

## ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation: "I WANT YOU TO WANT ME":  
IMPLICATIONS OF THE DESIRE TO BE  
SEXUALLY VALUED FOR  
PSYCHOLOGICAL FUNCTIONING AND  
ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS

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People often want to be seen as sexually appealing and desirable sexual partners. I refer to this tendency as the desire to be sexually valued, and I propose that it can differ between people and have effects on functioning within romantic relationships. I expected this desire to be psychologically important for cognition, well-being and behavior within relationships. I hypothesized that this desire would be associated with psychological well-being through biasing perceptions that one is sexually desired by their partner and exacerbating reactivity to sexual rejection. Furthermore, I proposed that this desire can refer to evaluations by others in general, or it may be targeted toward a specific person such as one's romantic partner. I expected the desire to be sexually valued to be associated with behavioral tendencies within romantic relationships, including initiation of sexual activity and a number of other behaviors targeted at increasing sexual value. Moreover, I hypothesized that people who desire to be sexually valued might adopt a communal sexual motivation towards their partners, a motivation to meet their partner's sexual needs, which can, in turn, be associated with their own and their partner's higher sexual and relationship satisfaction. Three studies were utilized to test these hypotheses.

Study 1 and Study 3 were dyadic studies, and Study 1 included a daily diary component. Study 2 was a self-report study including only people involved in romantic relationships. Results suggested that the desire to be sexually valued exacerbated the effects of daily, but not chronic, sexual rejection on some relationship outcomes. Further, this desire was associated with wishful thinking within romantic relationships, but the strength and nature of these effects depended on participants' attachment anxiety in Study 1. The desire to be sexually valued by one's partner predicted increased sexual communal strength toward that partner as well as engagement in a number of behaviors aimed at increasing one's sexual value. Finally, this desire was indirectly associated with relationship quality through perceptions of being valued by partners, suggesting that wishful thinking may explain some of its relationship benefits. Implications are discussed.

“I WANT YOU TO WANT ME”: IMPLICATIONS OF THE DESIRE TO BE  
SEXUALLY VALUED FOR PSYCHOLOGICAL FUNCTIONING AND  
ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS

by

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“I WANT YOU TO WANT ME”

## **Chapter 1: Definition of Desire to Be Sexually Valued and Discussion of Its Origins and Related Constructs**

*“I want you to want me  
I need you to need me  
I'd love you to love me  
I'm beggin' you to beg me”  
- Cheap Trick*

“But, you don’t want me, do you, Barton? You don’t want to ... make love to me. Why? What’s wrong with me?” These are words by Margaret Scully, the wife of Barton Scully, the Provost of Washington University, in the popular series *Masters of Sex*. Margaret is upset because Barton does not make love to her and does not show her sexual appreciation. Eventually, she finds out that Barton is attracted to men and although he vows that he still loves her and wants to be with her, she divorces him because she does not want to continue being with someone who does not desire her sexually. This is just one example from popular culture illustrating the importance of feeling sexually valued.

Healthy adults often desire to be appreciated for their sexuality and to be seen as sexually valuable (Bogaert & Brotto, 2014). This desire to be sexually valued can encompass wanting to appear physically or sexually attractive (i.e., being thought of as “hot” or “sexy”; Smolak et al., 2014) as well as wanting to be seen as a skilled or attentive lover (Beggan et al., 2013). For example, both men and women report enjoying receiving appearance related sexual attention (Visser et al., 2014), and feeling sexually attractive has important implications for both men and women’s experiences of their sexuality (Amos & McCabe, 2017). Furthermore, sexuality is an important part of

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identity starting in adolescence (Subrahmanyam et al., 2005). In his seminal theorizing on sexuality, Nagel (1969) noted that a key component of sexual arousal is the recognition that the object of that arousal desires the self. Furthermore, the Google engine estimates that “how to be good in bed” yields over 700,000 results, illustrating the popularity of tips claiming to enhance sexual skill. “How to feel sexy” yields an additional estimated 720,000 results.

These searches may be so common because many people want to be seen as sexually desirable and good lovers. Additionally, some research suggests that people are prone to experiencing self-enhancement in the domain of sexual skill and see themselves as better than others as sex partners (Beggan et al., 2013). Beggan and colleagues (2013) hypothesize that the importance of sexual skill to a positive identity produces these self-enhancement effects. Their findings suggest that people want to be seen as worthy sexual partners both in appearance and skill; they desire to be sexually valued. I propose that this desire differs significantly between people and is a psychological construct that can predict well-being and shape cognition, behavior, and other motivations. I refer to this construct as the desire to be sexually valued. This construct encompasses the want to be seen positively in the sexual domain, including appearing as sexually attractive and as a skillful lover. To discuss the desire to be sexually valued, it is important to differentiate it from some related but distinct constructs in the literature which have been outlined below.

### **Related but Distinct Constructs in the Literature**

#### ***Sexual Preoccupation***

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The desire to be sexually valued is likely to be related to sexual preoccupation, a tendency to often think about sex (Snell & Papini, 1989), given that both constructs include a tendency to engage in sexual cognitions. However, the two constructs are likely not redundant since sexual preoccupation may involve sexual thoughts other than those about wanting to be sexually valued (e.g. about sexual activity), and because sexual preoccupation does not directly implicate a desire to be sexually valued, or any desire for that matter.

### ***Body Surveillance***

Furthermore, the desire to be sexually valued is theoretically related to Body Surveillance, a tendency to be an observer of one’s own body (McKinley & Hyde, 1996), given that both constructs can be related to a desire to be seen as attractive based on physical attributes. Thus, those who think more often about their sexual desirability might be more likely to be preoccupied with the way their bodies look. However, given that sexual desirability can include aspects other than physical appearance, such as being an attentive lover (Elmerstig et al., 2017), the two constructs are not likely to be redundant.

### ***Appearance Contingent Self-Worth***

Appearance-contingent self-worth, self-worth that depends on whether one feels attractive (Crocker et al., 2003), is likely to be associated with wanting to be seen as sexually desirable given that both constructs may imply a desire to be viewed as attractive. However, given that sexual value is distinct from physical appearance (Elmerstig et al., 2017; Wade, 2000), and people could desire to be sexually valued for reasons unrelated to self-esteem, the two constructs are likely not redundant.

### ***Self-Objectification***

While self-objectification (i.e., viewing oneself as an object rather than a complete human being; Bartky, 1990; Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997) might be related to the desire to be sexually valued because both constructs reflect some concern with, or awareness of, how one is perceived by others, the constructs seem distinct. Whereas self-objectification refers to the structure of the self-concept, the desire to be sexually valued does not refer to self-definition. Furthermore, self-objectification involves the relative emphasis on appearance-related aspects over functional-related aspects of one's body (Noll & Fredrickson, 1998), but the desire to be sexually valued does not presume that people de-emphasize functional aspects of their bodies. In fact, people might often consider those aspects important to their sexual value. Thus, I expected that the construct would be related but distinct.

### ***Sexual Self-Esteem***

Sexual self-esteem refers to perception of oneself as a valuable sexual partner (Snell & Papini, 1989). Some conceptualizations posit that, for women, sexual self-esteem encompasses five distinct domains, including skill and experience, attractiveness, control (the ability to manage and regulate one's own sexual thoughts and experiences), moral judgment, and adaptiveness (the compatibility of one's sexual experience with other personal goals) (Doyle Zeanah & Schwarz, 1996). Other frameworks focus on the perception of one's general sexual value without identifying specific dimensions (Snell & Papini, 1989). Desire to be sexually valued is expected to be related to sexual self-esteem because those who want to feel appreciated for their sexuality may engage in behaviors that cause them to be viewed by themselves and others as sexually desirable

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(Koestner et al., 2002). Moreover, those who desire to be sexually valued might develop an inflated perception of their own sexual value given that people’s desires can skew their perceptions of how others view them (i.e., their metaperceptions), in the preferred direction (Lemay & Neal, 2013; Lemay & Spongberg, 2015; Kenny & DePaulo, 1993). However, not everyone who desires to be sexually valued might feel like that is the case, especially when people are clearly sexually rejected (de Graaf & Sandford, 2004).

### ***Enjoyment of Sexualization***

Enjoyment of sexualization refers to women’s enjoyment of the experience of being sexualized (Liss et al., 2011). However, the definition of this construct points to physical appearance as the exclusive source to feeling sexually valuable (Liss et al., 2011) when there might be other ways to do so, including perceiving that one is a skillful sexual partner (Beggan et al., 2013). Moreover, the effects of enjoyment of sexualization were originally discussed only for women, although some researchers have since examined effects for men as well (Visser et al., 2014). The Enjoyment of Sexualization Scale, the instrument developed to measure this construct (Liss et al., 2011), assesses feelings of control resulting from the enjoyment of sexualization. Further, this scale measures the extent to which women enjoy specific behaviors targeted at them including being whistled at by men. The desire to be sexually valued, on the other hand, refers to the general motivation to be sexually valued without conflating it with specific behaviors that may lead people to feel valued in this domain or the resulting feelings of control related to it. Satisfying one’s desire to be sexually valued may promote a sense of control, but this is not central to the construct. Furthermore, both men and women could

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experience the desire to be sexually valued, and the construct does not focus explicitly on the desire to be appreciated for one’s physical appearance.

Some preliminary results suggest that the desire to be sexually valued is only weakly to moderately related ( $r$  range  $-.05 - .50$ ) to the constructs listed here (Teneva & Lemay, 2021). Thus, the desire to be sexually valued is empirically and conceptually distinct from these other constructs.

### **Origins of the Desire to Be Sexually Valued**

It is important to consider why people might desire to be sexually valued. Just as most goals and desires, the desire to be sexually valued is likely to be shaped by a person’s needs, the narratives that surround them, and the network they are embedded in (Kruglanski et al., 2019). Although this theory has been traditionally applied to extremist motivations (Kruglanski et al., 2019), the basic principles can be translated to other motivations as well.

In part, individual differences in the desire to be sexually valued may be predicted by sex drive – the need to pursue and participate in sexual activity (Baumeister et al., 2001). People want to have sex with those they find sexually attractive (Ashmore et al., 1996). Hence, people with a strong sex drive might want to be sexually valued because that is one means to obtaining sex. In fact, preliminary results confirm that sex drive is a significant predictor of the desire to be sexually valued (Teneva & Lemay, 2021). However, sex drive is not the only need that could influence the desire to be sexually valued. In fact, even asexual people who lack sexual attraction directed toward others (Bogaert, 2015), can have fantasies about being sexually appealing (Yule et al., 2017). Thus, the desire to be sexually valued can exist even in the absence of sex drive.

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Need to belong, the need to affiliate with and be accepted by others (Baumeister & Leary, 1995), is also likely to influence the desire to be sexually valued. Those who want belonging might want to be viewed as sexually attractive as one way to achieve acceptance by others. Need to belong has also been found to be a significant predictor of the desire to be sexually valued (Teneva & Lemay, 2021). Further, the need for significance – the need to feel worthy and important to others and “to matter” (Kruglanski et al., 2009; Kruglanski et al., 2014) could also motivate the desire to be sexually valued given that some people might perceive that being sexually desirable increases their worthiness. In fact, preliminary results confirm that those who pursue a quest for significance are more likely to desire to be sexually valued by others (Teneva & Lemay, 2021).

However, these needs may not be sufficient for producing a desire to be sexually valued. Narratives or belief systems and opinions shared by a person’s group members or culture (Kruglanski et al., 2019) might determine whether people adopt a motivation to be sexually appealing as a means, or secondary goal (Kruglanski et al., 2002) to fulfill their needs for belonging, significance, and sexual activity. For example, the desire to be sexually valued might be adopted by those who consume popular media given that a number of scholars have argued that images in Western media in particular have become increasingly “sexualized” over time (Atwood, 2009; Olfman, 2009). This sexualization may involve portraying sexually valued people as having access to sex and being more socially included and significant. In addition, women in media might often be represented as worthy because of their sexual value (Gill, 2007), while men’s sexuality is often portrayed as central to their masculinity (Rohlinger, 2002). Thus, cultural stereotypes

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might signal to people that being sexually valuable can help them achieve some of their goals.

Further, social networks may influence the adoption of the desire to be sexually valued and transmit narratives regarding the instrumentality of sexual desirability. For example, acceptance to high status groups can be dependent on attractiveness (Krendl et al, 2011). Thus, people who desire acceptance from such groups in their social networks may believe that being sexually attractive will promote belongingness. Furthermore, peer norms about sexual desirability might exist in many groups. For example, adolescents perceive that they are more likely to be accepted by their peers if they are perceived as conventionally sexy (Shafer et al., 2013) and might adopt a desire to be sexually valued as a way to be accepted.

Additionally, the effects of this desire may be particularly significant in the context of committed romantic relationships, which are a part of people’s networks, given the integral role of sex for intimate relationships (Acker & Davis, 1992; Baumeister & Bratslavsky, 1999) and the positive effects of being sexually valued on relationship satisfaction and trait self-esteem that have been established, particularly for women (Meltzer & McNulty, 2014; Meltzer, 2019; Meltzer et al., 2017). It is possible that people might generally desire to be sexually valued, not always targeting that desire at a specific partner. However, the desire might also differ in strength depending on the target. For example, people often want to be desired more strongly by others that they find attractive compared to unattractive others because of a general need for reciprocity (Buunk & Schaufeli, 1999). Further, this need for reciprocity might lead people to want to be sexually valued by others with who they want to engage in sexual activity or who they

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might want to feel they belong with. Notably, people might be particularly likely to desire to be sexually valued by their romantic partners. Past research has established that being sexually valued by a committed partner is associated with increased relationship satisfaction (Meltzer et al., 2017) particularly for women, and being valued for one’s body, a facet of sexual value, can be associated with higher relationship satisfaction within relationships in which one is valued for other qualities as well (Meltzer & McNulty, 2014). It is reasonable to believe that these effects might be pronounced for people who strongly desire to be sexually valued by partners given that reactions to feedback in domains important to one’s goals tend to be exaggerated (Brown, 2010). Thus, it might be useful to assess people’s desire to be sexually valued specifically by their partner in committed romantic relationships as a predictor of their psychological functioning, behavior, and relationship satisfaction. Moreover, although in romantic relationships the desire to be sexually valued is often primarily focused on one’s partner, people might desire to be sexually valued by extradyadic partners especially if they are not highly committed to their relationship given that low commitment can increase attentiveness to relationship alternatives (Miller, 1997). Hence, a desire to be sexually valued by extradyadic partners might differ between people as well. The general desire to be sexually valued for people involved in committed romantic relationships is likely to represent a combination of their desire targeted at their partner and the desire targeted at other people outside of their current relationship.

### **Potential Outcomes of the Desire to Be Sexually Valued**

Desires or goals often guide behaviors because people frequently chose actions that can serve as means to pursuing important goals (Kruglanski et al., 2002). Moreover,

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desires can influence well-being when people experience events relevant to their satisfaction or frustration (Klug & Maier, 2014; Linnenbrink & Pintrich, 2001; Moberly & Watkins, 2010). Further, the impact of desires on cognition can also affect well-being (Kunda, 1990; Roese & Olson, 2007; Trope & Liberman, 1996). For example, people might feel positive affect when they perceive they are making adequate progress toward reaching an important goal and negative affect when they perceive insufficient progress (e.g. Moberly & Watkins, 2010; Pekrun et al, 2006). Moreover, desires influence well-being through motivated cognition. For example, a desire to be seen favorably can result in positive illusions, evaluating oneself more positively than others do, which can contribute to well-being (Taylor, 1989). The desire to be sexually valued might operate similarly to other desires and goals and these mechanisms are likely to be particularly important within romantic relationships given the importance of sex and sexuality for those relationships (Aron & Aron, 1991). This desire might heighten reactivity to sexual rejection by a romantic partner and influence well-being through this reactivity and other pathways such as wishful thinking (discussed in chapter 2). In addition, the desire to be sexually valued might lead to engagement in behaviors that increase one’s sexual value, including attempting to look more sexually attractive or being a more skillful sexual or attentive partner (discussed in Chapter 2). This project aims to uncover the effects of the desire to be sexually valued within committed relationships on psychological functioning and behavior.

Furthermore, I aim to present a nuanced view of the desire to be sexually valued and examine both its positive and negative implications. Past research has often focused on the negative effects of the enjoyment of sexualization, a related construct, including

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self-objectification and negative eating attitudes as well as endorsement of sexist norms for women (Liss et al., 2011). However, there is some evidence to suggest that enjoyment of sexualization might also be related to positive outcomes such as increased self-esteem (Visser et al., 2014). In addition, receiving positive sexual evaluations from a committed partner who also values the self in other ways is related to higher relationship satisfaction (Meltzer & McNulty, 2014; Meltzer et al., 2017) and positive sexual and physical evaluation within relationships are associated with higher self-esteem particularly for women (Meltzer, 2019). Taking a comprehensive perspective, the current investigation examines multiple theorized outcomes of the desire to be sexually valued, including outcomes that might be costly or unpleasant for people, and those that might be advantageous or pleasant.

In addition, the proposed studies examine the effects of the desire to be sexually valued without limiting the investigation to a specific gender. Past theorizing has often focused on the effects of sexualization and the desire to be viewed sexually solely for women (e.g. Liss et al., 2011) or has used different methodology to examine effects for men and women (e.g. Meltzer et al., 2017). However, Visser and colleagues (2014) suggest that both men and women enjoy being sexualized at times and the effects of this enjoyment on functioning do not depend on gender. Use of a common measure of the desire to be sexually valued can permit comparisons of the predictors and implications of this desire across genders.

The current project investigates the effects of the desire to be sexually valued within romantic relationships. This conceptualization builds on prior research, which has focused on the effects of perceived sexual value without directly measuring the desire for

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such value, and research examining the desire to be perceived as physically sexually appealing without including other possible avenues to achieve sexual value or specific targets of that desire. Further, the proposed studies examine the positive and negative effects of this desire on behavioral patterns and psychological well-being within romantic relationships. To study the desire to be sexually valued, a validated measure of this desire was created.

### **Measurement of Desire to Be Sexually Valued and Specifying the Target of Desire**

The Desire to Be Sexually Valued Scale (DTBSVS) aims to measure the strength of one's desire to be considered sexually appealing and valuable. A preliminary study was designed to validate this measure (Teneva & Lemay, 2021). The developed measure is included in Appendix A. It demonstrated excellent internal consistency reliability ( $\alpha = .88$ ). In addition, the responses of all participants to the DTBSVS items were submitted to a principal-component factor analysis. This process resulted in extracting two factors based on their Eigenvalue ( $> 1$ ). These factors explained 63.57% of the total variance in the scale. The first factor explained 43.22% of the variance (4.75 Eigenvalue). All positively worded items loaded on this factor (loadings  $> .73$ ). The second factor explained 20.35% of the variance (2.24 Eigenvalue). All negatively worded items which were reverse scored loaded on this factor (loadings  $> .79$ ). There were no items with significant cross-loadings on the two factors, and the factors were correlated at  $r = .26$ . This pattern, with one factor representing positively worded items and another representing negatively worded items, often characterizes scales measuring a single construct (Spector, et al., 1997). Thus, factor analysis suggests that the items in the DTBSVS are likely to measure one construct, although responses to items sharing the

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same positive or negative wording are more strongly inter-related, and that all of the items exhibit strong factor loadings. Items in this measure do not refer to specific partners and ask about a general desire to be sexually valued. The original measure does not specify a target of the desire to be sexually valued but the measure can be adapted to assess the desire to be sexually valued by particular partners including a committed romantic partner and extradyadic partners.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter defines the novel construct desire to be sexually valued as the aspiration for the self to be seen as sexually attractive and valuable. Moreover, the differences and similarities between the desire to be sexually valued and related but isomorphic constructs in the literature including desire to be valued, self-objectification, body surveillance, appearance contingent self-worth, and enjoyment of sexualization are outlined. In addition, predictors and measurement of the desire to be sexually valued and distinctions between targets of that desire are discussed. These definitional distinctions lay the groundwork of investigating ways in which the desire to be sexually valued might be associated with psychological functioning and behavioral patterns (discussed in Chapter 2) within committed romantic relationships.

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## **Chapter 2: Why and How Is the Desire to Be Sexually Valued Expected to Influence Psychological Functioning, Behaviors and Attitudes in Committed Relationships?**

### **Research Hypotheses**

The desire to be sexually valued might be particularly important for psychological functioning within committed romantic relationships because of the centrality of sexuality in those relationships. People perceive sex appeal as one of the features of romantic love (Aron & Aron, 1991; Fehr, 1988). Moreover, passion, which partly refers to being attracted to and valuing a partner in a sexual domain, is one of the dimensions of the prototype of love (Aron & Westbay, 1996) and both men and women report valuing their partners for sexuality, but this reported value is stronger for men (Zubriggen et al., 2011).

In addition, the desire to be sexually valued might be particularly strong within romantic relationships because people want to meet their partners' ideals and often perceive that being sexually desirable would help them do so. Sex appeal and sexuality are reported as part of the features of the ideal romantic partner (Fletcher et al., 1999). Extant research suggests that people strive to meet their partners' ideals and standards for a romantic partner, and they are happier when they successfully do so (Campbell et al., 2001; Langis et al., 1994; Murray et al., 1996; Rusbult et al., 2009). In addition, people can somewhat accurately detect their partners' desires (Kenny & Acitelli, 2001). More specifically, past research suggests that people are partly accurate when perceiving how closely they meet their partners' ideals about attractiveness and vitality, one of the three central domains in which people form ideals about romantic partners identified by Campbell and colleagues (2013). Thus, people might detect the importance of being

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attractive and sexually valuable to their partner and develop a desire to be sexually valued to meet that partner's standards. Moreover, people often project their own attitudes onto others (Allport, 1924) - particularly to their romantic partners (Kenny & Acitelli, 2001; Murray et al., 1996; Lemay et al., 2007) - and if they perceive sexual value to be an important characteristic of a romantic partner, they might assume that their partner expects the same and desire to fulfill that partner's ideals.

In addition, if people consider sexuality to be an important part of their self-concept, they might desire to be sexually valued by their partners in romantic relationships given that people often strive to receive positive feedback in domains that are important to them (Dunning, 1995), including in romantic relationships (Katz & Beach, 2000). Thus, there are multiple factors that might lead to a desire to be sexually valued within relationships and create differences in the strength of that desire between people.

The desire to be sexually valued might also be an important predictor of the behaviors and attitudes exhibited within romantic relationship. When people are motivated to attain a goal, such as feeling sexually valuable, they employ means that are expected to help them in the process of attainment (Kruglanski et al., 2002; Kruglanski et al., 2011). Importantly, goal pursuit and choice of means can happen automatically and outside of conscious awareness (Bargh, 1990; Oettingen et al., 2006; Shah, 2005). Hence, it is not necessary for people to explicitly form and state a goal and choose a mean to pursue it for motivational processes to occur. This might often be the case with the desire to be sexually valued. Thus, when people have a strong desire to be sexually valued they

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might engage in behaviors and cognitions that could increase their sexual value both consciously and subconsciously.

### **Overview of the Current Research**

This dissertation aims to investigate the implications of this desire on psychological functioning and behavioral patterns within romantic relationship. The first set of hypotheses addresses ways in which the desire to be sexually valued might influence psychological functioning within committed relationships. I hypothesized that the desire to be sexually valued exacerbates the negative effects of feelings of sexual rejection by a romantic partner on psychological well-being. More specifically, I expected that those who are high in desire to be sexually valued experience more extreme psychological distress when perceiving they are sexually rejected by their partners compared to those low in desire to be sexually valued (H1). In addition, I expected the desire to be sexually valued to positively bias the perceptions of sexual acceptance by a committed partner and (H2), in turn, influence relationship and sexual satisfaction (H2a). Additionally, I expected this positive bias to be related to a higher likelihood of initiating sexual activity and physical intimacy within relationships (H2b).

The desire to be sexually valued was additionally hypothesized to be related to behaviors and attitudes within relationships. More specifically, I expected that people who strongly desire to be sexually valued engage in activities that normatively promote sexual value, or that they perceive to promote sexual value (H3). Furthermore, I hypothesized that people who are high in the desire to be sexually valued might adopt a communal sexual motivation towards their partners, which can lead to their own and their

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partner’s higher sexual and relationship satisfaction (H4). The rationale behind each of these hypotheses is outlined below.

### **H1: Desire to Be Sexually Valued Exacerbating Effects of Perceptions of Sexual Rejection on Well-Being**

The desire to be sexually valued was expected to exacerbate the effects of sexual rejection on well-being (Figure 1). I expected that sexual rejection from romantic partners can influence multiple aspects of psychological functioning (path B in Figure 1). For example, feeling sexually rejected might be associated with negative affect given that rejection is a painful experience (Blackhart et al., 2009; MacDonald & Leary, 2005), romantic rejection is especially powerful (Fisher et al., 2010) and sexuality is an important part of romantic relationships (Fletcher et al., 1999) particularly for those who strongly desire to be sexually valued. Moreover, perceptions of sexual rejection might negatively influence sexual self-esteem given that sexual self-esteem is the perception of how valuable one is as a sexual partner (Snell & Papini, 1989) and perceived rejection from a partner can signal one’s lower value in that domain. Moreover, feelings of sexual rejection could relate to global self-esteem given that sex appeal can be an important source of esteem (Wade, 2000). Furthermore, sexual rejection from a partner might impact one’s sexual satisfaction given that sexual satisfaction is often related to being desired by one’s partner (Pascoal et al., 2014). Additionally, a similar influence on one’s overall relationship satisfaction might occur because perceptions of partners’ sexual appeal are an important feature of committed relationships (Fehr, 1988) and people want to meet their partner’s ideals (Sucharyna, 2013). Furthermore, when people perceive that their partner has sexually rejected them, it might lead them to value their partner less

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given that rejection and perceived negative regard often lead to devaluation of the person who has exhibited it in order to protect the self (Murray, Holmes & Griffin, 2000; Smart Richman & Leary, 2009). Thus, I expected perceptions of sexual rejection by a committed partner to be related to multiple indicators of psychological well-being for the perceiver, including affect, sexual and global self-esteem, sexual and relationship satisfaction and evaluation (sexual and general) of one's partner. I expected that these effects manifest for most people given that rejection is a painful experience (Baumeister & Leary, 1995) and sexual activity is a central feature of romantic relationships (Acker & Davis, 1992) but particularly for those who strongly desire to be sexually valued because of the importance of sexual feedback to them.

Although the desire to be sexually valued might lead to wishful thinking and enhance perceptions that one is considered sexually valuable by their partner (discussed under H2), those who strongly desire to be sexually valued might still feel sexually rejected at times. Some of those perceptions of sexual rejection may be accurate given that people are somewhat aware how attracted their partners are to them (Campbell et al., 2013). I expect the desire to be sexually valued to exacerbate reactivity to perceived sexual rejection, moderating the relationship between feelings of sexual rejection and psychological well-being. More specifically, those who are high in desire to be sexually valued might suffer poorer psychological well-being when perceiving they have been sexually rejected by their partner compared to those low in desire to be sexually valued (path A in Figure 1). Those who highly desire to be sexually valued might be particularly vulnerable to sexual rejection because they are receiving negative feedback in a domain that is important to them and that they might consider an integral part of romantic

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relationships (Park et al., 2006; Swann et al., 2002). Moreover, past research suggests that frustrated goal pursuit can lead to negative outcomes such as depression and anxiety particularly when people ruminate over their failure to meet a goal (Jones et al., 2013). Thus, it is reasonable to believe that those who desire to be sexually valued might be more negatively affected by their partners' sexual rejection than those who do not possess this desire. In other words, if Sarah and John, and Maria and Chris are in separate romantic relationships, if Sarah has a high desire to be sexually valued, and John rejects her sexually, she will be more negatively affected by this event than her friend Maria, who experiences a low desire to be sexually valued and perceives her partner Chris has sexually rejected her. However, the effects of the desire to be sexually valued might be further moderated by the perceiver's implicit theories about sexual value as well as their attachment anxiety (path C in Figure 1).

### ***Implicit Theories about Sexual Value***

I expected implicit theories about one's own sexual value in the eyes of their partner to moderate the relationship between desire to be sexually valued, sexual rejection and well-being. People might have different implicit theories about whether sexual value is a fixed entity, or something that can be changed with effort, similar to entity and incremental theories people can hold about intelligence and personality (Dweck et al., 1995; Dweck & Leggett, 1988). In addition, people might differ in their perceptions of the extent to which they can control their sex appeal. Prior research suggests that perceived control and self-efficacy can influence responses to negative feedback (Major et al., 1991) and people who hold implicit incremental theories in specific domains are more likely to cope well with failure to meet their goals (Hong et al.,

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1999). Similar patterns might be observed when people believe they have control over how sexually valuable they appear to their partner and generally consider sexual value to be a malleable entity. Hence, I expected the desire to be sexually valued to exacerbate reactivity to sexual rejection more strongly for those who hold fixed, or entity, beliefs about sexual value compared to those who hold incremental beliefs (path C in Figure 1), views that one can change how sexually attractive their partner finds them to be.

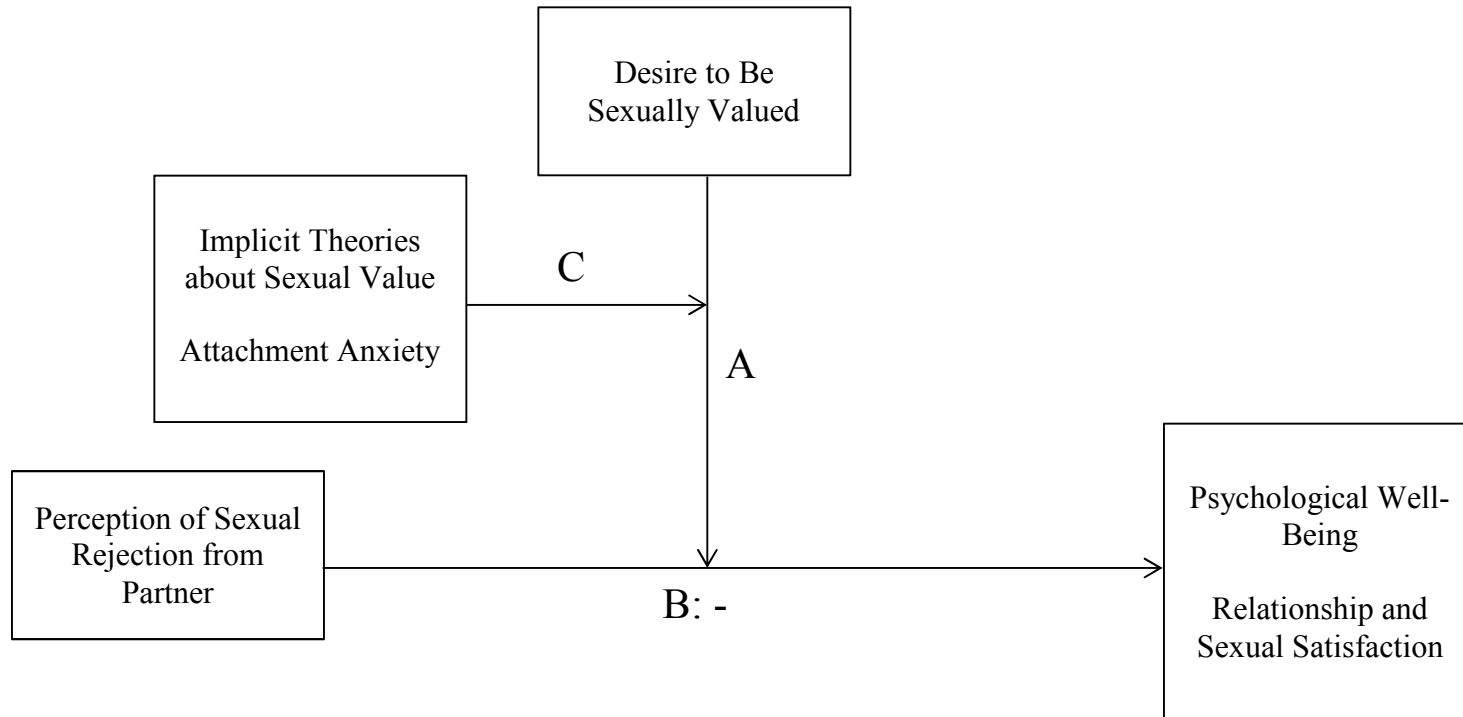
### *Attachment Anxiety*

Attachment theory postulates that people develop beliefs about themselves and others in close relationships based on interactions with caregivers early in life, which influence experiences in intimate relationships in adulthood (Hazan & Shaver, 1987). Anxious attachment is characterized by a strong desire for intimacy and closeness coupled with pervasive worries about rejection and abandonment from close partners (Brennan et al., 1998; Hazan & Shaver, 1987; Simpson et al., 1996). Anxiously attached individuals strongly desire to be seen as valuable by partners but often perceive that is not the case (Collins & Read, 1990; Pietromonaco & Beck, 2015) and exhibit more negative reactions when their needs to be valued by others are frustrated (DeWall et al., 2010; Simpson et al., 1996). Thus, I expected that perceivers' attachment anxiety might moderate the relationship between desire to be sexually valued, sexual rejection and well-being (path C in Figure 1). Desire to be sexually valued is likely to exacerbate the effects of perceived sexual rejection on well-being for most people but this aggravation might be particularly strong for those who are anxiously attached given their predisposition to react strongly to interpersonal rejection.

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**Figure 1**

*Desire to Be Sexually Valued Exacerbating Effects of Sexual Rejection on Psychological Well-Being*



## **H2 and H2a: Desire to Be Sexually Valued Wishful Thinking, and Relationship and Self-Evaluations**

I expected one's perceptions that their romantic partner values them in the sexual domain to be partly accurate and partly biased by their own desire to be sexually valued (H2) and for one's desire to be sexually valued to indirectly predict their relationship and sexual satisfaction and their sexual self-esteem through the perception that their partner values them sexually when controlling for accuracy (H2A). In other words, I expected to observe evidence suggesting the existence of wishful thinking in regards to one's sexual value to their partner, and evidence suggesting that such wishful thinking is associated with relationship quality and sexual self-evaluations. These predictions are depicted in Figure 2. Extant research suggests that motivation can influence cognition (Bartlett, 1932; Festinger, 1962; Higgins & Molden, 2003; Kruglanski, 1990). More specifically, motivation can bias cognition in directional ways, distorting perceptions in a preferred direction. Directed motivated cognition is related to the desire to reach a particular outcome. For example, people tend to believe that their own qualities and attributes lead to positive outcomes because of their desire to view the self positively (Kunda, 1987). More specifically, people who desire to be valued by others in general might exhibit biased perceptions that others value them, i.e. wishful thinking (Lemay & Sponberg, 2015). Further, people who want to be valued by particular partners, including romantic partners, appear more secure that they are, in fact, valued (Lemay et al., 2021). I expected that the desire to be valued in the sexual domain specifically can influence cognition in similar ways. In particular, I predicted that those who desire to be sexually valued would perceive that their romantic partners value them sexually above and beyond the effect of

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their partner’s actual feelings (path A in Figure 2). This prediction is in line with extant research suggesting that perceptions of romantic partners can be biased (Lemay, 2014; Kenny & Aciatelli, 2001; Murray, Holmes, Dolderman et al., 2000) and that one source of bias is one’s motivation to maintain positive views of the self in particular domains (Brown, 1986; Lemay & Spongberg, 2015; Sedikides & Gregg, 2008). However, I also expected for people to be somewhat accurate in perceiving how much their partner values them sexually given that judgments of partners in relationships are partly accurate (Fletcher & Kerr, 2010; Kenny & Aciatelli, 2001; Lemay, 2014; Lemay & Spongberg, 2015). In other words, I hypothesized that one’s belief that their partner sees them as sexually valuable will be predicted by that partner’s actual self-reported evaluations (Path B in Figure 2). Taken together, these predictions suggest that perceptions that a partner evaluates the self as sexually valuable are partly accurate and partly biased by one’s desire to be sexually valued.

Furthermore, I expected one’s desire to be sexually valued to have a significant indirect effect on their relationship and sexual satisfaction and sexual self-esteem through the perception that the partner sexually values the self when controlling for accuracy (Hypothesis 2a paths A and D in Figure 2). That is, people might be more satisfied with their relationship and sex life, and have higher confidence in their value as sexual partners generally, because they perceive their partners find them sexually desirable, even when this perception is due to wishful thinking. This prediction is in line with past research suggesting that biased perceptions of partner evaluations of the self can impact relationship satisfaction (Lemay et al., 2007; Lemay & Teneva, 2020; Murray, Holmes & Griffin, 2000). Further, people who perceive they are sexually valued by their partners,

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even if those perceptions are partly biased, might experience higher sexual self-esteem given that these positive evaluations might aid in developing a positive sexual self-concept (Snell & Papini, 1989). In other words, if Sarah and John are in a romantic relationship, Sarah’s perception that John finds her sexually valuable might be partly based on John’s actual perception that Sarah is sexually appealing and partly based on Sarah’s own desire to be sexually valued, suggesting wishful thinking. In addition, if Sarah’s desire to be sexually valued positively biases her perception that John values her in the sexual domain, she might be happier with the relationship and their sex life, and she might experience higher sexual self-esteem, above and beyond how she would feel if her perceptions were only based on John’s evaluations. In addition, I hypothesize that the bias resulting from the desire to be sexually valued will be moderated by attachment anxiety and self-esteem (path C in Figure 2), as described next.

### *Attachment Anxiety*

As described in H1, anxiously attached individuals strongly desire to be regarded as valuable by partners but often perceive that is not the case (Collins & Read, 1990; Pietromonaco & Beck, 2015). This pattern could extend to perceptions of sexual value in light of research suggesting that anxiously attached people often engage in sex to obtain approval or reassurance by a partner (Davis et al., 2004) and sexual and general relationship satisfaction are particularly closely related for those who are anxiously attached (Butzer & Campbell, 2008). Thus, I expected that the effect of the desire to be sexually valued on one’s perception that their partner values them would be moderated by the perceiver’s anxious attachment, such that the relationship will be stronger for those low in attachment anxiety. Those who are high in attachment anxiety might not

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experience the wishful thinking related to their desire to be sexually valued because of their preoccupation with rejection.

