Differentiation, negative attributions and sexual desire in committed relationships

by

Prerana Dharnidharka

B.S., Mumbai University, 2007
M.S., Kansas State University, 2014

AN ABSTRACT OF A DISSERTATION

submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

School of Family Studies and Human Services
College of Human Ecology

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Manhattan, Kansas

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Abstract

Sexual desire is important to personal and relational well-being but inevitably declines over time in committed relationships. Individuals, further, commonly report times when they desire more or less sex than their partners (desire discrepancy) which is negatively associated with both relationship and sexual satisfaction. How partner's make meaning out of (i.e., attributions about their partner's lower desire for sex) and respond (pursue, withdraw or engage) to moments of discrepant desire is likely influenced by the extent to which partners are able to maintain a clear sense of self in the context of physical and emotional closeness (i.e., their level of differentiation), although this has yet to be tested. Through two studies, I explored the types of attributions and behaviors in response to desire discrepancies and how negative attributions and behaviors mediate the link between differentiation and sexual desire. Specifically in Study 1, I analyzed open-ended responses from 463 participants, using deductive content analysis to examine types of negative attributions and behaviors in response to moments of desire discrepancy. In Study 2, using the findings from Study 1, I developed items to quantitatively measure specific negative attributions and behaviors in response to desire discrepancies. Using a sample of 511 participants, I refined the factor structure of the Desire Discrepancy Attributions and Behaviors Scale and used a path analysis to examine how differentiation is associated with sexual desire both directly and indirectly through negative attributions, emotions, and behaviors (pursue-withdraw). Results indicated that an individual's level of differentiation is positively associated with sexual desire and this link is significantly mediated by negative attributions and certain negative behaviors. The clinical implications and areas for future research based on the findings of this study are discussed.

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Chapter 1 - Introduction

Sexual desire lies at the heart of intimate relationships and is closely tied to overall relationship well-being and stability (Impett, Strachman, Finkel, & Gable, 2008). Unfortunately, research findings suggest that, on average, desire declines with age and relationship length (Eplov, Giraldi, Davidsen, Garde, & Kamper-Jørgensen, 2007; Klusmann, 2002). It also tends to vary by gender; men reliably report greater desire for sex than women at all stages of the relationship (see review by Meana, 2010). And, both men and women in committed relationships, commonly report times when they have more or less desire than their partner (Herbenick, Mullinax, & Mark, 2014), which is negatively associated with their sexual and relationship satisfaction (e.g., Mark, 2012).

The meaning a person makes of their partner's lower desire, when they try to engage their partner in physical intimacy but their partner declines, influences how they respond, both emotionally and behaviorally. For instance, an individual might attribute their partner's lack of interest to causes internal and personal to themselves (e.g., "I am not attractive/ desirable"; "She doesn't care about me"), thereby triggering emotional distress and a negative behavioral response, decreasing desire in the relationship. Alternatively, the individual might perceive the discrepancy as being due to uncontrollable external circumstances, (e.g., "She is stressed from work"; "He is feeling unwell") easily brush it aside and respond in a way that maintains connection with their partner and sustains their desire. Whether partners respond with negative attributions and subsequent negative behaviors or external attributions and engagement is likely influenced by the extent to which partners are able to maintain a clear sense of self in the context of physical and emotional closeness (referred to as a partners' levels of differentiation; Schnarch, 2009).

According to Schnarch (2009), although an individual's level of differentiation is expressed in all areas of committed relationships, it is especially expressed and tested in the area of committed sexual behavior. People at low levels of differentiation are thought to draw a greater proportion of their self-worth from the evaluation and validation of others, especially intimate partners (Schnarch, 2009), increasing their preoccupation with rejection and reactivity to the emotional ups and downs of intimate relationships (Schnarch, 2009; Skowron, 2000). Accordingly, partners at lower levels of differentiation might be more likely to make negative attributions in moments of desire discrepancies such as negatively evaluating themselves, their partner, or the relationship, resulting in increased distress. Given their greater emotional distress and emotional reactivity overall (Skowron, 2000), individuals with lower differentiation may then be more likely to pursue their partner to reduce distance and seek reassurance (i.e., fusion) or withdraw from their partner to protect themselves from rejection (i.e., emotional cut-off).

Research findings support the links between negative attributions about partner behavior (i.e., attributions that intensify impact of undesirable partner behavior), negative emotions (e.g., anger), and negative behavioral responses (e.g., less effective problem solving) (Fincham, 2003). Previous research on attributions and relationship behavior, however, has largely examined global attributions (attributions about the relationship overall) with the assumption that global attributions influence specific attributions (attributions in response to specific events) and consequent behavior in dyadic interactions (Fincham, 2003). According to differentiation theory, though, events of desire discrepancy between partners may carry important meaning for partners above and beyond general attributions. To date, no research has been conducted to explore specific attributions for desire discrepancies; how these attributions and accompanying emotional

and behavioral responses are influenced by partners' levels of differentiation in the context of committed sexual behavior.

Further, recent research has indicated that the well-documented gender differences in the experience and nature of desire might in fact be overestimated and that all desire is impacted by both internal and relational factors (Meana, 2010). Given the importance of desire to committed relationships and its seemingly inevitable decline, more research is needed to understand the intrapersonal and interpersonal processes that contribute to and sustain desire.

Accordingly, the current investigation has three goals: 1) to identify specific attributions and behavioral responses to moments of desire discrepancies in committed heterosexual relationships based on differentiation theory and develop a quantitative scale to assess such attributions and behaviors; 2) to test the links between differentiation and sexual desire in committed heterosexual relationships as mediated by attributions and emotional and behavioral responses in the context of desire discrepancies; and 3) to explore gender differences in these areas. Specifically, two studies will be used to test these hypotheses. The first study will use open-ended responses from individuals in committed relationships to identify specific attributions and behavioral responses to desire discrepancies. Using the findings from Study 1, Study 2 will quantitatively examine the proposed theoretical model linking differentiation and sexual desire.

Chapter 2 - Literature Review

Given the impact of sexual desire on personal and relational well-being, it is important to increase our understanding of the intra- and inter-personal processes that contribute to sustaining desire for men and women in committed heterosexual relationships.

Sexual Desire in Committed Relationships

Sexual desire is one of the most talked about and least understood aspects of intimate relationships. Although there is no commonly agreed upon definition, sexual desire is generally thought to be "*the sum of the forces that lean us toward and push us away from sexual behavior*" (Levine, 2003, p. 280). More specifically, it is often conceptualized as a subjective state constituting the need, drive (biological component) and motivation (psychological component) to engage in sexual activity (Brezsnyak & Whisman, 2004; Clayton & Montejo, 2006; Diamond, 2004; Levine, 2003). The media portrays desire as being essential to a happy relationship and research underscores its close ties to overall relationship well-being and stability (Impett et al., 2008). Unfortunately, both men and women report a decline in desire as a function of age and relationship duration (Eplov et al., 2007; Klusmann, 2002). Declines in sexual desire may be impacted by life-stage (e.g., retirement), medical (e.g., cancer) and contextual issues (e.g., financial problems; Ferreira, Narciso, Novo, & Pereira, 2014) as well as inter- and intra-personal processes.

Inter- and Intrapersonal Gender Differences in Desire

Gender differences in the prevalence of sexual desire have been well-documented (see review by Baumeister, Catanese, & Vohs, 2001). Men generally report greater desire than women; women's desire is more variable and tends to decline as early as one year into the relationship (Klusmann, 2002). In fact, low sexual desire is one of the most common presenting

problems for women in sex therapy clinics and has been the focus of much study and clinical intervention (Beck, 1995; Meana 2010). Recent research has indicated, though, that these gender differences in desire may have been overestimated. Women's desire, although undeniably more responsive to external cues and relationship characteristics (e.g., emotional intimacy) than men's desire, is also impacted by internal factors (e.g., desire for novelty or sexual fantasies; Meana 2010; Sims & Meana, 2010). Similarly, men's desire, in contrast to the traditional view of a strictly spontaneous, biological drive in search of an outlet, is also responsive and impacted by both internal (e.g., self-esteem) and relational factors (e.g., love and commitment). This study, therefore, seeks to investigate how intrapersonal (e.g., differentiation and associated cognitive and affective responses) and interpersonal processes (e.g., behavioral responses) that contribute to desire might vary by gender.

Moments of Desire Discrepancy

Day-to-day fluctuations and discrepancies in desire are normative features of committed relationships with both men and women commonly reporting experiencing more or less desire than their partner at various points in their relationship (Sutherland, Rehman, Fallis, & Goodnight, 2015). Although desire discrepancy is negatively related to sexual and relationship satisfaction (Davies, Katz, & Jackson, 1999; Herbenick et al., 2014; Mark, 2012; Mark & Murray, 2012), it is the perception of the direction (is my desire higher or lower as compared to my partner) and magnitude (how big is the discrepancy) of the discrepancies that negatively impact sexual behavior in committed relationships (Sutherland et al., 2015). Thus, although desire discrepancies are ubiquitous, the specific attributions partners make when they perceive a discrepancy are an unexplored mechanism by which desire discrepancies impact overall desire and sexual satisfaction.

Intra-and Interpersonal Processes Impacting Sexual Desire

A person's level of differentiation, the theory suggests, determines their ability to sustain desire and satisfying sexual experiences in their committed relationships directly and indirectly through the attributions they make about disagreeable partner behavior and their subsequent emotional and behavioral responses. These specific cognitive, emotional, and behavioral mechanisms through which differentiation impacts sexual and relational outcomes have not been studied and warrant our attention.

Differentiation

Differentiation has been conceptualized as a multidimensional construct operating both intra- and interpersonally (Kerr & Bowen, 1988). At the intrapersonal level, differentiation refers to the ability to balance thought and emotion. Highly differentiated people are able to experience and manage strong affect and access calm, logical states of mind when needed. Poorly differentiated people, on the other hand, tend to be emotionally reactive and easily influenced by the emotionality of others (Kerr & Bowen, 1988; Skowron & Friedlander, 1998). At the interpersonal level, differentiation refers to a balance between autonomy and connectedness. Highly differentiated people are able to maintain an "I" position, or a clear sense of self, in the context of significant relationships and hold onto their core beliefs even when pressured to conform (Kerr & Bowen, 1988; Skowron & Friedlander, 1998). While people with higher levels of differentiation are able to balance their needs with those of significant others (Kerr & Bowen, 1988), poorly differentiated people express their lack of balance in one of two ways: becoming fused with significant others (i.e., seeking extreme closeness) such that they are unable to maintain a sense of self and are preoccupied with concerns of rejection, or becoming emotionally

cut-off (i.e., seeking extreme distance) and preoccupied with their sense of self being engulfed by the other (Skowron & Friedlander, 1998).

Differentiation has shown to be negatively associated with chronic anxiety and psychological distress and positively associated with well-being and marital quality (see review by Miller, Anderson & Keals, 2004; Skowron, 2000; Skowron & Friedlander, 1998). Importantly, husbands' emotional cut-off has been found to significantly predict both husbands' and wives' marital discord with differentiation scores accounting for 74% of the variance in wives' and 61% of variance in husbands' marital satisfaction (Skowron, 2000). Differentiation has also been found to be positively associated with sexual desire (Ferreira et al., 2014; 2016) and sexual satisfaction (Goff, 2010). Although evidence suggests that differentiation impacts relationship and sexual outcomes, there is little research on the mechanisms through which differentiation influences intimate relationships overall, and in the area of committed sexual behavior, specifically.

Differentiation and sexual desire. In an extension of Bowen's notion of differentiation, Schnarch (2009) linked the evolution of differentiation to developmental processes in committed relationships. Like Bowen, he suggested that partners' levels of differentiation are determined by family-of-origin experiences, however unlike Bowen, he contended that differentiation, instead of remaining stable across the life course (Kerr & Bowen, 1988), develops and is tested as a function of committed intimate relationships. Schnarch (2009) proposed that as we enter committed relationships and our attachment to our partners grows, so does the anxiety of rejection. As partners become important to us, we wrestle with the dilemma of wanting to be accepted for our true selves while being fearful of rejection. As we resolve these inherent dilemmas of intimate relationships and grow in our levels of differentiation (i.e., maintain a

sense of self while being close), we are able to reach greater levels of sexual desire and sexual satisfaction (Schnarch, 2009).

Consequently, Schnarch (2009) posed differentiation as the counterforce to naturally declining desire in committed relationships. He theorized that an individual's level of desire is impacted by their subjective states (thoughts and feelings) as much, if not more than, their responsiveness to sensation and physical stimulation (Schnarch, 2009). He further predicted that individuals at low levels of differentiation will struggle to manage the anxiety that is common and inevitable in sex (e.g., performance anxiety, anxieties about the relationship; Schnarch, 2009). Poorly differentiated people will be overly concerned with their partners' acceptance of them as a function of their fusion or will be overly concerned with closeness as a function of their cut-off (Schnarch, 2009). All of these anxieties and relationship dynamics will contribute to low desire and poor sexual experiences (Schnarch, 2009).

Two qualitative studies provide indirect support for the theoretical premise that a balance between the forces of autonomy and connectedness is necessary to achieve and maintain high desire in intimate relationships. Using dyadic couple interviews, Ferreira and colleagues (2015) found that autonomy (e.g., having a sense of "otherness", physical distance from partner and personal projects) enhanced desire for both men and women and sharing feelings about the relationship and dyadic activities was a frequently used desire-promoting strategy (Ferreira, Fraenkel, Narciso, & Novo, 2015). In an exploration of the reasons for waning desire among married women, Sims and Meana (2010) found that although some degree of closeness enhanced desire, an emphasis on closeness in the long run dampened desire. Lack of transgressions in marital sex (e.g., no risk or illicit quality to the sex) and overfamiliarity with their partners (e.g., a lack of individuality, overfamiliar sexual advances, and mechanical sex) were among the core

themes that emerged for the women's waning desire (Sims & Meana, 2010). Taken together, these findings suggest that autonomy in addition to closeness and anxiety regulation may be necessary to generate and sustain desire in committed relationships.

Finding the balance between closeness and autonomy may be increasingly challenging as differentiation levels decrease and individuals rely more on their partner for comfort and validation (other-validated intimacy) versus comforting and soothing themselves in the presence of the partner (self-validated intimacy). Since poorly differentiated people tend to draw their self-worth from their partner's validation, they are, theoretically, less likely to risk rejection by revealing their authentic self or engaging in sexual experimentation, thereby contributing to low desire and sexual boredom. Highly differentiated people, on the other hand, feel more secure in their sense of self and are able to self-validate and self-soothe in the absence of another's validation. This enables them to risk revealing their authentic selves, self-disclose, and initiate or respond with new sexual behaviors. Thus, differentiation is necessary for sustaining desire over time in committed relationships. Based on these theoretical ideas and empirical findings, I expected a person's level of differentiation to be directly and positively associated with sexual desire.

The Role of Attributions

Partners in intimate relationships are constantly interpreting and evaluating the causes and intentions behind the others' behaviors. As intimate relationships develop and partners grow closer, the risk of rejection also grows (Murray, Derrick, Leder, & Holmes, 2008). Because people with low differentiation are overly concerned with their partners' acceptance, Schnarch (2009) suggests that they are more likely to perceive their partner's behavior as an evaluation of their self-worth. Thus, in those moments when their partner responds to their initiation of sex

with less than equal desire, people with low levels of differentiation are more likely to perceive their partner's lower desire as a personal rejection than partners with higher levels of differentiation. More specifically, they are likely to perceive their partner's lower desire as being caused by factors internal to themselves and as a negative evaluation of their self-worth. Similarly, as a function of their emotional reactivity, they may also be more likely to make other negative attributions such as negatively evaluating the partner's motivations, intent, and the relationship. As would be expected, the negative attributions about self, partner motivation, and intent have been found to negatively impact relationship satisfaction and other important relationship outcomes such as the degree of trust in a relationship and forgiveness (Miller & Rempel, 2004; Hall & Fincham, 2006; Sumer, & Cozzarelli, 2004).

