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Perceived Sexual Intent: Power, Relationship Status, and Gender

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Perceived Sexual Intent: Power, Relationship Status, and Gender

by

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Dedication

To Cadence and Mora,

There you are, knocking politely (this time) before barreling through my office door. Mora asked me to take a day off, and Cadence had another cute picture for me. Perhaps one day you will read this thing I spent so much time writing while you learned to walk and talk, and you will find that I have dedicated it to you. By then, you will most likely have heard all of this before. Know that I believe every word of it, and I genuinely think it is worthwhile advice. Reading it here might help you remember and understand it (and maybe even me) better.

Some people, probably most, will tell you that love is, or should be, selfless. That is not true. Love is selfish - maybe the most selfish - and that is a good thing. To love means to value intensely. People who do not value themselves face great difficulty when it comes to valuing anything at all. So they are prone to waiver in what or whom they value and to what degree. This means that their "love" will also easily wax and wane. How can a person who believes love is selfless say "I love you" and truly mean it? How can a person who is not rationally self-interested intensely value others?

Many who say love should be selfless will also tell you love means making sacrifices. This results from the way many people are somewhat thoughtless & aimless, failing to live intentionally, and often doing their best to ignore reality, along with its many constraints and opportunities. As a result, many such people tend to confuse or

conflate 'sacrifice' with any instance of choosing one thing over another. I choose you over other things because I value you much more than other things. That is not the same as making a sacrifice. I gain a profoundly personal, incredibly selfish joy simply from your existence. There is nothing selfless or sacrificial about the way I feel toward you and care for you. You are of great value to me, and things I do to benefit you bring reality a bit more into accordance with what I value. For that reason, I want to use this as an opportunity to tell you a few simple things that I think will help you immensely (but also anyone else, incidentally).

First, *love yourself*. That is to say, value yourself intensely. Be selfish, and never let anyone shame you for it. Set aside the distorted, negative connotation often heaped upon the concept of selfishness. Selfishness, or self-interest if that term sits better, means a concern for one's own state, well-being, and overall success (not to be confused with mere whimsy, fleeting excitement, nor momentary comfort per se, although those things have a rightful place). To be abundantly clear, I am not offering you a license to do as you please regardless of how it impacts others. Rather, this is a reminder that you are an end in yourself, not a means to the ends or welfare of someone else. Therefore, live for your own sake, and respect that others will, and should, do the same. *Never* sacrifice yourself to others, and *never* expect others to sacrifice themselves to you. You might wonder "but what if it is a mutual sacrifice - I for them, them for me?" That scenario might be even worse, since the net outcome is everyone giving up things they value and all parties suffering. That seems perilously prone to mutual misery, and I caution that such situations are breeding grounds for eventual resentment.

Instead, be something you love. Your self-esteem will be attractive to others who see in you things they also value. Likewise, you will be attracted to people who embody things you value, and their self-esteem (or lack of it) can signal whether they share your values. Then, your relationships can be ones of mutual benefit rather than mutual sacrifice. In my experience, what I have learned from other people, and even in my study of sociology, I find that it is wholly possible for people to develop mutually beneficial relationships and to engage in exchanges where every party involved gets something they value more than what they give in return. Those are the relationships you want to cultivate. You have to choose, but you need not sacrifice.

Second, a metaphor I find useful. Know that the gate to Hell opens wide. To enter Heaven, on the other hand, one steps through a very narrow gate. Do not resent this fact. These gates are not barriers in the slightest. Each welcomes all who would enter, but they were built to accommodate likely human behavior. The path to Heaven is a long, challenging one, and most travelers are easily deterred. Furthermore, those who walk it invite others, but never force them to come along. The path to Hell is spacious, paved with good intentions, requires little effort to walk, and there are many who will beg, if not demand, that you join them there. Chance, of course, always plays a role, but that role is much smaller than people want to believe. Also, many people refuse to choose a path at all, which is to implicitly choose to flow like water along the path of least resistance to the lowest possible point.

Do not fall prey to any of these traps. You can minimize the influence of chance in your life; you are not the victim of circumstance, no matter how bad things might seem

or how good things seem for someone else (envy is a frightful, destructive monster). Never let anyone force your path; those who try see you as means and not as an end. Avoid flowing easily to a low place. Choose. Be intentional. Want little, but want something carefully and thoughtfully selected. Then, go out and get what you want. Relentlessly. Keep asking; there will be answers. Keep seeking; you will find. Keep knocking; doors will open.

To Teresa,

Thank you for being with me through this long process and through so much more (past, present, and future). As you point out from time to time, sometimes I say very little. Occasional brevity aside, I am generally an open book, but you are, without doubt, the only person to ever read me cover to cover, liner notes and all. There are a few things I want to say to you, and they are brief. They come easily as I write this, but I mean them as sincerely as anything I have ever conveyed to anyone.

I love you. I love you more than anything else. Please, love yourself as much as I love you. Love yourself as selfishly as you love me. I want you now and forever.

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... a flood wiping out my neighborhood, home invasions, funding hiccups, my first child, taking a great position with the South Carolina Revenue and Fiscal Affairs Office Data Integration and Analysis Division, my second child, caring for elderly/ailing family members, and a global pandemic later - this thing is finally finished.

Abstract

Does lacking power cause people to think potential partners are less interested in engaging with them sexually? Do men and women perceive the interests of potential sex partners differently? Does the amount of sexual intent perceived by people who are in a romantic relationship differ from that of singles? Power has been shown to impact perceptions in other contexts, and the way people rate the attractiveness of potential mates is shown to differ depending upon their own relationship status. Similarly, gender differences are a central theme in discussions of sex related perceptions, preferences, and behaviors. In this study, I utilize an experimental design to determine whether power causes differences in perceived sexual intent. I also test hypotheses about how relationship status and gender relate to differences in perceived sexual intent.

Using Bayesian model averaging techniques, I analyze data obtained from 538 research subjects recruited using the Prolific online worker platform. Subjects were randomly assigned to treatment conditions, and a standard semantic priming procedure was used to experimentally manipulate low/high power. Results provide strong support for the hypothesis that high power individuals perceive more sexual intent from potential partners. Strong support against the existence of any difference in perceived sexual intent being attributable to the gender of subjects is also found. However, I find that the gender of potential partners is related to the amount of sexual intent perceived by subjects. The evidence also supports the absence of any relationship status effect.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Do people who lack power perceive the sexual intentions of others differently than do the powerful? Does a person's current relationship status influence the degree to which they believe that someone (other than their current relationship partner) is interested in having sex with them? In this dissertation I seek to better understand variance in the degree to which individuals perceive sexual intent from potential sex partners.¹ Of the plethora of influences that might shape a person's perception of someone else's sexual intentions toward them, I am concerned with variation stemming from individual differences in social power and romantic relationship status. Additionally, I examine whether/how gender is related to differences in how people perceive others' sexual intent. Understanding the implications of social power is of particular interest, and the study is designed with that emphasis in mind. I utilize experimental methods to determine the causal effect of social power on the way individuals perceive the sexual intentions of others.

In the course of the discussion that follows, I will use several terms that have somewhat different meanings/connotations in other contexts and/or have applications that extend beyond the boundaries I wish to impose at present. Here, *sexual intent* refers

¹In reference to a focal actor, *potential sex partner* refers here to any other individual who is compatible with that actor's self-stated sexual partnering preferences in terms of sex/gender. As an example, when referring to a self-identified heterosexual female/woman, for the purposes of this research any male/man is considered to be a potential sex partner.

specifically to a person's subjective interest in pursuing some type of sexual activity with another person. In reference to a focal actor, *potential sex partner* refers to any other individual who is compatible with that actor's self-stated sexual partnering preferences as regards the gender of individuals with whom they desire to engage in sex. This means that when referring to a woman who self-identifies as being sexually attracted to men, any man would be a potential sex partner.² Similarly, for men who indicate being sexually attracted to men, *potential sex partner* refers to a man. I am only concerned herein with how much sexual intent a focal actor perceives on the part of a potential sex partner. When I use the term *perceive*, I am not making a distinction between related concepts such as *thinking*, *feeling*, or *believing*. Additionally, the accuracy of perceptions about the sexual intent of others is an interesting topic that is already the center of a body of research that does inform the study at hand.³ However, in this dissertation I address variance in perceptions about the sexual intent of potential sex partners, regardless of whether or not/to what degree those perceptions are accurate.

Social power, or simply *power*,⁴ is conceptualized here as the potential to obtain favorable outcomes in social interactions based on asymmetric dependence on and/or control of valued resources (Emerson 1972; Thibaut & Kelley 1959). I turn specifically to one's subjective *sense of power*, which refers only to the extent to which the individual

²This is a constraining assumption explicitly intended to simplify the scope of this study. Treating all men/women as a potential sex partner for a focal actor is obviously a broad generalization. For example, few women who are attracted to men would view their father as a potential sex partner. Other obvious wrinkles to this constraining assumption come quickly to mind - we might not admit, to ourselves or anyone else, some types of attraction; who/what we are attracted to right now might change by tomorrow; we might find a particular person wholly unattractive, because of their gender or any other trait, yet still be highly motivated to engage with them sexually for some reason.

³See Perceived Sexual Intent section for further discussion.

⁴Throughout, I will use the terms "social power" and "power" interchangeably.

feels they can exert influence over the outcomes and experiences of others (Anderson & Berdahl 2002; Tost, Gino, & Larrick 2012), not their actual ability to do so. *Romantic relationship status*, or *relationship status*,⁵ refers to whether a focal actor is currently in a relationship (i.e. engaged in a romantic relationship with a partner; partnered, dating, engaged, married), or single, (i.e. not currently engaged in a romantic relationship with a partner; not dating, not engaged, not married). Relationship status is known to cause variance in the perceived attractiveness of potential sex partners (Petit & Ford 2015).

Existing research also demonstrates differences across men and women in sex-related perceptions (Al-Shawaf, Lewis, & Buss 2015; Bendixen, Kennair, & Buss 2015; Hall, Xing, & Brooks 2015; Thomas et al. 2019; Tybur & Lieberman 2009), such as men perceiving higher degrees of sexual intent from others than do women (Bendixen 2014; Kunstman & Maner 2011; Perilloux, Easton, & Buss 2012; Perilloux & Kurzban 2015). Differences between men and women have also been noted in sex-related preferences and tendencies such as reported frequency of sexual thoughts, desire, arousal, and sex drive (Baumeister, Catenese, & Vohs 2001; Chivers et al. 2004; Lippa 2009), and in experiencing sexual regret (Bendixen et al. 2017; Galperin et al. 2013; Kennair et al. 2018). I posit that differences in power, relationship status, and gender are related to

⁵There are innumerable types of relationships in which people engage. As used here, “romantic relationship” refers to mutually consensual, physically intimate personal relationships between individuals who presumably have some emotional and/or material interest in maintaining said relationship. Examples include dating pairs, married couples, and similar socially recognized categories of romantic partnership. This is not intended to exclude, for example, relationships between partners in an arranged marriage or between individuals engaged in a type of relationship sometimes referred to as a “friends with benefits” relationship. Rather, I would contend that those relationships are, in terms of emotional commitment and attachment between partners as well as social expectations from outside parties, less intense forms of romantic relationships. Romantic relationship status is conceived of here as a dichotomy between partnered individuals and single individuals. In reality, romantic relationship status is often not so clearly delimited, and one could readily offer an argument for a wide spectrum of relationship statuses that vary relative to one another along a number of conceptual axes (e.g. sexual exclusivity and expected duration, to name a few).

variation in the degree of sexual intent perceived from potential sex partners. I extend existing research and theory addressing the impacts of power and relationship status on perception and social cognition to explain variation in sexual intent perceptions. Also, I investigate whether/how one's power and relationship status interact with one another and their gender to shape the way the person perceives the sexual intentions of potential sex partners.

Power is known to have profound effects on a wide variety of interpersonal perceptions and processes (Galinsky et al. 2006; Goodwin et al. 2000; Keltner, Gruenfeld, & Anderson 2003; Simpson & Borch 2005; Simpson, Markovsky, & Steketee 2011b; Smith & Trope 2006; Weick & Guinote 2008, 2010; Weick, Guinote, & Wilkinson 2011) and affects sex-related perceptions and behaviors, specifically (Bargh et al. 1995; Kunstman & Maner 2011; Maner, Kaschak, & Jones 2010; Pryor & Stoller 1994). In light of these known effects and an understanding of the pervasiveness of power dynamics within various social interactions, it is important to understand whether and how power influences perceived sexual intent. Sociological researchers in the group processes tradition have long studied power as it pertains to various types of decision making processes, justice perceptions, organizations, bargaining, and related areas. That body of research does not typically address sexual behavior or sex-related perceptions specifically, despite the fact that one of Emerson's classic examples of the exchange process is romantic and sexual exchange (Emerson 1962).

Some research in the exchange tradition analyzes overall romantic relationship satisfaction, as well as sexual satisfaction. Those topics are usually addressed as they

occur within the context of ongoing dating or marital relationships (Hughes & Snell 1990; Huston 1973; Sprecher 1998, 2001). Relationship status has also been cited by sociologists and other researchers as being an important influence on perceptions and behaviors (Kanter 1968; Kelley 1983; Rusbult 1983; Rusbult & Buunk 1993; Simpson, Gangestad, & Lerma 1990). I expect power and relationship status differences lead to differences in the degree of sexual intent people perceive from potential sex partners. Thus power and relationship status would play a role in things like the development of (or failure to develop) sexual and/or romantic relationships and the likelihood of specific scenarios leading to sexual advances (whether wanted or unwanted). I build upon existing lines of research by broadening our understanding of the way power is implicated in sexual intent perceptions and by examining whether power affects the perceptions of men and women differently. In doing so, this dissertation contributes to our understanding of the general influence of power on perceptions, processing impacting perceptions of potential sex partners, partnership formation processes, and known gender variance in sexual intent perceptions.

To test the hypothesized relationship of power to sexual intent perceptions, I employ an essay writing procedure to experimentally manipulate subjects' personal sense of power. By varying the parameters of the writing task, subjects are primed to experience a sense of low or high social power. I analyze the extent to which people perceive sexual intent from potential sex partners using the Sexual Intent Scale (Harnish, Bridges, & Rottschaefer 2014). My expectation is that greater power leads to attributing greater degrees of sexual intent to potential sex partners, with this effect of power

operating similarly for men and women. Further, I anticipate that partnered individuals will perceive lower degrees of sexual intent from potential sex partners than will singles, though there is reason to believe this relationship effect is less pronounced for partnered individuals with a high sense of power.

Organization of the Discussion

In subsequent chapters, I expand the discussion above, providing a detailed account of the specific hypotheses proposed, the research and theory upon which they are based, the data and methods I use to test them, as well as the results of my analyses and their implications. The dissertation is structured as follows. In Chapter 2 I address background information that motivates the study, including relevant theoretical and empirical scholarship related to relationship status, gender, and power as they relate to the topic of perceived sexual intent. I introduce my 6 hypotheses about sexual intent perceptions in Chapter 2. In Chapter 3, I explain the method of data collection, the design of my experimental procedures, and the measures used. I also include in Chapter 3 a discussion of the Bayesian model averaging methods deployed to create and evaluate the model of perceived sexual intent that is used for inferential analyses.

Chapters 4 and 5 cover the descriptive and inferential analyses, respectively. In Chapter 4 the sample is analyzed and described at length. I carry out some analyses to assess data quality, such as checking the operation of the experimental manipulation before closing out Chapter 4. I begin Chapter 5 with a description of the outcomes on the Sexual Intent Scale used to measure sexual intent perceptions, and then proceed to a

discussion of variable selection, model comparison, and model averaging. The remainder of Chapter 5 tests each of my 6 hypotheses using the results of the inferential analyses.

I conclude the dissertation with Chapter 6, which begins with a discussion of my results. The 6 hypotheses are again taken in turn, with an eye toward how the results of the study update our understanding of the relationships that are critical to each hypothesis. Chapter 6 continues with a discussion of the implications of the study as it pertains to our understanding of variance in sexual intent perceptions and, in particular, why/how power-induced variance in perceived sexual intent is related to social interactions more broadly. I also touch upon the limitations of the study and some directions for future study, followed by brief closing remarks.

CHAPTER 2: Background and Theory

Power

Beliefs about power and the exercise of power figure prominently into cultural values and moral expectations, as well as attitudes within personal relationships (Fiske 1992; Howard et al. 1986; Keltner et al. 2003; Vasquez et al. 2001). Scholars have long discussed power as a basic human motivation and have sought to identify the sources and determinants of power (Hobbes 1968; Nietzsche 1968). Existing research addresses the relationships between, for example, power and individual characteristics such as authoritarianism (Adorno et al. 1950) and motivational style (Winter 1973); power and interpersonal processes such as control (Pfeffer 1992; Pfeffer & Salancik 1978), dependence, and social exchange (Blau 1964; Emerson 1976; Thibaut & Kelley 1959); and between power and sociostructural variables such as relative expertise and legitimate authority (French & Raven 1959). Power is viewed as a basic and pervasive force in social relationships, playing a dynamic role in perception and behavior (Emerson 1962; Fiske 1993b; Keltner et al. 2003; Kemper 1991; Moskowitz 1994; Thibaut & Kelley 1959).

Some depict power as a social motive, focusing on an actor's intentions or actions (Winter 1988), as in treatments of power and dominance. Others emphasize a target's response to a focal actor, as in treatments of power as influence (Keltner et al. 2003).

Emerson (1962) convincingly argued that the statement “X has power” is vacant unless we also specify “over whom” (Emerson 1962), underscoring the notion that power is a property of social interactions. In other words, power is not a property of individuals but of relationships or sets of relationships. Emerson went on to define power in terms of dependence, stating that the power of actor A over actor B is the amount of resistance on the part of B which can be potentially overcome by A. Power so defined will not be observable in every interactive episode between A and B, although it does exist as potential. Furthermore, this line of scholarship demonstrates that two actors can each have an equal amount of power over one another. Importantly, this leads to the realization that while such a balancing of power might prevent the emergence of a pattern of dominance, it does not render power inoperative in either/both directions - from A to B and/or from B to A (Emerson 1962).

Similarly, power can be defined as an actor’s relative capacity to modify others’ states by providing/withholding resources or administering punishments (Emerson 1962; Fiske 1993a; Rusbult et al. 1991; Thibaut & Kelley 1959; Weber 1947). The capacity to control and/or influence others figures prominently in most conceptualizations of power (Blau 1964; Copeland 1994; Emerson 1962; French & Raven 1959; Galinsky, Gruenfeld, & Magee 2003; Weber 1947). Power viewed in this way is commonly referred to as *social power* to acknowledge that power is derived via the actor’s relationships with others (Fiske 1993a; Galinsky et al. 2003). The terms “power” and “social power” are used synonymously here.

A person's subjective sense of power refers to the extent to which that individual feels/believes they could control or exert influence over the outcomes and experiences of others (Anderson & Berdahl 2002; Tost et al. 2012), regardless of their actual ability to do so. Presumably, actually possessing power will lead to an elevated personal sense of power, but this is not necessarily the case. Nor is it necessarily the case that individuals who in reality lack power will feel powerless. On average, I expect that actually having power does lead to feeling powerful and actually lacking power leads to feeling less powerful. However, one's sense of power would likely have a more substantial impact on their subsequent perceptions and behaviors than their actual power (e.g., Thomas and Thomas 1928). For this research I adopt the practical option and rely on personal sense of power, rather than actual level of power. It is easier to measure a person's sense of power (by asking) than to measure the actual power they possess in their day-to-day life. The best test of the person's actual power would be found in the exercise thereof or a failed attempt to do so, which will itself be compromised by the tendency for felt lack of power to be associated with inaction.

The popular notion that "power corrupts" may be an overstatement, but it is certainly the case that variations in power affect perception, attitudes, and behaviors. The awareness of power has many social psychological consequences (Fiske 1993a; Galinsky et al. 2003; Keltner et al. 2003; Kipnis 1972), shaping whether, how, and what things are perceived. Moreover, possessing or lacking power in one context can shape individuals' perceptions and behaviors in subsequent interactions that take place in different social situations (Anderson, John, & Keltner 2012), with the effects of power being found to

operate even in situations where power may seem irrelevant (Smith & Bargh 2008). That feeling powerful/powerless in one arena can spread to feeling powerful/powerless in another is particularly important to the research at hand.

One's general sense of power can be impacted by their position within the overall social hierarchy as well as via social interactions in specific settings (e.g., workplace, campus environment, friendship group). Variance in the feeling of power over the decisions, opportunities, resources, and outcomes of others in one area might lead to differences in perceptions of potential sex partners. As such, men and women, who often differ in terms of societal-level social power and status as well as the manner in which they are socialized to adhere to gendered sexual norms and expectations (Klein, et al. 2019; Rudman et al. 2012; Ridgeway & Correll 2004; Ridgeway 2008; Stets 1995; Sprecher 1985), might systematically enter interactions with a different sense of power on average. If power impacts perceptions of sexual intent, then a gender difference in sense of power generally, or sense of power in sexual situations specifically, ought to give way to gender differences in sexual intent perceptions. Those differences in perception could, in turn, contribute to differentiated preferences and behavioral tendencies.

Broadly speaking, having power is thought to activate systems of behavioral approach (Anderson et al. 2012; Keltner et al. 2003). Individuals with power express greater degrees of positive affect and lower degrees of negative affect (Anderson et al. 2012; Keltner et al. 19), show greater sensitivity to rewards and acquiring them, and demonstrate lesser sensitivity to threats, loss, and failure (Croizet & Claire 1998; Zander & Forward 1968). Mating goals are also found to be closely related to systems of

approach (Depue 1995); initiation of courtship, flirtation, and other aspects of mate procurement are associated with and require high degrees of behavioral approach and disinhibition. Because of this relationship with behavioral approach and disinhibition, power might activate mating goals if they are absent, and power's activation of the approach system could spread to mating related goals. This would increase the likelihood that mating goals become salient and are pursued (Kunstman & Maner 2011).

Power also diminishes inhibitions, such that having power loosens the grip of social norms and their regulatory function over the behavior of those who possess it (Galinsky et al. 2003; Keltner et al. 2003; Whitson et al. 2013). This can lead those high in power to view others as an instrumental means toward their ends (Bartky 1990; Gruenfeld et al. 2008) and make the powerful prone to being less attentive to individuals' personal and individuating qualities (Byrne 1971; Frederickson & Roberts 1997; Gruenfeld et al. 2008; Newcomb 1961; Tesser 1988). Power leads individuals to pursue a more assertive approach to interactions, to enjoy higher self-esteem, and to report better physical health and mood (Adler et al. 2000; Anderson et al. 2012; Barkow et al. 1975; Bugental & Cortez 1988; Keltner et al. 2003; Marmot 2004). Some research even indicates that there is a tendency for those in power to take advantage of subordinates (Tangri, Burt, & Johnson 1982), potentially leading to instances of sexual harassment, and that sexual harassment is at times used to maintain a power advantage over others (Bargh et al. 1995; Bohner et al. 1993; Brownmiller 1975; Farley 1978). Additional studies show that mental concepts of power and sex are closely associated; this is

especially apparent with those who are likely to sexually harass others (Bargh et al. 1995; Pryor 1987, 1993; Pryor & Stoller 1994).

Power has been found to induce goal pursuit (Anderson & Galinsky 2006; Galinsky et al. 2003; Gruenfeld et al. 2008) and having power motivates action, leading people to become more goal oriented (Anderson & Galinsky 2006; Galinsky et al. 2003; Gruenfeld et al. 2008; Kunstman & Maner 2011; Maner et al. 2010; Smith & Bargh 2008). Power serves as a social catalyst, focusing people on positive goal relevant cues and giving individuals a green light to take action (Kunstman & Maner 2011). Since goals, like other mental representations, can be made salient via activation of associated concepts, an elevated sense of power should then activate mating goals due to cognitive links between power and sex (Bargh & Chartrand 1999; Chartrand & Bargh 1996; Pryor & Stoller 1994; Zurbriggen 2000). The hypothesized connection between power and mating goals is also consistent with evolutionary theories of mating (Buss & Schmitt 1993; Gangestad 2000; Kenrick 1992), which suggests that powerful individuals have enjoyed relatively high sexual access to potential mates and that as access to a goal increases, so too does an actor's motivation for seeking the goal (Förster & Friedman 2007; Sadalla, Kenrick, & Vershure 1987). Thus experiencing power may cause people to also experience heightened levels of mating motivation (Kunstman & Maner 2011) and to anticipate higher degrees of sexual intent from potential partners.

Bringing these findings together leads me to anticipate that priming subjects to experience high or low power will result in variance in perceived sexual intent. People who feel powerful are more prone to “go for it,” whatever “it” may be, because they are

more attuned to rewards and more prone to actively engage others in search of rewards. Those who have an elevated sense of power will be more likely to sexualize situations and people, be more prone to view people in utilitarian terms, and be more likely to have a positive outlook about the person and the possibility of engaging in sexual exchange with potential partners. Their elevated sense of power should make them less concerned with rejection and failure, which would in turn make potential partners appear to be more receptive. The opposite should be true of those who have a decreased sense of power. Low power individuals are more likely to be on guard against rejection, are less primed to see others in sexual and instrumental terms, and should be, due to having less positive/more negative affect, less likely to believe that others have taken an interest in them.

All else being equal, there is little reason to expect that the anticipated effects of power on perceptions of sexual intent described above should be inherently different for men and women. However, existing gender stratification could result in a difference in the general sense of power for each gender on average. If the effects of power on sexual intent perceptions proposed here do exist, a gender discrepancy in general sense of power could then lead to observed variation across men and women in outcomes shaped by power. As to how power and romantic relationship status might interact to impact sexual intent perceptions, it is worthwhile to consider the social norms surrounding relationships as well as some existing findings regarding the effect of relationship status on perception, which I address in the next section.

Relationship Status

Most people believe that romantic relationship partners, within both dating and marital relationships, should refrain from extradyadic sexual involvement (Sheppard, V.J., Nelson & Andreolimathie 1995; Thornton & Young-DeMarco 2001). Monogamy is thought by most people to be the standard and/or the most favorable type of romantic relationship (Conley et al. 2015, 2019; Grunt-Mejer & Campbell 2015) and is the prevailing pattern of sexual partnering in the vast majority of regions and cultures around the world (Wellings et al. 2006). Sexual partnering relationship forms other than monogamy, such as polyamory and other types of consensual nonmonogamy, are widely stigmatized, while monogamy is broadly viewed more favorably (Conley et al. 2013; Moors et al. 2013). Conley and colleagues (Conley et al. 2013) find that a preference for monogamous relationships is even present within people who are themselves engaged in consensually non-monogamous relationships. They demonstrate what they refer to as the pervasiveness of monogamy beliefs, commenting that the stigma surrounding nonmonogamy and preference for monogamous relationships generalizes across a number of groups including “college students and non-college adults, women and men, all ethnic groups, and among heterosexual, gay/lesbian, and bisexual” research participants (Conley et al 2013, p. 13).

Additionally, the most common partnering arrangement for those involved in polyamorous relationships, a form of consensual nonmonogamy, involves a distinction between one’s primary partner and one or more secondary partners (Balzarini et al. 2019; Veaux, Hardy, & Gill 2014). Research demonstrates that, similar to individuals in

monogamous relationships, individuals in polyamorous relationships engage in more mate retention behaviors and report greater satisfaction with their primary partner than with secondary partners (Mogilski et al. 2017). Individuals in consensually non-monogamous relationships are also found to experience jealousy in a way that is similar to those in monogamous relationships, particularly as related to their primary partner (Mogilski et al. 2017, 2019). Cognitive jealousy, specifically, is reported by individuals in consensually non-monogamous relationships, toward both their primary and secondary partners, more than by monogamous individuals. This suggests that individuals engaged in consensually non-monogamous relationships may spend more time thinking jealous thoughts and rationalizing their feelings of jealousy, though they may experience less distress about these thoughts than do those who practice monogamy (Mogilski et al. 2019).

Regardless of the pervasive normative expectations surrounding monogamy discussed above, extradyadic sexual activity by individuals who are currently engaged in (supposed) monogamous dating or marital relationships is fairly common, particularly for dating relationships (Allen 2006; Luo, Cartun, & Snider 2010; Wiederman 1997; Wiederman & Hurd 1999). Social scientists have long acknowledged that one major threat to the continuation and stability of relationships, of any sort, is the presence of desirable alternative partners (Kelley 1983; Kelley & Thibaut 1978; Leik and Leik 1977; Rusbult 1983; Simpson et al. 1990), and power-dependence theory makes clear the important relationships between dependence on a current exchange partner, outside options, and power (Emerson 1962). Individuals who perceive availability of attractive

alternatives demonstrate lower commitment to maintaining current relationships. Partnered individuals with fewer and less desirable alternatives are more likely to report stronger commitment to a current partner (Rusbult 1980). Theoretically, ignorance of alternative partners, and opportunities to engage with alternative partners, functions as a relationship protective mechanism. This assumption is supported by empirical evidence demonstrating that, relative to single individuals, partnered individuals tend to devalue the attractiveness of alternative sex partners (Johnson & Rusbult 1989).

According to interdependence theory (Kelley & Thibaut 1978) individuals may forgo opportunities for desirable outcomes in order to maintain a current relationship. Relationship partners may develop feelings of obligation which make them tolerant of relationship inequities and cause them to forgo or even derogate alternative partners (Johnson & Rusbult 1989; Rusbult & Buunk 1993). Longitudinal research has demonstrated that perceived quality of alternatives decreases substantially with increased involvement with a current partner. As individuals become more involved with a current partner, they describe alternative partners in increasingly negative terms (Rusbult 1983; Rusbult & Buunk 1993). Within a relationship, conflict can be reduced through diminishing the value of alternatives (Thibaut & Kelley 1959); persons involved in a committed relationship may maintain relationship stability by, consciously or subconsciously, devaluing potential alternative partners (Kanter 1968; Kelley 1983; Leik and Leik 1977; Thibaut & Kelley 1959).

If alternative partners appear less appealing to the partnered individual, their current relationship is protected. In the research mentioned above, an actor's current

relationship status is shown to impact that actor's evaluations of potential sex partners. I extend this alternative partner derogation logic, asking whether relationship status might also impact the degree to which an individual perceives sexual intent from potential sex partners. It stands to reason that if partnered individuals derogate the attractiveness of alternative partners (Lydon, Fitzsimons, & Naidoo 2003; Ritter, Karremans, & Schie 2010; Simpson et al. 1990), they might also be less attentive to, or altogether ignore, the sexual intentions of potential sex partners toward themselves. If so, partnered individuals should be less likely to identify the behaviors of potential sex partners as signs of sexual interest.

Existing research indicates that individuals shield their ongoing relationships from the allure of alternative partners by, for example, paying less attention to physically attractive potential sex partners (Miller 1997; Ritter et al. 2010), having biased recollections of potential partners (Karremans, Dotsch, & Corneille 2011), and by displaying fewer behavioral signs of interest when interacting with alternative partners (Karremans & Verwijmeren 2008). These tendencies each hint at a mechanism whereby involvement in a romantic relationship bestows individuals with what Simpson et al. (1990) refer to as *perceptual blinders*. This mechanism shields partnered individuals from the distracting and tempting lure of alternative sex partners. Hence, I expect that partnered individuals, relative to singles, will perceive lower degrees of sexual intent from potential sex partners, effectively perceiving them as less of an opportunity and thereby protecting the stability of their current relationship. However, an elevated sense of power might diminish the force of these perceptual blinders due to the tendency of

power to lessen the impact of social regulation over the powerful. Thus relationship status should interact with power in such a way that the hypothesized effect of relationship status is smaller for those primed with high power.

Sex and Gender

Researchers deploy a variety of theories to explain variations in sexual intent perceptions, as well as other sex-related attitudes, behaviors, and characteristics. These explanations are sometimes broadly divided into those approaches oriented toward evolutionary/biological considerations and those that focus on socialization/culture (for related discussions see Baumeister & Mendoza 2011; Baumeister & Vohs 2004; Lindgren et al. 2008; Petersen & Hyde, 2011). As regards perceptions of sexual intent, the view that men are more sexually motivated and tend to sexualize situations and people more than do women is common to both of these sets of approaches, though the reasons for their predictions differ. So there is little difference in the implication of either the evolutionary approaches or socialization approaches in terms of the hypotheses made in this research.

The degree to which observed differences in the sexual intent perceptions, as well as other attitudes, behaviors, and characteristics, of men and women arise from biological sex differences or gender and gendered socialization/gendered norms remains a point of discussion in research on sexual behavior and sexuality. As the science of sex, gender, and sexuality has progressed, some consensus has developed that the influence of both biology and cultural/social influences must be explored (Hart et al. 2019; Schilt & Bratter

2015; Westbrook & Saperstein 2015). Current thinking has moved beyond one-sided treatments that address one of these (biology, culture) while disregarding the other set of forces (Wood & Eagly 2013). Scholars have critiqued research methods where sex and gender are wholly conflated, rather than being measured separately and in a more nuanced manner (Hart et al. 2019; Schilt & Bratter 2015; Westbrook & Saperstein 2015). Females overwhelmingly identify as women, and males as men, but within these two sex-gender groups (female-woman and male-man), there is a great deal of variation in characteristics typically associated more closely with either femininity or masculinity.

I have adopted the terminology of gender (*gender, man, transgender, woman*) rather than the terminology of sex (*sex, female, intersex, male*) throughout. This should not be interpreted as disregarding sex (*female, intersex, male*) as a distinct concept and potential causal factor for the outcomes analyzed, nor for preferencing gender explanations above sex or vice versa. I did not identify or sort potential research participants who might be transgender individuals ahead of their participation.⁶ Where these individuals are excluded from analyses, it is in part because of concerns over sample size and reliability of statistical methods when analyzing small numbers of cases.⁷ Since I cannot make valid inferences specifically about transgender individuals due to their small numbers in my data, exclusion is preferable to subsuming them and their

⁶Some of my research subjects self-identified as transgender when asked specifically about their gender identity. Also, some subjects identified their sex at birth as female and indicated their gender as being a man, others who indicate being male selected "woman" as their gender. I address the sex and gender breakdowns of research subjects in subsequent chapters where I describe the data in detail.

⁷There were very few criteria used to prevent participation in the research. That is to say, volunteers were accepted indiscriminately. The methods used to recruit research subjects only sought to restrict inclusion on the basis of age in order to avoid using minors as research subjects. One other caveat is that the Prolific platform used for recruiting subjects sets some minimal requirements for users of its service, such as age and provision of valid contact and payment information.

unique life experiences within conclusions that are overwhelmingly driven by the influence of others.

Sexual Intent Perceptions

Social interactions are complicated, dynamic processes that often entail a degree of ambiguity. This might be especially true of sexually charged interactions, during which individuals communicate interest or lack of interest in pursuing sexual intimacy with one another. Often, people hesitate to reveal their intentions in an overt manner (Fichten et al. 1992; Metts & Spitzberg 1996), choosing to instead hint at their intentions in ways that are open to multiple interpretations (Fichten et al. 1992; Henningsen 2004; Metts & Spitzberg 1996; Perper & Weis 1987). This practice protects against potential embarrassment and rejection while providing individuals with opportunities to explore interest and reciprocity (Henningsen 2004). This ambiguity opens up the possibility of misperception of sexual intent, a situation where one person mistakenly assumes that another person is sexually attracted to and interested in engaging in sex (Abbey, McAuslan, & Ross 1998).

Misperception of sexual intent can lead someone who is desirous of sex to fail to pursue a person who is in fact interested in being a sex partner (e.g. a missed opportunity). Perhaps more perilously, misinterpreting a potential sex partner's intentions can lead to a failure to discontinue pursuit of an uninterested person. While the latter sort of misperception generally will result in an awkward moment of explicit rejection and embarrassment (Byers & Lewis 1988), such errors can also contribute to a

variety of unwanted sexual experiences (Abbey 1987; Abbey et al. 1998; Donat & Bondurant 2003; Haselton 2003; Kowalski 1993; Lindgren et al. 2008; Malamuth & Brown 1994; Shea 1993). A substantial body of research indicates that while men and women both misunderstand and misperceive one another's sexual intentions, men are more likely to perceive sexual intent within interactions than are women. This tendency on the part of men to perceive higher degrees of sexual intent is sometimes referred to as the *oversexualization effect* (Harnish et al. 2014) and has been variously explained via reference to numerous gender differences in socialization and/or evolved biological differences between the sexes.

I am concerned with how people perceive sexual intent in other individuals who align with their own sexual preferences, rather than errors in those perceptions. The oversexualization effect provides an important example of sex-related perceptions and gender differences in those perceptions. While explanations of the oversexualization effect differ in the precise mechanisms they propose (with a noteworthy distinction between evolution focused and socialization focused arguments; see, for example, Lindgren et al. 2008), most have in common a focus on sex/gender difference and make many similar predictions. I will argue that the oversexualization effect might be, at least in part, attributable to the influence of power on perceptions of sexual intent alongside men and women being differentially located in societal hierarchies.

The results of numerous studies indicate that, relative to women, men perceive other people and interactions in a manner that is more sexualized (Abbey 1982; Farris et al. 2008; George et al. 2006; Haselton & Buss 2000; Perilloux et al. 2012; Shea 1993).

Men and women tend to perceive each other's sexual intentions somewhat differently, and researchers have focused considerably on the elevated tendency of men to rate female targets as conveying sexual intent to a greater extent than do women. This is the case both when women rate themselves as well as when women rate the sexual intent of other women. As explored initially in a line of research conducted by Abbey and colleagues, this tendency of men to oversexualize is the case whether female targets are depicted in still photographs (Abbey & Harnish 1995) or in live interactions (Abbey 1982; Abbey, Zawacki, & McAuslan 2000). Other researchers have found these gender differences in perceptions of sexual intent using similar methodologies to those pioneered by Abbey and colleagues as well as when using a variety of other methodologies.

Edmonson and Conger (1995) had observers rate the sexual intentions of targets observed via audiotapes and photographs. Additional replications have involved live interactions in the laboratory that provide further evidence that men perceive more sexual intent in women's behavior than women perceive in their own or other women's behaviors (Saal, Johnson, & Weber 1989; Shea 1993). In studies where participants were asked to rate written descriptions of behaviors that might occur in a date setting, men tend to perceive the behaviors of women as indicative of greater degrees of sexual intention than women reported having when they enacted the behaviors (Haselton & Buss 2000; Willan & Pollard 2003). Evidence garnered utilizing survey methodologies (Haselton 2003) confirms prior findings based on self-reported experiences (Abbey 1987), and indicates that many college students, women in particular, have experienced situations

where their actions were misinterpreted as sexual come-ons. Based on these existing findings, I formulate my initial sexual intent attribution hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1: Gender → Perceived Sexual Intent

Men will perceive greater degrees of sexual intent from a potential sex partner than will women.

In previous studies of sexual intent perceptions, researchers have found that when the sex of the target being perceived is manipulated, behaviors and other characteristics are interpreted more sexually when the target is female (Abbey 1987; Bostwick & DeLucia 1992; Koeppel et al. 1993). In addition to findings that demonstrate that men oversexualize people/situations, and that men and women alike attribute more sexuality to female targets than to male targets (Lindgren et al. 2008), men rating a hypothetical female target are found to provide higher ratings on the measure of perceived sexual intent I will use in this study (the Sexual Intent Scale, discussed further below) than women rating a hypothetical male target (Harnish et al. 2014). I expect to replicate those findings, observing greater degrees of perceived sexual intent amongst men⁸ than women. Hypothesis 1 reflects that expectation.

Alternatively, it is possible that there will be no difference in perceived sexual intent based on gender, or even that the opposite of my hypothesis could be

⁸ It should be noted that I expect most of the ratings in this study to be cross-gender ratings, where an individual is rating a target of the opposite sex. This is because most men are male and heterosexual, and in this study hypothetical targets will be chosen based on each respondent's self-reported sex/gender and sexual preference.

the case (e.g. women perceiving greater degrees of sexual intent from potential sex partner than men). There exists a normative expectation of female sexual restraint, lower levels of sexual enthusiasm, and sexual passivity, while the opposite is expected of males (England et al. 2012). Recognition of these gendered expectations could translate to heterosexual men, on average, rating the sexual intentions of potential sex partners lower than would heterosexual women.

