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The experience of sexual desire : an empirial-phenomenological investigation

Johnny M. Dossett

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I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Johnny M. Dossett entitled "The experience of sexual desire : an empirical-phenomenological investigation." 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.

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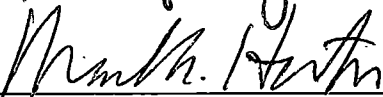
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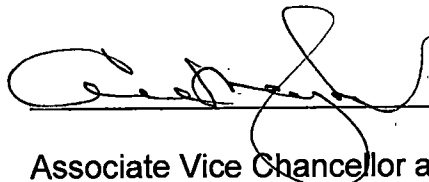
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and recommend its acceptance:







Accepted for the Council:



Associate Vice Chancellor and
Dean of The Graduate School

THE EXPERIENCE OF SEXUAL DESIRE:
AN EMPIRICAL-PHENOMENOLOGICAL INVESTIGATION

A Dissertation
Presented for the
Doctor of Philosophy Degree
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Johnny M. Dossett

December 2000

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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to Cindy, Micah, and John.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This work has required the efforts of many. The faculty of the Psychology Department at The University of Tennessee have shown me great patience and support. I am particularly grateful to my dissertation committee, Howard Pollio, Wesley Morgan, John Lounsbury, and Mark Hector. Without their genuine encouragement and support my efforts would not have come to fruition. Howard Pollio's appreciation of the fact that there are many equally meritorious paths in life – even for graduate students – was invaluable.

The greatest debt is owed to my family, particularly my wife Cindy. There were countless evenings when our own lives had to be put on hold so that this project could be completed. Her patience and support has been unwavering.

ABSTRACT

Previous efforts to investigate sexual desire have been hampered by inadequate concern for the phenomena's largely personal nature. In this qualitative study sixteen participants were interviewed who provided detailed descriptions of their experiences of sexual desire. Protocols were prepared and analyzed, individually by the primary researcher and in a group setting by The University of Tennessee Phenomenology Interpretive Group.

A thematic structure with one global theme, several lesser themes, and some notable departures from existing notions of sexual desire emerged. Virtually all participants found it necessary to describe two kinds of experiences: "lust" and "love," and they showed a strong tendency to associate sexual desire with love. They often acknowledged, for example, that although they might experience lust in regard to a physically attractive person, they did not desire them. Other themes included the role of the body in sexual desire, changes in awareness, and changes in the experience over time, which most participants referred to as maturity. Few gender differences were noted; male and female participants produced quite similar descriptions of sexual desire.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

"I am convinced that mankind has never had any conception of the power of Love, for if we had known him as he really is, surely we should have raised the mightiest temples and altars, and offered the most splendid sacrifices, in his honor, and not - as in fact we do - have utterly neglected him."

(Aristophanes)

As human beings, our very being is infused with sexuality; some have even maintained that the two are inseparable (Freud, 1905/1938; Becker, 1992). For this reason, sexual desire would seem to be at the heart of many concerns, questions, and behaviors that seem to frighten or disturb us. Sometimes desire is implicated as being errant or in need of control as with unwanted pregnancy, pedophilia, rape, or safer-sex promotions. In other instances, the waning of desire is of primary concern, and the goal becomes one of promoting desire so that our relationships can be more fulfilling. In either case, a better understanding of sexual desire seems crucial.

This research has a specific focus: how the research community has understood sexual desire and how this understanding has changed in response to prevailing intellectual currents, paradigm shifts within the discipline of psychology, and societal norms. It has been accorded varying degrees of importance, from a simple bodily function facilitating reproduction, to an experience approaching spiritual communion and religious ecstasy. Sexual desire has been considered both an appetite and a drive; and its source, internal or external, has been strongly debated. It has been considered both unidimensional and multidimensional. Finally, it is important to note that the clinical community has often made major contributions, beginning with Freud and ending with contemporary sex therapists.

Definitional Issues and Preliminary Considerations

Sexual desire is obviously important, but it is poorly understood. Sexual desire, libido, horniness, lust, passionate love, sexual instinct, sexual interest, sexual appetite, sexual motivation, and sex drive often are used interchangeably by professionals and laypersons alike. As early as 1956 Beach noted that sexual "drive" is "widely and loosely" used but "without any accompanying definition" (p. 1). Everaerd and Laan (1995) referred to sexual desire as, "the terra incognita of sexuality" (p. 255). Stephen Levine (1987), a major contributor to contemporary thought about sexual desire, defined sexual desire as "the psychobiologic energy that precedes and accompanies arousal and tends to produce sexual behavior"

(p. 36). In a more recent work (1998), however, Levine admits that he really “had little idea what ‘psychobiological’ energy was” (p. 37).

For most of this century it has been popular to conceptualize human sexual response as a series of stages or phases. Masters and Johnson’s (1966) influential model identified four phases: (a) excitement, (b) plateau, (c) orgasm, and (d) resolution. Not until the late 1970’s did modern theorists recognize desire as a unique facet of human sexuality. Largely in response to experiences with clients in therapy – who often had no problems with arousal or orgasm, but little desire – clinicians urged sexual desire be recognized as a conceptually distinct aspect or phase of sexual response (Kaplan, 1977; Lief, 1977).

While many researchers have welcomed the identification of desire as a separate phase of the sexual cycle, others have suggested it is precisely this attempt at discrimination that is the source of difficulty. Bancroft (1997), for example, has proposed that much of the confusion surrounding the construct is due to an insistence that sexual desire be distinct from sexual excitation. There may be no desire apart from physiological excitation. While it is true that the mere existence of the term sexual desire does not necessitate its existence in a scientific sense, and that a common reasoning error in science is for labeling to be taken as understanding or explanation, it is also true that getting rid of a label as an expedient means for dealing with a phenomenon that is particularly difficult to grasp is just as fallacious.

As with many topics in a predominantly sex-negative culture (Kleinplatz, 1996) sexual desire became of scientific interest as a source of difficulty and attracted little interest as a focus of basic research. However, with such problems in defining the construct of sexual desire it is not surprising that there is also controversy surrounding "disorders" predicated on "too little" or "too much" sexual desire. If an acceptable definition of sexual desire is not available, it seems unclear how a meaningful assessment of "too much" or "too little" can be made.

Obviously, one possibility to be avoided is embracing an idea largely because it meshes with prevailing opinion. The scientific community's experiences with hysteria and views on masturbation are an embarrassing matter of public record. And surgical sexual assignment of children with ambiguous genitalia threatens to be a contemporary example of what can happen when the mere popularity of a view obscures the lack of evidence for it. (See Diamond, 1997 for a discussion of the unfortunate results of an overzealous belief in the power of the environment to influence gender identity.)

Sex researchers should be extremely cautious in reifying partner complaints. Whether such complaints are about too much sexual desire, too little sexual desire, or about desire simply having an errant focus, such complaints should not necessarily be made into clinical or theoretical entities. Although all science is influenced by social and political factors (Kuhn, 1970) sexual science has often been much more strongly affected. We have few taboos about gas

laws, but many about sexual practices; and we should not mistake cultural admonitions for scientific principles.

Many sexual problems seem to manifest themselves as a disorder of desire. Some disorders are actually instances of one partner wanting more sex than the other (Zilbergeld & Ellison, 1980). In a survey of 289 sex therapists, Kilmann, Boland, Norton, Davidson, and Caid (1986) reported that desire discrepancy between partners was the most frequently encountered presenting complaint. Desire disorder also may be more about relationship difficulties than about the desire phase of a partner's sexual response cycle (Talmadge & Talmadge, 1986). Finally, partners may have quite different interests when it comes to sexual behaviors they need to participate in to feel sexually satiated (Levine, 1998; Hurlburt, Apt, & Rombough, 1996; Morin, 1995). Low levels of desire may be low levels of desire for certain behaviors considered objectionable or a reaction to a limited selection of available practices found exciting; and someone considered to have high levels of desire may have received their label primarily because of an interest in atypical sexual activities, rather than in frequent sexual encounters (Levine, 1998; Remple & Serafini, 1995). I have included selected literature purporting to discuss sexual desire disorder that in my judgement contributes to our understanding of sexual desire generally, although my coverage is not exhaustive.

Finally, Strongman (1987) suggested that human sexuality is the product of many factors: "arousal through neural processes, hormones, external stimuli,

imagery, and thought in massive interaction, all tempered by learning and experience" (p. 221). Any model of human sexual desire must give consideration to biological, socio-cultural, and personal determinants. Our everyday experiences, scientific investigations, and data on sexuality in societies other than our own, all make this readily apparent. Proposed models, however, vary considerably on several points: (a) whether or not sexual desire is distinct from other phases of the sexual response cycle, (b) whether or not human sexual desire is substantially different from sexual motivation in animals, (c) whether or not sexual desire is primarily biological or primarily social, (d) whether sexual desire is a unitary phenomenon or multidimensional phenomenon, and (e) how sexual desire is related to other aspects of relationship such as romantic love.

Early Modern Conceptualizations of Sexual Desire

Freud must be included in any serious discussion of sexual desire. He "did more than anyone before him, or since, to open our intellectual horizons to the world of human passions" (Jager, 1989, p. 217). Freud sometimes used his term libido to mean what we commonly think of as sexual desire today, defining it as "sexual desire in the broadest sense" (1910/1957, p. 101). Unfortunately, he also defined it in several other ways: "psychical desire" (1894/1962, p. 107), the sum of the person's "erotic tendencies" (1917/1955, p. 139), and as "the motive force of sexual life" (1932-36/1964, p. 131). As noted by Havelock Ellis (1938/1978), the more closely Freud's use of the term libido is examined the more all encompassing it becomes.

When Freud conceptualized libido as what we think of as sexual desire, it is clear that he understood it to be analytically separable from other aspects of sexuality, and that it was as subject to disturbance as any other component:

The union of the genitals in the characteristic act of copulation is taken as the normal sexual aim. It serves to diminish the sexual tension and to quench temporarily the sexual desire (gratification analogous to satisfaction of hunger). (Freud, 1905/1938, p. 563)

The execution of the sex act presupposes a very complicated sequence of events, any one of which may be the locus of disturbance. The principal loci of inhibition in men are the following: the turning aside of the libido at the initiation of the act (psychic unpleasure); absence of physical preparedness (nonerectibility); abbreviation of the act (ejaculatio praecox), which may equally well be described as a positive symptom; suspension of the act before its natural culmination (absence of ejaculation); the nonoccurrence of the psychic effect (of the pleasure sensation of orgasm)...(Freud, 1926/1936, p. 12).

A triphasic model of sexual response involving desire, excitement, and orgasm can easily be identified in Freud's comments predating modern theorists by at least half a century (Lief, 1988). Freud considered sexual desire similar to hunger, acknowledged that it was part of a complex sequence, and considered it subject to independent disruption. There also are indications, however, that Freud had fundamental questions about the nature of sexual desire on par with those of modern researchers: "It remains entirely unexplained whence the sexual tension comes which originates simultaneously with the gratification of erogenous zones, and what its nature is" (Freud, 1905/1938, p. 608). Brill (1938), the translator for the above section, notes that the phrase translated as "sexual tension" in English, appears as the word "lust" in German. "Lust" in German includes the experience of sexual desire or "tension" and also the pleasure or the

satisfaction of desire. In this passage, Freud is uncertain about the origins of sexual desire, the nature of sexual desire, and its temporal relationship to sexual arousal; all of these are concerns for contemporary researchers as well.

Sandor Rado was the educational director of the New York Psychoanalytic Institute when it was founded in 1931. He was more focussed than Freud on sexual desire as being worthy of independent study and as a potential source of difficulty. In formulating an "adaptational view of sexual behavior" he developed a model which included what he called, "the sexual motive state" (Rado, 1949, p. 164) which Leiblum and Rosen (1988) interpret as sexual desire. Their adaptation of this model includes three components:

- (1) Submanifest excitation from internal stimulation establishes receptivity to psychologic stimulation leading to
- (2) Automatic mechanisms of arousal inciting sensory and intellectual stimulation that leads to
- (3) Sexual motive state mobilizing and organizing the resources of the organism toward attainment of orgasmic pleasure.

Although somewhat limited by contemporary standards because of a focus on orgasm, this model clearly does include sexual desire.

The central features of early psychoanalytic models provided controversial yet important ideas which many later theorists would respond to and, in so doing, advance knowledge of human sexuality tremendously. Sexual desire was generally described as a biologically based "push" from within — a drive. The animal and biological, rather than the uniquely human, aspects of our sexuality

were emphasized. There was an emphasis on conflict and unconscious motivation, and many frequently occurring sexual practices were pathologized.

Some contemporary models contain similar features. Kaplan (1977) also maintains that desire has an internal locus. Levine (1987) includes biological drive in his conceptualization of sexual desire and refers to a "sexual drive center" (1998, p. 38). And Rado's (1949) notion of internal stimulation establishing a kind of receptivity to sexual stimuli sounds very similar to the concept of proceptivity as described by later theorists (e.g., Weinrich, 1987).

Albert Moll was a pioneer of early sex research. He founded the International Society for Sex Research in 1913, and organized the first international congress on sexology (Hoenig, 1977). Moll (1912/1929) provided one of the first attempts at a more rigorous definition of human sexual response. His model consisted of two stages which have been described by Ellis (1938/1978): (a) The first is primarily focussed on the genitals, which Moll called detumescence; and (b) the second prompts the partners to contact each other physically and emotionally, which Moll called contrectation. This model is important because it indicates Moll recognized an experientially integrated sexual act can consist of multiple components, that sometimes exist independently of one another and be meaningfully analyzed. For example, young children may frequently masturbate to orgasm with no knowledge of the typically assumed goals of such behavior: sexual reproduction and/or expression of romantic love. Similarly, one child may be very much in love with another and yet harbor no

sexual thoughts toward him or her. It takes very little imagination to see these patterns in adult relationships as well.

Havelock Ellis was one of the first and most effective theorists to disagree with many ideas that were popular in the psychoanalytic community. Ellis (1938/1978) modified Moll's model to include contraction whether psychic or physical, as a part of what he called tumescence. To Ellis, tumescence referred to the building up of excitement and the engorgement of the sexual tissues as well as the very early stages of orgasm. But it also included the early psychological preliminaries to intercourse such as courtship by which he meant one partner sexually approaching the other, an expression of sexual desire. Ellis considered tumescence to begin as primarily psychic and become largely vascular. Detumescence follows and consists of most of the orgasmic response and the period of relaxation afterward.

Ellis' (1938/1978) model is important. His concept of psychic tumescence is very similar to what we consider sexual desire today, and this conception is a departure from the insistence that sexual motivation always begins with the body. It can be effectively argued that Ellis recognized desire as a unique component of sexual response worthy of independent analysis about 50 years before other sex researchers. In addition, Ellis frequently discussed sexual desire directly, and many of his observations sound quite contemporary. He noted that although abstinence may pose no great health risk, the difficulties are still quite real. He also believed that conflicts associated with unsatisfied sexual desire could cause

many otherwise healthy persons to experience a range of problems including erotic obsessions, anxiety, and depression.

Ellis also discussed relationships among overall interpersonal satisfaction, problems with attaining orgasm, and sexual desire. Citing Hamilton (1929), Ellis (1938/1978) observed that some couples who rated themselves below average in sexual desire reported more satisfactory marriages than those who rated themselves average or above average in sexual desire. In addition, he found that many women who were having difficulty experiencing orgasm actually had higher than normal levels of sexual desire. It could be seen several decades ago that the relationships between components of the sexual response cycle and overall relationship satisfaction were not going to be simple ones.

Ellis (1938/1978) was an early advocate of acknowledging that sexual desire played an important role in the lives of women as well as men. He illustrated by citing Hamilton who found only one case of persistently absent sexual desire out of 100 women in his 1929 study. Ellis himself reported receiving many letters from women complaining about high levels of sexual desire and circumstances providing few socially sanctioned opportunities for satisfaction. He believed that women were in a less advantageous position sexually because males had more options for seeking sex outside of marriage, and they also were more prone to arousal and orgasm during sleep.

Finally, Ellis (1938/1978) discussed four ways that disturbances of sexual life may lead to disorder. The fourth is particularly relevant to our discussion:

...a change in the amount of sexual desire, this alone serving to destroy the balance of health and to introduce the conditions for the occurrence of neurosis. The inhibition of the sexual impulse through the external inability for its satisfaction here becomes pathogenic; the amount of sexual desire is not indeed measurable, it is a relative change in amount that causes the trouble, and the subject finds himself overburdened in the struggle with this relatively changed amount....Although it has no objective clinical validity, this abstract analytical classification may be said to sum up conveniently the various conditions with which we have been dealing. (p. 356)

Several important ideas are expressed in this passage. For one, Ellis tries to address sexual problems from the standpoint of a person in a relationship.

(The two chapters just prior to the one containing the above passage are entitled, "Marriage," and "The Art of Love" respectively.) Assuming a relationship is initially sexually acceptable, it seems clear that problems may stem from the development of different levels of sexual desire between partners. It is the change, or the lack of harmony between partners on this issue, that results in difficulties. There is little point to measuring desire levels; in fact, it may not even be possible. Further, there is not a firm basis for establishment of a clinical diagnosis. (It should be noted that today many researchers also question whether or not there should be a disorder based on levels of sexual desire claimed to be too high or too low.)

Behavioral Approaches

Many important insights into the nature of sexual desire achieved during the earlier part of this century had to be rediscovered by contemporary theorists. In keeping with the prevailing Zeitgeist, for much of this century most researchers were kept busy unraveling the physiological and behavioral mysteries of human

sexuality. Analogies with animal behavior were popular, and there was little emphasis on the subjective aspects of sexual life. Both of these factors impaired recognition of the importance of sexual desire.

Behaviorism offered two ways of dealing with sexual desire. Some theorists (e.g., Masters & Johnson, 1966) largely ignored sexual desire as a subject appropriate for empirical study. At best, it was subsumed within arousal as an imperceptibly low level of physiological response to sexual stimulation. At worst, it became a kind of epiphenomenon not substantial enough to merit scientific inquiry. Some theorists (see DeLamater, 1991 for a discussion) conceded sexual desire's existence and importance but, in keeping with a behavioral tradition, emphasized cognitive appraisal of physiological response to environmental stimuli as its source.

Kinsey and his associates provide an example of the first approach. They made their monumental contribution to knowledge about human sexuality through publication of two volumes detailing sexual behavior in male and female humans (Kinsey, Pomeroy & Martin, 1948; Kinsey, Pomeroy, Martin & Gebhard, 1953). Prior to cataloguing human sexual behaviors, Kinsey spent 20 years in taxonomic study of gall wasps. It is therefore not surprising that his analyses of human sexuality often seem like protracted lists of the kinds of sexual behaviors "the human animal" (Kinsey et al., 1953, p. 596) engages in and with what frequency.

The Kinsey approach was not conducive to increased awareness of the importance of sexual desire. Beach as early as 1956 noted that, by implication at least, Kinsey simply equated sexual desire with frequency of orgasm. Sexual experiences were evaluated almost entirely in terms of orgasms or "outlets" because this yielded data amenable to statistical analysis, although this measure would seem a poor approach to assessing information about sexual desire (Rosen & Leiblum, 1987). The empirical nature of his research may have been a breath of fresh air for research psychologists discontent with Freud's notions of an unconscious realm and its links to our sexuality, although many features of human sexuality escaped his empirical net. Indeed, he was skeptical of any claim that the psychological aspects of sexuality were perhaps more important than physiological ones as indicated in the following passage:

Such thinking easily becomes mystical, and quickly identifies any consideration of anatomic form and physiologic function as a scientific materialism which misses the "basic," the "human," and the "real" problems in behavior. (Kinsey, Pomeroy, Martin, & Gebhard, 1953, p. 642)

It is not surprising that Kinsey had a tendency to consider views different from his own as mystical. It is as common for scientists to be unaware of the active role they play in constructing their facts as it is for everyone else (Kuhn, 1970; Latour, 1979). As Latour (1979) observed, "Scientific activity is not 'about nature,' it is a fierce fight to *construct* reality" (p. 243). Although Kinsey was being a bit facetious, he was essentially correct in his assessment of the ways in which his views were likely to be criticized. According to many contemporary

researchers there is much about human sexuality that is missed by models restricted to physiology or visible behavior.

Kinsey relied heavily on argument "de animalibus" (Robinson, 1989, p. 56): As a way of understanding human sexuality, this approach has severe limitations. Animals certainly manifest sexual behavior, but it is highly questionable whether or not they are motivated by anything resembling human sexual desire; they simply lack our powers of abstraction and symbolization. Animals have physiology and behavior, but no eroticism, and it is through eroticism that sex becomes meaningful (Morin, 1995). Animals procreate, but for them procreation cannot be a symbolic struggle against mortality because presumably they are unaware of their own mortality (Bataille, 1962). Of course, humans also engage in sex for procreation, but such encounters represent a small proportion of total sexual activity (De Waal, 1995). In addition, even our closest relatives, chimpanzees, utilize sex symbolically to avoid aggression and promote smooth social interaction (Abramson, 1995).

Since sexual desire is a subjective phenomenon (Bancroft, 1989; Levine, 1984; Morin, 1995) an approach to research which considered first-person data to be of little value was ill-equipped to recognize the importance of this experience. Kinsey was also clearly a behavioral reductionist in his approach to study of sexuality. In discussing the various components of sexual response he referred to the "totality which we call behavior" (Kinsey et al., 1953, p. 643). It apparently did not occur to Kinsey that the "totality" of human sexuality may not

be captured by behavior alone. As Kinsey himself expressed it, "Whatever the poetry and romance of sex, and whatever the moral and social significance of human sexual behavior, sexual responses involve real and material changes in the physiologic functioning of an animal" (p. 594). He maintained that all of these other features of sexual response "can be nothing but certain aspects of that same basic anatomy and physiology" (p. 643).

This almost total focus on observable, quantifiable, and behavioral responses led Kinsey to develop a unitary concept of sexual arousal. He thought that all of the changes that occur in response to sexual stimulation occur with any sexual stimulation but to a lesser or greater degree. Even during very mild sexual stimulation Kinsey considered there to be low level changes in physiological responses such as blood pressure, pulse rate, respiration rate, peripheral circulation, and glandular secretion. With adequate levels of stimulation "the reacting individual may experience what we identify as sexual orgasm" (Kinsey et al., p. 594). For Kinsey, sexual response began with sexual stimulation and subsequent physiological arousal rather than with a subjective state such as sexual desire.

Kinsey's (1953) model was essentially cumulative, with sexual response a continuous progression or, to use Robinson's (1989, p. 129) metaphor, a "gradual crescendo" culminating in orgasm. It was Masters and Johnson who added the notion of "an inevitable sequence of physiological events" (Bancroft, 1989, p. 70). In their classic text, "Human Sexual Response", Masters and

Johnson (1966) developed a model which included (a) excitement, (b) plateau, (c) orgasm, and (d) resolution phases. Many other authors of that era considered Masters and Johnson's work representative of the current state of knowledge and deferred to their findings (e.g., Katchadourian & Lunde, 1972). There was little mention of sexual desire.

Masters and Johnson were similar to Kinsey in their emphasis on behavior. Kinsey did not think the public was ready for direct observational sexual research and did not mention it in his writings (Robinson, 1989). He used in-depth interviews to collect most of his data. Masters and Johnson, however, used laboratory observation of actual sexual activities to collect information on the anatomy and physiology underlying the behavior that had so interested Kinsey. Neither identified desire, libido, drive, or sexual interest as being an important component of sexual response, nor was it recognized as a potential source of difficulty. Masters and Johnson (1970) in their discussion of sexual inadequacies began with premature ejaculation and made no mention of any desire phase difficulties. Their emphasis is clearly stated in the following passage (Masters & Johnson, 1966):

What physical reactions [italics added] develop as the human male and female respond to effective sexual stimulation? Why do men and women *behave* [italics added] as they do when responding to effective sexual stimulation? If human sexual inadequacy ever is to be treated successfully, the medical and behavioral professions must provide answers to these basic questions. (p. 4)

Eventually, evidence of a type of sexual inadequacy not treatable by modifying behavioral responses to provide "effective sexual stimulation" (e.g., Masters &

Johnson, 1970, p. 336) necessitated the addition of sexual desire as a central component of human sexuality. This also suggested to later researchers that some of Masters and Johnson's clients, who had been treated for excitement and orgasm phase problems with only limited success, should have been assisted with their sexual desire difficulties instead (Levine, 1987).

Desire as Appetite

Beach (1956) was one of the first researchers to suggest that the concept of drive was inadequate to account for human sexuality. His work has important implications for any understanding of sexual desire. Beach maintained that human motivation to engage in sexual behavior does not meet the criteria of a primary drive such as hunger, because nothing much happens with sexual deprivation. No "genuine tissue or biological needs" (p. 4) are produced by sexual abstinence. Human sexual motivation is more properly understood as an appetite, with little biological basis. To this end, Beach (1956) proposed male sexual behavior could profitably be understood as consisting of two phases: (a) The "SAM" or sexual arousal mechanism, which is responsible for facilitating arousal to the point where a "copulatory threshold" is attained, and (b) once copulation is attained the "IEM" or intromission and ejaculatory mechanism insures arousal continues until the ejaculatory threshold (p. 19).

In the Beach model human males differ from sub-human males primarily in the extent to which the SAM is governed by symbolic factors. In the human male SAM is extensively modified by experience: "Sexual values may become

attached to a wide variety of biologically inappropriate stimulus objects or partners. Conversely, responsiveness in the usual heterosexual situation may be partly or completely blocked" (p. 27). Regarding female sexual response, Beach provides no model but is "relatively certain" that it involves "quite different sorts of events" than those of the male model.

In analyzing Beachs' theorizing about human sexuality it can be seen that there is a progressively greater involvement of learning and social forces as one approaches the very beginnings of sexual response. Regarding intromission and ejaculation, Beach considered human males little different from rats. In terms of the arousal mechanism, however, Beach acknowledged the great importance of experience and symbolic factors. Although he did not address sexual desire directly, in collaboration with Ford (Ford & Beach, 1951) he did mention phases of sexual response that proceed any "actual sexual contact" and which serve to "draw the two sexes together" (p. 85). After analyzing some 190 human societies, they finally concluded there were few if any universals applicable to this aspect of sexual response.

Beachs' work is important for several reasons. He was one of the earliest researchers to point out that the concept of sexual desire needed clarification. He was also one of the first to acknowledge the importance of symbolism in a model of human sexual motivation. He was aware of crucial nonreproductive functions served by sexuality such as providing underlying energy for day-to-day activities as well as cohesion and integration to the family and thus to society. Finally, he

recognized that because of its biological underpinnings, human sexual response can be adversely affected by factors as ubiquitous as habituation. He further noted that because of its reliance on symbolism, it also was subject to many other disruptions (Ford & Beach, 1951; Beach, 1956).

Hardy (1964) developed a more complete model of sexual motivation as an appetite. While he acknowledged roles for both biology and experience in accounting for human sexual behavior, it was clear to him that experience was more important: "It seems warranted to conclude that the overwhelming proportion of the variance in human sexual motivation and behavior is not explicable in terms of some biological need or tension, however conceived" (p. 4). For Hardy, motivation consisted of a learned expectation that a certain course of action will result in a positive change in affect state. Sexual desire results from originally neutral stimuli being paired with innately pleasurable sensations produced by genital stimulation.

This learning occurs progressively. Initially, the expectation that intimate contact with a partner will result in pleasurable sensations is largely the product of vicarious learning. Individuals are provided with vivid descriptions or even visual depictions of the pleasures that await them. As dating begins, partners find contact with one another pleasurable. Habituation to the initial activities of courtship propels them toward increasingly more intense amatory behavior. Once activities such as hand holding and hugging progress to the point where there is erotic arousal, "the desire to repeat and continue the experience is greatly

enhanced...(and)...the activities which led up to the initial erotic arousal now have a tendency to serve as cues leading to the arousal of sexual desire" (p. 11).

There are also many sources of negative affective expectations for sexual behaviors giving rise to what Hardy (1964) calls problems of approach and avoidance. In American society females have traditionally been the keepers of the gate. Males push for more sexual stimulation, and females provide resistance against this push. Full participation in courtship and in an assortment of sexually arousing activities – but only up to a certain point – is common for many couples, and this creates a highly unstable state. It is not unusual for increased appetite to "overbalance the restraints" resulting in "guilt, anxiety, and cognitive dissonance" (p. 12).

Hardy's (1964) model of sexual desire left him with an unsettling conundrum to deal with. It was based on an intricate web of cues grounded ultimately in the pleasures associated with genital stimulation. The experience of pleasure associated with sexual activity raises the "eternal question" of whether our partners are making love with us merely to satisfy their own selfish desires or as a reflection of their concern for us and our enjoyment. Hardy suggested there have been two attempts to deal with this problem: (a) the dissociation of love and sex, resulting in a tendency for males to conceptualize females as being either the kind you take to bed or the kind you take home to mother, and females perceiving any male with a keen interest in making love as someone not to be

trusted; and (b) the claim that love and sex are synonymous, which Hardy considers as simply not a very plausible alternative.

Hardy offers no satisfactory resolution to this difficulty, and cites Reiss (1960) as a source of empirical evidence that his description aptly fits the situation in which most American men and women find themselves. Americans tend to distinguish between sex for sex's sake and sex as an expression of love. Men are considered opportunistic and more prone to pursue sex for its own sake whereas women typically reserve sexual intercourse for lovers. Women must therefore be on guard; the more insistent a man is about sexual intercourse, the less certain his partner is that he indeed does love her.

Whalen (1966) in his classic paper entitled, "Sexual Motivation" provides us with another example of a theory acknowledging that both biology and experience are factors in human sexual motivation; but in opposition to Hardy, his model makes biology much more important. Sexual desire, or sexual motivation in the Whalen model, consists of two components: (a) arousal, the momentary level of sexual excitation, and (b) arousability, the individual's "characteristic rate of approach to orgasm as a result of sexual stimulation" (p. 152). Both arousal and arousability are influenced by experience; through learning, increasing numbers of stimuli produce arousal. Such stimuli also depend, both centrally and peripherally, on the maintenance of adequate hormone levels as well as on feedback from sexual stimulation. Sexual motivation has a physiological basis, but is also influenced by experience. Sexual

behavior itself results from the interaction of sexual motivation and habit (Whalen, 1966).

Whalen (1966) considers his model fundamentally different from Hardy's in terms of the relationship of sexual motivation to sexual behavior. For Hardy, the direction of the behavior is an integral part of the behavior. For Whalen, the behavioral expression of sexual motivation is independent of the motivation itself. For example, Whalen asserts that both homosexual and heterosexual behavior are "different habit states which may be activated by identical motivational states" (p. 161).

A Contemporary Clinical Contribution: The Return of Desire

Our personal experiences and folk notions of sexual desire can make it seem unnecessary to consider whether or not the construct exists in such a way that it can be studied independently from other aspects of human sexual response. This is because a sexual encounter that goes well tends not to be cluttered with a lot of thought. The experience is unreflected, though not undirected; and is accomplished with little or no talking and thinking about what to do (Pollio, 1982). In fact, most of us can relate to Pollio's observation that thinking too much actually disturbs the synchrony between partners engaged in sexual behavior. When the components of a sexual experience are seamlessly integrated, the importance of the individual elements and their vulnerability to disruption can go unnoticed.

Sexual encounters, however, do not always go well. For any cycle, individual elements are more likely to become figural when their normal contribution to the overall integration is disturbed. (For example, many drivers have no idea their car even contains an ECM or electronic control module until it, and their car, are not functioning.) Levine (1987) has observed something similar in sexual behavior and suggests that desire consists of three components that do not exist in pure form but that can be experienced as relatively separate during periods of adversity. It seems likely this is a general principle and that identification of desire as a unique component of the human sexual response cycle has been, at least in part, due to more couples having problems with this specific aspect of their relationship. The wisdom of not fixing something if it isn't broken often escapes us although its logical equivalent the need to fix something that is broken usually gets our attention, particularly if in something as compelling as sexuality.

In the late seventies sexual desire was finally rediscovered. Behaviorism's hold on psychology had weakened, and the sexual revolution was in full swing. Not only was sex acceptable, people felt compelled to be maximally sexual. Many felt they deserved not just a modicum of sexual satisfaction but sexual bliss. In addition, women had entered the work force in record numbers, and many couples found themselves struggling with new issues. Although the memory of the "summer of love" was still fresh, many thirty-something adults found they must now juggle work, love, sex, and children of their own. The time

was right for some to complain about not getting enough sex which, in a sex-positive era, meant their partner was not sufficiently interested in sex. Before diagnostic labels could be assigned to clients lacking adequate levels of sexual interest, the desire phase had to be added to the sexual response cycle.

