking whether or not participants had engaged in token resistance, Muehlenhard and Peterson (2005) then asked participants to write a description of it.

To our initial horror, most of the respondent descriptions did not fit our definition of token resistance. They had been asked to write about instances in which they wanted to, were willing to, and intended to engage in sexual activity but for some reason indicated that they didn’t want to. Instead, most wrote about being

ambivalent. Many wrote about wanting sex in some ways but not in others. Many distinguished between wanting the sexual activity and wanting its consequences. Some wrote about wanting to engage in sex but being unwilling to do so; others wrote about not wanting to engage in sex but being willing to do so. (p. 16).

Muehlenhard and Peterson (2005) have subsequently suggested the importance of creating a new model of sexual desire which would incorporate the complexities described by their participants. These researchers' findings highlight a potential drawback of the current study's interview question to *Describe a time when you didn't want to participate in some sexual activity, but you decided to anyway*. Simultaneously, however, Muehlenhard and Peterson's (2005) finding also highlights a strength of the current investigation in terms of utilization of qualitative methodology to explore a complex sexual phenomenon. While the current investigation's initial question may have been limiting to participants in terms of defining the experience of CUSA too narrowly, the study's qualitative interview method hopefully enabled them to speak about their experiences in their complexity.

Participants in the current study described having positive, negative, and mostly mixed feelings regarding their experiences of not wanting to engage in sexual activity but deciding to anyway. Similar to Muehlenhard and Peterson's (2005) findings, participants in the current study rarely described strictly not wanting the sexual activity, and were much more likely to talk about both reasons they did want the sexual activity and reasons they did not want it. Participant descriptions of their experiences' of CUSA in the current study are filled with mixed feelings. Muehlenhard and Peterson's (2005) suggestion to engage in a discourse of ambivalence seems imperative if an examination of such complex sexual phenomena is to be elucidating. Conducting qualitative and quantitative inquiry into individuals' experiences of mixed or ambivalent sexual desire might enable

us to better understand individuals' sexual decision making and the conflicting interests evaluated by individuals during the decision making process. Further, asking individuals about sexual activity they consented to but were ambivalent about might offer individuals additional freedom and flexibility to describe the intricacies of their experiences. As Muehlenard and Peterson (2005) suggest, classifying sex as either wanted or unwanted, "is inadequate to represent the nuances of people's experience, thus obscuring the understanding of those experiences (p. 16).

Clinical Implications and Conclusions

The current study rendered a unique thematic structure of the experience of CUSA. It is hoped that results from this investigation will stimulate further research on this complicated topic. Given that we know little about the enduring impact of engaging in CUSA on individuals who have had the experience, it seems premature to make specific clinical recommendations at this time. Like many studies, the current investigation has generated more questions than it has successfully answered. An important unanswered question worth raising is whether there is anything unique to consensual unwanted *sexual* activity or could the thematic structure for CUSA be applied to other forms of non-sexual compliance. I would be likely to answer that there is, indeed, something unique to sexual compliance, but this question, too awaits further study. Stanley (2006) has recently studied couple members' perceptions of relationship sacrifice and the effects of these perceptions on relationship functioning over time. He found a positive relationship between individuals' perceptions of sacrifice and later marital adjustment, such that higher satisfaction with sacrifice predicted that a couple would

remain nondistressed over time, and that their marital adjustment would still be maintained one and two years later. These results suggest the importance of attitudes about sacrifice in impacting relationship outcomes. Sexual sacrifice (i.e. CUSA) might actually be no different from other nonsexual sacrifice; what might be important is how an individual feels about making that sacrifice. Thus, future research should aim to explore not only the experiences of CUSA and its impact on long term relationship functioning, it should also examine the meaning that engaging in CUSA has for individuals, as this is also likely relevant to individual and relationship outcomes.

