

A Leisurely Experience (Sometimes): Understanding Sexual Experiences for Couples
in a Committed Relationship

by

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AUTHOR'S DECLARATION

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners.

I understand that my thesis may be made electronically available to the public.

Abstract

Sexual experiences are an important part of everyday life, yet little research has taken place to understand its implication in the leisure realm. As leisure scholars adopt a holistic view of the individual, one's sexual experiences remain a critical element devoid of empirical research. The current study examined the linkages between leisure and sexual experiences for six couples in the life stage of early adulthood. Findings revealed that relationally, couples conceptualized sexual experiences as a means to express love. At an individual level, it was clear that leisurely dimensions including intrinsic motivation, perceived freedom, involvement, arousal, mastery and spontaneity were present in some sexual experiences. This research provides support that sexual experiences can be plotted on Neulinger's (1981) Leisure Continuum highlighting the work-like and/or leisurely aspects of relational sexual experiences.

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Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my loving husband, Matthew Bondy.

“General opinion’s starting to make out that we live in a world of hatred and greed, but I don’t see that... If you look for it, I’ve got a sneaky feeling you’ll find that love actually is all around” (Love Actually, 2003).

Table of Contents

AUTHOR'S DECLARATION	ii
Abstract	iii
Acknowledgements.....	iv
Dedication.....	v
Table of Contents	vi
List of Figures	x
Chapter 1: Introduction.....	1
Chapter 2: Literature Review.....	7
2.1 Defining the Leisure Experience.....	7
2.2 A Dimensional Approach to Leisure.....	10
2.3 Forms of Leisure	13
2.4 Understanding Sexuality	17
2.5 Understanding the Sexual Experience.....	19
2.6 The Four Sexual Meanings	22
2.7 A Shift in Understanding Sexual Experiences	26
2.8 Understanding Relationships	29

2.9 Sex and Leisure: An Integrated Perspective	34
2.10 Early Adulthood: Understanding Life, Leisure and Sexual Experiences.....	38
2.11 Summary of Literature	41
Chapter 3: Methods.....	42
3.1 Qualitative Research Methodology.....	42
3.2 Interpretive Worldview	43
3.3 Research Method: Grounded Theory	43
3.4 The Research Process.....	44
3.5 Data Analysis	52
3.6 Documenting the Research Journey.....	56
3.7 Evaluating the Research Process.....	58
3.8 Amanda and David.....	60
3.9 Zana and Samir.....	62
3.10 Jill and Caleb.....	64
3.11 Beth and Carter.....	66
3.12 Alexis and Rex	68
3.13 Stan and Caitlin.....	69

Chapter 4: Findings.....	72
4.1 Who Am I?	72
4.2 Expressing Love.....	78
4.2.1 A Foundation for Love	78
4.2.2 Nurturing the Relationship	83
4.2.3 Enjoying one Another.....	86
4.3 Leisurely Experience.....	90
Chapter 5: Discussion	102
Chapter 6: Conclusion.....	129
References	132
Appendix A: Email Script.....	155
Appendix B: Revised Email Script.....	157
Appendix C: Personal Email Script	159
Appendix D: Interview Preparation Sheet	161
Appendix E: Individual Interview Guide.....	162
Appendix F: Introductory Letter	164
Appendix G: Consent Form.....	167

Appendix H: Couple Interview Guide	168
Appendix I: Community Resources Information Sheet.....	170
Appendix J: Open Coding.....	171
Appendix K: Axial Coding	174
Appendix L: Selective Coding.....	176
Appendix M: Feedback Email	178

List of Figures

Figure 1: Defining the Sexual Experience	19
Figure 2: Neulinger's Paradigm of Leisure	113

Chapter 1: Introduction

Leisure is a fundamental quality of human life (Kelly & Freysinger, 2000). It is an avenue where key aspects of human growth and development are learned and where play is exhibited and explored. Leisure has been defined as an activity, as a state of mind, a quality of action, time, and finally as a dimension of human life (Kelly & Freysinger, 2000). While leisure has been defined in numerous ways, most leisure experiences involve six key elements including: intrinsic satisfaction, perceived freedom, involvement, arousal, mastery and spontaneity (Unger & Kernan, 1983). These elements of leisure often lead to the development of self-concept and sense of identity (Kelly & Freysinger, 2000). What defines a good leisure experience is different for everyone. That is, for some it may involve socialization with others, cultural pursuits, and/or various forms of activity. Irrespective, a leisure experience is deeply personal (Kelly & Freysinger, 2000) and provides individual rewards and feelings of internal satisfaction (London, Crandall & Fitzgibbons, 1977; Neulinger, 1974; Iso-Ahola, 1980).

