

SEXUAL COMMUNICATION IN ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS:  
AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE DISCLOSURE OF SEXUAL FANTASIES

BY

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## ABSTRACT

This study explored the communication of sexual fantasies in romantic relationships. While self-disclosure of sexual likes and dislikes has been positively associated with sexual satisfaction (Cupach & Metts, 1991), no study has specifically examined the private disclosure of sexual fantasies. Guided by communication privacy management theory (Petronio, 2002), this research investigated the rewards and costs associated with disclosing sexual fantasies to one's romantic partner. Moreover, the research examined the relationship between the willingness to discuss sexual fantasies and sexual satisfaction, along with how the content of the sexual fantasy might influence the decision to disclose. An online questionnaire featuring open- and closed-ended questions was used to measure participants' willingness to discuss sexual fantasies, rewards associated with this discussion, motivations for avoiding this topic, sexual satisfaction, and relational satisfaction. Participants ( $N = 370$ ) were also asked to write down their favorite or most recurring sexual fantasy. The results of this study indicated that those individuals who have acted out their sexual fantasies, and/or those that are more willing to discuss their sexual fantasies, have higher sexual satisfaction. Results also indicated the content of one's sexual fantasy does have an influence on whether one discloses or acts out a fantasy. A variety of rewards and costs were also found to be associated with disclosing sexual fantasies to one's romantic partner. Results from this study have important implications for both researchers and romantic couples.

## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION AND RATIONALE

Both researchers and sex therapists note the importance of understanding and studying sexual fantasies. Sexual fantasy has been shown to be related to a number of variables associated with sexual satisfaction. Leitenberg and Henning (1995) contend that the majority of research on sexual fantasies seems to indicate that more frequent sexual fantasy contributes to greater sexual desire, more orgasms during intercourse, greater arousability, fewer sexual problems, and even greater sexual satisfaction in general.

Researchers have also argued that sexual fantasies may be used to enhance the performance or pleasure of sexual activities (Eisenman, 1982; Leitenberg & Henning, 1995). In a review of literature on sexual fantasy, Hill (2008) reported that more frequent sexual fantasies contribute to greater levels of sexual activity and enhanced sexual experiences. In addition, studies have reported a positive association between orgasmic frequency during sex and frequency of sexual fantasy (Arndt, Foehl, & Good, 1985; Epstein & Smith, 1957; Lentz & Zeiss, 1983; Wilson, 1978). Moreover, research has found that a lack of sexual fantasies or guilt about sexual fantasies can contribute to sexual dysfunction (Cado & Leitenberg, 1990; Zimmer, Borchardt, & Fischie, 1983). Infrequent sexual fantasy is shown to be one of the defining criteria for the sexual disorder inhibited sexual desire (Leitenberg & Henning, 1995).

While research has reported the sexual benefits of having sexual fantasies, it still remains uncertain if sharing sexual fantasies with a romantic partner will also produce sexual benefits. For example, a benefit of sexual fantasies as argued by Leitenberg and Henning (1995), and later Dubois (1997), is that sexual fantasies are private, do not depend solely on the participation of a partner, and can often be experienced by an individual without the negative consequences (such



as embarrassment, or rejection) that one might receive if they told someone. Therefore, it is unclear if the benefits of sexual fantasies discussed above are lost if the sexual fantasy is shared.

Sex therapists and self-help authors argue that sharing sexual fantasies with one's romantic partner will help strengthen a couple's sexual satisfaction (see Altman, 2004; Gabriel, 1996; Hooper, 2001; Keesling, 2005). Empirical research, however, has yet to substantiate this claim. The researcher could find no studies that have examined the relationship between disclosure of sexual fantasies and sexual satisfaction. In addition, only a few studies have even explored the extent to which individuals communicate their sexual fantasies (Askmen.com, 2010; Coffelt & Hess, 2006; Davidson & Hoffman, 1986). So while individuals might enjoy thinking about their sexual fantasies to help with their sexual desire or sexual pleasure, the question remains whether they would also improve their sex life by sharing and/or acting out their favorite sexual fantasies.

Research has reported a significant correlation between sexual satisfaction and sexual communication in romantic relationships. For example, Cupach and Metts (1991) found sexual communication to influence sexual satisfaction in two ways: (1) greater sexual satisfaction is the result of greater disclosure of specific sexual likes and dislikes, which is means of obtaining information about a partner's sexual preferences, and (2) self-disclosure about sexual preferences in itself enhances intimacy and relational satisfaction. Open communication about sex is expected to result in more sexual rewards and fewer sexual costs as couples communicate their likes and dislikes (MacNeil & Byers, 2005). Therefore, it would stand to reason that individuals might want to share their sexual fantasies because of the benefits associated with sexual self-disclosure. However, sexual fantasies are considered a different type of sexual self-disclosure than sexual likes, dislikes, or preferences (see Barker, 2006; Herold & Way, 1988; Wideman, Welsh, McNulty, & Little, 2006). Coffelt and Hess (2006) discovered that couples associate

sexual fantasies to be one of the more private topics in their relationship, and more difficult to discuss than sexual preferences. Further, Anderson, Gibeau, and D'Amora (1995) found sexual fantasies to be very personal to the owner of the fantasy.

Sexual fantasies are not only highly personal, but they can be quite involved. A sexual fantasy may contain very specific details of sexual acts and occurrences that one often finds erotic and sexually arousing (Leitenberg & Henning, 1995). Sexual fantasies not only involve sexual techniques and positions that one would associate with the disclosure of sexual likes; sexual fantasies may also involve a story, a scene, and/or an environment. Sexual fantasies can involve conversations, settings, time of day, temperature, clothing, and other specifics; everything one would associate with the imagery of a story or complex narrative. In his book about sexual fantasies, Kahr (2008) found that most people associate sexual fantasies with a set of sexual scenes with sexual imagery and sexual dialogue that one finds sexually arousing. On one hand, the private and involved nature of a sexual fantasy might make them difficult to discuss; on the other hand, the sharing and/or enacting of the sexual imagery and sexual dialogue found in a sexual fantasy, could provide the owner of the fantasy with enhanced sexual pleasure or satisfaction in their relationship. Research studies need to explore the extent to which couples are disclosing and acting out their sexual fantasies.

This study addresses three important theoretical contributions guided by a framework that incorporates privacy management and sexual self-disclosure. First, it explores the potentially positive relationship between sharing sexual fantasies and sexual satisfaction, along with the relationship between acting out sexual fantasies and sexual satisfaction. Second, it examines the costs and rewards associated with the disclosure of sexual fantasies to help determine how individuals in romantic relationship manage the decision to reveal or conceal this private topic. Third, this study seeks to develop an understanding how the content and specificity of the sexual

fantasy may influence the decision to disclose this topic, and then examines the consequences of sharing or not sharing this topic with one's romantic partner.

To help explain the relationships that were explored in this study, a conceptual model of sexual fantasy disclosure was created (see Figure 1). In Figure 1, the model demonstrates how the decision to reveal a sexual fantasy comes from the consideration of costs and rewards, which is also influenced by the theme and specificity/involvement of the sexual fantasy content. The model also explores whether there is a difference in sexual satisfaction score between those that reveal or conceal their sexual fantasy. The difference in sexual satisfaction score is also examined in terms of acting out the sexual fantasy. Finally, the model explains that the content of the sexual fantasy might also influence the sexual satisfaction scores of those sharing and acting out their sexual fantasy.

This initial chapter has focused on the purpose and rationale for the current study. Chapter two provides the theoretical framework for understanding the conceptual model proposed in Figure 1, while summarizing literature on sexual fantasies, sexual satisfaction, sexual self-disclosure, and topic avoidance. The third and fourth chapters summarize the method and results of the study. The final chapter discusses the findings of the study, as well as the implications for future research related to the disclosure of sexual fantasies in romantic relationships.

## CHAPTER TWO

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### **Theoretical Framework**

The first part of this chapter explores the decision to reveal or conceal in the conceptual model. According to Figure 1, the decision to reveal consists of not only weighing the costs and rewards of the disclosure, but also consideration of the specific content of the sexual fantasy. To help understand the tension involved in this decision to reveal, communication privacy management (CPM, Petronio, 2002) was applied. CPM is a theory about disclosure that helps explain the tension and decision individuals face when revealing private information. CPM has been utilized to frame many studies on sexual conversations (e.g., Faulkner & Lannutti, 2010; Greene, Derlega, Yep, & Petronio, 2003). Petronio (2002) argues that the balance of privacy and disclosure is vital to the way individuals manage relationships.

With CPM, the decision to disclose is no longer an individual one. Individuals establish rules that govern how they share private information with one another. It is a relational negotiation of the rules by which the information is stored and managed. Coffelt and Hess (2006) used CPM as a backdrop to understand the reluctance of mothers and daughters to engage in communication about sex. Using participant interviews, Coffelt and Hess (2006) found that the avoidance of sexual issues depended on the perceived privacy of the information. This finding is consistent with CPM. Recently, Faulkner and Lannutti (2010) used CPM as a theoretical framework to understand the sexual and relational outcomes of adolescent's satisfying and unsatisfying conversations about sex with romantic partners. Faulkner and Lannutti (2010) found the results of sexual conversations of young adults to include relational consequences of distrust, anger, understanding, and being afraid to talk to a partner, as well as sexual outcomes such as

better sex, condom use, and better sex talk. Their results suggest the costs and rewards of sexual disclosure have implications for the effectiveness of sexual communication.

In CPM, discussing or revealing very private issues may cause discomfort. Petronio (1991, 2000, 2002) assumed that the revelation of otherwise private information in a relationship may leave individuals feeling vulnerable and/or resentful. Therefore, Petronio (2002) argued the choices and rules that individuals make on what to disclose and what to withhold is based on the criterion one uses to decide the potential rewards and costs of disclosing. Thus, it is important to understand what motivates individuals to either disclose or conceal their sexual fantasies. As noted by Faulkner and Lannutti (2010), sexual self-disclosure about topics like sexual fantasies might “increase sexual rewards and overall relationship satisfaction or decrease rewards and cost individuals through stigma, loss of face, and role and relationship risks” (p. 376). Unlike other rule-based theories, in CPM individuals have to manage the reveal/conceal tension when there are good reasons for both. For example, an individual might see the reward of improving sexual variety, enhancing sexual pleasure, or possibly dealing with sexual frustrations, but at the same time might avoid the subject for fear of rejection, embarrassment, or judgment. According to CPM, individuals are very protective of their disclosures, especially when they are private (Petronio, 2002). Because of the private and personal nature of one’s sexual fantasies, it is highly likely that individuals will often avoid disclosing their sexual fantasies and/or need to estimate a high amount of rewards in disclosing such a private topic.

### **Topic Avoidance**

Examining the reasons behind topic avoidance in romantic relationships is important for many reasons. The majority of research on topic avoidance in romantic relationships has revealed topic avoidance to be negatively associated with relational satisfaction (Caughlin & Afifi, 2004; Caughlin & Golish, 2002; Finkenauer & Hazam, 2000; Knobloch & Carpenter-

Theune, 2004). Topic avoidance itself has been associated with diminishing the maintenance and enhancement of romantic relationships (Aron, Norman, & Aron, 2001), as well as weakening the strength of the romantic relationship (Masheter & Harris, 1986). Openness is considered constructive, and a willingness to deal with issues directly is a key point for managing conflict (Rubin, Pruitt, & Kim, 1994). Openness about sex specifically has also been argued as essential for overcoming sexual problems in romantic relationships (Tiefer, 2004).

As has been established, topic avoidance can be a major issue in romantic relationships (Caughlin & Vangelisti, 2000; Gottman, 1979). While the negative association between topic avoidance and relational satisfaction has been well documented, more recent research has shown that the relationship between topic avoidance and relational satisfaction may be dependent on the particular circumstances surrounding it, and the motivations behind the avoidance (e.g., Caughlin & Afifi, 2004; Donovan-Kicken & Caughlin, 2010). For example, Donovan-Kicken and Caughlin (2010) surveyed 140 women and discovered the association between topic avoidance and relational satisfaction to be more negative when participants reported their avoidance to be caused by a belief that talk would be futile. Caughlin and Afifi (2004) also discovered that topic avoidance was dissatisfying to a couple if it was motivated by the belief that relational partners are unresponsive. Because the reasons and motivations behind the avoidance influence the relationship between topic avoidance and relational satisfaction, it becomes important to focus on the specific reasons why an individual might avoid a topic such as sexual fantasies.

**Possible reasons for avoidance.** In terms of overall topic avoidance, research has consistently indicated that individuals avoid topics for several reasons. Individuals in romantic relationships are often motivated to avoid topics to protect oneself in order to avoid embarrassment or vulnerability (Afifi & Guerrero, 2000; Greene, Derlega, Yep & Petronio, 2003; Guerrero & Afifi, 1995; Ijams & Miller, 2000; Roloff & Ifert, 2000); to protect others and

the relationship in order to avert relationship problems, like conflict (Afifi & Guerrero, 2000; Dindia & Allen, 1992; Ijams & Miller, 2000; Roloff & Ifert, 1998; Rosenfeld, 1979; Zhang & Siminoff, 2003); and to prevent futile or inappropriate discussions of certain topics (Cloven & Roloff, 1994; Gilbar & Ben-Zur, 2002; Salander & Spetz, 2002).

In addition, people might avoid discussing their sexual fantasies because they believe that no good could come of it. Individuals often avoid sensitive topics because they label them inappropriate or unacceptable to talk about. Individuals or couples may believe sexual fantasy talk is taboo, or off limits (Baxter & Wilmot, 1985; Guerrero & Afifi, 1995). There is also evidence they use avoidance to maintain appropriate relational boundaries (Hatfield, 1984), and talking about sexual fantasies may be inappropriate because the relationship has not progressed far enough to warrant such a discussion (Afifi, Caughlin, & Afifi, 2007; Guerrero & Afifi, 1995). It could be possible that a relationship would lack the level of closeness needed for intimate disclosure (Caughlin & Afifi, 2004; Roloff & Ifert, 1998). For example, in the realm of sexual communication, the argument has been made that sexual communication increases as a relationship progresses (MacNeil & Byers, 2009). As a relationship progresses, the levels of trust and rapport may increase enough to allow an individual to feel comfortable discussing more private issues.

**Avoidance of sex.** Avoidance of sexual topics and ambiguity in communication about sex are the norm in most romantic relationships (Widman, Welsh, McNulty, & Little, 2006). Most individuals believe sexual information is private and requires protection (Faulkner & Mansfield, 2002; Petronio, 2002). Even though sexual conversations are important, many individuals are uncomfortable and/or unskilled at having conversations with partners and potential partners about sex (Allen, Emmers-Sommer, & Crowell, 2001). Recent research has

found discussions of sexual pleasure produce just as many unsatisfying conversations as they do satisfying conversations (Faulkner & Lannutti, 2010).

In addition, most people admit that they are embarrassed to talk about sex (Tiefer, 2004). As Tiefer (2004) notes, “To talk about sexual daydreams and feelings in a straightforward fashion feels like it breaks some taboo and you are a bad person” (p. 86). Parker, Ivanov, Chamberlain, and Tigner (2007) also found that participants felt too embarrassed or uncomfortable discussing sex. These authors also found that participants would rather engage in an unwanted sexual relationship than lose the approval, affection, attention, or love of their partners. Another possible reason why individuals might avoid the discussion of sexual fantasies is the fear of being labeled sexually abnormal. In her sexual normalcy research, Tiefer (2004) argues that people care deeply about how others view the normality of their sexuality. It stands to reason, then, that these issues could influence the reluctance that people face when deciding to disclose their sexual fantasies.

Additional reasons why sexual topics are often avoided involve the extreme anxiety, negative beliefs, and guilt associated with sex and sexuality (Garcia & Carrigan, 1998). In their review of the sexual fantasy literature, Leitenberg and Henning (1995) found in the majority of studies, individuals associate guilt with sexual fantasies. While their review did not mention guilt as a possible reason for individuals to avoid disclosing their sexual fantasies to their partner, it did show a clear relationship between guilt and frequency of sexual fantasy. For example, numerous studies have discovered that individuals who report higher sex guilt also had fewer sexual fantasies and experienced less sexual arousal (e.g., Follingstad & Kimbrell, 1986; Green & Mosher, 1985; Moreault & Follingstad, 1978; Pelletier & Herold, 1988). To address this possible avoidance, and to discover the rewards and costs associated with the disclosure of sexual fantasies, the following research questions were asked:



RQ1: What potential rewards are perceived by individuals who choose to disclose their sexual fantasies with their romantic partner?

RQ2: Why do individuals in romantic relationships avoid talking about their own or their partner's sexual fantasies?

### **Content of Sexual Fantasy**

According to the conceptual model (Figure 1), the decision to reveal is also influenced by the content of the sexual fantasy. The content of the sexual fantasy consists of the themes involved in the fantasy, and the specificity/involvement of the sexual fantasy.

**Sexual fantasy themes.** When considering the motivation that causes individuals to conceal or reveal his or her sexual fantasy to their partner, it is important to consider how the themes contained in a sexual fantasy might influence the potential disclosure. At the end of their review of sexual fantasies, Leitenberg and Henning (1995) hypothesized that willingness to share fantasies may depend on the content of the fantasies themselves. It is possible that the themes of the fantasy may make the decision to reveal much more difficult, especially if the owner of the fantasy feels that his or her sexual fantasy may be considered overly risqué or inappropriate. The worry about judgment and ridicule one might feel could possibly keep an individual from disclosing such a fantasy. The nature of the act and who it is with could both be a factor when deciding whether to tell one's romantic partner.

Past research has found that individuals have a variety of themes contained in their sexual fantasies. A review of the literature associated with sexual fantasies finds four common fantasy themes. Individuals often fantasize about: (1) multiple sexual partners, (2) sex with strangers or celebrities, (3) sexual power, and/or (4) people and situations from the past.

**Multiple sexual partners.** Multiple studies have found the theme of group sexual imagery (e.g., group sexual activity) to be found in sexual fantasies (see Gee, Devilly, & Ward, 2004).

Hunt (1974) also found a common theme to be multiple sex partners of the opposite sex at the same time.

***Sex with strangers or celebrities.*** Hunt (1974) found a common theme of sexual fantasies for men and women in his research study to be intercourse with a stranger. Other researchers have found common themes in the general population to include sex with a celebrity or with a new partner (Howitt, 2004; Shanor, 1978; Sue, 1979; Wilson & Lang, 1981).

***Sexual power.*** Several other researchers have identified forced sexual experiences as common themes of sexual fantasy. Hunt (1974) found sexual contact involving force to be a common sexual fantasy. In one study, Arndt, Foehl, and Good (1985) administered a survey to 263 individuals. Participants were asked to indicate on a 7-point scale the frequency to which they fantasized about a given fantasy during the past year. Each participant was given a multitude of sexual fantasy themes derived from past studies. They discovered that a third of the participants admitted to fantasizing about forcing someone into sexual activities (Arndt et al., 1985). Leitenberg and Henning (1995) reported that across seven studies, 31.1% of males in the general population reported fantasies of forced sexual contact. The themes of sexual power and irresistibility, along with submission-dominance scenes have been found in multiple studies (see Gee, Devilly, & Ward, 2004).