Harold Lief (1977;1988) and Helen Kaplan (1977; 1979) are generally credited with convincing modern psychologists that sexual desire, analytically at least, is separable from other stages of the sexual response cycle. Their experiences with clients prompted this conclusion. It was not uncommon for clients to report engaging in sexual behavior without experiencing sexual desire themselves, including satisfactory excitement and orgasm. It was also not uncommon for clients to report having adequate sexual desire but problems with satisfactory arousal or attaining orgasm. Based on clinical observations, it seemed desire was necessary to reflect adequately the experiences of many clients and to provide the best opportunity for treatment.

Lief (1977) described sexual desire as a "readiness for sexual activity" (p. 94). In addition, he also described it as a "psychic state," "cognitive script," and "blueprint" ready to facilitate sexual arousal (1988, p. ix). He compared it to Beach's (1956) concept of proception, which Weinrich (1987, p. 259) defined in the following way: "Proception is the state first occupied by the initiator of courtship; it is the indication that one is ready to respond to an overtly sexual approach."

Although Lief has contributed much to the modern concept of sexual desire, the notion of desire as a kind of preparatory stance may not be in keeping with the way most people experience it. In an illustration of the preception phenomenon provided by Perper (1985), a young woman initiator positions herself in close physical proximity to a man with whom she wishes to have a sexual relationship. Such movement of the body may be the first behavioral indicator of sexual desire, but is not desire itself. Sexual desire is the subjective state that motivated the young woman to move herself closer to the object of her desire, not merely a state of readiness, nor the act of moving itself.

Lief (1977; 1988) does make several important observations about sexual desire:

1. It is an aspect of human behavior that demands a biopsychosocial approach. We cannot hope to understand desire without greater knowledge of the biological mechanisms that support it, although Lief also acknowledges the tremendous influence of social factors. Indeed, interpersonal difficulties are probably the most important source of problems associated with desire (Lief, 1977;1988).

2. He notes that desire has different levels of intensity. An individual may experience lower levels of desire because of a variety of situational factors such as stress, habituation, and relationship difficulties. Although Lief describes situational factors, he is also open to the possibility that there may be genetic or

constitutional factors that leave some individuals experiencing generally lower levels of sexual desire than others.

3. Finally, Lief helps us to appreciate the importance of a better understanding of sexual desire by observing that many therapists report difficulties in desire both as their most frequent complaint and their most difficult to treat.

Helen Kaplan is a central figure in any discussion of modern notions of sexual desire. Like Lief, Kaplan became convinced of the importance of recognizing sexual desire as a separate phase of sexual response through her experiences with clients in sex therapy, specifically failures in sex therapy. Examination of her records revealed that patients who did not respond to traditional sex therapy techniques often were suffering from a lack of sexual desire. Sometimes patients who complained of excitement or orgasmic difficulties, but denied having any desire problems, lost interest in sex as soon as their other problems showed improvement. It was clear that somewhat different mechanisms were responsible for the different phases of sexual response and that each was subject to impaired functioning (1977).

Kaplan (1977) considers sexual desire, or libido, to be an appetite similar to food with a specific locus in the brain. The appetite for sex is presumably controlled by specific neural circuits, requisite levels of neurotransmitters, and circulating hormones. The specificity of its physiological underpinnings makes it subject to enhancement or disruption independently of the other phases of

sexual response. In addition, desire is also subject to "impairment by psychic forces" (p. 4).

Both Lief (1977) and Kaplan (1977) indicate problems surrounding sexual desire may severely stress a relationship. Such problems may prompt the higher desire partner to view the lower desire partner as "cold" and "rejecting" (Lief, p. 95). Of course, the higher-desire partners often find themselves accused of being demanding and too sex-focussed. If such problems remain uncorrected, the relationship may not recover:

It is not uncommon for the partner of the low-libido patient to react with an obsessive concern about the situation and with severe depression, rage, and despair. A lack of sexual desire by one partner frequently precipitates the termination of a relationship. (Kaplan, 1977, p. 6)

To avoid these difficulties the lower desire partner will often implement various strategies of denial and complaint. For example, they may claim they do not find their partners as attractive as they used to or that their partners are not good lovers. Specious problems with arousal and/or orgasm may appear, largely because they seem much less stressful than problems with desire:

It is less threatening to feel that "he has trouble with his erections" than "he does not desire me." People tend to equate sexual desire falsely with love and/or their partner's feeling of desire with their desirability. (Kaplan, 1977; p. 8)

Sexual desire may be less discreet than originally proposed. It may be more of an emergent experience, resulting from a blending of several components, rather than a discreet preliminary stage of the human sexual response cycle. Levine (1984; 1987; 1995; 1998) was one of the earliest

theorists to propose such a model, and his model remains one of the most comprehensive. Levine defines sexual desire as "the psychobiologic energy that precedes and accompanies arousal and tends to produce sexual behavior" (1987, p. 36). It has two essential qualities: (a) the amount of energy that it has varies, and (b) its sources are often personally elusive (1987). We often cannot say why we felt desire so strongly in this situation and not at all in some other circumstance. Desire is produced by the interaction of three components: (a) drive, analogous to Freud's libido or sexual instinct; (b) wish, a cognitive component closely linked to behavior but often conflicting with drive; and (c) motive or willingness, the most important of the three in adults.

These three components differ in important ways. Drive is testosterone driven, genetically organized, and strongest in adolescents and young adults. At high levels of intensity it can be experienced as overwhelming; at low and moderate levels it is easily overridden (Loewenstein, 1996). In most instances sexual drive may be more important for enabling responses to the sexual initiations of others than to provoking sexual behavior in the first place (Levine, 1987).

Wish reflects self-governance. There are many reasons why someone might wish to have sex, both sexual and nonsexual: pleasing a partner, relieving tension in self or partner, seeking to feel loved, seeking to make a partner feel loved, seeking to avoid disappointing a partner, and so on. There are also many reasons why one might wish not to have sex: not being ready, fear of disease,

fear of pregnancy, fear of the requisite intimacy and vulnerability, or an intent to punish a misbehaving partner. In addition, drive and wish often conflict. Many adolescents and young adults find themselves experiencing strong drive to engage in sexual behavior but do not wish to because they are not ready. Many adults in long-term relationships also find themselves wishing to engage in sexual behavior for a variety of reasons in the absence of any endogenous arousal or drive to do so (Levine, 1987).

In Levine's model (1984), sexual motivation or willingness is both the most complex component and the most important in adult relationships. There are five major inducers of sexual motivation: (a) biologic drive, (b) a conscious decision to excite oneself, (c) interpersonal behavior, (d) voyeuristic experiences, and (e) attraction in the absence of interpersonal behavior. The first two are internal; the last three all involve external sources of stimulation. According to Levine (1984) each of these inducers involves at least a brief fantasy: "Fantasy may well be the intrapsychic mechanism for generating the earliest peripheral physiological manifestations of arousal" (p. 86), and the most important of these inducers of sexual motivation is interpersonal behavior (Levine, 1984). The most important type of interpersonal behavior, in the context of maintaining life-long desire, is empathetic verbal exchange (Levine, 1988).

Other Contemporary Models

Singer and Totes (1987) also propose a model in which sexual desire is the product of an interaction among several components, although drive is not

one of them. Since these researchers are biologists, they make no apologies for considering human sexual motivation an “*unexceptional* [italics added] part of the mammalian picture” (p. 483). Drive refers to a push from within the animal associated with an aversive internal state induced by deprivation. The animal is motivated to alleviate this aversive state. Incentive refers to an external pull fostered by exposure to rewarding environmental stimuli.

There is a predictable pattern for many contemporary discussions of sexual desire. Initially sexual desire is compared to hunger, and it is speculated that both are innate drives. Though this comparison has some intuitive appeal, differences between hunger and sexual desire are then discussed such as no damage to the organism resulting from sexual deprivation (e.g., Beach, 1956). Then, of course, the stage is set for a discussion of how sexual desire really is not an innate drive at all but an appetite, largely the product of learning (e.g., Hardy, 1964).

Singer and Totes (1987) undermine the drive concept even further. They suggest that not even hunger is a so-called primary drive, except perhaps in very extreme cases, and that sexual motivation is never a drive under any circumstances. When an animal is hungry a state of deprivation ensues which changes the incentive values of food. Foods become more appealing and the animal eats, long before experiencing any pain associated with hunger. Similarly, sexual stimuli become more appealing as a result of sexual deprivation and

hormonal influence although there is no experience of discomfort. Singer and Totes admit this last assertion remains untested.

Singer and Totes (1987) also propose a novel account of masturbation which yields some insight into important assumptions underlying their model. Three components are said to interact and produce sexual motivation or desire: (a) an internal state of deprivation, (b) external incentives, and (c) species-typical access behavior toward the incentive class. Each of these is capable of controlling the overall motivational state, and they suggest the last as an explanation for masturbation, an almost universal behavior among mammals. Just as a cat pounces on a ball of string in the absence of a mouse, or birds produce spontaneous song, most mammals masturbate when there is sexual deprivation and no sexual partner. The authors point out that hunger and thirst don't seem to have similar surrogate behaviors. Animals do not simply chew on a substitute and become satisfied. They maintain the only real difference is the ready availability of a surrogate sexual incentive: "One can easily find a way to manipulate one's genitals" (p. 495).

Singer and Totes seem to assume the goal of sexual desire in humans is to have an orgasm, and this assumption is a problematic aspect of their model. (Kinsey, discussed earlier, espoused a similar view.) Masturbation may occur frequently while there is little desire to have sex with a partner. Even partner sex may occur frequently while there is little sexual desire. Finally, there may be high levels of sexual desire and no sexual activity at all (Lief, 1988). Sexual desire

simply becomes unintelligible when the complex meanings carried by human sexual behavior are not adequately addressed.

Morin's 1995 study of eroticism provides important insights into the complex nature of sexual desire. When asked to describe peak sexual experiences, his subjects generated several recurring themes such as (a) "a feeling of participation in the grand scheme of existence," (b) "a clear though often inexpressible sense of meaning and purpose," and (c) "a sense of completion, not needing anything else, and an acceptance of what is" (p. 336). While it may be true that human sexuality requires biology, an analysis limited to this level does not capture sexual desire as it exists in the lives of human beings.

Existential "truth" may be more important in discussions of sexual desire than physiological truth. As Aron and Aron (1991) observe, it is similar to the claim that a beautiful pearl is "only a bit of sand plus some stuff around it" (p. 44). It's an all too common example of analysis getting scientists not closer to, but more distant from, human truth. Human beings have made the ability to communicate into poetry and opera, eating food into gourmet cooking, perception into art, and sex into "the search for the infinite and immortal" (Aron & Aron, 1991, p.44). Sex without a partner, sex with a partner with whom there is no emotional involvement, and sex with a partner with whom one has a profound emotional bond are all very different experiences. It is unlikely they are prompted by the same motivational state, and it is only society or science that classifies them as variations in the same experiential category.

Everaerd and Laan (1995) observe that conceptions of sexual desire change with the times and reflect different notions about the role of sex in relationships and the rules governing sexual access to one another. Three major historical changes provide the context necessary for understanding current sexual desire-related issues. First, there has been a shift from an internal drive model to an incentive model. Second, because there is no drive from within, the sexual cycle must be started from outside the person. Lastly, and probably most importantly, the rules of access to partners have drastically changed. In an attempt to reflect these historical changes, Everaerd and Lann (1995) propose a model in which sexual desire is understood to be not in the person or the person's sexual response system at all. Instead, sexual desire is considered an emergent phenomenon resulting from a process in which three components interact: (a) internal state, (b) incentives, and (c) rules of access to partners.

The internal state is described by Everaerd and Laan (1995) as the "disposition to respond sexually" (p. 257). It has both a biological and a cognitive component. The biological component is our built-in capacity to respond to sexual stimuli. It is unclear whether or not there are stimuli that humans find innately sexual; what is clear is that a great deal of what we consider sexual is the product of learning. The cognitive component consists of the representation of sex in memory. Much of the conditioning of the biological sexual system to mental representations of sex occurs unreflectedly. Strategic links also take place, and part of our reaction to the awareness of sexual feelings is voluntary.

Incentives are environmental stimuli that match the requirements of the internal state (Everaerd & Laan, 1995). They are "external" events that initiate the sexual response cycle. Sexual response, however, can also be initiated by the "cognitive pathway" (p. 258) as, for example, in sexual fantasies. Everaerd and Laan (1995) do not explain their construal of an individuals' fantasies as environmental stimuli. Although environmental events can certainly provoke a fantasy, it seems quite plausible for fantasies to occur in the absence of any environmental impetus.

Very important changes have occurred in the rules of access to our partners. The emancipation of women has made male access to partners no longer a right; it must now be by consent, and preferably, by mutual desire. A set of publicly endorsed rules of access have become part of our culture and part of our notion about what "real love" is. Even though there often are discrepancies between these ideal guidelines and how sexual encounters actually get negotiated (Everaerd & Laan, 1995), social skills have now become an issue.

As Levine (1984) has noted, this is an especially tricky part of the arrangement. It is quite common, probably the norm, for only one partner to initially be interested in sex, and the response an initiating partner gets often hinges primarily on how they ask: "the task is to engage the partner. Many seeming desire problems stem from the process of negotiating a sexual relationship, rather than a lack of drive or motivation to behave sexually" (p. 92). Everaerd and Laan (1995) suggest there is a general lack of appreciation for

such interpersonal aspects of our sexual relationships and an overemphasis on the "irrational" aspects which makes any attempt at ameliorating desire difficulties "almost impossible" (p. 259).

Everaerd and Laan (1995) are not optimists when it comes to relationship difficulties involving sexual desire. They make several telling observations: (a) The changes in rules of access make it necessary that we have our partner's consent to engage in sexual activity, (b) our notions of romance make it necessary that this consent be accompanied by desire as well, (c) this desire must also occur spontaneously, because most of us consider planning to detract considerably from the magic and wonder that is romance, and (d) this state of "desirous bliss" must last a lifetime, because we expect our relationships to last our whole lives and for us to be sexual throughout.

One of the most difficult tasks of the sex therapist is to insure that they do not induce unreasonable expectations in the patient. According to Everaerd and Laan (1995), "sexual desire follows its own natural course; once it is over, it is really gone" (p. 255). The spontaneous sexual desire experienced early in romantic relationships would seem to result from conditioned links between the biological components and the cognitive components -- how sex has come to be represented in memory -- of an individual's personal sexual response system. It seems spontaneous because of the automaticity of response and because the conditioning occurs largely without reflection during all the excitement and adventure that characterizes dating and courtship. Over the course of time desire

is likely to weaken. Our internal state may simply become generally less sensitive to sexual stimuli due to decreased levels of functioning physiologically, or simple habituation may result in lower levels of response.

Hill (1997) suggests that a notion of "global sexual desire" conceived of as "heightened sexual interest" or "sexual arousal" may be "conceptually too vague and inexact to provide a meaningful explanation of human sexual motivation" (p.150). Sexual desire has typically been construed in too narrow a fashion. The build up and release of sexual energy, operational definitions based upon overt details of sexual behavior, and the inborn drive for orgasm, each capture only certain aspects of human sexuality. The expression of affection and power through sexuality necessitate a more complex concept of human sexual motivation capable of reflecting "dispositional sexual motives" defined by Hill and Preston (1996) as "stable interests in particular aspects of sexual behavior" (p. 22).

Hill and Preston (1996) propose a total of eight incentives that motivate sexual behavior, most of which are socially-oriented: (a) the desire to feel emotionally valued by one's partner, (b) the desire to express feelings of emotional value for one's partner, (c) the desire to obtain relief from stress or from negative psychological states, (d) the desire to provide one's partner with this nurturance or stress relief, (e) the desire to enhance one's feelings of power, (f) the desire to experience the power of one's sexual partner, (g) the desire to experience pleasure, and (h) the desire to procreate. This model acknowledges

the symbolic role that sexual behavior plays in human interaction, our use of sex to provide stress relief and nurturance, and the important role power plays in sexuality. As a result, it is much better able to handle qualitative differences in sexual experiences.

The Hill and Preston (1996) model also acknowledges both environmental and dispositional contributions to sexual behavior. Motivational theory traditionally assumes the existence of incentive classes which provide the same or similar kinds of satisfaction, hence our ability to have a meaningful discussion of sexual motivation and expression. Any given situation, however, will present only certain incentives and an individual's reaction to available incentives will depend on dispositional motives. Only if there is a strong interest in an available incentive will there also be a significant elevation in sexual motivation, or desire, to obtain the incentive. This is in direct opposition to the often expressed description of sexual desire as a "relatively non-specific sensation" (p. 29).

Remple and Serafini (1995) also propose a model emphasizing the variety of experiences that people find sexually arousing and the importance of a match between sexual practices and individual interests:

...even within the range of normal sexual practices, the activities one person finds wildly arousing may leave another person feeling indifferent or even disturbed. There are indeed "different strokes for different folks."
(p. 4)

Remple and Serafini (1995) maintain that the experience of sexual desire varies along two major dimensions: (a) intensity or frequency, and (b) diversity or variety. Subjects in their study who experienced sexual desire as being primarily

about intensity or frequency found sexual activities that were intimate and partner-focussed to be more arousing. Subjects that experienced sexual desire as being primarily about diversity or variety tended to find stranger-focussed activities more arousing. It is interesting to note that subjects who reported experiencing the most discomfort when having to go without sexual activity did not have an increased desire to fulfill their needs with a wide variety of sexual activities; instead, their preference was for erotic activities with an intimate partner.

The Remple and Serafini (1995) article is important, although their conclusions must be interpreted with caution. It is important because it provides more evidence that the experience of sexual desire may not be one dimensional. Much of the confusion research participants report about their experiences, and researchers labor about trying to interpret, may stem from an inadequate recognition of the multidimensional nature of sexual desire. Since the 1995 Remple and Serafini research was based on data collected from female subjects only, these general conclusions must be considered incomplete until similar research is done with males.

Spector, Carey, & Steinberg (1996) also concluded that sexual desire is a multidimensional construct, although their model is primarily cognitive. They make the very important point that sexual desire is not behavior and define sexual desire as "interest in sexual activity" (p.178). They used factor analysis to identify two types of sexual desire: (a) dyadic, and (b) solitary. Solitary sexual

desire may be more physical, provide primarily tension release, often involves erotic materials, and is primarily about an individual focussing on his or her own sexual needs and wishes rather than those of a partner. Dyadic sexual desire is about satisfying emotional as well as physical needs: "Dyadic desire refers to interest in or a wish to engage in sexual activity with another person. Dyadic desire may also involve a desire for intimacy and sharing with another" (p. 186).

Spector, Carey, & Steinberg (1996) may be too rigid in conceptualization of two types of sexual desire. Solitary desire may be less about the actual desire for sexual behavior in solitude than about an avenue for realization, at least in fantasy, of sexual goals not obtainable at the moment in reality. Also, there is no discussion of the quite reasonable possibility that in some contexts very physical desires and needs are expressions of deeply felt emotions. Both possibilities require further investigation.

Other theorists directly suggest that human sexuality is fundamentally relational in nature. For example, although Talmadge and Talmadge (1986) primarily address low sexual desire, their comments are important to an understanding of sexual desire more generally. They begin by reiterating the frequently noted observations that sexual desire problems in both men and women are on the increase and that a clearer conceptualization of sexual desire is needed. They maintain that "sexual expression remains primarily relational. Human beings have strong needs to be connected to one another in mutual dependency" and that "In a committed relationship, sexuality is a physical

expression of primary emotional bonds and is best understood in the context of the relationships which govern it, i.e., the family-of-origin and marriage." (p. 6)

For Talmadge and Talmadge, intimate sexual relationships are primarily about an unconscious connection between partners, not about the visible trappings that often are the focus of societal and even of some professional evaluations. Reflecting their primary theoretical orientations of object relations and systems theory, Talmadge and Talmadge assert that few nontrivial aspects of human sexuality can be understood without consideration of how sexual partners influence one another and how both have been influenced by their families. They consider the exchange of physical pleasuring that takes place between committed partners to be a "symbolic reawakening of early child-parent interactions and all that they were or were not" (p. 6).

Their elaboration of the symbolic nature of sexual desire is the major contribution made by Talmadge and Talmadge to our discussion. We tend to choose partners that provide something we need, and sexual expression with such partners may have a salutary effect. Physical contact between partners can be a way of lovers emotionally "feeding" one another that can "touch the innermost parts of the self." High levels of desire are associated with facilitation of this symbolic function and lower levels with its impairment. Talmadge and Talmadge echo the view that emotional connection leads to greater desire such as "when the husband becomes more intimate and emotionally expressive with

his wife and the wife's sexual desire increases" (p. 7). It is important to note, however, that the direction of causality is still in question.

Summary and Concluding Comments

A consideration of changing perspectives on the nature of sexual desire provides important insights into several issues of concern to contemporary psychologists: (a) The validity of stage models is called into question, because sexual desire was originally considered an additional stage to the sexual response cycle, (b) the dangers of reductionism are aptly illustrated, because it can clearly be seen that no one perspective provides an adequate understanding of sexual desire, (c) the impact of cultural prescriptions masquerading as scientific principles is more apparent when considering a potentially "taboo" and emotionally-charged topic such as sexual desire, and (d) the importance of understanding the symbolic dimension to human activities, over and above the merely physiological or behavioral, is aptly demonstrated when the role of sexual desire is considered.

Our increasing knowledge of sexual desire provides another example of the inadequacy of stage models. The largely physiological components of human sexual response such as excitement, plateau, and orgasm are much less problematic to stage oriented theorists. Although originally conceived as a first stage, we have seen that desire does not have to precede the other stages of sexual response. It may never be experienced during sexual response at all (Kaplan, 1977) or may be intensely experienced in the absence of any sexual

behavior or intent to engage in sexual behavior. The evidence suggests that sexual desire is more usefully conceived of as a multidimensional, emergent, and experiential – rather than exclusively physiological – phenomenon (e.g., Levine, 1987; Metts & Sprecher, 1998).

Sexual desire also provides an excellent example of why strict reductionism of any variety must be avoided by psychologists. Early psychoanalytic theorists considered libido the driving force of personality development, both healthy and pathological (e.g., Freud, 1905/1938). Some behaviorists largely ignored sexual desire in preference for an exhaustive cataloguing of behaviors and the development of strategies for manipulating them (e.g., Kinsey et al., 1948, 1953; Masters & Johnson, 1966, 1970). Other theorists have suggested that sexual desire is not a source of motivation located within the individual at all; its primary source is in the immediate environment and the opportunities for reinforcement currently available (Hill & Preston, 1996). Still others attempt to reduce sexual desire to pure physiology, with some going so far as to eliminate it entirely as anything meaningfully distinguishable from arousal (e.g., Bancroft, 1997). Finally, some humanistic psychologists conceive of sexual desire and its fulfillment as an almost religious experience (Kleinplatz, 1996; Morin, 1995).

In considering sexual desire we also have an opportunity to explore cultural influences on science and its progress. These influences have prompted theorists to make two assumptions regarding human sexuality and its problems:

(a) most sexual problems faced by couples can be addressed and ameliorated, and (b) barring organic difficulties, sexual problems are generally caused by a lack of information and/or – importantly – relationship issues. There has been a wide-spread reluctance to acknowledge that sexual problems can cause relationship problems or to admit that good sex can have a beneficial impact on other aspects of a relationship.

Research on sexual desire has forced us to reevaluate both of these notions. A sexual desire discrepancy between partners is often perceived by the higher desire partner as a lack of concern and emotional commitment on the part of the lower desire partner and can be a serious threat to continuance of the relationship (Kaplan, 1977; Lief, 1977). Yet such a discrepancy, perceived as lower desire by the higher desire partner, can have several sources many of which are not easily manipulated: (a) a congenitally lower level of desire (Levine, 1984), (b) an interest in forms of sexual expression different from those of a partner (Levine, 1998), (c) a different attitude toward the importance of sex in a relationship (Remple & Serafini, 1995), or (d) present life difficulties (Lief, 1977). Each of these factors can severely stress an otherwise satisfying relationship through desire disruption. These effects can be very insidious, because individuals often are unaware of the factors that influence sexual desire. Indeed, one of the essential characteristics of sexual desire is that individuals experience it as "personally baffling" (Levine, 1988, p. 23).

Finally, a consideration of the richly symbolic nature of sexual desire urges caution in prescriptions for individuals having sexual problems; some traditional suggestions may even have to be changed. Successful resolution of issues such as infidelity, the waning of desire in long-term relationships, and even resistance to use of certain forms of birth control may require consideration of many distinctly nonphysiological aspects of sexual desire. As argued by Kleinplatz (1996) "the intrapsychic, interpersonal, and *symbolic* [italics added] meanings that we confer to the physical, behavioral events are what create an erotic experience or lack thereof" (p. 108). It is precisely this erotic dimension to sexual desire that facilitates achievement of what is "perhaps the ultimate human desire, that is, to be known and understood and fully accepted" (p. 115).

CHAPTER II

EXISTENTIAL – PHENOMENOLOGICAL RESEARCH

For the most part, we do not first see, and then define, we define first and then see.

(Lippmann, 1922)

The content and problems of psychology have lagged behind its institutionalization and the establishment of acceptable methodologies (Koch, 1959). Psychology as an independent discipline was established by individuals who were committed to a natural science approach to inquiry (Valle, King, & Halling, 1989), and this has led to a host of difficulties: (a) Many important topics could not be investigated by psychologists working within a natural science framework (Binswanger, 1963); (b) explanations offered by psychologists were often not in keeping with our experience and seemed more like scientific fiction (Valle & King, 1978) than accurate accounts, yet any claims to knowledge not based on a natural science approach were dismissed (Binswanger, 1963); and (c) perhaps, because of a good-intentioned but misguided allegiance, natural science methods are sometimes used to investigate topics for which they are not completely appropriate.

Natural science methods are well-suited for answering "Why?" or "How?" questions. They are not so well-suited for answering most "What?" questions (Valle, King, & Halling, 1989). Questions about cause - effect relationships are often "Why?" or "How?" questions; for example, the question as to why a couple is seeking professional counsel may have a straightforward answer: perhaps the husband is having erectile difficulties. Even the question as to the reasons for the husband's having such difficulties is likely to have a comparatively straightforward answer. Perhaps he has impaired circulation caused by adult-onset diabetes or is suffering from a side-effect of high-blood pressure or medication for its treatment. Again, such questions may be answerable by successful application of natural science methods much the same as questions in many other areas of inquiry.

Natural science methods are a great boon to psychology, as long as their potential limitations are acknowledged. Behavioral phenomena can be understood very much as any phenomenon in biochemistry or botany: by reduction to a complex of simpler constituents that are themselves – in principle at least – already understood, or familiar. The practice of "normal science" (Kuhn, 1970, p. 5) is based on the assumption that the scientific community already knows what the world is like. While this is admittedly somewhat circular, with theories being supported by the very facts they define as facts, it works well for certain classes of phenomena – phenomena where the data collected are essentially meaningless until associated with other phenomena in some conceptual framework (Strasser, 1963; Binswanger, 1963).

Even some "What?" questions can be addressed reasonably well by natural science methods. Continuing our example, "What is erectile dysfunction?" This question certainly presents some difficulties. Is not being able to maintain an erection for two hours dysfunction? Two minutes? Not with a spouse, but an with extra-marital partner? Once a month, but not once a week as wished by a partner? Though obviously challenging, this question can be answered reasonably well because the phenomena is behavioral and subject to assessment by what is generally accepted as an objective, third-person perspective.

However, most "What?" questions present problems for natural science methods and are not so easily addressed. Often they involve experiential phenomena and tend to be essentially meaningful in and of themselves (Binswanger, 1963); as Romanyshyn and Whalen (1989) observe, contemporary psychology "does not elucidate human experience, the common sense world of everyday action, but ignores it" (p 19). Such phenomena are either labeled "subjective"—indicating they are unfit for scientific investigation — or research is attempted with results that sound like the oft-cited example of claiming that "a Beethoven quartet is nothing but a cat's intestines scraped by a horse's tail" (Binswanger, 1963, p. 35).

Our conceptualization of female orgasm provides an excellent example. The physiological understanding of orgasm provided by Masters and Johnson during the 1960s was interpreted as indicating so many similarities between male and female response that it became axiomatic that all female orgasms were the

same. Many women doubtless made sure they had the kind of orgasms they were "supposed" to be having and stopped exploring other possibilities. Other women continued to report experiencing different types of orgasms but were ignored. Because of the prevailing Zeitgeist, and the privileged status accorded the biomedical model (Capra, 1988), the existing (though limited) physiological information carried the day and it took 25 years to acknowledge the existence of more than one kind of female orgasm.

It is clear that in some instances "findings" should be understood more properly as artifacts of method. As Maslow once remarked, "If the only tool you have is a hammer, you tend to treat everything as if it were a nail" (as cited in Ornstein, 1973). Experimental research attempts to structure in advance what is going to be experienced (Romanyshyn & Whalen, 1989). Further, "That which is studied is not totally separable from the manner in which it is studied, and the researcher participates in defining the researched" (Romanyshyn & Whalen, 1989, p 29). These problems are of special import to researchers in human sexuality. People are very opinionated about sex, and moral and political rhetoric about sexual activities abounds. This fosters an environment in which there is a great deal of opportunity for the unintentional as well as the intentional misuse of sexuality research.

Operational definitions have been frequently proposed as a solution to many of the research problems faced by the social and behavioral sciences. In an operational definition the construct of interest is defined by a specific set of operations used to measure. This is often considered a sufficient answer to the

“What?” question, the operations being taken as equivalent to the concept being defined (Pedhazur & Schmelkin, 1991). Data can then be collected, analyzed, published, replicated, and even applied – with little attention paid to whether or not anyone knew what was being researched.

Numbers are impressive. It is quite easy to get caught up in the bells and whistles of the latest statistical procedures and the computer programs to do them. Although many quantitatively-oriented researchers are familiar with the “garbage in – garbage out” warning as it applies to implementing the correct statistical procedure, their penchant for numbers may make them less aware that it applies to the entire research process. The important “test of fit” is not between the mathematical models in an analysis; it is between the researcher’s interpretation of that analysis and the world.

Operational definitions are useful, but are not substitutes for answers to the “What?” questions of inquiry. Even Bridgman (1954), the physicist credited with the original suggestion that the social sciences could benefit substantially by emphasizing operational definitions, quickly became concerned that his suggestions were being misinterpreted:

I feel that I have created a Frankenstein, which has certainly got away from me. I abhor the word operationalism or operationism, which seems to imply a dogma, or at least a thesis of some kind. The thing I have envisaged is too simple to be dignified by so pretentious a name. (pp. 74-75)

Psychologists have been particularly susceptible. They have been extremely concerned with making psychology as respectable as the “real” sciences – a philosophy of science issue – but typically lacking in training as

philosophers, "Some psychologists in their enthusiasm mistook the operationist footnote for the whole philosophy of science, if not for the whole of philosophy" (Bergmann, 1954, p. 48). As Northrop (1947) notes, focussing on operational definitions "has tended to solve very few problems and to introduce more and more rhetoric and less and less science into the subject matter" (p. 125). As rationality demands, and many psychologists have forgotten, before we can design an instrument to measure something, we must know "what" it is that we wish to measure (Pedhazur & Schmelkin, 1991).

A greater appreciation for what science is like would benefit psychology greatly. There would be much less opposition to diversity in approaches to research. This is difficult, because despite how often claims about "science" are made, science is as problematic to define as is the meaning of life (Ziman, 1968). Polanyi (1964) maintains science is a belief system to which we are already committed. Berger and Luckmann (1966) maintain that science is no more than a process of consensus formation. According to Kerlinger (1986), the purpose of science is theory, although other psychologists remind us of just how typically personal and unobjective the pursuit of theory actually is. Science is not about a search for truth, facts, or even the Laws of Nature by implementation of the scientific method. Perhaps Popper expressed the situation most succinctly, "I suggest that it is the aim of science to find *satisfactory explanations*, of whatever strikes us as being in need of explanation" (1979, p. 191).

