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UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN COLORADO

Greeley, Colorado

The Graduate School

DESIRE AND THE POWER OF PRACTICE:  
QUEER SEXUAL PERSPECTIVES

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree of  
Master of Arts

Philip William Kemp

College of Humanities and Social Science  
Department of Sociology

December 2020

This Thesis by: Philip William Kemp

Entitled: Desire and the Power of Practice: Queer Sexual Perspectives

has been approved as meeting the requirement for the Degree of Master of Arts in College of Humanities and Social Science, Department of Sociology

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## ABSTRACT

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This research provides a theoretical analysis of the lived experiences of 17 queer individuals, ages 19 to 66, regarding their sexual desires and practices. Queer Theory is incorporated to inform on sex, gender performance and sexuality as social constructs, to inform grounded theoretical concepts, and to identify expressed social behavior by each participant. Social Exchange Theory is used to analyze participant responses. Modified grounded theory is incorporated to posit a particular social exchange that I refer to as the *queer exchange*; in which particular costs/benefits are considered before queer individuals engage in social exchanges due to their potentially (un)perceived queerness. This research includes semi-structured interviews and addresses *what factors affect the manifestation of queer sexual desire into queer sexual practice*. Five main themes discerned in this research are desires; practices; empowerments; barriers; and queer defined. Within those 5 main themes, 18 sub-themes emerged. I propose that queer exchanges tend to act as high-cost/high-reward or high-cost/low-reward social exchanges for queer individuals regarding their sexual desires and/or sexual practices. These high costs tend to be associated with primary social units, and often include repressed ideology in the participants early stages of socialization. The differences in high-reward and low-reward for these participants are a result of empowerments like, or barriers like discrimination, violence, objectification and/or repression.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Sex, the act, is personal, but it is also social, cultural, and political. From a constructionist's paradigm, we are defined socially by sex markers, gender performance and sexuality, as well as other social factors such as religious and political associations (West and Zimmerman 1987; Butler 1990; Warner 2000; Califia 2002). However, socially constructed expectations of sex, gender performance, and sexuality dictate so much of our character that interest in these socially constructed identities tends to be the very first question ever asked about ourselves (e.g., Is it a boy or a girl?). Our sense of self and sexuality are socio-historical constructs. The self is historically perceived to be transcendent and universal to the nature of being human (Wilchins 2011). Also, the self is instrumental to social exchange considering that human beings have and/or are capable of rational choice. The purpose of this exploratory qualitative study is to contextualize queer sexuality and the lived sexual experiences of queer individuals through open-ended interviews. For the purposes of this research, I examined performance, performativity, desire, and sexual practice among queer identified people by asking,

Q1     What factors affect the manifestation of queer sexual desire into queer sexual practice?

As these sociohistorical constructions have evolved over time, so have disciplines of thought and research on how to categorize these social behaviors. Over the last 150 years, the normalization and deviation of certain types of sex, gender performance, and sexuality have become increasingly political and varied, as seen in LGBTQIA+ identity politics (Warner 2000).

The socially constructed sexual self, in current Western culture, is best understood by discussing social constructionism through a queer theoretical paradigm. By utilizing Queer Theory and Social Exchange Theory, queer individual sexual experiences can be analyzed to understand the process of queer sexual exchanges. Queer individuals are socialized to weigh the cost of self-realized desire against conformity by performing a cost-benefit analysis of expressing one's queer desires in social exchanges. This cost-benefit analysis directly affects the manifestation of queer sexual practice, as well as other queer behaviors for fear of objectification, oppression, and/or violence. Informed social policies can be developed for recognizing and including queer people's lived experiences with this research. Further, this research may directly benefit any person questioning their sexual desires and social power dynamics by better understanding the plethora of standpoints from queer individuals.

### **Theoretical Framework**

I take an informed and modified grounded theoretical approach to understanding this social phenomenon by integrating Queer Theory with Social Exchange Theory to introduce the concept of the *queer exchange*, defined here as a type of social exchange proposition which considers an individual's queer identity(ies) and/or queerness in the process of value exchanges with others. The purpose of the queer exchange is not additive, but rather complementary to Homan's Behaviorist Propositions (1961). George C. Homans (1958) developed Social Exchange Theory as a micro level theory suggesting that the relationships a person engages in are based on some sort of value exchange, where individuals generally perform a cost-benefit analysis of exchange in any given social interaction; this cost-benefit analysis then informs an individual's decision on how they proceed with each interaction in order to maximize rewards and reduce costs to themselves (Appelrouth and Edles 2017). Homans (1961) follows his theory up with a working paradigm in

which to understand an individual's decision-making process by creating the Homan's Behaviorist Propositions. The first of these five propositions is *stimulus proposition*, if the previous particular stimulus of an individual's action has been rewarded in the past, then the more similar the current stimulus is to the past, the more likely the person is to repeat the action (Appelrouth and Edles 2017). The second proposition is *success proposition*, the more often an action is followed by a reward, the more likely an individual will repeat that behavior (Appelrouth and Edles 2017). The third proposition is *value proposition*, the more valuable a reward to an individual, the more that individual will perform to receive that reward (Appelrouth and Edles 2017). The fourth proposition is *deprivation-satiation proposition*, the more often an individual receives a particular reward, the less valuable that reward becomes to that individual, and thus that individual performs less behaviors that result in that particular reward (Appelrouth and Edles 2017). The fifth and final proposition from Homan's Behaviorist Propositions is *frustration-aggression proposition*, if an individual receives an unexpected reward and/or punishment for their behavior, that individual will become angry and be prone to aggressive behavior, resulting in value for that individual (Appelrouth and Edles 2017).

To best understand the queerness of these participant responses, a Queer theoretical framework is also applied. Queer Theory articulates a perspective of socially constructed nuances among sex, gender performance, and sexuality (Butler 1990; Warner 2000; Califia 2002). For many queer individuals, the stigmatization of queer sexualities is an everyday assault on their psychological well-being; this phenomenon requires queer individuals to manage and adjust their social performances in ways that conform to and/or challenge normative gender performativity (Crawley and Willman 2018). Queer performance for some becomes an intentional political act

(Warner 2000). Better understanding of queer sexuality in contemporary society could lead to more equitable social standards for queer people by decreasing stigmas of deviation.

## CHAPTER II

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### **Background**

Sexuality, post-enlightenment, became a medium through which to manage the public good. Social constructionist Michel Foucault challenged the nature of sexuality and the politics that come from trying to identify the self by addressing the socio-historical processes that change and shape understandings of the self. Foucault (1980, 3) states, “To know who you are, find out about your sex. Sex has always been the focal point where, besides the future of our species, our 'truth' as human subjects is tied up.” Foucault is critiquing that contemporarily, humans have been conditioned to think of the social construct of sex (and at this time in history gender and sexuality as well) as a ‘naturally’ occurring thing. Building on Foucault with a more postmodern ideology, Weeks (2007) suggests that to make sense of what sexuality should or could be, we first must understand what sexuality is, as sexuality has been constructed in much the same way as gender. Further, Foucault (1980, 4) posits that, “Sexuality could indeed be spoken of a great deal, but only in order to forbid it.” Foucault was a direct critic of sciences’ attempt to categorize sexuality into manageable, understandable, distinct characteristics in the nature of the body; whereas Weeks suggests the study of sexual categories as a result of social construction and what that will mean for future social exchanges (Wilchins 2011). The need for understanding current dynamics in sexual desire and practice among queer populations is paramount to the understanding of modern queer social exchanges, even if those dynamics are uniquely queer and uncategorical. In

conducting qualitative interviews, these exchanges can be captured in a way that highlights the milieu of individual experience. With individuals discussing their sexual desires and sexual practices openly, candidly, and with a sense of self-empowerment, this type of research has captured those experiences first-hand, and analyzed the power of exchange by considering trends in individual queer perspectives.

First however, it is crucial to understand some of the founding concepts in Queer Theory and how this theory integrates with Social Exchange Theory. Anchored in post-postmodern Feminist Theory, West and Zimmerman (1987), prominent gender scholars, discussed the concept of performance regarding sex and gender as an act of “doing.” West and Zimmerman challenged a long held cultural belief that sex (what one has) and gender (what one is) are the only two factors in understanding people's sexuality. In fact, sex, gender performance and sexuality are far more complicated social constructions. Building on the work of feminists, gender scholars and poststructural/postmodern theorists, queer theorist Judith Butler expands on the everyday experience of the self by introducing the concept of performativity. Butler (1990) goes beyond a type of “role play” and presents a comprehensive definition of performativity as “something that produces a series of effects,” meaning that performativity is a result of interpellation that then becomes a routine process.

Whereas performativity is an unconscious behavior, queer performance became an active political movement during and continued after the Civil Rights era, when second wave feminism and gender studies became more diverse. Queer Theory can be used to explain the socio-historical and socio-cultural experiences of people who do not adhere to heteronormative binaries of sex and gender performance, which made it an ideal theoretical framework coupled with Social Exchange Theory in conducting this research. Queer, like homosexual and heterosexual, is used

interchangeably in contemporary culture as a term of categorization for sex, gender performance and sexuality, and mostly developing from the gay and lesbian political activism of the 70's and 80's (Duggan 1992). Even though the intent and defining qualities of queer or queerness is meant to be anti-categorical, queerness has transformed from a personal performance into a political moniker. Queer became a term used by social activists critical of both liberal and nationalist politics, meant to "advocate the constructionist turn in lesbian and gay theories and practices" (Duggan 1992, 156). Harkening back to the Civil Rights era, many involved in early queer politics invoked analogies of similar oppressions between those who identified as queer and additional minority groups that endured racism, ethnocentrism and other forms of discrimination.

Graver than political division or public outing are the consequences to the queer community by way of erasure. Moving beyond postmodern feminist thought, Eve Sedgwick (1994) addresses the epistemological habitus of US culture, and how these processes of studying the nature, limits, and validity of queer identities directly effects the livelihood of queer youth. Sedgwick's (1994) point of cultural inclusion is pertinent to queer theory and the progression of academic and political pursuits for queer folks, as her analysis of the qualitative responses to queer life-experiences by queer folks indicate that without positive representation of queerness, queer youth are more susceptible to violence and discrimination; a point reflected later in this research.

Queer identities and in tandem queer politics are meant to denote a ceaseless opposition to normalization, to supplant and supersede the "normal", to disrupt and question the status quo. In a way, queer identity asks culture to be ever critical of social relativism and norms of reciprocity. This makes the queer perspective particularly important to understand regarding the social exchanges queer people ultimately have with others. Queer is more about its endless effects, rather than of its concrete existence (Jagose 1996). An important part of queerness and queer politics is

that a person can choose to label themselves, or not, in any way they want. The power of queerness is the power of flexibility, fluidity, change and variation in the ways one performs or presents themselves. In this way, queer individuals ultimately practice the queer exchange proposition in context to each of their interpersonal experiences individually. Much like code-switching, with each new interpersonal exchange and considering the counter-culture bias of queerness in general, queer individuals calculate whether any particular exchange will result negatively. Warner (2000) discusses the “moralism” of Western culture that regulates sexual behavior by discussing the socio-historical use of shaming sexual desire. This social shaming is a factoring difference in how or why queer sexual desire does or does not manifest into sexual practice. Due to hegemonic-patriarchal-white norms, people of color, women, lesbians, homosexuals, feminists, queer people and anyone else perceived as feminine in our society are systematically oppressed by an ideology of inferiority to the dominant cis-gender, white male culture (Wilchins 2011). This oppression is a prominent result in the lived experiences of many queer exchanges and is likely to instill a frustration-aggression proposition in individuals for the lack of normal reciprocity experienced in any given interpersonal exchange.

### **Contemporary Queer Research**

Since sex, gender performance, and sexuality are deeply interlinked concepts (West and Zimmerman 1987), understanding the self-perceived lived experiences of individuals through a queer theory perspective is invaluable (Butler 1993a). Cardoso (2007) provided an insightful, international analysis of sexual behaviors across cultures and educational backgrounds for an intersectional study of sexuality; this research speaks to the normalization and globalization of hegemonic narratives and adds context to this research on queer populations by underscoring the importance of intersectionality. In analyzing gender differences in sexual attitudes and behaviors,

Petersen and Hyde (2011) provided a comprehensive look at sexual behaviors and sexual attitudes that suggest social gender equality can come from a more liberal valuing of various sexualities and sexual practice. In researching the degree and direction of sexual desire discrepancies, Rosen et al. (2018) provided context for research into measuring sexual desire, sexual satisfaction, and relationship satisfaction amongst heterosexual couples, and why this is important to know in queer populations. Pascoal et al. (2018) provide a conceptualization of mediating factors such as cognitive dissonance between sexual beliefs and sexual functioning that may suggest whether a person's sexual practice follows their sexual desire. Since queer people tend to have a variety of sexual habits, including auto-sexual behavior, Kirschbaum and Peterson's (2018) study on the labeling of masturbation suggests for future research to use an open-ended, context free method of defining masturbation. Both sexual acts with the self and sexual acts with others differ through the context of culture as well.

Although sociological conversations and research regarding sex, gender performance, and sexuality are expanding, a persistent hetero-normative culture exists in mainstream politics and academia which hegemonically categorize these concepts in binary terms (Valocchi 2005). Terms like men and women, masculinity and femininity, heterosexual and homosexual are all routinely positioned within research and politics as an "absolute" or a conditional truth to human being (Valocchi 2005). Valocchi (2005) echoes Lorber's (1996) sentiment in stating "heterosexuality is the uninterrogated norm"; although hetero-normativity has been disrupted extensively since Lorber wrote this in 1996, heterosexuality is still the dominant socio-culture norm for the study of sexuality in contemporary research (Rosen et al. 2018; Kirschbaum and Peterson 2018; Petersen and Hyde 2011). This gap in the research creates the need for rich, in-depth qualitative understandings of contemporary queer sexuality that positions those experiences as valid,

acceptable human experience. Additionally, recent scholars have posited the importance of utilizing queer theory in qualitative social science research in ways that develop new “queer methodologies” that can better measure queer experiences (Nash 2016). Often when queerness is represented in contemporary research on sexual desire and sexual practice, research tends to focus on just lesbian and gay populations (Nash 2016). Even more troubling is an insider/outsider effect on queer populations of study and potentially non-queer researchers trying to analyze an “other” populace (Nash 2016).

Between 2010 and 2020, significant qualitative social research conducted on or about queer populations has been published by Peterson and Hyde (2011), Ferguson (2013), Nash (2010, 2011, 2013, 2016), Moyano et al. (2017), Kirschbaum and Peterson (2018), Mark et al. (2018), and Hammock et al. (2019). Leading contemporary researchers in the field of queer sexuality include Catherine Nash in her commitment to creating and applying queer methodologies to social science research. Between 2010 and 2013, Nash wrote three articles on the experiences of trans and genderqueer individuals living in queer spaces. She relied on observational and interview methods in gathering data on these queer populations, like I have done for this thesis research. In her book, *Queer Methods and Methodologies*, Nash (2016) produces principle understandings for queering methodologies in both qualitative and quantitative research. Nash (2016), echoing Ferguson’s (2103) argument, goes into rich detail as to the importance of queer inclusion, like concerns of intersectionality, and the bias and/or hesitations by academia more broadly in queering research design.

Ferguson’s (2013) article, "Queering Methodologies: Challenging Scientific Constraint in the Appreciation of Queer and Trans Subjects," and Hammock’s et al.’s (2019) article, “Queer Intimacies: A New Paradigm for the Study of Relationship Diversity” are both fairly recent journal

articles that provide similar research as this thesis, in that they target queer populations as the focus of the research, and implement queer methodologies in conducting qualitative research, resulting in unique findings about queer populations not usually available due to hegemonic heteronormative practices. Much like Ferguson (2013) and Nash (2016), I take a theoretical approach to queering qualitative methods for the purpose of conducting social science research on queer populations. However, whereas Ferguson (2013) uses the HBO documentary *Middle Sexes: Redefining He and She* (Thomas 2005) as an analytical platform, I utilized face-to-face interviews to gather primary data.

“Queer Intimacies: A New Paradigm for the Study of Relationship Diversity” (2019) by Hammock, Frost, and Hughes is an insightful article that develops a working model of contemporary queer intimacy, while addressing 21<sup>st</sup> century challenges to normative assumptions about relationship intimacy. Although, Hammock et al.’s (2019) research on queer intimacies did not inform my research design or data collection, it was helpful in conducting critical analysis of my research. Hammock et al. (2019) propose a queer paradigm in which to study relationship intimacy diversity by establishing these seven axioms derived from their research; intimacy may occur, (1) within relationships featuring any combination of cisgender, transgender, or nonbinary identities; (2) with people of multiple gender identities across the life course; (3) in multiple relationships simultaneously with consent; (4) within relationships characterized by consensual asymmetry, power exchange, or role-play; (5) in the absence or limited experience of sexual or romantic desire; (6) in the context of a chosen rather than biological family; and (7) in other possible forms yet unknown. Hammock et al.’s seven axioms set up a repeatable and researchable paradigm in which to study contemporary sexual desires and sexual practices of queer populations. Hammock et al.’s (2019) and I both took a grounded theoretical approach to analyzing data on

queer populations. Although Hammock et al. (2019) developed these seven axioms to utilize in analyzing data on previous research, I conducted original research with a different approach to gathering data while also utilizing different theory to analyze my results<sup>1</sup>.

Queer sexual desire challenges the normative script of a dominant heterosexual culture. Regardless of the particular body within which desire is experienced, the normalization and stigmatization of queer desires fall under scrutiny from historically hegemonic social constructions (Hammock et. al 2019). Qualitative research on the minority stressors experienced by a transgender person expressing their sexual desire, parallel the minority stressors experiences of other cis and non-binary queers (Timmins, Rimes and Rahman 2017). Since queer people tend to experience similar stigmatization for their sexual desires and practices, conducting research on those populations has led to better social scientific understandings of desire and has the potential for broader understandings for and expansion of queer politics, queer desires, and the overall queer social exchange. In utilizing queer theory, social exchange theory and qualitative methodology, I have posited to enrich the socio-historical and socio-cultural understandings of people who do not adhere to heteronormative binaries of sex, gender performance and sexuality.

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<sup>1</sup> Comparisons and additions to Hammock et al's (2019) seven axioms and my own findings can be found in the results section.

## CHAPTER III

### METHODS

#### **Research Design**

The purpose of this exploratory qualitative study was to contextualize queer sexuality and the lived sexual experiences of queer individuals through open-ended interviews. A modified version of the Sexual Desire Inventory-2 (SDI-2) (Spector et al. 1996), which measures a person's sexual desire using a two-factor model, has been integrated into this research for the purposes of capturing the broadest qualitative responses possible. However, the original SDI-2 survey is not a useful tool in researching queer populations due to the questions being designed on a two-factor model, where only dyadic and solitary responses are possible. New research suggests that for this survey instrument to adequately measure queer sexual experiences, it must be modified into a three-factor model including responses for an “attractive other” (Moyano et al. 2017; Mark et al. 2018), rather than the original dyadic/solitary two-factor model, “self” and “partner,” designed by Spector et al. (1996). I have modified and integrated a new three-factor model of the SDI survey to include sexual desires/practices with “attractive other”, in addition to dyadic “partner” relationship and solitary desire responses, as suggested by Moyano et al. (2017) and Mark et al. (2018). Integrating the modified SDI into an open interview guide helped to identify sexual desire and practice trends from the qualitative interview responses of each research participants.

This qualitative study involved analysis of semi-structured, open-ended interviews on sexual identity, sexual desire, and sexual practice by contextualizing these results using Queer

Theory and Social Exchange Theory. Recent literature on contemporary queer sexuality has expressed the need for expanded qualitative methodology (Moyano et al. 2017; Mark et al. 2018). These voluntary interviews were conducted with participants 18 years of age or older who fit the ambiguous “label” of queer discussed earlier. My research question is, “What factors affect the manifestation of queer sexual desire into queer sexual practice?”

### **Measurements**

Based on previous research (Spector et al. 1996; Moyano et al. 2017; Mark et al. 2018 ) and theoretical inquiry, participants’ self-perceived identities or anti-identities regarding sexual biology, sexuality, gender performance, and other socially informed manifestations of queerness were measured with the question “What does ‘being’ a queer person mean to you.”<sup>2</sup> Question two, “In what ways do you experience sexual desire(s) and/or sexual practice(s),” was the measure of participants’ self-realized experiences to sexual desire and sexual practice. Question three, “Have you ever felt your sexual desire(s) or sexual practice(s) to be repressed or the target of discrimination? And if so, in what ways,” was intended to capture experiences of repression and/or discrimination based on their self-perceived identities as queer people. Question four, “In what ways do/would you like to experience sexual desire(s) and/or sexual practice that you have not previously,” was intended to capture organic responses to their self-realized experiences of sexual desire, and gave each participant an opportunity to speak to whatever barrier may be preventing them from fulfilling their sexual desires. Question five, “Describe the type(s) of people are you attracted to,” was intended to capture both self-realized and socially informed archetypes of attraction to others. Question six, “What difficulties have you had in finding sexual partners that share your sexual desires,” was intended to capture participants’ organic responses to their self-

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<sup>2</sup> The full interview guide can be found in the appendix.

realized experiences of barriers to sexual practices, as queer people. Question seven, “How important is consent for sexual practice with another person, to you?”, and the follow up question “In your opinion what constitutes consent,” was intended to capture participants organic responses to their self-realized experiences of consensual or non-consensual sex (in any form described by the participant) with another person. Question eight, “In what ways do you feel supported by your romantic and/or sexual partners, in your sexual desire(s) and/or practice(s),” was intended to capture participants’ organic responses to their self-realized experiences of social encouragement for their own queerness; in addition this question gave space for the participant to open up about their sexual desires and sexual practices. Question nine, “In what ways do you feel supported as a queer person by friends, family or a community,” and the follow up question “Does this support or lack of support effect your sexual desire(s) or practice,” were intended to capture the participants organic responses to their self-realized experiences of social encouragement for their own queerness; in addition this question gave space for the participant to open up about barriers to their sexual desires and sexual practices. Question ten, “How often do you engage in sexual behavior with a partner, an attractive other person, or with yourself,” was intended to capture their self-realized experiences of sexual desire, sexual practice and each individuals’ sex drive. Question eleven, “When you have sexual thoughts about, see or spend time with a partner, an attractive other person, or with yourself, describe your desire to engage in sexual practice,” was also intended to capture their self-realized experiences of sexual desire, sexual practice and sex drive. Question twelve, “In what ways is it important for you to fulfill your sexual desire through activity with a partner, an attractive other person, or yourself,” was also intended to capture the participants organic responses to their self-realized experiences of sexual desire, sexual practice and sex drive. Question thirteen, “How long could you go comfortably without having sexual

activity of some kind,” and the follow up question, “If you’ve ever considered or practiced celibacy, please explain,” were intended to capture their self-realized experiences of sexual desire and their will, power and/or access to act on those desires. Question fourteen, “How long has it been since you performed sexual activity of any kind,” was intended to capture their self-realized experiences of sexual practice, and gave the participant space to discuss any barriers to performing their sexual desires when or who they wanted. Question fifteen, “Is there anything you would like to add or discuss that was not covered during this interview,” gave each participant the opportunity to discuss anything else that was on their mind at the time, that did not get captured by this interview guide. After conducting three pilot interviews, one recurring question not originally included in the interview guide but later became utilized as a go-to backup question (reliant on the participants acknowledgement of *sex with self*) was, “If you don't mind me asking, when it comes to yourself, does masturbation come from a place more of desire, or more of like a physical body maintenance thing?” Any other questions that were asked during the interview process arose organically as follow-up questions to participant responses.

