

# Why Humans Have Sex

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**Abstract** Historically, the reasons people have sex have been assumed to be few in number and simple in nature—to reproduce, to experience pleasure, or to relieve sexual tension. Several theoretical perspectives suggest that motives for engaging in sexual intercourse may be larger in number and psychologically complex in nature. Study 1 used a nomination procedure that identified 237 expressed reasons for having sex, ranging from the mundane (e.g., “I wanted to experience physical pleasure”) to the spiritual (e.g., “I wanted to get closer to God”), from altruistic (e.g., “I wanted the person to feel good about himself/herself”) to vengeful (e.g., “I wanted to get back at my partner for having cheated on me”). Study 2 asked participants ( $N = 1,549$ ) to evaluate the degree to which each of the 237 reasons had led them to have sexual intercourse. Factor analyses yielded four large factors and 13 subfactors, producing a hierarchical taxonomy. The Physical reasons subfactors included *Stress Reduction*, *Pleasure*, *Physical Desirability*, and *Experience Seeking*. The Goal Attainment subfactors included *Resources*, *Social Status*, *Revenge*, and *Utilitarian*. The Emotional subfactors included *Love and Commitment* and *Expression*. The three Insecurity subfactors included *Self-Esteem Boost*, *Duty/Pressure*, and *Mate Guarding*. Significant gender differences supported several previously advanced theories. Individual differences in expressed reasons for having sex were coherently linked with personality traits and with individual differences in sexual strategies. Discussion focused on the complexity of sexual motivation and directions for future research.

**Keywords** Sexual motivation · Sexual intercourse · Gender differences

## Introduction

Why people have sex is an extremely important, but surprisingly little studied topic. One reason for its relative neglect is that scientists might simply assume that the answers are obvious: to experience sexual pleasure, to relieve sexual tension, or to reproduce. Previous research already tells us that the answers cannot be as few or psychologically simple. Leigh (1989), for example, documented seven reasons for sex: pure pleasure, to express emotional closeness, to reproduce, because a partner wants it, to please a partner, to make a conquest, and to relieve sexual tension. The most comprehensive existing taxonomy, framed from a theoretical perspective of dispositional sexual motives, documented eight reasons: to feel valued by a partner, expressing value for a partner, obtaining relief from stress, nurturing one's partner, enhancing feelings of personal power, experiencing a partner's power, experiencing pleasure, and procreating (Hill & Preston, 1996).

Several theoretical perspectives suggest that reasons for engaging in sexual intercourse might be even more numerous and complex than even this previous research suggests. With the exception of “to make a conquest,” most of the documented reasons for having sex above implicitly assume the context of an ongoing romantic relationship or long-term mateship. Sexual strategies theory (Buss & Schmitt, 1993) and strategic pluralism theory (Gangestad & Simpson, 2000), however, propose that humans have a menu of mating strategies, including long-term, short-term, and extra-pair mating. Thus, there might be reasons for having sex with a casual sex partner or extra-pair partner,

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such as the desire to experience sexual variety (Symons, 1979) or seeking to improve one's sexual skills (Greiling & Buss, 2000) that differ from those that motivate sex in the context of an ongoing romantic relationship.

Even within the context of an ongoing mateship, there could be numerous reasons for having sex beyond those already documented. For example, sex might be used to reward a partner or as a favor in exchange for something the partner has done. Or sex might be used to punish a partner, such as when someone engages in a retaliatory affair in order to exact revenge on a partner for having committed some violation within the relationship (Greiling & Buss, 2000). Also, within an ongoing relationship, sex might be used to intensify the relationship, escalate the level of commitment within the relationship, or turn a short-term relationship into a long-term relationship (Buss, 2003). In the clinical literature, Basson (2000) described how women may engage in sexual intercourse for the "spin-offs" they receive, such as emotional closeness, bonding, commitment, love, affection, acceptance, tolerance, and closeness.

From yet another perspective, people might use sex as a form of "mate guarding" (Buss & Shackelford, 1997). This could function in one of several possible ways. First, satisfying a partner sexually might function to deter the partner from seeking sexual gratification elsewhere. Second, this strategic use of sexuality might send signals to potential mate poachers, perhaps by rendering the partner less "open" to extra-pair liaisons, causing potential mate poachers to choose other potential targets (Schmitt, 2004; Schmitt & Buss, 2001).

Another perspective comes from the literature on sperm competition (Baker & Bellis, 1995; Shackelford, Pound, Goetz, & LaMunyon, 2005). From this perspective, a man whose partner might have been sexually unfaithful might seek sex, which functions to displace the sperm of the rival male. Or a woman might deplete the sperm of her partner, leaving few available for insemination of rival women. None of these hypothesized functions, of course, need operate through conscious psychological mechanisms.

More generally, sex can be viewed as a fungible resource—something that one person has the potential to give and something that another person may want. As a sought-after resource, sex can be exchanged for other resources. Exchanging sex for money, as in the case of prostitution, is one obvious example (Burley & Symanski, 1981). Sex could also be exchanged for meat, as occurs among many traditional hunter-gatherer groups such as the Ache of Paraguay (Hill & Hurtado, 1996). Sex could be exchanged for favors, special privileges, a preferred job, or indeed for any resource.

Finally, the psychology of sex does not occur merely between the individual partners directly involved. Sex occurs within a broader social and cultural context, with

implications for prestige, status, and reputation (Buss, 2003). Having sex with a high status individual, for example, might raise a person's status within the group. Within some groups, having sex with numerous partners might enhance a person's reputation, providing the motivational impetus for initiating sex. Sex, of course, can sometimes damage a person's status and reputation, providing reasons for avoiding it or concealing it from others in the group. In sum, because sex has consequences for status and reputation that can act as incentives (or deterrents), a person might be motivated to have sex for social reasons that have nothing to do with the personal relationship within which it occurs. All of these diverse theoretical perspectives, when taken together, point to a singular conclusion: The reasons people have sex are likely to be far more numerous and psychologically complex than previous taxonomists have envisioned.

The current research had several primary goals: (1) to identify a broader array of potential reasons that motivate people to engage in sexual intercourse using a nomination procedure designed to survey the wider domain of reasons; (2) to develop an organized taxonomy of reasons for sex using a large sample of women and men; (3) to provide a more comprehensive research tool that can be used by sex researchers; (4) to identify whether women and men differ in their expressed reasons for engaging in sexual intercourse; and (5) to examine whether individual differences in sexual strategies, as measured by the Sociosexuality Inventory (Simpson & Gangestad, 1991), are linked to individual differences in reasons for having sex.

Regarding gender differences, previous researchers have explored this issue in a delimited way. Some have found that men are more motivated by purely physical reasons, such as physical release or simply because they are "horny," whereas women are more motivated by emotional reasons, such as to become psychologically closer to a partner (e.g., Carroll, Volk, & Hyde, 1985; Denney, Field, & Quadagno, 1984; Leigh, 1989). Others have found that men, more than women, have sex in order to provide relief from stress and to enhance their feelings of personal power (Hill & Preston, 1996). Several evolution-based theories suggest that men will be more motivated by the desire for sexual variety (Symons, 1979), the chance for an opportunistic copulation (Buss, 2003), the physical appearance of a potential partner (Buss & Schmitt, 1993), and that emotional factors, such as expressing love or intensifying psychological commitment, would figure more prominently in women's reasons for having sex (Buss, 2003). The current research was capable of testing these theories, as well as providing a more comprehensive atheoretical description of a potential panoply of gender differences in the reasons expressed for having sex.

## Study 1: Initial Item Generation

### Method

Participants were 203 men and 241 women ranging in age from 17 years to 52 years who were recruited from upper and lower level psychology classes, graduate classes in psychology, and from community volunteers who were participating in several other ongoing studies in the Sexual Psychophysiology Laboratory at the University of Texas. Potential volunteers were told the purpose of the study was to make a comprehensive list of all the reasons why people engage in sexual intercourse.

Persons who agreed to participate in the study were asked the following open-ended prompt, “Please list all the reasons you can think of why you, or someone you have known, has engaged in sexual intercourse in the past.” Participants were encouraged to list as many responses as possible. Efforts were made to ensure confidentiality by having participants sit at a distance from other participants such that other’s responses could not be easily read. Anonymity was assured by having participants include only their age and gender on their answer sheets.

### Results

A total of 715 reasons were collected. The authors each independently reviewed the reasons and noted those that were either identical or similar with minor wording changes. Reasons given that both authors marked as similar were deleted or compiled into one combined response, resulting in 237 distinct reasons. The 237 reasons (see Table 3) obtained were listed using a conventional questionnaire format with each item presented as a brief descriptive statement to which subsequent participants rated the likelihood that a given reason has or would lead them to engage in sexual intercourse. The questionnaire was termed the Why Have Sex? (YSEX?) questionnaire. The following instructional set was given at the beginning of the instrument, “*People have sex (i.e., sexual intercourse) for many different reasons. Below is a list of some of these reasons. Please indicate how frequently each of the following reasons led you to have sex in the past. For example, if about half of the time you engaged in sexual intercourse you did so because you were bored, then you would circle “3” beside question 3. If you have not had sex in the past, use the following scale to indicate what the likelihood that each of the following reasons would lead you to have sex. I have had sex in the past because...*” The response choices were listed on a 5-point Likert scale, with

scale interval anchors being *None of my sexual experiences* (1), *A few of my sexual experiences* (2), *Some of my sexual experiences* (3), *Many of my sexual experiences* (4), and *All of my sexual experiences* (5).

## Study 2: Psychometric Analyses

### Method

#### Participants

A total of 1,549 undergraduate students (503 men, 1046 women) participated in this study in exchange for course credit. Participants were distinct from those who took part in Study 1. Participants were enrolled in either the 2000–2003 Fall sessions of Introductory Psychology courses (September–December) or the 2001–2004 Spring Introductory Psychology sessions (January–May). Sample sizes varied between cohorts (2000–2001,  $n = 570$ ; 2001–2002,  $n = 341$ ; 2002–2003,  $n = 341$ ; 2003–2004,  $n = 297$ ). Participants ranged in age from 16 years to 42 years (96% between the ages of 18 and 22), and the mean age was 19 years.

The sample consisted of 62% Caucasian, 4% African American, 15% Hispanic, 15% Asian American, <1% Native American, and 3% “other ethnicity” participants. Ethnicity was determined with the question, “What ethnicity do you most identify with?” Region of heritage was also assessed based on countries of birth or countries of parents’ birth. Across ethnicities, most participants reported North American heritage (96% of Caucasians, 91% of African Americans, 94% of Hispanics, 71% of Asian Americans, 67% of Native Americans, and 59% of “other” ethnicities). The second most substantial reported heritage was Asian heritage (23% of Asian Americans and 33% of “other” ethnicities). Less than 5% of each ethnicity reported South American, African, Middle Eastern, Western European, Eastern European, or South Pacific heritage. Religious affiliations varied, with 36% Fundamentalists, 25% Catholics, 14% Protestants, 14% Atheists/Agnostics, 5% Jewish, 4% Hindus, 2% Buddhists, 1% Muslims, and <1% Pagans/Spiritualists.

Sexual experience data were available for 910 women and 343 men. Of these, 73% of women and 68% of men reported having experienced sexual intercourse in the past. Among both men and women, 88% reported having engaged in oral sex and 95% reported having engaging in some form of sexual petting in the past. Four percent of the women and 2% of men were married. Six percent of women and 5% of men were living with a sexual partner.

## Measures

**Reasons for sexual intercourse** Motivators for engaging in sexual intercourse were measured using the 237 item YSEX? questionnaire that was developed in Study 1.

**Personality** The Big Five Inventory-short form (BFI) is a 44 item inventory developed by John, Donahue, and Kentle (1991) to assess each of the “Big Five” personality dimensions: Neuroticism, Extraversion, Openness to Experience, Agreeableness, and Conscientiousness. The 44 self-descriptive statements were measured on a 5-point scale, with responses ranging from disagree strongly (1) to agree strongly (5).

**Sexual strategies** The following five items from the Sociosexual Orientation Inventory (SOI; Simpson & Gangestad, 1991) were used to analyze unrestricted sexual behavior and fantasy: “With how many partners have you had sex (intercourse or oral sex) *in the past year?*”; “With how many partners will you probably have sex with (intercourse or oral sex) *over the next five years?*”; “With how many partners have you had sexual intercourse, or oral sex, on one and only *one occasion?*”; “When in a stable and committed relationship, how often would you *fantasize* about sex with someone other than your current partner?”; and “Sex without love is okay.” An SOI composite was computed by averaging the sum of the five z-transformed scores.