The truth is not what many assume it to be. Truth cannot be absolute; it is not objective but must always be subject to reformulation as our understanding of

things changes. As noted by Pedhazur and Schmelkin (1991), a well-recognized authority on research design and quantitative methods, truth changes depending upon context:

What is considered true from one conceptual framework, for a given purpose, and under given conditions, may be deemed not true from another conceptual framework, for a different purpose, and under different circumstances. (p. 148)

Truth is a uniquely human concern, and unlike fresh air and clean water, it is not out there for us to find. As William James commented over a century ago, truth is made (James, 1890/1950; Kvale, 1996).

Facts also are not simply waiting for us to find them. Often it is assumed that facts exist for us to discover, accumulate, measure, classify, and manipulate. Nietzsche (1968) suggests that a more helpful way to understand the role of facts in human existence would be to realize that we never encounter facts at all: "Everything of which we become conscious is arranged, simplified, schematized, interpreted through and through...We never encounter 'facts'" (pp. 263-264). We discover the facts we do, not because it was somehow necessary, but because we went looking for them (Pedhazur & Schmelkin, 1991).

Nor are psychologists looking for laws of nature. These are not waiting to be discovered any more than truth or facts. As Thurstone (1947) notes, these so-called laws of nature are not "in nature" at all; they are ways of making sense out of nature. Of course — importantly — there are many different ways to conceptualize nature and many different ways to make sense out of nature. It is a simple task to find multiple explanatory schemes that serve human needs by

considering other cultures or other historical eras, and the observation that knowledge is often more about justification of beliefs that are already in place, than about the accurate representation of an objective world, has become common place in postmodern thought (Kuhn, 1970; Kvale, 1996).

The reader may consider these observations unnecessary. They appear to address issues of a bygone era when our notions of science and the nature of the world were more "quaint" than today (Pedhazur & Schmelkin, 1991). It is true that the heyday of extreme positivism is over in philosophical circles, and that slavish devotion to a narrowly conceived scientific method is no longer indorsed by most philosophers of science. Not everyone, however, seems to be aware of this position; or if they are aware of it, they reject it.

These observations are timely because, for many psychologists, empiricism is virtually synonymous with scientific method as implemented by the natural sciences. Many psychologists simply do not acknowledge the merits of methods copied from the natural sciences, they insist on them (Kvale, 1996). They seem unaware that contemporary counterparts to the original philosophers and physicists who provided psychology's foundations have generally abandoned such an extreme attitude to the pursuit of knowledge. For example, Ornstein (1973) provides the following comment from the physicist Oppenheimer on abstract quantitative knowledge versus experiential knowledge:

These two ways of thinking, the way of time and history, and the way of eternity and timelessness, are both part of man's effort to comprehend the world in which he lives. Neither is comprehended in the other nor reducible to it . . . each supplementing the other, neither telling the whole story. (p. 5)

There are many ways to know things. The suggestion that to be empirical is to conduct statistical analysis of data collected through utilization of operational definitions inspired by a biomedical model is profoundly limiting. While this approach has been fruitful in animal research, and in considering certain limited aspects of human functioning, it cannot facilitate an investigation into the full range of interesting and important human psychological phenomena, particularly those concerned with human sexuality.

All methods implemented in the quest for understanding are supported by a particular philosophy. The natural sciences developed upon a foundation provided by Descartes which de-emphasizes experience. The fledgling sciences of his day were in direct competition with powerful nonscientific sources of authority on many matters that scientists wished to study. Descartes proposed a rigid separation of subject and object (dualism) which gave scientists the freedom to conduct research on various physical aspects of the human body without encountering undue criticism from religious or civil authorities. This separation became fundamental not only to the natural sciences generally, but also to how the majority of people in the western world construe their own personal existence.

The word "construe" was chosen carefully. Etymologically, the word is from the Latin *construere* meaning to construct. At the heart of the split between subject and object is not something essential to human consciousness, but an assumption. Descartes assumed that consciousness begins with an independent

self, thinking about, rather than experiencing its world. As other philosophers such as Husserl would later observe, Descartes did not carry his method of doubt far enough. Intentionality, characterized by an "openness to" rather than a "thinking about," may be more fundamental to human consciousness.

Dualism and its handmaiden experimental method, once again were cast into the role of "liberators" within the approach to psychology proposed by Wilhelm Wundt. Wundt's goal was to free psychology from philosophy, medicine, and physics. As Boring (1950) observed, Wundt was clearly a dualist, conceiving of mind and body as "totally different universes" (p. 333). When Wundt established psychology as an independent discipline, he did so with the conscious intent of emulating the methodology used in the natural sciences as a means of bolstering psychology's credibility. On this basis, the split between subject and object was firmly implanted in academic psychology, and the experimental method became the Holy Grail of psychology.

We should not make the mistake, however, of assuming that Wundt naively believed that the goals of psychology could be met through experimental methods alone:

Wundt never held that the experimental method is adequate to the whole of psychology: the higher processes, he thought, must be got at by the study of the history of human nature, his *Volkerpsychologie*. (Boring, 1950, p. 328)

Closely examined, it can be seen that even Wundt, often considered the father of experimental psychology, was well aware of the benefits of conceptualizing psychology as a human science (Giorgi, 1970).

Volkerpsychologie or folk psychology was designed to include many nonexperimental approaches such as those presently used in sociology and anthropology. Wundt thought this important, writing some ten volumes on the subject; unfortunately, there are few traces of this emphasis in contemporary American psychology that claims Wundt as its founding ancestor. Many historians of psychology attribute this state of affairs to Titchner, "the person who brought his own version of Wundtian psychology to America" (Schultz & Schultz, 1987, p. 63). Titchner brought the Wundtian emphasis on rigor, empiricism, experimental method, and the structuralist approach generally but excluded much that Wundt thought was necessary for a complete psychology. This is one of several historical factors that would eventually leave much of psychology obsessed with objectification and ill-equipped to address many questions that, in principle at least, could be investigated with both empiricism and rigor — although not with methods modeled after those of the natural sciences.

Boring (1950) further observes that you cannot have a meaningful discussion of method in the absence of a discussion of subject-matter. Although Wundt is remembered most often for his emphasis on the importance of experimental research, he considered immediate experience the proper subject-matter of psychology. A lopsided importation of his work has combined with a lingering affinity for behaviorist principles to produce the distorted notion that Wundt conceived of consciousness as analyzable into distinct elements akin to those in chemistry. Psychologists may be unwittingly attacking a straw man when they attack this position. Boring (1950) notes that Wundt considered

experience to be in constant flux and an active process. In addition, Wundt was interested not only in analysis, but in synthesis, and he considered the "molar" or "manifold" rather than the elemental or molecular, aspects of conscious awareness as "phenomenal reality" (p. 333).

Most psychologists today are trained to implement methods co-opted from the natural sciences. The Cartesian split between subject and object and devotion to experimental methods are considered foundational to most psychologists; unfortunately, contemporary psychologists are less likely than Wundt to question the philosophical assumptions underlying them. Typical academic research careers consist of filling in the details of projects favored by administrators and/or mentors by using officially endorsed approaches. The philosophical foundations and related assumptions generally are destined to remain unexamined (Kuhn, 1970).

The attitude of the discipline as a whole is in keeping with the ways in which these ideas are dealt with in many introductory general psychology textbooks. First, the student is firmly told that psychology is a science and that psychologists use the scientific method; then, the importance of critical thinking is discussed. Critical thinkers "do not automatically accept and believe what they read or hear" (Wood, & Wood, 1999, p. 6). Further, critical thinkers "are willing to modify or abandon prior judgments, including deeply held beliefs" (p. 6). It is doubtful that many psychologists want the awesome power of full-blown critical thinking unleashed on their own cherished assumptions.

As noted, the hope has been that some of the credibility enjoyed by natural science would be conveyed to psychology by virtue of method alone. Methods of data collection and analysis however, are tools to be used in addressing specific research questions (Diekhoff, 1996), and would seem to have no special merit beyond their suitability for a specific task. Because of the special relationship we humans have with our tools, "we often confuse our tools with reality." (Ornstein, 1973, p. 3). An impoverished set of tools restricts our notions of reality and severely limits our ability to understand anyone who's existence differs very much from our own.

Kerlinger (1986) refers to the overallegiance to a favored method as little more than "dogmatic guruism." Such dogmatism effectively obviates what all students of research know to be the first step in designing and implementing any empirical inquiry: adequate consideration of both the research question and the nature of the phenomena under investigation. A poor fit between tool and task, or between method and research goal, does nothing to enhance the credibility of the researcher or the discipline. Confidence in a watchmaker would not be bolstered by discovering their tool box contained only hammers, chisels, and crowbars.

Contemporary research psychology is plagued both by an unreasonable fear of the subjective and by an equally unreasonable preoccupation with objectivity. While the experiential world of the researcher is often unwittingly accorded a privileged status, the subjective world of the research participant is looked upon with suspicion:

The experiences or perceptions of the subjects, on the other hand, are held to be questionable at best. In most researches, they are not even solicited. When they are, they are not treated as comparable to, that is as potentially informative as, the experiences of the researcher. (Fischer, 1989, p. 128)

Research, and the knowledge resulting from it, must always be grounded in experience. Much to the chagrin of many researchers, "perception of the reality of an object is dependent on a subject" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 27), and this cannot be less true in traditional research than in phenomenological research:

The whole universe of science is built upon the world as directly experienced, and if we want to subject science itself to rigorous scrutiny and arrive at a precise assessment of its meaning and scope, we must begin by reawakening the basic experience of the world of which science is the second-order expression. (Merleau-Ponty, 1962/1992, p. viii)

The reflections and experiences of the researcher are often crucial to research design and implementation: (a) The experiences of the researcher are often the source of hypotheses to be tested, or these experiences may be combined with those of colleagues in focus groups; (b) items selected for instruments are chosen because of face validity, in other words, they are in keeping with the experiences of those designing the research; (c) finally, at the conclusion of the research, the merits of the project are assessed in terms of generalizability and validity, both essentially experiential concerns.

In addition, psychologists face many problems not encountered by other researchers. Human beings are not simply aware – they are aware they are aware. Humans have values, beliefs, and goals which are not simply latent variables moderating the influence of the environment on behavior, they are emergent aspects of a complex intentional structure. Human beings are not

simply objects exposed to various natural processes subject to investigation by appropriate natural science methods; they are processes, certainly subject to description and understanding, but much less so to explanation and prediction (Bugental, 1989).

There can be little serious controversy about humans being different from other objects and animals (Kinget, 1975). Although even a child is aware that human beings differ in important ways from stones, plants, rats, pigeons, and cats, research scientists often are reluctant to acknowledge such differences:

So the experimentalist prefers to pretend none of this is true, and in the laboratory reduces the human to an object. (Bugental, 1989, p. xi)

Tolman (1932/1949) made it very clear how he, and doubtless many other psychologists, regard the world of human subjectivity:

I am suspicious of ... verbal reports. I prefer to try to work out psychology with the aid of more gross forms of behavior. My motto for the present is: "Rats, no men."

This is an acceptable motto only if one's goal is a psychology of the rat.

Psychologists often investigate research topics that are much less tolerant of a split between subject and object. There are some aspects of life that we must be *present to* rather than *think about* if we are to increase our understanding. Some phenomena emerge from a dialogue rather than derive from a set of antecedent causes (Valle, King, & Halling, 1989). Not all research is for the purpose of explaining by establishing causal connections between operationally defined variables. Although less common (Lippmann, 1922), there

are times when researchers must see first and it is in these situations when understanding is advanced not by explaining, but by describing.

There are philosophical and methodological alternatives to the procrustean combination of Cartesian dualism, logical positivism, and experimental procedure. Edmund Husserl attended Wundt's lectures on psychology while he was at the University of Leipzig as well as those of Franz Brentano at the University of Vienna; he also served, for a time, as Carl Stumpf's assistant at the University of Halle (Stumpf, 1982). Husserl became the "father" of phenomenology, an approach to philosophy that is both rational and empirical but which rejects the subject/object split without collapsing into physiological reductionism.

Husserl became convinced that the split between subject and object was one of the most serious problems faced by Western thought. The success of the natural sciences had led to an extension of their methods and their presuppositions to any and all sciences. There was only one, objective, factual, autonomous, real world, and this world was to be understood rationally. Although each science might investigate this or that thing in the world, there was really no need for fundamentally different methods from one science to another (Kockelmans, 1967). Husserl believed that this assumption led to a "gradual scientific repudiation of the spirit" (Stumpf, 1982, p. 454) and he concluded that an understanding of humans, as humans, is not possible using such natural science methods (Stumpf, 1982).

Husserl's goal was to develop a different, and more appropriate, method for investigating human subjectivity or Spirit. He believed that Descartes actually deserved the credit for being the father of phenomenology, but that he did not go far enough in applying his method of doubt. He agreed that individual awareness is the source of all knowledge but that what is most fundamental to consciousness is not self-awareness. The self is not a primordial axiom to use as the basis for logical deductions about the balance of existence. The self emerges from a dialogue between awareness and context, and where there is consciousness, there is always and already its context. It is meaningless to refer to consciousness as if it could exist in isolation, apart from a world to be conscious of – the self is not immutable, the self is not independent, the self is not foundational.

According to Husserl, intentionality is the most fundamental attribute of human consciousness. Intentionality refers to the deceptively simple notion that consciousness is always “consciousness of something.” For Husserl, the implications of this observation are enormous. If the essence of consciousness is a projection or directedness toward the world, then the entire natural scientific attitude regarding how we should come to understand existence (i.e. the application of scientific principles to analysis of data coming into our senses from objective things out there in the world) must be revised. The phenomena of experience are not objective things out there in the world at all, but events and objects intended by us. The objects studied by the natural sciences are “abstractions and artificial structures as compared with our original experience”

(Stumpf, 1982, p. 458), and Husserl encourages a return "to the things themselves" (Kockelmans, 1967, p. 29). This is, of course, a complete reversal of the official credence paid to the realm of the subjective by most scientists.

This return to a more primordial experience of the world requires, as a precondition, a suspension of what Husserl referred to as the natural attitude:

In the natural attitude man's perception and thinking are wholly turned toward things, which are given to us as unquestionably obvious and, depending on our standpoint, appear now in this way and now in that. (Kockelmans, 1967, p. 27)

Husserl called this suspension the phenomenological *epochē*; it is an essential aspect of Husserl's method. *Epochē* is the Greek word for "bracketing." Where Descartes doubted everything except his thinking self, Husserl thought that we must suspend all assumptions, including the notion of the thinking self accepted as axiomatic by Descartes. We must endeavor to have no assumptions or presuppositions and stand back from the phenomena of experience. Through applying this method Husserl made a radical departure from traditional philosophy and concluded that the so-called objective world of Descartes, and the natural sciences generally, does not exist in the sense suggested. Instead, Husserl (as cited in Stumpf, 1982, p. 457) found that his consciousness "contained" the world:

...for me the world is nothing other than what I am aware of and what appears valid in such cogitationes (my acts of thought). The whole meaning and reality of the world rests exclusively on such cogitationes. My entire worldly life takes its course within these. I cannot live, experience, think, value and act in any world which is not in some sense in me, and derives its meaning and truth from me.

Husserl's insights are observations about what must be the ontological status of human reality, given the nature of human consciousness. The human world and the world of the natural sciences are not the same. The natural sciences only capture a part of what Husserl referred to as the *Lebenswelt* or life-world: the totality of perceptions and experiences of individuals found in everyday life. This is perhaps appropriate because these experiences are the source of natural science, its abstractions, and any claims to validity: "In the last analysis, the basic justification or confirmation of truth is to be found in the type of evidence that derives from events of the life-world" (Stumpf, 1982, p. 458). It was Husserl's emphasis on the everyday lives of concrete individuals that made his ideas attractive to existential thinkers such as Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty, both important to the development of existential-phenomenological psychology.

Heidegger was one of the first thinkers to combine existential concerns with the methodology proposed by Husserl (Valle, King, & Halling, 1989). Heidegger continued and expanded Husserl's emphasis on the human life-world, and his central concern was correcting the tendency to think about humans in the same way as we think about things (Stumpf, 1982). Heidegger maintained that we cannot understand human beings by making exhaustive lists of their qualities. Humans reflect on their existence; they are aware of their being, and this awareness makes a different approach to inquiry into human essence necessary.

Heidegger even suggested that the word "human" is misleading. History is replete with attempts to define human. Descartes defined human beings as a combination of mind and body. As discussed previously, this established a

chasm between subject and object where knowing subjects look out at a world full of knowable objects. As long as we view others, and often even ourselves as objects, we will be unable to learn about human existence. Human existence is not a quality of a thing; it is a mode of being. If we want to understand human beings, we must come to a better understanding of their existence, and we are only now beginning to bridge this gap and thus make a better understanding of ourselves possible.

Heidegger suggests a new conceptualization of humankind, as Dasein. Dasein translates from German approximately as "being there." It is Heidegger's attempt to capture humanity's essence, that of being-in-the-world, rather than object-in-the-world. In fact, thus far we have been discussing the "world" in a manner with which Heidegger would have almost certainly disagreed. Even what humans consider as the "world" is, according to Heidegger, an aspect of Dasein. Each of us has our purposes, projects, and moods; therefore, we cannot avoid projecting a context in which we come to understand the objects in our world. The same objects, however, may give rise to many worlds, and objects have their meaning because of these projections, not because of any inherent quality. In short, Heidegger turned the entire previously held relationship of human beings to their world upside down. Analogous to field theory in physics, "human" for Heidegger came to indicate a field or region rather than a bounded entity (Barrett, 1958).

One aspect of this unique relationship of humans to their world is the capacity for what Heidegger called *Sorge* or "care." Human beings can transcend

the immediate situation and have the capacity for reflection. Our powers of abstraction give our existence an incredible wealth of possibilities but also expose us to a great risk not shared by other creatures. Only humans have the capacity to objectify others and to allow themselves to be objectified by simply conforming rather than truly existing:

Perhaps the most ubiquitous and ever-present form of failure to confront nonbeing in our day is *conformism*, the tendency of the individual to let himself be absorbed in the sea of collective responses and attitudes, to become swallowed up in *das Mann*, with the corresponding loss of his own awareness, potentialities, and whatever characterizes him as a unique and original being. (May, 1983, p. 107)

All life eventually confronts nonbeing, but the possibility of nonbeing is an integral part only of the mode of existence of Dasein. The projection of humankind's existence upon a temporal horizon is precisely what provides for the possibility of understanding our existence. Although our existence is temporal, we sometimes prefer to preoccupy ourselves with objective time as a means of evading confronting our own mortality (Heidegger, 1962). Although our powers of abstraction and a gift for language foster much chatter about eternity, we know we will die with many projects unfinished. The choice of projects becomes the devilish choice which many actively seek to avoid. We are at great risk, says Heidegger, of leading an inauthentic existence, of denying our finitude when it comes to project choice and blithely allow others to make decisions for us so that our beliefs, values, talents, and goals — our human uniqueness — receives no actualization, no expression.

Existential phenomenology is the result of this combination of Husserl's method and Heidegger's emphasis on the essence of everyday existence. Maurice Merleau-Ponty also derives from this joint tradition "which seeks to understand the events of human existence in a way that is free of presuppositions of our cultural heritage, especially philosophical dualism and technologism, as much as this is possible" (Valle, King, & Halling, 1989, p.6). Merleau-Ponty makes his own original contribution and should not be considered as someone who simply completes the details of Husserl's work:

Husserl does not constitute an absolute beginning or even an absolute norm for Merleau-Ponty. He himself situates his work in a much broader historical perspective. In general, we may say that Merleau-Ponty uses fundamental concepts of phenomenology, but interprets them in his own way. (Kwant, 1967, p. 377)

Merleau-Ponty makes the important observation that a complete reduction is not possible. This is a fundamental departure from Husserl who had a much more absolutist notion of intentionality and sought incontrovertible essences. By applying his method of eidetic variation, Husserl believed the mind could be used as a tool to imagine alternative appearances of a phenomenon to determine what was essentially, rather than simply accidentally, an aspect of the phenomenon. For Merleau-Ponty such essences are illusions and introduce a distance between the conscious act and its focus, which does not characterize our original intentional relationship with our world. There simply are no essences in the sense meant by Husserl (Kwant, 1967). Kwant expresses Merleau-Ponty's view succinctly: "regardless of how deeply we penetrate into ourselves we always find

there the reference to the other” (p. 378). Human existence at its most primordial is still relational.

For Merleau-Ponty (1962/1992) experience is fundamental and underlies Husserl’s work. What is most basic to human existence is not “I think” – regardless of speculations about content – but “I can.” The world is intelligible, not by virtue of any transcendent aspects that are absolute or necessary but because throughout our existence, we are in perpetual relationship with the world. This constant and pervasive interaction is fostered by a pre-reflective level of intentionality sometimes unrecognized by Husserl (Kwant, 1967). It is through our bodies that we “can” do whatever we can do, and it is by virtue of both having and being a body, that we can both have a world, and that the world, as subject to any possibility of human understanding, can exist. Intentionality for Merleau-Ponty is invariably corporeal (Pollio, Henley, & Thompson, 1997).

Merleau-Ponty in his Phenomenology of Perception (1962), provides a detailed critique of psychology’s preoccupation with objectivity (Kvale, 1996). This work provides one of the most detailed analyses of the implications of existential phenomenology for psychology. Merleau-Ponty maintains that the entire notion of using science to develop an objective understanding of things in an external world is misguided. When anyone attempts to understand their world, the very nature of consciousness is such he or she “buries” his or her “perceptual and practical intentions” in objects (p. 82). These objects in the world ultimately appear to be separate from and prior to our intentions: “classical science is a form of perception which loses sight of its origins and believes itself complete” (p.

57). It is the pre-scientific realm that phenomenological research makes its focus, and it is the pre-scientific realm which “endows scientific operations with meaning and to which these latter always refer back” (p. 59).

Consistent with his views on the corporeal nature of our intentional relationship to the world, Merleau-Ponty (1962/1992) proposed an alternative understanding of the body. According to Merleau-Ponty, the human body is not a mechanical body, but a lived-body; and many (e.g. Kwant, 1967) consider Merleau-Ponty’s theory of the body-subject as his most important contribution.

We certainly can view both ourselves and others as objects:

In so far as I have a body, I may be reduced to the status of an object beneath the gaze of another person, and no longer count as a person for him, or else I may become his master and, in my turn, look at *him*.
(Merleau-Ponty, 1962/1992, p. 167)

Human existence is not just accidentally accompanied by an external body, “existence realizes itself in the body” (p. 166). There is no assemblage of facts, regardless of how immense and orderly, to which human existence can be reduced:

...existence is not a set of facts (like ‘psychic facts’) capable of being reduced to others or to which they can reduce themselves, but the *ambiguous* [italics added] setting of their inter-communication, the point at which their boundaries run into each other, or again their woven fabric. (p. 166)

Human projects and concerns all have a metaphysical significance which will remain “incomprehensible if man is treated as a machine governed by natural laws, or even as ‘a bundle of instincts’” (p. 166).

While of obvious importance to psychology generally, Merleau-Ponty's understanding of the body and its relationship to existence is especially important to a better understanding of many issues pertaining to human sexuality. Because of the "metaphysical structure" (p. 167) of the body, sexuality and existence permeate one another to such an extent that it is often impossible to determine which actions and decisions are sexual and which are nonsexual. The issue, according to Merleau-Ponty (1962/1992), is not deciding whether or not human life rests on sexuality, but developing an appreciation of what is to be understood as sexual. Metaphysics, "the coming to light of something beyond nature," is not restricted to lofty academic discussions as many philosophers might suggest. Science conceptualizes sexuality much more narrowly than we experience it. Metaphysics, says Merleau-Ponty, "begins with the opening out upon 'another', and is to be found everywhere, and already, in the specific development of sexuality" (p. 168), and further, "sexuality is coextensive with life" (p. 169).

Finally, there is another important implication of Merleau-Ponty's abandonment of Husserl's search for absolute essences. Merleau-Ponty came to understand human existence as being characterized by ambiguity:

In other words, ambiguity is of the essence of human existence, and everything we live or think has always several meanings. (1962, p. 169)

This ambiguity is a "bad" thing only in the light of a Cartesian obsession with clarity as the hallmark of true and valuable knowledge: "... this ambiguity cannot be made a matter of reproach, for it is inherent in things" (p. 172). According to

Merleau-Ponty (1962/1992) human life cannot be reduced to physiology, economics, or sexuality; but neither can we transcend these aspects of our existence. We are not miners digging up chunks of immutable truth; we are more like travelers who can share details of our journeys with one another (Kvale, 1996). In fact, notes Kwant (1967) it is through preoccupation with the search for absolutes that "we devalue all our real knowledge in the name of an impossible goal" (p. 404).

Existential-phenomenological psychology offers a human science alternative to the natural science approach to psychology (Giorgi, 1970). It avoids many of the problems discussed above and provides an approach to research which yields knowledge based not upon preconceived hypothetical constructs and statistical analysis, but upon an openness to experience and description. The goal of phenomenological research is to "produce clear, precise, and systematic descriptions of the meaning that constitutes the activity of consciousness" (Polkinghorne, 1989). Through reflective analysis and interpretation of detailed experiential accounts provided by participants, themes can be identified. Although no claims to universal truths are made, meaningful relationships can be uncovered, and the experience of some domains may be better articulated and understood.

In many ways phenomenological research provides a much needed bridge between research and clinical traditions in psychology. Since many clinical conditions are extreme expressions of "normal" tendencies, dialogues with clients provide therapists with valuable insights into realms of human experience

that doubtless have application outside of therapy. The phenomenal world of the client is not just important to diagnosis (see for example Sims, 1992) – by definition it must also be important to any researcher interested in “subjective phenomena.” Although traditional quantitative approaches are largely incapable of investigating experiential phenomena, the phenomenological interview also uses dialogue and brings the person to the researcher as a person rather than an object. It thus provides a powerful method of investigating subjective phenomena.

The phenomenological interview, the method through which participant descriptions are collected, is very similar to a clinical interview (Kvale, 1996). The experience may even be a journey of discovery for both researcher and participant (Pollio, Henley, & Thompson 1997). Seldom does one encounter as good a listener as a skilled phenomenological interviewer, and both share an interest in the topic under investigation. In the course of providing the most complete and accurate description possible for the researcher, the participant may develop a better understanding of the meaning of the phenomenon in the context of their own unique existence.

The Present Study

As noted, clinicians have been most vocal in urging that sexuality researchers focus their efforts on desire. This is reasonable since sexual desire is a personal experience, and clinicians are of necessity interested in client descriptions of experience. But as Morin (1995) observes, sexual desire

research requires a departure from the approaches commonly used by most research psychologists:

To study desire we must move beyond our preoccupation with sex organs and venture into more elusive territory where even the most sophisticated laboratory instruments become practically useless. (p. 172)

Phenomenological research methods reclaim for psychology the ability to investigate many topics that natural science methods are at best struggling with, and sexual desire is a perfect candidate for a phenomenological mode of investigation.

Such research is unquestionably empirical but not constrained by a necessity to begin the study with an operational definition already firmly in mind. In this instance, the goal is not to test conjectural statements about the quantitative relationships between constructs but to develop a better understanding of the thematic structure of an important human experience. Phenomenology was clearly the method of choice.

Method

Participants

Participants included in the present study all resided in East Tennessee and were all affiliated with the University of Tennessee as either faculty or students. Some were located by way of invitations to become involved in the research, which were posted on bulletin boards located in university-owned housing facilities. Others were located by announcements made in classes being taught on the campus of the University of Tennessee. Whether posted or delivered in person (see Appendix for a copy this notice), invitations to participate

in the project always briefly described the purpose of the research and what participation would entail, including any known risks or potential benefits.

Demographic information was collected for each participant (see Appendix for a copy of this form). There was no attempt, however, to control the sexual orientation, age, marital status, or degree of sexual experience of participants. Selection criteria did, however, include the following considerations: (a) firsthand experience of sexual desire, (b) an adequate level of comfort in discussing the experience with an interviewer, and (c) sufficient interest in the topic. It was decided the final list of participants would include an equal number of males and females. This would facilitate separate analysis of male and female protocols should it become necessary.

A total of sixteen participants were interviewed, eight males and eight females. The males ranged in age from 18 to 54; their mean age was 29. Female participants ranged in age from 19 to 39; their mean age was 27. Of the male participants, four were single, three were married, and one was divorced. Of the female participants, four were single, and four were married.

Interviews

The same researcher conducted all interviews. Every effort was made to accommodate participant schedules. Fourteen of the participants were interviewed on the campus of the University of Tennessee in small private rooms used by the psychology clinic for individual psychotherapy. Two of the participants elected to be interviewed elsewhere; one male preferred to be

interviewed in a private office located on the UT campus and one female preferred to be interviewed at her home.

Because of the sensitive nature of the data being collected, it was decided that the potential loss of anonymity actually constituted the principal risk of participation in this project. To minimize any possibility of this occurring, it was the suggestion of the Institutional Review Board for the University of Tennessee that no identifying marks be made on any materials collected from participants. Each interview began with a discussion of the project and the necessity of obtaining informed consent. The Informed Consent document did not require participant signature. The researcher was asked to bear witness that each participant fully understood any risks or benefits associated with their participation and that they gave their consent (see Appendix for a copy of this document). In addition, further protection was provided by destruction of the audio-tapes used to record the interviews after transcription.

Interviews were between one and two hours in length; when transcribed by the researcher they ranged from 15 to 25 pages in length. Each interview began with the following opening statement: "I would like for you to think of some times in your life when you were especially aware of sexual desire, and describe them in as much detail as you can." As each interview proceeded, the researcher asked the participants further questions in an effort to collect as much information as possible about their experiences of sexual desire.

The researcher's goal was to promote a full, rich description of the experience, yet help prevent the participant from straying too far off the topic of

the research. Questions requiring the participant to make inferences or hypothesize about relationships between various aspects of their experiences were avoided as much as possible. Every effort was made to stay with expressions originally chosen by the participants. When this was not possible, descriptors suggested by the researcher were verified by the participant as accurately describing his or her experiences. Where appropriate, brief, interim summaries were made and verified or adjusted through further exploration in the interview.

Thematic Analysis

The goal of a phenomenological investigation is a descriptive understanding of the essential thematic structure of an experience. It is important to stay as close to the actual descriptors provided by participants as an accurate interpretation will permit. For example, understanding a protocol would not be enhanced by failing to note that one participant's description, "I felt like I was on fire" is similar to another's, "I thought I would burn up." The goal is to develop a theme that accurately captures these similar experiences.

Departure from the language used by participants is quite risky. It should be done sparingly, and only when necessary. Such departures are the phenomenological equivalent of a quantitative researcher normalizing a nonnormal distribution, or making linear a merely monotonic relationship between variables. Information about the data is being lost and/or changed. Many such decisions are made in both qualitative and quantitative research, and it is at this

point that research becomes craft-like – more art than science. Good decisions in this realm facilitate understanding; poor ones obscure it.

The researcher's preconceived notions about the phenomenon must not be allowed to wield undo influence on interpretation of the protocols.

Unwarranted abstraction and speculation about causal relationships are also to be avoided. Three strategies were implemented to achieve these goals in this study: (a) a bracketing interview, (b) individual analysis, and (c) group analysis.

It is, of course, impossible to be totally detached from a research topic. In all research the topic is of special relevance for the researcher. While this does provide important energy and enthusiasm, it also makes the researcher at special risk for bias toward his/her project and findings. Phenomenologists are keenly aware of the contextual nature of the research process and no attempt to maintain an illusory objectivity is made. In this research, this potential problem was addressed directly by group analysis of the primary researcher's own ideas about and experiences of sexual desire.

Prior to the collection and analysis of any participant data, the primary researcher underwent a bracketing interview conducted by an experienced member of the phenomenology research group. A transcription of this interview was then thematized by the research group with the researcher in attendance. The following potential themes were identified: (a) change in desire over time, (b) desire as powerful, (c) differences between desire in men and women, (d) spiritual/connecting desire versus animal/instrumental desire, and (e) desire as originating in the self, not the other. In addition, it was suggested that the

researcher be cautious about two tendencies: (a) anticipating differences between male and female participants, and (b) trying to force dichotomous interpretations on participant descriptions.