### **Recruitment and Interviewing**

Snowball sampling initiated by purposive sampling of queer individuals through social and professional networking were utilized throughout the recruitment process. Recruitment tools, such as flyers, were placed in common public areas on Midwestern college campuses and in community centers with permission. Although the efforts to find research participants was conducted amongst LGBTQIA+ communities and networks, there may be various personal and/or political reasons for people of those communities to not self-identify as queer or choose (not) to participate in this research.

I conducted seventeen interviews over a four-month period with individuals who responded to either the recruitment flyer or were referred from a previous participant. After careful explanation of the consent required for ethical research by my institutions Institutional Review Board (IRB), each participant was offered potential compensation for their interviews, in the way of a randomized lottery for one of three \$25 gift cards. Not all participants chose to enter the lottery. All entries were placed in a censored/black bucket, and each “winner” was selected at random one at a time. Willing participants were asked to provide the principle investigator with a mailing address that they could potentially receive one of these three gift cards. All contact information will be destroyed upon releasing the executive summary to each participant along with all gift cards.

During interviews, I was conscientious about making my designated interview location a safe space with adequate access to the public. All but one interview took place at public libraries, in small study rooms with a closing door, or in the privacy of each participant homes via Skype. One exception was a meeting at a participants’ place of business out of respect for their comfort and convenience. For all participants’ comfort, I tried to position myself furthest from the door, so that each participant could sit as close as they choose to the exit. For consistency purposes and with the participants permission, I started recording as soon as the participant and myself were seated. I followed a script during the interview process with the exceptions of follow-up questions specific to each participant. During the recording of each interview, I did not use the participant’s real/ given or legal names to further prioritize their confidentiality through transcription. Instead, I assigned a pseudonym to each participant during the transcription. Once the interview was complete, I provided each participant with a signed copy of the consent form approved by my IRB, a follow-up resource list, and my business card to pass on to other potential participants. When

meeting in public face-to-face, I collected my materials and left the meeting area only after providing each participant ample time to leave ahead of me, to provide an additional level of comfort to each participant (with the exception of the one interview in the participants' workplace).

Table 1: Participant Demographics

| Participant Pseudonym | Age | Race and/or Ethnicity                                | Sexual Orientation | Gender Performance                              | Lives In       |
|-----------------------|-----|--|--------------------|---|----------------|
| Alex                  | 60  | White (Pink)   | Dysphoric          | Neither / Hermaphrodite                         | Colorado       |
| Ariel                 | 25  | Caucasian  | Bisexual           | Cis Female                                      | Colorado       |
| Bjorn                 | 42  | Caucasian  | Pansexual          | Female  | Colorado       |
| Caitie                | 22  | White Bread  | Bisexual           | This Woman                                      | Colorado       |
| Dennis                | 21  | Caucasian  | Pansexual          | Trans-Male                                      | Oregon         |
| Elsa                  | 24  | White / Caucasian                                    | Bisexual           | Cis Female                                      | Colorado       |
| Jake                  | 20  | Peruvian / White                                     | Asexual            | Non-Binary                                      | Colorado       |
| Janis                 | 19  | White, Irish, Celtic, French-Canadian                | Demisexual         | Cis Female                                      | Colorado       |
| Jenn                  | 20  | White / Caucasian                                    | Bisexual           | Cis Female                                      | Colorado       |
| Jill                  | 30  | Caucasian  | Pansexual          | Cis Female                                      | Colorado       |
| Leaf                  | 27  | Asian American, Indian-Malalylee                     | Pansexual          | Non-Binary, Gender Fluid, Genderfuq, Genderfull | Colorado       |
| Lex                   | 30  | Caucasian  | Pansexual          | Trans-Masculine, Pre-T                          | North Carolina |
| Margo                 | 65  | Caucasian / White                                    | Lesbian            | Female  | Colorado       |
| Pearl                 | 28  | Caucasian, German, Swedish, French, English, Italian | Bisexual           | Female, Non-Binary                              | Colorado       |
| Prim                  | 24  | White, Jewish  | Pansexual, Asexual | Non-Binary, Gender Fluid                        | Colorado       |
| Robin                 | 66  | Caucasian  | Lesbian            | Female  | Colorado       |
| Victoria              | 28  | Caucasian  | Lesbian            | Cis Female                                      | Colorado       |

The demographics of the seventeen participants interviewed (shown above in Table 1) indicate the participants ages range from 19 to 66 years old; all but one participant identified as either Caucasian or mixed white race. Their collective, self-identified sexual orientations include:

Pansexual (6), Bisexual (5), Lesbian (3), Asexual (2), Demisexual (1), and Dysphoric<sup>3</sup> (1); their collective, self-identified gender identities or performances include: Cis-Female (6), Non-Binary (4), Female (3), Genderfluid (2), Genderfuq (1), Genderfull (1), Trans-Male (1), Trans-Masculine (1), Pre-T (1), This Woman (1), Neither/Hermaphrodite<sup>4</sup> (1); fifteen participants live in Colorado, one participant lives in Oregon and one participant lives in North Carolina. Although the total number of gender identities/performances listed above outnumber the total of participants, some participants hold multiple gender identities or performances in various spaces.

### **Transcription and Coding**

Transcription for each interview was done entirely by the principle investigator. Interview length varied from approximately 21 to 117 minutes. I utilized Dedoose, an online coding software, to thematically code and analyze each interview. I categorized the participants' data into five root codes, with seventeen subsidiary codes<sup>5</sup> and one independent root code (Kink and BDSM). Each root code was designated a general definition, while each sub-code was designated a more specific definition. Throughout the coding process, I assigned transcript excerpts more specific sub-codes, rather than assigning a root code (except Kink and BDSM) to any particular excerpt. I applied 800 coded themes to 264 interview excerpts, averaging about 3 coded themes per excerpt. Most excerpts, even when short, required a multi-theme approach to coding such as Pearl's response to what it means for her to be a queer person; "I think it's not putting yourself in a box, um, and be open-minded and just living a path outside that normal, acceptable range for someone's sexuality or gender." Since she discussed not being put into a box and being open

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<sup>3</sup> Alex, 60, Hermaphrodite-Dysphoric Sexuality's feelings about their dysphoric sexual orientation is discussed in the results section.

<sup>4</sup> Alex, 60, Hermaphrodite-Dysphoric Sexuality's Neither\* status for gender identity aligns with his sex and sexuality dysphoria.

<sup>5</sup> The code book with complete definitions can be found in the appendix.

minded, I coded for “(Anti)Identity Label.” Pearl, 28 and Bisexual, also mentions sexuality and gender. So, I coded both of those concepts respectfully. Within just one sentence, 3 different themes had emerged from Pearl’s response.

To best capture each participant’s descriptions of the barriers they faced to their sexual desires or sexual practices, the root code Barriers was created with Discrimination or Violence, Objectification, and Repression as its sub-codes. To capture the sexual, sensual, and/or romantic desires of my queer participants, it was necessary to sub-code Desires into three categories, Desired Experiences, Desired Type, and Sex Drive. To best capture each participants’ descriptions of their empowerments to sexual desires or sexual practices, the root code Empowerments was created with the sub-codes, Encouragement from Others, Acceptance of Self, Coming Out: Coming Out to Others & Coming Out to Self. Next, to best capture each participant descriptions of their sexual practices, the root code Practices was further sub-coded to include Celibacy, Questions of Consent, Sex Act: Sex with Others & Sex with Self. The sub-codes Coming Out and Sex Act, were treated similarly to the root codes in that they were also sub-coded once more, and their sub-sub-codes were designated to transcription excerpts as such. Finally, to best capture each participant’s own descriptions of their gender, sexual orientation, performance, or (anti)identities as queer individuals, the root code Queer Defined was sub-coded into, (Anti)Identity Label, Gender, & Sexual Orientation. Table 2 shows the frequency distribution of each code, and not only provides specific information as to the frequency of each experience described but may give some insight into how salient these experiences are to each participant during the interview.

Table 2: Code Application

| <b>Codes</b>               | Alex      | Ariel     | Bjorn     | Caitie    | Dennis    | Elsa      | Jake      | Janis     | Jenn      | Jill      | Leaf      | Lex       | Margo     | Pearl     | Prim      | Robin     | Victoria  | <b>Totals</b> |
|----------------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|---------------|
| <b>Barriers</b>            |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |               |
| Discrimination or Violence | 3         | 1         | 4         | 1         | 0         | 1         | 1         | 2         | 1         | 1         | 4         | 1         | 2         | 2         | 3         | 3         | 3         | <b>33</b>     |
| Objectification            | 2         | 1         | 2         | 0         | 0         | 1         | 0         | 3         | 0         | 1         | 2         | 0         | 0         | 0         | 2         | 0         | 0         | <b>14</b>     |
| Repression                 | 4         | 5         | 1         | 3         | 2         | 7         | 3         | 8         | 3         | 2         | 5         | 3         | 4         | 2         | 4         | 3         | 4         | <b>63</b>     |
| <b>Desires</b>             |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |               |
| Desired Experiences        | 3         | 8         | 9         | 7         | 3         | 10        | 8         | 9         | 7         | 6         | 12        | 8         | 6         | 5         | 2         | 7         | 5         | <b>115</b>    |
| Desired Type               | 1         | 2         | 2         | 6         | 1         | 5         | 4         | 5         | 2         | 3         | 3         | 1         | 1         | 1         | 3         | 1         | 4         | <b>45</b>     |
| Sex Drive                  | 3         | 2         | 5         | 4         | 4         | 0         | 2         | 0         | 0         | 2         | 8         | 2         | 6         | 3         | 3         | 5         | 3         | <b>52</b>     |
| <b>Empowerments</b>        |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |               |
| Acceptance of Self         | 2         | 2         | 3         | 0         | 3         | 6         | 2         | 7         | 2         | 4         | 4         | 0         | 3         | 3         | 8         | 6         | 2         | <b>57</b>     |
| Encouragement from Others  | 2         | 4         | 3         | 2         | 3         | 3         | 5         | 4         | 3         | 6         | 5         | 2         | 3         | 5         | 2         | 4         | 4         | <b>60</b>     |
| Coming Out to Others       | 2         | 1         | 1         | 1         | 0         | 1         | 1         | 5         | 2         | 0         | 0         | 0         | 0         | 0         | 3         | 3         | 3         | <b>23</b>     |
| Coming Out to Self         | 0         | 0         | 0         | 0         | 0         | 3         | 1         | 2         | 1         | 0         | 0         | 0         | 2         | 0         | 3         | 3         | 1         | <b>16</b>     |
| <b>Practices</b>           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |               |
| Kink & BDSM                | 0         | 1         | 2         | 2         | 2         | 0         | 0         | 0         | 0         | 6         | 5         | 2         | 0         | 0         | 1         | 0         | 0         | <b>21</b>     |
| Celibacy                   | 1         | 1         | 1         | 1         | 1         | 0         | 1         | 0         | 1         | 1         | 2         | 2         | 1         | 1         | 1         | 1         | 1         | <b>17</b>     |
| Questions of Consent       | 1         | 1         | 4         | 1         | 2         | 1         | 1         | 1         | 2         | 3         | 2         | 2         | 1         | 1         | 1         | 1         | 1         | <b>26</b>     |
| <b>Sex Act</b>             |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |               |
| Sex with Other             | 6         | 7         | 7         | 7         | 8         | 5         | 7         | 6         | 7         | 8         | 8         | 9         | 8         | 7         | 8         | 9         | 4         | <b>121</b>    |
| Sex with Self              | 3         | 2         | 3         | 2         | 4         | 3         | 3         | 2         | 1         | 3         | 2         | 2         | 1         | 1         | 1         | 1         | 1         | <b>52</b>     |
| <b>Queer Defined</b>       |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |               |
| (Anti) Identity Label      | 0         | 0         | 1         | 1         | 1         | 3         | 3         | 2         | 1         | 2         | 2         | 1         | 1         | 1         | 2         | 2         | 2         | <b>25</b>     |
| Gender                     | 2         | 0         | 2         | 0         | 1         | 1         | 3         | 0         | 0         | 1         | 1         | 1         | 0         | 3         | 2         | 0         | 0         | <b>17</b>     |
| Sexual Orientation         | 2         | 1         | 2         | 0         | 3         | 3         | 8         | 4         | 3         | 4         | 2         | 1         | 0         | 2         | 2         | 1         | 5         | <b>43</b>     |
| <b>Totals</b>              | <b>37</b> | <b>39</b> | <b>52</b> | <b>38</b> | <b>38</b> | <b>53</b> | <b>53</b> | <b>60</b> | <b>36</b> | <b>53</b> | <b>70</b> | <b>39</b> | <b>42</b> | <b>40</b> | <b>53</b> | <b>54</b> | <b>43</b> | <b>800</b>    |

In 800 code applications, code frequency ranged from 14 to 121 occurrences; with “Sex with Other” at 121 occurrences followed by, “Desired Experiences” at 115; these two occurrences appearing over twice as many times as any other code application. The inflation of these two codes are most likely a result of the over-all focus of the research and interview guide concepts, “desires” and “practices.” “Objectification” may be the least frequent code occurrence at 14, but it occurs in nearly half (8 of 17) of the interview participants. The infrequency to apply the code “objectification” may be a result of not asking direct questions about trauma, bodies or body parts (as outlined in my consent form). Even without including direct questions about trauma, body or body parts, I applied the sub-codes for the root code “Barriers” which includes, “Discrimination or Violence,” “Objectification” and “Repression” a total of 110 times to nearly all participants. Dennis was the only outlier in that he did not discuss either discrimination/violence or objectification. All other participants discussed at least two of the three barriers.

## CHAPTER IV

### RESULTS

Five main coded themes occurred during all interviews, with a total of eighteen sub-themes. Some of the more salient themes include: Repression, “I feel like a lot of straight people feel like they're the default, you know.” (Caitie, 22 Bisexual); Desired Experiences, “I guess it really depends on who it is. For me. Like I would approach different genders differently.” (Prim, 24, Pan/Ace); Desired Types, “I think lately I have been noticing that I am attracted to people who do the kind of gender-queery stuff.” (Elsa, 24, Bisexual); Encouragement from Others, “I'd say the most consistent support comes from other queer friends. They're very affirming. From folks who are not queer, um, they make an effort,” (Lex, 30, Pansexual); Consent, “Yeah, consent is vital. It is crucially important for sexual practice with me and another person.” (Leaf, 27, Pansexual); Sex with Others, “So, the thing I love about being queer is that it has really redefined what sex means to me.” (Jill, 30, Pansexual); and Sex with Self, “I'd rather masturbate now, then form a new relationship. It is impossible finding a person that will accept both [sexes]. So, I don't bother” (Alex, 60, Hermaphrodite-Dysphoric Sexuality). Each theme provided valuable insight into the exchange process for participants' queer desires, manifesting or not into sexual practices. The following paragraphs are a culmination<sup>6</sup> of each participants' response to their lived experiences as queer individuals, and how they process those queer exchanges with other individuals given their social attraction.

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<sup>6</sup> A full list of selected quotes used for analysis in this results section can be found in the appendix.

## Desires

### *Desired Experiences*

In finding empowerment for the desires we have for ourselves and others, critical analysis about our desired experiences and desired types of people we want to share those experiences with were paramount in these results. Sometimes, it is difficult to know, see or understand what our individual desires are; whether fear or lack of opportunity or the inability to be self-reflective, sometimes it just takes acceptance and practice. Many participants spoke of their desired experiences as if they are hopes and dreams of the future, “I definitely would want to be with more women of any not so specific type. I think that because I've been more used to men, it's easier to find myself with men” – Caitie (22, Bisexual), or “With my partner now, I guess in reality, there probably are some things that I would try out. Like I might try toys” (Robin, 66, Lesbian), and, “I feel like for me the strongest desire would be with a feminine person... Or with another trans/nonbinary person because I would be more comfortable with like, mutual respect and understanding there” (Prim, 24, Pan/Ace). Caitie, Robin and Prim show a bit of their queer exchange process when considering either future partners or future practices. The social attractions expressed by these participants inform what type of social exchange they desire in the moment.

### *Desired Type*

Acceptance and community are crucial for queer individuals to experience the empowerment they need to fulfill their desires. Each of these participants discussed their desired type of sexual partner in ways that appeared socially informed, and therefore held a particular value to the participant in their queer exchange such as, “Positive people. Um, I guess people who have a faith life too” (Robin, 66, Lesbian), and “I have a lot of trauma in experiences with male bodies that I just don't enjoy” (Victoria, 28, Lesbian). Additionally, a lot of discussion about intelligence

as a valued proposition in the process arose, “I have mental issues and for someone to be able to listen non-judgmentally lately is like, that attracts me to a person” (Ariel, 25, Bisexual), and “I think I'm sexually attracted to somebody that's very secure in who they are, and emotionally intelligent” (Robin, 66, Lesbian), and “Well, smart. I can't handle people that I have to explain how to turn on the water faucet” (Alex, 60, Hermaphrodite-Dysphoric Sexuality).

Through each participant's own socially informed perspectives, cultural bias and lived experiences, the expected social performance value of others allows each participant space to be performative in how they pursue attracting or not attracting a partner, “I have in the past also identified on the aromantic, gray-romantic kind of spectrum. I rarely, and only in certain circumstances with certain people, experience a romantic attraction” (Leaf, 27, Pansexual), and “Not just all about them. So, they have to be willing to share and if they're not willing to share at all about them then, I have no time” (Alex, 60, Hermaphrodite-Dysphoric Sexuality). Also, Victoria (28, Lesbian) states, “I have a lot of trauma in experiences with male bodies that I just don't enjoy and there is too much risk involved with my body when there's a penis involved. I'm not typically attracted to, um I'm visually attracted to men sometimes, but when the idea of intimacy enters my mind then it's no longer attractive. Or, it doesn't go beyond physically attractive.” Each of these participants express the value and reward of going through the queer exchange process (or not) based on the socially constructed other.

### *Sex Drive*

When it came to describing their sex drives or sexual desires as a matter of importance, participants value assessment nearly split in half as to whether they felt they had a high sex drive, “Like my ideal answer, it'd be as often as fucking possible, but in reality like a couple times a week” (Leaf, 27, Pansexual), or low sex drive, “When I was on steroids, my male part worked

quite well. I'm off of steroids. It doesn't work at all. So, it's kind of like a gigantic clitoris that doesn't do too much of anything. So, uh, sexual desire is in the toilet" (Alex, 60, Hermaphrodite-Dysphoric Sexuality). Certain commonalities among most participants in that acceptance and community are crucial for queer individuals to experience the empowerment they need to fulfill their desires. The cost/reward of this queer exchange is described as communicative, "I'm very much supported. More so now by the woman I'm with..., probably because there's so much communication. We've acknowledged the difference in our sex drives, but she's very aware of when it's lacking" (Margo, 65, Lesbian), encouraging, "I was like, I'm not even sure that I liked it anymore, you know, like, he was like totally cool about that" (Prim, 24, Pan/Ace), and accommodating for sexual environments to manifest, "Like my ideal answer, it'd be as often as fucking possible, but in reality... I'm just so fucking busy these days" (Leaf, 27, Pansexual), leading to behavior that suggests potential stimulus, success, and value propositions for future queer exchanges.

### **Practices**

#### *Kink & Bdsm*

One theme that emerged frequently was the topic of Kink & Bondage, Discipline, Dominance, Submission, Sadochism and Masochism or BDSM sexual desires and sexual practices. Interestingly, Caitie, Leaf, Jill, Bjorn, and Dennis all discussed desired experiences in kink and/or BDSM practices as a way of feeling empowered by a queer exchange. Again, acceptance and community appears to be crucial for queer individuals to experience the empowerment they need to fulfill their desires, "I set my boundaries at the beginning and then I can just kind of like let go and give up control. And that feels really good. I think that there is a tendency for people to misunderstand kink in particular, especially [some] feminists" (Jill, 30,

Pansexual). The ways in which each participant involved with kink & BDSM described these queer exchanges is representative of the overall intrinsic rewards that queer individuals assesses from those exchanges, “I’m part of the kink community and so a lot of my sexual desires are around that. It can be as simple as psychological. It doesn’t have to be physical. I’m super into BDSM” (Jill, 30, Pansexual), and “I’m pretty heavily involved in the kink and BDSM communities. I work as a pro-Dom right now and most of my sexual interaction is in a kink or BDSM context” (Leaf, 27, Pansexual), and “I usually just meet people there. I don’t like to participate in public sexual acts. But I don’t have a problem with watching them or with being in an environment with them” (Bjorn, 42, Pansexual).