Domain-specific attributions. Although the majority of studies on attributions in intimate relationships have largely been guided by the measurement of global attributions, scholars acknowledge that attributions can be domain-specific, which thus far, have been inadequately studied (Fincham, 2003). Evidence from the marital violence literature suggests that different types of partner behavior and relationship events can trigger certain types of attributions more readily (Fincham, 2003). For instance, an exploration of hostile attributions among violent men found that negative intent for a wife's behavior was perceived more readily in situations related to jealousy or spousal rejection (Holtzworth-Munroe & Hutchinson, 1993). Therefore, it is possible that with respect to sexual behavior in committed relationships, there are domain-specific attributions which are yet to be identified empirically. Individuals may more readily perceive internal causes or negative intent and motivation for their partner's lower desire as compared to other disagreeable relationship events. Taken together, committed sexual behavior and desire discrepancies might naturally evoke attributions which are rejection-laden

and people at low levels of differentiation may be especially prone to negatively evaluating themselves, their partners, and the relationship in the face of their partner's lower desire. I therefore expected a person's level of differentiation to be directly and inversely associated with their propensity to make negative attributions.

Negative Emotional and Behavioral Responses

Attributions have also been found to directly influence behavior in intimate relationships (Fincham, 2003). Across five studies, when husbands and wives perceived their partner's behavior as being intentional, motivated by selfishness, and blameworthy, they engaged in less effective problem solving, more avoidant and hostile behavior (Fincham & Bradbury, 1992) and more negative behavior (e.g., criticism, expression of negative affect) during problem solving and help-giving tasks (Miller & Bradbury, 1995). A longitudinal study found that husbands' and wives' maladaptive attributions predicted negative interactions over a 12-month period and earlier behavior did not predict attributions at a later time point, providing further evidence that attributions influence behavior and the link is unidirectional (Fletcher & Thomas, 2000). Attributions may also be related to negative behavior indirectly through negative emotion.

Weiner's (1985) attributional theory of emotion suggests that every event has an intrinsic level of agreeableness or averseness which triggers an emotional response. It is, however, the assessment of the cause of the event which determines the specific affective experience. Thus, to the extent that people negatively evaluate themselves, their partner or the relationship, as the cause for their partner's lower desire, they will experience negative emotions (e.g., anger, shame). Weiner (1985) further suggests that partners' emotional experience in response to these attributions will determine the behavioral response. In other words, emotional experience will mediate the attribution-behavior link. Therefore, if people at low levels of differentiation make

negative attributions, they will experience negative emotion, such as anger, and respond with negative behavior. Accordingly, evidence from the field of social cognition suggests that attributions and appraisals shape emotional experience (e.g., Berscheid, 1983; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Roseman, 1984; Weiner, 1985), and negative emotions are positively associated with demand-withdraw patterns of behavior among relationally distressed couples (Tashiro & Frazier, 2007).

In line with Weiner's (1985) attributional theory of emotion and research on the behavioral outcomes of negative attributions, differentiation theory predicts that poorly differentiated people are not only more likely than well differentiated individuals to perceive rejection but also to respond in anxious and reactive ways (Schnarch, 2009; Skowron & Friedlander, 1998). In response to this negative emotion, partners who tend towards fusion might engage in pursue-type behaviors in an attempt to reduce emotional distance from their partners and those who tend towards cut-off might withdraw in order to protect themselves from disappointment. Demand-withdraw patterns in the area of couple communication and conflict have been shown to be negatively associated with relationship satisfaction both concurrently and longitudinally (Caughlin and Huston, 2002; Heavey, Christensen, & Malamuth, 1995); yet their association with sexual desire has yet to be examined. And, theoretically individuals are thought to default to one style of responding based on their level of differentiation, but it is not known how pursuing one's partner versus withdrawing from them might impact their own level of desire. Accordingly, I hypothesized that, first, negative attributions would be directly and positively associated with behavioral pursuit and withdrawal and indirectly through negative emotions; second, pursue and withdrawal will be directly and inversely related to sexual desire.

The Current Investigation

Sexual desire is important to the health of intimate relationships and inevitably declines over time. Further, partners are commonly confronted with discrepancies in their levels of desire for sex. Based on differentiation theory, I expected that low levels of differentiation will shape and bias attributions about moments of desire discrepancies towards negative evaluations of self, partner and the relationship, and drive negative emotions and pursue-type or withdraw-type behaviors. Specific types of attributions and behavioral responses in the context of desire discrepancies have not yet been identified. Therefore, the purpose of Study 1 is to identify types of attributions and behaviors specific to the context of desire discrepancies in committed relationships through a content analysis of open-ended responses. Building on Study 1, the purpose of Study 2 is to, first, use the results of Study 1 to develop a quantitative scale measuring negative attributions and behaviors in response to moments of desire discrepancies; second, refine the factor structure of the quantitative scale; third, to test the proposed theoretical model linking differentiation with sexual desire through attributions, negative emotions, and behavioral responses; and finally, to test how these processes might differ for men and women.

Chapter 3 - Study 1

Methods

Purpose

Study 1 seeks to examine the following research questions:

1. What specific types of attributions do people in committed relationships make to explain moments when their partner has a lower desire for sex than they do?
2. In what ways do people in committed relationships respond behaviorally when their partner has a lower desire for sex than they do?

Participants and Procedure

Participants for Study 1 were recruited through Amazon's Mechanical Turk, an online recruitment website, to participate in a larger study on differentiation and intimate relationships. Samples recruited through Mechanical Turk tend to be similar to other online samples and more demographically and racially diverse than traditional university samples (see review by Paolacci, Chandler, Ipeirotis, 2010). Studies also show that standardized measures have similar reliability and validity in MTurk samples and the main motivation for MTurkers to participate in surveys is for leisure rather than to generate income (Paolacci, et al., 2010). To be eligible to participate in the study, participants had to report being over 18 years of age and currently in a committed intimate relationship. Of the 500 people that completed the survey, 37 people were dropped for failing any of the three attention questions or for taking fewer than 10 minutes to complete the survey. The final sample consisted of 463 participants (men = 216 and women = 244) who ranged in age from 18 to 69 years (M = 35.75, SD = 11.10). With respect to race, the sample was 71.9% European American, 8.4% African American, 7.3% Asian, 6.5% Bi/Multi-racial, 5.2%

Latino, and 0.6% American Indian. Relationship duration ranged from 0.25 years to 54.17 years with the average length being 8.5 years (*SD* = 8.54).

After providing informed consent, participants completed a 20-30 minute survey including an open-ended question about their experience of discrepancies in desire for sex: "If you are like most couples, sometimes one of you is more interested in having sex at a particular time than the other partner. Think back to the last time you were interested in having sex but your partner wasn't. How did you know your partner wasn't interested in having sex? When it became clear that your partner wasn't interested in having sex what were your immediate thoughts? What did you attribute to your partner's lack of interest in sex? What did you do next?" Each participant was paid $2.50 USD for their time.

Data Analysis

Content analysis, *"*a systematic and objective means of describing and quantifying phenomena*"* (Elo et al., 2014, p.1), was the main analytic strategy in Study 1. From a deductive standpoint, content analysis is guided by previous theory and research and is best used for the extension and verification of existing theory (Hseieh & Shannon, 2005). It has three phases: preparation, organization, and reporting (Elo & Kyngas, 2007). In the preparation phase, the key task is to identify the unit of analysis (Elo & Kyngas, 2007). In this study, a unit of meaning (i.e., text which consists of an attribution or a behavioral response) was the unit of analysis.

As the first step in coding, in order to identify units of meaning and build familiarity with the data, two coders and I read all the open-ended responses and highlighted text which, on first impression, seemed to represent an attribution, or an affective or behavioral response. Instances of affect were coded in order to distinguish between a cognitive, affective, and behavioral response. For instance, responses such *as "I immediately thought that there was something*

wrong with me" were highlighted as an attribution. Responses such as "*I was disappointed*" were highlighted as an affective response and responses such *"so I turned over and went to sleep"* were highlighted as a behavioral response.

In the organization phase, the key task is to identify important concepts and develop a coding scheme based on the research questions and existing theory and research. Based on differentiation theory and the attributions and marital behavior literature, I expected that attributions in response to desire discrepancies would vary on causal (internal vs. external) and intent (degree of perceived partner intent) dimensions. Further, as an extension of the causal dimension of attributions, I expected attributions to vary in the degree to which partners' lower desire was seen as a negative evaluation of the respondents' self-worth. Thus, the attribution categories established a priori were causes for partner's disinterest in sex (internal to me, negative evaluation of self-worth, external to me, and external to us both) and intent (purposefulness of partner disinterest). Similarly, I expected that behavioral responses to moments of desire discrepancy would be shaped by a person's level of differentiation and their attributions, reflecting fusion (pursue-type behaviors), cut-off (withdraw-type behaviors) or a balance between autonomy and connectedness (staying engaged-type behaviors).

As a second step in coding, all coders used the established categories to code the highlighted attributions and behavioral responses independently. Participant responses such as *"I thought that she was mad at me"* were coded as 'internal to me', *"I...felt there "must be" something wrong with me"* as 'negative evaluation of self-worth', *"I attributed her lack of interest in sex to her being tired after work all day" as* 'external to me' and *"it's usually a timing issue" as* 'external to us both'. Meaning units such as *"My immediate thought was that he was cheating"* and *"He deliberated did that on purpose"* were coded as attributions indicating

partners' disinterest in sex was 'intentional'. With respect to respondent's behavior, meaning units such as *"I cried and got in an argument with him saying I wanted more sex"* and *"I was nice to her and slyly romantic"* were coded as 'pursue-type' behavior; meaning units such as *"I backed off*", *"I just went into the other room and sulked"* were coded as 'withdraw-type' behavior and meaning units such as *"so I laid by him and rubbed his back"* and *"We just hung out and enjoyed each other's company"* were coded as 'staying engaged-type' behavior.

Following the first two rounds of coding, the coders met to evaluate the appropriateness of the a priori categories, re-organize and develop other categories to capture the highlighted attributions and behaviors which did not fit the existing categories. For example, attribution categories reflecting internal causes of partner's disinterest (internal to me, negative evaluation of self-worth) became themes under the broader category of 'partner disinterest is personal' (i.e., behavior is about me). Attribution categories reflecting external causes of partner's disinterest (external to me, external to us both) were regrouped under the category of 'partner disinterest is not personal' and 'partner disinterest is about the relationship was added as a category to capture a third type of causal attributions'. More themes were added under the category of 'partner disinterest is not personal' to capture the range of reported attributions: partner disinterest is 'reasonable' (e.g., *She told me that she had injured her knee in the gym… I thought that was a reasonable explanation")*, partner disinterest in sex is 'normal' (e.g., "*It's not uncommon"),* 'partner is telling the truth' about why they are disinterested in sex at the moment (e.g., *"I figured she was telling the truth"* and "*I believed that he was too tired*"). Three other attribution categories were also added: 'motivation for partner disinterest' (negative and positive), 'stability of causes' for their partner's disinterest (temporary and permanent) and whether their partner's disinterest was 'blameworthy'. Attributions could be coded as reflecting more than one theme or

category. For instance, attributions about the negative motivation for partner's disinterest (e.g., *"I assume he's cheating on me again"*) were frequently coded under blameworthiness too, as blame was implied in the response.

A category of 'Neutral' with the themes of 'self-activity' and 'together-activity' were added to capture behavioral responses which did not clearly fit pursue-, withdraw- or staying engaged-type behaviors. 'Self-regulation' was also added as a category to capture a range of secondary cognitive coping strategies. It included several themes such as 'positive reappraisal' (e.g., *"I was offended at first but realized that I was being selfish. I attributed his tiredness to his behavior"),* 'perspective-taking' (e.g., "*I just thought back to times when he was in the mood and I wasn't, he'd been supportive of me")* and 'acceptance' (e.g., *"I understand my partner has a lower sex drive and accept it. It's just nature").* In the third round of coding, all coders reviewed and recoded all the attributions and behaviors based on the new coding scheme (See Table 1 for final coding scheme and definitions). Percent agreement between coders (an index for inter-coder reliability) was 76.84% for attributions, 88.42% for behaviors and 95% for self-regulation.

Results

The final coding scheme included three classes: attributions (represented by seven categories), self-regulation (represented by three categories), and behavioral responses (represented by four categories). See Table 1 for list of categories and frequency of meaning units.

Attributions about Partner's Disinterest in Sex

The most common category of attributions was 'partner disinterest is not personal', followed by 'partner disinterest is personal.' Within the category of 'partner disinterest is not personal,' the 'external to me' theme contained the majority (75% of units within the category)

of coded meaning units. Example responses in this theme were, *"When he wasn't interested, I thought, oh well. He is a teacher in a rough school, so he is tired all the time,"* and *"He was feeling ill, it didn't bother me, I knew he wasn't feeling good."* The theme 'partner disinterest is reasonable' (i.e., partner's disinterest is reasonable or understandable given the circumstances) held the second most coded meaning units (13% of units within the category). Example responses were, *"he was tired after a long day and just wanted to rest. It is easy to understand that. It's nothing personal,"* and *"We work opposite shifts so it is understandable and I do not take it personally or let it bother me"*. Less common themes under 'partner disinterest is not personal' were: causes of partner's disinterest are 'external to us both' (4% of units within this category), 'normal' (3% of the meaning units within this category), 'rare/ uncommon' in the relationship (3% of the meaning units within this category), and the perception that their 'partner is telling the truth' (2% of meaning units within this category).

The category 'partner disinterest is personal' accounted for 14% of the meaning units under the class of 'attributions' and contained two themes: their partner's disinterest was 'internal' (i.e., caused by them) or reflected a respondent's 'negative evaluation of self-worth' (i.e., partner disinterest means something bad about me). The theme of 'internal to me' accounted for 61% of the meaning units within this category and included responses such as *"I thought that she was mad at me,"* and *"I worried that he's not attracted to me anymore"*. Meaning units that conveyed respondents' 'negative evaluation of self-worth' made up 39% of the category and included statements such as *"I feel rejected, and like something must be wrong with me," "I attributed my own looks and personality to his lack of interest,"* and *"I feel like I am not good enough, and not good at sex"*.

Comparatively, fewer attributions of 'partner disinterest is intentional' (2% of attributions), 'negative motivation for partner disinterest' (4% of attributions) and 'partner disinterest is blameworthy' (2% of attributions) were noted in the data. Meaning units such as, *"because I wanted to have sex after watching 50 Shades, he didn't want to,"* and *"She knew that I was interested in sex because of the pornography, and she would not let it happen"* reflected a deliberate avoidance of sex and are examples of the category 'partner disinterest is intentional'. Meaning units such as *"[I]felt that he thought his needs and his timetable of having sex were more important than mine,"* and *"I usually muster the mood for him when I'm not ready, but he just would not even try,"* reflected partners' perceived selfishness and lack of effort and are examples of the category 'negative motivation for partner's disinterest'. Attributions that referred to negative motivations (e.g., "*he's cheating on me again"*) implied that the partner was to blame for their disinterest or lack of sex in general. About 1% of the attributions reflected a perception that partners' disinterest in sex was motivated by benign or positive reasons (e.g., *"she didn't want the experience to be lack luster"*).

The attribution categories 'partner disinterest is about the relationship,' (1% of attributions) and 'stability of causes' (1% of attributions) were the least referenced in the data. Responses such as "*We were growing apart"* and *"Sometimes it is because we have been fighting"* are examples of respondent's perceptions that their partner's disinterest in sex was about quality of their relationship. Responses such as *"There's always tomorrow,"* and *"I knew he would come around soon,"* are examples of perceived temporariness of the causes for their partner's disinterest.

Self-regulation Strategies in Response to Initial Attributions

In addition to attributions, three secondary cognitive responses were noted in the data and grouped under self-regulation. First, some participants described a process of 'positive reappraisal' which involved reframing their attribution for their partner's disinterest in sex positively. For example,

> "My immediate thoughts were that it was a reflection on me and the way I look these days. I just had a baby not long ago and am EXTREMELY displeased with the way I look. My feelings were hurt and I thought maybe he was attracted to someone at work. Once I composed myself I realized that it was just because he was tired from an early shift at work and not sleeping very well."