I also explore whether and how power impacts sexual intent perceptions and whether women primed to experience high power perceive greater degrees of sexual intent from potential sex partners than would otherwise be the case. In other words, I expect that priming women with high power will result in their attributing more sexual intent to others in a way that is more typically expected from men. Such a finding would indicate that what has previously been explained as sex and/or gender difference in perceived sexual intent is, at least partially, attributable to similar effects of power on men and women who happen to exist in a social system that is stratified by gender.

Power and Perceived Sexual Intent

One explanation for men attributing more sexual intent to women than women do themselves is that this is reflective of a more general tendency of men to perceive the world overall in more sexualized terms. Although attributing it to different mechanisms, both evolutionary/biological perspectives and gender socialization perspectives agree that men have a general tendency to be more interested in, focused on, and desirous of sex

and that men tend to sexualize people and situations (Lindgren et al. 2008; Petersen & Hyde 2011). Supporting this generalized oversexualization assumption, researchers point out that heterosexual men not only perceive greater degrees of sexual intent from female targets than do women, they also perceive higher degrees of sexual intent from male targets than do women (Abbey 1982; Abbey & Harnish 1995; Abbey & Melby 1986; Abbey et al. 2000).

Whether the oversexualization effect is an issue of heterosexual men over perceiving the sexual intentions of women or simply oversexualizing people in general is not a point of great concern within this study. However, I bring attention to the tendency of men to oversexualize because the hypothesized effects of power on sexual perceptions offers an additional explanation for this effect that does not hinge on sex differences, as is the case with current prominent explanations. Because men are situated higher in a gendered status hierarchy, they may, on average, have an elevated sense of power relative to women. So, due to the tendency of power to evoke sex-related concepts and goals, activate approach tendencies, and free individuals from the inhibiting force of normative expectations, men might tend to sexualize people and situations more readily than women, leading to men attributing more sexual intent to others than do women on average.

Experiencing power has been found to induce goal pursuit and can lead to viewing others in utilitarian terms. Power has also been found to activate mating goals, and researchers have identified implicit associations between sex and power related concepts. People who experience an elevated sense of power may be more likely to view

others in sexualized terms, individuate them less based on personal characteristics and actions, and thus be more likely to interpret their behaviors as indications of sexual intent and interest. Also, possessing power may trigger the approach system, leading those in power to be more enthusiastic and oriented toward positive interaction with others, causing them to project sexual interest onto others. This leads to my second hypothesis:

Hypothesis 2: Power → Perceived Sexual Intent

High power individuals will perceive greater degrees of sexual intent from potential sex partners than will low power individuals.

Men and women are situated at different locations in the gender hierarchy, which might lead to a difference in their baseline sense of power. However, I find little reason to expect that the effect of power on sexual intent perceptions will be inherently different for men and women. This is reflected in my third sexual intent attribution hypothesis:

Hypothesis 3: Power*Gender → Perceived Sexual Intent

The effect of power on perceived sexual intent will be equivalent for men and women.

While my expectation, based on existing theory and research, is that power will impact the sexual intent perceptions of men and women in a similar manner (Hypothesis 3), there are logically possible ways in which the effects of power could differ by gender. One process that could produce gender differentiation in the effects of power pertains to potential reactions to identity threat that might arise from power priming. For example,

the masculine overcompensation thesis holds that men will react to insecurity in their masculinity by engaging in extreme demonstrations of masculinity – such as exaggerated aggression, risk-taking, dominance, control, and/or displays of sexuality/sexual prowess (Kimmel 1996, 2008; Willer et al. 2013).

The basic logic behind the masculine overcompensation thesis – that people will react to identity threats by attempting to cover up their self-perceived deficits relative to that identity – is well-supported and cited in other contexts beyond gender (Willer et al. 2013; Willer, Kuwabara, & Macy 2009). Masculinity theory argues that the stakes for maintaining a normative gender identity are relatively high for men, relative to women, because masculinity is valued above femininity and is very narrowly defined (relative to feminine identities, which are considered to be more fluid/flexible). The standards of masculinity are thought to be so exacting as to be virtually unattainable, causing men to constantly struggle to achieve them (Connell 1995; Connell & Messerschmidt 2005).

Historically based differences in access to opportunities to acquire power and resources are cited as resulting in socialization processes that lead to men acting in a more assertive and powerful fashion than women, even in the absence of explicit power differences. Examples include men initiating speech more frequently in group contexts, speaking longer, interrupting others' speech more frequently, and looking more directly at others while speaking more (Ellyson & Dovidio 1985;). Social expectations dictate that women act in ways that are more communal, helpful, and less domineering than what is expected from men, while men are expected to be more assertive and forceful (Eagly & Karau 2002). These expectations are conveyed as part of socialization processes across

the life course. Women receive greater reinforcement for communal, cooperative, and tolerant behavior and stronger reprisal for agentic, assertive behaviors.

Men, on the other hand, receive more reinforcement for assertive and aggressive behavior but more reprisal for communal behaviors (Eagly & Karau 2002; Ferguson 2000; Kroska et al. 2014). Some researchers suggest that women tend to see themselves as lower in power than do men (Kroska 2002), and both men and women rate female associated identities lower in power than the male associated counterpart identities (Francis & Heise 2006; Langford & Mackinnon 2000). Thus being primed to experience a low sense of power would not likely represent a situation of identity threat for women as it might for some men. In experimental research examining mixed-sex dyads and comparing the effects of high and low power treatments to a neutral control condition, men in the neutral control condition dyads reported a higher sense of power than did women in the neutral condition dyads (Gonzaga, Keltner, & Ward 2008), giving some indication that a baseline difference in the sense of power exists across men and women in mixed-sex groups.

As a result of differences in gender-specific socialization and the expectation that men will adhere more closely to the narrowly defined masculine identity, priming men to experience low power might result in some men enacting extreme demonstrations of their masculinity, whereas a similar reaction would not be expected for women. This is because being in a low power position or mindset could represent a threat to a masculine identity, whereas it would be less incongruent with femininity. If men primed with low power feel that their masculinity is threatened, one possible reaction would be to

hypersexualize situations and others. This could result in imputing higher degrees of sexual intent to potential sex partners.

If masculine overcompensation occurs in this way for a high enough concentration of men primed with low power, the observed effect of low power priming could differ across subgroups of men and between men and women. In that case, some men primed with low power might rate potential sex partners as being more interested (rather than less interested, as in Hypothesis 2) relative to men in the neutral or high power conditions. However, this would only be expected from those men who do in fact feel that their masculine identity is threatened, and the degree to which this would impact the outcomes for men on average is unclear. Willer and colleagues (Willer et al. 2013) gauge perceptions of threat to gender status in their correlational study by directly asking research participants whether social changes threaten the status of men in society. Other existing research suggests that men's perception that the status difference between men and women has declined are linked to overcompensatory behaviors (Dall'Ara & Maass 1999; Maass et al. 2003; Willer et al. 2013).⁹

Other logical possibilities as to how gender could interact with power might focus more on women's sexual intent perceptions. For instance, there is a chance that perceived sexual intent could be differentiated across men and women as the result of fear based responses from women. Because of higher sexual victimization rates for women (Black et al. 2010), women may be more prone to hypersexualize opposite-sex individuals. That is, due to victimization and/or fear of victimization, women might be

⁹I include the gender identity threat measure used by Willer and colleagues in my data collection instrument. See Chapter 3: Data and Methods.

expected to impute greater degrees of sexual intent to men than might otherwise be the case as a form of hypervigilance, effectively “playing it safe” to avoid a false negative in terms of interpreting men’s sexual intentions toward them. This represents a potential main effect of gender/gender socialization, with women being differentially located in society’s status hierarchy relative to men, rather than an effect of power or an interaction between gender and power, per se. In the case of women for whom this tendency is present/of sufficient strength, priming them to experience low power could exacerbate it or make it salient, leading them to assign higher sexual intent ratings to others, particularly men. It is unclear how this would shape the average effect of power on sexual intent ratings for women overall, though.

To reiterate, regardless of the possibilities mentioned above, and based on research finding similar/the same effect of power for men and women on other perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors, I expect that the effects of power on sexual intent perceptions, net of other factors, will be the same for men and women. That would be parallel to, for example, the impacts of power on sexual aggression being found to affect men and women in an identical manner in terms of increasing a tendency toward sexual harassment (Williams, Gruenfeld, & Guillory 2017). A lack of gender difference in the effects of power is also seen in studies of infidelity, where gender does not moderate the effect of power on actual or intended infidelity (Lammers et al. 2011), and in research addressing the impacts of power on response to social comparison information, where the effects of power are not moderated by gender (Johnson & Lammers 2012). Similarly,

power is found to be associated with both greater sexual assertiveness and sexual esteem to the same degree for men and women (Lammers & Stoker 2019).

Relationship Status and Perceived Sexual Intent

Similar to the tendency of partnered individuals to derogate the attractiveness of alternative sex partners (Simpson et al. 1990), I expect to find that the perceptual blinders effect impacts perceptions of sexual intent. This is reflected in my fourth hypothesis:

Hypothesis 4: Relationship Status → Perceived Sexual Intent

Partnered individuals will perceive less sexual intent from potential sex partners than will single individuals.

Believing that a potential sex partner is interested in engaging in sexual activity represents a threat to the stability of one's current relationship. Additionally, social norms pressure individuals who are currently engaged in a romantic relationship into a pattern of monogamy, with extradyadic sexual activity being taboo and likely to result in stigma. Because it would work to maintain relationship stability and help partnered individuals to avoid stigma, I expect there to be a tendency of partnered individuals to overlook or downplay the sexual intentions of potential sex partners. On average, singles might not have as consistent and reliable opportunities for sex with an ongoing partner as those that are clearly available and readily identifiable to partnered individuals. Because of this, and because they are free from the threat of stigma resulting from non-monogamy faced by partnered individuals, I expect single individuals, on average, to be more open

and attentive to the possibility of engaging with potential sex partners. This would be reflected in increased perceptions of sexual intent amongst singles, relative to partnered individuals, as hypothesized above.

Absent other factors, I expect that the theoretical mechanisms motivating Hypothesis 4 would operate in a similar fashion for men and women. However, because of gendered social norms and sexual double standards that restrict women more so than men as regards promiscuous sexual behavior (Bogle 2008; Crawford & Popp 2003; Hamilton & Armstrong 2009; Sprecher, Treger, & Sakaluk 2013), I expect that the effect of relationship status will have a stronger impact on the sexual intent perceptions of women. This is reflected in my fifth sexual intent attribution hypothesis:

Hypothesis 5: Relationship Status*Gender → Sexual Intent Attribution

Relationship status will diminish the degree of sexual intent perceived from a potential sex partner to a greater extent for women than for men.

An additional explanation for why involvement in a romantic relationship might diminish the degree of sexual intent perceived by women more so than men has to do with the tendency of power to diminish inhibition. Because gender stratification could position men to have an elevated sense of power relative to women on average, men might also be less inhibited on average. Thus any tendency of partnered individuals to perceive lesser degrees of sexual intent from potential sex partners that stem from being sexually inhibited by social norms might be less pronounced for men relative to women. This explanation rests on the existence of a moderating effect of power on the effects of

relationship status reflected in Sexual Intent Hypothesis 4. My sixth hypothesis reflects this expected interaction between relationship status and power:

Hypothesis 6: Relationship Status*Power → Sexual Intent Attribution

Partnered individuals primed with low power will perceive lesser degrees of sexual intent than will partnered individuals primed with high power.

CHAPTER 3: Data and Methods

To test the hypotheses outlined in the previous chapter, I conducted an experiment via remotely administered survey. The chief advantage of experimental methods is the ability to manipulate subjects' personal sense of power. The online approach, as compared with conducting the data collection in a laboratory setting, was expected to yield greater response rates and sample sizes while minimizing costs. Conducting an experiment using web technologies does have drawbacks relative to traditional, in-person laboratory experiments. The most relevant drawback in the context of this study relates to the variability in the environments, times of day, and devices used by respondents who complete the data collection instrument. In a laboratory, conditions for all subjects are standardized, eliminating possible confounding factors. To some extent, randomization and averaging across subjects should diminish contamination from differing conditions (e.g. some participants completing the data collection instrument at work versus home). I acknowledge the constraints, but in light of available funding and other practical concerns, the benefits of the online experimental approach far outweigh the drawbacks.

Subject Recruitment and Data Collection

Research subjects were recruited using the Prolific online research platform (Prolific 2021), an online crowdsourcing platform where individuals work for pay.¹⁰ The Prolific platform is similar to other online workforce recruiting platforms, like the widely used Amazon Mechanical Turk platform, but is somewhat more focused on attracting academic researchers and subject pools. Researchers analyzing online recruiting platforms have demonstrated that research samples obtained from these sources are reasonably representative of the general population in the United States (Burhmester et al 2011). Experimental data collected via online platforms have been found to be as valid and reliable as those collected with more traditional methods, such as recruiting college students and mailing paper surveys (Burhmester et al. 2011; Mason & Suri 2012). In particular, online platforms have greater degrees of diversity in their subject pools than found in recruitment pools used frequently by psychologists, sociologists, and economists that are composed largely of college freshmen. Research participants recruited online have been found to be as or more attentive to instructions and experimental research tasks than other research participants (Hauser & Schwarz 2016).

Requests for participants listed on the Prolific platform did not make potential subjects aware of the exact goals or experimental nature of the research. These were obfuscated in order to avoid the possibility of demand characteristics or other threats to

¹⁰The Prolific platform used for recruiting subjects has limited tools for interaction with research participants and data collection. Research participants were routed from the Prolific platform to a separate interface for data collection. The Limesurvey software platform (Limesurvey 2021) was used to administer the actual data collection instrument. That software then conveyed the necessary information back to the Prolific platform for the purposes of reimbursement while storing data pertinent to my analyses in a separate data base.

validity of the data. In particular, subjects were not explicitly told that the research is concerned with the impact of power on perceived attractiveness of potential sex partners, nor were they informed that the research involves an experimental manipulation. Instead, the requests for research subjects asked Prolific workers to respond to a survey about memory, mood, and personality. The recruitment materials disclosed that the survey subjects would be asked to complete did include sensitive material, such as questions about sexual history and similar, and that the data would be used for academic research was made clear prior to beginning participation.

Subjects recruited via the Prolific platform were provided with a link to an online survey that consisted of a set of demographic type questions (age, race, sexual preference, socioeconomic status), sexual history measures, relationship status questions, the experimental treatment, the Sexual Intent Scale, and several other items described in greater detail in subsequent sections. Subjects were given instructions prior to initializing the survey. Due to the sensitive topics discussed in the data collection instrument, upon completing the data collection instrument subjects were provided with information on how to access resources to assist with any emotional distress they might have experienced when recalling potentially negative experiences from their past.¹¹

The analyses presented in this dissertation are conducted using data collected during November 2020. Cases that were missing data on the focal dependent variable for the study (Sexual Intent Scale) were removed. Cases where the subject did not respond to the experimental manipulation or supplied a response that did not address the prompt

¹¹This included weblinks, email addresses, and telephone contact information for several organizations that offer guidance to those who have had negative, potentially traumatic, sexual experiences.

have also been removed. Additionally, a relatively small number of cases failed attention checks or displayed other clear signs of poor effort and/or technical difficulty,¹² and so were discarded. Those removals resulted in a loss of approximately 9% of the workers from Prolific who initiated some type of contact with the data collection instrument.¹³

A total of 658 cases appear in the raw data collected, and ultimately 538 cases remain in my analytic sample after removing cases with various data quality issues. Of the 120 cases omitted from my analyses, 29 were discarded due to having either nonsense responses, responses that did not describe a power situation, or responses that described high power when prompted to recall low power, or vice versa, when completing the experimental manipulation essay writing portion of the data collection instrument (described in detail below). Another 27 cases provided no response to the experimental power manipulation prompt, stated that they could not remember an incident of the type they were asked to recall, or similar. Next, 7 cases were dropped due to non-response on the sexual intent dependent variable. Subsequently, I eliminated 45 cases from the analyses because they were missing data on 1 or more of the variables used in final statistical models of the sexual intent outcome. Following those deletions, there were 12 transgender individuals who were removed from the sample due to the small sample size of that subgroup and inability to make valid comparisons across highly granular

¹²For example, some cases appeared to have incorrectly utilized the backward navigation feature of their web browser, closed their web browser before completing the data collection instrument, or similar.

¹³The quantity here is conservative in the sense that I used an over-cautious calculation to describe the portion of cases that were deleted. Because of the way Prolific presents requests to workers, the user interface, and the software implementation for collecting data, some Prolific workers who initiated contact with the data collection arguably would not be counted as cases at all. For instance, a Prolific worker might have read the request for workers on the Prolific platform and, while looking for more information, clicked on a link that took them to an instruction page. This would have initialized a row in the data base even if the person decided not to proceed with the data collection instrument.

categories of gender. Only men who indicated that they were born male and women who indicated having been born female were retained in the final sample.

The number of cases removed from the sample is not believed to represent a point of concern in terms of data quality and/or validity. 17 of the 120 instances of individual contacts that were eventually dropped from the sample only opened the instrument and had no other interaction with it, providing no response to any items nor reading any of the data collection questions. Many of the other dropped cases similarly had very little interaction with the data collection instrument and/or gave responses which might be viewed as attempts at manipulation of the recruitment platform rather than legitimate non-response or cases of withdrawal from participation.¹⁴ The final analytical sample utilized for most analyses in this dissertation consists of 538 cases having complete data on all variables appearing in the final models that are eventually used for hypothesis testing and other statistical procedures.

Experimental Procedure

The question that most motivates the research presented in this dissertation asks whether differences in power lead to differences in perceived sexual intent. To test the hypotheses

I offer in response to this question, I rely on a recall and writing task to experimentally

¹⁴Because of the degree to which this research addresses sexual behavior, there are a number of questions in the data collection instrument that might be viewed as too personal, sensitive, disturbing, or similarly uncomfortable for some people. It is possible that such questions would lead to patterns of non-response and/or withdrawal from participation. However, this does not explain the 17 specific cases to which I refer as having only opened the data collection instrument and provided no further interaction. Those 17 individuals encountered only an initial greeting message, if anything at all. They might have had a software or connection error that prevented them from even reading the greeting. An additional 4 cases read the initial greeting, but did not proceed further. Another 2 cases failed an attention check item subsequent to the greeting message and had no further interaction. 4 cases responded to the initial attention check item in the correct manner but then had no further interaction with the data collection instrument.

manipulate subjects' sense of power via semantic priming. The experimental manipulation of power, a check of the experimental manipulation, and other aspects of the experimental procedure are discussed below.

Experimental Manipulation of Power

The semantic priming method of manipulating subjects' sense of power that I deploy in this research has been implemented across a range of social psychological and network perception research projects investigating the effects of power on a number of outcomes in various contexts (Anderson & Galinsky 2006; Galinsky et al. 2003; Guinote, Willis, & Martellotta 2010; Simpson, Markovsky, & Steketee 2011a; Simpson et al. 2011b; Weick & Guinote 2008). This procedure has become a standard means of priming subjects' personal sense of power (Simpson et al. 2011b). Priming is the activation of particular cognitions or knowledge structures in a given situation (Bargh, Chen, & Burrows 1996). Primes can be subliminal or supraliminal (Galinsky et al. 2003), and while participants may be aware of supraliminal primes, they are typically unaware of their effects on subsequent behavior (Fiske & Taylor 2008).

The power priming procedure, described in detail below, has generated numerous important insights regarding the effects of power. Using this procedure, subjects primed with high power have been found to take more risks (Anderson & Galinsky 2006), to be more likely to treat interaction partners as a means to an end (Gruenfeld et al. 2008), and to be less likely to spontaneously take the perspective of others (Galinsky et al. 2006). Researchers have also demonstrated that the effects of power priming are not unlike the

effects of manipulating structural power (Galinsky et al. 2003). Following the method used by Galinsky et al. (2003), the power prime writing task used here involves asking subjects to recall and write about an event in their lives during which they variously had power over others or were subject to the power of others. By manipulating the details of the writing task, high and low power conditions are generated.¹⁵ An initial set of instructions for the power prime writing task were presented to subjects as follows:

On the next page you will be asked to recall and think about an event from your past and to write about how that event made you feel in a provided field. After reading the prompt, please continue writing about the event for at least 3 minutes. Write as many things that you can remember about the event, especially how that event made you feel. Continue to the next page when you are ready to read the prompt.

Based on screener questions appearing in the instrument prior to the power prime procedure, subjects were sorted by gender and relationship status. Within gender-relationship status groups (e.g. single women, partnered women, single men, partnered men), subjects were randomly assigned to one of the experimental conditions (low power condition/high power condition). The intent of this stratified randomization procedure was to ensure approximately equal sample sizes across experimental conditions as well as

¹⁵In pilot studies, I used a modified priming task similar to that implemented by Tost and colleagues (Tost et al. 2012) to generate a neutral power condition. Analysis of pilot study data that were collected near the beginning of the 2020 covid-19 pandemic lead me to question the usefulness of the neutral prime essay. In brief, the prime used for the neutral condition asked subjects to describe a time when they made a purchase for themselves. This prime was thought to be neutral with respect to power and affect. However, many of the responses in those pilot data contained descriptions of very negative, likely disempowering, experiences of shopping and making purchases under pandemic lockdown conditions. For this reason and resource constraints, the neutral condition was dropped from the study.

approximately equal proportions of single and partnered men and women within each condition.

After random assignment, subjects were next presented with a prompt instructing them to recall either a situation in which they had power over other people (high power condition) or a situation in which other people had power over them (low power condition). Subjects were asked to write about the details of the recalled situation. The instructions for the low and high power conditions were as follows:

Low Power Condition Prompt

Please recall a particular incident in which another individual or individuals had power over you. By power, we mean a situation in which another individual or individuals controlled your ability to get something you wanted, or were in a position to evaluate you. Using the space provided below, please describe this situation in which another individual or individuals had power over you, what happened, how you felt, etc. Please write about the incident for at least 3 minutes and write as much as you can remember. You will not be able to proceed to the next page until 3 minutes have passed.

High Power Condition Prompt

Please recall a particular incident in which you had power over another individual or individuals. By power, we mean a situation in which you

controlled the ability of another person or persons to get something they wanted, or were in a position to evaluate those individuals. Using the space provided below, please describe this situation in which you had power over another individual or individuals, what happened, how you felt, etc. Please write about the incident for at least 3 minutes and write as much as you can remember. You will not be able to proceed to the next page until 3 minutes have passed.

Both low and high power condition subjects were given three minutes to think and write about the details of the recalled event, how it made them feel, and so on. The software used to administer the data collection instrument did not allow subjects to advance to the next step of the data collection until the allotted time had passed. Making subjects aware of this feature was intended to encourage at least minimal engagement with the writing task. The resulting essays were also assessed for non-response, entry of random characters, or other forms of invalid response.

Manipulation Check

I selected the manipulation check used here directly from published studies in which the authors experimentally investigated the effects of power on some outcome of interest and used the same experimental manipulation used in the present study. The items that make up the experimental manipulation check were positioned in the data collection instrument directly after the items for the main dependent variable. This placement ensures that the manipulation check itself does not have an effect on the dependent outcome (which

would be possible if it appeared prior to the dependent variable item) while also appearing close enough in temporal order that the effect of the experimental manipulation is unlikely to have diminished substantially/completely. Placement of the manipulation check in my data collection mirrors the way this manipulation check is used in published studies. The manipulation check items asked subjects to reflect on the situation they recalled and wrote about during the experimental manipulation and to rate on a 1-7 scale how much they disagree/agree with the following statements:

1. I felt powerful.
2. I felt dominant.
3. I felt powerless.

After reverse coding the third item, the outcomes of these three items are averaged to generate the manipulation check score. Higher values on the manipulation check indicate an elevated sense of power, lower scores indicate lower sense of power, and the average manipulation check score for the high and low power experimental condition groups should vary accordingly.

Measures

I have organized this section into separate parts addressing the focal outcome/main dependent variable, measures of the focal independent variables (power, relationship status, gender), and other measures that are treated together as control variables. The terminology I use for referring to these variables should not be interpreted in the strictest technical sense. For example, while I place relationship status in the focal independent

variables section, in some instances I will discuss results from statistical models that treat relationship status as a dependent variable to determine whether other traits are correlated with relationship status. Overall, though, all variables are categorized with reference to their specific implementation in models of perceived sexual intent.

Dependent Outcome – Perceived Sexual Intent

The focal outcome of this research is the degree to which individuals perceive sexual intent from potential sex partners. To measure perceived sexual intent, I asked subjects to complete the Sexual Intent Scale (SIS). This self-report scale was designed by Harnish and colleagues (Harnish et al. 2014) to measure the tendency of individuals to interpret social situations, contextual cues, and the characteristics/behaviors of others as indications of the person being interested in engaging in sexual interactions. The SIS consists of 35 items addressing multiple aspects of sexual intent perceptions. While the Sexual Intent Scale was developed utilizing samples of college students for construction and validation, it is thought to be generalizable to other groups (Harnish et al. 2014).

Based on gender and sexual preference questions that appear early in the data collection instrument, the appropriate wording was piped into SIS items. The items were thus tailored to each subject's traits such that it always describes the hypothetical individual in items as a person that represents a potential sex partner for the subject. Subjects respond to the SIS by indicating their level of agreement with each of the 35 items on a scale ranging from 1 (never) to 5 (always). The outcomes of all 35 items are averaged to establish the sexual intent score. Higher sexual intent scores are believed to

indicate a greater likelihood of attributing sexual intentions/interests to a person based on interpersonal and situational cues; lower scores indicate a lesser likelihood of attributing sexual intent to a person (Harnish et al. 2014).

The items that make up the SIS scale were situated in the data collection instrument subsequent to a block of randomly ordered items that captured demographic information, sexual and relationship history items, and other characteristics.¹⁶ Following those items, the experimental manipulation appeared. At that point, subjects completed the SIS items, after which they encountered the manipulation check items. The manner in which the SIS was presented was based on the original description of the scale and procedures discussed by Harnish and colleagues (2014). Upon completing the experimental manipulation items, subjects encountered the following instructions:

We are interested in finding out about your understanding of behaviors that convey sexual intent when interacting with others. By “sexual intent” we mean whether or not a person is interested in having sex with someone. When answering the following questions, please keep your own experiences in mind. No two statements are exactly the same, so please consider each statement carefully before answering.

Mirroring the approach of Harnish and colleagues, subjects were presented with the first twenty five items of the SIS, in a random order, and asked to indicate whether they thought each behavior or situation listed either never, rarely, sometimes, usually, or

¹⁶That block of items included things like the Bem Sex Role Inventory, the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale items, sex drive measures, sociosexual orientation items, and number of previous sex partners, along with additional items described in a later section.

always means that the hypothetical person in the scenario is interested in having sex with them. All SIS items were tailored to the individual subject by inserting either “man” or “woman,” “her” or “him” into the question items dependent on the subject’s previous responses regarding their sexual preferences.¹⁷ This means that the hypothetical individual referred to by the SIS items could always be considered a potential sex partner for the subject. For example, a subject who indicated that they are attracted to women would see the item “At a bar, a woman winks at me,” while a subject who indicated that they are attracted to men would see “At a bar, a man winks at me.”¹⁸ Next, subjects met with the remaining 10 SIS items and were asked to respond using the same never-always scale used with the initial 25 SIS items.¹⁹

The overall SIS outcome can be separated into three components,²⁰ referred to as sexual facility, friendship facility, and sexual empathy (Harnish et.al. 2014). I point out the multiple components of the scale here in the interest of clarity, but my focus in this research is exclusively on the composite sexual intent measure (all items of the SIS taken together). The sexual facility dimension focuses on behaviors that could convey sexual attraction. This subscale includes items such as “A [man|woman] asks me to come to his/her apartment late at night to work on a project” and “A [man|woman] I met at a bar asks for my telephone number.” The friendship facility dimension concerns behaviors that

¹⁷I elaborate on items that capture sexual preferences in the control variables section.

¹⁸In the case of subjects who indicated attraction to both men and women, as well as subjects indicating not being sexually attracted to anyone, SIS items were consistently customized based on random assignment to feminine or masculine linguistic elements.

¹⁹The separation of the initial 25 SIS items from the final 10 follows the approach of Harnish and colleagues. The 10 Sexual Empathy component items are slightly different in flavor from the Sexual Facility and Friendship Facility items because they ask the subject to reflect on themselves rather than a hypothetical subject, making this a logical point for splitting the lengthy set of items across multiple pages.

²⁰The scores for each component are the mean of the particular items for that component.

convey sociability and could be perceived as either indicating friendliness or sexual interest. Example items from this subscale include “A [man|woman] tells me [he|she] enjoys talking with me” and “The [man|woman] I’m talking with is open about [his|her] feelings and opinions.” The sexual empathy dimension concerns understanding one’s own or another’s thoughts, feelings, and intention regarding sexual intentions. Items that are part of this subscale include “I know when a [man|woman] is hitting on me” and “I have no difficulty in determining if a [man|woman] is being seductive.”

The 10 items that constitute the friendship facility component of the SIS tend to be associated with lower mean scores than the sexual facility component items. These 10 items are characterized by situations and actions that are thought to be vague relative to those that make up the sexual facility component - vague in the sense that the items depict situations and actions that could be indicative of either friendly interests or sexual interests. People frequently use ambiguous behaviors that hint at sexual interest rather than displaying those interests more explicitly (Henningesen 2004; Metts & Spitzberg 1996; Perper & Weis 1987). This might be viewed as a type of preemptive face-saving measure that allows for downplaying interest as friendly, rather than sexual, when that interest is not reciprocated. The items represented in the friendship facility component serve such a purpose, and they are associated with the initial phase in the trajectory of many relationships, wherein self-disclosure, affection, and companionship develop. The 15 sexual facility component items involve situations and behaviors that are thought to be more explicitly sexual than the friendship component items. The distinction is important in the context of other sexual partnering research because individuals are often reluctant

to directly convey sexual intent to a potential partner (Ficthen et al. 1992; Mettrs & Spitzberg 1996). The sexual empathy component items are representative of one's views about their own ability to identify the sexual intentions of others and confidence in their own ability to do so.

In accordance with Hypothesis 2, I expect power to act on perceptions of sexual intent in such a way that the overall SIS will be positively associated with power. I base this on the results of research showing that elevated power is positively associated with self-esteem and assertiveness, as well as being associated with a decrease in attention to the individuating qualities and behaviors of others. Additionally, a decreased sense of power is related to greater sensitivity to failure and rejection, which could increase one's doubt in their ability to accurately gauge the degree to which others are interested in them as a sexual partner or otherwise. I expect that, net of other factors, the sexual intent construct measured by the SIS will be higher for individuals in the high power treatment condition relative to those in the lower power condition. In accordance with Hypothesis 4, individuals currently in a relationship should have lower scores on the overall SIS measure than those who are single, on average. In accordance with Hypothesis 1, I expect that women will have lower SIS scores on average than will men.

Independent Variables

There are three variables that I treat as independent variables, both in terms of how I refer to them and in how they appear in statistical analyses. These are power, gender, and

relationship status.²¹ Power is the central independent variable in this study. As described above, power is experimentally manipulated, measured dichotomously as low or high power, and subjects have been randomly assigned into either the low or high power treatment condition groups. Since gender and relationship status cannot be experimentally manipulated in the same way as power, I rely on sampling and statistical control methods to test hypotheses about the impacts of relationship status and gender on sexual intent perceptions. Details about the gender and relationship status variables are provided in separate sections below.

Relationship Status

To measure relationship status, subjects were asked to “choose the response that best describes your current romantic relationship status.” Subjects were presented with the options “single (not in a romantic relationship)” and “in a relationship.” For those who indicated that they were in a relationship, subsequent items asked for a greater level of detail about the nature of their relationship. Singles were also asked for additional details about being single and their past relationships, in a parallel fashion to the follow up items displayed to those who indicated being in a relationship.

Subjects self-categorized as being “single” or “in a relationship.” This binary categorization overlooks nuances associated with liminal forms of romantic and sexual

²¹Gender and relationship status could also be conceptualized as blocking factors, particularly in the manner that blocking factors are used in some statistical analyses of variance and blocked experimental designs. I decided that treatment is not adequate for these variables in the contexts of the present study because blocking factors are often treated almost entirely as nuisance factors, or noise, whereas these variables are core concerns here. Also, because of methodological limitations, the cell sizes across the gender-relationship status blocks would not be equal in size. For these and other reasons, I chose to discuss these variables as ‘independent variables.’

relationship types that are not dyadic in nature, as well as other sorts of relationships that some, including the parties involved, would likely term “non-traditional.” The critical distinction, however, is between people who, for whatever reason, see themselves as being in a relationship, regardless of the particulars of the relationship, and people who do not see themselves as such. The distinction between, for example, a polyamorous relationship and a monogamous relationship might be a mediating/moderating factor.²² Other details about the relationships of subjects who identified as being “in a relationship” were collected and are discussed further below. Similarly, subjects who indicated being “single” provided details about whether they had ever been in a relationship along with other details of how they feel about being single.

Gender

I based the sex and gender categorization of research subjects on self-reports obtained using an approach that relies on separate question items to capture sex (including responses of *female*, *intersex*, and *male*) and gender (including responses of *man*, *transgender*, *woman*, and *a gender not listed here*²³) (Bauer et al. 2017; Hart et al. 2019; Tate, Ledbetter, & Youssef 2013). Using self-identifications based on this two-step approach to sex and gender, I dichotomized research subjects into two sex groups (male and female).²⁴ For gender, I retained each of the response options appearing in the data collection instrument as separate categories. There are a relatively small number of

²²I capture some data on this degree of granularity, but given various constraints it is not considered extensively in my final analyses.

²³ For subjects who identified themselves as a gender not listed, an additional, open-ended response item was displayed.

²⁴ While the option was present, no respondents indicated that they were intersex at birth.

individuals present in my sample for whom their sex at birth does not correspond with their gender identification. These individuals are ultimately dropped from most analyses.²⁵

Control Variables

The remaining variables included in this research are treated as control variables in the sense that they might have some relationship to/influence upon the dependent outcome and/or the independent variables in the conceptual model of perceived sexual intent.²⁶

While some these variables are in many ways interesting in their own right, for the purposes of this study variance in the perceived sexual intent outcome that might be attributable to the control variables is viewed as noise. This is because the existence of such correlations might distort my assessment of variance attributable to power, relationship status, and gender. I discuss possible relationships between the control variables and other variables I analyze throughout this dissertation, some in greater detail than others, but largely the control variables are included to support non-spuriousness of any relationships identified between the independent and dependent variables.

Some of the variables in this section could be mediators/moderators of the hypothesized relationships between the independent variables and the dependent variable (e.g. sex drive, relationship satisfaction). Others might relate to variation in perceived sexual intent due to being tied to differences in power and related constructs (e.g.

²⁵Sample size constraints mostly preclude comparisons of individuals whose gender identity does not correspond with their sex at birth to one another and/or individuals in the sample whose gender identity does correspond to their sex at birth..

²⁶See previous discussion of subject recruitment and data collection, as well as discussion of sex and gender distributions in the data found in Chapter 4.

socioeconomic status, self-esteem). For instance, there is a strong theoretical basis to assume that one's sociosexual orientation will have an impact on the degree of sexual intent they perceive from potential sex partners (Perilloux, Easton, & Buss 2012). There are also known patterns of variance in sociosexual orientation by gender, with men being higher in sociosexual orientation than women (Buss & Schmitt 1993; Jackson & Kirkpatrick 2007; Simpson & Gangestad 1991). In light of this, I consider whether using sociosexual orientation as a statistical control might improve models of perceived sexual intent, result in more reliable and accurate estimation of the relationships between gender and perceived sexual intent. Another example is self-esteem, which has been shown to be related to mating attitudes and behaviors (Schmitt & Jonason 2019; Rosenthal, Moore, & Flynn 1991; Vrangalova & Ong 2014) and positively correlated with one's sense of power (Fast, Gruenfeld, Sivanathan, & Galinsky 2009).

Some of the other variables I categorize as controls are particularly interesting in the context of this study and receive more attention than, for example, control variables like age²⁷ and race-ethnicity.²⁸ This is not to imply that characteristics like age and race-ethnicity are unimportant. It is possible that perceived sexual intent and/or relationship status, like many things, vary systematically with differences in those characteristics. For the sake of brevity and clarity, I minimally address several of the variables categorized as controls. In-depth exploration of precisely how all of the control variables fit into a more complex conceptual model of perceived sexual intent is left to be carried out elsewhere.

²⁷Subjects provided their age in years.

²⁸Race-ethnicity was captured by an item in the data collection instrument which instructed them to "choose the response that best describes you" followed by categories for "White," "Black/African American/African," "Asian," "Hispanic/Latino/Latina," and "Other Race/Ethnicity."

Educational Attainment

Subjects provided the highest level of education they have attained, choosing from the categories “less than high school,” “high school,”²⁹ “some college/associate’s degree/certificate of study,” “bachelor’s degree,” “master’s degree,” and “PhD/MD/JD/other doctoral level degree.” In a variety of research, education level is used to gain insight into socioeconomic status and frequently serves as a statistical control. Individuals with higher educational attainment experience greater degrees of career success and more desirable economic outcomes, things that could contribute to a greater sense of well-being and, perhaps, power.

Income

Subjects were asked to indicate both their personal and household incomes in U.S. dollars. These items allowed a free-entry numeric response.³⁰ In the case of household income, subjects were presented with the following text:

What was your total household income (pre-tax income) last year? In other words, how much money did all adult members of your household (include only people who live with you that are related to you or in a relationship with

²⁹The less than high school and high school categories were collapsed when the education variable was used in analyses.

³⁰The software used for data collection made it possible to verify some types of responses in real-time as the subject completed the data collection instrument. The income responses, for example, would not accept non-numeric text. Other real-time response verification included forced-response for some items (e.g. gender, relationship status, the essay task for the experimental manipulation procedure), minimum character requirements, and disallow of contradictory responses/survey flow routing (e.g. singles were not asked to respond to items that gather details about a current relationship).

you, do not include someone who is only a roommate) make combined last year before any taxes or other deductions were subtracted? Please provide a dollar amount in the field provided below.

The personal income item similarly instructed respondents to provide the pre-tax dollar amount of their income from the previous year. As with the educational attainment items, the income items were included in the data collection instrument in order to gain understanding about subjects' socioeconomic status.

Socioeconomic Status

In addition to the education and income measures discussed above, I elected to also include a more subjective measure of socioeconomic status. A person's sense of their socioeconomic status or social rank might impact the degree to which they have feelings of security, control, and power above and beyond what might be expected based on arguably more objective measures of socioeconomic status such as income, and educational attainment. Because of this study's concern with how power affects perception, I wanted to capture subjects' own view about their social status.

Subjects were asked to describe where they believe they stand in terms of societal stratification using the McArthur Scale of Subjective Social Status (Adler, Epel, Castellazzo, Ickovics 2000). Responses to this item result in a measure of self-identified socioeconomic status with values between 1 and 10. The item is administered by displaying an image of a ladder along with the following instructions:

Think of this ladder as representing where people stand in our society. At the top of the ladder are the people who are best off, those who have the most money, most education, and best jobs. At the bottom of the ladder are the people who are the worst off, those who have the least money, least education, and worst jobs or no job at all. The ladder has 10 rungs. The first rung (1) is the lowest position, at the bottom of the ladder; the top rung (10) is the highest position, at the top of the ladder. The higher up the ladder you are, the closer you are to the people at the very top; the lower you are, the closer you are to the people at the very bottom. Where do you think your family stands on this ladder? Choose the number that best corresponds with what you believe to be your family's place on the ladder.