The numerous and diverse rewards of leisure has led much of the field to embrace a holistic view of the individual focusing on physical, social, psychological, intellectual, emotional and spiritual well-being; emphasizing the whole person (Iwasaki, Coyle & Shank, 2010). This holistic view of the individual within the leisure context is closely related to the component of wellness, which is “a way of life oriented toward optimal health and wellbeing in which the body, mind, and spirit are integrated by the individual to live more fully within the human and natural community” (Myers, Sweeney & Witmer, 2000, p.252). Leisure

experiences can contribute to personal wellness by: providing a sense of worth, assisting in managing stress, increasing emotional awareness and coping strategies, acting as a method of self-care and finally as a form of exercise (Myers, Sweeney & Witmer, 2000). Clearly, leisure experiences are important in sustaining and/or improving lifelong wellness (Penhollow, Jackson & Hartzell, 2010).

Like leisure, sexual experiences also contribute to wellness and overall well-being. Sexual experiences are an integral component of dyadic relationships, in particular, a marriage (Spreecher, Christopher, & Cate, 2006). The intimacy that can develop within sexual relationships has a profound influence on social development, personal adjustment and physical health (Moss & Schwebel, 1993). Sexual activity has also been linked to improvements in emotional health through stress reduction, reduced rates of depression, improvements in self-esteem and overall quality of life (Wipple, Knowles, Gianotten & Golub, 2007). Jannini (2009) concluded, "I am definitively sure that safe, frequent, and satisfactory sexual activity is not only fun, but also a powerful booster of health!" (p. 2642). On average individuals under the age of forty engage in sexual experiences once a week, as such much is to be learned about its connection to wellness and leisure (Blanchflower & Oswald, 2004).

Often considered a part of both social and biological health, sexuality is an everyday experience that can be learned in part through socialization (Kelly, 2009). Giles (2004) defined a sexual experience as two interrelated components: (a) thoughts about wanting sexual interaction (sexual desire), and (b) the specific sexual behaviours that occur (kissing,

sexual touching, sexual penetration etc.). For the purposes of this research, the sexual experience is defined by three interrelated spheres: intrapersonal (individual thoughts feelings), extrapersonal (the specific sexual acts) and environmental (unique situational, environmental and/or cultural components which impact the individual). Through this definition, a holistic view of the individual is acknowledged including: previous experiences, upbringing, and individual thoughts and feelings around the sexual experience. This definition represents the primary focus of this study.

Scant research has explored sexual experiences within the area of leisure. Notable exceptions include Neulinger's (1974) book "Psychology of Leisure" in which he explored feelings and attitudes towards sexual activity in relation to the Protestant Work Ethic. This Ethic "not only glorified work and denigrated leisure, but it also implied a stern position on sexuality" (p. 135). Additionally, Neulinger and Breit (1971) found data that strongly supported the contention that a person's value system was integrated with sex and leisure. As such, someone who had conservative leisure attitudes would also tend to have conservative sexual attitudes. In 1980, Godbey explored the historical perspectives of sexual activity examining pornography, prostitution, and the trends in leisure-related sexual activity.

More recently, Meaney and Rye (2007) established loose connections between the key characteristics of leisure (fun, sense of enjoyment, mastery, flow, risk etc.) and sexual experiences. Kelly and Freysinger (2000) also analyzed sexual activity as it relates to leisure. These researchers developed a theoretical understanding of how leisure and sexual experiences may be related. With respect to empirical research, Lin (2008) conducted one of

very few studies that explored sexuality as a leisure pursuit for Taiwanese females. Although no English translation of her work yet exists, her research demonstrates the need for further empirical research exploring sexual experiences and leisure. Most recently, Berdychevsky et. al (2013) conducted a grounded theory study to explore how sex is perceived and experienced by people with depression. The grounded theory study suggested a complex and multidimensional paradox of sex as leisure for individuals coping with depression and their significant others (2013). In sum, the lack of empirical research suggests that studies are needed to explore the theoretical connections between leisure and sexuality. This emergent area of research will be the basis of the current study.

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore and understand the linkages between sexual experiences and leisure for couples in a committed relationship between the ages of 25 and 40. Individuals within this age range are passing through the developmental stage of early adulthood (Towler, 2003). This life stage is characterized by numerous fundamental components including: “selecting and courting a mate, learning to live with someone, starting a family, rearing children, managing a home, getting started in a career, finding a congenial social group and finally taking on some sort [of] civic responsibility” (Towler, 2003, p. 118). As gender roles in society change and adapt the numbers of dual-income couples continue to rise furthering both childrearing and life stressors on the early adulthood couple (Statistics Canada, 2010). Now more than ever, couples are faced with the need to juggle “two careers, children, a marriage, and household responsibilities” which can lead to role overload (Ward & Belanger, 2011, p. 102). With these societal changes it is

important to further understand the integration of leisure and sexual experiences for those navigating the early adulthood stage of development not only to obtain further knowledge but to one day have support and resources for this population.