Second, some participants described taking their partner's perspective or using perspective-taking to minimize the negative impact of the partner's expression of disinterest. Example meaning units for this category were: *"At first, my feelings were a bit hurt, but I realized I say 'no' a lot more than he does,"* and *"Not having sex isn't the end of the world. We aren't teenagers…"* Third, some participants described accepting the way things were. For example, the following respondent attributed their partner's lack of disinterest in sex to an external stressor and then provided a statement of acceptance at the end:

> "I don't feel bad about it these days, I am working a lot and my husband has to be the primary care giver for my 92 year-old mother who has dementia and lives with us. So sex is a little on the back burner these days. Such is life at times."

Behavioral Responses to Partner Disinterest in Sex

As hypothesized, the majority of behavioral responses to partner disinterest in sex could be categorized as pursue-, withdraw-, or staying engaged-type behaviors. Due to the lack of

depth in the data and an inability to ask follow-up questions, about one-third of the behavioral meaning units did not clearly reflect an orientation of the respondents' behavior (towards or away from the partner) or the potential impact of the behavior on the relationship (conflict-promoting or conflict- negating) . They were thus, categorized as 'neutral' behavioral responses. For example, masturbation as indicated by meaning units such as *"I took care of it myself"* and *"I just went and took a shower and took care of myself"* were coded as neutral since their orientation and impact were not evident. Other meaning units such as *"After [my partner indicated their disinterest], I got ready for work"* were coded as neutral- self (i.e., behavior was performed alone) and meaning units such as *"We continued to watch TV"* were coded as neural-together (i.e., behavior was performed with partner).

Of the hypothesized behavioral response categories, the withdraw-type was the most prevalent (31% of behaviors), followed by staying engaged-type and (30% of behaviors), and pursue-type behaviors (6% of behavior). Meaning units such as *"I rolled over and went to sleep", "I left him to be alone while I went and found something to do",* and *"I just went into the other room and sulked"* were coded as behaviors that signaled withdrawal from their partner when their attempt to engage in sex was turned down. Meaning units such as *"We kissed and cuddled", "I just took care of him and waited for him to feel better"*, *"I told her we could do this another time"*, and *"I kissed her forehead and got ready to just sleep"* reflected attempts by respondents to 'stay engaged' with their partner. Pursue-type behavioral responses were the least prevalent, representing only 6% of behavioral meaning units. Meaning units coded as pursue-type behaviors included respondents' attempts to engage unproductively with partners in an effort to seek comfort or reparation from their partner (e.g., *"I was very mad and I told her," "It turned me off and made me uninterested in sex and then I started an argument with him"*).

Discussion

Desire discrepancies, or times when one partner wants more sex than the other, in long-term committed relationships, is a common affliction (Sutherland et al., 2015). Although desire ebbs and flows within individuals and between partners over time, desire discrepancies are associated with lower relationship and sexual satisfaction (Davies et al., 1999; Herbenick et al., 2014; Mark, 2012; Mark & Murray, 2012). Study 1, with the goal to explore and identify attributions and behaviors, in response to desire discrepancies, found that in response to the same prompt- "partner does not want to have sex," participants generated a variety of explanations for why their partner did not want sex, ranging in the extent to which their partner's disinterest was caused by them, the relationship, or their partner. They also made related assessments of the motivations for and blameworthiness of their partner's disinterest. This provides evidence that moments of desire discrepancy in committed relationship prompt partners to make sense of what their partner's disinterest in sex means, and that attributions may be an important construct in understanding the phenomenon of desire discrepancies.

Further, attributions varied along expected theoretical themes. Specifically, a proportion of participants perceived their partner's disinterest to be caused by them or a negative reflection on their self-worth. This is consistent with differentiation theory which suggests that people at low levels of differentiation would be more likely, as a function of their anxieties about acceptance, to perceive themselves to be the cause of negative partner behavior. And, as a function of emotional reactivity to the ups and downs of relationships, people at low levels of differentiation are more likely to perceive negative partner behavior as personal to their partner. Accordingly, participant's attributions also reflected a perception that their partner was being

intentionally avoidant, had negative motivations for turning down their sexual invitation, and was to blame for their lack of interest in sex.

In contrast, differentiation theory would suggest that partners with high levels of differentiation would be more likely to make benign or non-personal attributions in response to their partners' disinterest in sex. Interestingly, participants most frequently attributed their partners' disinterest as "external to me." This could suggest that the average differentiation level in this sample was high, although we were unable to test these hypotheses in this study. Alternatively, this finding could mean that the theoretical assumption that differentiation levels are most strongly challenged during intimacy is incorrect and partners' disinterest in sex is not a big deal to most people. A third, more likely, interpretation could be that due to the format of an open-ended question at the end of a lengthy survey, the data only captured partial participant attributions. Detailed follow-up questions, which were not possible in this study, would potentially have revealed more complex and varied interpretations of partner's disinterest in sex and provided greater context of the relationship within which to locate the attributions.

In addition to the expected range of attributions, participants also reported self-regulation strategies as a secondary cognitive response to their initial attributions. The use of positive reappraisal, perspective taking and acceptance— well-established as cognitive self-regulation strategies in the literature (see review by Aldao, Nolen-Hoeksema, & Schweizer, 2010) — suggest that sometimes when participants formulated negative attributions they also attempted to minimize its consequent negative impact. It is possible then, if individuals perceive negative partner behavior, in this case disinterest in sex, as being caused by them or as a negative reflection of their self-worth, cognitive self-regulation could be a protective mechanism, reducing the negative impact of these attributions on the individual and the relationship. Further

research is needed to test this hypothesis and explore the link between differentiation and self-regulation in response to negative attributions.

With respect to behaviors in response to desire discrepancies, as hypothesized, participants also reported a variety of behaviors, ranging in the extent to which they were oriented towards or away from the partner and in their potential for conflict. This finding is consistent with differentiation theory, which predicts that people, based on their level of differentiation will either engage unproductively with their partners to reduce emotional distance (oriented towards partner with high conflict potential), disengage to protect themselves from rejection (oriented away from partner with high potential conflict) or stay engaged for the sake of emotional intimacy (oriented towards partner with low conflict potential).

Interestingly, 'withdraw-type' behaviors were more commonly reported than pursue-type behaviors in response to partner disinterest in sex. It is possible that withdrawing from one's partner when turned down for sex is the most common response. If desire discrepancy moments occur frequently, perhaps instead of these moments activating partners' differentiation level, people attribute it to external reasons and withdraw. It is also possible that withdrawal as a behavioral response to negative relationship events is gendered. Traditional sexual scripts dictate that men initiate sexual activity in heterosexual relationships more than women (Dworkin & O'Sullivan, 2005 & O'Sullivan & Byers, 1992) and research suggests that men withdraw in conflict situations more frequently than women in heterosexual relationships (e.g., Stanley, Markman & Whitton, 2002). It is possible, therefore, that men were the primary initiators of sex in this sample and more frequently described withdrawal when faced with a refusal. This possibility could not be directly tested in this study but more women (n = 50) than men (n = 8) reported that they never or rarely get turned down for sex. This suggests that the frequency of

initiation and gendered scripts about initiating and responding to sexual advances might provide important context for understanding behavioral responses to desire discrepancies. The extent to which withdrawal is a common response to desire discrepancies and its potential for conflict also needs further assessment.

Strengths and limitations. Although this study had a large sample comprised of an almost equal number of men and women, the brief nature of the qualitative responses and lack of follow-up questions limited my ability to better understand how men and women differentially make meaning of and respond to moments of sexual desire discrepancy. It is possible that with detailed follow-up questions, other dimensions of attributions in response to desire discrepancies would emerge. More research is needed on gender differences in these areas and to what extent the variance in attributions and behaviors can be explained by partners' levels of differentiation.

Conclusion

This study provided evidence that individual's attributions in response to desire discrepancies may vary in ways consistent with differentiation theory. Due to the potential impact of these attributions on sexual desire in committed relationships, it is important to examine the intrapersonal (differentiation) and interpersonal factors (relationship characteristics) that shape these attributions and their association with overall sexual desire and other relationship characteristics (satisfaction and conflict) in committed relationships.

Chapter 4 - Study 2

Methods

Purpose

The goals of study 2 are: 1) to use the results of Study 1 to develop a quantitative scale measuring negative attributions about and behavioral responses to moments of desire discrepancies, 2) to refine the factor structure of the scales created in Study 1 to assess partners' negative attributions and behaviors in response to moments of desire discrepancies, 3) to explore the impact of differentiation on sexual desire through partners' attributions, and emotional and behavioral responses to moments of desire discrepancy, and 4) to test how this process might differ for men and women. The hypotheses and research question guiding Study 2 are as follows:

Measurement Hypotheses & Research Questions:

1. The factor structures of the items developed to represent negative attributions and behaviors in response to desire discrepancies will be consistent with theory.
    a. Specifically, items developed to represent attributions internal to the participant, to the relationship and to the partner; attributions external to the participant and partner and attributions referring to stable causes will load on distinct factors.
    b. Items developed to represent pursue-type, withdraw-type and staying engaged-type behavior will load on distinct factors.
2. Attributions and behaviors in response to desire discrepancies will demonstrate convergent validity and be distinguishable from global attributions and negative interactions, respectively.
    a. Attributions and behaviors in response to desire discrepancies will be positively correlated with established dimensions of attributions and negative interactions as

measured by the Relationship Attribution Measure (RAM; Fincham & Bradbury, 1992) and the Negative Interaction Scale (NIS; Stanley, Markman, & Whitton, 2002) respectively.

b. External attributions in response to desire discrepancies will be inversely associated with negative attributions in response to desire discrepancies and negative interactions and positively associated with relationship and sexual satisfaction.

c. Negative attributions and behaviors will be positively correlated with each other and negative interactions and inversely associated with relationship satisfaction and sexual satisfaction.

d. Negative behaviors (pursue- and withdraw-type) will be positively associated with negative interactions and inversely associated with relationship and sexual satisfaction.

3. To what degree will the factor structure of the negative attributions and behaviors in response to desire discrepancies scales created from Study 1 be invariant between men and women?

Structural Hypotheses and Research Questions:

1. Consistent with the predictions of differentiation theory, differentiation will be positively associated with sexual desire.
2. Negative attributions will be directly and inversely associated with desire.
3. The association between differentiation and sexual desire will be at least partially mediated by attributions, emotional responses and behavioral responses. Further, the association between attributions and behavioral responses will be at least partially mediated by emotional responses. Specifically:

a. Differentiation will be inversely related to negative attributions for desire discrepancies.
b. Negative attributions will be positively associated with negative emotional responses, and negative behavioral responses (e.g., pursue- and withdraw-type).
c. Negative emotions will be positively associated with negative behavioral responses.
d. Negative behavioral responses will be inversely related to sexual desire.

4. How will the associations of differentiation with sexual desire via attributions, emotions, and behavior differ between men and women?

Participants and Procedure

Participants in long-term committed relationships were recruited through Amazon's Mechanical Turk. To be eligible, participants had to be over the age of 21 years old and in a committed relationship of at least three years. An online survey was created for the purpose of this study and IRB approval was obtained prior to data collection. The online survey took approximately 25-30 minutes and participants were paid $2.25 USD for their time. In addition to the items created to measure specific attributions and behavioral responses in the context of desire discrepancies, standard measures of attributions (Relationship Attribution Measure; Fincham & Bradbury, 1992), and conflict (Negative Interaction Scale; Stanley, Markman, & Whitton, 2002) were included to validate the Desire Discrepancy Attributions and Behavior Scale.

Of the 601 participants who completed the survey, 1 participant was dropped for being 20 years of age, 8 participants for being in relationships under 3 years and 24 participants for failing

the attention check questions. Further, since this study is focused on heterosexual relationships, participants in same-sex relationships (n = 33) were dropped. Finally, one-way ANOVAs showed that participants who took less than 13 minutes to complete the survey had significantly different mean scores on age and key study variables (e.g., differentiation) than participants who took more than 13 minutes to complete the survey. Thus to ensure the quality of the data, 47 participants who took less than 13 minutes to complete the survey were dropped, leaving a final sample of 511.

Among the 511 participants in the operational sample, 51.7% were female and 48.3% were male. The average age was 35.69 years (SD = 10.54). In terms of race, the sample was 76.7% European American, 7.4% African American, 6.7% Asian, 5.9% Latino, 2.3% multiracial, 0.6% Native American and 0.4% other race. With respect to education, 10.4% had completed high school or GED, 22.5% had completed some college, 12.3% an associate's degree, 41.9% a bachelor's degree and 12.9% a graduate degree. The average income level in the sample was $40,000-$59,000 and the average relationship length was 10.15 years (SD = 8.22). Most participants reported having 0 children (54.4%), with 18.5% participants reporting one child, 15.6% participants reporting two children, 7% participants reporting three children and 4.5% participants reporting more than three children. A small proportion of participants were currently pregnant (2.3%) and 7.2% participants reported currently trying to get pregnant.

Measures

Demographic variables. In order to provide background information about the sample, a number of demographic questions were included in the survey. Participants were asked to report their sex, race, income, education, relationship status and length.

Contextual variables. To assess the prevalence of desire discrepancies in this sample, the following item was used "Using the scale below, rate which statement best captures yours and your partner's desire levels." Responses were indicated on a 5-point scale: 2 = *My desire level is much higher than my partner's*, 1 = *My desire level is slightly higher than my partner's*, 0 = *My desire level is equal to my partner's*, -1 = *My partner's desire level is slightly higher than mine*, and -2 = *My partner's desire level is much higher than mine*. Higher scores indicated the participant reporting greater desire as compared to their partner. To assess frequency of initiating sex, the following item was used: "As compared to your partner, how frequently do you initiate sex, on average?" Responses were indicated on a 5-point scale: 2 = *I initiate sex much more than my partner*, 1 = *I initiate sex slightly more than my partner*, 0 = *I initiate sex an equal amount as my partner*, -1 = *I initiate sex slightly less than my partner*, -2 = *I initiate sex much less than my partner*. Higher scores reflected greater initiation of sex as compared to their partner.

Differentiation. The 63-item multidimensional Crucible Differentiation Scale (CDS; Schnarch & Regas, 2012) was used to assess differentiation. Participants were asked the extent to which they agreed with items such as "I tell people what I think they want to hear" and "I get as much out of helping other people as I do from pursuing my individual goals" on a 6-point Likert scale from *not at all true* (1) to *very true* (6). Items were recoded and averaged to produce a global score with higher scores indicating greater differentiation. Schnarch and Regas (2012)

found that the global score showed high internal consistency (α = .91-.96) and test-retest reliability. In this sample the alpha coefficient was α = .91 for men and α = .87 for women.

Sexual desire. The 25-item Hurlbert Index of Sexual Desire (HISD; Apt & Hurlbert, 1992) was used to measure sexual desire. Items such as "My desire for sex with my partner is strong" and "I lack the desire necessary to pursue sex with my partner" were rated on a 5-point Likert scale from *all of the time* (0) to *never* (4). Scores ranged from 0 to 100 with higher scores indicating greater desire. In past samples, this measure has shown good internal consistency (α = .89) and test-retest reliability (e.g., Hurlbert, Apt & Rombough, 1996). In this sample, the alpha coefficient was α = .65 for men and α = .96 for women.

Causal and responsibility attributions. The 24-item Relationship Attribution Measure (RAM; Fincham & Bradbury, 1992) was used to assess global causal and responsibility attributions. Participants were presented with 4 vignettes of negative partner behavior (e.g., "Imagine that your partner is distant and cool toward you") followed by 6 statements that participants indicated their level of agreement on a Likert scale from *strongly disagree* (1) to *strongly agree* (6). The responses assess 3 types of causal attributions including locus (behavior is attributed to be internal to the partner), stability (the likelihood that this behavior will change) and global (the behavior is attributed to affect all parts of the relationship), and 3 types of responsibility attributions including intent (the behavior was intentional), motivation (the behavior was selfishly motivated), and blame (the partner should be blamed for their behavior). Twelve items were summed to create a causal attribution score and 12 items were summed to create a responsibility attributions score. This measure has shown to be reliable with high internal consistency (α = .84–.89) and test-retest reliability coefficients (e.g., Hall & Fincham, 2008). In the current sample the alpha coefficient for the causal attribution subscale was α = .88

for men and α = .76 for women. The alpha coefficient for the responsibility attribution subscale was α = .85 for men and α = .81 for women.