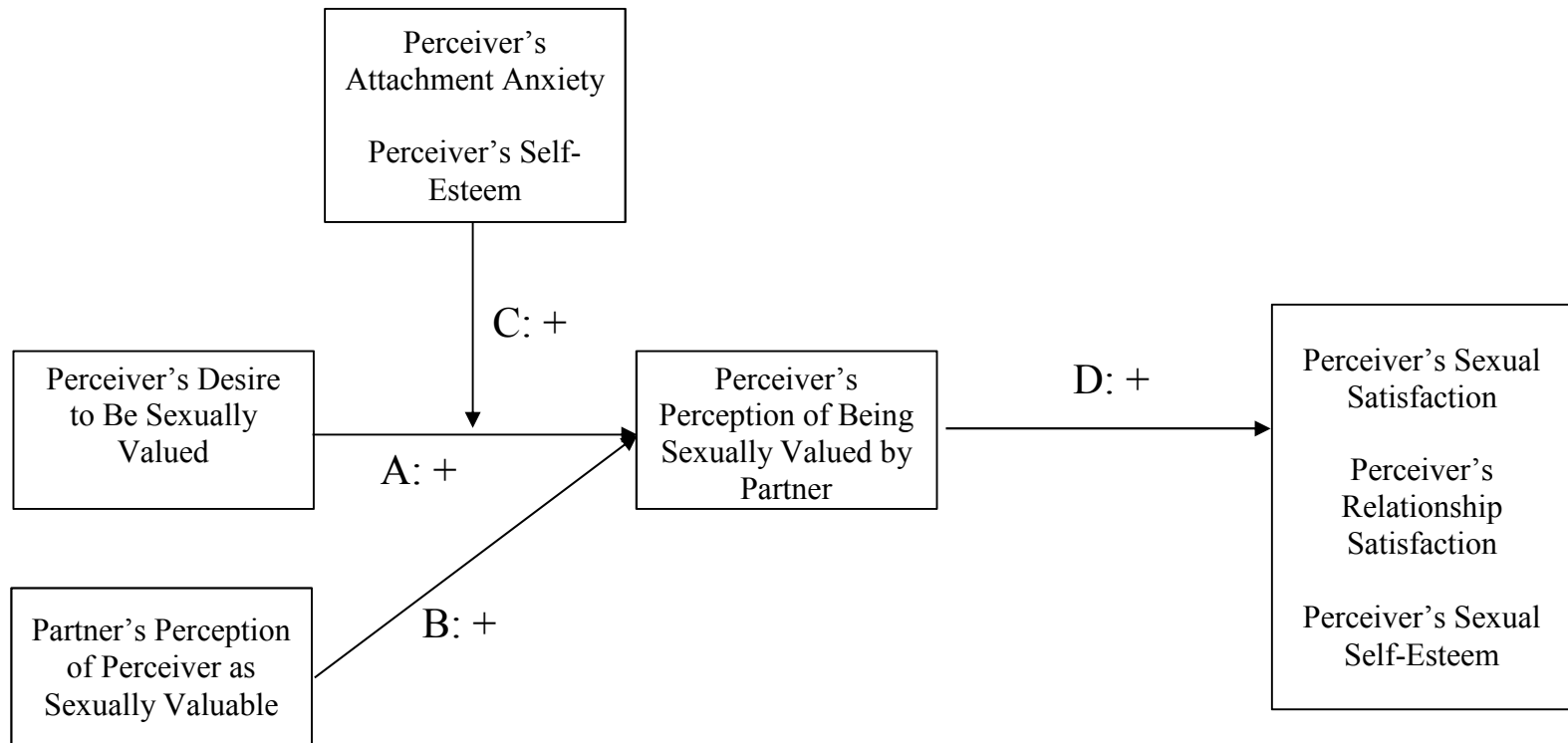
### ***Self-Esteem***

Another possible moderator of the relationship between the desire to be sexually valued and the perception that a romantic partner sexually values the self is trait self-esteem. Self-esteem is the individual's general attitude toward the self (Rosenberg et al., 1995). People low in self-esteem experience negative views of the self. They often tend to be sensitive to rejection (Downey & Feldman, 1996), and perceive devaluation from close partners (Leary & Baumeister, 2000) including romantic partners (Murray, Holmes, & Griffin, 2000). Moreover, people low in self-esteem experience negative biases regarding their value in relationships and these biases exacerbate their perceptions of devaluation by their partner over time (Murray, Holmes, & Griffin, 2000). These patterns might extend to the domain of sexual value, an important feature of romantic relationships (Fletcher et al., 1999). Thus, I expected that the effect of the perceiver's desire to be sexually valued on their perception that their partner values them would be moderated by the perceiver's self-esteem such that the relationship would be stronger for high self-esteem individuals. Similar to anxiously attached individuals, low self-esteem individuals might be less likely to experience the wishful thinking resulting from the desire to be sexually valued.

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**Figure 2**

*Desire to Be Sexually Valued, Wishful Thinking and Relationship Outcomes*



**H2b: Desire to Be Sexually Valued, Wishful Thinking and Initiating Sexual Activity and Physical Intimacy**

I expected that people with a strong desire to be sexually valued would initiate sexual activity and physical intimacy with their partners more regularly, and that this effect would also be partly explained by their wishful thinking (Figure 3). In other words, I hypothesized that through the model of wishful thinking described in H2, perceptions that a romantic partner sexually values the perceiver would predict a higher likelihood of the perceiver initiating sexual activity and physical intimacy with that partner (path D in Figure 3). In other words, a significant positive indirect effect of a perceiver’s desire to be sexually valued through the perceivers’ belief that they are sexually valuable to their partner was expected to be observed given that feeling desired is one of the most common reasons to engage in sexual activity (Meston & Buss, 2007).

However, even when controlling for partners’ actual perceptions and perceivers’ belief that they are sexually valuable to their partner, perceivers’ strong desire to be sexually valued was expected to feasibly still directly predict a tendency to initiate sex and intimacy (path E in Figure 3) given that that might be one of the most effective ways for people who strongly desire being sexually valuable to elicit this desired appraisal (Meston & Buss, 2007).

Past research suggests that people often engage in sex to feel emotionally valued, appreciated and important to their partners (Hill & Preston, 1996) and this pattern might extend to desiring positive evaluations in the sexual domain such that people might initiate sexual activity and physical intimacy with their partner to feel sexually valued. The willingness of one’s partner can directly provide evidence that one is valued in the

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sexual domain, since it demonstrates that one has a willing sexual partner. Additionally, people might perceive that they would be more valued by their partners if those partners are sexually satisfied given that lay theories emphasize frequency of sexual activity and physical intimacy as an important component of sexual satisfaction (Pascoal et al., 2014). In other words, engaging in sexual activity can be a means of satisfying a partner, and people might infer that if the partner is sexually satisfied, they will sexually value the self. Thus, I expected that the desire to be sexually valued would both directly and indirectly through wishful thinking predict likelihood of initiation of sexual activity and physical intimacy.

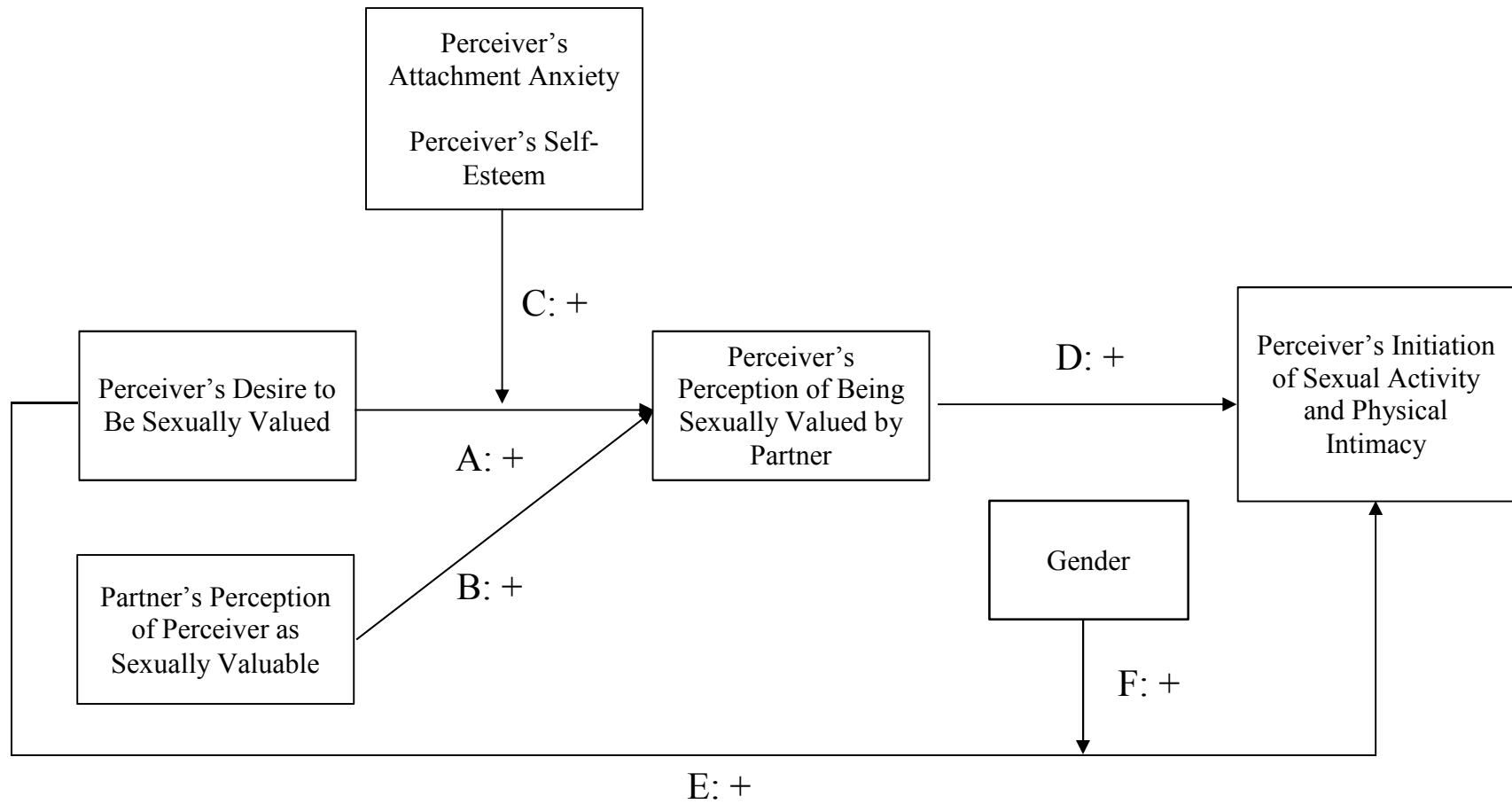
### *Gender*

I expected the direct relationship between desire to be sexually valued and initiating sexual activity and physical intimacy to be moderated by gender (path F in Figure 3). I hypothesized that both men and women would be more likely to initiate sex when they desire to be sexually valued but this association would be stronger for men than women. Romantic and sexual social scripts emphasize men’s initiating role (Seal & Ehrhardt, 2003), although some scripts might be becoming more flexible with culture changes (Masters et al., 2013). In addition, men often report on taking on a dominant role even when they desire sharing the responsibility of sexual initiation (Dworkin & O’Sullivan, 2005). Hence, I expected that those who strongly desire to be sexually valued would initiate sex more often than those who have a relatively weak desire, and this effect would be stronger for men than for women.

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**Figure 3**

*Desire to Be Sexually Valued, Wishful Thinking and Initiation of Sexual Activity and Physical Intimacy*



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### **H3: Engagement in Behaviors Enhancing Sexual Value**

When people strongly desire something, they often enact behaviors intended to fulfill their desire. Desiring to be sexually valued might lead to the adoption of multiple behaviors that enhance sexual value (path A in Figure 4). Sexual initiation is one such behavior discussed above already, which is examined in more depth because it is expected to be a major way people try to obtain reassurance of their sexual value in committed relationships. There are other behaviors that might serve a similar function, but they might vary more across people in terms of beliefs about their efficacy in meeting the desire to be sexually valued. Prior literature has mostly focused on behaviors that can enhance one’s appearance in a sexual way. A study by Smolak and colleagues (2014) suggests that women engage in multiple activities to appear sexually attractive, including wearing makeup and attractive clothing, and styling one’s hair. The study, however, failed to identify specific behaviors that men might engage in regularly to ensure they appear sexy. However, most behaviors tested by the authors were related to specific appearance enhancement (e.g. style hair, shave face, wear high heels) with the exception of three items measuring general behavioral trends (drink to feel more confident, “psych yourself up” to be more confident, be assertive). It is possible that men might engage in different behaviors to increase their sexual value, such as exercising to conform to male attractiveness ideals (Epel et al., 1996), or trying to become more attentive lovers. In fact, women often report that their ideal partner is someone who is “good in bed” and men might pick up on that desire and attempt to fulfill that ideal (McGuirl & Wiederman, 2000). In addition, men report a desire to develop defined muscles partly as a way to appear more sexually attractive (Morrison et al., 2003). Moreover, it is possible that there

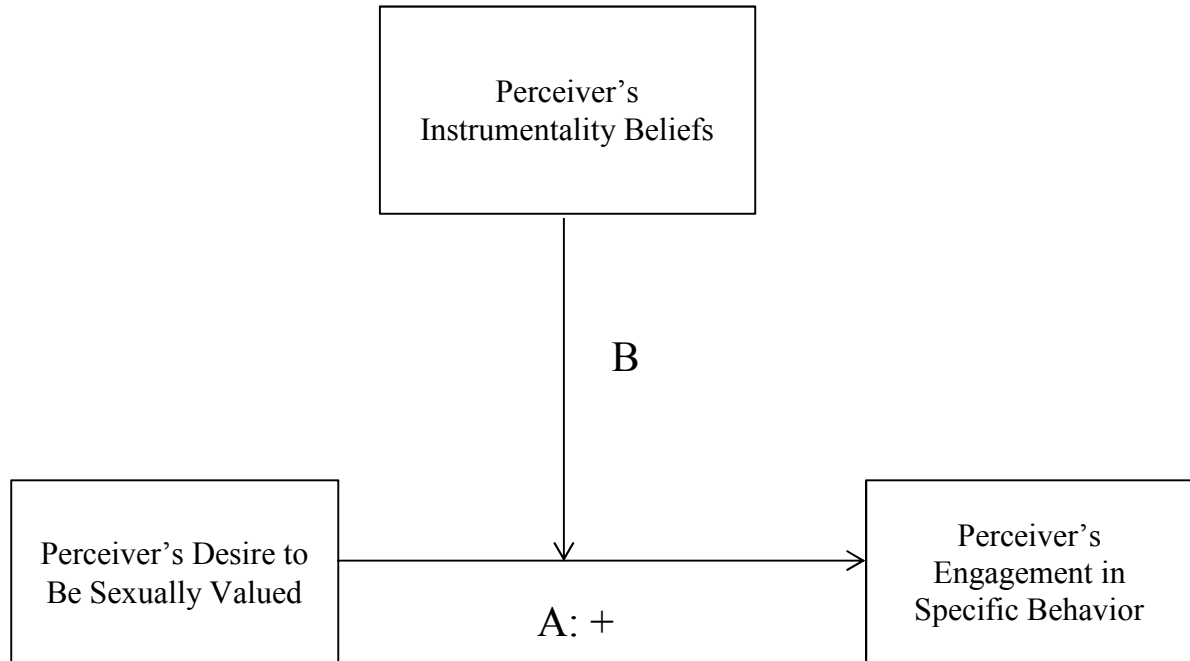
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is large variability between people in beliefs about effective strategies to increase sexual value, and this variability might be particularly high for men given that there are less clear standards about what makes a man sexually attractive compared to standards concerning women (Wienke, 1998).

Lemay, Ryan, and Teneva (2021) examined the role of instrumentality beliefs in guiding people’s pursuit of interpersonal value. They demonstrated that people who want social approval enact more prosocial behavior primarily when prosocial behavior is viewed as instrumental to obtaining approval. However, prior research has not examined such beliefs in the domain of sexuality and their impact on behavior within committed relationships. The current research aims to address this gap. I predicted that people who feel a strong desire to be sexually valued would engage in behaviors that enhance their sexual value to their partner. I further expected that this association would be moderated by people’s beliefs about the instrumentality of each specific behavior (i.e. how successful it would be in increasing sexual evaluation from their partner if enacted effectively) (path B in Figure 4). These predictions follow from expectancy value theory which posits that people are likely to engage in behaviors they believe are important or useful in aiding them to achieve their goals (Wigfield & Eccles, 2000). In other words, if Sarah desires strongly to be sexually valued, she might try to be adventurous when it comes to sex, for example, if she believes that this will make her more sexually attractive to her partner John. However, there could be multiple other behaviors and tendencies serving a similar aim, including trying new things in the sexual domain, exercising, and putting effort into taking care of a partner’s sexual needs.

**Figure 4**

*Desire to Be Sexually Valued and Engagement in Behaviors Eliciting Sexual Value*



**H4: Desire to be Sexually Valued, Communal Sexual Motivation and Relationship**

**Outcomes**

In addition, people who strongly desire to be sexually valued might adopt communal sexual motivation toward their committed partner in romantic relationships (path A in Figure 5). Communal sexual motivation is a motivation to meet a partner's sexual needs (Muisse & Impett, 2015). People high in sexual communal strength experience genuine concerns for their partners' sexual needs (Muisse & Impett, 2016). I propose that those who strongly desire to be sexually valued by their partners would be more likely to adopt communal sexual motivation toward those partners given that being sexually responsive is a desired quality (Birnbbaum et al., 2016) and so people may expect

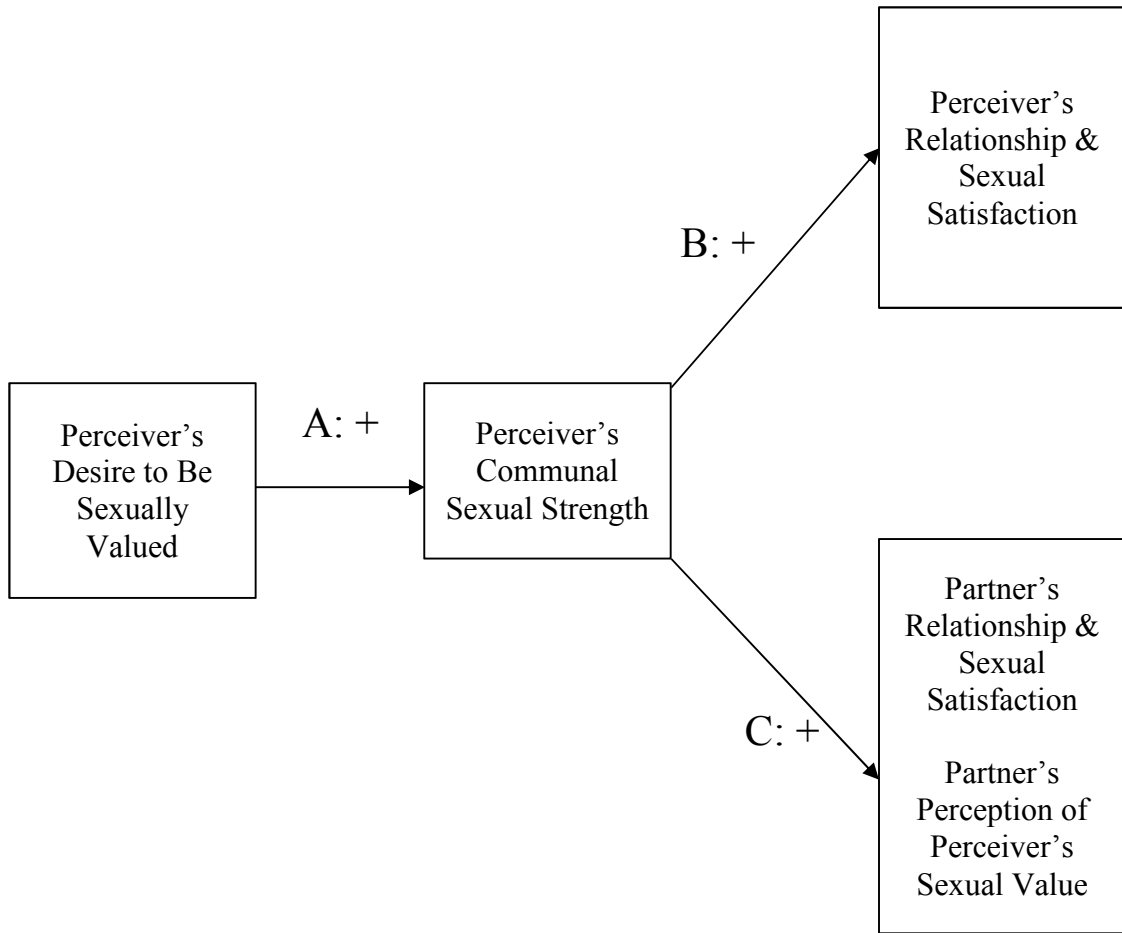
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that meeting their partner’s sexual needs is a means to being sexually valued by their partner. In other words, Sara might aim to respond to her partner John’s sexual needs as a way to ensure that he finds her sexually desirable.

This adoption of sexual communal motivation by perceivers who strongly desire to be sexually valued was expected to, in turn, predict increased sexual and relationship satisfaction for both themselves and their partners as well as increase the partners’ perception of the perceiver’s sexual value (paths B and C in Figure 5). These predictions are in line with a large body of literature suggesting that one’s sexual communal motivation can predict their partner’s sexual and relationship satisfaction at a specific time as well as longitudinally (Muisse & Impett, 2015; Muise & Impett, 2016; Day et al., 2015) and one’s own sexual desire (Impett et al., 2015; Muise et al., 2013). Moreover, sexually responsive partners are often viewed as more sexually desirable (Muisse & Impett, 2015; Birnbaum et al., 2016). Keeping with the above example, when Sara aims to respond to John’s sexual needs, this might lead him to find her more sexually attractive and increase both of their sexual and relationship satisfaction.

**Figure 5**

*Desire to Be Sexually Valued, Communal Sexual Strength and Relationship Outcomes*



**Desire to Be Sexually Valued and Targets of That Desire**

The general desire to be sexually valued was expected to be positively related to both the desire to be sexually valued by one’s committed partner and the desire to be sexually valued by extradyadic partners (i.e., people other than one’s current romantic or sexual partner).

People often rely on close others as means to their goals (Orehek & Forest, 2016). Thus, the general desire to be sexually valued is likely associated with the desire to be sexually valued by one’s romantic partner because obtaining positive sexual evaluations

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from a romantic partner can fulfill the general desire (Meltzer et al., 2017). However, a general desire to be sexually valued might also be associated with a higher desire to be sexually valued by extradyadic partners as well, given that this is another means through which people can increase their perceived sexual value and people often adopt multiple means to achieve a goal (Emmers-Sommer et al., 2010; Kruglanski et al., 2002).

It is likely that the desire to be sexually valued by one’s partner is a better predictor of relationship processes and perceptions of partners’ sexual evaluations compared to the general desire to be sexually valued and the desire targeted at extradyadic partners given the better predictor-criterion specificity (Woo et al., 2015). In addition, within committed relationships, the desire to be sexually valued by one’s partner and the desire to be sexually valued by extradyadic partners might exhibit opposing effects on relationship quality, particularly if people express their desire to be sexually valued by extradyadic partners to their current monogamous partners, given that such expression might trigger jealousy (Fleischmann et al., 2005).

In the current research, Study 1 utilizes only the general desire to be sexually valued measure as a predictor of the hypotheses outlined above. However, given the expected higher specificity within the context of romantic relationships, Studies 2 and 3 are focused on the effects of the desire to be sexually valued by one’s partner. In those studies, measures of the general desire to be sexually valued and the desire targeted at extradyadic partners are included as covariates in order to demonstrate the unique predictive power of the desire targeted at one’s partner, but the effects of these covariates are not discussed at length since they are not the focus of the current dissertation.

### **Additional Covariates**

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Models examining the effects of the desire to be sexually valued by one’s partner in Studies 2 and 3 controlled for a number of additional covariates. In study 2, sexual desire for one’s partner and need to belong were included as covariates. Prior research suggests that sex drive – a general desire for sexual activity – is one of the predictors of the desire to be sexually valued (Teneva & Lemay, 2021). It is likely that one’s sexual desire for their partner specifically is associated with a higher desire to be sexually valued by that partner as well given that being sexually valued by a partner might increase one’s chances of engaging in sexual activity with them. Further, one’s sexual desire for their partner might explain some of the effects of the desire to be sexually valued. For example, people might initiate sexual activity with their partner both because of their sexual desire for that partner and because they might want their partner to sexually desire them. Similarly, need to belong – another of the established predictors of the desire to be sexually valued (Teneva & Lemay, 2021) – was included as a covariate in Study 2 given that this need might provide an additional explanation of some of the effects of the desire to be sexually valued. For example, people might develop a sexual communal motivation towards a partner both because they want to be sexually valued by that partner and because they have a need to belong that the partner fulfils and being sexually attentive to that partner might ensure they stay in the romantic relationship.

In Study 3, general sex drive was included as a covariate for reasons analogous to the ones described for the sexual desire for one’s partner specifically. In addition, analyses controlled for participant’s general desire to be valued by their partners. This construct is not domain specific and refers to the tendency to want to be seen as a valuable partner more generally, such as obtaining the partner’s approval or commitment.

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Past research suggests that this general desire is related to higher relationship quality and multiple relationship maintenance behaviors (Lemay et al., 2021). Thus, this measure was added as a control in order to demonstrate the predictive power of the desire to be valued in the sexual domain specifically, above and beyond effects of the general desire to be valued by one’s partner on the current outcomes. Further, Study 3 included measures of the desire to be valued for one’s warmth and competence by a romantic partner, and those measures were added as covariates in all models. Warmth and competence are fundamental dimensions of person perception and evaluation (Fiske, 2018). The desire to be valued by one’s partner in these positive domains might be related to a number of the examined outcomes. For example, those who want their partners to see them as warm might develop sexual communal strength towards those partners in order to elicit positive evaluations in this domain. Hence, these covariates afforded examination of the unique effects of the desire to be sexually valued by one’s partner on outcomes above the effects of the desire to be valued by a partner in other positive domains like warmth and competence.

### **Potential Moderation by Gender and Relationship Length**

Gender moderations of all effects were examined given that prior theorizing has often focused on the way in which effects related to sexual evaluation can be different for men and women (Meltzer & McNulty, 2014; Meltzer et al., 2017; Liss et al., 2011). In addition, the moderating role of relationship length was considered for all hypotheses given that sexual desire has been shown to decline over time (Johnson et al., 1994; Klusmann, 2002; Levine, 2003) and this decline might be reflected in the effects of the desire to be sexually valued.

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### **Summary**

In summary, the current project suggests that desire to be sexually valued is an important construct to consider in the realm of romantic relationships that, through a variety of mechanisms, can influence one’s psychological well-being and behavior within relationships, which can in turn impact both the self and the partner’s relationship and sexual well-being.

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### **Chapter 3: Study 1. A Diary Dyadic Study Investigating the Effects of The Desire to Be Sexually Valued**

A dyadic study including a daily diary component was conducted to test some of the hypotheses posed in Chapter 2. Participants in the study were couples in committed romantic relationships. The study was utilized to test H1 stating that the desire to be sexually valued can exacerbate the effects of sexual rejection on well-being both at the trait level using general measurements and for more fleeting perceptions using data from daily interactions. Moreover, H2 stating that the desire to be sexually valued is associated with wishful thinking and can positively bias perceptions that one is sexually valued by their romantic partner was examined both at a trait level and in daily perceptions and the effects of this wishful thinking effect on relationship outcome were examined (H2a). The moderating role of attachment anxiety and self-esteem in this positive bias was examined. Furthermore, the study investigated H2b stating that a strong desire to be sexually valued is associated with higher likelihood of initiating sexual activity and wishful thinking serves as one of the mechanisms explaining this effect.

#### **Participants**

Both members of romantic couples were recruited for this study using the University of Maryland SONA system for paid studies, advertisements in popular websites, flyers placed around the University of Maryland campus and its surroundings, and recruitment emails. Each partner was compensated up to \$40 if they completed a preliminary survey, a two-hour lab session and 12 to 14 daily surveys. Moreover, partners were compensated up to \$30 each if they completed another set of 12 to 14 daily surveys 3 months after their initial lab appointment and a 6-month follow-up questionnaire. Participants were in committed romantic relationships and qualified for the study if they

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had been together for at least 1 year. The sample consisted of both members of 235 community couples and included 207 mixed sex couples, 5 male-male couples, 12 female-female couples, and 5 couples in which at least one partner identified as “Other” (M age = 29.03 years; SD = 9.64). The sample included 67.4% Caucasian, 19.4% Asian, 9% Black or African American, 0.2% Native American or Alaskan Native, and 0.2% Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander participants. The majority of couples, 58.7%, were dating; 32.6% were married; 7.6% were engaged, and 1.1% identified their relationship status as “Other”. Couples had been together an average of 6.85 years (SD=7.46 years).

### **Procedure**

#### ***Online Preliminary Survey***

To avoid the possibility of some measures influencing participants’ perceptions of their partners during the lab session, participants separately completed an online preliminary survey via Qualtrics prior to attending their scheduled lab session. The survey included a measure of their general desire to be sexually valued as well as other measures outlined below and questions pertaining to unrelated hypotheses. This task was designed to take about 30 minutes.

#### ***Lab Session***

For the lab session portion, romantic dyads reported to the Interpersonal Relationships laboratory and participated in a number of activities. First, they completed self-report measures on computers in separate rooms including those outlined below and some measures pertaining to hypotheses unrelated to the current project. After both partners completed the first portion of the study, they were instructed to engage in a discussion about their goals and separately answered some self-report questions about the

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discussion. These tasks were unrelated to the current study. The lab session lasted between one and two hours.

### ***Daily Diary 1***

Starting the day after their lab appointment, participants completed 14 consecutive daily surveys online. Participants were instructed to complete the surveys between 7 pm and midnight each night and to avoid discussing them with their partner. Measures included in the surveys addressed experiences during the day of reporting. The measures relevant to the current hypotheses are outlined below. The surveys also included questions pertaining to unrelated hypotheses. Each daily survey took approximately 5-10 minutes.

### ***Daily Diary 2***

Participants completed a second set of daily diary studies for 14 days starting 3 months after their initial lab sessions. The surveys and method are identical to the first set of daily diaries.

In addition, participants completed a final online survey six months after the laboratory session which was not relevant to the current investigation. Participants were debriefed at the end of the study and compensated up to \$70 each for their time. After removing duplicate daily records, incomplete records and records completed at inappropriate times, 9,652 valid daily assessments remained for use in statistical analyses (an average of 20.5 valid assessments per participant).

## **Online Preliminary Survey Measures**

### ***Desire to Be Sexually Valued***

## “I WANT YOU TO WANT ME”

To assess general desire to be sexually valued, each participant completed a 13-item measure on a scale from 1 – *Strongly Disagree* to 7 – *Strongly Agree*. Two items are excluded from the analyses because of their low correlations and their specific reference to the desire to be sexually valued in the absence of mutual sexual attraction: “It makes me feel good to know that someone sees me in a sexual way, even when I am not attracted to him/her”; I would feel happy if I knew that someone had sexual attraction for me, even if I didn’t feel the same way toward him/her.” The desire to be sexually valued might be strongest when targeted at attractive others and its existence in the absence of attraction is a distinct tendency that should be examined separately. These items were also dropped from the measure permanently and thus not used in Studies 2 and 3. The items included in the analysis are presented in Appendix A. Negatively worded items were reverse scored and after all items were averaged to create a composite score. A higher score indicates greater desire to be sexually valued. The scale was internally consistent,  $\alpha = .88$ .

### ***Trait Self-Esteem***

The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (1965) was used to measure participants’ self-esteem. This measure includes ten items evaluated on a scale from 1 – *Strongly Disagree* to 7 – *Strongly Agree*. Sample items include “I feel that I have a number of good qualities” and “I take a positive attitude toward myself”. Negatively worded items were reverse scored and all items were averaged. Higher composite scores indicate greater trait self-esteem. The complete measure is included in Appendix B. The scale was internally consistent,  $\alpha = .91$ .

### ***Attachment Anxiety***

## “I WANT YOU TO WANT ME”

Participants completed the 9 items assessing attachment anxiety from the Attachment Security measure (Simpson et al., 1996). Items were completed using a scale from 1 – *Strongly Disagree* to 7 – *Strongly Agree*. A sample item assessing attachment anxiety is “My romantic partners are often reluctant to get as close as I would like” A composite score for attachment anxiety was created by first reverse scoring negatively worded items and then averaging all items. Higher composite scores indicate greater attachment anxiety. The complete measure is included in Appendix C. The scale was internally consistent,  $\alpha = .84$ .

### **Lab Session Measures**

#### ***Perceptions of Partner’s Sexual Evaluation***

Participants completed a 3-item measure assessing their perceptions of their partners’ sexual evaluation of them. Items were completed using a scale from 1 – *Strongly Disagree* to 7 – *Strongly Agree*. The items included “My partner considers me hot and sexy”; “I am sexually desired by my partner” and “My partner is sexually attracted to me.” Responses to these items were averaged to create a composite score and higher composite scores indicate greater perceptions of the partner’s sexual evaluation. The scale was internally consistent,  $\alpha = .93$ . Further, a reverse coded version of this measure was used in analyses investigating the effects of perceived sexual rejection. For this version, higher scores represent higher perceptions of sexual rejection by partner.

#### ***Relationship Satisfaction***

Participants’ relationship satisfaction was assessed using the 5-item relationship satisfaction subscale from the Investment Model (Rusbult et al., 1998). Items were completed using a scale from 1 – *Strongly Disagree* to 7 – *Strongly Agree*. A sample item

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is “Our relationship makes me very happy.” All items in this scale were averaged. Higher composite scores indicate that participants feel more satisfied in their relationship with their partner. The complete measure is included in Appendix D. The scale was internally consistent,  $\alpha = .86$ .

### ***Sexual Evaluation for Partner***

Participants completed a 3-item measure assessing their sexual evaluation of their partners. Items were completed using a scale from 1 – *Strongly Disagree* to 7 – *Strongly Agree*. The items included “I am sexually attracted to my partner”; “I desire my partner sexually” and “My partner is hot and sexy.” Responses to these items were averaged to create a composite score and higher composite scores indicate greater sexual evaluation of one’s partner. The scale was internally consistent,  $\alpha = .92$ .

### **Daily Measures**

Measures relevant to the current research included in the daily diary surveys are listed below.

#### ***Daily Self-Esteem***

Participants completed a 3-item measure assessing their self-esteem on the day of each survey adapted from Rosenberg (1965). Items were completed using a scale from 1 – *Strongly Disagree* to 7 – *Strongly Agree*. Items included “Today, I felt satisfied with myself”; “Today, I took a positive attitude toward myself”; “Today, I felt good about myself.” All items in this scale were averaged. Higher composite scores indicate that participants experience greater self-esteem on a given day.

#### ***Sexual Desire for Partner***

## “I WANT YOU TO WANT ME”

Participants completed one item used by Muise & Impett (2015) assessing sexual desire for their partner on the day of each survey – “I felt a great deal of sexual desire for my partner today.” The item was completed using a scale from 1 – *Strongly Disagree* to 7 – *Strongly Agree*. Higher agreement to this item indicates greater sexual desire for one’s partner on a given day.

### ***Perceptions of Partner’s Sexual Desire for the Self***

Participants completed one item assessing their perceptions of their partners’ sexual desire for themselves used by Muise & Impett (2015) on the day of each survey – “My partner felt a great deal of sexual desire for me today.” The item was completed using a scale from 1 – *Strongly Disagree* to 7 – *Strongly Agree*. Higher values suggest perceiving a partner’s greater sexual desire on a given day.

### ***Initiating Sexual Activity***

Participants completed one item assessing their daily sexual initiation efforts used by Muise & Impett (2015) – “Today, I tried to initiate sexual activity with my partner.” The item was completed using a scale from 1 – *Strongly Disagree* to 7 – *Strongly Agree*. Higher agreement to this item indicates greater initiation effort on a given day.

### ***Sexual Rejection***

Participants completed one item assessing their feelings of sexual rejection by their partner on the day of each survey used by Muise & Impett (2015) – “Today, I felt sexually rejected by my partner.” The item was completed using a scale from 1 – *Strongly Disagree* to 7 – *Strongly Agree*. Higher agreement to this item indicates perceptions of greater sexual rejection by a partner on a given day.

### ***Acceptance of Partner***

## “I WANT YOU TO WANT ME”

Participants completed one item assessing their acceptance of their partners on the day of each survey – “Today, how rejecting or accepting were you of your partner?” The item was completed using a scale from 1 – *Very Rejecting* to 7 – *Very Accepting*. Higher scores on this item indicate greater acceptance of partner on a given day.

### ***Partner Evaluation***

Participants completed one item assessing their overall evaluation of their partners on the day of each survey – “Today, how did you view your partner?” The item was completed using a scale from 1 – *Very Negatively* to 7 – *Very Positively*. Higher scores on this item indicate a more positive evaluation of one’s partner on a given day.

### ***Relationship Satisfaction***

Participants completed one item assessing their relationship satisfaction with their partner on the day of each survey – “Today, how satisfied did you feel in your relationship with your partner?” The item was completed using a scale from 1 – *Very Dissatisfied* to 7 – *Very Satisfied*. Higher scores on this item indicate greater relationship satisfaction on a given day.