To better understand the complexities of leisure and sexual experiences for couples within the developmental stage of early adulthood, a series of semi-structured interviews took place with participants living in or within one hour driving distance of the University of Waterloo. Individual interviews took place with each member of the couple and the process concluded with a couple interview, which revealed the shared understandings and meanings each couple attributed to both sexual and leisure experiences. Through a grounded theory methodology, I developed a number of themes that help explain the linkages between sexual and leisure experiences for those in a committed relationship between the ages of 25 and 40. The research questions that guided this study were:

1. What are the connections between sexual experiences and leisure?
2. Do couples utilize leisure and sexual experiences to navigate the life stage of early adulthood?
3. Do linkages exist amongst the intrapersonal, extrapersonal and environmental spheres of the sexual experience?
4. In what ways do sexual and leisure experiences contribute to a sense of wellness?

This research fulfilled three goals: first, this research allowed for a much needed empirical understanding and exploration of sexual and leisure experiences; second, by providing greater insight into the linkages between sex and leisure, this study can serve as a baseline for further research; and within my work as a recreational co-op student within the therapeutic recreation field, I noticed few resources were available to practitioners to assist clients with disabilities in the area of sexuality. It is my hope that this thesis will inspire others to delve into this unknown topic of leisure broadening not only the research available, but also providing additional support to leisure participants and practitioners. Finally, for the participants, this study allowed them the opportunity for personal reflection and sharing of their leisure and sexual experiences both as individuals and as couples. Their involvement in this project will hopefully facilitate greater personal insight into two important dimensions of life, but also contribute to a dialogue within their own relationships, and amongst their social circles. It is my hope that through their interviews, the participants feel as though they have contributed to something bigger and assisted in further understanding sexuality and leisure for young adults.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This section will review literature pertaining to leisure, sexuality and the ways sexual experiences have been viewed through a leisure lens. This section will shed light upon the gaps amongst these two fields further warranting the critical need for this research.

2.1 Defining the Leisure Experience

Leisure has been defined in numerous ways, but most popularly as time, activity, a state of mind, a quality of action and finally, a dimension of life (Kelly & Freysinger, 2000). One of the most popular and common conceptualizations of a leisure experience is that it is a pursuit undertaken during free time (Heintzman, 2007). When viewed as free time, leisure is dichotomized between work and leisure – making leisure the time ‘left over’ at the end of the day (Brighbill 1960; Clawson 1964). However, rarely is our ‘left over’ time free from obligation especially within our fast paced society (Heintzman, 2007). In fact, now more than ever individuals are expected to fulfill multiple roles including: two careers, children, a marriage in addition to household responsibilities (Ward & Belanger, 2011). Additionally, free time may have a unique definition depending on the individual. “What is free time for the retired person, the student, the homemaker or the unemployed? If we assume that ‘free time;’ is primarily time when we aren’t involved in activities for which we receive money, then the definition has no meaning to many in our society” (Godbey, 1980, p. 7). However, time is often an essential element of people’s conceptualization of leisure. Thus, time

remains important for leisure scholars, but other definitions have been sought to address the limitations associated with time. One such definition is that of activity (Dumazedier, 1974).

Heintzman (2007) identified leisure as a pursuit or an activity taking place during free time. In leisure, the activity can consist of games, sports, cultural events and celebrations or social interactions (Kelly, 1990). When conceptualizing leisure as an activity, information can be learned about a specific group, activities and or population. For example, in understanding leisure as an activity it would be important to know that “men engage in more sports teams than their female counterparts, and that females are more involved in the arts than men” (Henle, 2007, p. 15). A focus on activity as a definition of leisure is problematic insofar as it fails to appreciate what people enjoy about an activity, their motivation for participation, and feelings or emotions they associate with a particular activity. Dumazedier (1967) understood the need to explore the meaning behind leisure activities, and concluded that relaxation, diversion, creativity and other aspects may be at the root of leisure activities. In other words, leisure can be defined as a state of mind.

Neulinger (1974) defined leisure as “a physical and mental state void of work and worries of financial character” (p. 25). Neulinger’s viewpoint examines the state of consciousness of the person involved in leisure, rather than the activity itself (Kelly & Freysinger, 2007). Through this lens, the focus is placed upon the orientation, attitude, conditions and experiences that occur for the individual while immersed in the leisure experience (Kelly, 1990). As a result, there is a focus on perceived freedom, intrinsic motivation and non-instrumentality (Neulinger, 1974). A sense of freedom is paramount to

the state of consciousness definition of leisure as without it, “there is no leisure, only an extension of all of the obligations of life” (Kelly & Freysinger, 2000, p. 20). While this definition highlights the mental state which contributes to leisure experience, it is also important to understand the quality of the leisure experience.