***People and situations from the past.*** Conventional homosexual or heterosexual imagery with past, present, or imaginary lovers usually known to the person is a common theme of sexual fantasies. According to Leitenberg and Henning's (1995) review on the literature of sexual fantasies, people and situations that have caused sexual arousal in the past will often become the subject of a person's fantasies later on. Sexual fantasies often incorporate sexual themes from one or more previous sexual experiences (Hunt, 1974; Plaud & Bigwood, 1997). Sexual fantasies often also include people that are not one's current romantic partner (Gil, 1990). According to

Altman (2004), 90% of men and 75% of women have fantasies that do not include their lover. It may be difficult, therefore, to tell one's partner about a sexual fantasy that involves someone other than them.

Knowledge and visuals associated with one's past sexual experience may make the current partner feel jealous, insecure, or inadequate (Anderson, Kunkel, & Dennis, 2011). Therefore a disclosure such as this might make one or both parties feel extremely jealous and hurt the relationship. This scenario is even more likely when the current partner knows the individual that helped create the sexual fantasy. People tend to be the most jealous when they are familiar with or still know the individual in their lover's sexual fantasy, and the least jealous when they are not acquainted with these person(s) at all (Anderson et al., 2011; Pines & Aronson, 1983). In this situation, the specific theme(s) of the fantasy is influencing the decision to disclose. It remains uncertain however, which themes in sexual fantasies might cause individuals to avoid disclosing their fantasy to a partner. Due to the lack of research in this area, the following research questions were asked:

RQ3: How does the theme of one's sexual fantasy influence the disclosure of sexual fantasy to one's romantic partner?

RQ4: How does the theme of one's sexual fantasy influence the relationship between disclosure of sexual fantasies and sexual satisfaction?

**Specificity of fantasy.** Besides the specific themes of the sexual fantasy, this study also examines the relationship between the specificity of one's sexual fantasy with: (1) sexual satisfaction, (2) relational satisfaction, (3) comfort discussing one's sexual fantasies, and (4) comfort discussing partner's sexual fantasies. As was mentioned earlier, sexual fantasies can often be very elaborate and include specific situations or narratives (Kahr, 2008; Wilson, 1978). Of course, not all sexual fantasies contain elaborate and specific situations. Sexual fantasies can

differ greatly in their level of involvement and/or level of specificity. One person's sexual fantasy might include elaborate scenes, story lines, role play, costumes, or more; while another's might simply involve one or two details. Indeed, the amount of material and specifics in one's sexual fantasy needed to actually act out the fantasy could vary greatly. That level of involvement or specificity could influence the decision to disclose (or act out) a sexual fantasy.

In her interviews with the phone sex operators, Flowers (1998) noted how the operators marveled at how specific the fantasies were that the callers would want and use. It is that level of involvement and/or specificity that might have an influence on the dependent variables used in this study. For example, would someone with a highly elaborate and specific fantasy be more or less inclined to share that fantasy with their partner knowing how involved or difficult it may be? Would that person also experience an extreme amount of sexual pleasure if that highly specific and personal sexual fantasy was enacted? An important area of this study is to discover whether the more elaborate sexual fantasies are tougher or easier to disclose, and whether that disclosure would then lead to greater sexual or relational satisfaction. Hence, the following research questions were asked:

RQ5: How does the specificity/involvement of one's sexual fantasy influence the disclosure of sexual fantasy to one's romantic partner?

RQ6: How does the specificity/involvement of one's sexual fantasy influence the relationship between disclosure of sexual fantasies and sexual satisfaction?

### **Sexual Fantasies**

The third part of the conceptual model involves the relationship between the decision to reveal and the sexual satisfaction for the owner and revealer of the sexual fantasy. Research on sexual fantasies has been extensive on the common nature of sexual fantasies, and their positive influence on individuals. In their extensive review of the literature on fantasies, Leitenberg and

Henning (1995) conclude that some of the most common fantasies concern romance and sex. As pointed out by Wilson (1978), a sexual fantasy can be an elaborate story or it can be a fleeting thought of some romantic or sexual activity. It can involve bizarre imagery or it can be quite realistic. It can involve memories of past events or it can be a completely imaginary experience. Leitenberg and Henning (1995) define the term sexual fantasy as “any mental imagery that is sexually arousing or erotic to the individual” (p. 470). Sexual fantasies are extremely common among both men and women (Wilson, 1978, 1997). Leitenberg and Henning (1995) noted that 95% of all men and women report having fantasies in at least one context (e.g., while daydreaming, while masturbating, during sexual activity with a partner). Sexual fantasies are so frequent that women report experiencing a sexual fantasy or thought 4.5 times a day, while men experience a sexual fantasy or thought 7.2 times a day (Jones & Barlow, 1990).

Although past thinkers like Freud (e.g., 1962) have argued that the tendency to engage in sexual fantasy is a negative tendency involving deprivation of sufficient sexual satisfaction or psychological problems, the majority of research has found just the opposite. For example, Singer (1966) argued that sexual fantasies reflect having a healthy sexuality, and are simply another form of normal sexual stimulation used to promote sexual arousal and enjoyment. Ellis and Symons (1990) discovered that roughly 90% of participants reported that when they had a sexual fantasy, they enjoyed the feeling. Further, Hawkins (1974) argued that sexual fantasies provide healthy outlets for an individual to release erotic thoughts. Watkins (1990) advocates that fantasies can reveal one’s hopes and desires for the future, and can reveal wishes concerning sex and intimacy. The general idea behind such findings is that sexual fantasies are an integral part of sexual arousal.

Understanding sexual fantasies is seen as important to the scientific study of human sexuality (Plaud & Bigwood, 1997). Sexual fantasies are thought to stimulate or enhance

pleasurable sexual feelings (Leitenberg & Henning, 1995), and sustain or increase an individual's level of sexual arousal (Campagna, 1985). Further, empirical evidence supports the fact that sexual fantasy plays a role in developing and maintaining an individual's sexual repertoire (McGuire, Carlisle, & Young, 1964). Leitenberg and Henning (1995) reported that sexual fantasy can affect later behavior, reflect past experience, be connected to the commission of sexual offenses, and be used as an adjunct to sex therapy. Therefore, sexual fantasies may provide unique insight into the different scripts that may underlie sexual behavior in relationships (Gagnon & Simon, 1973; Leitenberg & Henning, 1995). Enough evidence clearly exists to warrant claims that sexual fantasies are important to understanding sexual thoughts (Dubois, 1997) and sexual behaviors (Eisenman, 1982; Malamuth, 1981).

### **Sexual Satisfaction**

A satisfying sexual relationship is an important component of many romantic relationships. This type of satisfaction is highly correlated with both relationship longevity and relational satisfaction (see Sprecher & Cate, 2004). Perhaps this is why researchers have referred to sexual satisfaction as a barometer for how well a relationship is doing (Sprecher & Cate, 2004). Using a multiple regression analysis obtained from a 70-item questionnaire from 797 married men and women, Young, Denny, Luquis, and Young (1998) discovered five predictor variables that comprise sexual satisfaction in married couples: (1) overall relational satisfaction, (2) satisfaction with non-sexual aspects of the relationship, (3) frequency of sex, (4) sexual functioning, and (5) sexual uninhibitedness.

**Overall relational satisfaction.** Sexual satisfaction has been found to be highly correlated with the overall satisfaction of the relationship. Further, sexual satisfaction has been found to be related to the quality of a relationship (e.g., intimacy, amount of physical affection, love, and relational satisfaction) (Lawrance & Byers, 1995; Oggins, Leber, & Veroff, 1993), and

relational stability (Sprecher, 2002). Cox (2003) notes that a quarter of the satisfaction one gets in a romantic relationship comes from the act of sex. Studies have also found that an increase or decrease in sexual satisfaction will produce a similar change in relational satisfaction.

Longitudinal evidence has shown that a change in sexual satisfaction is associated with a change in relationship satisfaction (e.g., Edwards & Booth, 1994; Sprecher, 2002).

**Satisfaction with non-sexual aspects of the relationship.** This variable is comprised of three items: shared goals, respect, and recreational companionship. A positive sexual relationship can influence many aspects of the relationship. For example, one's emotional relationship is also highly correlated with one's sexual satisfaction (Darling, Davidson, & Cox, 1991; Hulbert, Apt, & Rabehl, 1993; Rosenzweig & Dailey, 1989). Young et al. (1998) argued that the closeness of the romantic relationships is positively associated with sexual satisfaction. Young et al. (1998) found satisfaction with non-sexual aspects of the relationship to be the variable with the second highest correlation with sexual satisfaction.

**Sexual frequency.** Sexual frequency refers to how often a couple has sex. For the Young et al. (1998) study, frequency of sex was measured using a single item asking for the approximate number of occasions per month in which one has sexual activity with their spouse. Sexual frequency has been shown to have a major influence on sexual satisfaction. Couples that are more sexually active are more likely to stay together (Sprecher & Regan, 2000). The more frequent a couple has sex, the more likely they are to report having higher levels of general relational satisfaction. But when it comes to quality versus quantity of sex, quality better predicts relational outcomes (Sprecher & Regan, 2000).

**Sexual functioning.** This variable relates to the frequency of self and spouse orgasms. Research has shown that orgasms can play a major role in sexual and relational satisfaction; they are seen as the apex of sexual pleasure (see Sprecher & Cate, 2004). Orgasm occurrence and

consistency is positively related to the quality of the sexual relationship but also the general quality of the relationship (Young, Denny, Young, & Luquis, 2000). In the results of their mailed out 70-item questionnaire, Young et al. (1998) reported that sexual orgasm is strongly correlated to sexual and relational satisfaction. Orgasm occurrence is not only correlated to sexual satisfaction, but orgasm frequency is also positively associated with sexual satisfaction and relational satisfaction in romantic relationships (Birnbaum, Glaubman, & Mikulincer, 2001; Birnbaum, Svitelman, Bar-Shalom, & Porat, 2008; Young et al., 2000). For example, Singh, Meyer, Zambarano, and Hurlbert (1998) had 69 women fill out a survey with items measuring coital orgasm frequency and timing in relation to their partner. Their regression analysis provided further evidence of the relationship between the frequency/consistency of orgasms and both sexual and relational satisfaction. Frequency of coital orgasm was associated with marital happiness, sexual compatibility, masturbatory frequency, active sexual participation, and duration of nongenital and genital foreplay.

**Sexual uninhibitedness.** Sexual uninhibitedness in sexual activity with one's spouse assesses the occurrence and enjoyment of sexual variety. In the Young et al. (1998) study, this variable was measured by asking participants about the frequency and enjoyment of oral-genital sex, anal sex, and masturbation. Sexual satisfaction is found to be strongly correlated with an individual's interest in and willingness to participate and experiment in a variety of sexual activities (Greeley, 1991; Young et al., 1998). These findings suggest that couples that are more willing to try new things in the sexual arena will often feel more sexually satisfied.

One specific area of sexual communication that has been shown to have a strong relation to sexual satisfaction is the disclosure of sexual likes and dislikes. Researchers have found that self-disclosing desired and undesired sexual techniques to a partner leads to greater sexual satisfaction and fewer sexual problems (Byers & Demmons, 1999; LoPiccolo & LoPiccolo,



1978; Metts & Cupach, 1989; Russell, 1990). Communication about sexual practices, desires, and preferences allows partners to negotiate a mutually and maximally enjoyable sexual script, which then leads to greater sexual satisfaction (Cupach & Metts, 1991). Self-disclosure of sexual topics such as these has both short-term and long-term rewards. As noted by MacNeil and Byers (2009), “Sexual self-disclosure may be an intentional or instrumental strategy to enhance one’s sexual relationship by informing one’s partner about one’s sexual preferences in established relationships just as it is in new relationships” (p. 11). MacNeil and Byers (2009) go on to suggest that sexual satisfaction may be enhanced by sharing of sexual likes and dislikes specifically, and not just self-disclosure in general. Thus, MacNeil and Byers (2009) argue that future research needs to examine the extent to which this kind of communication is beneficial.

Communicating sexual fantasies is a type of sexual self-disclosure different from sexual self-disclosure of preferences, likes, or dislikes (Coffelt & Hess, 2006). Barker’s (2006) clearly separates sexual fantasies and sexual practices into two separate topics. Widman et al. (2006) argues that sexual communication may include discussions of a wide variety of topics such as sexual histories, sexual likes and dislikes, or sexual fantasies. The often used sexual self-disclosure scale (SSDS) developed by Herold and Way, (1988) breaks up sexual self-disclosure into eight areas: personal views on sexual morality, premarital sexual intercourse, oral sex, masturbation, sexual thoughts or fantasies, sexual techniques, use of contraception, and sexual problems or difficulties.

Overall, the relationship between the specific disclosure of sexual fantasy and sexual satisfaction in a romantic relationship has yet to be explored. An examination of the literature on the benefits of sexual fantasies does point to a possible significant relationship. Indeed, sexual fantasies have been shown to be positively related to sexual functioning, sexual frequency, and possibly sexual uninhibitedness (Hill, 2008; Leitenberg & Henning, 1995). Given the significant

correlations between these three concepts (i.e., sexual functioning, sexual frequency, and sexual uninhibitedness) and sexual satisfaction (Young et al., 1998), it is possible the disclosure of sexual fantasies to one's partner may also be significantly correlated with sexual satisfaction.

The last part of the conceptual model explores the relationship between acting out a sexual fantasy and sexual satisfaction for the owner of the fantasy. Sharing a sexual fantasy would also increase the chances that one's partner would then act out or role play all or part of the fantasy. This kind of role play could possibly enhance the sexual satisfaction for the owner of the fantasy. According to MacNeil and Byers (1997), decreased sexual satisfaction comes from an increase in the number of sexual concerns and problems for the self and for the partner, and over 70% of their participants reported at least one or more sexual concerns. Sexual difficulties are identified as moderately important factors for relationship or marriage breakups, and are also associated with sexual satisfaction (Sprecher & Regan, 2000). One of the strongest sexual difficulties in a relationship involves the quantity and quality of the current sex. Over time, the amount of sexual behavior decreases for all couples. Sprecher and Regan (2000) argue two reasons for this decline. One is associated with aging and decreases in physical and sexual functioning. A second reason has to do with the negative effects of extreme familiarity and predictability of sex and sexual desire for the partner. If individuals become overly familiar with each other and sex becomes mundane or simply a routine, then it is likely that the passion and allure for sexual behavior will fade. One possible way to break that routine and possibly put some passion and adventure back into a sexual relationship is through the sharing of sexual fantasies.

Through the disclosure of sexual fantasies, a couple might be able to role play scenarios and engage in unique sexual maneuvers or sexual games, which could facilitate positive sexual experiences. Using several national surveys conducted separately by Gallup and the University

of Chicago, Greeley (1991) discovered that couples with sexual variety and experimentation are more satisfied than couples without. Disclosing sexual fantasies, and then living out those sexual fantasies, could allow a couple to experience more sexual variety and experimentation and/or influence the sexual satisfaction for the owner and revealer of the sexual fantasy. Given the research in this area, the following hypotheses were proposed:

H1: Discussing sexual fantasies with a romantic partner is positively correlated with sexual satisfaction.

H2: Participants who act out their favorite/most recurring sexual fantasy(s) will have higher sexual satisfaction than those who do not.

## CHAPTER THREE

### METHOD

This study utilized a self-report, online questionnaire that contained both open- and closed-ended questions to assess participants' willingness to discuss sexual fantasies, rewards associated with this discussion, motivations for avoiding this topic, sexual satisfaction, relational satisfaction, disclosure of their favorite or most recurring sexual fantasy to their romantic partner, and general demographic information (see Appendix C for a copy of the online survey). Wiederman (2004) argued that self-report questionnaires, while not perfect, are the best means available to researchers to get the most valid and reliable data. Because of the sensitive nature of human sexuality, "about the best researchers can do is to ask respondents to report on their experiences, and then correlate such self-reports with other variables" (Wiederman, 2004, p. 32). Leitenberg and Henning (1995) also acknowledged that there simply is no choice but to rely on self-report when dealing with sexual fantasies. The online survey utilized in this study was approved by the University Institutional Review Board (see Appendix A).

#### **Participants**

Participants were 370 adults (135 men and 235 women). Participants were recruited through four mediums: (1) listings on Facebook.com; (2) listings on Craigslist.com; (3) message board postings on a sex chat website; and (4) introductory speech classes at a large Midwestern University. No information about demographics for each medium was assessed. Participants that were part of the introductory speech classes received course credit in exchange for their participation. The average age of participants across all four mediums was 21.2 years ( $SD = 5.36$ ). Most of the participants were White/European-American (87.6%), while the remaining participants were Asian or Pacific Islander (5.4%), Hispanic (3.5%), African American (3.0%), Middle Eastern (0.3%), and American Indian or Alaskan Native (0.3%). The majority of

participants considered themselves heterosexual (93.5%), while the remaining participants indicated their sexual orientation to be gay (1.4%), lesbian (0.5%), bisexual (4.3%), or other (0.3%).

## **Procedures**

Data was collected through the website [www.qualtrics.com](http://www.qualtrics.com). Upon entering the survey, participants were first asked if they were 18 years or older. Participants that selected “No” were directed to a site thanking them for their interest, but explaining how they were too young to complete this survey. Participants that selected “Yes” were directed to an information statement which explained the purpose of the study, the potential risks to the participants, and the confidentiality of the participant’s responses (see Appendix B). After acknowledging they had read and understood the information statement, participants were then directed to the survey. Participants were asked to complete the questions with their current or most recent romantic partner in mind while they completed the survey. The average duration of romantic relationships in months was 21.20 ( $SD = 37.01$ ). Upon completion of the survey, participants who completed the survey for course credit were directed to a page that allowed them to write their class and instructor.

## **Measures**

As noted above, in order to address the research questions and hypotheses proposed in this study, a survey using open- and closed-ended questions was used. In the beginning of the survey, a definition of sexual fantasies was provided for the participant. This definition of sexual fantasies was borrowed from previous research by Leitenberg and Henning (1995). Sexual fantasies were defined as:

Any mental imagery that is sexually arousing or erotic to the individual. A sexual fantasy can be an elaborate story, or it can be a fleeting thought of some romantic or sexual

activity. It can involve bizarre imagery, or it can be quite realistic. It can involve memories of past events, or it can be a completely imaginary experience. (p. 470)

**Own Fantasy Disclosure.** In order to measure a participant's willingness to discuss their own sexual fantasies, a six-item questionnaire was created. Items were accompanied by 7-point Likert-type scales ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree." Sample items included: "I feel uneasy disclosing my own sexual fantasies with my partner," and "It does not bother me to discuss my sexual fantasies with my partner." Three items were reverse-scored and then all items were summed to produce a total score that could range from 6 to 42. A higher score indicated a greater willingness to discuss one's sexual fantasies with one's partner (Cronbach's alpha = .94).

**Partner Fantasy Disclosure.** In order to measure a participant's willingness to discuss their partner's sexual fantasies, a six-item questionnaire was created. This questionnaire was identical to that of the own fantasy disclosure questionnaire except the participant was asked about their partner's sexual fantasies. Items were accompanied by 7-point Likert-type scales ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree." Sample items included: "I feel uneasy disclosing my partner's sexual fantasies with him/her," and "It does not bother me to discuss my partner's sexual fantasies with him/her." Three items were reverse-scored and then all items were summed to produce a total score that could range from 6 to 42. A higher score indicated a greater willingness to discuss one's partner's sexual fantasies with him or her (Cronbach's alpha = .94).