The possibility that engaging in CUSA might be related to an individual's psychological structure is important to consider. What should a clinician do with Shapiro's obsessive-compulsive patient in psychotherapy if he described engaging in CUSA as one of the ways in which he complies with the requests of others? According to Shapiro, the locus of this individual's problem lies in his *own* obsessional expectations of himself. According to the patient, however, the expectations to which he feels compelled to comply originate *outside* of himself in the social world of others. The therapist sees the problem as the patient's lack of insight into his own self-imposed requirements, whereas the patient feels burdened by others in his life who, he feels, demand his compliance. This example presents an interesting clinical dilemma which parallels the earlier discussion about the relevance of society based gender role expectations to engaging in CUSA. Is it easier for an individual to focus on society's role in requiring compliance because it absolves him or her of personal responsibility for behaviors in which he or she chose to engage? Or are the expectations which we perceive others to have of us a function of our own neuroticism?

It is likely that both the social context and individual personality factors mutually create constraints which lead to engaging in compliant activities such as CUSA. The only way that engaging in these compliant behaviors would be evaluated in a clinical setting, however, would be if they caused distress. If individuals engage in CUSA in the context of a satisfied committed relationship, most likely they would never seek psychotherapy. A more likely clinical picture would consist of an individual who finds that he or she is complying with others' requests across multiple contexts, and consequently feels unfree to make his or her own choices in life. Often individuals seek psychotherapy when they feel "stuck" and one goal of treatment is often simply to help patients to get "unstuck." If an individual who had been feeling constrained to engage in CUSA sought treatment, one aspect of treatment might be to assist the patient feeling constrained (either by others or by himself) to develop insight into the fact that he or she does, in reality, have alternative choices. Exploring in psychotherapy the patient's fears and concerns about pursuing those choices would likely be a fruitful area of focus.

Another way that engaging in CUSA might be brought to clinical attention would be in the context of couples or sex therapy. It might be that engaging in CUSA is something that individuals who suffer with low sexual desire endure in order to maintain their intimate relationships. Couples therapy would be indicated only for couple members who become distressed about or have persistent negative feelings about engaging in CUSA. In this context, first, it would be important to help couple members feel safe enough to communicate with one another about their feelings of sexual desire or lack thereof. In the current study, individual decisions to engage in CUSA were closely linked with either pleasing their partners or keeping their partners from becoming displeased.

Therefore, it would be very important to discuss relationship partners expected versus actual reactions to the one another's rejection of sexual initiation. This might disabuse couple members' of inaccurate assumptions they may have about their partners' possible responses to their saying "no." It might also be useful to discuss stereotypical male and female gender roles and to learn whether they bear any relevance in couple's decision making. Normalizing sexual disinterest or lack of sexual desire among both men and women would be important. In addition, providing psychoeducation about natural fluctuations in sexual desire that occur during the course of long term intimate relationships would also be valuable. Talking with couple members specifically about issues of noncorrespondent desire as a normal part of long term relationships might also further reduce their anxiety about their sexual relationship. Perhaps the most important intervention to make overall might be to assist couples in communicating openly about these issues so that they do not become overwhelmed by them. Successful communication in this area might prevent difficulties in the sexual arena from impacting the well-being of the overall relationship.

In light of current findings, it remains unclear at this time whether and under what conditions engaging in CUSA might lead to an individual to seek psychological services. It seems most likely that individuals would seek psychotherapy for various other reasons, such as anxiety, depression, or difficulty making decisions, and that their engaging in CUSA might be one aspect of a larger constellation of problems. It seems somewhat more likely that a couple might pursue couples or sex therapy if CUSA became something they began to feel badly about. If an individual or couple is significantly distressed by participation in CUSA, seeking treatment is clearly advisable. At this time,

it remains an empirical question whether engaging in CUSA is harmful enough to either to an individual's or couple's functioning to warrant psychological services.

Conclusions

The current investigation generated a unique structure of the experience of consenting to unwanted sexual activity that is characterized by three major themes: *Focus, Expectation, and Outcome*. Results suggest that when an individual engages in CUSA, there is a minimization of the desires of the self in favor of a focus on the desires of the other, often to the exclusion of the "full self" in the interaction. An individual's decision to engage in CUSA is informed by social rules, gender roles, and standards for reciprocation. An individual engages in CUSA to bring about various desired outcomes and to avoid other undesired outcomes, often resulting in the individual experiencing unexpected consequences.