Analysis of data provided by participants began with the interview process itself. During each interview I compiled a set of notes which served two purposes: (a) They helped me to make sure that all aspects of the participant's experience of sexual desire which emerged in the interview were adequately explored, and (b) since they were made in the physical presence of the participant, they afforded an opportunity for subtleties of tone, inflection, and gesture to be represented in the data. I could refer to them as an aid in preparing the final summary of each protocol.

After all interviews were transcribed, I began a thorough analysis of each protocol. Each transcription was read from beginning to end to develop a sense of the participant's unique experience of the phenomenon. A list was then made of "invariant constituents" or statements that describe "unique qualities of an experience, those that stand out" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 128). This initially unclustered list was then organized into clusters of similar constituents representing potential themes for each participant. A summary, in terms used by the participant wherever possible, was produced from these clusters of related constituents. I was thus able to produce tentative thematic descriptions for each participant's experience of sexual desire. These could then be used to produce a tentative composite description of the thematic structure of sexual desire for all participants.

In addition to individual analysis by the researcher, interviews were brought to the Phenomenological Interpretive Group at The University of Tennessee for a total of six sessions of group analysis. Three male and three female protocols were considered by the group. In group analysis protocols are read aloud by members of the group - one member taking the part of the research participant, and one taking the part of the interviewer - in an effort to bring the dialogue back to life as much as possible. In addition, when appropriate, the interviewer provided information about subtle aspects of the dialogue not readily apparent from the transcripts alone.

Analysis in the group setting is truly a collaborative effort. All members of the group are free to make any observations about the dialogue they consider important. At anytime any member of the group may ask the interviewer to clarify aspects of the interview, present tentative invariant constituents for comment from the group, or discuss any other issue relevant to facilitating the emergence of a better understanding of the participant's experience as represented by the protocol. The multiple perspectives provided by the group help prevent unwarranted theorizing and biased interpretation. The group also "provides a public test of whether an interpretation is directly supported by the text" (Pollio, Henley, & Thompson, 1997).

Many aspects of quantitative research follow an almost cookbook approach. In typical quantitative research most of the flexibility in the research is prior to actual analysis of the data. In the classic approach the researcher is committed to a hypothesis and an agreed upon statistical procedure for

evaluating it before any data is collected. The researcher analyzes the data correctly or “gets it right” by precise application of a statistical algorithm.

Protocol interpretation is a hermeneutic process, and hermeneutic analysis is not a cookbook approach. In hermeneutic analysis the researcher improves understanding at the level of potentially shared meanings – in the absence of any lofty goal of “getting it right” – by careful application of a technique – there is no algorithm. The process has several aspects: (a) identification of possible themes as they emerge in a protocol, (b) comparison and adjustment of these themes as they appear in other sections of the protocol, typically representing different contexts for the participant, (c) continual reinterpretation of individual themes in the context of the whole protocol, as well as adjustment to the understanding of the whole protocol in response to better understanding of individual themes, (d) interpretation of each individual protocol in the context of all others, which results in a better understanding of the thematic structure of the phenomenon itself, and (e) if all goes well, interpretation of present themes in the light of what they contribute to our understanding of the phenomenon under investigation in the context of human experience considered more generally.

CHAPTER III

RESULTS

Two kinds of love
One for the way you walk
One for the way you love me
Two kinds of love
Great temptation

(Stevie Nicks, 1989)

Before presenting results of this study, it is important to keep its purpose in mind: to develop a better understanding of the thematic structure of human sexual desire. Because of the relationship between language and experience, a brief look at the etymology of the word "desire" may be informative. The word "desire" is from the Latin *desiderare* or "desiderate" as it survives in archaic usage today. "Desiderate" has at least three possible meanings: (a) feel to be missing, (b) regret the absence of, and (c) wish to have. Although sexual desire is often discussed as if primarily physiological and similar in animals and humans – somewhat like hunger – it would sound strange for someone to say they "miss" food or water when hungry or thirsty. As intimated by the discussion above, participants described sexual desire as having many aspects. Sometimes they

described experiences closely tied to a physical conception of the body. At other times they described relational experiences of an almost spiritual nature.

Many would also consider the definitions of desire presented above as anthropomorphic if applied to animal behavior; they do not seem to describe animals in heat. They are consistent, however, with participant descriptions of their experiences of sexual desire. It is important to be open to how "nonsexual" sexual desire can be – or, alternatively – to expand our notions of the kinds of things that are "sexual" when it comes to human beings. Participant F-1 expressed this possibility quite well in describing her own experiences of sexual desire:

It's out of the realm of sex per se. It happens around sex, but that's not the only time it happens. And it's not a whole lot different just because it's happening around sex. The difference is the body is more engaged. My body and his body are more engaged in it...My feelings of sexual desire have become more dispersed in the fabric of my life...The boundaries around sexual desire are not as defined as they used to be...*more things in life are sexual* [italics added].

Researchers from many different traditions use interviews to collect information. Kinsey (1948;1953), for example, used lengthy interviews to collect data on sexual "outlets." But Kinsey was a taxonomic specialist working at the height of psychology's love affair with behaviorism, and he collected a sea of information about how, when, where, with whom, and how often men and women experience orgasm. He was more of what Kvale (1996) referred to as an epistemological "miner" digging up "facts" which he understood to be nuggets of truth. No one can question Kinsey's contribution to understanding human sexual

behavior, but an interviewer can also be a traveler and it's this metaphor that inspires the present program of research.

The interviewer as traveler is on a journey of discovery with his or her participant, and both are likely to be affected by the trip. When fellow travelers meet, at least three kinds of learning are possible: (a) learning about the culture of the other, (b) developing new perspectives on your own culture in the light of comments from the other and, (c) learning about the human condition more generally. Similarly, thoughtful dialogue about sexual desire - a topic of interest to both researcher and participant - resulted in more than just useful information for the researcher. It was also a significant experience for most participants.

Participants found the task difficult. As one participant put it, "...desire is something that you can't even define, because it is a total picture." [M-1] As might be expected, at the start of the interview some participants reported experiencing awkwardness in describing an experience generally considered to be of a very personal nature. In no case, however, did this continue beyond the first few minutes of the interview, and the interviewer did not judge this to be a major source of difficulty.

Some participants spontaneously commented that describing sexual behavior (rather than sexual desire) would be comparatively easy:

It would be so much easier to talk about the physical aspects...It would be a damn piece of cake! [M-2]

Expressions of a willingness to describe details of their sexual behavior - in preference to the difficulties associated with describing desire - was considered

by the researcher to indicate that participants were not inhibited by discussion of sexuality or the interview conditions, but rather found the topic daunting. This difficulty seemed to stem from the nature of sexual desire itself: sexual desire is much easier to experience than to describe. Several participants made this very clear:

It is SO much easier to feel than it is to explain. [F-2]

I can just do it. I can't explain it. [F-3]

Whew!...It's hard to put your finger on it. It's so much more of an experience than anything else. [F-4]

While acknowledging the difficulty of the task, most participants expressed positive feelings about being interviewed and considered it a learning experience.

Many had simply never thought about it as directly before:

I'm having a hard time putting it all together. How I...I mean, I've never thought about it, so I don't know how to really explain it. [M-2]

Others commented on how their participation guided them to deeper understandings of their own experiences:

I ended up sort of conceptually thinking about, just suddenly starting to make some little distinctions I think I had not made before I thought about this question. [F-5]

It's a lot more complicated than I would have ever thought. [F-1]

Some were unequivocal about how much they enjoyed being interviewed:

I enjoyed this. It was nice. I didn't know how it was going to be, and at first I was like, "Oh God! I can't believe I got myself into this." But now that I've done it, it was great. It was fun. [F-3]

All protocols were analyzed on the basis of a hermeneutic approach. In this type of analysis the goal is to articulate the meaning of the phenomenon in

the context of the participant's life situation. Because all human activities carry meaning – including sexual activities – no human experience can be fully understood solely in terms of the immediate situation, physiology, or from any other single perspective. Whether analyzing a religious text or a research protocol describing human experience, hermeneutic approaches involve movement from analysis of components to analysis of the whole, followed by reinterpretation of each in the light of knowledge gained and continued analysis:

...the meaning of the whole has to be derived from its individual elements, and an individual element has to be understood by reference to the comprehensive, penetrating whole of which it is a part. (Betti, 1980, p. 59)

Hermeneutic analysis is sometimes described as a spiral to distinguish it from other more linear approaches. For each protocol, the individual components and the whole are interpreted in terms of one another, and the process continues spiraling out to include other protocols of different participants. Just as each participant's experience of desire must be understood in the larger context of the person's life, the research project itself can only be meaningfully interpreted, or judged useful, in the light of the conditions which produced the researcher and the participants. The results presented here reflect the belief that for humans, sexuality is richly imbued with meaning, and that hermeneutic analysis of these meanings is crucial to an improved understanding of many aspects of desire.

Thematic Structure of the Experience of Sexual Desire

Hermeneutic analysis of the 16 protocols yielded 4 major themes:

- Lust versus love
- The role of the body

- Changes in awareness
- Changes in the meaning of desire

It is important for the reader to be aware that the isolated manner in which themes are discussed does not reflect how they were experienced or described by participants. They are discussed separately to facilitate understanding of each theme and the context in which they emerged during the analysis. Some themes were especially prominent in certain protocols or sections of a protocol and not in others. When an individual theme became figural, the experience was contextualized by the balance of the person's life. The other themes and the experience of desire as a whole, make up important aspects of that context.

A graphic depiction of thematic structure can be very valuable. The thematic structure of sexual desire as it emerged during analysis of data collected in this research appears as Figure 1. The figure may be usefully interpreted *somewhat* like a contingency table, but the reader should understand that themes are not mutually exclusive: Themes sometimes coexist, overlap, and fade imperceptibly into one another.

The global theme of love versus lust is represented by the headings at the top of the diagram. The left sidebar represents the theme of the body's role. For most participants, the issue was the extent to which they experienced *being* as opposed to *having* a body. The dotted boundaries between having and being, however, indicate that this distinction was not a rigid one. The theme of change is indicated by the middle column. The solid arrows indicate the dominant direction of change reported by participants in their lives, from lust to love. The dotted

		SEXUAL DESIRE	
		LUST	LOVE
ROLE OF THE BODY	BEING	RISK OF POOR SEXUAL DECISION MAKING	POTENTIAL FOR BONDING & COMMUNION
	HAVING	USE OF THE BODY TO OBJECTIFY OTHERS	USE OF THE BODY TO EXPRESS EMOTION

←·····

→

CHANGE

→

←·····

Figure 1. Thematic Structure of Sexual Desire

arrows indicate a potential but less frequently described change: occasional lust-like experiences described by some participants, especially those in long-term relationships. Finally, patterns emerged in the kinds of changes in awareness described by participants. Brief summaries of these appear in each cell, with their relationships to other themes indicated by their location in the overall structure.

Lust Versus Love

Virtually all participants, regardless of age or sex, felt it was necessary to describe two varieties of desire to capture their experiences fully:

“I think desire has two different coins, the person and the physical...physical attributes.” [F-6]

I think there are like two types of sexual desire that a person can experience. I think that you can find somebody attractive – or be attracted to somebody. If you find somebody attractive, you can have sexual desire towards them, but it is only when you are actually attracted to the person that you act on that sexual desire. Does that make sense? [F-2]

I think there are two different kinds of desire, if that makes any kind of sense. One is a desire to just, you know, be with somebody and be real close and have sex, and it's not just the actual physical sex part that makes it fun. It's the whole...It's the whole situation, and the feeling, you know, being close, and I like this person and...this is a lot of fun. The other is, “let's go do the physical sex thing,” and then, you know, then it's over. [M-2]

There's two different things, because the relationship that I was in before this one, it was more lust than love, you know. I mean we just kind of got together, and we just had sex all the time. And you know, I just desired her in that way. And the relationship I'm in now, we have a lot of sexual desire for each other, but then we also love each other. I mean, it's...I'm kind of young to say I'm in love, but that's just how it is. [M-3]

...I've had two distinct types of relationships in my life, and some have been that way and some have been the other. I mean some have been short-term; some have been long-term. And the aspects of desire in those relationships have been different...On the short-term, there's a very animalistic type of urgency for sex, and that's the only reason I would even

have a relationship with somebody, for the sheer sake of sex: And with the pursuing — or getting to know somebody — ultimately you will have sex, but the bonus is, you have a relationship, and you really get to know somebody. And that's cool! So you get a friend, and you get a partner. But with the short-term, it's just sex. There's no strings. There's no kind of a relationship, nothing. [M-8]

One participant [F-5] explained it as the difference between “being in heat,” which she described as a “lovely but silly moment,” versus “being in love,” which she described as “very serious and earth-moving and big.” The desire of love is

...not just sort of this little bodily desire, but a desire to be with him all over the place, that was there whether he was present or not. [F-5]

For me, arousal is something that happens to me; that's just physiology. My body is doing stuff. Desire has got an object. It's a desire for *this man* (italics added). Maybe that is how...yeah, I guess that is it, 'cause I've thought about it before, I just haven't put words to it. Arousal is just me walking around with hot pants or whatever. Desire is a desire for an other. And I don't think you get desire without arousal, but I can have some arousal without desire. [F-5]

Some participants were so emphatic that the experiences were different they felt only one experience should be described as desire. They reserved the word “desire” for use in describing their experience with someone they typically cared for very much:

“I think as I got older, and been in relationships — I'm trying to determine the difference between desire and lust, because I don't know if they're comparable, or different. To me they would be different — I'd forget, and I *thought it was desire* [italics added] for someone, but it was actually just a first impression...lust.” [F-3]

This participant made a reference to “just physical sparks” when someone was “really good looking.” She was then asked if this was desire:

No. I call that...lust...I mean, I can look at somebody...The reason why I separate it is because when I'm walking down the street and I see somebody that's like pretty to me...I can look at them and let them pass by and be like, "Oh wow!" And I can like exclaim in my head, "That's a really pretty person." It can be a girl or boy. I can like play at either one and be like, "Wow, they're really attractive." That doesn't mean I'm necessarily attracted to them. Maybe in other circumstances I would be, but it takes more than me just being able to see somebody physically to be like, "Oo la la!" You know? I can point at them, but I won't desire them. Or I can say that, you know, I'm physically attracted to them, but that doesn't mean that I'm desiring them. I don't think about them more than a second more. I guess I always think of desire as a stronger thing. Like when I think of desire, I think of yearning...When I think of sexual desire, I think of more than just desiring to look at them. [F-4]

Another participant suggested that for her, lust was primarily a function of the immediate situation rather than of her partner's characteristics as a person:

I think it was just living on the edge, doing something that you know you could get in trouble for. That was a lot of it. You know...wait until his parents leave or his parents are upstairs...I don't think it was desire. I think it was more like lust. There was tension built up...I don't think you should ever be allowed to French kiss until after you are married! [F-7]

She continued by describing her distinction between simply finding someone "attractive" and being "attracted to" someone:

Lets say there's two guys, and they're both attractive because they both have physical characteristics that I find appealing, so I find person A "attractive" because of their physical aspects, but I am "attracted" sexually to person B because their emotional aspects are the same as mine; their moral standards are the same as mine. Physical attractiveness is what I'm looking for...just how they're balanced it seems emotionally as a person. Did that make sense? Did I explain that well enough? Sexual desire to me is reinforced and acted upon to a person that I'm "attracted to," so sexual desire equals "attracted" not "attractiveness" because when I think of attractiveness, I just think of physical characteristics. [F-2]

This participant also made it clear that physical characteristics are not enough.

For her to experience sexual desire it must be a certain kind of person:

The only thing the two would have in common would be physical characteristics, because, I mean like, if a person is really attractive, but they're loud and obnoxious, of course I'm not going to have sexual desire towards them. [F-2]

Some participants described no instances of sexual desire outside of a relationship with someone they cared about. When asked if she ever experienced what she herself would label as sexual desire outside of a relational context, one participant replied as follows:

No. I mean, I think they're attractive, but I don't think like, how they'd be sexually. That thought normally doesn't run through my head, like you know, "Ooo! Do it with them" because I have to be in love. I have to feel...emotions before anything like that. Even before...I can't...I can't even kiss anybody without having some feelings for them. I'm weird like that. [F-8]

As was typical of other participants, she admitted she saw people throughout the day that she considered physically attractive, but sexual desire is a different matter:

Like when I'm just walking to class, and I'll see a really beautiful or pretty person, and I'll look at them for a little bit, and they'll catch my eye, but I'm just looking at their features. And for me desire comes...Like if I was a guy, I think I would have a problem because society says it's OK to look at, you know, Playboy and everything, and go, "Ooo!" But if I was a guy, I think I'd have a real problem because I can't look at a guy and go, "Ooo!" and like want him sexually. [F-8]

I guess with like every beautiful person you see, there is like a hint of sexual stuff, but it's not...It's not the same as like, "hey baby, I want to do you" or anything like that. It's just this real little, small little, hint of sexual that's going on. [F-8]

In addition to not experiencing sexual desire in response to the physical features of "beautiful" people that she sees, she experiences the physical features of the partner she cares about differently:

Yeah. I don't know how to...It's like they...they'll peak my sexual interest like, just like...like in a different spot than Bill peaks mine. Or maybe he just peaks it a lot more...I don't know. Like I can't...*I don't look at Bill the same way as I'd look at a beautiful stranger walking down the road.* [italics added]. [F-8]

Participant F-8 attributes the difference to her emotional attachment to her current partner and is steadfast in her conviction that she experiences sexual desire only when she is emotionally involved:

Yeah, it's just different [the impact of other beautiful people] than what Bill has on me. I mean, I think I remember like when I went...remember the first time I saw him. I was like, "Ooo wow!" and he peaked it, you know, a little bit. But now, it's just like...he has his own reserve parking space there! [F-8]

Another participant expressed the difference between lustful desire and loving desire as an issue of control. Contrary to connotations often associated with the word "lust" and myths about the bewitching sexual powers of particularly beautiful people, participants in this study generally characterized lust as more frivolous, less serious, and – importantly – easier to resist than desire. It is when there is a connection with the person, in combination with at least a modest "physical spark," that it becomes difficult to control yourself:

The difference between the attraction and the desire is how much it's embodied and how much, I guess, control, I feel like I have over it. The attraction is something, it's just like I said, it's like low level frequency. It's fun, and I can...I just...I enjoy being in it. I enjoy the whole...It feels like play to me, and I enjoy that play, and then, the desire was when it got very, almost out of my control. [F-5]

Males also commonly described desire as being different from a motivation to engage in sexual activity based primarily on physical attraction and focussed primarily on physical satisfaction of themselves:

There wasn't a whole lot of desire there, other than, 'Lets just have sex.' You knew that was coming....*It wasn't as much desire* [italics added]. It was just kind of meet at home, and let's get through the preliminaries quick, and there was still no other connection, other than that. [M-4]

In fact, despite expectations prompted by common stereotypes, there were very few differences between male and female descriptions. Consider the following male description of simply finding a girl attractive contrasted with what the participant views as desire. It is almost identical with that provided by female participant F-4:

I mean, to me there's a difference between being attracted to a girl and desiring her....I guess it doesn't differ a whole lot from desire it's just...everything is lesser. You don't like...You're attracted to a girl, but you don't focus as much on her. You just say, "Well that's an attractive girl." Well, it's like the difference between me looking out of the window and seeing a good-looking attractive girl and saying, "She's a beautiful girl" — I guess that would be attracted — and actually have her in that chair talking to me, and all of a sudden I see like these qualities that make me desire her. So, I guess one's uh, being attracted to a girl is by appearance, and desiring a girl is like reality enters in. [M-5]

As was the case for the female participants, desire — as opposed to lust — for male participants was associated with qualities of the person beyond the merely physical:

I've only really made out with two girls in my whole life. I think to make out with somebody, and to have desire for somebody, you really gotta love em. I mean, I lust after Jeanie McCarthy and Carmen Electra, but...[M-6]

Since both desire and lust were mentioned, the participant was asked for more details:

Yeah. I think, you know...You just kind of...When you desire somebody, you want every part of them, maybe. And I think that's when I look forward to making out with my girlfriend. It's like for those 2 hours or 3 hours we make out, she's just mine. Nobody else is gonna take her away from me. She isn't gonna leave. She just wants to be there with me, and I like that

very much. I look forward to it cause I know that's when she is just gonna be with me and nobody else. Like when we're watching T.V. and my dad calls, her mom calls, her friends call. It's just like, there's always something, you know? She has to do homework. I have to do homework. Doorbell rings. Somebody knocks. You know? We just...You're not really...When I look forward to making out with her, I just want to be with HER. I think that's why I desire her so much, is cause I love her. I don't think you can really desire anybody you don't love....I don't think you can really desire some lady you saw walking down the street in a tight blue dress. You can lust after her; you can fantasize about her. But you can't really desire her....I think once you quit desiring a person's mind, and how they feel, I don't think you really...you don't want them as bad, and I think desire goes away sexually. You stop caring totally for the person. I think there is a big difference between lust and desire, but I made that point earlier. [M-6]

The participant in this instance is a 21 year old male. Without the corrective provided by the phenomenological interview, it would be common place to conclude – incorrectly – that such a young man was experiencing sexual desire as he watched a lady in a “tight blue dress.” The fundamentally subjective nature of sexual desire makes it impossible to conclude from a strictly physiological or behavioral perspective whether or not a person is experiencing sexual desire.

Lust was characterized by little or no concern for the other as a person. Participants most frequently described this experience as “lust,” [for example M-3; M-6; F-3] but other expressions such as “purely carnal,” [M-7] “animalistic,” [M-4] “being in heat,” [F-5] and “primal urges,” [M-7] conveyed the same basic notion. With lust, the other is important only as a source of gratification or as an object to be used; they are important solely for what they can do for someone else. Desire was often referred to as “love.” Lust differs from desire in several

ways, one of the principal ones being the extent of mutual concern the partners show for each other as *persons*.

Most participants were keenly aware of the extent to which they objectified their partners in lustful – as opposed to loving – encounters:

... it was the whole culture. All my buddies were the same way. The girls we went out with were the same way. And *there times when it really didn't matter who went home with who* [italics added] because the people that we all hung out with all had the same objective. So you almost felt more camaraderie with the guys going and playing ball than with the girls that you should have been having the relationship for. So it was all just this...this...party, lust-type, animal-type...lets go have sex because it feels good and then when it's over with, it's over with, and it really didn't matter who. [M-4]

...you don't care what they say. You just want to have sex, and you're just like, "whatever" and go along with whatever they're talking about. It doesn't even matter, and the ones that you really follow, you're earnestly interested in all the aspects of that person. I mean, I've met some cool people that I've slept with that have been instantaneous relationships that were cool. And then I've had some that are, just, I didn't care; they didn't care. I mean it was just like, no sense even talking about political issues, it wouldn't be doing a thing. We could talk about her hair for all I care, and it didn't matter. [M-8]

You don't care about the person. You don't care about what they think, or how they act. You just want them for two hours alone. You know, two or three hours alone, you don't care if you see them anymore. You don't care if they're hit by a Mack truck. You don't care if they're run over by a semi. It's just a physical thing like. [M-6]

The ability to objectify partners was not confined to males. For example, one female participant described what she called "aggressive" and "wild sex." To her, this meant sex that was not in the context of a romantic relationship. It often involved "unusual places" and "freaky" activities that she wouldn't feel comfortable doing with a romantic partner, and she had no illusions about the status of such partners:

...because you don't have to talk to them later, I guess. You don't have to worry about what they think. And so that...you just...okay like if you're in a romantic type of relationship, you have to...I'm not going to say "answer to" because that sounds really...dominating...but you know you have to discuss actions and...feelings for that person but like if you're...if you engage in...act upon a sexual desire with a person that you're just attracted to, then the whole emotional is not there so *you don't really care about the other person* [italics added]. [F-2]

Another female participant described her earlier experiences of desire as being based primarily on whether her partner had status, good looks, and money:

I mean he could be the biggest son of a bitch you could probably find as long as he looked good and with the money or the car, the usual things when you're younger...[F-6]

She added that such experiences are

...more exciting when you're younger. Like when you've *had someone* [italics added] who's good looking or has money or whatever....I guess you feel like you have achieved a certain status amongst your peers. They try to...you know girls that age, like 20, 19 or 20, if you've got somebody that's good looking, or has money, or...I guess you feel like you've achieved something, or reached a goal that everybody else is trying to obtain. [F-6]

It is clear by this participant's use of the phrase "had someone" and her comments about appearance and money that these partners were not related to as persons. In a discussion of the importance of trust in the context of loving desire, this participant admitted that in her earlier relationships she herself was not deserving of the trust she now values so highly.

In lust physical appearance and sexual attributes of the partner become particularly figural because they are the sole basis for relationship. One participant described it as

...more of a feeling of an animalistic type of, "Let's just have sex" sexual desire, where you're looking at the person and saying, "Yeah, I want to

have sex with her." You're not even looking at her mind, or her person. It's just looking at her body and saying, "Yeah, we're gonna do it." But, not with Angie; it's completely different. [M-4]

Well, the animal lust sex WAS orgasm. Now orgasm is just a small portion of what it's all about: the feeling, and wanting that feeling to last and last and last...It doesn't even have to get to that point to be completely fulfilling and enjoyable. [M-4]

I think it was a purely carnal relationship. We were friends, but there wasn't any intimacy beyond sexual intimacy. We were very different people. [M-7]

Despite the negative connotations associated with the word "lust," it would be inaccurate to conclude that participants viewed lust in a universally negative light. Their views were much more complicated and subtle. Not all participants considered sexual activities associated with the experience of lust to be immoral or even inappropriate. They also did not consider sexual activities in the context of lust less satisfying physically. Some even commented the sex in these circumstances was both more frequent, and more exciting.

Participant F-2 is a good example. She was concerned that her comments would sound "horrible":

I just don't want it to be, like taken out of context. I feel like if you're romantically involved with somebody, obviously you want to have sex with the person, and you experience sexual desire toward that person. [F-2]

But in reference to what she called the "self-centered kind of relationship," she admitted that she experienced desire in such an unromantic context as (a) occurring more frequently, (b) having greater intensity, and (c) as more "aggressive." She also added this observation:

...but that doesn't mean that one is better than the other. If I wasn't involved with a person, I would think both were OK from an outsider point

of view. But since I'm in a romantic relationship, I think that's like the best one to encounter. [F-2]

Desire in a romantic context is "acted upon longer." She says the issue is "...an hour of sexual desire as opposed to a life-time of sexual desire." [F-2]

Participant F-6 also struggled with describing her experiences of desire in a long-term relationship without sounding negative:

You still feel that giddiness. You still joke around and feel light-hearted when you're with that person, but I believe... You know, between the first time experience versus as you get older... You know, it doesn't get dull, but it becomes... not the feeling like it was the first time - whether being in love or being with someone.... There's more of a consistency. There's more, I don't want to say dull... That's not what I'm saying. There's more of an ease about it. [F-6]

Males provided very similar descriptions. In what he describes as "short-term" relationships, M-8 experiences desire as an "animalistic type of urgency for sex":

I think the short-term is a stronger urgency, at least for me, or it used to be. I mean you're just like a dog with another dog in heat. I mean it's just like... There's very much a sense of urgency. [M-8]

Participant M-8 also experiences "long-term" sexual desire as less intense:

There's an urge there, but it's over a longer sustained period of time. And it's not as strong, but it's there. Maybe it is initially strong I guess to spark the interest, but... it doesn't come on... Or it doesn't last. My short-term is a very, very strong feeling, and the long-term, it's a sustained feeling. The urge is not as strong, it's just more drawn out. [M-8]

All participants *preferred*, however, to be in a sexual relationship with someone they cared about and who cared about them. They found sex in this context more satisfying and more fulfilling:

Well obviously, with my first girlfriend in college, it was very physical. I was, you know, not only was she a professional dominatrix, but she also

continued that persona into her everyday public life. And you know, as far as clothing, and attitude, and things like that, that was rather exciting and attractive to me initially. Although I, you know that's stuff's exciting within itself, it really wasn't a very fulfilling thing. [M-7]

I definitely enjoy the long-term better. But, you know, there's a sense of fun or sexual just...expression wise is just really fun, or was when I was a little younger. But I don't know if that was just because I was younger or...But I've had some great relationships and the sex has been phenomenal. I would say the longer is better. It's much more fulfilling, but the short-term is usually not...It's fun, but it's not as fulfilling at all. Sexually, yeah, it's gratifying, but it's not...I guess my reactions or the consequences of it are not as appealing as the long-term...which is weird. You would think if you have such a strong urgency towards the short-term, it would make it better, but it's not necessarily true. [M-8]

It's more fulfilling I guess you might say, because...I just have this feeling that there is more to sex than just the physical, you know, "grr grr grr."
[M-2]

I am a very practical person, and sometimes I feel like I've shoved aside my practical side, or I've separated my body from my mind. And I've done things sexually with people that I really didn't care about that much. I mean, I cared, but...like...I wanted a relationship - a very short one - where I really didn't care a whole lot about this guy...not very much at all, but I did, just like a little bit. And then my other relationships were more...I cared more. [F-8]

When participant F-8 was asked specifically about the differences between her two experiences, she made the following observations about her "very short" relationships:

It wasn't emotional, at all. It was just physical like, "give me physical pleasure." It wasn't, "give me physical pleasure and fulfill my emotional needs." [F-8]

She experiences desire in the context of her current long-term relationship quite differently:

I feel different emotions. Like when I kiss him, I feel totally different emotions than when I kiss somebody I don't care about, and his are definitely more fulfilling. [F-8]

The Role of the Body

When participants were asked to reflect on their experiences of sexual desire, they also described the corporeal aspects of sexuality. In this regard, participants noted repeatedly that physical appearance, touching, kissing, and physiological arousal were all important aspects of their experience of sexual desire. It is also clear, however, that focused reflection on the experience of desire itself prompted virtually every participant to describe how sexual desire was not solely nor even primarily motivated by physical attributes of their partner or of their relationship with him or her.

Many participants acknowledged physical attributes as a source of initial interest:

The physical features are what attracts me first...They're like the bait. [F-8]

...maybe initially it'll start, maybe like the seed of it will be like the whole lust-like physical attraction...the more you know that person, the more knowledge you got about that person, is almost like the fertilizer and the water and the soil for the seed. And then it'll like...the whole tree...and then boom, you have the desire, but all like the lower levels start it...and it's like barely a plant. It's more like...uh...so anyway, your mind is still very much involved. Like you can rationalize it away, still...I mean I have the power to rationalize it all away. [F-4]

I remember in college...this is another college I attended before here...seeing a girl walking up a hill, and I was like, "I gotta meet that girl!" I mean, right off the bat it's like, "I've got to meet that girl!" long hair, beautiful body, just gorgeous, a really good looking girl, and I ended up going out with her and having a relationship with her. But that day, and just seeing her walking...the wind kind of going through her hair, the whole kind of deal...I was like, "Man that's it. I've got go find out who that is!" [M-8]

He looked great! And that day I just...It was the first time I ever said to someone, "You are a very handsome person." That was the first time I ever said it to someone, and I couldn't say nothing else. [F-3]

Initial attraction based on physical attributes was described as being especially important in lust-oriented encounters. In some instances, a physically attractive partner and an active sexual relationship with them was even enough to keep participants with a partner for extended periods of time. Participant M-3 explained his *two-year* relationship with a girl he described as "jealous," "dumb," and one that he just wanted to have sex with and "didn't care what she felt about it":

I guess the sex was so good, it just kept us together. I don't know what it was. [M-3]

Similarly, participant M-7 described earlier relationships as instances in which he thought more with his body than his head, and this was enough to keep him in some relationships:

I feel tempted to say that the earlier things were just purely hormonally fueled, although I don't want to cheapen it to that because obviously I was looking for fulfillment in other areas as well. I think anyone does in a relationship, at least I do. I think with those earlier situations, I was looking for the emotional satisfaction as well, however, I certainly was not... *I did not cut off any of those relationships because I wasn't being fulfilled emotionally* [italics added]. Sexually they certainly were wonderful, and that for a very good part did keep me there and somewhat tied to those relationships, no matter how deleterious the effects may have been on my personality or my persona or my wellbeing... [M-7]

Physical aspects of a partner and sexual activity with him or her, although important, were not enough to sustain relationships for most participants. Other attributes of the partner and the relationship became figural for most participants:

...but once I got to know Bill, like on the inside, his physical features...they matter, but they don't matter as much anymore. [F-8]

Well, I think looks is a big part of it. If a girl is butt ugly you're definitely not gonna want them too much (laughs), but I mean looks is just part of it. You have to have the other things that go with it. Like I just said, the personality is definitely a big part of it: If she's dumb, she don't know

nothing, she's kind of an airhead, you're not gonna respect her as much than if she's smart and intelligent. And if she's a great person all around, you're gonna want her more, at least I do. [M-3]

Now, surprisingly, when I look at a woman now, I'm looking at things that are not just pure looks, because to me some women are – and I'll use the term "sexy" here for whatever other reason – and some women aren't, and you can be knock-out looking by the cover of magazines or whatever, but to me you aren't sexy....*I have learned that good-looking means nothing* [italics added]. [M-1]

I guess desire...It seems like it usually comes more out of, more out of a girl's attitude...just how they act more than how they look. Of course, looks has got a lot to do with it, but it seems like women that are...that are more...I don't know, that don't necessarily act all sexual or whatever, you know...jeese...I don't know where I'm going with this. I never thought about it like this before...strange. It seems like if they...You know, women don't have to act sexual to make you or make me want to have sexual desire or whatever...It's more or less being around them...[M-2]

Yeah. (pause) Yeah, like physical attraction alone doesn't spark any high-pitched sexual desire for me. (pause) I mean, it could help, but it would never just come from that. [F-4]

One participant took a kind of "falsification test" approach and noted that physical features alone can't be enough, because you can always find imperfections in someone's physical body. It must, therefore, be something else about the person that is the source of desire, something from inside:

I can pretty much find fault physically with any girl in the world, like something that would bug me, or whatever. And so it's always something from the inside, that I guess, transfers to the outside...that makes them desirous. Cause, I don't know...it could be the most beautiful woman in the world, but if she is like the redneck type, like I was telling you about, that... her whole type is a constant battle...you know, a small series of battles and stuff, that would really turn me off you know. But...yeah, I'd say it's definitely something from the inside. [M-5]

Participants described lust and desire (love) as coming into being differently. Although lust may be directly linked to things like physical features of

a potential partner, sexual desire was described as an emergent experience, resulting from a not-always-easy-to-predict combination of qualities of whole persons. Although lust is primarily about behavior, sexual desire – somewhat paradoxically – is only potentially linked to sexual behavior during a particular instance of its occurrence.