**Sexual Satisfaction.** In order to measure sexual satisfaction, the Global Measure of Sexual Satisfaction (GMSEX, Lawrance & Byers, 1998) was used to assess satisfaction with the sexual relationship. Lawrance and Byers (1998) provided evidence that the GMSEX is significantly correlated with other measures of sexual satisfaction. Participants responded to the question: "Overall, how would you describe your sexual relationship with your current partner?"

Participants respond by rating their answers on five 5-point bipolar scales. Possible scores on the GMSEX range from 5 to 25. Higher scores indicated greater sexual satisfaction (Cronbach's alpha = .89).

**Relational Satisfaction.** The Global Measure of Relational Satisfaction (GMREL, Lawrence & Byers, 1998) was used to assess satisfaction with the overall relationship. Participants responded to the question: "In general, how would you describe your overall relationship with your current partner?" Participants respond by rating their answers on five 5-point bipolar scales. Possible scores on the GMREL range from 5 to 25. Higher scores indicated greater relational satisfaction (Cronbach's alpha = .91).

**Reasons for Avoidance.** To discover the reasons and motivations individuals had for avoiding the topic of sexual fantasies, an open-ended question first utilized by Anderson et al. (2011) was adapted to fit this study. Participants received the following written instructions:

The researchers would like you to explain to us in your own words, if you or your current/most recent romantic partner's sexual fantasies are something you would rather **avoid** discussing in your relationship, **what concerns cause you to avoid** the topic? If you are completely comfortable discussing your own, or your partner's sexual fantasies, then state that below.

**Potential Rewards for Discussing.** To discover the motivations and possible rewards participants saw in discussing their own or their partner's sexual fantasies, participants were asked an open-ended question. Participants received the following written instructions:

The researchers would like you to explain to us in your own words, what **potential rewards** do/did you see as motivation for discussing the topic of sexual fantasies? If you have never discussed the topic of sexual fantasies with this partner, write "not relevant."

**Content of Fantasies.** In order to discover how the content of one's sexual fantasy might influence his or her disclosure of their sexual fantasies, participants were asked to write down in detail their most frequent or reoccurring sexual fantasy(s). After writing down their fantasy(s), participants were then asked to note which of those fantasies they had: (1) shared with their romantic partner; and (2) acted out with their romantic partner. This part of the question was scored as either (0) hadn't discussed/hadn't acted out or (1) had discussed/had acted out.

**Demographics.** General demographics were also measured at the end of the survey. Participants were asked to provide about their age, ethnicity, religiosity, sexual experience, and length of time they have/had been together with their current or most recent romantic partner.



## CHAPTER FOUR

### RESULTS

The current study investigated the conceptual model of sexual fantasy disclosure in romantic relationships (Figure 1) to gain a better understanding of how this disclosure can possibly help or hurt one's sex life and romantic relationship, as well as explore the possible variables that might influence this disclosure. Given the fact that research has yet to fully explore these connections, it is important to examine the relationships proposed in the model.

#### **Overall Coding Process for Research Questions 1, 2, 3, and 4**

To help answer research questions 1, 2, 3, and 4, an inductive and thematic analysis was conducted. Rather than using preexisting categories, themes in this study were formed and created by what emerged within the discourse (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). Owen (1984) suggests the use of thematic analysis as one way to see how partners perceive and describe their relationships. Owen's (1984) framework encourages researchers to use their data to guide the identification of themes in interviews or open-ended surveys. Responses were coded and thematized utilizing Owen's (1984) framework. In his research about how participants use discourse to interpret their relationship, Owen (1984) examined relational themes in his open-ended questions which he defined as "the patterned semantic issue or locus of concern around which a couple's interaction centers" (p. 275). A theme was noted in relational discourse when the three criteria were present: (1) recurrence, (2) repetition, and (3) forcefulness. Using criteria such as these ensure consistent, meticulous data analysis (Davis, 2010). Owen (1984) argued that using this criterion "allowed salient meanings to be discovered in the foreground" (p. 275).

Recurrence happens when, "at least two parts of a report had the same thread of meaning, even though different words indicated such a meaning" (Owen, 1984, p. 275). This criterion examines the meanings threaded throughout the responses, even if different words are used to get

at the same meaning. Repetition is the “explicit repeated use of the same wording” (Owen, 1984, p. 275). This criterion is an extension of the first. It involves explicit repetition of the same wording while recurrence involves an implicit recurrence of meaning using different discourse (Owen, 1984). Finally, forcefulness is a written inflection “which serve(s) to stress and subordinate some utterances from other locutions” (Owen, 1984, p. 275). This criterion involves italics, underlining, and changing size of print to indicate written forcefulness. This enables the researcher to understand the importance of words or phrases.

The open-ended data for research questions 1 and 2 were coded by the primary researcher and two independent coders who were chosen for their knowledge of relational communication. The two independent coders were trained by the researcher to look for potential themes using Owen’s (1984) inductive analysis process. The coding process began with the generation of a list of themes. Each coder generated this list by examining the first 90 responses. The independent coders and the author then met together, had multiple discussions, and then worked together to collapse these initial theme categories into more specific themes. The coding system was then committed to paper so that all coders could reference the criterion for each theme at any time. All coders then independently coded all 370 open-ended responses for research questions 1 and 2 using the agreed upon themes. The researcher and the two independent coders then met for a final time to go over the results.

Once the data was collected and compared across the three coders, all disagreements were discussed in order to devise an agreed upon theme(s) for each participant’s open-ended response for research questions 1 and 2. It is important to note that each participant’s response for both research questions 1 and 2 could contain more than one theme. For example, a participant might report both an improved sex life and deeper connection as rewards for discussing sexual fantasies. Intercoder reliability for research questions 1 and 2 were calculated

using Scott's *pi*, a formula commonly used in communication research (Keyton, 2006).

Intercoder reliability for research question 1 was found to be adequate at .864. Intercoder reliability for research question 2 was also found to be adequate at .825.

Research question 3 and 4 were coded using the same criteria used for research questions 1 and 2. However, research questions 3 and 4, which examined the specific theme of an individual's sexual fantasy, were coded only by the primary researcher. Due to the sensitivity of the topic, and the anonymity that was promised to the participants, only the primary researcher read and coded the themes for the sexual fantasies.

### **Research Question 1**

Research question 1 asked about potential rewards perceived by participants who chose to disclose their sexual fantasies with their partner. The coding for research question 1 resulted in five themes. Table 1 presents the number and percentage of participants whose responses contributed to each theme. Each participant response could have included more than one theme. For example, the vast majority of participants responded with at least one reward that they saw as a result of discussing sexual fantasies. Of the 370 participants, 70 (19%) wrote "N/A" or said they could not think of any rewards that could come from discussing sexual fantasies in their romantic relationships. Because of this, only the 300 responses that indicated at least one reward were coded. The most common themes surrounding the potential rewards were, "Fulfillment" ( $n = 113$ ; 37.7% of 300), "Establish Deeper Bond or Connection" ( $n = 98$ ; 32.7%), and "Improves Sex Life Directly" ( $n = 88$ ; 29.3%). Other themes that were present but not as substantial were "Opens Communication" ( $n = 34$ ; 11.3%) and "Know Partner Preferences" ( $n = 27$ ; 9.0%). Four participants simply put "improves relational satisfaction." These four responses were not included in any of the five themes. The following sections highlight direct quotations from participants' responses to illustrate the nature of contributions to the themes.

**Fulfillment.** This theme contained responses that addressed the potential fulfillment or acting out of the fantasy. As one individual put, *“If you don’t talk about them they can’t happen.”* For 113 participants, there was a strong link between sharing a sexual fantasy and acting out a sexual fantasy. For these individuals, a clear reward to disclosing sexual fantasies was the higher likelihood that their fantasies or their partner’s fantasies may then become a reality. Common responses for this theme included:

*“Getting to live out said fantasies.”*

*“I found that when we did talk about it, we would both try and fulfill the others fantasy, as much as possible. Almost like a game.”*

*“The fulfillment of sexual fantasies was the potential reward for discussing the topic of sexual fantasies.”*

*“Acting out these fantasies are always rewarding. When acting out my own fantasies, I feel rewarded. When acting out her fantasies, I get satisfaction from knowing that she is enjoying what is happening.”*

*“Our fantasies could be realities.”*

*“A ‘reward’ would mostly consist of carrying out the fantasy.”*

**Establish Deeper Bond or Connection.** The second most reoccurring theme was the reward of a deeper connection or bond with one’s romantic partner. According to 98 participants, a reward to discussing sexual fantasies entails a stronger closeness that perhaps did not exist before. As one participant wrote in regard to the rewards of discussing sexual fantasies with a romantic partner, *“It binds two people together.”* Another participant wrote, *“Brings couples closer together.”* Several people mentioned an emotional satisfaction from this deeper connection:

*“Sharing fantasies reflect a lack of self-consciousness and can bring the people closer together, whether they are ever acted on or not.”*

*“Would create a feeling of having a deeper connection.”*

*“The rewards of discussing these fantasies are that discussing these will bring my partner and I close together and more comfortable with our sexual relationship.”*

*“We become closer as a couple”*

Also noted in this theme were responses highlighting how the disclosure of such a private and personal topic to a romantic partner will enhance the relationship, even if the fantasy is never actually carried out. Examples of these responses include:

*“Your partner just feels a closer bond to you knowing that you are able to express those feelings to them.”*

*“I think it creates a closer experience to do something you only discuss with one another.”*

*“Obviously knowing something about them that not many people know makes you that much closer to them, if it’s a deviant fantasy, it might cause problems but in most cases I think it brings people closer.”*

**Improves Sex Life Directly.** A direct positive influence on one’s sex life was another common theme which emerged from the data. 88 respondents suggested that discussing sexual fantasies would make one’s sex life more satisfying. A response was coded into this theme if a respondent believed that a reward of discussing sexual fantasies directly improved the sex they will have or are currently having with their romantic partner. Most responses mentioned how discussing sexual fantasies can spice up a sexual relationship, and keep their sex life from getting boring or routine. Others believed that discussing sexual fantasies adds a variety and

experimentation to their sex life that they cannot get with discussions about other sexual topics.

Participants noted:

*“It definitely makes our sex life more exciting and considering that most of our talk about fantasy happens in a more intimate setting it can even help make the mood a little bit more exciting!”*

*“It could help improve the physical relationship. I realize it’s important to keep trying new things so we’re satisfied.”*

*“The disclosure and fulfillment of fantasies can make all the difference in the bedroom from regular old in-and-out, to “holy, sh\*t, that was amazing.”*

*“Some potential rewards are for later on in the relationship when sex isn’t as big of thing anymore but it’s needed so keep enjoying and the stimulating the relationship. Keeps from boring, repetitive sex.”*

*“Knowing each others fantasies has spiced up our sex life, so I would say it is a great reward.”*

*“So that me and my partner would have a very wonderful, spontaneous, adventures, and satisfying sex life and relationship. These were not in any of the relationships in the past including my 2 marriages.”*

*“So we can enjoy sexual pleasures together and venture out.”*

**Opens Communication.** Besides spicing up one’s sex life, another common theme was about opening up channels of communication. The discussion of sexual fantasies is also perceived to open up communication in a romantic relationship. A response was placed in this theme when there was a mention of increased openness in the relationship or if discussing sexual fantasies increased overall communication in the relationship. Besides creating an openness in the relationship overall, 34 participants noted a possible increase and new sense of ease in

discussing sexual topics, once they have discussed their sexual fantasies. Common responses within this theme were:

*“It encourages openness in every part of the relationship.”*

*“Potential rewards are being more open.”*

*“Discussing sexual fantasies openly in a relationship improves communication.”*

*“The relationship will be healthier and more open.”*

*“By discussing topics, such as this one, you are able to be more open in a relationship which will end up being more pleasurable than if you are holding back information such as this topic.”*

*“It is important to have a relationship where you can be open and honest about what you want.”*

Within this theme, a strong sense of trust was associated with this openness.

**Know Partner Preferences.** The last theme that emerged from the data in relation to research question 1 was the reward of learning about a partner’s sexual preferences. Not only did people have the reward of knowing their partner’s sexual likes and dislikes, but they also knew what settings, language, costumes, role play, and environments are particularly arousing to their partner. For 27 participants, knowing a partner’s strong sexual preferences was considered a clear reward for discussing sexual fantasies. As one individual wrote, *“If both of you are on the same page with your fantasies, you could find out that you both would like to try something, and/or you avoid doing something that one person finds uncomfortable.”* Discussing sexual fantasies seemed to help couples find more shared sexual interests. Other common responses were:

*“The satisfaction of knowing what each other likes”*

*“The potential rewards were that we both knew what the other was desiring.”*

*“They would know what I wanted and how I wanted it. I would then know what they were up for.”*

*“How will your partner know how to please you just right without knowing what some of your fantasies are? When you explain what things you like, they get an idea of what pleases you.”*

It is important to note this theme was different from the Improves Sex Life Directly theme.

While knowing a partner’s sexual preference might enhance their sex life, it is a communicative act, which is still different than physically acting out a sexual fantasy or altering one’s sex life.

This theme involved the benefit of knowing a partner’s sexual preference, which does not guarantee fulfillment or an enhanced sex life. Therefore, Know Partner Preferences and Improve Sex Life Directly are two separate rewards.

To summarize results for research question 1, the majority of respondents did see at least one reward, whether potential or real, that came from the discussion of sexual fantasies. The rewards perceived with discussing this topic were linked to the realization and acting out of the fantasy. The discussion of this topic also seemed to produce not only a deeper connection between a couple, but a better sex life as well. For a smaller number of participants, discussing this topic can also improve overall communication and openness in the relationship, along with new knowledge of their partner’s extreme likes and/or preferences. What is also important to note is that several of the participants believed that two of these rewards, stronger connection and increased openness, can happen regardless whether the fantasy is realized or not. Examples of this point include:

*“My partner and I have been together for almost 5 years, so, discussing our sexual fantasies and desires helps us to maintain a varied sex life. Talking about things, even if they don’t happen, keep our sexual relationship as exciting as our emotional one.”*



*“I feel like it makes us more open and honest in our relationship, even if we do or don’t act upon these fantasies.”*

## **Research Question 2**

As shown in Figure 1, the weighing of rewards and costs is considered vital to the decision to reveal a sexual fantasy. Because of the potential benefits associated with discussing the topic of sexual fantasies with one’s romantic partner, research question 2 asked about the reasons and motivations behind the potential avoidance or reluctance to discuss their own or their partner’s sexual fantasies. Results revealed that 105 of the 348 participants that wrote down a fantasy have not shared their most frequent or reoccurring sexual fantasies with their romantic partner.

The coding for research question 2 resulted in nine themes. Table 2 presents the number and percentage of participants whose responses contributed to each theme. Of the 370 participants in the study, 201 claimed to be comfortable or completely open when discussing the topic of sexual fantasies (54% of the participants). Six individuals also claimed they were comfortable with the topic but it has never come up. The most common themes surrounding avoidance of the topic were “Partner Reaction” ( $n = 34$ ; 9.2% of all participants), “Awkwardness of Topic” ( $n = 23$ ; 6.2%), and “Too Personal or Private” ( $n = 22$ ; 6%). Other themes that were present but not as substantial were “Marriage/Importance” ( $n = 17$ ; 4.5%), “Benefit to Partner” ( $n = 15$ ; 4%), “Worry Regarding Content of Partner’s Fantasy” ( $n = 10$ ; 2.7%), “Worry Regarding Fulfillment of Fantasy” ( $n = 9$ ; 2.5%), “Vague Avoidance” ( $n = 16$ ; 4.3%), and “Other/Confused” ( $n = 15$ ; 4%). The following paragraphs employ direct quotations from participants’ responses to illustrate the nature of contributions to the themes.

**Partner Reaction.** Many participants ( $n = 34$ ) reported avoiding the discussion of sexual fantasies because they were worried about the negative reaction from their partner. The

uncertainty of the partner reaction was a factor in the avoidance of sexual fantasies. As one participant wrote, *“The only concerns that arise from the topic of discussing the sexual fantasies would be how they would be received by the other individual. Uncertainty of how they will view it would be the biggest deterrent.”* Participants who noted this theme for their avoidance worried about being judged or criticized by their partner. Some individuals feared the discussion of sexual fantasies could lead to a breakup in the relationship. Common responses for this theme included:

*“Fearing embarrassment, judgment, shame or being viewed as perverse or ‘not normal.’ I think all of these concerns may prevent disclosure of sexual fantasy for either person, in my opinion.”*

*“I try to avoid discussion because I worry that she will make fun of me, think it was stupid or be so averted to the idea that she breaks up with me.”*

*“I feel like it would be uncomfortable to discuss my own sexual fantasies because I would be nervous that my partner would be turned off by this and think that I was weird.”*

*“Most concerns derive from being afraid of being judged and criticized, therefore not being able to completely open up.”*

*“The most worry thing, for me, is that she would think I am a weirdo with strange desires.”*

Participants were especially concerned their partner would find them or their fantasies to be too wild, crazy, or strange.

**Awkwardness of Topic.** The second most mentioned reason for avoidance was Awkwardness of Topic. Twenty three participants noted that they found the topic of sexual fantasies to be either too awkward to discuss or bring up. Responses under this category included

any motivations or reasons, that included the difficult and/or awkward nature of this topic, which kept them from discussing this issue. Common responses coded within this theme included:

*“It can be an awkward topic to discuss.”*

*“Some things are just awkward to bring up.”*

*“It can be a little difficult to talk about because I don’t usually talk about sexual stuff so finding the words to say without sounding corny or gross can be difficult”.*

This last example was often cited as a reason for avoidance under this theme. Participants wrote that they did not know how to have this discussion, what words to use, or specifically how and when to bring the conversation up.