Yet, there was some discussion of the costs most associated with their queer exchanges in certain kink communities, “I think I also have some internalized issues with the kink community and some weariness I think especially for... going into clubs and announcing your bisexual instead of queer gives other people, mostly straight men, a different impression” (Caitie, 22 Bisexual), and “I’m in the BDSM community. I’m not super open about that just because it is very taboo to talk about still” (Dennis, 21 Pansexual), and “In kink it’s all about pushing boundaries. So, consent is extremely important. Taking someone to the edge using pain, um, and if you don’t have a clear idea of what someone likes, then you can very easily end up stepping over that edge, and you don’t want that” (Lex, 30, Pansexual). Discussed more in *Questions of Consent*, we see here how Lex shows the importance for all individuals in a queer sexual exchange to have clear communication about the outcome of their exchange.

### *Celibacy*

The responses to the celibacy questions seemed to align with participants’ sexual orientations, the availability of exchange with sexual partners, and/or queer accepting

environments. Most participants expressed a willingness or at least an acceptance of celibacy as a cost in their sexual desires and sexual practices. A few participants simply equated celibacy with the lack of opportunity for exchange, not necessarily abstinence for abstinence sake. Caitie, Jill, and Elsa all replied with a simple and resounding, “No” they have not considered celibacy, seeming to propose a high-cost/low-reward evaluation for the concept.

From a critical queer theory perspective, celibacy as described by these participants reflects their socio-cultural constructions of sexual power. Some participants spoke to the power of choosing when and if to have sex, given their circumstances. Jenn, Lex and Robin all empowered by their religious faith, took traditional action of celibacy at times in their lives. Although results for participants who have or have not practiced celibacy were split, all participants seemed to have strong emotional reactions or responses to the question of celibacy during their interviews such as, “As a clergy person, this is hard to say. I think sex is meant for us to enjoy... However, I think sex has such an emotional component to it that, as much as I like it, it would be difficult for me to do it with somebody else... without it having a deeper meaning” (Robin, 66, Lesbian). We can see how Robin assesses multiple social factors into her prioritizing any potential queer sexual exchange over celibacy; in part providing a value to celibacy and sexual activity with a sense of distributive justice. Other participants discussed the lack of power in the situation, being involuntarily celibate through no sense of efficacy or simply lacking the social attraction to sexual activity, “[The] last time I had sex was 2000. So, 19 years” (Alex, 60, Hermaphrodite-Dysphoric Sexuality), and “Not really. I went about seven years before I started hormones. It wasn't for not trying, it [just] wouldn't happen for me” (Dennis, 21 Pansexual). Leaf (27, Pansexual) went beyond describing their sexuality as the only behavioral exchange which may necessitate celibacy, “I feel like emotional celibacy and romantic celibacy are definitely something I've practiced.” For most of

these participants there is a trend of high-cost/high-reward for considering celibacy as part of their cost/benefit analysis for queer sexual exchanges.

### *Questions of Consent*

More than any other question asked during the interview process, the question of consent was expressed as the most valuable cost/benefit variable regarding sexual behavior, “It is THE most important part of practicing sex with another human! Full stop, it’s the top priority” (Victoria, 28, Lesbian). All but one participant had strong reactions to questions about consent for sexual acts with others, “It’s incredibly important. I would not participate in any sexual practice without consent from both parties” (Jill, 30, Pansexual). Almost everyone had clear responses regarding the necessity of consent, communication, and/or an agreed upon understanding from all parties, that sexual practices and activities should only be conducted with enthusiasm, and without pressure or coercion, “so like in kink and BDSM generally like safe words is kind of the understanding of like how people delineate that. But like I think what’s important is that in all relationships you have communication about the consent process” (Leaf, 27, Pansexual). Communication, trust and mutual respect seem to be paramount concerns for nearly all queer participants, “Queer people do tend to be traumatized and have a history of experiencing sexual abuse or sexual assault, so it’s really, really, really important that we’re all aware of [consent]” (Janis, 19, Demisexual). Body autonomy seemed to be the key rationality behind each participants’ ideology of consent, “It was missionary position. It was you don’t talk about sex. My body didn’t belong to me. My body belonged to my husband, um, because my body belonged to God, not to myself” (Bjorn, 42, Pansexual). Rationale choice was expressed to be the only appropriate measure of power between participants describing their sexually charged queer exchanges, “I do feel like consent is important, but if I’m drunk and some other person are drunk and we start doing

stuff, I mean, I started drinking knowing that that's usually where I end up when I drink. And so, I just don't drink” (Ariel, 25, Bisexual). These are consistent value propositions found elsewhere in queer research such as Hammock et al's (2019) seven axioms for a queer paradigm.

### *Sex with Other*

Communication was an important concern for each of the participants who spoke about queer sexual exchanges with partners, “So, having that freedom to be able to experience what it is that I want to experience, and talk about what I want to talk about, to be able to be free to be like, ‘I'm in the mood.’ Or like, ‘I'm not in the mood.’ That is vital to my mental health” (Bjorn, 42, Pansexual). Some participants talked about sexual activity with others as a type of communication in and of itself such as Caitie (22, Bisexual), “I definitely see it as a love language, as a way of communicating how much you care about someone,” and Jill (30, Pansexual), “I think that there's just ways of being intimate with somebody... I'm now growing and learning to see as... a type of connection that you wouldn't have with just anybody.” These participant examples of sex with others within the context of the queer exchange, typifies the participants’ stimulus proposition for future exchange. As each participant experiences the benefits or rewards from communicating their queer desires, they are generally more fulfilled in their queer sexual exchanges.

Many participants spoke to their desire stimulus’ be discussing the actual sexual practices that they perform or would like to perform with others such as Ariel (25, Bisexual), “I've always been the submissive partner no matter who the other partner is. So, like currently the way I experience my actual practices, I'm always very submissive,” and Pearl (28, Bisexual) “I think [sex] is fairly important, but not the most important. There's been times with me and my husband where one of us will cum and the other one won't. I don't know, it's fine cause we're really happy with getting that person off.” The key themes amongst all participants regarding their fulfilled

value of sex with others are acceptance, communication, and the environment in which to express queer sexual desires. These three value factors, acceptance, communication, and the environment in which to express queer sexual desires, are in part factors for these participants to have equitable queer exchanges regarding sexual activity, providing insight to my research question, “What factors affect the manifestation of queer sexual desire into queer sexual practice?”

### *Sex with Self*

Discussions about sex with self or masturbation seemed to develop naturally within the interview process. I was surprised at the willing and candid responses of each participant. The idea of masturbating for body maintenance became a main theme for nearly half (8 of 17) who expressed that they masturbate, “Personal maintenance for sure, like 100%. I like very rarely think, ‘oh I have to do this!’ I’m just like, I need a stress reliever or I’m lonely or something like it’s just personal maintenance and very rarely comes from like the sex drive is the origin” (Jake, 20, Asexual). Everyone else expressed some level of sexual desire that went along with having sex with one’s self except for Jenn (20, Bisexual), “Honestly, not at all hardly. I never did growing up either. Like, I just don’t feel the need to anymore because of how often I do engage [with my partner].” The key themes amongst all the participants regarding their fulfillment with sex with one’s self are acceptance of self, self-maintenance, and/or the environment in which to express queer sexual desires. Like *Sex with Other*, two of these themes regarding *Sex with Self* also provide insight to my research question.

## **Empowerments**

### *Acceptance of Self*

All participants found acceptance of themselves, their identities and /or their desires in various ways over time. For some, acceptance of self became a stimulus all its own. Many stated

the practice of self-acceptance is ongoing and transformational, but requires being visible, being seen by society, “We had to consciously make that decision in the church because there were other seminarians that did not ‘come out’ to their Bishop and were in a [queer] relationship but went through the process and got ordained before they ‘came out’” (Robin, 66, Lesbian). The power of sincerity and openness was a common theme among participants that either described themselves as not feeling repressed in their sexual desires and/or sexual practices, “I think for me, a big part of what turns me on is talking about sex. Like, I love to talk with my partners about what we're both interested in or what we can do together or what one or the other one of us likes and we can accommodate for that or make it happen” (Leaf, 27, Pansexual), as well as those who stated they had experienced repression in the past, but have found ways to overcome that repression and affirm who they are to themselves by networking with others that accept them, “Well, I feel like I always knew in the back of my head, like I'm probably gay and queer and all of that, but I mean it wasn't as accessible to me. And once I started exploring my gender more, it became more obvious” (Prim, 24, Pan/Ace). Although the identity politics we all are socialized to contend with and categorize ourselves by don't always “fit” for each queer individual. The real benefit of self-acceptance comes from exploring and being truthful with oneself.

### *Coming Out to Others*

The “coming-out” process for queer individuals is a great example of the queer exchange process, where the following participants discuss their internalized experiences with the costs and rewards associated in their exchanges with others regarding specifically the participants queerness, “I came out in the eighth grade and I was the first person in my school to come out...” (Caitie, 22 Bisexual), and “Homosexuality is a sin. It is a choice. So now looking back, it's sort of hard to remember what I thought at the time...” (Victoria, 28, Lesbian), as well as, “yeah that was

definitely a roller coaster for sure, and then you know ever since coming out again and as a queer person, you're constantly coming out or deciding whether or not to come out in different situations and with different people every other day" (Janis, 19, Demisexual). People experience this social phenomenon in different ways, and the cost/rewards associated with each queer exchange vary depending on the distributive justice expected by both parties such as, "Well, my family, aside from my mom, doesn't know about my sexuality" (Ariel, 25, Bisexual), and "Because of being part of the church, my [current] spouse and I feel like part of our calling is to normalize I guess, and to explain to people what queer is" (Robin, 66, Lesbian). This process of exchange can extend over an entire lifetime, "[my parents have] always been like, if you're ever gay, it's totally fine... But I almost feel like that was almost too much pressure for me growing up... This is absolutely a privilege thing, but I have not really come out to them about being gay" (Prim, 24, Pan/Ace). Overall, each participant spoke to either finding the reward of coming out to others in their lives as valuable to their growth as a queer person, or if the cost were too great, they simply self-selected the individuals in their lives to have that particular queer exchange.

### *Coming Out to Self*

Much like the processes in *acceptance of self* and *coming out to others*, each participant described their experiences of coming out to themselves as sort of a fluid, ongoing process such as, "I think from my heart and realizing my sexual desires and even though I wouldn't outwardly admit it to other people, but having relations with the same sex made me realize I wasn't straight" (Elsa, 24, Bisexual), and "All of the romantic and or sexual partners that I've had, not all of them, the few I consider important in the past few years have been incredibly supportive of me in finding my own identity, in [my] coming out process" (Janis, 19, Demisexual). These kinds of assessments of one's self are important to making rational choices, "I think I realized that I was lesbian, or gay,

when I was probably in junior high and at that time there wasn't, it wasn't as open as it is now” (Margo, 65, Lesbian). Mostly the rationality of those choices dictates what sort of behavioral propositions a queer individual will experience in queer exchanges.

### *Encouragement from Others*

Each of my participants spoke to the idea that encouragement from others and finding a community that is accepting, are necessary to feeling fulfilled as a queer person in their desires and practices. Here we can see Caitie discuss the costs and rewards of her queer exchange with her partner, “I think [my sexual practices have] been really good, constantly checking in for consent is a big one for me and [my partner has] been really, really good about that. I feel supported in almost every way I'd say.” Robin (66, Lesbian) discusses similar costs and rewards in her queer exchange for sex with her partner “I think my sexual desires more than my partners. I think that there are times where, uh, she would be fine to not have sex, but she makes the time for me, to satisfy me... so yeah, I think that that's a great support to me.” Other participants that discussed their cost/rewards for queer exchange with a partner are Victoria (28, Lesbian), “If I verbalize things that are important to me, [my partner] is very intentional about keeping that in mind and honoring it in every aspect,” and Jill (30 Pansexual), “I feel very safe saying like, ‘Hey, like I was watching videos of people fisting the other day and I'd like to try that,’ and [my partner would] be like, ‘Okay, cool, let's try it,’ so yeah, feel pretty supported. I don't feel limited at all.” Pearl (28, Bisexual) discusses the cost/rewards for both herself and her partner in their queer exchanges regarding sexual practice, and how communication is a key process in this queer exchange in order to maximize rewards for both people, “[My partner] will do things for me that he knows that I like, that he's not necessarily into. Um, which obviously makes me feel supported, you know, anything that I would want, I just have to talk to him about it.” In these participant responses about

encouragement from others, we notice an uncommon trend in the usual cost/benefit analysis for a queer exchange among these participants, in that there is a low-cost/high reward for this encouragement from others.

Not just sexual/intimate partner relationships offered these queer participants perceived beneficial rewards in their queer exchanges with others. Most participants spoke about the encouragement they were rewarded with by having that queer exchange with a community. Prim (24, Pan/Ace) talks more about her community of support when discussing herself in social queer exchanges, “I have three roommates who are amazing. They all use my preferred name. They all know my girlfriend and they were like the first ones to really hop on board and like fully accept [me] for who [I am].” Bjorn (42, Pansexual) gives her unique perspective about having queer exchanges within new communities, but her experiences also reflect the cost/reward analysis and consideration that each other participant expresses, “Back when I was a preacher's wife, I was supposed to be able to go to church and feel a sense of community, and a sense of belonging, and a sense of love. And I never got that. When I started hanging out in the queer community, I got that.” Margo (65, Lesbian) speaks to the encouragement rewarded to her by her family and how important that community is for queer exchanges to result in presumably positive propositions for the future, “I feel very much supported by family. My parents...<sup>7</sup> they've been very supportive. I didn't come out until I was, uh 25, 26... And when things change in my relationships, the same support has been there.” Lex (30, Pansexual) speaks to the difference in cost/benefits of their queer exchanges with both queer and non-queer individuals, “With friends, I'd say the most consistent support comes from other queer friends. They're very affirming. From folks who are not queer, um, they make an effort.” Stimulus, success and value, these are the propositions available to these

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<sup>7</sup> More context available in the Excerpts for Selected Quotes section of the appendix.

queer participants when they experience encouragement from others to pursue their sexual desires and practices.

## **Barriers**

### *Discrimination or Violence*

Even though I explicitly avoided asking direct questions about trauma, bodies and body parts, 16 out of 17 participants were very candid and forthcoming about their experiences with discrimination or violence in their queer exchanges with others regarding their sexual identity or practices, “I know that you can't ask or aren't gonna ask any trauma-based information. For me, my sexuality is 100% trauma based” (Bjorn, 42, Pansexual). Fear is a common tool used in manipulating people individually and as a group, and is often used as a foregone cost to queer populations regarding their potential queer exchanges with others, “a bunch of students in the time that I have been on my college campus, being openly attacked for their sexuality or gender and then the institution not naming that as a hate crime. Like those kinds of things are very blatant discrimination to me around sexual identity or practices” (Leaf, 27, Pansexual). These types of social exchanges provide a deprivation of sorts in that they deprive queer individuals from manifesting their queer sexual desires openly for fear of the same discrimination and/or violence they witness from others in a hegemonically heteronormative driven society.

Although Discrimination and Violence are justifiably coded separately from Desired Experiences, it is pertinent to point out that the desired experiences of queer individuals includes not having to fear discrimination and/or violence as part of being who they are, or in the exchanges they have with others. Other barriers such as objectification, “There's the odd like interaction with a guy at a bar. It's like, ‘Oh, you guys are really hot, you know’” – Jill (30, Pansexual), and repression, “So, [by the] time I turned 19. I had my first period, then I divorced my mom. I said,

‘You lied to me. You altered me. You changed me. You’ve made me into something I was never meant to be.’ So, I could never forgive her” (Alex, 60, Hermaphrodite-Dysphoric Sexuality), were discussed as more elusive or conditional forms of oppression to the participants’ ability to perform their sexual desires or sexual practices and have desirable and rewarding queer exchanges with others.

### *Objectification*

Objectification of sexual desire and/or sexual practice as a barrier to the experiences of queer individuals, manifests not only in their intimate queer exchanges with others, “I think it has been hard finding dominant kinky women who don’t want to perform for straight men or that’s not their main choice” (Caitie, 22 Bisexual), but also in non-intimate queer exchanges. These types of barriers tend to reinforce either a deprivation-satiation, or frustration-aggression proposition to queer individuals in the pursuit of queer exchanges. Here we can see Prim (24, Pan/Ace) discuss her frustration-aggression proposition to having queer exchanges for sex with non-intimate cis male partners, “I’ve definitely had sex with more cis men than any other demographic, and I feel like sex with cis men is very much just like, ‘got to get that nut,’ you know.” Additionally, outwardly social and professional areas of queer lives are also subject to objectification as a cost to their queer exchanges in a heteronormative culture like Jill (30, Pansexual) discusses here, “I just started working on a farm and it’s a lot of just cis heterosexual dudes who, you know, there’s like a lot of shop talk and whatever that I’m supposed to put up with.” Jill’s perceived cost of her social exchange at work is the “shop talk” of the fetishization of lesbian women by cis, straight men.

### *Repression*

Much of what was described during these interviews as barriers to sexual desire or sexual practice came in the form of repressed action or ideology as a product of family encounters, “I

think [my parents] think of the purple hair, the way that I dress, it's all going to be a phase... I think they can sometimes lump my queerness in with all the other things that they think are like young adult experimental things” (Caitie, 22 Bisexual). Most participants who spoke about feelings of repression, spoke about how there were costs to socializing with their families in a queer exchange, “I grew up on just a tiny area on a small farm with uptight Christian people... I wouldn't have thought about [engaging in a queer exchange] because even though I knew that I liked [women], what was I going to do? Like I couldn't do anything” (Ariel, 25, Bisexual).

Barriers such as repression are social forces that function to oppose the empowering reward factors described earlier regarding “sex with others” and “sex with self.” So, along with acceptance from others and/or self, communication, self-maintenance, and the environment in which to express queer sexual desires as rewards to these participants’ queer exchanges, discrimination or violence, objectification, and/or repression are cost factors that may affect the manifestation of these queer individuals’ sexual desires into sexual practices.

### **Queer Defined**

#### *(Anti) Identity Label*

This theme occurred in most participant responses to the very first question in the interview guide, “What does ‘being’ a queer person mean to you.” Of the seventeen participants, eleven responded with an (anti) identity label comment regarding their self-perceived identities, much like Pearl’s (28 Bisexual) testimonial presented earlier. Here are some of those thematic responses, “To me personally. Um, I think a lot of it is just existing outside of what is consider or expected to be like normal. And I don't like using the word ‘normal’” (Caitie, 22 Bisexual) and “[Queer] means a lot of things to me... somewhat of an identity and cultural thing in terms of reflecting my own identity in the spaces I want to occupy... also a political and a social thing in terms of where I

spend my time, energy, money or support” (Leaf, 27, Pansexual). The comments provided by each participant reflect the position of previous research that queerness is ambiguous, unknown, flexible, fluid and against the norm (specifically heteronormativity) (Warner 2000; Nash 2016; Hammack et al. 2019).

According to these participants, “queer” may or may not be used as a self-ascribed label, and if used, many participants state they use it as an “umbrella” term to encompass any or all of the LGBTQIA+ community, something performative of gender and sexuality. In using Queer as an umbrella term in queer exchanges, the reward for these participants is the community in which they gain and feel a social connection, “I personally love the umbrella of queer, um, because I feel like it can capture so many different identities within like the LGBTQIA+ community” (Prim, 24, Pan/Ace), as well as “Queer to me is sort of the term... of being an umbrella, and I fell under the umbrella of the LGBTQIA+. But, I’m under that umbrella in my own definition” (Victoria, 28, Lesbian). The (anti)identities represented here provide some insight into the social capital these participants utilize in their queer exchanges.

### *Gender*

West and Zimmerman posit that it is not only biological sex and gender that make up our sexualities. Gender performance accounts for a lot of how we manage our sexual desires and sexual practices in social exchanges, by acting as another type of social capital to use in queer exchanges. Each participant answered a gender performance/identity question in their questionnaire (see Table 1). All discussion of gender was weaved into other discussions presented earlier in these results.

### *Sexual Orientation*

I designed this research to include only those who practiced sexuality outside of heteronormative culture. However, the ways in which each of these participants spoke of their sexual orientations, sexuality and sexual desires confirmed the ambiguity of the term “queer.” Some talked about queerness not just in terms of their sexuality, but also genders and performance, “It's really whatever I want it to be... towards my sexual sexuality, but also how I present my gender... I guess queer for me is a term that is flexible... It's really whatever I want it to be” (Jill, 30, Pansexual). Each participant talked about the utilization of queer sexual and/or gender orientation as a way to self-realization, “I’m assigned male at birth, and I’ve only come to terms with being non-binary in the past year and a half. So, before that, I pretty much just identified as being gay which didn’t ever really feel right” (Jake, 20, Asexual), and “I would say that I am 90% attracted to femme queers, cis-females, femme presenting and non-binary folks that are a little more fluid” (Victoria, 28, Lesbian). Nearly all participants labeled themselves in some way according to modern identity politics but also described themselves as not always or rarely ever just fitting into one category.