## Procedure

Participants were administered a demographics questionnaire, the YSEX? questionnaire derived from Study 1, the short form version of the Big Five Inventory (John et al., 1991), selected items from the Sociosexual Orientation Inventory (Simpson & Gangestad, 1991), and a number of additional sexually relevant questionnaires not reported here. In each cohort, participants were administered questionnaires in small groups of 5–10 same-sex individuals. To preserve privacy, participants were given either partitions or several feet of space from other participants. Participants were informed of the sexual nature of the study before they applied to participate. Same-sex researchers informed participants of the sexual material, obtained consent, administered questionnaire packets, and answered participant questions that arose during testing. Confidentiality was protected by assigning each participant with a randomized code number connected to all of his or her data, and consent forms were kept in a separate file. Upon completion, questionnaire packets were inserted into a

large “drop box” as participants exited the testing room. Questionnaire data were stored in locked file cabinets, and all files connected to the study were password-protected. The Institutional Review Board at the University of Texas at Austin approved this research from 2000 to 2004.

## Results

### Item analyses

**Most and least frequently endorsed reasons for having sex** There were nine themes that appeared to characterize the most frequently endorsed reasons for having intercourse: (1) pure attraction to the other person in general; (2) experiencing physical pleasure; (3) expression of love; (4) having sex because of feeling desired by the other; (5) having sex to escalate the depth of the relationship; (6) curiosity or seeking new experiences; (7) marking a special occasion for celebration; (8) mere opportunity; and (9) sex just happening due to seemingly uncontrollable circumstances.

Table 1 shows the 50 reasons for having sex receiving the highest endorsements for men and women separately. The most frequently endorsed reason why both men and women reported engaging in sexual intercourse was because they were attracted to the person. As can be seen in Table 1, out of a pool of 237 items, 8 of the top 10, and 20 of the top 25 reasons given for engaging in sexual intercourse were similar for men and women.

Table 2 presents the 50 most infrequently endorsed reasons for having sexual intercourse out of the possible 237 reasons. The least frequently endorsed reasons for having intercourse could be categorized into five broad themes. One theme involved wanting to harm another person, either a partner (e.g., “I was mad at my partner, so I had sex with someone else”), a rival (e.g., “I wanted to hurt an enemy”) or a stranger (e.g., “I wanted to give someone else a sexually transmitted disease (e.g., herpes, AIDS)”). A second theme involved attaining resources such as a job, a promotion, money, drugs, or gifts. A third common theme revolved around enhancing social status (e.g., “I wanted to be popular”; “I wanted to have more sex than my friends”). A fourth theme centered on having sex as a means to a seemingly unrelated end, such as getting rid of a headache or menstrual cramps, and a fifth theme involved having sex out of duty or pressure.

**Gender differences in reasons for having sex** To examine gender differences at the item level, given that 237 *t*-tests would be conducted, we set the significance threshold at a conservative level of  $p < .005$ . Thus, roughly one difference that showed significance at this level would be

**Table 1** Top 50 reasons why men and women have sex

Item	Women		Item	Men	
	M	SD		M	SD
1. I was attracted to the person	3.89	1.32	I was attracted to the person	4.03	1.16
2. I wanted to experience the physical pleasure	3.75	1.19	It feels good	3.96	1.28
3. It feels good	3.59	1.39	I wanted to experience the physical pleasure	3.84	1.21
4. I wanted to show my affection to the person	3.58	1.25	It's fun	3.57	1.39
5. I wanted to express my love for the person	3.48	1.30	I wanted to show my affection to the person	3.46	1.26
6. I was sexually aroused and wanted the release	3.30	1.33	I was sexually aroused and wanted the release	3.43	1.28
7. I was "horny"	3.11	1.26	I was "horny"	3.38	1.25
8. It's fun	3.05	1.49	I wanted to express my love for the person	3.26	1.31
9. I realized I was in love	2.92	1.47	I wanted to achieve an orgasm.	3.14	1.55
10. I was "in the heat of the moment"	2.89	1.06	I wanted to please my partner	3.11	1.35
11. I wanted to please my partner	2.79	1.32	The person's physical appearance turned me on	2.96	1.44
12. I desired emotional closeness (i.e., intimacy)	2.76	1.25	I wanted the pure pleasure	2.85	1.41
13. I wanted the pure pleasure	2.73	1.42	I was "in the heat of the moment"	2.84	1.09
14. I wanted to achieve an orgasm	2.65	1.46	I desired emotional closeness (i.e., intimacy)	2.79	1.31
15. It's exciting, adventurous	2.49	1.23	It's exciting, adventurous	2.71	1.30
16. I wanted to feel connected to the person	2.44	1.33	The person had a desirable body	2.67	1.44
17. The person's physical appearance turned me on	2.39	1.37	I realized I was in love	2.66	1.46
18. It was a romantic setting	2.39	1.14	The person had an attractive face	2.62	1.47
19. The person really desired me	2.39	1.40	The person really desired me	2.56	1.39
20. The person made me feel sexy	2.37	1.29	I wanted the adventure/excitement	2.45	1.25
21. The person caressed me	2.34	1.31	I wanted to feel connected to the person	2.45	1.37
22. It seemed like the natural next step in my relationship	2.24	1.18	I wanted the experience	2.43	1.27
23. I wanted to become one with another person	2.24	1.33	It was a romantic setting	2.35	1.15
24. It just happened	2.21	1.07	The person caressed me	2.34	1.27
25. I wanted to increase the emotional bond by having sex	2.20	1.28	The person made me feel sexy	2.32	1.32
26. I wanted the experience	2.17	1.24	It seemed like the natural next step in my relationship	2.29	1.19
27. I wanted the adventure/excitement	2.17	1.22	I wanted to increase the emotional bond by having sex	2.27	1.29
28. The person had an attractive face	2.15	1.35	I wanted to keep my partner satisfied	2.25	1.26
29. The person was a good kisser	2.14	1.27	The opportunity presented itself	2.24	1.18
30. I wanted to intensify my relationship	2.14	1.15	It just happened	2.23	1.14
31. My hormones were out of control	2.11	1.17	I wanted to intensify my relationship	2.22	1.25
32. I wanted to try out new sexual techniques or positions	2.11	1.16	I wanted to try out new sexual techniques or positions	2.22	1.16
33. I wanted to feel loved	2.11	1.22	My hormones were out of control	2.20	1.17
34. The person had a desirable body	2.08	1.31	The person was too "hot" (sexy) to resist	2.17	1.26
35. I wanted to celebrate a birthday or anniversary or special occasion	2.06	1.05	I was curious about my sexual abilities	2.17	1.09
36. I wanted to communicate at a "deeper" level	2.06	1.24	I wanted to improve my sexual skills	2.16	1.22
37. I was curious about sex	2.06	1.08	I wanted to become one with another person	2.16	1.36
38. It was a special occasion	2.03	1.03	I saw the person naked and could not resist	2.15	1.27
39. The person was intelligent	1.91	1.23	The person was a good kisser	2.15	1.26
40. I wanted to say "I've missed you"	1.90	.99	I wanted to feel loved	2.15	1.26
41. I wanted to keep my partner satisfied	1.88	1.12	I wanted to celebrate a birthday or anniversary or special occasion	2.14	1.11
42. I got "carried away"	1.88	1.03	The person was too physically attractive to resist	2.11	1.23
43. The opportunity presented itself	1.87	1.09	It was a special occasion	2.11	1.08
44. The person had a great sense of humor	1.87	1.19	I hadn't had sex for a while	2.10	1.07
45. I wanted to improve my sexual skills	1.87	1.14	The person had beautiful eyes	2.06	1.31

**Table 1** continued

Item	Women		Item	Men	
	M	SD		M	SD
46. I was curious about my sexual abilities			I wanted to communicate at a “deeper” level	2.02	1.22
47. The person seemed self-confident	1.86	1.06	I wanted to experiment with new experiences	2.01	1.14
48. I wanted to make up after a fight	1.84	1.19	The person was intelligent	2.01	1.28
49. I was drunk	1.83	.98	I wanted to keep my partner happy	2.00	1.21
50. I was turned on by the sexual conversation	1.82	1.10	I was curious about what the person was like in bed	1.94	1.08

Note: Absolute range, 1–5.  $n = 894$ – $908$  for women;  $n = 460$ – $480$  for men

attributable to chance alone. An astonishing 123 items, or 52% of the items, showed significant gender differences at or beyond the  $p < .005$  level.

Men showed significantly greater endorsement of having sex due to physical reasons, such as “The person had a desirable body”; “The person was too “hot” (sexy) to resist,” and simply because the opportunity presented itself:

“The person was available”; “The person had too much to drink and I was able to take advantage of them.” Men exceeded women on many items that pertained to physical pleasure such as, “I wanted to achieve an orgasm,” and “It feels good.” Men more than women reported having sex as a way to improve their social status (e.g., “I wanted to enhance my reputation”; “I wanted to brag to my friends

**Table 2** The 50 most infrequent reasons why men and women have sex

Item	Women		Item	Men	
	M	SD		M	SD
1. I wanted to give someone else a sexually transmitted disease (e.g., herpes, AIDS)	1.02	.22	The person offered to give me drugs for doing it	1.08	.43
2. Someone offered me money to do it	1.02	.20	I wanted to give someone else a sexually transmitted disease (e.g., herpes, AIDS)	1.09	.46
3. I wanted to get a raise	1.03	.24	I wanted to punish myself	1.10	.44
4. It was an initiation rite to a club or organization	1.03	.25	I wanted to breakup my relationship	1.10	.44
5. I wanted to get a job	1.03	.26	I wanted to get a job	1.10	.45
6. I wanted to get a promotion	1.03	.27	It was an initiation rite to a club or organization	1.10	.45
7. The person offered to give me drugs for doing it	1.03	.26	Someone offered me money to do it	1.11	.47
8. I wanted to punish myself	1.04	.28	I was afraid to say “no” due to the possibility of physical harm	1.12	.54
9. I wanted to hurt/humiliate the person	1.04	.28	I wanted to make money	1.12	.50
10. I wanted to feel closer to God	1.04	.29	I wanted to feel closer to God	1.12	.56
11. I wanted to breakup my relationship	1.04	.28	I wanted to get a raise	1.12	.53
12. I wanted to breakup another’s relationship	1.05	.28	I wanted to hurt/humiliate the person	1.12	.55
13. I wanted to be used or degraded	1.06	.33	Because of a bet	1.12	.49
14. I wanted to gain access to that person’s friend	1.06	.32	I wanted to breakup another’s relationship	1.12	.46
15. I wanted to get a favor from someone	1.06	.35	I wanted to get a promotion	1.13	.56
16. I wanted to enhance my reputation	1.06	.33	I wanted to hurt an enemy	1.13	.52
17. It would get me gifts	1.06	.34	It would get me gifts	1.13	.49
18. I wanted to make money	1.06	.36	The person had a lot of money	1.14	.54
19. I wanted to hurt an enemy	1.06	.33	I wanted to be used or degraded	1.14	.51
20. Because of a bet	1.06	.31	I wanted to break up a rival’s relationship by having sex with his/her partner	1.14	.54
21. It was a favor to someone	1.06	.32	I wanted to get rid of a headache	1.14	.55
22. I wanted to end the relationship	1.06	.32	It would damage my reputation if I said “no”	1.15	.52