**Too Personal or Private.** Twenty two participants also avoided the topic of sexual fantasies because they thought the topic of sexual fantasies was too personal or private to discuss. A response was coded in this theme if the private nature of the topic was mentioned or how the person was too shy to discuss this issue. Common responses in this theme were:

*“Some things just seem so private that I wouldn’t even share them with the closest person in my life.”*

*“Would not like to discuss them because I believe they are private matters.”*

*“I think it’s extremely personal.”*

Responses included in this theme included comments that indicated how participants felt their relationship has not progressed enough, or enough trust hadn’t been built into the relationship yet, to allow the disclosure of a topic they consider very private. One participant wrote, *“It depends on the partner: how long you have been together, how comfortable you are with that person, etc.”*

Besides the private nature of the topic, participants also considered themselves too shy a person to talk about sexual fantasies. An example of these responses include:

*“I feel shy, and although I am extremely close to this person, for some reason I get quiet when discussing my own fantasies.”*

*“I am shy and I don’t like to talk about sex.”*

**Marriage/Importance.** The fourth most mentioned reason for avoidance dealt with marriage and importance of sex ( $n = 17$ ). Responses were coded in this category if there was mention of waiting until marriage to discuss this issue, or the notion that this type of discussion or topic was not important for their relationship. Some participants avoided the topic of sexual fantasies because they were not married. These participants felt it was inappropriate to discuss this issue until they were married. Sample responses were:

*“Not being in a martial relationship and the possibility of falling into temptation causes to not want to talk about it.”*

*“I feel awkward discussing this because I believe we should be married before acting out all our sexual fantasies.”*

*“I rather avoid discussing sexual fantasies because I am waiting until marriage to participate in such activities. It is for my own good that I do not discuss them since waiting until marriage to participate is important for me.”*

*“We don’t talk about sex. We won’t have sex until after we are married, so why talk about it? It is also not a foundational issue for us.”*

Participants also noted the lack of importance towards sex or sexual fantasies in their relationship. Examples of these responses include:

*“Simply put, sex is not the most pressing matter in our relationship so it the topic is avoided only out of necessity for day to day life.”*

*“Sexual fantasies are something that I don’t feel the need to talk about with my romantic partner. We have an abstinent relationship, so I do not feel the need to talk about these things at this point in my life.”*

**Benefit to Partner.** Fifteen participants wrote they avoided the topic of sexual fantasies to benefit their partner. Some knew the topic would make their partner uncomfortable, therefore they avoided the issue to save their partner from having to discuss their or their partner’s sexual fantasies, *“My partner is a pretty sheltered girl. At the moment, I don’t think she’d be very comfortable telling me what her fantasies are. I don’t even know if she’s ever thought of really dirty things,”* and *“I try to avoid anything that would make her feel uncomfortable.”* Others avoided the topic because they were afraid the information of their own sexual fantasies would hurt their partner’s self-esteem, or make them jealous. Responses included:

*“I’m just more cautious...if it is something that could get her really jealous, say, a threesome.”*

*“Looking back (as the relationship is over) much of this was due to my awareness of her low self-esteem, and I didn’t feel that it would be a good idea to suggest that I had dreams with other people in them, etc.”*

While most of these individuals noted they were comfortable with discussing sexual fantasies, they chose to avoid the topic for the benefit of their partner. Other participants avoided this topic because they did not want to make their partner feel obligated to perform or help live out their sexual fantasy with them. As one participant wrote, *“Concerns that cause me to avoid the topic are that in which involve making her feel obligated to perform those activities with me.”*

**Worry Regarding Content of Partner’s Sexual Fantasies.** The sixth theme that emerged from the thematic analysis surrounded the content of the partner’s sexual fantasies. Here, ten participants avoided the topic of sexual fantasies for fear of what their partner’s sexual

fantasies might entail. Therefore, a response was coded in this theme if the avoidance was due to the fear of knowing the specific content or details of their partner's fantasy(s). For some, the fear of jealousy or hurt feelings was quite strong. These participants thought that knowing their partner's sexual fantasies would hurt their feelings or make them feel less special in some way. This theme was most pronounced for women: of the ten cases, nine were women. Most of these women worried their partner fantasized about having sex with a woman that wasn't them.

Sample responses included:

*"I would be worried that his fantasies involve other women or things that would hurt my feelings or scare me."*

*"I am extremely jealous and have very low self esteem at this point in my life and I am afraid to talk to him about what he really wants because the off chance he a) would want to have sex with more than just me, or b) his fantasy wouldn't even include me."*

*"Bringing in another woman is a fear of mine, that is the typical male fantasy of a threesome. I just can't share my guy in that way, and find it hurtful he would want to go out on me like that."*

**Worry Regarding Fulfillment of Fantasy.** For a small number of participants ( $n = 9$ ), the topic of sexual fantasies was avoided because they had no interest in fulfilling their partner's fantasies, they felt they probably could not fulfill their partner's fantasies, or they felt their partner could not fulfill their fantasy. For these participants, the discussion of sexual fantasies was not needed because they knew the fantasy could not be acted out, or because they knew the actual acting out of the fantasy would not live up to their or their partner's expectations. Participants also worried about their abilities as a lover, and how they would be inadequate in fulfilling their partner's sexual fantasy. Common responses coded within this theme were:

*“The only concern that causes me to avoid the topic is worry about what the actual fantasy will be and if I could ever live up to it or do it correctly, I suppose.”*

*“I am not comfortable discussing my partner’s sexual fantasies because it worries that we will have to try them, and furthermore I worry that I am not the person they need for that fantasy.”*

*“There’s only so much I’m willing to do so I get nervous that if they fantasize about something I wouldn’t do, they’ll be disappointed in me.”*

*“I avoid the topic with my boyfriend sometimes because I get nervous that maybe I’m not as good as his other partners have been. It also makes me nervous that I won’t be good enough or that maybe I won’t sexually fulfill his needs.”*

*“I’m not sure if he would respond to my wishes or would be able to fulfill my fantasy. It wouldn’t be the same as I thought it would be. It might not live up to my expectations.”*

**Vague Avoidance.** Sixteen participants simply put that they avoided the topic or were uncomfortable discussing the topic, but did not elaborate on the reasons or motivations that caused them to avoid the topic. Therefore, if a participant simply stated they avoided the topic and did not elaborate as to why, their response was coded as a Vague Avoidance.

**Other/Confused.** Fifteen participants left a confusing answer that was coded as Other/Confused. These responses included answers that made no sense to the question asked. For example, one participant simply wrote, *Santa*. Other participants did not follow the instructions and wrote down the content of their sexual fantasy for this question. Responses like this were then labeled as Other/Confused. Besides the 15 participants whose answers were considered other, six respondents simply put N/A.

To summarize results for research question 2, results revealed that over half of participants responded they were comfortable discussing the topic of sexual fantasies. Of those

that claimed they avoided the issue or feel uncomfortable discussing this topic, they did so for a variety of reasons. The most common reason the topic of sexual fantasies was avoided was due to the uncertainty or fear of their partner's reaction. Participants worried their partner would judge them or criticize them, or even label them as abnormal in some way. Two other important themes for avoidance surrounded the awkwardness and private nature of the topic. Participants noted they struggled with constructing and/or initiating this awkward topic, while some thought the topic of sexual fantasies to be too private or personal to disclose to their partner. A smaller portion of individuals also avoided because they were not married, or worried about the content or possible fulfillment of their partner's fantasy.

#### **Research Question 3 and Research Question 4**

The third research question of this study asked how the theme(s) of one's sexual fantasy might influence the willingness to disclose one's own sexual fantasy. This research question dealt with the first part of the conceptual model that examined the relationship between content of sexual fantasy and decision to reveal.

Due to the extreme variety and different types of sexual fantasies, fantasies are difficult to accurately measure (Gee, Devilly, & Ward, 2004). It is very difficult to create a questionnaire that would include everyone's specific sexual fantasy theme. Therefore an inductive approach was used to allow themes to emerge through open-ended questions. The analysis of this research question mirrors that of the first two research questions; however, with this research question only the primary researcher did the coding. The researcher coded the participant's open-ended responses to the question, "Please discuss in detail the content of your favorite or most frequently recurring sexual fantasy or fantasies." Because fantasies are often multidimensional, containing several themes (Plaud & Bigwood, 1997), it was important to utilize a coding system that had the ability to code for several themes. The coder therefore used Owen's (1984) criteria of recurrence,



repetition, and forcefulness to discover ten different themes that emerged from the data: (1) Power, (2) Water, (3) Real Person, (4) Character, (5) Romance, (6) Role Play, (7) Toys/Ingredients, (8) Location, (9) Specific Sexual Act, and (10) Multiple Partners. The themes were not mutually exclusive. A sexual fantasy could have had all or none of these themes.

**Power.** A theme was scored for Power when an indication of dominance or submission was present. This theme includes the mention of force or power being exerted to or from an individual. Power could be in reference to bondage, tying down, gagging, handcuffing, or any activity relating to dominance or submission. Finally, any mention of control or being in charge was scored as a theme of Power. For example, a theme was Power if the participant referenced a desire for their partner or themselves to take control and force one against a wall. Any fantasies of rape or sexual assault also fit into this theme. Sample Power fantasies found in this study included:

*“I enjoy domination fantasies centering on physical bondage, such as handcuffing, hand tying, and possibly gagging.”*

*“Most of mine are of a dominatrix point of view. I like to imagine being controlled and even tied down in a completely submissive way.”*

*“Honestly I just want my partner to slam me up against a door (I have over-the-door handcuffs yah) and ram into me over and over until I can’t take any more. I also have a set of cuffs and straps for use in bed, and my guy can tie me down spread-eagle, blindfold me, and drop hot candle wax over me until I can’t handle the teasing anymore.”*

*“My favorite sexual fantasy involves bondage, namely being tied down or restricted in some way so that my partner is in control of the situation. Pain doesn’t usually enter my fantasy, but restriction does.”*

*“My personal favorite was one where I tied up my girlfriends hands to the bed post at her parents house and had animalistic sex.”*

**Water.** The primary researcher coded for Water whenever the sexual fantasy made reference to water. The reference could be part of a public setting like a pool, or a private setting such as a shower. The water in the sexual fantasy could have been the center of the sexual act (i.e., sex under a waterfall), or could have been included as part of the fantasy (i.e., as we looked across the ocean). Examples of the Water theme included:

*“Showering with my partner and washing their body.”*

*“My fantasy includes water. Either a shower or a body of water of some sort.”*

*“The shower. Oral and regular sex. The water intensifies everything.”*

*“The most recurring sexual fantasy would be on the beach, and in the shower.”*

*“Having sex under a waterfall.”*

*“We would be watching a movie, laying in bed. After—or during the movie—we would fool around. Then, I would carry him in my arms to the shower where we will have sex.”*

**Characters.** Characters was coded for when there was a generic or made up person that appears in the sexual fantasy. This theme includes when a participant would reference a non-real person with an occupation (i.e., nurse, fireman), or the description of a type of person (i.e., real buff guy, old man). While characters would often appear in a sexual fantasy where the participant would mention role playing, the two themes were considered different from each other for two primary reasons: (1) participants would sometimes refer to role playing without mentioning any use of characters, and (2) participants would refer to characters without making reference to role playing. It was not clear from all sexual fantasies whether the participant wanted to role play the fantasy with their partner or actually act on their fantasy with a real cop, robber, or any other character. Examples of theme Characters from this study were:

*“My fantasies often revolve around me being at an older man’s house, such as a teacher’s or coworker’s house and then being pressured or forced into sex with him...he just “has to have me” sexually and has been harboring an attraction for a long time.”*

*“I’m a robber, and she’s a maid working at the rich house. I’m doing my Ocean’s Eleven type robbery and she walks in, a some foreplay and next thing we’re doing it in the basement, which is the size of dorm.”*

*“A fantasy of a medieval knight being visited by a maiden or harem girl sent to make love to them to get them to do what someone who sent the girls want them to do.”*

*“To have sex with a fireman on top of a firetruck.”*

*“I don’t know why but a school girl is the most frequent. Glasses, pig tails, and short skirt. With a ruler in their hand.”*

**Real Person.** Unlike character, sexual fantasies were coded as this theme when there was a reference to a real, specific person other than one’s romantic partner. While most of the time this person was a celebrity, some of the time it was a relative or friend of the participant or their romantic partner. Sample responses from this theme were:

*“Reggie Bush!”*

*“Taylor Swift”*

*“Me with my wife and her friend in bed.”*

*“My number one sexual fantasy that I desired was a threesome with her roommate. I promised her that I would not touch her roommate in any way and oddly enough her roommate brought it up to me one time but it never happened.”*

*“My most recent sexual fantasy is simply having sex with the actress mila kunis. She is so hot.”*

**Romance.** A sexual fantasy was coded for the theme of Romance if there was a reference to the word romantic or a romantic story line that involved romantic encounters such as a candle lit dinner or sitting under the stars. Romance would also include descriptions of emotional closeness or an emotional response. Sample fantasies for the Romance theme included:

*“Laying on the beach at night, looking up and the stars in their arms holding each other close and kissing under the stars.”*

*“Him coming home from the navy in his whites and him just picking me up and driving us home then carrying me through the front door, locking it behind him and as we make our way to the room slowly undressing till we finally get to the room and he kisses me all over and tells me about everything he misses telling me he loves me.”*

*“Anything romantic like in the Notebook or Titanic.”*

*“It’s the typical girl’s dream, my guy brings me flowers and makes me dinner, so on and so forth. It’s just really a romantic night.”*

*“It’s not very sexual, usually I just think about kissing my partner passionately. It’s more of a romanticized view of our last kiss.”*

**Role Playing.** The primary researcher coded for the theme of Role Play when the participant’s sexual fantasy specifically mention the term role playing, or they described their fantasy as a play or act they would like to perform. For this theme an individual would specifically mention the fact they would be role playing out the fantasy and not actually want to do or have sex with the situation or person involved in the sexual fantasy. For some participants, their sexual fantasy involves their partner and themselves acting out a fantasy with costumes and/or roles. Examples of this theme include:

*“We play student/teacher, nurse/patient and some form so bondage. We also use a lot of toys for both of us and enjoy the use of costumes.”*

*“Role play.”*

*“I am a school girl, and he is the teacher. Lots of foreplay and ‘teaching.’”*

*“He pretends to break into my apartment and tie me to the bed.”*

*“Roleplaying with costumes.”*

**Toys/Ingredients.** The theme of Toys/Ingredients was coded for whenever there was a mention of sex toys or food ingredients used as part of the sexual fantasy. A sex toy was coded when there was a specific reference to the word toy or when a reference to a sex toy was explicitly used (i.e., dildo, vibrator). Ingredients included any reference to food (i.e., whipped cream, chocolate). Toys and ingredients were scored together as one theme because of their similar role in sexual fantasies. Sample fantasies for the Toys/Ingredients theme include:

*“It’s in the kitchen, whipped cream is involved.”*

*“The most recent fantasy would be my partner and I would use sex toys and body oils.”*

*“I think about different positions and ingredients....(i. e. whipped cream, hershey syrup...freaky freaky.”*

*“Most recurring fantasy of mine is the man taking control of me, telling me what to do, using toys in a public/exotic place.”*

*“Chocolate syrup and oral sex.”*

*“I would love to have sex on the beach in sexy lingerie with whip cream and chocolate.”*

**Location.** The primary researcher coded for Location when the participant’s sexual fantasy made reference to a specific location that took place in a public setting. Only four participants made reference to a location that they wrote as private (i.e., their room). Those individuals were not coded as Location. Location was in reference to a public setting as in a park, beach, or public pool. Individuals whose theme was coded as Location often made

reference to the thrill of getting caught having sex in a public setting. Examples of this theme include the following:

*“I would like to have sexual intercourse in a library. I think I like the secrecy of an act like that. It seems to me it would be naughty to be something like that in public but that is also why I am drawn to it.”*

*“Public sex, basically meaning having sex in a place that you aren’t supposed to, and could potentially get caught at.”*

*“Trying on lingerie with my boyfriend and then him coming in to the dressing room and having sex with him there.”*

*“Making love on the 50 yard line of a football field at night.”*

*“Public group sex. Best in subways!”*

**Specific Sexual Act.** This theme was coded when a sexual fantasy made reference to any explicit sexual act. Using the phrase “having sex” would not be counted in this theme; however, describing the type of sexual act would be counted in this theme (i.e., oral sex, anal sex, vaginal sex). Also, any reference to a sexual position or a specific type of touch construed as sexual would be coded as Specific Sexual Act. Example of this theme would include referencing the type of sexual act that was going on, whether it being sucking, cupping, caressing, and/or fondling. Samples from the Specific Sexual Act theme were:

*“My girlfriend, and her little sister, and her pet boa constrictor are all in one huge bed, and her sister is on top of me (and we’re fucking) while my girlfriends is sucking my balls, and the snake has us all tied up in that position with it’s slithery, snakey body!”*

*“It involves her and I having sex with her lying face down on a couch and me thrusting into her vagina from the top and squeezing her breasts.”*

*“Trying the sexual position deemed ‘69.’”*

*“I am lying on my back and my partner is either sitting reverse cowgirl style on me or giving me oral, while another girl is squatting facing me a few inches over my face. After a bit of this we transition so the extra girl is on her back while I’m having sex with her and my partner is bent over in front of me with her legs around the extra girl’s head.”*

*“I am tied up and at the mercy of the person I’m with. He flicks my nipples, and has a boy come up to me and has him suck on my nipples. He then takes out his dick and makes me take it in, even if I don’t want to.”*

**Multiple Partners.** Any reference to two or more people in the sexual fantasy with the participant was labeled with the theme of Multiple Partners. For example, if an individual simply wrote threesome, or wrote of a fantasy that included themselves and more than one other person would fit into this theme. Examples of the Multiple Partners theme included:

*“My fantasy is to have sex with 2 men...kissing and sucking one and being taken care of below.”*

*“I enjoy the most when my girlfriend would bring home a random girl from the party that night and we all enjoyed each others company.”*

*“Being with my current girlfriend and her friend.”*

*“My most frequent fantasy is of my girlfriend and I having a threesome with another girl. Sometimes the other girl is easily recognizable in my mind and other times it is some one of whom I have no recollection.”*

**Other.** Twenty nine participants had a sexual fantasy that did not fit into any of the ten themes. For example one participant wrote about a fighting fantasy with blood and sweat. Some participants either simply wrote, “sex” or gave an answer that was confusing and did not seem to answer the question.

Eighty six participants wrote N/A or claimed they didn't have any sexual fantasies; those individuals were not included when calculating the percentage of each theme. Therefore, all percentages listed below were taken from a total of 284. The most commonly mentioned themes were that of Power ( $n = 53$ , 18.7% of participants), Specific Sexual Act ( $n = 45$ , 15.8% of participants), and Location ( $n = 43$ , 15.1%). The themes of Multiple Partners ( $n = 38$ , 13.4% of participants), Characters ( $n = 38$ , 13.4%), Role Play ( $n = 32$ , 11.3%), and Water ( $n = 31$ , 10.9%) were also present, but in less frequency. The themes of Romance ( $n = 17$ , 6.0% of participants), Toys/Ingredients ( $n = 14$ , 4.9%), and Real Person, ( $n = 10$ , 3.5%) were present but in much less frequency. Other accounted for 10.2% of participants.

To fully answer research question 3 and examine the relationship between theme and decision to reveal proposed in Figure 1, an independent samples t-test was applied to each theme using Own Fantasy Disclosure, as the dependent variable. This test was done to discover possible differences in means between those that had a theme present, and those that did not. In addition, to fully address research question 4, an independent samples t-test was also used to discover significant mean differences on sexual satisfaction between those that shared a particular theme with their romantic partner, and those that did not. The same t-test was used to discover mean differences for sexual satisfaction between those that acted out a particular theme with their romantic partner, and those that did not. See Table 3 for a summary of all mean scores.

Of the 348 participants who wrote down a sexual fantasy and answered the question about whether they shared that fantasy, 243 (69.8%) reported they had indeed shared their favorite/most recurring sexual fantasy with their romantic partner. Overall, the themes of Power and Location were the most shared sexual fantasies. Of the participants with the theme of Location, 83.7% had shared their sexual fantasy with their romantic partner. Of the participants with the theme of Power, 81.1% had shared their sexual fantasy with their romantic partner.



Participants with the theme of Water; however, had the highest mean score for the variable Own Fantasy Disclosure ( $M = 31.87$ ).