From the current findings it appears that CUSA may be experienced differently within committed relationships than in casual ones; in the context of satisfied committed relationships, CUSA may be a sacrifice similar to one made by someone else for the good of the relationship. In committed relationships, however, in which CUSA becomes habitual and/or the relationship is unsatisfying, engaging in CUSA may have some negative consequences. In more casual encounters, or in situations in which an individual does not feel free to make another choice, engaging in CUSA may result in more pronounced negative outcomes such as regret, resentment, or possibly depression. These possibilities should be thought of as hypotheses that await further investigation.

The current study demonstrated the importance of context (the interpersonal relationship) to the experience of CUSA. Because context is such an important aspect of the experience, it should be given prominence in further study into the phenomenon. The identification of CUSA as a *gendered experience*, that is, experienced similarly by men and women yet informed in complementary ways by rules dictating masculinity and femininity, also deserves further empirical inquiry.

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APPENDICES

Antioch College Survival Guide

Sexual Offense Prevention & Survivors' Advocacy Program A Division of the Antioch College Counseling Center, 1st Floor North Hall, PBX 1130

"The Spirit of the Policy is YES"

The Spirit of Antioch's ["Sexual Offense Prevention Policy \(SOPP\)"](#) is about "Yes!": people having the opportunity in intimacy to face one another in deeper and truer, more honest, more fully satisfying ways; actually being bodily present with our selves and each other; the Cosmic YES of wholly present living. This 'spirit' of CONSENT, the awareness-raising/hair-raising aspect of the policy, catalyzes people to become aware of what they really want sexually, find ways to make a partner aware of that, and to be aware of what their partner is actually okay with sexually. Conscious and confident intimacy is the best!

This spirit is about a fully affirmative YES. Not an ambiguous yes, or a "well-not-really-but ok- I-guess yes," certainly not a "silent-no 'yes,'" or an "ouch" or "yuck-but-I'm-afraid-to-hurt your- feelings yes." This is about YES, UM HUM, ABSOLUTELY, YIPPEE YAHOO YES! Being with someone who you are sure REALLY WANTS to be with you. Being with someone who you are sure YOU REALLY WANT to be with. THAT is EXCITING, is EROTIC, is DEEP, is GREAT, is YES! That is consent. That is the Spirit of the policy.

The Spirit of the policy is also about No, hearing that a person is really NOT OK being with you in this way or that way, and being able to tell a person that you are NOT OK doing this or that. It is also about the EXPECTATION that they will RESPECT your choices, your requests, and your answers to their requests WITHOUT deriding you, manipulating you, or threatening you in any way. This spirit is about respecting that each person, for WHATEVER REASONS they choose, has a right to define why and how they will be touched,

at any time or step along the way, no matter what you intend or want to share with them. (and vice versa.)

And because we come from a culture that so often disrespects personal choices sexually through confusing dynamics, gender role socialization, sexual manipulation, abuse and violence- part of the spirit of the policy is corrective. It helps us all learn to SPELL OUT THE NO'S so that each of us may feel freer and safer being assertive about and affirmed for SPELLING OUT THE YESES.

Antioch's SOPP is SOCIAL REVOLUTION - of course, why else would it ignite such a mixture of joy, empowerment, confusion and backlash? - and it is exhilarating to be part of a community that is working so hard to increase equality and mutual satisfaction, and to rectify domination and oppression.

24-HOUR CRISIS AND SUPPORT LINE

This special service is available to Antioch students on campus, on coop and traveling outside. To reach this beeper number from off-campus, call 1 -888-392-6761 or 6727 on campus.

SEXUAL CONSENT, SEXUAL VIOLENCE AND SAFETY

The statistics on the frequency of sexual violation on college campuses today are alarming. While the Sexual Offense Prevention Policy and Program help make the campus a safer environment for everyone, we still have problems here. Sexual assaults, sexual harassment and relationship violence between people who know each other are the most frequent kinds of violation. Violations occur between men and women, men and men and women and women. Like on many campuses, violations often happen while people are using substances.

The "spirit" of SOPP is Consent - promoting consensual and mutual pleasure in all sexual intimacy that is occurring between community members. The "spirit" is to get people to think about their sexual pleasures, needs and boundaries, and to expect and enjoy - dialogue and respect with intimate partners.