Sexual Preference and Identity

Subjects were asked about their sexual preference and who they are interested in as sexual partners using two separate items. For one of these items, the following instructions were presented to the subject:

People differ in their sexual orientation and preferences. We are interested in your sexual preference. Please choose the response that most accurately describes you.

Response options included “I am sexually attracted to men,” “I am sexually attracted to women,” “I am sexually attracted to both men and women,” and “I am not sexually attracted to anyone.” While this item sufficiently records information about what sort of person the subject is interested in sexually, sexual preference is also tied in many ways to identity categories that are widely recognized across society. For some more so than others, how a person identifies in terms of their sexuality factors into their overall identity and sense of self. Sexual identities have, in many respects, come to carry many connotations beyond sexual preference. For this reason, the data collection instrument included a separate item with the instructions “please choose the response that best describes you” followed by the options “I am homosexual/gay/lesbian,” “I am bisexual,” “I am straight/heterosexual,” “I am asexual,” “I am unsure about my sexuality,” “I consider myself something that is not listed here.” For those who selected the final category, an additional item appeared which allowed the subject to describe themselves in their own words using a free-text response field.

Previous Sex Partners

Subjects were asked to provide details about their sex lives because there is reason to believe that sexual history, sexual preferences, and related characteristics might be correlated with perceived sexual intent. One of the sexual history variables considered in this study is a subject’s lifetime number of sex partners. It is possible that individuals who tend to perceive greater degrees of sexual intent from others would be more likely to initiate sexual interactions, and so accumulate higher numbers of sex partners. This

relationship could operate in the opposite direction too – those who accumulate higher numbers of sex partners might tend to perceive greater degrees of sexual interest from others. Either way, such tendencies could be part of a general inclination toward being sexually motivated and more concerned/preoccupied with having sex than others who lack those tendencies.

Sociosexual Orientation

In order to understand subjects' overall sexual proclivities better, I included the Sociosexual Orientation Inventory (SOI). The SOI consists of nine items designed to measure individual tendency to be interested in casual, uncommitted sex outside of a romantic relationship context. This tendency is referred to variously as “sociosexuality” or “sociosexual orientation,” and the items that compose the scale cover behavioral tendencies (e.g. having sex with a partner on one and only one occasion), attitudes (toward uncommitted sex), and desire for sex. Examples of the items that form the SOI include “with how many different partners have you had sexual intercourse without having any interest in a long-term committed relationship with that person?” and “How often do you experience sexual arousal when you are in contact with someone you are NOT in a committed romantic relationship with?” The SOI items are averaged together, and higher SOI scores are believed to indicate greater tendency to prefer, desire, engage in, and be accepting of sex outside of romantic relationship contexts.

This sociosexual orientation measure can be considered a measure of the tendency toward casual sexual partnering that is separate from romantic considerations, sometimes

referred to as uncommitted sex (Penke & Asendorpf 2008). Sociosexuality is consistently found to be higher for men than women across culturally and geographically diverse groups (Schmitt 2018), but it is by no means unique to men. Both men and women who are high in this trait might, presumably, be more prepared to be single and forgo partnerships. At minimum, it seems logical that people who are high in this trait would, in terms of their sex lives, at least be more amenable to the conditions of singlehood than individuals who are lower in this trait because of their greater affinity for sexual activity sans relationship ties. I anticipate a positive relationship between sociosexual orientation and perceived sexual intent. If this proves to be the case, variance in this measure might explain some degree of the variation in perceived sexual intent between men and women due to the gender differences in sociosexual orientation.

Sex Drive

It is possible that individuals who are more desirous of sexual activity will perceive more sexual intent than would individuals who have no desire for sexual interaction. Sex drive is consistently found to be higher for men than women. Thus sex drive differences might explain some of the known differences in the way men and women perceive sexual intentions, potentially making sex drive an important statistical control. To measure sex drive I included an eleven item sex drive scale in the data collection instrument. Examples include “when you first see an attractive person, how strong is your sexual desire?” and “when you have sexual thoughts, how strong is your desire to engage in sexual behavior with a partner?” The sex drive measure items utilized a seven point

response scale. The results from these items were averaged to establish a sex drive score, with higher scores indicating increased desire for/concern with having sex.

Gender Traits

Gender serves as a special point of concern in this study, and is used as an independent variable. It is common for researchers to utilize either a dichotomous sex categorization (female/male) or a dichotomous categorization of gender (man-woman). At times, researchers will include additional categories, such as an intersex category when discussing sex or a transgender category when discussing gender. Often the dichotomous approach is preferable due to very small sample sizes when including additional categories in the absence of a large sample or some oversampling strategy to capture sufficient numbers in each gender category for conducting valid/reliable statistical analyses.

The gender measure used in this study will facilitate statistical tests of the relationships between gender and sexual intent perceptions as well as examination of how the effects of power on sexual intent perceptions are different, if at all, for men and women. However, relying on binary measures of gender or utilizing more granular classifications involving, e.g., categories such as transgender, non-binary, and gender fluid, necessarily loses some degree of nuance. People enact gender in a range of ways and/or identify with categories other than those traditionally associated with their sex at birth (Lucal 1999; Valentine 2007; Westbrook & Saperstein 2015). Gender is typically associated with membership in a sex category, but is not wholly determined by sex, and

there exists substantial diversity in the way people within each category enact gender (West & Zimmerman 1987). Another complication is that gender determinations made by others may not align with how a person feels, how they wish to portray themselves, or how they wish to be viewed by others (Westbrook & Schilt 2014).

Studies that rely solely on binary measures of gender might mask interesting variation within categories (Hart et al. 2019). Gender can be conceptualized as an interactional process, and a person's gender presentation is likely to be divergently perceived when viewed from multiple perspectives. A person does gender by enacting patterns of behavior that are socially understood to be feminine or masculine, but their gender is simultaneously determined by others who perceive that enactment. There is likely some discrepancy between people's understanding of their own gender and how they are perceived by at least some of the people with whom they interact (Westbrook & Schilt 2014).

Gender is neither perceived nor experienced as an entirely uniform, categorical identity. People both identify with and are perceived to have varying degrees of femininity and masculinity, regardless of their gender (Lucal 1999; Valentine 2007; Westbrook & Saperstein 2015). There is a great deal of complexity in, and interactions between, sex, gender, and varying levels of femininity/masculinity for any person (regardless of gender identity), and reflected appraisals (Cooley 1902; Mead 1934). In addition to analyzing subjects' self-identified sex and gender, I chose to also assess gender traits and related concepts of self. To do so, I included the Bem Sex Role Inventory and items measuring both self- and other-appraisals of femininity/masculinity.

Bem Sex Role Inventory

I included the Bem Sex Role Inventory (BSRI) early in the data collection instrument. This scale has been criticized on various grounds, but it continues to be widely deployed (Alirezaei 2022; Dolliver & Rucker 2018; Harrison & Michelson 2019; Lammers & Byrd 2019; Martin 2019; Reilly et al 2022) and has a number of useful qualities. The BSRI³¹ uses self-appraisal of numerous gender-stereotypical traits to independently measure individuals' masculinity and femininity (Kachel, Steffens, & Niedlich 2016). The BSRI has been used extensively as an indirect measure of gender identity (Wood & Eagly 2015), and it is one of the most commonly utilized measures of feminine and masculine traits in gender-focused research (Dolliver & Rucker 2018).

The BSRI measures femininity and masculinity by asking respondents to rate themselves on a 1-7 scale for 12 items traditionally thought of as being more closely associated with either females (in the case of the femininity trait; e.g. gentle, tender) or males (in the case of the masculinity trait; e.g. dominant, strong personality). Historically, the femininity and masculinity traits have been construed as opposite points on a continuum. Since the 1970's, attributable in large part to the research and scholarship of Bem, these two traits have come to be viewed as separate constructs. Current thinking largely reflects the notion that any individual can be high or low in either/both femininity and/or masculinity. These traits are related to a number of gender

³¹ To help limit the length of the data collection instrument, I chose a short form of the BSRI. The full version of the inventory is in excess of thirty items, and the shorter, 12 item version used here has been found to produce very similar, equally reliable results (Wood and Eagly 2015).

stereotyped preferences and behaviors, and the average level of each trait for females and for males, especially for young females in the United States, is known to have changed slightly over time (Dolliver & Rocker 2018; Wood & Eagly 2015).

Masculinity historically has been tied to power and strength, and the masculinity measure that is part of the BSRI is composed of traits such as having leadership ability and having a strong personality. Individuals who are higher in the masculinity trait measured by the BSRI might feel more powerful. If that is the case, and if my hypothesis about the relationship between power and perceived sexual intent are true, then elevated masculinity could also be related increased tendency to perceive sexual intent from potential sex partners. It is less clear how the femininity trait measured by the BSRI might relate to perceived sexual intent, but it could be that individuals who are higher in the femininity trait measured by the BSRI tend to have a lower sense of power.

It is worth reiterating that the femininity and masculinity traits measured by the BSRI are not separate ends of a spectrum and are not mutually exclusive. Individuals can be low or high in neither, either, or both, and any connection between these measures and power or other constructs could be equally complex. Regardless, controlling for these two traits in models of perceived sexual intent alongside the independent variables discussed will, for example, help to determine whether gender has an impact on perceived sexual intent that is independent of the degree to which the person possess these gendered traits.

Self- & Other-Appraisals of Femininity/Masculinity

The BSRI represents an indirect approach to measuring femininity and masculinity; indirect in the sense that it does not explicitly ask respondents how they see themselves in terms of the specific traits it aims to measure. In contrast, the self- & other-appraisal of femininity/masculinity items I included use a direct approach to tapping these constructs by explicitly asking respondents how they see themselves in relation to these specific terms. Following Hart and colleagues (2019), I asked respondents to rate their femininity and masculinity on two separate scales. Respondents were presented with the question “In general, how do you see yourself?” followed by two 7-point scales, one labeled as feminine, the other masculine. I refer to these two items as the self-appraisal of femininity and masculinity measures.

As with the BSRI femininity and masculinity trait measures, it could be the case that one’s self-appraised femininity and/or masculinity might be related to the degree to which they feel powerful and/or in control. Both the BSRI and the direct self-ratings of femininity/masculinity operationalize gender as gradational and yield more information than when gender is measured solely as categorical. Thus these items capture more empirical nuance and better reflect contemporary gender theory and societal views of individual differences.

Self-concept undoubtedly impacts a person's behavior, and we know that self-image and behavior are also influenced by our perception of others’ opinions of us. How one believes others perceive them in terms of gender might impact the way they enact gender, interact with others, and how they perceive various aspects of social interaction.

For this reason, I also included the reflected-appraisal items used by Hart and colleagues (2019), asking respondents “In general, how do most people see you?” followed by separate 7-point scales for feminine and masculine. Another interesting possibility that might be captured by these items pertains to the specific alignment, or lack thereof, between a person’s self- and other-appraisals of femininity/masculinity. A discrepancy between self-image and how a person believes others see them might affect things like self-esteem, willingness to engage in social interactions, and with whom to engage. When a person believes others have a different impression of them, they might be more prone to experience some degree of tension, inauthenticity, or other negative affect during social interactions, perhaps influencing how they perceive the sexual intent of others.

Physical Attractiveness

Subjects were asked “how would you rate your own level of physical attractiveness.” This item had a response scale ranging from “very unattractive” (1) to “very attractive” (10), and it appeared in the early part of the data collection as part of a block of questions with a randomized order. Similar to my assumption that self-esteem is positively related to whether people think others are interested in them sexually, I assume that individuals who believe they are attractive will be more likely to think others are interested in them sexually.³² This might be particularly relevant since physical appearance figures prominently in sexual attraction. Additionally, self-esteem, self-ratings of attractiveness,

³²It could also be the case that an individual’s impressions about their physical attractiveness stem, at least in part, from attention received from potential sex partners.

and beliefs about how attractive one is to other people could each be construed as components of a latent self-image construct.

Body Mass Index

Subjects in the sample reported their height (in feet and inches) and weight (in pounds). From these items, I computed subjects' body mass index (BMI). BMI is a point of interest due to the strong emphasis on weight and body shape found in societal beauty standards. There is a degree of stigma attached to being overweight, and researchers studying physical attraction have found that people consistently find overweight individuals to be less attractive (Fales et al. 2016). Being aware of this, overweight individuals might underestimate the sexual interests of potential partners, assuming that others are not attracted to them physically. BMI might also be related to self-esteem and/or beliefs about one's own appearance, and operate on sexual intent perceptions through those other constructs.

Self-Esteem

Self-esteem might bolster or be bolstered by elevated feelings of power. Other constructs, such as the self-rating of physical attractiveness discussed above, confidence, and various affective states could be correlated with self-esteem and sense of power as well (Bale & Archer 2013; Barkow et al. 1975; Weaver & Byers 2006), potentially muddying examination of the relationship between power and perceived sexual intent. I used the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale to measure subjects' self-esteem. This widely

used measure consists of 10 items. Some of these are positively coded, such as “I am able to do thing as well as most other people” and “I take a positive attitude toward myself.” Other items are reverse coded, such as “I certainly feel useless at times” and “at times I think I am no good at all.” The items are averaged to establish a self-esteem score, with higher values reflective of greater self-esteem and a more positive self-image.

Sense of Power Scale

To measure subjects’ sense of power, the data collection instrument included the generalized version of the Sense of Power Scale (Anderson et al. 2012). This scale consists of eight items derived from existing theory and research on power. The items assess a range of beliefs individuals have about four specific domains of power, including belief about one’s ability to make decisions in their relationships with others (e.g. “If I want to, I get to make the decisions”), to influence other people’s behavior (e.g., “I can get others to do what I want”) and opinions and beliefs (e.g., “Even if I voice them, my views have little sway,” reverse-coded), and to satisfy their own desires and wishes in the context of their relationships with others (e.g., “Even when I try, I am NOT able to get my way” - reverse-coded).³³

The Sense of Power Scale appeared relatively early in the data collection instrument as part of a block of items with randomized ordering. That block of items appeared prior to the experimental manipulation. This placement is important because it leaves the Sense of Power Scale outcomes free from the influence of the experimental treatment, allowing the measure to be used to determine factors that are correlated with

³³ The complete Sense of Power Scale is provided in the Appendix I: Data Collection Instrument.

sense of power prior to experimentally manipulating power. Global sense of power here refers to a construct that is thought to be relatively stable and less bound to situational cues than a separate momentary sense of power construct.

The authors who originally developed the Sense of Power Scale (Anderson et al. 2012) tested several iterations across multiple domains, as well as a generalized version (which is the one used in this study). They found that while there is some correlation between sense of power across domains, sense of power can be largely domain- or relationship-specific. Differences across domains seem to, on average, follow common-sense patterns. For example, a person can (and most appear to) simultaneously have a low sense of power in relationships with parents, moderate sense of power in relationships with friends, and high sense of power in relationships with workplace subordinates. There is a moderate degree of consistency in sense of power across domains. Theoretically, multiple senses of power across many domain-specific areas contribute to a person's general sense of power, alongside the influence of various personal traits (e.g. extroversion, self-esteem, narcissism). The contribution of any particular domain-specific sense of power to general sense of power likely varies by domain and considerably across individuals. Furthermore, existing research finds considerable individual variation in personal sense of power; this is the case in multiple studies, both within specific domains and at the general level.

My hypothesis about the relationship between power and perceived sexual intent does not distinguish between general sense of power and more momentary, situational feelings of power. However, my research design is much better suited to address the

latter. The experimental procedure I use to prime low/high power is expected to act on a subjects' momentary, situational sense of power. It might have little to no impact on their general sense of power.³⁴ I contend that how powerful one feels in a moment of interaction with a specific potential sex partner would have more impact on how sexually interested they perceive that person to be than would their global sense of power, though both general/global and specific/in-the-moment sense of power would likely play a role.³⁵

Gender Identity Threat

In the previous chapter, I discussed identity threat and, specifically, gender identity threat. I hypothesize that the effects of power on perceived sexual intent will not differ by gender (Hypothesis 3). However, it is possible that men and women react differently to feelings of power/powerlessness because of the degree to which those feelings are tied to gender roles. Whereas normative gender roles hold that men should be/act powerful and avoid being/acting weak, weakness is generally depicted as more acceptable on the part of women. In this way, priming a man to feel low in power might represent a threat to his gender identity in a way that could be argued to be less likely in the case of priming a woman to feel low in power, net of other factors.

³⁴Initially I considered using the Sense of Power Scale as a means to check the experimental manipulation of power. However, in pilot studies the Sense of Power Scale turned out to be less than optimal for that purpose. This is most likely because it measures a global construct while the power manipulation acts upon a more momentary, situational, and fleeting facet of one's sense of power. A separate item was added to the instrument to be used as a manipulation check (discussed further below), but the Sense of Power Scale was retained for the reasons discussed in the text. Particularly, because it allows for exploration/verification of relationships between many of the included control variables and power, which are germane to the broader discussion addressed in this dissertation and important for understanding the connection between individual interactions and social structures.

³⁵Disentangling those fully is well beyond the scope of this dissertation, and is an area ripe for future research. This is especially the case given some of the findings of this project.

Identity threat could occur in a number of ways across numerous facets of one's identity,³⁶ but gender identity threat is particularly relevant in the context of this research. I placed an item used by Willer and colleagues (2013) to analyze threats to masculine identity in the data collection instrument. The item read "recent changes in our society often disadvantage [men|women|trans persons]." Responses ranged from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree" on a four point scale. Gender identity threat is more commonly discussed with respect to men and masculinity, but it is plausible that other gender identities might be threatened by the experimental manipulation of power or other aspects of the data collection procedure in some way. For this reason, and for the purposes of balancing the data collection instrument as much as possible for all subjects, this item was displayed to all subjects with the wording tailored to their self-identified gender.³⁷

In the case of men and masculine identity threat, compensatory behaviors are sometimes observed in reaction to threats to masculine identity.³⁸ Hypersexuality is one such compensatory behavior, and, accordingly, men who feel their masculine identity has been threatened might engage in overcompensation by, for example, imputing greater degrees of sexual intent to potential sex partners. Whether or not this measure is

³⁶Everyone plays many roles, many of which contribute to varying degrees to their identity and self-concept. A person's gender identity, parent identity, professional identity, and religious identity might be separately or conjointly threatened, and in different combinations/to varying degrees in the context of a given interaction.

³⁷The word "men" in the item was replaced by "women" or "transgender people" to customize the item.

³⁸Parallels could be made between masculine overcompensation and overcompensation in response to other sorts of identity threat. It is possible that anyone who has power, control, and strength as part of their sense of self might experience identity threat in response to low power priming. Somewhat paradoxically, this could also be the case for people who view themselves as low in power – priming them to experience high power could create cognitive dissonance in so far as being/feeling powerful simply does not resonate with their concept of self.

impacted by the experimental manipulation of power is interesting in itself, and, based on the theoretical framework upon which this study is predicated, I expect this measure to be negatively related to power.³⁹

Unwanted Sexual Experiences

Some relationship between past sex-related victimization and sex-related perceptions has been identified in existing research (Donat & Bondurant 2003). Subjects were asked about previous experiences of unwanted sex⁴⁰ near the end of the data collection instrument. There were 8 items pertaining to unwanted sex included in the data collection instrument. These items can be divided evenly into victim and perpetrator items, with the difference being whether the subject is considered to have committed or experienced the act in question. The items addressed the following situations:

1. Someone being verbally pressured into having sex that they did not want.
2. Someone having sex they did not want because they were too drunk, high, or otherwise incapacitated to stop it (referred to here as incapacitated sex).
3. Someone having been physically forced to have sex or oral sex they did not want (rape).
4. Someone having been in a situation where another person attempted to physically force them to have sex but they got away (referred to here as attempted rape).

³⁹This proved to be the case in analyses of data from pilot studies. In those data, the mean outcome on this gender identity threat item for a neutral control group were higher than the mean for a high power treatment group but lower than the mean outcome for a low power treatment group.

⁴⁰I use the term “unwanted sex” here to refer to a wide range of behaviors/situations. These vary greatly in their degree of severity, invasiveness, legality, and the items capture very little detail regarding the scenarios they mention. For instance, I include both instances of verbal pressure/persistent requests for sexual interaction and forcible rape under the umbrella term of “unwanted sex.” This is not to equate the acts, other than acknowledge that they all pertain to sex and are undesirable and potentially traumatic. Rather, grouping these together is a matter of linguistic convenience, given their conceptual similarities. The acts certainly differ in degree and type, but all pertain to sex that is unwanted on some level.

So, for instance, subjects were asked both “have you ever been verbally pressured into having sex that you did not want?” as well as “have you ever verbally pressured someone into having sex that they did not want?” The victim versions of these items and the perpetrator versions were presented in random order as separate blocks of internally randomized questions. These items were eventually combined into two binary indicators – one for having ever experienced an unwanted sex situation and one for ever having perpetrated an unwanted sex situation.

Other Measures

In addition to the many measures discussed above, the data collection instrument contained several other questions that were included for reasons that are more peripheral to the analyses discussed in this dissertation. For example, the final two questions in the instrument asks subjects to recall the happiest moment of their life and for feedback about the data collection process/experience itself. The latter question was initially introduced during pilot studies and retained for the final data collection in order to understand potential points of confusion in question items and/or how subjects react to the data collection in general.

The happiest moment question was included primarily for the purpose of moving subjects to a better affective state in the event they found any of the preceding items distressing in any way. The idea behind the happiest moment item follows the same logic as the experimental manipulation of power – having individuals recall past experiences is believed to prime them to re-experience the same/similar affective states as those felt

during the recalled experience. The data collection instrument includes items that variously prime subjects to recall moments of powerlessness, sexual victimization, and/or other potential stressful topic. It is reasonable to assume that the data collection instrument might prime some individuals' into having a diminished mood. Placing relatively mood-neutral items and the happiest moment item toward the end of the data collection procedure takes advantage of the priming mechanism to mitigate negative affect.

Analyses

My analytic strategy proceeds in three phases. The initial phase involves describing features of the sample as well as various sub-groups of interest within the sample. While describing the sample, I also utilize inferential statistical approaches to identify relationships between variables and inform statistical models used in subsequent analyses. Next, I conduct tests to assess the quality of the data, primarily the validity of the experimental manipulation of power. I then model the dependent outcome and test the hypotheses that were presented in Chapter 2 using a Bayesian model averaging procedure.

Descriptive Analyses

The first phase of my analysis consists primarily of utilizing data visualization methods alongside descriptive statistics to understand the composition of the overall sample and various sub-groups within the sample. I analyze the sample and sub-groups at the same

time by, for example, inspecting the distribution of a given trait within the overall sample and several subgroups simultaneously in a single graph or table. In many instances, I consider all groups that constitute the independent variables (e.g. men and women, singles and those in a relationship, low and high power treatment groups) that are part of analyses planned for hypothesis testing.

While describing the sample, special attention is given to determining whether features in the data might impact analyses used for testing the hypotheses posed in Chapter 2. The population from which my sample is drawn is individuals in the United States who are of the age of majority. However, the data come from a sample that is only random in the sense that I imposed very minimal selection criteria on the subject pool (US Prolific workers). The sample is unlikely to be truly representative of that or any other specific population.⁴¹ For instance, there is reason to believe that this sampling strategy might yield a sample that is, for example, younger and more educated than the population of the United States overall (Burhmester, Kwang, and Gosling 2011). However, there is little reason to think the sampling strategy will yield data that are unique in any way likely to preclude or hinder tests of my hypotheses or substantially diminish the validity/reliability of the results, and the strategy is likely to yield a sample that is an improvement over undergraduate lab samples.

I am testing hypotheses, based on abstract theories, about processes that give way to variance in perceived sexual intent, rather than describing the existence of features or tendencies in an overall population per se. In this sense, a non-representative sample

⁴¹The sample could not be considered to be a representative or random sample of even the population of Prolific platform users because of the way users select into specific studies. Prolific users view offers for work and impose their own personal criteria when choosing which offers to accept.

would not immediately be considered by most to be a critical flaw. Sample composition should only be of concern in so far as the sample is sufficiently diverse on the traits featured in my hypotheses to facilitate valid and reliable statistical analyses.⁴² Still, there could be features of the data that pose difficulties for statistical analyses, and I make an effort to uncover these in advance of conducting the analyses that facilitate hypothesis testing. For example, in the process of describing the sample I will comment on the distribution of various characteristics that might be related to the main independent and dependent variables in some way (e.g. self-esteem might be positively related to sense of power which could in turn be related to perceived sexual intent). Some of these are eventually included in models of the focal dependent outcome as statistical controls.

Assessing Data Quality

Aside from standard data quality monitoring and verification strategies, such as eliminating cases with missing data points and cases that failed attention check items, I attempt to assess the data for issues that might impact upon the analyses I conduct using these data. Critically, I test the operation of the experimental priming procedure. To check the experimental manipulation of power, outcomes on the manipulation check score will be compared across the low and high power treatment groups. If the mean manipulation check score for the high power group is higher than for the low power group, this will be taken as confirmation that the experimental manipulation of power has worked as intended. This procedure is similar to that used in existing studies that deploy

⁴²Ultimately, the sample does appear to be loosely representative of the United States population in many ways. So while it does not perfectly represent a population, it is relatively diverse in terms of race, age, sexual preference, gender, relationship status, education, and voting behaviors.

the same experimental manipulation of power as I have used in this research (Tost et al. 2012).

Inferential Analyses & Hypothesis Testing

In the final phase of my analysis, I utilize general linear regression techniques to model the primary outcome in this study (perceived sexual intent) and test the hypotheses proposed in Chapter 2. In addition to the independent variables necessary for hypothesis testing, I investigate inclusion of other controls based on results of preliminary analyses. Analyses involving the use of linear regression techniques frequently proceed in two consecutive stages. In the first, a candidate 'best' model is selected based on presence/absence, and statistical relevance or significance, of potential predictor variables. In a second stage, the regression coefficients of the selected model are used for some combination of inference concerning the importance of specific predictors and/or forecasting future outcomes. The task of identifying a good or best subset of predictors is known as the model selection problem, and this problem is tackled in the first stage of the two stage procedure.

While very common, the two step procedure is known to be problematic. The second step in the two step procedure ignores uncertainty associated with the first step, resulting in misleading inferences and overconfident parameter estimates (Burnham & Anderson 2003; Draper 1995; Hurvich & Tsai 1990; Miller 1990). Additionally, it is often the case that multiple models provide similarly adequate descriptions of the distributions generating a set of data according to some criteria such as model fit or

predictive capability, further complicating selection of a 'best' model (Fragoso et al. 2018). To avoid and manage these and related issues, I adopt a Bayesian approach to model selection and accounting for model uncertainty. Bayesian Model Averaging (BMA) is an application of Bayesian inference to the problems of model selection, combined estimation, and prediction that produces straightforward model choice criteria and leads to less risky predictions (Bergh et al 2021). This differs from the all-or-nothing mentality associated with other model building and hypothesis testing approaches where a model is rejected or accepted wholesale, because BMA retains all model uncertainty up to the final inference (Hinne et al. 2020).

Additionally, utilizing BMA opens a path to a more intuitive interpretation of evidence provided by the data in favor of one theory relative to another, by directly comparing the competing statistical models that represent them (Kass & Raftery 1995). Within a Bayesian framework, one can discuss the probability that one model or hypothesis is correct or true, rather than the likelihood that one has rejected a null hypothesis erroneously as in classical p-value based hypothesis testing. BMA provides a numerical summary of the strength of evidence for various hypotheses as well as the ability to incorporate those weights into an average model that is used for drawing inferences (Wasserman 2000). I discuss the specifics of the BMA procedure I utilize, and the interpretation of the results, in greater detail below.

Bayesian Model Averaging

The standard statistical procedure of linear regression, along with the many generalized forms of linear regression modeling, involves accounting for outcome variance by modeling the relationships between that outcome (dependent variable) and some set of predictors (independent variables, covariates). When all available predictors are included, the regression model often is over fit to the data on hand, which can lead to unreliable regression coefficients, poor generalizability, and poor predictive/forecasting (Myung 2000; Porwal & Raftery 2022). Many regression analyses begin by either reducing the set of initial predictors down from all possible predictors or building up the model by adding predictors. Such step-wise methods, where variables are sequentially added/removed on the basis of significance tests and/or model fit criteria, are used frequently, but neither their theoretical or empirical properties are found to be desirable (Miller 2002; Freedman 1983).

BMA has a number of advantages over step-wise model selection and null hypothesis testing. Among them, several derive from the Bayesian approach in general. For instance, Bayesian inference does not violate basic principles of statistical decision making, such as the likelihood and stopping rule principles (Berger & Delampady 1987; Berger & Wolpert 1988; Dienes 2011). Bayesian inference does not assign special status to the null hypothesis; this makes it possible to measure evidence in favor of the null, or some other, hypothesis (Gallistel, 2009; Kass & 1995; Rouder et al. 2009). The standard use of null hypothesis testing allows a researcher to describe the probability of encountering data at least as extreme as those that were observed, given that the null

hypothesis is true and the sample was generated according to a specific procedure. Bayesian inference, instead, allows researchers to discuss what has been learned from the data regarding the relative plausibility of the hypotheses under consideration - as quantified by, for instance, Bayes factors (Raftery 1995; Wetzel et al. 2011).

Other benefits are more specific to BMA in particular. For example, when there are many candidate independent variables, typical model selection procedures can be misleading and tend to find strong evidence for effects that likely do not exist (Raftery 1995). Conditioning on a single model, selected via step-wise or other methods, ignores model uncertainty, leading to uncertainty about quantities of interest (Kass & Raftery 1995). Additionally, BMA has many good theoretical properties, including producing point estimators and predictions that minimize mean squared error, having calibrated estimation and prediction intervals, and optimizing predictive distributions (Madigan & Raftery 1994; Porwal & Raftery 2022; Rubin & Schenker 1986). BMA is an extension of Bayesian inference methods, in which parameter uncertainty is modeled using the prior distribution, to address these problems with model selection, combined estimation, and prediction. BMA produces easily interpreted model choice criteria and improves model based predictions and hypothesis testing. This is accomplished by modeling uncertainty related to variable selection and model specification via averaging over the parameters of multiple models (Bergh et al. 2021; Fragoso et al. 2018).

The core idea of BMA is that the predictive distribution of some quantity of interest is a weighted average of distributions under different candidate models.⁴³ The

⁴³The set of candidate models referred to here can be established in a number of ways depending on the particulars of the study, availability of data and predictors, and/or known models of interest that an analyst wishes to compare. BMA, in common with other methods of multi-model inference, is flexible in this

weights in question are equal to the posterior probabilities of each of the candidate models given information available in the data on hand (Porwal & Raftery 2022; Raftery 1995; Wasserman 2000). The posterior model probability (PMP) represents the relative probability in favor of a model, relative to others, after the data are observed (Raftery et al. 1997; Hoeting et al. 1999). Simultaneously, BMA obtains weights for numerous candidate models and calculates parameter estimates for each model. In this way, BMA accomplishes variable selection and parameter estimation together rather than sequentially (Bergh et al. 2021).

Mechanics of BMA

To explain BMA further, I begin from a common definition of a multiple regression model, given in Equation 1, and then extrapolate to the process of BMA. Imagine that a sample of data, D , having n observations is to be analyzed. In Equation 1, Y refers to a $n \times 1$ vector of values for the dependent variable, and the x_1, \dots, x_p refer to the n values observed for each of the p possible independent variables. The α represents a scalar intercept. The relationships between the independent variables and the dependent variable are represented by the set of regression coefficients β_1, \dots, β_p . The residual errors, ϵ , are assumed to be normally distributed with mean of zero and unknown variance, $N(0, \sigma^2)$. The β_1, \dots, β_p are typically estimated in a way that minimizes the sum of the squared residual errors, often called the residual sum of squares.

regard. The set of candidate models will often consist of all possible models that can be calculated with the predictors available in the data on hand. Taking a very abstract view, this set of models includes all possible models in a hypothetical model space composed of all possible predictors for which data could theoretically be collected.

$$Y = \alpha + \beta_1 x_1 + \beta_2 x_2 + \dots + \beta_p x_p + \epsilon$$

Equation 1. Linear Regression Model

The linear regression model is very well known, and frequentist approaches using least squares and maximum likelihood estimation (MLE) methods to estimate parameters for linear regression models are a standard tool in the data analyst's kit. The linear regression model is broadly applied, well understood, and is the focus of relatively early lessons in most training in statistical analysis. While frequentist and Bayesian methodologies take slightly different approaches to the linear regression model, when using reasonably large samples of data, they typically give results that are very similar (Raftery 1995). A noteworthy difference in the two, though, is that the Bayesian approach expresses model parameters in terms of probability distributions, rather than as fixed constants. Importantly, this means interpreting the results in terms of degrees of belief as opposed to making probability statements about the long run frequency guarantees about procedures used to produce the result (Wasserman 2004). Thus rather than the frequentist interpretation of a parameter estimate only in relation to the frequency at which similar inferences might be made in repeated practice, the Bayesian interpretation expresses a degree of belief about the estimated parameter given prior information in light of present data (Gelman et al. 2020; Wasserman 2004).

Referring now to the case of multiple candidate models, with p overall possible predictor (independent) variables, there exists a model space M_1, \dots, M_k made up of 2^p candidate models. So, for example, with a set of 30 possible predictors, there are

over⁴⁴ $2^{30}=1,073,741,824$ models to consider. Even with a relatively small number of predictors, the size of the model space means that choosing a single model, or even a small set of models, to use for inference will be difficult. Out of the set of all possible candidate models, there are two that are sometimes given special demarcation because they are at times used as points of reference against which other candidate models are compared. The first is the model containing all of the possible predictors. The model M_k for which $k=2^p$, is sometimes denoted as M_s , and referred to as the 'saturated' model. The second is the model containing none of the p predictors. That model, often referred to as the 'null' or 'intercept-only' model, is frequently denoted as M_0 and the predicted values it yields for each case are equal to the mean of the observed values on the dependent variable. When considering multiple models, for any particular model, M_k , from the set M_1, \dots, M_k , another useful notation is as follows:

$$Y = \alpha + \sum_{j=1}^{p_k} \beta_j^{(k)} x_j^{(k)} + \varepsilon$$

Equation 3. Notation for a Specific Model from the Set of All Possible Models

where $x_1^{(k)}, \dots, x_{p_k}^{(k)}$ is a subset of x_1, \dots, x_p , $\beta_j^{(k)}, \dots, \beta_{p_k}^{(k)}$ is a vector of regression coefficients to be estimated, and ε is the error term. I will also use θ_k to denote the vector of unknown parameters, $(\alpha, \beta^{(k)}, \sigma)$, in M_k that are to be estimated from D.

⁴⁴ I say "over" 2^{30} models because this calculation strictly addresses the 30 parameters in question, setting aside any consideration of additional terms generated from these initial 30 variables for the purposes of representing, e.g., non-linear effects of the available predictors on the dependent variable or interactions between independent variables.

Bayesian estimation expresses all uncertainty, including that about the unknown parameters of a model, in terms of probability, viewing the parameters as random variables. All results in a Bayesian analysis then follow from elementary probability theory, relying especially upon the definition of conditional probability, the law of total probability, and Bayes' theorem (Gelman et al. 2020; Jeffreys 1961; Raftery 1995; Rozanov 1969; Wasserman 2000). Viewing each of the possible linear regression models in the set as a probability model in this way, the Bayesian approach proceeds by assigning a prior probability, $p(\theta_k|M_k)$, to the parameters of each model, representing expectations about the parameter values of the model before viewing D (Raftery 1995; Wasserman 2000). For a single model, a posterior distribution, reflecting the relative plausibility of the parameter values after prior knowledge has been updated in light of D, is then obtained using Bayes' theorem. The degree to which D leads to a change from prior beliefs is quantified and used for hypothesis testing. Analogously, when considering a set of models, a prior probability, $p(M_k)$, is assigned to each model itself. The prior model probability allows for a description of the uncertainty regarding whether that model accurately describes the data (Fragoso et al. 2018). Then, posterior model probabilities (Equation 4) and Bayes factors (discussed below) can be calculated and used to test hypotheses and compare across candidate models in a set.

Selecting Priors

Bayesian analysis begins from existing, or prior, beliefs and knowledge; these are incorporated directly into the analysis and are updated based on the observed data. Prior

information can come from previous experience, existing studies, commonly held beliefs, or some form of educated guess. When prior information about the parameters is available, it should be used, but often it is the case that the amount of such information, if it exists at all, is very little (Eicher et al. 2011). As such, the practice of using what are referred to as non-informative, reference, or default priors was developed to reflect the common dearth of prior information. Another benefit of default priors, one that is particularly relevant to a study, such as this one, that is the first to test a specific hypothesis, is that the use of default priors places the influence of the prior distribution further beyond the manipulation of the biases of the researcher.

Numerous default parameter priors have been proposed. For this study, I rely on a widely used prior specification, the unit information prior (UIP; Kass & Wasserman 1995; Porwal & Raftery 2022; Raftery 1995). This prior specification is known to perform well (Eicher et al 2011; Porwal & Raftery 2022). The UIP has a number of desirable qualities, including simplicity, intuitive appeal, and ease with which it, and its related approximation based on Schwarz's Bayesian information criterion (Raftery 1995; Schwarz 1978), can be implemented. The UIP is a weak prior specification⁴⁵ that is diffused over the region of the model likelihood where the parameter values are considered to be most plausible but without being overly spread out (Kaplan & Lee 2018). Raftery (1995) demonstrated that the UIP has very little influence on the conclusions of the analyses, making a contribution to the posterior mean and variance of approximately n^{-1} of the total. In other words, use of the UIP is akin to the prior

⁴⁵It is weak in the sense of being especially non-informative.

representing approximately the same amount of information as that of a single observation (i.e. unit) in the data.⁴⁶ Similarly, for the PMP's I follow the standard practice of using a default prior where $p(M_1)=p(M_2)=...=p(M_k)$ and the prior model probabilities sum to one. This prior specification is considered to be non-informative because it treats all models as being equally likely prior to accounting for the data.

Model Selection

Solving the model selection problem can be viewed as a process of comparing among the many candidate models in search of the (hypothetical) model that is most likely to generate the outcome in question. Whereas selecting a single best model would ignore some degree of model uncertainty, averaging over the candidate models instead acknowledges the inherent uncertainty in the conclusions inherent to the model selection problem. The PMP for each model, conditional on D , can be compared to others, and interpreted as the probability of M_k being the hypothetical best model.

$$p(M_k|D) = \frac{p(D|M_k)p(M_k)}{\sum_{l=1}^k p(D|M_l)p(M_l)}$$

Equation 4. Posterior Model Probability of M_k Given D

⁴⁶The UIP is formed based on the maximum likelihood estimate of the parameter mean, with variance equal to the expected information matrix for one observation. For more extensive, technical discussions of the choice of priors, how they influence conclusions, their relative merits, and the case for using the UIP, see also Eicher et al. 2011, Fernandez et al. 1998, Ley & Steel 2009, Porwal & Raftery 2022.

The first term in the numerator on the right hand side of Equation 4, $p(D|M_k)$, is the probability of the data given model M_k , called the integrated likelihood, and plays a central role in Bayesian model uncertainty as a weight used when averaging across models. The integrated likelihood⁴⁷ of M_k (Equation 5) consists of the likelihood function, $p(D|\theta_k, M_k)$, times the prior distribution, $p(\theta_k|M_k)$, integrated over the parameter space θ_k under model M_k (Kaplan & Lee 2018; Raftery et al. 1997). The likelihood function, $p(D|\theta_k, M_k)$, summarizes the information about θ_k that is available in the data.

$$p(D|M_k) = \int p(D|\theta_k, M_k) p(\theta_k|M_k) d\theta_k$$

Equation 5. Integrated Likelihood for a Model, M_k

The second term on the right hand side of Equation 4, $p(M_k)$, accounts for the probability of the model given prior existing knowledge. The denominator in Equation 4 ensures that $p(M_k|D)$ integrates to 1, representing the assumption that the hypothetical best model is present in the set of models examined (Kaplan & Lee 2018). By capitalizing on the PMP of each model being equal to its portion of the total posterior mass of the model set, the PMP of a model can be viewed as a measure of evidence for that model. Thus a simple strategy for selecting a single model is to choose the one with the highest PMP,⁴⁸ sometimes referred to as the highest probability model (HPM).