The themes of Characters and Toys/Ingredients were the least shared sexual fantasies. Of the participants with the theme of Toys/Ingredients, 57.1% had shared their sexual fantasy with their romantic partner. For those participants with the theme of Characters in their sexual fantasy, 68.4% had shared their sexual fantasy. When examining the lowest scores for the variable Own Fantasy Disclosure, participants with the theme of Real Person had the lowest mean score ( $M = 25.50$ ).

Of the 349 participants who wrote down a sexual fantasy and answered the question about whether they had acted out their fantasy, 171 (49%) claimed to have acted out their favorite/most recurring sexual fantasy with their romantic partner. Of the ten themes found in this study, those with the theme of Romance had the highest percentage of those who acted out the sexual fantasy (64.7%). Although it should be noted that the themes of Power (62.3%), Specific Sexual Act (62.2%), and Water (61.3%) were close. It is important to also note that these themes are not mutually exclusive. Participants who had the theme of Power could have also had the theme of Specific Sexual Act and/or Water; although this combination of themes was considerably rare.

An examination of each theme individually reveals that those who shared their sexual fantasy with their romantic partner had higher sexual satisfaction scores. This was true for every theme except for Power and Real Person. It should be noted though that the difference in mean scores between those who shared and those who did not, for these two themes, was very small. Their sexual satisfaction scores were almost identical. Also, those who acted out their sexual fantasy had higher scores on sexual satisfaction than those that did not for all ten themes.

Below, each theme is examined specifically in order to help understand the relationship between the theme and the decision to reveal, along with the theme and sexual satisfaction that is proposed in Figure 1.

**Power.** An independent samples t-test revealed no significant differences between those that had the theme of Power and those that did not for the variable Own Fantasy Disclosure. However, it is worth noting that the differences in mean scores with the variable Own Fantasy Disclosure were very close to being significant ( $t = -1.85, p = .065$ ). From these results it appears individuals with themes of Power in their sexual fantasy are more open and willing to discuss their own sexual fantasies than those individuals without themes of Power.

Of the 53 individuals who had a theme of Power in their sexual fantasy, 43 of them (81.1%) ended up sharing this sexual fantasy with their romantic partner. 33 of the 53 individuals (62.3) claimed to have acted out their sexual fantasy with their romantic partner. Independent samples t-tests however produced no significant mean differences for the variable sexual satisfaction between those that had shared or acted out and those that did not.

**Water.** Independent samples t-tests revealed no significant differences for Own Fantasy Disclosure between those with the theme of Water in their sexual fantasies and those without. Of the 31 individuals who had the theme of Water in their sexual fantasy, 24 (77.4%) have shared their sexual fantasy and 19 (61.3%) have acted out the fantasy. Independent samples t-tests also revealed no significant mean differences between those that shared and those that did not, and those that acted out and those that did not on the variable of sexual satisfaction. It is also worth noting that individuals who acted out a theme of Water almost had significantly higher sexual satisfaction scores than those who did not act out the sexual fantasy ( $t = -2.00, p = .055$ ).

**Real Person.** Results of the independent samples t-test revealed no significant differences on Own Fantasy Disclosure between those whose sexual fantasy contained a real

person other than their current partner, and those whose fantasy did not. Of the ten participants who had a fantasy containing a real person, seven (70%) shared this fantasy with their romantic partner, while only three (30%) acted out this fantasy with their romantic partner. Those acting out this theme mentioned dressing their partner up as the real person in order to fulfill their sexual fantasy. There were no significant mean differences with sexual satisfaction scores between those that shared and those that did not. This same lack of significant was also found between those having acted out their fantasy and those that did not.

**Characters.** Results for this theme revealed no significant differences between those that revealed a sexual fantasy with the theme of Characters and those that did not for the variable of Own Fantasy Disclosure. Of the 38 individuals with the theme of Characters, 26 (68.4%) shared this sexual fantasy with their romantic partner while 18 (47.4%) of the participants acted out their sexual fantasy containing the theme of Characters. Separate t-tests found no significant differences between those that had shared their sexual fantasy and those that did not on the dependent variable of sexual satisfaction. The same lack of significance was found between those that had acted out this sexual fantasy and those that had not. It should be noted however that a separate analysis using relational satisfaction as the dependent variable reported a significant difference in mean scores between those with the theme of Characters in their sexual fantasy and those without ( $t = 2.48, p < .05$ ). Those without the theme of Characters scored significantly higher on relational satisfaction than those whose sexual fantasy contained the theme of Characters.

**Romance.** An independent samples t-test revealed no significant differences on Own Fantasy Disclosure between those with the theme of Romance and those without. Of the 17 participants who had the theme of Romance in their sexual fantasy, 13 (76.5%) had shared this fantasy with their romantic partner. 11 (64.7%) of the participants have acted out their sexual

fantasy containing the theme of Romance. The mean scores on the variable sexual satisfaction were found to be not significantly different between those that had shared this sexual fantasy and those that have not. This was also true for those that had acted out this sexual fantasy and those that had not.

**Role Play.** Results from this theme revealed no significant mean differences on Own Fantasy Disclosure between individuals whose sexual fantasy contained the theme of Role Play and those whose did not. Of the 32 individuals who had a sexual fantasy containing the theme of Role Play, 25 (78.1%) claimed to have shared this sexual fantasy with their romantic partner. There was however no significant mean difference in sexual satisfaction between those that had shared and those that had not. It was also discovered that 19 (59.4%) of the individuals in this theme acted out their fantasy with their romantic partner. There was however no significant mean differences on sexual satisfaction between those that had acted out the fantasy and those that had not.

**Toys/Ingredients.** An independent samples t-test revealed no significant mean differences between those with the theme of Toys/Ingredients and those without for the variable Own Fantasy Disclosure. In total 14 participants had a sexual fantasy which contained the theme of Toys/Ingredients. Of those 14 participants, eight (57.1%) had shared their sexual fantasy with their romantic partner. Five (35.7%) of the participants acted out their sexual fantasy. Results revealed zero significant mean differences on the dependent variable of sexual satisfaction between those that shared this fantasy, and those that did not. This lack of significant mean difference was also found between those that had acted out the fantasy and those that did not.

**Location.** Individuals with the theme of Location in their sexual fantasy had similar mean scores on Own Fantasy Disclosure as that of individuals without the theme of Location. An independent samples t-test revealed zero significant mean differences. Of the 43 participants

whose sexual fantasy contained the theme of location, 36 (83.7%) shared their sexual fantasy with their current partner. The differences in mean scores between these two groups across sexual satisfaction were not statistically significant. Twenty one (48.8%) of those whose fantasy contained the theme of Location had acted out this sexual fantasy with their romantic partner. Again, mean scores on sexual satisfaction between those that had acted out the fantasy and those that hadn't were not significantly different.

**Specific Sexual Act.** An independent samples t-test revealed no significant mean differences between those with the theme of Specific Sexual Act in their sexual fantasy, and those without, on the variable Own Fantasy Disclosure. Of those with the theme of Specific Sexual Act in their fantasy, 33 (73.3%) of them had shared their fantasy with their romantic partner. The differences in mean scores between the shared and have not shared with the two dependent variables were not significant. Of those with this theme, 28 (62.2%) have acted out their sexual fantasy. Results revealed however a moderately significant difference in sexual satisfaction score ( $t = -1.917, p = .062$ ). Those that had acted out their fantasy containing a theme of Specific Sexual Act scored much higher on sexual satisfaction than those who did not act out their Specific Sexual Act fantasy.

**Multiple Partners.** Those with the theme of Multiple Partners in their sexual fantasy had lower scores on sexual satisfaction than those without the theme of multiple partners. Also, those with this theme had higher scores on Own Fantasy Disclosure than those without. None of these mean score differences however were statistically significant. Of the 38 participants who had a sexual fantasy involving Multiple Partners, 27 (71.1%) had shared their sexual fantasy with their romantic partner. There was not a significant difference however between those that shared and those that did not with the variable sexual satisfaction. Fifteen (39.5%) of participants with this theme claimed to have acted out their sexual fantasy involving multiple partners. There was also

no significant difference in mean scores of sexual satisfaction between those that acted this sexual fantasy out and those that did not.

**Multiple Themes.** Since the themes discovered in this study were not mutually exclusive, it was possible for a participant to have more than one of the ten themes in their sexual fantasy. An analysis of the overlap of themes discovered 30 different combinations of themes in the participant's sexual fantasies. The most common combination of themes was that of Characters and Role Play. Besides this combination however there were no other consistent combinations found. Overall, 22 individuals had the combination of Character and Role Play. The next closest combinations were that of Specific Sexual Act and Multiple Partners ( $n = 6$ ), and Power and Specific Sexual Act ( $n = 5$ ). An independent samples t-test was performed to see if there was a significant difference on Own Fantasy Disclosure. Results showed those with the combination of Character and Role Play did not differ significantly on this variable. This result was also true for the other two combinations of Specific Sexual Act/Multiple Partners, and Power/Specific Sexual Act.

An independent samples t-test was also administered with the combination of Character and Role Play to test for differences between those who shared and those who did not, along with those who acted out the fantasy and those that did not. Of the 22 people with this combination of themes, 17 (77.2%) had shared their sexual fantasy with their romantic partner. Tests revealed no significant differences with the variable sexual satisfaction between the 17 that shared and the five that did not. Of the 22 people with this combination of themes, 11 (50%) had acted out the sexual fantasy with their romantic partner. Tests also revealed no significant differences on the dependent variable between those who acted out the sexual fantasy and those that did not. Even though the sample was low, these same tests were performed on the other two combinations of Specific Sexual Act/Multiple Partners, and Power/Specific Sexual Act. All tests proved to be

nonsignificant. Finally, it is perhaps worth noting that of the ten themes, three of them: Characters, Water, and Specific Sexual Act were the only ones to be paired with every other theme. It appears that these three themes were consistently found in sexual fantasies for individuals with multiple themes in their fantasy.

**Summary.** These results revealed the relative lack of influence that the theme or content of the sexual fantasy seems to have on the comfort or willingness to disclose sexual fantasies. It also appears that those who share and act out their sexual fantasy, regardless of the theme, seem to produce higher sexual satisfaction scores than those that do not; however, the difference in most cases was not significant. It should be noted that those who acted out their sexual fantasy with the theme of Water or Specific Sexual Act had close to significantly higher levels of sexual satisfaction than the individuals who did not act out their sexual fantasy.

#### **Research Question 5 and Research Question 6**

The specificity or involvement of participant's sexual fantasies was also a variable examined in this study. It was thought that individuals with a more elaborate, involved, or specific sexual fantasy might have a tougher time revealing or perhaps even acting out their sexual fantasy with their romantic partner. According to the conceptual model found in Figure 1, the specificity/involvement of a sexual fantasy would influence the decision to reveal a sexual fantasy, along with the sexual satisfaction scores for those that decide to share or act out a sexual fantasy.

In order to code for specificity, each theme was coded on the basis of the components necessary to fulfill the fantasy (i.e., location, costume, position, etc.), and the specificity of the components. A component in a theme was considered a part of the fantasy, and the more parts of the fantasy there were the higher the rating. The components were also weighed on their specificity. For example, using the phrase "sex" would not be as specific as "oral sex." Saying,

“My fantasy is to have sex in a car” would not be considered as involved or specific as saying “My fantasy is to have oral sex in the back of a car.” This fantasy has two components: (1) oral sex, and (2) in the back of a car. This fantasy is also specific on the sexual act, and where in the car.

Each theme was given a specificity/involvement rating of low (level 1), moderate (level 2), or high (level 3). Ratings labeled as low involved themes that contained few components necessary to fulfill the fantasy, and did not have much specificity to the components. For example, a fantasy that had one or two vague components was labeled low. A fantasy that had two to four components was labeled moderate. A fantasy that had four or more components was labeled high. Again, the specificity of the component was also weighed. A fantasy with 4 specific components would be labeled high, but a fantasy that simply said, “Having sex under a waterfall with candles and music” would be labeled moderate. A score of high (level 3) was reserved for sexual fantasies that contained the highest level of involvement. A score of low (level 1) was given to those fantasies that little involvement, while a score of moderate (level 2) was given to those fantasies that had a medium level of involvement. Example themes of each score are listed below. Examples of fantasies with a low (level 1) rating of specificity/involvement were:

*“In the fantasy a priest must reenact a recent sexual experience as the only way to give me absolution from my sin.”*

*“Having sex with someone I really love in a semi-public setting. Not like a stadium or anything crazy, just a park.”*

*“Multiple partners.”*

*“I want to have sex with a girl under a waterfall.”*

*“He pretends to break into my apartment and tie me to the bed.”*



*“Having sex in an open field of grass.”*

*“My most frequent fantasy entails sexual intercourse with my partner dressed in leather.”*

*“Slutty nurse”*

*“My favorite sexual fantasy involved having sexual relations with my partner using miscellaneous sexual toys like handcuffs or whipped cream.”*

Themes that were given a specificity/involvement score of moderate (level 2) were slightly more involved and also more specific than the themes above. For example, in order to take the last example theme above and turn it into a level 2 rating would involve making it more involved and specific so that it would read, *“My favorite sexual fantasy involved having animalistic sex with my partner in my bedroom while he used handcuffs, and then spread whipped cream all over my body.”* Below are examples of fantasies that were labeled moderate (level 2) fantasies:

*“My most frequently recurring sexual fantasy involves my partner being more physically dominant over me. I suppose details within that involve vigorous sexual pursuit, and an obvious show of strength during sex.”*

*“We would be watching a movie, laying in bed. After—or during the movie—we would fool around. Then, I would carry him in my arms to the shower where we will have sex.”*

*“There is a fire at my house. I am saved at the last minute by a fire fighter and we have sex in the back of his fire truck.”*

*“My favorite sexual fantasy involves my partner and I acting out numerous positions and whispering names to one another like ‘daddy’, ‘mommy’, ‘baby’, and such things.*

*Switching positions frequently enhances the experience greatly.”*

*“My most recurring fantasy of mine is the man taking control me, telling me what to do, using toys in a public/exotic place.”*

*“I’m in a locker room or other confined space with other men undressing and we start to compare bodies. Then someone sees me eyeing them and invites me over and things start to get frisky and soon we are making out which eventually leads to sex.”*

*“that I am lying in bed and she walks up to me and does a strip tease and then strips me down. Then we play around for a while and eventually have sex.”*

Those sexual fantasies that received a specificity/involvement rating of high (level 3) were the sexual fantasies with the most elaborate and information or narratives. Below are examples of those fantasies receiving a rating of level 3:

*“My sexual fantasy included being taken into the bedroom, having previously dressed for an intimate evening under my professional clothes of the day, and being slowly undressed, tied seductively to the bed, and pleased by my romantic partner’s mouth all over my body. Silk ties at the arms and feet, blind folded, but with the warmth and scent of candles lighted around the room.”*

*“I am a little rabbit and he is a huge lion. We meet in a forest and he doesn’t want to kill me. He wants to bone. So we end up having sex, this little rabbit and this huge lion. But there is so much cum for me (the little rabbit) that I have to swim in it. But after my short swim I drink it and love it.”*

*“It starts with a candle-lit dinner with Rupert Grint, except he has a mullet. He climbs across the table towards me, throwing our dinner to the floor. He takes me by the hand and leads me to another room, where there is a hot tub full of vanilla pudding. He throws me into the pudding head first. Unfortunately, I can’t swim in pudding but he jumps in and rescues me. I have never been so turned on, or so covered in pudding in my life.*

*Little did I know, while struggling to rescue me from the pudding all of our clothes happened to slide off. Turner gill suddenly appears as out naked life guard. He began giving me the hottest wettest mouth to mouth resuscitation. Not necessarily on my lips that breathe. Exhilarated, they came at me and started tag-teaming me. It was getting hot and heavy. After we reach our steaming climax, we clothe, shake hands, and go our separate ways.”*

*“It’s nothing crazy. Just him and me on the bed together, our skin illuminated by the bright sun streaming through his bamboo shutters. He’s in that great pair of black boxer-briefs and I’m wearing that really great white silk bra and pantie set I got from Victoria’s Secret last winter. They feel really great on my skin, and they make my breasts look amazing. We’re kissing on the bed and he’s taking his time on me; his fingers run over my shoulders and his lips are grazing lightly over the skin on my neck. Goosebumps rise. I feel him penetrate me and his strong arms wrap around my waist. I can feel his desires emanating through his skin, but the will to keep it slow and please me keeps him with me. We continue slow and fierce for hours, drenched in our sweat.”*

*“In my most frequently recurring sexual fantasy, my wrists are bound with handcuffs to the underneath side of the bed while my ankles are secured with a length of rope which is looped underneath the bed. There is enough slack in the rope to allow for multiple positions. My partner is completely in charge. I am blindfolded only part of the time. While am not blindfolded, my partner describes each action in detail before performing it.”*

Participants who did not write down a sexual fantasy, or simply put “sex,” were not included in the analysis used to answer research question 5. Of the 259 participants who were used in the following analysis, 196 (75.7%) participants fell into low (level 1)

specificity/involvement, 49 (19.0%) fell into moderate (level 2) specificity/involvement, and 14 (5.4%) fell into high (level 3) specificity/involvement. In order to fully answer research question 5 and 6, a one-way multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was conducted to determine the effect of the three levels of specificity/involvement of sexual fantasies on four dependent variables: Own Fantasy Disclosure, Partner Fantasy Disclosure, sexual satisfaction, and relational satisfaction. Significant differences were found among the three levels of specificity/involvement of sexual fantasies on the dependent measures, Wilks's  $\Lambda = .89$ ,  $F(18, 506) = 3.82$ ,  $p < .05$ . Table 4 contains the means and the standard deviations on the dependent variables for the three levels of specificity/involvement.

Analyses of variances (ANOVA) on each dependent variable was conducted as follow-up tests to the MANOVA. To help control for Type I error, each ANOVA was tested at the .0125 level (.05 divided by the number of ANOVAs conducted) using the Bonferroni method. The ANOVA on the sexual satisfaction scores was significant,  $F(2, 256) = 11.34$ ,  $p < .05$ ,  $\eta^2 = .08$ , while the ANOVA on the Own Fantasy Disclosure, Partner Fantasy Disclosure, and relational satisfaction scores was nonsignificant.

Post hoc analyses to the univariate ANOVA for the recall scores consisted of conducting pairwise comparisons to discover which levels of specificity/involvement were significantly different from each other. Each pairwise comparison was tested at the .004 level (.0125 divided by 3). Participants whose sexual fantasy fell into the high (level 3) specificity/involvement produced significantly lower sexual satisfaction scores in comparison with participants whose sexual fantasies fell into the low (level 1) or moderate (level 2) specificity/involvement (see Table 4). The level 1 and level 2 participants were not significantly different from each other. Because the sample sizes were fairly unequal, a post hoc comparison using Hochberg's GT2 was also administered. Hochberg's GT2 is a post hoc tests often used

when sample sizes are fairly different (Field, 2009). The pairwise comparisons using this test were extremely similar to those of the Bonferroni method. Only the sexual satisfaction scores between levels 3 and 1, and 3 and 2 were significantly different.