Even when experiencing sexual desire, participants in this study reported other aspects of being with their partners as more important:

I think I feel more sexual desire for the girl that I respect more than the one I just went and had sex with, for you know, just to do. I feel more sexual desire for the one that I'm in love with. I mean, we do everything together...We have a great time. I enjoy her personality you know, just who she is instead of...I mean, I don't worry about sex as much as I did with the other girl, you know. And that's what I feel the difference is between them. [M-3]

It's not the actual sexual intercourse itself. I can mess around all night and get just as much out of it as I could if I...you know...just had sex one time...and then had orgasm and that was it. But to me it's like...Sexual desire is – it's the touching and the kissing and, you know, the whole emotional closeness thing more than it is the actual sex part. [F-2]

Where the goal before was sex, that's not the goal now. So it is more...maybe constrained is the wrong word....There's less emphasis on the sexual...on having sex. There's more emphasis on...There is more emphasis on creating that feeling, and having the warmth, and the togetherness, and setting the stage. We like that feeling, and we've talked about it. We both like...We like that feeling. We like setting it up and being together, and holding one another and talking and...So it doesn't really necessarily have to end with sex to be fulfilling. I'm not saying it's not nice when it does, but it doesn't necessarily have to. [M-4]

But when it does, its better than any of the animal sex I ever had...I had ever had before, because there's such a feeling of togetherness and warmth...And again, the whole objective before, with the animal type, was sex. [M-4]

These participants identified the partner's personality and emotional closeness as important aspects of sexual desire. Even exchanges between partners that might appear decidedly nonsexual can yield high levels of sexual desire that is experienced in a bodily way. Participant M-1 provided the following example as a development from an exchange, that from a third-person perspective, would be called an "intellectual conversation":

It's not really the intellectual turn on; it's a sexual turn-on because you know they care about you which in turn makes you excited about them. So when they talk to you about your music and say, "Oh this is good" or whatever, it's all making you feel warm. The brain is not going, "Oh, I'm glad she likes it." Your body is going, "DAMN!" [M-1]

When you can share all those things, you can talk intimately and yet have the candles and the champagne and the music and the whole setting and nobody home...And yet we can still discuss how we're going to rearrange the yard and it's still not getting outside of a sexual discussion. We're gonna make love, and we're gonna have a sexual relationship; we're gonna have sex and we're really drawing warmth from each other, and connecting with each other, but yet, we can discuss all these other things and it still doesn't take away...Let's face it, if you discuss shoveling dog poop out of the back yard it's usually gonna get in the way of a lot of sexual conversations. But, yet, we can have the discussions about anything and it doesn't detract from it, because the words really aren't as important as the feeling and the togetherness...of knowing that we're sharing everything. We're sharing everything intimately. [M-4]

The experiences of participants in this study suggest that to describe sexual desire we may need to move beyond the physical. One young female participant was especially clear in this regard. She provided some of the most powerful descriptions of her body and the physicality of desire for her partner:

I just like the way he smells...It makes me tingly on the inside...a kind of butterfly feeling...It makes me think sexual thoughts...It makes me happy...kind of like your heart pounding...A heating sensation came over my body, and it was like, "Fuck it!"....He just...you know...took my breath away...My bodily organs all like, just forget for a second what they're

supposed to be doing because they're so overpowered by him...his presence...I mean, he like makes me pudding almost. [F-8]

This same participant, however, acknowledges that "almost everybody turns their head at a beautiful person," [F-8] but the experience means nothing to her. Her partner may have attractive physical features, but they are not what excite her most. She and her partner may engage in sexual activities, but they are not primarily about physical release and/or satisfaction; they are symbolic and meaningful. Participant F-5 expressed it very well:

Anybody can have sex. Anybody can do that, but to me, it's how you link emotionally with the person. You get your feelings across by the way you kiss... [F-5]

Many other participants made it clear that sex was a way of communicating many complex emotions:

...every time I think of sex, or kissing, or anything, it always...It always goes back to him. [F-8]

When I do anything like kiss Bill, it's an emotional kiss. It's different from when I kiss somebody that I really don't care about. When I kiss somebody I don't care about, it's just like, it was a kiss. That's all it was. It was just a kiss. But when I kiss Bill, it's kind of like *the kiss was saying* [italics added] that, "I love you." [F-8]

And the influence runs in both directions:

The sexual part of the relationship almost "indepths" it a little more. [F-8]

If you're talking about the specific topic of like making love...I'm not just talking about having sex; I'm talking about making love...in the sense of like, making love...There's gonna be sexual desire there, in like a general situation, in a normal situation, I suppose...whatever normal is. In a normal scenario for making love there's gonna be sexual desire involved, but I consider making love to be an expression of emotion, otherwise it's not making love, it's simply sex, it's simply an action. And I think that making love is an expression of emotion, so it's almost like...You're expressing your sexual desire for somebody, but through this action -

expressing your sexual desire - you're also expressing your emotions to that person. And for me, I guess it's kind of combined because of my emotions I have sexual desire, and so...I'm expressing that. [F-4]

Not only did participants describe sex as normally conceived of as taking a backseat to other aspects of relating to their partners, they clearly were aware of physical sexual expression as an avenue to and symbolic of a deep sense of connection or bond:

When I met my wife I was very sexually attracted to her, but there was also a bond. We very much clicked when we first met. Within an hour we were very conversant with one another and shared a lot of the same life experiences. And on the whole, that made me very excited about her...I think that although I was physically attracted to her, that wasn't my...that wasn't the predominant thing with it...of my attraction to her. It certainly was her attitude, very strong-willed, but also very caring, very conscious of other people's emotions and needs and desires....I had several other experiences before that, that were rather shallow and really didn't fulfill me in any way or form, and after a while, the way someone appeared to me didn't necessarily evoke any sexual attraction on my part. [M-7]

I think that the long-term things...The desire isn't always sexual in the long-term. Some of it is, but there's also a sense of...what I was saying when I talked about the getting to know somebody and creating a relationship, and a friendship, and a sense of bond between you and that person, and that is the most gratifying thing. There is sexual desire, but there's also a sense of some sort of a bond, I guess is the only way I can say it. [M-8]

... to me, sexual desire is an emotional need, because I mean, it's not just because you want to hop in bed with somebody because you're really wanting to get your groove on or whatever. You just...to me it's like the close bond type of thing. You're entering into the new level type of stage in your relationship. [F-2]

This bond is characterized by care for the other. Unlike lust, a relationship with desire involves genuine regard for the interests, feelings, and fulfillment of the other person:

It was what I could get out of it, what would make me just happy, not the other person. Whereas now, since I'm married, it's focussed on one person, what I can do to make him happy, what makes him physically happy. And he does the same, vice versa, for me. I believe it's part of a relationship. [F-6]

Well, as I was saying before, I would not define a relationship as...It's not give and take. It's not one-sided. I'd say there's equal give and take, back and forth; there is a sharing there, and it may not be at the same time. Certainly there are cycles where I may need some more emotional support than my wife does, and she'll give it to me and vice versa. There's other times when we may both be going through some kind of stress or crisis where we try to assist one another emotionally, or whatever form, and we're very conscious of that. We're very, very aware of what each other's needs and desires are. And once again, I'm not saying we maybe fulfill the other person, but we try. And we try to have a very good rapport with one another. We try to be very conversant about these things. There's not a lot of assumption in our relationship, a lot of times...We actually talk things out, but we're also very aware of each other's feelings just from having this security within our relationship. [M-7]

Lust was described as somewhat one-sided, although desire was described as not being able to exist without the other feeling much the same way. It is not just "nice" when the other person feels similarly; participants believed that desire (love) virtually requires it:

It's very much a mutual thing. Not only am I interested, but they have to be doing something, whether its in a conversation, a smile, the way they are sitting close to me, or whatever, indicating that there is a potential interest on their part. So, something mutual has to be going on....But you know, maybe some people can not care about the other person. Maybe they can, you know, as they say, some men can make love to a log if they're hot enough. I don't know. I can't. [M-1]

If I can tell that this person is just not interested, it's like, you know, the sexual desire just isn't there. It doesn't build up. It's like, you know, looking in somebody's eyes you can kind of get a feeling of whether or not they're interested. [M-2]

He feels the same way I do, and that just like...definitely makes him more desirable. It is very comforting. [F-8]

And just as lust is devoid of feelings, desire is defined by its emotionality:

It's just normal...I mean almost everybody turns their head at a beautiful person. It's not like I want them, it's just...like...they're pretty, you know? A lot of my desire for Bill does not have a lot...I mean it has to do with his looks; that's the first thing that you're attracted to, but it has to do with more than that, the experiences that I have been through with him and the feelings that I feel for him...the deep feelings. My deep feelings are most of what my desire is. [F-8]

My wife is physically attractive to me, I mean she has...she has a nice body. She's a little overweight, but that doesn't matter because her...It's like this, there are some girls who are physically attractive, but you wake up in the morning and you look at them and you go, "Woa, man she was hit by a buss last night!" Where Angie, my wife, I wake up anytime and look at her and her face is always just as beautiful...always. There is never a time where I can't look at her face and just feel, feel this attraction....And since I can look in her face, and look in her heart, and see all those things – her body is attractive, she's all attractive to me at that point, and it really doesn't matter...where before it mattered. [M-4]

Many participants commented that partners they desire make them feel good about themselves, they listen to them, they have qualities they lack. A genuine interest in being with someone was described as a great aphrodisiac. The hint that feelings are not mutual kills desire, but not lust. In lust, you are not concerned about the other's feelings:

I've experienced sexual desire and had sex and not had orgasm, and still felt good. I've had those like...I think it's really cool to be in the shower. I love taking showers with my partner. I think that's the coolest thing, and I find that a big turn on. I don't know why. But very seldom do those end in both of us being pleased, very seldom. But I still feel good about the situation, and I think that has a lot to do with sexual desire. If you're in lust, that's the one main goal, is to for you and your partner to have an orgasm, and that's not really the goal, I don't think, in sexual desire. I think sexual desire is a feeling of completeness... [F-7]

They make it clear to you that they are interested in you in every way. That's why I said even when they touch you and go to the next step, they make it clear to you that the interest in you is total and complete. Fire is surrounding you. Yeah, so they take you in every way: In your personal

life, they can inspire you in your job, in your writing. Yeah, they take you to things beyond where you could go just because they believe in you, and they believe in you as a lover; they believe in you as a person. [M-1]

I can tell her anything. She's understanding. [M-3]

I mean...you don't know in your heart whether or not that's the person you're going to marry, but you know in your heart that's the person that you love, not just for the day. You know like next week you're going to love the person, and so the emotional closeness that you gain with the person, as far as like being their confidant, being able to talk to the person as you would like a best friend, then that's when...That's when I desire more to be with a person sexually than I would any other time. [F-2]

I desire Bill, like emotionally...I desire him to be there, to be my like partner and to be my mate and all that stuff. You know? To be there whenever I need him...to be my friend. If I didn't have that part of the desire in the relationship, I don't think I could have a strong relationship with him. Because, this is like the first time that my boyfriend has ever been like, a real friend, and I like it a lot. [F-8]

Our friendship definitely deepens my desire for him. I think most women want a man that they can talk to like their best friend, and how lucky can you get if you find a companion you can do sexual stuff with and that can be your friend? That's like...that's it! [F-8]

This all encompassing...She's everything from companion, and best friend, mother, wife...She's the person that goes...She's my hiking partner. She's my cooking partner. She's my landscaping partner. She's my work partner. We connect on everything, so the wanting to be with her is more than just the sexual. That's just a portion of it. That's just a piece of it. It's just that being together...She represents that connectedness with everything, all those things that I've been working to achieve and all those other things that I've been working to put behind...She represents all the goodness, and I don't think that it would've...I dated other girls; and it never connected. In between in this inner period, I dated other girls who sexually were very attractive, but nothing ever connected and so I didn't take it...I didn't take it to that step, but with her, everything connected, everything...I must have connected with her too, because I'm nuts, and she still stays with me and loves me. [M-4]

Participants in this study were not just aware of their bodies. It would be a trivial observation to note that experiences of sexual desire are associated with

increased awareness of the body. Participants were particularly aware of the different roles their bodies played - as roles. It has become a truism in psychology that many aspects of human sexual functioning are learned. It must be remembered, however, that human beings are capable of considerable abstraction and reflection. Participants in this study reported an awareness of the body as figural during experiences of sexual desire. Sometimes the body was experienced as serving to objectify another person through exploitation of their body, and sometimes the body was experienced as a means of achieving an almost spiritual connection by way of corporeal body interaction.

Changes in Awareness

One of the most striking aspects of how participants described their experiences of sexual desire involved fundamental changes in their mode of existence as indicated by marked changes in awareness. In the midst of sexual desire participants said that their "whole state of mind changes," they "don't make as much sense," that "thoughts just don't come into my head," they "become more nervous," and "the way that I think about things" changes. These changes seemed to involve interaction between the culturally prescribed categories of "mind" and "body" to an extent participants found disquieting. We are able to talk about mind and body as being different, but we seldom experience them as being different:

It was so weird. I couldn't answer any questions, just say, "You are very beautiful." [F-3]

You almost feel like you have to have it. It's not really rational, of course. [F-4]

I suppose it's somewhat unreal in a sense, because – while I can't speak for anyone else – obviously I have this idealized picture in my mind of what I expect a woman to be, and it's probably very different from the mainstream idea. It really is very surreal though. I can't describe...When all those things just kind of fall into place, it's almost as if there's some air of unreality to it. To me, everything is there. [M-7]

Whether described as "not really rational," "weird," or as "unreal," corporeal aspects of desire prompted changes in awareness that participants felt needed explaining, though most were ill-equipped to do so.

Human beings both have bodies and are bodies. This places them in the position of – on the one hand – being able to objectify their partners and even themselves – but on the other hand – being able to achieve an almost spiritual union with another person by way of sexual expression. For many participants, sexual desire seemed to toggle them between these modes of existence with surprising ease and rapidity – almost like flipping a switch. Although not every participant described the full range of possibilities, both extremes were described by most participants.

In some instances participants became almost totally embodied and reported little additional awareness. They became their bodies, and aspects of their body's responses became figural. Note how clearly – often in the same sentence – some participants described both a heightened awareness of the body and a concomitant alteration in experience. For example, participant F-6 described desire as making her feel excited, but she added that it affected her by making her "giddy" and "silly." Other participants made similar observations:

"You feel, or I feel warm, hot for that person, just crazy. You have a hard time thinking." [F-7]

Some kind of feeling comes over my body where I just...I Stop...My brain stops..." [F-8]

Some participants experienced this change as distressing. The next two examples are from participants who described experiences of sexual desire that occurred in response to the presence of someone they knew and were interested in, but at a time when they judged sexual behavior to be inappropriate. Under these circumstances, changes in their bodies were accompanied by a sense of panic or danger:

...all of a sudden it's like my brain dropped out of my body. I had no sense of the fact that we were still engaged in this intellectual argument (laughing), and all I knew was that he was within about two inches of...that his flesh was within about two inches of my flesh, just about everywhere. We were close enough at that point to have kissed, and so I couldn't back up any farther because I was as backed up as far as I could go. And I just remember feeling this overwhelming sense of heat, just going through my entire body. My heart was pounding. I couldn't breathe. I couldn't talk. I didn't remember what we were talking about. And I just at that point then...that was very pleasurable, but it almost immediately went into kind of a sense of panic. I was thinking: "I've got to get away from this guy, because if I don't get away from this guy, I just don't know what's gonna happen." And so...I don't even remember what I did. I managed to move his arm, and I got away from him. But that was really an overwhelming feeling of sexual desire. [F-1]

I was so aware of desire that I couldn't hear what he was saying. My body changed. I felt like I couldn't hear him. I could see his mouth moving, but I couldn't concentrate on what he was saying at all. And some of it was the feeling of blood rushing in my ears, so that it really was making it hard to hear, but some of it was sort of...My desire was to tell him to pull the car off the road some place, so that we could neck or whatever, and I was just sort of having this little conversation with myself, "No you cannot do that." I mean it's ok...I was hearing myself wanting that, and sort of trying to deflect myself from doing anything about it by just paying attention to what was happening with me, because that would fill up some time to just pay attention and sort of narrate to myself what was happening, would...was

how I sort of kept myself in line. And I know that time really stood out to me because I had never had an experience quite like that...where I...where there's, that particular bodily change where I just couldn't hear him, and I was so aware of wanting to...him...to do this thing that was...would not have been a good thing for us to do. [F-5]

Other participants stopped short of describing sexual desire as "dangerous" [F-5] but made it clear they experienced it as powerful and as a potential source of problems. Sexual desire can sometimes urge you to make decisions that you may regret later:

It's like I was saying at the beginning, the way the brain works — I think — changes. It's like...maybe an example of it. You know, I figure there's nothing worse than having unsafe sex. You can get diseases, get someone pregnant, I mean...kill yourself. I mean there's just nothing good about it. I mean, think about it rationally. Don't do it period, paragraph. That's my thoughts on the subject. Then you get in a situation, and you get, you know, all turned on, and you get all this sexual desire going, and you're in this situation and you're like, "would it really be so bad?" You know what I mean? It's like if I was thinking rationally, and usually it's like you know, thinking rational enough to say, "I need to just chill out. I'm not doing that." But it's like, you know the, if I don't have all the sexual desire going, it's like, no way. I wouldn't do that, period, paragraph. And then *when you get all this sexual desire going, the brain's working in a different way* [italics added], and it's saying, it's like the devil's sitting on your shoulder saying, "wait a minute, just do it, it couldn't be that bad, no big deal." And so I think that's a real good example — at least how my brain works — in that if you know it, the thought process changes when it's all full of desire. And I figured it was kind of like that for everybody, but I don't know. [M-2]

Some participants articulated this diminished agency and heightened sense of embodiment somewhat differently: Sexual desire has a way of making "nothing else matter." Some experienced this effect as a predominantly positive influence and some as a predominantly negative one. Words used to describe this narrowing included "focused," "trapped," and "locked." The individual context of the person's life seemed to influence experiences of this feature. In the context

of a relationship with a partner where sexual activities could be freely enjoyed, the focusing was described as a source of "comfort" and "escape," and this aspect of desire was judged as generally positive:

It's like a rush. It almost feels like...almost like a surge of adrenaline....When I'm completely in it, things aren't important anymore.... I don't know, like when I've been wrapped up...like when I'm totally engulfed in — the few times that I have — it's been like...It's almost like a rush...When I'm completely in it, things aren't important anymore, things that had to be like done by tomorrow, like certain things that you were stressing about maybe at the beginning of the night...Once you're wrapped up in desire, nothing else seems to matter anymore. What's important is the moment, what's here and now kind of thing. I mean...you almost become blinded to the world around you. The only world that matters is the one that you and the other person are involved in. I guess that's how like responsibilities are forgotten so quickly...so easily. [F-4]

I don't know. I can't put it into more words. Like, this is a good moment in my life. This is like a moment I'll remember. There is nothing else in the world, you know, for that time being. I guess it's what people equate heroin to: You know about things outside of what you're doing, but you just don't care. [M-5]

...someone who sets your mind totally and completely on fire and that makes you think of NOTHING but them, nothing but the moment. It wouldn't matter if the world was coming to an end and they were televising it, you couldn't think of nothing else at the moment, because it is someone that can do that to you, and she's the only person that I have ever found that can do that to me. [M-1]

Each of the participants quoted above reported experiencing sexual desire as largely positive. It is also apparent, however, that each of the participants included a warning: (a) responsibilities may be quickly forgotten, (b) desire is like a dangerous drug, and (c) you can be so caught up in the "fire" that you wouldn't notice the end of the world.

Some participants were even more direct emphasizing the two-edge nature of sexual desire. It is a safe haven from worldly concerns. It can make you

forget all the humdrum minutia like feeding your pets, but when your total person, "all you are" is put on the line through expression of your desire, it can also be experienced as problematic:

I guess it's like, like an escape and a trap — all at the same time — because you're escaping the outside world or events or affairs, you know, whatever else is going on in your life, but by stepping out of that you're also stepping right into that...that feeling, that moment...where *all you are* [italics added] is focussed on that...Well, it's like you're not thinking about outside things at that particular moment. Yeah, I mean you're not thinking, "The rent is due," "Did you feed your cat?" or "How come my car is missing a hubcap?" You know, you're not thinking about things like that. [M-5]

Being your body puts you at much greater risk than simply operating your body. Participants in this study evidenced a very keen awareness of this fact. Letting go and not "holding back" — in other words being your body — was specifically mentioned by some participants as vitally important to experiencing high levels of desire:

...but just when you were having sex, you could feel they were holding back, or they had a set rule...set rules of stuff they would and wouldn't do...you know, like firmly in their mind, and to me, that pretty much killed my desire, when you can kind of sense that about a girl. [M-5]

In desire, though not in lust, openness was described as crucial to breaking down the "wall that you've put up for yourself":

Sexual desire is, in my feeling, the way I feel about it, is a way of...a breakdown in...you have to be really *open* [italics added] when you have sexual desire. You have to be able to sort of put your guard down, because it's feelings about yourself, and feelings I've expressed about myself with my partner, that you don't with anybody else. Whereas lust isn't like that at all, you just, "boom" and it's there. I think you work up to sexual desire. It has some attributes to it like, for instance...I keep thinking of the way I feel needed and the way I feel wanted. I don't know, it's just more of a feeling kind of thing. It's hard to describe. [F-7]

In lust, adds participant F-7, there is no feeling, "there's detachment."

When you let yourself go and sexually engage partner, there is great potential, but you also are extremely vulnerable. Some participants described partners with a "vulnerable look" as being sources of particularly strong desire:

It'd be like a weird moment. To me, it's mostly like with imagery...like a certain...I guess what turns me on with girls is like a certain...either right before you're gonna have sex or kind of building up to it, the thing that turns me on most is...I'll see like a vulnerable look in a girl. That'll always kind of turn me on...just a look they don't know they're giving. To me, it seems like it only happens in blue-eyed girls for some reason. I can't think why; that's the only girls I've seen it in. And it's just this split-second thing, but the image will stick with me for...sometimes for years. I don't know...To me that...that turn on I guess...is just...It's something I know that I'll think about later on. [M-5]

This openness or vulnerability has two dimensions. There may be an evolutionary basis for finding a "vulnerable" look appealing (e.g., Buss, 1994). For participants in this study, however, the meaning of being vulnerable was different: they expressed no concerns about physical vulnerability, and it was clear they were concerned about emotional vulnerability:

...sexual desire, once you're that far, like swept away, you have to be so comfortable with that person because that person can do anything to you. That person can crush you, could crush you in the sense of like - now this is where I completely have it tied together with emotions - if you're longing for that closeness, if you're longing to be that close to somebody, and then you find out that they really...they really could care less, they just...they just want to scrog you and that's it, then it's almost...It's like a heartbroken type thing. *You've given so much of yourself to that moment* [italics added], and they had the ability to do like...I don't know...It gives that person incredible strength over you emotionally. You're vulnerable...vulnerable to that other person, and so it can turn a beautiful situation into a horrific one in seconds flat, if the other person isn't experiencing mutual things. Like if you're being swept...If you're having that sensation of being swept away...and that like magical feeling, then you find out later that it's all a joke, that this person was just playing games with your head, and that all

they wanted to do was get in your pants, it's almost like a...wow...It's just really, crushing. [F-4]

Because you are vulnerable, being open to the possibility of a strong sense of communion or bonding with your partner requires equally high levels of comfort and trust. A lack of trust was described as a "desire killer":

...because there's that trust there. I think, sexually, I'm...I think our sexual...our sex is probably ten times, a hundred times better, because of it...because there is that mutual trust. [M-7]

I enjoy sex better because our relationship is so open and trusting and everything. I mean, I think the sex is better. I have more sexual desire for the girl I'm with now. [M-3]

I didn't trust her. I think trust...maybe that's another part of desire, is trust in the person. [M-6]

I guess it [trust] falls into my category of what I've found desirable in someone, or if I don't believe I trust somebody, that kind of closes the gate for me...of being either attracted to them physically or....Well, I'm just saying that usually if you have sexual desire, or have sex with someone, you usually trust them. For me it's the person, plus, you know, physically, the physical sex. If I feel like that person has either done me wrong, or I don't trust them, there is no desire there anymore for me; that's been severed, 'cause I'll always remember. [F-6]

...if you have an emotional tie that's strong, that's controlling you...it's controlling you really...You feel like out of control to it. And it's not an uncomfortable out of control because you completely trust this person. Then it's like uh...then you...maybe sexual desire springs from like the want to touch something, to feel something; to physically touch some part of what you're feeling. [F-4]

It is of interest to note that participants did not consider a better emotional connection as the only or even the most important benefit of being able to trust their partner. Trust produces both stronger levels of sexual desire and better sex.

Participants distinguished more than one way for your "brain to drop out of head." With lust, change in awareness was exemplified by a preoccupation — on

the part of participants – with their own physical responses judged to be in response to the physical features of a potential partner and also by the instrumental use of thought to get what they wanted from a potential partner. With what most participants called desire (love), participant awareness changed in another sense: they were preoccupied with obsessive and unreasonably idealistic thoughts about the other, not as just an object, but as a person. Various aspects of their partner as a person and the nature of their relationship became figural, and – in stark contrast with lust – this was accompanied by a lack of interest in being manipulative.

The presence or absence of the actual or potential partner also served to differentiate between ways of experiencing during lust and desire (love). Participants described lust as being about an attractive body to have sex with, not about a person, and obsessive thoughts about the other generally occurred only when the person was present. When the other person was no longer physically present, the compulsion to think about them typically evaporated. For one participant, this was the most salient difference between her experiences of what she called “lust” and what she called “desire.” Lust occurred when the other person was present:

It was just whenever I saw him, you know, that the feeling came....With lust, it was...I wanted him, but when he left, that want feeling went away, and then another guy might have come in and I wanted him. And when he left, that lust feeling went away.... [F-3]

Her description of desire was quite different:

But this guy!...that feeling was with me *when I thought about him* [italics added]....the feeling doesn't go away when that person leaves. [F-3]

Obsessive thoughts about the other when they were absent was associated with desire.

With lust, "when they're gone, they're gone," but with desire, "when they go, it hurts; you think there is a piece missing." [M-6] In the following examples, two married women describe their experiences of desire for males other than their husbands. Both illustrate this important and somewhat paradoxical aspect of desire: feelings are sometimes most intense when the desired person is not even around and thus cannot be a proximal source of arousal:

One was contained in time and space [her experiences of lust]. The other one wasn't. It didn't matter where I went. It didn't matter what I did. I was still gonna want to be with him. So to me, that's how it's different in terms of desire. One was, "...eah, get out of his presence and it'll wear off." The other one, it didn't matter. [F-5]

This participant describes her experience of desire for someone she knew in school that by her own admission she says she would have an affair with now if given the opportunity:

I still think about him...If he just knew how he made me feel. I was just so attracted to him. Sexual desire to me is just, I don't know if it...I kind of want to create a picture with it, like everything is just perfect. It makes me feel like I'm perfect, like there's no fault. [F-7]

Participants often described remembrances of past experiences of desire and/or sexual activities with their partners. These remembrances were such figural aspects of desire, that some participants were quite conscious that they were "making a memory" when engaging in sexual activities. They knew that in the future they would be able to enjoy recalling these events and that they would serve as powerful sexual fantasies to enhance future times with their partner.

Describing her thoughts about her current boyfriend when he is away, F-5 called them "memories or little scenes that'll go through my head." Another participant, who described lust as "uncomfortable" and desire as "comfortable," also articulated very well his view of the importance of good memories of times with his partner:

You know, it's like...like a pleasant memory as opposed to...just sex....I think that plays a role. I think every experience that I've had, that I remember, plays a role in sexual desire. I don't know how. I don't know how to explain that. But I think it...I think it all, you know, it all gets put together, and it's got something to do with it....But I think it's you know, with an individual person or with some, you know, somebody you've been with repeatedly, previous experiences will, will change your desire. Like, if you didn't have a real good experience, it's like, there's gonna be something inhibiting your...the desire. Does that make sense? [M-2]

Lust or sexual desire may have a sudden onset. Sexual desire, however, is also built up intentionally. Subjects showed considerable insight into the role played by their thinking about being with their partner. You – said one participant – *decide* to build up your desire. You do this with someone that you are attached to emotionally, someone that you desire. But you stop thinking about someone that you just lust after as soon as they are not around, after all, any other pretty person can take their place, but no one can take the place of someone that you desire: desire is for a specific special person. As one participant expressed it, when he was in a relationship where lust was his motivation, he thought about his partner, but he also thought about other girls too:

In lust, I thought about...I didn't think. I thought about sex with her, but then I thought about sex with other girls too. Whereas this one, I don't think like I did in the other one. [M-3]

Another participant, after explaining how important thinking was to desire, was asked to describe her experiences:

I mean, it [thinking] has a huge role in the sense of like, If I'm having a conversation somebody - I'm just using this as an example, because that's a lot how like desire started for me - In a sense of like when I'm having a conversation with somebody and I'm getting to know them more and more and it's like...I'm feeling more of a bond to them, more of an understanding between us...the comfort level goes up, and then you start noticing other things, and you start thinking about things that you're attracted to, things that like make this person special, things that make you want to be with this person, and then it's more like...that's when you start thinking...You almost stop concentrating on what they're saying, and more concentrate on what you've already decided you like about them...what you've already decided you're attracted to about them....I guess that's part of the process of building it up. It's almost like you are building it up. It's almost like a decision that you've made to like build this desire up...where you just stop...The person might be talking to you, and you're just like in your head. You almost put like put a whole break through the...and you're just like, "wow, this person's really amazing." It's almost like when I start talking to myself almost. It's almost like you are blatantly recognizing that you have an attraction to this person, and that this person is just really special in such and such a way. And like this person really cranks your tractor in some way. [F-4]

This participant was then asked for more details about building desire:

Well, I think you can. Maybe it's not necessarily... It's conscious because you're definitely doing it like within your head, and you can almost like, if you're fully aware of what you're doing, you can pretty much mark the steps, "ok, now I'm getting like, really hot and bothered" kind of thing. Or you can like, get up and walk away, and like, do something else. You know what I mean? You could, you know make yourself frustrated, but eventually it would go away, and you would be able to focus on something else. But you basically, you're just sitting there and building it up in your own head, you know. Maybe like, putting more and more things on the list that makes you want this person, like more and more...It's like...Like I said, you're making the decision, like I'm gonna become more...Like I'm gonna desire this person more and more now. You know, you don't decide like that...it's more of a...a conscious like thing of like, blatantly acknowledging that you do already desire this person and in the essence of just doing that, you build on that more. Like I...that's like another thing that makes you want this person. And that person's just really incredible,

and you just like, build it up and build it up and build it up until it becomes a really intense thing. [F-4]

Participants in this study experienced sexual desire in some unintuitive ways. They described it as not simply driven by physical features of a partner, or by biological forces within themselves. Rather, it was described as closely tied to the interaction between two "whole" persons, and under considerable voluntary control. In addition, sexual desire was often not even primarily about sex, at least, not as typically understood. Several participants described experiences of sexual desire that they thought were quite successful, that did not end in sexual activity at all.