If someone experiences a violation, there are several options available to effectively address the situation. These options include a range of ways, formal and/or informal, to clearly confront a person who has violated someone and to determine appropriate consequences for an action. The policy primarily seeks to be an educational force in the community, helping us all to discuss and listen to how our actions affect each other. Yet there is also a judiciary process available to fairly ascertain accountability and community safety of both individual persons and of the community.

There are many students who have experienced sexual violation before arriving at Antioch. Healing from that experience may be an integral part of their personal, social and academic lives while they are here. Support services are available for this process through the Counseling Center and the SOPP office.

Antioch has a Sexual Harassment Policy and a [Sexual Offense Prevention Policy](#), which have been designed to help deal with these problems when they occur on campus and/or when they involve an Antioch community member. Read these policies. You are responsible for knowing them.

CONSENSUAL SEXUALITY AT ANTIOCH

Under the Sexual Offense Prevention Policy:

- All sexual contact and conduct between any two (or more!) people must be consensual;
- Consent must be obtained verbally before there is any sexual contact or conduct;
- Silence is never interpreted as consent;
- If the level of sexual intimacy increases during an interaction (i.e., if two people move from kissing while fully clothed, which is one level, to undressing for direct physical contact, which is another level), the people involved need to express their clear verbal consent before moving to that new level;
- If one person wants to initiate moving to a different level of sexual intimacy in an interaction, that person is responsible for getting the consent of the other person(s) involved before moving to that level;

- If you have a particular level of sexual intimacy before with someone, you must still be sure there is consent each and every time;
- If you have a sexually transmitted disease, you must disclose this fact to a potential partner before engaging sexually;
- If anyone asks you to stop a particular kind of sexual attention or behavior, you must stop it immediately no matter what your intentions are with the attention.

Don't ever make assumptions about consent; assumptions can hurt someone and get you in trouble. Consent must be clear and verbal (i.e., saying, "Yes, I want to kiss you, too.")

Sexual Offense Prevention Policy

(SOPP) Approved on April 23, 2002

PREFACE

In 1991, a group of Antioch students began creating this policy which would alter the culture of an entire community. This policy is the embodiment of Antioch College's commitment to ending sexual violence and fostering a culture of consensual sexuality. It governs the Antioch College Community by working with existing staff and faculty policies. It now exists as a piece of a larger educational framework charged with furthering these goals. The intent of this document is not to replace existing local, state, or federal laws, but to create an educational system to deal with sexual offenses within our community. All new students and visitors are required to sign a contract stating that they have read and understand the expectations of the policy. Due to the educational nature of this policy, the standards of conduct are different from those set forth by law. It is recommended that individuals discuss safer sex practices before initiating sexual behaviors. The college encourages community members to report violations of local, state, and federal law to the appropriate government agency.

CONSENT

"Consent" is defined as the act of willingly and verbally agreeing to engage in specific sexual conduct. Previously agreed upon forms of non-verbal communication are appropriate methods for expressing consent. In order for "consent" to be valid, all parties must have unimpaired judgment and a shared understanding of the nature of the

act to which they are consenting including safer sex practices. The person who initiates sexual conduct is responsible for verbally asking for the "consent" of the individual (s) involved. "Consent" must be obtained with each new level of sexual conduct. The person with whom sexual conduct is initiated must verbally express "consent" or lack of "consent". Silence conveys a lack of consent. If at any time consent is withdrawn, the conduct must stop immediately.

OFFENSES DEFINED

Any non-consensual sexual conduct is an offense under this policy. Examples of offenses include but are not limited to:

- ° Sexual Assault is a non-consensual sexual act including but not limited to vaginal penetration, anal penetration and oral sex. Penetration, however slight, includes the insertion of objects or body parts.
- ° Sexual Imposition is non-consensual sexual touching.
- ° Sexual Harassment is any unwanted sexual attention including but not limited to sexually threatening or offensive behavior.

PROCEDURES

Any suspected offense should be reported to a member of the sexual offense prevention and survivors' advocacy staff. To ensure confidentiality the community member who makes a formal complaint is referred to as the Primary Witness. The person whom the complaint has been filed against is referred to as the Respondent. The staff member is responsible for discussing available options. This includes those of the Antioch Community as well as other options.