**Table 2** continued

Item	Women		Item	Men	
	M	SD		M	SD
23. I wanted to break up a rival's relationship by having sex with his/her partner	1.06	.29	I wanted to get back at my partner for having cheated on me	1.16	.55
24. It would damage my reputation if I said "no"	1.06	.36	I felt sorry for the person	1.16	.55
25. The person had a lot of money	1.06	.34	I wanted to gain access to that person's friend	1.16	.56
26. Someone dared me	1.06	.33	I wanted to be popular	1.16	.60
27. I wanted to have more sex than my friends	1.07	.33	I was physically forced to	1.17	.57
28. I wanted to even the score with a cheating partner	1.07	.32	I felt jealous	1.17	.59
29. I thought it would boost my social status	1.07	.35	The person bought me jewelry	1.17	.58
30. I wanted to be popular	1.07	.37	I wanted to end the relationship	1.18	.61
31. I wanted to get a special favor from someone	1.07	.38	My friends pressured me into it	1.18	.59
32. I was afraid to say "no" due to the possibility of physical harm	1.07	.35	It was a favor to someone	1.18	.54
33. I wanted to relieve menstrual cramps	1.08	.35	I wanted to get a favor from someone	1.18	.63
34. My friends pressured me into it	1.08	.40	Someone dared me	1.18	.58
35. I felt sorry for the person	1.08	.36	I wanted to avoid hurting someone's feelings	1.19	.52
36. I felt jealous	1.08	.36	My regular partner is boring, so I had sex with someone else	1.19	.63
37. My regular partner is boring, so I had sex with someone else	1.08	.38	I wanted to be popular	1.19	.62
38. I wanted to get rid of a headache	1.08	.37	I felt guilty	1.19	.60
39. I wanted to change the topic of conversation	1.09	.40	I wanted to enhance my reputation	1.20	.53
40. The person had too much to drink and I was able to take advantage of them	1.09	.40	I wanted to gain acceptance from friends	1.20	.57
41. I wanted to impress friends	1.10	.43	I thought it would boost my social status	1.20	.61
42. The person was famous and I wanted to be able to say I had sex with him/her	1.10	.44	I thought it would help "trap" a new partner	1.20	.62
43. I wanted to get out of doing something	1.10	.42	I was mad at my partner, so I had sex with someone else	1.21	.59
44. I wanted to get even with someone (i.e., revenge)	1.10	.43	I wanted to get out of doing something	1.21	.61
45. I wanted to make someone else jealous	1.10	.38	I wanted to have a child	1.22	.74
46. I was competing with someone else to "get the person"	1.11	.42	I wanted to make someone else jealous	1.22	.63
47. I thought it would help "trap" a new partner	1.11	.48	I wanted to change the topic of conversation	1.22	.66
48. I was slumming	1.11	.42	I wanted to defy my parents	1.22	.65
49. I wanted to brag to friends about my conquests	1.12	.45	I wanted to stop my partner's nagging	1.22	.62
50. The person demanded that I have sex with him/her	1.12	.45	I wanted to manipulate him/her into doing something for me	1.23	.61

Note: Absolute range, 1–5.  $n = 893$ – $907$  for women;  $n = 461$ – $478$  for men

about my conquests") and their sexual experience (e.g., "I needed another notch on my belt"; "I wanted to improve my sexual skills"). Finally, men exceeded women on endorsing a variety of utilitarian reasons for sex: "I wanted to change the topic of conversation"; "I wanted to improve my sexual skills."

Women exceeded men on only three of the 237 reasons (at  $p < .005$ ): "I wanted to feel feminine"; "I wanted to express my love for the person"; "I realized that I was in love." Means, SDs, and effect sizes calculated using Cohen's  $d$  are reported for the 50 items showing the largest sex differences in Table 3.

### Factor analysis

Because items differed in their variances, all factor analyses were conducted on  $z$ -score transformations standardized on the combined sample of men and women. Principal components analyses were conducted on the 237 items separately by gender. We used direct oblimin with Kaiser normalization for the analyses because we expected the factors for having sex to be related. After inspection of the scree plot, we examined three, four, and five factor solutions. A four factor solution yielded the most consistent pattern of loadings for both men and women. The four

**Table 3** Top 50 largest gender differences in why men and women have sex

Item	Women		Men		<i>t</i>	<i>d</i>
	M	SD	M	SD		
1. The person wore revealing clothes	1.29	.74	1.89	1.09	-10.62*	-.64
2. I wanted to feel masculine	1.16	.65	1.69	1.14	-9.23*	-.57
3. I wanted to relieve “blue balls”	1.15	.57	1.50	.81	-8.11*	-.50
4. I wanted to feel feminine	1.59	1.00	1.25	.67	7.54*	.40
5. The person had a desirable body	2.08	1.31	2.67	1.44	-7.38*	-.43
6. The person was “available”	1.34	.76	1.74	1.07	-7.38*	-.43
7. The person’s physical appearance turned me on	2.39	1.37	2.96	1.44	-6.99*	-.40
8. It’s fun	3.05	1.49	3.57	1.39	-6.47*	-.36
9. The person had an attractive face	2.15	1.35	2.62	1.47	-5.82*	-.33
10. I wanted to achieve an orgasm	2.65	1.46	3.14	1.55	-5.75*	-.33
11. The opportunity presented itself	1.87	1.09	2.24	1.18	-5.55*	-.33
12. I wanted to see if I could get the person into bed	1.22	.62	1.47	.87	-5.46*	-.33
13. I wanted to keep my partner satisfied	1.88	1.11	2.25	1.26	-5.38*	-.31
14. I wanted to have more sex than my friends	1.07	.33	1.25	.69	-5.34*	-.33
15. I wanted to enhance my reputation	1.06	.33	1.20	.53	-5.33*	-.32
16. I wanted to increase the number of sex partners I had experienced	1.17	.58	1.40	.88	-5.28*	-.31
17. I saw the person naked and could not resist	1.79	1.14	2.15	1.27	-5.16*	-.30
18. The person was too “hot” (sexy) to resist	1.82	1.10	2.17	1.26	-5.14*	-.30
19. The person had too much to drink and I was able to take advantage of them	1.09	.40	1.27	.69	-5.12*	-.32
20. I needed another “notch on my belt”	1.13	.50	1.33	.78	-5.12*	-.31
21. I hadn’t had sex for a while	1.80	.97	2.10	1.07	-5.07*	-.29
22. It feels good	3.59	1.39	3.96	1.28	-4.98*	-.28
23. My partner kept insisting	1.62	.87	1.89	1.07	-4.81*	-.28
24. I knew the person was usually “out of my league”	1.23	.65	1.45	.89	-4.75*	-.28
25. I thought it would boost my social status	1.07	.35	1.20	.61	-4.43*	-.26
26. The person had beautiful eyes	1.75	1.15	2.06	1.31	-4.40*	-.25
27. The person was too physically attractive to resist	1.81	1.12	2.11	1.23	-4.38*	-.26
28. It was a favor to someone	1.06	.32	1.18	.54	-4.38*	-.27
29. I wanted to have something to tell my friends	1.14	.51	1.29	.66	-4.37*	-.25
30. I was bored	1.41	.74	1.62	.93	-4.33*	-.25
31. I wanted to improve my sex skills	1.87	1.14	2.16	1.22	-4.32*	-.25
32. I had not had sex in a long time	1.67	.93	1.91	.99	-4.30*	-.25
33. I wanted to brag to friends about my conquests	1.12	.45	1.26	.68	-4.20*	-.24
34. Someone dared me	1.06	.33	1.18	.58	-4.18*	-.25
35. I wanted to impress friends	1.10	.43	1.24	.65	-4.14*	-.25
36. I wanted to act out a fantasy	1.61	.92	1.86	1.13	-4.14*	-.24
37. The person demanded that I have sex with him/her	1.12	.45	1.27	.72	-4.12*	-.25
38. I wanted to please my partner	2.79	1.32	3.11	1.35	-4.11*	-.24
39. I wanted to get even with someone (i.e., revenge)	1.10	.43	1.24	.64	-4.10*	-.26
40. The person was famous and I wanted to be able to say I had sex with him/her	1.10	.44	1.26	.79	-4.07*	-.25
41. I was competing with someone to “get the person”	1.11	.42	1.24	.65	-4.07*	-.24
42. I could brag to other people about my sexual experience	1.14	.53	1.30	.76	-4.07*	-.24
43. I wanted to get a favor from someone	1.07	.38	1.19	.61	-4.05*	-.24
44. I wanted adventure/excitement	2.17	1.22	2.45	1.25	-4.04*	-.23
45. I thought it would make me feel healthy	1.23	.66	1.42	.90	-4.03*	-.24
46. I wanted to see what all the fuss is about	1.45	.79	1.66	.99	-4.02*	-.23
47. I wanted to be popular	1.07	.37	1.19	.62	-3.96*	-.24



**Table 3** continued

	Item	Women		Men		<i>t</i>	<i>d</i>
		M	SD	M	SD		
48.	I wanted to change the topic of conversation	1.09	.40	1.22	.66	-3.92*	-.24
49.	I wanted to end the relationship	1.06	.32	1.18	.61	-3.86*	-.25
50.	I was “horny”	3.11	1.26	3.38	1.25	-3.82*	-.22

Note: Absolute range, 1–5. \*  $p \leq .001$ .  $n = 871$ – $908$  for women;  $n = 453$ – $480$  for men

factors accounted for 42% and 35% of the total item variance in men and women, respectively. We labeled these factors Physical Reasons, Goal Attainment Reasons, Emotional Reasons, and Insecurity Reasons.

Next, to examine whether the general pattern of factors were comparable for men and women, we conducted a coefficient of comparability (Nunnally, 1978), which is a test of the correlation among the factors derived from one population and the factors derived from a second population. Correlations among factors derived separately among men and women for the factors Physical Reasons, Goal Attainment Reasons, Emotional Reasons, and Insecurity

Reasons, respectively, were:  $r(44) = .97$ ;  $r(46) = .95$ ;  $r(20) = .96$ ;  $r(31) = .90$ , all  $ps < .001$ . Because the factor structures were similar for men and women, we then conducted a principal components analysis on the intercorrelations among the 237 reasons, extracting four factors, and rotating the factors via the direct oblimin method, using the combined sample of men and women. The four factors accounted for 37% of the total item variance, and the pattern of item loadings on the factors corresponded closely to the expected factors of Physical Reasons, Goal Attainment Reasons, Emotional Reasons, and Insecurity Reasons (see Table 4).

**Table 4** Factor analysis of the 237 item YSEX? Questionnaire in combined sample of men and women

Item	Item Description	Factor			
		Physical	Goal Attainment	Emotional	Insecurity
200	The person's physical appearance turned me on.	.74			
217	The person had a desirable body.	.74			
123	I wanted the pure pleasure.	.71			
151	I wanted to achieve an orgasm.	.71			
51	I wanted the adventure/excitement.	.70			
220	The person had an attractive face.	.70			
32	I was “horny.”	.68			
54	It's fun.	.67			
103	The person was too “hot” (sexy) to resist.	.67			
21	It feels good.	.66			
19	I was sexually aroused and wanted the release.	.66			
113	The person was too physically attractive to resist.	.65			
153	I wanted to improve my sexual skills.	.64			
9	It's exciting, adventurous.	.64			
106	I wanted to experiment with new experiences.	.63			
221	I saw the person naked and could not resist.	.61			
52	I wanted the experience.	.61			
99	The opportunity presented itself.	.60			
83	I wanted to try out new sexual techniques or positions.	.59			
15	I wanted to experience the physical pleasure.	.59			
41	I was curious about what the person was like in bed.	.58			
218	I had not had sex in a long time.	.56			

**Table 4** continued

Item	Item Description	Factor			
		Physical	Goal Attainment	Emotional	Insecurity
222	I was turned on by the sexual conversation.	.55			
219	The person smelled nice.	.53			
203	The person had beautiful eyes.	.53			
212	The person was really desired by others.	.53			
211	The person really desired me.	.53		.31	
85	My hormones were out of control.	.52			
225	The person wore revealing clothes.	.52			
196	I am a sex addict.	.52			
193	I wanted to get the most out of life.	.52			
104	I thought it would relax me.	.52			
126	I'm addicted to sex.	.52			
92	I was curious about my sexual abilities. (93)	.51			
59	I hadn't had sex for a while. (59)	.51			
207	The person was a good kisser. (210)	.48		.31	
107	I wanted to see what it would be like to have sex with another person.	.47			-.30
224	The person caressed me.	.47		.34	
204	The person made me feel sexy.	.46		.35	
67	I wanted to release tension.	.46			
201	The person was a good dancer.	.45			
60	The person was "available."	.45			
42	I was curious about sex.	.44			
46	I wanted to release anxiety/stress.	.44			
110	It would allow me to "get sex out of my system" so that I could focus on other things.	.44			
18	I was attracted to the person.	.43			
210	The person seemed self-confident.	.43		.32	
134	I was frustrated and needed relief.	.42			
195	I wanted to feel masculine.	.42			
58	I wanted to act out a fantasy.	.42			
157	I wanted to satisfy a compulsion.	.40			
227	I knew the person was usually "out of my league."	.40	-.32		
209	The person had a great sense of humor.	.40		.36	
2	It just happened.	.39			
118	I wanted to see whether sex with a different partner would feel different or better.	.39			
1	I was "in the heat of the moment."	.39			
44	I wanted to please my partner.	.38		.37	
37	It was easier to "go all the way" than to stop.	.38			-.33
197	I wanted to see what all the fuss is about.	.38			
109	I could brag to other people about my sexual experience.	.37			
216	I wanted to see if I could get the other person into bed.	.37	-.31		
130	I was drunk.	.37			
102	I wanted to increase the number of sex partners I had experienced.	.36	-.32		
96	I got "carried away."	.36			-.36
192	I wanted to relieve "blue balls."	.36			
228	The person was mysterious.	.35			
205	An erotic movie had turned me on.	.34			
114	I wanted to celebrate something.	.34		.33	
105	I thought it would make me feel healthy.	.34			