### ***Daily Emotion***

Participants completed a 6-item measure of their daily emotions (Reis et al., 2000) on the day of each survey. They indicated the extent to which they felt “joyful”, “happy”, “pleased”, “depressed”, “worried/anxious” and “angry/hostile” on a scale from 1- *Not at All* to 5 – *Extremely*. Items assessing positive emotions were averaged to create a composite of daily positive emotion. Higher scores on the composite indicate stronger positive emotions on a given day. Items assessing negative emotions were averaged to create a composite of daily negative emotion. Higher scores on the composite indicate

## “I WANT YOU TO WANT ME”

stronger negative emotions on a given day. The scales for positive and negative emotions were internally consistent,  $\alpha_P = .93$ ;  $\alpha_N = .77$ ;

### **Analysis Strategy**

For analyses using only trait level variables (i.e. measures of general tendencies as opposed to daily fluctuations), a multilevel model treating individuals as nested within dyads was utilized for testing hypotheses. Dyad members were treated as indistinguishable. Items measuring general tendencies and feelings were used.

To test hypotheses on a daily level, a crossed multilevel model that accounts for nesting of crossed days and individuals within dyads was used (Bolger & Laurenceau, 2013). A compound symmetry structure was utilized in order to estimate the covariance between the two partners in terms of their intercepts (reflecting average tendencies in the outcome variable across days) and in terms of day-specific residuals. Daily predictor variables were centered on person means (i.e. restructured as to reflect daily differences from people's average tendencies across all daily diaries they completed) to examine within-person effects, while means across all daily observations for each person were used to examine between-person effects (Enders & Tofighi, 2007). Dyad members were treated as indistinguishable.

Both trait level and daily level models were assessed in order to examine chronic and fleeting perceptions of partners' sexual evaluations and compare patterns pertaining to them.

Models were tested using the Linear Mixed Models command in SPSS (27) and degrees of freedom were calculated using the standard Satterthwaite approximation.

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Sample size for these models was determined by budgeting constraints. However, even for the more complex daily model, the sample size well exceeds guidelines provided by Kreft (1996), who suggested 10 level 1 units (i.e., daily assessments) per level 2 unit (i.e., people), and by Hox (2013), who suggested at least 100 level 2 units (i.e., people). Correlations or partial correlations are provided as effect size indices, depending on whether the model included one predictor or several predictors (Rosenthal et al., 2000).

Gender and relationship length moderations for all effects were explored and results are reported separately by gender or relationship length if a significant moderation was detected. For analyses that investigated gender differences, only differences between men and women were compared by dropping participants who did not provide their gender and those who identified as non-binary from the analyses, since sample size of non-binary participants was not sufficient for meaningful comparisons.

## Results

### *Descriptive Statistics and Correlations*

To determine if people generally desired to be sexually valued, their answers on the desire to be sexually valued scale were centered on its midpoint. Then, an unconditional model with this centered variable as an outcome was used. Analyses suggested that on average participants scored significantly higher than the midpoint of the scale,  $b_{intercept} = 0.22$ ,  $t = 4.29$ ,  $p < .001$ .

Additionally, men experienced significantly higher desire to be sexually valued than women,  $b = 0.39$ ,  $t = 4.57$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $r = .19$ . Age was not associated with the desire to be sexually valued,  $p = .093$ , but people who had been in a romantic relationship longer experienced a lower level of this desire,  $b = -0.02$ ,  $t = -2.48$ ,  $p = .014$ ,  $pr = -.13$ .

## “I WANT YOU TO WANT ME”

Means, standard deviations and correlations for trait variables are available in Table 1. Means, and standard deviations for daily variables are provided in Table 2. Correlations of uncentered daily variables and intake variables of interest are provided in Table 3.

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**Table 1**

*Study 1 Means, Standard Deviations and Correlations Among Trait Variables*

	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.
<b>1. Desire to be sexually valued</b>	4.72 (1.03)					
2. Perceived sexual evaluation from partner	-.01	6.11 (0.94)				
3. Attachment anxiety	.13*	-.29*	2.80 (1.10)			
4. Self-esteem	-.10*	.18*	-.37*	5.23 (1.10)		
5. Relationship Satisfaction	-.05	.44*	-.32*	.19*	6.02 (0.84)	
6. Sexual evaluation of partner	.07	.41*	-.06	.09	.46*	6.37 (0.77)

Note. \* $p < .05$ . Significance levels are estimated using multilevel strategy described. Means (outside parentheses) and standard deviations (inside parentheses) appear on the diagonal. N = 425 observations

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**Table 2**

*Study 1 Means and Standard Deviations of Daily Variables*

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Daily Partner Acceptance	6.05	1.05
Daily Partner Evaluation	6.04	1.06
Daily Negative Affect	1.76	0.77
Daily Positive Affect	3.22	0.92
Daily Perceived Sexual Desire from Partner	4.41	1.78
Daily Initiation of Sexual Activity	3.29	1.89
Daily Perceived Sexual Rejection from Partner	2.15	1.39
Daily Relationship Satisfaction	6.04	1.10
Daily Self-Esteem	5.23	1.27
Daily Sexual Desire for Partner	4.62	1.74

Note. Minimum N = 9357 observations

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**Table 3**

*Study 1 Correlations Among Uncentered Daily Variables and Intake Variables of Interest*

	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.	10.	11.	12.
1. Daily Acceptance of Partner	-											
2. Daily Partner Evaluation	.78*	-										
3. Daily Negative Affect	-.27*	-.28*	-									
4. Daily Positive Affect	.37*	-.38*	-.37*	-								
5. Daily Perceived Partner Sexual Desire	.29*	.32*	-.11*	.27*	-							
6. Daily Perceived Sexual Rejection	-.16*	.14*	.14*	-.10*	-.15*	-						
7. Daily Relationship Satisfaction	.75*	-.19*	-.30*	.41*	.33*	-.21*	-					
8. Daily Self-Esteem	.36*	.81*	-.50*	.67*	.23*	-.09*	.41*	-				
9. Daily Sexual Desire for Partner	.34*	.37*	-.14*	.30*	.69*	.00	.36*	.27*	-			
10. Daily Initiation of Sexual Activity	.15*	.37*	-.06*	.17*	.53*	.17*	.16*	.14*	.56*	-		
11. Attachment Anxiety	-.17*	-.19*	.15*	-.19*	-.12*	.11*	-.22*	-.21*	-.09*	-.02*	-	
<b>12. Desire to Be Sexually Valued</b>	.00	.00	.05*	-.00	.05*	.02*	-.01	.01	.12*	.04*	.12*	-

Note. \* p<.05. Significance levels are estimated using multilevel strategy described. Minimum N = 9357 observations

***H1: Desire to Be Sexually Valued Exacerbating Effects of Perceptions of Sexual Rejection on Well-Being – Trait Level***

To investigate whether the desire to be sexually valued exacerbated the effects of perceived sexual rejection from a partner on one’s self-image and their relationship evaluations, in separate models, I regressed multiple outcomes of interest on both perceived sexual rejection (using the reverse coded perceptions of partner sexual evaluation scale), the desire to be sexually valued, and their interaction. All variables in these models were measured during the surveys completed before the daily component of the study and refer to general tendencies in people’s relationships. Results from these models can be found in the Model 1 portion of Table 4. Further, given the large number of effects and moderations, a summary of the results regarding H1 is presented in Table 7. The interaction term of interest did not significantly predict self-esteem or relationship satisfaction,  $ps > .165$ . However, the interaction between perceivers’ desire to be sexually valued and the perceived sexual rejection from their partners was a significant predictor of the perceiver’s sexual evaluations of that partner,  $b = 0.10, t = 3.19, p = .002, pr = .16$ . Furthermore, I explored the conditional effects of perceived sexual rejection from partner when the desire to be sexually valued was relatively low (- 1 SD) and when it was relatively high (+1 SD). Predicted values are depicted in Figure 6. Perceived rejection from partner predicted lower perceptions of the sexual value of that partner both for those low in the desire to be sexually valued,  $b = -0.47, t = 9.28, p < .001, pr = -.39$ , and for those high in the desire to be sexually valued,  $b = -0.26, t = -5.59, p < .001, pr = -.24$ , however, the relationship was stronger for the former, contrary to the hypothesis.

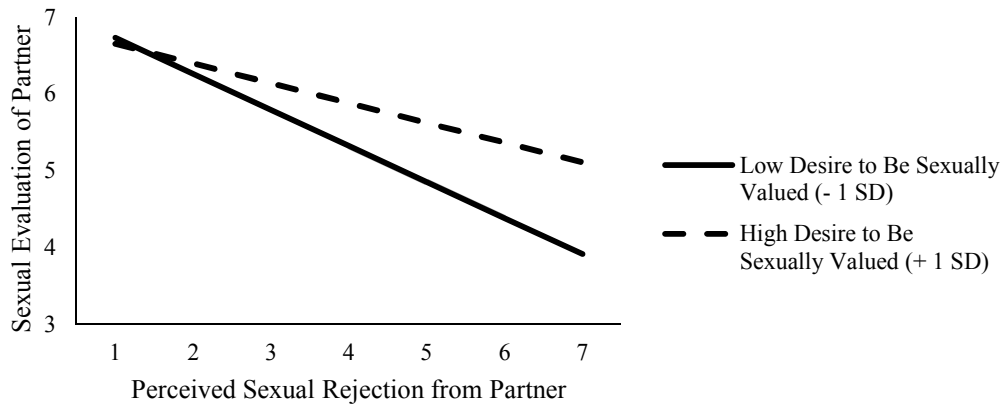
I further explored the conditional effects of the desire to be sexually valued when perceived sexual rejection from partner was relatively low (- 1 SD) and when it was

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relatively high (+ 1 SD). For those who perceived relatively low levels of rejection by a partner, the desire to be sexually valued predicted lower perceptions of the sexual value of that partner,  $b = -0.15$ ,  $t = -5.32$ ,  $p = .038$ ,  $pr = -.10$ , while for those who perceived relatively high levels of rejection from a partner, this desire predicted higher sexual evaluations of that partner,  $b = 0.15$ ,  $t = 3.37$ ,  $p = .001$ ,  $pr = .17$ , contrary to hypothesis.

**Figure 6**

*Moderating Effect of the Desire to Be Sexually Valued in the Relationship Between Perceived Sexual Rejection from Partner and Sexual Evaluation of that Partner – Trait Level*



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**Table 4**

*Study 1 - Results of Models Examining Effects of Perceived Sexual Rejection from Partner, Desire to Be Sexually Valued and Attachment Anxiety on Self and Relationship Evaluations – Trait Level*

Predictor	Self-Esteem		Relationship Satisfaction		Sexual Evaluation of Partner	
	<i>b</i>	<i>ES</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>ES</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>ES</i>
	[95% CI]		[95% CI]		[95% CI]	
<u>Model 1: Perceived Sexual Rejection, Desire to Be Sexually Valued and Interaction</u>						
Perceived Sexual Rejection from Partner	0.15 [-0.36 0.65]	0.03	-0.20 [-0.52 .13]	-0.06	-0.85 [-1.17 -0.54]*	-0.25
Desire to Be Sexually Valued	0.02 [-0.19 0.23]	0.01	0.04 [-0.09 0.18]	0.02	-0.14 [-0.28 -0.01]*	-0.10
Perceived Sexual Rejection * Desire to Be Sexually Valued	-0.07 [-0.17 0.03]	-.07	-0.03 [-0.09 0.04]	-.05	0.10 <b>[0.04 0.17]*</b>	.16

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Model 2: Perceived Sexual Rejection, Desire to Be Sexually Valued, Attachment Anxiety and Interactions

Perceived Sexual Rejection	-0.71		0.59		-0.36	
from Partner	[-1.81 0.40]	-0.06	[-0.14 1.33]	0.08	[-1.09 0.37]	-0.06
Desire to Be Sexually Valued	-0.11		0.48		0.04	
	[-0.55 0.34]	-0.02	[0.19 0.77]*	0.17	[-0.26 0.33]	0.00
Attachment Anxiety	-0.45		0.72		0.20	
	[-1.24 0.34]	-0.06	[0.20 1.24]*	0.16	[-0.32 0.72]	0.03
Perceived Sexual Rejection						
from Partner * Desire to Be	0.10		-0.18		-0.02	
Sexually Valued	[-0.11 0.32]	0.05	[-0.33 -0.04]*	-0.12	[-0.16 0.13]	0.00

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Perceived Sexual Rejection from Partner * Attachment Anxiety	0.21 [-0.14 0.56]	0.06	-0.29 [-0.52 -0.06]*	-0.14	-0.13 [-0.36 0.11]	-0.04
Desire to Be Sexually Valued * Attachment Anxiety	0.00 [-0.15 0.15]	0.00	-0.17 [-0.26 -0.07]*	-0.19	-0.04 [-0.14 0.05]	-0.03
Desire to Be Sexually Valued * Attachment Anxiety * Perceived Sexual Rejection from Partner	-0.03 [-0.09 0.03]	-0.06	0.06 <b>[0.02 0.10]*</b>	0.15	0.03 [-0.01 0.07]	0.06

\* $p < .05$ . Note. ES = effect size.

**Attachment Anxiety Moderation.** To explore the role of attachment anxiety in the relationship between perceived sexual rejection, desire to be sexually valued and outcomes of interest, in separate models, I regressed self-image and relationship evaluation outcomes on perceived sexual rejection, the desire to be sexually valued, attachment anxiety, the product of the three variables, and all two-variable product terms between them. Results from these models can be found in the Model 2 portion of Table 4. The three-way interaction term did not significantly predict self-esteem, or the sexual evaluation of one’s partner,  $ps > .165$ . However, the interaction between one’s desire to be sexually valued, the perceived sexual rejection from one’s partner, and attachment anxiety was a significant predictor of relationship satisfaction,  $b = 0.06$ ,  $t = 2.87$ ,  $p = .004$ ,  $pr = .16$ . I explored the interaction of interest between the desire to be sexually valued and perceived rejection for participants with low attachment anxiety (- 1 SD) and for participants with high attachment anxiety (+1 SD). However, this two-way interaction was not a significant predictor of relationship satisfaction for either level of attachment anxiety,  $ps > .079$ .

***H1: Desire to Be Sexually Valued Exacerbating Effects of Perceptions of Sexual Rejection on Well-Being – Within-Person Daily Effects***

To investigate whether the desire to be sexually valued exacerbated the within-person effects of perceived sexual rejection on one’s self-image and their relationship evaluations on a daily basis, in separate models, I regressed multiple outcomes on both daily person-centered perceived sexual rejection, the desire to be sexually valued measured at intake and their product. Results from these models can be found in Table 5. Further, given the large number of effects and moderations, a summary of the results regarding H1 is presented in Table 7. This interaction term did not significantly predict

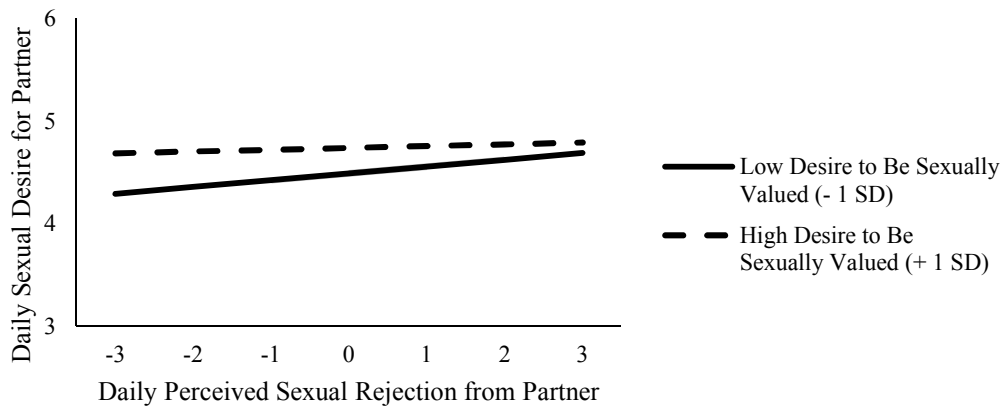
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daily self-esteem, daily acceptance of partner, or daily partner evaluation  $p > .136$ .

However, this term was a significant predictor of daily sexual desire for one's partner,  $b = -0.02$ ,  $t = -2.18$ ,  $p = .029$ ,  $pr = -.02$ . I further explored the conditional within-person effects of daily perceptions of sexual rejection from partner, when the desire to be sexually valued was relatively low ( $-1$  SD) and when it was relatively high ( $+1$  SD). Daily rejection perceptions were not a significant predictor of sexual desire for one's partner when the desire to be sexually valued was relatively high,  $p = .245$ . However, on days when they felt stronger rejection from their partners, those who scored relatively low on the desire to be sexually valued experienced higher sexual desire for those partners,  $b = 0.07$ ,  $t = 3.86$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $pr = .02$ , a pattern not consistent with predictions. This interaction is depicted in Figure 7.

**Figure 7**

*Moderating Effect of the Desire to Be Sexually Valued in the Relationship Between Daily Perceived Sexual Rejection from Partner and Daily Sexual Desire for that Partner – Within-Person*



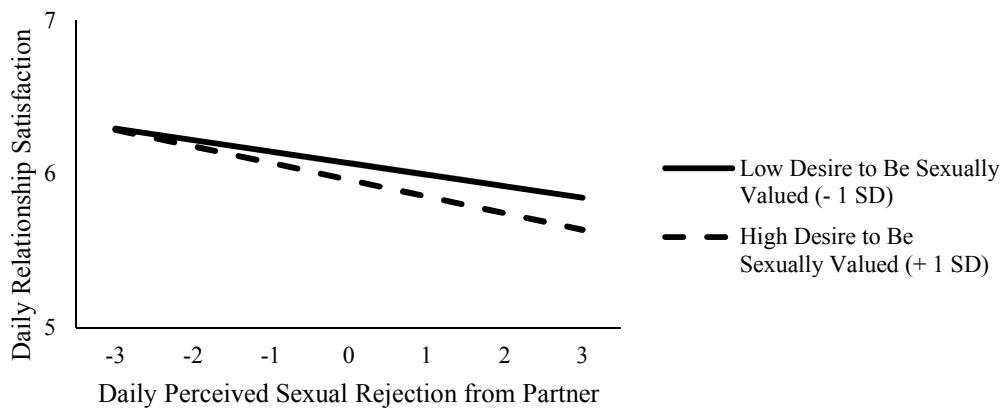
The interaction between the desire to be sexually valued and person-centered perceptions of sexual rejection was also a significant predictor of daily relationship satisfaction,  $b = -0.02$ ,  $t = -2.35$ ,  $p = .019$ ,  $pr = .01$ . I further explored the conditional

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within-person effects of daily perceptions of sexual rejection from partner, when the desire to be sexually valued was relatively low (- 1 SD) and when it was relatively high (+ 1 SD). Daily rejection perceptions were associated with lower relationship satisfaction both for those low in the desire to be sexually valued,  $b = -0.08$ ,  $t = -6.85$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $pr = -.07$ , and for those high in the desire to be sexually valued,  $b = -0.11$ ,  $t = -11.29$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $pr = -.10$ . However, this effect was stronger for participants who strongly desired to be sexually valued, as expected. This interaction is depicted in Figure 8.

**Figure 8**

*Moderating Effect of the Desire to Be Sexually Valued in the Relationship Between Daily Perceived Sexual Rejection from Partner and Daily Relationship Satisfaction – Within Person*



The interaction between the desire to be sexually valued and person-centered perceptions of sexual rejection was also a significant predictor of daily positive affect, but the nature of the relationship differed between genders,  $b = -0.05$ ,  $t = -3.67$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $pr = -.03$ . For men, the interaction was a significant predictor of positive affect,  $b = -0.02$ ,  $t = -2.14$ ,  $p = .003$ ,  $pr = -.02$ . I further explored the conditional within-person effects of daily perceptions of sexual rejection from partner, when the desire to be sexually valued was relatively low (- 1 SD) and when it was relatively high (+ 1 SD) for men. Daily rejection

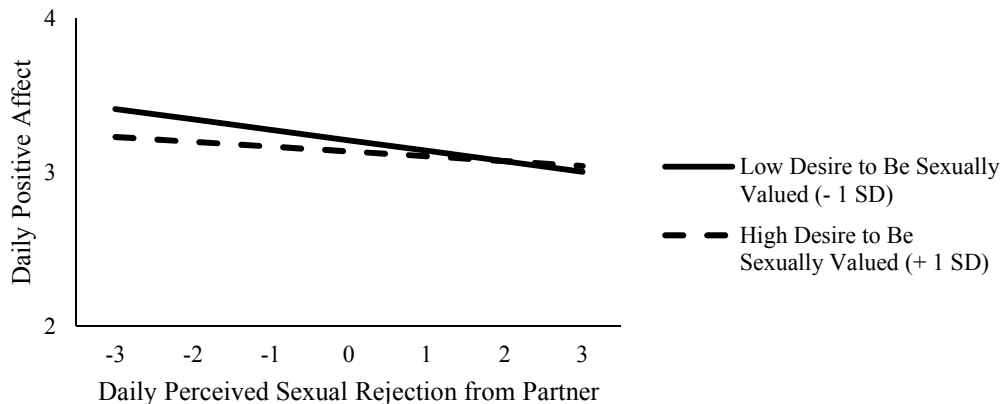
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perceptions were associated with lower positive affect both for those high in the desire to be sexually valued,  $b = -0.07$ ,  $t = -5.60$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $pr = -.05$ , and for those low in the desire to be sexually valued,  $b = -0.13$ ,  $t = -3.37$ ,  $p = .001$ ,  $pr = -.02$ . However, this effect was stronger for men who experienced a low desire to be sexually valued, contrary to the hypothesis. This interaction is depicted in Figure 9a.

For women, the interaction was also a significant predictor of positive affect,  $b = -0.05$ ,  $t = 3.67$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $pr = -.02$ . I further explored the conditional within-person effects of daily perceptions of sexual rejection from partner, when the desire to be sexually valued was relatively low ( $-1$  SD) and when it was relatively high ( $+1$  SD) for women. Daily rejection perceptions were not associated with daily positive affect for women low in the desire to be sexually valued,  $p = .336$ . However, for women high in the desire to be sexually valued, daily perceptions of sexual rejection were associated with lower daily positive affect,  $b = -0.07$ ,  $t = -3.02$ ,  $p = .003$ ,  $pr = -.05$ , as expected. This interaction is depicted in Figure 9b.

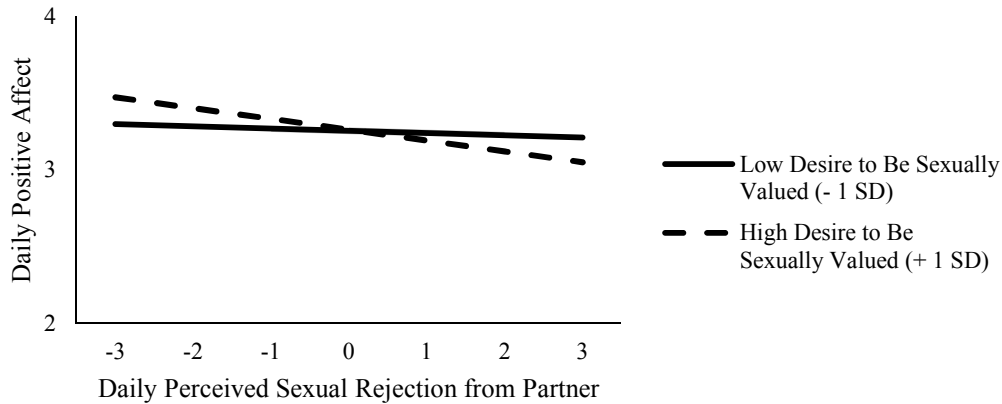
**Figure 9a**

*Moderating Effect of the Desire to Be Sexually Valued in the Relationship Between Daily Perceived Sexual Rejection from Partner and Daily Positive Affect for Men – Within-Person Effects*



**Figure 9b**

*Moderating Effect of the Desire to Be Sexually Valued in the Relationship Between Daily Perceived Sexual Rejection from Partner and Daily Positive Affect for Women – Within Person Effects*



Further, the effect of the interaction of the desire to be sexually valued and person-centered perceptions of sexual rejection on negative affect also differed between genders,  $b = 0.03$ ,  $t = 2.53$ ,  $p = .011$ ,  $pr = .02$ . For women,  $b = 0.02$ ,  $t = 2.61$ ,  $p = .009$ ,  $pr = -.02$ , but not for men,  $p = .369$ . the interaction was a significant predictor of negative affect. I further tested the conditional within-person effects of daily perceptions of sexual rejection from partner, when the desire to be sexually valued was relatively low (- 1 SD) and when it was relatively high (+ 1 SD) for women. Daily rejection perceptions were associated with higher negative affect both for women low in the desire to be sexually valued,  $b = 0.04$ ,  $t = 2.92$ ,  $p = .004$ ,  $pr = -.08$ , and for women high in the desire to be sexually valued,  $b = 0.08$ ,  $t = 8.62$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $pr = -.08$ . However, this effect was higher for women who strongly desired to be sexually valued as expected.

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**Table 5**

*Study 1 - Results of Models Examining Within-Person Daily Effects of Perceived Sexual Rejection from Partner and the role of the Desire to Be Sexually Valued on Daily Self and Relationship Evaluations*

Predictor	Daily Self-Esteem		Daily Sexual Desire for Partner		Daily Acceptance of Partner		Daily Relationship Satisfaction	
	<i>b</i>	<i>ES</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>ES</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>ES</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>ES</i>
	[95% CI]		[95% CI]		[95% CI]		[95% CI]	
Daily Perceived Sexual Rejection from Partner	0.00	0.01	0.12	0.02	-0.05	-0.01	-0.02	-0.01
	[-0.07 0.08]		[0.02 0.22]*		[-0.12 0.02]		[-0.08 0.05]	
Desire to Be Sexually Valued	-0.05	-0.01	0.15	0.12	-0.03	0.00	-0.02	0.02
	[-.14 .03]		[0.05 0.26]*		[-0.08 0.03]		[-0.11 0.01]	
Perceived Sexual Rejection * Desire to Be Sexually Valued	0.00	0.00	-0.02	-0.02	0.00	-0.02	-0.02	-0.01
	[-.02 .01]		<b>[-0.04 0.00]*</b>		[-0.02 0.01]		<b>[-0.03 0.00]*</b>	

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Predictor	Daily Positive		Daily Negative		Daily Partner	
	Affect		Affect		Evaluation	
	<i>b</i>	<i>ES</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>ES</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>ES</i>
	[95% CI]		[95% CI]		[95% CI]	
Daily Perceived Sexual Rejection from Partner	-0.13 <sub>M</sub>	-0.03 <sub>M</sub>	0.11 <sub>M</sub>	0.03 <sub>M</sub>	-0.04	-0.01
	[-0.21 -0.06] <sub>M</sub> *		[0.04 0.18] <sub>M</sub> *		[-0.10 0.03]	
	0.09 <sub>F</sub>	0.01 <sub>F</sub>	-0.04 <sub>F</sub>	-0.01 <sub>F</sub>		
	[0.00 0.18] <sub>F</sub>		[-0.12 0.04] <sub>F</sub>			
Desire to Be Sexually Valued	-0.03 <sub>M</sub>	-0.01 <sub>M</sub>	0.02 <sub>M</sub>	0.01 <sub>M</sub>	-0.03	-0.01
	[-0.11 0.04] <sub>M</sub>		[-0.04 0.08] <sub>M</sub>		[-0.09 .03]	
	0.00 <sub>F</sub>	0.00 <sub>F</sub>	0.08 <sub>F</sub>	0.08 <sub>F</sub>		
	[-0.08 0.09] <sub>F</sub>		[0.01 0.14] <sub>F</sub> *			

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Perceived Sexual Rejection *	0.02 <sub>M</sub>	0.02 <sub>M</sub>	-0.01 <sub>M</sub>	-0.01 <sub>M</sub>	0.01	-0.01
Desire to Be Sexually Valued	<b>[0.00 0.03]<sub>M</sub>*</b>		[-0.02 0.01] <sub>M</sub>		[-0.02 0.00]	
	-0.03 <sub>F</sub>	-0.02 <sub>F</sub>	0.02 <sub>F</sub>	0.02 <sub>F</sub>		
	<b>[-0.05 -0.01]<sub>F</sub>*</b>		<b>[0.01 0.04]<sub>F</sub>*</b>			

\* $p < .05$ . Note. ES = effect size. Coefficients were pooled across gender unless gender significantly moderated the effect of the desire to be sexually valued on an outcome, in which case the relationship was estimated separately for males and females, which are denoted with “M” and “F” subscripts, respectively.

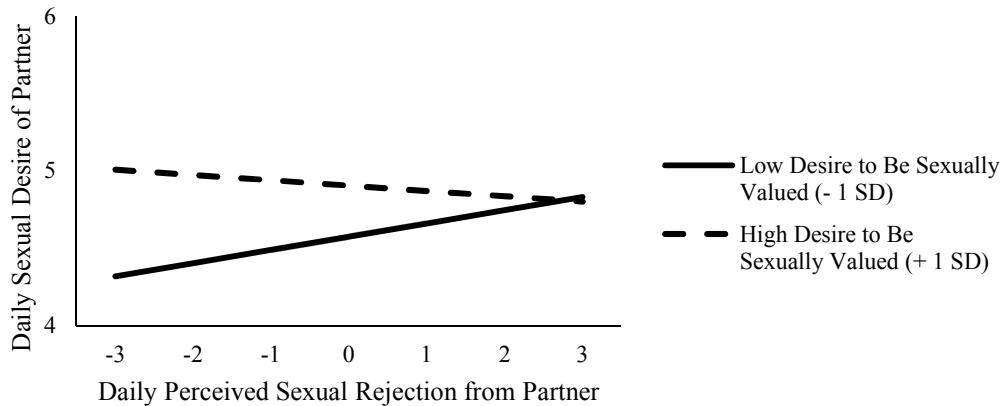
## “I WANT YOU TO WANT ME”

**Attachment Anxiety Moderation.** To explore the role of attachment anxiety in the relationship between perceived daily sexual rejection, desire to be sexually valued and outcomes of interest, in separate models, I regressed self-image and relationship evaluation outcomes on desire to be sexually valued and attachment anxiety measures collected at intake, person-centered daily sexual rejection, all two-way interactions, and a product term of the three variables. Given the large number of effects and moderations, a summary of the results regarding H1 is presented in Table 7. The three-way product term was not a significant predictor of daily acceptance of one’s partner and daily negative affect. Although this term was a significant predictor of daily self-esteem,  $b = -0.02$ ,  $t = -2.35$ ,  $p = .019$ ,  $pr = .02$ , the interaction of interest between the desire to be sexually valued and perceptions of partner sexual evaluation, was not associated with daily self-esteem for those high,  $p = .081$ , or low,  $p = .853$ , in attachment anxiety.

The three-way interaction term was a significant predictor of daily sexual desire for partner,  $b = 0.03$ ,  $t = 3.83$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $pr = .03$ . All conditional effects for this interaction are presented in Table 6. Analyses of conditional effects revealed that the interaction between the desire to be sexually valued and daily perceptions of sexual rejection was a significant predictor of sexual desire for one’s partner for those who were low in attachment anxiety,  $b = -0.11$ ,  $t = -4.49$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $pr = -.03$ , but not for those who were highly anxious,  $p = .433$ , contrary to hypotheses. More specifically, for those low in attachment anxiety, daily perceptions of partner sexual rejection predicted higher sexual desire for their partners if they also experienced a low desire to be sexually valued,  $b = 0.09$ ,  $t = -4.49$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $pr = -.03$ , but not if they experienced a high level of this desire,  $p = .101$ . This pattern is depicted in Figure 10.

**Figure 10**

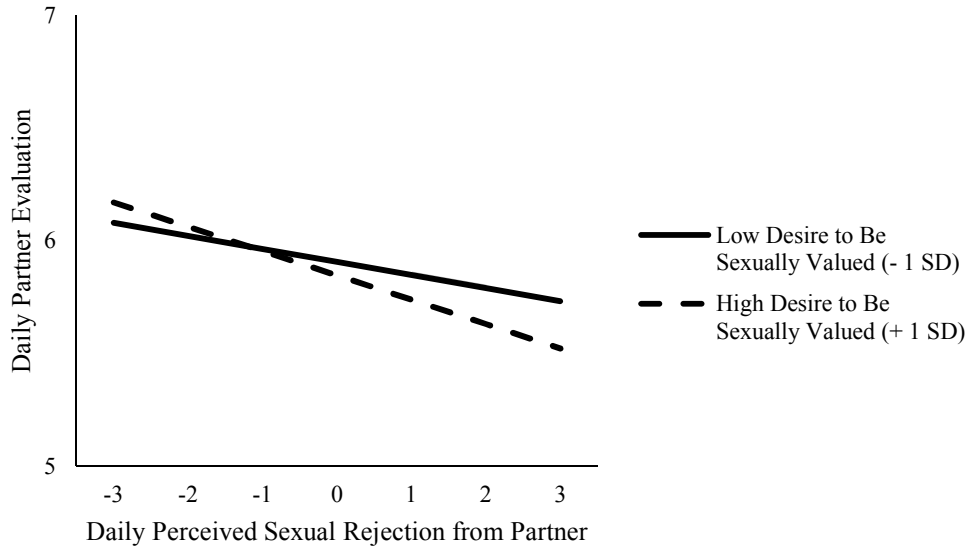
*Moderating Effect of the Desire to Be Sexually Valued in the Relationship Between Daily Perceived Sexual Rejection from Partner and Daily Sexual Desire for Partner for those Low in Attachment Anxiety – Within-Person Effects*



Furthermore, the three-way interaction term was also a significant predictor of daily partner evaluations,  $b = -0.01$ ,  $t = -2.76$ ,  $p = .006$ ,  $pr = .02$ . All conditional effects for this interaction are presented in Table 6. Analyses of conditional effects revealed that the interaction between the desire to be sexually valued and daily perceptions of sexual rejection was a significant predictor of sexual desire for partner for those who were highly anxious,  $b = -0.03$ ,  $t = -2.71$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $pr = -.03$ , but not for those who experienced low anxiety,  $p = .451$ , as hypothesized. More specifically, for participants high in attachment anxiety, daily perceptions of partner sexual rejection predicted significantly less positive evaluations both for perceivers who also experienced a strong desire to be sexually valued,  $b = -0.11$ ,  $t = -9.04$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $pr = -.08$ , and those who experienced a low level of this desire,  $b = -0.06$ ,  $t = -3.54$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $pr = -.03$ , but the effect was stronger when the desire to be sexually valued was high as expected. This pattern is depicted in Figure 11.

**Figure 11**

*Moderating Effect of the Desire to Be Sexually Valued in the Relationship Between Daily Perceived Sexual Rejection from Partner and Daily Partner Evaluation for those High in Attachment Anxiety -Within-Person Effects*



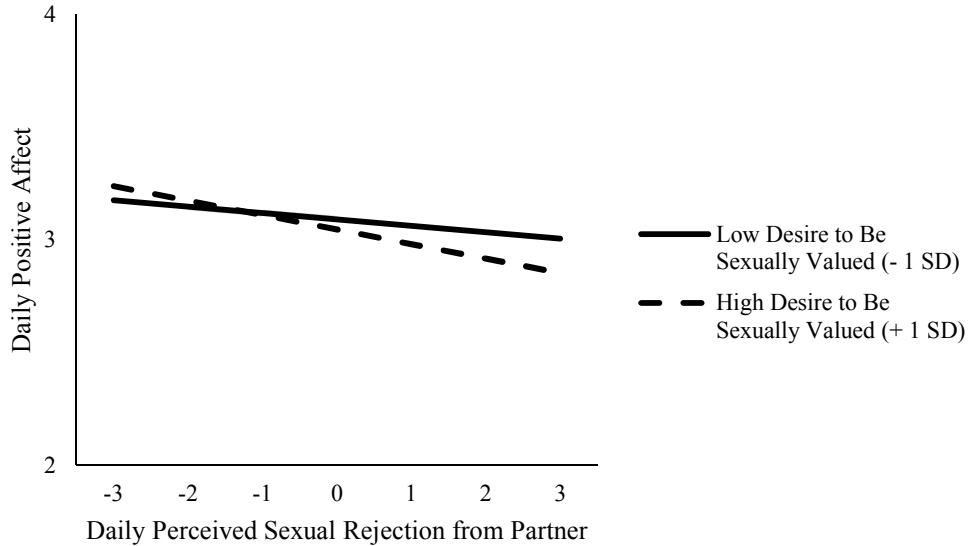
In addition, attachment anxiety, the desire to be sexually valued and daily perceptions of partner sexual rejection interacted in predicting daily positive affect,  $b = -0.01$ ,  $t = -2.91$ ,  $p = .004$ ,  $pr = .02$ . All conditional effects for this interaction are presented in Table 6. Analyses of conditional effects once again revealed that the interaction between the desire to be sexually valued and daily perceptions of sexual rejection was a significant predictor of daily positive affect for those who were highly anxious,  $b = -0.02$ ,  $t = -2.26$ ,  $p = .024$ ,  $pr = -.03$ , but not for those who experienced low anxiety,  $p = .155$ . More specifically, for participants high in attachment anxiety, daily perceptions of partner sexual rejection predicted significantly lower daily positive affect both for perceivers who also experienced a strong desire to be sexually valued,  $b = -0.07$ ,  $t = -6.22$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $pr = -.05$ , and those who experienced a low level of this desire,  $b = -0.03$ ,  $t = -1.97$ ,  $p = .049$ ,  $pr = -.02$ , but the effect was stronger when the desire to be sexually

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valued was high as expected. This pattern is analogous to the one observed for daily partner evaluations and is depicted in Figure 12.