If a complaint involves a non-community member the Advocate will contact the Dean of Students' Office and discuss options available to ensure the safety of the community. If the Primary Witness, Respondent or the Advocate are concerned about the safety of the parties involved, the Advocate will contact the Dean of Students. The Dean of Students is responsible for addressing the safety of all community members.

If a complaint cannot be resolved through other options, the Hearing Board process is available to all community members. To take a complaint to the Hearing Board a formal written complaint explaining the alleged offense must be filed with the Advocate. This process is a method of ensuring that the educational guidelines set forth by this document are followed.

The Hearing Board sessions are not open to the public. Until the completion of this process, the Primary Witness, Respondent, and other participants are responsible for not releasing any information pertaining to this proceeding (see confidentiality). If the Respondent is a student, the Advocate will notify the Dean of Students. The Dean of Students is then responsible for contacting the Respondent within the same day that they are notified. The Dean of Students must offer all students involved off-campus housing for the duration of the process, and if requested arrange for said housing. Depending on current policies the Hearing Board process may not be available to resolve complaints against faculty or staff.

This policy will be reviewed every three years. To initiate this review process the Advocate is responsible for assembling a committee of community members that reflects the diversity of Antioch College. Any revisions are subject to the approval of ComCil and AdCil. In the period of time between revisions changes may be proposed by the Advocate for approval by ComCil.

Changes made in this manner will be approved by AdCil during the three year review process. Appendices to this document may be updated as needed by the Advocate. The Advocate is responsible for creating an educational plan at the start of every term. This plan should consist of educational events, orientation sessions, and opportunities to increase the knowledge of the campus about safer sex, preventing sexual violence and understanding this policy.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Community members must respect confidentiality in matters relating to the Sexual Offense Prevention Policy. If confidentiality is violated, the Advocate or any party may take the Primary Witness, the Respondent, or any community member before Community Standards Board. Students, staff, faculty, and administration are responsible for maintaining confidentiality. To accuse a community member of committing a sexual offense under this policy without following the appropriate procedures is a violation of community standards.

If the hearing process is utilized, a Primary Witness' name may not be released to the community without their consent. Until the hearing board makes a finding, the Respondent's name may not be released. Any evidence used to reach a decision is confidential unless there is an

appeal. All records of the hearing board process are turned over to the college attorneys.

HEARING BOARD POOL SELECTION

The Hearing Board pool shall consist of three faculty, three staff, and three student seats. The composition of the Hearing Board Pool will reflect the diversity of the campus. The Dean of Faculty is responsible for recommending faculty to fill three seats. The Advocate is responsible for recommending staff to fill three seats. Faculty and Staff appointed to the Hearing Board pool serve a year-long term starting in August. Faculty and Staff appointments must be approved by AdCil. The Director of Campus and Residence Life and the Community Manager(s) recommend Hall Advisors or other students to fill three trimester long seats. Student appointments must be approved by Comcil. Training for Staff and faculty members who are on the Hearing Board pool will take place in August before the start of the Fall Term. The student seats will be trained during Hall Advisor Training. The Advocate will conduct all training for Hearing Board Pool members with the assistance of the College attorney.

ComCil must approve the student seats at the first meeting of the term. In the event that a Hearing Board is needed prior to the first meeting of ComCil, the Advocate, the Director of Campus and Residence Life and the Dean of Students are responsible for selecting an appropriate student. If the need arises to replace a member of the Hearing Board pool the Advocate, the Dean of Students, and the Director of Campus and Residence Life and the Community Manager(s) shall recommend the replacement to the appropriate council for approval.

Members of the Hearing Board pool rotate through the three Hearing Board seats. The Advocate and the Dean of Students will serve as non-voting members of each Hearing Board. The role of the Advocate is to ensure the policy is implemented fairly and efficiently. The Hearing Board will convene twice a month throughout the term. If there is no hearing planned there may be trainings. If there is no hearing or training, the Advocate may cancel the meeting.

The Hearing Board will take into account the Primary Witness's story, the Respondent's story, character witnesses, and other relevant evidence to determine an appropriate remedy. The Advocate is responsible for ensuring the community is aware of any offenses that

are determined to have been committed. The Dean of Students is responsible for ensuring the remedy is followed. Decisions must be made, reports written, and submitted to the Primary Witness and Respondent within 24 hours of the hearing.