Negative interactions. The 4-item Negative Interaction Scale (NIS; Stanley, Markman, & Whitton, 2002) was used to measure relationship conflict: ‘‘Little arguments escalate into ugly fights with accusations, criticisms, name calling, or bringing up past hurts,’’ “My partner seems to view my words or actions more negatively than I mean them to be,” ‘‘My partner criticizes or belittles my opinions, feelings, or desires,’’ and “When we have a problem to solve, it is like we are on opposite teams.” Participants indicated the frequency of these events on a scale from *never* (0) to *all the time* (5). The alpha coefficient in this sample was α = .79 for men and α = .83 for women.

Relationship satisfaction. The 4-item, Couple Satisfaction Index (CSI-4, Funk & Rogge, 2007) was used to assess relationship satisfaction. Participants will be asked to rate their level of satisfaction for 3 items (e.g., “How rewarding is your relationship with your partner?”) on a Likert scale from *not at all* (0) to *completely* (5). The fourth item asked participants to indicate their overall level of happiness with their relationship on a 7-point scale from *extremely unhappy* (0) to *perfect* (6). Items were summed with higher scores reflecting higher satisfaction. The 4-item CSI has shown good internal reliability in past samples (α = .94; Funk & Rogge, 2007). In this sample, the alpha coefficient was α = .93 for men and α = .95 for women.

Control variables. Sexual satisfaction was controlled for by using the Global Measure of Sexual Satisfaction (GMSEX; Lawrance & Byers, 1995). Participants were asked to respond to the question “In general, how would you describe your sexual relationship with your partner?’’ on five, 7-point ranges: Bad-Good, Unpleasant-Pleasant, Negative-Positive, Unsatisfying-Satisfying, and Worthless-Valuable. Item responses were summed with higher scores reflecting

greater sexual satisfaction. The GMSEX has shown good internal consistency with people in long-term relationships (α = .96; Byers, 2005) and a community sample (α = .96; Lawrance & Byers, 1995). The GMSEX has also shown to be stronger psychometrically (Mark, Herbenick, Fortenberry, Sanders & Reece, 2014) than The Index of Sexual Satisfaction (ISS) and the New Sexual Satisfaction Scale–Short (NSSS-S). In this sample the alpha coefficient was α = .95 for men and α = .97 for women.

Anxiety and depression was controlled for by using the 4-item Patient Health Questionnaire (PHQ-4; Kroenke, Spitzer, Williams & Löwe, 2009). Participants were asked how frequently they have experienced problems such as "Feeling nervous, anxious or on edge" and "Feeling down, depressed or hopeless" on a scale from *not at all* (0) to 3 = *nearly every day* (3). Scores were summed with higher sores reflecting higher levels of psychological distress. The 4-item PHQ measure has been found to have good internal reliability with the 4-item composite score having an alpha of α = .85. In this sample, the alpha coefficient for the 4-item composite score was α = .91 for men and α = .91 for women. Relationship duration, measured in years, was used as a final control.

Analysis Strategy

Item Creation

Based on the themes developed in Study 1, I developed 27 items to measure negative attributions reflecting 7 categories: partner disinterest is personal (internal to me, negative evaluation of self-worth) partner disinterest is not personal (external to me, external to us both), partner disinterest is about the relationship, negative intent, negative motivation, blame and stability of causes. I also developed 12 items to measure negative behaviors reflecting 3 categories: pursue-type (fusion), withdraw-type (cut-off) and staying engaged-type. Nine items

reflecting a range of emotions (e.g., anger, sadness, guilt, interest, affection etc.) were also added. These items (see Table 2 and 3 for the items) were used with the following vignette: *"Imagine you are interested in having sex with your partner. You get physically close to your partner and let them know you are interested. Your partner says, "No, not right now." Answer the following questions while thinking of this situation."* In response to the vignette, participants were asked to indicate the likelihood that they would experience the listed thoughts (i.e., attributions), emotions, and behaviors on a 7-point scale from *Not likely at all* (1) to *Extremely likely* (7).

Refining Factor Structure

In order to refine the factor structure of the scales developed to assess attributions (Desire Discrepancy Attributions Scale) and behaviors (Desire Discrepancy Behaviors Scale) in response to moments of desire discrepancy, exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses were conducted. Testing for item normality and exploratory factor analyses were conducted in SPSS Version 24. Because the factors were expected to be correlated, principal components analysis (PCA) with varimax rotation was used to explore the factor structures. Confirmatory factor analyses based on the exploratory factor analyses (for created scales) and previous research (for established scales) were then conducted separately for men and women in M*Plus* 7.0 (Muthén & Muthén, 1998-2012) as a first step toward assessing partial measurement invariance. Full information maximum likelihood estimation (FIML) was used to address missingness in the data (0% to 11%). As partial measurement invariance could not be established between men and women for the negative behavior scales, subsequent structural models were run separately for men and women. Descriptive analyses and bivariate correlations between all variables in the models were computed SPSS Version 24.

Assessing Differences between Men and Women

As partial measurement invariance could not be established between men and women for the negative behavior scales, subsequent structural models were run separately for men and women. Men and women's structural models were compared using model fit indices (AIC and BIC values) and a series of independent-samples t-tests were conducted to compare mean differences on negative attributions and negative behavior subscales and model variables.

Partial Structural Equation Model

With respect to the third objective of Study 2, a partial structural equation model was run in M*Plus* 7.0 to examine (1) if differentiation was positively associated with sexual desire and, (2) to what degree this association was mediated by attributions, emotional responses, and behavioral responses. In order to capture the measurement error present in the negative attributions, it was modeled as a latent construct. Psychological distress, relationship length and sexual satisfaction were added as controls for the mediating variables (negative attributions emotions and behavior) and sexual desire. Only significant pathways for the controls were retained in the model for parsimony. Bootstrap analysis with 2,000 bootstraps (Preacher & Hayes, 2008) was used to test for indirect effects.

Results: Measurement Models

Determining the Factor Structure of the Desire Discrepancy Attribution Scale (DDAS)

Full sample exploratory factor analysis. All items were normally distributed with inter-item correlations being in the expected directions. Principal Components Analysis (PCA) extracted five factors with Eigenvalues greater than 1 for attributions related to the desire discrepancy event, explaining 64.81% of the variance. The Scree plot indicated that there was an

elbow after 4 factors with eigenvalues above 1. Thus, based on the distribution of variance explained across the factors and the scree plot, a four factor model was retained. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy was .94 and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was significant, indicating good model fit. Examining the factor loadings for individual items indicated that the four factors represented attributions about 1) a negative evaluation of self and the relationship (labeled 'About Me/Relationship'; 12 of items), 2) a negative evaluation of partner (labeled 'About Partner'; 6 of items), 3) external causes (6 items), and 4) stable causes (labeled 'Stable'; 3 items). The first factor (About Me /Relationship) accounted for 39.67% of the variance, the second factor (About Partner) accounted for 9.63%, the third factor (External causes) accounted for 10.26%, and the fourth factor (Stable) accounted for 5.24% of the variance.

Confirmatory factor analysis for men. In order to achieve well-fitting models for both men and women before testing for measurement invariance, confirmatory factor analyses (CFA) were conducted separately for men and women. Five models using all 27 items were sequentially tested to confirm the four factor structure and guidelines provided by Kline (2011) were used to evaluate goodness-of-fit. In model 1, all items were expected to load on one factor. In model 2, items relating to negative attributions (About me/ Relationship, About Partner) were expected to load on one factor and items relating to external attributions (External and Stable causes) were expected to load on the second factor. In Model 3, items relating to negative evaluation of self and relationship were expected to load on one factor, items relating to negative evaluation of partner were expected to load on the second factor and items relating to external attributions (External and Stable) on the third factor. In model 4, items related to stable and external attributions were expected to load on separate factors with a total of 4 factors. Finally to test, if

attributions relating to negative evaluation of self and the relationship constituted distinct factors, a five factor model was tested (About Me, About Relationship, About Partner, Stable and External). Chi-square difference tests indicated that each iteration of the model improved fit, allowing the retention of the 5-factor model. Next, modification indices were used to improve model fit: items with factor loadings below.4 were dropped (items 15, 21, 24) and several error terms were correlated, based on theoretical rationale, for cross-loading items (see correlated error terms in Figure 1). The final 5-factor model was considered to have adequate model fit: χ^2 (237) = 612.97, $p < .001$; root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) = .08, 90% CI [.07, .09], comparative fit index (CFI) = .91, Tucker–Lewis index (TLI) =.89, standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) = .06. All factor loadings were positively associated with the latent factors and significant at the .001 level. See Table 4 for the items used as indicators for each latent construct and Figure 1 for individual standardized factor loadings.

Confirmatory factor analysis for women. As was done with the men, five models using all 27 items were sequentially tested to confirm the four factor structure using chi-square difference tests to determine if the addition of factors, one by one, improved mode fit (Kline, 2011). As with the men, the 5-factor model (items loading the same as in the men's sample) was the best fit to the data: χ^2 (235) = 541.78, $p < .001$; root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) = .07, 90% CI [.06, .08], comparative fit index (CFI) = .93, Tucker–Lewis index (TLI) =.92, standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) = .06. Item 22 loading onto the "Stable" factor had a low factor loading (.3) but was retained based on inter-item correlations and model fit indices. The final CFA in the men's sample had lower AIC (14366.41) and BIC values (14671.73) as compared to CFA in the women's sample (AIC: 15446.25, BIC: 15764.51)

indicating the CFA was a fit better in the men's sample. See Table 4 for the items used as indicators for each latent construct and Figure 2 for individual standardized factor loadings.

Determining the Factor Structure of the Desire Discrepancy Behavior Scale (DDBS)

Full sample exploratory factor analysis. All items were normally distributed with inter-item correlations being in the expected directions. The PCA extracted 3 factors with Eigenvalues greater than 1 that explained 58.90% of the variance. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy was .75 and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was significant, indicating adequate model fit. Most items loaded on the expected factors: items related to pursue-type behavior (items 1 and 5) loaded on the first factor, items related to withdraw-type behavior (items 2, 8 and 10) loaded on the second factor and items related to staying engaged-type behavior (items 3,7,11 and 12) loaded on the third factor. Interestingly, item 5 ("I would masturbate and take care of my needs") loaded with the pursue-type behavior items, item 9 ("I would continue to flirt and be romantic so that we could have sex later") cross-loaded on the staying engaged factor and item 6 ("I would walk away and be silent the rest of our time together") loaded on the pursue factor instead of withdrawal. The first factor (Pursue) accounted for 20.70% of the variance, the second factor (Withdrawal) accounted for 13.50%, the third factor (Staying engaged) accounted for 24.71%. Thus, based on the distribution of variance explained across the factors and the scree plot, a three factor model was retained and the cross-loading items (items 6 and 9) were noted for possible trimming in the CFAs.

Confirmatory factor analysis for men. Again, in order to begin testing for structural equivalence, the model was tested for fit to the data of men and women separately. All 12-items were used to test 3 models: a one-factor model, a two-factor model with pursue- and withdraw-

type behaviors loaded on the first factor (negative behaviors) and staying engaged items loaded on the second factor (positive behaviors), and a three-factor model (with pursue-, withdraw, and staying engaged-type factors). In the three-factor model, items, 1, 4, 5 and 9 were expected to load on the pursue-type factor; items 2, 6, 8, and 10 were expected to load on the withdraw-type factor; and items 3,7,11 and 12 were expected to load on the staying-engaged-type factor. Chi-square difference tests indicated that model fit improved with the addition of each factor. Thus, the 3- factor model was retained based on theoretical rationale and model fit indices.

Modification indices showed that, similar to the EFA, item 9 ("I would continue to flirt and be romantic so that we could have sex later") was cross-loading on the 'staying engaged' factor and had a low factor loading. It was, thus, dropped. Although item 6 ("I would walk away and be silent the rest of our time together") had cross-loaded in the EFA, it loaded adequately on the withdrawal factor in the CFA and was retained. Item 8 ("I would do something else") had a low factor loading but was retained, as dropping it worsened model fit. Based on modification indices, the error terms of item 3 and 12 (both loaded on the staying engaged factor) were correlated. The final 3-factor model was considered to have good fit: χ^2 (31) = 44.24, p >.05; root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) = .04, 90% CI [.00, .07], comparative fit index (CFI) = .98, Tucker–Lewis index (TLI) =.97, standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) = .04. All factor loadings were positively associated with the latent factors and significant at the .001 level. See Table 5 for the items used as indicators for each latent construct and Figure 3 for individual standardized factor loadings.

Confirmatory factor analysis for women. A similar process was used to conduct CFAs in the women's sample. In model 1, all items were expected to load on one factor and in model 2, positive and negative behavior items were expected to load on 2 factors. A Chi-square difference

test indicated that the two-factor model improved fit, although the overall model fit was poor. The three factor model did not converge. Based on inter-item correlations, a four factor model was tested with items 1, 4, 5, and 9 loading on the first factor (Pursue), items 2 and 8 on the second factor (Withdraw), items 6 ("I would walk away and be silent the rest of our time together") and 10 ("I would roll away and go to sleep") on the third factor, which was labeled "Silent conflict", and items 3, 7, 11 and 12 on the last factor (Staying engaged). This model indicated adequate model fit: χ^2 (28) = 99.26, p >.01; root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) = .08, 90% CI [.06, .10], comparative fit index (CFI) = .92, Tucker–Lewis index (TLI) =.88, standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) = .07.

Two items with factor loadings below.4 were dropped and based on modification indices error terms between 2 items were correlated (See Figure 4). The final four-factor model showed adequate model fit based on the following indices: χ^2 (28) = 82.56, p >.01; comparative fit index (CFI) = .93, Tucker–Lewis index (TLI) =.88, standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) = .07. The root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) = .09, 90% CI [.07, .11], however, was above the recommended range for good fit (Kline, 2011). Since the same number of factors, and thereby partial measurement invariance, could not be established for the desire discrepancy behavior scale for men and women, the partial structural equation models were conducted separately for men and women. See Table 6 for the items used as indicators for each latent construct and Figure 4 for individual standardized factor loadings.

Convergent Validity for the DDAS and DDBS

In order to test convergent validity, bivariate correlations were computed between the DDAS and DDBS subscales and standardized measures (See Tables 7,8, 9 and 10). As expected, the DDAS subscales (About Me, About Partner, About Relationship and Stable) were positively

correlated with the causal and responsibility attributions from the RAM, psychological distress as measured by the PHQ-4, and negative interactions (the NIS), and negatively correlated with relationship satisfaction (the CSI-4) and sexual satisfaction (the GMSEX) for both men and women. A closer examination of the bivariate correlations between the negative attribution subscales and the RAM subscales for men and women indicated most correlations were below $r = .5$, suggesting that although there is evidence to support convergent validity, the negative attribution subscales are capturing unique attributions and are distinguishable from global relationship attributions. As expected, the External subscale of the DDAS was negatively associated with the negative attribution subscales of the DDAS and positively associated with relationship and sexual satisfaction.

Also as expected, the Pursue and Withdraw subscales of the DDBS for men were positively correlated with negative interactions (the NIS), causal and responsibility attributions (the RAM) and psychological distress and inversely associated with relationship and sexual satisfaction. Similarly, for women, the Pursue and Silent Conflict subscales of the DDBS were positively associated with negative interactions, causal and responsibility attributions from the RAM and psychological distress. The Withdrawal subscale of the DDBS for women, on the other hand, had non-significant correlations with all the standardized measures suggesting it has problems with validity. The Staying Engaged subscale of the DDBS, for both men and women, did not have significant associations with the negative behavior subscales of the DDBS or with causal and responsibility attributions (from the RAM), but was positively associated with couple and sexual satisfaction, indicating that Staying Engaged-type behavior is distinguishable and distinct from negative behavior.