⁴⁷The integrated likelihood is also referred to as the marginal likelihood, model evidence, or the type II likelihood (Berger 1985; Gneiting & Raftery 2007; MacKay 2003).

⁴⁸In fact, selection strategies of various sorts can be motivate based on posterior probabilities using a decision theoretic framework where the goal is to maximize expected utility. See Chipman et al. 2001 for a brief discussion with further references.

However, when the goal is not strictly to choose a single model but to focus, instead, on inferences that more carefully account for uncertainty, then an average of values, using the PMP to weight the contribution of each model to the final estimates, is preferred (Fragoso et al. 2018; Hoeting et al 1999; Raftery 1995; Wasserman 2000).

Comparing Models and Testing Hypotheses

Aside from being useful for selecting a single best model, model comparisons are useful for testing hypotheses. Comparisons between models, e.g. M_i and M_j , can be conveniently made and summarized according to the ratio of their PMP's, also called the posterior odds⁴⁹ (Equation 6).

$$\frac{p(M_i|D)}{p(M_j|D)} = \frac{p(D|M_i)}{p(D|M_j)} \frac{p(M_i)}{p(M_j)}$$

Equation 6. Posterior Odds of M_i Against M_j

The expression of the posterior odds comparing two models in Equation 6 says that D updates the prior odds, $\frac{p(M_i)}{p(M_j)}$, through the Bayes factor, $\frac{p(D|M_i)}{p(D|M_j)}$, to yield the posterior odds. When non-informative priors are selected or the two models in question are otherwise believed to be equally probable a priori, i.e. $p(D|M_i)=p(D|M_k)$, then the

⁴⁹The use of Bayes factors for model comparison is conceptually similar to the likelihood ratio test (LR test). Unlike the LR test, Bayes factors explicitly accommodate the inclusion of priors in estimation and comparison of model, as well as making comparisons between non-nested models. The LR test does not consider prior information and requires that the models being compared are nested models. Another noteworthy difference is that the LR test involves reducing the full range of possible parameters to through maximization while Bayes factors rely on integrating over possible posterior values (Kass & Raftery 1995).

Bayes factor BF_{ij} equals the posterior odds in favor of M_i (Kass & Raftery 1995). When using BF_{ij} to compare models, values greater than 1 favor M_i and values less than 1 favor M_j . BF_{ij} can be interpreted as a probability or as how much more likely M_i is than M_j . Probability itself is a meaningful scale, giving Bayes factors a very intuitive interpretation. However, linguistic categories offering rough descriptive statements proposed by Raftery (1995) have been broadly adopted (see Table 3.1).

When the models being compared represent hypotheses taken from scientific theories, the Bayes factor can be interpreted as the evidence in favor of one theory over the other provided by D. For example, if the H_i and H_j , represented by statistical models M_i and M_j , are compared, resulting in $BF_{ij}=2$, then it can be said that the data are twice as likely to have occurred under H_i than under H_j . This framework is readily extensible to comparisons of several hypotheses, and it can provide positive evidence in support of a null hypothesis. Approaching hypothesis testing in this manner is argued to be an improvement over standard p-value based, null hypothesis testing. It is viewed as an improvement because it has a more intuitive interpretation, is a more precise way of balancing concerns about statistical power and significance levels, and better aligns with the goal of identifying theories that best describe the main features of reality (Raftery 1995).

Table 3.1: Evidence Corresponding to Bayes Factor and PMP Values when Comparing Two Models as Proposed by Raftery (1995)

BF_{ij}	$p(M_i D)$ (%)	Linguistic Interpretation
> 150	> 99	Very strong evidence in favor of M_i
$20 - 150$	$95 - 99$	Strong evidence in favor of M_i
$3 - 20$	$75 - 95$	Positive evidence in favor of M_i
$1 - 3$	$50 - 75$	Weak evidence in favor of M_i
$= 1$	$= 50$	Equal support for each model

Estimating Quantities of Interest

Bringing this all to bare on specific estimates, I refer now to an unknown quantity of interest, Δ . The Δ could be, for example, a future observation y , the utility of some course of action, or an effect size. When using BMA to estimate Δ , the PMP are important as they become mixing weights in the posterior distribution of Δ , formulated as a mixture distribution (Clyde & Iverson 2015; Hoeting et al. 1999; Raftery 1995). Bayesian inference about Δ given D is based on its posterior distribution, which, based on the law of total probability, is given as depicted in Equation 7 (Draper 1995; Raftery 1995).

$$p(\Delta|D) = \sum_{l=1}^k p(\Delta|M_k, D) p(M_k|D)$$

Equation 7. Posterior Distribution of Unspecified Quantity of Interest, Δ

The model described in Equation 7 is an average of the posterior distributions under each of the M_1, \dots, M_k models considered, weighted by their PMP's. Focusing specifically on the linear regression model, I will describe the case when Δ is the regression

parameter β_1 . Across the space of candidate models, typically some of the models will specify $\beta_1=0$, meaning that $Pr[\beta_1=0|D]$, e.g. the posterior probability of β_1 being zero given the data, will itself be non-zero. This relates directly to a point of particular interest - whether β_1 is included in the hypothetical best model. This can be determined based on the posterior probability that the value of this parameter is non-zero, $Pr[\beta_1 \neq 0|D]$, referred to as the posterior inclusion probability (PIP; Equation 8).

$$Pr[\beta_1 \neq 0|D] = \sum_{A_1} p(M_k|D)$$

Equation 8. Posterior Inclusion Probability β_1

In Equation 8, $A_1 = [M_k : k=1, \dots, K; \beta_1 \neq 0]$, i.e. A_1 represents only the subset of models that include β_1 . The PIP can be viewed as a measure of the relevance of a predictor - relevant in terms of how well that predictor explains the dependent outcome (Bergh et al. 2021; Hinne et al. 2020; Hoeting et al. 2002; Raftery et al. 1997). The PIP can be interpreted directly or converted to the odds scale⁵⁰ and viewed as the odds of the predictor having a non-zero or non-zero effect on the outcome analyzed. For example, if the PIP for a coefficient of the effect on a dependent variable related to the gender of a subject is high, e.g. $p(\beta_{woman} \neq 0|D) = .99$, the result would be interpreted as there being a 99% chance that the indicator for being a woman is in the hypothetical true model. In this case it can be said that there is very strong evidence for a non-zero relationship between the outcome and being a woman. It is worth noting that the PIP can be

⁵⁰Odds = Probability / (1 - Probability)

converted to a probability of exclusion. This is especially useful when the PIP is particularly low, in which case converting to an exclusion probability represents a somewhat more intuitive interpretation. PIP values lower than 50% represent unfavorable odds of inclusion; so low PIP values necessarily offer evidence for the exclusion of the parameter from the hypothetical best model.⁵¹

When $p(\beta_1 \neq 0|D)$ is sufficiently high to support the belief that the effect is non-zero, the posterior distribution of the size of the effect (Equation 9) will also be of interest.

$$p(\beta_1|D, \beta_1 \neq 0) = \sum_{A_1} p(\beta_1|D, M_k) \left(\frac{p(M_k|D)}{Pr[\beta_1 \neq 0|D]} \right)$$

Equation 9. Posterior Distribution of Effect Size β_1

The posterior distribution of β_1 can be summarized by its posterior mean and standard deviation; these can be viewed as a Bayesian point estimator and Bayesian analogue of the standard error, respectively (Raftery 1993; Raftery 1995). In the equations for the mean of the posterior distribution of β_1 (Equation 10) and its standard error (Equation 11) below, $\hat{\beta}_1(k)$ and $se_1(k)$ are the maximum likelihood estimator and standard error of β_1 under model M_k (Leamer 1978; Raftery 1993).

⁵¹A PIP of 50% can be thought of as non-informative in the sense that it represents even odds for and against the inclusion of the parameter in the hypothetical best model of the outcome in light of the data. The further the PIP is from 50%, the greater the weight of evidence and the stronger the argument for/against the predictor as being particularly relevant (or not) in explaining the model outcome.

$$E[\beta_1|D, \beta_1 \neq 0] \approx \sum_{A_1} \hat{\beta}_1(k) \left(\frac{p(M_k|D)}{Pr[\beta_1 \neq 0|D]} \right)$$

Equation 10. Mean of the Posterior Distribution of β_1

$$SD^2[\beta_1 \text{ divide } D, \beta_1 \neq 0] \approx \sum_{A_1} [se_1^2(k) + \hat{\beta}_1(k)^2](k) \left(\frac{p(M_k|D)}{Pr[\beta_1 \neq 0|D]} \right) - E[\beta_1|D, \beta_1 \neq 0]^2$$

Equation 11. Standard Error of Mean of the Posterior Distribution of β_1

Candidate Models and Occam's Window

Putting BMA into practice can be difficult due to what is often a daunting number of possible models to consider. For the inferential analyses presented in this dissertation, there are at least 28 candidate independent variables that I consider when modeling the perceived sexual intent outcome. This means that the model space under consideration consists of well over 200 million possible models. Advances in computing technology have alleviated the difficulty stemming from the size of the set of possible models, but only to a certain extent. Several practices have been adopted that make the implementation of BMA more manageable as regards computational intensity and the ability to assess the models included in the set of models from which an average is taken. These model space reduction techniques include the use of various reduction criteria and/or any of several forms of Markov Chain Monte Carlo (MCMC) sampling techniques. However, even with modern computer hardware and methods and only a modest number

of predictors, computing times can remain very high and problematic convergence issues can derail these procedures (Bergh et al. 2021; Hoeting et al. 1999).

A much less computationally intensive practice that has been widely adopted involves 1) excluding models that are much less likely⁵² than the HPM and 2) excluding models that contain effects for which there is no evidence.⁵³ Once these two exclusion criteria have been met, the remaining set of models are said to exist within Occam's window.⁵⁴ Studies have demonstrated that using the Occam's window set of models and BMA yields better out-of-sample predictive performance than is the case when selecting any single model (Madigan & Raftery 1994; Raftery 1995; Raftery et al. 1995). I identify the Occam's window set of models using a leaps and bounds algorithm (Furnival & Wilson 1974; Raftery 1995; Raftery et al. 2022) before applying BMA to develop a final model of perceived sexual intent that is used for inferential analyses.⁵⁵

⁵²Following the recommendation of Raftery (1995), I exclude those models that are 20 times less likely than the HPM from the Occam's window subset.

⁵³Specifically, this criteria means excluding models that have more likely, less complex models nested within them.

⁵⁴The name was chosen to signify that this approach is a generalization of the famous Occam's razor, or principle of parsimony, in scientific explanation (Raftery 1995).

⁵⁵See Chapter 5: Inferential Analyses.

CHAPTER 4: Descriptive Analyses and Data Quality

In this chapter I describe the data collected from subjects recruited via the Prolific platform. This chapter includes mostly descriptive analyses but also some inferential analyses geared toward verifying data quality and effectiveness of the experimental procedures. Inferences about the relationships between the traits addressed in this chapter and perceived sexual intent appear in the subsequent chapter. This chapter is divided into two sections. A section titled “Descriptive Analyses” is further divided according to the various traits and characteristics of the subjects and other variables captured by the data collection instrument. In the “Assessing Data Quality” section, I focus on the operation of the experimental manipulation of power.

Descriptive Analyses

In this section I describe the sample in detail. I discuss the distribution of various traits across the sample overall, and in many instances I breakdown the distribution of a given trait by gender and/or relationship status categories. The analytic sample includes only subjects with no missing values on the variables that become part of the model selection and BMA procedures later implemented.⁵⁶

⁵⁶See discussion of sample size and deleting of cases with incomplete data provided in Chapter 3. See Chapter 5 for a discussion of model selection, model averaging, and hypothesis testing.

Sex & Gender

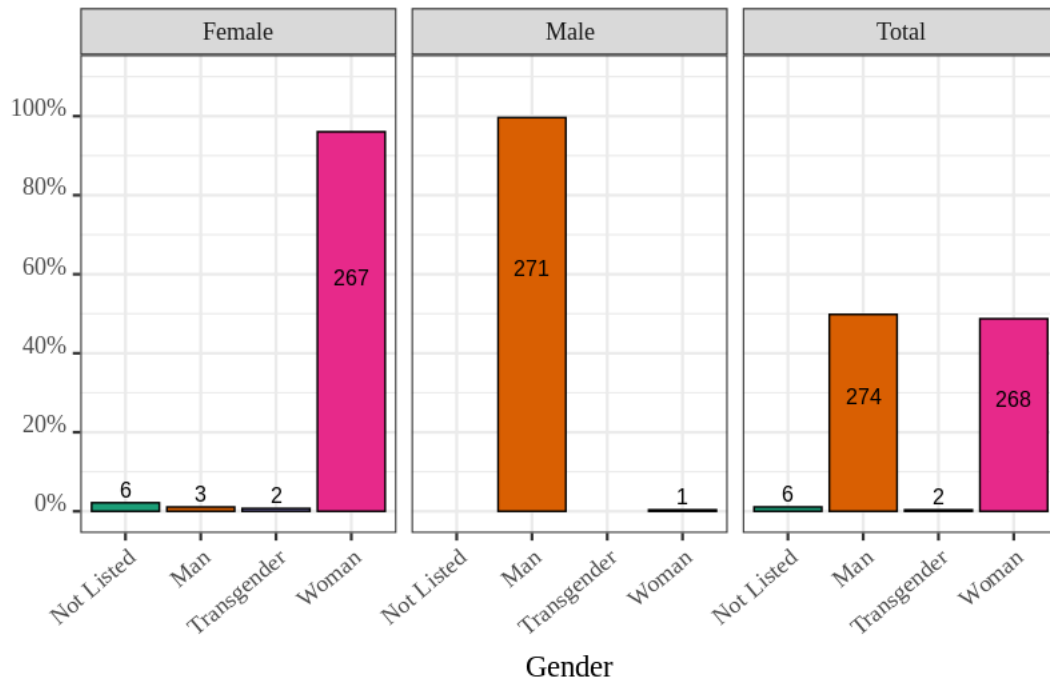
I separately asked subjects to identify their sex and their gender.⁵⁷ Societal-scale populations in most geographic areas are approximately 50% female, ranging from ~48% to ~52% from country to country (Ritchie & Roser 2019). Samples from online recruiting platforms similar to Prolific have yielded a similar ratio; ~52% women for example (Burhmester et al. 2011). There are 272 males and 278 females in the sample following the removal of cases from the raw data due to failing attention checks and/or missing data points on all variables other than sex/gender variables that I use in my final analyses.⁵⁸ When asked about their gender, 274 subjects indicated they are a man, 6 indicated that their gender was not listed in the available responses, 2 indicated that they are transgender, and 268 indicated that they are a woman. Figure 4.1 depicts gender distribution in the sample by sex.

As is typical, the vast majority of females in the sample indicate that they are women (>96%) and the vast majority of males indicate that they are men (99.63%). In my data, 2% of subjects indicated a gender identity that does not align with their sex in the traditionally expected manner. There are 3 females who identified as a man and 1 male identified as a woman; 2 females identified as transgender, and 6 females indicated that their gender was not listed in the available responses. Of the females who indicated their gender was not listed in the available responses, 4 included some form of “non-

⁵⁷These items appeared together so that a person could see both at the same time, easily change their response to one upon reading the next.

⁵⁸There were cases who had no response to the sex item that were removed from the sample prior to this count. For example, cases that failed an early attention check would not have a response on the sex item. Otherwise, all cases responded to the sex and gender items in the data collection instrument. It is also worth noting that, there was an intersex response option available on the sex item. No subjects indicated being intersex.

binary”⁵⁹ in their explanation of their gender; 1 indicated that she considers herself “agender” but “presents as the default” gender for her sex; and one described herself as androgynous.



Note: Bars are labeled with raw counts.

Figure 4.1: Gender of Subjects by Sex

In this sample, subjects whose gender identity does not correspond to their sex at birth are too few in number ($n=12$) to conduct valid/reliable statistical analyses using variables that describe granular gender categories. Additionally, analyses that attempt to utilize sex and gender together would be complicated by the powerful correlation between the two. For

⁵⁹Any subject who indicated that their gender was not listed in the available responses was shown a follow up item that asked them to describe their gender in their own words.

example, because all of the subjects who selected “a gender not listed” were female,⁶⁰ any models that include both sex and gender would be impacted by the colinearity of the “not listed” gender category of gender and the “female” category of sex. Similarly, any other characteristic that might be correlated with identifying as a gender other than man, transgender, or woman would be colinear with being female in these data.

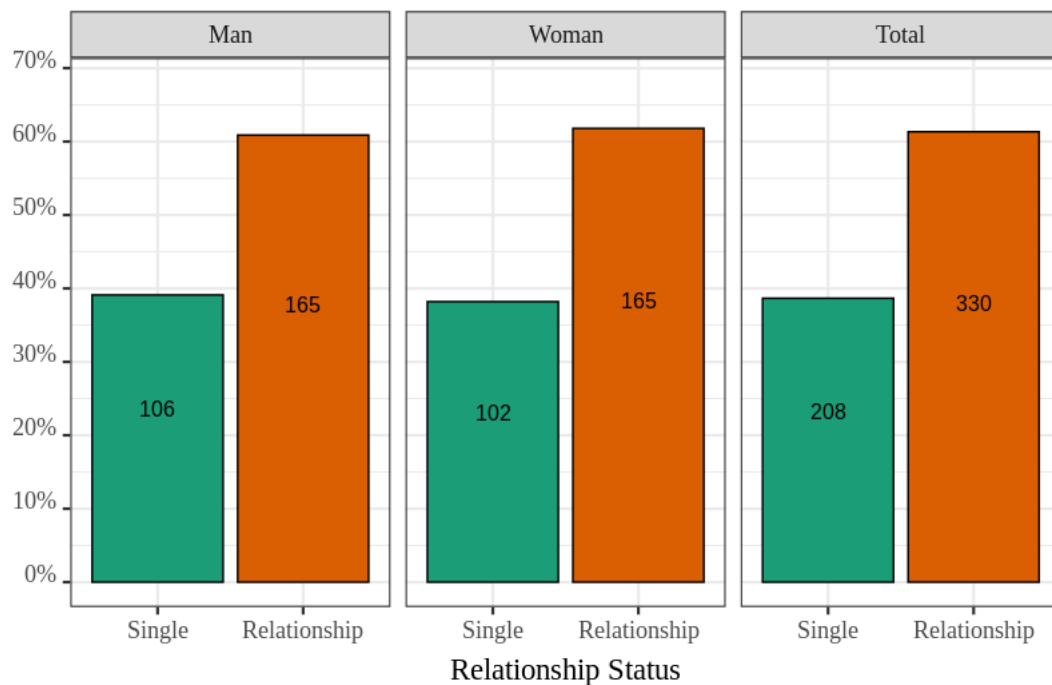
These complications are expected in a sample of this size, given the known distribution of sex-gender categories and relatively rare occurrence of some gender identities in the population. In light of this, special handling of sex-gender categorization of subjects is required. For all analyses moving forward, I have removed from the sample all subjects whose gender identity does not correspond with their sex at birth. These omissions amount to a small reduction in overall sample size (~2% decrease from the 658 contacts from the Prolific platform). Consequently, remaining individuals in the sample are people whose sense of personal identity and gender correspond with their sex.

Relationship Status

When asked about their romantic relationship status, approximately 61% of my sample indicated that they are currently in a relationship. There is no substantive difference in relationship status by gender in this sample ($\chi^2_1=0.02$; $p\leq 0.898$). The portion of subjects who are in a relationship is slightly lower than recent population estimates for the United States. For example, one 2019 survey found that approximately 69% of adults

⁶⁰This is congruent with the view of masculinity and related normative expectations that are imposed upon males being more constraining and highly surveilled, relative to females and femininity. That increased constraint can manifest as more rigid adherence to traditional gender roles and identifications on the part of males. See the Sex and Gender section of Chapter 2.

in the U.S. were in a relationship (Brown 2020). The slightly higher percentage of singles in this sample might be related to the age of the sample (more on this below). It could also be that more people were single at the time these data were collected than might otherwise be the case as a result of covid-19 pandemic mitigation measures decreasing opportunities for social interaction and relationship development.⁶¹



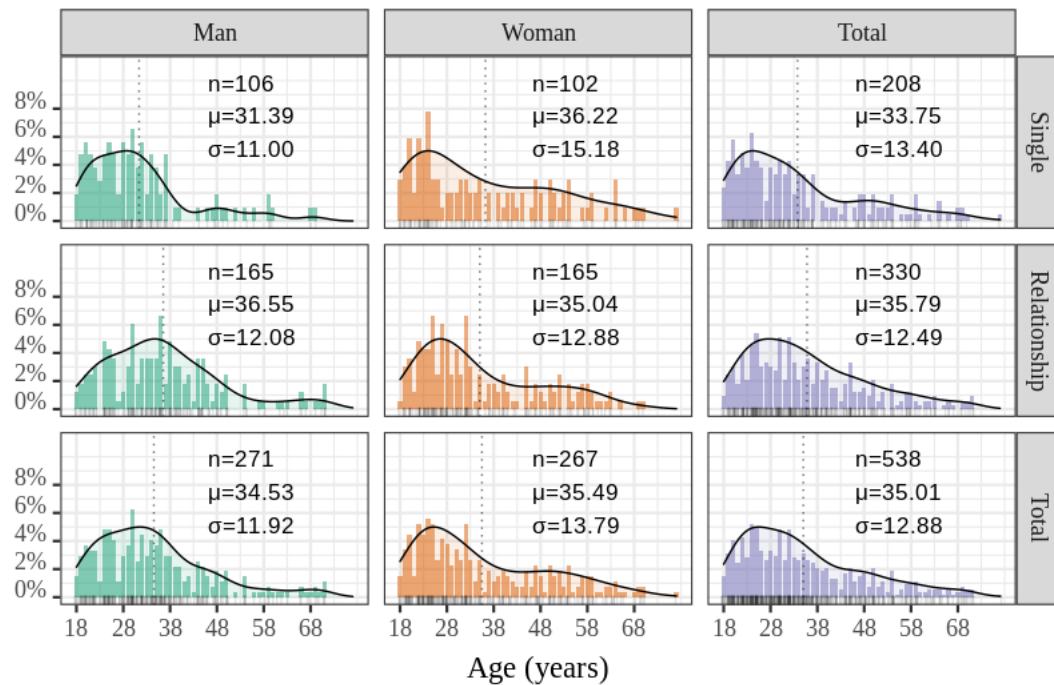
Note: Bars are labeled with raw counts.

Figure 4.2: Relationship Status by Gender

⁶¹I briefly cover the connection between age and relationship status in these data, but my comment here about the pandemic lockdown being related to more single-hood is only speculative.

Age

The overall mean age of the sample is approximately 35 years, and difference in mean age by sex is essentially non-existent ($d=0.07$; $t_{523}=0.87$; $p\leq 0.387$). Age varies by relationship status for men ($d=0.44$; $t_{239}=3.62$; $p=0.000$) but not women ($d=0.09$; $t_{187.97}=0.65$; $p=0.517$).



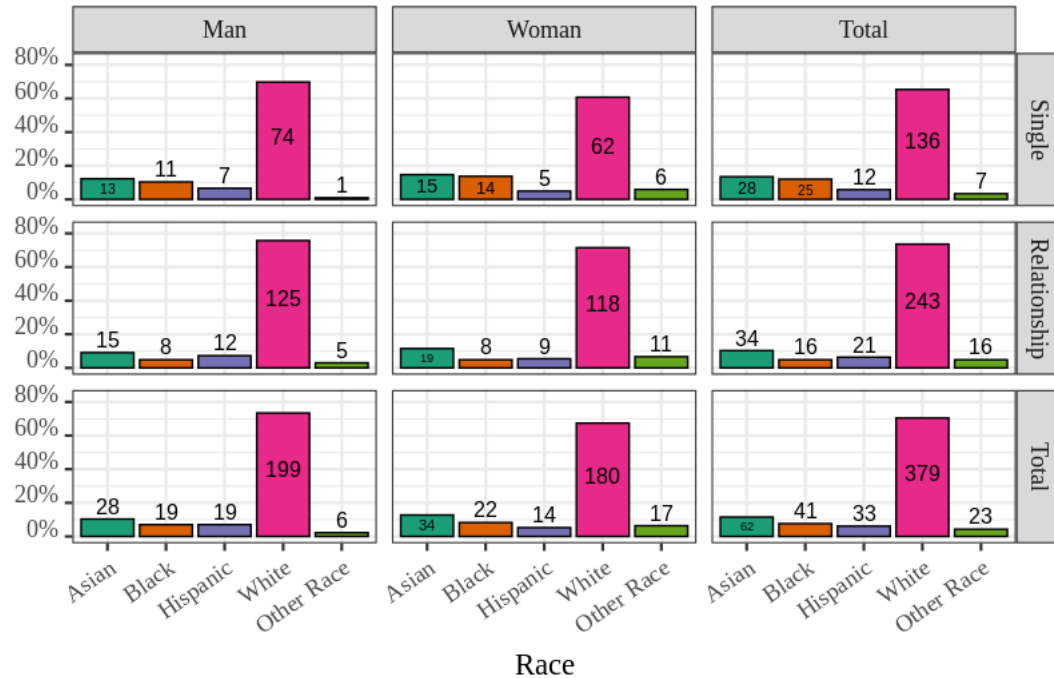
Note: Normalized histogram and rug overlain with density estimate.

Figure 4.3: Age by Gender & Relationship Status

Race-Ethnicity

The sample is reasonably diverse as regards race-ethnicity. Compared to population estimates based on 2019 Census Bureau data (U.S. Census Bureau 2021), the sample has a smaller portion of individuals who identify as black (8% this sample; 13% Census

Bureau data) and a larger portion identifying as Asian (12% this sample; 6% Census). The combined percentage of respondents who identify as either Hispanic or white (77%) is very close to the percentage reported by the Census Bureau (~76%) for a comparable categorization (e.g. race without distinguishing between Hispanic/Latino ethnicity). The percentage of subjects in this sample who selected the “other race” category (4%) is also similar to the percentage represented by the combination of other race categorizations available in Census Bureau data (about 3% when Census categories are combined). There is not a systematic difference in race by gender ($\chi^2_4=7.74$; $n=538$; $p\leq 0.102$), but the distribution of race is not independent of relationship status ($\chi^2_4=11.68$; $n=538$; $p\leq 0.020$). Subjects who identified as either black or Asian disproportionately identified as being single.

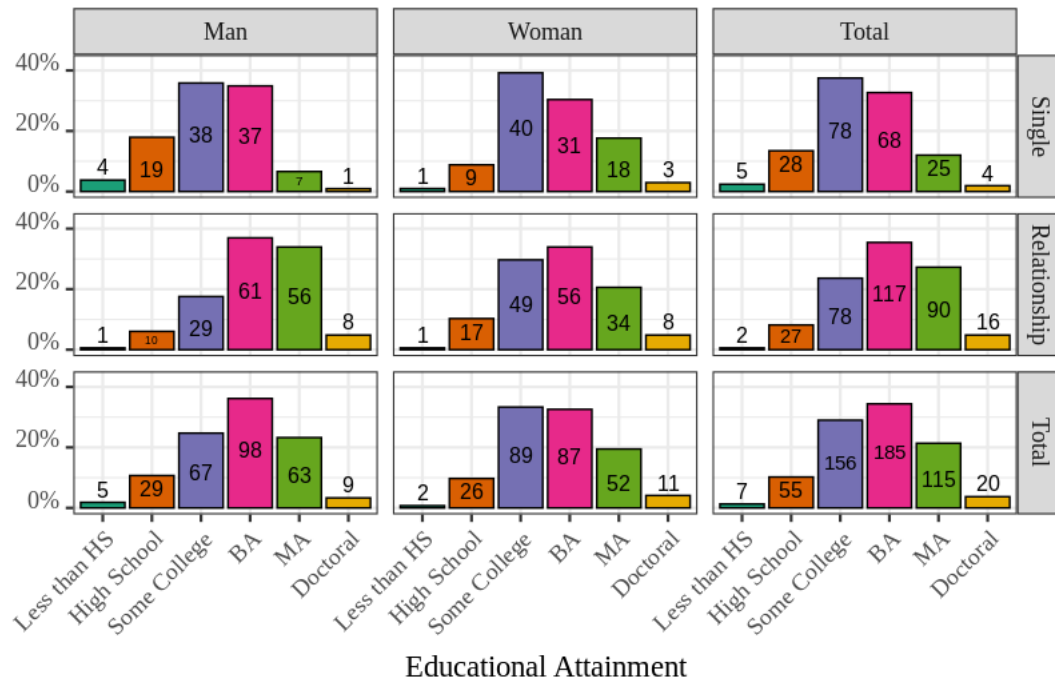


Note: Bars are labeled with raw counts.

Figure 4.4: Race by Gender & Relationship Status

Educational Attainment

Subject's educational attainment is independent of their gender ($\chi^2_3=4.91$; $n=538$; $p \leq 0.273$). However, education levels differ by relationship status ($\chi^2_5=32.21$; $n=538$; $p \leq 0.000$). This is likely attributable, at least in part, to life course changes, with education and likelihood of being in a relationship both increasing as individuals age.



Note: Bars are labeled with raw counts.

Figure 4.5: Educational Attainment by Gender & Relationship Status

Subjects in the sample are somewhat more educated than the population of the U.S. at large. In this sample about 88% of subjects have some level of college education or higher compared to only about 63% based on 2020 Census Bureau data (U.S. Census Bureau 2021). While this is a noteworthy way in which this sample differs from the U.S. population at large, the difference does not represent a problem for the validity/accuracy/reliability of the analyses and results of this research. If educational attainment has any relationship to the sexual intent dependent variable, that will be evident in analyses that utilize educational attainment as a control variable. Additionally, traits along which people differ that tend to vary with educational attainment (e.g.

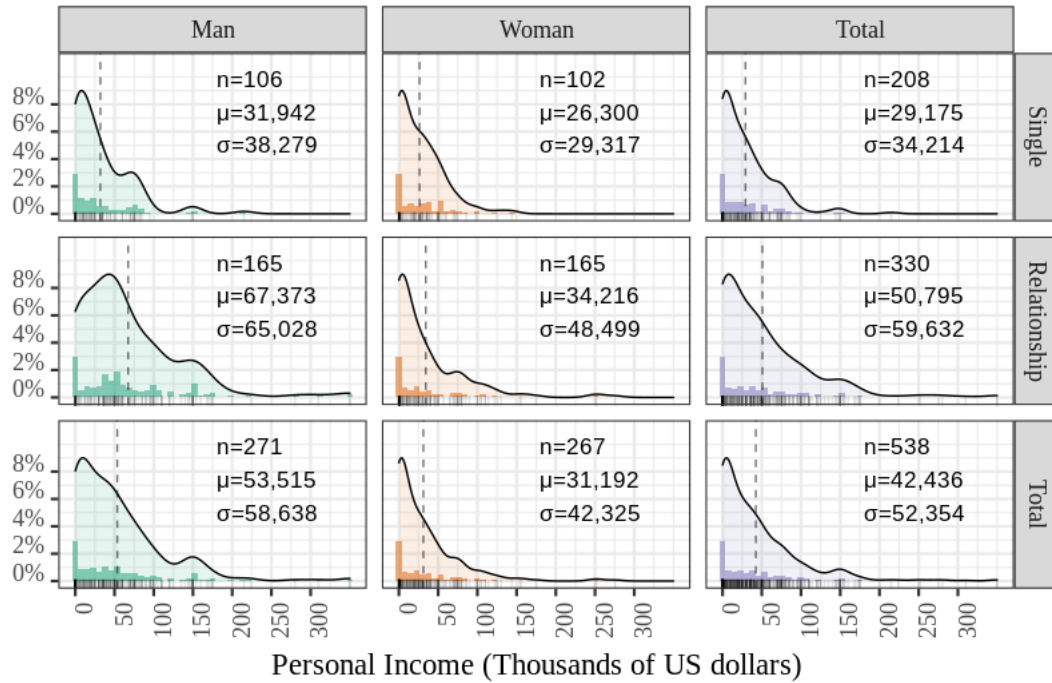
income, self-rated socioeconomic status) are also taken into account in my analyses. A plausible explanation for this higher level of educational attainment is that less educated individuals might be less likely to utilize online work platforms, such as the Prolific platform utilized to recruit research subjects for this project. Also, the skew toward younger ages in these data might be related both to greater degrees of education and parental education as well, given growth in educational attainment over time in the United States.

Income

The incomes of subjects are largely unremarkable, reflecting mostly expected patterns.⁶² One thing about the incomes reported by subjects in this sample that stands out as atypical is that they are somewhat lower than what might be expected relative to recent U.S. population data, which is often examined at the household unit of measure. The median household income in this sample is \$55,000, while the median income for all households in the U.S. during 2020 was approximately \$67,500 (Shrider et al. 2021). This is likely due to the sample being somewhat younger than the population at large. The relatively higher level of educational attainment in the sample might be expected to translate to higher incomes, but this effect, assuming it exists at all, could be overcome by the drag on incomes related to relatively lower age of the sample. Another element that

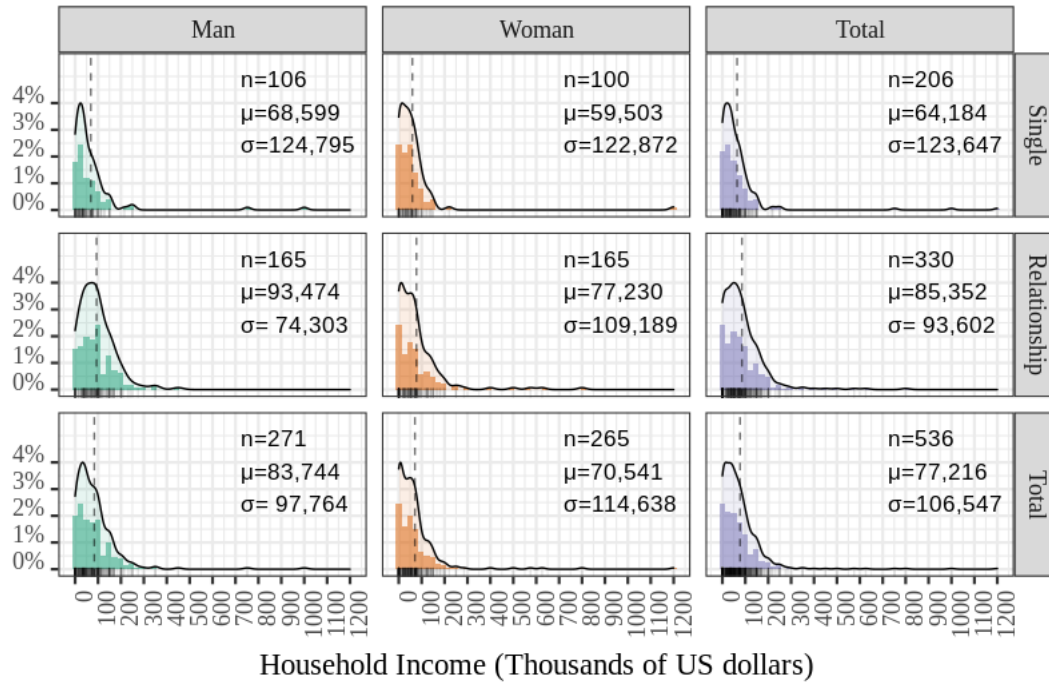
⁶²For personal and household incomes, there are outliers that might influence summary statistics. I suspect that at least some of them are due to data entry errors as subjects completed the data collection instrument. For many analyses described in this dissertation I tried multiple specifications of these two variables. I utilized strategies such as top-coding the variables (i.e. recoding any values above a threshold to an artificial maximum) and discretizing the values into category schemes (e.g. percentiles). Ultimately, I left the values of these variables as they were reported by subjects in the original dollar increments.

might contribute to this difference is the recruiting vector. Online worker platforms might be more attractive, all else considered, to people who are in need of funds, between jobs, or similarly looking for a relatively easy way to earn extra income.



Note: Normalized histogram and rug overlain with density estimate.

Figure 4.7: Personal Income by Gender & Relationship Status



Note: Normalized histogram and rug overlain with density estimate.

Figure 4.8: Household Incomes by Gender & Relationship Status

Considering personal incomes,⁶³ men in this sample have higher personal incomes than the women ($d=0.44$; $t_{491.54}=5.07$; $p\leq 0.000$). Subjects who are currently in a relationship have a higher average personal income than singles ($d=0.42$; $t_{531.83}=5.34$; $p\leq 0.000$). This is also the case when comparing differences in personal incomes by relationship status of men and women separately, but the relationship status difference is more dramatic in the case of men ($d=0.63$; $t_{267.21}=5.64$; $p\leq 0.000$) than women ($d=0.19$; $t_{264.9}=1.66$; $p\leq 0.098$). However, the difference in incomes by relationship status appears to be attributable to other traits, rather than relationship status itself. The average personal income for men in the sample is approximately \$12,465 more than that of the women, net of other factors.

⁶³Based on little substantive difference between the two in terms of changes when introducing them to candidate statistical models and their relationships to other variables, I utilize personal incomes and do not discuss household incomes further.

The effect of age is curvilinear, with substantial increases for every year of age when young that diminish and eventually decline somewhat later in life. Increases in education are associated with increased incomes.

Table 4.1: Regression Model of Personal Incomes

Intercept	-67863 ***
In a Relationship	3714
Man	12465 *
Man:Relationship	11651
Age	3786 ***
Age-Squared	-40 ***
Some College	5428
BA	20378 **
Graduate Degree	51913 ***
Observations	538
Adjusted R ²	0.29

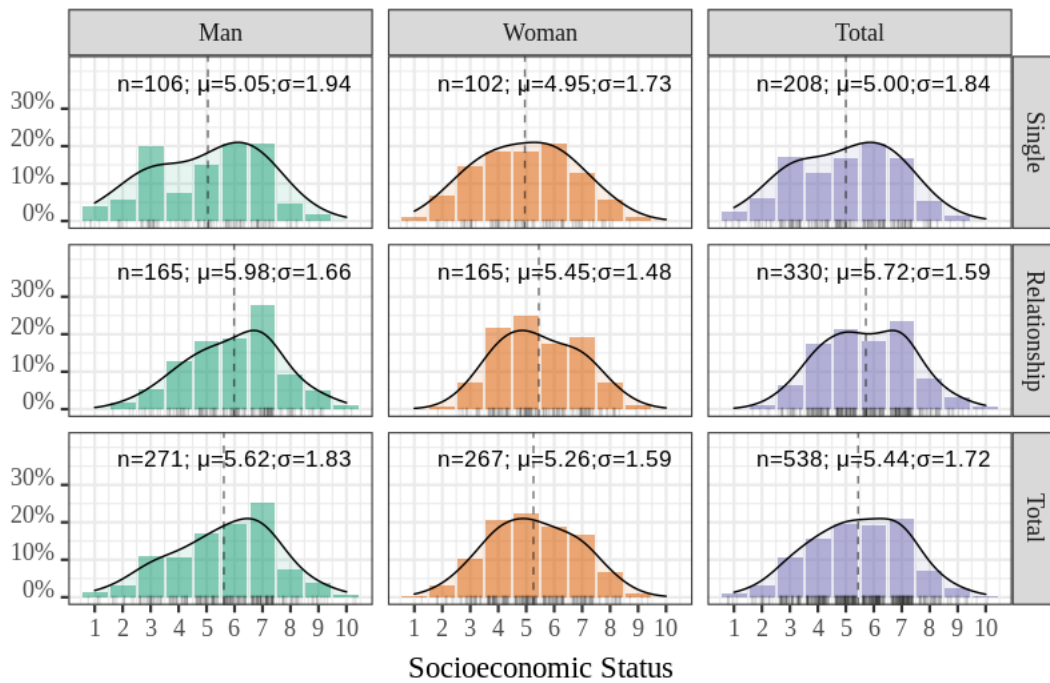
* p<0.050; ** p<0.010; *** p<0.001

Socioeconomic Status

Figure 4.10 depicts the distribution of subjective self-ratings of SES ratings in the sample. SES is usually considered to consist of decidedly economic factors, like income, alongside more symbolic/conceptual elements such as occupational prestige and educational attainment. The SES measure used here (McArthur SES Ladder) explicitly mentions money, jobs, and education. It depicts the different social positions of society's members as a hierarchy, portraying SES to subjects using a ladder and asking subjects to choose their position on that ladder.