**Table 4** continued

Item	Item Description	Factor			
		Physical	Goal Attainment	Emotional	Insecurity
131	It seemed like good exercise.	.33			
87	It became a habit.	.33			-.33
125	I wanted to make a conquest.	.32			
100	I wanted to see what it would be like to have sex while stoned (e.g., on marijuana or some other drug).	.32			
3	I was bored.	.32			
95	I wanted to lose my inhibitions.	.32			
215	The person flattered me.	.32			
12	I was under the influence of drugs.	.31			
13	I wanted to have something to tell my friends.				
31	I was tired of being a virgin.				
11	I wanted to get rid of aggression.				
124	I wanted to dominate the other person.				
115	I was seduced.				
155	I wanted to get a raise.		-.88		
154	I wanted to get a job.		-.85		
156	I wanted to get a promotion.		-.85		
181	It was an initiation rite to a club or organization.		-.84		
169	I wanted to give someone else a sexually transmitted disease (e.g., herpes, AIDS).		-.83		
147	I wanted to punish myself.		-.74		
129	Someone offered me money to do it.		-.73		
213	I wanted to gain access to that person's friend.		-.71		
148	I wanted to break up a rival's relationship by having sex with his/her partner.		-.70		
178	I wanted to hurt an enemy.		-.68		
173	I wanted to get rid of a headache.		-.67		
177	I wanted to even the score with a cheating partner.		-.66		
167	I wanted to get a favor from someone.		-.65		
170	I wanted to breakup another's relationship.		-.64		
141	Because of a bet.		-.63		
133	The person offered to give me drugs for doing it.		-.62		
137	My regular partner is boring, so I had sex with someone else.		-.60		
78	I wanted to hurt/humiliate the person.		-.59		
168	I wanted to breakup my relationship.		-.59		
56	I wanted to be popular.		-.58		
199	The person had a lot of money.		-.58		
214	I felt jealous.		-.56		
158	I wanted to make money.		-.55		
143	I wanted to get a special favor from someone.		-.55		
198	I thought it would boost my social status.		-.54		
127	It was a favor to someone.		-.54		
119	I was mad at my partner, so I had sex with someone else.		-.54		
226	The person had too much to drink and I was able to take advantage of them.		-.53		
112	It would damage my reputation if I said "no."		-.53		
128	I wanted to be used or degraded.		-.51		
161	I wanted to get out of doing something.		-.51		
191	I wanted to relieve menstrual cramps.		-.50		
145	I wanted to enhance my reputation.		-.49		

**Table 4** continued

Item	Item Description	Factor			
		Physical	Goal Attainment	Emotional	Insecurity
150	I wanted to impress friends.		-.47		
160	I wanted to change the topic of conversation.		-.46		
57	It would get me gifts.		-.45		
23	The person was famous and I wanted to be able to say I had sex with him/her.		-.45		
7	I wanted to feel closer to God.		-.46		
55	I wanted to get even with someone (i.e., get revenge).		-.44		
202	Someone had told me that this person was good in bed.	.33	-.44		
174	I was afraid to say “no” due to the possibility of physical harm.		-.43		
63	I wanted to make someone else jealous.		-.42		
49	I wanted to end the relationship.		-.41		
5	Someone dared me.		-.40		
208	The person had bought me jewelry.		-.40		
50	My friends pressured me into it.		-.40		
144	I wanted to get back at my partner for having cheated on me.		-.40		
28	I wanted to make someone else jealous.		-.40		
39	I was competing with someone else to “get the person.”		-.39		
152	I wanted to brag to my friends about my conquests.	.32	-.39		
29	I wanted to have more sex than my friends.		-.38		
146	I wanted to keep warm.		-.37		
108	I thought it would help me to fall asleep.		-.36		
182	I wanted to become more focused on work – sexual thoughts are distracting.		-.35		
27	I wanted to have a child.		-.35		
69	I was slumming.		-.35		
206	The person had taken me out for an expensive dinner.		-.34		
176	I wanted to burn calories.		-.34		
231	I wanted to reproduce.		-.34		
162	I wanted to test my compatibility with a new partner.		-.33		
171	I wanted to avoid hurting someone’s feelings.		-.33		
138	I was on the “rebound” from another relationship.		-.33		
190	I wanted to defy my parents.		-.31		
101	It’s considered “taboo” by society.		-.30		
97	I needed another “notch on my belt.”				
82	I wanted to reaffirm my sexual orientation.				
186	I wanted to return a favor.				
8	I wanted to gain acceptance from my friends.				
35	Everyone else was having sex.				
30	I was married and you’re supposed to.				
229	I realized I was in love.			.64	
117	I wanted to increase the emotional bond by having sex.			.63	
16	I wanted to show my affection to the person.			.62	
90	I wanted to communicate at a deeper level.			.62	
14	I wanted to express my love for the person.			.62	
166	I wanted to become one with another person.			.61	
74	I wanted to feel connected to the person.			.59	
183	I wanted to say “I’ve missed you.”			.55	
184	I wanted to celebrate a birthday or anniversary or special occasion.			.52	
71	I wanted to intensify my relationship.			.52	

**Table 4** continued

Item	Item Description	Factor			
		Physical	Goal Attainment	Emotional	Insecurity
135	It was a romantic setting.	.32		.51	
188	I wanted to welcome someone home.			.51	
185	I wanted to say “I’m sorry.”			.48	
164	I wanted to put the passion back into my relationship.			.47	
189	I wanted to say “goodbye.”			.47	
187	I wanted to say “Thank you.”			.46	
235	I wanted to lift my partner’s spirits.			.45	
142	It was a special occasion.	.32		.44	
163	I wanted to get a partner to express love.			.43	
72	It seemed like the natural next step.			.41	
223	The person was intelligent.	.39		.39	
6	I desired emotional closeness (i.e., intimacy).			.38	
234	I wanted to help my partner forget about his/her problems.			.38	-.37
159	I wanted to keep my partner satisfied.			.36	
79	I wanted the person to feel good about himself/herself.			.36	
10	I wanted to make up after a fight.				
93	I wanted a “spiritual” experience.				
136	I felt insecure.				-.67
48	I felt like it was my duty.				-.67
53	I felt obligated to.				-.66
47	I didn’t know how to say “no.”				-.65
80	I didn’t want to disappoint the person.				-.63
61	I didn’t want to “lose” the person.				-.59
132	I was pressured into doing it.				-.59
26	I wanted the person to love me.				-.57
25	I was verbally coerced into it.				-.57
139	I wanted to boost my self-esteem.				-.54
233	I wanted my partner to notice me.				-.53
73	I wanted to be nice.				-.53
43	I wanted to feel attractive.				-.51
88	I wanted to keep my partner happy.			.31	-.51
121	It was expected of me.				-.51
84	I felt guilty.				-.50
91	I was afraid my partner would have an affair if I didn’t have sex with him/her.				-.50
232	I wanted to feel loved.			.44	-.49
17	I felt like I owed it to the person.				-.49
65	I wanted to feel powerful.				-.48
77	I wanted him/her to stop bugging me about sex.				-.46
172	I wanted to make myself feel better about myself.				-.46
34	I was feeling lonely.				-.45
122	I wanted to keep my partner from straying.				-.45
68	I wanted to feel good about myself.	.34			-.45
33	I wanted to feel loved.			.44	-.45
140	I wanted to get my partner to stay with me.				-.44
22	My partner kept insisting.				-.44
180	I wanted to raise my self-esteem.				-.43
111	I wanted to decrease my partner’s desire to have sex with someone else.				-.43

**Table 4** continued

Item	Item Description	Factor			
		Physical	Goal Attainment	Emotional	Insecurity
86	It was the only way my partner would spend time with me.				-.42
62	I thought it would help “trap” a new partner.				-.41
24	I was physically forced to.				-.41
66	I wanted to “possess” the person.				-.41
175	I wanted to keep my partner from straying.				-.41
98	The person demanded that I have sex with him/her.		-.36		-.40
237	I wanted to make my partner feel powerful.				-.40
64	I felt sorry for the person.				-.40
81	I was trying to “get over” an earlier person/relationship.				-.40
70	I felt rebellious.				-.39
4	It just seemed like “the thing to do.”				-.39
149	I wanted to stop my partners’ nagging.		-.37		-.39
236	I wanted to submit to my partner.			.31	-.38
38	I wanted to ensure the relationship was “committed.”				-.37
	I wanted to make the person feel better about herself/himself.			.34	-.37
179	I wanted to feel older.				-.37
165	I wanted to prevent a breakup.				-.37
45	I wanted to display submission.				-.36
76	I wanted to manipulate him/her into doing something for me.				-.36
36	I wanted the attention.				-.34
94	It was just part of the relationship “routine”.				-.34
89	I had no self-control.				-.34
40	I wanted to “gain control” of the person.				-.33
194	I wanted to feel feminine.				-.30
230	I wanted to forget about my problems.				
75	I wanted to feel young.				
120	I wanted to fulfill a previous promise to my partner.				
20	My friends were having sex and I wanted to fit in.				

Note: Factor loadings < .30 have been suppressed

**Subfactor analyses and scale construction** Because each of the four factors contained a large and quite heterogeneous number of different reasons, separate principal components analyses were conducted on items within each of the four broad domains of Physical Reasons, Goal Attainment Reasons, Emotional Reasons, and Insecurity Reasons. After inspection of the scree plots, we examined two through five factor solutions. The best fitting solutions were a four factor solution that accounted for 47% of the total item variance for Physical Reasons, a four factor solution (47% of total item variance) for Goal Attainment Reasons, a two factor solution (51% of total item variance) for Emotional Reasons, and a three factor solution (44% of total item variance) for Insecurity Reasons (see Tables 5–8 for factor loadings).

The Physical reasons subfactors were labeled *Stress Reduction*, *Pleasure*, *Physical Desirability*, and *Experience Seeking*. The Goal Attainment subfactors were labeled *Resources*, *Social Status*, *Revenge*, and *Utilitarian*. The two Emotional reasons subfactors were labeled *Love and Commitment* and *Expression*. The three Insecurity reasons were labeled *Self-Esteem Boost*, *Duty/Pressure*, and *Mate Guarding*. Each of the subfactors was relatively homogeneous within the factor, yet distinct from each of the other subfactors, thus providing a level within the taxonomy that was both psychologically and functionally inclusive.