For some participants, the separation of sexual desire from activities normally considered as sexual was quite pronounced. Participant F-4 describes her passion for riding horses as being very similar to sexual desire:

I had that a lot with like animals too. Like I grew up with animals, and I have an extremely high comfort level with animals. And so now that I'm like in college, in a college town...I've trained horses ever since I was 10 years old, and I started training horses...And so it's like, now I'll get killer desires to just be on a horse, so much that I can actually feel the rhythm of the horse's hoofs underneath me. And I'll do the same thing. I'll just sit there and drive myself crazy by thinking about it and concentrating on it, and...It's so sweet inside of my head, that I just cannot wait until the actual moment that I'm on a horse. [F-4]

Similarly, participant F-5 maintains that sexual desire for her is a fundamental aspect of how she exists in the world. Sexual expression with her partner is certainly one manifestation of it, but only one:

To me, I look out and it's almost like the Earth is shimmering. I mean Eros is just there, and I'm real aware of it. [F-5]

She describes this experience as a "sensual relationship with the world":

I'm sorry, I just don't know how to talk about this. There is a certain way of moving or of my body...feeling my body in the world or my body in contact with other things, and other people. It's just sort of sensuality. It isn't specifically sexual. It's not...it can very easily elide into sexual desire, but it doesn't have to? [F-5]

Sensuality, I guess I see this, sensuality as an opening, an openness to...to the world...I mean I can be openly sensual to the world, and oh, I don't know...I find myself walking up to a flower and just burying my nose in it. Or uh, or picking up a rock and just having to rub it against my face because I just have to feel it. I don't feel like I have to do anything about that; it's ok to be that way in the world...It isn't a man, so that makes a difference. [F-5]

The participant continued, explaining what she meant by her comment that the world is not a man:

...but for one thing that's not dangerous, and so it doesn't carry that with it...And for another thing, I don't...the object is different. I'm not asking the world to take...I don't expect it to do anything back, or ask it to do anything back, and with a man that I desired it would be that sensuality and that openness, but...It's...I mean it's in there. I can just think of times...One thing I really like to do is nuzzle a man's beard. It's just the most wonderful thing, and it's right in that middle point, I mean you're...I'm not to the point of wanting sex, but I'm feeling kindly disposed...toward him and wanting to move closer and closer and I can just think of...I mean it is, it is that sensuality. It is exactly the way I might bury my nose in a flower or rub a rock against my face or...taste something that is really wonderful. But...so I don't know. One seems part of the other... [F-5]

Sensuality and eroticism were central features of the very fabric of some participant's lives. Sometimes this eroticism was sculpted into what we refer to as sexual desire. At other times this eroticism, with or without expression through union with a partner, was experienced as "something spiritual" [F-1] a route to transcendence:

No, I think that is what I've been trying to say. It's more like a refining of a general...That's what I was trying to say when I was talking about the erotic? ...an awareness of the erotic...which is just such a dumb way to

say it...it's just so intellectual...but that's what I was getting at...that there is just...Sexual desire is just a sort of a sculpting of something that's always there, or a refining of a readiness, or a something that's always there. [F-5]

Another participant expressed it similarly:

For me, I can feel this feeling *when nobody is present* [italics added] this more, kind of ecstatic feeling. It is very much tied in with my experience of the world. I mean, I can feel something that's very akin to this feeling when I am standing in the middle of a thunderstorm or standing on the edge of the desert...this kind of feeling of being on the edge of ecstasy with regard to my relationship with him. For me, that's why I think of it as something spiritual. It's something that transcends. [F-1]

Changes in the Meaning of Desire

Participants described their experiences of desire as having changed over time. For most participants, when they were younger they were primarily interested in "quick sex" with an attractive partner. A physically attractive potential partner produced noticeable body reactions, and in retrospect, participants typically referred to this experience as lust rather than desire:

When I was in high school – this is a thing that cracks me up about getting older – In high school I would see a guy, and I'd melt and run down in my shoes....Either I liked them...you could've just shown me flash cards. Yes, either he was my type, or he was not my type. [F-5]

And with a little more maturity, you might still want those things [quick sex with an attractive partner], but you are able to keep that in check a little more. I mean...I don't know, there's something about an instantaneous thing. I don't know why that is. I really have not pondered on it, but there's something that just clicks. You can see other women and – nothing, and then you see one or something and, "damn!" It just hits you. I don't know why that is. [M-8]

As they got older, participants noted that they became more interested in the whole person, and they described sexual desire as being about wanting *someone*, not just a body to have sex with:

... and I'd forget and I thought it was desire for someone, but it was actually just a first impression, lust for me. So after getting beyond that, and as I got older, sexual desire was, like I said, wanting someone. [F-3]

Some participants clearly attributed the differences between their earlier and later experiences to physical processes such as varying levels of hormones:

I think when you're younger, you're very hung up on sex, more than anything else. When you're just...Your testosterone is different, and your hormones are different. I don't think you're as cognizant of the fact that there's consequences. You're just...You're very single-minded on what you're after....I don't know if it was my age or...You know, when you're young your hormones are running through you a little more rampant than in older stages of my life. It's almost like it's an instinctive thing I think, because you're not necessarily in an animal world of mating cycles or something, but it's like there's something...There's something that triggers it, and it's instantaneous. I'm not talking about walking around horny or anything. I'm saying like...There's just some sense of an urgency or a feeling, and I don't know why that is...[M-8]

Participants were not simply describing differences that map neatly onto a division between short-term anonymous and more lasting relationships.

Participants who were married, or in other long-term relationships, also described sexual desire as going through a change or transition. One participant discussed desire in the context of her marriage:

I can't really remember the beginning of our marriage. I remember more of the last six or seven years, because I think most of the sexual desire was based on our age. I mean, I think we would have...I don't care if it was probably...There was no concern for either's feelings. It was just boom, boom you know, and that's it. 'Cause a lot of it I think was just hormonal. [F-7]

Participants generally viewed their earlier lust-motivated experiences in a somewhat negative light. Participant M-2 described desire as being "comfortable" and lust as being "uncomfortable," but when he was younger, he still engaged in lust-motivated encounters where sex was the only goal:

I mean there's situations where, you know, more in the past than present and all, but you know... You'd be out on the town at night, you know, drinking and... You know, just the typical hook up thing, where it's not necessarily that you feel comfortable that leads to sexual desire. It's just, it's just two people wanting to have sex... But this I guess... Yeah I think being comfortable is real important, an important aspect to me. [M-2]

Many early experiences were defined by objectification. The following participant went so far as to admit that he stayed with an earlier partner for the sex, referring to his partner as "dumb" and as a "piece":

...probably because I was a little bit younger then. That's probably my first time I ever had sex, with that girl, the first time. And that's the first time I had ever had sex and I probably... Because that was my first *piece* [italics added], I just held on, and I didn't realize all that stuff. You know, I was just worried about having somebody. You know, you're getting sex, and after that first year, I was like, "Well look at her; I mean she's dumb." She just... She's not good to you, and she's, all those things. You know I just hung on to her just for that... just for sex because, you know she was my first, I guess.... Well, I'm not like that anymore. I just happen to be with that girl, I guess.... There's two different things. Because the relationship that I was in before this one, it was more lust than love. I mean we just kind of got together, and we just had sex all the time. And you know, I just desired her in that way. And the relationship I'm in now, we have a lot of sexual desire for each other, but then we also love each other. [M-3]

Since these experiences were driven by the physical attributes of a potential partner about which little is actually known, participants were free to imagine the person as having whatever attributes they wished:

I would make up whole personality for him... to go with the bodily response I was having... and that was stupid! Lots of times they were not who I made them up to be. And maybe that happened some in college too... I don't know... [F-5]

It was common for reality to come up short. One participant commented that her reality was always so out of synchrony with her fantasies that she had given up. She no longer expected to have what she thought she wanted sexually.

Virtually every participant articulated a change in their experience of sexual desire over time. For most, this change was characterized by an increase in the importance of nonphysical attributes of prospective partners. In the following example, one participant describes how her experience of the same man changed as she became less focussed on physical appearance:

...and that [her experience of sexual desire] has changed so much, and I don't know when it changed. It changed sometime after I got married, but I don't know when. I know that the man that I fantasized about in church, that's the first time that I was aware he was somebody that I'd known for a very, very long time, since I was a teenager. And at that point it had probably been twelve years...ten years...twelve years, something like that, and I had always thought of him as this really geeky older guy, and terribly physically unattractive. But I didn't know him very well; I mean I had just gone by the physical stuff. He was physically unattractive to me. And then I did get to know him, and he just became more and more beautiful, and attractive to me. And that was the first time that I was aware that that had changed somehow, that...If I got to know somebody...they were more attractive to me, and I've just found that to be the case ever since. I just don't...I can look at a man and make an aesthetic judgment, yes he's very beautiful, or he's not very beautiful, or he's ... but I wouldn't call him attractive. I would just say he's pretty or not pretty, or good looking or not good looking. That has nothing to do with attractive. Desire doesn't come up unless – I'm going to amend that a tiny little bit – Desire does not generally come up unless I know him. It arises out of knowing him, and then, aye yih yih! Look out! [F-5]

As participants developed expanded notions of what they found desirable in others, partners were no longer viewed as sources of sexual pleasure. Their partner's happiness often took center stage:

Like I said, with maturity you change over time, and your experience...you...What you desire the most, or what you feel like would please you, has changed for me over the years. Because I believe, once you've tried that when you're younger and realize it doesn't really satisfy you, I think the other aspects usually kick in for everybody. They desire who the person is, what they value...[F-6]

Now that we've gotten older, it's more, "How do you feel?" "What do you want?" "What turns you on?" or "I want you to do this for me, because that's what turns me on." At the very beginning, even when we were dating, it was strictly hormonal because in only a few instances do I even feel like it was the least bit desirable or romantic, because most of the time it was just sort of "rabbitized" (laughing). So I think as we have matured, so has our sexual desire. Whereas I have matured, so has my sexual desire. I mean, I can talk mainly to him. It's kind of hard to talk to anybody else about what I like and what I want, and...to have him respond positively also helps me out an awful lot too. [F-7]

Maybe it was just maturity. Maybe it was just growing up. After so many different...and so many years...Maybe it was just growing up and connecting with somebody who was also ready at the same time because...It mattered what she thought. It mattered how she felt, and it mattered what she wanted, how she wanted and what she wants. And the relationship is more...The being together, the desire, is more about what makes her happy than what makes me happy. I ...cause to see her...to see the love just emit...just come from HER...wanting to be close and wanting to be together and she actually wants ME, rather than just...somebody. And maybe it was just finding the right person at the right time, who could fill all those empty holes that were there. [M-4]

It [sex] just means something totally different than it used to, and so desire for it means something totally different than it used to. Yes, the meaning of it has changed over time, and so my experience of that has changed. [F-1]

Many participants also made it clear that they had no wish to return to their earlier experiences of desire. One of the best things about being a little older, notes F-5, is getting beyond looks and being more able to become excited by the person:

One of the lovely things about...that I like about...I don't do that any more. It doesn't matter...It doesn't matter what a man looks like. I find myself...uh...when I get to know somebody...It's a process of knowing them; that...either they'll become more or less attractive to me. Uh...and it's been sort of a surprising, and lovely thing; there's always a relationship there. [F-5]

Although someone may not be aware of it while in a relationship based on lust, once they experience a sexual relationship based upon a sense of connection

with another person, they are likely to view their earlier relationships in a new light — as having been somewhat empty and lonely:

Because when you go back to “animal” and “lust” you also go back to empty and lonely. Because there was a lot of emptiness and loneliness, because there was nothing past that. [M-4]

Some spoke disparagingly of their earlier experiences of desire, and some were reluctant to say these earlier experiences were wrong; they were just not as fulfilling as their current experiences:

I attribute it more to a maturation of sorts...That I kind of...And I don't really like this term, but for lack of a better one, I had “played the field” as much as I wanted at that point. And I felt I had gathered and gained, indeed, the experience I was looking for: to see what I was really looking for, what would fulfill me. And I was unsure of it in those earlier relationships. I certainly would have been very aware of the physical attributes that I'm attracted to, however, I never was certain of what I was completely looking for. And by those earlier relationships, it certainly confirmed my...what type of things I was sexually attracted to — and what was lacking in them that I desired as well. [M-7]

One major aspect to this change was learning that you can have both. You can have a partner that you are attracted to physically, and with whom you have a sense of connection going beyond that. To most participants, this came as a surprise. Participant F-8 describes her relationship with her boyfriend that she considers very sexually desirable and her best friend:

Definitely. I never thought I could...I never thought I could have both, but now I do. I'm like, “Yee haw!” [F-8]

You can have all kinds of sex that is “just sex” and not realize that there is more until you experience it:

As the person that I was then, I mean they were HOT! [his earlier sex partners] We were out having a good time, and there was desire there to have sex, and that's what I was shooting for. But from the context now, the

way I look back, it was JUST SEX, and to me now, that isn't nearly as desirous. I mean it was just...The "me" now says, "That isn't fulfilling." It's not...It's not being with the whole person; it's just being with a body, and it doesn't matter what body, as long as it's an attractive body, it doesn't matter. So to me then, the real physical attractiveness mattered...because more than that was really intimidating. Almost...more than that was intimidating. Almost as if it would be too much work. You have to try too hard to get the final goal. So me then, I just wanted a very attractive, easy, fun, party, go-out-and-have-a-good-time girl. Where to me now, that isn't even...That doesn't come close to what I want, or what I have. *And I didn't know that I could have...I had never experienced both until I met my wife* [italics added], where everything about her is just so...just maybe I see all the pieces of me that were missing, in her and that make her...makes me want to be close to her because I want to somehow have...find out what's missing in ME, that she has, a goodness, a kindness and just, gentleness and...still physically attractive, but yet all the things combined makes her extremely attractive. It makes me want to be with her and close to her and...There's much more desire with my wife because, to make her feel good, and to make...And I know she's trying to make me feel good and it's just a mutual feeling. It isn't the selfishness of the animal lust type stuff...fun...it was fun at that time...This is so much more past...With my wife, it's much more past fun...It's fun; It's past fun. It's just...It's past fun. [M-4]

Although we have discussed each theme in turn, the reader should note that themes are not experienced in isolation. Much like the major existential grounds (Pollio, Henley, & Thompson, 1997) more generally, the themes that emerged in analysis of desire have no existence apart from one another. When one aspect of the experience of desire is figural, the others provide the context in which it was possible for the more salient experience to emerge.

CHAPTER IV

DISCUSSION

We are discontinuous beings, individuals who perish in isolation in the midst of an incomprehensible adventure, but we yearn for our lost continuity... this continuity is chiefly to be felt in the anguish of desire...

(Georges Bataille, 1962)

We may indeed be discontinuous beings on our way to nonbeing, thrown into an incomprehensible world without option and snatched back out again regardless of whether our projects are completed or uncompleted. Much of the human drama, however, is defined by the struggle to escape the meaninglessness of life, feeling of isolation, and our finitude. While some have suggested that our associations with others constitute the only real source of hell (Sartre, 1944/1955), it is also possible that others provide an opportunity for growth of the self through a genuine meeting between two people (Buber, 1958).

Participants in this study took the latter view. Only by looking into the eyes of a being equally terrified of being alone, can there exist the potential for combating the ultimate, existential sense of loneliness. The heady neediness of romantic love, which many find too intense to maintain indefinitely, holds the promise of facilitating special moments of connection between partners that help them cope with these sources of Angst. Many couples are convinced that their love, "will last forever." Comments like, "she/he is my everything" are common. If all goes well, the sense of isolation can be overcome. As one participant [M-4] explained in describing such a special moment with his partner, you can achieve, "that feeling of being one together."

There are numerous difficulties in any investigation of sexual desire, lust, and love. For many years these topics were considered inappropriate for empirical investigation. Although significant research on some of these issues has now been completed, many of today's most favored research methods allow the researcher to collect and analyze data on a topic such as love without ever actually defining — as opposed to operationally specifying — the construct. As Aron and Aron (1991) note regarding love, "...most researchers and theorists have side-stepped defining it" (p. 25). Other theorists make much the same observation for sexuality (Reiss, 1986), sexual desire (Levine, 1998), and lust has been discussed even less in the literature. A recent comprehensive computer database search of the psychological literature from 1967 to the present yielded 1621 sources with "love" in the title, 780 with "desire" in the title, and only 31 with "lust" in the title.

This leads to a curious state of affairs. We have research on categories of love (e.g., Berscheid & Walster, 1978), styles of love (e.g., Lee, 1977), and how liking compares to loving (e.g., Rubin, 1970). We have research into sexual desire and hormone levels (e.g., Bancroft, 1988), disorders of sexual desire (e.g., Leiblum & Rosen, 1988; Beck, 1995), and sexual desire and its relationship to a host of personality attributes (e.g., Whipple, 1987). We generally have not, however, based our understanding of these phenomena on how they are experienced in everyday life, particularly in the case of lust and sexual desire, with the result that research findings may evidence coherence with existing literature but have little correspondence with human life. This lack of empirically-based basic knowledge has also left us vulnerable to misunderstandings about how sexual desire, lust, and love are related to one another. Since all three are personal phenomena, there has been some increasing acceptance of data collected from participants about their own experiences (e.g., Tennov, 1979; Lee, 1977). Phenomenological research, however, offers an even more direct way of studying such experiences.

There are many indications that sexual desire and its relationships to lust, and love are complex and multifaceted. Very often sexual activities are referred to as "making love." Not all sexual encounters, however, are referred to in this manner. Sex in any way coercive is not referred to as making love, and sex agreed to simply to appease a complaining partner may be called "just sex" by the acquiescing partner. In some instances consensual and mutually enjoyable sexual activities – which are clearly the product of some kind of motivation – are

referred by the same words that also participate in metaphors of harm and violence. In hearing that someone has been "fucked" or "screwed" it is not immediately clear whether they have had an enjoyable sexual experience or their car stolen. Not only is this the stuff of legendary comedic performances, much like the study of humor more generally, it can tell us much about ourselves. Collecting and analyzing descriptions of these experiences is the only way to develop an understanding of their similarities, differences, and interrelationships.

Deeply entrenched dualism is a major stumbling block to developing models that more closely approximate how we experience sexuality. As an example, Aron and Aron (1991) in considering several theories of human sexuality, suggest it is helpful to view theories as existing on a continuum from those based on the notion that "love is really sex" to those based on the notion that "sex is really love." Proposed examples of the former include, physiological psychology, sociobiology, and evolutionary psychology. Examples of the latter include Plato and object relations theory. Much like the emphasis on whether a health problem is "physical" or "mental," many theorists seem to assume a relationship is either sexual or emotional and that these are mutually exclusive categories that can be used to classify sexual expression.

This fragmented, rather than integrated, view of sexuality's relationship to human existence as a whole continues when the role of sex in close relationships is considered in more detail. Our notions of healthy sexual expression reflect our culture's current biases regarding the proper order of importance: relationship is more important than sex. Our culture's sex-negative focus is allowed to wield a

disproportionate influence, and the oft-stated assumption is that sexual problems are a manifestation of "deeper" issues between partners. In other words, sexual difficulties not unambiguously associated with physiology are attributed to things like communication, a lack of respect, jealousy, or anger.

All human acts, however, are inextricably linked to one another and to the total context of a person's existence. It is therefore unavoidable that many things will affect the quality of our sexual interactions. An individual human life is not reducible to any single aspect of that life (Merleau Ponty, 1962/1992).

Demanding work schedules, children, and financial problems are just a few examples of common obstacles to a couple's sexual enjoyment. Too little recognition is given to the reality that anything which diminishes the enjoyment a couple receives from their sexual interaction can thereby be a detrimental influence to the whole relationship. Sexuality – naively conceived as a simple biological function – can be compartmentalized in the abstract, but not in the everyday fabric of our lives. As Merleau Ponty observes:

...to thought [italics added], the body as an object is not ambiguous; it becomes so only in the experience which we have of it, and pre-eminently in sexual experience, and through the fact of sexuality....It [sexuality] is at all times present there like an atmosphere.

The ambiguity referred to here need not be understood as negative; life is simply inherently more ambiguous than our culture teaches us to anticipate. Or as one participant [F-1] expressed regarding sexual desire:

It's a lot more subtle. I guess maybe part of it is wanting to express something to him, wanting to let him know how much I care for him. Maybe sometimes there's a sense of needing to be comforted by him. That may fuel it. Sometimes there's just a need for physical release

behind it, but more often it's that I want to express something to him about how I'm feeling about him. Usually now the sexual desire starts in the context of feeling some sense of love toward him...usually. There are still times, occasionally, when I can kind of just get more tuned into that – what did we used to call it? “the raw pagan lusties” – when I'll notice something like the shape of his cap, or something about his jaw, or his hand, and I'll tune in on that and think, “oh well...yum!” And I'll just allow that to kind of take it from there. But even so, even in those contexts, there's still all the relational stuff. *I just can't separate any of it out anymore.* [italics added]

Interestingly, accepting ambiguity and experiencing both sexuality and the human body as less bounded did not result in anxiety. In my judgment, participants evidencing greater awareness of the ambiguities associated with embodiment were the most calm and coherent during their interviews.

It is difficult to overstress that either/or approaches are of limited usefulness. Theorists working from the premise that love is really sex have a very difficult time plausibly accounting for the existence of many experiences strongly associated with love. Theorists working from the premise that sex is really love have an equally difficult time plausibly accounting for the extremely physically sexual manner in which love is expressed in tender, romantic, and loving relationships. This is Descartes' central problem revisited by sexology; and many contemporary researchers – because they feel even more strongly the need to justify their efforts than do psychologists more generally – are very reluctant to challenge the dogma, lest they be labeled unempirical, research heretics or worse.

Researchers under the influence of dualistic assumptions and accustomed to a subject/object split, can also have difficulty understanding experiential data. In the analysis of protocols collected for this research, it was not uncommon for

members of the Phenomenology Lab to express surprise at how nonsexual participant descriptions of sexual desire could be. Much like Ryle's (1949) example of someone looking for the "University" after a complete tour of the campus, some lab members seemed to still be looking for sexual desire — conceived a priori as a genital sensation or other indicator of physiological arousal — even though they had been pouring over lengthy descriptions of the phenomena. Participants described their experiences of sexual desire — whether or not they were in keeping with the preconceptions of researchers. The goal in phenomenological research is to learn from the data collected, not to insist that participants provide information in support of an already decided upon theoretical framework.

A more productive approach is to acknowledge the illusory nature of the question of whether sex is really love or love is really sex. Just as an automobile may be taken to one shop for inspection and repair of its tires and to another for inspection and repair of its engine, for pedagogical reasons human beings are studied from many perspectives. An argument about whether an engine or tires is more important, however, is understood immediately as ill-conceived: you don't have a car without both. Similarly, human beings are integrated wholes; and studying from different perspectives does not mean different things are being studied:

...they raise also the problems and techniques of integration of this twofold nature of man, his lower and his higher, his creatureliness and his god-likeness. On the whole, most philosophies and religions, Eastern as well as Western, have dichotomized them, teaching that the way to become "higher" is to renounce and master "the lower." The existentialists,

however, teach that *both* are simultaneously defining characteristics of human nature. Neither can be repudiated; they can only be integrated. (Maslow, 1968, p. 11)

It is not surprising that Maslow (1968) also considered sexuality a healthy influence. A direct focus on improving the level of enjoyment resulting from sexual interaction is seldom emphasized. It requires acknowledging that sex is not just a natural part of a healthy loving relationship, or a potential source of problems, but also a source of positive influence. As with the notion that passion must fade over time, the empirical support for an asymmetrical relationship between sexual satisfaction and relationship satisfaction is not impressive and may be more representative of wishful thinking, or more properly an effort at reduction of cognitive dissonance on a society-wide scale than sound theory or empirical data.

It is common, however, to acknowledge the power that sex has to do harm to a relationship. Many lay persons, and even some therapists, advise that sexual activities outside of a steady relationship are a clear indication by the offending member of the couple that they do not have much concern for their partner. Even if extradyadic sexual activities are not an issue, a partner that is too insistent that improved sex should be a focus in their relationship may have their comments dismissed as immature carping, or they may encounter comments like, "all you ever think about is sex." Finally, it may be asserted that such an interest in sexual improvement is not "really" about sex at all, but an indication of some aspect of the relationship that is causing problems. Therapists, often in response to work with clients experiencing problems with

sexual desire, have been some of the most outspoken proponents of the need for greater awareness of the harm that can be done to a relationship by sexual difficulties.

In a culture that traditionally has not emphasized sex as a positive influence, and where many things compete for a person's time, the specific redressers available for enhancing sexual satisfaction are far more threatening than the ubiquitous – though ambiguous – assertion that a couple's difficulties are due to relationship issues. The former requires both the embracing of sex as a good thing and devotion of time and energy to its pursuit, however, a partner can often get by with simple acknowledgement of the latter. A relationship can be destabilized by too little emphasis on its sexual aspects as when desire is allowed to wane:

When you reach for someone and you are turned away, whether it's for *whatever reason* [italics added], at any time of the month, tired, whatever...After you have reached for someone so many times...and you are turned away, you just stop reaching; the sexual desire dies, and you don't feel anything any more because you get tired of being pushed away.
[M-1]

Of course, a relationship can also be strengthened by improving the nature of sexual interaction between partners. Sexual desire, because it is a major source of difficulty for many couples and a multifaceted subjective phenomenon, has assumed a pivotal role in efforts to understand how sexuality is integrated with a person's total existence.

Relationship to Prior Conceptions of Love and Desire

Participants were asked for descriptions of their experiences of sexual desire. They differentiated sexual desire into one experience they referred to as lust and into another they referred to as love. Figure one, representing the thematic structure of sexual desire, reflects this differentiation. Logic – it seems a bit of a stretch to suggest that lustful behavior is not to some extent the product of sexual desire – and vernacular usage of the term "sexual desire" necessitated this differentiation. Many participants, however, struggled in their efforts to provide the most accurate description of their experiences possible and seemed to find the language available to them inadequate. They showed a strong preference for discussing love as sexual desire, and most refused to acknowledge that lust was desire at all.

Love is often considered a basic human emotion (e.g., Bernstein & Nash, 1999). One problem with much of the relevant human sexuality literature is that it suggests there is always a specific emotional component, often identified as some "type" or "category" of love, associated with sexual activity. Participants described some kinds of sexual activities as being loving, and some kinds of sexual activities as having little to do with a love. They most often chose love or desire to describe the former and lust to describe the latter. It is not surprising that our erotic experiences should have a dual nature, and many researchers and theorists have made this claim.

Lee (1977) conducted an extensive analysis of love. He analyzed how love has been described in literature from Plato to contemporary authors. He also

is one of the few researchers who collected descriptions from subjects concerning their own experiences of love. He identified six different love styles — relationship styles not individual styles — and gave them each a Latin or Greek name:

1. Eros — romantic, passionate love.
2. Ludus — flirtatious, game-playing love.
3. Storge — friendship love.
4. Pragma — practical love.
5. Mania — possessive, dependent love.
6. Agape — all-giving, selfless love.

Note that this is a typology of love and not a thorough analysis of sexual desire. Sexual activity in the absence of an experience of connection — described by participants here as "lust" — is excluded as are nonsexual loving relationships.

Although the structured interview procedure used by Lee actually included very few questions referring to sexual events, researchers have often attempted to relate these love styles to sexual attitudes and practices (e.g., Hendrick & Hendrick, 1987). Eros is considered closely associated with sexual desire by most theorists. The following definition provided by Strong, DeVault, and Sayad (1999) expresses this well:

As a style of love, eros is the love of beauty. Erotic lovers delight in the tactile, the sensual, the immediate; they are attracted to beauty (though beauty is in the eye of the beholder). They love the lines of the body, its feel and touch. They are fascinated by every detail of their beloved. (p. 208)

As Berscheid (1988) once expressed the issue regarding romantic love, if she were "forced against a brick wall to face a firing squad who would shoot if not given the correct answer [when asked to define love] . . ." she admits that she "would whisper 'It's about 90 percent sexual desire as yet not sated'" (p. 373). In addition, using Lee's styles in their research, Hendrick and Hendrick (1986) found that subjects rated Eros the highest, followed by Agape and Storge. They rated Ludus the lowest.

These findings are consistent with those reported here. Our participants also emphasized the close connection between desire and love. They recognized the important role played by physical sexuality during the early stages of a relationship and acknowledged it as an avenue for the symbolic expression of emotion as well as a source of ongoing pleasure and excitement as the relationship continues. They also considered their desired partners as their friends and commented on the mutual concern and care they felt for each other — elements of what Lee referred to as Storge and Agape love styles. Features of the lowest ranking love styles such as playing games in relationships, or being jealous and possessive, were specifically mentioned as detrimental to desire.

It is also the eros lovestyle that is most closely associated with a sense of communion in which sex is very emotional and "seems to be the merging of two souls" (Sprecher & McKinney, 1994, p. 205). After an extensive analysis of Lee's (1977) lovestyles, Hendrick and Hendrick concluded that "love and sexuality are strongly linked to each other and to both the physical and spiritual aspects of the human condition" (1987, p. 293). Some in this culture still consider sexual

expression and spirituality antithetical to one another. In other cultural traditions, however, this is certainly not the case. Results such as those reported here suggest that as our society becomes more diverse, the specific sources of this religious doctrine are having less impact. Currently, many in this culture also experience sexuality as having a spiritual dimension.

Participants also found it necessary to acknowledge that sometimes sexual activity is clearly not characterized by mutual care and concern between partners. They utilized the term lust as a way to describe sexual behavior devoid of any sense of connection with the partner. The meaning intended when the word "lust" is used, has been a source of continuing confusion. Allgeier and Allgeier (2000) provide the following brief discussion:

One dictionary defines *lust* as 'an intense longing' and 'sexual desire often to an intense or unrestrained degree.' (p. 159)

Allgeier and Allgeier (2000) then make the observation that other researchers, in this case Sternberg (1986), consider lust as the passionate component of love.

At this writing, the literature on sexual desire still evidences some confusion about the relationship of lust to sexual desire. Regan and Berscheid (1999) published their recent monograph with the goal of dispelling "...some of this confusion by reviewing and bringing together in one volume past and present theory, supposition, and knowledge about sexual desire." (p. viii). They entitled their book, however, "Lust: What We Know About Human Sexual Desire." The title suggests that sexual desire and lust are synonymous. Lust does not even appear in the index of the book as a term that can be referenced independently

of desire. The available evidence suggests this is too close an association between these concepts. Some lusts are not for sex, and some instances of desire – while clearly sexual – are not lustful.

Participants in this study described a different understanding of lust than Regan and Berscheid (1999). They understood lust as a response to the physical presence of another person in terms of two elements: (a) physiological responses typically associated with sexual excitement, and (b) cognitive appraisals of the other person as being sexually attractive and hence the source of their excitement. Participants varied in how approving they were of lust and in whether or not they were likely to act on lust – depending upon their own values and current life situations – but they all had a very similar understanding of the phenomena. Lust for these participants was simply not an "intense longing" nor was it "unrestrained."

Academic writers are in an awkward position. To maintain a professional style they avoid colloquialisms, but languages are living, active, and constantly changing. Close adherence to current official definitions and accepted usages can result in nuances of meaning going unnoticed, or alternatively, in extensions into realms that may not be close to experience. Phenomenologists attempt to sidestep some of this difficulty by reporting results in words used by participants as much as possible, and this approach produced descriptions of lust different from some popular scientific proposals.