### **Comparisons to Previous Research**

I found many comparisons to Hammock et al. (2019) seven axioms with additions or variations to each of their findings. The first variation I found is that queer sexual behavior may occur within relationships featuring any combination of cisgender, transgender, nonbinary identities, and/or other bodies, such as Alex who did not ascribe/adhere to any of these categories. Also, I found this queer exchange may occur with people of multiple gender identities and sexual orientations across the life course, in multiple relationships simultaneously with consent in which each relationship may or may not be sexually active. Queer sexual behavior may result within

relationships characterized by consensual or non-consensual asymmetry, power exchange, and/or role-play, and in the absence or limited experience of sexual or romantic desire. Additionally, just as Hammock et al (2019) found, these queer exchanges may occur in the context of a chosen rather than biological family, and in other possible forms yet unknown. Again, Hammock et al.'s (2019) seven axioms gave good insight during analysis, but did not serve to inform the research design, interview process or coding of transcriptions for this research. Other differences/additions in my research findings compared to Hammock et al. (2019) not listed above are cases of non-consensual asymmetry and power exchanges, the use or development of multiple sexual orientations over the life course, various ways of identifying one's body including those that don't fit established socio-cultural categories, and individuals in one or more relationship that may or may not be sexually active in one or more of those relationships.

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSION

The key themes amongst all participants, regarding their sexual desires and practices are acceptance from others and/or self, communication, the environment in which to express queer sexual desires, discrimination or violence, objectification, and/or repression. According to the participants of this research, queer sexuality is fluid. Each of these participant's stated that they had experienced their sexual desires and/or sexual orientations change over time, and that this process is ongoing. Being "out" as a queer person empowers queer individuals' desires. Both for the self and for other queers in a community, having publicly displayed visibility of queerness is necessary for queer empowerment. These lived accounts show promise, hope and humility in the face of rejection, and serve as a testament to the power of practice and acceptance as both intrinsic and extrinsic rewards. The fact that repression is a common occurrence for these queer individuals provides direct evidence to the cost of these participants' queer exchanges, and the power dynamics between hegemonic, heteronormative, and queer cultures. The imbalance of exchanges in power and reward for these participants resulted in either a deprivation-satiation and/or frustration-aggression proposition for future social exchanges.

The empowerment of engaged intimacy, with one's self or with others, may include sexual, sensual and/or romantic engagement. More than half of the participants in this research spoke to their intimacy as being fulfilled by not just sexual activities, but non-physical romantic, sensual and erotic social exchanges. Many of these intimate queer social exchanges resulted in one or all

of the value, success and/or stimulus propositions for future desired exchanges. As an alternative to the queer social exchange with others, masturbation was found to fulfill certain functions for these participants, such as body maintenance, specific queer sexual act or both. Many participants discussed how the personal physical upkeep involved a nearly daily routine of masturbation that was not spawned from a sexual desire. Others describe fulfilling their desires to engage in masturbation as an intentional queer sexual act, specifically aimed at pleasure fulfillment. Above all and once more, acceptance and community are crucial for queer individuals to experience the empowerment they need to fulfill their desires and gain the sense of distributive justice for their queer exchanges.

Queer individuals are socialized to weigh the cost of self-realized desire against conformity by performing a cost-benefit analysis of expressing one's queer desires in social exchanges. This cost-benefit analysis in a queer exchange directly affects the manifestation of queer sexual practice, as well as other queer behaviors for fear of objectification, oppression and/or violence. The experiences of these participants represent the intrinsic and extrinsic rewards, as well as distributive justice and cost to the use of the queer exchange by each participant, such as the encouragement from accepting partners, or the repression of being socialized by family and/or religious rhetoric into the participants' potential to internalize homophobia. Many participants expressed the power or lack of power within those imbalanced exchanges. Implications of this research suggest that queer sexualities are not static or necessarily continual over a lifespan, suggesting the need for science and academia to continue to broaden the scope and range of queer participation in future social research.

This research was designed to give space for queer history, theory, practice and testimony from specifically queer perspectives on the experiences of sexual desire and sexual practice.

Manifesting their sexual desires into sexual practices appears to be an ongoing process of cost/benefit analysis, and exploration of the self for queer participants in their queer exchanges. The use of queer methodologies in this and future social scientific research is paramount in collecting data.

### **Limitations and Future Research**

Establishing rapport with my participants was necessary to having them feel at ease and willing to share candid and detailed information. Although I had designed these interviews to be conducted face-to-face, throughout the research process it became more difficult to schedule and meet with participants, so I had to request a modification through my IRB in order to interview participants via Skype. Since I designed my interview guide to not include direct questions about trauma, bodies or body parts, I feel that I have missed a large area of data regarding the lived sexual experiences of queer individuals. Future research should study the power dynamics within queer sexual acts themselves, especially trauma-based sexual desire. Comprehensive comparative qualitative research among queer and non-queer populations regarding sexual desires and sexual practices should be conducted in the future.

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APPENDIX A  
INTERVIEW GUIDE

“Hello, my name is Philip Kemp and I am conducting this open-ended interview with the following voluntary participant regarding their sexual desire(s) and sexual practice(s) for use in academic research. Even though you have previously signed a consent form, would you please confirm that you acknowledge this interview is being recorded, is entirely voluntary, and at any time you may refuse to answer any question or end the interview on your own accord? As a responsible employee of the University of Northern Colorado, it is my duty to report any violations of Title IX or UNC’s sexual misconduct policies to the Office of Institutional Equity and Compliance.”

#### Demographic Questionnaire

1. What is your age?
2. What is your gender identity/performance?
3. What is your race(s) and/ or ethnicities?
4. Where do you currently live?
5. Do you consider yourself a queer person or that you belong to a queer community?
6. Do you have any partners or significant others?

#### Exploratory Questions

1. What does “being” a queer person mean to you?
2. In what ways do you experience sexual desire(s) and/or sexual practice(s)?
3. Have you ever felt your sexual desire(s) or sexual practice(s) to be repressed or the target of discrimination? And if so, in what ways?
4. In what ways do/would you like to experience sexual desire(s) and/or sexual practice that you have not previously?

5. Describe the type(s) of people are you attracted to.
6. What difficulties have you had in finding sexual partners that share your sexual desires?
7. How important is consent for sexual practice with another person, to you? In your opinion what constitutes consent?
8. In what ways do you feel supported by your romantic and/or sexual partners, in your sexual desire(s) and/or practice(s)?
9. In what ways do you feel supported as a queer person by friends, family or a community? Does this support or lack of support effect your sexual desire(s) or practice?
10. How often do you engage in sexual behavior with a partner, an attractive other person, or with yourself?
11. When you have sexual thoughts about, see or spend time with a partner, an attractive other person, or with yourself, describe your desire to engage in sexual practice.
12. In what ways is it important for you to fulfill your sexual desire through activity with a partner, an attractive other person, or yourself?
13. How long could you go comfortably without having sexual activity of some kind?
14. If you've ever considered or practiced celibacy, please explain.
15. How long has it been since you performed sexual activity of any kind?
16. Is there anything you would like to add or discuss that was not covered during this interview?

“For your self-care, here is a copy of free public and local resources for queer and questioning people. If you have any further questions, please feel free to reach out to me at [philip.kemp@unco.edu](mailto:philip.kemp@unco.edu) or follow up with any of the resources provided. I appreciate your participation in my research. I would also appreciate that if you know of someone else who would be comfortable interviewing for my research, that you please pass on my contact information to

them so they can reach out to me voluntarily. Thank you again for your time. I would be happy to supply you with a copy of my final research summary; also, if you would like to enter a lottery for a possible gift card reward, valued up to \$25, please leave me with an appropriate mailing address. All contact information will be secured, and accessible by myself and will be destroyed once final contact for research summary and/or gift card rewards have been made.”

APPENDIX B

CODE BOOK

| Code Titles                | Description  |
|----------------------------|--|
| Barriers                   | Instances where participants discuss feeling repressed or discriminated against based on their sexual desires and/or sexual practices. Barriers to them acting on their desires.   |
| Discrimination or Violence | Any description of participant fearing or experiencing discrimination or violence.   |
| Objectification            | Any descriptions of the participant fearing or experiencing objectification by others because of their gender performance or sexual orientation.   |
| Repression                 | Any descriptions of feeling repressed in participants desires or practices.  |
| Desires                    | Instances where participants discuss their actual desires.   |
| Desired Experiences        | Any descriptions given by the participant that indicate their desires for sexual, sensual or romantic experiences.   |
| Desired Type               | Any description of a desired type or preference for a sexual partner.  |
| Sex Drive                  | Any instances where the participant uses the phrase, "sex drive," or describes their sexual desires in a behavioral way.   |
| Empowerments               | Instances where the participant described being encouraged, accepted or appreciated by others or themselves for their sexual orientation or sexual desires.  |
| Acceptance of Self         | Any time the participant describes the acknowledgement and/or acceptance of their own sexual orientation, sexual desires or sexual practices.  |
| Encouragement from Others  | Any instances where the participant describes being encouraged or appreciated by others for their sexual orientation or sexual desires.  |
| Coming Out                 | Any time the participant talks about "coming out" as queer publicly or privately. Or instances where participants discuss how they first experienced their queer desires.  |
| Coming Out to Self         | Any time the participant first experienced a "queer" sexual encounter, as defined by the participant. Or any instances where the participant first self-realized they had sexual, sensual or romantic desires about themselves or others that would be considered non-heteronormative and cis-gendered encounters. |
| Coming Out to Others       | Any instances where the participant publicly acknowledged their sexual orientation or sexual desires to others.  |
| Practices                  | Any descriptions of sexual, sensual or romantic behaviors.   |
| Kink & BDSM                | Any description or mention of participation with kink or bdsm sexual desires/practices   |
| Celibacy                   | Any discussions of practicing celibacy voluntarily or non-voluntarily.   |
| Questions of Consent       | Descriptions of what consent for sexual activity means to the participant. How important that consent is for sexual practice.  |
| Sex Act                    | Instances of sexual activity described by the participant.   |

|                       |   |
|-----------------------|---|
| Sex with Others       | Any instances of sexual, sensual or romantic behavior with an other person than one's self.   |
| Sex with Self         | Any instances of sexual, sensual or romantic behavior with one's self.  |
| Queer Defined         | Participants own definition for what "being" a queer person means to them.  |
| (Anti) Identity Label | Queer described as an ambiguous label, specifically because of its othering quality. Or as an umbrella term that encompasses LGBTQIA+ spectrum. Or queer being used to describe personal behaviors that are not necessarily sexual or gendered. |
| Gender                | Any description or discussion of gender orientation or performance.   |
| Sexual Orientation    | Any descriptions about the sexual orientation of the participant.   |

APPENDIX C  
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD  
APPROVAL LETTER



DATE: January 17, 2020

TO: Philip Kemp, Masters  
FROM: University of Northern Colorado (UNCO) IRB

PROJECT TITLE: [1465610-6] Queer Sexual Perspectives  
SUBMISSION TYPE: Amendment/Modification

ACTION: MODIFICATION APPROVED  
APPROVAL DATE: January 17, 2020  
EXPIRATION DATE: \*see note in bold below\*  
REVIEW TYPE: Expedited Review

Thank you for your submission of Amendment/Modification materials for this project. The University of Northern Colorado (UNCO) IRB has **APPROVED** your modification submission. All research must be conducted in accordance with this approved submission.

This submission has received Expedited Review based on applicable federal regulations.

Please remember that informed consent is a process beginning with a description of the project and insurance of participant understanding. Informed consent must continue throughout the project via a dialogue between the researcher and research participant. Federal regulations require that each participant receives a copy of the consent document.

Please note that any revision to previously approved materials must be approved by this committee prior to initiation. Please use the appropriate revision forms for this procedure.

All **UNANTICIPATED PROBLEMS** involving risks to subjects or others and **SERIOUS** and **UNEXPECTED** adverse events must be reported promptly to this office.

All NON-COMPLIANCE issues or COMPLAINTS regarding this project must be reported promptly to this office.

**Under the recently revised Common Rule, this project will not require annual continuing review by the committee. Your project has been assigned a "Next Report Due" date of October 9, 2022. Just prior to that date, the IRB will check in with you to get a current status of your project. This will help us determine if your project needs to be extended or if your study is ready to be closed. If you have completed your project prior to that date, please contact the Office of Research & Sponsored Programs to complete a closing report.**

Please note that all research records must be retained for a minimum of three years after the completion of the project.

If you have any questions, please contact Nicole Morse at 970-351-1910 or [nicole.morse@unco.edu](mailto:nicole.morse@unco.edu). Please include your project title and reference number in all correspondence with this committee.

Modification to (1) revise project title, (2) add one question about race/ethnicity, and (3) add option to video record, had been approved.

This letter has been electronically signed in accordance with all applicable regulations, and a copy is retained within University of Northern Colorado (UNCO) IRB's records.

APPENDIX D

TRANSCRIPT EXCERPTS FOR SELECTED QUOTES

*Desires*

**Desired Experiences**

In what ways do or would you like to experience sexual desire and/or sexual practice that you have not previously? – Principle Investigator

I definitely would want to be with more women of any not so specific type. I think that because I've been more used to men, it's easier to find myself with men. Especially now as an adult out of the house, out of Oklahoma, I've been a lot more open to meeting with other queer women and being with queer women. But I think exploring also the friendships. But yeah, just being with women in general more would be nicer. Being dominated by women. Definitely. I think if our culture allows men to be more outwardly dominant or like talk about it more, I think that'd be nice just to experiment too with another woman. – Caitie 22  
Bisexual

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Oh, and so when I want to try something new, first of all, my partner and I filled out this sexuality survey and we had this two hour discussion about our sexual desires, what we wanted, and it was really detailed, awesome thing. And so, in that conversation it talked about so many different like kinks, toys, um, positions, just even masturbation. Um, there's so many different things and having that conversation, um, and [my partner] being willing to have that conversation I think was the biggest support because once we did have that conversation, we knew what each other liked and didn't like and what we wanted more of. I told him at the beginning of our relationship, I like BDSM, like I like being dominated, you know, like 'Choke me please!' He was uncomfortable with it at first and he's talked to me about it, but nonetheless he got used to it and now he enjoys it. Um, or at least he says he does and if not, he still supports what I want. So, my current partner is always up for whatever I want to do or try. I recently showed him the remote toy, and he was like, 'Okay, yeah, let's do it!' – Ariel 25 Bisexual

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I'm good! Yeah. I'm good (Robin gestures with thumbs up and excitement in her face about the idea of her sexual satisfaction). With my partner now, I guess in reality, there probably are some things that I would try out. Like I might try toys. – Robin 66 Lesbian

Cool. Not everybody can find satisfaction in their life, so that's great! (laughter) – Principle Investigator

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Um, I don't know. I think that's something that I'm always like asking myself as a person who works professionally, like in sex work and professional Dom work. It's something that I always am trying to push my own boundaries in terms of experience and reflection and awareness and skill. And so recently I have been expanding into learning how to do single-tail whips. I have a lot of really good

skills and practice across like pro BDSM stuff, but that's an area that I have not really done a lot of. And so, I've been doing some skilled trades with some other pro-Doms for them to teach me to do whips. So that's been fun and something I've been recently exploring. – Leaf 27 Pansexual

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I have never had sex with a strap on or anything like that, but I think that is a desire for me. Definitely. Um, yeah, and because I am BI or pansexual or whatever, like it doesn't necessarily matter, you know, with who. That's just, I don't know. For me it's very like gender affirmative, I guess. – Prim 24 Pan/Ace

I gotcha. Yeah, any particular reason you haven't had that occurrence yet? – Principle Investigator

Probably just a lack of opportunity, most of all I think that had [my last] relationship worked out, um, with the woman I was seeing in Florida, it could have been a possibility. – Prim 24 Pan/Ace

Yeah, okay. I appreciate that. When you have sexual thoughts about, see, or spend time with a partner, attractive other person or yourself, describe your desire to engage. – Principle Investigator

If it were a woman, I would probably like be the one who approaches her. I don't even know what I would say, but I would come up with something sly and cute and probably try and hang out and talk for like the night. Um, with a dude, it's easy. All you have to do is make eyes at them, fem-presenting. And then if it were a trans person or something, I feel like I would be much more cautious, you know, I would probably try to approach them as more of a friend beforehand and then see if that would expand. It's just so much easier with men. So, I feel like that's like my default, but I don't know if that's actually where the strongest desire lies. I feel like for me the strongest desire would be with a feminine person... Or with another trans/nonbinary person because I would be more comfortable with like, mutual respect and understanding there. – Prim 24 Pan/Ace

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I really want to (laughter) try like tying knots and tying up my girlfriend but I haven't. We've been talking about it the last week. That's the only thing I can think of. – Victoria 28 Lesbian

And how accepting or how open is your partner to it? – Principle Investigator

She is open to discussing anything. She was definitely into the idea of me using bondage on her. And, the reason it came up is I found a study in London that offers a figure drawing workshop, [where] they have somebody suspended and tied up. I was like, 'wow I would like to go to London someday and like draw someone that is tied up or even just like their hands are bound,' and she was like, 'you can do that with me if you like and learn how to do the stuff with the ropes.' And I was like, 'Ahhh, yeah!' – Victoria 28 Lesbian

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One thing that I would love to do one day is participate in a sex club. Like I've been to watch and to just be there in the environment. Um, but I've never actually had sex with anybody, like on the floor or whatever where people can do that. Um, and I guess group sex over three people. I've had some threesomes, but I think it'd be fun to go to an orgy or something. – Jill 30 Pansexual

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Right now, I am in a heterosexual relationship, and so far, all of my experience has been heterosexual, but I do have the desire to be in a homosexual relationship or some kind of experience with that, and maybe a polyamorous experience too. I would like to explore more sexual experiences with not only just females, but all kinds of genders too. Um, I've had kind of some experience with other females, but kind of not like sexually. But I would like to at some point just explore that part. So, I guess what I just thought was, even down to the positions, I guess. Because I feel like that's kind of a power move. Like whatever position you're in kind of defines the kind of power you have in that experience. I feel like as a queer person, I'm very open to all kinds of things, because I don't think there is a specific role for anybody. Like, sex shouldn't be a certain way, because of a certain relationship you're in; it's literally as open-ended as you want it to be. – Jenn 20 Bisexual

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Safely! Um, it is really hard for me personally to find safe sexual partners. – Bjorn 42 Pansexual

I gotcha. Do you mean as far as activity or like health wise? – Principle Investigator

Activity. With the communities I hang out in, we're all very aware of the health aspect of it. Like everybody gets tested regularly. Um, we're all very cautious about that. But safety, in activity-wise, um, I usually can't even get past the first date, let alone moving on to sexual preferences and things that I'd like to try before I become a sexual fantasy object for the other person. Therefore that doesn't create a safe space for me to be able to be like, 'Hey, you know, I'd really like to be tied up and some hot wax dripped on me and then scraped off with a knife and, you know, make out with me and central touching' and all that stuff. I haven't found one single person yet that would be willing to do that in a safe manner and not do for them only. Kind of sucks. – Bjorn 42 Pansexual

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## Desired Types

I think humor is definitely a big one. I think being able to make my partner laugh and having my partner make me laugh is a big one. Um, I like arms a lot. If someone does pushups or whatever and they have big arms. I really like men or women definitely. Um, I think having a talent is really impressive to me. If I see people in their natural habitat or like doing what they do, singing, rock climbing, whatever, um, I tend to really appreciate that about them. And that's how I usually

get to know them, or I introduce myself to people. I'd say definitely, um, more dominant personalities. I'm attracted to people who are not rude about it, but like aren't afraid to push conversations or be a little bit more forthcoming. – Caitie 22 Bisexual

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I really like, um, well I'm gonna kind of dichotomize it between men and women. I am extremely attracted to red headed women. Um, it's not like a fetish, other women are pretty, don't get me wrong, but it's just redheads. I don't know, freckles. Oh my gosh, and freckles! But after I get past like, I like a pretty face with red freckles, um, after that, the biggest thing, without a sense of humor, there's nothing that I can do with someone. So, it's really important to have a good sense of humor and for me to be able to be vulnerable. Um, emotionally, again, I have mental issues and for someone to be able to listen non-judgmentally lately is like, that attracts me to a person. But as far as physicality goes, I feel bad for saying some of this, but like thinner women, um, more feminine women, um, like I love long hair, but like, but also kind of tough like, but also kind of tough, if that makes sense. And then as far as men go, I don't know, not necessarily like ripped but you know, fit enough to like help you move stuff, move the couch or whatever, um, and can pick me up or whatever. – Ariel 25 Bisexual

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Positive people. Um, I guess people who have a faith life too, that helps a lot. I have this thing for ankles. Uh, I don't know that there's a physical type. I'm trying to think if there's a physical type, because I've been attracted to people that had different physical characteristics. Um, I think real secure in their person. Um, I think I'm sexually attracted to somebody that's very secure in who they are, and emotionally intelligent. Not that we all don't have our moments for sure, but that's very attractive to me. – Robin 66 Lesbian

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If I could answer this question, I feel like I would solve a lot of my own problems. (laughter) I don't know. I am pansexual and panromantic and so like generally just people. I have in the past also identified on the aromantic, gray-romantic kind of spectrum. I rarely, and only in certain circumstances with certain people, experience a romantic attraction. Even the nuance of those things is hard for me to articulate because I don't know, like I have not really had any rhyme or reason to the types of people I'm attracted to except for that they're authentic and honest and are like situated in a growth mindset for themselves and the people around them. Those are pretty much my general requirements of the type of people I'm attracted to. And beyond that, fuck if I know. – Leaf 27 Pansexual

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I'm into females, but if the right guy comes along, of course. – Alex 60 Dysphoric Sexuality

Well tell me, regardless of gender, what about character type, personality, what attracts you? – Principle Investigator

Well, smart. I can't handle people that I have to explain how to turn on the water faucet. So, I'm an electronic engineer by trade, I've got an IQ of 127 roughly. And uh, I've been around the world twice, North pole once, military don't ask, don't tell. So, um, far as people, they have to be able to listen. Not just all about them and there's no room for me. So, they have to be willing to share and if they're not willing to share at all about them then, I have no time. – Alex 60  
Dysphoric Sexuality