### Figure 12

*Moderating Effect of the Desire to Be Sexually Valued in the Relationship Between Daily Perceived Sexual Rejection from Partner and Daily Positive Affect for those High in Attachment Anxiety – Within-Person Effects*



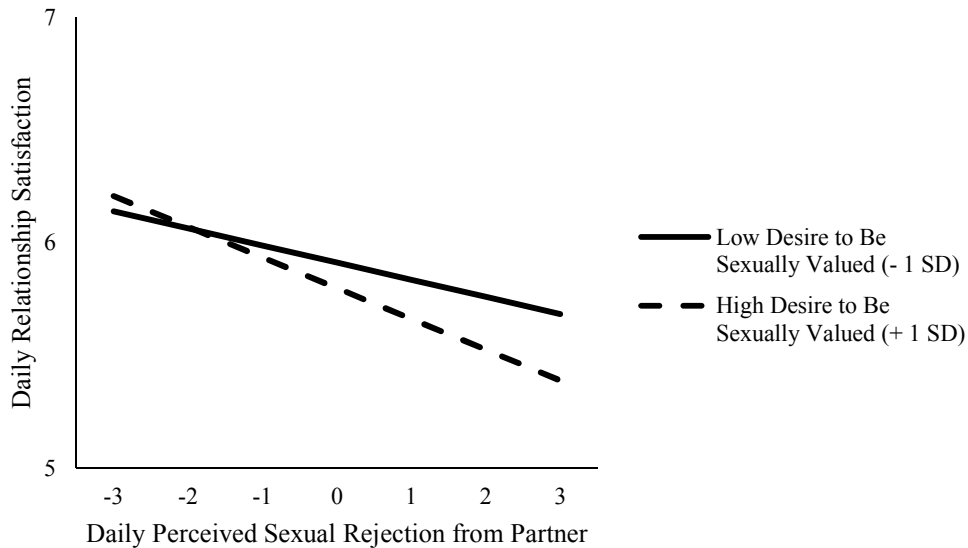
Finally, attachment anxiety, the desire to be sexually valued and daily perceptions of partner sexual rejection interacted in predicting daily relationship satisfaction,  $b = -0.01$ ,  $t = -2.91$ ,  $p = .004$ ,  $pr = .02$ . All conditional effects for this interaction are presented in Table 6. Analyses of conditional effects once again revealed that the interaction between the desire to be sexually valued and daily perceptions of sexual rejection was a significant predictor of daily relationship satisfaction for those who were highly anxious,  $b = -.03$ ,  $t = -3.24$ ,  $p = .001$ ,  $pr = -.03$ , but not for those who experienced low anxiety,  $p = .107$ . More specifically, for participants high in attachment anxiety, daily perceptions of partner sexual rejection predicted significantly lower daily relationship satisfaction both for perceivers who also experienced a strong desire to be sexually valued,  $b = -0.14$ ,  $t = -11.43$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $pr = -.10$ , and those who experienced a low level of this desire,  $b = -0.08$ ,

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$t = -4.73, p < .001, pr = -.05$ , but the effect was stronger when the desire to be sexually valued was high as expected. This pattern is analogous to the one observed for daily partner evaluations and daily positive affect and is depicted in Figure 13.

**Figure 13**

*Moderating Effect of the Desire to Be Sexually Valued in the Relationship Between Daily Perceived Sexual Rejection from Partner and Daily Relationship Satisfaction for those High in Attachment Anxiety – Within-Person Effects*



### *Desire to Be Sexually Valued Exacerbating Effects of Perceptions of Sexual Rejection on Well-Being – Between-Person Daily Effects*

Auxiliary analyses using measures from this study on the role of the desire to be sexually valued on the between-person effects of daily perceptions of sexual rejection on outcomes of interest are presented in Appendix T.

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**Table 6**  
*Conditional Effects of Perceptions of Sexual Rejection and the Desire to Be Sexually Valued at High and Low Attachment Anxiety – Study 1*

	Outcome											
	Daily Sexual Desire for Partner						Daily Partner Evaluation					
	Low Attachment Anxiety (- 1SD)			High Attachment Anxiety (+ 1SD)			Low Attachment Anxiety (- 1SD)			High Attachment Anxiety (+ 1SD)		
	<i>b</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>ES</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>ES</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>ES</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>ES</i>
	Effect of the Desire to Be Sexually Valued											
Low Sexual Rejection Perception (- 1 SD)	<b>.22</b>	<b>.001</b>	<b>.12</b>	.09	.218	.03	-.01	.857	-.01	.00	.968	-.01
High Sexual Rejection Perception (+ 1 SD)	.10	.143	.08	.12	.116	.04	.01	.848	.04	-.06	.193	-.04
	Effect of Daily Perceived Sexual Rejection											
Low Desire to Be Sexually Valued (-1SD)	<b>.09</b>	<b>&lt;.001</b>	<b>.02</b>	.04	.133	.01	<b>-.08</b>	<b>&lt;.001</b>	<b>-.05</b>	<b>-.06</b>	<b>.001</b>	<b>-.03</b>
High Desire to Be Sexually Valued (+ 1 SD)	-.03	.101	-.02	<b>.06</b>	<b>.001</b>	<b>.01</b>	<b>-.07</b>	<b>&lt;.001</b>	<b>-.05</b>	<b>-.11</b>	<b>&lt;.001</b>	<b>-.08</b>

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	Outcome											
	Daily Positive Affect						Daily Relationship Satisfaction					
	Low Attachment Anxiety (- 1SD)			High Attachment Anxiety (+ 1SD)			Low Attachment Anxiety (- 1SD)			High Attachment Anxiety (+ 1SD)		
	<i>b</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>ES</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>ES</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>ES</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>ES</i>
	Effect of the Desire to Be Sexually Valued											
Low Sexual Rejection Perception (- 1 SD)	.02	.595	.03	.00	.940	-.01	-.01	.821	.04	-.02	.609	-.02
High Sexual Rejection Perception (+ 1 SD)	.04	.238	.04	-.04	.294	-.03	-.02	.702	.04	-.09	.047	-.05
	Effect of Daily Perceived Sexual Rejection											
Low Desire to Be Sexually Valued (-1SD)	<b>-.06</b>	<b>&lt;.001</b>	<b>-.05</b>	-.03	.055	-.02	<b>-.07</b>	<b>&lt;.001</b>	<b>-.05</b>	<b>-.08</b>	<b>&lt;.001</b>	<b>-.05</b>
High Desire to Be Sexually Valued (+ 1 SD)	<b>-.04</b>	<b>&lt;.001</b>	<b>-.03</b>	<b>-.06</b>	<b>&lt;.001</b>	<b>-.05</b>	<b>-.07</b>	<b>&lt;.001</b>	<b>-.05</b>	<b>-.14</b>	<b>&lt;.001</b>	<b>-.10</b>

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**Table 7**

*Summary of the Support for the Exacerbating Role of the Desire to Be Sexually Valued on the Effect of Sexual Rejection on Outcomes*

– *Study 1*

Exacerbating role of the Desire to Be Sexually Valued on the Effect of Sexual Rejection	<i>Self-Esteem</i>	<i>Relationship Satisfaction</i>	<i>Sexual Evaluation/Desire of Partner</i>	<i>Acceptance of Partner</i>	<i>Partner Evaluation</i>	<i>Positive Affect</i>	<i>Negative Affect</i>
Trait Level	Not supported	Not supported	Not supported	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Anxiety Moderation	Not supported	Not supported	Not supported	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Within-Person Daily Level	Not supported	<b>Supported</b>	Not supported	Not supported	Not supported	<b>Supported for women but not men</b>	<b>Supported for women but not men</b>

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Anxiety Moderation	Not supported	<b>Supported – supported for those high in anxiety but not those low in anxiety</b>	Not supported	Not supported	<b>Supported – supported for those high in anxiety but not those low in anxiety</b>	<b>Supported – supported for those high in anxiety but not those low in anxiety</b>	Not supported
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***H2: Desire to Be Sexually Valued Wishful Thinking - Trait Level***

In a model, one's desire to be sexually valued and their partner's actual reported evaluation of the self were added as predictors of one's perceptions of the partner's sexual evaluation. Partner's actual reports were used as an accuracy benchmark to compare perceptions to. While one's desire to be sexually valued was not a significant predictor of their perceptions of partners' sexual evaluations,  $p = .563$ , partner reported sexual evaluation predicted higher perceptions that the self was sexually valued,  $b = -0.50$ ,  $t = 8.99$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $pr = .40$ . Thus, participants' perceptions of their partners' sexual evaluation of the self were somewhat accurate (i.e. predicted by actual evaluations reported by partners), in support of our hypothesis. However, I did not find evidence for wishful thinking, or a desire to be sexually valued bias, contrary to our hypothesis.

**Attachment Anxiety Moderation.** Further, I explored the moderating role of attachment anxiety on the effect of the desire to be sexually valued in the model above.

I included attachment anxiety and the product of attachment anxiety and the desire to be sexually valued to the above model to investigate their interaction. The interaction between the desire to be sexually valued and attachment anxiety was a significant predictor of the perceived sexual evaluation by one's partner,  $b = -0.10$ ,  $t = -3.14$ ,  $p = .002$ ,  $pr = -.15$ . I further explored the conditional effects of the desire to be sexually valued when attachment anxiety was relatively low ( $-1$  SD) and when it was relatively high ( $+1$  SD). Predicted values are depicted in Figure 14. For those relatively low in attachment anxiety, the desire to be sexually valued predicted higher perceptions that one was sexually valued by their partner,  $b = 0.11$ ,  $t = 2.14$ ,  $p = .033$ ,  $pr = .10$ , while for those high in anxiety, this desire predicted lower perceptions that one was sexually

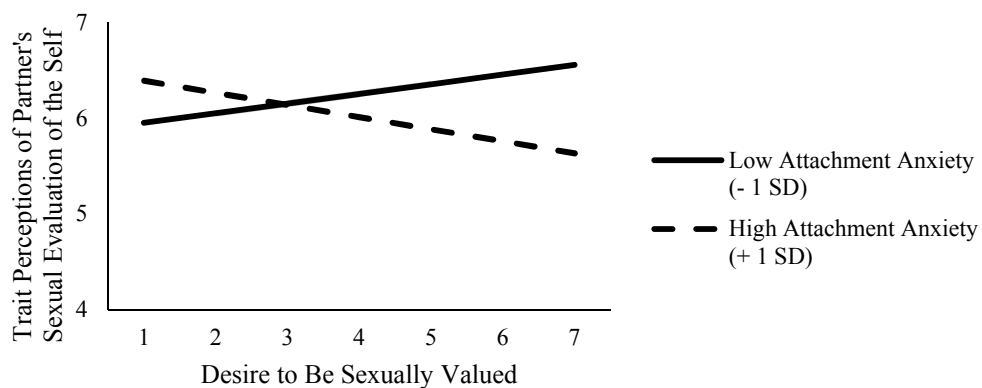
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valued by their partner,  $b = -0.12$ ,  $t = -2.12$ ,  $p = .035$ ,  $pr = -.11$ , when controlling for actual partner sexual evaluations.

Furthermore, I explored the conditional effects of attachment anxiety when the desire to be sexually valued was relatively low (- 1 SD) and when it was relatively high (+1 SD). When the desire to be sexually valued was low, attachment anxiety did not significantly predict perceptions of partner’s sexual evaluation,  $p = .145$ , however, when this desire was high, attachment anxiety predicted lower perceptions of partners’ sexual evaluations,  $b = -0.28$ ,  $t = -6.00$ ,  $p = .004$ ,  $pr = -.28$ , when controlling for actual partner sexual evaluations. Taken together, these results suggest that participants low in attachment anxiety experienced the hypothesized “wishful thinking” effect and perceived they were valued sexually by their partners above and beyond what the partners actually reported when they desired to be sexually valued. However, participants high in attachment anxiety appeared to experience the opposite effect and their desire to be sexually valued was negatively associated with their perceptions of how much their partners valued them in the sexual domain.

**Figure 14**

*Attachment Moderation of the Desire to Be Sexually Valued Bias on Trait Perceptions of Partner’s Sexual Evaluation of the Self*



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**Self-Esteem Moderation.** Further, I explored the moderating role of self-esteem of the effect of the desire to be sexually valued on perceptions of partners’ sexual evaluation of the self.

I included self-esteem and the product of self-esteem and the desire to be sexually valued to the above model to investigate their interaction. The interaction between the desire to be sexually valued and self-esteem was not a significant predictor of perceived sexual evaluation by one’s partner,  $p = .357$ .

### *Auxiliary Analysis - Analysis of Discrepancies Between Perceptions and Partner’s Evaluations*

Analyses confirmed that perceptions of partner sexual evaluations were somewhat biased by the desire to be sexually valued although the effect of this bias depended on attachment anxiety. To further explore the nature of this bias, and more specifically whether those who desired to be sexually valued by their partners were likely to overestimate how much those partners valued them in the sexual domain, an outcome variable representing the difference between one’s perceptions of their partner’s sexual evaluations of them and the actual sexual evaluation reported by their partner was created using variables assessing general tendencies. Positive scores on this variable represented likelihood to overestimate partner’s sexual evaluation of the self, while negative scores represented a likelihood to underestimate those evaluations. This outcome was modeled as predicted by the desire to be sexually valued, actual reported sexual evaluation from partner and attachment anxiety. All predictors were centered on their grand mean. Thus, the intercept in this model represented the difference between one’s perceptions of their partner’s sexual evaluation of them and the sexual evaluation that partner actually

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reported for a participant with an average standing on all predictors (Lemay et al., 2006; West & Kenny, 2011). Analyses suggested that on average participants tended to underestimate how sexually valued they were by their partners,  $b_{\text{intercept}} = -.26$ ,  $t = -6.54$ ,  $p < .001$ . Further, analysis was repeated after re-centering the desire to be sexually valued and estimating the average difference between one’s perceptions of their partner’s sexual evaluation of them and the sexual evaluation that partner actually reported for those relatively low in that desire (- 1 SD) and those relatively high in the desire (+ 1 SD) but with average standing on all other predictors. Both those low in this desire,  $b_{\text{intercept}} = -.27$ ,  $t = -4.62$ ,  $p < .001$ , and those high in the desire,  $b_{\text{intercept}} = -.26$ ,  $t = -4.47$ ,  $p < .001$ , on average underestimated how sexually valued they were by their partners.

### **H2a: Desire to Be Sexually Valued Wishful Thinking and Relationship Outcomes – Trait Level**

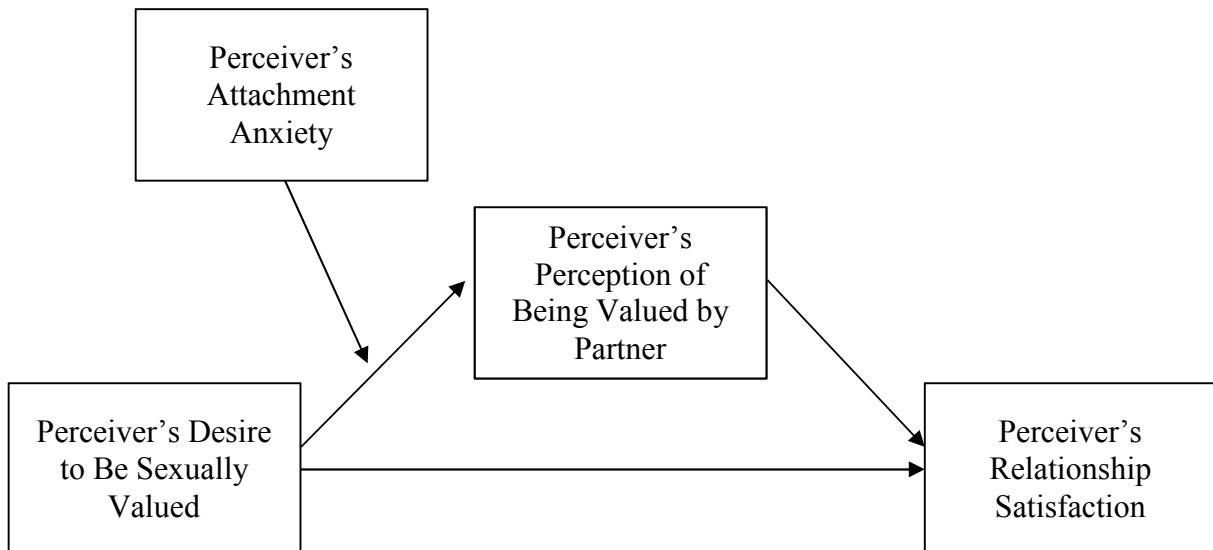
The overall indirect effect of the desire to be sexually valued on relationship satisfaction through perceptions that one was sexually valued by their partner while controlling for actual sexual evaluations from partner was not examined because of the non-significant relationship between the desire to be sexually valued and one’s perceptions of sexual value to their partner. However, given that attachment anxiety moderated this relationship, the moderated mediation model depicted in Figure 15 was examined instead while controlling for actual reported sexual evaluation from one’s partner. The model was fit using path analysis in MPlus (Version 5.2). Indirect effects of the desire to be sexually valued on relationship satisfaction were examined separately for those with low levels of attachment anxiety (- 1 SD) and those with high levels of attachment anxiety (+1 SD). Confidence intervals around these effects were constructed using bootstrapping with 5,000 repetitions. To account for the dyadic nature of the data,

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all structural pathways were constrained to equality across dyad members using recommendations from Olsen and Kenny (2006). Further, covariances between variables of interest were accounted for and analogously constrained to equality across dyad members. More specifically, the covariance between one’s relationship satisfaction and their own and their partner’s attachment anxiety and the covariance between relationship satisfaction and the product of the desire to be sexually valued and perceptions of partner sexual evaluations were accounted for. Additionally, sexual evaluations for one’s partner were modeled as covarying with one’s relationship satisfaction and with their perceptions of the partner’s sexual evaluations of the self. The model had excellent fit based on recommendation from Hu & Bentler (1999),  $\chi^2(36) = 46.52, p = .112, CFI = .99, RMSEA = .03, SRMR = .03$ .

**Figure 15**

*Attachment Moderation of the Indirect Effect of the Desire to Be Sexually Valued on Relationship Satisfaction through Perceptions of Partner’s Sexual Evaluation of the Self*



Analyses suggested that for those who were low in attachment anxiety, the desire to be sexually valued predicted significantly higher relationship satisfaction through

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perceptions of sexual value to one's partner as expected,  $b = 0.03$ , 95% CI [0.01 0.06]. However, for those who were relatively anxious, this indirect effect was negative,  $b = -0.04$ , 95% CI [-0.08 -0.01]. Thus, these results suggest that wishful thinking about partners' sexual evaluation of the self is associated with higher relationship satisfaction for those low in attachment anxiety. However, anxious people who want to be sexually valued might underestimate their partner's sexual evaluation of them and experience lower relationship satisfaction as a result.

### **H2: Desire to Be Sexually Valued Wishful Thinking - Daily Level**

Next, the biasing effect of the desire to be sexually valued on daily perceptions of partner sexual evaluations of the self was examined. In a model, one's desire to be sexually valued and their partner's average reported sexual desire for the self across days were added as predictors of one's daily perceptions of their partner's sexual evaluation of them. Partner's actual reports were used as an accuracy benchmark to compare perceptions to. While one's desire to be sexually valued was not a significant predictor of perceptions of the partners' sexual evaluations,  $p = .751$ , partner reported sexual desire for the self predicted higher average daily perceptions that one is sexually valued by their partner,  $b = 0.85$ ,  $t = 31.43$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $pr = .46$ . Thus, participants' average daily perceptions of their partners' sexual desire of the self were somewhat accurate i.e. predicted by actual daily desire reported by partners in support of our hypothesis. However, average daily perceptions of partner's sexual desire were not biased by the desire to be sexually valued, contrary to our hypothesis. Thus, the indirect effect of the desire to be sexually valued on relationship satisfaction through perceptions that one is sexually valued by their partner was not investigated because of the lack of a significant

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relationship between the desire to be sexually valued and perceptions of partner sexual evaluations.

**Attachment Anxiety Moderation.** Further, I explored the moderating role of attachment anxiety on the effect of the desire to be sexually valued in the previous model.

I included one’s desire to be sexually valued, their attachment anxiety, their partner’s average daily reported sexual desire of the self, and their interaction as predictors of daily perceptions of partner’s sexual desire for the self. The interaction between the desire to be sexually valued and attachment anxiety was not a significant predictor of daily perceived sexual desire by one’s partner,  $p = .608$ .

**Self-Esteem Moderation.** Further, I explored the moderating role of self-esteem on the effect of the desire to be sexually valued on average daily perceptions of partners’ sexual evaluation of the self.

I included one’s desire to be sexually valued and self-esteem, their partner’s average daily reported sexual desire of the self and their interaction as predictors of daily perceptions of partner’s sexual desire for the self. The interaction between the desire to be sexually valued and self-esteem was not a significant predictor of daily perceived sexual desire by one’s partner,  $p = .436$ .

## **H2b: Desire to Be Sexually Valued, Initiating Sexual Activity and Wishful Thinking**

To investigate whether the desire to be sexually valued was related to a higher likelihood of initiating sexual activity, the desire to be sexually valued measured at the preliminary survey was modeled as a predictor of the between person differences in daily initiation of sexual activity. The desire to be sexually valued was not a significant predictor of this outcome,  $p = .103$ . Further, gender was added as a predictor of the

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differences in initiation of sexual activity. Analyses suggested that women were significantly less likely to initiate daily sexual activity,  $b = -0.23$ ,  $t = -3.46$ ,  $p = .001$ ,  $pr = -.07$ . However, the desire to be sexually valued was still not a significant predictor of sexual initiation when controlling for gender,  $p = .445$ .

The product of the desire to be sexually valued and gender was added as a predictor to investigate their interaction. This product was not a significant predictor of differences in the tendency to initiate sexual activity,  $p = .334$ .

The hypothesis that the desire to be sexually valued would explain sexual initiation partly through wishful thinking was not supported given that this desire was not significantly related to perceptions that the partner sexually values the self when accounting for accuracy benchmarks using between person difference in daily variables. However, in a model controlling for perceptions of sexual evaluations from partner measured at intake, and actual sexual evaluation reported from partner at intake, the desire to be sexually valued was associated with a higher likelihood of initiating sexual activity across days,  $b = 0.10$ ,  $t = 2.26$ ,  $p = .024$ ,  $pr = .05$ . Further, the same model suggested that those who considered themselves more sexually valued by their partners were also more likely to initiate sexual activity,  $b = 0.12$ ,  $t = 2.49$ ,  $p = .013$ ,  $pr = .08$ . Actual reported sexual evaluations from partners were not associated with initiation of sexual activity,  $p = .645$ .

This model was replicated controlling for between-person differences in perceptions of sexual evaluations from partner and actual sexual evaluation reported from partner reported using the daily surveys. People who perceived they were sexually desired more strongly by their partners across days were more likely to initiate sexual

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activity,  $b = 0.42$ ,  $t = 10.23$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $pr = .05$ . However, although the effect of the desire to be sexually valued on initiation of sexual activity was trending in the expected direction, it was not significant,  $p = .06$ . Once again, actual reported sexual evaluation from one's partner was not associated with instigation of sexual activity,  $p = .532$ .

### **Discussion**

The desire to be sexually valued did not seem to exacerbate the effects of sexual rejection on chronic outcomes of interest. In addition, contrary to initial hypothesizing, for those who experienced a high desire to be sexually valued, sexual rejection from a partner was associated with a more positive sexual evaluation of that partner. Further, the relationship between the desire to be sexually valued and chronic sexual rejection in predicting outcomes of interest was not dependent on attachment anxiety.

Additionally, the desire to be sexually valued did not exacerbate the within-person effects of daily sexual rejection on outcomes of interest for everyone. Contrary to initial hypothesizing, for those who experienced a high desire to be sexually valued, daily fluctuations in sexual rejection perceptions were not associated with participants' sexual desire for their partners. However, for those low in the desire to be sexually valued, on days when they felt more sexual rejection from their partners, they desired those partners more strongly. Further, the desire to be sexually valued did not exacerbate the effects of daily fluctuations of perceptions of sexual rejection on daily partner acceptance and evaluation and daily self-esteem. However, the desire to be sexually valued did have the expected exacerbating effect on daily relationship satisfaction and, for women, on daily positive and negative affect.

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Further, the exacerbating effect of the desire to be sexually valued on the within-person effects of perceived daily sexual rejection seemed to depend on attachment anxiety as well. Unexpectedly, the desire to be sexually valued exacerbated the effects of perceived sexual rejection from a partner on daily sexual desire for that partner for those who experienced low attachment anxiety, but not for those who were highly anxious. However, in support of initial theorizing, the desire to be sexually valued exacerbated the effects of daily perceived sexual rejection on daily partner evaluations, daily positive affect and daily relationship satisfaction particularly for those who were highly anxious.

Study 1 confirmed that perceptions that one is sexually valued by their partner within committed romantic relationships are partly accurate – i.e. based on actual perceptions reported by that partner, as hypothesized. I did not find evidence for the bias expected to result from the desire to be sexually valued for all participants. However, analyses suggest the chronic positive bias associated with the desire to be sexually valued manifested for those low in attachment anxiety, while those who were highly anxious experienced a chronic negative bias that was not expected. In addition, through these biases the desire to be sexually valued demonstrated a positive indirect effect on relationship satisfaction for participants low in attachment anxiety, and a negative indirect effect on relationship satisfaction for participants high in attachment anxiety. These biases were not observed using daily measurements. Further, self-esteem did not seem to moderate the expected desire to be sexually valued bias.

Moreover, I did not find evidence that the desire to be sexually valued interacted with gender in predicting daily tendencies to initiate sexual activity. However, the desire to be sexually valued predicted a higher likelihood of initiating sexual activity. This

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desire was associated with a higher likelihood to initiate sexual activity across days when accounting for trait perceptions of partner sexual evaluations and actual sexual evaluation reported from partner.

#### **Chapter 4: Study 2. Differentiating Between Targets of the Desire to Be Sexually Valued**

Study 2 was used to examine the relationship between the general desire to be sexually valued and the desire to be sexually valued by one’s romantic partner. Furthermore, the study allowed to test H2a concerning the indirect positive effect of the desire to be sexually valued by one’s romantic partner specifically on relationship and self-evaluation outcomes including relationship and sexual satisfaction and sexual self-esteem through perceptions of sexual value to one’s partner, and H2b stating that the desire to be sexually valued by one’s romantic partner can lead to higher likelihood of initiating sexual activity with romantic partners. However, an accuracy benchmark (i.e., a measure of the partner’s actual evaluation of the participant) was not available in this study. The moderating role of attachment anxiety in the relationship between the desire to be sexually valued by one’s partner and perceived sexual evaluations from that partner was examined. Further, the desire to be sexually valued by extradyadic partners was measured; its relationship with the general desire to be sexually valued and the desire to be sexually valued by one’s romantic partner specifically were examined. Additionally, the desire to be sexually valued by extradyadic partners and the general desire to be sexually valued were used as covariates when investigating effects of the desire to be sexually valued by one’s romantic partner. Sexual desire for one’s partner and need to belong were also modeled as covariates in all models.

#### **Participants**

Participants for this study were recruited using the University of Maryland SONA credit system to complete a self-report questionnaire taking up to an hour of their time. Participants needed to be in a committed romantic relationship to qualify for the study (M

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length = 1.46 years, SD = 1.80 years). Most participants, 92.6%, identified their relationship as monogamous; 3.5% identified it as open; 2.4% were engaged or married and .4% identified their relationship as “Other”. The sample consisted of 256 participants after removing participants who failed to complete an attention check. Participants included 57.4% women, 41% men and 1.2% who identified as “Other” (Age M = 20.06 years, SD=3.07). The sample was relatively diverse with 56.6 % Caucasian, 17.2% Asian or Asian American participants, 9.4% Black or African American, 9% Hispanic, .4% Native American participants, and 7.0% who identified as Other”. Most participants, 85.2%, identified as heterosexual or straight; 9.8% identified as bisexual; 3.1% identified as homosexual or gay, and 1.6% identified as “Other“.

### **Procedure**

Participants completed a set of self-report questionnaires pertaining to the current study and some measures for unrelated hypotheses taking up to an hour of their time. They were given a choice whether to access the study online at their convenience or during a scheduled lab session and were debriefed electronically at the end of the study. Participant answers were kept anonymous and participants automatically received 1 class credit after completion of the survey.

### **Measures**

#### ***Desire to Be Sexually Valued – General***

General desire to be sexually valued was measured with the scale described in Study 1. The full scale can be found in Appendix A. The scale included an attention check item – “Please choose “Somewhat disagree””. The scale was internally consistent,  $\alpha = .85$ .

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### ***Desire to be Sexually Valued – Romantic Partner***

To assess desire to be sexually valued by one’s current romantic partner each participant completed an 11-item scale adapted from the general measure to pertain specifically to a current romantic partner. A sample item is “I would be disappointed if I was seen as sexually undesirable by my partner.” The items included in the analysis are presented in Appendix E. Negatively worded items were reverse scored and after all items were averaged to create a composite score. A higher score indicates greater desire to be sexually valued by a romantic partner. The scale was internally consistent,  $\alpha = .77$ .

### ***Desire to Be Sexually Valued – Extradyadic Partners***

To assess desire to be sexually valued by extradyadic partners participants completed an 11-items scale adapted from the measure of the general desire to be sexually valued to pertain only to extradyadic partners. A sample item is “I want people outside of my current relationship to be sexually attracted to me.” The items included in the analysis are presented in Appendix F. Negatively worded items were reverse scored and after all items were averaged to create a composite score. A higher score indicates greater desire to be sexually valued by extradyadic partners. The scale was internally consistent,  $\alpha = .89$ .

### ***Attachment Anxiety***

Participants completed 18 items assessing attachment anxiety from the revised version of the Experiences in Close Relationships scale (Fraley et al., 2000). Items were completed using a scale from 1 – *Strongly Disagree* to 7 – *Strongly Agree*. A sample item assessing attachment anxiety is “I am afraid that I will lose my partner’s love.”

Composite scores were created by first reverse scoring negatively worded items and then

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averaging all items. Higher composites indicate greater attachment anxiety. The full measure is available in Appendix G. The scale was internally consistent,  $\alpha = .92$ .

### ***Satisfaction with Sex Life Scale***

Sexual satisfaction with partner was measured using a 5-item scale adapted from the Satisfaction with Sex Life Scale (Neto, 2012) to pertain specifically to satisfaction with one’s sex life with a current romantic partner. Items are completed using a scale from 1 – *Strongly Disagree* to 7 – *Strongly Agree*. A sample item is “I am satisfied with our sex life.” All items were averaged to create a composite score. A higher score indicates greater sexual satisfaction with partner. The full measure is available in Appendix H. The scale was internally consistent,  $\alpha = .91$ .

### ***Perceived Sexual Value – Romantic Partner***

To assess one’s perceived sexual value to their romantic partner, a 10-item measure was adapted from the desire to be sexually valued by partner measure. Items were modified to assess perception, rather than desire, of being sexually valued by one’s partner. Items are completed using a scale from 1 – *Strongly Disagree* to 7 – *Strongly Agree*. A sample item is “I am sexually desired by my partner.” The items included in the analysis are presented in Appendix I. Negatively worded items were reverse scored and after all items were averaged to create a composite score. A higher score indicates a perception of a greater sexual evaluation from one’s partner. The scale was internally consistent,  $\alpha = .88$ .

### ***Relationship Satisfaction***

Relationship satisfaction was assessed using the 7-item Relationship Assessment Scale (Hendrick et al., 1988). Items were completed using a scale from 1 – *Low* to 5 –

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*High.* A sample item is “How well does your partner meet your needs?” Negatively worded items were reverse scored and after all items were averaged to create a composite score. A higher score indicates greater relationship satisfaction. The full measure is available in Appendix J. The scale was internally consistent,  $\alpha = .89$ .

### ***Initiation of Physical Intimacy and Sexual Activity with Partner***

The tendency to initiate sexual activity and physical intimacy with one’s partner was assessed by 5 items developed for the current study for which participants indicated how likely they were in their current relationship to engage in a number of behaviors on a scale from 1 – *Not at all* to 5 – *Extremely*. A sample item is “Initiate physical intimacy with your partner?” All items were averaged to create a composite score. A higher score indicates a greater tendency to initiate sexual activity. The full measure is available in Appendix L. The scale was internally consistent,  $\alpha = .93$ .

### ***Sexual Desire for Partner***

Sexual desire for a romantic partner is measured using an approach outlined by Birnbaum and colleagues (2011). Participants indicated the extent to which they were generally interested in engaging in seven sexual and pre-sexual activities with their partner including “kissing”, “making out” and “having intercourse.” Items are assessed on a scale from 1 – *Not at All* to 5 - *Extremely*. All items were averaged to create a composite score. A higher score indicates greater sexual desire for one’s partner. The scale was internally consistent,  $\alpha = .90$ .

### ***Need to Belong***

Participants completed 11 items from the Need to Belong Scale (e.g. “I need to feel that there are people I can turn to in times of need”; “I have a strong need to belong”;

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Leary et al., 2013). Items were completed on 7-point response scales 1- *Strongly Disagree* to 7 - *Strongly Agree* and the scale was internally consistent ( $\alpha = .82$ ). The full measure is available in Appendix S. Negatively worded items were reverse scored and after all items were averaged to create a composite score. A higher score indicates greater need to belong.

### ***Sexual Self-Esteem***

Participants completed 9 items from the Sexual Self-Esteem subscale of the Sexuality Scale (e.g. “I am a good sexual partner”; “I am better at sex than most other people”; Snell & Papini, 1989). The full measure is available in Appendix K. Items were completed on 7-point response scales 1- *Strongly Disagree* to 7 - *Strongly Agree* and the scale was internally consistent ( $\alpha = .91$ ). Negatively worded items were reverse scored and after all items were averaged to create a composite score. A higher score indicates greater sexual self-esteem.

### **Analysis Strategy**

Regression analyses were utilized to test hypotheses. Unstandardized regression coefficients are reported. Cohen’s  $f^2$  was used to estimate effect sizes. Indirect effects were estimated using bootstrapping with 10,000 resamples in the PROCESS macro for SPSS (Hayes, 2017). Posteriori power analyses suggest that with the current sample size,  $N=254$ , 6 predictors, and an  $\alpha=.05$ , there was .94 power to detect single regression coefficients with small effect sizes,  $f^2 = .05$  (Faul et al., 2007). Correlations, means, and standard deviations for all variables can be found in Table 8. Gender and relationship length moderations were explored for all models and results are reported separately for men and women or for shorter and longer relationships respectively if the moderation is

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significant. For effects that investigated gender differences, only differences between men and women were compared, since sample size of non-binary participants was not sufficient for meaningful comparisons. Those who identified as non-binary and those who did not provide gender information were eliminated from the moderation analyses involving gender.

### **Descriptive Statistics and Correlations**

The average response on the Desire to Be Sexually Valued Scale ( $M=4.96$ ,  $SD=0.55$ ) was significantly higher than its midpoint,  $t(255) = 8.83$ ,  $p < .001$ , Cohen's  $d = .85$ . Similarly, participants generally desired to be valued specifically by their romantic partners ( $M=5.82$ ,  $SD=0.71$ ), providing responses higher than the midpoint of the scale,  $t(254) = 29.87$ ,  $p < .001$ , Cohen's  $d = 1.87$ . However, responses to the scale measuring the desire to be sexually valued by extradyadic partners ( $M= 3.70$ ,  $SD = 1.18$ ) were significantly lower than the scale's midpoint,  $t(255) = -10.87$ ,  $p < .001$ , Cohen's  $d = -0.68$ .

Further, women experienced significantly higher desire to be sexually valued by their romantic partners ( $M = 5.97$ ,  $SD = 0.66$ ) than men ( $M = 5.60$ ,  $SD = 0.72$ ),  $t(250)=4.37$ ,  $p<.001$ , Cohen's  $d = 0.56$ . However, there were no gender differences in the general desire to be sexually valued,  $p = .113$ , and the desire to be sexually valued by extradyadic partners,  $p = .995$ .

Additionally, age did not predict the desire to be sexually valued regardless of target,  $ps>.054$ . Relationship length was not a significant predictor of the general desire to be sexually valued or the desire to be valued specifically by extradyadic partners,  $ps>.500$ . However, people who had been in a relationship with their partner longer, were

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more likely to experience a desire to be valued specifically by them,  $b = .01$ ,  $t = 3.30$ ,  $p = .001$ ,  $f^2 = .25$ .

Both the desire to be sexually valued by one's romantic partner,  $b = .39$ ,  $t = 7.25$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $f^2 = .13$ , and the desire to be valued by extradyadic partners,  $b = .41$ ,  $t = 11.45$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $f^2 = .39$ , were associated with the general desire to be sexually valued in a model using the desire to be sexually valued by one's romantic partner and the desire to be sexually valued by extradyadic partners as predictors of the general desire.

A paired sample test revealed that participants had a higher desire to be sexually valued by their romantic partners than by extradyadic partners,  $t(254) = 26.52$ ,  $p < .001$ , Cohen's  $d = 2.16$ .

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**Table 8**

*Correlations, Means and Standard Deviations for Study 2 Variables*

	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.
1. Desire to Be Sexually Valued by Partner	5.82 (0.71)								
2. Desire to Be Sexually Valued by Extradynamic Partners	.15*	3.70 (1.18)							
3. General Desire to Be Sexually Valued	.42*	.59*	4.97 (0.85)						
4. Initiation of Sexual Activity and Physical Intimacy	.34*	.01	.16*	3.69 (0.87)					
5. Need to Belong	.30*	.30*	.31*	-.02	4.82 (0.94)				
6. Sexual Desire for Partner	.42*	-.03	.22*	.58*	.04	4.14 (0.80)			
7. Perceptions of Sexual Evaluation from Partner	.38*	-.03	.19*	.25*	.13*	.34*	5.90 (0.80)		
8. Sexual Satisfaction	.16*	-.16*	.07	.24*	.02	.29*	.39*	5.36 (1.26)	
9. Relationship Satisfaction	.29*	-.30*	-.03	.21*	.02	.38*	.29*	.51*	4.31 (0.68)

Note. \* $p < .05$ . Means (outside parentheses) and standard deviations (inside parentheses) appear on the diagonal. N=255 observation

**Desire to Be Sexually Valued by Romantic Partner and Initiation of Sexual Activity and Physical Intimacy**

The desire to be sexually valued by one’s partner and gender were modeled as predictors of likelihood of initiating sexual/physical activity with romantic partners while controlling for need to belong, sexual desire towards that partner, the general desire to be sexually valued and the desire to be sexually valued by extradyadic partners. Results from that regression can be found in Table 9. Analyses suggested that those who experienced a higher desire to be sexually valued by their partners, were more likely to initiate sexual activity and physical intimacy with that partner. There were no gender differences in the likelihood to initiate physical intimacy and sexual activity with one’s partner based on this model.