The Advocate is responsible for maintaining the educational nature of these proceedings. If the Hearing Board does not resolve the issue adequately other options are available to any participant.

REMEDIES AND OPTIONS

Options and remedies are available to resolve complaints and ensure the educational mission of this policy is met. They are available to the Primary Witness and the Respondent. Some possible remedies follow:

- Mediation
- Optional attendance to survivor's groups
- Optional attendance to Alcoholics Anonymous or other substance abuse programs
- Working with the SAP on events or other activities

The Hearing Board may determine a new remedy (not on these lists) or choose from the above list or the following:

- Mandatory sexual offense therapy
- Mandatory substance abuse therapy,
- Public apology
- Community service
- Loss of on-campus housing
- Suspension or Expulsion

The Advocate (although non-voting) can assist in the creation or selection of an appropriate remedy.

Appendix A-2

Dissertation Advertisement

Study Participants Needed

I am conducting a study about the experience of “consensual unwanted sexual activity” which is defined as deciding to participate in sexual activity when you do not wish to do so. I will individually interview undergraduate students A) who have had this particular experience and B) are willing to talk about it with me in a one-on-one interview.

8 extra-credit points will be given for participation in this study as interviews typically last between 1-2 hours.

All interviews will be strictly private and confidential.

Each interview will be audiotaped, but you will be interviewed using a pseudonym to protect your identity. A detailed description of the type of experience I am studying is provided below.

I will ask you to describe a specific incident in which a sexual partner initiated some type of sexual activity and which, for whatever reason, you did not want to do it but you did not communicate to this partner that you were not interested, and you decided to engage in the activity anyway. I am *not* referring to situations in which someone pressured you or forced you to participate. By definition, this person did not even know that you did not want to do this. I am also *not* referring to situations when you teased a sexual partner and told him or her "no" when you really did want to engage in the activity. I am also *not* referring to situations that could be considered child abuse.

I am *only* interested in times when a sexual partner initiated a sexual activity, you did not want to engage in it, and you decided to engage in it anyway without letting your partner know that you did not want to. The definition of sexual activity is not just intercourse, but any type of sexual behavior.

If you have had this experience and are interested in being interviewed for this study, please email me, Samantha Litzinger, at slitzing@utk.edu. All emails will be strictly confidential.

Appendix A-3

Informed Consent Form

**Consensual Unwanted Sexual Activity
Informed Consent Form**

There is growing interest in exploring the topic of consensual unwanted sexual activity, particularly among the college population, a group in which this experience has been found to be quite common. While there is speculation about the impact that experiences of consenting to participate in sexual activity, in the absence of sexual desire, may have on participants, empirical data exploring these experiences is lacking. This study seeks to understand the meaning that consenting to participate in unwanted sexual activity has for individuals who have had such experiences. You will be asked to describe several specific incidents in which you did not want to participate in some form of sexual activity, from kissing to sexual intercourse, but, for one reason or another, you decided to anyway. After the interview, you will be asked to provide some basic demographic information, and complete a few brief questions about your sexual history. **For your participation, you will earn 8 extra-credit points.**

Your identity will be kept strictly confidential. You have the option of choosing a pseudonym or of having one assigned. Only the interviewer (the Principal Investigator) will have a list of actual names and this consent form. Consent forms will be stored in a locked cabinet in a locked room at the University of Tennessee for three years, after which time they will be destroyed. The transcripts, with all identifying information removed, will be kept with the Principal Investigator for the length of the study plus ten years, after which time they will also be destroyed. All information regarding this study will always be kept strictly confidential.

The interview will be audiotaped and then transcribed by the interviewer and/or a research assistant for analysis. Both the audiotape and the transcript will be identified by pseudonym only. Interviews typically last 1½ to 2 hours and conclude when you are satisfied that your experiences have been adequately described and understood. The transcript will then be analyzed both by the interviewer alone and with the aid of an interpretive research group that upholds confidentiality of all material analyzed by the group.

It is possible that short passages from your transcript will be used in reporting the findings, such as in the results section of the dissertation, or if study findings are submitted and/or accepted for publication. In any and all instances in which these passages are presented, only your pseudonym will be used and any information in your description that might lead to your identity will be altered or removed as appropriate.