It is also helpful to look at the history of a word such as "lust" rather than simply the most current published definition. Interestingly, use of the word lust as

participants in this study chose to use it indicates at least a partial return to the original use of the word:

The noun *lust* preserves the same form it had in Old English but its meaning is now quite different. It originally was a word of neutral connotations, meaning simply "pleasure." *Lust* is related to the now archaic verb *list*, meaning "to wish to, to be inclined to." In theological usage Old English *lust* was used to refer to pleasures and desires that were considered sinful, especially sexual desire. In this context *lust* was a term of opprobrium and reproach. This disapproval has carried over to the most recent sense of *lust* "an overwhelming desire or craving." The meaning "pleasure" is now obsolete. (Webster's II new Riverside University Dictionary, 1984)

Participants used *lust* to refer to purely pleasure-focussed sexual interest in someone. There was a clear return to a more neutral connotation, and whether the experience was more of a "wish" or just an "inclination" varied. A popular contemporary human sexuality text mirrors this more neutral attitude toward *lust*:

Lust is a normal, healthy human emotion that can be very pleasurable for two people when they both desire sexual expression with one another. It is reasonable for two adults who are sexually attracted to each other to choose to express their *lust* by becoming sexually intimate. (Allgeier & Allgeier, 2000, p. 159)

Although the above passage indicates a somewhat simplistic understanding of a complex event, it does illustrate that *lust* need not always be experienced as an irresistible force. It is unclear how the "overwhelming" connotation developed. It may be a holdover from when sex was simply considered "bad." For much of the not-too-distant past sex was only tolerated even in the context of marriage. As Paul admonished, "it is better to marry than to burn" (I Corinthians 7:9, King James Version). It would surely take a formidable

influence to derail someone from the path of righteousness with their immortal soul weighing in the balance.

Though not totally accepting of all forms of consensual sexual expression, we are historically more accepting today than in the recent past. Perhaps this is why the "overwhelming" connotation is being dropped in many examples of common usage. Participants did not report experiencing lust as this powerful. Lust was reserved for somewhat less than idea sexual encounters or the motivation for such encounters, if not actualized. Sexual desire was differentiated from lust and articulated as occurring in more of a relational context, and it was sexual desire that participants often experienced as overwhelming.

Shaver, Schwartz, Kirson, and O'Connor (1987) had subjects sort 135 index cards – each with an emotion word written on it – into piles that seemed to go together. Cluster analysis of this data identified five major emotions. Shaver et al. labeled them love, joy, anger, sadness, and fear. Emotionally laden sexual expression in all its richness and complexity, as well as all nonsexual forms of attachment, were subsumed under the word "love." Further analysis indicated that love was divided into subgroups of emotions. The researchers labeled these groups affection, lust, and longing. Some of the words for affection and all of the words for both lust and longing appear below:

LOVE:

Affection

fondness

liking

caring

adoration

tenderness

compassion

sentimentality

Lust

arousal

lust

desire

passion

infatuation

Longing

longing

As with Lee's (1977) research, these findings are often discussed in an attempt to gain insight into the nature of romantic and/or sexual love. Aron and Aron (1991) draw conclusions about the relationship between sex and love based upon the research of Shaver et al. (1987). They maintain that only two of the 135 words were directly related to sexuality: arousal and lust. These two words were in what Shaver et al. (1987) referred to as the "lust" sub-cluster. Also in this sub-cluster were the only two words that could be used to describe an intense nonsexual love: passion and infatuation. Based on these results, Aron and Aron (1991) concluded that, "...all in all, subjects did not appear to separate sexuality sharply from love" (p. 40).

The Aron and Aron (1991) analysis of the Shaver et al. research fails to take some important facts into consideration. In the case of arousal and lust, the reader is encouraged to be very general and interpret these words as being closely associated with sexuality. Actually, these words are only potentially related to sexuality. Sexual experiences are only one kind of experience that may

be associated with arousal, and sexual lust is only one kind of lust. Many people lust for money, fame, power, or violence. By contrast, when it comes to passion and infatuation, the reader is encouraged to ignore how these words are used in everyday parlance. It is common to associate passion and infatuation strongly with sexuality. Of course, most people understand the notion of being passionate about work (for example), but when passion is mentioned, work is not the first thing that comes to mind.

Interpretation of the present research in light of the Shaver et al. findings also requires more rigorous consideration of what constitutes an emotion.

Bernstein and Nash provide a representative contemporary definition of emotion:

...organized psychological and physiological reactions to changes in our relationship to the world. These reactions are partly subjective experiences and partly objectively measurable patterns of behavior and physiological arousal. (1999, p. 310)

Zimbardo provides a somewhat more detailed definition:

...a complex pattern of changes including physiological arousal, feelings, cognitive processes, and behavioral reactions made in response to a situation perceived by an individual to be personally significant in some way. (1988, p. 405)

Despite the manner in which it is sometimes discussed, sex is clearly not an emotion. It is but one aspect of an individual's total response to a combination of factors such as physiological arousal, behavioral proclivities, environmental contingencies, cognitions, and subjective feelings. Any of these factors can be radically different across situations, and emotions often are triggered by an assessment of the current situation in comparison to goals (Bernstein & Nash, 1999). Hunger and thirst, for example, are important sources of motivation but

are not themselves emotions. Although the absence of food or water is likely to produce an emotional response, which one is a function of the situation as interpreted by the individual. Thirst while in a long line at a lemonade stand may elicit a different emotion (anger) than thirst experienced as the last water is consumed when stranded in the desert (fear). Similarly, a variety of different emotions can accompany sexual behavior from joy to disgust, depending on the motivation for engaging in sexual activities in some specific situation. In some contexts, sex may occur with little or no emotion at all.

Factor analysis and cluster analysis (as used by Shaver et al., 1987) both share the same potential weakness with respect to validity: the opportunity for bias to enter research with the labeling process. With proper labeling one hopes that what is essentially nothing more than an abstract interpretation of a matrix of numbers will reflect relationships between themes as they are experienced outside the research context. There is also the possibility that factor or cluster labeling will not increase understanding:

The danger of reification is great. It is easy to name a factor and then to believe there is a reality behind the name. But giving a factor a name does not give it reality. (Kerlinger, 1986, p. 591)

The forced-choice aspect of this research may also be a source of difficulty, particularly when investigating a phenomenon as multifaceted as love. The total lack of words unambiguously associated with sexuality makes it difficult to understand on what basis it is possible to conclude anything at all about sexuality. While undoubtedly some insight into features of human emotion was gained on the basis of the Shaver et al. study, the words sorted by subjects were

selected precisely because the researchers decided (a priori) they were "representative of the major emotions people experience in life" (Aron & Aron, 1994, p. 139). It is unavoidable that the words chosen were to some extent a reflection of the researcher's assumptions (Berscheid, 1988).

The present research avoided some of these difficulties. Participants were asked directly about sexual desire. It was not necessary to speculate as to whether sexual information was being collected or not. Participants were free to describe their experiences in any way they wished. Every attempt was made to avoid imposing preconceptions during collection or analysis of the data. In the course of describing a complex experience such as sexual desire, there was a natural tendency for participants to move from one aspect to another, eventually interweaving its behavioral, emotional, situational, cognitive, and biological aspects. This reflection fostered the emergence of a better understanding of how these different aspects relate to and influence one another.

The findings reported by Shaver et al. are quite consistent with those reported here, as long as the specifics of each are kept in mind, and the labels provided by the experimenter are not considered essential. Subjects in the Shaver et al. study were sorting words pertaining to emotion, and one cluster was a general love category with a tenor very similar to how participants in this study described love. The other cluster consisted of clearly sexual words, creating a cluster that might be labeled romantic or sexual love – rather than lust. Sexual expression in the absence of love was not captured in the Shaver et al. study. Similarly, in the present study aspects of sexual expression in the absence

of love were described, but nonsexual love was not dealt with. The two studies investigated different topics using different methods; interpreted within the proper design limits, however, the findings are similar.

Fehr (1988) proposed a prototype model of love. She asked subjects to list the characteristics of a person experiencing love. There were 68 characteristics, which she then had subjects rate according to their centrality to the construct. Ratings ranged from 1, "extremely poor feature of love" to 8, "extremely good feature of love." Features most central to love received the following ratings:

trust:	7.50
caring:	7.28
honesty:	7.18
friendship:	7.08
respect:	7.01
concern for other	7.00

Factors more closely associated with physical expression of love were less central:

sex appeal:	5.87
sexual passion:	5.81
physical attraction	5.58
excitement	5.03
heart rate increases	4.26

Subjects in the Fehr study were not reflecting specifically on romantic love or sexual desire. Although all relationships between people who love each other share certain features, they also often exhibit important differences. Sexuality is a fundamental dimension on which they differ. We love our children, but not sexually. We love our spouses, but to announce that you no longer find them sexually attractive, or that you have had sex with another, would in many instances destroy the relationship. Some researchers acknowledge the sexual nature of certain of our loving relationships:

The study of love and sexuality as companion variables is one of our goals in close relationship research, because it is apparent to us that trying to separate love from sexuality is like trying to separate fraternal twins: they are certainly not identical, but, nevertheless, they are strongly bonded. (Hendrick & Hendrick, 1987, p. 282)

Much of this literature mirrors our culture's discomfort with acknowledging the importance of sexuality to many loving relationships. Data collected on "love" generally, is acceptable. Often the reader is soon caught up, however, in an attempt on the part of the original researcher or an interpreter to demonstrate how relevant the findings are for our understanding of love between dating or marriage partners, relationships which are highly sexual.

The Fehr study was also not designed to investigate sexual desire.

Subjects were given the following instructions:

If you were asked to list the characteristics of a person experiencing terror you might write: possible danger occurs, heart beats quickly, may be imaginary like a ghost, hands tremble... Please make a similar list for the concept love. (Aron & Aron, 1994, p. 133)

In the Fehr (1988) study, subjects were under pressure to respond with little reflection. They had only three minutes to list as many features of love as they could. The research was inspired by prototype theory, and the time limit was included as a means of determining which features would be more prototypical. Prototypical features should be much easier (quicker) to access. A speeded task, however, would seem to be a poor way to access the breadth or depth of a subject's understanding. In addition, not all undergraduate students have been in love. It is quite possible that some subjects had limited experience with the phenomenon being investigated. As Aron and Aron noted in an earlier paper (1991), in some instances collecting data from students is "perhaps more of a comment on the *students views of* [italics added] love and sexuality than of the actual relationship" (p. 33). Also, the task does not specify sexual or nonsexual love. Most subjects would probably rather assume nonsexual love was the topic than be embarrassed about assuming sexual love was the topic. Such an assumption would introduce a biased view concerning the importance of sexuality to the experience of love.

All of these factors probably pushed for a socially correct view, yet even these findings are consistent with the present study. Participants also described features such as trust, caring, and concern as being more important in the context of love or desire than sexual activities themselves. As important as sex is, it does not seem to be at the core, even for romantic love. Sexual expression in the absence of any care at all was not captured by the Fehr research.

Aron and Westbay (1992) used the 68 features identified by Fehr as characteristics of a person experiencing love as data for a factor analytic study. Three factors emerged and were labeled: (a) intimacy, (b) commitment, and (c) passion, suggesting that although there is general agreement about love's features, there are individual differences as well. Some people emphasize intimacy, some commitment, and some passion. The intimacy factor contained features which were judged by the researchers to be most central to the concept of love, and the passion factor contained features that were less central to it. Though somewhat peripheral with respect to love, these features are important aspects of lust as described by participants in the current study. Lust in the current study was described precisely as the absence of each of these features demonstrating a concern for the partner as a person and as having a focus on sexual activities. Also, as reported here for the thematic structure of sexual desire, Aron and Westbay (1992) found no differences between how men and women understand the features of love.

Participants often spoke of love and sexual desire as if they were virtually synonymous. Prurient relationships were generally described as motivated by lust, not desire. Attributes associated with desire in this study, such as a concern for the person, are more in keeping with what some researchers have termed being "in love" rather than with simply loving someone. Luby & Aron (1990) studied the prototypical features of being in love in comparison to those for love. Central to both were features such as caring, intimacy and respect. Desire, sex, and euphoria, however, were among those features central to being in love. This

is very consistent with the results reported here in which participants differentiated between love/desire and lust.

Relationships Among Themes

It is little more than a convenient fiction when we discuss themes as if they somehow existed independently of one another or of the person experiencing them. It is an analytical device meant to help us understand each theme, although it can be misleading. More than one theme often occurred in the same section of a protocol. In some protocols, the various themes were represented about equally. Other protocols, however, were characterized by having a dominant theme, with less prominent themes providing a context or ground. Rather than being a problem, this is exactly in keeping with the seamless nature of conscious experience. In addition, sexual desire exists only as one aspect of a person's more general experiences in his or her life situation. To understand a theme, you must be able to appreciate this context.

A distinction between lust and desire was common to all participants. Early in their interviews, most participants found it necessary to articulate a difference between the two. Some were adamant that they were totally different things. Others understood the difference as between types or kinds, although they found it difficult to say what they were types of. Still others described the difference as being between levels of desire, with lust being a very low level. Regardless of how we've articulated the differences, virtually all participants felt this distinction was crucial to an understanding of their experiences of sexual desire.

The body was described by participants as having different roles in lust and desire. In the context of a lust-oriented encounter, unreflected awareness of the body, being your body, was considered particularly risky because you didn't know much about the person. For this same reason participants reported it was relatively easy to resist. In the context of desire, however, an unreflected encounter with another holds the potential for establishing a special bond with that person, although this requires adequate trust and knowledge of the other as a person. When these prerequisites are met, the temptation to be your body is a powerful force. In the context of an ongoing relationship, it can imbue sexual activities with a sense of communion.

Consistent with the abstract descriptions of the roles played by the body in lust and in desire, participants also experienced their bodies differently in lust and in desire. In lust, the body often was experienced as an instrument of objectification used to exploit others. In desire, the body generally was experienced as an instrument two people could consciously use to express emotions that often defy verbalization. As described above, some couples, through bodily encounters in sex, sought to break down the boundaries between themselves and achieve a sense of connection beyond the physical. Although they involve the body, participants described such experiences as not primarily about the body.

The Experience of the Body

The relationship between our thoughts about the world and our experiences of the world has been the subject of considerable analysis and

speculation. Participants were quite sophisticated in their awareness of the different ways their bodies could be conceptualized as well as of the impact of these different conceptualizations, including how we experience other persons. This personal awareness of the body was so central to the experience of sexual desire that discussions of sexual desire in its absence — and there has been considerable nonphenomenological research on sexual desire — are best considered not about human sexual *desire*, but about models of animal sexual *motivation* fitted to human phenomena that are only somewhat similar.

Sometimes bodily awareness took the form of participants describing how they talked about their bodies. In an effort to comprehend and describe their experiences of sexual desire, participants made use of several metaphors. Our culture has a strong penchant for natural science explanations and mechanistic metaphors for body functions including sexuality. It was surprisingly common for participants to describe their experiences of sexual desire as an “adrenaline surge” or a “hormone rush.” And there can be little doubt about the relevant conceptual metaphor when one participant described her experience of sexual desire for her partner as when he “cranks her tractor.” [F-8] Sometimes such metaphors are appropriate, and we clearly do experience our bodies as machines that we “operate.” Sometimes, however, such metaphors obscure important information.

Participants described some sex as “animal” sex. This is a potentially useful metaphor for obvious reasons. Participant M-2 described it well:

...from what I understand about animals, they don't have feelings to go with it [sex]; they just do it and they're done. And I guess that might be a pretty good way to describe it. You just want to do the physical things and then be done.

In a further elaboration of what he meant by "having no feelings" this participant [M-2] described how he would respond to the opportunity to have sex with a girl who had been drinking. He comments, "I don't really care what she thinks about it." He was also prepared for the morning after, "I don't care if tomorrow she thinks she wanted to have sex or not..." Animals don't deceive one another. Animals are incapable of objectifying or dehumanizing. Only another human is in a position to dehumanize. Many behaviors with surface similarity to those considered reprehensible in the human world are common in the animal world, and the animals are just being what they are. Humans, of course, are not animals in this sense, and any absolution from responsibility is illusory. Human beings cannot have "animal sex" anymore than they can experience the world as another animal experiences it in any realm.

Different metaphors capture different aspects of an experience. (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). A potential problem, however, is that metaphors can also conceal important features of a concept. As noted by Lakoff and Johnson (1980), all metaphors "can hide aspects of reality" (p. 236), and "by virtue of what it hides, can lead to human degradation" (p. 236). Metaphors, observe Lakoff and Johnson, can "constrain our lives" (p. 236). In this particular passage the authors were referring to political and economic metaphors, but their observations apply much more generally:

... it is one thing to impose a single objectivist model in some restricted situations and to function in terms of that model - perhaps successfully; it is another to conclude that the model is an accurate reflection of reality. There is good reason why our conceptual systems have inconsistent metaphors for a single concept. The reason is that there is no one metaphor that will do. Each one gives a certain comprehension of one aspect of the concept and hides others. To operate only in terms of a consistent set of metaphors is to hide many aspects of reality. Successful functioning in our daily lives seems to require a constant shifting of metaphors. The use of many metaphors that are inconsistent with one another seems necessary for us if we are to comprehend the details of our daily existence. (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p. 221)

Animal, mechanical, medical, hydraulic, and violent metaphors – all very common – may be obscuring important aspects of human sexuality.

Participants also described situations in which an awareness of their bodies was direct rather than reflected. Conceptualization of the body as less of a “thing” to have and operate, and more of a “place” to be and have a world, was associated with parallel changes in the nature of relationships. “Just being your body” in some contexts was associated with objectification and potential abuse; “just being your body” in other contexts was associated with a sense of bonding and communion.

Even scholars easily get lost in the tribal language of existentialism and phenomenology (Ihde, 1986). Terms such as noesis, noema, and intentionality can sound very removed from the world of everyday reality. In sexuality as in many other realms of experience, the use of abstract language is common, the language of natural science. This is ironic considering it is a general principle of existentialist thought that the everyday world is important and worthy of research emphasis. A phenomenological method of inquiry helps to prevent participants

from lapsing into their prescribed patterns of talk about sexual desire, indicative more of gender stereotypes, overused metaphors, and myth than experiences of the lived-body.

Mindful reflection on experiences of sexual desire produced vivid descriptions illustrating several points made by existentialist philosophers such as Merleau Ponty who have analyzed the impact of embodiment on experience and relationships. In some instances, participants articulated situations in which their gaze upon another person was associated with an intentional – if not fully cognitive – wish on their part to possess the other, to dismiss the personhood of the other, to take their subjectivity, to enslave, to reduce the other to the status of a "mote in a sunbeam" (Sartre, 1944/1955). Of course, human awareness is such that we also know that an actual or potential partner may be looking at us similarly:

...in so far as I have a body, I may be reduced to the status of an object beneath the gaze of another person, and no longer count as a person for him, or else I may become his master and , in my turn, look at *him*.
(Merleau Ponty, 1962/1992, p. 167)

Sometimes humans willingly participate in objectification of one another. We know that our actions are sometimes authentic, sometimes indifferent, and sometimes artfully orchestrated to hurt and deceive; and some simply seek a connection with others. As a character in Sartre's (1944/1955) play *No Exit* described it, "I'm just a hollow dummy, all that's left of me is the outside" (p. 35). Relationships based largely on mutual fascination and gazing upon one another are ultimately unfulfilling to both because, "deep down in my eyes you'll see

yourself..." (p. 35). The eyes as "windows" to the soul provide little comfort to those involved in what could be described as a soulless interaction. Merleau Ponty (1962/1992) expressed this well:

...this mastery is self-defeating, since, precisely when my value is recognized through the other's desire, he is no longer the person by whom I wished to be recognized, but a being fascinated, deprived of his freedom, and who therefore no longer counts in my eyes. (p. 167)

Although several participants made it clear that they saw nothing wrong with superficial sexual encounters, most participants eventually made it their goal to avoid objectifying and enslaving relationships. Many described eye contact as a potentially very good thing:

Eye contact is big...Eye contact, a lot of times is an uncomfortable thing to me, but I think it is a very important thing because to get the sexual desire...Eye contact boosts desire, I think...I certainly think looking into someone's eyes *when they're looking back* [italics added] is more important than...does a lot more for desire than looking at their boobs or looking at their figure. You know, you're looking at them, and its more of a feeling of, of being on the same wavelength...I think eye contact makes you want to be closer to that person...[M-2]

Metaphor is not just verbal. More generally, the issue deals with the impact of our attitude towards the world on our experiences of it; and some theorists have been more encouraging than others about our relationships with others. Martin Buber (1958) described two ways in which human beings encounter their world: one speaks to encounters characterized by objectification; the other applies to special moments of connection. He refers to them as "primary words" (p. 4), but refers here not simply to the spoken word, but to the fundamental attitude we take toward the world. The primary word *I – Thou* must be spoken with the whole being, and the primary word *I – It* cannot be spoken

with the whole being (Buber, 1958). Some participants even described relationships in which more knowledge of the other as a person actually detracted from the objectified sex, which was sometimes the clear purpose of the couple's interactions. The world of *I – It* is a world of objects for our manipulation; it is the world in which we spend most of our time. Unfortunately, the primary word *I – It* is how we speak not only to our toasters and automobiles, it often reflects our attitude toward other human beings.

In the world of *I – Thou*, we stand *in relation to* rather than *make use of*. There are three different domains for entering this world of relation: (a) the natural world, (b) the human world, and (c) the spiritual world. Some participants described deceptively nonsexual sounding encounters with their partners when asked to describe their experiences of sexual desire. This is because the sense of communion attained during sex for some couples is not the kind of experience that results from active pursuit; it is a special moment that emerges – sometimes when one's attitude toward life is conducive to genuine relating:

No aim, no lust, and no anticipation intervene between *I* and *Thou*. Desire itself is transformed as it plunges out of its dream into the appearance. Every means is an obstacle. Only when every means has collapsed does the meeting come about. (Buber, 1958, pp. 11-12)

Sometimes, participants described these special periods of relating as including sexual activities and sometimes not. Alternatively, it could be argued, as did some participants, that our notions of what constitutes "sex" needs to be expanded. Moments of pure relating are difficult to describe. If you have had this

kind of experience, no explanation is necessary. If you have not, no amount of description is adequate.

Change

Asymmetry characterizes the experience of change from lust to desire. There was no description by any participant of a primarily lustful encounter even momentarily being experienced as a “bonding” or “connecting” with the other as a person. You cannot achieve a bond with someone you are relating to as a body. You don’t know anything about them as a person, and there is no basis for such a bond. Participants did describe, however, relationships that were primarily characterized by sexual desire, occasionally being experienced as lustful. Even when the “raw pagan lusties” [F-1] reappear in a long-term relationship, the experience means something different than it did before. Participants were of the opinion that there is no going back: sex is still an expression of commitment and care – albeit a different and more intense one than usual.

The theme of change or transition is closely related to the distinction between lust and desire. For most participants, their first sexual experiences were associated with what they described as lust, characterized by little interest in a partner as anything but a route to physical pleasure. Over time, this tendency to relate to sexual partners primarily as objects, or in some instances as instantiations of ideal fantasy partners, was replaced by loving desire. This more mature – to use the term preferred by most participants – desire was associated with the goal of relating to partners as whole persons, including both their strengths and their weaknesses, and was characterized by a genuine concern for

the other. Sometimes such change took place across several relationships; sometimes it took place in the context of the same relationship with lust serving as the source of initial interest until other features of the person were appreciated.

It is well-established that how most people experience their intimate relationships changes over time. Tennov (1979) asked several hundred people an extensive series of questions about love, sex, and relationships. She made the following comments about one group of respondents:

A group of older women who answered the questionnaire complained that they had difficulty deciding whether or not the statements were true. Many of them had been true at one time in these women's lives but not at other times. As one 41-year-old woman said, "At one time or another in my life almost every statement would have applied but today almost none apply. (p. 6)

The general consensus among most theorists seems to be that the "ravages of time" are not kind to sexuality. An entire generation of consumers of both popular and professional literature have been almost bullied into the belief that they should expect sexual expression to be less a part of their lives as they age and their relationships continue. They should expect to have less frequent sex as the relationship continues. They are to expect less intense orgasms. (If you are a male you are told to expect your ejaculate to "seep" out rather than be forcefully propelled.) They are to expect to be slower to respond to sexual stimulation. Passion itself, they have been told, simply does not last: "Their love burns brightly but soon flickers and dies" (Strong, et al., 1999, p. 208).

Some refer to the strong bonds of affection that emerges from passion's dying embers as companionate love (Sternberg, 1986). This kind of love is supposed to characterize relationships where the partners have been together for many years and know each other very well. Such relationships have the commitment that romantic relationships lack. Companionate love also has the intimacy but lacks the passion (Allgeier & Allgeier, 2000).

Not everyone accepts the notion that long-term relationships are destined to be passionless, or even less passionate. When discussing the notion of companionate love, one middle-aged male in a recent human sexuality class commented that if he wanted a companion, he would get a golden retriever. He made it clear that he was interested in a lover – in the classic sense of romantic lover – for a lifelong partner. Consistent with this admittedly anecdotal comment, the empirical research is actually surprisingly unresponsive of a universal decline with age:

In sum, the idea that love (especially passionate love) inevitably declines has been widely theorized but only *somewhat* [italics added] supported by data. While the decline does typically occur, it is much less precipitous, and much more variable, than has been implied by many of the theorists. (Aron & Aron, 1994, p. 141)

Although students of research in psychology are taught that it is inappropriate to apply group statistical findings directly to individuals, it seems it is acceptable to make pronouncements about individuals, even with questionable findings, in support of culturally comfortable myths about taboo subjects.

Many reasons have been proposed for changes over time. Declining hormone levels may simply make the aging human less interested in and less

capable of sexual response. It also could be due to habituation. One kind of habituation might be to the person as a sexually arousing stimulus, much like there is less response to repeated presentation of any other stimulus. Another example might be habituation to some stimulating and/or rewarding aspect of the relationship such as the power of the relationship to be a source of self-expansion (Aron & Aron, 1994):

The euphoria of falling in love arises from the excitement of the rapid expansion of self that is occurring through, for example, the staying up all night talking, the doing each thing together for the first time, the shared new adventures. But, inevitably, if the relationship develops, one gets to know the partner pretty well. The beloved is always changing and growing, and there are always things not yet discovered – but the dramatic transition from a stranger to an intimate cannot be repeated with the same person. (p. 140)

There are, however, other reasons for popular views of what happens to our sexuality and relationships as we age that have less to do with physiological or psychological necessity than cultural preoccupations and the prevailing Zeitgeist. We are a culture obsessed with youth. There is general devaluing of older people in our culture, including their merits as sexual beings. Young people often seem to assume that vitality and sexual expression are their special prerogatives. College students in freshmen human sexuality classes evidence a range of reactions from nausea to disbelief when forced to acknowledge that their parents and grandparents are sexual beings. This attitude is summed up well by a recent comment from a sophomore during a documentary film presenting the results of a study involving older subjects. The subjects were described as being in "top physical condition." The student laughed aloud and

commented, "How could they be in top physical condition? They are in there fifties!" It was decided to not shatter this particular student's illusions by pointing out that many people in their fifties are in better physical condition than many younger adults.

Another reason for disparaging views of long-term sexual relationships may be the unprecedented popularity currently enjoyed by biological models. The physiological changes associated with aging, therefore, are readily accepted as being deleterious to all matters sexual. In addition, evolutionary models are also widely accepted, and theorists working from these perspectives suggest it is perfectly understandable for young, reproductively healthy people to be considered the standard of sexual attractiveness. Closely related is the fact that older partners – whether by choice or physiological necessity – are generally not having sex for procreation. They are having sex for pleasure, and our culture has never been very supportive of sex purely as a source of pleasure.

Participants reported changes in their awareness of desire over time but not like those that would be predicted on the basis of most of the professional literature or folk notions. (It is interesting the extent to which these work in concert on this issue.) The changes reported were generally experienced as growth not decline. Their experiences of sexual desire began with what they tended to refer to as lust, characterized by little concern for the partner as a person and an emphasis on obtaining physical pleasure for themselves. Over time, however, sexual desire became experienced more as love, characterized by a focus on the partner's happiness and pleasure.

Participant descriptions also departed from much of the existing theory — if not empirical findings — in that participants generally did not report a decline in sexual passion over time. As previously discussed, most described their current interactions with their current partners as more fulfilling than earlier interactions with earlier partners. They also reported that the sex itself was better and more satisfying. It is possible, of course, that such responses were motivated by a desire to reduce cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957). Participants in long-term relationships may feel they are faced with declining sexual passion which they can do little about, yet they also care very much about their partners, and would not be able to deal with the guilt of abandoning them for the sole purpose of better sex. As an option they may be motivated to change their attitude toward their existing relationship.

There is a perfectly plausible alternative explanation, however, that is consistent with both the existing literature and the findings reported here. Research into safer-sex practices indicates an interesting relationship between sex-negative influences such as less sex education and personality factors such as erotophobia and levels of sexual problems such as STDs and unwanted pregnancies. Less emphasis on sex education and higher levels of erotophobia are actually associated with increased problems (Mauldon & Luker, 1996; Fisher, Byrne, White, & Kelley, 1988). Many of our more conservative decision makers, apparently unaware of the relevant literature but quite concerned about untoward sexual behavior, are exacerbating the very problems they are most concerned about.

Similarly, less emphasis on the unique potentials of human sexuality may create its own set of difficulties. For example, a focus on the procreative aspects of sexuality may lead to dissolution of a relationship if there are no offspring. Just as an animal may abandon an infertile mate, historically the inability to conceive has been commonly accepted as grounds for divorce. More to the point of our current discussion, if a couple's level of sexual interaction remains primarily orgasm focussed, they may indeed be susceptible to simple habituation. One partner may simply find the other partner less exciting and be more prone to have an affair or even begin the whole cycle of "falling in love" again with a new more exciting partner. Many in our society appear to be following this pattern.

Many life experiences are less interesting (arousing) when you don't understand them very well. Art, music, opera, even football can all be boring to the uninitiated. It is often possible to share in the enthusiasm for a particularly rousing example. Falling in love is so culturally entrenched an idea that everyone finds it exciting, like watching a triple play in baseball. The crowd is roaring; the excitement is contagious. Any lummoX, any schlep, can fall in love; the script is widely understood. Something else, however, is required to enjoy a game where — to the uninitiated — nothing seems to be happening; you have to understand it.

The argument can be made that long-term sexual relationships are similar. Most parents come to expect a child to grow tired of a new toy or game before they have really learned to use or play it. Some adults unwittingly manage their intimate relationships with much the same attitude. The process of maturation referred to by most participants involved the development of both a more than

surface level appreciation of their partner's qualities and a realization that a maximally satisfying sexual relationship requires thought and effort.

A theme such as change or transition carries with it the possibility that in some participant protocols it will only be a potential theme: they may simply not have experienced the transition yet. This seems to be the case with participant M-5, who was 24 years old at the time of the interview. While he had unquestionably experienced sexual desire, there are indications that his experiences did not include all of the aspects of desire that other participants described as crucial. In addition, the word "love" did not appear anywhere in his protocol. There was no mention of concern for the other as a person. There was some reference to orgasm in his partner, but it seemed of primary interest to him as proof of his sexual prowess. Sometimes he even completely disengages himself psychologically from his partner in the effort to insure that she experiences orgasm, thereby validating his notions of himself as a good sexual partner. Despite this, there seems to be little genuine expression of concern for his partner.

Finally, this participant reported being interested in qualities beyond the physical, not because he has a genuine interest in his partner as a person, but for what personality attributes may indicate about the likelihood of him getting what he wants from her sexually. Whereas most other participants have fantasies that could be described more accurately as "thoughts about the other when they are absent," this participant's fantasies were more in keeping with how such thoughts are understood at their most basic: images of a partner wearing certain

clothing, being in a particular position, making noises that he finds arousing, and accepting his advances without too much protest. He admits he is "pretty aggressive" when he is with a girl with whom he has a "comfortable sexual relationship."