Self-identifications of class often yield a mean rating near the middle of whatever scale is used. When asked specifically about class, people in the U.S. tend to self-identify

as middle class, even when more objective measures of socioeconomic status would indicate otherwise. This is the case in my sample, where the average income is below population averages but responses to the SES item average just above the midpoint of the available 10 point scale ($\mu=5.44$). The mean SES rating of men, relative to women, is slightly higher ($d=0.21$; $t_{527.70}=2.42$; $p=0.016$). Also, the SES ratings of subjects in a relationship, relative to singles, are higher ($d=0.42$; $t_{393.85}=4.63$; $p=0.000$).



Note: Normalized histogram and rug overlain with density estimate.

Figure 4.10: Socioeconomic Status by Gender & Relationship Status

Delving further, the model below provides a glimpse of some factors associated with variance in self-reported SES. The model contains indicators for several demographic

variables, as well as a measure of self-esteem. Self-rated socioeconomic status is not significantly different for men relative to women. There is a small, but statistically significant, decrease in SES for each year of age that diminishes in magnitude over time. Educational attainment and SES are positively related to one another.

Table 4.2: Model of Self-Rated Socioeconomic Status

Intercept	5.49 ***
Man	0.12
In a Relationship	0.19
Age	-0.15 ***
Age-Squared	0.00 ***
Asian	0.24
Black	-0.59 *
Hispanic	0.36
Other Race	-0.26
Some College	0.23
BA	0.68 **
Graduate Degree	1.28 ***
Personal Income	0.00 ***
Self-Esteem	0.63 ***
Observations	538
Adjusted R ²	0.28

* p<0.050; ** p<0.010; *** p<0.001

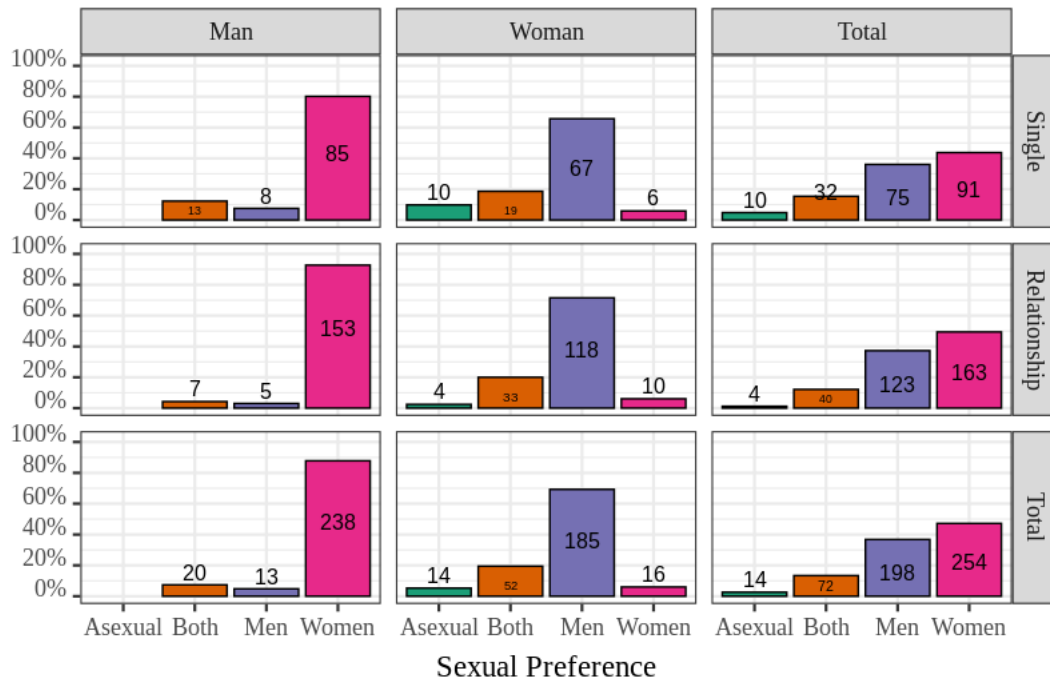
Each dollar increase in personal income is associated with a small, but statistically significant, increase in self-rated SES (an approximate increase of 0.08 in SES per \$10,000 increase in personal income).⁶⁴ Net of other factors, SES varies systematically by race groups. Blacks rate themselves lower in SES relative to whites, with no statistically significant difference in SES outcomes for other race groups relative to whites. Increases in self-esteem are related to large increases in self-rated SES.

⁶⁴This per-dollar effect is minuscule, but the variable was retained in the model because the cumulative effect across the range of incomes represented in these data can be meaningful.

Taken together, these results support the notion that subjective, self-rated SES differs from what might be expected based on objective measures. The relatively large magnitude of the self-esteem effect in this model, which is bigger than all effects aside from the increase related to having a graduate degree, suggests that one's perception of self is strongly related to where they personally place themselves in the broader social hierarchy. Self-esteem is as or more closely related to subjective SES than more objective aspects of socioeconomic standing and likely career trajectory (e.g. in terms of income, education).

Sexual Preference, Identity, and Attraction

I asked subjects to indicate their sexual preferences using two separate items in the data collection instrument. For one of these items, subjects chose a response they felt best described them from a list of options that correspond to sexual identity categories (e.g. heterosexual/straight, homosexual/gay/lesbian, bisexual). I refer to this item as the sexual identity measure. The other sexual preference item instead asked respondents to choose which of four statements about sexual attraction most applied to them. Three of the statements began with "I am sexually attracted to ..." and were completed with either "men," "women," or "both men and women." The fourth statement was "I am not sexually attracted to anyone." I refer to this item as the sexual preference measure. Outcomes for both of these are depicted in the figures below.

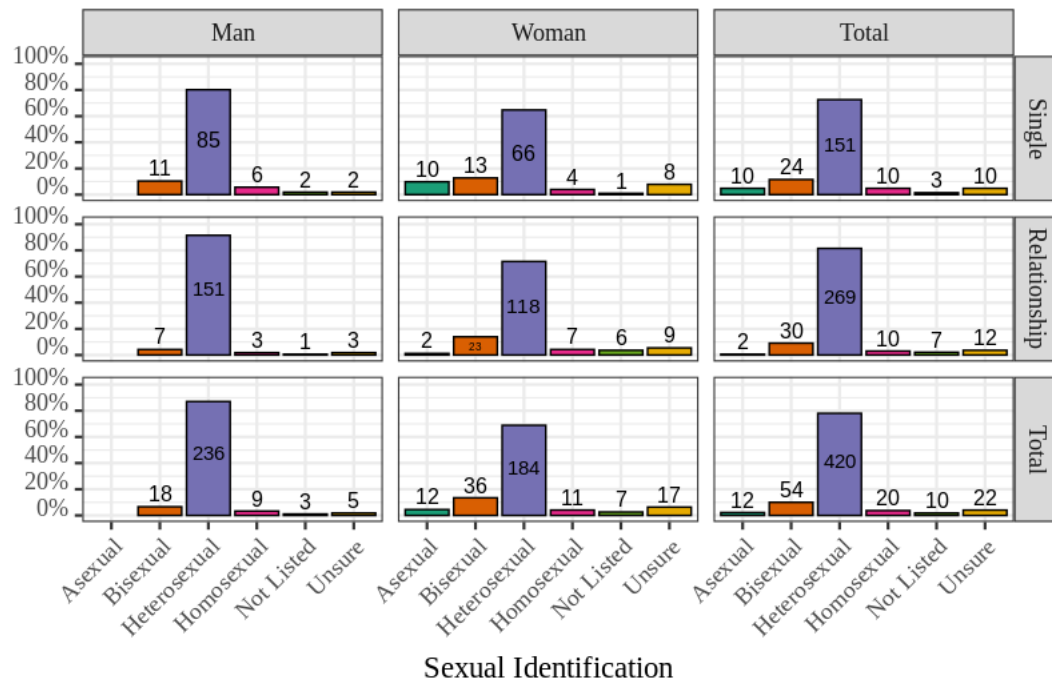


Note: Bars are labeled with raw counts.

Figure 4.11: Sexual Preference by Gender & Relationship Status

Approximately 78% of subjects identify as heterosexual/straight. Sexual preference differs systematically by gender ($\chi^2_5=32.76$; $p \leq 0.000$), with 87% of men identifying as heterosexual/straight compared to only 69% of women. No men identified as being asexual, compared to about 4% of women. The percentage of women who identified as bisexual (13%) is approximately twice that of the percentage of men (7%) who identified as such. Results on the sexual attraction measure, depicted below, are roughly congruent with the responses for the sexual preference measure. For example, the percentages of men and women who responded to the sexual attraction item in a way that reflects heterosexuality match the percentages who identified as being heterosexual on the sexual preference measure.⁶⁵

⁶⁵These items appeared at separate points during data collection, with numerous items in between them.



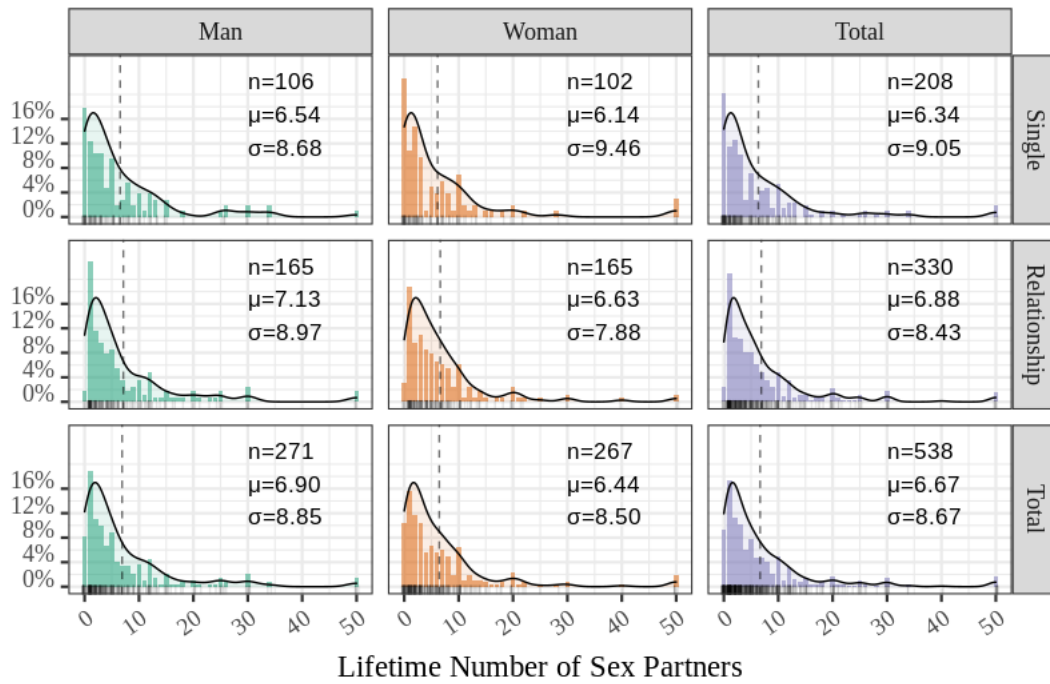
Note: Bars are labeled with raw counts.

Figure 4.12: Sexual Identity by Gender & Relationship Status

Previous Sex Partners

Subjects' were asked how many sex partners they have had in the past.⁶⁶ Their responses are summarized in Figure 4.13.

⁶⁶Because of the text-entry response form for these items, it seems plausible that some of the extremely high values were data entry errors on the part of subjects as they completed the data collection instrument. For all cases where life time sex partners exceeded 50 ($n=4$), the case was reassigned a value of 50 lifetime sex partners. I chose this maximum value because the cumulative frequency of lifetime number of sex partners at 50 is approximately 99 and some of the outliers are 4-6 times higher. These outlier cases potentially result from typographic errors when subjects responded (e.g. intended to type '30' but entered '300'), and they would have a disproportionate impact on summary data and various analyses. 9 subjects who indicated having over 40 sex partners, and only 4 subjects who indicated having over 50 lifetime sex partners. Out of 12 subjects who indicated having more than 30 lifetime sex partners, 6 were women and 6 were men.

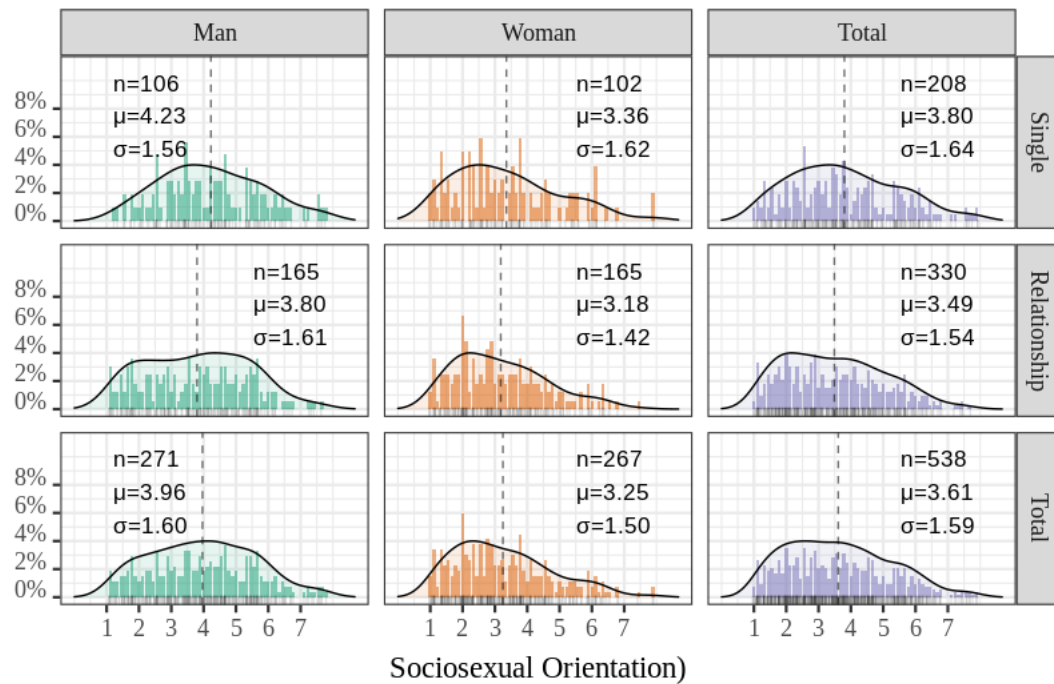


Note: Normalized histogram and rug overlain with density estimate.

Figure 4.13: Number of Previous Sex Partners by Gender & Relationship Status

There is an often identified difference in number of previous sex partners across men and women. Men typically report (sometimes substantially) higher numbers of sex partners than do women. In these data men report higher numbers of previous sex partners, but the gender difference in average number of lifetime sex partners is not statistically significant ($d=0.05$; $t_{535.67}=0.61$; $p=0.543$).

Sociosexual Orientation



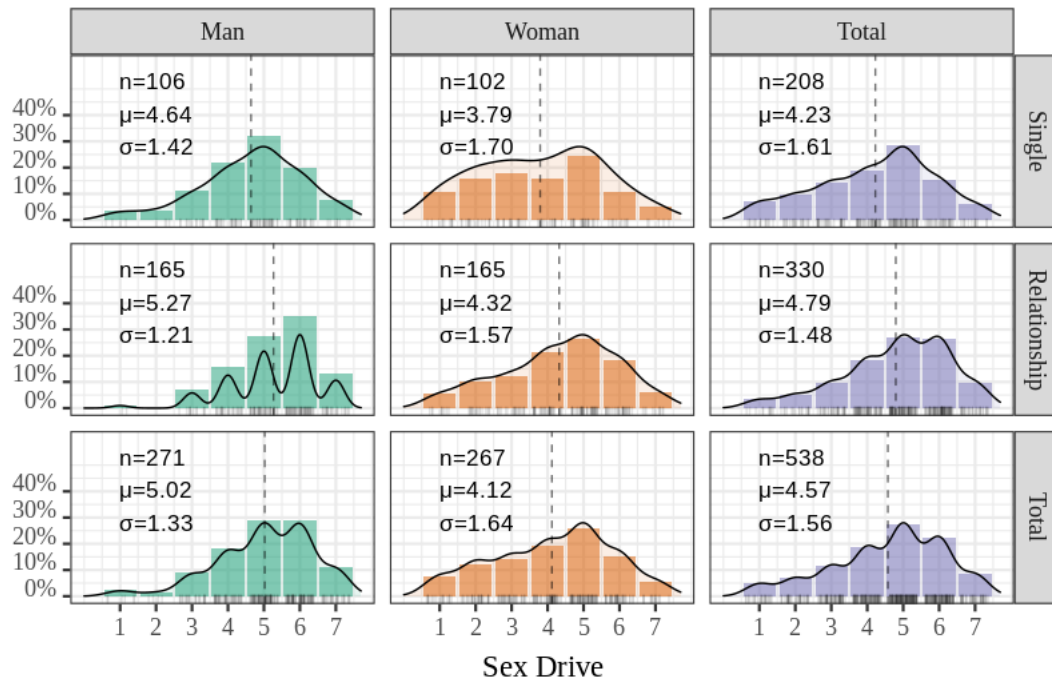
Note: Normalized histogram and rug overlain with density estimate.

Figure 4.14: Sociosexual Orientation by Gender & Relationship Status

Consistent with existing literature, there is a significant difference in sociosexual orientation by gender in these data ($d=0.46$; $t_{534.66}=5.37$; $p=0.000$). On average, men in the sample are more oriented toward casual sex outside of relationship contexts than are women. It is possible that being highly oriented toward casual sex might result in an individual imputing sexual intent onto others. If so, the gender differences in sociosexual orientation could result in a difference in the sexual intent perceptions of men and women. As such, sociosexual orientation represents a potentially important control variable, and might help explain gender differences in sexual intent perceptions should any exist.

Sex Drive

Similar to the case of sociosexual orientation, sex drive is a trait that is often described as differing for men and women. Higher sex drives are attributed to men, both in academic research and in popular culture media representations. This is also the case in these data, where men are found to have higher sex drives than women ($d=0.61$; $t_{510.83}=7.01$; $p=0.000$). The difference in sex drive by relationship status is statistically significant, with those in a relationship having a higher sex drive on average ($d=0.37$; $t_{411.89}=4.11$; $p=0.000$).



Note: Normalized histogram and rug overlain with density estimate.

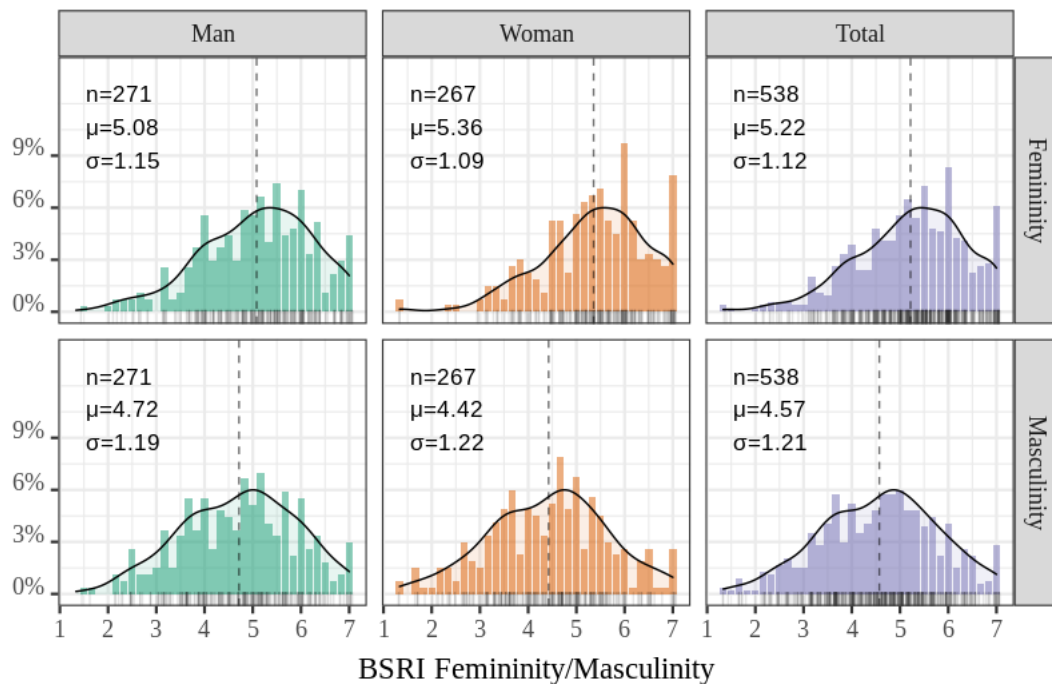
Figure 4.15: Sex Drive by Gender & Relationship Status

Gender Traits

I included two approaches to measuring gender traits in this study. The first of these is the BSRI, which takes an indirect approach, and the second approach measures these gender traits by directly asking subjects about self- and other-appraisals of these traits. I summarize the outcomes on these measures below.

Bem Sex Role Inventory

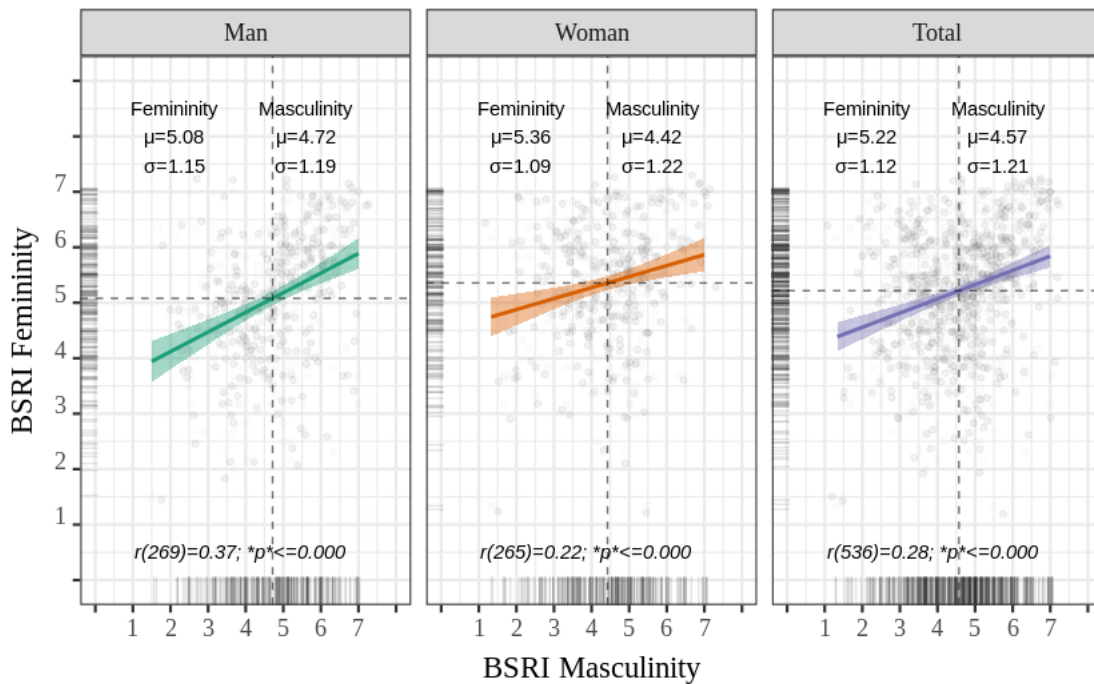
The figure below summarizes outcomes on both the femininity and masculinity traits from the BSRI measure. Outcomes for men and women are displayed for each trait along with sample totals.



Note: Normalized histogram and rug overlain with density estimate.

Figure 4.16: BSRI Femininity & Masculinity Traits by Gender

Unsurprisingly, the mean femininity trait score is significantly higher for women than men ($d=0.25$; $t_{535.18}=2.88$; $p=0.004$) and the mean masculinity score is significantly higher for men than women ($d=0.24$; $t_{535.03}=2.81$; $p=0.005$). For women, the mean femininity score is higher than the mean masculinity score. This difference is statistically significant ($d=0.81$; $t_{524.98}=9.34$; $p=0.000$). Interestingly, this is also the case when comparing the average femininity and masculinity traits for men ($d=0.31$; $t_{539.36}=3.64$; $p=0.000$). As demonstrated in the figure below, the BSRI femininity and masculinity traits, rather than being opposite one another, are positively correlated.

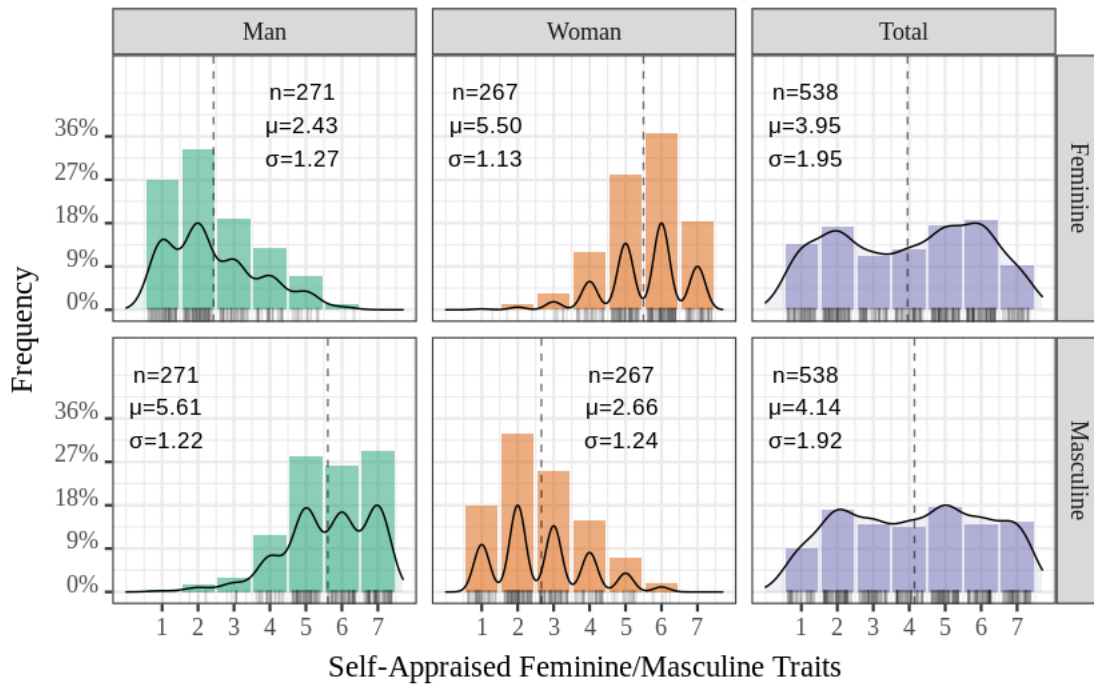


Note: Scatterplot and rug overlain with regression line and confidence interval.

Figure 4.17: Correlation between BSRI Femininity & Masculinity Traits by Gender

Self- & Other-Appraisals of Femininity/Masculinity

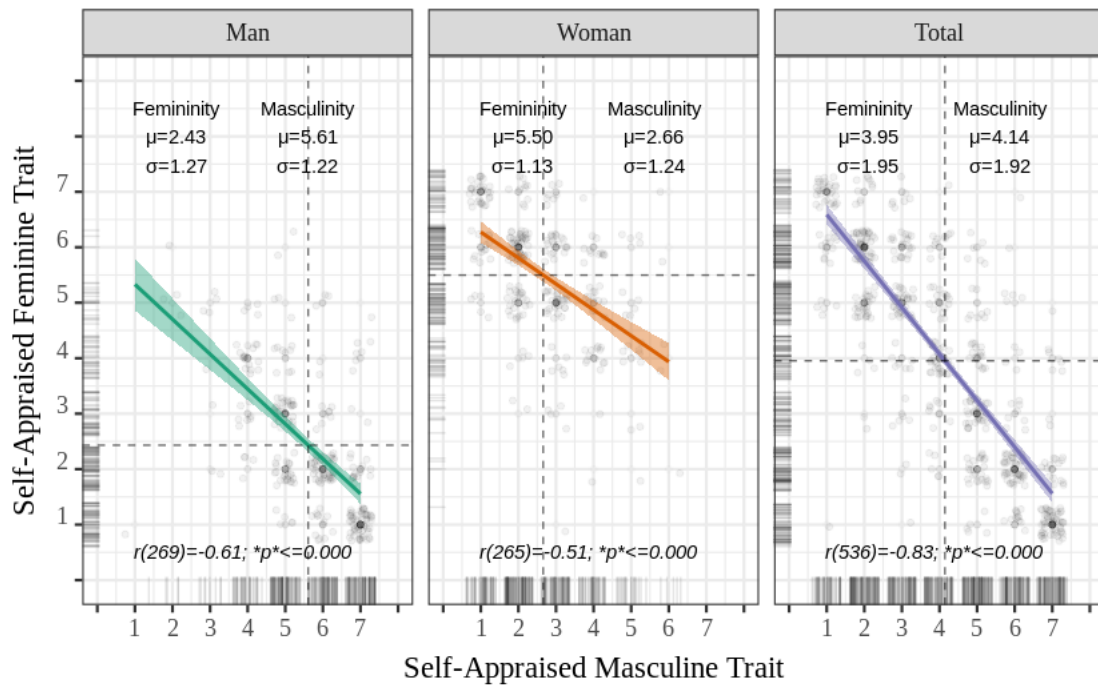
As seen in Figure 4.18, asking subjects how they would be characterized in terms of these particular gender traits directly via self-appraisal, as opposed to the indirect approach utilized by the BSRI, yields results that more highly reflect the expected, stereotypical contrast by gender.



Note: Normalized histogram and rug overlain with density estimate.

Figure 4.18: Self-Appraised Feminine & Masculine Traits by Gender

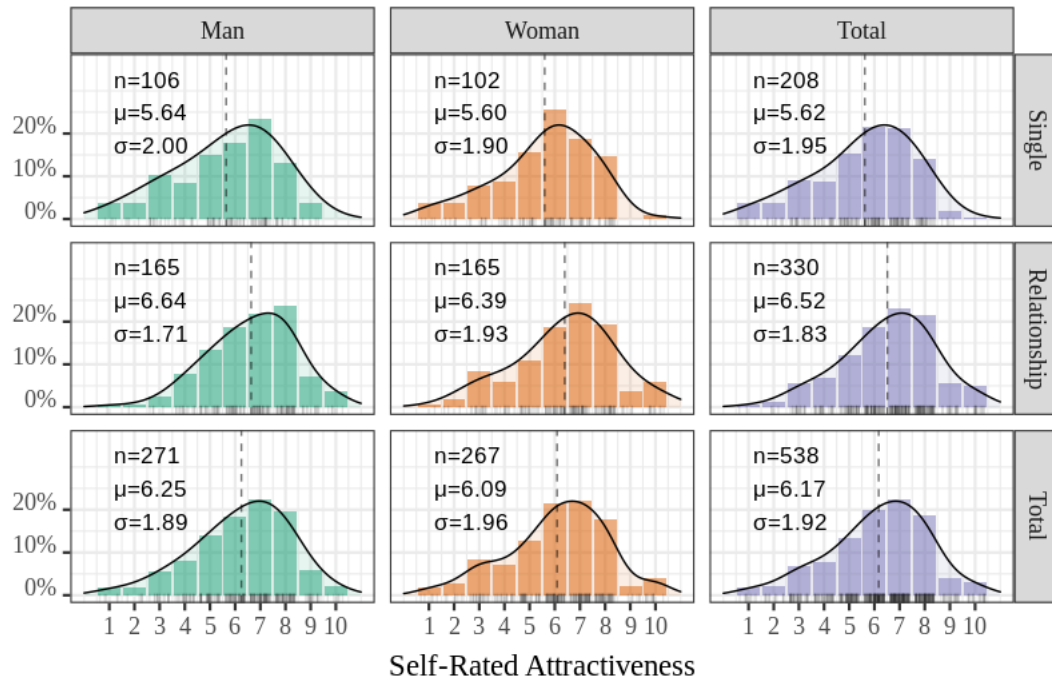
The average self-appraised femininity score is substantially higher for women than men ($d=2.56$; $t_{530.76}=29.67$; $p=0.000$). The mean self-appraisal of masculinity of men is substantially higher than that of women ($d=2.4$; $t_{535.47}=27.78$; $p=0.000$). Figure 4.19 demonstrates the correlation between self-appraised feminine trait and self-appraised masculine trait.



Note: Scatterplot and rug overlain with regression line and confidence interval.

Figure 4.19: Relationship between Self-Appraised Feminine & Masculine Traits

Self-Rated Attractiveness

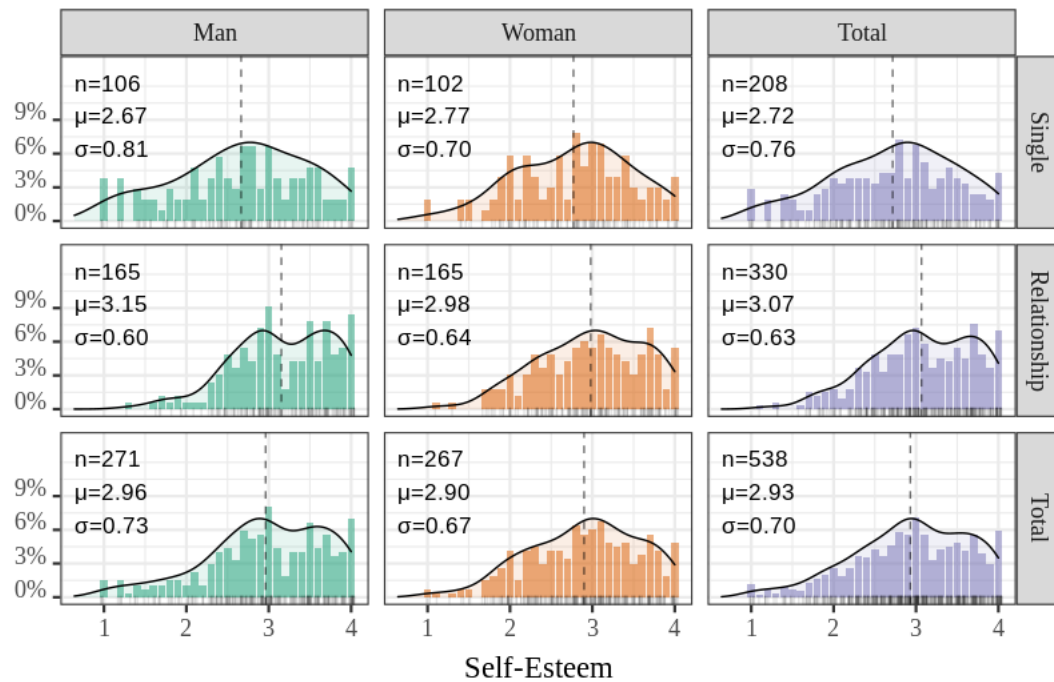


Note: Normalized histogram and rug overlain with density estimate.

Figure 4.20: Self-Rated Attractiveness by Gender & Relationship Status

The negligible gender difference in how subjects in this sample rate their own level of physical attractiveness is not statistically significant ($d=0.08$; $t_{534,59}=0.95$; $p=0.343$). On average, subjects rate themselves slightly above the mid-point of this scale. The averages for men and women are similar, but for men there is a greater degree of skew ($G_1=-0.54$; $SE_s=0.15$) than is the case for women ($G_1=-0.41$; $SE_s=0.15$).

Self-Esteem



Note: Normalized histogram and rug overlain with density estimate.

Figure 4.21: Self-Esteem by Gender & Relationship Status

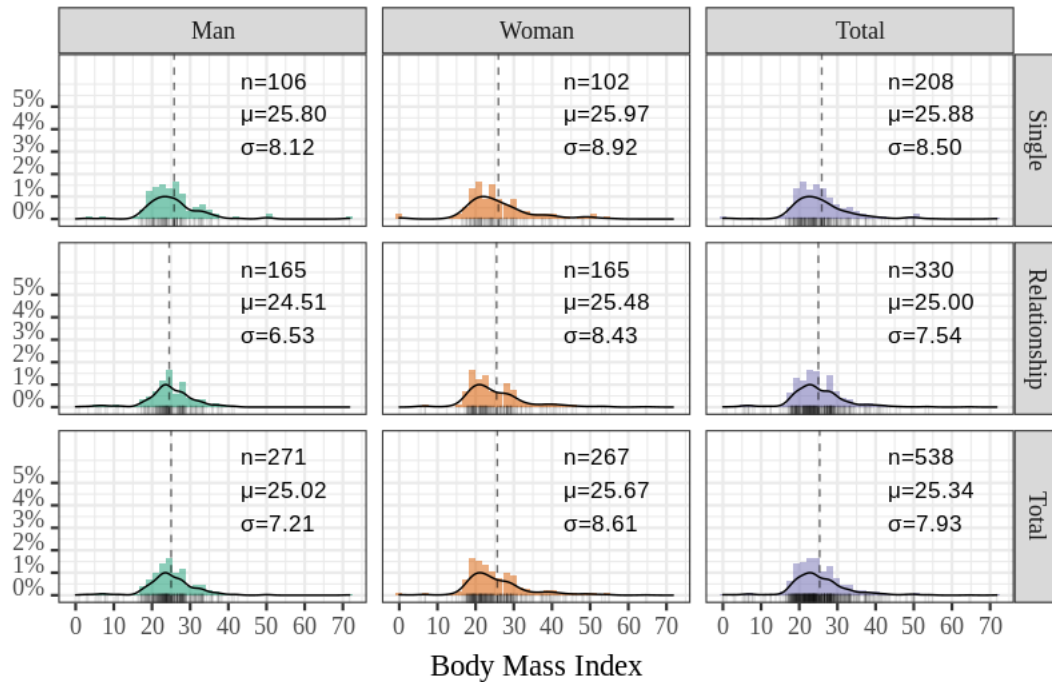
Self-esteem might bolster or be bolstered by elevated feelings of power. Other constructs, such as the above self-rating of physical attractiveness item or the BMI measure discussed below, as well as various other affective states could logically be assumed to be correlated with self-esteem and power as well. There is essentially no difference in self-esteem by gender ($d=0.09$; $t_{534}=1.04$; $p=0.300$). The model in Table 4.2 demonstrates a positive relationship between self-rated attractiveness and self-esteem, and that the relationship between the two does not differ significantly by gender.

Table 4.2: Self-Esteem Regressed on Physical Attractiveness & Gender

Intercept (Woman)	1.87***
Man	-0.30
Attractiveness	0.17***
Man:Attractiveness	0.05*
Observations	538
Adjusted R ²	0.29

* p<.05; ** p<.01; *** p<.001

Body Mass Index



Note: Normalized histogram and rug overlain with density estimate.

Figure 4.22: Body Mass Index by Gender & Relationship Status

Given that thinness is a beauty norm, I expect that those with higher BMI would rate themselves as less physically attractive. Furthermore, I expect that BMI would also be negatively correlated with self-esteem. Because being overweight, in addition to having

potentially harmful effects on general health, is also largely viewed negatively, it stands to reason that being overweight might diminish a person's self-esteem. I assume that each of these factors would be related to one another and the extent to which a person feels powerful/powerless. The matrix in Table 4.3 shows the correlations between self-esteem, self-rated physical attractiveness, and BMI.