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I experience desire, like attraction to women, actually people of all genders. Typically, mainly women are what I will practice sexuality with, other women. I have attraction to multiple genders. – Victoria 28 Lesbian

What differentiates what you desire from what you practice? – Principle Investigator

I have a lot of trauma in experiences with male bodies that I just don't enjoy. And there is too much risk involved with my body when there's a penis involved. I'm not typically attracted to, um I'm visually attracted to men sometimes, but when the idea of intimacy enters my mind then it's no longer attractive. Or, it doesn't go beyond physically attractive. – Victoria 28 Lesbian

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I've kind of figured out that when I'm attracted to females, they're a little bit more like, not like your traditional girly girl; just because I used to be very Tom-boyish, and I still kind of am in some cases. And I feel like I am attracted to that. Because it feels kind of nostalgic to me, but I also appreciate when a girl is like killing it. In males, I'll tend to be attracted to darker haired, maybe darker complexion, and like tall. I've always been interested in things that are different than me, so not necessarily white, blond, blue eyed boys, or girls for that matter. Something different always intrigues me. – Jenn 20 Bisexual

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I think lately I have been noticing that I am attracted to people who do the kind of gender-queery stuff. You know like someone who was born with a penis who doesn't subscribe to all of the masculine things and maybe paints his nails or something like that. Or like I think just like people who play with gendered attributes. Because for me a lot of my attraction is based on like how I feel about the person, and I think self-reflection. Like if someone that self-reflects a lot, I'm much more attracted to that. So, I think for me some of that like gender stuff shows that you've done self-reflection because you're not chugging along in those pink and blue boxes. So, definitely people that play with gender. – Elsa 24

## Bisexual

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I'm kind of attracted to everyone. I'm pansexual. So, everyone is fair game as long as they're nice people. Um, I really enjoy looking at men who are very, like, muscularly defined. I enjoy that. That's very nice. Um, and people who are, who have body acceptance, those are my two things. – Dennis 21 Pansexual

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I'm really attracted to intelligence, honestly. Um, and personality types. So, I'm more along the lines of like the pansexual type of queer. Um, I can be attracted to someone physically and I could be like, 'Oh, well, you know, their eyes, their smile, they're a really sexy person' and then they can open their mouth and they could say something. All attraction has gone. Uh, it goes along with that safety aspect. I've had too many people break consent and violate consent with me that it's, if I see any kind of traits that would, they would be like, they won't let me go in an embrace. They won't stop kissing me if I ask him to stop kissing me, any kind of personality trait and then I'm totally turned off. So male, female, trans, nonbinary, none of that stuff bugs me, 100% personality. – Bjorn 42 Pansexual

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The person I married, the man I married was very much like that. Nine years older, but long hair, big full beard. My parents were not happy. But then once that was done, we were only married six years. When it came to the women. And still is in this day, I'm very much drawn to a very strong personality. Now obviously looks are a part of it, but the women who I've found myself most attracted to are very dynamic, very sure of themselves, have a great deal of competence. But that for me really trumps looks okay, I met some beautiful women but are so mousy, for lack of a better word, and so unsure of themselves and perhaps I need to be around people who are a little bit more dynamic, to bolster myself and so forth. But I'm not at all attracted, no matter how good looking they are, to women who don't fit into that category. I think, outdoorsy, you know, just I guess a bold person also, determined. People with a lot of confidence. – Margo 65 Lesbian

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Well, I'm a very sexual person and I'm attracted to men, women, non-binary people, really just about everybody. All genders. – Lex 30 Pansexual

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I have a preference that's more towards men. Um, but I have found women attractive in the past. Um, right now, I mean with the partner I'm with, um, he's gender fluid and it's more versatile on the intimate style of sex. And that's actually now my preference. You know, I like having that romantic intimacy involved with it. Um, and as far as just like a type, I tried not to box myself in there too. I've dated people, different backgrounds, um, and I think they're all good flavors.

(laughter) – Pearl 28 Bisexual

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I'm attracted to women, and non-binary people, and people who don't identify within gender. Sometimes I'm attracted to men but that's super rare. Mostly women and femme identifying people, but I don't like to box myself into just that. I don't usually like to say that I'm a lesbian, even though that's probably the label that fits closest to me. Just because there's like a trans-exclusionary, non-binary-exclusionary kind of label attached to that (lesbian) word. And, that is not who I am as a person. I'm very open to experiences in all types of people and I think who I allow myself to recognize who I'm attracted to has changed so drastically since I started the coming out process, which is continuous (laughter). – Janis 19 Demisexual

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## Sex Drive

How often do you engage in sexual behavior with a partner, attractive other person or yourself? – Principle Investigator

At least once a day. Sometimes every other day. But I'd say on average it's once a day. – Caitie 22 Bisexual

All right. Um, how long has it been since you've performed sexual activity of any kind? – Principle Investigator

It's 3:00 PM, less than a day. I could probably give you an hour if I had a little bit to think. – Caitie 22 Bisexual

Okay, not a problem. And it sounds like that's pretty typical? – Principle Investigator

Yeah. – Caitie 22 Bisexual

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How often do you engage in sexual behavior with a partner, attractive other person or yourself? – Principle Investigator

Um, because I think sexual behavior is not getting a home run every time. Hmm. Every day. A home run probably once a week. But, um, yeah, constantly. – Robin 66 Lesbian

Okay. I gotcha. I appreciate that. Um, how long has it been since you've performed sexual activity of any kind? Principle Investigator

Well, you could go, um, three days or you could say 12 hours, you know, I mean, so, yeah. – Robin 66 Lesbian

Okay. And I think from what you've said, that seems pretty typical for you, that timeframe?

Yeah. – Robin 66 Lesbian

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Like my ideal answer, it'd be as often as fucking possible, but in reality, like a couple times a week. I'm just so fucking busy these days that I literally have to schedule sex with partners just because of my life. Um, I think with other people it's like that like, uh, I have a couple times a week or multiple times a day if I can manage it in my schedule. With myself, it's at least every day, if not multiple times a day. Um, sometimes less often when I'm really, really busy, like when I'm traveling a lot, it can be way less often because I just like exhaust myself when I'm on the road. Um, but then sometimes also when I'm on the road I'm like, I'm going to go have sex with a bunch of new people in the city. So sometimes I do that too, but pretty often not a number. My sex drive is super strong and it's usually only because I am completely physically spent, or I have to do work or other things. I have to prioritize in my time is why I'm not engaging in sexual practices. – Leaf 27 Pansexual

Okay. How long has it been since you've performed sexual activity of any kind? – Principle Investigator

Um, like it's been a couple of hours. – Leaf 27 Pansexual

All right. And would you say that's typical? Pretty normal. – Principle Investigator

Yeah. It's very typical. Like now that I run my own business, I kind of make my own schedule. So, it's also really good like working in, living in academia where your schedule can be flexible. So, yeah, – Leaf 27 Pansexual

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Not very often. It's funny, I actually dated a guy in the winter of 2018, and we never had sex. I'm pretty sure we actually did oral, but we never like had penetrative sex, and we really didn't date for very long. There were a lot of issues that fell apart quickly. I was like, I'm not even sure that I liked it anymore, you know, like, he was like totally cool about that. So that was awesome. Probably with myself most frequently, but my sex drive has gone down a lot. Um, I'm on anti-depressants and things like that, so that could be affecting it. Yeah, maybe once a week with a partner. I feel like I kind of go through spurts where I have energy to go out and meet people and have a hookup. So, I did that earlier this month, sub with like two people already this month, this year. Um, but that's kind of out of the blue for me. Like, I don't normally do that. – Prim 24 Pan/Ace

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Since I'm off medication I don't. Uh, when I was on steroids, my male part worked quite well. I'm off of steroids. It doesn't work at all. So, it's kind of like a gigantic clitoris that doesn't do too much of anything. So, uh, sexual desires is in the toilet. So, there is none. And uh, I'd rather masturbate than be with somebody. – Alex 60 Dysphoric Sexuality

Okay. How long has it been since you've performed sexual activity of any kind? – Principle Investigator

Trying to think back on relationships. Well, when I was on testosterone, the urge was chemically based. Cause on hormones, whew, at a thousand milligrams you become a horn-dog. So, now without testosterone it's nothing. I can go months, six months, a year without sex. So, it's like no. But it was all basically chemical based. And then when I was off testosterone, masturbation served as gratification, relieved stress. Uh, with other people it was definitely chemical base. – Alex 60  
Dysphoric Sexuality

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When I'm by myself usually a couple times a day. Um, with my wife it varies. It would be several times a week to, we don't engage in sexual relations for over six months. So, it varies quite a bit. – Dennis 21  
Pansexual

Okay, if you can describe for me maybe any causes for that variation? – Principle Investigator

Um, when we first got together, we both identified as asexual. Okay. So, sex is never been super important to us. It's never been like a really close thing. So, it's still isn't super important to our relationship. – Dennis

Okay. Um, do you find a lot of satisfaction with either yourself or your partner regarding more sensual, or romantic encounters rather than sexual? – Principle Investigator

I get more satisfaction through romantic gestures, like going out on dates and just spending quality time together than I do with sexual relations. – Dennis 21  
Pansexual

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How long could you go comfortably without having sexual activity of any kind? – Principle Investigator

Including myself? Depends on my mental health. Honestly. If I'm in a triggered state or I'm having a bad mental health time, I can go as long as probably like a month for me personally. Um, usually after about a week it gets to a mental state of mind where I need to have that personal release when it comes to being with another person, I've gone as long as three years, four years. So, it's, I'm like, “well, I've got toys.” – Bjorn 42  
Pansexual

Okay. All right. Um, how long has it been since you've performed sexual activity of any kind? – Principle Investigator

A day. – Bjorn 42  
Pansexual

Okay. And you'd say that's pretty typical given your routine? – Principle Investigator

Yeah, pretty typical for me. – Bjorn 42  
Pansexual

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I'm very much supported. More so now by the woman I'm with, than I did with my long-term partner, probably because there's so much communication. We've acknowledged the difference in our sex drives, but she's very aware of when it's lacking. When I need more than she does. She's extremely supportive, I think more so, than the entire package of the sex act, the needs, the balance, the consent. So, yeah, I feel more supported in all aspects sexually with her than I have with anyone I've ever been with. There's not as much sex, but it's more complete, much more complete. – Margo 65 Lesbian

Okay. How often do you engage in sexual behavior with a partner, attractive other person or yourself? – Principle Investigator

With my partner, probably couple times a month, and with myself, probably about twice a week. – Margo 65 Lesbian

Okay. Would you say that's pretty typical? – Principle Investigator

Yeah. Yes. – Margo 65 Lesbian

I mean, I feel a great deal of desire. Um, I would say that depending on the situation though, I still try to keep a level head upon acting on those desires. So, it's incredibly situational. If I feel comfort, I know that, um, if there's not likely to be any consequences, then I can be incredibly spontaneous. Um, just jump right in. But I'm also, capable of exercising a degree of caution. – Lex 30 Pansexual

I mean, you know, when I was single two years ago it was very different. I had a higher sex drive, but my hormones have been adjusted, doubled since then. So, I know there's a big change, I guess that comes with it. Um, and psychological, I don't know, it feels like I'm a different person than a few years ago. – Pearl 28 Bisexual

Yeah. All right. How long has it been since you performed sexual activity of any kind? – Principle Investigator

Um, like a week. – Pearl 28 Bisexual

Okay, and that's pretty typical? – Principle Investigator

Yeah. – Pearl 28 Bisexual

How long has it been since you performed sexual activity of any kind? – Principle Investigator

(looks at watch) What time is it? It's been... 14 hours. – Victoria 28 Lesbian

So, what I'm noticing is people typically look at their watch. – Principle Investigator

Yeah! (laughter) – Victoria 28 Lesbian

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Okay. How long has it been since you performed sexual activity of any kind? – Principle Investigator

Um... like a day (laughter). – Jenn 20 Bisexual

Okay. Would you say that's pretty typical? – Principle Investigator

Yep. – Jenn 20 Bisexual

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At this age, yes. I think there has been a shift that, although my sex drive hasn't changed, I realized that in order for me to be compatible with my partner or for us to be comfortable with one another, we had to incorporate more things that gave us that connection, gave us that closeness without sex directly. – Margo 65 Lesbian

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Um, I don't feel like [sex] is that important. You know, if I have those sexual desires then nothing came of it, I wouldn't explode, I'd be fine (laughter) and move on with my life, I guess. – Janis 19 Demisexual

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### *Practices*

#### **Kink and BdsM**

Pretty big difficulty. I think I also have some internalized issues with the kink community and some weariness I think especially for, I don't want to speak for all, um, like bisexual or queer women, but I think especially on like FetLife or going into clubs and announcing your bisexual instead of queer gives, uh, other people, mostly straight men, a different impression. So, I think, I dunno. I definitely have some reservations about the labels I'm cognizant of how other people are viewing the labels that I put on myself. I think a lot of the kink community around revolves that I've been in. I haven't been in specifically queer kink communities yet, so I think that might be interesting. But especially the ones that I've been in, I think a lot of it revolves around how um, dominant men view women and even if there is a dominant woman, there's a big like performance value that I'm not a big fan of. So, I think it has been hard finding, for me, finding dominant kinky women who want, who want to perform for men straight men or that's not their main choice, if that makes sense. Not having or like what men want or what men want to see be the main ideal. I think that's probably been the easiest one is finding like truly queer women, not just, yeah. – Caitie 22 Bisexual

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I'm pretty heavily involved in the kink and BDSM communities. I work as a pro-Dom right now and most of my sexual interaction is in a kink or BDSM context. So, I have a couple of regular partners that I see one of them weekly or biweekly,

and one of them once or twice a month. Then there's a couple that are kind of in and out depending on what our schedules are like, um, every couple of months. I could be experiencing like thoughts myself, or videos, or texting a video, chatting with them. It's just like how we stay in contact, like whether we're hanging out or doing stuff together, whether that's activities related or unrelated to sex or going to spaces like Munches, community events, play parties or events and stuff like that.

So, your interpersonal dynamics when it comes to sexual practice sometimes occurs in manners where you're not necessarily in the same place at the same time  
– Principle Investigator

Yeah, totally. So, like probably most of my communication around sex either happens in person, or if not in person, through digitally mediated means of communication. Whether that's like on FetLife or through like Lex that's like a queer dating app or like text message you know, messenger platforms or whatever, so yeah. Yes. – Leaf 27 Pansexual

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Um, sexual desire is huge one. I'm part of the kink community and so a lot of my sexual desires are around that. It can be as simple as psychological. It doesn't have to be physical. I'm super into BDSM. I have been loving going to kink clubs, where I can watch other people dress up in a certain way. Um, for me particularly, I'm usually submissive. Um, wear a collar, like to interact with people in a way that is, um, sort of playing roles. I think that it's sort of like play for adults, consenting adults, but a huge part of kink, which I love is that consent is really built into the whole picture. I mean to the point where like you're setting up scenes with another person with specific boundaries set from the beginning, 'This is what I want, this is what I don't want, this is how far I'm willing to go, here is the signal I'm going to make when things are not okay for me anymore.' It's very safe. It's very structured. Um, but yeah, structured but also free at the same time. I don't want to make it seem like it's all rules, rules, rules. I love..., it's play, it's fun. Um, it should be fun I think, but I also think that for me, since I tend to be more submissive when I'm playing, it's a way for me to experience a different part of my life and other parts of my life, I'm very controlled, very type A and very organized. Everything is in order. I have control. I'm just used to being a caregiver, you know, taking control of a lot of situations. And so sexual, being part of sexual act with other people and normally means that I can, I set my boundaries at the beginning and then I can just kind of like let go and give up control. And that feels really good. I think that there is a tendency for people to misunderstand kink in particular, especially [some] feminists. I've been in a lot of conversations with people who are asking me like, how can I be a feminist and then also give up control, especially when I was dating cis men and interacting in that way with cis men. It's like, 'how could you give up your control to a man like that or experience abuse?' So yeah, I guess more misunderstanding. I guess that is a type of discrimination that they're making judgements about it without actually understanding it. – Jill 30 Pansexual

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I'm in the BDSM community. I'm not super open about that just because it is very taboo to talk about still. But other than that, I don't feel like repressed or anything. Before I started hormone replacement therapy, um, I never really had any type of sexual desire, so this is kind of new to me. – Dennis 21 Pansexual

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I am a member of one of the BDSM dungeons here in town, so I hang out with people that are also members, friends and socializing. I personally don't choose anybody for a partner unless I know them, like in a very casual acquaintance type of situation. I have attended a few of the sex parties around town. Like Panorama, just kind of for queer people to go and to be openly sexual with each other. They make me uncomfortable. I'll be honest, but I do go to them because I don't like the mental block of the uncomfortableness, so I'm like, 'I'll go, and I won't be uncomfortable this time.' I usually just meet people there; I don't like to participate in public sexual acts. But I don't have a problem with watching them or with being in an environment with them. Um, it's usually just a very private and personal thing for me. So, like, not that I'm opposed to anything just because of my own personal experience. Um, and the ability for people to violate consent in those public places. Yeah. If it's just one on one, or one and two, then I can have more control over the situation. – Bjorn 42 Pansexual

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I've probably had sex with most of my friends. So, I mean those were the people that I know, you know. You just stop, bring it up. Um, say, 'I'm, I'm interested,' and then more often than not something will happen. Um, you meet people online. I've used the app OkCupid to meet up with people and there's also a lot of kinky parties in the area, So, I've gone to some of those to meet people there. In kink it's all about pushing boundaries. So, consent is extremely important. Taking someone to the edge using pain, um, and if you don't have a clear idea of what someone likes, then you can very easily end up stepping over that edge, and you don't want that. – Lex 30 Pansexual

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## **Celibacy**

Have you ever considered or practice celibacy? – Principle Investigator

As a clergy person, this is hard to say. I think sex is meant for us to enjoy. So, let me preface it with that. However, I think sex has such an emotional component to it that, as much as I like it, it would be difficult for me to do it with somebody else versus masturbation, with somebody else, without it having a deeper meaning. So, it would be very difficult for me personally to just have sex to satisfy that need. Because to me, there's such a bonding that goes with [sex]. So yes, I have, because when I discovered my sexuality, I didn't want to just go out and... so I practiced celibacy because to me that was a choice to not get myself in a situation that I would later regret. The choice to not act on what I could have done. So, I chose to be celibate versus having sexual relationship with somebody that was not

going to develop into anything. – Robin 66 Lesbian

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I didn't have sex for three years when I first moved to Colorado. So, I don't know that I would count that as practicing celibacy. I was willing to have sex, but it just never happened. I was more okay, abstaining from committed relationships, romantic or otherwise. Um, but I just happened to also not have sex during that time. It wasn't comfortable though. (laughter) None of it was comfortable. I have gone a long amount of time, but I, I don't want to, and I try to avoid it. Yeah. And I don't know, I feel like emotional celibacy and romantic celibacy are definitely something I've practiced. I think, like, I wouldn't call it sexual celibacy because it wasn't really intentional. It just was like how the cards played, you know, so to speak "how the cookie crumbled." Um, if I could have had sex, I would have, but I didn't have an opportunity. – Leaf 27 Pansexual

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[The] last time I had sex was 2000. So, 19 years. I guess, yes, it would be. – Alex 60 Dysphoric Sexuality

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Celibacy meaning no sex with myself or with someone else? Not long. I can recall a time when I didn't have sex with another person for seven months, but I wasn't comfortable by any means. If I were to refrain from having sex with myself, maybe a week. Hmm, I would say then if I were defining it as no sex with another person, seven months is the longest and it wasn't on purpose. I was looking, it just didn't happen. – Victoria 28 Lesbian

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Not really. I went about seven years before I started hormones. It wasn't for not trying, it wouldn't happen for me. So, um, I mean I've thought about it, but I don't think that it..., I think sex and what people think about sex is more of a social construct and I don't like social constructs. – Dennis 21 Pansexual

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Um, yeah. A little bit. It doesn't work very well for me because of my mental health. Um, but I have practiced it. – Bjorn 42 Pansexual

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I've given it some thought but I don't know what I'd gain from it. I've just kind of been like, 'I know it's a healthy thing to do regularly,' so it's fine. I don't think that would really benefit me but if I were in a place of introspection, and really was doing this for myself, and it would really help, I would consider it. But I don't think I have ever been at that point. Sure, I mean, asexuality is so broad and it's so different for so many people. So, yes. I don't know I could be wrong. So, yeah if we're thinking of celibacy as default, then I'd say yeah. I guess it makes [sexual desire] a little easier for me, like I don't have to have [sexual activity] within a couple months of each other like most people do. – Jake 20 Asexual

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Okay. So, I mentioned that I grew up in a religious household. Uh, when I was in high school I did, I didn't even kiss my significant other. I went to college. I tried dating, but nobody really wanted to be celibate. I lost my religious beliefs. I became an atheist. I started experimenting with my sexuality at that point, and just kind of fell out of that and I'm much happier. I'm much happier for it. – Lex 30 Pansexual

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In high school. I mean, it wasn't a like a choice, uh, environment I was in, no one wanted to have sex with me, so, celibate. I mean, I'm married now so I don't really see the point in not having sex [at this point]. (laughter) – Pearl 28 Bisexual

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Yes. Um, yeah, I did up until I was about 18, because that was when I decided I wanted to try to explore my options and all the things about myself. It was like a conscious decision to practice [celibacy], even mentally I was trying to stay away from sex so I could more easily practice celibacy. If I wasn't always thinking about [sex], it would be easier to ignore it. But it was up until I was 18 that I was actively celibate. My religion was definitely the main reason; it was the only reason. Even when I was practicing celibacy, I had a lot of sexual desire for sure. – Jenn 20 Bisexual