Composites were formed for each of the subfactors by calculating the mean of the items that loaded on each of the subfactors. Six items had factor loadings < .30 and were

**Table 5** Subfactor analyses of physical reasons for engaging in sexual intercourse

Item	Item Description	Factor			
		Stress Reduction	Pleasure	Physical Desirability	Experience Seeking
134	<b>I was frustrated and need relief.</b>	.67			
46	<b>I wanted to release anxiety/stress.</b>	.60			
67	<b>I wanted to release tension.</b>	.59			
3	<b>I was bored.</b>	.57			
12	I was under the influence of drugs.	.55			
131	<b>It seemed like good exercise.</b>	.55			
104	<b>I thought it would relax me.</b>	.54			
126	<b>I'm addicted to sex.</b>	.54			
110	<b>It would allow me to "get sex out of my system" so that I could focus on other things.</b>	.53			
100	I wanted to see what it would be like to have sex while stoned (e.g., on marijuana or some other drug).	.51			
130	I was drunk.	.50			
196	<b>I am a sex addict.</b>	.49			
105	<b>I thought it would make me feel healthy.</b>	.43			-.31
192	I wanted to relieve "blue balls."	.43			
2	It just happened.	.42	-.30		
60	The person was "available."	.39			
125	I wanted to make a conquest.	.39			
59	<b>I hadn't had sex for a while.</b>	.39			
109	I could brag to other people about my sexual experience.	.34			
205	An erotic movie had turned me on	.33			
218	I had not had sex in a long time.	.33			
157	<b>I wanted to satisfy a compulsion.</b>	.33			
85	My hormones were out of control.				
21	<b>It feels good.</b>		-.75		
15	<b>I wanted to experience the physical pleasure.</b>		-.73		
19	I was sexually aroused and wanted the release.		-.70		
32	<b>I was "horny."</b>		-.64		
18	I was attracted to the person.		-.62		
54	<b>It's fun.</b>		-.61		
123	<b>I wanted the pure pleasure.</b>		-.53		
151	<b>I wanted to achieve an orgasm.</b>		-.47		
9	<b>It's exciting, adventurous.</b>		-.45		-.35
1	<b>I was "in the heat of the moment."</b>	.35	-.44		
220	<b>The person had an attractive face.</b>			-.89	
217	<b>The person had a desirable body.</b>			-.85	
203	<b>The person had beautiful eyes.</b>			-.76	
219	<b>The person smelled nice.</b>			-.75	
200	<b>The person's physical appearance turned me on.</b>		-.31	-.73	
212	The person was really desired by others.			-.70	
221	<b>I was the person naked and could not resist.</b>			-.66	
201	<b>The person was a good dancer.</b>			-.55	
113	<b>The person was too physically attractive to resist.</b>			-.54	
225	<b>The person wore revealing clothes.</b>			-.53	
215	The person flattered me.			-.53	

Table 5 continued

Item	Item Description	Factor			
		Stress Reduction	Pleasure	Physical Desirability	Experience Seeking
103	<b>The person was too “hot” (sexy) to resist.</b>			-.53	
222	I was turned on by the sexual conversation.			-.52	
228	The person was mysterious.			-.36	
195	I wanted to feel masculine.			-.33	
42	<b>I was curious about sex.</b>				-.73
92	<b>I was curious about my sexual abilities.</b>				-.70
52	<b>I wanted the experience.</b>				-.67
106	<b>I wanted to experiment with new experiences.</b>				-.64
197	<b>I wanted to see what all the fuss is about.</b>				-.62
107	<b>I wanted to see what it would be like to have sex with another person.</b>				-.58
51	<b>I wanted the adventure/excitement.</b>		-.37		-.51
153	<b>I wanted to improve my sexual skills.</b>				-.49
41	<b>I was curious about what the person was like in bed.</b>				-.48
95	<b>I wanted to lose my inhibitions.</b>				-.47
193	<b>I wanted to get the most out of life.</b>				-.41
83	<b>I wanted to try out new sexual techniques or positions.</b>				-.40
99	<b>The opportunity presented itself.</b>				-.37
58	<b>I wanted to act out a fantasy.</b>				-.35
118	<b>I wanted to see whether sex with a different partner would feel different or better.</b>	.30			-.34

Note: Factor loadings < .30 have been suppressed. Items bolded were included in the composite scoring

not included in the composites. Seven items in the Stress Reduction subfactor, two in the Pleasure, four in the Physical Desirability, one in the Resources, three in the Social Status, two in the Revenge, five in the Utilitarian, one in the Love and Commitment, one in the Expression, nine in the Self-Esteem Boost, and two in the Pressure subfactors were excluded from the composite calculations because they did not fit conceptually with the remaining items. Four items were excluded from the composite scores because they were gender specific (i.e., “I wanted to feel masculine,” “I wanted to feel feminine,” “I wanted to relieve blue balls,” and “I wanted to relieve menstrual cramps”). One item in each of the Utilitarian, Stress Reduction, Self-Esteem Boost, and Mate Guarding subfactors was eliminated from the composite scoring because the item was conceptually similar to another item within that composite (see Tables 5–8 for items included in the composites). This yielded a total of 142 items.<sup>1</sup>

To begin examining the reliability of the condensed 142-item Why Have Sex (YSEX?) questionnaire, Cronbach’s coefficient alphas were calculated for each of the subfactors

and factor composite scores separately by gender and for the total sample (see Table 9). In each of the total, male, and female samples, values exceeded .85 for each of the Physical, Goal Attainment, Emotional, and Insecurity Factor scores, indicating high internal consistency. At the subfactor level, in the combined sample, values ranged from .75 for the Self-Esteem Boost to .83 for the Stress Reduction and Resources subfactors. In the male sample, subfactor alphas ranged from .77 to .89 for the Utilitarian and Resources subfactors, respectively. In the female sample, subfactor values ranged from .70 for the Revenge subfactor to .86 for Experience Seeking and Duty/Pressure subfactors.

#### Composite analyses

*Gender differences in reasons for having sex* Between gender, independent samples *t*-tests were conducted on each of the factor and subfactor composites. As can be seen in Table 10, significant differences (at  $p < .005$ ) were found between men and women on each of the Physical, Goal Attainment, and Insecurity subfactor composite and total scores. By contrast, there were no significant gender differences in frequency of endorsement on any of the Emotional composites or total factor score.

<sup>1</sup> The 142-item YSEX? Questionnaire is available from the corresponding author.



**Table 6** Subfactor analyses of goal attainment reasons for engaging in sexual intercourse

Item	Item Description	Factor			
		Resources	Social Status	Revenge	Utilitarian
155	<b>I wanted to get a raise.</b>	.61			
147	<b>I wanted to punish myself.</b>	.60			
154	<b>I wanted to get a job.</b>	.57			.37
78	<b>I wanted to hurt/humiliate the person.</b>	.57			
156	<b>I wanted to get a promotion.</b>	.57			.33
169	<b>I wanted to give someone else a sexually transmitted disease (e.g., herpes, AIDS).</b>	.53		.33	
129	<b>Someone offered me money to do it.</b>	.49			
7	<b>I wanted to feel closed to God.</b>	.48			
158	<b>I wanted to make money.</b>	.46			.34
27	<b>I wanted to have a child.</b>	.45			
174	I was afraid to say “no” due to the possibility of physical harm.	.45			
231	<b>I wanted to reproduce.</b>	.43			
181	<b>It was an initiation rite to a club or organization.</b>	.40			
133	<b>The person offered me drugs for doing it.</b>	.35		.31	
49	<b>I wanted to end the relationship.</b>	.34			
128	<b>I wanted to be used or degraded.</b>	.33			
56	<b>I wanted to be popular.</b>		.79		
145	<b>I wanted to enhance my reputation.</b>		.57		
29	<b>I wanted to have more sex than my friends.</b>		.54		
39	<b>I was competing with someone else to “get the person.”</b>		.48	.33	
112	<b>It would damage my reputation if I said “no.”</b>		.48		
23	<b>The person was famous and I wanted to be able to say I had sex with him/her.</b>		.47		
198	<b>I thought it would boost my social status.</b>		.47		.33
50	<b>My friends pressured me into it.</b>		.41		
127	<b>It was a favor to someone.</b>		.40		
5	<b>Someone dared me.</b>		.38		
150	<b>I wanted to impress friends.</b>		.38		
226	The person had too much to drink and I was able to take advantage of them.		.34		
69	I was slumming.		.33		
57	It would get me gifts.		.33		
144	<b>I wanted to get back at my partner for having cheated on me.</b>			.77	
119	<b>I was mad at my partner so I had sex with someone else.</b>			.71	
55	<b>I wanted to get even with someone.</b>			.64	
177	<b>I wanted to even the score with a cheating partner.</b>			.60	
28	<b>I wanted to make someone else jealous.</b>		.40	.59	
148	<b>I wanted to break up rival’s relationship by having sex with his/her partner.</b>	.36		.57	
138	<b>I was on the “rebound” from another relationship.</b>			.56	
137	My regular partner is boring, so I had sex with someone else.			.54	
63	<b>I wanted to make someone else jealous.</b>		.30	.52	
170	<b>I wanted to breakup another’s relationship.</b>	.35		.51	
178	<b>I wanted to hurt an enemy.</b>			.44	
141	Because of a bet.	.34		.34	
213	I wanted to gain access to that person’s friends.				
161	<b>I wanted to get out of doing something.</b>				.72
176	<b>I wanted to burn calories.</b>				.69
146	<b>I wanted to keep warm.</b>				.61
206	<b>The person had taken me out for an expensive dinner.</b>				.60

**Table 6** continued

Item	Item Description	Factor			
		Resources	Social Status	Revenge	Utilitarian
173	<b>I wanted to get rid of a headache.</b>				.59
160	<b>I wanted to change the topic of conversation.</b>				.58
108	<b>I thought it would help me to fall asleep.</b>				.57
208	The person had bought me jewelry.				.55
182	<b>I wanted to become more focused on work- sexual thoughts are distracting.</b>				.54
162	I wanted to test my compatibility with a new partner.				.52
167	<b>I wanted to get a favor from someone.</b>				.50
190	<b>I wanted to defy my parents.</b>				.41
171	I wanted to avoid hurting someone's feelings.				.37
143	I wanted to get a special favor from someone.				.33
192	I wanted to relieve menstrual cramps.				.33
168	I wanted to breakup my relationship,				.32
101	It's considered "taboo" by society.				.31
214	I felt jealous.				
199	The person had a lot of money.				

Note: Factor loadings < .30 have been suppressed. Items bolded were included in the composite scoring

**Table 7** Subfactor analyses of emotional reasons for engaging in sexual intercourse

Item	Item Description	Factor	
		Love & Commitment	Expression
74	<b>I wanted to feel connected to the person.</b>	.80	
117	<b>I wanted to increase the emotional bond by having sex.</b>	.78	
90	<b>I wanted to communicate at a "deeper" level.</b>	.76	
14	<b>I wanted to express my love for the person.</b>	.73	
16	<b>I wanted to show my affection to the person.</b>	.73	
71	<b>I wanted to intensify my relationship.</b>	.72	
6	<b>I desired emotional closeness (i.e., intimacy).</b>	.67	
166	<b>I wanted to become one with another person.</b>	.64	
72	<b>It seemed like the natural next step in my relationship.</b>	.59	
229	<b>I realized I was in love</b>	.58	
163	<b>I wanted to get a partner to express love.</b>	.50	
79	<b>I wanted the person to feel good about himself/herself.</b>	.40	
159	I wanted to keep my partner satisfied.	.36	
188	<b>I wanted to welcome someone home.</b>		-.88
185	<b>I wanted to say "I'm sorry."</b>		-.85
187	<b>I wanted to say "thank you."</b>		-.83
189	<b>I wanted to say "good bye."</b>		-.83
184	<b>I wanted to celebrate a birthday or anniversary or special occasion.</b>		-.73
183	<b>I wanted to say "I've missed you."</b>		-.71
235	<b>I wanted to lift my partner's spirits.</b>		-.56
164	I wanted to put the passion back into my relationship.	.32	-.44

Note: Factor loadings < .30 have been suppressed. Items bolded were included in the composite scoring

**Table 8** Subfactor analyses of insecurity reasons for engaging in sexual intercourse

Item	Item Description	Factor		
		Self-Esteem Boost	Duty/ Pressure	Mate Guarding
65	<b>I wanted to feel powerful.</b>	.86		
180	I wanted to raise my self-esteem.	.74		
172	<b>I wanted to make myself feel better about myself.</b>	.73		
139	<b>I wanted to boost my self-esteem.</b>	.70		
179	I wanted to feel older.	.67		
237	I wanted to make my partner feel powerful.	.64		
43	<b>I wanted to feel attractive.</b>	.59		
194	I wanted to feel feminine.	.58		
70	I felt rebellious.	.54		
66	I wanted to “possess” the person.	.50		
233	<b>I wanted my partner to notice me.</b>	.47		-.38
36	<b>I wanted the attention.</b>	.43		
40	<b>I wanted to “gain control” of the person.</b>	.42		
76	<b>I wanted to manipulate him/her into doing something for me.</b>	.41		
136	<b>I felt insecure.</b>	.41		
45	I wanted to display submission.	.40		
64	I felt sorry for the person.	.40	.37	
34	I was feeling lonely.	.35		
86	It was the only way my partner would spend time with me.	.33		
81	I was trying to “get over” an earlier person/relationship.	.30		
47	<b>I didn’t know how to say “no.”</b>		.75	
132	<b>I was pressured into doing it.</b>		.74	
53	<b>I felt obligated to.</b>		.73	
25	<b>I was verbally coerced into it.</b>		.70	
48	<b>I felt like it was my duty.</b>		.69	
77	<b>I wanted him/her to stop bugging me about sex.</b>		.65	
22	<b>My partner kept insisting.</b>		.63	
17	<b>I felt like I owed it to the person.</b>		.51	
24	<b>I was physically forced to.</b>		.51	
121	<b>It was expected of me.</b>		.50	
84	<b>I felt guilty.</b>		.49	
80	<b>I didn’t want to disappoint the person.</b>		.47	
73	<b>I wanted to be nice.</b>		.45	
94	It was just part of the relationship “routine.”		.32	
89	I had no self-control.		.32	
4	It just seemed like “the thing to do.”			
122	<b>I wanted to keep my partner from straying.</b>			-.83
175	I wanted to keep my partner from having sex with someone else.			-.81
140	<b>I wanted to get my partner to stay with me.</b>			-.79
111	<b>I wanted to decrease my partner’s desire to have sex with someone else</b>			-.74
165	<b>I wanted to prevent a breakup.</b>			-.73
91	<b>I was afraid my partner would have an affair if I didn’t have sex with him/her.</b>			-.63
38	<b>I wanted to ensure the relationship was “committed.”</b>			-.60
61	<b>I didn’t want to “lose” the person.</b>			-.58
26	<b>I wanted person to love me.</b>			-.43
62	<b>I thought it would help “trap a new partner.</b>			-.40