**Table 9**

*Desire to be Sexually Valued by Romantic Partner and Covariates Predicting Likelihood of Initiating Physical Intimacy and Sexual Activity with Partner – Study 2*

Predictor	<i>b</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>f</i> <sup>2</sup>
<b>Desire to Be Sexually Valued by Romantic Partner</b>	<b>0.19</b>	<b>2.34</b>	<b>.020</b>	<b>.02</b>
Desire to Be Sexually Valued by Extradyadic Partners	0.01	0.16	.876	.00
General Desire to Be Sexually Valued	-0.01	-0.15	.882	.00
Gender	-0.01	-0.15	.882	.00
<b>Sexual Desire for Partner</b>	<b>0.59</b>	<b>9.08</b>	<b>&lt;.001</b>	<b>.27</b>
Need to Belong	-0.90	-1.74	.083	.01

Next, the product term of the desire to be sexually valued by one’s partner and gender was added to the model outlined above in order to investigate their interaction.

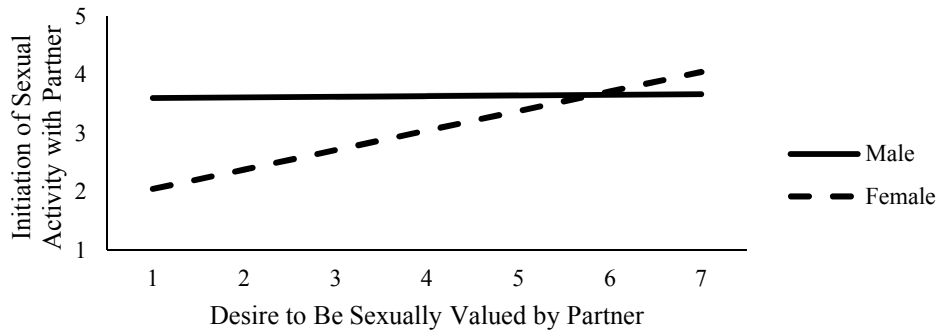
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Additionally, the interactions between gender and all outlined covariates were controlled for. None of these additional interactions involving covariates were significant predictors of the outcome of interest,  $p > .295$ . The interaction term between the desire to be sexually valued by one’s partner and gender was a significant predictor of the likelihood to initiate sexual activity and physical intimacy,  $b = .32$ ,  $t = 2.02$ ,  $p = .044$ ,  $f^2 = .01$ .

Further, I explored the conditional effects of the desire to be sexually valued for men and women separately. For women the desire to be sexually valued by their partner was associated with a higher likelihood of initiating sexual activity,  $b = .33$ ,  $t = 2.97$ ,  $p = .003$ ,  $f^2 = .02$ , above and beyond the covariates, while no significant effect was exhibited for men,  $p = .925$ . This pattern is depicted in Figure 16.

**Figure 16**

*Moderating Effect of Gender in the relationship between the Desire to Be Sexually Valued by One’s Partner and Initiating Physical Intimacy and Sexual Activity with that Partner*



I further explored gender differences when the desire to be sexually valued by one’s partner was relatively low ( $-1$  SD) and when it was relatively high ( $+1$  SD). There were no gender differences in likelihood of initiating sexual activity at either level of the desire to be sexually valued,  $p > .689$ .

**Desire to Be Sexually Valued by Romantic Partner, Perceptions of Sexual Value and Relationship and Self-Evaluation Outcomes**

To examine whether the desire to be sexually valued by one’s partner indirectly predicted relationship outcomes through perceptions of partner sexual evaluations, first, the desire to be sexually valued by one’s romantic partner was modeled as a predictor of perceptions of that partner’s sexual evaluations of the self, while controlling for need to belong, sexual desire for that partner, the general desire to be sexually valued and the desire to be sexually valued by extradyadic partners, given that those predictors of the desire to be sexually valued might also be associated with higher perceptions of one’s sexual value in the eyes of their partner. Results of this regression can be found in Table 10. Analyses suggested that those who desired to be sexually valued by their partners more strongly were more likely to perceive that those partners actually valued them in the sexual domain.

**Table 10**

*Desire to be Sexually Valued by Romantic Partner and Covariates Predicting Perceptions of Sexual Value to Partner – Study 2*

Predictor	<i>b</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>f</i> <sup>2</sup>
<b>Desire to Be Sexually Valued by Romantic Partner</b>	<b>0.29</b>	<b>3.68</b>	<b>&lt;.001</b>	<b>.05</b>
Desire to Be Sexually Valued by Extradyadic Partners	-0.10	-1.96	.051	.01
General Desire to Be Sexually Valued	0.10	1.35	.178	.01
<b>Sexual Desire for Partner</b>	<b>0.20</b>	<b>3.12</b>	<b>.002</b>	<b>.03</b>
Need to Belong	0.05	0.90	.368	.00

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Additionally, attachment anxiety, the interaction between attachment anxiety and the desire to be sexually valued, and the interactions between attachment anxiety and all covariates were added to the model above. Attachment anxiety did not moderate the effect of any of the predictors including the desire to be sexually valued by one’s partner on perceptions of sexual value to partner,  $ps > .109$ .

Next, in separate models, I regressed outcomes of interest – relationship and sexual satisfaction and sexual self-esteem – on both the desire to be sexually valued by one’s partner and perceived sexual value from that partner as well as all covariates from the previous step. Results of this regression can be found in Table 11.

**Table 11**

*Desire to be Sexually Valued by Romantic Partner, Perceptions of Sexual Value to Partner, and Covariates Predicting Relationship and Self-Evaluations – Study 2*

Predictor	<i>b</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>f</i> <sup>2</sup>
<b>Outcome – Relationship Satisfaction</b>				
<b>Desire to Be Sexually Valued by Romantic Partner</b>	<b>0.16</b>	<b>2.50</b>	<b>.013</b>	<b>.02</b>
<b>Perceptions of Sexual Value to Partner</b>	<b>0.11</b>	<b>2.09</b>	<b>.038</b>	<b>.02</b>
<b>Desire to Be Sexually Valued by Extradynamic Partners</b>	<b>-0.19</b>	<b>-4.64</b>	<b>&lt;.001</b>	<b>.06</b>
General Desire to Be Sexually Valued	0.00	-0.05	.962	.00
<b>Sexual Desire for Partner</b>	<b>0.22</b>	<b>4.15</b>	<b>&lt;.001</b>	<b>.05</b>
Need to Belong	0.03	0.70	.484	.00
<b>Outcome – Sexual Satisfaction</b>				
Desire to Be Sexually Valued by Romantic Partner	-0.09	-0.73	.467	.00
<b>Perceptions of Sexual Value to Partner</b>	<b>0.53</b>	<b>5.26</b>	<b>&lt;.001</b>	<b>.10</b>

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<b>Desire to Be Sexually Valued by Extradynamic Partners</b>	<b>-0.20</b>	<b>2.53</b>	<b>.012</b>	<b>.02</b>
General Desire to Be Sexually Valued	0.16	1.37	.173	.01
<b>Sexual Desire for Partner</b>	<b>0.30</b>	<b>2.83</b>	<b>.005</b>	<b>.03</b>
Need to Belong	0.02	0.194	.846	.00
<b>Outcome – Sexual Self-Esteem</b>				
Desire to Be Sexually Valued by Romantic Partner	-0.15	-1.39	.165	.01
<b>Perceptions of Sexual Value to Partner</b>	<b>0.22</b>	<b>2.53</b>	<b>.012</b>	<b>.02</b>
<b>Desire to Be Sexually Valued by Extradynamic Partners</b>	<b>0.15</b>	<b>2.13</b>	<b>.034</b>	<b>.02</b>
General Desire to Be Sexually Valued	0.11	1.06	.291	.00
<b>Sexual Desire for Partner</b>	<b>0.41</b>	<b>4.49</b>	<b>&lt;.001</b>	<b>.07</b>
Need to Belong	-0.19	-2.67	.008	.02

Perceptions of more positive sexual evaluations from partner were related to higher relationship satisfaction, sexual satisfaction and sexual self-esteem. Further, in these models the desire to be sexually valued by one's romantic partner was associated with higher relationship satisfaction but did not exhibit a relationship with sexual satisfaction or sexual self-esteem.

Lastly, bootstrapping analyses were performed to test the indirect effect of the desire to be sexually valued by one's partner on relationship and sexual satisfaction and sexual self-esteem through perceptions of sexual value, while controlling for all covariates in the previous models. This desire had a significant indirect positive effect on sexual self-esteem,  $b = 0.06$ , 95% CI [0.01 0.14], and sexual satisfaction,  $b = 0.14$ , 95% CI [0.05 0.25], but not relationship satisfaction,  $b = 0.03$ , 95% CI [0.00 0.08], through

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perceptions that one was sexually valued by their partner. However, the desire to be sexually valued exhibited a direct positive effect on relationship satisfaction,  $b = 0.16$ , 95% CI [0.03 0.29], but not on sexual satisfaction,  $b = -0.09$ , 95% CI [-0.34 0.16], or sexual self-esteem in these models,  $b = -0.15$ , 95% CI [-0.37 0.06].

### **Desire to Be Sexually Valued and Infidelity**

Auxiliary analyses using measures from this study on the effects of the desire to be sexually valued by one’s partner, perceptions of partner sexual evaluation, and covariates on infidelity are presented in Appendix U.

### **Discussion**

As hypothesized, the desire to be sexually valued by one’s romantic partner was found to be related to a higher likelihood to initiate sexual activity and physical intimacy with that partner. However, this effect seemed to manifest only for women contrary to the initial hypothesis suggesting that the pattern might be more prominent for men.

Additionally, analyses suggested that the desire to be sexually valued by one’s partner had a significant positive effect on sexual satisfaction and sexual self-esteem but not relationship satisfaction through perceptions that one was sexually valued by their partner. The desire to be sexually valued by one’s partner, however, exhibited a direct positive effect on relationship satisfaction when controlling for perceptions that one was sexually valued by their partner and covariates. This study was not dyadic, so it is not possible to discern whether these effects were partially explained by a “wishful thinking” bias.

**Chapter 5: Study 3. A Dyadic Study Investigating Effects of the Desire to Be Sexually Valued by One’s Partner Specifically**

Study 3 is a dyadic study designed to investigate the effect of the desire to be sexually valued by one's partner specifically on cognition, motivation, and behavior. Further, this study explored the role of implicit beliefs about sexual value in the effect of desire to be sexually valued by one’s partner on engagement in behavior aimed at increasing one’s sexual value. In addition, the study examined whether those who held entity beliefs and highly desired to be sexually valued were more likely to suffer negative effects resulting from perceived sexual rejection. Two parts were initially included in the design – Part I investigating general tendencies and Part II manipulating perceptions of sexual rejection and investigating participants’ reactions to the manipulation. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the ineffectiveness of the manipulation, the second part was not administered to all participants. The first part of the study allowed for investigation of H2a-c concerning the wishful thinking effect of the desire to be sexually valued and its consequences, including relationship and sexual satisfaction and the initiation of sexual activity. The moderating role of attachment anxiety and general self-esteem on the wishful thinking effect was tested. In addition, H3 stating that the desire to be sexually valued can lead to engagement in behaviors aimed at increasing sexual value was tested. Further, I examined whether those who desired to be sexually valued by their partners were particularly likely to engage in behaviors they considered instrumental in increasing their sexual value to that partner using a measure of instrumentality beliefs. H4 concerning the relationship between desire to be sexually valued and sexual communal motivation was tested. Furthermore, H1 stating that the desire to be sexually valued exacerbates reactivity to sexual rejection was examined. This hypothesis proposes that

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those who highly desire to be sexually valued experience lower general and sexual self-esteem, more negative affect, and lower relationship and sexual satisfaction when they feel sexually rejected compared to those who do not desire sexual value strongly.

However, the rejection manipulation initially presented to participants was not utilized in these analyses because it proved ineffective, and because data collection for this component of the study was terminated due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Instead, reverse coded perceptions of partner’s sexual evaluation of the self were used to indicate rejection, as in Study 1, and this hypothesis was tested only using correlational data. Additionally, the moderating role of attachment anxiety and implicit beliefs in the relationship between sexual rejection and the desire to be sexually valued by one’s partner was examined. Finally, to ensure that the effects of desire to be sexually valued by partners are not due to associations with related but distinct motivations, all analyses controlled for the general desire to be sexually valued, the desire to be sexually valued by extradyadic partners, sex drive, the general desire to be valued by one’s partner (not specific to sexuality), and the desires to be valued by one’s partner specifically for one’s warmth and competence.

### **Participants**

Participants for this study were initially recruited through the UMD psychology subject pool. Participants needed to be in a committed monogamous romantic relationship and sexually active to qualify for the study and to participate along with their romantic partners. Initially, both partners were required to complete a pre-survey separately and attend the same laboratory session. Later, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the laboratory session was eliminated from the design and participants completed only

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the measures included in the initial pre-survey online. These participants received course credit in exchange for participation. Additional participants were recruited using the online Prolific system. In exchange for participation, both partners received up to \$10 each if they completed all parts of the study. A total of 204 couples were recruited after dropping couples in which at least one partner completed the survey so quickly as to suggest careless responding (under 5 min) and couples in which at least one partner failed multiple attention checks. Out of the total number of couples, 104 were recruited through SONA and 100 were recruited through Prolific. There was a significant difference in relationship length between the Prolific and SONA participants,  $t(106.29) = -10.87, p < .001$ , Cohen's  $d = -1.89$  such that the average relationship length for the Prolific participants (M length = 7.64 years, SD = 5.75 years) was significantly higher than the average relationship length for the SONA participants (M length = 1.28 years, SD = 1.11 years). Overall, the average relationship length amongst all couples was 4.43 years (SD = 5.21 years). Out of the full sample, 53.9% of the couples identified their relationship as “dating”, 16.7% identified it as “living together”, 4.9% were engaged, 21.1% were married and 1.5% identified their relationship as “Other”. In addition, the sample included 172 mixed sex couples, 7 male-male couples, 15 female-female couples and 5 couples in which at least one partner identified as “Other”.

Further, participants recruited through Prolific (M age = 32.13 years, SD = 9.40 years) were on average significantly older than those recruited through SONA (M age = 19.88 years, SD = 1.49 years),  $t(208.93) = -18.21, p < .001$ , Cohen's  $d = -2.06$ . The average age in the full sample was 26 years (SD = 9.09 years). The majority of participants, 74%, identified as white. The sample also included 4.4% who identified as

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Latinx, 6.4% who identified as Black, and 3.2% who identified as “Other”. Additionally, participants from SONA primarily resided in the United States, but the Prolific participants included 64.5% who resided in the United Kingdom, 21.3% who resided in the United States, 2.8% who resided in New Zealand, 2.4% who resided in Canada and 2.4% who resided in other countries. While at least one member of the couples recruited through SONA needed to be a student, 75.7% of the Prolific participants indicated that they were not students. Hypotheses were investigated using the full sample because there were no differences in the effects studied between the SONA and Prolific participants (moderation effects were tested).

### **Procedure**

Participants completed the measures outlined below and some measures unrelated to the current hypotheses online. They provided electronic consent and were debriefed at the end of the study. The first 51 couples also participated in a lab session that included a manipulation aimed at inducing sexual rejection. However, the manipulation was not successful since participants assigned to the sexual rejection condition did not feel more sexually rejected than those assigned to the sexual acceptance or control conditions,  $p > .328$ . In part, this may have been due to the low sample size. Because of its ineffectiveness and the inability to continue administering the manipulation in-person due to measures related to the COVID-19 epidemic, the manipulation was excluded from the study design for the rest of the participants. In addition, for those 51 couples, the Sexual Evaluation of Partner measure was omitted from the study design due to a technical error. Participants were contacted after they finished the study to complete that measure separately using an online survey, and their answers were merged with the original data.

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## **Measures**

### ***Desire to Be Sexually Valued – General***

General desire to be sexually valued was measured with the same scale identified in Study 1. The full scale can be found in Appendix A. The scale was internally consistent,  $\alpha = .86$ .

### ***Desire to Be Sexually Valued – Romantic Partner***

The desire to be sexually valued by a romantic partner was measured with the same scale identified in Study 2. The full scale can be found in Appendix E. The scale was internally consistent,  $\alpha = .80$ .

### ***Desire to Be Sexually Valued – Extradyadic Partners***

The desire to be sexually valued by extradyadic partners was measured with the same scale identified in Study 2. The full scale can be found in Appendix F. The scale was internally consistent,  $\alpha = .90$ .

### ***Implicit Beliefs about Sexual Value***

Implicit beliefs about sexual value were assessed using an adapted version of a measure of implicit self-theories (De Castella & Byrne, 2015). All items were completed on a scale from 1 – *Strongly Disagree* to 7 – *Strongly Agree*. Four items assessing entity self-theory of sexual value such as “To be honest, I don’t think I can really change how sexually appealing I am” and four items assessing incremental self-theory of sexual value such as “Regardless of my current sexual desirability level, I think I can change it quite a bit” were included. Entity items were reverse scored and after all items in the two scales were averaged to create one composite score. A higher score on this composite indicates

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higher incremental beliefs, while a lower score indicates higher fixed beliefs. The full scale can be found in Appendix M. This scale was internally consistent,  $\alpha = .91$ .

### ***Engagement in Behaviors Aimed at Increasing Sexual Value***

Participants were asked to indicate how often they engaged in multiple behaviors that may increase their sexual value to their partners on a scale from 1 – *Never* to 5 – *Almost Always*. Items were developed for this study and included “exercise”, “try new positions in bed”; “wear attractive clothing”; “initiate sex.” Items can be found in Appendix O. Seventeen of the items in this measure corresponded with the perceiver’s belief about behavior effectiveness measure items described below. The list of behaviors was developed for the current research.

### ***Behavior Instrumentality Beliefs***

To assess beliefs about the instrumentality of specific behaviors for improving one’s sexual value to a current partner, participants indicated the extent to which they believed their partner would find them more sexually attractive after enacting a series of behaviors including, for example, if they “put in effort into looking more attractive”; and “asked about what my partner needs in bed”. All items were assessed on a scale from 1 – *Strongly Disagree* to 7 – *Strongly Agree*. The full measure is available in Appendix N. In analyses matching instrumentality beliefs and behavior likelihood, the likelihoods of three of the behaviors - dieting, exercising to lose weight and exercising to build muscle were averaged to correspond to instrumentality beliefs about being liked by a partner for “being more fit”. Furthermore, items measuring the likelihood of “using pornographic materials to fantasize about sexual experiences”, “flirting with others in front of partner”, and “surprising partner sexually” were included in the behavior measure but did not

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correspond to items assessing instrumentality belief, so they were omitted from those analyses.

### ***Trait Sexual Self-Esteem***

Trait sexual self-esteem was assessed using the measure outlined in Study 2. The scale was internally consistent,  $\alpha = .93$ .

### ***Relationship Satisfaction***

Participants' relationship satisfaction was assessed using the measure outlined in Study 1. The scale was internally consistent,  $\alpha = .88$ .

### ***Sexual Satisfaction***

Participants' sexual satisfaction with their partner was assessed using the Satisfaction with Sex Life Scale outlined in Study 2. In addition, the New Sexual Satisfaction Scale – Short Form (NSSS-S; Stulhofer et al., 2011), a 12-item measure assessing sexual satisfaction regardless of sexual orientation and gender was added. It was scored on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = *not at all satisfied*, 5 = *extremely satisfied*) and all items were averaged to create a composite score. A higher score indicates greater satisfaction with sex life. The full measure is available in Appendix P. Both the Satisfaction with Sex Life Scale,  $\alpha = .94$ , and the NSSS-S,  $\alpha = .89$ , were internally consistent.

### ***Sexual Communal Strength***

Participants' sexual communal strength towards their partners was assessed using a 6-item measure developed by Muise et al., 2013. All items were assessed on a scale from 0 – *Not at all* to 5 – *Extremely*. A sample is “How high a priority for you is meeting the sexual needs of your partner?” Negatively worded items were reverse scored and after

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all items were averaged to create a composite score. A higher score indicates greater sexual communal strength towards partner. The full measure is available in Appendix Q.

The scale was relatively internally consistent,  $\alpha = .69$ .

### ***Attachment Anxiety***

Attachment anxiety was assessed using the measure outlined in Study 2. The scale was internally consistent,  $\alpha = .92$ .

### ***Trait General Self-Esteem***

Trait general self-esteem was assessed using the measure outlined in Study 1. The complete measure is included in Appendix B. The scale was internally consistent,  $\alpha = .90$ .

### ***Perceived Sexual Value – Romantic Partner***

One’s perceived sexual value to their romantic partner was assessed using the measure outlined in Study 2. The scale was internally consistent,  $\alpha = .88$ .

### ***Sexual Evaluation of Romantic Partner***

To assess one’s sexual evaluation of their romantic partner a 10-item measure was adapted from the perceived sexual value to a romantic partner measure. Items were completed using a scale from 1 – *Strongly Disagree* to 7 – *Strongly Agree*. A sample item is “I desire my partner sexually.” Negatively worded items were reverse scored and after all items were averaged to create a composite score. A higher score indicates a greater sexual evaluation of one’s partner. The scale was internally consistent,  $\alpha = .92$ .

### ***General Desire to Be Valued by Partner***

To assess participants’ general desire to be valued by their partner regardless of domain, an 11-item measure was adapted from Lemay & Spongberg (2015). Items were

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completed using a scale from 1 – *Strongly Disagree* to 7 – *Strongly Agree*. A sample item is “Being accepted and valued by my partner is important to me.” Negatively worded items were reverse scored and after all items were averaged to create a composite score. A higher score indicates a greater general desire to be valued by one’s partner. The full measure is available in Appendix R. The scale was internally consistent,  $\alpha = .84$ .

### ***Desire to Be Sexually Valued for Warmth by Partner***

To assess participants’ desire to be valued by their partners because of their warmth, a 3-item measure was created for this study using qualities corresponding to warmth extracted from Cuddy and colleagues (2008). Items were completed using a scale from 1 – *Strongly Disagree* to 7 – *Strongly Agree*. Items included “I want my partner to value me for my warmth”; “It is important to me to be valued for my helpfulness by my partner”, and “I want my partner to value me for my honesty.” All items were averaged to create a composite score. A higher score indicates a greater desire to be valued for one’s warmth by one’s partner. The scale was internally consistent,  $\alpha = .79$ .

### ***Desire to Be Sexually Valued for Competence by Partner***

To assess participants’ desire to be valued by their partners because of their competence, a 3-item measure was created for this study using qualities corresponding to competence extracted from Cuddy and colleagues (2008). Items were completed using a scale from 1 – *Strongly Disagree* to 7 – *Strongly Agree*. Items included “I want my partner to value me for my intelligence”; “I want to be desired by my partner because of my determination.”, and “It is important to me to be valued for my skillfulness by my partner.” All items were averaged to create a composite score. A higher score indicates a

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greater desire to be valued for one’s competence by partner. The scale was relatively internally consistent,  $\alpha = .68$ .

### ***Initiation of Sexual Activity and Physical Intimacy with Partner***

Tendency to initiate sexual activity and physical activity with partner was assessed using the measure described in Study 2. The scale was internally consistent,  $\alpha = .91$ .

### ***Sex Drive***

Participants completed 4 items from the Sex Drive Questionnaire (Ostovich & Sabini, 2004) including “How often do you experience sexual desire?”; “How often do you orgasm in the average month?”; “How many times do you masturbate in the average month?”, and “How would you compare your level of sex drive with that of the average person of your gender and age?” Items were completed on different 7-point response scales (1: *Never* – 7: *Several times a day*; 1: *Very much lower* – 7: *Very much higher*). All items were standardized then averaged to create a composite score. A higher score indicates greater sex drive. The scale was internally consistent,  $\alpha = .76$ .

### **Analysis Strategy**

Multilevel models treating individuals as nested within dyads was utilized for testing hypotheses. Dyad members were treated as indistinguishable. Models utilized a compound symmetry structure in order to estimate the covariance between the two partners.

To test the hypothesis that those who desire to be sexually valued by their partners engage in more sexual behaviors particularly when they consider those behaviors instrumental in eliciting positive sexual evaluations from their partner, data was

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restructured so that individual behavior ratings were at the lowest level of analysis, and a multilevel model treating behaviors as nested within person and people as nested within dyads was used.

Models were tested using the Linear Mixed Models command in SPSS (27) and degrees of freedom were calculated using the standard Satterthwaite approximation.

Indirect effects were estimated using Monte Carlo confidence intervals and 20,000 repetitions (Selig & Preacher, 2008).

Sample size for these models was determined by budgeting and time constraints. However, the sample size well exceeds guidelines provided by Hox (2013), who suggested at least 100 level 2 units (i.e., dyads). Correlations or partial correlations are provided as effect size indices, depending on whether the model included one predictor or several predictors (Rosenthal et al., 2000).

Gender and relationship length moderations for all effects were explored and results are reported separately for men and women or relatively long and relatively short relationships respectively if a significant moderation was detected. Further, moderations of sub-sample type (Prolific vs. SONA) for all effects were examined, but no significant moderation effects were detected, so results are presented for the full sample. For effects that investigated gender differences, only differences between men and women were compared, since sample size of non-binary participants was not sufficient for meaningful comparisons. For these analyses, participants who identified as non-binary and participants who did not provide their gender were dropped.

To control for possible confound effects with related desires or drives, all models controlled for sex drive, the general desire to be sexually valued (i.e., not specific to

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one’s partner), the desire to be sexually valued by extradyadic partners, the general desire to be valued by one’s partner regardless of domain (e.g., to receive the partner’s positive regard), and the desire to be valued by a partner for one’s warmth and competence.

### **Descriptive Statistics and Correlations**

To determine if people generally desired to be sexually valued, their answers on the desire to be sexually valued scale and the scales targeting the desire to be sexually valued by one’s partner and by extradyadic partners were centered on their midpoints. Then, unconditional models with these centered variables as outcomes were used. Analyses suggested that on average participants scored significantly higher than the midpoint of the scale measuring their desire to be sexually valued by their romantic partners,  $b_{intercept} = 1.35$ ,  $t = 33.64$ ,  $p < .001$ . Similarly, participants generally desired to be sexually valued,  $b_{intercept} = 0.23$ ,  $t = 4.37$ ,  $p < .001$ . However, responses to the desire to be sexually valued by extradyadic partners scale were significantly lower than its midpoint,  $b_{intercept} = -1.04$ ,  $t = -14.86$ ,  $p < .001$ .

Men experienced significantly higher desire to be sexually valued by extradyadic partners than women,  $b = 0.24$ ,  $t = 2.24$ ,  $p = .026$ ,  $r = .12$ . However, there were no gender differences in the general desire to be sexually valued,  $p = .442$ , or the desire to be sexually valued by one’s romantic partner,  $p = .250$ .

Additionally, age was associated with lower desire to be sexually valued by one’s romantic partner,  $b = -0.01$ ,  $t = -2.37$ ,  $p = .019$ ,  $r = -.13$ , but not with the general desire to be sexually valued,  $p = .066$ , or the desire to be sexually valued by extradyadic partners,  $p = .981$ . Further, participants in longer relationships experienced lower desire to be sexually valued by their romantic partners,  $b = -0.002$ ,  $t = -2.89$ ,  $p = .004$ ,  $r = -.16$ , and

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lower general desire to be sexually valued,  $b = -0.002$ ,  $t = -2.56$ ,  $p = .011$ ,  $r = -.14$ .

However, relationship length was not associated with the desire to be sexually valued by extradyadic partners,  $p = .889$ .

Both the desire to be sexually valued by one's romantic partner,  $b = 0.59$ ,  $t = 11.40$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $pr = .50$ , and the desire to be valued by extradyadic partners,  $b = 0.46$ ,  $t = 14.96$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $pr = .60$ , were associated with the general desire to be sexually valued in a multilevel model including the desire to be sexually valued by one's partner and the desire to be sexually valued by extradyadic partners as predictors of the general desire.

Correlations for all variables are available in Table 12. Means and standard deviations are available in Table 13.

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**Table 12**

*Correlations, Means and Standard Deviations for Study 3 Variables*

	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.	10.	11.	12.	13.	14.	15.	16.	17.	18.
1.DTBSVP	-																	
2.DTBSVE	-.09	-																
3.DTBSG	.38*	.52*	-															
4.Attanx	-.15*	.25*	.08	-														
5.DTBVG	.53*	-.32*	.07	-.21*	-													
6.DTBVW	.39*	-.29*	.01	-.16*	.48*	-												
7.DTBVC	.32*	-.13*	.03	-.13*	.29*	.58*	-											
8.Implicit	.24*	.00	.16*	-.12*	.12*	.14*	.15*	-										
9.Initiation	.38*	-.02	.20*	-.13*	.17*	.13*	.17*	.18*	-									
10.Rsat	.18*	-.27*	-.11*	-.38*	.32*	.31*	.27*	.01	.21*	-								
11.Sexcomm	.51*	-.21*	.13*	-.08	.41*	.33*	.17*	.17*	.28*	.16*	-							
12.Sexdrive	.17*	.22*	.32*	.08	-.09	-.04	-.03	.16*	.34*	-.05	.24*	-						
13.Sexesteem	.13*	.07	.17*	-.30*	-.02	.07	.13*	.15*	.32*	.14*	.11*	.38*	-					
14.Ses	.08	-.12*	-.05	-.52*	.07	.10*	.18*	.14*	.15*	.23*	-.02	.00	.47*	-				
15.SexSat	.18*	-.11*	.07	-.19*	.06	.22*	.20*	.02	.41*	.49*	.22*	.21*	.38*	.20*	-			
16. NSSS-S	.25*	-.16*	.04	-.22*	.09	.22*	.25*	.07	.40*	.48*	.25*	.29*	.44*	.26*	.76*	-		

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17.Sexvalpart	.45*	-.21*	.11*	-.26*	.31*	.27*	.28*	.15*	.44*	.44*	.38*	.17*	.28*	.22*	.54*	.59*	-
18.Sexval	.31*	-.13*	.10*	-.24*	.25*	.32*	.25*	.13*	.37*	.51*	.20*	.12*	.29*	.20*	.69*	.65*	.51*

---

Note. \* $p < .05$ . Significance levels are estimated using multilevel strategy described. Means (outside parentheses) and standard deviations (inside parentheses) appear on the diagonal. N minimum=357 observations. DTBSVP = Desire to Be Sexually Valued by Partner; DTBSVE = Desire to Be Sexually Valued by Extradysadic Partners; DTBSG = General Desire to Be Sexually Valued; Attanx = Attachment Anxiety; DTBVG = General Desire to Be Valued by Partner; DTBVW = Desire to Be Valued for Warmth by Partner; DTBVC = Desire to Be Valued for Competence by Partner; Implicit = Implicit Theories about Sexuality; Initiation = Initiation of Physical Activity with Partner; Rsat = Relationship Satisfaction; Sexcomm = Sexual Communal Strength Toward Partner; Sexdrive = Sex Drive; Sexesteem = Sexual Self-Esteem; Ses = General Self-Esteem; SexSat = Satisfaction with Sex Life; Sexvalpart = Perceptions of Partner’s Sexual Evaluation of the Self; Sexval = Sexual Evaluation for Partner

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**Table 13**

*Study 3 Means and Standard Deviations of Variables*

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Desire to Be Sexually Valued by Partner	5.85	0.73
Desire to Be Sexually Valued by Extradyadic Partners	3.46	1.24
General Desire to Be Sexually Valued	4.73	1.00
Attachment Anxiety	3.41	1.16
General Desire to Be Valued by Partner	6.08	0.74
Desire to Be Valued for Warmth by Partner	6.14	0.72
Desire to Be Valued for Competence by Partner	5.86	0.82
Incremental Beliefs about Sexuality	4.74	1.13
Initiation of Physical Activity with Partner	4.13	0.78
Relationship Satisfaction	6.02	0.86
Sexual Communal Strength Toward Partner	6.73	1.10
Sex Drive	0.00	0.76
Sexual Self-Esteem	4.53	1.17
General Self-Esteem	4.78	1.15
Satisfaction with Sex Life	5.23	1.34
NSSS-S	4.02	0.65
Perceptions of Partner's Sexual Evaluation of the Self	5.96	0.76
Sexual Evaluation for Partner	5.71	1.00

**H2: Desire to Be Sexually Valued by Romantic Partner and Wishful Thinking**

The wishful thinking effect of the desire to be sexually valued by one’s romantic partner was examined. In a model, one’s desire to be sexually valued and their partner’s actual reported evaluation were added as predictors of one’s perceptions of the partner’s sexual evaluation. Partner’s actual reports were used as an accuracy benchmark to compare perceptions to. Additionally, one’s general desire to be sexually valued, their desire to be sexually valued by extradyadic partners, their sex drive, their desire to be generally valued by their partner, and the desires to be valued by their partner for their warmth and competence were added as covariates in this model. Results from this model can be found in Table 14.

**Table 14**

*Desire to be Sexually Valued by Romantic Partner, Actual Sexual Evaluation Reported by Partner and Covariates Predicting Perceptions of Sexual Value to Partner – Study 3*

Predictor	<i>b</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>pr</i>
<b>Desire to Be Sexually Valued by Romantic Partner</b>	<b>0.30</b>	<b>4.93</b>	<b>&lt;.001</b>	<b>.26</b>
<b>Actual Reported Sexual Evaluation by Partner</b>	<b>0.29</b>	<b>8.27</b>	<b>&lt;.001</b>	<b>.38</b>
<b>Desire to Be Sexually Valued by Extradyadic Partners</b>	<b>-0.11</b>	<b>-3.15</b>	<b>.002</b>	<b>-.17</b>
General Desire to Be Sexually Valued	-0.04	-0.87	.385	-.05
<b>Sex Drive</b>	<b>0.10</b>	<b>2.09</b>	<b>.037</b>	<b>.11</b>
Desire to Be Generally Valued by Partner	0.02	0.34	.731	.03
Desire to Be Valued by Partner for One’s Warmth	-0.04	-0.71	.475	-.03
<b>Desire to Be Valued by Partner for One’s Competence</b>	<b>0.15</b>	<b>3.16</b>	<b>.002</b>	<b>.16</b>

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Perceptions of partner sexual evaluations were somewhat accurate, predicted by actual reported partner sexual evaluations, and somewhat positively biased by the desire to be sexually valued by one’s romantic partner, as predicted.

### ***Attachment Anxiety Moderation***

Attachment anxiety did not moderate the effect of the desire to be sexually valued on one’s perceptions of their partner’s sexual evaluation when controlling for the interactions between attachment anxiety and all other covariates in the model described above,  $p = .294$ .

### ***Self-Esteem Moderation***

Self-esteem did not moderate the effect of the desire to be sexually valued on one’s perceptions of their partner’s sexual evaluation when controlling for the interactions between self-esteem and all other covariates in the model described above,  $p = .153$ .

### **Auxiliary Analysis - Analysis of Discrepancies Between Perceptions and Partner’s Evaluations**

Analyses confirmed that perceptions of partner sexual evaluations were biased by the desire to be sexually valued by one’s partner. To further explore the nature of this bias, and more specifically whether those who desired to be sexually valued by their partners were likely to overestimate how much those partners valued them in the sexual domain, an outcome variable representing the difference between one’s perceptions of their partner’s sexual evaluation of them and the actual sexual evaluation reported by their partner was created. This method was analogous to the one utilized in Study 1. Positive scores on this variable represented likelihood to overestimate partner’s sexual

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evaluation of the self, while negative scores represented a likelihood to underestimate this evaluation. This outcome was predicted by the desire to be sexually valued by one's partner, actual reported sexual evaluation from partner and all covariates listed above. All predictors were centered on their grand mean. Thus, the intercept in this model represented the difference between one's perceptions of their partner's sexual evaluation of them and the sexual evaluation that partner actually reported for a participant with an average standing on all predictors (Lemay et al., 2006; West & Kenny, 2011). Analyses suggested that on average participants tended to overestimate how sexually valued they were by their partners,  $b_{\text{intercept}} = .23$ ,  $t = 7.44$ ,  $p < .001$ . Further, analysis was repeated after re-centering the desire to be sexually valued by one's partner and estimating the average difference between one's perceptions of their partner's sexual evaluation of them and the sexual evaluation that partner actually reported for those relatively low in that desire (- 1 SD) and those relatively high in the desire (+ 1 SD) but with average standing on all other predictors. Those relatively low in the desire to be sexually valued neither underestimated, not overestimated how much their partners sexually valued them,  $p = .922$ . However, those who highly desired to be sexually valued on average overestimated how much their partners actually valued them in the sexual domain,  $b_{\text{intercept}} = .45$ ,  $t = 8.20$ ,  $p < .001$ .