Results: Partial Structural Equation Models

Consistent with the hypotheses of Study 2, I tested the relationship between differentiation and sexual desire mediated by negative attributions, emotions and behavior. Accordingly, only the three negative attribution subscales from the DDAS and the negative behavior subscales from the DDBS were used in all further analyses. Since partial measurement invariance could not be established for the DDBS, all further analyses were conducted separately for men and women. Based on the sample size and complexity of the model, all the standardized scales were modeled as manifest and only the desire discrepancy- specific scales from the previous CFAs were considered for inclusion as latent. Based on evidence from the marital attribution literature (Fincham, 2003) which has shown all types of negative attributions are negatively associated with relationship outcomes, I did not expect differential relationships between the three negative attribution subscales and negative behaviors or sexual desire, thus these subscales were loaded onto one latent factor called Negative Attributions. Because differentiation theory suggests that an individual is likely to pursue their partner if they tend towards fusion or withdraw if they tend towards cut-off and the differential associations of pursuit versus withdrawal with desire are not known, the negative behavior subscales in the (Desire Discrepancy Behavior Scale) were modeled as correlated manifest variables.

Descriptive and Preliminary Analyses

Descriptive analyses, conducted to provide an overall snapshot of the sample, and results of the independent-samples t-tests comparing mean differences on model variables between men and women are shown in Table 13. Bivariate relationships between model variables were in the expected directions and are depicted in Tables 11 and 12.

Comparing men and women. Men and women differed significantly in the direction and magnitude of desire discrepancies with men reporting being the partner with greater desire more frequently and perceiving a greater magnitude of desire discrepancy than women. Men also reported initiating sex significantly more frequently than women. Men and women did not differ significantly on negative attributions with the exception of the About Partner subscale; men reported significantly more negative attributions about their partner in response to desire discrepancies than women. With respect to negative behaviors, mean differences were conducted at the item level as different items were used to compute subscale scores. Men and women differed significantly only on 2 behavior items: men had higher mean scores on item 4 ("I would masturbate and take care of my needs") and women had higher mean scores on item 8 ("I would do something else.").

Partial Structural Equation Model for Men

After establishing stable factor structures for the DDBS and DDAS and examining the correlation matrix, the hypothesized causal paths, with negative attributions modeled as a latent construct, were evaluated for fit to the data (Figure 5). The partial structural equation model for men showed adequate fit to the data: χ^2 (38) = 84.48, p < .001; root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) = .09, 90% CI [.07, .11], comparative fit index (CFI) = .95, Tucker–Lewis index (TLI) =.92, standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) = .04. Factor loadings for the negative attribution latent construct were .86, .85 and .87 for About Me, About Relationship and About Partner respectively and were significant at the .001 level.

As hypothesized (H1), men's differentiation was positively associated with their sexual desire (β = .30, p < .01), controlling for sexual satisfaction. Men's differentiation was also

inversely associated with making negative attributions (H3a; β = -.33, p < .01) while controlling for psychological distress, relationship length and sexual satisfaction.

Men's negative attributions, in turn (H2), were inversely associated with desire (β = -.47, p < .01) and positively associated with negative emotions (H3b; β = .63, p < .01), pursue behavior (H3b; β = .74, p < .01), and withdraw behavior (H3b; β = .56, p < .01). Contrary to hypothesis 3c, men's report of negative emotions was not significantly associated with pursue (β = -.04, p > .05) or withdraw behavior (β = .01, p > .05). Surprisingly, men's pursue behavior was positively associated with their sexual desire (H3d; β = .48, p > .05) while withdraw behavior did not have a significant association (H3d; β = -.01, p > .05).

Indirect effects. In addition to the direct pathways, tests of indirect effects revealed two significant indirect pathways for men: their level of differentiation was significantly associated with sexual desire via negative attributions (β = .16, 95% CI = .04, .29, p <.05) and via negative attributions and pursue behavior (β = -.12, 95% CI = -.23, -.05, p <.05). Altogether, the model accounted for 37% of the variance in sexual desire for men.

Post-hoc examination of effects between differentiation and DDAS subscales.

Based on differentiation theory, I proposed that a low level of differentiation may not only increase an individual's propensity to make negative attributions in general but also attributions involving internal causes (i.e. caused by me) and a negative evaluation of self-worth specifically. Due to the low sample size and a lack of power, the differential associations between differentiation and types of negative attributions were tested separately as post-hoc analyses. By constraining the direct pathways between differentiation and About Me, About Partner and About Relationship attributions one at a time and using chi-square difference tests, significant differences between the magnitude of the direct effects were tested. There were no

significant differences in the magnitude of the association between differentiation and men's attributions about their partners' disinterest in sex being personal (About Me subscale; β = -.61, b = -.86, $p < .01$), about the relationship (About Relationship subscale; β = -.54, b = -.84, $p < .01$) and about the partner (About Partner subscale (β = -.53, b = -.77, $p < .01$).

Partial Structural Equation Model for Women

Similar to the men, the hypothesized causal paths were modeled, with negative attributions as a latent construct and evaluated for fit to the data (Figure 6). The partial structural equation model for women showed good fit to the data: χ^2 (36) = 78.84, p < .001; root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) = .07, 90% CI [.05, .09], comparative fit index (CFI) = .95, Tucker–Lewis index (TLI) =.92, standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) = .05. Based on the AIC and BIC values, the structural model for men was better fitting (AIC = 2463.74, BIC = 2571.15) than the structural model for women (AIC = 3974.81, BIC = 4107.39). Factor loadings for the negative attribution latent construct were .95, .82 and .78 for About Me, About Relationship and About Partner subscales respectively and were significant at the .001 level.

As hypothesized (H1), women's differentiation was significantly and positively associated with their sexual desire (β = .31, $p < .01$) while controlling for their sexual satisfaction. Women's differentiation was also inversely associated with negative attributions (H3a; β = -.50, $p < .01$) while controlling for psychological distress and relationship length. Contrary to hypothesis 2 and the men's finding, women's negative attributions were positively associated with sexual desire (β = .41, $p < .01$). Women's negative attributions (H3b) were also positively associated with negative emotions (β = .49, $p < .01$), pursue behavior (β = .68, $p < .01$) and silent conflict (β = .42, $p < .01$). Negative attributions, however, were not significantly

associated with withdraw behavior (H3b; β = -.08, p >.05). Similar to the men, women's report of negative emotions (H3c) was not significantly associated with their likelihood to engage in pursue-type (β = .02, p > .05) or withdraw-type behavior (β = -.01, p > .05). Negative emotion was, however, significantly associated with the silent conflict subscale (H3c; β = .15, p >.05). With respect to hypothesis 3d, women's likelihood of engaging in pursue- (β = .07, b = .06, p > .05) or withdraw-type behaviors in response to their partners' disinterest in sex (β = -.07, b = -.06, p > .05) was not associated with their sexual desire but their likelihood of engaging in silent conflict was negatively associated with their own sexual desire (β = -.19, p < .01).

Indirect effects. Tests of indirect effects revealed three significant indirect pathways between differentiation and sexual desire for women. First, women's level of differentiation was significantly associated with sexual desire via negative attributions (β = -.21, 95% CI = -.35, -.07, p <.01). Second, their level of differentiation was also associated with sexual desire via negative attributions and silent conflict behavior (β = .04, 95% CI = .01, .07, p <.05). Third, their negative attributions were associated with their silent conflict behavior via their experience of negative emotions (β = .04, 95% CI = -.002, -.150, p <.05). Altogether, the model accounted for 44% of the variance in sexual desire for women (See Table 14 for R^2 values for other model variables).

Post-hoc examination of effects between differentiation and DDAS subscales. Similar to men, significant differences in the magnitude of the relationships between differentiation and the negative attribution subscales were tested by constraining direct pathways one at a time and using chi-square difference tests. The magnitude of the relationship between differentiation and women's personal attributions for their partner's disinterest (About Me subscale; β = -.64, b = -.91, p < .01) versus the association between differentiation and their likelihood of making

attributions about the relationship (About Relationship subscale; β = -.59, b = -.93, p < .01) did not differ significantly. The magnitude of the association between differentiation and About Me (β = -.64, b = -.91, p < .01) and About Partner attributions (β = -.48, b = -.61, p < .01), did differ significantly, with differentiation being more strongly associated with the About Me subscale.

Chapter 5 - Discussion

Sexual desire, despite its importance to the health of intimate relationships (Impett et al., 2008), is poorly understood. Although it is acknowledged that sexual desire tends to decline in committed relationships and is influenced by a myriad of biological and psychological factors (e.g., Meana 2010), it is not known how intrapersonal constructs such as differentiation impact sexual desire and the specific cognitive, emotional and behavioral mechanisms underlying this relationship. The purpose of the current investigation was to explore the intrapersonal and interpersonal processes that sustain sexual desire, especially in the context of desire discrepancies—a common, problematic feature of committed relationships (Herbenick et al., 2014). Qualitative results suggested that in response to desire discrepancies, partners may make domain-specific attributions, specifically negatively evaluating themselves to be the cause of their partner's disinterest in sex, aligning with the predictions of differentiation theory. Through subsequent quantitative analysis, I found evidence that differentiation is positively associated with sexual desire and negatively associated with negative attributions in response to desire discrepancies in committed relationships. These findings provide preliminary support for the theoretical notion that the global intrapersonal construct of differentiation, or the ability to maintain a clear sense of self and balance autonomy and closeness might be necessary to sustain desire in committed relationships and that negative attributions might be a mechanism through which differentiation influences sexual desire in a committed relationship.

Attributions and Behaviors in Response to Desire Discrepancies

In addition to established dimensions of negative attributions in response to partner negative behavior (caused by the relationship as a whole, stable factors, negatively motivated, intentional, and blameworthy; Fincham, 2003), the results of study 1 provided preliminary

evidence for the presence of a category of domain-specific attributions in response to desire discrepancies: negatively evaluating oneself and one's self-worth as the cause of partners' disinterest in sex (internal attributions). Three types of behavioral responses, consistent with differentiation theory and varying on the dimensions of orientation towards partner and conflict potential (pursue, withdraw and engage) were also found.

The exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses of the negative attribution and behavior subscales in Study 2 indicated that the theorized dimensions of negative attributions and behaviors in Study 1 may be distinct from each other. Further, bivariate correlations between the Desire Discrepancy Attribution subscales (DDAS) and standardized measures of attributions provided initial support that domain-specific attributions (attributing a partner's disinterest in sex to being caused by oneself, partner, or the relationship) overlap with, but are distinct, from global attributions. Similarly, responding to a partner's disinterest in sex by pursuing them and initiating conflict or withdrawing from them was found to overlap yet be distinct from global negative interactions. These findings suggest that there may be unique, domain-specific attributions and behaviors in response to desire discrepancies which need to be assessed in addition to global attributions and behaviors to fully understand the processes that maintain desire in committed relationships.

Interestingly, certain attributions, such as "he/she is cheating on me," and "he/she is doing this to hurt me," loaded on the latent factor reflecting a negative evaluation of self-worth rather than the hypothesized dimensions of partner motivation and blame for the DDAS subscale. For men and women, the attribution that their partner is cheating seems to imply that there is something wrong with them which makes cheating possible. Certain attributions such as 'he/she has a low sex drive", "our sex drives are not in sync" and "it has to do with our life situation

(e.g., pregnancy")" were hypothesized to reflect the dimensions of external causes and low blame, but were found instead, to be a reflection of "stable causes" and positively associated with other negative attribution subscales. This suggests that attributions of external causes in response to desire discrepancies such as "a partner's disinterest in sex is due to external circumstances such as pregnancy" may not minimize negative impact or protect the participant from negative outcomes as external attributions for non-sexual negative partner have been found to do (Fincham, 2003). This provides further indication that attributions may have different and specific dimensions and may be differentially associated with relationship outcomes in the area of sexual desire and behavior in committed relationships

Differences in the Process of Desire for Men and Women

It is worth noting that partial measurement invariance could not be established between men and women for the desire discrepancy behavior scale (DDBS) and the CFAs for negative attributions fit better in the men's sample than the women's sample. Although, further testing and refinement of the DDAS and DDBS factor structures is needed, it appears that men and women may think of and respond to, desire discrepancies differently. This may be influenced by cultural-level sexual scripts in the United States: men need and subsequently want more sex and are the active initiators; women are the desired ones who passively respond to sexual initiation and set limits (e.g., Masters, Casey, Wells, & Morrison, 2013; Seabrook et al., 2016).

Indeed, in previous research (Dworkin & O'Sullivan, 2005 & O'Sullivan & Byers, 1992), and the present study, men in heterosexual relationships report initiating sex more frequently and experiencing more desire than their female partners. Based on cultural scripts of men's and women's roles in sex, men may be more likely than their partners to perceive a greater level of desire, initiate sex and be rejected more often, and subsequently blame their partner for the lack

of sex in the relationship. Men in this sample reported a greater likelihood of negatively evaluating their partner as being the cause of their disinterest as compared to women and were more likely to make attributions in response to desire discrepancies such as "he/ she is manipulating me." Conversely, men may feel unable to decline sexual advances from their partner (because the script dictates men always want sex), possibly resulting in women experiencing a lower frequency of rejection and a consequent lower likelihood of interpreting their partner's disinterest as personal. Women may also think of themselves as being less sexual and as passive responders to men's sexual advances (Seabrook et al., 2016) thereby protecting them from the experience of rejection.

Further, an unexplored mediating mechanism between experiencing a rejection of sexual advances and the subsequent attributions and behavioral responses might be the degree of "disjuncture" (i.e., the degree of discontinuity; Masters et al., 2013) that exists between cultural- and individual-level sexual scripts. For instance, it is unknown how a rejection of sexual advances might impact a woman who conforms to cultural-level sexual scripts. She might be more distressed and make more negative meaning as compared to a man because her initiation of sex does not match her own sexual script and is thus a bigger deal. Similarly, a woman who does not conform to cultural-level scripts and enacts the role of being the sexual initiator just as much or more than their male partner, might differently evaluate the meaning of the rejection— "It's not me because he usually responds' or 'It *must* be me because I *always* initiate and he *never* responds' or 'What is wrong with our relationship or him because he does not respond (and he is supposed to)?'

The CFA for negative behavior in the women's sample provided initial evidence for 3 distinct types of negative behavior versus two types of behavior as hypothesized and as seen in

the men's sample. For women, showing displeasure without actually initiating a verbal argument (silent conflict) emerged as a third distinct factor. "Silent conflict" as it has been termed in this study is similar to the concept of "complaint withholding", a style of conflict avoidance used in intimate relationships where an individual decides to stay silent about their complaint instead of risking an argument (Liu & Roloff, 2016). Complaint withholding is often used to protect the offending partner from hurtful messages, but paradoxically, is associated with an increase in the person's experience of angry thoughts and feelings (Wegner, 2009), resentment (Suchday, Carter, Ewart, Larkin, & Desiderato, 2004), festering of the unresolved complaint over time (Tjosvold, Wong, & Chen, 2014) and emotional exhaustion (Liu & Roloff, 2015). Additionally, complaint withholding is negatively associated with closeness in relationships and emotional intimacy (Liu & Roloff, 2016). Given the negative individual and relational impact of complaint withholding, it is not surprising that in the present study, of the three types of negative behavioral responses to desire discrepancies, "silent conflict" alone was negatively associated with desire.

Complaint withholding may also be another strategy of protecting oneself from conflict enacted by people at low levels of differentiation who tend towards emotional cut-off. Although gender differences have not been directly tested with complaint withholding, individuals dependent on partners for valued resources (often women) are more likely to withhold complaints (see review by Worley, 2016). Therefore, the above evidence and results from the CFA suggest that women may be more likely to avoid expressing their displeasure when their male partner declines sex. And the likelihood of avoiding conflict in this manner may be influenced by sexual scripts too—if women don't need sex as much as men, they may feel less entitled to complain when the man declines.

Post-hoc analyses suggested that differentiation was more strongly related to "about me" attributions as compared to "about partner" attributions for women but not for men. This suggests that, when women do make negative attributions about their partner's disinterest in sex, as a function of their level of differentiation and associated fears of rejection, they may be more likely to make internalizing attributions as compared to negative evaluations of their partner. This difference was not seen with "about relationship" attributions, posing the interesting possibility that for women, attributing a partner's disinterest in sex to the relationship may be similar to attributing it to oneself.