Note: Factor loadings < .30 have been suppressed. Items bolded were included in the composite scoring

**Table 9** Internal consistency of the 142 item YSEX? Factor and subfactor items

Factor	Subfactor	Number of Items	Combined <i>N</i> = 1190–1288	Men <i>N</i> = 355–393	Women <i>N</i> = 835–895
Physical		45	.94	.94	.94
	Stress Reduction	12	.83	.84	.82
	Pleasure	8	.81	.80	.81
	Physical Desirability	10	.80	.80	.79
	Experience Seeking	15	.86	.87	.86
Goal Attainment		47	.93	.95	.91
	Resources	15	.83	.89	.73
	Social Status	11	.82	.87	.72
	Revenge	10	.76	.83	.70
	Utilitarian	11	.76	.77	.74
Emotional		19	.87	.89	.86
	Love and Commitment	12	.82	.85	.81
	Expression	7	.77	.80	.76
Insecurity		31	.91	.93	.90
	Self-Esteem Boost	9	.75	.79	.71
	Duty/Pressure	13	.87	.82	.86
	Mate Guarding	9	.79	.83	.77

Note: Internal consistency scores are Cronbach's coefficient alphas

*Personality and reasons for having sex* Within gender, Pearson product-moment correlations were conducted between each of the Big Five personality domains and each of the YSEX? subfactor and factor scores. As can be seen in Table 11, among women, Agreeableness and Conscientiousness were significantly negatively associated with each of the Physical, Goal Attainment, and Insecurity subfactor and total factor composites. Agreeableness, but not Conscientiousness, was also significantly negatively associated with each of the Emotional subfactor composite and total scores. Neuroticism was significantly positively associated with each of the Insecurity subfactor, and total factor composite scores and with the Stress Reduction, Experience Seeking, Revenge, Utilitarian, and Love and Commitment subfactor composites. By contrast, with one exception (Pleasure and Extraversion), neither Extraversion nor Openness were significantly related to any of the subfactor or total composite scores in women.

The general pattern of correlations between the Big Five personality domains and the YSEX? factors were strikingly different among men than that seen among women (see Table 11). Whereas in women, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, and Neuroticism were the personality domains most associated with motivators for engaging in sexual intercourse, together these three domains were associated with only two subfactor composite scores (Love and Commitment with Agreeableness; Duty/Pressure with Conscientiousness) in men. Also, in contrast to that seen in women,

Openness was significantly negatively related to the Social Status subfactor, and significantly positively related to the Love and Commitment subfactor and the Emotional total factor composite scores. Consistent with the findings reported for women, Extraversion was not significantly related to any of the subfactor or total factor composite scores.

*Mating strategies and reasons for having sex* Within gender, Pearson product-moment correlations were conducted between SOI composite scores and each of the subfactor and total factor scores. As can be seen in Table 12, the general pattern of correlations was similar for men and women. That is, the Physical, Goal Attainment, and Insecurity reasons total composite scores were all significantly positively correlated with SOI composite scores for both men and women with only two exceptions among men (Experience Seeking and Mate Guarding). Gender differences emerged with Emotional reasons, with both the Expression subfactor and Emotional total factor scores being significantly positively related to SOI scores in women but not men.

## Discussion

The purpose of the present study was to provide a comprehensive investigation into the multitude of reasons why people engage in sexual intercourse. We identified 237

**Table 10** Gender differences in YSEX? Factor and subfactor scores

Factor	Subfactor	Women		Men		<i>t</i>	<i>d</i>
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
Physical		1.79	.51	1.98	.58	-5.69*	-.35
	Stress Reduction	1.46	.48	1.64	.59	-5.24*	-.34
	Pleasure	2.66	.75	2.85	.74	-4.21*	-.26
	Physical Desirability	1.50	.50	1.74	.61	-6.93*	-.43
	Experience Seeking	1.77	.59	1.93	.66	-4.31*	-.26
Goal Attainment		1.23	.26	1.36	.45	-5.56*	-.35
	Resources	1.16	.24	1.27	.45	-5.00*	-.31
	Social Status	1.13	.26	1.31	.53	-6.60*	-.43
	Revenge	1.25	.31	1.35	.48	-4.04*	-.25
	Utilitarian	1.39	.41	1.53	.50	-4.65*	-.31
Emotional		1.86	.51	1.93	.62	-1.98	-.12
	Love and Commitment	2.06	.58	2.12	.69	-1.63	-.09
	Expression	1.51	.54	1.59	.66	-2.16	-.13
Insecurity		1.40	.41	1.50	.54	-3.48*	-.21
	Self-Esteem Boost	1.42	.41	1.50	.55	-2.71*	-.17
	Duty/Pressure	1.33	.45	1.45	.57	-3.62*	-.23
	Mate Guarding	1.45	.51	1.57	.65	-3.16*	-.21

Note: Absolute range, 1–5. \*  $p \leq .005$

**Table 11** Correlations between YSEX? Composites and Big Five personality domains

Item	Men					Women				
	E	A	C	N	O	E	A	C	N	O
Physical Total	.04	.02	-.04	.04	.03	.05	-.18**	-.18**	.08*	.03
Stress Reduction	.03	-.03	-.04	.06	-.04	.03	-.15**	-.16**	.10**	.02
Pleasure	.04	-.00	-.03	-.04	.05	.09**	-.19**	-.11**	.07	.02
Physical Desirability	.06	.03	-.01	.02	-.02	.02	-.11**	-.07*	.05	-.00
Experience Seeking	.02	.02	-.06	.07	.07	.02	-.16**	-.16**	.08*	.06
Goal Attainment Total	.03	-.03	-.07	.08	-.09	.01	-.13**	-.13**	.08*	-.01
Resources	.03	-.03	-.07	.08	-.09	-.01	-.09*	-.09*	.02	.05
Social Status	.05	-.04	-.04	.07	-.15**	-.02	-.12**	-.12**	.03	-.06
Revenge	.00	-.04	-.08	.07	-.09	.03	-.13**	-.11**	.08*	-.02
Utilitarian	.04	.03	-.06	.08	-.02	.00	-.12**	-.10**	.11**	-.02
Emotional Total	.07	.11*	-.03	.04	.12*	.01	-.13**	-.05	.09**	.00
Love and Commitment	.07	.14**	.02	.01	.16**	-.00	-.13**	-.04	.10**	.01
Expression	.04	.02	-.07	.07	.03	.02	-.09**	-.05	.06	-.02
Insecurity Total	.06	-.03	-.09	.07	-.03	-.05	-.17**	-.13**	.16**	-.04
Self-Esteem Boost	.07	-.01	-.06	.08	.00	-.02	-.16**	-.14**	.15**	-.01
Duty/Pressure	.05	-.09	-.11*	.07	-.09	-.05	-.14**	-.11**	.14**	-.06
Mate Guarding	.06	.03	-.05	.04	-.03	-.03	-.13**	-.09*	.14**	-.01

Note: \*  $p \leq .05$ , \*\*  $p \leq .001$ . Labels are extraversion (E), agreeableness (A), conscientiousness (C), neuroticism (N), and openness to experience

**Table 12** Correlations between YSEX? Composites and Sociosexual Orientation Inventory

Item	Men	Women
Physical	.17*	.33**
Stress Reduction	.25**	.31**
Pleasure	.13*	.34**
Physical Desirability	.19**	.27**
Experience Seeking	.08	.25**
Goal Attainment	.23**	.21**
Resources	.23**	.13**
Social Status	.21**	.14**
Revenge	.26**	.24**
Utilitarian	.14**	.20**
Insecurity	.13**	.21**
Self-Esteem Boost	.18**	.22**
Duty/Pressure	.14**	.20**
Mate Guarding	.10	.14**
Emotional	-.00	.09**
Love and Commitment	-.02	.07
Expression	-.02	.11**

\*  $p \leq .05$ , \*\*  $p \leq .001$ 

distinct reasons why people have sex. Of these, 142 reasons were clearly represented by four broad factors and 13 subfactors (see Tables 5–8).

The current research made several contributions to knowledge about human sexuality. It provided an expanded understanding of the number and psychological complexity of reasons that people believe motivate them to have sex. It provided an organized taxonomy of major factors, based on factor analyses conducted on a large sample of participants. By examining potential differences at both the item and factor level, it provided a more thorough description of gender differences in the reasons for engaging in sexual intercourse than that provided by previous research. Finally, it provided links between stable individual differences in the sexual strategies that individuals pursue and the reasons they express for having sex. Each of these contributions will be examined in turn.

#### *The psychological complexity of motivations for sex*

The current research provided perhaps the most comprehensive exploration to date of the reasons people express for having sexual intercourse. They ranged from the mundane (e.g., “It feels good”) to the spiritual (e.g., “I wanted to feel closer to God”). They ranged from altruistic (e.g., “I wanted the person to feel good about himself/herself”) to manipulative (e.g., “I wanted to get a promotion”). Some have sex to feel powerful; others have sex

to debase themselves. Some have sex to impress their friends; others have sex to inflict costs on their enemies (e.g., “I wanted to break up a rival’s relationship”).

The frequently endorsed reasons for having sex, if taken at face value, reflect what motivates most people most of the time—attraction, pleasure, affection, love, romance, emotional closeness, arousal, the desire to please, adventure, excitement, experience, connection, celebration, curiosity, and opportunity. These were common experiences that may reflect a fundamental universal core of human sexual motivation—a notion that requires cross-cultural research to test.

The less frequently endorsed reasons for having sex, however, may be no less important than the commonly endorsed reasons. First, many low base-rate reasons have momentous consequences for the individuals who experience them, even if they are not widely shared by most people. Consider, for example, the least frequently endorsed reason for having sex by women (the third least for men) in Table 2: “I wanted to give someone else a sexually transmitted disease (e.g., herpes, AIDS).” Although this desire may motivate only one out of a hundred or thousand sex acts, the consequences for the “recipient” can be tragic. There is no cure for herpes, so carriers are carriers for life. Having herpes can jeopardize existing relationships, cause reputational damage, and be further spread to other sexual partners. If the sexually transmitted disease is HIV, the sex act can cost the recipient his or her life. Although the desire to give someone else a STD may rarely motivate sex, when it does, its impact can destroy lives.

Consider another infrequently cited reason for having sex: “I wanted to break up a rival’s relationship by having sex with his/her partner.” Infidelity within the context of a committed romantic relationship is one of the most frequently cited reasons for relationship dissolution worldwide (Betzig, 1989). Having sex with another’s partner and then revealing that fact to the partner is indeed a successful means of causing a breakup. If the reason for wanting to break up the other’s relationship is motivated by mate poaching, a common motivation, then the consequences of this one act cascade even wider. Romantic breakups are among the most psychologically painful life events and can rupture friendships others had with the couple (Buss, 2003; Hatfield & Rapson, 1996). Similarly, although sex motivated by the reason “I wanted to get back at my partner for having cheated on me” was endorsed infrequently, its consequence could be large in magnitude. Sexual infidelity and the jealousy it provokes, in addition to causing breakups, is one of the leading causes of violence within mateships (Wilson & Daly, 1992). In extreme cases, it can lead to murder (Buss, 2005).