Table 4.3: Attractiveness, BMI, & Self-Esteem Correlation Matrix

	Attractiveness	BMI	Self-Esteem
Attractiveness	1	***	***
BMI	-0.39	1	
Self-Esteem	0.54	-0.06	1

Note: Pearson correlation coefficients in the bottom triangle, p-values in the top; * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

While in the expected direction, the relationship between BMI and self-esteem is negligible and not statistically significant ($r_{536} = -0.06$; $p = 0.196$). BMI has a moderate, negative correlation with subjects' self-rated attractiveness ($r_{536} = -0.39$; $p = 0.000$). Self-rated attractiveness has a moderate and statistically significant ($r_{536} = 0.54$; $p = 0.000$), positive correlation with self-esteem. I suspect each of these is also correlated with general sense of power (discussed below).

Sense of Power

The general sense of power measure included in the data collection instrument is composed of eight items and is intended to measure the extent to which a person generally experiences feelings of social power in their day-to-day life. Table 4.4 contains

a matrix of the correlations between the general sense of power items⁶⁷. As is the case in existing research, based on these data the sense of power scale has high internal consistency ($\alpha=0.889$; $M=4.766$; $SD=1.075$). None of the pair-wise correlations between these items are negligible, and most are of moderate size.

Table 4.4: General Sense of Power Component Items Correlation Matrix

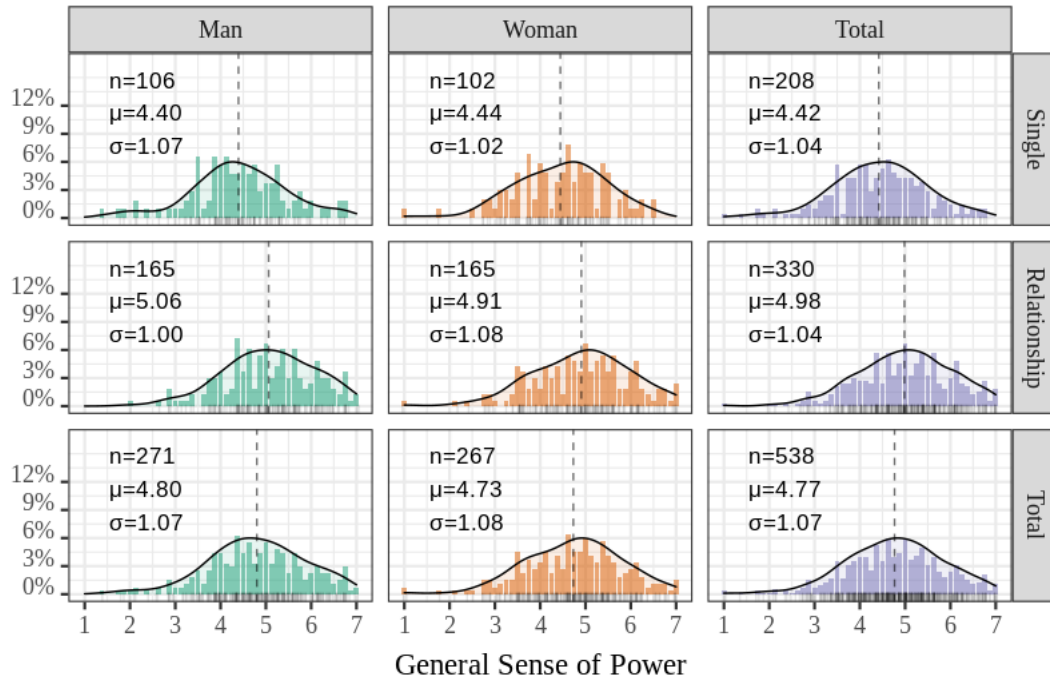
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Item 1	1	***	***	***	***	***	***	***
Item 2	0.52	1	***	***	***	***	***	***
Item 3	0.65	0.35	1	***	***	***	***	***
Item 4	0.47	0.68	0.32	1	***	***	***	***
Item 5	0.59	0.43	0.59	0.37	1	***	***	***
Item 6	0.53	0.69	0.32	0.70	0.45	1	***	***
Item 7	0.47	0.66	0.4	0.67	0.42	0.67	1	***
Item 8	0.59	0.36	0.54	0.33	0.53	0.37	0.38	1

Note: Pearson correlation coefficients in the bottom triangle, p-values in the top; * $p<.05$; ** $p<.01$; *** $p<.001$

Sense of Power: Gender, Relationship Status, & Self-Esteem

In light of a traditional status hierarchy wherein men are afforded greater status and historical gender norms that expect assertiveness and control from men but submissiveness on the part of women, it is interesting that there is a negligible difference in mean GSP by gender ($d=0.06$; $t_{535.86}=0.75$; $p=0.454$). On the other hand, the difference in mean GSP between those who are single and those who are not is noteworthy ($d=0.54$; $t_{440.2}=6.14$; $p=0.000$).

⁶⁷Note that these correlations are computed after items 2, 5, 6, and 7 were reverse coded.



Note: Normalized histogram and rug overlain with density estimate.

Figure 4.24: General Sense of Power by Gender & Relationship Status

To explore the difference in mean general sense of power between singles and those in a relationship further, I developed models regressing sense of power on sex, relationship status, and the interaction of the two (Table 4.5). The effect of relationship status, but not of gender, is statistically significant. The effect of relationship status does not differ by gender.

Table 4.5: General Sense of Power Regressed on Gender & Relationship Status

	Initial Model	w/Interaction
Intercept (Male, Single)	4.38***	4.44***
Man	0.07	-0.05
Relationship	0.57***	0.46***
Man:Relationship		0.20
Observations	538	538
BIC	1591.46	1596.52
Adjusted R-squared	0.06	0.06

* $p < 0.050$; ** $p < 0.010$; *** $p < 0.001$

Relative to singles, individuals in a relationship feel more powerful on average; this is true for both the bivariate analysis ($d=0.54$; $t_{440,2}=6.14$; $p=0.000$) and after controlling for gender differences.⁶⁸ The causal direction of this effect cannot be determined from these data alone. It could be the case that people who feel more powerful are more desirous of and/or able to secure relationships or that being in a relationship elevates sense of power. Of course, these effects are not necessarily mutually exclusive. The finding that people in a relationship have an elevated sense of power speaks to several phenomena that are engrained in popular culture and supported to some extent by existing research. One such phenomenon addresses the possibility that higher sense of power increases the chance of being in a relationship. Confident people are found to be more attractive as potential mates than those who are not (Buunk et al. 2002). Individuals who feel powerful might act in a more confident manner, thereby increasing their desirability and aiding in securing a relationship partner.

⁶⁸The effect of relationship status on general sense of power was also found to be statistically significant and of substantive size in more complex models (results not shown) that included controls for age, race, income, self-esteem, sexual preference. Similarly, the interaction between gender and relationship status was not statistically significant in more complex models.

Another phenomenon that comes to mind touches upon the relationship status to increased sense of power causal pathway. Securing a relationship partner might increase feelings such as happiness, security, and self-worth, leading to an increased sense of power. If this is the case, and confident, powerful people are perceived as more attractive as indicated to be the case in existing research, then being in a relationship should make one more attractive as a potential sex partner. This might contribute to mate choice copying, a type of non-independent mate choice, where the probability of acceptance of a potential mate increases if that person has previously been chosen as a mate by others. Women, and to a lesser extent men, have been found to engage in mate choice copying (Eva & Wood 2006; Hill & Buss 2008; Little et al. 2015). Confidence and self-esteem are closely related (Bale & Archer 2013), and confidence is considered to be sexually attractive, especially in comparison to an overt lack of confidence (Buunk et al. 2002). There is a moderate, positive relationship between self-esteem and general sense of power ($r_{536}=0.59$; $p<0.000$).

What about relationship status and self-esteem? Self-esteem might be expected to be higher on average for those who are in a relationship, although this could vary extensively with relationship satisfaction. The model depicted in Table 4.6 regresses self-esteem on relationship status and a set of demographic control variables, supports the assumption that self-esteem is higher for those engaged in a relationship than for singles.

Table 4.6: Self-Esteem Regressed on Relationship Status & Additional Controls

Intercept (Single)	1.07**
Relationship	0.21***
Observations	538
Adjusted R-squared	0.25

Note: Coefficients w/p-values in parentheses. Model includes controls for age, race, sexual preference, self-assessed socioeconomic status, and educational attainment (results not shown);

* $p < 0.050$; ** $p < 0.010$; *** $p < 0.001$

In this study, a person's own relationship status is hypothesized to impact the degree of sexual intent they perceive from a potential sex partner. I propose that partnered individuals perceive less sexual intent from potential sex partners than do singles because doing so would work to ensure the stability of their current relationship. This assumed mechanism is supported to some extent by research that demonstrates a derogation effect - whereby partnered individuals, relative to singles, "derogate" the attractiveness of potential sex partners by rating them less attractive on average.

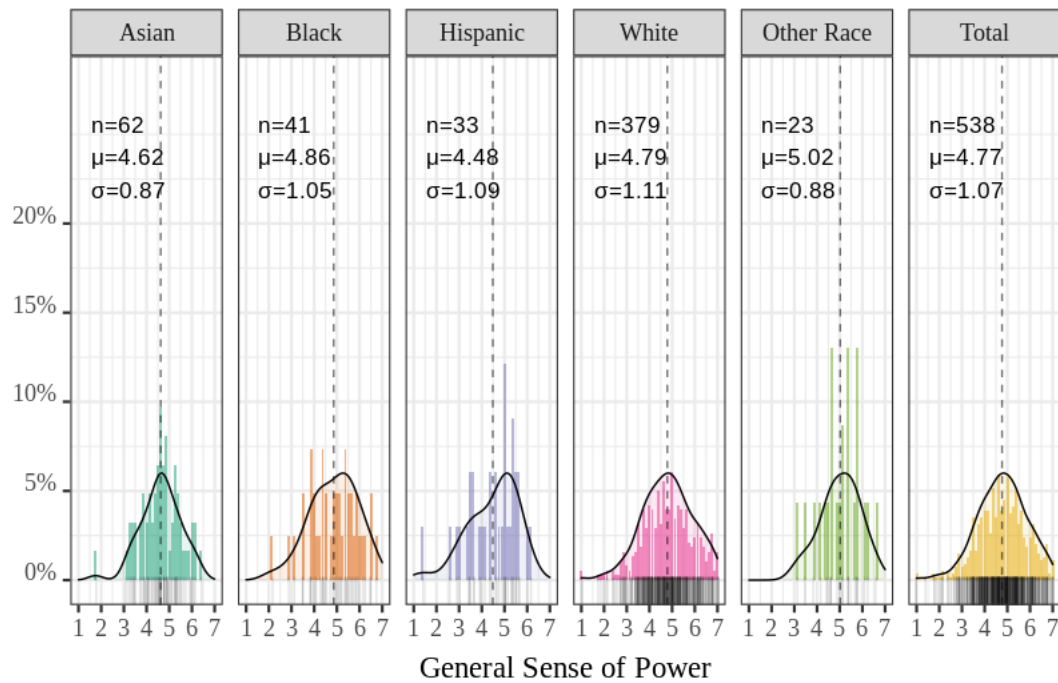
Aside from the case of assessing the attractiveness of potential sex partners other than one's current relationship partner, I assume that the mechanisms driving the derogation effect would also manifest in other ways. For instance a person who is currently involved in a relationship might exhibit ignorance or downplaying of the sexual intent of potential sex partners. If it is the case that partnered individuals are both more attractive to potential partners and less likely to realize/acknowledge those interests, then they might more frequently find themselves in situations that are ripe for misunderstanding and embarrassment. Additionally, this could lead to friction between the partnered individual and their current mate. The current mate might interpret the person's obliviousness to the interests of potential sex partners as acceptance, and

become jealous or have some other negative emotional response. While such scenarios could make for good comedy, in reality the outcomes might be harmful at times.

Sense of Power: Race and Age

There is slight variation in general sense of power across categories of race-ethnicity.

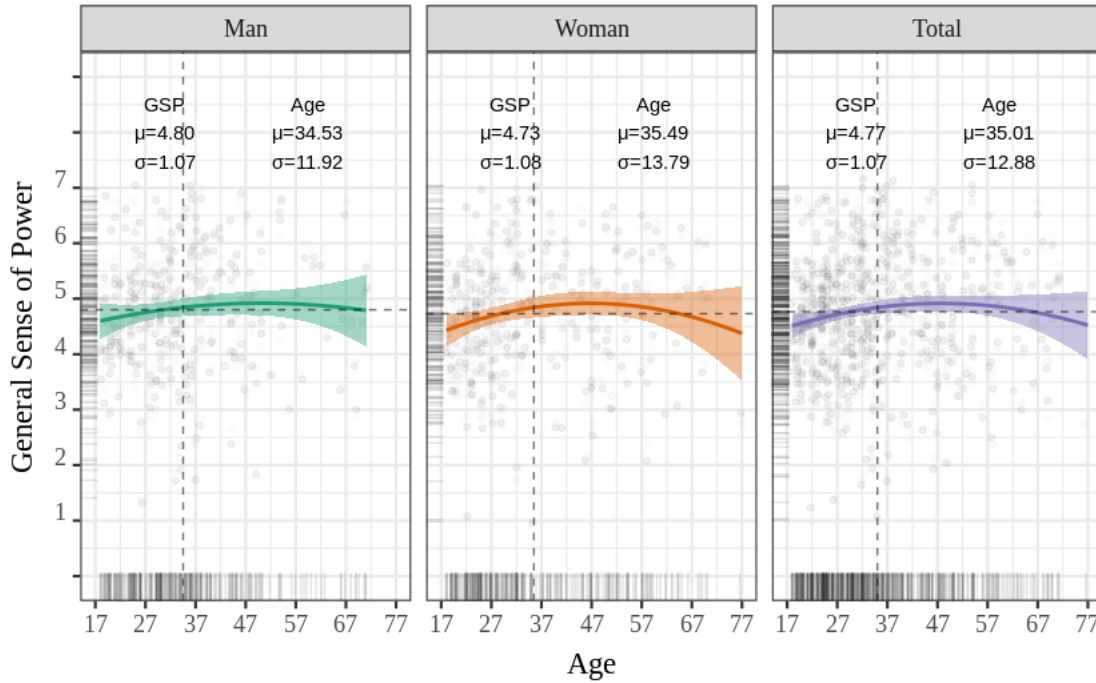
Those differences are small and not statistically significant ($F_{4,533}=1.29$; $p=0.274$).



Note: Normalized histogram and rug overlain with density estimate.

Figure 4.25: General Sense of Power by Race

Figure 4.26 demonstrates a relationship between age and general sense of power. Younger and older individuals tend to have somewhat lowered general sense of power than individuals who are middle aged, and the relationship is statistically significant (Age: $\beta=0.04$, $p\leq 0.031$; Age²: $\beta=0.00$, $p\leq 0.061$).



Note: Scatterplot and rug overlain with regression line and confidence interval.

Figure 4.26: Relationship between General Sense of Power & Age by Gender

Sense of Power: Gender Traits

Traditional gender stereotypes promote notions of strength, willingness to engage in risk, and assertiveness as masculine qualities and associate these with males and manliness. At the same time, a more restrained demeanor and nurturing tendencies are associated

with females, and women are expected to adhere to these qualities. Could there be an association between general sense of power and these gender-typical traits? The models in Table 4.7 regress GSP on gender, the BSRI gender traits, and the interactions of gender and BSRI traits. Neither the effect of the femininity trait nor the effect of the masculinity trait on GSP is significantly different for men and women.

Table 4.7: General Sense of Power Regressed on Gender & BSRI Gender Traits

Intercept (Woman)	2.20***
Man	-0.29
Femininity	0.13*
Masculinity	0.42***
Man:Femininity	-0.03
Man:Mascularity	0.09
Observations	538
Adjusted R-squared	0.31

* $p < 0.050$; ** $p < 0.010$; *** $p < 0.001$

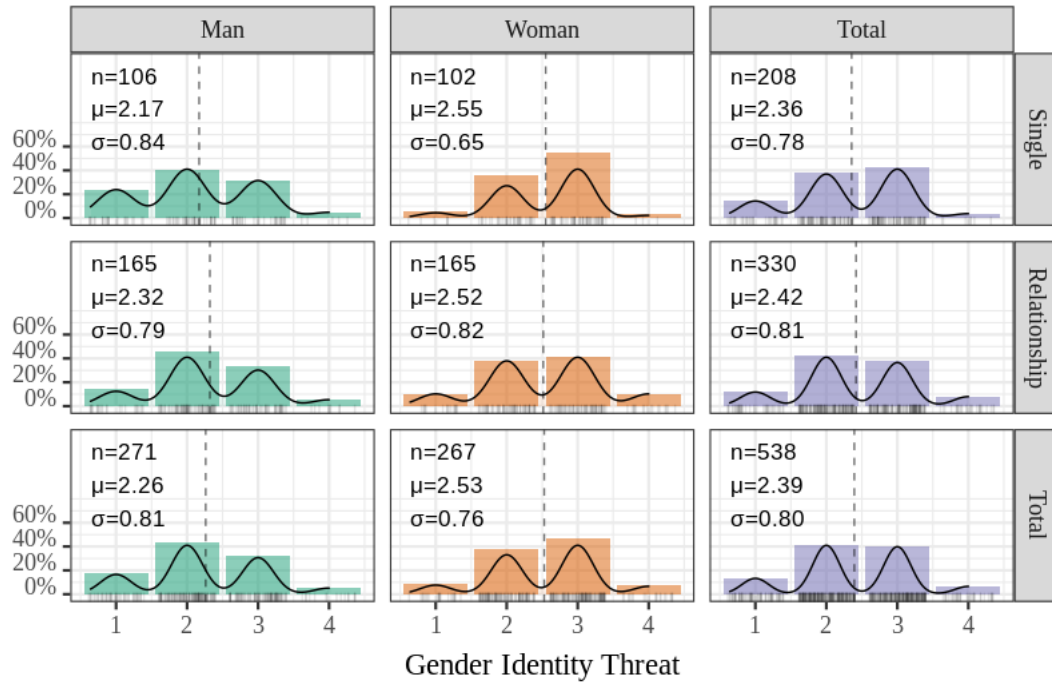
The relationship between gender and GSP is very small and not statistically significant. For men and women alike, individuals who are higher in either of the BSRI gender traits tend to also have a higher GSP. However, the increase in GSP associated with a unit increase in the femininity trait is relatively small while the increase related to a unit increase in masculinity is relatively large. In a separate model for GSP (results not shown), the interaction of femininity and masculinity was not found to be statistically significant. The relationship between the femininity trait and GSP appears to be robust to changes in the level of the masculinity trait, and vice versa.

Gender Identity Threat

The mean response on the gender identity threat measure is higher for women than men. This gender difference is statistically significant ($d=0.34$; $t_{534.33}=3.93$; $p=0.000$). In light of known gender stratification across society, finding that women, on average, feel their gender is disadvantaged or threatened to a greater extent than do men is not unexpected. On the other hand, given the specific wording of the item in the survey instrument⁶⁹ and strides toward gender equality in the U.S. in recent decades, this result is interesting. Objectively, it could be argued that while gender inequalities continue to exist, society has undergone shifts toward gender parity in areas such as employment, wage growth, educational attainment, and obtaining roles traditionally occupied almost wholly by men in government, industry, and other organizations. Yet many women in this sample believe that recent societal changes have disadvantaged women more.⁷⁰ The graph below summarizes the gender identity threat measure.

⁶⁹The item read “recent changes in society have disadvantaged [men|women],” and subjects were asked to indicate their level of disagreement/agreement.

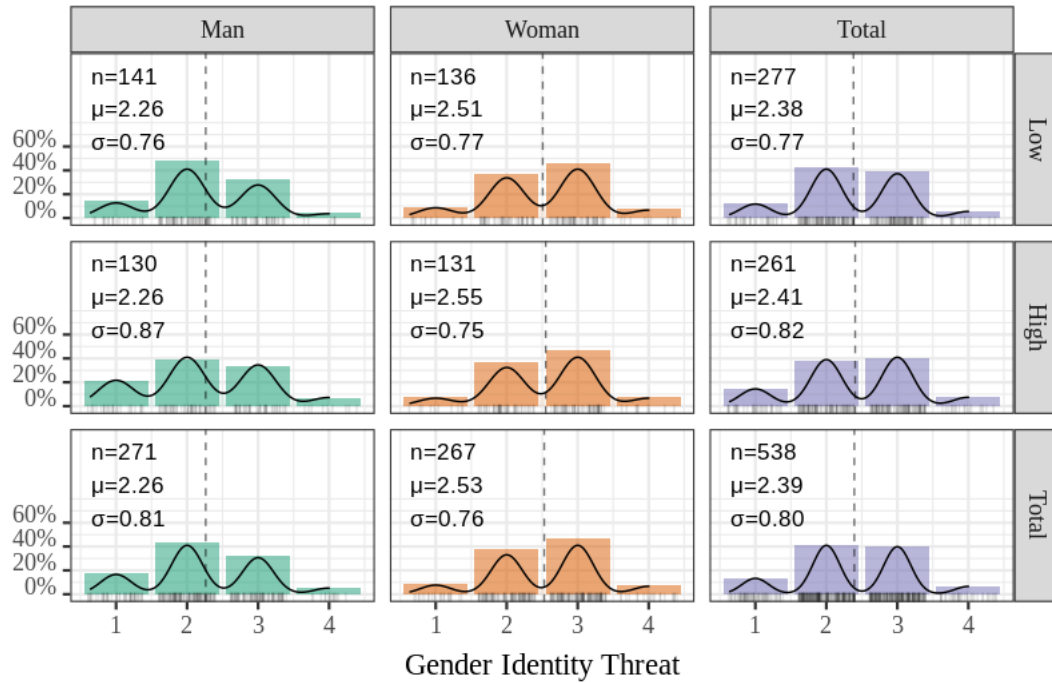
⁷⁰Whether or not one’s opinion regarding this issue happens to be accurate is mostly immaterial in the context of this research. It is what the person thinks/feels to be the case that is assumed to influence their perceptions and motivate their behaviors, regardless whether those feelings, opinions, and beliefs are objectively accurate or not.



Note: Normalized histogram and rug overlain with density estimate.

Figure 4.27: Gender Identity Threat by Gender & Relationship Status

It is worth noting that while power was experimentally manipulated prior to subjects completing the gender identity threat measure, power treatment condition does not appear to be related to variance in this measure. The graph below shows the gender identity threat measure, comparing across power treatment conditions. Gender identity threat differs significantly by gender ($d=0.34$; $t_{534.33}=3.93$; $p=0.000$) but not by power treatment ($d=0.03$; $t_{528.73}=0.34$; $p=0.733$).



Note: Normalized histogram and rug overlain with density estimate.

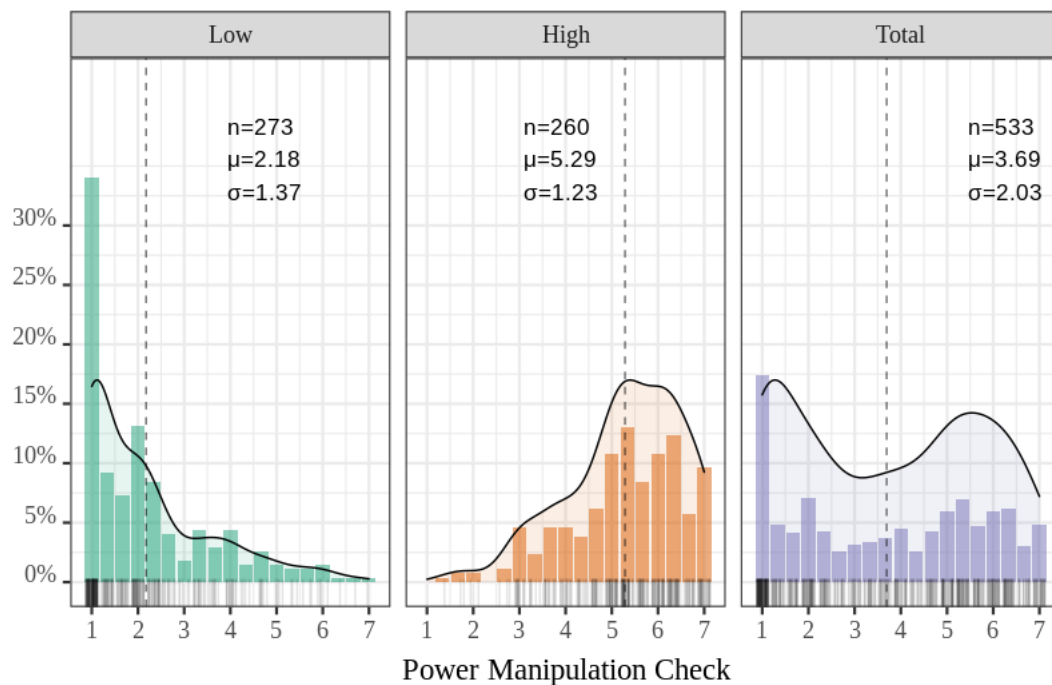
Figure 4.28: Gender Identity Threat by Gender & Power Treatment

Assessing Data Quality

As discussed in Chapter 3, my initial means of assessing the quality of the data collected from subjects recruited via the Prolific platform included techniques such as utilizing attention check items to screen for inattentive participants. One such item was implemented at the beginning of the data collection instrument. Failure to appropriately address the item would lead to the case being marked to be discarded and the software redirecting the respondent to the end of the data collection instrument. In such a case, no data would be collected from the participant. Further, cases where the respondent did not complete critical open-ended text response items (e.g. the power prime essay procedure)

were eliminated during cleaning and organizing of the data.⁷¹ Aside from those data assessment measures, I included a set of items in the data collection instrument that serve as the experimental manipulation check measure. Outcomes on this manipulation check are explored below.

Power Manipulation Check



Note: Normalized histogram and rug overlain with density estimate.

Figure 4.29: Power Manipulation Check Outcomes by Treatment Condition

I began my assessment of the experimental manipulation check outcomes by conducting a Levene test of equality of variances ($F_{1,531}=0.5$; $p=0.478$), which provided insufficient evidence to reject the null hypothesis of equal variances in the manipulation check measure for each power treatment condition. The average combined manipulation check

⁷¹See Chapter 3 for a discussion of these procedures.

score differs tremendously by treatment group ($d=2.38$; $t_{529.14}=27.55$; $p=0.000$). The high power condition mean score is higher than the mean score for the low power condition for the global manipulation check measures, indicating that the experimental manipulation likely had the intended effect.

I also examined the component items of the manipulation check measure separately. On average, subjects in the high power condition have higher scores on the first item ($\mu_{High}=5.09$); they report feeling more powerful during the recalled scenario than do those in the low power condition ($\mu_{Low}=2.08$; $d=1.94$; $t_{524.26}=22.33$; $p=0.000$). For the second component item, dominance, those in the high power condition also report having this feeling to a greater extent on average ($\mu_{High}=4.91$) than do those in the low power condition ($\mu_{Low}=1.93$; $d=2.09$; $t_{510.61}=24.07$; $p=0.000$). Additionally, those in the low power condition indicate greater feelings of powerlessness ($\mu_{Low}=2.52$), assessed with the third component item, than do those in the high power condition ($\mu_{High}=5.86$; $d=2.05$; $t_{519.31}=23.82$; $p=0.000$). Based on these results, it seems likely that the experimental manipulation of power is working as intended.

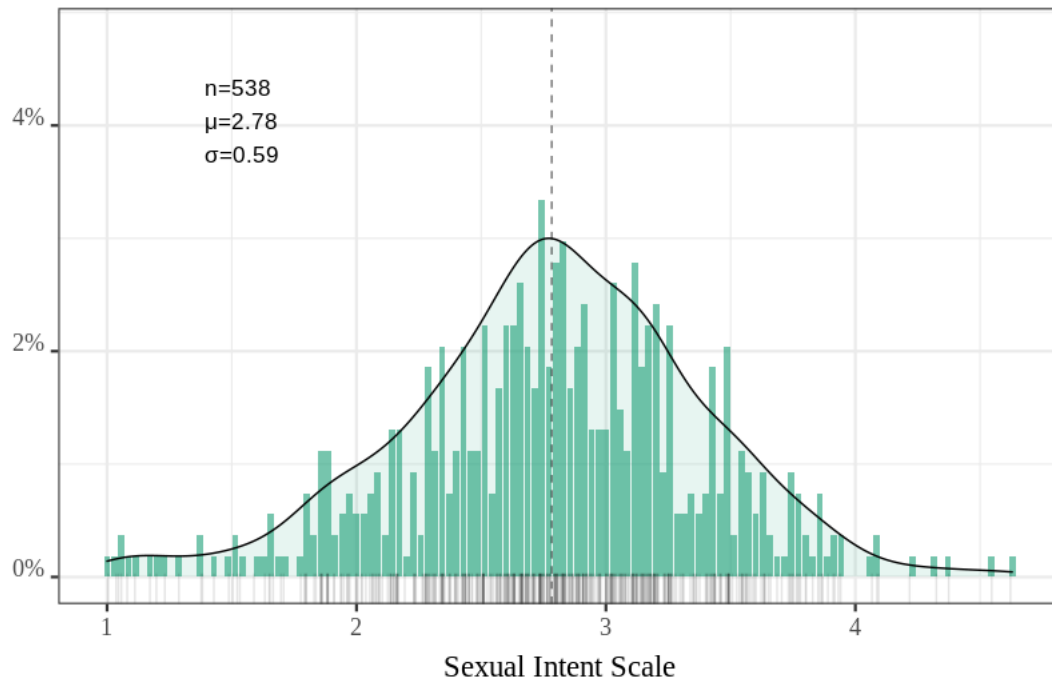
Chapter 5: Inferential Analyses

In this chapter, I discuss the most substantive portion of my overall analysis. In the sections that follow, I first take a basic look at the distribution of scores on the SIS. I visualize the variance in the sexual intent perception outcomes and conduct an initial examination of the relationships between SIS scores and the main independent variables using standard linear regression model techniques. The intent of this preliminary step, aside from an initial description of the SIS outcome, is to set the stage for demonstrating how the explanatory model is improved through the use of BMA. Next, I use BMA techniques to select among potential candidate models, identify the Occam's window set of models, and average over the Occam's window models to account for uncertainty resulting from the model selection process itself. The BMA results are then used to test my hypotheses.

Sexual Intent Scale

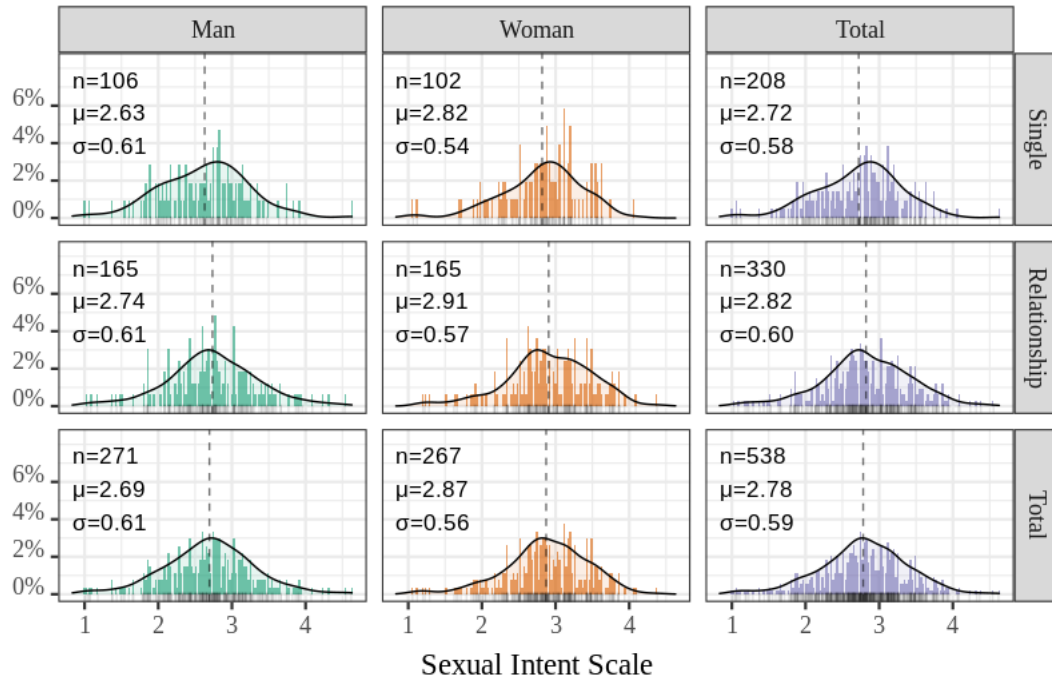
The mean SIS outcome is just above the mid-point of the scale. A Shapiro-Wilk test of normality suggests that the distribution of outcomes for the sample overall might differ from a normal distribution ($W=0.99$; $p=0.004$). With a sample of this size the Shapiro-Wilk test could be overly sensitive, detecting even non-substantive departures from normality. However, the anticipated difference in SIS by power treatment condition,

relationship status, and gender would likely account for any possible multimodality, if present. In particular, the experimental treatment of power should, if the theoretical assumptions underpinning this research are valid, induce multimodality in this measure.



Note: Normalized histogram and rug overlain with density estimate.

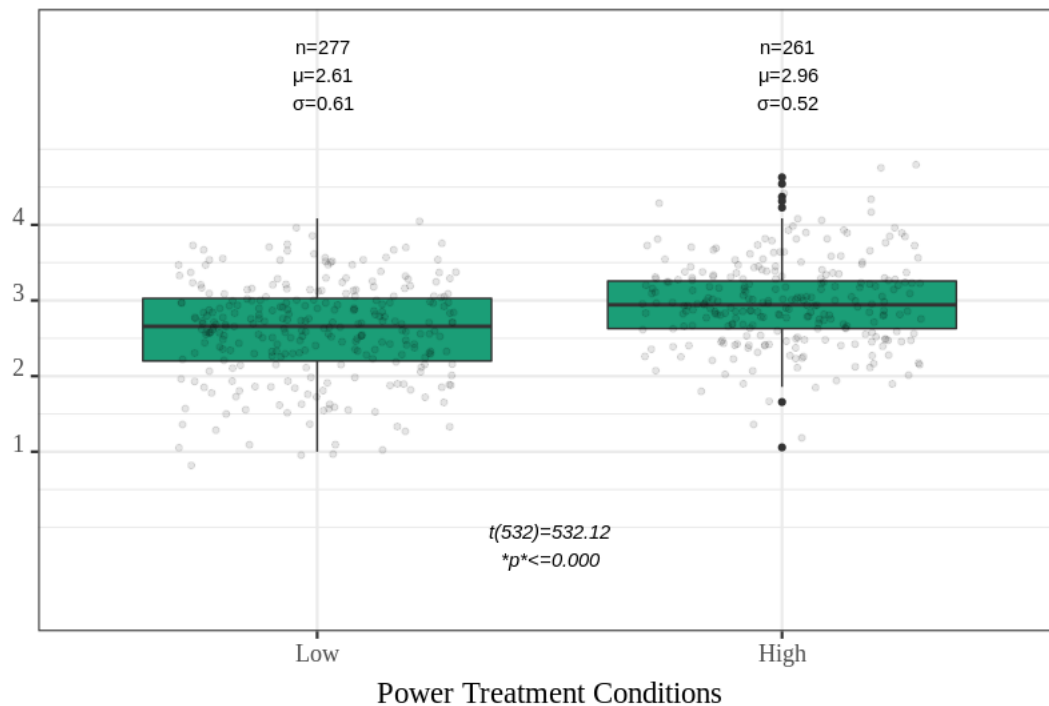
Figure 5.1: Sexual Intent Scale Outcomes



Note: Normalized histogram and rug overlain with density estimate.

Figure 5.2: Sexual Intent Scale Outcomes by Gender & Relationship Status

Some variation in sexual intent outcomes exists across gender and relationship status groups ($F_{1,1}=12.35$; $p=0.000$). Mean SIS outcomes are lowest for single men, somewhat higher for men in a relationship, followed by single women, with the highest mean outcome found amongst women in a relationship. SIS outcomes by gender and relationship status groups contradict my first and fourth perceived sexual intent hypotheses (H.1; H.4), which predict that men and individuals who are single will perceive greater levels of sexual intent from potential sex partners than will women and partnered individuals. However, this is prior to accounting for differences between the low and high experimental treatment conditions or variance attributable to any of the control variables.



Boxplot overlay w/scatter, Welch's t-test results.

Figure 5.3: Sexual Intent Scale Outcomes by Treatment Condition

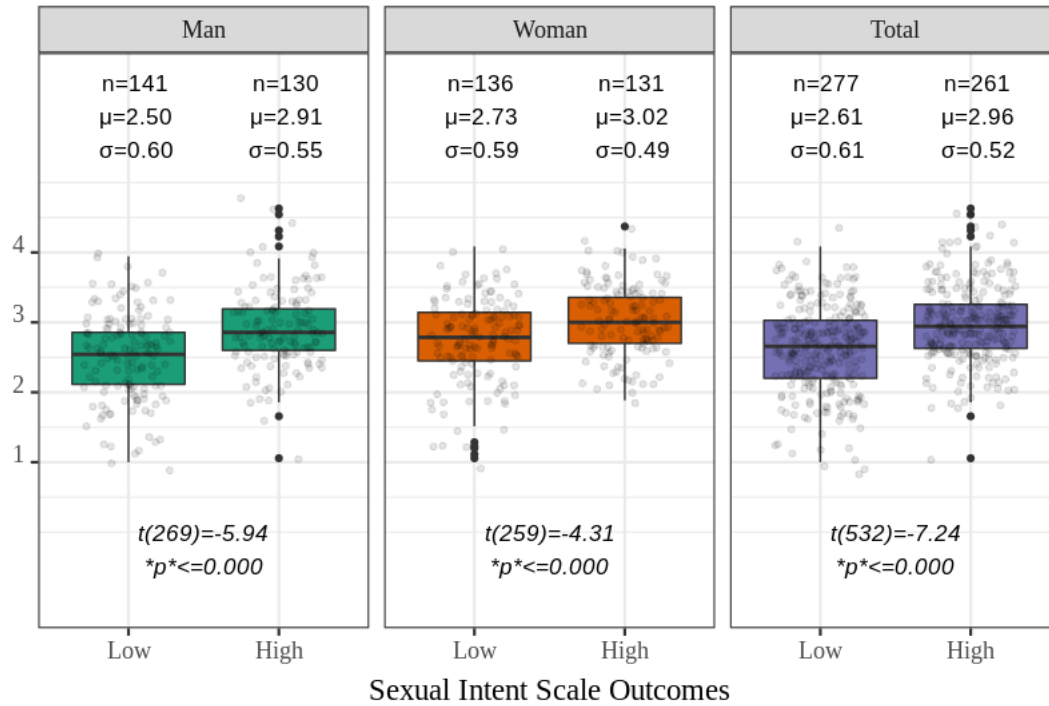
My hypothesis that high power will lead individuals to perceive higher degrees of sexual intent from potential sex partners (H.2) is central to this research. To test that hypothesis, I randomized subjects into low and high power conditions and experimentally manipulated power. The figure above summarizes SIS outcomes across the low and high experimental treatment conditions. SIS outcomes are substantially higher on average for subjects in the high power condition, demonstrating a moderately sized, statistically significant power treatment effect ($d=0.62$; $t_{532.12}=7.24$; $p=0.000^{72}$). This outcome

⁷²Based on the results of a Levene test of equality of variances, the difference in the variances in SIS outcomes for the two experimental treatment condition groups is statistically significant ($F_{1,536}=5.40$; $p=0.021$). However, substantively the difference in the variances is not large, and this degree of difference is not expected to substantially impact nor inhibit hypothesis tests. In light of the inequality of variances of the experimental conditions, I verified the results of this and other statistical tests using methods that are robust to inequality of variances (results not shown). There were no substantive differences in the results using the alternate methodologies.

provides some initial support for my hypothesis that high power increases the tendency of individuals to perceive sexual intent from potential sex partners. However, at this stage of the analysis, this result is only preliminary, and this model serves largely as a point of reference in the model selection process. The above results regarding the differences in the SIS outcome by treatment condition represent a model in which the relationships of all other variables to SIS, including the gender and relationship status independent variables, are assumed to be non-existent. That is, the effects of all other predictors are assumed to be zero.