His notion of a relationship in which he feels comfortable is one where there is no "fear of rejection" and/or "nervousness." Although most participants used descriptors like "animalistic" somewhat disparagingly, this participant used it to describe his preferred arrangement:

...when you're animalistic, you can just kind of grab them and throw them down on the bed and start doing whatever your routine is at that particular moment. And since they've been with you before, I guess they find that appealing. They like that, you know. It's just more of a... It's like an animal feeling. It's like, you see a girl, and you immediately go up to her and start advancing on her and fulfill your carnal urges, you know. And the other one [desire], I wouldn't say is too animalistic, because you're restrained. And it's pretty much my experience that animals don't restrain themselves too much. They pretty much make it clear if they want sex or not. [M-5]

It seems quite plausible that at the time of the interview, this participant's experiences were limited to an experience of desire that other participants had certainly acknowledged, but felt they had left in their past.

The experiences of most participants were not like those of M-5. It is important to remember that the protocol just discussed is interesting precisely because it differed from the others. The experiences of most participants often were not in keeping with animal-inspired, bio-medical, or religious models which conceptualize sexuality as either unrelated or fundamentally opposed to spirituality, and — unfortunately sometimes — humans are affected by their notions of themselves.

People have a way of meeting expectations made of them. Sometimes this requires “dumbing down” their potential. At other times humans maximize their potential and rise to the challenge. Some of the most popular models of sexuality are of the “dumbing down” variety. All humans have “tangled wings” (Konner, 1982) to some extent by virtue of being embodied, but there no need to thwart human potential unnecessarily. As William James noted over a century ago, it is the claim that free will is “illusory” that is truly specious. In the context of everyday human living – the only relevant context – our beliefs about our choices are very powerful. There is growing interest in aspects of sexuality associated with art, eroticism, communion, and spirituality. An approach to conducting human sexuality research as outlined and demonstrated here, may provide a valuable tool for investigating such topics, and in so doing, may help us to become better acquainted with visions of ourselves that serve to maximize human potential rather than thwart it.

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APPENDIX

INVITATION TO BECOME A RESEARCH PARTICIPANT

Title of Study: An Empirical Phenomenological Investigation of
 Sexual Desire
Johnny Dossett:

I am interested in your experience of sexual desire. In this study you will be asked to describe experiences of sexual desire in your own words in a tape recorded interview that will take approximately 1 to 2 hours.

Every effort will be made to maintain anonymity. All data will be held strictly confidential, available only to the research team and maintained under lock and key. Results obtained from the analysis may be made public in professional journals and/or at professional conferences but no personal identification will be linked to any data collected or presented. The project involves minimal risk to you in that you will be asked to share your experiences with the research team. There may be little direct benefit to your participation in the project. However, often people report that they find such interviews have helped them deepen their own understanding of the phenomenon under study. In addition, there is the possibility that the information you contribute will be important to the field of psychology.

If you think that you would like to participate in my study or have any additional questions, please call me at either number above and feel free to leave a message if I am not there. I look forward to hearing from you and appreciate your taking time to consider participation in my research.

Johnny M. Dossett

INFORMED CONSENT

The purpose of this study to investigate the experience of sexual desire. You will be asked to describe your own experiences of sexual desire in your own words in a audio-taped interview. The recording will be transcribed and the resulting text subjected to a form of content analysis. The interview will last 1 to 2 hours and will be conducted with only the interviewer present. Your identity will be kept confidential. All data will be available only to the research team and maintained under lock and key in Austin Peay 401C. Results obtained from the analysis may be made public in professional journals and/or at professional conferences but no personal identification will be linked to any data collected or presented. The audio tapes will be destroyed after successful transcription.

Participation in the project involves minimal risk to you in that you will be asked to share your experiences with the research team. There may be little direct benefit to you. However, often people report that they find such interviews have helped them deepen their own understanding of the phenomenon being investigated. You are free to discontinue the interview at any time for any reason without prejudice and any information collected will be promptly destroyed.

Do you understand the explanation of this study? ___YES ___NO

Do you agree to participate as described? ___YES ___NO

My signature below indicates the project has been explained to the subject and they have agreed to participation as described.

John M. Dossett - Project Director

Date

Subject # _____

Participant ID# _____

DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

SEX _____

AGE _____

MARITAL STATUS _____

THIS IS MY _____ (FIRST, SECOND, ...) MARRIAGE OR OTHER LONG -
TERM RELATIONSHIP

LENGTH OF TIME IN THIS RELATIONSHIP

SAMPLE PROTOCOL

Participant M – 7

2/4/98

I: I would like for you to think of some times in your life when you were especially aware of sexual desire and describe them in as much detail as you can. And my function will be to sort of, keep us on track, and to assist you in exploring things that come up in the interview.

P: Would this be a first experience?

I: It doesn't matter.

P: It doesn't matter?

I: Talk about whatever instances help you to describe your experience of sexual desire. It doesn't really matter whether you talk at length about one instance and then move on to another instance or, more abstractly...Although sometimes it helps people, I think, to focus on a specific instance. Usually things get going after we first get started...Once we get rolling on something, I can help you to explore things.

P: An interesting question. I would say that...I mean I was very aware of my sexuality, I'd say from a fairly young age. I can remember being sexually interested in the opposite sex, and even starting to masturbate as early as 8, late 8 or 9. But, however, there was a long stretch...besides self-pleasuring, I didn't become sexually active until the senior year of high school, for whatever reason. I've always, despite having a somewhat outgoing personality at times, I am rather shy also. So I always have a difficult time meeting women, to date. However, I suppose this is somewhat ironic, my best friends were all women in high school. I had very few male friends. And I suppose that was my inclination towards art and the people who mostly made up the art department were women. But they were very close to me, and I'd always find it easier to confide in them, than men. That maybe due...My parents got divorced when I was 2; I was raised by my mother. I don't mean to meander into that...But I was very interested in dating women, but I just couldn't get up the nerve to ever ask anyone out, or to pursue my feelings. Of course, later on I found out that many of these women I was friends with were interested in possibly dating me, but they weren't as forthcoming...So I didn't start dating until my senior year and it was actually I started going out with a friend of mine. And it was somewhat interesting that, initially she was...I had made my feelings known to her in a rather traumatic incident, because she somewhat rejected them. At the same time there was another woman that had become interested in me, and was very forthcoming with that information, so at that point I felt somewhat rejected by my friend, but I was interested in exploring the possibilities of a relationship with this other person. But as soon as I started

pursuing that, the woman who I had expressed interest with first, all of a sudden became interested in me. So, with little or actually no experience, I was forced into this position to choose between people I was rather interested in. So I ended up going out with this friend of mine. And while it wasn't a long relationship, it was about half a year, we were very close. And we were intimate, but we never engaged in sexual intercourse, other than heavy petting, things of that nature. So that was really my first experience being sexually active. After that I moved from that state where I attended high school to another state to go to college, and I hadn't been in college probably three weeks, and I had broken up with the other girl after I left, it was impossible to pursue a relationship across state lines, amazing that I had that small insight. But I met someone three weeks into my first year of college. Now I went from dating someone who had as little sexual experience as I had had, to all of a sudden, not only dating someone who has lots of experience, but also was a sex worker, worked in the sex industry. And she was a...She uh...She basically put herself through school by being a professional dominatrix. Which was somewhat interesting. I lost my virginity with her. That relationship lasted about a year. I'm trying to think of any particulars that were somewhat interesting...I think with that it was a purely carnal relationship. We were friends, but there wasn't any intimacy beyond sexual intimacy. We were very different people. Would you like me to talk about particular things within that relationship?

I: Yeah. I'm not really interested in sexual behaviors, well, I'm interested personally, but, not...professionally at the moment...(both laugh). What I'm really interested in is the experience of desire itself.

P: Uh uh.

I: If you can maybe think of an instance that would help you describe your experience of desire? (pause) It's somewhat difficult...

P: Yeah...

I: ...there's a flow to things. And what I'm asking you to do is to reflect on that flow and sort of stop it for just a minute...

P: I'm...I suppose I could talk in terms of what attracted me to this person. Would that be...?

I: Sure, start with that.

P: Well obviously, with my first girlfriend in college, it was very physical. I was, you know, not only was she a professional dominatrix, but she also continued that persona into her everyday public life. And you know, as far as clothing, and attitude, and things like that; and that was rather exciting and attractive to me

initially. Although I, you know that's stuff's exciting within itself, it really wasn't a very fulfilling thing. So that relationship really didn't bring me...It didn't seem to have any substance to it beyond that. It really wore thin. I guess, I can almost skip over every other experience up until my...the person I married, where a lot more complex emotions and feelings came into play with her. When I met my wife I was very sexually attracted to her, but there was also a bond. We very much clicked when we first met. Within an hour we were very conversant with one another and shared a lot of the same life experiences. And on the whole, that made me very excited about her. We actually pursued a friendship for a few months prior to making our feelings known to one another, but...I think that although I was physically attracted to her that wasn't my...that wasn't the predominant thing with it...of my attraction to her. It certainly was her attitude, very strong-willed, but also very caring, very conscious of other people's emotions and needs and desires. And, but at the same time not willing...I shouldn't say not willing, but she would not...She had strong enough character that she would not let someone else's needs...I'm sorry, I'm trying to articulate my thoughts.

I: It's fairly difficult. I think you're doing well.

P: She wouldn't let someone's needs necessarily cripple her; she would always remain cognizant of the fact that she needed to maintain her strength but at the same time help someone else as much as she could. And that was very, very attractive...That was really the first person that I'd ever met like that. Not so altruistic to the point where they themselves can no longer function because they're trying to help someone else. She really maintained a good balance within herself. And I found that immensely attractive about her. 'Cause I had always considered myself someone that probably was not as balanced as I could be, and for me, because of those qualities I just mentioned, it was really...I felt it very important to develop our friendship before pursuing an intimate sexual relationship, or before making my feelings at least known. At this point I was unaware of her feelings for me other than just friendship. So that became a very important aspect to our initial relationship. I would say after the first two months, and after I had made my feelings known, she reciprocated, however, she was slightly hesitant to become involved with me because, well...one my age. I was four years younger than her. She had also previously been involved with someone in the arts, as I am or was. And maybe this is where stereotypes come into play, she was hesitant to become with someone...

I: "I tried this already."

P: ...that's right, and apparently that had been a bad experience. So, I think we cautiously approached having a relationship, but I'll say that hesitantly probably lasted about 3 weeks, because by a month into the relationship, we had moved in together. And it was somewhat out of desire, and somewhat out of necessity.

My roommate had just moved out of state, and I was unable to find a new one, so I couldn't afford to pay my rent. So I conveniently moved in with her and her roommate who her roommate was actually a very good friend of mine. So we very easily moved into a domesticated life. There was really no transition period it seemed. It was as if we had been together for quite a long time, knew each other's routines; and I suppose that didn't make me complacent to her feelings. It was kind of a wonderful feeling, in a sense. It really fit like an old glove, and it was...I don't mean that in a demeaning sort of way, it was really...I think it really fulfilled something I needed, but at the same time it was new relationship so there was the excitement of getting to know one another, but was a familiarity there that made it more comfortable. So that really worked out very well, and we got married a year after that point. We actually got married on the anniversary of the day we met. We've been married eight years now.

I: These different things that you've...the way that you've described this relationship with your partner right now...

P: Uh uh.

I: ...are these aspects of sexual desire for you in that relationship or...? I'm just trying to get you to remember the focus of what I'm trying to talk about.

P: I...think I find it difficult to sometimes distinguish between these things, and sexual desire...

I: Between which things?

P: A person's personality; it's all a factor in there. Their physical attributes, but their personality is very much a key component. I mean, my initial attraction was definitely HER LOOKS, and that made me pursue a conversation with her. But like all those things are components into my sexual desires for her. I had several other experiences before that, that were rather shallow and really didn't fulfill me in any way or form. And after a while that, the way someone appeared to me didn't necessarily evoke any sexual attraction on my part.

I: But initially looks are important?

P: Initially, right. I'm definitely attracted to a certain body type, and a certain look. Those are very, very important to me. I'm actually very particular on the kind of woman I'm attracted to, probably to my detriment. And really, my wife did meet all those criteria. And not to say that I had not dated women before who had met that criteria as well. It was, like I said, the emotional, the personality component that didn't work in those other relationships.

I: When the looks are there...

P: Uh uh.

I: What is that like for you? What is that experience like?

P: I suppose it's somewhat unreal, in a sense, because — while I can't speak for anyone else — obviously I have this idealized picture in my mind of what I expect a woman to be, and it's probably very different from the mainstream idea. It really is very surreal though. I can't describe...When all those things just kind of fall into place it's almost as if there's some air of unreality to it, to me everything is there.

I: You feel as if there is an unreal aspect to it when all those physical features that you like are there?

P: Somewhat yeah. I suppose because I have such particular tastes, that when that's realized in a person standing before you, not to say that I focus on this ideal type...over and over again in my head, but it's definitely curious. I don't see that type necessarily very often, so...It definitely, there is that immediate gravitation towards that person. And that certainly helped that my...the woman who was to be my future wife was...seemed very pleasant and an amiable person, and receptive to being conversant with me so...that all played into it as well.

I: What about the other situations you described as being purely carnal?

P: Purely carnal?

I: ...or very physical or...

P: Well, I would say those women were of the same general physical dimensions as my wife. Things such as dress don't matter to me as much, so, not to say that all these women were, you know, clones of one another. They certainly weren't. When I was talking about being physically attracted to someone, I look for a certain weight, a certain height, hair color, things of that nature. But as far as how they carry themselves and their attitudes and their dress, which I think is a component of that, they all would differ somewhat. But for those other women, it was really personality clashes. We may have clicked on a sexual level, but there were, you know, maybe one major personality clash or several. Either being too dominant, not to say that's bad if that's your profession, or it's kind of hard to put words to how...to what didn't make these relationships work out. Or you know, too much emotional baggage being brought into the relationship from outside sources. There would just be some type of clash, for whatever reason.

I: Again, remembering that our focus is sexual desire, you kind of set up two situations. One in which you establish a bond with the other person, one involving complex emotions in which sexual attractiveness in a physical sense is important, but not predominant. And the other situation is one that is very physical, and not fulfilling, whereas the one involving a bond with this person is fulfilling... Could you say a bit more about your experience of desire? I mean, we are talking about sexual relationships in both instances...

P: Right.

I: ...and presumably there is some motivation for sexuality there...

P: Right.

I: ...in both instances. Could you maybe help me to understand how you experience desire differently in those two situations, if indeed you do? The desire aspect itself...

P: OK.

I: Of course, I know it's difficult...to be so focussed on one aspect...

P: Right.

I: ...of what is essentially a holistic experience.

P: Well, you know, I feel tempted to say that the earlier things were just purely hormonally fueled, although I don't want to cheapen it to that, because obviously I was looking for fulfillment in other areas as well. I think anyone does in a relationship, at least I do. I think with those earlier situations, I was looking for the emotional satisfaction as well, however I certainly was not...I did not cut off any of those relationships because I wasn't being fulfilled emotionally. Sexually they certainly were wonderful, and that for a very good part did keep me there, and somewhat tied to those relationships. No matter how deleterious the effects may have been on my personality or my persona or my wellbeing, not to shift focus from that again, going back to my wife, I attribute it more to a maturation of sorts... That I kind of...and I don't really like this term, but for lack of a better one, I had "played the field" as much as I wanted at that point, and I felt I had gathered and gained indeed the experience I was looking for to see...What I was really looking for what would fulfill me, and I was unsure of it in those earlier relationships. I certainly would have been very aware of the physical attributes that I'm attracted to, however I never was certain of what I was completely looking for. And by those earlier relationships, it certainly confirmed my...what type of things I was sexually attracted to, and what was lacking in them that I desired as well. (pause) Have I gone to off track?

I: No. Could you say more about the notion of, "hormonally fueled?"

P: My hormones? (laughing)

I: ...help me to understand exactly what you're talking about in terms of desire, in the first instance.

P: Right. I think, certainly at that age, and that age for me being eighteen years old, eighteen – twenty one, I probably was thinking more with my body than my head at that point. Having just been initiated into the world of sexual intercourse, I was intrigued to explore every possibility I could, and granted with this same ideal body type I have. Probably at that point, I wasn't very aware of the other things I was looking for. However, that certainly...I don't know...I've kind of come to an impasse I think. I probably need you to motivate me.

I: OK. Let's see if we can motivate you. How important would you say that appearance is for either kind of desire?

P: The ratio to emotional?

I: Yeah. Or just in general.

P: Oh...I'm gonna say 40%...40 – 60%. Sixty being the emotional fulfillment. I'd say it's very important.

I: In both instances?

P: In both instances, yes.

I: Are we really talking about – I don't want to put words in your mouth –

P: No, no, no...

I: I'm trying to make sense out of what you've been saying...Is desire experientially the same for you, in both instances, or are we suggesting that there are two kinds of desire for you? One predicated on exclusively physical kinds of things, and the other more involving emotions, or...

P: I suppose what I was trying to say before with the early relationships, is probably physical attractiveness was probably...the ratio was more lopsided. I'd say the physical attributes probably played a much more important role. Like I was saying before, I think after I had gone through those experiences and kind of assessed them in my mind over a period of time, and what was unfulfilling...I went through about an eight month period where I wasn't seeing anyone and it

really did give me a long time to reflect on those things that had come before. And while the physical part is very important, I found it...to be...for there to be something lacking. But in those earlier cases, I would probably say the physical attractiveness was a very important part.

I: You've used, "fulfilling" to describe both of these situations. Are you talking about different kinds of fulfillment?

P: I would say one is a...I would characterize one as solely...well, or majority of being physically fulfilling, and I'd describe the latter one as a...more of a...emotional and physical fulfillment, and not necessarily in that order.

I: Not necessarily in that order?

P: No. (laughs).

I: Is that what we are really talking about? Two different kinds of desire? Is that too strong a thing to say? It's just that we've been talking about your experiences as if they're in two camps...

P: Well I...Maybe I should...

I: ...which is fine. I just...

P: No. no.

I: If that's the way you understand it, then that's the way I want to understand it.

P: I suppose what I was trying to say about, with my wife, is that...Really those two different camps, which I probably did perceive it more earlier on in my experiences with women as two different things, really I saw them as combined within the relationship with my wife. And that's why it is more fulfilling. It's only through that reflection in those experiences, that I understood that.

I: So the second is not simply fulfilling in a different sense, it's actually more fulfilling...

P: It's...

I: ...it's like you got both...

P: I've got everything I want.

I: Oh, she would be so happy!

P: I've got the ideal body type. I'm very sorry if there's any women listening to this tape, I don't mean to be offensive.

I: They have no idea what your ideal body type is.

P: OK.

I: Why should they feel offended? They can all fantasize about it being them, whatever their body type is.

P: But yes, I do find my relationship now...and I don't think I could just ever have a purely physical relationship ever again...purely physical. I mean I don't...I guess what I'm alluding to is some kind of infidelity, but not that I could ever would or attempt something like that, but I...regardless of there being peaks and valleys to our relationship, I recognize that I am more fulfilled in this relationship in every regard, sexually, emotionally...than I was with any previous relationship before.

I: You suggested that this is something that has changed for you over time. You referred to it as a maturity of sorts.

P: Right.

I: Could you say a bit more about that?

P: Well, it was over time, but it was...the process was probably a little more accelerated than in most people just because most people become sexually active, in some capacity or another, earlier than I did. And really for me, I guess it was late 17 – 21, it was a 4-year period, 3 to 4 year period, where it was very intense and very quick. And I kind of ran through the gamut of relationships in...that most people start in high school or even in junior high...I mean I had plenty of friends who were sexually active as freshmen in high school. And for whatever reason, my inability to let my feelings be known to women, you know, it didn't happen until later on. So I did go through that process, and it seems like everyone does go through that process, but at a later time and probably at a more accelerated rate.

I: So desire for you early on was very physical.

P: I think I associated my emotional needs being met by my friends. And I suppose this is why I saw them more as separate in that you had a significant other or a girlfriend or boyfriend whatever, to fulfill your more sexual needs.

I: What did you mean by, "thinking with the body" as an aspect of this first, earlier kind of desire?

P: Well...I just don't want to put it in more cruder terms. Although I'd be glad to. Just letting go with more of...more primal urges, I suppose. God that's just like speaking cliches. I'm sorry for speaking in cliches.

I: I don't care. After this process of, "maturity" then, down through the ages, desire has become for you something that now is completely different in that sense, in that it's not purely physical anymore, right?

P: No.

I: Ok. And now how would you describe it? I know you have been doing that. I'm just trying to hammer on the same thing.

P: Redundancy is a good thing, believe me.

I: Every once in a while something new will emerge out of this dialogue.

P: It's like squeezing a small orange or something, not much juice in there.

I: Things that you've mentioned are the involvement of complex emotions, the forming of a bond...You've said that your partner now is conscious of the needs and desires of others. I mean, those are things that you could explore and say a bit more about. You mentioned her altruism.

P: Well, one thing I will say that's probably very, very important...My wife and I have what I feel and what she feels...we've discussed it...is a very, very strong bond with one another. Neither of us believe in divorce really. We pretty much believe in, you find someone and you commit to them. My wife did not come...Her parents are still together. They've been married for 35 years. I came from a...my parents got divorced when I was two. I was from my father's fourth marriage, and my father's been married five times. But I've always believed very heavily in the institution of marriage, and I think that in itself, that commitment that assures you that we will be together no matter what. We will weather the worst times, and we'll sail on the good times. Sorry, I should shoot myself for saying something that stupid. But anyway, I think that in itself is very powerful to me, and it's securing and I think it allows you to kind of transcend a lot of the physical and emotional baggage. You can kind of move it to a different plateau, or another level, and you can explore many things, sexuality and emotions with this person, without fear of any sort of a reprimand or you know, humiliation. It does afford a sense of comfort and security. And not to say that I have the ultimate, perfect relationship. Obviously we have our problems, like anyone does

in a relationship. However, I know that my wife will always be there for me, and I for her, barring death or some other horrible accident.

I: In this other kind of desire, this more mature kind of desire...What was I going to say?

P: We can redefine that if you like.

I: No that's just fine. I don't want to redefine anything. Even if you want to expand on that, that's fine. But I'm trying to stay with the words you have actually used. So in terms of this more mature kind of desire, all these things that you've mentioned are aspects of the experience of desire for you. Not just a purely physical thing,

P: Right.

I: ...now desire is really about this bond, this sense of a strong bond with someone, this sense of commitment, and the security and comfort that that provides. Something that you did say that's interesting, that I have developed an interest in myself, is the notion of that situation providing the opportunity to explore and do other things. Could you say more about that?

P: Well, it's difficult to say since I've never experienced this in another relationship, and obviously it would...you really...I guess that would contradict that whole notion of that type of relationship, 'cause obviously you could never be that committed to someone, if you weren't with them anymore, unless of course they've died or some other terrible incident happened to them. I don't feel I...When I was dating...OK I was committed...Before I met my wife I was dating another woman who, I did have a...We did have a very strong commitment to one another, but not as strong as my wife and I have. We had actually talked about getting married ourselves. But there was always a somewhat underlying hesitancy on possibly both our parts. And I think because of that...Well I'll just say what had happened. We had a really traumatic incident and she had got pregnant. She had been pregnant once before when she was in high school and had an abortion. She came from a very strict, Greek orthodox family, and of course they didn't know about her first abortion. And I had wanted...I said, well we're committed to one another, although I did not want to have children at that time, and I don't necessarily want to have them at this time either, I said well, if we're gonna be committed to one another, why don't we just have the child. Well, unfortunately that did break us up, but...With my wife, and I'd say even if we weren't married, we had this type of commitment before we were even married, this wouldn't have even been an issue. I would have felt completely secure with this incident. And granted, it is a very traumatic incident, especially when it's unplanned. And that's how I feel we've somewhat transcended that. I feel we can have complete faith in one another, to ride out any problems, and just to

experience things probably in a different way because of that commitment. I don't think either of us are having to constantly worry or second guess our feelings or our commitment, or our love for one another. We understand that it's underlying, not to say that it doesn't need to be reiterated from time to time, certainly it does. But it certainly has brought a lot of security to both our lives.

I: You used the word comfortable. Is that just part of the same sense of security?

P: Uh uh. I try and not use the same word over and over again. Don't want to beat it to death.

I: You said that your partner's sense of balanced altruism was very attractive to you.

P: Uh uh.

I: What did you mean by that?

P: I really admire and find attractive, someone who is willing... Maybe altruism isn't the proper word, because altruism really would be defined as someone who gives of themselves regardless of themselves. And I guess what I meant by balanced altruism was that my wife is a very giving person and she will give a 110% of herself, however she would never get into a situation where she would [end of tape]

So anyway, I find someone that's very conscious of someone else's needs and desires... I suppose that someone like myself, I try to be very conscious of those things myself, and I suppose when I see it in someone else, I know that the potential for like a reciprocal thing, is great.

I: And this reciprocal aspect of a potential relationship is important in this kind of desire?

P: That's right.

I: In the other kind of desire, in the other camp, what about this reciprocal aspect of the relationship? Or is the relationship really important in the same sense we've been talking about?

P: We're talking about the physical aspect now?

I: Well you tell me.

P: You said the other so, which one. I thought we were talking about the emotional one, not the physical one. I don't think there could be any sort of reciprocal...besides they don't look like my wife.

I: So there's no reciprocity in the...

P: That's called narcissism. Hopefully, God, if any woman looked like me, I'd run away from them as fast as I could. It would be terrifying.

I: So it's not important, in the hormonally fueled type of desire, for the other person to be as conscious of the needs and desires of others? You don't really expect that.

P: No. I think that's more of a selfish use of...It was a...using one another for mutual purposes of sexual satisfaction.

I: And the second kind of desire is definitely better. Is that what you're saying?...Rather than the hormonally fueled, primal urges?

P: The hormonally fueled desires (laughing) in and of themselves, they're not bad, but by the...It's not as if I think I think someone who has these things are like nefarious, a demon from hell or anything, but I think without...There's kind of a symmetry when you have both components. And I think they compliment, and they play off of each other very well. So I think what you're looking for is more of a balance.

I: Is the "primal urge" component as intense and strong...is it the same in the second kind of situation?

P: It's more intense.

I: It's even more intense?

P: Uh, uh. Because there's that trust there. I think, sexually, I'm...I think our sexual...our sex is probably ten times, a hundred times better, because of it...because there is that mutual trust. (pause) I think for myself, having those...having had several one-night stands, that there was some component in that component being some type of emotional commitment or security missing, was very evident in those situations for me, very evident. And because of that, it detracted from the sex. Even if you're just trying to have a...a purely carnal experience, you can't really just give of yourself completely, you're gonna withhold something, something probably very intangible that I can't put into words at all.

I: So a lack of any kind of a bond, or any kind of a sense of trust...

P: Uh uh.

I: ...actually made the sex not all that it could be.

P: Correct.

I: Even in these relationships supposedly predicated on "primal urges" (both laugh)...

P: Right, right. In so many words, it only goes so far. It only takes you, maybe, half way home.

I: ...the primal urges?

P: ...the primal urges. But I don't think there's anything morally wrong; I'm not ashamed of those things. I have no problems with any of those things whatsoever, but I think, as I said before, I think there has to be somewhat of a symmetry there, for it to be completely fulfilling to myself. I know that, it's not even that I guess; I know that.

I: What do you mean by somewhat of a "symmetry?"

P: Well, with the emotional component. I think that you need to have a balance. For myself I need to have that balance.

I: I assume you mean the emotional connection as well as the...

P: Right.

I: ...the primal urges.

P: You know, I don't know if I've ever had the emotional by itself. I suppose one could say you've had that with a parent, but I probably would disagree [you and me both]. 'Cause it is different when you have a significant other. You know, a parent is more nurturing and that type of thing, and was not looking to be nurtured by a significant other. I mean if I was, I probably wasn't ready for a relationship.

I: I do know one guy who married someone who basically mothers him.

P: Was that the one you were talking about?

I: Yeah, I can't get him out of my mind. It's almost like the other pole. You've got all sex on one end. Somewhere in the middle you have sense of symmetry. And

then you've got people who are beyond the pail at the other end, who have essentially married a parental figure.

P: I've thought about that several times since you brought that up, and you're right, that whole Madonna/prostitute complex is really interesting. But, interestingly enough, I did not have a very supportive family when I was growing up, but I found my security and what I lacked from my parents at that time, in other forms. So I never did feel that lacking in me for whatever reason. In many regards, not sexually, but I did feel very mature. In many regards I was very mature for my age, at a very young age. (pause) I find these seats very uncomfortable.

I: They are, aren't they.

P: I'm not fidgeting cause I'm nervous. (laughs)

I: I don't think these are high-quality seats. These are like a sponge, not ergonomically designed. So sex is ten times better when there is mutual trust?

P: I don't know if I could... That's not a quantification...

I: I'm not going to hold you to the "ten times."

P: Right.

I: But it is experienced by you as being much better...

P: Right. Right.

I: ...because of the mutual trust.

P: (pause) Definitely.

I: Could you say more about the notion of "reciprocity?" In this kind of relationship where you actually have a bond with someone and a sense of commitment.

P: Well, as I was saying before, I would not define a relationship as... It's not give and take. It's not one-sided. I'd say there's equal give and take, back and forth; there is a sharing there. And it may not be at the same time. Certainly there are cycles where I may need some more emotional support than my wife does, and she'll give it to me and vice versa. There's other times when we may both be going through some kind of stress or crisis where we try to assist one another emotionally, or whatever form. And we're very conscious of that. We're very, very aware of what each other's needs and desires are. And once again, I'm not

saying we maybe fulfill the other person, but we try. And we try to have a very good rapport with one another. We try to be very conversant about these things. There's not a lot of assumption in our relationship, a lot of times... We actually talk things out, but we're also very aware of each other's feelings just from having this security within our relationship.

I: One's crap and one isn't. You've used that phrase a lot...

P: Hey, it works for me. "One's crap, one's not."

I: What about the physical experience of desire? Is it the same for you in these two instances? I mean, we've talked a lot about emotional aspects, or lack thereof. Is desire primarily about these kinds of experiences for you? Is connection, or not connection with the other person?... Well you said that in the first instance, the lack of an emotional element was something that you were aware of...

P: Right.

I: Is that something that's in the forefront of your experience of desire regardless of which kind it is? In the one case I guess you'd be aware of the lack of a sense of emotional commitment or connection, and in the other one... Are you primarily aware of all these emotional aspects of your relationship? Or are there more physical kinds of things? Do the physical experiences differ between the two kinds of desire?

P: Is there a difference? Is that...

I: Some people in describing their experiences of desire talk about feeling flushed or talk about feeling heat or...

P: It's an actual physical...

I: Right. And I'm saying, is desire more about these issues, for you, in terms of your experience of desire...?

P: I'd say so. I'd say so...

I: Which is just fine.

P: I don't really put it in a physiological level. I don't... I'm very unaware of my own body... I'm not saying sexually, obviously I'm very aware of it, because I've got those, "primal urges." (laughing) But I could be completely stressed out, and my body all tensed up, and I'd be completely unaware of it. So I don't really think

in those terms, for whatever reason. Maybe I try to intellectualize it too much. I'm not certain. I just know I don't really think about that aspect of it.

I: That's fine.

P: It is present; I don't know how to read it.

I: Is there anything that we haven't talked about that you would like to contribute to the permanent record here? This goes on your permanent record...About your experiences of desire? I mentioned the physical attributes because sometimes other people mention them. I thought maybe there is something in your awareness that we haven't talked about yet for whatever reason. But if that's not a part of your experience, that's great. Any final observations or comments that you would like to make...that we haven't explored?

P: Well, the only think I can think of is that because of the way my relationship is now, with my wife, I must say I'm very much more optimistic about my future. And I don't have a sense of foreboding that I need to accomplish something right now. And it has really freed me up in a lot of ways, maybe this sounds somewhat selfish, well not selfish; but in a strange way it has freed me up to really pursue my life as well. 'Cause I'm not solely searching for these things, and it seems to me many people, they get fixated on the whole notion of sex and relationships and are unable to pursue other areas that they may be interested in much more. And I can say that? Hey, I could sit on a box for the rest of my life and probably be content, so...

I: ...sit on a box? (laughing)

P: ...I'm not saying I'm going for a Ph.D. or anything, not to say there's anything wrong with that.

I: Sit on a box? You've already complained about that nice cushion!

P: Yeah, I know.

I: I'm just teasing.

P: Alright, a well-cushioned box.

I: OK, well are you burned out? In terms of exploring these issues?

P: I could talk about it forever.

VITA

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