### **H2a: Desire to Be Sexually Valued by Romantic Partner, Wishful Thinking and Relationship Outcomes**

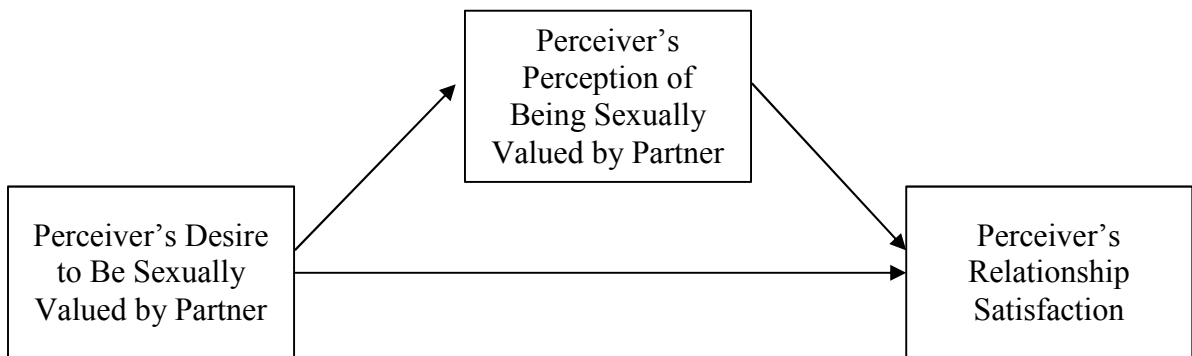
The mediation model depicted in Figure 17 was examined to estimate the indirect effect of the desire to be sexually valued by one's partner on relationship satisfaction through perceptions of sexual value to that partner. In addition, the actual reported sexual evaluation of the self from partner was used as an accuracy benchmark. Moreover, the

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general desire to be sexually valued, the desire to be sexually valued by extradyadic partners, sex drive, the desire to be generally valued by one’s romantic partner, and the desires to be valued by that partner for one’s warmth and competence were modeled as covariates.

**Figure 17**

*Indirect Effect of the Desire to Be Sexually Valued on Relationship Satisfaction through Perceptions of Partner’s Sexual Evaluation of the Self*



The relationship between the desire to be sexually valued by one’s partner and perceptions of one’s sexual value to that partner was tested above and can be found in Table 14. Next, the desire to be sexually valued by one’s partner, perceptions of sexual value to partner and all covariates were modeled as predictors of relationship satisfaction. Results from this analysis are reported in Table 15.

**Table 15**

*Desire to be Sexually Valued by Romantic Partner, Perceptions of Sexual Value to Partner, Actual Sexual Evaluation Reported by Partner and Covariates Predicting Relationship Satisfaction – Study 3*

Predictor	<i>b</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>pr</i>
Desire to Be Sexually Valued by Romantic Partner	-0.15	-1.94	.054	-.12

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<b>Reported Sexual Evaluation by Partner</b>	<b>0.10</b>	<b>2.20</b>	<b>.028</b>	<b>.17</b>
<b>Perceptions of Sexual Value to Partner</b>	<b>0.35</b>	<b>5.47</b>	<b>&lt;.001</b>	<b>.29</b>
Desire to Be Sexually Valued by Extradyadic Partners	-0.01	-0.35	.727	-.02
<b>General Desire to Be Sexually Valued</b>	<b>-0.13</b>	<b>-2.49</b>	<b>.013</b>	<b>-.12</b>
Sex Drive	-0.08	-1.49	.139	-.09
<b>Desire to Be Generally Valued by Partner</b>	<b>0.24</b>	<b>3.29</b>	<b>.001</b>	<b>.19</b>
Desire to Be Valued by Partner for One’s Warmth	0.04	0.57	.570	.04
<b>Desire to Be Valued by Partner for One’s Competence</b>	<b>0.13</b>	<b>2.19</b>	<b>.029</b>	<b>.11</b>

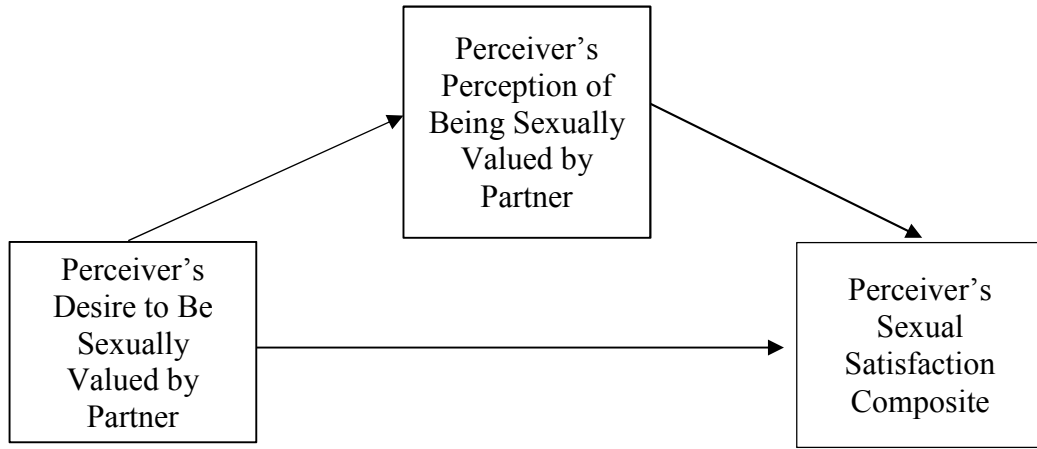
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In this model, one’s perceptions of being sexually valued by their partner were associated with higher relationship satisfaction, and the desire to be sexually valued by one’s partner was not directly related to relationship satisfaction. Finally, a Monte Carlo confidence interval around the indirect effect of the desire to be sexually valued by one’s partner on relationship satisfaction through perceptions of sexual value to that partner was estimated for this model, and this effect was found to be significant 95% CI [0.05 0.17].

Further, a similar model was built to examine the indirect effect of the desire to be sexually valued on sexual satisfaction. This model is depicted in Figure 18.

**Figure 18**

*Indirect Effect of the Desire to Be Sexually Valued on Sexual Satisfaction through Perceptions of Partner’s Sexual Evaluation of the Self*



In that model sexual satisfaction was represented by a composite variable estimated by standardizing and averaging scores on the Sex Life Satisfaction scale and the NSSS-S given that each of these measurements addresses sexual satisfaction with one’s romantic partner. In addition, all covariates used in the above model were added. The results of the model including the desire to be sexually valued by one’s partner, perceptions of sexual value to partner and all covariates as predictors of sexual satisfaction are reported in Table 16.

**Table 16**

*Desire to be Sexually Valued by Romantic Partner, Perceptions of Sexual Value to Partner, Actual Sexual Evaluation Reported by Partner and Covariates Predicting Sexual Satisfaction – Study 3*

Predictor	<i>b</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>pr</i>
Desire to Be Sexually Valued by Romantic Partner	-0.04	-0.54	.587	-.05

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<b>Reported Sexual Evaluation by Partner</b>	<b>0.56</b>	<b>9.21</b>	<b>&lt;.001</b>	<b>.25</b>
<b>Perceptions of Sexual Value to Partner</b>	<b>0.10</b>	<b>2.26</b>	<b>&lt;.001</b>	<b>.44</b>
Desire to Be Sexually Valued by Extradyadic Partners	-0.07	-1.71	.087	-.07
General Desire to Be Sexually Valued	-0.03	-0.55	.582	-.05
<b>Sex Drive</b>	<b>0.12</b>	<b>2.21</b>	<b>.028</b>	<b>.16</b>
<b>Desire to Be Generally Valued by Partner</b>	<b>-0.18</b>	<b>-2.63</b>	<b>.009</b>	<b>-.16</b>
<b>Desire to Be Valued by Partner for One’s Warmth</b>	<b>0.15</b>	<b>2.13</b>	<b>.034</b>	<b>.13</b>
Desire to Be Valued by Partner for One’s Competence	0.10	1.81	.071	.09

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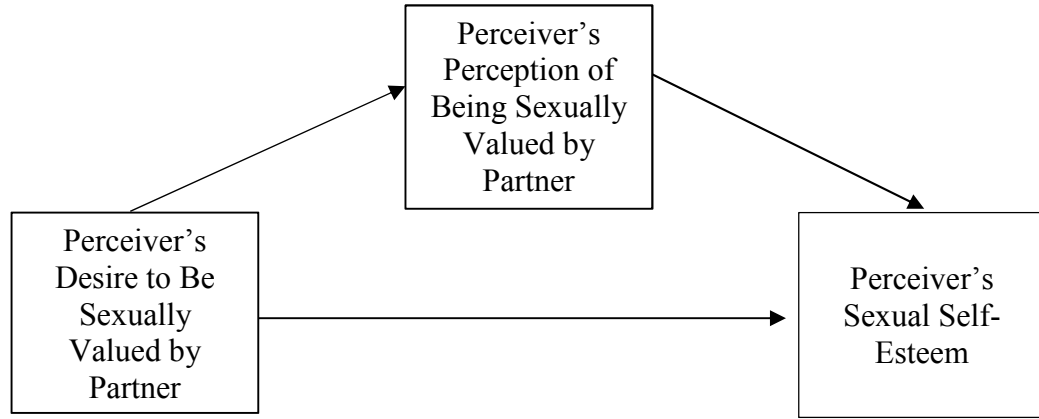
Analyses suggested that perceptions that one was sexually valued by their partner were associated with higher sexual satisfaction. In this model, the desire to be sexually valued by one’s partner was not directly associated with sexual satisfaction. Further, Monte Carlo estimation confirmed that the desire to be sexually valued had a significant positive indirect effect on sexual satisfaction via perception that one was sexually valued, 95% CI [0.10 0.25].

Additionally, an analogous model was built to examine the indirect effect of the desire to be sexually valued on sexual self-esteem. This model is depicted in Figure 19.

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**Figure 19**

*Indirect Effect of the Desire to Be Sexually Valued on Sexual Self-Esteem through Perceptions of Partner’s Sexual Evaluation of the Self*



All covariates used in the previous models were added. The results of the model including the desire to be sexually valued by one’s partner, perceptions of sexual value to partner and all covariates as predictors of sexual self-esteem are reported in Table 17.

**Table 17**

*Desire to be Sexually Valued by Romantic Partner, Perceptions of Sexual Value to Partner, Actual Sexual Evaluation Reported by Partner and Covariates Predicting Sexual Self-Esteem – Study 3*

Predictor	<i>b</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>pr</i>
Desire to Be Sexually Valued by Romantic Partner	-0.12	-1.04	.301	-.05
<b>Reported Sexual Evaluation by Partner</b>	<b>0.16</b>	<b>2.33</b>	<b>.021</b>	<b>.15</b>
<b>Perceptions of Sexual Value to Partner</b>	<b>0.23</b>	<b>2.39</b>	<b>.017</b>	<b>.12</b>
Desire to Be Sexually Valued by Extradyadic Partners	-0.01	-0.41	.681	-.01
General Desire to Be Sexually Valued	0.06	0.85	.397	.04

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<b>Sex Drive</b>	<b>0.46</b>	<b>5.58</b>	<b>&lt;.001</b>	<b>.28</b>
<b>Desire to Be Generally Valued by Partner</b>	<b>-0.10</b>	<b>-0.92</b>	<b>.357</b>	<b>-.06</b>
Desire to Be Valued by Partner for One’s Warmth	0.00	-0.01	.995	.01
<b>Desire to Be Valued by Partner for One’s Competence</b>	<b>0.18</b>	<b>2.16</b>	<b>.031</b>	<b>.11</b>

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Analyses suggested that perceptions that one was sexually valued by their partner were associated with higher sexual self-esteem. In this model, the desire to be sexually valued by one’s partner was not directly associated with sexual satisfaction. Further, Monte Carlo estimation confirmed that the desire to be sexually valued had a significant positive indirect effect on sexual satisfaction via perception that one was sexually valued, 95% CI [0.01 0.14].

The indirect effects of the desire to be sexually valued by one’s partner were estimated while controlling for actual sexual evaluation by partners. Thus, they suggest that those who highly desire to be sexually valued by their partner experience higher sexual and relationship satisfaction and sexual self-esteem in part because their desire positively biases their perceptions of how much their partner values them in the sexual domain.

**H2b: Desire to Be Sexually Valued by Romantic Partner, Wishful Thinking and Initiating Sexual Activity and Physical Intimacy**

The desire to be sexually valued by one’s partner and gender were modeled as predictors of initiating sexual activity and physical intimacy while controlling for all covariates listed in the previous section. Results from this model are presented in Table 18.

**Table 18**

*Desire to be Sexually Valued by Romantic Partner and Covariates Predicting Initiation of Physical Intimacy and Sexual Activity – Study 3*

Predictor	<i>b</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>pr</i>
<b>Desire to Be Sexually Valued by Romantic Partner</b>	<b>0.32</b>	<b>4.88</b>	<b>&lt;.001</b>	<b>.26</b>
Desire to Be Sexually Valued by Extradyadic Partners	-0.05	-1.38	.168	-.07
Gender	-0.09	-1.13	.260	.06
General Desire to Be Sexually Valued	0.04	0.76	.446	.03
<b>Sex Drive</b>	<b>0.27</b>	<b>5.04</b>	<b>&lt;.001</b>	<b>.25</b>
Desire to Be Generally Valued by Partner	0.02	0.18	.861	.00
Desire to Be Valued by Partner for One’s Warmth	-0.07	-0.98	.330	.01
Desire to Be Valued by Partner for One’s Competence	0.10	1.84	.067	.11

The desire to be sexually valued by one’s partner was associated with a higher likelihood of initiating sexual activity with that partner, but there was no gender difference in the likelihood to initiate sexual activity and physical intimacy in the model. Further, the product of gender and this desire was entered into the model in order to investigate their interaction in predicting likelihood to initiate sexual activity with partner while controlling for the interactions between gender and covariates. This interaction between the desire to be sexually valued by one’s partner and gender was not a significant predictor of the likelihood to initiate physical intimacy,  $p = .452$ .

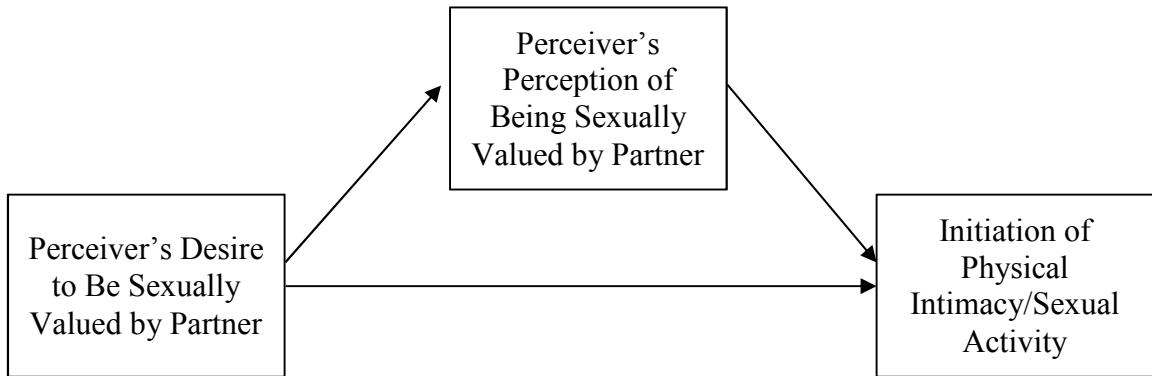
The mediation model depicted in Figure 20 predicting sexual initiation from the desire to be sexually valued by one’s partner was examined while controlling for actual

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reported sexual evaluation from one’s partner. Additionally, this model controlled for all other covariates used in previous analyses.

**Figure 20**

*Indirect Effect of the Desire to Be Sexually Valued on Initiation of Sexual Activity through Perceptions of Partner’s Sexual Evaluation of the Self*



Results from this model are presented in Table 19.

**Table 19**

*Desire to be Sexually Valued by Romantic Partner, Perceptions of Sexual Value to Partner, Actual Sexual Evaluation Reported by Partner and Covariates Predicting Initiation of Physical Intimacy and Sexual Activity – Study 3*

Predictor	<i>b</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>pr</i>
<b>Desire to Be Sexually Valued by Romantic Partner</b>	<b>0.24</b>	<b>3.45</b>	<b>&lt;.001</b>	<b>.21</b>
<b>Reported Sexual Evaluation by Partner</b>	<b>0.17</b>	<b>3.93</b>	<b>&lt;.001</b>	<b>.18</b>
<b>Perceptions of Sexual Value to Partner</b>	<b>0.26</b>	<b>4.38</b>	<b>&lt;.001</b>	<b>.25</b>
Desire to Be Sexually Valued by Extradyadic Partners	0.00	0.09	.930	.01
General Desire to Be Sexually Valued	-0.01	-0.20	.842	-.03
<b>Sex Drive</b>	<b>0.18</b>	<b>3.18</b>	<b>.002</b>	<b>.22</b>

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Desire to Be Generally Valued by Partner	-0.06	-0.95	.345	-.09
Desire to Be Valued by Partner for One’s Warmth	-0.08	-1.17	.244	.01
Desire to Be Valued by Partner for One’s Competence	0.08	1.62	.106	.11

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In this model, both the desire to be sexually valued by one’s partner and perceptions of one’s sexual value to that partner predicted higher likelihood to initiate physical and sexual intimacy with the partner. Further, the indirect effect of the desire to be sexually valued by one’s partner on this likelihood through perceptions of sexual value to the partner was examined using Monte Carlo estimation and was determined to be significant, 95% CI [0.04 0.11]. Thus, these results suggest that positive bias about one’s sexual evaluation by their partner resulting from the desire to be sexually valued by that partner can result in higher likelihood to initiate physical intimacy and sexual activity within relationships. In addition, the desire to be sexually valued by one’s partner exhibited a direct effect on the likelihood of initiating sexual activity.

### **Desire to Be Sexually Valued and Approach/Avoidance Sexual Motives**

Auxiliary analyses using measures from this study investigating the effects of the desire to be sexually valued on approach and avoidance motives to engage in sexual activity are presented in Appendix V.

### **H3: Engagement in Behaviors Enhancing Sexual Value**

The desire to be sexually valued by one’s romantic partner was modeled as a predictor of specific behaviors aimed at increasing sexual value while controlling for participants’ sex drive, their general desire to be valued by their romantic partners, their desires to be valued by their partners for their warmth and competence, their general

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desire to be sexually valued, and their desire to be sexually valued by extradyadic partners. Results of these models are presented in Table 20. The desire to be sexually valued by one’s partner was not associated with more exercising to lose weight or build muscle, wearing attractive clothing, surprising one’s partner sexually, asking about a partner’s sexual needs, flirting with others in front of a partner, being submissive or dominant in bed, trying new positions and techniques in bed, changing appearance according to a partner’s tastes or using pornographic materials to fantasize about sexual experiences. However, this desire was associated with lower likelihood of attending to one’s own sexual needs for women but not for men. Additionally, the desire to be sexually valued by one’s partner was related to a lower likelihood of dieting and showing one’s partner that others find the self attractive. This desire was also associated with higher likelihood of attending to a partner’s sexual needs, initiating sexual activity with that partner, showing enthusiasm during sexual activity with that partner, and trying to last as long as possible in bed within romantic relationships.

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**Table 20**

*Desire to Be Sexually Valued by Romantic Partner and Covariates Predicting Behaviors Aimed at Increasing Sexual Value – Study 3*

Behavior	Desire to Be Sexually Valued by Partner		General Desire to Be Sexually Valued		Desire to Be Sexually Valued by Extradyadic Partners		Sex Drive		General Desire to Be Valued by Partner		Desire to Be Valued by Partner for One’s Warmth		Desire to Be Valued by Partner for One’s Competence	
	<i>b</i> ( <i>t</i> )	<i>pr</i>	<i>b</i> ( <i>t</i> )	<i>pr</i>	<i>b</i> ( <i>t</i> )	<i>pr</i>	<i>b</i> ( <i>t</i> )	<i>pr</i>	<i>b</i> ( <i>t</i> )	<i>pr</i>	<i>b</i> ( <i>t</i> )	<i>pr</i>	<i>b</i> ( <i>t</i> )	<i>pr</i>
Dieting	<b>-0.23*</b> (-2.23)	<b>-.11</b>	-0.07 (-0.95)	-.03	0.12 (1.91)	.09	-0.08 (-1.04)	-.06	-0.06 (-0.06)	-.04	-0.02 (-0.21)	-.01	<b>0.22*</b> (2.62)	<b>.14</b>
Exercising to Lose Weight	-0.17 (-1.59)	-.08	-0.11 (-1.36)	-.05	0.08 (1.33)	.06	-0.08 (-0.98)	-.05	-0.09 (-0.83)	-.07	-0.18 (-1.62)	-.08	<b>0.26*</b> (2.99)	<b>.16</b>
Exercising to Build Muscle	0.02 (0.20)	.00	0.01 (0.92)	.03	0.04 (0.53)	.02	<b>0.28*</b> (3.30)	<b>.17</b>	<b>-0.24*</b> (-2.11)	<b>-.13</b>	-0.09 (-0.79)	-.04	<b>0.34*</b> (3.60)	<b>.19</b>
Wearing attractive clothing	-0.04 (-0.43)	-.03	<b>0.17*</b> (2.42)	<b>.13</b>	<b>0.15*</b> (2.58)	<b>.12</b>	-0.03 (-0.35)	.03	-0.14 (-1.46)	-.10	<b>0.25*</b> (2.51)	<b>.12</b>	<b>0.19*</b> (2.41)	<b>.14</b>

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Surprising partner sexually	0.01 (0.14)	.01	0.06 (0.91)	.06	-0.02 (-0.38)	-.03	<b>0.37*</b> (5.27)	<b>.28</b>	<b>-0.39*</b> (-4.31)	<b>-.22</b>	0.25 (1.47)	.09	0.15 (1.89)	.10
Asking partner about their sexual needs	0.09 (0.91)	.02	-0.04 (-0.53)	.01	-0.09 (-1.69)	-.08	<b>0.44*</b> (6.37)	<b>.31</b>	<b>-0.20*</b> (-2.20)	<b>-.11</b>	0.14 (1.50)	.10	<b>0.21*</b> (2.71)	<b>.13</b>
Attending to partner’s sexual needs	<b>0.37*</b> (4.26)	<b>.18</b>	-0.12 (-1.88)	-.03	-0.02 (-0.42)	-.05	<b>0.29*</b> (4.60)	<b>.24</b>	-0.13 (-1.55)	-.09	<b>0.26*</b> (3.01)	<b>.16</b>	0.02 (0.29)	.02
Attending to partner’s sexual fantasies	-0.02 (-0.24)	.02	-0.04 (-0.50)	-.04	-0.01 (-0.17)	.02	<b>0.42*</b> (5.81)	<b>.30</b>	<b>-0.25*</b> (-2.55)	<b>-.16</b>	0.15 (1.47)	.09	0.14 (1.76)	.09
Initiating Sexual activity with partner	<b>0.25*</b> (2.74)	.14	0.06 (0.95)	.05	-0.05 (-0.98)	-.05	<b>0.52*</b> (7.69)	<b>.36</b>	<b>-0.22*</b> (-2.60)	<b>-.13</b>	0.13 (1.46)	.08	0.07 (0.89)	.05
Showing enthusiasm during sexual activity with partner	<b>0.18*</b> (2.19)	<b>.13</b>	0.09 (1.47)	.08	<b>-0.12*</b> (-2.64)	<b>-.13</b>	<b>0.41*</b> (6.90)	<b>.33</b>	0.10* (1.28)	.03	<b>0.27*</b> (3.37)	<b>.18</b>	0.00 (0.06)	.01

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Showing partner that other people find the self attractive	<b>-0.22*</b> (-2.50)	<b>-.12</b>	0.01 (0.18)	.01	<b>0.17*</b> (3.52)	<b>.18</b>	<b>0.14*</b> (2.19)	<b>.12</b>	<b>-0.33*</b> (-3.97)	<b>-.22</b>	0.07 (0.84)	.04	0.13 (1.94)	.10
Flirting with others in front of partner	-0.08 (-1.48)	-.11	-0.06 (-1.42)	-.08	<b>0.13*</b> (3.72)	<b>.19</b>	<b>0.10*</b> (2.17)	<b>.12</b>	<b>-0.37*</b> (-6.47)	<b>-.31</b>	0.04 (0.64)	.03	0.04 (0.76)	.05
Trying to last as long as possible in bed	<b>0.33*</b> (2.82)	<b>.14</b>	<b>-0.40<sub>F</sub>*</b> (-3.99) <b>0.48<sub>M</sub>*</b> (3.04)	<b>-.20<sub>F</sub></b> <b>.05<sub>M</sub></b>	0.05 (0.77)	.04	<b>0.41*</b> (4.70)	<b>.23</b>	<b>-0.54*</b> (-4.97)	<b>-.25</b>	<b>0.27*</b> (2.29)	<b>.12</b>	0.06 (0.68)	.03
Being submissive in bed	0.10 (0.93)	.05	0.11 (1.38)	.06	-0.02 (-0.33)	-.02	<b>0.42<sub>F</sub>*</b> (3.79) 0.03 <sub>M</sub> (0.21)	<b>.19<sub>F</sub></b> .01 <sub>M</sub>	<b>-0.23*</b> (-2.33)	<b>-.09</b>	<b>0.24*</b> (2.22)	.09	0.00 (-0.05)	.00
Being dominant in bed	0.06 (0.60)	.03	-0.04 <sub>F</sub> (-0.40) <b>0.33<sub>M</sub>*</b> (2.86)	<b>-.02<sub>F</sub></b> <b>.15<sub>M</sub></b>	-0.05 (-0.82)	-.04	<b>0.62*</b> (7.94)	<b>.39</b>	<b>-0.41*</b> (-4.27)	<b>-.21</b>	0.02 (0.22)	.01	<b>0.24*</b> (2.90)	<b>.14</b>
Trying new positions in bed	0.08 (0.85)	.06	-0.04 (-0.58)	-.01	0.07 (1.34)	.06	<b>0.28*</b> (4.23)	<b>.24</b>	-0.18 (-1.95)	-.16	0.13 (1.37)	.10	0.12 (1.59)	.10
Trying new techniques in bed	-0.02 (-0.27)	.00	-0.11 (-1.70)	-.04	0.03 (0.64)	.02	<b>0.35*</b> (5.66)	<b>.30</b>	<b>-0.24*</b> (-2.88)	<b>-.22</b>	<b>0.23*</b> (2.60)	<b>.16</b>	-0.03 (-0.40)	.02

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Changing appearance according to partner's tastes	0.12 (1.19)	.03	-0.08 (-1.16)	-.04	0.10 (1.71)	.11	<b>0.21*</b> <b>(2.89)</b>	<b>.14</b>	<b>-0.43*</b> <b>(-4.53)</b>	<b>-.24</b>	<b>0.45<sub>F</sub>*</b> <b>(2.88)</b> <b>-0.27<sub>M</sub></b> <b>(-2.13)</b>	<b>.15<sub>F</sub></b> <b>-.09<sub>M</sub></b>	-0.18 <sub>F</sub> * (-1.54) <b>0.26<sub>M</sub></b> <b>(2.48)</b>	-.06 <sub>F</sub> .13 <sub>M</sub>
Attending to own sexual needs	<b>-0.32<sub>F</sub>*</b> <b>(-2.55)</b> 0.13 <sub>M</sub> (0.95)	<b>-.13<sub>F</sub></b> .05 <sub>M</sub>	<b>0.13*</b> <b>(1.99)</b>	<b>.10</b>	0.02 (0.42)	.02	<b>0.54*</b> <b>(8.03)</b>	<b>.38</b>	<b>-0.29*</b> <b>(-3.38)</b>	<b>-.17</b>	<b>0.26*</b> <b>(2.90)</b>	<b>.15</b>	0.11 (1.53)	.08
Using pornographic materials to fantasize about sex	-0.21 <sub>F</sub> (-1.73) 0.16 <sub>M</sub> (1.23)	-.10 <sub>F</sub> .07 <sub>M</sub>	-0.09 (-1.46)	-.06	0.09 <sub>F</sub> (1.31) <b>0.30<sub>M</sub>*</b> <b>(3.87)</b>	.06 <sub>F</sub> .20 <sub>M</sub>	<b>0.72*</b> <b>(11.14)</b>	<b>.48</b>	<b>-0.20*</b> <b>(-2.35)</b>	<b>-.13</b>	0.06 (0.68)	.04	0.08 (1.10)	.07

Note. \* $p < .05$ . Coefficients were pooled across gender unless gender significantly moderated the relationship between a predictor and the outcome

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Further, the desire to be sexually valued by one’s partner was modeled as a predictor of the average involvement in all of the behaviors while controlling for the same covariates listed above. The desire did not predict a composite of all behaviors. Results from this model can be found in Table 21.

**Table 21**

*Desire to be Sexually Valued by Romantic Partner and Covariates Predicting Engagement in Behaviors Aimed at Increasing Sexual Value – Study 3*

Predictor	<i>b</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>pr</i>
Desire to Be Sexually Valued by Romantic Partner	0.03	0.71	.478	.03
Desire to Be Sexually Valued by Extradyadic Partners	0.04	1.29	.198	.06
General Desire to Be Sexually Valued	-0.03	-0.89	.377	.00
<b>Sex Drive</b>	<b>0.29</b>	<b>8.50</b>	<b>&lt;.001</b>	<b>.39</b>
<b>Desire to Be Generally Valued by Partner</b>	<b>-0.20</b>	<b>-4.36</b>	<b>&lt;.001</b>	<b>-.28</b>
Desire to Be Valued by Partner for One’s Warmth	0.10	2.22	.027	.13
Desire to Be Valued by Partner for One’s Competence	0.11	2.89	.004	.17

Additionally, incremental beliefs about sexual value were examined as a moderator of the effect of the desire to be sexually valued by one’s partner on a composite of the measured behaviors when controlling for the interactions between incremental beliefs and all covariates. Those beliefs influenced the relationship of interest, but their effect depended on relationship length,  $b = -0.002$ ,  $t = -3.45$ ,  $p = .001$ ,  $pr = -.17$ . More specifically, the desire to be sexually valued and incremental beliefs about sexual valued did not interact in predicting engagement in behaviors for those in

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relatively long relationships (+ 1 SD),  $p = .170$ , but this interaction was a significant predictor of behavior engagement for those in relatively short relationships (- 1 SD),  $b = -0.19$ ,  $t = 2.94$ ,  $p = .004$ ,  $pr = .14$ . Conditional effects of the desire to be sexually valued by one’s partner for those holding relatively low (- 1 SD) and high (+ 1 SD) levels of incremental beliefs, and conditional effects of incremental beliefs for those relatively low (- 1 SD) and high (+ 1 SD) on that desire are presented in Table 22. Analyses suggest that the desire to be sexually valued by one’s partner was not associated with engagement in behaviors aimed at increasing one’s sexual value for those in long relationships. However, this desire was associated with higher behavior engagement for those in short relationships who held high incremental beliefs, and lower behavior engagement for those in short relationships who held entity beliefs (i.e. low incremental beliefs).

**Table 22**  
*Conditional Effects of the Desire to Be Sexually Valued and Incremental Beliefs for Participants in Relatively Short and Long Relationships – Study 3*

	Engagement in Behaviors					
	Short Relationships (- 1SD)			Long Relationships (+ 1SD)		
	<i>b</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>ES</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>ES</i>
	Effect of the Desire to Be Sexually Valued by Partner					
Low Incremental Beliefs (- 1 SD)	<b>-.20</b>	<b>.025</b>	<b>-.12</b>	-.02	.828	.00
High Incremental Beliefs (+ 1 SD)	<b>.23</b>	<b>.048</b>	<b>.09</b>	.15	.100	.02
	Effect of Incremental Beliefs					

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Low Desire to Be Sexually Valued by Partner (-1SD)	.59	.269	.04	-1.00	0.072	-.02
High Desire to Be Sexually Valued by Partner (+ 1 SD)	.87	1.53	.07	-1.11	.062	-.03

To test the hypothesis that those who desire to be sexually valued by their partners engage in more sexual behaviors particularly when they consider those behaviors instrumental in eliciting positive sexual evaluations from their partner, data was restructured and a multilevel model treating behaviors as nested within person and people as nested within dyads was used. In these models, the intercept and slope of person-centered instrumentality beliefs were modeled as random. Fifteen behavior items (including a composite of three original behaviors) and the specific instrumentality beliefs corresponding to them were used for this model. Person-centered instrumentality beliefs and the desire to be sexually valued by one’s partner were modeled as predictors of behaviors. Further, participants’ sex drive, their general desire to be valued by their romantic partners, their general desire to be sexually valued, and their desire to be sexually valued by extradyadic partners were added as covariates. Results from this regression are presented in Table 23. Participants engaged in behaviors they considered more instrumental to achieving sexual value. However, those who desired to be sexually valued by their partners were not more likely to engage in the behaviors included in this analysis.

**Table 23**

*Desire to be Sexually Valued by Romantic Partner, Person-Centered Instrumentality Beliefs and Covariates Predicting Engagement in Behaviors Aimed at Increasing Sexual Value – Study 3*

Predictor	<i>b</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>pr</i>
Desire to Be Sexually Valued by Romantic Partner	0.07	1.41	.160	.03
<b>Instrumentality Beliefs</b>	<b>0.27</b>	<b>20.88</b>	<b>&lt;.001</b>	<b>.31</b>
Desire to Be Sexually Valued by Extradyadic Partners	0.02	0.82	.415	.02
General Desire to Be Sexually Valued	0.01	0.38	.706	.01
<b>Sex Drive</b>	<b>0.29</b>	<b>7.77</b>	<b>&lt;.001</b>	<b>.20</b>
<b>Desire to Be Generally Valued by Partner</b>	<b>-0.29</b>	<b>-6.10</b>	<b>&lt;.001</b>	<b>-.14</b>
<b>Desire to Be Valued by Partner for One’s Warmth</b>	<b>0.16</b>	<b>3.23</b>	<b>.001</b>	<b>.08</b>
<b>Desire to Be Valued by Partner for One’s Competence</b>	<b>0.08</b>	<b>2.26</b>	<b>.025</b>	<b>.07</b>

Next, the product of the desire to be sexually valued by one’s partner and person-centered instrumentality beliefs was added to this model to investigate their interaction. This model also controlled for the interactions between instrumentality beliefs and all covariates. The interaction of interest was not significant predictor of likelihood to engage in behaviors eliciting sexual value,  $p = .847$ .

Further, the moderating role of implicit theories about sexual value in the relationship between the desire to be sexually valued by one’s partner and person-centered instrumentality beliefs was examined. Implicit theories did not moderate this relationship,  $p = .183$ .

**H4: Desire to be Sexually Valued, Communal Sexual Motivation and Satisfaction and Relationship Outcomes**

To investigate the indirect effect of the desire to be sexually valued by one’s partner on relationship outcomes through sexual communal strength, this desire was first modeled as a predictor of sexual communal strength. The model and all other subsequent models controlled for participants’ sex drive, their general desire to be valued by their romantic partners, their desires to be valued by those partner for their warmth and competence, their general desire to be sexually valued, and their desire to be sexually valued by extradyadic partners. Results from this model can be found in Table 24. Those who desired to be sexually valued by their partner were more likely to adopt communal sexual motivation toward that partner.

**Table 24**

*Desire to be Sexually Valued by Romantic Partner and Covariates Predicting Sexual Communal Strength – Study 3*

Predictor	<i>b</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>pr</i>
<b>Desire to Be Sexually Valued by Romantic Partner</b>	<b>0.52</b>	<b>6.13</b>	<b>&lt;.001</b>	<b>.30</b>
<b>Desire to Be Sexually Valued by Extradyadic Partners</b>	<b>-0.13</b>	<b>-2.60</b>	<b>.010</b>	<b>-.13</b>
General Desire to Be Sexually Valued	-0.01	-0.22	.824	-.01
<b>Sex Drive</b>	<b>0.32</b>	<b>5.09</b>	<b>&lt;.001</b>	<b>.25</b>
<b>Desire to Be Generally Valued by Partner</b>	<b>0.24</b>	<b>3.02</b>	<b>.003</b>	<b>.15</b>
<b>Desire to Be Valued by Partner for One’s Warmth</b>	<b>0.21</b>	<b>2.50</b>	<b>.013</b>	<b>.13</b>
Desire to Be Valued by Partner for One’s Competence	-0.11	-1.56	.119	-.08

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Further, perceivers’ sexual communal strength and their desire to be sexually valued by their partner were modeled as predictors of outcomes of interest – their own and their partner’s relationship and sexual satisfaction and the actual reported sexual evaluation from their partners while controlling for covariates listed above. A composite of the standardized and averaged scores on the NSSS-S and sexual satisfaction scale was used as an outcome. Results from these models can be found in table 25. Sexual communal strength was not associated with one’s own or their partner’s relationship or sexual satisfaction. However, those who reported higher sexual communal strength toward a partner were likely to be more sexually valued by those partners. Further, the desire to be sexually valued by one’s partner was not associated with any of the outcomes in these models.