To further understand the mean scores on sexual satisfaction for those participants whose sexual fantasy fell into the high (level 3) specificity/involvement, an independent samples t-test was administered to test for differences in mean scores between those who shared their fantasy and those who did not. Of the 14 participants placed in level 3, ten (71.4%) had shared their sexual fantasy. Results from the t-test were revealed to be nonsignificant ( $t = -.19, p > .05$ ). Those who shared their sexual fantasy had almost identical sexual satisfaction scores with those who did not share their sexual fantasy. An independent samples t-test was also administered to discover possible mean sexual satisfaction differences between those who acted out their sexual fantasy and those who did not. Of the 14 participants placed in level 3, seven (50.0%) had acted out their sexual fantasy. Results from the t-test were revealed to be significant ( $t = -2.45, p < .05$ ). Those participants who acted out their highly specific/involved sexual fantasy had a significantly higher sexual satisfaction score than those who did not act out their sexual fantasy. Compared with participants who did not act out level 1 or 2 sexual fantasies, level 3 participants who did not act out their sexual fantasy have a much lower sexual satisfaction score.

While the difference was not significant at the .05 level, it is also important to note that participants who fell into the level 3 category also had much lower mean scores on Own Fantasy Disclosure. The ANOVA conducted on the dependent variable Own Fantasy Disclosure was significant at the  $p < .10$  level ( $F(2, 256) = 2.38, p < .10, \eta^2 = .02$ ). Post hoc analyses indicated a significant difference at the  $p < .10$  level between level 1 and level 3 participants. It appeared that level 3 participants also felt more uncomfortable disclosing their sexual fantasy than other participants.

## Hypothesis 1

Hypotheses 1 and 2 examined the last part of the conceptual model which explored the relationship between the decision to reveal and sexual satisfaction, along with the decision to act out the fantasy and sexual satisfaction. Hypothesis 1 predicted that those that discuss their sexual fantasies with their romantic partner will be more sexually satisfied in their relationship. The results of hypothesis 1 was calculated by taking the sum of one's score on the own fantasy disclosure questionnaire and comparing it to the sum of one's sexual satisfaction score. A significant and positive relationship between Own Fantasy Disclosure and sexual satisfaction was found ( $r = .39, p < .05$ ). Results also revealed a significant and positive relationship between the summary of Partner Fantasy Disclosure and sexual satisfaction ( $r = .37, p < .05$ ). These results suggest that individuals who are more willing to discuss their own or their partner's sexual fantasies also have higher sexual satisfaction. Thus, hypothesis 1 was confirmed.

Summary of Own and Partner Fantasy Disclosure was also significantly correlated to relational satisfaction. Although the correlation was considerably weaker than the correlation between sexual satisfaction, results revealed a significant relationship between Own Fantasy Disclosure and relational satisfaction ( $r = .18, p < .05$ ), and between Partner Fantasy Disclosure and relational satisfaction ( $r = .15, p < .05$ ).

An independent samples t-test was also utilized to test for significant differences in sexual satisfaction between those that have shared their favorite or most reoccurring fantasy with their romantic partner. After explaining in detail the content of their sexual fantasy, respondents were told to also indicate whether they have shared this fantasy with their romantic partner. Results were coded as either (0) had not shared this sexual fantasy with their current partner, or (1) they had shared this sexual fantasy with their current partner. Results revealed a significant difference between these two groups ( $t = 3.04, p < .05$ ). Participants that did share their favorite

or most reoccurring sexual fantasy reported higher sexual satisfaction scores ( $M = 22.43$ ,  $SD = 3.34$ ) than those that had not shared their favorite or most reoccurring sexual fantasy ( $M = 21.44$ ,  $SD = 3.71$ ). Of the 348 participants who wrote down a sexual fantasy 243 (69.8%) claimed to have shared their favorite/most recurring sexual fantasy with their romantic partner. It should also be noted that a significant difference between these two groups did not exist for the variable relational satisfaction.

## **Hypothesis 2**

This study also examined the difference in means on the sexual satisfaction measure between those that have acted out their favorite or most recurring sexual fantasy with their romantic partner, and those that have not. Results revealed that of the 349 participants who wrote down a sexual fantasy and answered this question, 171 (49.0%) had acted out their favorite or most reoccurring sexual fantasy with their current or most recent romantic partner. An independent samples t-test revealed a significant difference between these two groups ( $t = 3.90$ ,  $p < .05$ ). Participants that had acted out their favorite or most reoccurring sexual fantasy reported higher scores on sexual satisfaction ( $M = 22.85$ ,  $SD = 2.78$ ) than those that had not acted out their favorite or most reoccurring sexual fantasy ( $M = 21.40$ ,  $SD = 3.93$ ). Similar to those that shared their sexual fantasies and those that did not, an independent sample t-test indicated no significant difference in relational satisfaction scores between those that had acted out their sexual fantasy and those that had not ( $t = .58$ ,  $p > .05$ ).

## **Overall Summary of Results**

Overall, half the participants said they were comfortable discussing sexual fantasies with their partner. Of those that avoided the topic they did so because of the fear of partner reaction, the awkwardness of the topic, and because they felt the topic was too personal or private to discuss at that time in their relationship. The biggest potential rewards for discussing this topic

turned out to be fulfillment of the fantasies, a deeper bond or connection, and an improved sex life. Different themes were found to be discussed more than others, and individuals with highly specific sexual fantasies have significantly lower sexual satisfaction scores than those that do not. Results for hypothesis 1 revealed a significant relationship between willingness to discuss one's sexual fantasies, and sexual satisfaction, as well as a significant relationship between willingness to discuss partner's sexual fantasies, and sexual satisfaction. Hypothesis 2 was also confirmed. A more detailed examination of these findings as well as theoretical implications of all results will be discussed in the final chapter.



## CHAPTER FIVE

### DISCUSSION

The current study examined the rewards, costs, and potential outcomes of discussing sexual fantasies within romantic relationships. Communication privacy management theory (Petronio, 2002) was utilized to help understand the decision to disclose one's own sexual fantasies. As Petronio (2002) argued, "Privacy has importance for us because it lets us feel separate from others. It gives us a sense that we are the rightful owners of information about us" (p. 1). One of the major benefits of having sexual fantasies is the sense that they belong to the owner. As Leitenberg and Henning (1995) state, "in fantasy one can imagine anything one likes, however unrealistic, without experiencing embarrassment or rejection or societal and legal restrictions" (p. 469). By sharing one's sexual fantasy, he or she is giving up the benefit where the fantasy only belongs to them. To share a fantasy involves a lot of potential costs that include ridicule, judgment, or embarrassment. Therefore, the rewards associated with the disclosure, and the knowledge that one's partner can be trusted to keep this information private, have to be great. The first part of this chapter will focus on the area of the conceptual model that involves the rewards and costs associated with the decision to reveal a sexual fantasy to a romantic partner.

#### **Research Question 1**

Research question 1 asked about the potential rewards associated with disclosing a sexual fantasy to a romantic partner. Results revealed that of the vast number of participants ( $n = 370$ ), 81.1% reported at least one reward associated with discussing the topic of sexual fantasies with their romantic partner. This is an important finding considering that the self-disclosure of sexual rewards is important for couples seeking to maintain or enhance their sexual relationship over the long term. Focusing on sexual rewards rather than sexual costs is a characteristic of satisfying relationships (MacNeil & Byers, 2009).

The most mentioned reward was the chance at fulfillment. Simply put, participants felt if they didn't discuss their sexual fantasies, then the likelihood of them being acted out was small. Consistent with this idea is the fact that only six participants in this study acted out their sexual fantasy without also sharing their sexual fantasy with their romantic partner. As indicated from the results of hypothesis 2, which examined the relationship between acting out a fantasy and sexual satisfaction, those that get to fulfill their favorite or most recurring fantasy have better sex lives than those that do not.

Enhancing or improving one's sex life was another major reward reported by participants. The majority of participants reported how sexual fantasies would spice up the relationship, add variety to their sex life, and keep it from getting boring. The power of sexual variety has been shown to increase sexual satisfaction in relationships (Greeley, 1991; Sprecher & Regan, 2000). Thus, sexual fantasies may allow couples to role play and also add variety to their sex life. This finding does seem to validate the claims from therapists and self-help authors (Altman, 2004; Gabriel, 1996; Hooper, 2001; Keesling, 2005) that discussing one's sexual fantasy can improve or increase the sexual satisfaction in one's relationship. Couples who are struggling with their sex lives, or find their sex lives to be boring or mundane, would most likely benefit from disclosing their sexual fantasies.

Besides sexual rewards, the discussion of sexual fantasy(s) could also provide a deeper bond or sense of connection within the overall relationship. Participants reported that discussing sexual fantasies with one's partner could produce closeness and strengthen the emotional bond between them and their partner. This finding is consistent with the arguments of Gabriel (1996) who argued sharing sexual fantasies will deepen the emotional bond for couples. This finding is also consistent with the assumptions of communication privacy management (CPM) theory. As Petronio (2002) argued, disclosure of private and personal information can give enormous

benefits, one of which is an enhanced sense of intimacy and connection. Because the topic of sexual fantasies can be considered very private and personal information (Coffelt & Hess, 2006), it has the potential reward of creating a bond and enhancing closeness.

Participants in this study also noted that discussing sexual fantasy can also open up and improve communication between two partners. Responses in this study not only mentioned improving sexual communication, but overall communication as well, as a result of sharing sexual fantasies. This kind of openness was also mentioned alongside the issue of trust. Perhaps couples who are struggling with their sexual communication or openness in a relationship might benefit from the trust and openness that comes along with discussing sexual fantasies. Along with open communication, participants also wrote about the reward of knowing a partner's sexual preferences. Even if someone did not want to act out their partner's sexual fantasy, at least the discussion would give them insights into some of their partner's sexual preferences. This knowledge of partner preferences, as argued by past research, is significantly related to both short-term and long-term rewards (MacNeil & Byers, 2009).

## **Research Question 2**

Along with research question 1, research question 2 focused on the area of the conceptual model which examines the weighing of costs and rewards that make up the decision to reveal a sexual fantasy in a romantic relationship. The second research question in this study examined the specific reasons and motivations why individuals might avoid a discussion of sexual fantasies. While the rewards could be plentiful, participants still reported possible costs for disclosing such a topic. As has been well documented in this study, previous research has also found that avoiding topics in romantic relationships can harm the relationship (Caughlin & Afifi, 2004; Caughlin & Golish, 2002; Finkenauer & Hazam, 2000; Knobloch & Carpenter-Theune,

2004). Therefore, it is important to understand why couples might avoid discussing the potentially very positive topic of sexual fantasies.

Of the 44% of participants who reported they were not completely comfortable or open discussing both their own and their partner's sexual fantasies, the majority avoided the topic for fear of partner reaction, the awkwardness of the topic, and/or the private and personal nature of the topic or person. Similar to past studies (Greene et al., 2003; Guerrero & Afifi, 1995), a large percentage of topic avoidance in this study was due to the fear of embarrassment or ridicule. Participants avoided the topic to protect themselves against the feeling of judgment, embarrassment, or criticism of their sexual fantasies. Participants also indicated of the fear of being labeled abnormal because of the content of their fantasy. This finding is consistent with the work of Tiefer (2004), who argued that people care deeply about how others view the normality of their sexuality. Petronio (1991, 2000, 2002) also argued that the revelation of private information in a relationship may leave individuals feeling vulnerable. Individuals in this study were highly concerned about discussing their own sexual fantasies for fear their partner would consider them "weird" or "abnormal" because their fantasy might be what their partner considered "unorthodox." As one participant wrote, *"He would think I am too weird and crazy."* This vulnerability could be viewed as a major cost, and therefore plays a major factor when deciding whether to disclose a sexual fantasy.

The second most mentioned reason for avoidance was due to the awkwardness of the topic. The topic of sexual fantasies, specifically, was seen as a topic that was awkward and therefore difficult to initiate and/or discuss with one's romantic partner. This finding adds to research that examined people's discomfort when discussing sex (Parker et al., 2007) and people's inability to have conversations with partners or potential partners about sex (Allen et al., 2001). The topic of sex has been found to be difficult to discuss and initiate. The topic of sexual

fantasies, specifically, seems to be no different. Future research should examine potential scripts or initiation strategies that couples could use to effectively initiate and construct this conversation. Sprecher and Regan (2000) discovered that couples are often indirect when they do talk about sex. Baxter (1987) also discovered that people use indirect posturing or innuendos to talk about sex. Further, Adelman (1992) found that the majority of couples had to rely on humor to help with condom use and difficult sex discussions. Perhaps some couples would find it easier to approach the topic of sexual fantasies from a humorous or indirect way, in an attempt to ease the discomfort or awkwardness they feel when trying to initiate or construct this potentially very positive discussion.

The third most frequent reason for avoidance was due to the private and personal nature of the topic or person. Some individuals reported they were simply too shy or private a person to reveal such a personal topic, while others reported the topic was simply too private to reveal. Past research has found the topic of sexual fantasies to be considered very private, even more so than the sexual topics of sexual history and sexual preferences (Coffelt & Hess, 2006). The idea that a sexual topic like sexual fantasy is too private to disclose is also consistent with past research that has examined the discussion of sexual information (Faulkner & Mansfield, 2002).

Not all individuals reported the idea of never discussing sexual fantasies; some simply felt their relationship had not progressed long enough in order to discuss such a private topic with their romantic partner. Research has found there to be certain level of closeness often needed for intimate disclosures (Caughlin & Afifi, 2004; Roloff & Ifert, 1998). The delay of discussing sexual fantasies could in fact be a positive choice for the romantic couple. A common mistake in dating couples' attempts to find intimacy is to attempt sexual communication too soon. Such interaction may create a tendency for persons to retreat in order to preserve autonomy (Baus & Allen, 1996).

Other motivations for avoiding the discussion of sexual fantasy that were mentioned less frequently were reasons of marriage/importance, benefit to partner, worried about content, and fulfillment. While important costs, all totaled these reasons only accounted for 31.6% of the total costs reported in this study.

### **Research Question 3**

According to the conceptual model of sexual fantasy disclosure found in Figure 1, it was suggested that the content of one's sexual fantasy might influence an individual's decision to reveal their own sexual fantasy. The examination of the content of the sexual fantasies focused on the theme of the sexual fantasy, as well as their level of specificity/involvement. Research question 3 explored the relationship between the theme of one's sexual fantasy, and a participant's decision to reveal their sexual fantasy. Ten themes emerged from coding the content of sexual fantasies. Participant sexual fantasies included the themes of Power, Water, Real Person, Character, Romance, Role Play, Toys/Ingredients, Location, Specific Sexual Act, and Multiple Partners. Several of the themes have also been reported in past research, while others are newly discovered themes. The theme of Power is consistent with past literature that discovered forced sexual activities are very common themes of sexual fantasies (Arndt et al., 1985; Hunt, 1974). The themes of Real Person and Character are also synonymous with the theme of sex with strangers and celebrities that has been found in past research (Howitt, 2004; Hunt, 1974; Wilson & Lang, 1981). These themes are also consistent with the idea that sexual fantasies often include people that are not one's current romantic partner (Altman, 2004; Gil, 1990). Finally, the theme of Multiple Partners found in this study is consistent with past research that has found participants often fantasize about having sex with multiple partners (Gee, Devilly, & Ward, 2004; Hunt, 1974).

When examining the percentages of those who shared their sexual fantasies and the participant scores on Own Fantasy Disclosure, it appears some themes are easier to discuss than others. Sexual fantasies with the themes of Location, Power, and Water seem to be the easiest to discuss. Participants with these themes reported the highest percentage of sexual fantasy disclosure, and also reported the highest levels of comfort discussing sexual fantasies. Independent samples t-tests also revealed that participants whose sexual fantasy contained the theme of Power were almost significantly more comfortable discussing their own sexual fantasies than those without the theme of Power in their sexual fantasy(s). Future research should examine the factors which cause individuals with the theme of Power in their sexual fantasy(s) to be highly willing to discuss their sexual fantasies. Perhaps people who have higher levels of erotophilia (i.e., express less guilt about sex, hold more positive attitudes to sexually explicit material) or socio-sexuality (i.e., individuals who prefer unrestricted sex) are more likely to have the theme of Power in their sexual fantasy.

In contrast, the themes of Real Person, Toys/Ingredients, and Characters were the least discussed in romantic relationships. Individuals with these themes showed the lowest percentage of sexual fantasy disclosure in their romantic relationship. According to scores on Own Fantasy Disclosure, individuals with these themes also reported the lowest comfort or willingness to discuss their sexual fantasies. It appears themes that contain specific people, whether actual or figurative, cause participants to be more hesitant to disclose their sexual fantasies. When deciding to disclose a sexual fantasy which contains specific people, it stands to reason the cost for such a disclosure could be higher. While a partner could easily accommodate a theme of Power, Specific Sexual Acts, or Water, it would be more difficult to dress or act as a real person. In a similar fashion, it may be difficult for a partner to act out the character of a fireman, police officer, robber, etc. This type of role playing or acting may be new and/or difficult for some

individuals to accomplish, especially when considering their romantic partner may have a very different image of what a fireman, police officer, robber, etc. might do or say.

The romantic partner may also worry about the outcome of telling their partner they have a sexual fantasy of a person that is not them, or a character that they are not. This disclosure may cause feelings of insecurity or jealousy in their romantic partner. In their research on disclosure of past sexual experiences, Anderson et al. (2011) found participants often avoided the discussion of their partner's past sexual experiences for fear of feelings of jealousy or insecurity. Therefore it seems reasonable to conclude individuals would feel hesitant discussing sexual fantasies with their romantic partner if they knew their fantasies contained other people besides their current romantic partner (whether real or fictional). The knowledge that one's partner fantasies about someone else could be the cause of these feelings of jealousy or insecurity. Perhaps this is why the most common sexual fantasies to be acted out (Romance, Power, Specific Sexual Act, and Water) do not involve another person, or role playing as another person.

#### **Research Question 4**

According to the conceptual model found in Figure 1, both the theme of a sexual fantasy and the specificity/involvement of the sexual fantasy are related to the sexual satisfaction scores associated with sharing and acting out a sexual fantasy. Research question 4 asked whether a participant's sexual fantasy themes influence their sexual and relational satisfaction that comes from sharing and acting out their most favorite/recurring sexual fantasy.

Independent samples t-tests were used to determine whether sharing or acting out a sexual fantasy produced significantly different mean scores with sexual satisfaction than not sharing or acting out the same fantasy. Results indicated that while sharing or acting out a sexual fantasy produced higher sexual satisfaction scores than those who did not share or act out a sexual fantasy, the scores were not significantly higher for any of the themes coded for this



study. However, the themes of Water and Specific Sexual Act did produce mean score differences that were extremely close to significant. It appears highly beneficial in terms of sexual satisfaction to act out a sexual fantasy if the fantasy contains the theme of Water or Specific Sexual Act.

The benefits of using water when acting out a sexual fantasy is not surprising considering the high percentage of adults who prefer incorporating water in their sexual activities (Griffin, 2011; Ogino, 2011). For example, in a recent survey administered and analyzed by the popular magazine *Cosmopolitan*, the first and fourth most popular and arousing places to have sex besides the bedroom involved water. The first most popular place was in the shower or the bathtub. Eighty two percent of the 1500 people surveyed mentioned they have had sex in the shower or the bathtub and would prefer to do so again. The fourth most popular place to have sex besides the bedroom was in a pool or body of water. Fifty four percent of the 1500 people surveyed expressed they have had sex in a pool or body of water. Therefore, it appears combining elements of water with sex is both popular and arousing.