Another example of a potentially important, but infrequently cited, pair of reasons for having sex was “I wanted to

get a promotion” and “I wanted to get a job.” Using sex to obtain jobs and promotions can be illegal and can create unfairness in the workplace by displacing more qualified candidates who are unwilling to exchange sex for positional advantage. Another infrequently cited pair of reasons for having sexual intercourse, “I was physically forced to” and “I was afraid to say ‘no’ due to the possibility of physical harm” also warrant mention. Forced sex, otherwise known as rape, is among the most psychologically traumatic events a person can experience. In one study of 147 things members of the opposite sex do that evoke anger and upset, forced sex proved to be the single most upsetting event for women (Buss, 1989a). It can devastate a person emotionally, causing depression, humiliation, grief, and post-traumatic stress disorder that can last months or years. It can damage reputations, cause relationships breakups, and can create psychological scars that take years to heal, if they ever do.

It is important to note that what constitutes a rare reason for the population as a whole might nonetheless constitute a frequent motivation for a subset of individuals within the population. For example, most people are not motivated to have sex in order to “get closer to God.” But for some people, this has become their cardinal motivation. Most people are not motivated by the desire to humiliate another or to feel humiliated by another through sex. For some, however, sadism or masochism defines their principal sexual mode of being. As noted in a different context, personal projects can range from “trivial pursuits” to “magnificent obsessions” (Little, 2005). One person’s seemingly trivial reason for having sex might well be another person’s magnificent obsession. Indeed, even within this rather homogeneous sample of college students, for nearly every reason, *some* individuals gave it the highest rating, indicating that it was the most frequent reason for having sex in their lives. The current research highlights the number, subtlety, and complexity of the many motives impelling human sexuality.

#### *Taxonomy of major motivations for sex*

The current study also provided a hierarchical taxonomy of factors motivating sexual intercourse. This taxonomy contained four broad factors at the highest level: Physical, Emotional, Goal Attainment, and Insecurity. Within each of these broad factors resided subfactors that were in many ways more meaningful than the broader clusters. Some of these subfactors—love and commitment, physical pleasure, stress reduction—have been documented by previous researchers (e.g., Hill & Preston, 1996). No previous taxonomies, however, include many of the factors, such as revenge, mate guarding, and resources. Although it would be premature to claim that the current taxonomy is comprehensive, it is reasonable to suggest that it is the most comprehensive taxonomy of motives for having sex yet

proposed. At a minimum, it provides a preliminary taxonomy on which future researchers can build.

#### *Research instruments of reasons for having sex*

The current study provided two research instruments that could be used by future investigators.<sup>2</sup> The first was the original research instrument containing all 237 reasons for having sex, as used in this study. This will be optimal for researchers who wish to capture all of the breadth and detail contained in the individual items. It also provides a useful starting point for researchers who wish to build upon the present taxonomy to develop an even more comprehensive taxonomy of sexual motives.

The second instrument contained the highest loading markers for the 13 subfactors, which can be summed with unit weighting to yield 13 scores. This 142 item instrument will be most useful for researchers who wish to include an assessment of the major motives for sex as part of their research design within the context of a broader empirical study. It also may prove useful as an assessment instrument for sex therapists who seek an assay of their client’s current psychological state regarding sexual motivation.

#### *Gender differences in reasons for having sex*

The current research provided the most comprehensive examination to date of gender differences in expressed reasons for engaging in sexual intercourse. When examining the most frequently cited reasons for having sex, men and women were remarkably similar in that 20 of the top 25 reasons given were identical for men and women. This broad-based similarity provides an important background context for interpreting gender differences. When examining endorsement frequency of reasons for having sex, however, substantial gender differences emerged such that men reported substantially higher frequencies than did women for the majority of individual items and subfactors. Men, significantly more than women, endorsed reasons centering on the physical appearance and physical desirability of a partner, such as “The person had a desirable body,” “The person’s physical appearance turned me on,” and “The person had an attractive face.” These findings support the evolution-based hypothesis that men tend to be more sexually aroused by visual sexual cues than are women, since physical appearance provides a wealth of cues to a woman’s fertility and reproductive capacity (Buss, 1989b, 2003; Symons, 1979). Using functional magnetic resonance imaging, Hamann, Herman, Nolan, and Wallen (2004)

<sup>2</sup> Available from the corresponding author upon request.

provided neurophysiological support for this notion when they reported greater activation of the amygdala and hypothalamus to visual sexual stimuli in men than in women.

Men, significantly more than women, also endorsed reasons indicating experience seeking and mere opportunity. Examples include “The person was “available,” “The opportunity presented itself,” and “I wanted to increase the number of partners I had experienced.” These findings support the theory that a major historical constraint on a man’s reproductive success has been the number of different women he can successfully inseminate, and this selection pressure has led men to have evolved a greater desire for a variety sexual partners (Buss & Schmitt, 1993; Schmitt et al., 2003; Schmitt, Shackelford, Duntley, Tooke, & Buss, 2001; Symons, 1979).

Women exceeded men in endorsing certain of the emotional motivations for sex, such as “I wanted to express my love for the person” and “I realized that I was in love.” These findings are consistent with previous research (e.g., Carroll et al., 1985; Denney et al., 1984; Leigh, 1989). They also support the evolution-based theory that women, more than men, prefer sex within the context of an ongoing committed relationship, and feelings or expressions of love provide signals of that commitment (Buss, 2003; Townsend, 1998). Also supporting this theory were findings that suggest sex without emotional involvement was a more powerful motivator for men than for women. Men exceeded women, for example, in endorsing items related to pure physical pleasure, such as wanting to achieve an orgasm, because it felt good, or simply because they were “horny.” It is important to note, however, that most of the emotional motivations for engaging in sex were not endorsed more frequently by women (e.g., “I wanted to feel connected to the person”; “I wanted to intensify my relationship,” “I desired emotional closeness”). In fact, the Love and Commitment and Expression subfactors were the only two of 13 subfactors that were not endorsed with significantly more frequency among men than women. This finding supports a growing body of clinical evidence suggesting that both men and women at times desire intimacy and emotional connectedness from sexual activity.

Two clusters of sex differences were not specifically predicted by any existing theories. One was that men more than women endorsed reasons for having sex that involved a variety of utilitarian functions, such as “to change the topic of conversation,” “to get a favor from someone,” or “to improve my sexual skills.” These findings contradict the stereotype that women, more than men, use sex to obtain special favors or treatment.

Another cluster of gender differences not specifically predicted involved enhancement of social status—boosting reputation, establishing bragging rights, and desiring to tell friends that they had sex with someone famous. Nonetheless,

these findings were consistent with the empirical data that suggest that men who are actually or effectively polygynous are granted higher social status. That is, there may be reciprocal links between sex and status—higher status gives men greater sexual access to multiple partners, and having multiple partners or highly desirable sex partners is one means of increasing social status (Buss, 2003). Conceptually related gender differences were identified by Hill and Preston (1996), who found that men were more motivated than women to have sex in order to enhance their feelings of personal power. On the assumption that self-esteem or feelings of personal power are psychological mechanisms designed, in part, to track social status (e.g., Leary & Downs, 1995), the Hill and Preston (1996) findings accord with the findings of the current study on status enhancement as a male motive for sex.

The finding that men endorsed most of the reasons for having sex with a substantially higher frequency than did women can be considered within the context of socially inculcated gender roles as well as the theory of parental investment and sexual selection. Although the traditional roles of men as initiators of sexual interactions and women as “gate keepers” may be less a factor today than it was several decades ago prior to the influences of feminism and oral contraceptives, research on college populations suggests these patterns still exist. In a study of sexual attitudes among 702 undergraduate students, females were significantly more likely than males to endorse the item “It is unnatural for the female to be the initiator in sexual relations” (Meston, Trapnell, & Gorzalka, 1998). If it is the case that a substantial proportion of the time a woman engages in sexual intercourse it is the result of male initiation, then this would necessarily impact both the frequency and ordering of reasons why a woman has sex. In other words, the reasons for having sex endorsed by women in this study may, in part, reflect their sexual opportunities as well as their underlying desires.

The theory of parental investment and sexual selection can also explain this overall gender difference, as well as explaining why these gendered “roles” exist to begin with. Women incur more obligate minimum investment to produce a child (nine month pregnancy versus one act of sex). According to parental investment theory, the low investing sex (in this case men) are predicted to compete more vigorously for members of the high investing sex (in this case women) (Trivers, 1972). The high investing sex, in contrast, is predicted to be more choosy or discriminating in their choice of sexual partners. Thus, the theory explains why men express dozens of reasons for having sex at a higher frequency than do women and why men might initiate sex more frequently than women (see also Baumeister & Vohs, 2004). It also helps to explain why parents might socialize their daughters to be more sexually restrained and



their sons to be less sexually restrained—a tendency that appears to be universal across cultures (Low, 1989). Nonetheless, it is important to bear in mind that there are substantial individual differences within each gender, and women who pursue a short-term mating strategy are especially likely to initiate sex (Gangestad & Simpson, 1990; Greiling & Buss, 2000).

#### *Sexual strategies, personality, and reasons for having sex*

The SOI can be viewed as a measure of individual differences in sexual strategies (Gangestad & Simpson, 1990), with those tending toward a short-term mating strategy scoring high and those tending toward a long-term mating strategy scoring low. High scorers on the SOI express attitudes favorable to casual sex and also report behaviors indicative of having engaged in casual sex. Thus, it was not surprising that high scorers on the SOI tended to endorse many more reasons for having sex than low scorers, with the notable exception of having sex for reasons of love and commitment. These findings add to a growing body of literature supporting the validity of the SOI. The strongest correlates of the SOI for women involved the physical composite—stress reduction, physical desirability, experience-seeking, and pure physical pleasure. The strongest correlates of the SOI for men involved stress reduction and the goal attainment factors, such as resources and revenge. Interestingly, the strongest correlate for men was the tendency of high SOI scorers to endorse having sex in order to extract revenge on someone. Future research could profitably explore other stable individual differences and how they relate to reasons for engaging in sexual intercourse.

The finding that relations between personality variables and reasons for having sex were much more apparent for women than for men is noteworthy. A gender-role perspective might explain this finding in terms of differences in the gender appropriateness of sexual constraint (i.e., females should be more restrained than males). If having sex (and lots of it) is something that society and evolution have deemed successful men do (i.e., agentic, powerful, competent), then acting in this manner would be consistent with societal expectations for men. For women, however, endorsing reasons for having sex other than love, commitment, and reproduction would be inconsistent with societal expectancies. Thus, in order for a woman to do so, and to report doing so, she would necessarily need to be less concerned about social dictates and this might reflect an underlying cold and dominant personality style. In support of this explanation, disagreeableness (a trait linked to coldness and dominance) was strongly associated with each of the subfactors for having sex.

The finding that the Big Five personality traits of Agreeableness and Conscientiousness were negatively related

to reasons for having sex in women is consistent with past research. Findings from a study conducted on 501 undergraduate students revealed that disagreeable, unconscientious women were more sexually experienced and more likely to engage in unrestrained sexual behaviors (e.g., higher number of lifetime sexual partners) than were agreeable women (Meston, Trapnell, & Gorzalka, 1993). The lack of a significant relation between Extraversion and reasons for having sex noted in the present study is somewhat surprising given that past research has noted relations between this personality dimension and unrestrained sexuality (Gangestad & Simpson, 1990). Perhaps, then, Extraversion is related to a woman's sexual experiences but not her reasons for having sex. That is, a woman who is extraverted may be more likely to seek out many sexual experiences and partners than an introverted woman, but this doesn't mean her reasons for doing so are varied.

The current study had a number of limitations that warrant consideration. First, it dealt with expressed reasons for having sex. As such, it cannot capture motivations that lie outside of awareness. Second, the low social desirability of some reasons (e.g., to punish a partner; to make money; to give someone a sexually transmitted disease) may have lowered response rates to these reasons, while the high social desirability of other reasons (e.g., to express love; to show affection) may have raised response rates to these reasons. Social desirability effects may have also played a role by exaggerating the tendency for men to report significantly more reasons for having sex than women (or conversely, for women to under-report reasons for having sex). In a large sample of university students, comparable in age to that used in the present study, Meston, Heiman, Trapnell, and Paulhus (1998) reported that impression management played a role in self-reported sexuality even under anonymous and confidential testing conditions identical to that used in the current study. Their findings suggested that for females, but not for males, presenting a favorable sexual image involved acting in a sexually restrained manner. This form of impression management, of course, may be linked to evolved gender differences in sexual strategies; reputations involving sexual promiscuity damage women's more than men's mate value (Buss, 2003).