Next, I analyze SIS outcomes further by comparing across men and women in addition to the experimental treatment groups. This analysis can be considered to represent another candidate model in which the effect of gender is now allowed to vary from zero. SIS outcomes by gender within power treatment condition groups are represented in Figure 5.4, and a model regressing the SIS outcome on these variables is presented in Table 5.1.⁷³ On average, those in the high power condition have higher SIS scores ($d=0.62$; $t_{532.12}=7.24$; $p=0.000$). The mean score of women is higher than that of men for the sample overall ($d=0.30$; $t_{533.38}=3.51$; $p=0.000$) as well as when making this comparison within each treatment condition.

⁷³The difference in the variances of the SIS outcomes across the gender and treatment condition groups is not statistically significant based on a Levene test of equality of variance ($F_{3,534}=1.65$; $p=0.176$).



Boxplot overlain w/scatter, Welch's t-test results.

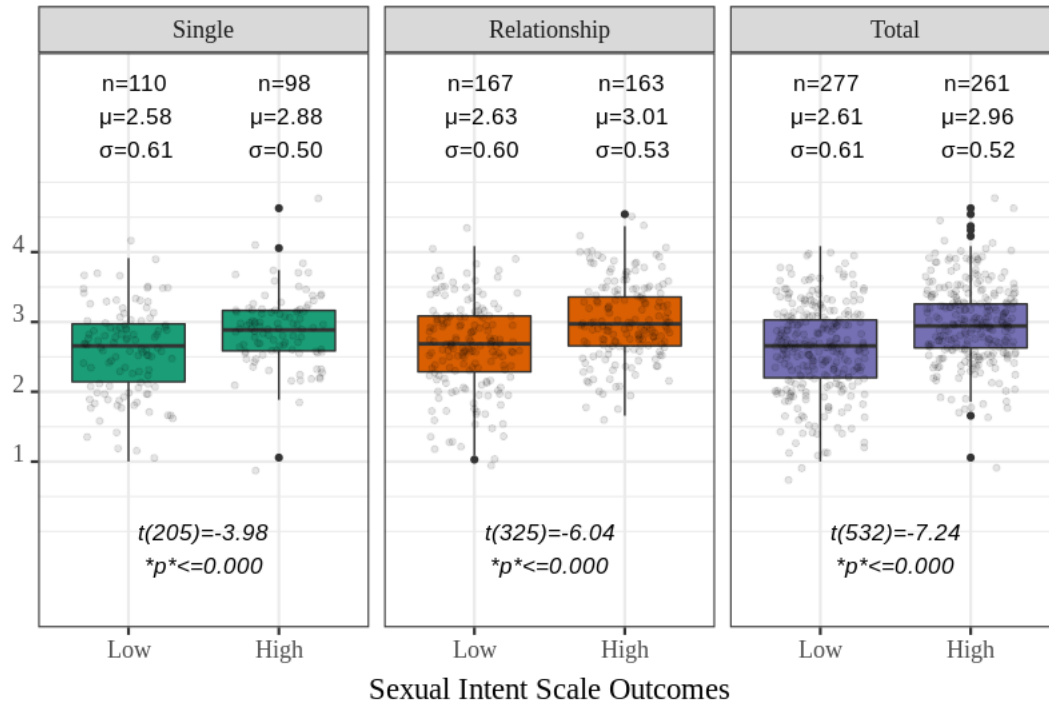
Figure 5.4: Mean SIS Outcomes by Treatment Condition & Gender

Gender and power treatment have statistically significant effects on SIS. The effect power has on SIS outcomes does not differ for men relative to women based on this model. Given the lack of a gender by treatment interaction effect in the model depicted in Table 5.1, it is unnecessary to examine the pairwise comparisons between the gender and power treatment condition groups.

Table 5.1: SIS Outcome Regressed on Gender & Treatment Condition

	Initial Model	w/Interaction
Intercept (Woman, Low)	2.70 ***	2.73 ***
Man	-0.17 ***	-0.24 ***
High Power	0.35 ***	0.29 ***
Man:High		0.13
Observations	538	538
BIC	928.26	932.75
Adjusted R-squared	0.11	0.11

* $p < 0.050$; ** $p < 0.010$; *** $p < 0.001$



Boxplot overlain w/scatter, Welch's t-test results.

Figure 5.5: Mean SIS Outcomes by Treatment Condition within Relationship Status

Turning to relationship status, Figure 5.5 depicts a comparison of mean SIS across the treatment conditions and relationship status groups.⁷⁴ The mean SIS score for those in a relationship ($\mu=2.82$) is higher than for singles ($\mu=2.72$) for the sample overall ($d=0.17$; $t_{450,32}=1.89$; $p=0.059$). In the Table 5.2 models, power has a significant effect on SIS outcomes. There is no statistically significant difference in SIS outcomes by relationship status, nor does the effect of power treatment condition on SIS outcomes differ by relationship status. It is also noteworthy that the effect of being in the high power condition is little changed from the case in the previous model of SIS. Again, in the absence of an effect of the interaction of relationship status and power treatment condition it is unnecessary to examine pairwise comparisons between the groups at the intersection of these variables.

Table 5.2: SIS Outcome Regressed on Relationship Status & Treatment Condition

	Initial Model	w/Interaction
Intercept (Single, Low)	2.56 ***	2.58 ***
Relationship	0.09	0.06
High Power	0.35 ***	0.31 ***
Relationship:High		0.07
Observations	538	538
BIC	937.82	943.61
Adjusted R-squared	0.09	0.09

* $p<0.050$; ** $p<0.010$; *** $p<0.001$

⁷⁴The difference in the variances of the SIS outcomes across relationship status and treatment groups is not statistically significant based on a Levene test of equality of variance ($F\sim 3, 534\sim 2.40$; $p=0.067$).

Next, I examine the effects of power, gender, and relationship status on SIS outcomes together. Table 5.3 depicts four models of the SIS outcome. The first model includes terms for treatment condition, gender, and relationship status. The subsequent models add terms for the interactions of these three independent variables. Inclusion of terms for the interactions of the main independent variables in this study does nothing to improve the efficiency of the model. This is evident from the unchanging R^2 values and increases in the information criteria statistics when comparing the more complex models to the initial model containing only the three main effect terms.

Table 5.3: Models of SIS Outcomes: Gender, Relationship Status, & Treatment Condition

	I	II	III	IV	V
Intercept	2.65***	2.65***	2.68***	2.67***	2.70***
Man	-0.17***	-0.17*	-0.23***	-0.17***	-0.24*
Relationship	0.09	0.09	0.09	0.05	0.05
High Power	0.35***	0.35***	0.29***	0.30***	0.23*
Man:Relationship		0.00			0.00
Man:High			0.13		0.13
Relationship:High				0.08	0.08
Man:Relationship:High					-0.01
Observations	538	538	538	538	538
BIC	931.31	937.60	935.89	936.97	954.11
Adjusted R-squared	0.11	0.11	0.11	0.11	0.11

* $p < 0.050$; ** $p < 0.010$; *** $p < 0.001$

One take away from the models in the table above is that the size and statistical significance of the coefficients associated with the power term are relatively consistent as the additional terms are introduced. The small sizes of the interaction effects, none of which approach the criteria for statistical significance, can be read as an indication that the effects of each of these variables do not greatly depend on the values of the other two.

When accounting only for gender, relationship status, and the experimental manipulation of power, people in a relationship, compared to singles, are not expected to perceive a meaningfully different amount of sexual intent from potential sex partners. From the initial model we might also draw the cursory conclusion that women perceive more sexual intent from potential sex partners than do men. Likewise, higher power seems to be associated with perceiving greater degrees of sexual intent.

These preliminary analyses offer a useful glimpse at the focal outcome and how it might be related to the main independent variables under consideration. The first model in the table could be viewed as the best model out of the candidate models explored thus far, based primarily on the information criteria associated with each model. It explains the same degree of outcome variance as the other models while being more parsimonious. However, given the control variables described in the previous chapter, many other candidate models exist. The analyses thus far demonstrate some of the difficulties in the process of selecting variables and choosing between candidate models. My examination of the SIS outcome already involves several candidate models. Aside from not having considered any of the control variables measured during data collection, basing inferences solely on the first model in the above table would explicitly ignore obvious uncertainty about the parameters.

In the descriptive analyses discussed in Chapter 4, I point out that my sample is reasonably diverse across a number of demographic and other subject traits. While not a population representative sample, it does not diverge from the adult population of the United States to a great extent in many regards. There is a reasonable amount of diversity

within subgroups of interest along other traits. However, there are a ways in which the groups represented by the categories of the independent variables in the models above differ from one another, and introducing statistical controls for those traits might be informative. For example, respondents' ages differ systematically with relationship status. The race of subjects is not independent of their relationship status, and there is a relationship between the educational attainment and relationship status of subjects. There are also differences between the men and women in the sample, such as men having higher average income, self-rated socioeconomic status, sociosexual orientation score, and sex drive than the averages of the women in the sample. Some of these traits (e.g. race, age, socioeconomic status, income) are of interest due to their role as status characteristics relevant in so many social interactions and/or the way they relate to possible differences in power. Others (e.g. sociosexual orientation, sex drive) are of particular relevance as they might explain variations in perceived sexual intent that presents as an effect of the independent variables.

Moving forward, I introduce additional statistical controls into my model of SIS outcomes in order to verify/clarify the initial findings, account for other traits of subjects, and address possible alternate explanations of variance in perceived sexual intent. However, rather than continue with an incremental model building approach, I implement the BMA procedure described in Chapter 3. This allows me to efficiently narrow a vast model space to a reasonable set of probable candidate models, establish a final inferential model by averaging across the set of candidate models, and then test my hypotheses. Importantly, the process of implementing BMA encourages an intense focus on model

specification and consideration of the entire space of models that are possible given available predictors.

BMA Results and Test of Hypotheses

To establish the final model of SIS outcomes that I use for hypothesis testing, I conducted the BMA procedure described in Chapter 3. Table 5.4 provides details about the Occam's windows set of models and includes relevant information for comparing them. Table 5.4 shows which of the available predictors appears in each of the 7 models that met the Occam's window model space reduction criteria. The PIP for each of the predictors is included, along with the BIC and PMP of each model. Additionally, Table 5.4 includes a series of Bayes factors comparing the first model to each of the others. Given that all models involving interactions between the predictors in Table 5.4 are restricted from the Occam's window set and all of the interaction terms are associated with $PIP=0$, the interaction terms are not explicitly listed in Table 5.4 or subsequent tables.

No single candidate model is clearly more supported than all others. Instead, the two models receiving the highest degree of support have approximately the same PMP. Models A and B each include predictors for power treatment condition, sexual preference, sociosexual orientation, self-rating of attractiveness, having ever experienced unwanted sex, GSP, and gender of the target rated by the subject as they completed the SIS measure items. Models A and B differ in that A includes the BSRI femininity score but not the sex drive score; the opposite is true of Model B. An indicator of having perpetrated an unwanted sex act against someone else appears in 1 of the 7 models. Previous number of

sex partners and sex drive are each included in 2 of the 7 models. The BSRI femininity score appears in 3 models. An indicator of having ever experienced unwanted sex and sociosexual orientation score each appear in 5 models. Treatment condition, sexual preference, self-rated attractiveness, GSP, and gender of the hypothetical target rated when completing the SIS measure appear in all of the Occam's window models. The remaining candidate predictors and various interactions between the predictors appear in none of the 7 Occam's window models depicted in Table 5.4.

The two HPM's (A and B) each represent 28% of the total posterior probability, indicating that there is a fair amount of model uncertainty. This uncertainty lends support to the usefulness of the model averaging approach. The third model ($PMP=22\%$) represents slightly less of the overall posterior probability than the first two. Following Model D ($PMP=15\%$), support for the final three models falls off sharply, with Models E, F, and G having $PMP \leq 3\%$. Comparing model A to each of the others using Bayes factors, the evidence in support of model A relative to either of models B, C, or D is non-existent to, at most, very weak. For example, $BF_{AB}=1.01$ means that the data are almost equally likely under models A and B. The data are 1.27 times more likely under model A than model C, 1.6 times more likely under A than D, and over 8, 10, and 11 times more likely under A than E, F, and G, respectively.

The results in Table 5.5 illustrate the difference in the Occam's window model set (Table 5.4) and several models of interest that were omitted. Models H through K include predictors similar to Model A, with a change of 1-2 predictors. Model H includes subject gender but excludes the gender of the hypothetical target the subject rated when

completing the SIS measure. We see from $BF_{AH}=76550.71$ that the data are over 76 thousand times more likely under model A than H. This is an enormous difference in the weight of evidence in favor of each model following observation of the data⁷⁵. The case is nowhere near as stark when comparing Models A and I; although the evidence still strongly favors model A, under which the data are 22 times more likely. Model I accounts for the gender of both the subject and the target the subject rated when completing the SIS measure. Model J includes the term for relationship status, but the increased complexity, relative to model A, does not substantially improve explanatory power. The data are over 15 times more likely under model A relative to J. Finally, under model A the data are about 20 times more likely relative to model K, which additionally includes the gender identity threat score.

Table 5.6 provides the results of the BMA procedure using the restricted set of models appearing in Table 5.4. The PIP's for each variable appear again in Table 5.6, along with the posterior mean and standard deviation of the sizes associated with each effect⁷⁶. The mean and standard deviation of $\beta|D$ are the product of averaging across the parameters of the models in the Occam's window set, weighted by the PMP's, in order to account for model uncertainty. An interesting artifact of this process can be seen in the size of the relationship of the previous number of sex partners predictor and the dependent variable. This predictor is present in 2 of the 7 models in the Occam's window

⁷⁵In this study I utilize default priors for the models that are agnostic as to which of the possible models is more likely to be/is plausibly the best, or hypothetical true, model, and those prior beliefs receive only a low degree of weight in the final estimates/model results. See Chapter 3 for a detailed discussion of the methods used and interpretation of Bayes factors for comparing models.

⁷⁶As discussed in Chapter 3, these are the Bayesian point estimator and a Bayesian analogue to the standard error (Raftery 1995).

set, and so has a non-zero PIP. However, in the models where this predictor does appear, it is associated with an effect size that is so small as to be essentially meaningless. Additionally, one of the models in which the number of previous sex partners is present receives very low weight in the average ($PMP=2\%$). To clarify this combination of a non-zero PIP with a zero effect size, it is worth noting that while the PIP does indicate that there is a 24% chance of the previous number of sex partners predictor being included in the hypothetical best model, it also means that the probability of exclusion for this predictor is 76%.⁷⁷

The case is similar with the BSRI femininity trait, the sex drive score, and the predictor for the subject having ever committed a type of unwanted sexual activity against someone else. For each of those predictors $0 < PIP \leq 50\%$ and, in the event of any effect at all,⁷⁸ the size of that effect is estimated to be very small. For all other predictors considered - age, race, BSRI masculinity trait, satisfaction with/commitment to current partnership status, gender identity threat score, educational attainment, self-rated SES, self-esteem, BMI, and self-/other-rated femininity/masculinity - there is very strong evidence for excluding them from the model. This indicates that they have very little, if any, relationship to the SIS outcome, given the data. Therefore, the relationship between those variables and the SIS outcome can be considered to be statistically non-existent. Moving forward, my discussion of the BMA results is organized around testing each of the hypotheses outlined in Chapter 2.

⁷⁷PIP = 50% can be interpreted as even odds of inclusion/exclusion.

⁷⁸Non-existent within rounding precision.

Table 5.4: Comparison of Models in the Reduced (Occam's Window) Set

Predictor	$Pr[\beta_p \neq 0 D]\%$	Models						
		A	B	C	D	E	F	G
Intercept	100	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
In a Relationship	0							
High Power Condition	100	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
Age	0							
Not Heterosexual	100	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
Race	0							
Sociosexual Orientation	76	+	+		+	+		+
Sex Drive	50		+	+				
BSRI Trait:								
Femininity	33	+				+		+
Masculinity	0							
Self-Rated Attractiveness	100	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
Partnership Status:								
Satisfaction With	0							
Commitment To	0							
Gender Identity Threat	0							
Unwanted Sex:								
Has Experienced	95	+	+	+	+		+	
Has Committed	3					+		
General Sense of Power	100	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
Educational Attainment	0							
Income	0							
Self-Rated SES	0							
Previous # Sex Partners	24			+			+	
Self-Esteem	0							
Body Mass Index	0							
Self-Rated Gender Trait:								
Feminine	0							
Masculine	0							
Other-Rated Gender Trait:								
Feminine	0							
Masculine	0							
Subject is a Man	0							
Target is a Woman	100	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
BIC		807.07	807.10	807.54	808.02	811.44	811.84	811.95
$BF_{A?}$		1.00	1.01	1.27	1.60	8.88	10.88	11.48
$p(M_k D) \%$		28	28	22	15	3	2	2

Note: Interactions, e.g. Gender*Treatment, Treatment*GSP, and others, that were included in candidate models have been omitted to save space. All interaction terms have PIP=0; none were in Occam's window models.

Table 5.5: Models of Interest Omitted from the Reduced (Occam's Window) Set

Predictor	Models			
	H	I	J	K
Intercept	+	+	+	+
In a Relationship			+	
High Power Condition	+	+	+	+
Age				
Not Heterosexual	+	+	+	+
Race				+
Sociosexual Orientation	+	+	+	+
Sex Drive				
BSRI Trait:				
Femininity	+	+	+	+
Masculinity				
Self-Rated Attractiveness	+	+	+	+
Partnership Status:				
Satisfaction With				
Commitment To				
Gender Identity Threat				+
Unwanted Sex:				
Has Experienced	+	+	+	+
Has Committed				
General Sense of Power	+	+	+	+
Educational Attainment				
Income				
Self-Rated SES				
Previous # Sex Partners				
Self-Esteem				
Body Mass Index				
Self-Rated Gender Trait:				
Feminine				
Masculine				
Other-Rated Gender Trait:				
Feminine				
Masculine				
Subject is a Man	+	+		
Target is a Woman		+	+	+
BIC	829.56	813.22	812.51	813.03
$BF_{A?}$	76,550.71	21.66	15.16	19.70

Note: PMP's not supplied because these models were excluded from the Occam's window set of models across which the averaging step of the BMA procedure took place. PIP's appear in Table 5.4.

Table 5.6: Sexual Intent Scale Outcomes: Bayes Model Averaging (BMA) Estimates

Predictor	$Pr[\beta_p \neq 0 D]\%$	Mean βD	SD βD
Intercept	100	1.57	0.16
In a Relationship	0	0.00	0.00
High Power Condition	100	0.33	0.04
Age	0	0.00	0.00
Not Heterosexual	100	-0.20	0.05
Race (White)	0		
Asian		0.00	0.00
Black		0.00	0.00
Hispanic		0.00	0.00
Other Race		0.00	0.00
Sociosexual Orientation	76	0.05	0.03
Sex Drive	50	0.02	0.02
BSRI Trait:			
Femininity	33	0.02	0.03
Masculinity	0	0.00	0.00
Self-Rated Attractiveness	100	0.05	0.01
Partnership Status:			
Satisfaction With	0	0.00	0.00
Commitment To	0	0.00	0.00
Gender Identity Threat	0	0.00	0.00
Unwanted Sex			
Has Experienced	95	0.15	0.06
Has Committed	3	0.00	0.03
General Sense of Power	100	0.11	0.02
Educational Attainment (\leq HS)	0		
Some College	0	0.00	0.00
BA	0	0.00	0.00
Graduate Degree	0	0.00	0.00
Income	0	0.00	0.00
Self-Rated SES	0	0.00	0.00
Previous # Sex Partners	24	0.00	0.00
Self-Esteem	0	0.00	0.00
Body Mass Index	0	0.00	0.00
Self-Rated Gender Trait:			
Feminine	0	0.00	0.00
Masculine	0	0.00	0.00
Other-Rated Gender Trait:			
Feminine	0	0.00	0.00
Masculine	0	0.00	0.00
Subject is a Man	0	0.00	0.00
Target is a Woman	100	-0.31	0.05

Note: Interactions, e.g. Gender*Treatment, Treatment*GSP, and others, that were included in candidate models have been omitted to save space. All interaction terms have PIP=0; none were in Occam's window models.

Hypothesis 1: Gender → Perceived Sexual Intent

Men will perceive greater degrees of sexual intent from a potential sex partner than will women.

I expected to see that the SIS scores of men would be higher than those of women, but that is not what I found in the data. For the indicator of subject gender, $PIP=0$; this is very strong evidence that subject gender is an incredibly weak predictor of perceived sexual intent. A bivariate analysis of the relationship between gender and SIS outcomes, as well as other candidate models that include gender as a predictor (such as the models depicted in Table 5.1 and Models H and I in Table 5.5) point toward men having lower SIS scores on average. However, all such models were excluded from the Occam's window set because the data were much more likely under other models. Importantly, once the gender of the target being rated when the subject completed the SIS measure is taken into account, the subject's own gender is not very informative as a predictor of SIS outcomes. While it might appear that the gender of a person is strongly related to the degree of sexual intent perceived from a potential sex partner, the outcome is, instead, more likely to be a function of the gender of that potential sex partner.

Because the majority of people are heterosexual (about 79% of this sample), most potential sex partners for men are women and vice versa. People rating the sexual intentions of men perceive greater degrees of sexual intent on average than those rating the sexual intentions of women. Though they are highly correlated, sexual preference does not fully determine the gender of a potential

sex partner. For heterosexual and homosexual subjects in my experiment, the gender of the target when completing the SIS measure was wholly dictated by the alignment of gender and sexual preference (e.g. women who indicated a desire to have sex for men evaluated a target described as a man). For all others, the gender of the target was randomly selected.⁷⁹ The set of all possible models includes some that feature interactions between gender, target gender, and sexual preference, but those models were excluded from the restricted model set and PIP=0 for each of those predictors. However, the data and the results of the analyses provide very strong support for inclusion of main effect terms for sexual preference and gender of the target being rated (PIP=100 for both effects). Net of other factors, and regardless of the gender of the subject, rating the sexual intent of a potential sex partner who is a woman, as compared to rating one who is a man, is associated with a decrease of .31 in the SIS score on average. Similarly, the subject having a sexual preference other than heterosexual is associated with a decrease of .2 in the SIS score. These are the second and third largest effect size estimates in this study.

Hypothesis 2: Power → Perceived Sexual Intent

High power individuals will perceive greater degrees of sexual intent from potential sex partners than those will low power individuals.

⁷⁹The intention being to better model reality and avoid imposing some restriction, such as defaulting to assigning the target a gender opposite to that of the subject.

Hypothesis 2 receives strong support from the data. The relationship between power and perceived sexual intent is the main focus of this study, and two measures of power are included in the model of SIS outcomes. Based on the results of the analysis, it is clear that power is highly relevant as a predictor of SIS outcomes. For both the power treatment condition and GSP predictors, PIP=100%. It is functionally certain, given these data, that the experimental manipulation of power has some effect on the SIS outcome. The relationship between SIS outcomes and the experimental manipulation of power is positive; being in the high power condition, relative to the low power condition, is associated with having higher SIS outcomes. The power treatment is estimated to have a larger effect on SIS outcomes than any other predictor considered. The SIS scores of subjects in the high power condition, controlling for other effects, are .31 greater than for subjects in the low power condition. While not as large in magnitude, increases in GSP score are also associated with higher SIS scores. A one unit increase in GSP score is associated with a .11 increase in the SIS outcome.⁸⁰

Hypothesis 3: Power*Gender → Perceived Sexual Intent

The effect of power on perceived sexual intent will be equivalent for men and women.

Hypothesis 3 also received a great deal of support from these data. The set of all possible models included those wherein terms for various interaction effects, including the interaction between gender and power treatment condition, were present. All such

⁸⁰For context, a one standard deviation change in GSP score is associated with an approximate increase of .12 in the SIS outcome.

models were eventually eliminated from the Occam's window set of models due to the data being much more likely under competing models. This means that there is very strong evidence against a non-zero effect of the gender by power interaction (e.g. $PIP=0$). Statistically speaking, the power treatment effect cannot be said to differ by subject gender.

Hypothesis 4: Relationship Status → Perceived Sexual Intent

Partnered individuals will perceive less sexual intent from potential sex partners than will single individuals.

Hypothesis 5: Relationship Status*Gender → Sexual Intent Attribution

Relationship status will diminish the degree of sexual intent perceived from a potential sex partner to a greater extent for women than for men.

Hypothesis 6: Relationship Status*Power → Sexual Intent Attribution

Partnered individuals primed with low power will perceive lesser degrees of sexual intent than will partnered individuals primed with high power.

The weight of the evidence stands against Hypothesis 4. For the predictor that indicates the subject is in a relationship, in comparison to those who are single, $PIP=0$. This means that, given the data, we can say with almost full certainty relationship status is not a meaningful predictor and confidently assume a zero effect. SIS does not differ by relationship status. Predictors representing relationship status by gender and relationship status by power treatment condition have $PIP=0$. So the evidence in favor of their

exclusion is very strong, and, based on these results, they are considered to have no relationship to the SIS outcome.

Chapter 6: Discussion

In this dissertation I investigated the degree to which individuals perceive sexual intent from potential sex partners. Numerous factors operating at the individual/psychological, situational/contextual, interpersonal, cultural, and other levels shape individuals' perceptions of others' intentions. This research was motivated, primarily, by three questions. First, I asked whether powerful people perceive the sexual intentions of potential partners differently than do those who lack power. Second, I questioned whether one's romantic relationship status influences whether/how much they think a potential sex partner (other than their current romantic partner) is interested in having sex with them. Distinctions made between the sexual tendencies of men and women that are commonly depicted in media, widely recognizable stereotypes, and even in much of the existing academic research motivated my third question - how might gender influence perceived sexual intent?

I examined whether/how sexual intent perceptions vary according to social power, romantic relationship status, and gender using a sample of 538 research subjects recruited from the Prolific internet worker platform. Subjects were randomly assigned to either a low or high power treatment condition, and a semantic priming procedure was used to experimentally manipulate feelings of low or high power. I measured subjects' tendency to perceive sexual intentions from a potential sex partner using the SIS, and compared

outcomes on this scale across power treatment conditions. I also compared the SIS outcomes of men to those of women and those of single subjects to subjects who were in a relationship.

Additional statistical measures were used to account for other possible influences on subjects' sexual intent perceptions. I examined traits such as general sense of power, BSRI gender traits, satisfaction with and commitment to one's current partnership status, the gender of the potential sex partner whose intentions are evaluated, as well as a number of other variables. BMA and related methods were used to reduce the vast set of candidate models to a smaller set of models that best explained the data before averaging model estimates to establish a final analytical model of SIS outcomes. That final model was then used to test my hypotheses regarding perceived sexual intent. The results produced several interesting insights, and I found support for some of the hypotheses presented in Chapter 2. I review each of my hypotheses below, discuss my findings, and explore some limitations of this study before offering some suggestions for future research that could build on my results.

Hypothesis 1: Gender and Perceived Sexual Intent

A large body of research, across multiple disciplines, analyzing many aspects of sexual behavior and tendencies, frequently involves comparisons of men and women. Men and women are consistently found to differ in, e.g., their attitudes about sex, their sex drives, sociosexual orientations, and average degrees of satisfaction with/enjoyment from sexual activity. To a large extent, findings in academic research mirror popular tropes about the

stereotypical differences between men and women, such as men being more desirous of sex overall and women being less oriented toward casual, non-committal sex outside the context of relationships than are men on average (i.e. women have lower sociosexual orientation as a group). This is not to say anything of the sources/causes of these differences, but that there is evidence to support the widespread belief that these differences exist.

Specific to the aims of this research, existing literature addressing perceived sexual intent consistently reports that men tend to impute greater degrees of sexual intent to others than do women. This is particularly the case when studies have asked men to rate the sexual interest of target women (both real and/or hypothetical, using a variety of methods) and compared those outcomes to the ratings supplied by women (sometimes other women and sometimes the target women themselves). Following from these and other existing ideas about gender differences in sex related perceptions, I posited that men will perceive greater degrees of sexual intent from potential sex partner than will women. Based on my findings, I am now confident that Hypothesis 1 must be rejected.

Hypothesis 1 stated that men will perceive greater degrees of sexual intent from a potential sex partner than will women. A straight-forward, bivariate look at the average SIS scores for men and women in my sample would support the exact opposite - men perceiving lower degrees of sexual intent than women on average. That difference was also present when I controlled for the experimental manipulation of power and differences in relationship status (see Table 5.3). However, I ultimately found powerful support for the alternative hypothesis that there is no meaningful difference at all in

sexual intent perceptions attributable to the gender of the person doing the perceiving. After accounting for the gender of the potential sex partner in question, whether the person assessing the sexual intentions was a man or a woman turned out to be a very weak predictor of how much sexual intent they perceive. I found the difference between men and women seen in the bivariate analysis and analyses that only account for other subject characteristics to be spurious.

Because a preference for opposite-sex partners is so common, men typically see women as potential sex partners and vice versa. The procedures used for this study were designed to reflect that reality. So, for example, subjects who identified as women and indicated being sexually attracted to men rated the sexual intentions of a hypothetical person described as a man. Men who are interested in sex with women met with a hypothetical target who was described as a woman. In the case of subjects who indicated being sexually attracted to both men and women, the gender of the hypothetical target was chosen at random since either would be applicable. I found that people rating how interested a man is in having sex with them tended to give higher ratings of sexual intent than did people rating how interested a woman is in having sex with them. This was the case regardless of the subject's own gender. This finding can be read as reflecting the way men and women alike commonly believe that men are more interested and ready to engage in sex than are women.⁸¹

⁸¹Whether or not/to what degree this belief is accurate is not directly consequential in this context. Although, I suspect it is an accurate assumption because, regardless of what the exact causal mechanism(s) might be, most of the evidence of which I am aware does point toward men being more interested in, desirous of, and willing to engage in sex more readily than women on average.

Subjects in this study were asked to think of a generalized man/woman and assess the intentions of that generalized person based on a very limited set of information. The generalized other is always a combination of information gleaned as much from social learning processes as personal experience, and should be expected to reflect common cultural themes and widespread beliefs. Men are stereotyped as being more motivated by/willing to engage in sex than women; and men are not characterized as especially scrutinizing about sex partners, frequently being stereotyped as opting for any available partner. Furthermore, gendered patterns of socialization train people to expect men to fill the role of active pursuer who is willing to pay some price for sexual access, while women are expected to take the role of hesitant gate-keeper who exacts that price. Even those who disagree with these characterizations would likely acknowledge that many/most other people accept them as reality and act accordingly. Hence men and women alike might default to assuming low sexual interest on the part of women and high sexual interest on the part of men. This is supported by my findings here. Women and men who rated potential sex partners who were women perceived less sexual intent than did subjects who rated the intentions of potential partners who were men.

Before addressing my other hypotheses, there are two things related to my conclusions regarding Hypothesis 1 that are worthy of mention. First, I caution against interpreting the lack of a gender difference in sexual intent perceptions reported in this study as being counter to the oversexualization effect established in existing sexual intent perception research. Importantly, the oversexualization effect theory hinges on accuracy of perceptions, which requires establishing a measure of the actual sexual intent of the

target being rated. I do not address accuracy of perceptions at all in this study, thus there is no way to test the validity of the oversexualization effect hypothesis. Furthermore, that men and women do not differ in the degree of sexual intent they perceive from potential sex partners as a direct result of their own gender does not necessarily preclude the existence of a gender difference in the accuracy of their perceptions.

The second point is more germane to the present study, and perhaps more interesting. My final analytic model accounts for the gender of the subject doing the rating, the sexual preference of the subject, and the gender of the potential sex partner whose intentions are assessed. My analyses yielded strong support for subject gender having no effect at all on perceived sexual intent, while gender of the target has a sizable effect (equivalent to about half of a standard deviation in the SIS outcome). I also found sexual preference to be a particularly relevant predictor of perceived sexual intent that is associated with a noteworthy effect size (equivalent to about a third of a standard deviation) on perceived sexual intent. Relative to subjects who indicate heterosexual preferences, being non-heterosexual is related to perceiving a lower degree of sexual intent. Non-heterosexuals who rated the sexual intentions of a potential sex partner who is a woman scored lower on the measure of perceived sexual intent than did heterosexuals rating women targets. The SIS scores of non-heterosexuals who rated men were the third highest, with heterosexuals who rated men having the highest scores on the perceived sexual intent measure.

I cannot speak definitively to why it is the case that non-heterosexuals perceived less sexual intent than heterosexuals, but I suspect that the difference stems, at least in

part, from uncertainty about the sexual preferences of the potential sex partner. That is to say that, for example, knowing a specific man is interested in sex with men might reasonably be assumed to impact whether or not another man interprets his actions as indicative of a desire to engage in sex together. Also, a homosexual individual might have what amounts to a higher threshold for believing that a potential partner is in fact interested in sex with them. The higher threshold being due to the potential for negative repercussions in the event that they make sexual advances toward a same-sex individual who turns out to be heterosexual. Historically, such an error could have resulted in extreme degrees of ostracism, if not outright physical violence. In other words, individuals who are interested in same-sex partners might simply tend to perceive lower degrees of sexual interest from potential partners as a defense mechanism. One way to test this would be to conduct this study again with a simple change to make the sexual preference of the potential sex partner known.⁸² Another possibility would be to vary the context in such a way as to increase/decrease the percent of others who are heterosexual and non-heterosexual. For example, it is possible that the SIS scores of heterosexuals would decrease and those of non-heterosexuals would increase if the context were specified as a gay/lesbian bar or nightclub.

⁸²This would eliminate the potential for the dampening effect I mentioned because the subject would not have to wonder whether the potential partner is homosexual or not. However, it could potentially introduce a confound by priming subjects to see the target as sexually receptive by default. This concern might be alleviated to a degree by also making the sexual preference of targets rated by heterosexual subjects explicit and/or by comparing outcomes against instances where, as in the present study, the sexual preference of the target is not explicitly stated.

Hypothesis 2: Power and Perceived Sexual Intent

As regards my second hypothesis - that high power individuals will perceive greater degrees of sexual intent from potential sex partners than will low power individuals - the results of my analyses provide clear and strong support. The data demonstrated that power treatment condition was an especially relevant predictor of perceived sexual intent. Comparing mean SIS outcomes across power treatment groups, SIS was substantially higher for subjects in the high power treatment group (over half of a standard deviation higher). This was the case in a simple bivariate analysis and when statistically controlling for other important variables.

Additionally, I found a relationship between the GSP measure and perceived sexual intent, providing observational evidence in support of Hypothesis 2. Both experimentally manipulated sense of power and the global sense of power construct were found to have a positive relationship with perceived sexual intent. Higher power leads to perceiving greater degrees of sexual intent from potential sex partners net of differences in sexual intent perceptions attributable to subject gender, sex drive, sociosexual orientation, relationship status, gender of the potential sex partner, and other factors. It is also worth noting that the size of the effect of the experimental manipulation of power had on the SIS outcomes was the largest of any effect identified in the study. In combination, my findings provide ample grounds for accepting Hypothesis 2.

Hypothesis 3: Gender, Power, and Perceived Sexual Intent

My data and analyses provided strong support for accepting Hypothesis 3, which states that the effect of power on the degree of sexual interest perceived from potential sex partners will be the same for men and women. I found that power strongly influenced perceived sexual intent, subject gender did not, and that the effect of power did not differ by subject gender. This is interesting for a number of reasons, chief among them being it demonstrates that an important, ubiquitous social force operates on men and women in a similar way in a context where gender difference tends to be a central theme. Also, these findings hint that, to the extent that one's perceptions are predictive of behavior, by changing the degree to which individuals or groups feel powerful, changes could also be induced in their way they interact with potential sex partners, and those changes would occur in a similar way for men and women. Furthermore, it means that power differentials by gender might manifest as perceptual differences that give way to behavioral differences between men and women.

Hypotheses 4, 5, & 6

I hypothesized that individuals who are currently in a romantic relationship would perceive less sexual intent from potential sex partners than would individuals who are single. I based this on a well-studied theme in existing research, known as the derogation or perceptual blinders effect. This effect refers to a tendency of partnered individuals to give lower ratings of attractiveness to potential sex partners (other than their current mate) than do single individuals. It has been identified by researchers as a mechanism

that serves to bolster the stability of a current partnership by effectively diminishing the value placed on potential alternative partners by a currently partnered actor. The results of my analyses lead to rejecting Hypothesis 4, however.

Considering the strength of the theoretical foundations and related empirical evidence on which I based Hypothesis 4, I contemplated a way to reconcile my present findings. One possibility is that relationship status does have the effect on perceived sexual intent that I anticipated, but that effect ends up being masked by other, somewhat opposite tendencies stemming from/related to relationship status itself. There could exist multiple, opposing effects of being partnered. Being oblivious to the sexual interest of a potential sex partner (i.e. being in a relationship blinding one to interested partners other than the current mate) is one tendency that would cause partnered individuals to avoid extra-dyadic sexual activity that could lead to relationship dissolution. Alternatively, being in a relationship could cause some people to become hypervigilant - perceiving an abundance of interest from potential sex partners, regardless of whether or not any is there at all, and so leading them to take measures to avoid extradyadic sex opportunities. Either effect, obliviousness or hypervigilance, could have the same end result of protecting relationship stability. Assuming each effect occurred with relatively equal frequency, the aggregate result would be the opposing tendencies canceling one another out, leading to the observed average effect of relationship status being zero. If it is the case that relationship status has both of these effects, there are likely some unaccounted for conditions and/or personal traits that leads to one of the two effects being activated in a given instance rather than the other.

Another explanation for my not finding a relationship effect here even though the partner derogation effect has been supported in other sexual perception and behavior literature relates to self-regulatory resources and the availability/quantity of alternatives. Derogating alternatives is described in existing literature as a motivated process that requires cognitive resources to deploy (Brady et al. 2020; Lydon & Karremans 2015; Ritter et al. 2010). In light of recent increases in the quantity of alternative partners available through, for example, online dating apps, it is possible that derogation effects simply did not show up given the context of the online data collection. Additionally, the anonymous nature of the hypothetical individual in my experimental design might be relevant to the absence of the derogation effect. In existing research paradigms where the derogation effect appears, there are typically visual cues. Seeing an actual person's face, in particular, might personalize the scenario in those studies in a way that my paradigm does not, causing subjects to focus more and thus muster self-regulatory forces to a greater extent. This could be explored by reproducing this study but with the addition of images for the hypothetical sex partner or by conducting the study in a more controlled setting to ensure that subjects' cognitive resources are not otherwise taxed.

Hypothesis 5 states that relationship status will have a greater impact on perceptions of sexual intent for women than men. Having not found support for substantive differences in sexual intent perceptions attributable/related to differences in relationship status, Hypothesis 5 cannot be supported. The foundation of Hypothesis 5 not only involved the assumption that relationship status has a specific, diminishing effect on perceived sexual intent, it also assumed that perceived sexual intent would vary by

gender. That assumption was not supported; sexual intent perceptions do not differ in a way that is directly attributable to the gender of the perceiver.

I had also assumed that the known tendency of power to diminish the constraining effect of social norms (e.g. normative expectations of monogamy constraining those in a relationship) would counteract any diminishing influence that being in a relationship had on sexual intent perceptions. Based on this, I arrived at Hypothesis 6, which stated that high power will reduce the diminishing impact of relationship status on perceptions of sexual intent. As with Hypothesis 5, my sixth hypothesis becomes unsupportable in the absence of a meaningful correlation between relationship status and perceived sexual intent.