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## Questions of Consent

For me, I'd say especially as a submissive, consent is everything, everything. Like I don't tend to be in equal or dominant enough positions ever to usually be pushing the envelope of consent. Usually it's being done to me. So, I think I have a very high bar for it. But for me, consent is enthusiastic, and desire based. Obviously 'no means no.' But I don't think that like everything else means yes. I think consent is specific to 'yes means yes.' Like, 'I want to do this,' 'this is something that I enjoy.' I tend to go nonverbal a lot when I get highly stressed or highly excited. So, a lot of sex scenes I get nonverbal in. I always have very good communication with my partners because I really need to know that I can trust them, and that someone's gonna respect that. So, I think consent's huge. – Caitie 22 Bisexual

Yeah. If you don't mind me asking, what does consent look like for you if it's not verbal? – Principle Investigator

Um, so instead of a safe word, I usually have a safe motion, which is my go-to is like two quick double taps. I do practice rounds where it's like making out or doing something that's not as heavy and then like practicing that. So, my partner understands what it means versus like accidentally patting them on the back, or like scratching. So, we know how those are going to feel different and on different body parts. Cause taps on the hand can feel different than like on the back. Consent is still verbal for me too. I also have safe words, it's just that I know my risks going into it. So, I tend to really try to focus on this and my safe 'motion'

and I need this to be the absolute, I also have, um, like yellow words, which are like don't stop. Like, I'm not withdrawing consent, I'm asking you to slow down. So, I tend to have like several levels of safeguarding, which I think really helps me feel comfortable. – Caitie 22 Bisexual

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I feel like that's a really hard question in one sense. Um, which is why I don't drink, because when I drink, I get very friendly. I'm okay that my consent. Um, like when I'm drunk, I know I'm under the influence of stuff, but I go into it knowing what's going to happen. And so although I do feel like consent is important, but if I'm drunk and some other person are drunk and we start doing stuff, I mean, I started drinking knowing that that's usually where I end up when I drink. And so, I just don't drink. Um, so aside from that, normal sober stuff I like, I don't want someone to just straight up ask me, 'Hey, can I do this?' Because, I tend to like kind of tease it on them. Um, but again, I'm really straightforward, I mean if I'm not comfortable, I'm not afraid to just get up. – Ariel 25 Bisexual

Would you say that it's not always directly verbal? – Principle Investigator

Yeah, it's definitely different. Um, for me, consent doesn't have to be verbal. However, you know, the other person might need it to be verbal. So that's another thing. Um, but for me, myself, I don't need a verbal confirmation. Body language is really important, and I think I'm good at reading body language. But again, I don't think I would go, for example, up to a stranger, start doing things to them just because. Um, I kind of haven't been in that situation, but I think there would have to be something talked about. Maybe not so direct but, but something talked about. But no, I don't think verbal matters as much to me. – Ariel 25 Bisexual

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I think consent is, I dunno if fluid is a good way, but I think that it is, um, continual. Just because somebody says 'yes' at the moment, doesn't mean they want to do this particular thing or that particular thing. So, I think it's through a process. It has to be continual consent, and that's really important to me. And the opposite way too, I would want to be able to say, 'I'm not comfortable that tonight or this morning, or whatever.' – Robin 66 Lesbian

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Yeah, consent is vital. It is crucially important for sexual practice with me and another person. I think definitely in the realm of kink, there are like realms of consensual and nonconsensual boundaries that may be perceived as somewhat blurry if you don't know what's happening. But I think for me it's really, really important. Um, I am very over communicative of my sexual and romantic, physical manifestations of desire with other people. Whether that's me and them vocally, or just like in the same room or space or connected in that way. As in it matters for me to get consent about what we're physically doing together, but just as much, it also matters to me to send them sex, or sending them pictures of things that they may not want. Also having consent for all of those things, you know. So, like, I am just a big over communicator when it comes to my interpersonal relationships. And so, I just try to talk about from the get-go what our

relationships mean. And I'm also a person who identifies as a relationship anarchist. So, I don't necessarily delineate between like my friends and my romantic partners and my sexual partners and all of those things. I just feel like I always just try to communicate with people about what type of interaction we want to have and what makes sense for us and for them and how I can respect their boundaries and vice versa. So, yeah, all the things and the stuff. Yeah, absolutely. I mean, so like in kink and BDSM generally like safe words is kind of the understanding of like how people delineate that. But like I think what's important is that in all relationships you have communication about the consent process. So like whether that means we're going to verbally communicate about consent as we're actively doing physical sexual practices together or we're going to about what we want to do now and we're not going to navigate consent in that space or we're only going to do it in these kinds of ways in these specific circumstances. Like using a safe word if we want to stop or whatever. So I think there's like a lot of different ways, whether that's, it could be verbally, it could be a signal, it could be a, I've had like, especially if you're doing bondage, like it can be a bell or dropping an item or like, you know, safe words or all kinds of other things. So yeah, I think it definitely can manifest in all kinds of different ways or consent. Yes. – Leaf 27 Pansexual

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I am constantly asking the whole time, like before I kiss someone, I'll ask if I can or like, 'is this okay?' 'Is it okay if I touch you here?' You know, like I just want to make sure they are very comfortable with everything the whole time and that they know what's going to happen. I know that people have trauma, and I don't think that sex should be something where they have to relive that trauma. I don't know. That's just a personal opinion though. I know that that's very different for lots of people. So that's just my own style. I am very much about making sure like every, step, touch, whatever is something that they are comfortable with. Again, I don't feel like that's something that's always been reciprocated to me. So that was kind of difficult. Yeah. – Prim 24 Pan/Ace

Have you ever seen consent take different forms or change over time with different people? – Principle Investigator

Yes. Definitely. Here's the story. Um, one time I had a threesome with two cis men. Um, and I was very, very drunk. At the time I remember saying yes and being excited and getting naked and then I don't remember anything. And then I remember waking up with, you know, a dick in my mouth, and another one down there. And just being in so much pain, I just started crying. But as soon as I started crying, they were just like, 'Oh no, like, what's wrong?' You know, but it was just like definitely way too drunk to actually have been getting into that. Um, so that's really hard. I know that they were really drunk too. I hope that if they'd noticed that I was unconscious, they would have stopped, you know. Um, and I'm not sure how long I was blacked out for. Um, but things like that. Definitely a reversal of consent. – Prim 24 Pan/Ace

I'm sorry to hear that. Um, thank you again for sharing all of that. – Principle Investigator

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How important is consent for sexual practice with another person to you? – Principle Investigator

At present? Zero. It's in the toilet. – Alex 60 Dysphoric Sexuality

Okay. What, um, in your opinion, what constitutes consent? – Principle Investigator

Uh, agreement with both, knowledge of both. You have you know, eye contact for one, and it has to be said, 'Hey, do you want to do this,' 'yeah, I want to do this.' So, it has to be a mutual agreement. – Alex 60 Dysphoric Sexuality

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It is "The" most important part of practicing sex with another human! Full stop, it's the top priority. The only thing that constitutes consent is verbal consent. Um, I would say with my partner, we have been together for a year and a half, and there is still verbal consent that is required. It's like not very formal consent every time like, 'Do I have your consent to...' but there is some verbal exchange before intercourse happens ever. – Victoria 28 Lesbian

Have you ever seen consent take different forms or change over time with different people? – Principle Investigator

Yes, I wouldn't say every single time, but I have definitely experienced like in sexual practice when something shifts, or there's a different position, or a gasp or sound, that there is a check-in for sure. That's happened countless times. I would say that consent is still required and withdrawing consent is also a thing and it's important. – Victoria 28 Lesbian

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It's incredibly important. I would not participate in any sexual practice without consent from both parties. And consent is an enthusiastic, freely given yes. Where there's no question whatsoever about, you know, whether they're interested or not. It means not instigating anything when someone's sleeping, when someone's drunk and they can't make decisions with a clear head. Um, obviously not with anyone where you question their capacity. That might mean that you check in during sex as well, because sometimes you start and if one party's not having fun, then that's okay. It can end right there. You know, it should not proceed, if everybody is not on board. Um, so yeah, it's very important to me. I even have started being aware of consent just with friends, 'is it okay if I hug you?' You know, 'is it okay if I touch you right now?' Because even if it's not sexual in nature, I'm learning more and more that bodily autonomy is very important, and some people might not want contact. I think there's also the difference between having a new partner versus a partner that you've been with for a while. My partner and I right now know each other very well. If I make a certain facial expression, you know, she can tell right away something's wrong, like

something's not okay. We'll stop immediately, and we check in with each other. But you don't have that necessarily with a new partner or with someone you're flirting with. So, I think in the beginning stages of meeting someone and starting an interaction, there needs to be more, it's sort of awkward to do, but there needs to be more explicit verbal like, 'Hey, is everything okay?' Like, 'Hey, can I touch you here?' Like, 'is it okay if we do this now' or whatever that looks like. – Jill 30 Pansexual

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Very important. Absolutely. Especially being a woman, and the whole rape culture we are raised with, it's definitely very close to me. Cause I want people to respect what I want, and I'll respect what they want too. Being self-aware, conscious, something that's not pressured. Like, if you're giving someone a stressful situation, they need to make a decision really quick, then that might be a manipulative way to get to a "consented" answer. Full consent I think is, completely 100% that person choosing, because they feel comfortable with a situation, to do something or not do something, and don't feel like they're forced. – Jenn 20 Bisexual

Have you ever seen consent take different forms or change over time with different people? – Principle Investigator

Consent can come in all forms. Verbal is very good consent, but the thing is, depending on the situation and the people involved, it'll change. Like, with my current partner, it's not like I have to constantly give him the permission to hug me or to kiss me, you know. Just because as partners, we've already had agreements and talked about our relationship. And we're at the point where we both really respect each other. So, if I were to say anything like, 'I don't want you to do this,' then he would respect that, and I would respect him. So, in that case, consent isn't always vocal, it's just whatever we've decided, I guess. Yeah, consent changes based on the situation. Everything is within its context. – Jenn 20 Bisexual

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I think that its verbal and kind of checking in with each other. Because I have been in a lot of situations where I didn't fully consent, but I never said anything, I never voiced it. Just in a lot of those uncomfortable situations where people never asked, and I never voiced it, and I never felt comfortable voicing it. Even if somebody is verbally consenting, listening to their body cues and if someone says 'no' one time not... but maybe you know. I think there's a lot of things that go into it. You can't just go off of verbal consent, you know. I kinda gotta have to try to piece together all the clues to make sure that everyone's having a good time. I think a little bit because at this point in my life I have a really supportive partner who's aware of those bodily cues. Even if I'm kind of uncomfortable for a second or do like a weird thing, he'll slow down or modify or ask. So, I've built some trust with a person, like for me verbal consent is as big deal in my long-term monogamous relationships, because I trust him, and I know he will pull back. So, I'm not necessarily always wanting him to ask. I think a lot of it is just when

you're in something that's more long-term and knowing a person and knowing their cues. Being sensitive, and also being the kind of person that makes someone feel comfortable. With some partners I was with in high school it was very like, I could say 'no,' but I would feel guilty about it. Which is not conducive to consensual sex. – Elsa 24 Bisexual

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Consent is a massively important thing for me personally. Um, it's actually a turn on for me if someone can say..., so if I'm on a date with someone and we've gotten to the point where I feel comfortable kind of making out with them, and I feel comfortable letting them touch my legs or something like that, you know, it's kind of progressing along that way. If they look at me and they say, 'do you mind if I touch your leg,' or 'could I put my arms around you and kiss you and I can hold you?' Man, it just like shoots off fireworks in me. It's like, wow, this person is really wanting to make sure I feel comfortable and I feel safe. And so not only is it a yes, but it's a hell yes! You know, at that point because they're being aware of what I might or might not like. It's that consideration for your partner that is missing in everything these days. – Bjorn 42 Pansexual

Have you ever seen consent take different forms or change over time with different people? – Principle Investigator

I have, I have seen 'em instead of 'no means no.' It's very slowly starting to become 'yes means yes.' And I think that has to do with the #MeToo campaign. And the fact that women and people in the queer community are starting to come out, and even some men are starting to come out and be like, 'yeah, I was sexually assaulted.' We need to change this into 'yes means yes,' instead of 'no means no.' Because some people freeze instead of flee, you know, and when you freeze you can't say yes, but you can't say no either. You just are stuck there. And so, I think that education is a massive thing and that it is slowly, very slowly changing. – Bjorn 42 Pansexual

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Oh, yeah, extremely. I feel like consent is not even a question of how important it is. It's vital! I understand that some people are into things that are very like, roll play where it's 'non-consensual,' but that's still consent as long as the two or more people have talked about it before hand. It's still consensual, even though it's staged in such a way that doesn't seem like it is. Obviously, I think that that is fine. As long as all parties know what they're getting into and are happy about it, I think that constitutes consent. with the three sexual partners I've had um, I think we've always been very upfront and made sure we were getting the consent we needed. In the longer term stuff, a lot of times as we got to know each other more, it got to be a lot more non-verbal, and you understand each other more, and if there's ever an issue they would speak up because they would feel comfortable enough to do that. In general, I think with the people I've been with, it's been consistent. – Jake 20 Asexual

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Oh, consent is paramount. Because that is one thing about my second partner. Initially she was very forceful, and to some degree that was exciting at first, and then it wasn't. Then it became uncomfortable. We talked about it and it lessened. But I realized many years into our relationship, this was her [Modus Operandi]. This is what she did. So, it took a while for us to find a good balance because to me that is extremely important. If there's consent. The woman I've been with now for about a year and a half, yeah, I was a little more aggressive than I should have been initially, and it almost ended our relationship right off the bat. Um, of course I apologized and we found our balance, but I think that's when it really hit home for me, leave what I had learned and what I knew of from my prior relationship, I still was carrying some of that aggressive behavior. I guess I got that ironed out. So, communication's key. It is very much key. My second partner and I for so long were not open to communication about feelings, about difficulties, um, which is what ended us. I wanted to go to counseling. She would not have anything to do with it. The woman I'm with now, actually, that's what she does for a living. So, I went to the opposite side of the spectrum. I went from someone who talks about nothing, to someone who wants to talk about everything. – Margo 65 Lesbian

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It really varies from person to person. My partner and I have been talking about consent. A lot of it, a lot of it does go back to consent. I actually just got out of a pretty shitty situation I'm getting divorced. In North Carolina you have to wait a full year of separation before you can get divorced. Um my ex did not really care about consent, and things got bad very quickly. So, I've been in that sort of a situation. I've also been in situations that I would say were very affirming where people listened and took what I said into account and their relationship was a lot better for it. – Lex 30 Pansexual

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Well, consent is definitely important to me. Um, and to me consent is not only, you know, them participating actively, but having that energy, you know. If they feel reserved, I'm going to step back and be like, 'Whoa, you actually want to do this?' 'Do you want to talk about it?' 'Do you really want to have sex?' 'We don't have to.' I'm not usually the one who initiates sex a lot. So, I guess it's more experience of getting my consent. The men I have initiated it with, I'm like, 'You wanna have sex?' And usually it's yes, or if they say no, I'm like, 'okay.' – Pearl 28 Bisexual

Have you ever seen consent take different forms or change over time with different people? – Principle Investigator

I've seen it take on different forms. I've had a couple of encounters where, we both just kind of started having sex, you know. There wasn't any doubt that we both wanted to. Um, yeah, like I said, I usually let them come to me cause, you know, rejections a bitch! (laughter) – Pearl 28 Bisexual

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I think it is incredibly important, one of the most important things. Obviously, I think consent is important in any kind of sexual relationship, whether it's a queer relationship or not. Queer people do tend to be traumatized and have a history of experiencing sexual abuse or sexual assault, and also belong to a marginalized community so it's really, really, really important that we're all aware of that (consent) with ourselves and with each other. Practice a consent culture, always. As far as what consent looks like, I usually will just straight up ask, 'is it okay if I kiss you,' 'is it okay if I do this or that,'; and I think what consent looks like can change if you're in like a long relationship, but I never want to assume and be wrong about it later. – Janis 19 Demisexual

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Consent is the most important thing to ever have. Any type of sexual relationships with anyone, regardless on if you know them, if you're married to them, or anything like that. Um, what constitutes as consent is enthusiastic yeses. And no mind-altering substances, nothing like that. Completely sound of mind, a 'yes.' Because we are into the BDSM seen, we have like safe words we have. Then I'll check in with facial expressions, 'what's going on,' stuff like that. Um, just to make sure consent is still given. – Dennis 21 Pansexual

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### Sex with Others

So, for me, there's an attraction that's just everything. She has a really nice figure for someone her age. I mean, it's incredible. What I have to do is reel-it-in, because when I'm around her and perhaps she's dressed very nicely and I used to compliment her quite a bit and, and it made her uncomfortable. I think it made her uncomfortable initially because we were at such opposite ends of the spectrum, and she maybe felt like those comments were getting us to the bedroom. So, I had to reel that in. I still find that feeling when I'm with her. I just don't express it as much because for me, yes, to be quite honest with you, if she was willing, I would have been tickled if we ended up in the bedroom. But since I know that's not necessarily the case with her, I had to reign that in. – Margo 65 Lesbian

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[Sex] with my husband, I think it comes from, usually we'll be like cuddling, you know, it's kind of intimate kisses on the neck and then my desire comes through. – Pearl 28 Bisexual

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When I feel desire for my partner, it feels very happy and loving. I definitely think that I see sex or any like part of that as a love response. It's definitely one of my love languages and for me it's not just an act, it's also an expression. So, I think I have a very happy, good emotion. It can get like passionate/aggressive if like [my partner and I] feeding off each other in the right way. But like just for me and my feelings, I would say happy, energetic and loving would be how I would describe it. – Caitie 22 Bisexual

Okay. Thank you. In what ways is it important for you to fulfill your sexual desires through activity with a partner, attractive other person or yourself? – Principle Investigator

For me, it's very important. I definitely see it as a love language, as a way of communicating how much you care about someone. I'm very cognizant. My partner also sees it like that, but not as much as me. So, we talk about that openly. I definitely see it as a way to express love. I think other people can have like a hobby together and that's their big thing, or just spending time together or laughing or doing something. And for me that expression of love is very much tied into sex. – Caitie 22 Bisexual

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Okay. Stop me if I'm being too detailed cause I don't know. So, in general, um, I've always been the submissive partner no matter who the other partner is. So, like currently the way I experience my actual practices, I'm always very submissive. And so the other person, my partner is, aggressive as the wrong word, but I don't just want to say dominant, but like, will grab my throat, or use handcuffs and we'll try to get creative with that, but our dog gets in the way. I just have a really big thing with being dominated and I think that comes from like my past and like my psychology and stuff. But I swear like any sort of dominance that pins me down or like, I don't know, just like any sort of dominance, it's just so exciting for me and it just gets like my blood flowing you know. I honestly don't really have any difficulties. All the partners, even like hookups that I've ever been with, have given me exactly what I've asked for. Um, as far as the way I'd like to be handled, um, I tend to be really straightforward and what I want and that makes it a lot easier. Um, so other than like, sometimes it takes a long time to have an orgasm and I'll just be like, 'Okay, we're done.' Like, I mean that kind of difficulty, but really, I can't think of many others. – Ariel 25 Bisexual

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With my partner, it's kind of like ebbs and flows. So, the thing I love about being queer is that it has really redefined what sex means to me. Like, I think a lot of people when they hear the word sex, they think of penetration. Um, but also like beyond that definition, I think that there's just ways of being intimate with somebody that can, that I'm now growing and learning to see as like intimate, romantic, um, a type of connection that you wouldn't have with just anybody. So, like taking a bath together, or giving each other massages, or even just like coddling. And so, yeah, sex where we like bring up sex toys and lube and like, you know, where we have something that looks like maybe what you would see if you look up porn or something. Um, that ebbs and flows for sure. Like sometimes there's two weeks with nothing and sometimes there's like five days in a row with like multiple times per day. It just kind of depends on where we're at in our lives and how we're feeling. But other things that I find very intimate, like reading erotica together or I don't know, just even like holding hands, or touching each other's bodies; ways that I wouldn't ever touch anybody else, that is daily – Jill 30 Pansexual

So, you can be sensual without being sexual? – Principle Investigator

Yes, and I still find the same satisfaction from it, like seeing a connection. – Jill  
30 Pansexual

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Um, before I was in an active relationship it would just be kind of off and on, maybe a week or so in-between. Now that I'm in a relationship, it's been a little more often (chuckle). Just because we're always like, hanging out you know. Cause it's a relationship and I actually care about this person, not just someone on the side. – Jenn 20 Bisexual

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I don't think it's super important to me. It's mostly I want to experiment, see what's fun, um, things like that. But I mean, if I could never have sex again, I wouldn't be that distraught about it. – Dennis 21 Pansexual

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In what ways is it important for you to fulfill your sexual desires through activity with another person or yourself? – Principle Investigator

For me, I'd say it's pretty, pretty darn important. Um, because of that suppression of, of growing up, uh, I would say I lived like 35 years of my 42 years being sexually suppressed. Yeah. So, having that freedom to be able to experience what it is that I want to experience, to be able to express what it is that I want to express, and talk about what I want to talk about, to be able to be free to be like, 'I'm in the mood.' 'So, you want to play around?' Or like, 'I'm not in the mood.' That is vital to my mental health. – Bjorn 42 Pansexual

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I haven't really been in a relationship in almost two years and so pretty much that whole time up until summer I wasn't sexually active with anybody. Then this summer was the first time I've like been involved in sexual activity of any kind, and that went on for like a month. Since then it's been sort of nothing (chuckle). – Jake 20 Asexual