A third limitation pertains to the relative youth of most of the sample. Reasons for engaging in sexual intercourse undoubtedly differ by age cohort and level of sexual functioning, and would be expected to change over the lifespan. For example, compared with the student sample assessed in this study, we would expect having sex for reproductive purposes to be endorsed much more frequently among 30 year to 40 year olds and having sex simply to gain social status to decline with age. We would also expect having sex out feelings of duty or guilt to be

much more frequently endorsed by individuals who experience clinically low levels of sexual desire than by college students. Examining such patterns in different populations is an important direction for future research. A fourth limitation is that the study was conducted within a single culture; future research could fruitfully conduct parallel studies in diverse cultures.

In summary, human sexuality is motivated by a complex and multifaceted psychology. Efforts to reduce sexual motivation to a small number of variables are doomed to fail (Hill & Preston, 1996). The taxonomy presented in the current study opens up several new avenues for important

future research. Do the 13 major clusters found in the current study replicate across cultures? Do they describe a universal core of human sexual motivation? To what extent do the reasons for having sex change across the life span? Do low base-rate reasons, such as having sex to break up another's relationship, to transmit a disease, or to debase oneself have a large impact that is disproportionate to their relative infrequency of occurrence? Are there important reasons for having sex beyond the 237 identified in the current study? As such, the current research is merely one step in the scientific agenda to understand the nuances and psychological complexity of human sexuality.

## Appendix

### YSEX?

People have sex (i.e., sexual intercourse) for many different reasons. Below is a list of some of these reasons. Please indicate how frequently each of the following reasons led you to have sex in the past. For example, if about half of the time you engaged in sexual intercourse you did so because you were bored, then you would circle “3” beside question 4. If you have not had sex in the past, use the following scale to indicate what the likelihood that each of the following reasons would lead you to have sex.

I have had sex in the past because...

1	2	3	4	5
None of my sexual experiences	A few of my sexual experiences	Some of my sexual experiences	Many of my sexual experiences	All of my sexual experiences

Item #	Item Description	Rating				
1.	I was frustrated and needed relief.	1	2	3	4	5
2.	I wanted to release anxiety/stress.	1	2	3	4	5
3.	I wanted to release tension.	1	2	3	4	5
4.	I was bored.	1	2	3	4	5
5.	It seemed like good exercise.	1	2	3	4	5
6.	I thought it would relax me.	1	2	3	4	5
7.	I'm addicted to sex.	1	2	3	4	5
8.	It would allow me to “get sex out of my system” so that I could focus on other things.	1	2	3	4	5
9.	I am a sex addict.	1	2	3	4	5
10.	I thought it would make me feel healthy.	1	2	3	4	5
11.	I hadn't had sex for a while.	1	2	3	4	5
12.	I wanted to satisfy a compulsion.	1	2	3	4	5
13.	It feels good.	1	2	3	4	5
14.	I wanted to experience the physical pleasure.	1	2	3	4	5
15.	I was “horny.”	1	2	3	4	5
16.	It's fun.	1	2	3	4	5
17.	I wanted the pure pleasure.	1	2	3	4	5
18.	I wanted to achieve an orgasm.	1	2	3	4	5
19.	It's exciting, adventurous.	1	2	3	4	5
20.	I was “in the heat of the moment.”	1	2	3	4	5
21.	The person had an attractive face.	1	2	3	4	5
22.	The person had a desirable body.	1	2	3	4	5
23.	The person had beautiful eyes.	1	2	3	4	5
24.	The person smelled nice.	1	2	3	4	5
25.	The person's physical appearance turned me on.	1	2	3	4	5
26.	I saw the person naked and could not resist.	1	2	3	4	5
27.	The person was a good dancer.	1	2	3	4	5
28.	The person was too physically attractive to resist.	1	2	3	4	5
29.	The person wore revealing clothes.	1	2	3	4	5
30.	The person was too “hot” (sexy) to resist.	1	2	3	4	5
31.	I was curious about sex.	1	2	3	4	5
32.	I was curious about my sexual abilities.	1	2	3	4	5

33.	I wanted the experience.	1	2	3	4	5
34.	I wanted to experiment with new experiences.	1	2	3	4	5
35.	I wanted to see what all the fuss is about.	1	2	3	4	5
36.	I wanted to see what it would be like to have sex with another person.	1	2	3	4	5
37.	I wanted the adventure/excitement.	1	2	3	4	5
38.	I wanted to improve my sexual skills.	1	2	3	4	5
39.	I was curious about what the person was like in bed.	1	2	3	4	5
40.	I wanted to lose my inhibitions.	1	2	3	4	5
41.	I wanted to get the most out of life.	1	2	3	4	5
42.	I wanted to try out new sexual techniques or positions.	1	2	3	4	5
43.	The opportunity presented itself.	1	2	3	4	5
44.	I wanted to act out a fantasy.	1	2	3	4	5
45.	I wanted to see whether sex with a different partner would feel different or better.	1	2	3	4	5
46.	I wanted to get a raise.	1	2	3	4	5
47.	I wanted to punish myself.	1	2	3	4	5
48.	I wanted to get a job.	1	2	3	4	5
49.	I wanted to hurt/humiliate the person.	1	2	3	4	5
50.	I wanted to get a promotion.	1	2	3	4	5
51.	I wanted to give someone else a sexually transmitted disease (e.g., herpes, AIDS).	1	2	3	4	5
52.	Someone offered me money to do it.	1	2	3	4	5
53.	I wanted to feel closer to God.	1	2	3	4	5
54.	I wanted to make money.	1	2	3	4	5
55.	I wanted to have a child. (27)	1	2	3	4	5
56.	I wanted to reproduce.	1	2	3	4	5
57.	It was an initiation rite to a club or organization.	1	2	3	4	5
58.	The person offered me drugs for doing it.	1	2	3	4	5
59.	I wanted to end the relationship.	1	2	3	4	5
60.	I wanted to be used or degraded.	1	2	3	4	5
61.	I wanted to be popular.	1	2	3	4	5
62.	I wanted to enhance my reputation.	1	2	3	4	5
63.	I wanted to have more sex than my friends.	1	2	3	4	5
64.	I was competing with someone else to “get the person.”	1	2	3	4	5
65.	It would damage my reputation if I said “no.”	1	2	3	4	5
66.	The person was famous and I wanted to be able to say I had sex with him/her.	1	2	3	4	5
67.	I thought it would boost my social status.	1	2	3	4	5
68.	My friends pressured me into it.	1	2	3	4	5
69.	It was a favor to someone.	1	2	3	4	5
70.	Someone dared me.	1	2	3	4	5
71.	I wanted to impress friends.	1	2	3	4	5
72.	I wanted to get back at my partner for having cheated on me.	1	2	3	4	5
73.	I was mad at my partner so I had sex with someone else.	1	2	3	4	5
74.	I wanted to get even with someone.	1	2	3	4	5
75.	I wanted to even the score with a cheating partner.	1	2	3	4	5
76.	I wanted to make someone else jealous.	1	2	3	4	5
77.	I wanted to break up rival’s relationship by having sex with his/her partner.	1	2	3	4	5
78.	I was on the “rebound” from another relationship.	1	2	3	4	5
79.	I wanted to make someone else jealous.	1	2	3	4	5
80.	I wanted to breakup another's relationship.	1	2	3	4	5
81.	I wanted to hurt an enemy.	1	2	3	4	5

82.	I wanted to get out of doing something.	1	2	3	4	5
83.	I wanted to burn calories.	1	2	3	4	5
84.	I wanted to keep warm.	1	2	3	4	5
85.	The person had taken me out for an expensive dinner.	1	2	3	4	5
86.	I wanted to get rid of a headache.	1	2	3	4	5
87.	I wanted to change the topic of conversation.	1	2	3	4	5
88.	I thought it would help me to fall asleep.	1	2	3	4	5
89.	I wanted to become more focused on work – sexual thoughts are distracting.	1	2	3	4	5
90.	I wanted to get a favor from someone.	1	2	3	4	5
91.	I wanted to defy my parents.	1	2	3	4	5
92.	I wanted to feel connected to the person.	1	2	3	4	5
93.	I wanted to increase the emotional bond by having sex.	1	2	3	4	5
94.	I wanted to communicate at a “deeper” level.	1	2	3	4	5
95.	I wanted to express my love for the person.	1	2	3	4	5
96.	I wanted to show my affection to the person.	1	2	3	4	5
97.	I wanted to intensify my relationship.	1	2	3	4	5
98.	I desired emotional closeness (i.e., intimacy).	1	2	3	4	5
99.	I wanted to become one with another person.	1	2	3	4	5
100.	It seemed like the natural next step in my relationship.	1	2	3	4	5
101.	I realized I was in love.	1	2	3	4	5
102.	It seemed like the natural next step in the relationship.	1	2	3	4	5
103.	I wanted to get a partner to express love.	1	2	3	4	5
104.	I wanted the person to feel good about himself/herself.	1	2	3	4	5
105.	I wanted to welcome someone home.	1	2	3	4	5
106.	I wanted to say “I’m sorry.”	1	2	3	4	5
107.	I wanted to say “thank you.”	1	2	3	4	5
108.	I wanted to say “goodbye.”	1	2	3	4	5
109.	I wanted to celebrate a birthday or anniversary or special occasion.	1	2	3	4	5
110.	I wanted to say “I’ve missed you.”	1	2	3	4	5
111.	I wanted to lift my partner’s spirits.	1	2	3	4	5
112.	I wanted to feel powerful.	1	2	3	4	5
113.	I wanted to make myself feel better about myself.	1	2	3	4	5
114.	I wanted to boost my self-esteem.	1	2	3	4	5
115.	I wanted to feel attractive.	1	2	3	4	5
116.	I wanted my partner to notice me.	1	2	3	4	5
117.	I wanted the attention.	1	2	3	4	5
118.	I wanted to “gain control” of the person.	1	2	3	4	5
119.	I wanted to manipulate him/her into doing something for me.	1	2	3	4	5
120.	I felt insecure.	1	2	3	4	5
121.	I didn’t know how to say “no.”	1	2	3	4	5
122.	I was pressured into doing it.	1	2	3	4	5
123.	I felt obligated to.	1	2	3	4	5
124.	I was verbally coerced into it.	1	2	3	4	5
125.	I felt like it was my duty.	1	2	3	4	5
126.	I wanted him/her to stop bugging me about sex.	1	2	3	4	5
127.	My partner kept insisting.	1	2	3	4	5
128.	I felt like I owed it to the person.	1	2	3	4	5
129.	I was physically forced to.	1	2	3	4	5
130.	It was expected of me.	1	2	3	4	5
131.	I felt guilty.	1	2	3	4	5
132.	I didn’t want to disappoint the person.	1	2	3	4	5
133.	I wanted to be nice.	1	2	3	4	5

134.	I wanted to keep my partner from straying.	1	2	3	4	5
135.	I wanted to get my partner to stay with me.	1	2	3	4	5
136.	I wanted to decrease my partner's desire to have sex with someone else.	1	2	3	4	5
137.	I wanted to prevent a breakup.	1	2	3	4	5
138.	I was afraid my partner would have an affair if I didn't have sex with him/her.	1	2	3	4	5
139.	I wanted to ensure the relationship was "committed."	1	2	3	4	5
140.	I didn't want to "lose" the person.	1	2	3	4	5
141.	I wanted the person to love me.	1	2	3	4	5
142.	I thought it would help "trap" a new partner.	1	2	3	4	5

#### SCORING SYSTEM

Factor	Subfactor	Item Numbers	Score Range
Physical Reasons		1-45	45-225
	Stress Reduction	1-12	12-60
	Pleasure	13-20	8-40
	Physical Desirability	21-30	10-50
	Experience Seeking	31-45	15-75
Goal Attainment		46-91	46-230
	Resources	46-60	15-75
	Social Status	61-71	11-55
	Revenge	72-81	10-50
	Utilitarian	82-91	10-50
Emotional		92-111	20-100
	Love and Commitment	92-104	13-65
	Expression	105-111	7-35
Insecurity		112-142	31-155
	Self-Esteem Boost	112-120	9-45
	Duty/Pressure	121-133	13-65
	Mate Guarding	134-142	9-45

Note: Subfactor scores are computed by adding the scores of the individual items that comprise the subfactor. Factor scores are computed by adding the scores of the items that comprise each of the subfactors under that specific factor.

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