**Table 25**

*Desire to be Sexually Valued by Romantic Partner, Sexual Communal Strength and Covariates Predicting Relationship Outcomes – Study 3*

Predictor	<i>b</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>pr</i>
<b>Outcome – Own Relationship Satisfaction</b>				
Desire to Be Sexually Valued by Romantic Partner	0.00	-0.15	.988	-.01
Sexual Communal Strength	.00	0.00	.999	-.01
Desire to Be Sexually Valued by Extradyadic Partners	-0.07	-1.80	.073	-.11
General Desire to Be Sexually Valued	-0.09	-1.92	.056	-.05
Sex Drive	0.01	0.13	.894	.03
<b>Desire to Be Generally Valued by Partner</b>	<b>0.20</b>	<b>2.89</b>	<b>.004</b>	<b>.17</b>
Desire to Be Valued by Partner for One’s Warmth	0.09	1.29	.197	.09

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<b>Desire to Be Valued by Partner for One’s Competence</b>	<b>0.14</b>	<b>2.49</b>	<b>.013</b>	<b>.13</b>
<b>Outcome –Partner Relationship Satisfaction</b>				
Desire to Be Sexually Valued by Romantic Partner	-0.04	-0.58	.561	-.04
Sexual Communal Strength	0.03	0.63	.531	.02
<b>Desire to Be Sexually Valued by Extradydic Partners</b>	<b>-0.09</b>	<b>-2.08</b>	<b>.038</b>	<b>-.13</b>
<b>General Desire to Be Sexually Valued</b>	<b>0.15</b>	<b>2.96</b>	<b>.003</b>	<b>.11</b>
Sex Drive	0.03	0.60	.547	.04
<b>Desire to Be Generally Valued by Partner</b>	<b>0.16</b>	<b>2.22</b>	<b>.027</b>	<b>.16</b>
Desire to Be Valued by Partner for One’s Warmth	0.05	0.67	.506	.06
Desire to Be Valued by Partner for One’s Competence	-0.01	-0.13	.896	.05
<b>Outcome – Own Sexual Satisfaction</b>				
Desire to Be Sexually Valued by Romantic Partner	0.07	1.06	.292	.07
Sexual Communal Strength	0.05	1.30	.196	.08
<b>Desire to Be Sexually Valued by Extradydic Partners</b>	<b>-0.14</b>	<b>-3.51</b>	<b>.001</b>	<b>-.16</b>
General Desire to Be Sexually Valued	0.01	0.23	.821	.03
<b>Sex Drive</b>	<b>0.13</b>	<b>2.68</b>	<b>.008</b>	<b>.26</b>
Desire to Be Generally Valued by Partner	-0.12	-1.79	.075	-.12
Desire to Be Valued by Partner for One’s Warmth	0.12	1.82	.069	.10
<b>Desire to Be Valued by Partner for One’s Competence</b>	<b>0.15</b>	<b>2.64</b>	<b>.009</b>	<b>.15</b>
<b>Outcome – Partner Sexual Satisfaction</b>				
Desire to Be Sexually Valued by Romantic Partner	0.02	0.30	.762	.04
Sexual Communal Strength	0.03	0.63	.527	.08
Desire to Be Sexually Valued by Extradydic Partners	0.03	0.75	.452	-.06

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General Desire to Be Sexually Valued	0.07	1.36	.177	.06
6Sex Drive	0.10	1.90	.058	.23
Desire to Be Generally Valued by Partner	0.03	0.45	.653	-.05
Desire to Be Valued by Partner for One’s Warmth	0.00	0.03	.975	.05
Desire to Be Valued by Partner for One’s Competence	-0.05	-0.85	.399	.06
<b>Outcome – Partner Sexual Evaluation of the Self</b>				
Desire to Be Sexually Valued by Romantic Partner	0.13	1.34	.180	.10
<b>Sexual Communal Strength</b>	<b>0.11</b>	<b>2.12</b>	<b>.035</b>	<b>.10</b>
<b>Desire to Be Sexually Valued by Extradynamic Partners</b>	<b>-0.12</b>	<b>-2.50</b>	<b>.013</b>	<b>-.15</b>
<b>General Desire to Be Sexually Valued</b>	<b>0.20</b>	<b>3.30</b>	<b>.001</b>	<b>.17</b>
<b>Sex Drive</b>	<b>0.26</b>	<b>3.82</b>	<b>&lt;.001</b>	<b>.23</b>
Desire to Be Generally Valued by Partner	0.03	0.30	.764	.02
Desire to Be Valued by Partner for One’s Warmth	-0.06	-0.63	.526	.05
Desire to Be Valued by Partner for One’s Competence	-0.04	-0.54	.590	.06

A confidence interval around the indirect effect of the desire to be sexually valued by one’s partner on that partner’s sexual evaluation of the self were calculated using the Monte Carlo Method and 20,000 repetitions. The desire to be sexually valued by a partner exhibited a positive indirect effect on actual reported sexual evaluations from the partner it was targeted at through sexual communal strength, 95%CI [0.003 0.120].

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### **H1: Desire to Be Sexually Valued Exacerbating Effects of Perceptions of Sexual Rejection on Well-Being**

Predictions about the exacerbating role of the desire to be sexually valued on rejection were not tested using the experimental manipulation of rejection as a predictor, since that manipulation was not successful in eliciting rejection.

However, these predictions were tested in a manner analogous to the one used in Study 1. Perceptions of sexual evaluations of the self from partner were reverse coded such that higher score represented more perceived sexual rejection. This reverse scored scale was used in subsequent analyses. All steps controlled for sex drive, general desire to be valued by one's partner, the desires to be valued by a partner for one's warmth and competence, the general desire to be sexually valued, and the desire to be sexually valued by extradyadic partners to estimate the unique predictive value of the variables of interest.

One's desire to be sexually valued by their partner, their perceptions of sexual rejection by that partner, and the product of these two variables were added as predictors of relationship outcomes including relationship and sexual satisfaction (using a two-scale composite described above), sexual self-esteem and sexual evaluation of one's partner. Further, these models controlled for the covariates listed above and their interaction with perceptions of sexual rejection. The interaction between the desire to be sexually valued by one's partner and sexual rejection was not associated with one's sexual self-esteem,  $p = .898$ . This interaction predicted one's relationship satisfaction,  $b = 0.15$ ,  $t = 2.04$ ,  $p = .042$ ,  $pr = .13$ . However, sexual rejection was not significantly related to relationship satisfaction for those with a strong desire to be sexually valued by a partner (+ 1 SD),  $p = .066$ , or those experiencing a low level of this desire (- 1 SD),  $p = .096$ . Similarly, the

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interaction between the desire to be sexually valued by one's partner and perceptions of sexual rejection by that partner was a significant predictor of one's sexual satisfaction,  $b = 0.16$ ,  $t = 2.25$ ,  $p = .019$ ,  $pr = .12$ , but perceptions of rejection were not associated with sexual satisfaction for those high in the desire to be sexually valued,  $p = .566$ , or those low in the desire to be sexually valued,  $p = .846$ . Analogously, the interaction of interest was a significant predictor of one's sexual evaluation of their partner,  $b = 0.26$ ,  $t = 2.73$ ,  $p = .007$ ,  $pr = .16$ , but the conditional effects of sexual rejection for those with a strong desire to be sexually valued by a partner (+ 1 SD),  $p = .632$ , or those experiencing a low level of this desire (- 1 SD),  $p = .988$ , were not significant.

### ***Attachment Anxiety Moderation***

To investigate whether those high in attachment anxiety were particularly likely to experience an exacerbating effect of the desire to be sexually valued on the effects of perceived sexual rejection, the product of attachment anxiety, perceptions of sexual rejection and the desire to be sexually valued by one's partner, and all corresponding two-way interactions were added as predictors of the outcomes of interest. Further, this model controlled for all covariates listed above and their two and three-way interactions with sexual rejection and attachment anxiety. Attachment anxiety was not a significant predictor of the effect of the interaction of the desire to be sexually valued and perceived sexual rejection on any of the outcomes of interest,  $p > .088$ .

### ***Implicit Theories Moderation***

To investigate whether desire to be sexually valued exacerbated reactivity to sexual rejection more strongly for those who held fixed beliefs about sexual value compared to those who held incremental beliefs, an analogous model to the one above

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was used incorporating the measure of implicit theories as a moderator. There was no significant three-way interaction between implicit theories, the desire to be sexually valued by one's partner and perceptions of sexual rejection in predicting any of the outcomes of interest,  $p > .263$ .

### **Discussion**

Study 3 confirmed that as hypothesized, the desire to be sexually valued by one's partner was associated with biased perceptions of the partner's sexual evaluations. In addition, those who wanted to be sexually valued by their partners on average overestimated how much their partners actually valued them in the sexual domain, while those who experienced a low level of this desire neither overestimated nor underestimated these partner evaluations. Similar to other biases in relationships (e.g. Lemay et al., 2007; Murray et al., 1996), the bias resulting from this desire had a positive effect on relationship and self-evaluations including relationship and sexual satisfaction and sexual self-esteem.

Moreover, this bias was also associated with participants' likelihood to initiate physical and sexual activity. In other words, those who strongly desired to be sexually valued by their partners were more likely to initiate physical and sexual activity in part because their desire biased their perceptions of how sexually desirable their partners found them. No gender differences were found in the relationship between the desire to be sexually valued by one's partner and the likelihood to initiate physical and sexual activity as measured by a multi-item scale.

Additionally, the desire to be sexually valued by one's partner predicted engagement in a number of other behaviors and tendencies including attending to a

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partner's sexual needs and showing enthusiasm during sexual activity with one's partner. Additionally, those high in this desire were actually less likely to diet, a behavior that is often connected to self-objectification in the literature (e.g. Fredrickson et al., 1998; Noll & Fredrickson, 1998). Some gender differences were uncovered in the effects of this desire on behaviors including attending to one's own sexual needs. In particular, women but not men who experienced this desire were less likely to attend to their own sexual needs. Furthermore, those in short relationships, but not those in long relationships were likely to engage in more of the behaviors measured.

Analyses also suggested that participants were particularly likely to engage in behaviors or tendencies they personally considered instrumental to being sexually desired by their partners. However, this relationship was not particularly strong for those high in the desire to be sexually valued by their partner, contrary to hypothesis.

As expected, the desire to be sexually valued by one's partner was also associated with higher communal sexual strength towards that partner. In other words, those who wanted to be sexually desired by their partners were more likely to be attentive to those partner's sexual needs. In addition, this desire had an indirect positive effect on partners' sexual evaluation of the self through sexual communal strength. In other words, those who wanted to be sexually valued by their partners actually had partners who more strongly sexually valued them in part because they were more sexually attentive to those partners.

Finally, I examined whether the desire to be sexually valued exacerbated the effects of sexual rejection on relationship and self-evaluations. Originally, a rejection manipulation was going to be used to test this hypothesis. However, perhaps due to the

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limited time to run this study caused by COVID-19 and the resulting small sample size for the lab data, the manipulation was ineffective in inducing feelings of sexual rejection. Instead, reverse coded perceptions of partner sexual evaluation were used as an indicator of perceptions of sexual rejection by one’s partner. The desire to be sexually valued by one’s partner did not appear to exacerbate the effects of sexual rejection on any of the outcomes.

Notably, the effects of the desire to be sexually valued were estimated while controlling for sex drive, the general desire to be liked by one’s partner, and the desires to be seen as warm and competent by that partner. Thus, the desire to be seen as sexually valuable by one’s partner had unique effects on relationship behaviors and well-being not captured by the effect of wanting to engage in sexual activity or the effect of desiring to be liked by one’s partner more generally or in the specific domains of warmth and competence. Finally, analyses also controlled for the general desire to be sexually valued, and the desire to be sexually valued by extradyadic partners, allowing to examine the effect of the desire to be seen as sexually valuable by one’s romantic partner specifically.

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**Table 26**  
*Hypotheses and Study Summary*

	Study 1	Study 2	Study 3
H1: The DTBSV was expected to exacerbate the effects of sexual rejection on relationship and personal well-being	Partially supported – no effects on the trait level but some exacerbation of within-person daily effects	N/A	Not supported
H2: The DTBSV was expected to be associated with wishful thinking within relationships	Partially supported – wishful thinking effect was observed only for participants low in attachment anxiety; an unexpected negative bias was observed for the highly anxious	Partially supported – DTBSV was associated with more positive perceptions of partner evaluations; no accuracy benchmark	Supported
H2a: DTBSV was expected to have a positive effect on relationship and sexual satisfaction and sexual self-esteem through perceptions that one is sexually valued by their partner when controlling for accuracy	Partially supported – an indirect positive effect on relationship satisfaction was observed for those low in attachment anxiety; negative effect was observed for the highly anxious	Partially supported – DTBSV exhibited an indirect positive effect on sexual satisfaction and sexual self-esteem, and a direct effect on relationship satisfaction, but this study did not include an accuracy benchmark	Supported
H2b: DTBSV was expected to have a positive indirect effect on likelihood of initiating physical intimacy and sexual	Partially supported – direct effect supported; indirect effect not supported	Partially supported – direct effect detected for women but not men; study did not	Supported

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activity through perceptions that one is sexually valued by their partner when controlling for accuracy; and a positive direct effect on this likelihood

include an accuracy benchmark

H3: DTBSV was expected to be associated with engagement in behaviors aimed at increasing sexual value; participants high in DTBSV were expected to be particularly likely to engage in behaviors they consider instrumental

N/A

N/A

Partially supported – DTBSV was associated with engagement in a number of specific behaviors; those in short relationships but not those in longer relationships who held high incremental beliefs were likely to engage in more behaviors generally; an interaction between DTBSV and instrumentality beliefs was not detected

H4: DTBSV was expected to be associated with sexual communal strength towards one’s partner and to exhibit indirect positive effects on own and partner relationship and sexual satisfaction and partner sexual evaluation of the self

N/A

N/A

Partially supported – DTBSV was associated with sexual communal strength and exhibited an indirect effect on partner sexual evaluations but not own or partner relationship and sexual satisfaction

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*Note.* DTBSV = desire to be sexually valued

## Chapter 6: General Discussion

The current research suggests that generally people desire to be sexually valued, i.e. they want to be seen in a positive light in the sexual domain by others. For those in committed romantic relationships, this desire can be targeted specifically at their romantic partners or at partners outside of the current relationship. Study 2 suggest that people usually desire more strongly the sexual evaluation of their romantic partners than that of people outside of the current committed relationship. Furthermore, the desire to be sexually valued seems somewhat important for psychological, motivational and behavioral outcomes. In addition, the desire to be sexually valued by one’s partner in particular has unique effects within romantic relationships. Table 26 provides a summary of the specific hypotheses in the current research and whether they were supported by each of the studies utilized.

Studies 1 and 3 examined whether the desire to be sexually valued exacerbated the effects of sexual rejection from one’s partner on relationship and self-evaluations. Results suggested that the general desire to be sexually valued and the desire to be sexually valued by one’s partner specifically did not exacerbate the effects of chronic perceptions of rejection on any of the outcomes of interest. In addition, this pattern did not depend on attachment anxiety, contrary to the initial hypothesis. Study 3 also suggests that implicit theories about sexual value did not influence the relationship between the desire to be sexually valued by one’s partner, perceptions of sexual rejection from that partner, and relationship outcomes. Moreover, in Study 1, contrary to the hypothesis, those high in the desire to be sexually valued were actually shown to sexually desire their partners more if they perceived those partners sexually rejected them, while

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those low in the desire to be sexually valued experienced lower sexual desire for rejecting partners. This effect may be due to the fact that people who are high on the desire to be sexually valued may perceive others as sexually attractive, even when they are rejected by them. This may reflect their higher sex drive given that those with a higher sex drive may find others more attractive generally. In addition, this higher sexual desire for partners might be a cause rather than a consequence of the desire to be sexually valued. People who find their partners to be sexually attractive or desirable may want to engage in sexual activity with them more often, and being valued by those partners may be a means to obtaining sex. Thus, perceived partner sexual desirability may predict a higher desire to be sexually valued.

In Study 1, the desire to be sexually valued did have the expected within-person exacerbating effect on relationship satisfaction and, for women, on daily positive and negative affect. In other words, those who strongly desired to be sexually valued were likely to experience lower relationship satisfaction on days when they perceived their partners sexually rejected them more than usual. Further, women who desired to be sexually valued and perceived their partners sexually rejected them, were more likely to report lower positive affect and higher negative affect on days when they felt particularly sexually rejected by their partners. However, effect sizes of these relationships were relatively small suggesting that although daily feelings of relationship satisfaction and women's daily affect were influenced by the desire to be sexually valued when people felt sexually rejected, there are likely a number of other factors that contribute to these fleeting experiences as well.

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Unexpectedly, the desire to be sexually valued exacerbated the effects of perceived sexual rejection from a partner on daily sexual desire for that partner for those who experienced low attachment anxiety, but not for those who were highly anxious. In other words, those who were relatively secure and highly desired to be sexually valued tended to report that their partners were less sexually desirable on days when they felt particularly sexually rejected by those partners, but this pattern was not replicated for anxious individuals. This finding suggests that relationship security may involve a tendency to devalue a partner that does not fulfill one's needs to be sexually desirable, i.e. to disengage from frustrating goal pursuit. On the other hand, those who are highly anxious might continue desiring a partner that has sexually rejected them. These findings are in line with past research suggesting that attachment anxiety is associated with commitment even to partners that do not satisfy one's needs (Slotter & Finkel, 2009) and suggest that this pattern might apply to the sexual domain.

However, in support of initial theorizing, the general desire to be sexually valued exacerbated the within-person effects of daily perceived sexual rejection on daily partner evaluations, daily positive affect and daily relationship satisfaction more strongly for those who were highly anxious. In other words, people who were anxious reported somewhat lower positive affect and relationship satisfaction and more negative evaluations for their partners on days when they felt more sexually rejected than usual by those partners. Study 1 suggested that those who strongly desired to be sexually valued and were highly anxious experienced the strongest within-person negative effects of sexual rejection. In other words, those who were highly anxious and desired to be sexually valued seemed to be especially sensitive to daily fluctuations in sexual rejection

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from their partners and experienced lower well-being on days when they perceived their partners rejected them more than usual although the negative effects of rejection were relatively weak for all participants. These findings are in line with past research suggesting that attachment anxiety is associated with hypersensitivity to social rejection, which sexual rejection is likely related to (Ronen & Baldwin, 2010), and research suggesting that those who are highly anxious are more strongly influenced by daily fluctuation in perceptions of romantic partners' behaviors (Sadikaj et al., 2011). In addition, these findings suggest that the desire to be sexually valued might be one of a number of factors contributing to the amplified relevance of sexual experiences on relationship satisfaction for those who are anxiously attached (Birnbaum et al., 2006). However, a similar pattern was not observed for chronic beliefs suggesting those who are anxious might be particularly sensitive to fleeting but not chronic sexual rejection. This may be the case because, when sexual rejection is chronically perceived, even secure people may view distancing from partners or devaluing relationships as warranted.

It is important to consider that only the daily measurements in Study 1 directly targeted perceptions of sexual rejection by one's partner. Chronic perceptions in Study 1 and Study 3 were, instead, measured using reverse scored perceptions of partner's sexual evaluations of the self. While those who believe their partners do not value them highly in the sexual domain are likely to experience some feelings of rejection, sexual rejection has been more narrowly defined as a decline of one's sexual advances (Kim et al., 2020). Thus, future research examining the desire to be sexually valued should aim to measure chronic sexual rejection in a manner that is more compatible with this definition. Furthermore, the average levels of rejection reported in these studies were relatively low,

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so effects of extreme feelings of sexual rejection could not be reliably estimated. In addition, the rejection manipulation initially incorporated in Study 3 was not effective in inducing perceptions of sexual rejection from one’s partner. Thus, future research should sample participants experiencing more variability in sexual rejection from partners or use a successful manipulation in order to provide better understanding of the role of the desire to be sexually valued in the effect of perceived sexual rejection on relationship and personal well-being. Specifically, future research might target couples seeking counseling services for problems related to sexuality given that members of these couples might experience stronger feelings of sexual rejection.

The current studies also addressed the hypothesis that, similar to other motivations aimed at maintaining positive views of the self in the eyes of others (Brown, 1986; Lemay et al., 2021; Sedikides & Gregg, 2008), the desire to be sexually valued can bias metaperceptions in romantic relationships. I expected the desire to be sexually valued to bias people’s perceptions of how much their romantic partners actually valued them in the sexual domain. In addition, I expected perceptions of partner’s sexual evaluations of the self to be somewhat accurate, similar to accuracy effects found in research on other metaperceptions in relationships (e.g., Kenny & Aciatelli, 2001; Lemay et al., 2007; Lemay et al., 2021). Study 1 and Study 3 suggested that perceptions of partners’ sexual evaluations within relationships were somewhat accurate, associated with partners’ actual reported sexual evaluations. Further, Study 3 suggested that, independently of this accuracy effect, the desire to be sexually valued by one’s partner was associated with somewhat more positive perceptions of being sexually valued by partners, which suggests that the desire to be sexually valued may engender a wishful

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thinking bias in which people assume that they are sexually valued by their partners although this biasing effect appears to have a relatively small effect size. A similar biasing effect of the general desire to be sexually valued was suggested in Study 1, but this effect was observed only for those low in attachment anxiety. These findings build on prior theorizing suggesting that, within romantic relationships, people exhibit wishful thinking (Murray & Holmes, 1997), and their desires can bias their metaperceptions (Kenny & Aciatelli, 2001; Lemay, 2014; Lemay et al, 2021; Lemay & Spongberg, 2015). More specifically, the current research suggests that these effects extend to the sexual domain and the desire to be sexually valued can operate similarly to other desires in relationships (e.g. Lemay, 2014; Lemay et al., 2021), biasing perceptions of one’s sexual value to their partner in a preferred direction.

However, the biasing effect of the general desire to be sexually valued was moderated by attachment anxiety in Study 1. Those low in attachment anxiety experienced a positive effect of the desire to be sexually valued, when controlling for their accuracy, i.e. the sexual evaluation their partners actually reported. Hence, these individuals demonstrated a wishful thinking bias. However, those high in attachment anxiety did not exhibit this pattern, and even demonstrated a negative bias associated with the desire to be sexually valued, perceiving that they could not obtain the sexual evaluations they wanted. Attachment anxiety is associated with negative cognitive biases in relationships (Campbell et al., 2005; Gillath et al., 2005) that might interfere with the wishful thinking stemming from the desire to be sexually valued. It is possible that people high in attachment anxiety develop rejection concerns when processing social information in domains that are relevant to obtaining others’ love. A high desire to be

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sexually valued might indicate that being valued sexually has this relevance (i.e. is important to achieve in order to receive love), which might lead those who are anxiously attached to develop concerns about sexual value from their partner.

These results suggest that the desire to be sexually valued might not produce positive illusions regarding others' sexual evaluations for everyone, but instead interacts with people's dispositions for security or insecurity in their relationships. Future research should examine other individual difference variables that may moderate the predictors and outcomes associated with this desire. However, this pattern was not replicated using daily measures of perceptions of partners' sexual evaluation, suggesting that wishful thinking effects related to the desire to be sexually valued might mainly manifest for perceptions of how a partner generally evaluates oneself, but not for perceptions of a partner's evaluations on a specific day. Perhaps this is the case because general perceptions of sexual acceptance and rejection are more psychologically impactful than perceptions that are circumscribed to a particular day. In addition, attachment anxiety did not exhibit a moderating role on the biasing effect of the desire to be sexually valued by one's partner in Study 3. Thus, the interaction pattern involving attachment anxiety in Study 1 might not be reliable. Future research should attempt a replication.

Findings from Study 3 suggest that those experiencing a strong desire to be sexually valued by their romantic partners on average overestimated how much those romantic partners actually value them, while those who experienced a weak desire neither overestimated nor underestimated their partners' evaluations. However, this pattern did not emerge in Study 1, when examining the general desire to be sexually valued as the predictor. Thus, it is possible that the desire to be sexually valued by one's partner

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specifically is more likely to be associated with the tendency to overestimate a partner’s sexual evaluation than the general desire to be sexually valued.

An alternative possible hypothesis for the relationship between the desire to be sexually valued and perceptions of sexual evaluations by one’s partner might be that those who perceive their partners to sexually devalue them may experience increased desire to be sexually valued by those partners due to a boosted awareness of an unmet need. While this is a possibility, the current research suggests that this effect is likely not experienced by most people, given that the desire to be sexually valued and perceptions of partner sexual evaluations were positively associated across the studies. Further, theorizing on disidentification and goal disengagement suggest that repeated failure in pursuit of a goal leads people to disengage from and devalue that goal (e.g. Wrosch et al., 2003). In addition, expectancy-value theory suggests that people are more likely to pursue goals that they anticipate being able to achieve (Wigfield, & Eccles, 2000). Like the wishful thinking perspective, these findings suggest a positive association between the desire to be sexually valued and perceptions of others’ sexual evaluations. Future research should examine the causal order in the relationship between the desire to be sexually valued and perceptions of partner’s sexual evaluations by employing an experimental design. However, given that theorizing on other metaperceptions suggests that goals usually precede positive illusions (Gagné & Lydon, 2001; Lemay et al., 2007; Lemay et al., 2021), it is reasonable to believe that the desire to be sexually valued leads to a wishful thinking effect.

I further explored whether the wishful thinking effect described above was associated with improved relationship well-being. In Study 1, the desire to be sexually

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valued exhibited an indirect positive effect on relationship satisfaction for participants low in attachment anxiety, through more positive perceptions of being sexually valued by partners, and an indirect negative effect on relationship satisfaction for participants high in attachment anxiety, through more negative perceptions of being sexually valued. Further, in Study 3 the desire to be sexually valued by one’s partner exhibited a similar indirect positive effect on one’s relationship and sexual satisfaction and one’s sexual self-esteem. Both Study 1 and Study 3 controlled for actual sexual evaluations from partners, so these indirect effects are likely to reflect bias associated with the desire to be sexually valued. Study 2 additionally indicated that the desire to be sexually valued by one’s romantic partner exhibited an indirect positive effect on one’s sexual satisfaction and sexual self-esteem through more positive metaperceptions about sexual value. However, Study 2 did not include an assessment of the partner’s actual sexual evaluations, so it is not possible to determine whether these effects were independent of partners’ sexual evaluations. All indirect effects were relatively small in size suggesting that although the desire to be sexually valued can contribute to improved relationship well-being and sexual self-perception through wishful thinking, there likely a myriad of other factors that are implicated in relationship and sexual satisfaction and sexual self-esteem.

Studies 1-3 suggest that the desire to be sexually valued both generally and by one’s romantic partner more specifically is related to greater relationship quality partly because those who desire to be sexually valued perceive that their partners find them more sexually desirable. Results confirmed that, within committed romantic relationships, positive sexual and physical evaluations from one’s partner are associated with relationship well-being (Meltzer, 2020). The current research extends past findings

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by examining the role of the desire for such evaluations. Further, Studies 1-3 build on prior research suggesting that both accurate and biased metaperceptions within relationships can influence relationship and personal well-being (Lemay et al., 2007; Lemay et al., 2021; Murray, Holmes & Griffin, 2000) and suggest that these findings extend to the sexual domain.

The positive illusions related to the desire to be sexually valued by one's partner were also shown to be associated with a somewhat higher likelihood of initiating sexual activity and physical intimacy with that partner in Study 3. In other words, those who desired to be sexually valued by their partners were more likely to try to instigate physical and sexual activity with them in part because they overestimated how sexually desirable their partners found them. Notably, this effect was estimated when controlling for one's sex drive, so it cannot be explained by the tendency of people who desire to be sexually valued to want more sexual activity in general. Further, as predicted, the desire to be sexually valued also exhibited a direct effect on the likelihood to initiate physical and sexual activity. I expected to observe this effect given that sexual activity and physical intimacy might be some of the most effective ways for people who strongly desire being sexually valuable to elicit this desired appraisal from their partners (Meston & Buss, 2007). In Study 1, positive illusions related to the general desire to be sexually valued were not observed on the daily level, so an indirect effect of the general desire to be sexually valued on average likelihood to initiate sexual activity across days was not estimated. However, when controlling for perceptions of partner's sexual evaluations and actual reported sexual evaluations from partners, the desire to be sexually valued had a positive effect on average daily sexual initiation, perhaps due to the lower error variance

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in the model after adding these explanatory control variables. It is likely that the difference across the studies in the strength of the effect is because of greater predictor-criterion specificity in Study 3; the desire to be sexually valued by one's partner may be more relevant to initiating sexual activity with that partner relative to the desire to be sexually valued by people in general. In addition, although there was some variability, on average people reported initiating sexual activity relatively infrequently during the daily studies, which is not unexpected considering recent research suggesting that about half of the people in relationships have sex less than once a week (Wellings et al., 2019). It is also possible that some sexual initiations occurred after the daily surveys were completed. Thus, it might be more useful to predict general tendencies of the initiation of sexual activity or observe participants during a longer period of time in order to estimate the effects of the desire to be sexually valued more reliably.

The gender differences in the effect of the desire to be sexually valued on sexual initiation were not consistent. While Studies 1 and 3 did not establish a gender difference in the association between the desire to be sexually valued and sexual initiation, Study 2 suggested that this desire was associated with an increased likelihood of initiating only for women, contrary to the initial hypothesis expecting a stronger effect for men. However, in this study men exhibited a relatively high likelihood of initiating sexual activity regardless of their desire to be sexually valued confirming past research suggesting that men initiate sexual activity more often than women (Morgan & Zurbriggen, [2007](#); Vannier & O'Sullivan, 2011). The current research builds on prior finding by revealing that women who strongly desire to be sexually valued by their partners might be more likely to initiate sexual activity than women who do not have this

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desire and gender differences in rates of initiation can be smaller for people who desire to be sexually valued. This pattern was not replicated in Studies 1 and 3, so it is likely dependent on additional factors. Past research suggests that that men desire more intercourse within relationships compared to women, but there are no gender differences in the desire for other physical activity such as kissing or petting (Santtila et al., 2008). Thus, the inconsistent findings may be partly explained by the fact that the measure of sexual initiation in Studies 2 and 3 included both sexual intercourse and other behaviors related to physical intimacy.

Notably, Study 3 suggests that people who desire to be sexually valued by their partners are also somewhat more likely to try to meet these partners’ sexual needs and to show enthusiasm during sexual activity with them. These are ways to feel sexually desirable that are not appearance related and have not been considered in past research when discussing attempts to appear “sexy” (e.g. Smolak et al., 2014). In addition, these findings are corroborated by findings in Study 2 and 3 suggesting the desire to be sexually valued is associated with moderately higher sexual communal strength, a concern for a partner’s sexual needs. These findings are important in light of the positive outcomes associated with sexual communal strength, including understanding when a partner is “not in the mood” (Muisse et al., 2017), increased commitment and relationship satisfaction for partners (Muisse & Impett, 2015), and a greater likelihood to sustain sexual desire over time (Impett et al., 2008). In addition, the current research suggested that perceivers’ desire to be sexually valued by their partners has an indirect positive effect on the extent to which these partners find perceivers sexually desirable through the perceivers’ sexual communal motivation. In other words, those who want to be sexually

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valued may successfully elicit positive sexual evaluations from partners because they care about these partner's sexual needs. Hence, one healthy way to satisfy a desire to be sexually valued might be adopting a sexual communal motivation and focusing on attending to partners' sexual needs. However, analyses did not uncover a similar indirect effect on one's own and their partner's relationship satisfaction. It is likely that an effect on relationship satisfaction was not observed because the sexual domain is only one of many domains contributing to relationship satisfaction. Further, the extent to which sexual and relationship satisfaction are linked can vary based on attachment anxiety. Specifically, for secure individuals this link has been found to be weaker than for those who are highly anxious (Butzer & Campbell, 2008). Thus, the desire to be sexually valued might not be a strong predictor of relationship satisfaction for everyone. In Study 3, an indirect effect of one's desire to be sexually valued by their partner through communal strength on one's own and their partner's sexual satisfaction was also not uncovered. These analyses suggest that although people who want to be seen as sexually valuable by their partners might care about these partner's sexual needs and attempt to meet them, they may not always be successful in doing so. Past research suggests that people are likely to be less successful in meeting their partner's needs when partners exhibit inhibited sexual communication and don't honestly share what they want (Davis et al., 2006). In addition, Study 3 suggested that those who desired to be sexually valued by their partners reported attending to those partners' sexual needs but did not report elevated levels of asking partners about their sexual needs. It is possible that the increased motivation to respond to a partner's needs in the sexual domain is less effective in cultivating sexual satisfaction when it is not accompanied by an increase in attempts to

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understand those needs through open communication. Thus, it might be important that future research includes measures of sexual communication and perceptions of sexual responsiveness when investigating the relationship between the desire to be sexually valued by one’s partner, sexual communal strength and partner relationship satisfaction.

In Study 3, the desire to be sexually valued by one’s partner predicted a lower likelihood of dieting, a behavior that has often been connected to self-objectification in the literature (e.g. Noll & Fredrickson, 1998). Thus, these results suggest that the desire to be sexually valued by one’s partner specifically is likely to exhibit a different relationship with disordered eating than self-objectification, which is related to seeing oneself as an object. These results are in line with findings suggesting that the desire to be sexually valued is weakly correlated with self-objectification,  $r = .29$  (Teneva & Lemay, 2021). In addition, women who desired to be sexually valued by their partners were somewhat less likely to attend to their own sexual needs. This effect may be partially explained by social scripts about women in committed relationship and self-pleasuring. Some past research suggests that women who self-pleasure within relationships can be viewed as threatening (Tiefer, 1996). Additionally, women who desire to be sexually valued by their partners might focus on the partner’s sexual needs at the expense of their own. It is key to consider these patterns when taking into account studies that suggest self-pleasuring may be related to a more positive image (Shulman & Horne, 2003) particularly for European American women, and studies that show that it is important for women to communicate their own sexual needs (Ferroni & Taffe, 1997) and have them met (Muise & Impett, 2015). Future research should investigate ways in

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which women who desire to be sexually valued by partner's can balance taking care of their own and their partners' sexual needs.

Further, in Study 3 those in short relationships who desired to be sexually valued and held incremental beliefs about sexual desirability were likely to engage in more behaviors aimed at increasing their sexual value to their partner, while those who desired to be sexually valued and held entity beliefs were likely to engage in fewer of these behaviors. In other words, in short but not in long relationships, people who wanted to be sexually valued by their partners and believed that they could change how sexually desirable they appeared to these partners engaged in more of the behaviors measured. It is possible that this effect emerges only in short relationships because people in those relationships might more often feel that they must prove their sexual value or earn their partner's sexual appreciation. Past research suggests that security increases with relationship length (Duemmler & Kobak, 2001), and this pattern might extend to the sexual domain. In addition, this finding is in line with past research on implicit theories (Dweck et al., 1995; Dweck & Leggett, 1988) suggesting that those who hold incremental beliefs are more likely to engage in behaviors aimed at achieving their goals compared to those who hold entity beliefs and extends these findings to the sexual domain.

Additionally, analyses from Study 3 demonstrated that participants were likely to engage in behaviors or tendencies they personally considered effective in increasing their sexual desirability in the eyes of their partners. However, this pattern was not particularly pronounced for those who desired to be sexually valued, contrary to hypothesis. This relationship did not depend on participants' implicit beliefs about sexual desirability. Future research should focus on investigating factors that determine whether people

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perceive healthier or healthier behaviors more instrumental in eliciting sexual value from their partners given that people are more likely to engage in behaviors they consider instrumental.

The desire to be sexually valued could be a construct that is somewhat useful to consider in both individual and couple therapy. Low sexual desire has been found to have a negative effect on sexual satisfaction (Chao et al., 2011), and a discrepancy in sexual desire between partners can have additional negative outcomes on relationship and sexual satisfaction (Mark, 2012). Those who highly desire to be sexually valued by their partners might be somewhat more vulnerable to these negative outcomes because they are receiving negative feedback in a domain that is important to them and that they might consider an integral part of romantic relationships (Park et al., 2006; Swann et al., 2002). Thus, therapists might want to evaluate the desire to be sexually valued and the extent to which it is fulfilled as possible risk factors for sexual and relationship problems along with other established risk factors. Furthermore, the desire to be sexually valued by one's partner should be differentiated from by the desire to be sexually desired by extradyadic partners and their effects should be considered separately.

In the current studies, the desire to be sexually valued was treated as a stable characteristic. Although I hypothesize that people exhibit general tendencies related to their want to be seen as sexually valuable, it is also possible that this desire fluctuates over time depending on a number of environmental factors. Goals and desires are likely to become particularly relevant when needs associated with them arise (Kruglanski et al., 2002). Thus, future research should investigate changes in the desire to be sexually valued over time using a longitudinal design and determine how it fluctuates in

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accordance to people’s needs (e.g. sex drive, need to belong, need for significance).

Further, the malleability of the desire to be sexually valued should be examined.

Experimental manipulations should be used to investigate what factors might temporarily increase or decrease the desire of interest in order to determine under what conditions the uncovered effects of the desire to be sexually valued might be particularly prominent.

Results from the current studies suggest that the desire to be sexually valued is likely often a successful means to fulfilling the higher order needs that may bring it about such as sex drive, the need to belong, and the need for significance. Prior findings confirmed that these higher order needs are significant predictors of the desire to be sexually valued (Teneva & Lemay, 2021). Further, in the current studies, participants appeared to be mostly successful in receiving the sexual valuation they wanted from their partners given the positive relationship between the desire to be sexually valued and the perception of being valued by one’s romantic partner in the sexual domain exhibited in all three studies. Future research should aim to directly estimate the fulfilment of higher order needs through the desire to be sexually valued and perceptions of one’s sexual desirability in order to quantify the instrumentality of this desire.

In addition, the developmental progress of the desire to be sexually valued should be considered. Future work should investigate when this desire starts to develop and determine whether developing it relatively early can have negative consequences, particularly for women, given that past research suggests that internalized sexualization in young girls can have negative effects on body surveillance and body shame (McKenney & Bigler, 2016). It is likely that, typically, the desire to be sexually valued

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starts developing in adolescence given that sexuality becomes important for one’s identity during that period (Subrahmanyam et al., 2005).

Additionally, research should examine how experiences of sexual trauma might be related to the desire to be sexually valued generally and specifically toward a romantic partner and the relationship between this desire and perceptions of partner sexual evaluations. Past research suggests that past trauma is associated with lower sexual desire particularly for women (O’Loughlin & Brotto, 2020; O’Loughlin et al., 2019) and sexual trauma can negatively impact sexual satisfaction and mental health for women (DiMauro et al., 2018). Further, women who have experienced trauma have been shown to experience lower sexual self-esteem (Shapiro & Schwartz, 1997) and to perceive themselves as less physically attractive (Kelley & Gidycz, 2015). Thus, it is possible that those who have experienced trauma might have trouble believing their partners value them sexually even when they desire that. The role of gender should also be accounted for given that past research has focused mostly on the effects of trauma for women.