Given these potentially substantial differences between men and women's attributions and behavior in response to desire discrepancies, further qualitative studies are needed to explore how gender and sexual scripts influence how men and women make meaning of, and respond to, desire discrepancies, and how the experience of desire discrepancies may impact their overall level of desire in the relationship.

Potential Mechanisms by which Differentiation Impacts Sexual Desire

Evidence from this investigation provides preliminary support that differentiation is an important intrapersonal construct to consider in the study of sexual desire in committed relationships. The positive significant association between differentiation and sexual desire for both men and women is consistent with the conclusions of three previous studies which found that a sense of autonomy in addition to closeness was needed to sustain desire (Ferreira et al., 2015; Ferreira et al., 2014; Sims & Meana, 2010). This evidence suggests that our ability to manage anxiety inherent in sex with a committed partner, be authentic and reveal our true selves, as a function of our level of differentiation, may be related to the degree of desire we experience in the relationship.

This study also highlights the importance of understanding domain-specific attributions when examining how specific sexual events in committed relationships impact overall levels of desire. And that domain-specific attributions in response to desire discrepancies may be shaped by one's ability to maintain a clear sense of self in the context of intimate relationships (i.e., one's level of differentiation). The inverse significant association between differentiation and the propensity to make negative attributions indicates that a person's level of differentiation and associated fears of acceptance from an intimate partner and emotional reactivity may bias their evaluations of their partner's disinterest in sex towards negative evaluations of self, partner and the relationship.

In line with the substantial evidence in the marital attributions literature (Fincham, 2003), negative attributions were significantly associated with the likelihood of experiencing negative emotions and responding with pursue-type and withdraw-type behaviors for men and pursue-type and silent-conflict-type behaviors for women. Therefore, the more participants thought that they were not good enough, their partner was selfish or lazy, and their relationship was not as close, the more they were likely to experience anger and disappointment, and respond by pursuing their partner (criticizing or complaining), withdrawing (backing off), or engaging in silent conflict (walking off in silence). This finding, contributes to the study of attributions and relationship outcomes by linking domain- specific negative attributions with emotion and behavior in the context of desire discrepancies.

Negative attributions were also significantly associated with sexual desire for both men and women. The direction of these associations, however, was counter to expectations for women. Men's negative attributions were inversely associated with desire whereas women's negative attributions were positively associated with desire.

Similarly, in contrast to the theoretical supposition that individuals' negative behavioral responses (pursue or withdraw), as a function of low differentiation, will reduce overall desire, withdrawal was not significantly associated with desire for men or women and pursuit of partner was significantly and positively associated with desire for men but not for women. Silent conflict behavior was inversely and significantly associated with women's desire. The bivariate correlations between negative attributions, negative behavior subscales and desire were in the expected directions with non-significant correlations between pursuit and desire for men, withdrawal and desire and About Me and About Partner subscales and desire for women. These correlations suggest that negative attributions for women may not have significant associations with their own level of desire. The use of cross-sectional data may also explain the unexpected direction of relationships— higher levels of desire may make men more likely to engage in conflictual behavior such as complaining or arguing and women more likely to form negative attributions about their partner's disinterest. Lastly, measurement error in the negative attribution and behavior subscales may account for the conflicting findings. The non-significant relationships between negative emotions and negative behaviors for men or women may be due to the small sample size in each group.

Tests of indirect effects showed that for men, negative attributions significantly mediated the association between their level of differentiation and sexual desire. Differentiation theory does not specify the cognitive and behavioral mechanisms through which a person's low level of differentiation impacts their sexual desire. The significant indirect effect provides partial support for negative attributions being a mechanism through which the global intrapersonal construct of differentiation might shape their level of sexual desire in a committed relationship. For women, negative emotion significantly mediated the associated between negative attributions and silent

conflict behavior providing partial support for the attribution-emotion-behavior link evidenced in the literature.

Clinical Implications

Low sexual desire is a common problem in non-clinical populations and sex therapy clinics, especially for women (Laumann, Paik, & Rosen, 1999, Meana 2010). Understanding low sexual desire as an intrapersonal and interpersonal process is important for helping couples address this issue without further stigmatizing the low desire partner. This study helps unpack some intrapersonal and interpersonal processes which may contribute to low desire in committed relationships. Findings provide preliminary evidence that issues related to the balance between autonomy and closeness might be relevant in the treatment of low sexual desire. Based on these findings, it would make sense for a clinician to assess the degree to which partners experience emotional intimacy *and* autonomy in the relationship and help them balance these competing forces. . Additionally, the clinician could explore the degree to which partners make internalizing attributions (negative evaluations of self), or blame the partner and the relationship when one person makes sexual advances and the other declines. Although, it is common to explore conflict management in couples' therapy, these findings suggest that it may be especially useful to explore behavioral responses and conflict management strategies, such as complaint withholding, specific to sexual behavior. Finally, the propensity to make internalizing attributions specifically and negative attributions generally might help the clinician make an overall assessment of each partner's differentiation level.

Limitations and Future Directions

Some strengths of this investigation overall are worth noting. First, open-ended responses to a specific desire discrepancy event in the context of a committed relationship allowed me to explore a unique research question. Second, the sample for the quantitative study, relative to undergraduate samples, was more diverse and included an almost equal number of men and women of a wide age range and in committed relationships of at least 3 years. This allowed a more reliable test of the theoretical ideas of differentiation and sexual desire specific to committed relationships.

Several limitations are also worth noting. First, the factor structures of the DDAS and DDBS need further refinement, validation and replication. The retained CFAs suffered from the issue of cross-loading items. Given the close correlations between types of negative attributions this is not surprising, however without further refinement, the negative attribution and behavior subscales cannot be established as being entirely distinct. The alphas for some of the negative behavior subscales (withdraw for men and women and silent conflict for women) and the standardized measure for desire (Hurlbert Index of Sexual Desire) for men were also low.

Second, couples in committed relationships initiate and reject sex in myriad, subtle ways which could not be captured by the prompt-"you express interest in sex and partner says no". Therefore, qualitative and diary studies are needed to explore and identify how couples attribute and behave, moment-to-moment, around the issue of sex initiation and rejection. Third, the differences and similarities between men and women in attributions and behaviors in response to desire discrepancies could not be tested directly. For instance, porn may shape young men's scripts about sex which may then manifest in how they make sense of women initiating and rejecting sex in adult committed relationships. Qualitative studies are needed to explore how men

and women differentially make sense of these events in their relationships, and how gender and related sexual scripts influence their attributions and behaviors. Similarly, it would be worth exploring how gender *and* cultural scripts for sex (e.g. scripts shaped by religion) interact with individuals' differentiation levels and manifest in committed relationships

Finally, the intrapersonal and interpersonal processes that contribute to desire, which are inherently reciprocal, were assessed with cross-sectional and individual-level data. The temporal ordering of the variables in this study- the modeled causal effects from differentiation to desire as mediated by attributions and behavior need to be tested with longitudinal data. In addition, the use of dyadic data analyses (e.g., actor-partner models) in future research would help untangle the effect of intrapersonal constructs such as differentiation and attributions and interpersonal constructs such as behavior on one's own level of desire from the effect on the partner's level of desire.

Conclusion

A couple unable to make sexual desire last after the early phases of their relationship is a well-recognized caricature of committed relationships. Theory suggests that differentiation, or one's ability to balance autonomy and closeness in intimate relationships, not only helps sustain desire but also determines how we respond cognitively, emotionally and behaviorally to commonplace events such as desire discrepancies which in turn also maintain desire. This investigation provided initial evidence for the presence of domain-specific attributions in the context of desire discrepancies and through a test of multivariate associations, provided initial support for the importance of the intrapersonal construct of differentiation and negative attributions in the study of sexual desire.

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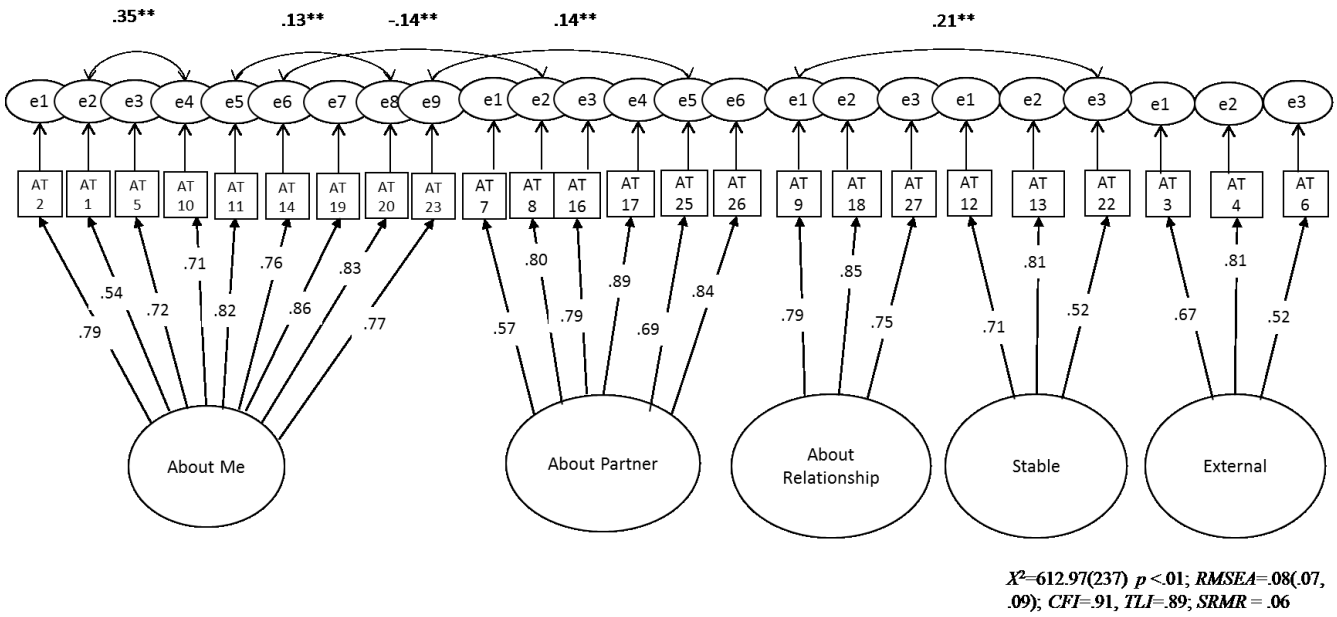
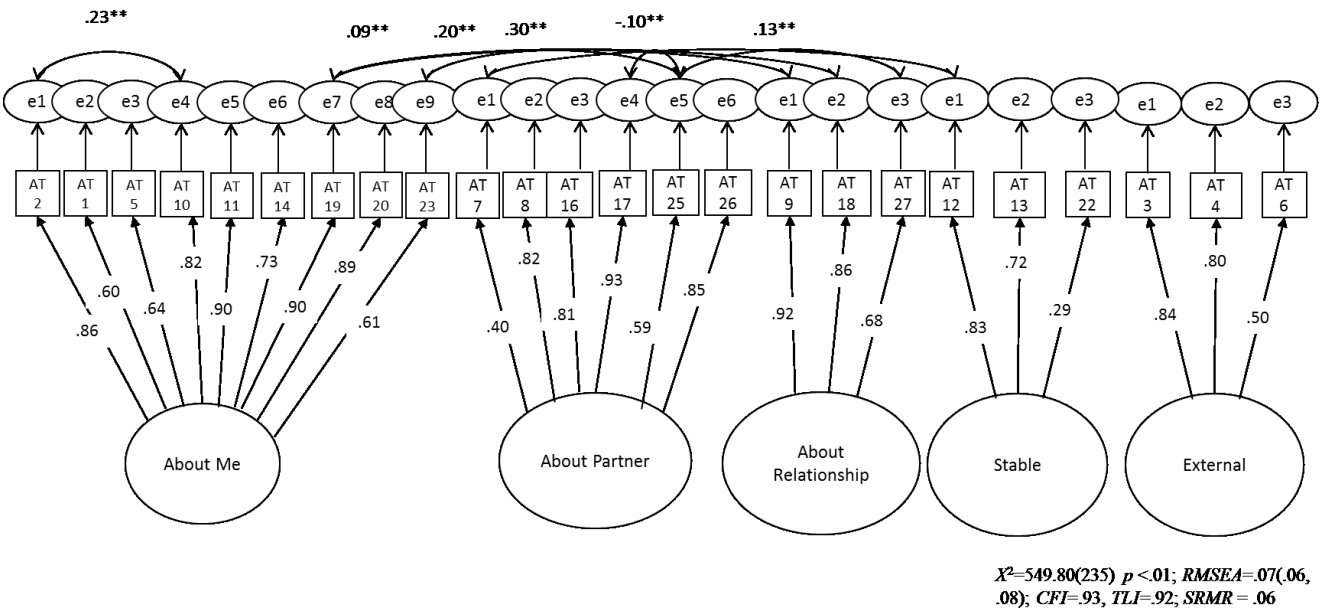
Appendix A- Figures

Figure 1. The Desire Discrepancy Attributions Scale for Men



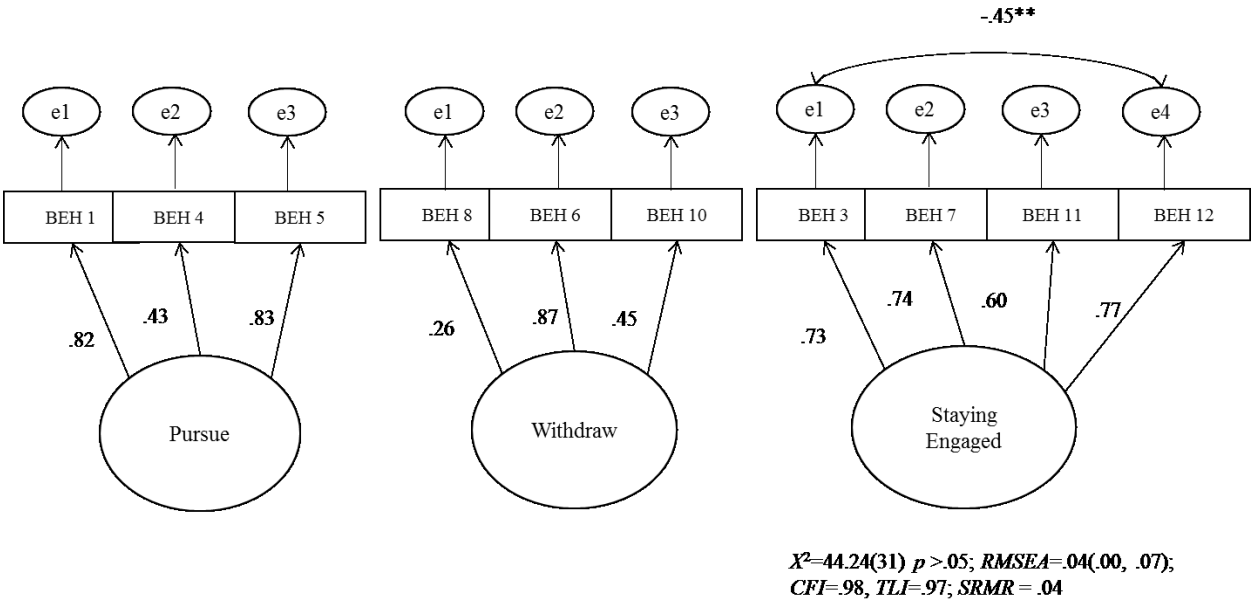
Note*: All latent factors are correlated. About Me with About Partner=.49; About Me with About Relationship=.72**; About Me with Stable=.43**; About Me with External=-.19**; About Partner with About Relationship=.51**; About Partner with Stable=.34**; About Partner with External=-.12**; About Relationship with Stable=.45**; About Relationship with External=-.20** and Stable with External=.03.
***p* < .01. (two-tailed).