The results also revealed it was important for sexual satisfaction to act out fantasies that contained specific sexual acts. Considering that self-disclosing desired sexual techniques to a partner often leads to greater sexual satisfaction and fewer sexual problems (Byers & Demmons, 1999; Cupach & Metts, 1991; LoPiccolo & LoPiccolo, 1978; MacNeil & Byers, 2009; Metts & Cupach, 1989; Russell, 1990), it would make sense that individuals would receive sexual benefits from sharing a fantasy with a specific sexual act. The specific sexual act of a position, movement, or stance may very well be the most arousing part of the sexual fantasy, and therefore the most important to act out. Of all the components of a fantasy (i.e., location, dress, characters, dialogue, etc.), the type of desired sexual act or position would possibly be the component most closely tied to an orgasm since it involves specific touches. Fulfilling the type of sexual act,

above all else, would theoretically increase the chances of orgasm, which is closely tied to greater sexual satisfaction (Young et al., 1998). In other words, if someone fails to get the location and character wrong when acting out a partner's fantasy, but is able to fulfill the specific sexual act, the chances for orgasm may be greater than if the location and character were fulfilled, but not the specific sexual act. Future research should continue to examine why the use of water and specific sexual acts during sex is so arousing and satisfying for participants.

While the conceptual model used in this study only focused on sexual satisfaction, the dependent variable of relational satisfaction was also measured separately. It should be of interest to note that participants with the theme of Characters had significantly lower scores on relational satisfaction than the rest of the sample. Perhaps those with the theme of Characters are in relationships where they wish their partner was someone else, or could be someone else. When reviewing the mean scores of those who act out different themes, it appears individuals do not receive the same high level of relational satisfaction when acting out a theme of Characters than they do with other themes. It appears there was no benefit in terms of relational satisfaction for those who acted out a sexual fantasy with a theme of Characters. Acting out or sharing a theme of Romance; however, seems somewhat important for relational satisfaction. An examination of Table 3 shows those with the theme of romance have the highest mean scores of relational satisfaction. Future research should examine why those with the themes of Characters in their sexual fantasies have lower relational satisfaction than those without this theme.

### **Research Question 5 and Research Question 6**

Perhaps the most intriguing finding from this study comes from the mean differences in sexual satisfaction scores between those with more specific/elaborate themes and those with low to moderate specific/elaborate themes. As shown in the conceptual model in Figure 1, the specificity/involvement of the sexual fantasy is related to the decision to reveal a sexual fantasy.

While there was not a significant difference between any of the three levels of specificity/involvement with the variable Own Fantasy Disclosure, it does appear that high specificity/involvement fantasies (level 3) are more difficult to discuss with one's romantic partner than low or moderate specificity/involvement fantasies. Participants who had high specificity/involvement sexual fantasies scored much lower on their willingness to discuss their sexual fantasies than participants with low or moderate sexual fantasies. Because of the nature of these high specificity/involvement sexual fantasies, it is not surprising they might be more difficult to discuss. These level 3 sexual fantasies were highly specific and highly involved, making it difficult for anyone to fulfill. Since these sexual fantasies would be difficult to fulfill, it stands to reason then that the participant would avoid the subject because they felt their partner would not be able to fulfill the fantasy anyway.

Past research has found that individuals will often avoid topics because they believe talking will not change the situation (Gilbar & Ben-Zur, 2002; Salander & Spetz, 2002). Therefore, individuals with highly specific/involved sexual fantasies may be more inclined to conceal their sexual fantasy. Also, of the 14 fantasies, coded as highly specific/elaborate in this study, many of them contained information that some would consider graphic, provocative, or perhaps taboo. For example, one such level 3 sexual fantasies involved an individual swimming in cum while drinking it. Another fantasy involved a threesome with oral sex in vanilla pudding. An examination of all the sexual fantasies seems to provide reasonable evidence that highly specific/involved sexual fantasies had more provocative material than low or moderate sexual fantasies. Therefore it is possible that these individuals with highly specific/involved sexual fantasies may be less willing to discuss their sexual fantasy because of the fear of being labeled abnormal. They may worry that their sexual fantasy will be perceived as too provocative or abnormal. Past research has found this type of motivation for avoidance to be common in

individuals (Tiefer, 2004). Parker et al. (2007) claimed that the participants in their study worried about losing the approval, affection, attention, and love of their sexual partners by talking about sex. Indeed, this study found the number one reason for sexual fantasy avoidance was due to the fear of judgment, embarrassment, or ridicule.

Also in the conceptual model (i.e., Figure 1), the specificity/involvement of the sexual fantasy is related to the sexual satisfaction of those that share their sexual fantasy, and those that act out their sexual fantasy. Results revealed a significant difference in sexual satisfaction scores between the three levels of specificity/involvement. Those with high specificity/involvement (level 3) sexual fantasies have significantly lower scores of sexual satisfaction than both participants with low (level 1) and moderate (level 2) fantasies. An examination of the sexual satisfaction scores for those individuals whose sexual fantasy fell into the high specificity/involvement group shows an interesting result. Those who fail to act out a highly specific/involved (level 3) sexual fantasy have much lower sexual satisfaction scores than low (level 1) and moderate (level 2) participants who fail to act out their sexual fantasy. In fact, there is a significant difference between those that act out their level 3 sexual fantasy and those that do not. It appears those with highly specific and elaborate sexual fantasies find acting out their sexual fantasy to be extremely important for their sexual satisfaction. It appears that if one has a highly specific/elaborate sexual fantasy, it would be beneficial for him or her to act out that fantasy if they want to have higher sexual satisfaction. Of all the groups or individuals examined in this study, those who did not act out their highly specific/involved (level 3) sexual fantasy produced the lowest mean sexual satisfaction score ( $M = 14.71$ ; highest score possible was 25).

As was discovered in hypothesis 2, those individuals who got the chance to act out their most favorite/recurring sexual fantasy have higher sexual satisfaction scores than those who did not. Individuals who fall into the high specificity/involvement group would most likely have

lower chances of getting to act out every aspect of their sexual fantasy than individuals in the low and moderate specificity/involvement group. Therefore, these level 3 individuals would not get to benefit from having acted out their sexual fantasies, and consequently have lower sexual satisfaction scores. Even the individuals who get to act out their highly specific/involved sexual fantasy might not get to act out all aspects of the fantasy, and not in the way they saw it happening. In their minds, it may be difficult to get all the aspects of their sexual fantasy “right.” Also, as discussed earlier, individuals in this high specificity/involvement group are less willing to discuss their sexual fantasy than low and moderate individuals. The fact that these high specificity/involvement individuals do not disclose nor act out their sexual fantasy(s) at the same rate and breadth as individuals falling into the low or moderate specificity/involvement, results in sexual satisfaction scores that are significantly lower. Thus, it would seem that the likelihood of getting increased amounts of sexual satisfaction from one’s sexual fantasies are far lower for those whose sexual fantasies are highly specific/involved.

### **Hypothesis 1**

Hypothesis 1 examined the relationship between Own Fantasy Disclosure and sexual satisfaction. This hypothesis was confirmed. Not only did this study reveal that participants who are more willing to discuss their own or their partner’s sexual fantasy(s) have better sex lives, it also revealed that participants who share their favorite or most recurring sexual fantasy with their romantic partner have higher sexual satisfaction than those that do not. There is a clear relationship between discussing sexual fantasies and sexual satisfaction. While past research has identified the positives of sexual self-disclosure in terms of likes and dislikes, along with the benefits of having sexual fantasies, no study has examined the potential positive effects of discussing sexual fantasies with their partner until now. Even though it is considered a very private and personal topic, even for a sexual topic (Coffelt & Hess, 2006), discussing this topic

can still produce sexual satisfaction. Sexual fantasies can now be confidently added to the list of sexual topics that have shown to, when discussed, be related to sexual satisfaction. Sexual fantasies joins the topics of sexual techniques, sexual preferences, and sexual likes/dislikes, as another sexual topic related to sexual satisfaction.

As was discussed earlier in research question 1, two rewards associated with disclosing one's sexual fantasy were the deepening of an emotional connection and the new knowledge of partner preferences. Past research has revealed these two rewards to be related to sexual satisfaction. Cupach and Metts (1991) argued that sexual communication influences sexual satisfaction in two ways: (1) Obtaining information about partner preferences leads to sexual satisfaction, and (2) This self-disclosure in itself enhances and intimacy and relational satisfaction. The sense of bond, closeness, and deepening of connection that participants referred to in this study could relate to enhanced intimacy and relational satisfaction. Therefore, it would seem possible that the disclosure of sexual fantasies, with its many rewards, would be related to sexual satisfaction.

These findings highlight the areas within the proposed conceptual model found in Figure 1 that deal with the relationship between decision to reveal and sexual satisfaction. As shown from the model, sexual satisfaction scores will be different depending on whether an individual decided to reveal or conceal their sexual fantasy from their romantic partner.

What is also interesting to note is those who did share their favorite or most recurring sexual fantasy did not show significantly higher scores on relational satisfaction than those that did not. Considering how previous research has noted a very strong correlation between sexual and relational satisfaction (see Sprecher & Cate, 2004), it is interesting that this type of sharing only related to the sexual area of the relationship. It should also be noted that while willingness to discuss one's own sexual fantasy(s) was significantly correlated to relational satisfaction, the

relationship was modest, and much lower than their correlation with sexual satisfaction. Finally, it is worth noting that well over half of participants had in fact shared their favorite or most recurring sexual fantasy with their romantic partner (roughly 70% of participants). This finding is consistent with recent research that found that 66% of participants were willing to tell their partner of their sexual fantasy (Askmen.com, 2010), though it should be noted that all the participants used in that study were males.

## **Hypothesis 2**

Hypothesis 2 predicted those who had acted out their favorite/most recurring sexual fantasy would have higher sexual satisfaction scores than those who had not acted out their favorite/most recurring sexual fantasy. As was proposed by the conceptual model in Figure 1, sexual satisfaction scores will be related to the enactment of sexual fantasies. The model also highlights the two distinct sexual satisfaction scores related to acting out a sexual fantasy, in that those who act out a sexual fantasy will have higher/different sexual satisfaction scores than those who do not act out their sexual fantasy. In their analysis of research on sexual fantasies, Leitenberg and Henning (1995) conclude their study by arguing that additional research needs to determine the extent to which people act out fantasies with their partner and how this affects their relationship. This study revealed a significant difference in sexual satisfaction between those that have acted out their favorite or most recurring fantasy, and those that did not. The participants that acted out the fantasy with their romantic partner ( $n = 180$ , 48.6% of participants) scored significantly higher on sexual satisfaction. This study suggests that sharing one's favorite or most recurring sexual fantasy and acting out one's favorite or most recurring sexual fantasy, are also both related to higher sexual satisfaction. Individuals surveyed in this study seem to have higher satisfaction when they share and/or act out their sexual fantasies. By acting out a sexual fantasy, one is partaking in a sexual act or play that one finds highly arousing. That fulfillment of

a sexual fantasy and heightened sexual arousal could very well lead to more or stronger orgasms, which have been reported by past research to significantly related to sexual satisfaction (Birnbaum et al., 2001; Birnbaum et al., 2008; Young et al., 1998; Young et al., 2000). And as was discussed in research question 1, a major reward to discussing a sexual fantasy, as reported by participants, is the possibility of fulfillment (the acting out of a sexual fantasy). Future research should continue to examine the benefits of acting out sexual fantasies, and the extent to which sexual fantasy enactment influences the sex life of a couple and the overall health of their relationship.

### **Implications for Researchers and Couples**

This study was the first of its kind to specifically examine the rewards and costs associated with the disclosure of sexual fantasies, as well as the relationship between this disclosure and sexual satisfaction. The conceptual model for this study proved to be a useful figure to help explain the disclosure of sexual fantasies in romantic relationships. The decision to reveal a sexual fantasy seems to be influenced by the rewards and costs of the disclosure, which is partly influenced the theme and specificity/involvement of the sexual fantasy. Those individuals that revealed their sexual fantasy have significantly higher sexual satisfaction scores than those that do not. Likewise, those that then act out the sexual fantasy have significantly higher sexual satisfaction scores than those that do not. Both discussing sexual fantasies with a romantic partner and acting out sexual fantasies with a romantic partner are indeed positively related to sexual satisfaction. It was also important to understand the extent to which couples disclose their sexual fantasies. Unlike sexual positions, for example, one cannot act on a sexual fantasy without fully disclosing all the parts. In this sense, it is difficult for one to fulfill all aspects of their sexual fantasy without disclosing it to their partner.



The discussion of sexual fantasies could be especially important for a variety of individuals and couples. Those whose sex life has become stale or boring could potentially benefit greatly from the sharing of sexual fantasies. The sharing of sexual fantasies and then fulfilling those fantasies could add both sexual variety and experimentation to a relationship. Considering the positive influence sexual variety can have on one's sex life (Greeley, 1991), sexual fantasies could serve an important role in a couple's sex life. As argued in Castleman (2004), "There are only so many ways one person can touch another. Fantasy has no limits. Our 'wildest dreams' are a safe way to become very aroused, which is how fantasy can help a good love life feel even better" (p. 62). This current study adds to the argument by relational therapists that the discussion of sexual fantasies can help maintain or heighten sexual arousal and sexual satisfaction (Altman, 2004; Hooper, 2001; Keesling, 2005). With the fulfillment of sexual fantasies also comes the potential to role play. This is another added benefit to sharing sexual fantasies. Role playing helps men and women experience more liberation while having sex. Role playing provides a sense of escape (Haltzman, 2008). This sense of escape could also help break up the routine or mundane sex lives of unsatisfied couples. To steal a commonly used phrase from sex therapists, role playing sexual fantasies can "spice up" a sex life.

This study suggests that acting out a sexual fantasy is related to higher scores of sexual satisfaction. Those with the theme of Water or Specific Sexual Act in their sexual fantasy, or those with highly specific/elaborate sexual fantasies, seem to especially gain an important sexual benefit to acting out their sexual fantasies. In terms of sexual satisfaction, those individuals gain the most by acting out their sexual fantasies. Therefore it would seem especially important for those with these themes and/or specificity/involvement to share and then act out their sexual fantasy with their partner.

Hopefully couples and researchers can also use the potential costs and reasons for avoidance from this study to help individuals produce effective sexual scripts that could people to initiate and construct conversations about their sexual fantasies. It is important that couples learn to let their partners know how they will not judge them or criticize them because of their sexual fantasies, and that having and discussing sexual fantasies are positive for many areas of the relationship. It is important to convey to one's romantic partner how their sexual fantasies, regardless of the themes present, will be met with openness and not ridicule. Romantic partners also need to feel comfortable about sharing this private information. This comfort comes from reassuring their partner they will keep his or her sexual fantasies private, and will not use them against this person in any way. This reassurance will help lower the partner's fears associated with partner reaction and too personal/private of an issue. Future studies should examine how couples could possibly ease into and initiate a discussion that would curb their anxiety or discomfort about sexual fantasies. For example, perhaps couples could start out sharing their basic sexual likes or dislikes, and then move to sharing their more detailed and possibly more risqué fantasies.

Whether avoided or disclosed, this study reported how common it is to have sexual fantasies, and how healthy it can be to share such fantasies. As argued by sex and health expert Castleman (2004), "Try to accept your fantasies without judging them. They are no reflection on your morality, faithfulness, or mental health. In meditation and in sexual fantasy, everything is permitted and nothing is wrong...grant yourself and your lover freedom of fantasy" (pp. 62-63). Treating a romantic partner's fantasies with acceptance could provide healthier discussions and relationships.

## **Limitations**

While the current research possessed certain theoretical strengths, there are limitations that should be addressed. The first limitation is the age of the participants. The average age for this sample was approximately 21. There is a strong possibility that younger individuals lack the sexual or relational experience to really understand the rewards, and especially the costs, of communicating sexual topics with a romantic partner. A younger or more sexually inexperienced population could limit the generalizability of the findings.

Furthermore, a second limitation is the fairly homogenous sample in terms of ethnicity. The vast majority of participants used in this study were Caucasian. There are cultural variations related to sex and sexuality (Crooks & Baur, 2011) and, therefore, there may be variations in trends related to willingness to discuss sexual fantasies in one's romantic relationship. It could be possible that different ethnicities may consider sex and talking about sex more taboo than others.

A third limitation is that the analysis used in this study does not imply causality; therefore the interpretations must be only discussed in terms of the correlation or association of the relationships (Allgeier, 2002). While ample evidence does exist for the relationships surrounding sexual satisfaction alluded to in this study, the direction of the relationships between many of these variables remains somewhat unknown. For example, while it is easy to say discussing one's own sexual fantasy leads to a higher sexual satisfaction, it could be possible the stronger sexual satisfaction is driving the willingness to discuss this issue.

A fourth limitation stems from the lack of knowing how each participant filled out the survey. While this study was able to assess which participants were taking the survey for course credit, it is unclear which responses were given by individuals from the sex chat site, Facebook, and Craigslist. The online survey used for this study was advertised to students, on the Facebook site of the primary researcher, on Craigslist, and on the online sex chat site 321sexchat.com.

Nowhere on the survey did it ask the participant where they had heard about the survey. Therefore it is uncertain what influence the medium might have had on the answers of the participants. Individuals using the sex chat site may be more open to discussing their sexual fantasies than other individuals.

There are also methodological issues with using an online survey (see Cantrell & Lupinacci, 2007; Van Selm & Jankowski, 2006). A participant's answers might have been influenced by who else was in the room with them when they completed the survey. A participant might not have given the most truthful of answers about the content of their sexual fantasy, or their willingness to discuss sexual fantasies, if their current romantic partner was near them or in the room while they were answering questions about their private sexual fantasies. Therefore, a social desirability bias (Wiederman, 2002) could be possible. Participants might have responded in a way to make themselves look more desirable to the researcher or the person in the room. It is possible a participant would exaggerate their sexual and relational satisfaction scores if their partner was near them.

Finally, longitudinal analysis is needed to determine the extent to which the discussion of sexual fantasies in a romantic relationship relates to both sexual and relational satisfaction. For example, results of this study indicate that sharing sexual fantasies could spice up a relationship and add sexual novelty and variety to a romantic relationship. However, once a fantasy has been acted out and executed several times, does the relationship go back to being stale or boring? Do couples need to keep changing or evolving their sexual fantasies to maintain or increase their sexual satisfaction? These questions need to be addressed by following individuals over time. It would be important to discover if sexual fantasies work for older or long-time partnered couples, and whether it is important to have many sexual fantasies, to keep changing one's sexual fantasies, or keep reliving a few of one's favorite sexual fantasies.

## **Conclusion**

Guided by CPM theory, this study discovered the rewards and costs associated with disclosing and discussing sexual fantasies in a romantic relationship. By doing so, this study was able to provide a better understanding of how the discussion of sexual fantasies can influence sexual satisfaction and relational satisfaction in a romantic relationship. The findings not only highlighted important barriers to discussing very private sexual information, but also demonstrated how the content of sexual fantasies can influence the decision to reveal very private and personal sexual fantasies. Romantic couples might benefit by learning the results of the study. With this information, couples could learn the benefits associated with sexual fantasies, along with helpful ways to construct the discussion of them. Hopefully, the findings from the study will advance theorizing on sexual fantasies, sexual communication within romantic relationships, and relational communication as a whole.