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There really is no difference in my sexual practice or desires at this age as, as I experienced in my teens, which I find a little confusing. I would think that it would diminish as I got older. It's not, um, I currently go to a therapist just for a lot of issues and that's something we've talked about in great length because my partner who is a little bit older, she's almost 70. She's kind of at the opposite end of the spectrum, more of a low sex drive. So, we've only been together about a year and a half, we are working now to find that balance. I think what we've found works for us more is activities such as biking, hiking, parties, museums, as far as our sex life is, it's at this point very infrequent, but I am definitely a serial monogamist. – Margo 65 Lesbian

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I'm actually, right now, a little bit of an anomaly just because I kind of felt like I needed a break. I'm going through a divorce. I'd tried to still keep sexual things happening through the summer and fall but you know, things got a little muddled. So, um, I actually haven't had sex with another person in three months, but that's a little bit of an anomaly. Um, outside of that it honestly depends on being involved with a very supportive partner. Um, I'd like to have sex every other day. With a non-supportive partner, I avoid sexual intimacy where possible. – Lex 30  
Pansexual

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What difficulties have you had in finding sexual partners that share your sexual desires? – Principle Investigator

Um, I'd say on a scale of like, you know, one being like really easy and 10 really hard, maybe a four or five. Normally if a guy went to have sex with a trans woman, he's already a little kinky. So, it works about 50%, roughly, maybe less. And then at the time when I presented as male, I did definitely have a hard time even finding a sexual partner. My hormones were different, and my body developed different. I had boobs and I was shaped like a pear. So, not that many gay men want to have sex with the guy who looks mostly like a girl, other than a couple who enjoy that. It was difficult. Um, and I know just presenting as female, I felt very empowered and I found my confidence and I think that has helps me. I think [sex] is fairly important, but not the most important. There's been times with me and my husband where one of us will cum and the other one won't. I don't know, it's fine cause we're really happy with getting that person off. – Pearl 28  
Bisexual

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## Sex with Self

If you don't mind me asking, when it comes to yourself, does masturbation come from a place more of desire, or more of like a physical body maintenance thing? – Principle Investigator

Kind of body maintenance thing? Yeah, much more to go to sleep or to like relieve stress, but with a partner, it's very desired filled. – Caitie 22  
Bisexual

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I guess it can be both. It depends on the time and I guess the practice, like normally if I'm using my vibrator, um, that's more of like a pleasure thing. Um, but other times like I'll just have to "knock myself out" to fall asleep. You know what I mean? – Prim 24  
Pan/Ace

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I'm a single mom, so shower time is my quiet time. – Bjorn 42  
Pansexual

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Okay, if we're talking about myself, the desire usually is there, I could engage in that probably four or five times a week if, I wanted to. Um, because my sex drive

is just really high. Um, So, there's not a lot of thought to be put in that to be quite honest with you. I was watching a show the other night on Netflix on orgasms. It was one of those little snippet documentaries and I thought, 'Seriously, there's a show on this?' And it was so interesting, and I think what I've found kind of relieving, there were several women on that are younger than me who participate in masturbation several times a week, and they just kind of do it as a release, as an energizer. And I thought, Oh, that's good. That's good to know. – Margo 65 Lesbian

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If I'm with myself, it's more of a maintenance thing, just kind of something to do. – Pearl 28 Bisexual

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I'd rather masturbate now, then form a new relationship. Cause, it's kind of hard to, it's impossible. It is impossible finding a person that will accept both. So, I don't bother. – Alex 60 Dysphoric Sexuality

Yeah. Okay. If you don't mind me asking, when it comes to masturbation, does that sometimes come from a place of desire or is that more of like the body maintenance type thing or both?

Good question. Um, I guess it's body maintenance because it's like an urge. I succumb to their urge quickly, get rid of it, until next month cause it's like a monthly thing. – Alex 60 Dysphoric Sexuality

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Okay. With myself, um, probably at least every other day. Um, and that's been like that for a while. – Jill 30 Pansexual

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Okay, if you don't mind me asking, what about with yourself? – Principle Investigator

Honestly, not at all hardly. I never did growing up either. Like, I just don't feel the need to anymore because of how often I do engage [with my partner]. Like I don't feel the desire anymore, it's not like I'm in a mood and don't have anything to satisfy, you know (laughter). Just because I'm a lot more involved now. I never really got involved like that with myself. – Jenn 20 Bisexual

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What's the level of your desire when you think about sex? – Principle Investigator

Um, I might think about it more and make impulsive decisions either by myself or with my wife. I mean if it gets to be too much, I'll just excuse myself and go masturbate or stuff like that. Especially if consent isn't given. My wife isn't in the mood all the time, so that's definitely important in this house. The level of desire, I think it varies depending on the thoughts I'm having. Generally, it's pretty manageable. I can go onto something else, but if it does get to be too much, either

my wife and I will have sex, or I'll engage in masturbation. – Dennis 21 Pansexual

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Even though I don't experience a lot of sexual attraction to people immediately, I do still have like a sex drive and I guess I'll masturbate a few times a week, that's not like an issue. Yeah, with other people it's pretty infrequent, I guess. – Jake 20 Asexual

If you don't mind me asking, when it comes to masturbation, does that come from sexual drive or is that more of personal maintenance? – Principle Investigator

Personal maintenance for sure, like 100%. I like very rarely think, 'oh I have to do this!' I'm just like, I need a stress reliever or I'm lonely or something like it's just personal maintenance and very rarely comes from like the sex drive is the origin. – Jake 20 Asexual

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Okay. [Sex] with myself, uh, usually three times a week. – Lex 30 Pansexual

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When it comes to yourself or masturbation, does that usually come from a place of desire or is it more of like body maintenance thing? – Principle Investigator

More of a maintenance or like a board thing. Yeah, it's just kinda something to do when I'm not quite sleepy enough. – Pearl 28 Bisexual

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### *Empowerments*

#### **Acceptance of Self**

I've had major consequences in the church, as far as finding a job and stuff and just getting ordained. In the Episcopal church, I don't know if you know this or not, but you go through this huge process where you're evaluated locally in a small group, and then your director of the church and this small group have to write up all these things, and it was a six month evaluation, and then you go to a psychiatrist, and you'd go to a big committee of the church leaders of the whole diocese; which in Colorado is the whole state. And then you see if you pass, and if you pass, the Bishop recommends what school to go to or a couple that you can check out. And then you go to that school for three years. And during that process you get evaluated all the time and you have two more opportunities to make this happen. And since I was in school when this revelation happened [self-identifying as queer], there were other gay people in the seminary, so the seminary itself was not a concern, but the diocese of Colorado dropped me totally from the process. So, then I was like a free agent and had to find another diocese that would pick me up. And that was accepting of queer people. The diocese of Chicago did pick me up because I was quite active in the seminary. So, the bishop knew me from that, and they picked me up and I had to go through the process all over again. So even though I finished seminary, I had another four years to go before I could be

ordained, which meant basically a whole committee, a whole other weekend of evaluation, a whole other psychiatric exam, you know. It's much harder to find a job in the church [when you're openly queer]. We had to consciously make that decision in the church because there were other seminarians that did not "come out" to their Bishop and were in a [queer] relationship but went through the process and got ordained before they 'came out.' Because they knew that they would take the chance, like I did, to be dropped from the seminary. Not all churches, some say they're accepting, but they don't want the director to be gay you know, 'you can come, but we don't want you in leadership.' – Robin 66  
Lesbian

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I think for me, a big part of what turns me on is talking about sex. Like, I love to talk with my partners about what we're both interested in or what we can do together or what one or the other one of us likes and we can accommodate for that or make it happen. So, I think that is a way that I feel supported by my partners. Just keep having that active communication, that is very attractive to me and a big turn on just talking about that stuff with your partners. I always tried to [reserve] a space of acceptance and understanding. And like part of my work as a pro-Dom is to create that space. Whether it's in session or if I'm facilitating workshops or doing education around [BDSM]. So, I always try to reflect the kind of reception or empathy or compassion or understanding for my own sexual desires that I would want others to do for me. So, I feel like most of my partners, that's something that I talk about with them and we're intentional about that space we create. – Leaf 27 Pansexual

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I think it's been hard for me to find a partner. I actually discovered my queer gender identity before my sexual attraction piece. Well, I feel like I always knew in the back of my head, like I'm probably gay and queer and all of that, but I mean it wasn't as accessible to me. And once I started exploring my gender more, it became more obvious. Like, 'Oh, I would really like to be with people who are not straight men.' But I've only had one girlfriend and that was in the past like six months, and I don't know. It's just been really nerve wracking. I had dreadlocks for several years, that was problematic and I'm really glad to have cut them off now. I had long hair for over 10 years before that, and it has always been curly ever since I was in third grade, like ringlets you know. By the time I graduated high school, it was like down to my waist and I was very attached to my hair. Um, I sometimes would use it to cover cleavage and stuff like that. I put the dreadlocks in because I was afraid of cutting my hair. And I always knew like, 'when I'm done with dreadlocks, I'm going to shave my head.' There was no way I would brush all those out, you know. So, I finally did shave my head at Pride for a donation. Wow it was amazing, um, and it was just so eye opening, very liberating, you know, to be like, I don't have to be this weighed down version of myself, if that makes sense. I don't know. I love having short hair now. I feel like it's really just helped me explore more of my identity. – Prim 24 Pan/Ace

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I don't know. I mean the queer things like recent for me, but I was going to do it (identify as queer) no matter what I think. It was actually like the one thing that I felt was mine. Like I didn't have to, I knew who I was in that environment. And very strongly, I know that's like the one place in my life where I found it by myself. I was into it way before I knew anybody who was into it. It was something I found alone. And so, yeah, I don't think outside support really affects it that much. And um, I think with being queer, I feel uneasy in certain public spaces sometimes, like showing affection towards my partner. But I don't think it's necessarily because I've ever experienced direct discrimination. There's just a vibe in the air or I'm judging other people, like certain groups of people, certain people in certain parts of the country, you know, that we traveled through. – Jill 30 Pansexual

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### Coming Out to Others

I went to middle school and high school in Oklahoma. Um, and I was luckily in Oklahoma City, which is the most liberal you're going to get in Oklahoma most accepting too. Um, so I came out in the eighth grade. Yeah. I came out in the eighth grade and I was the first person in my school to come out, and at first it wasn't a big deal. And then about, I, I don't even remember why it started with like, some like middle school drama started and my sexuality was used against me as like a weapon almost. It was, it wasn't a big deal until I did something bad and then it was “this is bad, and you are bad because you are queer.” Like, yeah, it became a bad thing once they decided they didn't like me. – Caitie 22 Bisexual

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Well, my family, aside from my mom, doesn't know about my sexuality. My grandfather learned that I was living with my partner before marriage and he told me that I needed Jesus. He told me I need to come to church. So, my family doesn't know. – Ariel 25 Bisexual

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Because of being part of the church, my [current] spouse and I feel like part of our calling is to normalize I guess, and to explain to people what queer is. So, we get a lot of questions and sometimes a lot of very personal questions. So that's good information for that person to be more inclusive in the future. The elders came around. Our one daughter's father worked with my father and so they were very close. And so, I think that was another kind of an edge in coming out and divorcing [my ex-husband]. – Robin 66 Lesbian

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My family is actually very open. I think that both of my parents are actually a little bit queer. But they're in like a hetero marriage. Um, and they've always been like, if you're ever gay, it's totally fine. They love and accept you; you know? But I almost feel like that was almost too much pressure for me growing up. So now it's really weird. This is absolutely a privilege thing, but I have not really come out to them about being gay. I have come out to them about being nonbinary

because that's something that [they're] unfamiliar with, but I'll just be like, 'Oh yeah, I'm dating a woman.' And without actually coming out and being like, 'Oh, mom, dad, like I'm BI, I'm Polly,' you know, it might be a good idea to sit down and have that conversation with them eventually. But I kind of like the shock factor of like 'you said, you'd always accept me' and now I'm just going to like spring it on you. Um, yeah, just being afraid or not willing to explore that part of me, I guess. Yeah. – Prim 24 Pan/Ace

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I was raised very religiously. Homosexuality is a sin. It is a choice. So now looking back, it's sort of hard to remember what I thought at the time, but I remember attraction from very early in my childhood that I didn't act on until I came out. I was sexually active with men because I was seeking attention and physical touch. But pretty much as soon as it was intimate and physical, I knew it wasn't what I actually wanted. And I wasn't attracted to [men]. That didn't make sense to me and I didn't have the vocabulary or understanding of my feelings. – Victoria 28 Lesbian

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Yeah, a lot of my family doesn't know about my sexuality. Because of that, I don't want them to view me differently and they definitely wouldn't see me the same way. Yeah, so I feel like I have to suppress that part, in certain situations. Mostly, I'm really open [with friends]. Like all of my friends are supportive of me. In the general community, it's not like I'll openly announce it (sexual orientation), but if someone asks me or it comes up in conversation, I'll just be like this is who I am, you know. – Jenn 20 Bisexual

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I first came out to my parents when I was like 13, so I was freshman in high school. Or 14, and it went really badly. They actually managed to convince me that my sexual attraction towards girls was a result of what they thought was somebody else sexually harassing me. Which was not the case, but they managed to twist that around because they were so uncomfortable with my sexuality. So, I actually managed to convince myself that I was straight for like five years until I started college. Then I came to college and I was like, oh shit (laughter). So, yeah that was definitely a roller coaster for sure, and then you know ever since coming out again and as a queer person, you're constantly coming out or deciding whether or not to come out in different situations and with different people every other day, and there's always different reactions that you have to be aware of and prepared for I guess. I'm very open to experiences in all types of people and I think who I allow myself to recognize, who I'm attracted to has changed so drastically since I started the coming out process, which is continuous (laughter). I came out to my parents for the second time a month ago. And, it didn't go terribly, like it wasn't great, but it wasn't terrible, and I don't live with them, and I'm not financially supported by them, so there's nothing they can really do. I still call them on the phone and talk to them since coming out, and for the most part it's been kind of nice. – Janis 19 Demisexual

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## Coming Out to Self

So, it's been just kind of a weird. Even when I was clearly feeling desire in high school I was always with my cis-female friends. So, even when I was acting on that desire, I was still kind of blind to myself that it wasn't you know? I was like, "this is for when I need to practice with my future male partners" and it was not, definitely not. So, it's kind of weird. Like the more I think about my identity as like a queer person and like what that means to me, the more I realize like a lot of things I haven't fully been able to... I haven't really fleshed out the differences, I think, in what I practice and what I desire. I also sometimes think that I... I don't consider this fully queer, so sometimes I think about being in consensual non-monogamous relationships. Which I don't think, I'm not saying that's like queer, but I think from what I've experienced it's (non-monogamy) more prevalent in the queer community than in the straight community sometimes. And um, the partner that I'm with now definitely very monogamous and I respect that and so that's another way that my practices and desires might not have fully linked up. Also, I think I could possibly hate non-monogamy cause it sounds like a lot of a scheduling nightmare to me. I definitely had queer desires as a child and I kind of, as a child I was totally like not aware of gender identities outside male and female, and I'd be like 'oh this guy is hot and this girl is really cool and pretty I like her outfit and her hair and I want to be her,' and all this stuff, and so for a lot of times I just kind of masked it, or attempted to mask it myself. And honestly, I think from my heart and realizing my sexual desires and even though I wouldn't outwardly admit it to other people but having relations with the same sex made me realize I wasn't straight. – Elsa 24 Bisexual

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I feel like my whole life, I've always been on the ace spectrum, the asexuality spectrum. I feel like I'm pretty demisexual if I had to put a label to it as well. I don't really experience attraction to people until I get to know them more and I feel like people will see people all the time and just kind of be like, 'oh they're hot' or whatever. They feel like they're sexually attracted to them, that just doesn't happen with me, I can see people and feel like a romantic attraction I think, so that's a little bit different. And then, since getting to college, I don't know if it's partially because I wasn't in a relationship, and I so I wasn't just focused on the one person I have to be attracted to, I started to noticed slowly that I was also attracted to um, women and other like femme presenting people I guess. That was sort of new, I was like 'okay'. I couldn't really figure it out, it just started to become a pattern of saying, 'okay, well I guess I'm kind of bisexual and I can be attracted to more than one gender. – Jake 20 Asexual

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I think I realized that I was lesbian, or gay, when I was probably in junior high and at that time there wasn't, it wasn't as open as it is now. So, I just assumed that it was a fluke. It was, uh, it was something that would pass. Did the same thing in high school, dated men or boys, got married. So, yeah, for a lot of years it was

definitely repressed. It was something that my struggle was internal, didn't talk to anyone about it, at all. – Margo 65 Lesbian

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All of the romantic and or sexual partners that I've had, not all of them, the few I consider important in the past few years have been incredibly supportive of me in finding my own identity, in [my] coming out process. All of them have been further along in the coming out process than I have. [They've] been openly queer and comfortable with all of that, more sexually experienced, but they have all been incredibly supportive in my own journey and allowing me to process these feelings that I have, and allowing me to be in the driver's seat and be comfortable with what I was doing. But also, this is such a turbulent time in life for queer people, I think. A lot of us didn't come out to ourselves or the world till college. A lot of us are still in that process of coming out and figuring out our identities and that makes it tough for any kind of relationship. I think it makes it extra complicated for sexual relationships. – Janis 19 Demisexual

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### **Encouragement from Others**

My partner is extremely open to sexual desires and talking about them and acting them out what's a fantasy versus what I would actually want. And being able to talk about fantasies versus what I would actually want. Um, I feel like he's very supportive. I think it's been really good, constantly checking in for consent is a big one for me and he's been really, really good about that. Um, yeah, I feel supported in almost every way I'd say. – Caitie 22 Bisexual

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I think [my wife] listens to and knows what I enjoy. So, for some people sex once a month is enough. And some people, sex every day is not enough. And a continuum. I know people who, if they never had sex, it would be fine. They just don't have that much sexual desire. I think my sexual desires more than my partners. I think that there are times where, uh, she would be fine to not have sex, but she makes the time for me, to satisfy me, and then she's says, 'I'm fine, just doing that.' 'You don't have to do anything in return.' I'm just, 'This is satisfying to me right now to do this for you,' you know. Um, so yeah, I think that that's a great support to me. I feel pretty well supported by family. [Our] grandsons are pretty good. We have grandsons and they're 17 and 19 now and they will bring their girlfriends around. – Robin 66 Lesbian

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Right now, I have three roommates who are amazing. They all use my preferred name. They all knew my girlfriend and they were like the first ones to really hop on board and like fully accept you for who you are. I am currently not out in a lot of facets of my life, at school and work I am. I am trying to use preferred name, which is just my initials. I feel overall supported by my family because I know that they're very loving and accepting, but like my dad is in the medical career and he's very much like, "I don't understand being non-binary like that just has no

biological sense in my mind.” Even though newer research has shown its valid. – Prim 24 Pan/Ace

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I absolutely feel supported. [My partner] is very different personality wise, and so a lot of things that I am not fully aware I desire in my life, she encourages. Like, ‘I can see you care about this and you’ve thought about it a lot.’ So, she’s encouraging me to experience something I didn’t even realize I should pursue. She just brings a lot to my attention and encourages. She has a lot more resources to offer than I do, so she available and able to give me like a loan when I wanted to start tattooing again. If I verbalize thing that are important to me, she is very intentional about keeping that in mind and honoring it in every aspect. – Victoria 28 Lesbian

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There's just an open dialogue. We have from the beginning been pretty open about talking about whether things change. You know, we sometimes have our relationship open, sometimes it's closed, sometimes we're looking for people together, sometimes it's separately. So, I feel supported that like I could say one day like, ‘Hey, I'm thinking of finding someone to go out with.’ Like, ‘is that okay?’ And you know, we could have a discussion about that. I feel very safe doing that. Um, and in the same way, I feel very safe saying like, ‘Hey, like I was watching videos of people fisting the other day and I'd like to try that,’ and she'd be like, ‘Okay, cool, let's try it,’ you know. Or she'd say, ‘Hey, that's not for me, but if you really want to do that, maybe we can find you someone who want to do that with you.’ Um, so yeah, feel pretty supported. I don't feel limited at all. – Jill 30 Pansexual

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All the partners I’ve been with have been respectful of me, and what I am saying during all parts of whatever interaction we are having. My partner now, what we both really like about each other that we’re both honest, and we both are open-minded. So, I feel really supported, like I can talk about anything; anything I feel, and he’ll just listen and won’t take offense or try to put in his two cents. He’ll just listen and understand me, then it’s a conversation. I feel very supported in that. I’m just very comfortable. – Jenn 20 Bisexual

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I just found the queer community back in August. So, for me, it's a complete night and day. Back when I was a preacher's wife, I was supposed to be able to go to church and feel a sense of community, and a sense of belonging, and a sense of love. And I never got that. When I started hanging out in the queer community, I got that. Like every person that I talked to, I'm like, ‘yeah, I'm afraid to be in big groups because I have social anxiety and I've been through this and I've been through that.’ Everyone understands, they’ve been through it too. They've been through the violated consent. They've been through the trauma as a child. They've been through the trauma as an adult. They've been through everything or at least similar things. And they can sympathize if they can't empathize. And therefore, I

feel more of a sense of acceptance for the core of who I am. I could be having a horrific day, or I can have a really bad date, and I can go hang out with this big group of people and everybody totally gets it. And I don't even have to say anything. I just have to be like, 'I'm having a bad day,' and you get hugs and you get laughter and you get smiles and you get, 'Hey, I'm glad you made it out today even though you're having a bad day. Let's, let's have a drink together.' – Bjorn 42  
Pansexual

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I feel very much supported by family. My parents, my mother's not with us, she died three years ago, but they've been very supportive. I didn't come out until I was, uh 25, 26. At that time my daughter was only two when I divorced my husband. And of course, your initial thought is, 'Oh my God, they're going to take my child.' No, they were very supportive all along. And when things change in my relationships, the same support has been there. Friends are incredible, straight friends, I've never had any difficulty with anyone in that regard. And in the lesbian community, the gay community here [in my town] is great. – Margo 65  
Lesbian