Figure 2. The Desire Discrepancy Attributions Scale for Women



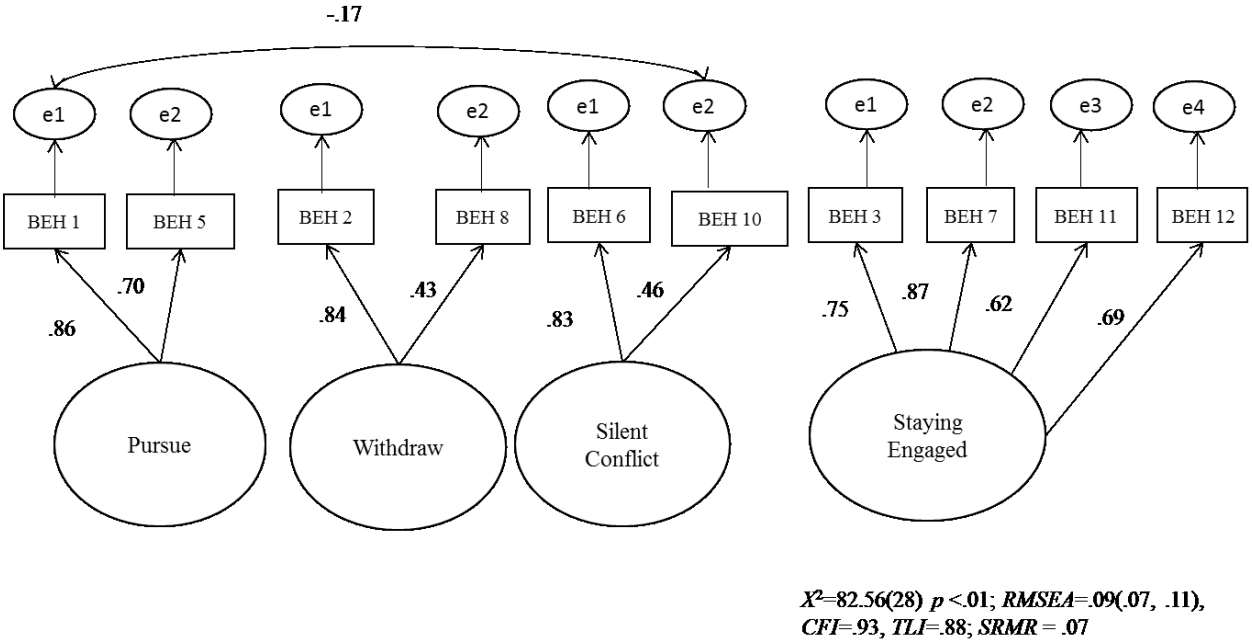
Note:* All latent factors are correlated. About Me with About Partner=.78; About Me with About Relationship=.87**; About Me with Stable=.35**; About Me with External=-.49**; About Partner with About Relationship=.73**; About Partner with Stable=.44**; About Partner with External=-.28**; About Relationship with Stable=.34**; About Relationship with External=-.39** and Stable with External=.10.
***p* < .01. (two-tailed).

Figure 3. The Desire Discrepancy Behavior Scale for Men



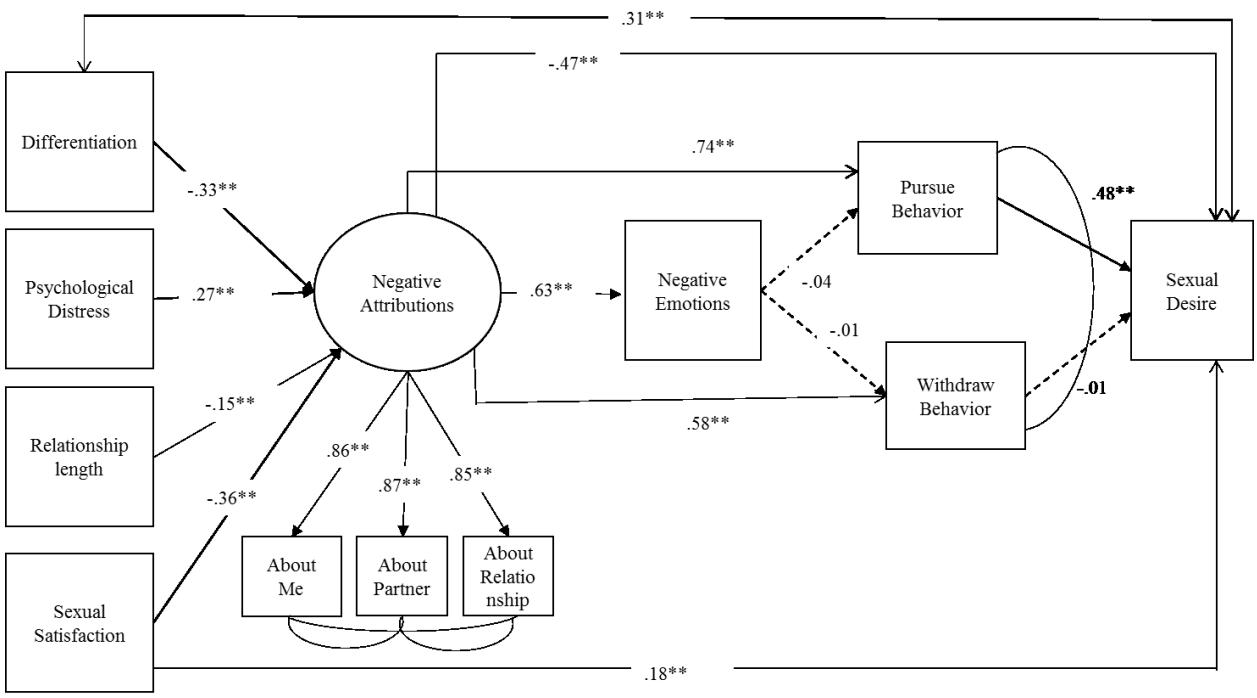
Note: All latent factors are correlated. Pursue with Withdraw = 0.86**; Pursue with Staying Engaged = -0.04; Withdraw with Staying Engaged = -.08.
***p* < .01. (two-tailed).

Figure 4. The Desire Discrepancy Behavior Scale for Women



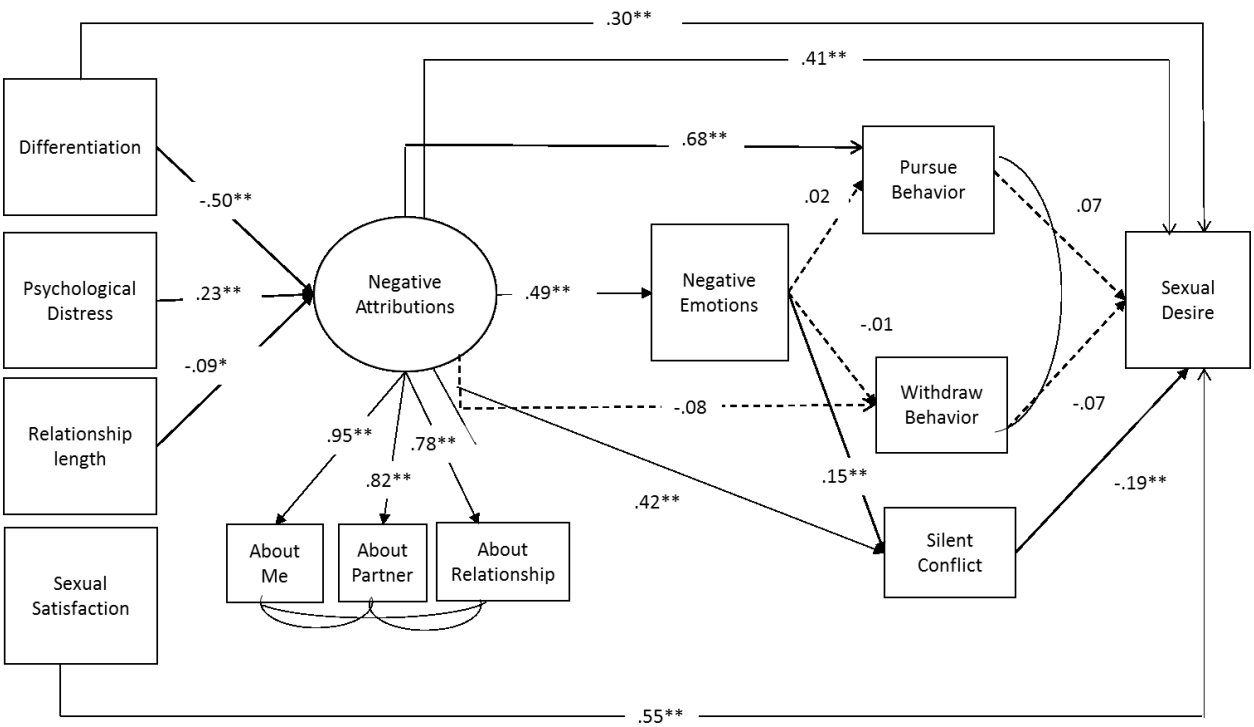
Note: All latent factors are correlated. Pursue with Withdraw = -0.42**; Pursue with Silent Conflict = 0.59**; Pursue with Staying Engaged = -0.21**; Withdraw with Silent Conflict = .04; Withdraw with Staying Engaged = .24** ; Silent Conflict with Staying Engaged = -.38**
**p < .01. (two-tailed).

Figure 5. Partial Structural Model for Men



Note: Path model for men. Standardized solution. Model fit indices: χ^2 (9) = 9.43, p = .22, CFI = .95, TLI = .92, RMSEA = .09 (90% Confidence Interval [CI]: .07, .11), and SRMR = .04. Solid arrows represent a significant pathway, whereas a dotted arrow represents a non-significant pathway. *p < .05. **p < .01. *** p < .001 (two-tailed).

Figure 6. Partial Structural Model for Women



Note: Path model for women. Standardized solution. Model fit indices: χ^2 (9) = 9.43, p = .22, CFI = .95, TLI = .92, RMSEA = .07 (90% Confidence Interval [CI]: .05, .09), and SRMR = .05. Solid arrows represent a significant pathway, whereas a dotted arrow represents a non-significant pathway. *p < .05. **p < .01. *** p < .001 (two-tailed).

Appendix B – Tables

Table 1. Final Coding Scheme

Categories	Meaning Units			Definitions
	(*N*)	% w/in class	% w/in category	
Attributions				An internal cognitive explanation or why the partner refused sex
Partners disinterest is personal	64	14%		
Internal to me	39		61%	Partner's behavior is about me
Negative evaluation of self-worth	25		39%	Partner behavior means something bad about me
Partner disinterest is not personal	353	75%		Partner's behavior is not about me but about my partner or his/her circumstances
External to me	265		75%	Partner's behavior is about circumstances common to both, or just external circumstances
Partner disinterest is reasonable	46		13%	Partner's behavior is reasonable or understandable given the circumstances
External to us both	15		4%	Partner's behavior is normal or common in relationships/life
Partner disinterest is normal	11		3%	Partner's given explanation is believable or partner can be believed.
Partner disinterest is rare/uncommon	11		3%	Partner's behavior is uncommon/rare
Partner is telling the truth	7		2%	Partner's behavior is about the quality of the relationship Partner's behavior is intentional/deliberate and directed towards the participant
Partner disinterest is about the relationship	5	1%		
				Partner's behavior had a benign motivation
Partner disinterest is intentional	11	2%		Partner's behavior has a negative/harmful motivation
Motivation for partner disinterest	21	5%		Partner's behavior or its causes will change
Positive	4		19%	Partner's behavior or its causes will not change
Negative	17		81%	Partner deserves blame/responsibility for the behavior

Stability of causes	5		1%	Making different, more positive meaning of the partner's behavior
Temporary	4	80%		Partner's behavior is not so bad or reducing negative impact
It won't change	1	20%		Accepting the status of relationship or partner's behavior
Partner disinterest is blameworthy	10		2%	Behavior directed towards the partner and is likely to promote conflict
				Behavior directed away from the partner and is likely to promote conflict over time.
Behavior	292			Behavior involving behavioral and/or emotional engagement without an agenda of sex
Pursue-type	16	6%		The orientation (towards or away from partner) or impact of the behavior was not clear.
Withdraw-type	83	31%		Behavior was performed alone.
Staying engaged	78	30%		Behavior was performed with partner.
Neutral	87	32%		
Self	65		75%	
Together	22		64%	
Self-regulation	79			
Positive reappraisal	39	49%		
Perspective taking	30	38%		
Acceptance	10	13%		

Table 2. Items derived from Content Analysis for Desire Discrepancy Attributions and Behavior Scale

Categories	Attributions
Rate the likelihood that you would think the following in response to your partner's behavior on a scale of 1 = Not likely at all to 7 = Extremely Likely	
Partner's disinterest is personal: Internal to me	He/She is mad at me
	I must have done something wrong
	He/She does not want me anymore
Partner's disinterest is personal: Negative evaluation of self-worth	There is something wrong with me
	I am not good enough for him/her
	I am not attractive/desirable
Partner's disinterest is not personal: external to me-internal to partner	My partner is probably just tired
	He/She has low sex drive
	He/She must be stressed
Partner's disinterest is not personal: external to us both	It's just a timing issue
	Our sex drives are not in sync
	It has to do with our life situation (e.g., pregnancy, age, medical issues)
Negative intent (the partner is doing on purpose and/or wants to hurt me)	He/She would rather watch porn/masturbate than have sex with me
	He/She is cheating on me
	He/She is doing this to hurt me
Stability (this is a temporary condition)	Oh well, tomorrow is another day
	We can have sex anytime
	He/ She will come around eventually
Negative Motivation (the partner has a negative motivation)	He/She is being lazy
	He/She is being selfish
	He/She is being manipulative
Blame (the partner deserves blame)	It is his/her fault because he/she won't even try
	It is his/her fault because he/she doesn't even care
	It is his/her fault because he/she puts their needs before mine
Partner's disinterest is about the relationship)	It is because we are growing apart
	It is because we don't feel very close/connected
	It is because we have been fighting a lot
Categories	**Behavioral response**
Rate the likelihood that you would respond in the following ways on a scale of 1 = Not likely at all to 7 = Extremely Likely	
Pursue-type	I would start an argument
	I would complain and ask why he/she did not want to have sex

	I would continue to try to flirt/be romantic so that we could have sex later
Withdraw-type	I would back off and go back to doing what I was doing before
	I would walk away and be silent the rest of the evening
	I would roll away and go to sleep
Staying engaged	I would rub his/her back and lay next to him/her
	I would cuddle with him/her and do something together (e.g., watch tv, take a nap)
	I would ask what he/she needed and take care of him/her
Neutral	I would masturbate and take care of my needs
	I would do something else (read a book, played video games, worked out)
	We would do something else together (e.g., watch tv/ /Netflix)

Table 3. Desire Discrepancy Attributions and Behavior Scale as used in the online survey

Prompt: Imagine you are interested in having sex with your partner. You get close to your partner and let them know you are interested. Your partner says, "No, not right now." Answer the following questions while thinking of this situation.

Rate the likelihood that you would think the following in response to your partner's behavior from 1 = Extremely Unlikely to 7 = Extremely Likely.

Item 1	He/she is mad at me
Item 2	There is something wrong with me
Item 3	My partner is probably just tired
Item 4	It's just a timing issue
Item 5	He/she would rather watch porn/masturbate than have sex with me
Item 6	Oh well, tomorrow is another day
Item 7	He/she is being lazy
Item 8	It's his/her fault because he/she won't even try
Item 9	It's because we are growing apart
Item 10	I must have done something wrong
Item 11	I am not good enough for him/her
Item 12	He/she has low sex drive
Item 13	Our sex drives are not in sync
Item 14	He/she is cheating on me
Item 15	We can have sex anytime
Item 16	He/she is being selfish
Item 17	It's his/her fault because he/she doesn't even care
Item 18	It is because we don't feel very close
Item 19	He/she does not want me anymore
Item 20	I am unattractive/undesirable
Item 21	He/she must be stressed
Item 22	It has to do with our life situation (e.g., pregnancy, health issues etc)
Item 23	He/she is doing this to hurt me
Item 24	He/she will come around eventually
Item 25	He/she is being manipulative
Item 26	It is his/her fault because he/she puts their needs before mine
Item 27	It is because we have been fighting a lot

Rate the likelihood that you would feel one or all the emotions in each question in response to your partner's behavior from 1 = Not likely at all to 7 = Extremely Likely. If you would experience an emotion that is very different from those that are listed, please fill in the textbox next to "Other" and rate it.