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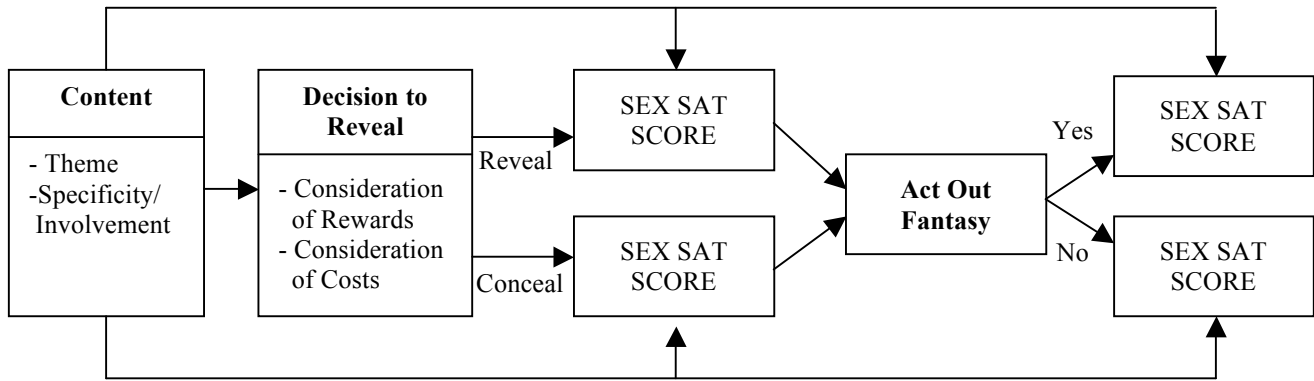


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**Figure 1. Conceptual Model of Sexual Fantasy Disclosure**

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**Table 1.** *Themes for Research Question 1: Rewards from Discussing Sexual Fantasies*

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Themes	<i>n</i>	% of 300
Fulfillment <i>(the reward of fulfilling self or partner's fantasy)</i>	113	37.7
Establish Deeper Bond or Connection	98	32.7
Improves Sex Life Directly	88	29.3
Opens Communication	34	11.3
Know Partner Preferences	27	9.0

---

**Table 2.** *Themes for Research Question 2: Costs for Discussing Sexual Fantasies*

---

Themes	<i>n</i>	% of 370
Partner Reaction	34	9.2
Awkwardness of Topic	23	6.2
Too Personal or Private	22	6.0
Marriage/Importance	17	4.5
Benefit to Partner	15	4.0
Worry Regarding Content of Partner's Sexual Fantasy	10	2.7
Worry Regarding Fulfillment of Fantasy	9	2.5
Vague Avoidance	16	4.3
Other/Confused	15	4.0

---

**Table 3.** Themes for Research Question 3 and 4: Themes of Sexual Fantasies and Mean Scores on the Dependent Variables

Theme	Overall	Shared		Acted out	
		Y	N	Y	N
<b>Power</b>					
Sexual Satisfaction	22.17	22.12	22.40	22.50	21.60
Own Fantasy Disclosure	31.64**				
<b>Water</b>					
Sexual Satisfaction	22.77a	23.00a	22.00	23.58a	21.50^
Own Fantasy Disclosure	31.87a				
<b>Characters</b>					
Sexual Satisfaction	21.58	22.27	20.08b	22.22	21.00
Own Fantasy Disclosure	28.87				
<b>Real Person</b>					
Sexual Satisfaction	20.50b	20.29	21.00	21.00	20.29
Own Fantasy Disclosure	25.50b				
<b>Romance</b>					
Sexual Satisfaction	22.47	22.62	22.00	23.27	21.00
Own Fantasy Disclosure	30.00				
<b>Role Playing</b>					
Sexual Satisfaction	22.09	22.20	21.71	22.26	21.85
Own Fantasy Disclosure	30.63				
<b>Toys/Ingredients</b>					
Sexual Satisfaction	20.50b	20.75	20.17	22.20	19.56b
Own Fantasy Disclosure	29.36				
<b>Location</b>					
Sexual Satisfaction	22.35	22.64	20.86	23.00	21.73
Own Fantasy Disclosure	31.49				
<b>Specific Sexual Act</b>					
Sexual Satisfaction	22.02	22.12	21.75	22.79	20.76^
Own Fantasy Disclosure	30.20				
<b>Multiple Partners</b>					
Sexual Satisfaction	21.66	21.74	21.45	22.40	21.17
Own Fantasy Disclosure	30.11				

a. indicates highest value for that category

b. indicates lowest value for that category

^ . indicates statistical significance at the .10 level, the mean difference between the Y and N for that variable

\*\* . indicates statistical significance at the .10 level, the mean difference between those with the theme and all the participants without

**Table 4.** Means for Research Question 5 and 6: Examining Specificity/Involvement of Sexual Fantasies

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	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Sexual Satisfaction*		
Level 1	22.59	3.13
Level 2	21.98	2.66
Level 3	18.28	6.42
Relational Satisfaction		
Level 1	21.94	3.95
Level 2	20.53	4.47
Level 3	20.64	4.58
Own Fantasy Disclosure		
Level 1	30.89	8.11
Level 2	30.18	8.16
Level 3	26.00	9.16
Partner Fantasy Disclosure		
Level 1	33.74	6.91
Level 2	33.39	8.09
Level 3	32.36	7.39

---

\* A significant difference  $p < .05$  existed between the levels in the variable

## APPENDIX A

1/7/11

HSCL #19116

Mike Anderson  
811 New Jersey St  
Lawrence, KS 66044

The Human Subjects Committee, Lawrence Campus (HSCL) has received your response to its expedited review of your research project

19116 Anderson/Kunkel (COMS) Sexual Communication in Romantic Relationships: An Investigation into the Self-Disclosure of Sexual Fantasies

and approved this project under the expedited procedure provided in 45 CFR 46.110 (f) (7) Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies. As described, the project complies with all the requirements and policies established by the University for protection of human subjects in research. Unless renewed, approval lapses one year after approval date.

Since your research presents no risk to participants and involves no procedures for which written consent is normally required outside of the research context HSCL may waive the requirement for a signed consent form (45 CFR 46.117 (c) (2)). Your information statement meets HSCL requirements. The Office for Human Research Protections requires that your information statement must include the note of HSCL approval and expiration date, which has been entered on the form sent back to you with this approval.

1. At designated intervals until the project is completed, a Project Status Report must be returned to the HSCL office.
2. Any significant change in the experimental procedure as described should be reviewed by this Committee prior to altering the project.
3. Notify HSCL about any new investigators not named in original application. Note that new investigators must take the online tutorial at [http://www.rcr.ku.edu/hsc/hsp\\_tutorial/000.shtml](http://www.rcr.ku.edu/hsc/hsp_tutorial/000.shtml).
4. Any injury to a subject because of the research procedure must be reported to the Committee immediately.
5. When signed consent documents are required, the primary investigator must retain the signed consent documents for at least three years past completion of the research activity. If you use a signed consent form, provide a copy of the consent form to subjects at the time of consent.
6. If this is a funded project, keep a copy of this approval letter with your proposal/grant file.

Please inform HSCL when this project is terminated. You must also provide HSCL with an annual status report to maintain HSCL approval. Unless renewed, approval lapses one year after approval date. If your project receives funding which requests an annual update approval, you must request this from HSCL one month prior to the annual update. Thanks for your cooperation. If you have any questions, please contact me.

Sincerely,

Jan Butin  
Associate Coordinator

Human Subjects Committee Lawrence



## APPENDIX B

### RESEARCH PARTICIPANT INFORMATION STATEMENT

Sexual Communication in Romantic Relationships:

An Investigation into the Self-Disclosure of Sexual Fantasies

Mike T. Anderson, Department of Communication Studies, University of Kansas

#### Purpose of Research

This project will explore whether an individual in a romantic relationship discusses or avoids the topic of their sexual fantasies with their romantic partner, and how that avoidance or disclosure relates to their sexual and relational satisfaction

#### Specific Procedures to be Used

Subjects will be asked to individually respond to a questionnaire online through the website qualtrics.com. The questionnaire requests demographic information, as well as data about the individual's most recent or current relationship. Questions will ask individuals to reflect on their thoughts about their sexual fantasies, and their views on sexual topics.

#### Duration of Participation

There exists no specific time period the questionnaire must be completed in. The questionnaire is designed to take roughly 30 minutes.

#### Benefits to the Individual

There is no direct benefit to individual participants, other than the knowledge that they have contributed to further research in the area of sexual communication in romantic relationships. The researcher will provide results upon the request of any study participants.

#### Risks to the Individual

Participants will be at no higher than minimal risk, as they will be asked only to complete a questionnaire. There are no right or wrong answers in the study. Any answers will contribute to the body of knowledge in this area. Thoughtful and in depth answers will be greatly appreciated.

#### Confidentiality

Neither participants' names nor other identifying information besides basic demographic information will be reported in this study. Only identification numbers will be reported if necessary. There will never be a way for those reading results to connect identity with data. Therefore, confidentiality is assured. All data collected will become part of a database used solely for research purposes by the researcher only. Let me reassure you that all your answers in the questionnaire will remain in strict confidentiality. Excluding future publications, the researcher is the only individual that reads the specific results to each questionnaire.

#### Voluntary Nature of Participation

You do not have to participate in this research project. If you do agree to participate, you can withdraw your participation at any time without penalty.

#### Human Subject Statement:

If you have any questions about this research project, contact Dr. Adrienne Kunkel at (785) 864-9884. If there are concerns about the treatment of research participants, contact the Human Subjects Committee Lawrence Campus (HSCL) at (785) 864-7429, 235 Youngberg Hall.

**I HAVE HAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO READ THIS INFORMATION STATEMENT AND AM PREPARED TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS PROJECT. BY CLICKING THE BOX BELOW I ACKNOWLEDGE THAT I AM OVER THE AGE OF EIGHTEEN AND UNDERSTAND THE INFORMATION WRITTEN ABOVE.**

CLICK THIS BOX TO CONTINUE WITH THE QUESTIONNAIRE

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_Mike Anderson  
Researcher's Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_12/06/2010  
Date

## APPENDIX C

# RELATIONAL DISCLOSURE QUESTIONNAIRE

### Part I. Number and Extent of Fantasy Disclosure Measure

**Instructions:** Please answer the following questions regarding your current romantic partner. If you are single, please answer the questions with your most recent romantic partner in mind. Keep this same romantic partner in mind throughout all of the following questions. To help you remember, please write his or her initials here: \_\_\_\_\_.

For the purposes of this questionnaire, **sexual fantasies** are defined as: any mental imagery that is sexually arousing or erotic to the individual. A sexual fantasy can be an elaborate story, or it can be a fleeting thought of some romantic or sexual activity. It can involve bizarre imagery, or it can be quite realistic. It can involve memories of past events, or it can be a completely imaginary experience.

**1) Have you at any time with this partner talked about at least one of YOUR sexual fantasies?**

Yes            No

**2) a. If yes, how many sexual fantasies of YOURS do you estimate you have discussed with this partner? Please circle a number:**

1      2      3      4      5      6+

**b. Of those fantasies that were discussed with this partner, how many of them did you eventually act out? Please circle a number:**

1      2      3      4      5      6+

**3) Have you at any time talked with your partner about one or more of his/her sexual fantasies?**

Yes            No

**4) a. If yes, how many sexual fantasies of THEIRS do you estimate you have discussed with this partner? Please circle a number:**

1      2      3      4      5      6+

**b. Of those fantasies that were discussed with this partner, how many of them did you eventually act out? Please circle a number**

1      2      3      4      5      6+

## Part II: Willingness to Discuss Own Sexual Fantasy Measure

**Instructions:** Here are a number of statements regarding **your** disclosure of sexual fantasies with your partner. Please read the following statements and indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with them. Please think of the same romantic partner you thought of for the first set of questions.

**1) I feel uneasy disclosing my own sexual fantasies with my partner.**

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree

**2) It does not bother me to discuss my sexual fantasies with my partner.**

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree

**3) I avoid talking about my own sexual fantasies with my partner.**

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree

**4) I would feel comfortable talking with my partner about my sexual fantasies.**

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree

**5) Communicating my own sexual fantasies to my partner is something I try to avoid.**

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree

**6) I have little to no problems talking about my own sexual fantasies with my partner.**

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree

## Part II: Willingness to Discuss Partner's Sexual Fantasies Measure

**Instructions:** The following statements are in regard to **your partner's** disclosure of sexual fantasies. Please read the following statements and indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with them. Please think of the same romantic partner you thought of for the previous set of statements.

**1) I feel uneasy discussing my partner's sexual fantasies with him/her.**

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree

**2) It does not bother me to discuss my partner's sexual fantasies with him/her.**

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree

**3) I try to avoid talking with my partner about his/her sexual fantasies.**

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree

**4) I would feel comfortable talking with my partner about his/her sexual fantasies.**

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree

**5) Communicating with my partner about his/her sexual fantasies is something I try to avoid.**

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree

**6) I have little to no problems talking about my partner's sexual fantasies with him/her.**

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree

### Part III: Sexual/Relational Satisfaction Measure

**Instructions:** The following questions ask you to think about your sexual relationship and your relationship in general. Please circle the dash on the continuum that best represents your answer for each of the pairings. Again, please think about your current or most recent romantic partner.

**1) Overall, how would you describe your sexual relationship with this partner?**

Good	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	Bad
Pleasant	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	Unpleasant
Negative	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	Positive
Satisfying	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	Unsatisfying
Worthless	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	Valuable

**2) In general, how would you describe your overall relationship with this partner?**

Good	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	Bad
Pleasant	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	Unpleasant
Negative	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	Positive
Satisfying	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	Unsatisfying
Worthless	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	Valuable



**Part IV: Open-Ended Rewards Question**

**Instructions:** Next, the researchers would like you to explain to us in your own words, what **potential rewards** do/did you see as motivation for discussing the topic of sexual fantasies? If you have never discussed the topic of sexual fantasies with this partner, write “not relevant.”

Lined writing area for responses.





**Part IV: Open-Ended Content of Sexual Fantasy Discussion Questions**

**Instructions:** Of the sexual fantasies that you wrote down, which ones, if any, have you **shared** with your partner?

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**Instructions:** Of the sexual fantasies that you wrote down, which ones, if any, have you **acted out** with your partner?

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## Part V: Socio-Sexuality Scale

**Instructions:** The following questions ask about your relationship and sexual history.

**1) With how many different partners have you had sex within the past 12 months?**

0                       1                       2 to 3                       4 to 7                       8 or more

**2) With how many different partners have you had sexual intercourse on one and only one occasion?**

0                       1                       2 to 3                       4 to 7                       8 or more

**3) With how many different partners have you had sexual intercourse without having an interest in a long-term committed relationship with this person?**

0                       1                       2 to 3                       4 to 7                       8 or more

**4) Sex without love is OK.**

1  Strongly Disagree                      2                       3                       4                       5  Strongly Agree

**5) I can imagine myself being comfortable and enjoying “casual” sex with different partners.**

1  Strongly Disagree                      2                       3                       4                       5  Strongly Agree

**6) I do not want to have sex with a person until I am sure that we will have a long-term, serious relationship.**

1  Strongly Disagree                      2                       3                       4                       5  Strongly Agree

**7) How often do you have fantasies about having sex with someone you are not in a committed romantic relationship with?**

1  Never                      2  Very Seldom                      3  About Once a Month                      4  About Once a Week                      5  Nearly Every Day

**8) How often do you experience sexual arousal when you are in contact with someone you are not in a committed romantic relationship with?**

1  Never                      2  Very Seldom                      3  About Once a Month                      4  About Once a Week                      5  Nearly Every Day

**9) In everyday life, how often do you have spontaneous fantasies about having sex with someone you have just met?**

1  Never                      2  Very Seldom                      3  About Once a Month                      4  About Once a Week                      5  Nearly Every Day

## Part VI: Sensation-Seeking Scale

**Instructions:** Please read the following statements and indicate the extent to which you agree with or disagree with each statement.

**1) I would like to explore strange places.**

1                       2                       3                       4                       5   
Strongly Disagree                      Strongly Agree

**2) I get restless when I spend too much time at home.**

1                       2                       3                       4                       5   
Strongly Disagree                      Strongly Agree

**3) I like to do frightening things.**

1                       2                       3                       4                       5   
Strongly Disagree                      Strongly Agree

**4) I like wild parties.**

1                       2                       3                       4                       5   
Strongly Disagree                      Strongly Agree

**5) I would like to take off on a trip with no pre-planned routes or timetables.**

1                       2                       3                       4                       5   
Strongly Disagree                      Strongly Agree

**6) I prefer friends who are excitingly unpredictable.**

1                       2                       3                       4                       5   
Strongly Disagree                      Strongly Agree

**7) I would like to try bungee jumping.**

1                       2                       3                       4                       5   
Strongly Disagree                      Strongly Agree

**8) I would love to have new and exciting experiences, even if they are illegal.**

1                       2                       3                       4                       5   
Strongly Disagree                      Strongly Agree

## Part VII: Sexual Conservatism Scale

**Instructions:** Please read the following statements and indicate the extent to which you agree with or disagree with each statement.

**1) A women who initiates a sexual encounter will probably have sex with anybody.**

1  Strongly Disagree      2       3       4       5  Strongly Agree

**2) A woman shouldn't give in sexually to a man too easily or he'll think she's loose.**

1  Strongly Disagree      2       3       4       5  Strongly Agree

**3) Men have a biologically stronger sex drive than women.**

1  Strongly Disagree      2       3       4       5  Strongly Agree

**4) A nice woman will be offended or embarrassed by dirty jokes.**

1  Strongly Disagree      2       3       4       5  Strongly Agree

**5) Masturbation is a normal sexual activity.**

1  Strongly Disagree      2       3       4       5  Strongly Agree

**6) People should not have oral sex.**

1  Strongly Disagree      2       3       4       5  Strongly Agree

**7) I would have no respect for a woman who engages in sexual relationships without any emotional involvement.**

1  Strongly Disagree      2       3       4       5  Strongly Agree

**8) Having sex during the menstrual period is unpleasant.**

1  Strongly Disagree      2       3       4       5  Strongly Agree

**9) The primary goal of sexual intercourse should be to have children.**

1  Strongly Disagree      2       3       4       5  Strongly Agree

**10) Women have the same needs for a sexual outlet as men.**

1  Strongly Disagree      2       3       4       5  Strongly Agree

**Part VIII: Erotophilia Measure**

**Instructions:** Please read the following statements and indicate the extent to which you agree with or disagree with each statement. There are no right or wrong answers, please respond to each item as honestly as you can.

**1) Almost all pornographic material is nauseating.**

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree						Strongly Agree

**2) Masturbation can be an exciting experience.**

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree						Strongly Agree

**3) It would be emotionally upsetting to me to see someone exposing themselves publicly.**

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree						Strongly Agree

**4) The thought of engaging in unusual sex practices is highly arousing.**

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree						Strongly Agree

**5) The thought of having long-term sexual relations with more than one sex partner is not disgusting to me.**

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree						Strongly Agree