Future research should also attempt to connect investigations of the origin of the desire to be sexually valued with investigations of its consequences. For example, it might be useful to consider whether partner behaviors differ in how effectively they can satisfy perceivers’ desire to be sexually valued depending on the origin of that desire. Those who desire to be sexually valued primarily as a way to fulfil their sex drive, might feel that this desire is fulfilled when their partner initiates sexual activity often. However, those for whom the connection between the need to belong and the desire to be sexually valued is stronger might feel particularly fulfilled when they receive compliments from

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their partners in the sexual domain, given that compliments have been found to satisfy the need to belong (Zhao & Epley, 2020).

The effect sizes for most of the established consequences of the desire to be sexually valued were relatively small. Thus, it is important to examine the desire to be sexually valued along with other established predictors with outcomes of interest similarly to the methods implemented in Studies 2 and 3. Future research should examine what situational and chronic characteristics might amplify the effects of the desire to be sexually valued. Further, dominance analysis should be utilized to determine the importance of the desire to be sexually valued for outcomes of interest compared to other established predictors.

There were some limitations and caveats to the current research. Experimental techniques were not employed in these studies to confirm the causal order of variables. Hence, while it is possible that interpretations are accurate, results could be interpreted in a different causal order. Convenience samples were used for the current studies that included a small proportion of older adults, gender non-binary participants, participants who did not identify as heterosexual, and participants who were not embedded in a Western culture. In Study 3, no differences in the effects of the desire to be sexually valued by one's partner on outcomes of interest were found between two different subsamples (recruited through a class credit system and Prolific). Thus, some stability in the findings across factors that differed in the two samples such as age, relationship length and student status was suggested. However, participants in the two sub-samples were still relatively similar in terms of cultural background and older adults made up a relatively small portion of the sample.

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Past research suggests that the desire to be sexually valued often arises as a means to satisfying more general needs such as sex drive, the need to belong, and the need for significance (Teneva & Lemay, 2021). However, there are often many possible means of satisfying these needs. Whether people turn to the desire to be sexually valued might additionally be dependent on the narratives they are exposed to and the messages they receive from others in their networks – family, close friends, and members of their community more generally (Kruglanski et al., 2019). These narratives and networks are likely to differ greatly depending on people’s age, cultural background, and race among other factors. Thus, the extent to which people adopt a desire to be sexually valued and the ways in which they manifest and try to satisfy it are likely dependent on these characteristics.

For example, in some cultures but not others, older adults often perceive that others view them as asexual (von Humboldt et al., 2021) and that there are social norms that require them to limit their sexual expressivity (Rowntree, 2014). In addition, internalizing these social norms has been found to inhibit older people’s sexual expression (Yun et al., 2014). Similarly, older individuals who internalize these peer norms might be less likely to develop a strong desire to be sexually valued since they may perceive desirability in the sexual domain as an unattainable goal. Additionally, social norms about acceptable ways of expressing older adult’s sexuality might differ between cultures (von Humboldt, et al., 2021). Thus, even when older adults desire to be sexually valued, they might express this desire in unique ways. Future research should include a sample of older participants when examining the desire to be sexually valued, and its effects.

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In addition, given that sexual scripts have been found to be highly dependent on the cultures and sub-cultures people are embedded in (Parker, 2009), cultural background, nationality, and religion are also likely to influence the extent to which people develop the desire to be sexually valued and the expression of this desire. Past research suggests that the importance and expression of sexual desire can differ between cultures (Hatfield & Rapson, 1993). It is likely that the desire to be sexually valued follows similar patterns and is more heavily emphasized in some groups compared to others.

Further, race and ethnicity might be additional factors determining the magnitude and effects of the desire to be sexually valued. Differences in the development and expression of this desire between races might be partially determined by social norms transmitted by parents. Prior research suggest that parents are an important source of information about matters related to sexuality, and children learn about social norms surrounding sexuality both through direct and indirect communication with their parents (Ballard & Morris, 1998; Kim & Ward, 2007). In addition, sexual behaviors are often modeled after behaviors enacted by peers or adult exemplars which can include parents (DiBlassio & Benda, 1990). However, parents of different races might approach issues related to sexuality uniquely. For example, within the United States, Asian Americans might receive on average lower levels of direct communication on sexual topics in their households compared to their counterparts from different ethnic groups (Kim & Ward, 2007). On the other hand, the parents of Asian American young adults have been found to often convey restrictive sexual messages to their children indirectly (Kim & Ward, 2007). These messages might influence the extent to which Asian American young adults

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adopt a desire to be sexually valued and the ways in which they express this desire.

People with other racial and ethnic identities are likely to also be influenced by the social norms that are passed on to them by their parents when adopting a desire to be sexually valued.

In addition, members of racial minority groups may have unique experiences with being sexually valued. They might encounter sexual racism, i.e. the “discrimination between potential sexual or romantic partners on the basis of perceived racial identity” (Callander et al., 2015). Further, experiencing sexual racism can induce feelings of shame (Caluya, 2006) and internalized racism (Han, 2006). In addition, members of certain racial minority groups and sub-groups may feel particularly sexually objectified. For example, past research suggests that within the United States, Black women are sexually objectified to a greater extent than white women (Anderson et al, 2018) and women of Asian American and Pacific Islander descent are overly sexualized and considered to be “exotic” (Azhar et al., 2021). Hence, when experiencing a desire to be sexually valued, members of racial minorities might desire to be seen in a positive sexual light but fear being fetishized and judged based on standards of beauty using members of the racial majority as exemplars (Sylvestrini, 2019). These worries might be particularly pronounced for those involved in inter-racial relationships (Buggs, 2017).

Similarly, people who do not identify as heterosexual and people who are not gender binary might experience unique worries related to being considered sexually valuable. For example, transgender and nonbinary people have been found to experience fetishization which can be related to their avoidance of situations that can bring it about (Anzani et al., 2021).

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Because of these cultural complexities that are particularly relevant to matters related to sexuality, the current results might not be generalizable to more diverse samples. Future research should aim to include more diverse participants to investigate whether the desire to be sexually valued can have similar consequences for relationships across different groups. In addition, measure variance should be considered. Scales that measure sensitive subjects can often behave differently across cultures (de Jong et al., 2012). Further, when studying participants from different races, some scale items might be more relevant for members of one group over others, and response styles may differ between races (Burlew et al., 2019). Thus, future research needs to validate a way to measure the desire to be sexually valued and its consequences in different cultures and within groups with varied ethnic and racial backgrounds. Additionally, within-group variance should be estimated.

Moreover, it is likely that the current studies included samples in which people's desire to be sexually valued were generally met. This pattern is partially confirmed by the high average perceptions of sexual evaluations from partners in all studies. Although there was some variability in the desire to be sexually valued and perceptions of sexual evaluation constructs that allowed for a meaningful investigation, couples who experienced extreme frustration of their desires were a small part of the sample. It is also possible that severe discrepancies in needs and relationship reality can lead to relationship dissolution, since they can interfere with relationship quality, a predictor of relationship dissolution (Balsam et al., 2017). Thus, people who desire to be sexually valued and do not get this need met by their partners may terminate the romantic relationship with that partner early, and be less likely to want to participate (or be eligible

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to participate) in a voluntary study on relationships with them. To understand the role of the desire to be sexually valued in relationship dissolution and understand the consequences of a severe discrepancy between this desire and partner behavior, future research should rely on stratified sampling, examine a range of couples longitudinally over time starting at the beginning of their relationship, assess people’s opinions about past relationships or include clinical samples.

Additionally, the current research included participants who reported a relatively high desire to be sexually valued particularly by their romantic partners. Although stratified sampling can be used to recruit participants with lower level of this desire, wanting to be seen in a positive sexual light by one’s partner might be at least somewhat normative given that people want to meet their partner’s ideals (Campbell et al., 2001). Another way to discern participants with a relatively lower desire to be sexually valued is to implement extreme wording in the general Desire to Be Sexually Valued Scale and the scale measuring the desire to be sexually by one’s partner specifically. For example, the item “I want to be sexually desired by others” could be reworded to “I always want to be sexually desired by others. Past research suggests that item wording can influence the way participants respond to measurement scales (Ben-Artzi, 2010), and that variability can be increased by including strong item wording (Lam & Stevens, 2009). Thus, scales including more extreme wording could allow for the identification of individuals experiencing a relatively low desire to be sexually valued and individuals experiencing more extreme levels of this desire than what is normative.

Despite the discussed limitations, the current studies also have noteworthy strengths. Most hypotheses were tested using multiple samples with different

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characteristics. In addition, the studies incorporated both a general measure of the desire to be sexually valued and a more specific measure targeted particularly at one’s partner comparing the effects of the two constructs. Further, Study 1 incorporated trait measures and daily measures allowing for a comparison of chronic patterns and the more fleeting daily fluctuations in the effects of the desire to be sexually valued. Study 1 and Study 3 are of dyadic nature and include perceptions from both partners within committed romantic relationships permitting for the investigation of accuracy and bias. Study 2 controlled for sexual desire toward one’s romantic partner specifically and need to belong, while Study 3 controlled for the general desire to be valued by one’s romantic partner regardless of domain, general sex drive, and the desires to be valued by one’s partner for warmth and competence when estimating effects of interest. Thus, results that are presented do not conflate the effects of the desire to be sexually valued with these other desires and drives. Further, Studies 2 and 3 controlled for the general desire to be sexually valued and the desire to be sexually valued by extradyadic partners, allowing to estimate the unique predictive power of the desire to be seen as sexually valuable by one’s committed partner.

### **Theoretical Contributions**

The current research contributes to existing literature on sexuality in a number of ways. The current studies are some of the few focusing on the motivation to be valued in the sexual domain as opposed to sexual self-esteem or perceptions that one is seen as desirable by their partner. They reveal that this motivation – the desire to be sexually valued – has a small unique predictive effect of well-being, behaviors and cognitions in relationships above positive perceptions of partner sexual evaluations. Further, these

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studies confirm past findings suggesting that positive sexual evaluations by a romantic partner can have some beneficial effects on relationship and self-evaluations (Meltzer & McNulty, 2014; Meltzer et al., 2017; Meltzer, 2020) and suggest that perceptions of sexual evaluations by one's partner should be examined concurrently with the desire to be sexually valued because these perceptions may be at least partially a product of wishful thinking, due to a strong desire to be sexually valued. In addition, the current studies contradict past research suggesting that women who enjoy being seen in a positive sexual light experience lower relationship satisfaction because their partners objectify them (Ramsey et al., 2017). More generally, the current research contradicts past literature suggesting that the effects of drawing positive attention to a woman's sexual desirability are always negative (Fredrickson et al., 1998; Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997; Liss et al., 2011). In fact, few gender differences in the effect of the desire to be sexually valued were revealed. In addition, the current studies are some of the few that do not employ different methods to estimate effects for men and women (e.g. Meltzer et al., 2017; Visser et al., 2014). The few gender differences that are detected (e.g. women but not men who desire to be sexually valued by their partners being less likely to attend to their own sexual needs) provide a useful direction for investigating specific harmful gendered sexual scripts and ways they can be changed in order to minimize their negative influence on those who desire to be sexually valued. A nuanced view of the desire to be sexually valued and its consequences (both positive and negative) is presented allowing to focus future discussion on ways in which its positive effects can be amplified and its negative effects can be minimized.

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In addition, the current research contributes to the literature on motivation and interpersonal perceptions (particularly metaperceptions) within romantic relationships. Findings support the ubiquitous literature demonstrating the influence of motivation on cognition, behavior and well-being (Deci & Ryan, 2012; Gollwitzer & Bargh, 1996; Kunda, 1990) and suggesting that this influence extends to processes within romantic relationships (Le et al., 2018; Lemay et al., 2021; Murray, 1999). More specifically, the three present studies extend past work suggesting that people can experience “wishful thinking” generally (Balcetis, 2008) and within romantic relationships (e.g. Lemay et al., 2021) by suggesting that this process applies to the sexual domain. Further, this work specifically confirms that sexual metaperceptions within romantic relationships, i.e. perceptions of the extent to which a romantic partner values the self in the sexual domain, are partly accurate and partly biased by the desire to be sexually valued similarly to general metaperceptions in relationships (Lemay et al., 2021). Further, biased perceptions of partner sexual evaluations of the self can affect relationship well-being and self-evaluations, similarly to other biased metaperceptions (Lemay et al., 2007; Lemay et al., 2021, although these effects are relatively small).

The current studies expand understanding of the factors that affect relationship processes and well-being within romantic relationships. More specifically, these studies demonstrate that those who desire to be sexually valued can experience somewhat higher relationship and sexual satisfaction when they perceive that their desire is met by their romantic partner. The current findings are important given that sexual and relationship satisfaction can contribute to happiness and overall life satisfaction (Hawkins & Booth, 2005; Schmiedeberg et al., 2017), and those who are more satisfied with their

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relationships experience fewer depressive symptoms (Røsand et al., 2012). In addition, Study 1 suggests that those who strongly desire to be sexually valued and are anxiously attached might be more vulnerable when perceiving fleeting sexual rejection from partners, contributing to theorizing on attachment anxiety and hypervigilance to relationship threat (MacDonald et al., 2012; Overall et al., 2014). Furthermore, the current research contributes to theorizing about sexual communal strength (Muise & Impett, 2015) by suggesting that one of the reasons people adopt this motivation is to obtain desired positive sexual evaluations from their partners, and that this communal motivation may serve as a means to obtaining those desired evaluations. Additionally, Study 3 identified some behaviors/tendencies that people might engage in in order to satisfy their need to be sexually desirable to their romantic partners, including the initiation of physical and sexual activity with one’s romantic partner. This study expands knowledge of the types of behaviors people might engage in if they want to appear “sexy” or sexually desirable and specifically suggests that not all of the behaviors aimed at fulfilling this want target physical appearance. This research also reveals new motivations (i.e., the desire to be sexually valued) that may underlie sexual initiation, a motivation that is distinct from sex drive.

The current studies suggest that the desire to be sexually valued is a somewhat psychologically and behaviorally important construct. In addition, this desire can be targeted at one’s romantic partner specifically within romantic relationships. In romantic relationships, the desire to be sexually valued appears to be related to some behavioral outcomes including engagement in specific behaviors, motivational outcomes such as the adoption of communal sexual strength toward partners, and well-being including sexual

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and relationship satisfaction. In particular, it appears that within committed relationships the desire to be sexually valued by one's romantic partner can have stronger and more positive effects than the more general desire for sexual evaluations. These studies highlight the need to investigate the extent to which people want to be seen as sexually desirable and the ways in which they might behave, think and feel in response to that need along with other established variables of interest in sexuality research. Further, the current research should serve as a steppingstone in considering how the desire to be sexually valued can be channeled in healthy ways, particularly within romantic relationships.







































Appendix T

Auxiliary Analyses – H1: Desire to Be Sexually Valued Exacerbating Effects of Perceptions of Sexual Rejection on Well-Being – Between-Person Daily Effects – Study 1

I explored whether the desire to be sexually valued exacerbated the between-person effects of perceived sexual rejection from one’s partner on self-image and partner and relationship evaluations using average values across days for all participants, allowing to examine between person effects. In separate models, I regressed multiple daily outcomes on people’s daily average perceived sexual rejection across days, the desire to be sexually valued measured at intake and their interaction. Results from these models can be found in Table T1. The interaction term did not significantly predict daily average self-esteem, sexual desire for partner, relationship satisfaction, or negative affect,  $ps > .210$ .

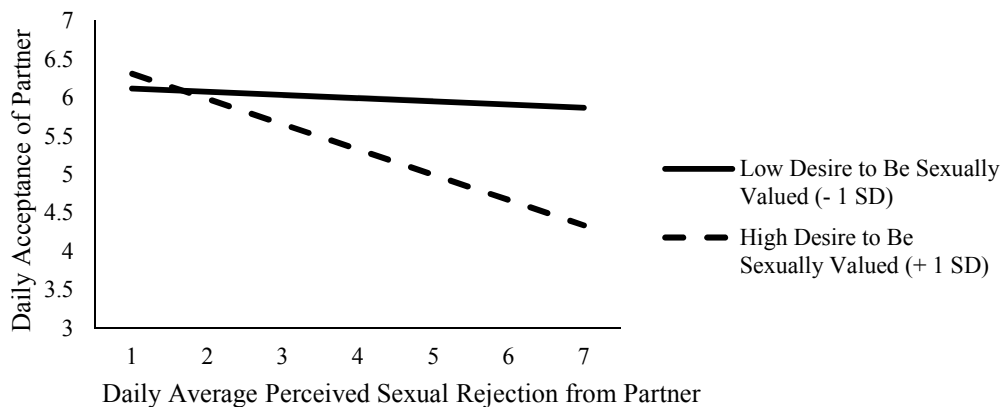
The desire to be sexually valued and perceptions of sexual rejection significantly interacted in predicting average daily partner acceptance, but the nature of this interaction depended on relationship length,  $b = 0.02$ ,  $t = 2.52$ ,  $p = .012$ ,  $pr = .06$ . For those in relatively short relationships, the interaction between the desire to be sexually valued and perceptions of sexual rejection by partner was a significant predictor of average daily partner acceptance,  $b = -0.13$ ,  $t = -2.06$ ,  $p = .040$ ,  $pr = -.08$ . I further explored the conditional between-person effects of average daily perceptions of sexual rejection from partner, when the desire to be sexually valued was relatively low (- 1 SD) and when it was relatively high (+ 1 SD). This interaction is depicted in Figure T1a. For participants in short-term relationships who experienced low desire to be sexually valued, perceptions of rejection from partner were not associated with average daily acceptance of that partner,  $p = .531$ . However, for those in short-term relationships who strongly desired to

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be sexually valued, sexual rejection from partners was associated with significantly lower acceptance of that partner,  $b = -0.32$ ,  $t = -3.75$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $pr = .15$ , following the expected pattern. For participants in longer relationships, the interaction between the desire to be sexually valued and perceptions of sexual rejection was also a significant predictor of average daily acceptance of that partner,  $b = 0.15$ ,  $t = 2.15$ ,  $p = .033$ ,  $pr = .02$ . I further explored the conditional between-person effects of average daily perceptions of sexual rejection from partner, when the desire to be sexually valued was relatively low (- 1 SD) and when it was relatively high (+ 1 SD). This interaction is depicted in Figure T1b. For participants who experienced high desire to be sexually valued, perceptions of rejection from partner did not influence average daily acceptance of that partner,  $p = .809$ . However, for those who experienced low desire to be sexually valued, sexual rejection from partners was associated with significantly lower acceptance of that partner,  $b = -0.33$ ,  $t = -3.66$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $pr = -.05$ , contrary to predictions.

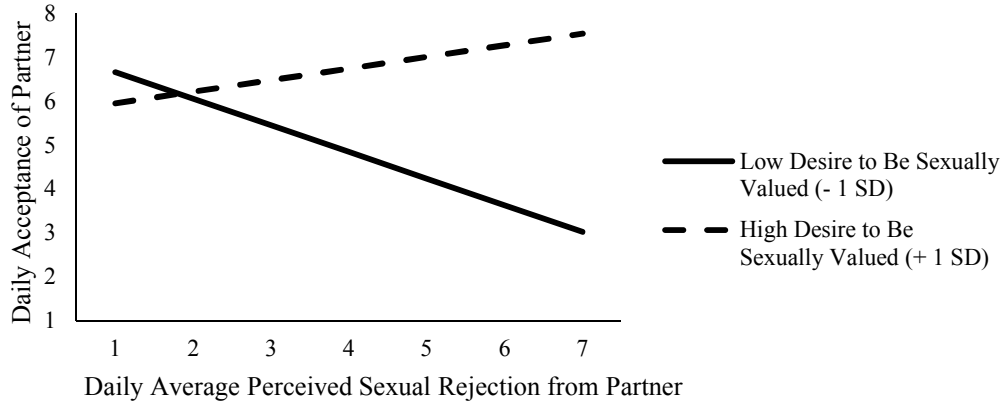
**Figure T1a**

*Moderating Effect of the Desire to Be Sexually Valued in the Relationship Between Daily Perceived Sexual Rejection from Partner and Daily Acceptance of Partner for those in Short Relationships – Between-Person Effects*



**Figure T1b**

*Moderating Effect of the Desire to Be Sexually Valued in the Relationship Between Daily Perceived Sexual Rejection from Partner and Daily Acceptance of Partner for those in Long Relationships – Between-Person effects*



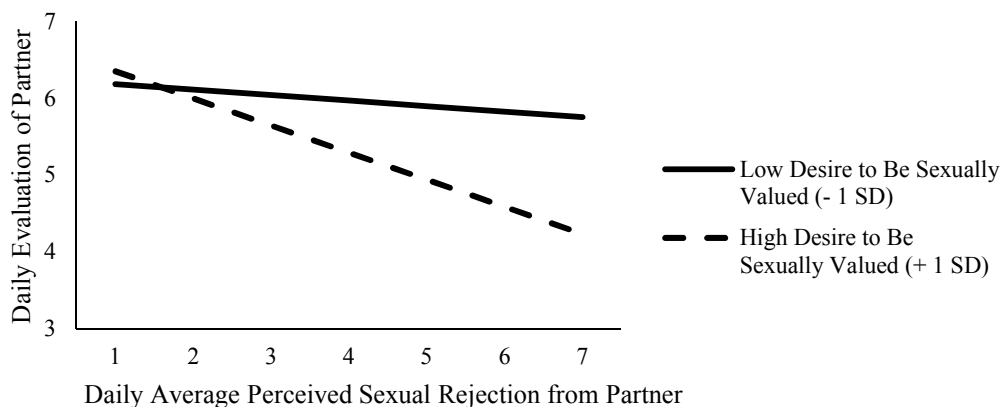
The desire to be sexually valued and perceptions of sexual rejection significantly interacted in predicting average daily partner evaluations, but the nature of this interaction depended on relationship length as well,  $b = 0.02$ ,  $t = 2.48$ ,  $p = .014$ ,  $pr = .06$ . For those in relatively short relationships, the interaction between the desire to be sexually valued and perceptions of sexual rejection by partner was a significant predictor of average daily partner evaluations,  $b = -0.14$ ,  $t = -2.11$ ,  $p = .035$ ,  $pr = -.07$ . I further explored the conditional between-person effects of average daily perceptions of sexual rejection from partner, when the desire to be sexually valued was relatively low (- 1 SD) and when it was relatively high (+ 1 SD). This interaction is depicted in Figure T2a. For participants who experienced low desire to be sexually valued, perceptions of rejection from partner were not associated with average daily evaluations of that partner,  $p = .377$ . However, for those who strongly desired to be sexually valued, sexual rejection from partners was associated with significantly lower positive evaluations of that partner,  $b = -0.35$ ,  $t = -4.07$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $pr = -.07$ , following the expected pattern. For participants in

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longer relationships, the interaction between the desire to be sexually valued and perceptions of sexual rejection was also a significant predictor of average daily acceptance of that partner,  $b = 0.15$ ,  $t = 2.02$ ,  $p = .044$ ,  $pr = .02$ . I further explored the conditional between-person effects of average daily perceptions of sexual rejection from partner, when the desire to be sexually valued was relatively low ( $-1$  SD) and when it was relatively high ( $+1$  SD). This interaction is depicted in Figure T2b. For participants who experienced high desire to be sexually valued, perceptions of rejection from partner was not associated with average daily evaluations of that partner,  $p = .623$ . However, for those who experienced low desire to be sexually valued, sexual rejection from partners was associated with significantly lower evaluations of that partner,  $b = -0.34$ ,  $t = -3.71$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $pr = -.05$ , contrary to hypothesis. This pattern mirrored observed for daily partner acceptance.

**Figure T2a**

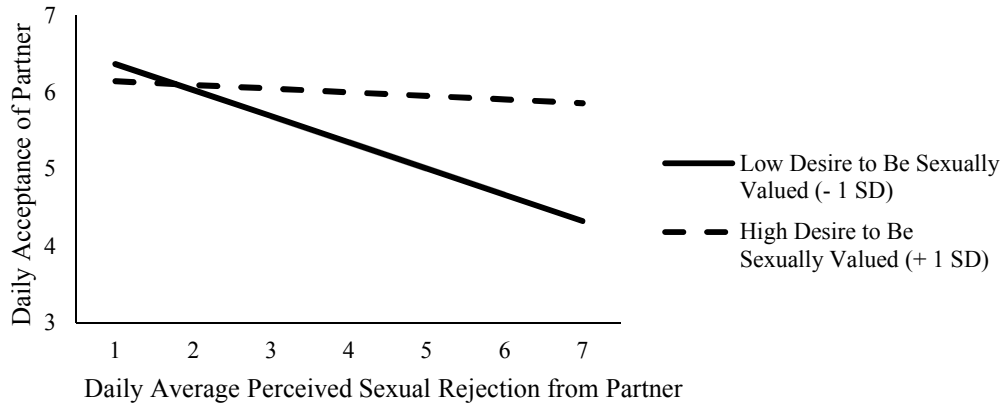
*Moderating Effect of the Desire to Be Sexually Valued in the Relationship Between Daily Perceived Sexual Rejection from Partner and Daily Partner Evaluations for those in Short Relationships – Between-Person Effects*



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**Figure T2b**

*Moderating Effect of the Desire to Be Sexually Valued in the Relationship Between Daily Perceived Sexual Rejection from Partner and Daily Partner Evaluations for those in Long Relationships – Between – Person Effects*



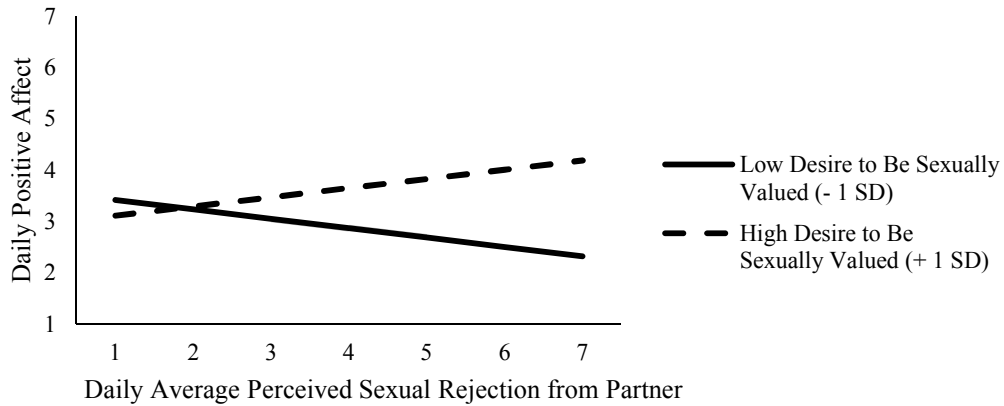
Finally, the desire to be sexually valued and perceptions of sexual rejection significantly interacted in predicting average daily positive affect. However, this effect was moderated by relationship length as well,  $b = 0.02$ ,  $t = 2.07$   $p = .040$ ,  $pr = .04$ . For those in relatively short relationships, the interaction between the desire to be sexually valued and perceptions of sexual rejection by partner was not a significant predictor of average daily positive affect,  $p = .191$ . However, this interaction was a significant predictor of average daily positive affect for those in relatively long relationships,  $b = 0.18$ ,  $t = 2.60$   $p = .010$ ,  $pr = .06$ . I further explored the conditional between-person effects of average daily perceptions of sexual rejection from partner, when the desire to be sexually valued was relatively low (- 1 SD) and when it was relatively high (+ 1 SD). This interaction is depicted in Figure T3. For participants in long relationships who experienced low desire to be sexually valued, perceptions of rejection from partner were associated with lower positive affect,  $b = -0.19$ ,  $t = -2.08$   $p = .038$ ,  $pr = .06$ . However, for those in long relationships who strongly desired to be sexually valued, sexual rejection

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from partners was associated with higher positive affect,  $b = 0.18$ ,  $t = 2.19$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $pr = -.07$ , contrary to hypothesis.

### Figure T3

*Moderating Effect of the Desire to Be Sexually Valued in the Relationship Between Daily Perceived Sexual Rejection from Partner and Daily Positive Affect for those in Long Relationships – Between – Person Effects*



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**Table T1**

*Results of Models Examining Between-Person Daily Effects of Perceived Sexual Rejection from Partner and the role of the Desire to Be Sexually Valued on Daily Self and Relationship Evaluations*

Predictor	Average Daily Self-Esteem		Average Daily Sexual Desire for Partner		Average Daily Acceptance of Partner		Average Daily Relationship Satisfaction	
	<i>b</i>	<i>ES</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>ES</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>ES</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>ES</i>
	[95% CI]		[95% CI]		[95% CI]		[95% CI]	
Average Daily Perceived Sexual Rejection from Partner	-0.07 [-0.30 0.15]	-0.01	-0.08 [-0.36 0.20]	0.00	0.43 <sub>s</sub> [-0.16 1.03] <sub>s</sub> -0.89 <sub>L</sub> [-1.57 -0.23] <sub>L</sub> *	0.06 <sub>s</sub> -0.04 <sub>L</sub>	-0.21 [-0.57 0.14]	-0.03
Desire to Be Sexually Valued	-0.25 [-.74 .23]	0.01	-0.36 [-0.96 0.25]	-0.05	0.22 <sub>s</sub> [-0.05 0.49] <sub>s</sub> -0.28 <sub>L</sub> [-0.57 0.00] <sub>L</sub>	0.07 <sub>s</sub> -0.01 <sub>L</sub>	-0.03 [-0.20 0.13]	0.06

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					-0.13 <sub>s</sub>			
Perceived Sexual Rejection *	0.04		0.09		<b>[-0.26 -0.01]<sub>s</sub>*</b>	-0.08 <sub>s</sub>	0.00	
Desire to Be Sexually Valued	[-.06 .14]	-0.01	[-0.03 0.22]	-0.01	0.15 <sub>L</sub>	0.02 <sub>L</sub>	[-0.07 0.07]	-0.07
					<b>[0.01 0.29]<sub>L</sub>*</b>			

Predictor	Daily Positive Affect		Daily Negative Affect		Daily Partner Evaluation	
	<i>b</i>	<i>ES</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>ES</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>ES</i>
	[95% CI]		[95% CI]		[95% CI]	
	0.30 <sub>s</sub>	0.04 <sub>s</sub>			0.43 <sub>s</sub>	0.05 <sub>s</sub>
Average Daily Perceived	[-0.28 0.88] <sub>s</sub>		0.04		[-0.17 1.04] <sub>s</sub>	
Sexual Rejection from Partner	-0.85 <sub>L</sub>	-0.06 <sub>L</sub>	[-0.19 0.36]	0.00	-0.88 <sub>L</sub>	-0.04 <sub>L</sub>
	[-1.51 -0.19] <sub>L</sub> *				[-1.57 -0.20] <sub>L</sub> *	
	0.13 <sub>s</sub>	0.04 <sub>s</sub>			0.22 <sub>s</sub>	0.06 <sub>s</sub>
Desire to Be Sexually Valued	[-0.13 0.39] <sub>s</sub>		0.04		[-0.05 0.49] <sub>s</sub>	
			[-0.09 0.17]	0.00		
	-0.26 <sub>L</sub>	-0.05 <sub>L</sub>			-0.26 <sub>L</sub>	-0.01 <sub>L</sub>



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**Attachment Anxiety Moderation.** To explore the role of attachment anxiety in the relationship between perceived daily sexual rejection, desire to be sexually valued and outcomes of interest, in separate models, I regressed self-image and relationship evaluation outcomes on desire to be sexually valued and attachment anxiety measures collected at intake, daily sexual rejection averaged for each person across days, all two-way interactions, and a product term of the three variables. This product term was not a significant predictor of any of the outcomes of interest,  $p > .210$ .

The role of the desire to be sexually valued in between-person effects of perceived sexual rejection were examined. The desire to be sexually valued exacerbated the negative effects of perceived rejection on average daily partner acceptance and daily partner evaluation for those in somewhat short relationships. However, this desire exhibited an opposite effect for those in longer relationships such that those low in the desire to be sexually valued were likely to report lower partner acceptance and more negative partner evaluations when they felt rejected, but that pattern was not observed for participants high in the desire to be sexually valued. The role of the desire to be sexually valued in between-person effects of perceived sexual rejection did not depend on attachment anxiety.

These results suggest that people in short relationships who desire to be sexually valued might be particularly likely to change their opinion about their partners negatively when they perceive sexual rejection from their partners on average across daily observations. This might be due to the fact that those in short relationships are still getting to know each other. Thus, specific actions by romantic partners may be more



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11. Fell in love
12. Felt a deep romantic attachment
13. Had a “back up” partner
14. Kept someone a secret from my partner
15. Gave sexual stimulation
16. Received sexual stimulation

**Analyses**

To examine the effects on infidelity, I regressed likelihood to engage in infidelity on both the desire to be sexually valued by one’s partner and perceived sexual value from that partner as well as multiple covariates including the general desire to be sexually valued, the desire to be sexually valued by extradyadic partners, sexual desire for one’s partner and need to belong. Results of this regression can be found in Table U1.

**Table U1**

*Desire to be Sexually Valued by Romantic Partner, Perceptions of Sexual Value to Partner, and Covariates Predicting Infidelity*

Predictor	<i>b</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>f</i> <sup>2</sup>
	<b>Outcome – Infidelity</b>			
<b>Desire to Be Sexually Valued by Romantic Partner</b>	<b>-0.28</b>	<b>-2.37</b>	<b>.018</b>	<b>.02</b>
Perceptions of Sexual Value to Partner	-0.14	-1.47	.144	.01
Desire to Be Sexually Valued by Extradyadic Partners	0.08	1.15	.251	.01
General Desire to Be Sexually Valued	0.14	1.28	.203	.01
Sexual Desire for Partner	0.13	1.31	.192	.01
Need to Belong	-0.03	-0.42	.677	.00

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The desire to be sexually valued by one’s partner predicted a lower likelihood of engaging in infidelity. However, perceptions that one was sexually valued by their partner and all covariates were not associated with infidelity.

Given that infidelity can be a major reason for the dissolution of romantic relationships (Hall & Fincham, 2006), the desire to be sexually valued by one’s romantic partner might be related to lower relationship dissolution through its effect on infidelity. Future research should examine this possibility.

### Appendix V

#### Auxiliary Analyses - Effects of the Desire to Be Sexually Valued on Approach and Avoidance Sexual Motives– Study 3

#### **Additional Measures**

##### ***Approach and Avoidance Sexual Motives***

Participants responded to a 9-item measure of sex motives from Impett et al., (2005) that captured a range of different reasons for engaging in sexual activity with one’s romantic partner. Participants rated the importance of five approach and four avoidance motives in influencing their decisions to engage in sex on 7-point response scales (1: *Very unimportant* – 7: *Very important*). The approach items were “To pursue my own sexual pleasure”; “To feel good about myself”; “To please my partner”; “To promote intimacy in my relationship”; and “To express love for my partner.” The avoidance items were “To avoid conflict in my relationship”; “To prevent my partner from becoming upset”; “To prevent my partner from getting angry at me”; and “To prevent my partner from losing interest in me.” Avoidance items were averaged to create a composite score for avoidance motivation. Approach items were averaged to create a

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composite score for approach motivation A higher on each composite score indicates a higher level of the corresponding motivation. The two sub-scale was internally consistent,  $\alpha_{\text{avoid}} = .93$ ,  $\alpha_{\text{approach}} = .72$ .

**Analyses**

To examine the relationship between the desire to be sexually valued by one’s partner and approach and avoidance sexual motives, one’s desire to be sexually valued by their partner was modeled as a predictor of each set of these motives. Additionally, one’s general desire to be sexually valued, their desire to be sexually valued by extradyadic partners, their sex drive and their desire to be generally valued by their partner were added as covariates in this model. Results from this model can be found in Table V1.

**Table V1**

*Desire to be Sexually Valued by Romantic Partner and Covariates Predicting Approach and Avoidance Sexual Motives*

Predictor	<i>b</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>pr</i>
<b>Outcome: Approach Motives</b>				
<b>Desire to Be Sexually Valued by Romantic Partner</b>	<b>0.38</b>	<b>6.34</b>	<b>&lt;.001</b>	<b>.31</b>
Desire to Be Sexually Valued by Extradyadic Partners	-0.06	-1.62	.106	-.09
General Desire to Be Sexually Valued	0.03	0.61	.545	.03
<b>Sex Drive</b>	<b>0.11</b>	<b>2.37</b>	<b>.019</b>	<b>.13</b>
Desire to Be Generally Valued by Partner	0.07	1.30	.195	.06
<b>Outcome: Avoidance Motives</b>				
Desire to Be Sexually Valued by Romantic Partner	0.09	0.56	.575	.04
<b>Desire to Be Sexually Valued by Extradyadic Partners</b>	<b>0.40</b>	<b>4.17</b>	<b>&lt;.001</b>	<b>.20</b>

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<b>General Desire to Be Sexually Valued</b>	<b>-0.42</b>	<b>-3.41</b>	<b>.001</b>	<b>-.16</b>
Sex Drive	0.04	0.35	.724	.00
<b>Desire to Be Generally Valued by Partner</b>	<b>-0.36</b>	<b>-2.32</b>	<b>.021</b>	<b>-.12</b>

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These exploratory analyses suggest that the desire to be sexually valued by one's partner is related to a higher likelihood to engage in sexual activity with that partner because of approach sexual motives but not avoidance sexual motives (Impett et al., 2005). In other words, people who want to be seen as sexually desirable by their partner were more likely to engage in sexual activity with that partner in order to obtain a positive outcome including making the partner happy, achieving physical pleasure and enhancing intimacy with that partner. However, wanting to be seen as sexually valuable by one's partner was not associated with the likelihood to engage in sexual activity with that partner to avoid a negative outcome such as conflict, partner's loss of interest or sexual frustration. These results are particularly important in light of research that suggests that approach sexual motives are associated with personal and relationship well-being in dating couples, while avoidance motives are associated with lower personal well-being and can be detrimental to relationship maintenance over time (Impett et al., 2005) and future research should examine the relationship between the desire to be sexually valued and these motives more closely.

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