Implications of this Study

The line of inquiry explored in this dissertation is important in terms of how it contributes to our understanding of the way people perceive others' sexual intentions toward them and sexual behaviors that might be motivated by those perceptions. This research, and a continuation of it, also has much to offer in terms of enhancing our understanding of social processes, perception, and behavior at more abstract levels. Most interactions involve an actor currently embedded in some kind of social structure (current relationships, dyadic or otherwise, of one form or another), having a degree of social power (either within or external to the specific interaction), being faced with assessing the intention of some other actor who represents a potential exchange partner of some kind. The concepts and methods I deployed here, in the context of analyzing perceived

sexual intent, could be applied to perceptions about the intentions of potential partners in other social interactions. It is feasible that the operation of power seen in this study - higher power individuals thinking potential sex partners are more interested in having sex with them than lower power individuals - would extend to, for instance, potential partnerships in business, charity, and political interactions.

At a more concrete level, this research is applicable to understanding, and perhaps preventing, unwanted sexual experiences. The results of this study hint that maximal risk probably exists in situations where there are large discrepancies in power, and that flat power structures would be potentially more effective at preventing unwanted sexual interactions than would training people to recognize sexual harassment. The findings here do support the use of some approaches that are already present in the discourse surrounding the subject of sexual harassment. The study offers a clear understanding of at least one mechanism through which perceptions can be driven to emerge in ways that provide fertile ground for unwanted interactions and outcomes.⁸³ This dissertation did not restrict the analyses of power to differentials in power resulting specifically from the given interaction within which the perceptions take place, but the findings certainly speak to such interactions. Based on these findings, we must acknowledge that a type of double pitfall is inherent to all dyadic interactions where a differential in power exists due to the structure of the interaction itself. This includes, for example, interactions in the

⁸³Not to be mistaken as a justification any specific actions people might take. I am speaking strictly about the situational features that might amplify the chances of people developing beliefs that lead to them acting (or failing to act) in particular ways that eventually come into conflict with a reality that has been misunderstood, resulting in negative outcomes for some party.

workplace between supervisors and subordinates, in education settings between instructors and students, and between government officials and citizens.

In scenarios where Person A has lower power than Person B, power influences the perceptions of both A and B in such a way that a greater number of possible outcomes are negative experiences for A than is the case for B - and this is true regardless of whether/how B takes advantage of/uses the power B possess due to the nature of the interaction. Take, for example, the case in which A has no interest in sex with B but B is interested in sex with A – what I view to be the scenario with the most potential for a, perhaps massively, negative outcome for both parties. B wants sex with A, and B's position of power predisposes B to perceive a greater degree of sexual intent from A than would have otherwise been the case. A, on the other hand, does not want sex, but because of A's low power position, A perceives less intent from B than would be the case in the absence of the power differential. The interaction proceeds with B thinking they both want to have sex and A oblivious to B's intentions. At some point, this misalignment will likely become very clear. Some solutions to mitigating this problematic scenario are already present in guidelines widely promoted as limiting instances of unwanted sexual interactions. For example, policies against fraternizing sexually with subordinates, if followed, do a lot to halt the potential conflict in this scenario. Likewise, the recommendation of open, honest, clear, and explicit communication, if practiced, should rectify the misunderstanding present in this scenario and limit the negative outcomes to mostly some minor embarrassment for both parties.

Another sort of problematic misalignment can exist in dyadic exchanges similar to the one described above. It is not as clearly prone to outright harm in the typical sense, but can still be an unfortunate minimizing of positive experiences, some of which might extend beyond the immediate sexual opportunity. Imagine the scenario just mentioned, except with the key change that A is now quite interested in B. In this second version of the scenario, the interests of the two parties align well, so the potential of unwanted sexual advances is no longer an immediate risk, at least not in the same way.⁸⁴ Moreover, imagine that Person B would in fact make a great partner for A, not only in terms of sexual compatibility but also in many other ways. Maybe B is particularly skilled at providing emotional support, is wealthy and generous, is part of a network where A might access job opportunities, or has access to other resources that would in some way be beneficial to A.⁸⁵ However, because of A's low power position, A is more prone to perceive B as being uninterested and decide not pursue further interaction with B. Admittedly, particularly as it relates to sexual partnering, this second scenario might seem very instrumental and utilitarian. Many would object to my depicting sexual and intimate relationships in these terms. For better or worse, though, that type of resource exchange

⁸⁴In the interest of clarity, what I am conveying here is that, since each person in the scenario is in fact interested in having sex with the other person, there is an elevated chance that sexual overtures made by either person will be positively received. Obviously, this is an over-simplification, and other factors, such as the way the advance is made, adherence to customs of appropriateness, and whether or not the specific signals are correctly interpreted would dictate precisely how the interaction unfolds. I am making an assumption that those other factors come together well, and focusing only on the element of how each actor initially interprets the interest of the other.

⁸⁵The precise nature of the resources could be anything beneficial to A, and those resources could be germane to the context of their present interaction or not. Those details are not particularly relevant to the example, which is focused chiefly on the possibility for A to gain more access to some resources via a connection with B that would not have otherwise been accessible.

has long been, and likely always will be, an important aspect of intimate partnerships, sexual and otherwise, and is very frequently to the mutual benefit of all parties involved.

Another interesting point arising from the results of this study is that scenarios like the second one above, where the likelihood of A missing an opportunity because low power decreases perceived sexual intent, could contribute to a sort of “rich get richer” phenomenon. This is because the net result of the predisposition among powerful people to perceive interest from potential interaction partners regardless of other situational factors should lead to powerful people, as a group, pursuing what they want more frequently. Importantly, this is true regardless of any other benefits that flow from their power, of which there are certainly many, and in no way reflects misconduct or ill-intentions. The opposite should also be true of low power individuals. Low power individuals, due to a tendency toward perceiving lower degrees of interest, will be more likely to miss opportunities simply by virtue of not perceiving and pursuing them.

Limitations

There are several limitations to this research that are worth discussing. First, while published research demonstrates that samples drawn from platforms similar to Prolific lead to reasonably similar outcomes as with other methods of recruiting subjects for academic research, they are not random samples from the population at large. Of course, that is by no means unique to this recruitment method, and I have little reason to believe that any difference in the sample I analyzed here and the U.S. population hindered this research to any substantive degree. Regardless, it would be worthwhile to reproduce this

study using a population representative sample. Doing so would not only bolster the findings presented here, if replicated, but would also afford the opportunity to delve further into the role, if any, of characteristics such as age, race, and income. Along those same lines, a larger sample size would also be desirable. The sample used in this research is of sufficient size to warrant/justify the analyses and conclusions made herein. However, in addition to solidifying the present findings, reproducing this research using larger samples, and perhaps targeted sampling, would facilitate analyses/better analyses of individuals from subgroups that are only a small portion of the overall population. For instance, it would be particularly interesting to include individuals whose sex at birth does not align with their gender identification and asexual men in a replication of this study as the present sample did not allow for analyses of these groups.

In addition to issues of non-representation encountered when using online platforms to recruit research subjects, there are aspects of data collection via web technologies that potentially interfere with experimental methods and data quality in general. I implemented attention check techniques to avoid problems related to inattentive research subjects, but those techniques only eliminate the most obviously inattentive subjects. Attention to/engagement with a data collection instrument and/or research task can be more or less relevant/important to collecting data from human subjects depending on the objectives and precise subject matter of a given study. In some instances, it might even be desirable to have research subjects be somewhat distracted. It is well accepted, though, that error can be introduced into measurements when research

subjects do not fully pay attention to and understand what is being asked of them during data collection.

The hurdle thrown up by inattention from research subjects completing an online data collection instrument might be amplified in the specific case of experimental procedures such as the semantic priming methods utilized in this research. That procedure relies heavily on engagement with the task to elicit the desired effect. There were some cases that I removed from the sample prior to analyses specifically due to poor engagement with/response to the semantic priming task,⁸⁶ but the criteria for removal were not especially stringent (e.g. gave no response, gave a response that was gibberish, gave a response that did not at all address a low/high power scenario). Some responses to the power prime task demonstrated clear thought and effort. Few subjects provided very high levels of detail, though, and many gave very short responses. Regardless, the experimental manipulation appeared to achieve the desired effect based on results of the manipulation check item, and the experimental manipulation had a strong effect on the dependent variable. Never the less, there are reasons to believe the experimental manipulation would have been more uniformly effective within a controlled environment.

Even if the operation of the experimental manipulation was not hindered, other factors that induce variance in the dependent and/or independent variables in my analyses could differ in relation to the many settings in which subjects likely interacted with the online data collection instrument. This might be especially relevant in the case of

⁸⁶The number was not high enough to cause concern over the quality of the data. See Chapter 3 for a discussion of removal of cases with data quality issues.

Hypothesis 4. The derogation effect upon which I based Hypothesis 4 is known to be mediated by degree of self-regulatory resources available. Self-regulatory resources might be more taxed in the contexts in which subjects completed the instrument for my data collection as compared to the controlled laboratory settings used in many of the experiments described in existing literature. Additionally, some subjects in my study who were in a relationship likely completed the data collection instrument in the presence of their relationship partner, but it is unlikely that all of them did. It is reasonable to assume that one's relationship status might be more or less salient depending on the presence or absence of their partner. Whether or not, and to what degree, a person's relationship is at the forefront of their mind at the time they completed the data collection instrument could mediate/moderate the impact of relationship status on the dependent variable. In hindsight, I could have accounted for this to some extent with something as simple as asking partnered subjects when they last saw their partner.

I used the SIS in this research to measure levels of perceived sexual intent. Using an existing measure of sexual intent allowed me to conserve resources and circumvent the myriad issues involved in constructing and validating a measurement instrument. From the available options, I found this scale to be the best option due, in part, to the thorough nature of, and availability of information about,⁸⁷ its construction. The SIS served my purposes well, and I believe it yielded accurate/valid results. That said, there are aspects of the scale that could be improved upon.

⁸⁷The original publication that describes the development of the scale is thorough and demonstrated that the scale had a number of desirable properties. Also, a special thanks to one of the authors of that paper, Richard J. Harnish, who was prompt in answering my inquiries about the scale and its development. He provided additional details about the process as well as original materials used in selecting items to include in the scale.

The SIS includes items that refer to behaviors of a hypothetical target that could be interpreted quite differently depending upon, e.g., the gender of the hypothetical target. One item from the SIS reads “a [man|woman] I’m talking with touches my arm.” Social scripts in the U.S. and other societies are gendered, and this type of unsolicited touching behavior might be interpreted quite differently from a man than from a woman in any context, perhaps more so in a potentially sexual context. Another example item reads “the [man|woman] I’m talking with is open about [his|her] feelings.” Again setting aside any sexual connotation, gendered social norms and scripts dictate that men express their emotions at different times and in different ways than women. Similarly, other items in the SIS have cultural connotations that might have changed in recent years and now be less relevant.⁸⁸ I do not believe these issues were detrimental to the research presented here to any substantive degree. Rather, I view them as minor limitations at most, and even more so as opportunities for further exploration.

One other limitation is worthy of mention. As regards gender and relationship status, this study is necessarily limited by the inability to experimentally manipulate those traits. The sex-gender of human research subjects cannot be experimentally manipulated.⁸⁹ Romantic relationship status probably cannot be experimentally manipulated without taking extraordinary, prohibitive measures to do so. It is possible to

⁸⁸An item that mentions making copies of music for someone calls to mind mix tapes and/or C.D.’s that people made and gave away when those were the dominant form of media used for listening to music. This might not be as relevant in an era when streaming services and electronic files are the dominant forms of media used for consuming music. Perhaps sending someone a link to a playlist is the equivalent, but that does not, to me, seem to be quite as intimate as is implied by this particular item in the SIS. Of course, that might be as much a function of my own experiences as anything else.

⁸⁹At least not in any ethical way that I can think of at the time of writing. Who knows what the future has in store - perhaps advances in biological, biochemical, or even biocomputing technology will facilitate this one day.

experimentally manipulate relationship status at a more abstract level, however, and possibly in a way that would facilitate studying the same topics I addressed in the present study. Longitudinal methods could also be deployed to address this limitation and better study how changes in relationship status relate to differences in the way the sexual intentions of potential sex partners are perceived. Such a study would capitalize on changes in the lives of individuals, comparing their personal tendencies to perceive greater/lesser degrees of sexual intent from potential sex partners before and after they enter a relationship.

Subsequent Research

The outcomes of this research offer several directions for future study. Some possibilities were alluded to in previous sections. For example, while the findings here did not support my hypothesis about differences in perceived sexual intent stemming from relationship status, that hypothesis should not be abandoned without additional study. The lines of theory that motivated that hypothesis are sound and have received respectable amounts of empirical support in other research examining different types of sex related perceptions (especially perceptions about the physical attractiveness of potential sex partners). Applying methods that overcome the limitations found in this study to investigate the interplay between relationship status and perceived sexual intent might lead to different results.

The results of this study should not be interpreted as running counter to the oversexualization phenomenon supported in existing literature. That is, in part, because I

asked slightly different questions than what is prevalent in existing literature addressing the oversexualization phenomenon. An important difference in this research and the existing research is equivalent to the difference in asking “does A want to have sex with B?” versus asking “does A want to have sex with you?” Those questions are related, but the difference in them might alter how power, gender, and relationship status impact the perceived sexual intent outcome in important ways. So, it would be worthwhile to directly replicate the predominant paradigm used in the oversexualization literature but with added attention to the specific independent variables that I investigate here. Specifically, the existing literature could be expanded to address the role of power. This study demonstrates that increasing power increases the degree to which people think a potential sex partner is interested in having sex *with them*. Does increased power also increase the degree to which people think a potential partner is interested in having sex *with someone else*? The answer might have interesting implications for mating market analyses and our understanding of mate competition, self-evaluations of mate value, aspects of relationship stability, and other related topics.

Conclusion

Any social interaction might be complicated by details such as understanding the intentions of each actor, whether those intentions are compatible, whether/how they intentions are communicated, and whether/how they are perceived. Interactions of a sexual nature are particularly intimate, and they arguably come with a higher set of stakes than other forms of interaction. What individuals perceive to be the case, whether

accurate or not, influences their behavior. In the case of sexual interactions, how the sexual intentions of a potential partner are perceived, if at all, might be the difference in lost opportunity, lifelong trauma, momentary embarrassment, one eventful night, or the beginning of a long-lived romantic relationship.

Sex is a ubiquitous part of the human experience. Similar could be said of social power. At one level or another, in some way, across multiple contexts, at different moments, everyone has it and everyone lacks it. Power dynamics permeate all aspects of social interaction. In this dissertation, I brought these well-studied topics – sexual intent perceptions and social power – together in a novel manner. I considered how relationship status differences might lead to variance in the way potential sex partners are perceived, drawing from existing literature that finds differences in the way partnered and single people rate the attractiveness of potential sex partners. Because numerous sources depict men and women as having different sexual tendencies, I investigated how gender differences might manifest in sexual intent perceptions.

Based on existing research separately examining power and sexual intent perceptions, I anticipated that increases in power would translate into perceiving greater degrees of sexual intent from potential sex partners. The experimental research described in this dissertation provided strong support for that assumption. The findings outlined here did not support what I had assumed about the interplay between relationship status and the way people perceive the intentions of potential sex partners. Neither did I find any support for the opposite. Instead, I found no meaningful correlation between relationship status and sexual intent perceptions. When controlling for a number of

relevant traits, people in a relationship tend to perceive similar degrees of sexual intent from potential sex partners as do singles. Similarly, I found no support for gender differences in sexual intent. However, the results demonstrated that the gender of the potential sex partner greatly influences the extent to which people perceive someone as wanting to have sex with them. When interpreting my findings in light of predominate, gendered sexual scripts, they lend support to the idea that gender is most relevant to sexual intent perceptions via a difference in the expectations society in general places upon men and women. People, men and women alike, interpret greater degrees of sexual intent from, or perhaps impute more sexual intent to, men.

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Appendix A: Data Collection Instrument

The instrument used for data collection is described below. The order of the items as they appear here does not reflect the exact order in which items appeared to subjects. Some items were placed into groups (in terms of organization, not in terms of the way they appeared on the screen to the subject). Then, the order in which items within a given group appeared were internally randomized. In this way, it was possible to randomize the appearance of items to some extent while also ensuring that specific items appeared before others. For example, items for subject gender and relationship status appeared early in the instrument in order to use information from those items to customize other parts of the instrument. Additionally, randomizing of items in separate groups facilitated separation of similar items, a practice that is intended to avoid demand characteristics. Not all items were viewed by all subjects. For instance, subjects who indicated being single were not shown relationship detail items. Conditional display of items is explained below. Items are numbered using Arabic numerals for convenience. Roman numerals are used to indicate instances where items displayed some text followed by sub-items, such as instances of multiple items sharing the same text instructions or similar. Descriptions of the response format used for an item, as well as other explanatory notes, are provided next to a bullet point beneath the item to which they apply.

The following items appear to all subjects:

1. Below are a number of personality traits. We would like you to reflect on your own personality and rate how much each personality trait below is true about you. On this scale, 1 means the item is never true about you (does not describe you at all) and 7 means the item is always true about you (very much describes you).
 - i. Gentle
 - ii. Sympathetic
 - iii. Tender
 - iv. Warm
 - v. Affectionate
 - vi. Sensitive to the needs of others
 - vii. Has leadership abilities
 - Response scale ranged from 1: Never True (not like me) to 7: Always True (very much like me)
 - Order of the sub-items was randomized
2. In general, how do you see yourself? Please answer on both scales.
 - i. Feminine
 - ii. Masculine
 - Response scale ranged from 1: Not at all to 7: Very
 - Order of the sub-items was randomized
3. Please indicate your age (in years).
4. What sex were you at birth (for example, on your original birth certificate)?

- Responses included:

- Male
- Female
- Intersex

5. What is your current gender?

- Responses included:

- Man
- Woman
- Transgender
- A gender not listed here [if selected, this response triggered display of a follow up item]

ii. You indicated that your gender was not listed as a response. In your own words, what is your gender?

- A text entry box was provided for the response

6. Choose the category that best describes you.

- Responses were randomized and included:

- Asian
- Black/African American/African
- Hispanic/Latino/Latina
- Other Race/Ethnicity [choosing this response triggered display of a follow up item]

- ii. You indicated "Other Race/Ethnicity" above. In your own words, describe your race/ethnicity.
 - A text entry box was provided for the response
- 7. Use the fields below to describe your height in FEET and INCHES.
 - i. Feet
 - ii. Inches
- 8. Please indicate your weight in POUNDS.
- 9. Please choose the response that most accurately describes you.
 - Responses included:
 - I am sexually attracted to MEN
 - I am sexually attracted to WOMEN
 - I am sexually attracted to both MEN and WOMEN
 - I am NOT sexually attracted to anyone
- 10. Choose the response that best describes your current romantic relationship status.
 - Responses included:
 - Single
 - In a Relationship
 - ii. You indicated that you are in a relationship (if this is incorrect, please change your response above to "single"). Is your relationship a monogamous/closed relationship (meaning that you and your partner expect each other to have no other sex partners) or is your relationship an open/polyamorous relationship

(meaning that you and your partner have agreed that you can have other sex partners)?

- Responses included:
 - My relationship is a closed/monogamous relationship
 - My relationship is an open/polyamorous relationship

11. On a scale from 1 (disagree strongly) to 7 (agree strongly), rate how much you disagree or agree with each of the following statements.

In my relationship with others ____:

- i. I can get people to listen to what I say.
- ii. My wishes do not carry much weight.
- iii. I can get others to do what I want.
- iv. Even if I voice them, my views have little sway.
- v. I think I have a great deal of power.
- vi. My ideas and opinions are often ignored.
- vii. Even when I try, I am not able to get my way.
- viii. If I want to, I get to make the decisions.

- Order of the sub-items was randomized
- Responses scale ranged from 1: Strongly Disagree to 7: Strongly Agree

12. In general, how do most other people see you? Please answer on both scales.

- i. Feminine
- ii. Masculine

- Response scale ranged from 1: Not at all to 7:Very

- Order of the sub-items was randomized

13. Below is a list of statements dealing with your general feelings about yourself.

Please indicate how strongly you agree or disagree with each statement. (strongly disagree; disagree; agree; strongly agree)

- i. On the whole, I am satisfied with myself.
- ii. At times I think I am no good at all.
- iii. I feel that I have a number of good qualities.
- iv. I am able to do things as well as most other people.
- v. I feel I do not have much to be proud of.
- vi. I certainly feel useless at times.
- vii. I feel that I'm a person of worth, at least on an equal plane with others.
- viii. I wish I could have more respect for myself.
- ix. All in all, I am inclined to feel that I am a failure.
- x. I take a positive attitude toward myself.

- Order of the sub-items was randomized

- Responses included:

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

14. How would you rate your own level of physical attractiveness?

- Response scale ranged from 1: Very Unattractive to 10: Very Attractive

15. In general, how would you rate your sex drive?

- Response scale ranged from 1: Very Low to 7: Very High

16. How would you rate your sex drive over the past 24 hours?

- Response scale ranged from 1: Very Low to 7: Very High

17. During the last month, how often would you have liked to engage in sexual activity with a partner (for example, touching each other's genitals, giving or receiving oral stimulation, intercourse, etc.)

- Responses included:
 - not at all
 - once per month
 - once every two weeks
 - once per week
 - twice per week
 - 3 to 4 times per week
 - once per day
 - more than once per day

18. During the last month, how often have you had sexual thoughts involving a partner?

- Responses included:
 - not at all
 - once per month
 - once every two weeks

- once per week
- twice per week
- 3 to 4 times per week
- once per day
- more than once per day

19. Indicate your response to each of the items below on a scale from 1 (no desire) to 7 (strong desire).

- i. When you have sexual thoughts, how strong is your desire to engage in sexual behavior with a partner?
- ii. When you first see an attractive person, how strong is your sexual desire?
- iii. When you spend time with an attractive person (for example, at work or school), how strong is your sexual desire?
- iv. When you are in romantic situations (such as a candle lit dinner, a walk on the beach, etc.), how strong is your sexual desire?
- v. How strong is your desire to engage in sexual activity with a partner?
 - Order of the sub-items was randomized
 - Response scale ranged from 1: No Desire to 7: Strong Desire

20. How important is it for you to fulfill your sexual desire through activity with a partner?

- Response scale ranged from 1: Not At All Important to 7: Extremely Important

21. Compared to other people of your age and sex, how would you rate your desire to behave sexually with a partner?

- Response scale ranged from 1: Much Less Desire to 7: Much More Desire

22. With how many partners have you had sex in the past 12 months?

23. With how many different partners have you ever had sexual intercourse *on one and only one occasion*?

24. With how many partners have you ever had sexual intercourse without having an interest in a long-term committed relationship with that person?

25. Answer each of the following items on a scale from 1 (totally disagree) to 7 (totally agree).

- i. Sex without love is OK.
- ii. I can imagine myself being comfortable and enjoying “casual” sex with different partners.
- iii. I do *not* want to have sex with a person until I am sure that we will have a long-term, serious relationship.

- Order of the sub-items was randomized

- Response scale ranged from 1: Totally Disagree to 7: Totally Agree

26. How often do you have fantasies about having sex with someone you are not in a committed romantic relationship with?

- Responses included:
 - Never
 - Very seldom

- About once every 2 to 3 months
- About once per month
- About once every 2 weeks
- About once per week
- Several times per week
- Nearly every day
- At least once per day

27. How often do you experience sexual arousal when you are in contact with someone you are not in a committed romantic relationship with?

- Responses included:
 - Never
 - Very seldom
 - About once every 2 to 3 months
 - About once per month
 - About once every 2 weeks
 - About once per week
 - Several times per week
 - Nearly every day
 - At least once per day

28. In everyday life, how often do you have spontaneous fantasies about having sex with someone you have just met?

- Responses included:

- Never
- Very seldom
- About once every 2 to 3 months
- About once per month
- About once every 2 weeks
- About once per week
- Several times per week
- Nearly every day
- At least once per day

29. Please choose the response that you feel best describes you.

- Responses included:
 - I am homosexual/gay/lesbian
 - I am bisexual
 - I am straight/heterosexual
 - I am asexual
 - I am unsure about my sexuality
 - I consider myself something that is not listed here [selecting this response triggers display of a sub-item]

ii. Tell us, in your own words, how you describe your sexuality/sexual preference.

The following items appeared only to those subjects who indicated being in a relationship.

30. You indicated that you are in an open/polyamorous relationship. The following questions ask about the details of your relationship. For the purposes of these questions, please choose one person with whom you are in a relationship and answer all of these questions as they relate to the relationship between you and that partner. Some people who are in a polyamorous/open relationship have multiple partners, and they may or may not consider one of those partners their primary or main partner. If you are in a relationship with multiple people and one of them is considered your primary or main partner, please answer the following relationship questions as they relate to the relationship between you and your primary/main partner. Asking you to choose only one of your relationship partners to answer these relationship questions about is in no way intended to diminish the importance or validity of your other relationships.

- This item was conditionally displayed only to subjects who indicated being in a polyamorous/open relationship

31. You previously indicated that you are currently involved in a romantic relationship. Choose the response below that best describes your current romantic relationship status.

- Responses included:
 - I am dating someone
 - I am engaged to be married

- I am married

32. We would also like to know approximately how long your current romantic relationship has lasted. To the best of your recollection, use the fields below to indicate the month and year in which your current romantic relationship began.

- A calendar utility was provided for the response

33. Please choose the response that best describes your living situation relative to your romantic relationship partner.

- Responses included:
 - We each have our place and spend most of our nights apart
 - We each have our own place, but we spend most nights staying together
 - We live together

34. Please indicate the degree to which you agree with each of the following statements regarding your current romantic relationship.

- i. My partner fulfills my needs for intimacy (sharing personal thoughts, secrets, etc.)
- ii. My partner fulfills my needs for companionship (doing things together, enjoying each other's company, etc.)
- iii. My partner fulfills my sexual needs (holding hands, kissing, etc.)
- iv. My partner fulfills my needs for security (feeling trusting, comfortable in a stable relationship, etc.)

- v. My partner fulfills my needs for emotional involvement (feeling emotionally attached, feeling good when another feels good, etc.)
 - Order of the sub-items was randomized
 - Response scale ranged from 1: Totally Disagree to 7: Totally Agree
35. Please indicate the degree to which you agree with each of the following statements regarding your current romantic relationship.
- i. I feel satisfied with our relationship.
 - ii. Our relationship is much better than others' relationships.
 - iii. Our relationship is close to ideal.
 - iv. Our relationship makes me very happy.
 - v. Our relationship does a good job of fulfilling my needs for intimacy, companionship, etc.
 - Order of the sub-items was randomized
 - Response scale ranged from 1: Totally Disagree to 7: Totally Agree
36. Please indicate the degree to which you agree with each of the following statements regarding your current romantic relationship.
- i. I want our relationship to last for a very long time.
 - ii. I am committed to maintaining my relationship with my partner.
 - iii. I would not feel very upset if our relationship were to end in the near future.
 - iv. It is likely that I will date someone other than my partner within the next year.
 - v. I feel very attached to our relationship-very strongly linked to my partner.
 - vi. I want our relationship to last forever.

- vii. I am oriented toward the long-term future of my relationship (for example, I imagine being with my partner several years from now).
- Order of the sub-items was randomized
 - Response scale ranged from 1: Totally Disagree to 7: Totally Agree
37. Since your romantic relationship began, how many times have you had sex with someone other than your current romantic relationship partner? Choose the most accurate response.
- Responses included:
 - I have NOT had sex with anyone other than my current partner since our relationship began
 - Once
 - Twice
 - Three times
 - Four times
 - Five or more times
 - Selecting one of the positive responses above triggered a follow up sub-item
- ii. Above you indicated that since this romantic relationship began you have had sex with someone other than your relationship partner one or more times (if this is incorrect, please change your response above). Does your relationship partner know about you having sex with someone else?
- Responses included:

- No they do not know - if they did, they would be unhappy/mad about it
- No they do not know - if they did, they probably would not mind/would not be mad about it
- Yes they do know - they were unhappy/mad about it
- Yes they do know - they did not mind/were not mad about it
- I'm not sure whether they know - they would be unhappy/mad about it
- I'm not sure whether they know - they would not mind/would not be mad about it

The following items appeared only to those subjects who indicated being in a relationship.

38. You previously indicated that you are currently single. Have you ever been involved in a romantic relationship?

- Responses were No/Yes
 - Positive response triggered display of a follow up sub-item
- ii. We would like to know approximately how long it has been since your most recent romantic relationship ended. To the best of your recollection, use the fields below to indicate the month and year in which your most recent romantic relationship ended.
- A calendar utility was provided for the response

39. Thinking back to your most recent romantic relationship, please choose the response that best describes your living situation relative to that partner during the time when you were in a relationship together.

- Responses included:
 - We each had our own place and spent most of our nights apart
 - We each had our own place, but we spent most nights staying together
 - We lived together
- This item was only displayed to single subjects who indicated having had a relationship at some point in the past

40. Please indicate the degree to which you agree with each of the following statements.

- i. My needs for intimacy (sharing personal thoughts, secrets, etc.) are fulfilled.
- ii. My needs for companionship (doing things together, enjoying each other's company, etc.) are fulfilled.
- iii. My sexual needs (holding hands, kissing, etc.) are fulfilled.
- iv. My needs for security (feeling trusting, comfortable in my interactions with others, etc.) are fulfilled.
- v. My needs for emotional involvement (feeling emotionally attached, feeling good when others I interact with feel good, etc.) are fulfilled.

- The response scale ranged from 1: Totally Disagree to 7: Totally Agree

41. Please indicate the degree to which you agree with each of the following statements.

- i. I feel satisfied with being single.
- ii. I am happier with being single than other single people are.
- iii. For me, being single is close to ideal.
- iv. Being single makes me very happy.
- v. Even though I am single, my needs for intimacy, companionship, etc. are filled.

- The response scale ranged from 1: Totally Disagree to 7: Totally Agree

42. Please indicate the degree to which you agree with each of the following statements.

- i. I do not want to be single for a very long time.
- ii. I would enter a relationship if given the opportunity.
- iii. I would feel upset if I cannot find a relationship partner in the near future.
- iv. It is likely that I will date someone within the next year.
- v. I am not very attached to being single.
- vi. I hope to find a relationship that will last.
- vii. I am actively trying to find a long-term relationship partner.

- The response scale ranged from 1: Totally Disagree to 7: Totally Agree

43. Do you currently know a specific person who you would like to start a romantic relationship with if possible?

- Responses included:
 - No
 - Yes - and this person definitely does NOT know I feel this way

- Yes - and this person MIGHT know I feel this way
- Yes - and this person DEFINITELY knows I feel this way

The following items appear to all subjects.

44. On the next page you will be asked to recall and think about an event from your past and to write about how that event made you feel in a provided field. After reading the prompt, please continue writing about the event for at least 3 minutes. Write as many things that you can remember about the event, especially how that event made you feel. Continue to the next page when you are ready to read the prompt.

45. Please recall a particular incident in which another individual or individuals had power over you. By power, we mean a situation in which another individual or individuals controlled your ability to get something you wanted, or were in a position to evaluate you. Using the space provided below, please describe this situation in which another individual or individuals had power over you, what happened, how you felt, etc. Please write about the incident for at least 3 minutes and write as much as you can remember. You will not be able to proceed to the next page until 3 minutes have passed.

- This item was displayed only to subjects who were randomly assigned to the low power treatment condition

46. Please recall a particular incident in which you had power over another individual or individuals. By power, we mean a situation in which you controlled the ability

of another person or persons to get something they wanted, or were in a position to evaluate those individuals. Using the space provided below, please describe this situation in which you had power over another individual or individuals, what happened, how you felt, etc. Please write about the incident for at least 3 minutes and write as much as you can remember. You will not be able to proceed to the next page until 3 minutes have passed.

- This item was displayed only to subjects who were randomly assigned to the high power treatment condition

47. We are interested in finding out about your understanding of behaviors that convey sexual intent when interacting with others. By “sexual intent” we mean whether or not a person is interested in having sex with someone. When answering the following questions, please keep your own experiences in mind. No two statements are exactly the same, so please consider each statement carefully before answering. We want you to tell us whether you think each behavior or situation listed never, rarely, sometimes, usually, or always means that the person is interested in having sex. For each item below, use the scale to indicate how often you think the behavior or situation means that the person is interested in having sex with you.

- i. A man/woman asks me to come to his/her apartment late at night to work on a project.
- ii. At a club, a man/woman dances with me.
- iii. At a bar, a man/woman winks at me.

- iv. A man/woman I just met at a bar asks for my telephone number.
- v. A man/woman dances with me in a sexually suggestive manner.
- vi. A man/woman wants to take me for a ride in his/her new car.
- vii. A man/woman who has a reputation for engaging in sex with many partners asks me for a date.
- viii. A man/woman I'm acquainted with surprises me with a gift.
- ix. At work or school, a man/woman I'm talking with touches my arm.
- x. A man/woman I'm acquainted with makes a copy of his/her favorite songs for me.
- xi. After going out to dinner with a man/woman, he/she invites me to his/her apartment.
- xii. A man/woman dressed in sexy clothing approaches me at a party.
- xiii. A man/woman bites his/her bottom lip when looking at me.
- xiv. A man/woman I'm acquainted with wants to know why I was talking to another man/woman.
- xv. A man/woman asks me to meet him/her for coffee.
- xvi. A man/woman tells me he/she enjoys talking with me.
- xvii. A man/woman I just met at a party is friendly with me.
- xviii. A man/woman I'm talking with is responsive to what I have to say.
- xix. I encounter the same man/woman repeatedly.
- xx. A man/woman accepts my offer to help with some work.
- xxi. At a cafeteria or restaurant, a man/woman I encounter smiles at me.

xxii. The man/woman I'm talking with is open about his/her feelings and opinions.

xxiii. A man/woman laughs a lot at the jokes I make.

xxiv. While walking together, a man/woman holds the door open for me.

xxv. A man/woman compliments my appearance.

■ Responses included:

- Never
- Rarely
- Sometimes
- Usually
- Always

48. Respond to each item below using the scale provided.

- i. I can tell if a man/woman is seeking a casual sexual partner.
- ii. I am aware of the sexual impression my appearance has on a man/woman.
- iii. I know when a man/woman is hitting on me.
- iv. I can tell if a man/woman is trying to make a sexual impression.
- v. I have no difficulty in determining when a situation may become sexual.
- vi. I have no difficulty perceiving sexual interest in a man/woman.
- vii. I can tell when a man/woman is sexually interested by the things they say.
- viii. I know when a man/woman is "coming on" to me.
- ix. I experience no difficulty in understanding if a man/woman wants to have sex.
- x. I have no difficulty in determining if a man/woman is being seductive.

- Responses included:

- Never
- Rarely
- Sometimes
- Usually
- Always

49. Earlier we asked you to write about an incident in which another individual or individuals had power over you. Please think of the situation you wrote about again. We would like to better understand how you felt in that situation. On a scale of 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 7 (Strongly Agree), rate how much you disagree or agree with each of the following statements.

In the incident I wrote about _____

- i. I felt dominant.
- ii. I felt powerless.
- iii. I felt powerful.

- Order of the sub-items was randomized
- The response scale ranged from 1: Strongly Disagree to 7: Strongly Agree
- This item only appeared to subjects who were assigned to the low power treatment condition

50. Earlier we asked you to write about an incident in which you had power over another individual or individuals. Please think of the situation you wrote about again. We would like to better understand how you felt in that situation. On a

scale of 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 7 (Strongly Agree), rate how much you disagree or agree with each of the following statements.

In the incident I wrote about _____

- i. I felt dominant.
- ii. I felt powerless.
- iii. I felt powerful.

- Order of the sub-items was randomized
- The response scale ranged from 1: Strongly Disagree to 7: Strongly Agree
- This item only appeared to subjects who were assigned to the high power treatment condition

51. Recent changes in our society often disadvantage [men|women|transgender people].

- The text of this item was customized based responses previously given by the subject
- Responses included:
 - Strongly Disagree
 - Disagree
 - Agree
 - Strongly Agree

52. You indicated that you agree that recent changes in our society often disadvantage [men|women|transgender people]. We would like to hear your thoughts about this

subject. In your own words, tell us how you feel recent changes in society have disadvantaged [men|women|transgender people].

- The text of this item was customized based on responses previously given by the subject

53. Have you ever been verbally pressured into having sex that you did not want?

- Responses were No/Yes

54. Have you ever had sex that you did not want because you were too drunk, high, or otherwise incapacitated to stop it?

- Responses were No/Yes

55. Have you ever been physically forced to have sex that you did not want?

- Responses were No/Yes

56. Have you ever been in a situation where someone attempted to physically force you to have sex you did not want but you got away?

- Responses were No/Yes

57. Have you ever verbally pressured anyone to have sex with you that they did not want?

- Responses were No/Yes

58. Have you ever had sex with someone who might not have wanted to have sex but they were too drunk, high, or otherwise incapacitated to stop it?

- Responses were No/Yes

59. Have you ever physically forced someone to have sex with you that they did not want?

- Responses were No/Yes

60. Have you ever been in a situation where you attempted to physically force someone to have sex with you when they did not want to have sex but they stopped you and/or got away?

- Responses were No/Yes

61. What is the highest level of education that you have achieved?

- Responses included:
 - Less than high school
 - High school graduate
 - Some college/associates degree/certificate of study
 - Bachelor's degree (BA, BS)
 - Master's degree (MA)
 - PhD, MD, JD (or other doctoral level degree)

62. Think of this ladder as representing where people stand in our society. At the top of the ladder are the people who are best off, those who have the most money, most education, and best jobs. At the bottom are the people who are the worst off, those who have the least money, least education, and worst jobs or no job at all. The ladder has 10 rungs. 1 is the lowest rung, at the bottom of the ladder; 10 is the highest rung, at the top of the ladder. The higher up on the ladder you are, the closer you are to the people at the very top; the lower you are, the closer you are to the people at the very bottom. Where do you think your family stands on this

ladder? Choose the number that best corresponds with what you believe to be your place on the ladder.

- An image of a ladder with numbered rungs was displayed with this item.
- The response scale ranged from 1: Bottom to 10: Top

63. What was your total personal income (pre-tax income) last year? In other words, how much money did you personally make last year before any taxes or other deductions were subtracted? Please provide a dollar amount in the field provided below.

64. What was your total household income (pre-tax income) last year? In other words, how much money did all adult members of your household (include only people who live with you that are related to you or in a romantic relationship with you, do not include someone who is only a roommate) make combined last year before any taxes or other deductions were subtracted? Please provide a dollar amount in the field provided below.

65. Please recall the happiest moment of your life. Using the space provided below, please describe the happiest moment of your life, what happened, who was there, what you did, etc.

66. You have almost completed this study. On the next page you will be provided with some verification information. Before you finish, is there anything that you would like to tell us about your experience completing this study? Feel free to leave any suggestions on how we could improve the data collection, whether you particularly like or dislike any aspect of the study, and whether you answered the

items honestly or not. Please use the space provided to tell us anything you would like us to know. Your comments here might be used to help us improve our research and approach to interacting with research participants in the future.

67. Thank you for completing this survey. Your verification code is: [random verification code]. Please retain this verification code for your records. When you click the 'Submit' button below, you will be redirected to Prolific. You have reached the end of the survey. Your participation in this research is greatly appreciated. Some of these questions and topics may be upsetting for some people. Remember that your answers are strictly anonymous. Also, here are some resources you can use if you are feeling uncomfortable or distressed, or if you simply want to learn more about your rights regarding sexual coercion and assault. The National Sexual Assault Telephone Hotline is a safe, free, and confidential service. You can call 800.656.HOPE (4673) or chat online at <https://hotline.rainn.org/online/>. You'll be connected to a trained staff member from a local sexual assault service provider in your area. You can also search for the nearest provider by state and ZIP code at centers.rainn.org. If you or someone you know is suicidal or in emotional distress, contact the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 1-800-273-8255 or chat online at <https://suicidepreventionlifeline.org/>. Trained crisis workers are available to talk 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Your confidential and toll-free call goes to the nearest crisis center in the Lifeline national network. These centers provide crisis counseling and mental health referrals. Thank you.