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With friends, I'd say the most consistent support comes from other queer friends. They're very affirming. From folks who are not queer, um, they make an effort. They don't always get it right. But I appreciate any effort that is put forward. In terms of family, I'm not really happy with where that's at right now. My parents, uh, just a lot of mixed signals. I mean, I asked for a cologne for Christmas and they did get it, but they already gave it to me because they didn't want me to open it in front of other family members, and they do not use my correct pronouns or my preferred name. I feel like the people in [my community] are actually pretty cool. We've got a great LGBT center here. Uh, there are trans support groups available to me. So, I feel relatively supported. – Lex 30  
Pansexual

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[My partner] will do things for me that he knows that I like that he's not necessarily into. Um, which obviously makes me feel supported, you know, anything that I would want, I just have to talk to him about it. He's always been really good and usually he wants to try out those things too. Um, yeah. cause before I even got engaged, my parents were very, 'no boys over.' And so, like I ended up having to go to these people's houses or like a car or whatever people do. But now that I'm in a serious relationship, it's okay. You know, even my mom has walked in on me and my husband having sex and it wasn't as awkward as I thought it was gonna be, you know. But once there is that love factor, it didn't matter. – Pearl 28  
Bisexual

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## *Barriers*

### **Discrimination or Violence**

Yeah, I would say so. I would also say that for me personally, it actually was more explicit when I moved to [Colorado], than ever in my life before cause I've never lived in a city that small. So, the two places I live before really were [in Texas] and so far in [Colorado]. Like a bunch of students in the time that I have been on or connected to my college campus, like being openly attacked for their sexuality or gender and then the institution not naming that as a hate crime. Like those kinds of things are very blatant discrimination to me around sexual identity or practices and like not experiences I ever had before I moved to Colorado, but definitely like to some degree there has been those experiences throughout my lifetime. – Leaf 27 Pansexual

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So, I recently broke up with my girlfriend and one of the reasons we broke up is because she had a very hard time respecting my gender identity. It seemed like the only time she could use my correct pronouns, which are, they/them, is when I was the butt of a joke. Um, and I'm very understanding of it's a process. You know, I am going through that with my family right now. Um, and they're trying and they're learning, and they'll ask me questions and things like that, but it just constantly felt like they were excuses for her. And none of it really made sense to me. So that was really hard. Just feeling a lack of respect. And then one of my more recent partners, that was just like a quick little hookup thing. We finished [having sex] and he noticed my armpit hair, which is very long and grown out right now. Sometimes I trim it, but not recently. Um, and he was like, 'Oh my God. Like, that's disgusting.' Like, 'I feel like I'm gay now.' Yeah. It's just really hard to navigate hookup culture as a queer person. Honestly, there is a lot of trauma and sleeping with cis people as a queer person. For me. – Prim 24 Pan/Ace

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I have tried to be lesbian and that turned out to be horrifying. As soon as she found out I had both [sexes], I was kicked to the curb. So, I hid the other female part of me, got married to a woman and because I still felt lesbianish to other women. My siblings told my ex what I was. They freaked massively, after having two kids. So, I was basically sterile. I had to go through artificial insemination for the kids to be born. But uh, yeah, they found out and threw me to the curb. [They] had me arrested too, put me in prison. Yeah. They were a police officer so, discrimination, very, very heavy. Yeah. Family, outcast completely. Mom wanted me to be a boy. Steroids, I had 200 milligrams at age 12. Every two years after that, exactly, every two years they increased it by 200 milligrams. So, by the time I was 18, I had a thousand milligrams, anger issues, zits galore. Yeah. So, time I turned 19. I had my first period, then I divorce my mom. I said, 'You lied to me. You altered me. You changed me. You've made me into something I was never meant to be.' So, I could never forgive her. – Alex 60 Dysphoric Sexuality

I apologize that happened. I appreciate you sharing. – Principle Investigator

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I know that you can't ask or aren't gonna ask any trauma-based information. For me, my sexuality is 100% trauma based. But I'm very self-aware. I'm very knowledgeable in the, 'Oh, you were triggered so now you want this,' or 'This is what you're fantasizing about because this is what happened to you yesterday.' So, I think that down the road a lot of research needs to be done about trauma-based sexuality, but that's why I'm in school for psychology. – Bjorn 42 Pansexual

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But um target of discrimination, yes. I have experienced pretty direct violence on multiple occasions. The one that stands out in my mind the most was in a grocery store in June or July (2019). A man approached my girlfriend and I and shoved her into the aisle of the grocery store. And [this] was in public and there were a lot of people. He was angry and was screaming, saying hateful things. Other than us just walking and holding hands, there is never a reason to shove somebody and yell at them in public but like obviously he didn't pick out anyone else in the grocery store to do that to. I have experienced a lot of discrimination in aggressive speech, slurs and what-not, which I would say I experience weekly, in the workplace sometimes and bars, public places. People aren't censored, they can say whatever they want. It happens to me. – Victoria 28 Lesbian

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## Objectification

What difficulties have you had finding sexual partners that share your sexual desires? – Principle Investigator

Pretty big difficulty. I think I also have some internalized issues with the kink community and some weariness I think especially for, I don't want to speak for all bisexual or queer women, but I think especially on like FetLife or going into clubs and announcing your bisexual instead of queer gives other people, mostly straight men, a different impression. So, I think I definitely have some reservations about the labels. I'm cognizant of how other people are viewing the labels that I put on myself. At least a lot of the kink community around that I've been in. I haven't been in specifically queer kink communities yet, so I think that might be interesting. But especially the ones that I've been in, I think a lot of it revolves around how dominant men view women. Even if there is a dominant woman, there's a big like performance value that I'm not a big fan of. So, I think it has been hard finding dominant kinky women who don't want to perform for straight men or that's not their main choice, if that makes sense. Not having, or liking what men want, or what men want to see be the main ideal. – Caitie 22 Bisexual

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I just started working on a farm and it's a lot of just cis heterosexual dudes who, you know, there's like a lot of shop talk and whatever that I'm supposed to put up with, but they're, you know, and that's the kind of environment where normally, I think in the past when I first came out I was like, Oh, I want to kind of stay away

from that. But even that, you know, everyone there is very accepting and there, I think it's more getting back to that like inquisitive ness. Like, you know, they ask certain things, but it's like, I don't think that it's meant to be aggressive or harmful any in any way. They're really, they really just don't know. And they, you know, have never met a lesbian before, you know. So, I feel mostly supported by community. There's the odd like interaction with a guy at a bar. It was like, 'Oh, you guys are really hot, you know,' but that's like few and far between. – Jill 30 Pansexual

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Let's see. I've definitely had sex with more cis men than any other demographic, and I feel like sex with cis men is very much just like, 'got to get that nut,' you know? (laughter) I'm sure it's not like that with everyone. You know, 'Not all men,' sorry. (laughter) Um, but in my experience, that's been the majority of it. Maybe it's just the people that I have found myself with or I don't make my own desires known or something like that. Like I'm catering to them (cis men) too much or something. Um, I don't know. – Prim 24 Pan/Ace

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## Repression

I feel like there's a lot of assumptions that I'm going to eventually end up with a man. I feel that most strongly with my parents. I think they think of the purple hair, the way that I dress, it's all going to be a phase and they're starting to realize that it might not be. But it's been a slow progress. Um, and I think they can sometimes lump my queerness in with all the other things that they think are like young adult experimental things. Which I know they're not internally, but that can definitely feel invalidating and kind of isolating. I'm much more comfortable bringing men home to be introduced or even like to my roommates just to be like, 'this is a guy that I'm sleeping with,' versus like, 'this is a girl that I'm sleeping with.' I think it absolutely attributes to me being more comfortable approaching men when I'm out with my friends because they would rather see me with a man because it means that I'm not attracted to them I think, or they don't want to see that as a possibility. And I'm not attracted to straight women at all. But I think there's definitely that like lingering quiet homophobia. I think it's more of like a bias that's hard to talk about and come by. But there's definitely, if I'm looking feminine at the bar, "we're there to pick up dudes" and the assumption that like even if there is a girl there, I probably shouldn't go home with her is definitely there. – Caitie 22 Bisexual

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Repressed, definitely. Um, God cause I grew up on just a tiny area on a small farm with uptight Christian people and lived with my grandparents for a while. Just because I didn't believe in God, they told me I was going to hell. Um, so I've always watched lesbian porn. When I was younger, it didn't occur to me to even I think about my sexuality. I mean, because my mom was very conservative, I just never thought about it. And so when I got to high school, um, it was my senior year and I was a student teacher in my choir class, there was this girl that, um,

was really straightforward and that she liked me and I knew that I liked her and she was totally my type. So, I couldn't, I wouldn't have thought about it because even though I knew that I liked her, what was I going to do? Like I couldn't do anything. And at the time the people in my school knew me and I just, I didn't want issues. It was my senior year and plus at home, if my parents were to find out, or her mom, what would she do? What would she think? Because prior to me going into sociology, [my mom] was really, really strict and you know, now she supports so many things, but it wasn't like that when I was in high school and I wasn't allowed to be anything. And even though the people in the choir and theater department were able to be open, it's like good for them. Like, I'm glad that they can, but I wasn't going to have that kind of support at home. And even though I knew my friends would support me because they were involved in the same things I was involved in; I still didn't feel like I could. – Ariel 25 Bisexual

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I think most of my sexual desires come from like a deep partnership and intimacy. Um, but most of the sexual interactions I have are very, like fleeting and superficial. If that makes sense. – Prim 24 Pan/Ace

Sure. Um, can you speak to why you might think that is? – Principle Investigator

Um, I think it's been hard for me to find a partner. I actually discovered my queer gender identity before my sexual attraction piece. Well, I feel like I always knew in the back of my head, like I'm probably gay and queer and all of that, but it wasn't as accessible to me. And once I started exploring my gender more, it became more obvious. Like, 'Oh, I would really like to be with people who are not straight men.' But I've only had one girlfriend and that was like in the past like six months and I don't know, it's just been really nerve wracking. We actually broke up not that long ago. Maybe repressed myself. Like I have repressed my own sexual desires. Because my family is actually very open. I think that both of my parents are actually a little bit queer. But they're in like a hetero marriage and they've always been like, 'if you're ever gay, like it's totally fine.' They love and accept you. But I feel like that was almost too much pressure for me growing up. So now it's really weird. – Prim 24 Pan/Ace

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Recently I got married to a gay guy and told him right up front what I was. He was like, 'I can handle that.' And we were living in central Colorado, and we bought this house and northern Colorado. The day we closed on the house, was the day he died. I stopped looking, completely I shut down. After going through all the other shit. – Alex 60 Dysphoric Sexuality

I'm sorry. I appreciate you sharing. – Principle Investigator

Okay. So that's repression to the nth degree. There's no way for a hermaphrodite on this planet to be accepted. I've been thrown to the curb way too many times. If I were born back in the Indian days, I would have been a shaman. I would have been idolized, but here... – Alex 60 Dysphoric Sexuality

Well, thank you. I appreciate you. Um, if you don't mind me asking, um, have you ever had the opportunity to meet up with or become familiar with other hermaphrodites? – Principle Investigator

I do not want to be mixed up with them. I don't know. I don't know why I don't want to, because, I guess I don't want to hear the horror stories they have. Cause if it's anything like mine, I don't want to hear, I got enough on my own. – Alex 60  
Dysphoric Sexuality

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Repressed, I have definitely felt. I wasn't fully truly aware of my sexuality until I was 26 and I had been sexually active for a whole decade. So. Definitely repressed during that time (1st decade of sexual activity). Once I sort of accepted that part of myself it kind of all became clearer to me. I was out of the closet to everyone and myself. So, I haven't felt really repressed since then and I am 28. I was raised very religiously. "Homosexuality is a sin." It is a choice. So now looking back, it sort of hard to remember what I thought at the time, but I remember attraction from very early in my childhood that I didn't act on until I came out. I was sexually active with men because I was seeking attention and physical touch. But pretty much as soon as it was intimate and physical, I knew it wasn't what I actually wanted. And I wasn't attracted to it. That didn't make sense to me and I didn't have the vocabulary or understanding of my feelings. So, I sort of repressed it myself and was definitely not encouraged to experiment in any way. And mainly what I was raised on was abstinence only, like period, period, period! "If you're sexually active you are married, in a heterosexual relationship that monogamous, only within marriage, only with one person, only after marriage." So, everything that I was experiencing sexually was already outside of that realm, but it felt acceptable, as far as me as a person being attracted to a man. It felt like it was what I was supposed to do. – Victoria 28 Lesbian

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Physically I haven't started, um, having sexual practice with my wife. So mainly it's a lot of like masturbation and stuff like that. However, I do have a lot of thoughts with my wife. They just haven't come into practice because I'm awkward. – Dennis 21 Pansexual

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I grew up super conservative Christian before finding myself. I call it my past life. I was a preacher's wife, so everything was suppressed. It was missionary position. It was you don't talk about sex. My body didn't belong to me. My body belonged to my husband, um, because my body belonged to God, not to myself. So, it's because you don't even talk about it, you don't have the option to discover yourself. You're made to feel guilty, and you're made to feel like you're a sinner and you're going to hell if you even think sexual thoughts, let alone masturbate or talk to somebody about desires or feelings or thoughts that you're having. I still find today in what I call the "vanilla world," the non-queer world and the non BDSM world, I still find that a lot of people are very uncomfortable with just simply talking about sex. Whether it's queer sex or straight sex or anything.

They're just very uncomfortable talking about it. They don't know how to ask for things like, 'Hey, you know, I had this thought pattern, I'm willing to try this.' Or you know, 'I saw this, this place.' Um, people just, they shy away from it. And I think a lot of it has to do with that religious repression that the majority of people like me grow up in. – Bjorn 42 Pansexual

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These days are repressed, no. Uh, but that's changed a lot over the course of the past decade. I didn't really start experimenting with sex until maybe I was 21 or 22, which is a little late. Because I grew up in a fairly religious household and that sort of thing was discouraged. I actually went to college thinking that I would, uh, be celibate, but I'm quite happy that I broke through that. – Lex 30 Pansexual

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I feel like my experiences with sexual desire would be completely different if it didn't have to be so scary and secretive. If I could hold hands with a partner while walking down the streets of [my city], like I don't even know what that would feel like, but it would change things significantly. I don't know. Like, I don't even know what it would be like to be in a queer relationship and not have that level of being scared or being nervous to show PDA, or talk about them in front of other people that I'm not out to. – Janis 19 Demisexual

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### *Queer Defined*

#### **(Anti) Identity Label**

Seeing that you answered "yes," you are a queer person, what does "being" a queer person mean to you? – Principle Investigator

To me personally. Um, I think it, for me, a lot of it is just existing outside of what is consider or expected to be like normal. And I don't like using the word "normal." I don't think that's the best word to use. But I think being queer, I guess for me it's a big part of, it's the community. It's finding. Like the found family I consider very important to it. I consider the people, I think I identify with the community more than I identify with any other label, if that makes sense. I call myself a queer person, but I think the acceptance and the family aspect that I find with queer people is what like when I think of the word queer or LGBT, that's what it means to me. – Caitie 22 Bisexual

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It means I'm primarily sexually attracted to someone of the same sex. When [my spouse] and I made a commitment to each other, we said that we would not be in the closet. The nuances of labels are still decided upon in most every public situation, but primarily we thought, "how will this person take it if I hold hands with," We were constantly living our life like that and it was tiresome. As far as politically kind of when, when you say that, I think, does that mean that I should march and every gay pride parade or something? And, and yes, I have, in my clergy collar, because I thought that's a really strong statement. Holding the hands

of my spouse, is more a religious calling, um, acceptable in God's eyes. – Robin 66 Lesbian

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Yeah. [Queer] means a lot of things to me. I think it's like somewhat of an identity and cultural thing in terms of reflecting my own identity in the spaces I want to occupy. But I think it's also a political and a social thing in terms of like where I spend my time or energy or money or support and things like that. So, I think it can manifest in a lot of different ways. Um, in terms of my own personal identity and experiences and attitudes and behaviors, but also just how I interact with the world is also a part of what being queer means to me. So, yeah, just like thinking about structures and systems in different ways than they may have otherwise been presented to me. – Leaf 27 Pansexual

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I personally love the umbrella of queer, um, because I feel like it can capture so many different identities within like the LGBTQIA+ community, you know? Um, so if you're not wanting to describe specifically your identity to every single person that you come across, it's very easy to just be like, "Oh, I'm queer." And they're like, Oh, you know, and if they're curious, they can ask more questions about it, you know, but if not, they're like, "Oh," um, yes, I know that I did used to be a slur. Um, and I think that the reclamation is kind of powerful. Um, and for me, being queer refers to both my gender and my sexual identity. – Prim 24 Pan/Ace

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Queer to me is um, sort of the term I've gathered along the way of being an umbrella, and I fell under the umbrella of the LGBTQIA+. I am not sure always where I fall. It's a little bit fluid. So, queer is a safe term for me as far as it covers where I'm at everyday all the time. Typically, I'm attracted to women but it's fluid. But, I'm under that umbrella in my own definition. – Victoria 28 Lesbian

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Well it's something that I've recently been identifying with. I was straight for almost my whole life up until now. I'm 30 now and when I was 26, I was dating a cis man and I just started thinking about, "why," like why I was having a lot of feelings for other women and just kind of curious. So, I guess queer for me is a term that is flexible for me. It's really whatever I want it to be, um, that can be applied towards my sexuality, but also how I present my gender. It really to me, gives you the freedom to be who you want to be, and love who you want to love, and have sex with who you want to have sex with. – Jill 30 Pansexual

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I think queer, I originally identified as heterosexual, and then I identified as bisexual and I didn't really know all of the differences. Like there's differences between pansexual and bisexual that I don't fully understand, and I think they are super personal. So, for me queer is kind of a catch all to where I don't feel like I have to fully explain if I am bi or pan because I still kind of don't know. So, basically for me being queer is just kind of a catch all for all the sexual and/or gender like, I don't fully know what it means to me... So, I don't think I have a specific answer to that. – Elsa 24 Bisexual

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I think that it means that you're just part of a community that doesn't adhere to specifically heterosexual relationships, either sexual, romantic or both. – Dennis 21 Pansexual

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Well I would say the baseline definition of being queer is not being straight (laughter). Um, so I'm definitely not straight. I don't really see myself fitting into one sexual identity or another, and its more comfortable to just say I'm queer. I don't really feel like explaining myself to people most of the time. – Janis 19 Demisexual

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## Sexual Orientation

Describe for me the type or types of people that you are attracted to. – PI

I would say that I am 90% attracted to femme queers, cis-females, femme presenting and non-binary folks that are a little more fluid. I would say my partner is typically pretty um, I don't know. To me it's like an abstract thing just the way you dress, like clothing doesn't make you masculine or feminine to me. But [my girlfriend] would be described as butch, wears boy clothes all the time. But to me she looks very feminine. She's a woman, she presents herself in a very femme way. I am attracted to female bodies. I think that doesn't necessarily mean cis gendered though. I think that's my full answer right now. – Victoria 28 Lesbian

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Okay. Seeing that you answered yes to the queer person question on your demographic's questionnaire, what does "being" a queer person mean to you? – PI

Uh, well it's something that I've recently been identifying with. Um, I was straight for almost my whole life up until now. Um, I'm 30 now and when I was 26, I was, um, dating a cis man and, I just started thinking about, you know, "why," like why I was having a lot of feelings for other women and just kind of curious. So, I guess queer for me is a term that is flexible for me. It's really whatever I want it to be, um, that can be applied towards my sexual sexuality, but also how I present my gender. It really to me, gives you the freedom to be who you want to be, and love who you want to love, and have sex with, who you want to have sex with. Uh, usually, well these days it's 99% CIS women. Um, usually like more masculine presenting I guess, or um, some trans men in the past. Um, I like, I guess getting back to that kink factor, I like that dominant personality, someone who takes control. – Jill 30 Pansexual

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Yeah, I feel like my whole life, I've always been on the ace spectrum, the asexuality spectrum. I feel like I'm pretty demisexual if I had to put a label to it as well. I don't really experience attraction to people until I get to know them more and I feel like people will see people all the time and just kind of be like, 'oh they're hot' or whatever. They feel like they're sexually attracted to them, that

just doesn't happen with me, I can see people and feel like a romantic attraction I think, so that's a little bit different. But yeah, it's difficult for me, and like I still have a sex drive, I still sometimes have a desire for stuff like that just, it doesn't come out as specific attraction to people usually until I get to know them more, and get to feel comfortable around them and all of that. I identified as um, I'm assigned male at birth, and I've only come to terms with being non-binary in the past like year and a half. So, before that when I was in high school, I pretty much just identified as being gay which didn't ever really feel right. I don't know why, I was just like 'maybe it's just internalized homophobia,' and I realize now that I'm not gay or even a man, so there you go. I sort of identified as that for a long time and I really found myself, it was hard to navigate because I experienced sexual attraction to people so infrequently that it was sort of hard to tell, as far as I knew I was really only attracted to men. I was in a relationship with a man for over two years, at the end of high school, coming to the end of college, and that's how I sort of identified. And then, since getting to college, I don't know if it's partially because I wasn't in a relationship, and I so I wasn't just focused on the one person, I started to noticed slowly that I was also attracted to um, women and other femme presenting people I guess. That was sort of new, I was like 'okay'. I couldn't really figure it out, it just started to become a pattern of saying, 'okay, well I guess I'm kind of bisexual and I can be attracted to more than one gender.' I don't know if you have another question later about romantic attraction but I think romantically, I think I have more of a preference for men and masculine people, and I think that's why since I had always experienced that my whole life, I thought that maybe that's what I felt towards men. Which is why I thought I was gay. But now, I still have the capacity for that for more than one gender, and it's certainly opened up more for women since then. I think in general I have a little bit more of a preference towards men and masculine aligned people. Definitely not exclusively at all. – Jake 20 Asexual

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