Your participation in this study is voluntary and you may decline to participate without penalty. If you decide to participate, you may withdraw from the study at anytime without penalty. If you withdraw from the study before data collection is completed, your data will be returned or destroyed.

If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures, please contact Samantha Litzinger by phone (865-974-2161) or by email (slitzing@utk.edu). If you have any questions about your rights as a participant, please contact the Research Compliance Services section of the Office of Research (865-974-3466).

I consent to participate in this research.

Name _____ Date _____

Signature _____

Appendix A-4

CUSA Participant Information

Pseudonym _____ Date _____

Date of Birth: _____ Age: _____

Sex: male _____ female _____

Major _____

Have you ever engaged in sexual activity (from kissing to petting)? Yes _____ No _____

Have you ever engaged in sexual intercourse? Yes _____ No _____

How many times have you participated in **sexual activity (kissing to petting)** when you did not want to do so, but you didn't let your partner know that you didn't want to? Circle your answer

Everytime Most of the Time Some of the Time Almost Never Never

How many times have you participated in **sexual intercourse** when you did not want to do so, but you didn't let your partner know that you didn't want to? Circle your answer

Everytime Most of the Time Some of the Time Almost Never Never

How many times have you participated in **sexual activity (kissing to petting)** when you did not want to do so, and you did let your partner know that you didn't want to? Circle your answer

Everytime Most of the Time Some of the Time Almost Never Never

How many times have you participated in **sexual intercourse** when you did not want to do so, and you did let your partner know that you didn't want to? Circle your answer

Everytime Most of the Time Some of the Time Almost Never Never

Appendix A-5

Summary of Post-Interview Questions

_____ Pseudonym

_____ Interview Date

1. How did you feel about the interview?
2. Did you find yourself having reactions that were distressing or upsetting to you?
3. If so, could you tell me more about that experience?
4. Are you currently feeling distressed/upset about the interview at this time?
5. Whether yes/no inform of Counseling Center resources and give opportunity to process feelings with interviewer.

Appendix A-6

Referrals

If you experience distress as a result of the study and do not feel comfortable, or choose not to indicate your discomfort to the interviewer, contact numbers are provided below so that you may seek psychological services should they be necessary.

UT Psychological Clinic
227 Austin Peay Building-Campus
(865) 974-2161

UT Counseling Center
900 Volunteer Blvd.
(865) 974-2196

VITA

Samantha C. Litzinger was born in Fayetteville, Arkansas where she lived until she graduated Fayetteville High School Co-Valedictorian in May of 1993. She attended and graduated from Bryn Mawr College in May of 1997 with a Bachelor of Arts in Psychology, magna cum laude, and with Honors for Research in Psychology. Following graduation, she received an Intramural Research Training Award from the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development at the National Institutes of Health, where she worked as a pre-doctoral research fellow for two years post- baccalaureate (June of 1997 to June of 1999). She also worked as a Project Manager for an NIH-funded grant to study depression prevention in adolescents at the University of Pennsylvania, under the direction of Martin E.P. Seligman (July of 1999 to June of 2001). She entered the doctoral program in Clinical Psychology at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville in August of 2001. She received a Masters of Arts degree in Psychology in August of 2003 for a thesis entitled: *Exploring relationships among communication, sexual satisfaction, and marital satisfaction*. In addition to psychology coursework, she conducted and assisted in research projects, taught undergraduate psychology courses, conducted assessments and psychotherapy in a variety of outpatient settings in Tennessee, and served as Clinic Coordinator for the University of Tennessee Psychological Clinic (May of 2004 to May of 2005). She accepted an APA approved clinical internship at NYU-Bellevue Hospital (July of 2005 to June of 2006). After her internship year, she was selected to serve as Chief Psychology Intern at NYU-Bellevue Hospital (July of 2006 to June of 2007).

Dr. Litzinger continued at NYU-Bellevue Hospital in the position of Chief Psychology Intern/Post-Doctoral Fellow. In addition, Dr. Litzinger served as a Marital Educator at Montefiore Hospital in Bronx, New York. In August of 2007, she was awarded the Doctor of Philosophy degree with a major in Psychology.