Item 1	Angry, Annoyed, Frustrated, Offended
Item 2	Sad, Disappointed, Hurt, Lonely, Helpless
Item 3	Loving, Affectionate, Sympathetic
Item 4	Interest, Curious
Item 5	Ashamed, Guilty, Regret

Item 6	Jealous, Envious
Item 7	Pleased, Relieved, Glad
Item 8	Scared, Nervous, Worried, Panicked
Item 9	Surprised, Amazed, Shocked
Item 10	Disgusted, Contempt
Item 11	Other

Rate the likelihood that you would do the following in response to your partner's behavior from 1 = Extremely Unlikely to 7 = Extremely Likely

Item 1	I would start an argument
Item 2	I would back off and go back to doing what I was doing before
Item 3	I would rub his/her back and lay next to him/her
Item 4	I would masturbate and take care of my needs
Item 5	I would complain and ask why he/she did not want to have sex
Item 6	I would walk away and be silent the rest of our time together
Item 7	I would cuddle with him/her and do something together (e.g., watch tv, take a nap)
Item 8	I would do something else
Item 9	I would continue to flirt/be romantic so that we could have sex later
Item 10	I would roll away and go to sleep
Item 11	I would ask what he/she needed and take care of him/her
Item 12	We would do something else together (e.g., watch Netflix)

Table 4. Desire Discrepancy Attributions Subscales for men and women

Subscales		Items
About Me	Item 2	There is something wrong with me
	Item 1	He/She is mad at me
	Item 5	He/She would rather watch porn/masturbate than have sex with me
	Item 10	I must have done something wrong
	Item 11	I am not good enough for him/her
	Item 14	He/She is cheating on me
	Item 19	He/She does not want me anymore
	Item 20	I am unattractive/undesirable
	Item 23	He/She is doing this to hurt me
About Relationship	Item 9	It's because we are growing apart
	Item 18	It is because we don't feel very close
	Item 27	It is because we have been fighting a lot
About Partner	Item 7	He/She is being lazy
	Item 8	It's his/her fault because he/she won't even try
	Item 16	He/She is being selfish
	Item 17	It's his/her fault because he/she doesn't even care
	Item 25	He/She is being manipulative
	Item 26	It is his/her fault because he/she puts their needs before mine
Stable Causes	Item 12	He/She has low sex drive
	Item 13	Our sex drives are not in sync
	Item 22	It has to do with our life situation (e.g., pregnancy, health issues etc)
External Causes	Item 3	My partner is probably just tired
	Item 4	It's just a timing issue
	Item 6	Oh well, tomorrow is another day

Table 5. Desire Discrepancy Behavior Subscales for men

Subscales		Items
Pursue	Item 1	I would start an argument
	Item 4	I would masturbate and take care of my needs
	Item 5	I would complain and ask why he/she did not want to have sex
Withdraw	Item 8	I would do something else
	Item 6	I would walk away and be silent the rest of our time together
	Item 10	I would roll away and go to sleep
Staying Engaged	Item 3	I would rub his/her back and lay next to him/her
	Item 7	I would cuddle with him/her and do something together (e.g., watch tv, take a nap)
	Item 11	I would ask what he/she needed and take care of him/her
	Item 12	We would do something else together (e.g., watch Netflix)

Table 6. Desire Discrepancy Behavior Subscales for women

Subscales		Items
Pursue	Item 1	I would start an argument
	Item 5	I would complain and ask why he/she did not want to have sex
Withdraw	Item 2	I would back off and go back to doing what I was doing before
	Item 8	I would do something else
Silent conflict	Item 6	I would walk away and be silent the rest of our time together
	Item 10	I would roll away and go to sleep
Staying	Item 3	I would rub his/her back and lay next to him/her
Engaged	Item 7	I would cuddle with him/her and do something together (e.g., watch tv, take a nap)
	Item 11	I would ask what he/she needed and take care of him/her
	Item 12	We would do something else together (e.g., watch Netflix)

Table 7. Bivariate correlations between Desire Discrepancy Negative Attribution Scales with other relationship outcomes for men (N = 247) and women (N = 264)

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1ABT ME		.77**	.84**	.51**	-.25**	.40**	.42**	-.36**	.49**	-.41**	.61**
2 ABT PART	.67**		.78**	.53**	-.21**	.44**	.50**	-.44**	.51**	-.50**	.47**
3 ABT REL	.80**	.65**		.53**	-.27**	.44**	.48**	-.50**	.56**	-.48**	.54**
4 Stable	.29**	.38**	.31**		.01	.37**	.28**	-.37**	.42**	-.39**	.26**
5 External	-.42**	**	.11	-.16**		-.13*	-.13	.27**	-.16*	.27**	-.24**
6 RAMC	-.42**	.38**	.50**	.27**	-.11		.82**	-.50**	.61**	-.36**	.30**
7 RAMR	.47**	.48	.43**	.22**	-.32**	.69**		-.45**	.52**	-.33**	.28**
8 CSI	.48**	-.45**	-.54**	-.20**	.21**	-.49**	-.43**		-.63**	.66**	-.32**
9 NIS	-.45**	.49	.54**	.26**	-.20**	.49**	.44**	-.58**		-.52**	.39**
10 GMSEX	.53**	-.32**	-.40**	-.27**	.22**	-.37**	-.30**	.67**	-.38**		-.24**
11 PHQ-4	-.32**	.40**	.54**	.30**	-.21**	.43**	.34**	-.50**	.58**	-.41**	
Men											
α	.92	.90	.85	.62	.70	.88	.85	.93	.79	.95	.91
Women											
α	.93	.88	.86	.62	.74	.76	.81	.95	.83	.97	.91

Note: Men above the diagonal and women below the diagonal.
*p < .05. **p < .01. (two-tailed).
ABT ME = About Me Negative Attribution Subscale, ABT PART = About Partner Negative Attribution Subscale, ABT REL = About Relationship Negative Attribution Subscale, Stable = Stable Negative Attribution Subscale, RAMC = Relationship Attribution Measure Causal Subscale, RAMR = Relationship Attribution Measure Responsibility Subscale, CSI = Couple Satisfaction Index, NIS = Negative Interaction Scale, GMSEX = General Measure of Sexual Satisfaction, PHQ-4 = Patient Health Questionnaire.

Table 8. Bivariate Correlations of Desire Discrepancy Negative Attribution Subscales with RAM subscales for men (N = 247) and women (N = 264)

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1 ABT ME		.84**	.77**	-.25**	.51**	.17**	.49**	.32**	.40**	.38**	.39**
2 ABT PART	.80**		.78**	-.27**	.53**	.18**	.55**	.36**	.42**	.44**	.47**
3 ABT REL	.67**	.65**		-.21**	.53**	.23**	.54**	.33**	.43**	.47**	.50**
4 External	-.42**	-.28	-.16*		.01	.02	-.19**	-.13*	-.10	-.14*	-.13*
5 Stable	.29**	.31**	.38**	.11		.27**	.37**	.28**	.28**	.27**	.27**
6 RAM Locus	.12**	.16**	.16*	.17**	.24**		.38**	.59**	.53**	.61**	.52**
7 RAM Stable	.45**	.47**	.34**	-.16*	.12**	.15*		.56**	.62**	.60**	.63**
8 RAM Global	.46**	.46**	.33**	-.23**	.25**	.24**	.55**		.74**	.72**	.67**
9 RAM Intent	.49**	.43**	.45**	-.26**	.18**	.19**	.55**	.65**		.79**	.74**
10 RAM Motive	.47**	.43**	.46**	-.30	.21**	.31**	.51**	.68**	.81**		.85**
11 RAM Blame	.39**	.36**	.44**	-.32**	.25**	.27**	.45**	.56**	.72**	.80**	

Note: Men above the diagonal and women below the diagonal.

Table 9. Bivariate Correlations of Desire Discrepancy Negative Behavior Scales with other relationship outcomes for men (*N* = 247)

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1 Pursue		. 55**	-.03	.33**	.41**	-.28**	.41**	-.34**	.39**
2 Withdraw			-.06	.40**	.41**	-.32**	.41**	-.24**	.36**
3 Staying Engaged				.01	.01	.30**	-.09	.28**	.15*
4 RAMC					.82**	-.50**	.61**	-.36**	.30**
5 RAMR						-.45**	.52**	-.33**	.28**
6 CSI							-.63**	.66**	-.32**
7 NIS								-.52**	.39**
8 GMSEX									-.24**
9 PHQ-4									
α	.68	.56	.78	.88	.85	.93	.79	.95	.91

Note: *$p < .05$. **$p < .01$. (two-tailed).

Pursue = Pursue Negative Behavior Subscale, Withdraw = Withdraw Negative Behavior Subscale, RAMC = Relationship Attribution Measure Causal Subscale, RAMR = Relationship Attribution Measure Responsibility Subscale, CSI = Couple Satisfaction Index, NIS = Negative Interaction Scale, GMSEX = General Measure of Sexual Satisfaction, PHQ-4 = Patient Health Questionnaire.

Table 10. Bivariate Correlations of Desire Discrepancy Negative Behavior Scales with other relationship outcomes for women (*N* = 264)

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1 Pursue		-.25**	.32**	-.15*	.24*	.36**	-.23**	.36**	-.15*	.33**
2 Withdraw			.20**	.17**	.09	-.04	.04	-.03	-.01	-.01
3 Silent Conflict				-.21**	.34**	.27**	-.30**	.34**	-.20**	.24**
4 Staying Engaged					-.29**	-.39**	.34*	-.19**	.33**	-.07
5 RAMC						.69**	-.49**	.49**	-.37**	.43**
6 RAMR							-.43**	.44**	-.30**	.34**
7 CSI								-.58**	.67**	-.50**
8 NIS									-.38**	.58**
9 GMSEX										-.41**
10 PHQ-4										
α	.73	.52	.55	.82	.76	.81	.95	.83	.97	.91

Note: *$p < .05$. **$p < .01$. (two-tailed).

Pursue = Pursue Negative Behavior Subscale, Withdraw = Withdraw Negative Behavior Subscale , Silent Conflict = Silent Conflict Negative Behavior Subscale, Staying Engaged = Staying Engaged Negative Behavior Subscale, RAMC = Relationship Attribution Measure Causal Subscale RAMR = Relationship Attribution Measure Responsibility Subscale, CSI = Couple Satisfaction Index, NIS = Negative Interaction Scale, GMSEX = General Measure of Sexual Satisfaction, PHQ-4 = Patient Health Questionnaire.

Table 11. Bivariate Correlations among Model Variables for Men (*N* = 247)

Variables		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1	Differentiation		.43**	-.61**	-.52**	-.53**	-.51**	-.44**	-.35**	-.29**	-.64**	.10	.12
2	Desire			-.42	-.26	-.41**	-.28**	-.10	-.24**	.32**	-.38**	-.03	.07
3	ABT ME				.77**	.84**	.63**	.62**	.54**	-.41**	.61**	-.18**	-.07
4	ABT PART					.78**	.54**	.74**	.55**	-.50**	-.47**	-.18**	.04
5	ABT REL						.55**	.61**	.58**	-.48**	.54**	-.14*	-.05
6	Negative Emotions							.45**	.42**	-.27**	.44**	-.18**	-.08
7	Pursue								.55**	-.34**	.39**	-.22**	-.05
8	Withdraw									-.24**	.36**	-.08	.04
9	Sexual Satisfaction										-.24**	-.11	-.00
10	Psychological Distress											-.17**	-.13*
11	Relationship Duration (yrs)												.16*
12	Income												
M		4.22	2.83	1.78	1.82	1.82	2.45	2.74	1.94	2.54	5.65	2.49	
SD		.59	.66	.84	.86	.96	.92	.65	.85	.81	1.42	3.10	
α		.91	.65	.92	.90	.85	.81	.68	.56	.97	.91		

Note: *$p < .05$. **$p < .01$. (two-tailed).

Table 12. Bivariate Correlations among Model Variables for Women (*N* = 264)

Variables		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
1	Differentiation		.30**	-.64**	-.48**	-.59**	-.39**	-.43**	.10	-.37**	.36**	-.64**	.16*	.08
2	Desire			-.04	-.00	-.16*	-.15*	.10	-.13*	-.20**	.54**	-.17**	-.20**	-.18**
3	ABT ME				.67**	.80**	.44**	.66**	-.10	.48**	-.32**	.58**	-.21**	-.11
4	ABT PART					.65**	.39**	.59**	-.06	.40**	-.32**	.40**	-.15*	-.01
5	ABT REL						.45**	.52**	.01	.56**	-.40**	.54**	-.13*	-.04
6	Negative Emotions							.34**	-.07	.37**	-.21**	.26**	-.13*	-.02
7	Pursue								-.25**	.32**	-.15*	.33**	-.21**	-.08
8	Withdraw									.20**	-.01	-.01	.12*	.06
9	Silent Conflict										-.20**	.24**	.04	-.02
10	Sexual Satisfaction											-.41**	-.10	-.02
11	Psychological Distress												-.18**	-.20*
12	Relationship Duration (yrs)													.22**
13	Income													
	M	4.27	2.41	1.80	1.63	1.84	2.63	1.71	3.40	2.31	5.65	2.62	11.14	
	SD	.64	.83	.92	.81	1.03	.54	.97	1.01	1.01	1.43	3.23	8.48	
	α	.87	.96	.93	.88	.86	.62	.73	.52	.55	.97	.91		

Note: *$p < .05$. **$p < .01$. (two-tailed).

Table 13. Mean Differences between Men and Women

Variables	Gender			
	Male	Female	*t*	*df*
Differentiation	4.22	4.23	-.91	465
	(.59)	(.64)		
Desire	2.83	2.41	6.07*	482
	(.66)	(.83)		
Negative Emotions	2.74	2.63	2.11*	508
	(.65)	(.55)		
Sexual Satisfaction	5.65	5.65	.03	504
	(1.42)	(1.43)		
Psychological Distress	2.49	2.62	-.44	502
	(3.10)	(3.23)		
Sex Initiation	.63	-.43	10.75*	509
	(1.02)	(1.20)		
Desire discrepancies	.62	-.30	9.34*	509
	(1.05)	(1.15)		
Attribution Subscales				
About Me	1.78	1.80	-.29	502
	(.84)	(.92)		
About Relationship	1.82	1.84	-.22	509
	(.96)	(1.04)		
About Partner	1.82	1.63	2.53*	500
	(.86)	(.81)		

Note: *p <.05 (two-tailed)

Table 14. Mean Differences between Men and Women on Negative Behavior Items

Subscales	Male (*N* =247)	Female (*N* =264)	*t*	*df*
Pursue Subscale Items				
I would start an argument	1.56 (.90)	1.50 (.92)	.75	508
I would complain and ask why he/she did not want to have sex	1.92 (1.05)	1.92 (1.23)	.07	508
I would masturbate and take care of my needs	2.32 (1.27)	1.72 (1.13)	5.69*	509
Withdraw Subscale Items				
I would do something else	2.99 (1.08)	3.22 (1.17)	-2.24*	509
I would walk away and be silent the rest of our time together	1.90 (1.12)	1.89 (1.18)	.12	509
I would roll away and go to sleep	2.73 (1.11)	2.73 (1.24)	-.01	507
Staying Engaged Subscale Items				
I would rub his/her back and lay next to him/her	2.65 (1.18)	2.63 (1.31)	.12	508
I would cuddle with him/her and do something together (e.g., watch tv, take a nap)	2.91 (1.18)	2.89 (1.31)	.15	509
I would ask what he/she needed and take care of him/her	2.77 (1.21)	2.45 (1.30)	2.83*	507
We would do something else together (e.g., watch Netflix)	3.02 (1.10)	3.21 (1.18)	-1.91	509

Note: *p <.05 (two-tailed)

Table 15. R-Square values for endogenous variables

Variables	R Square	
	Men	Women
Desire	.38	.44
About Me	.74	.90
About Relationship	.72	.68
About Partner	.76	.61
Negative Emotions	.40	.24
Pursue Behavior	.55	.48
Withdraw	.34	.01
Silent Conflict		.26