When defining leisure as a quality of action the focus is upon doing something – that something “may be mental and imaginative as well as physical. It may be solitary or socially involved. But it involves doing something in a real time and place” (Kelly & Freysinger, 2007, p. 17). Within this definition, the meaning of leisure occurs within the experience itself, rather than in the activity, time or the mind. This meaning is an essential component of the leisure experience; it is unique to each person, may have implications and may occur immediately or be delayed. Leisure “is related to work, family, education, the economy, government, religion, personal development, sexuality, and almost everything... yet it has distinguishing dimensions of actions with its primary meaning in the experience” (Kelly & Freysinger, 2007, p. 16). As a quality of action, leisure has a broad definition; this is also true when viewing leisure as a dimension of life. Leisure “is an experience, but in context. It has form, but is not defined by the form. It takes place in time, but defines the time rather than being defined by it” (Kelly & Freysinger, 2007, p. 16). In viewing leisure as a dimension of life the experience is deeply personal and can have a unique impact on all aspects of life (Kelly & Freysinger, 2007).

As Stewart (1998) acknowledged, leisure can also be multi-phasic allowing for experiences to be viewed as emerging states of mind rather than the traditional trait-like

conceptualization of leisure. These states of mind could include positive emotions, personal meanings, and cognitions related to the leisure pursuit or experience (Borrie & Roggenbuck, 2001). The idea of leisure consisting of multiple phases (or states of mind) stems from the work of Clawson and Knetsch (1966), which focused upon outdoor recreational experiences. Through their work five sequential phases were developed that one passes through while embarking upon an outdoor trip. These phases include: anticipation and planning, traveling to the site, on-site activity, return travel from the site, and recollection of the trip (Clawson, 1966). The concept of leisure experiences being multi-phasic is important for the purposes of this study, as both leisure and sexual experiences are experienced uniquely by an individual and as such there could be a variety of phases one passes through within these types of experiences.

Taken together, the conceptualizations of leisure explained above demonstrate that there are numerous ways to define and understand a leisure experience. As a result of the challenges in finding a single definition of leisure, it is important to embrace a dimensional approach to conceptualizing leisure.

2.2 A Dimensional Approach to Leisure

A dimensional approach to leisure draws upon elements or dimensions of leisure, which are thought to be applicable in all leisure experiences. A few of the more common dimensions typically associated with leisure include: intrinsic motivation, perceived freedom, involvement, arousal, mastery and spontaneity (Unger & Kernan, 1983).

Intrinsic motivation refers to the type of motivation, which is guided by pure interest and/or enjoyment in a task (Brainbridge, 2010). Within a leisure experience, intrinsic motivation encapsulates the satisfaction one derives from a leisure choice and the evaluation of the experience as satisfying and/or a worthwhile experience (Unger & Kernan, 1983). Being intrinsically motivated in leisure enables people to overcome obstacles, attain a goal, provide a sense of accomplishment and increase self-esteem (London, Crandall, & Fitzgibbons, 1977; Tinsley, Barrett & Kass, 1977; Berlyne, 1969). Likewise, intrinsic motivation has also been acknowledged as a contributor to mastery, involvement and arousal (Unger & Kernan, 1983; Hawes 1978).

Another dimension contributing to the leisure experience is perceived freedom. Perceived freedom has been defined as “a state in which the person feels that what he/she is doing is done by choice and because one wants to do it” (Neulinger, 1974, p. 15). It is this feeling of freedom that allows for an experience to be viewed as leisure, rather than an obligation. Perceived freedom varies based on the individual and the situation. For example, while on a date one’s perceived freedom could exist between making a choice between two leisure options: going to see a movie or taking a walk in the park. Perceived freedom also speaks to the ability to withdraw one’s participation without negative consequences (Neulinger, 1974). By being provided with a choice one is able to have freedom within their leisure pursuit and ultimately contribute to defining the experience as leisure rather than an obligation.

Inextricably linked to a sense of perceived freedom is the dimension of involvement. Involvement focuses on the total absorption of a person during leisure (Unger & Kernan, 1983). Within a leisure experience one is able to become withdrawn from the current reality and have the potential to be suspended within a microcosm (Gordon, Gaitz & Scott, 1976; Piaget, 1963). Traditionally, involvement has been studied through the theory of flow. Flow “predicts that experiences will be most positive when a person perceives that the environment contains high enough opportunities for action (or challenges), which are matched with the person’s own capacities to act (skills)” (Csikszentmihalyi & LeFevre, 1989, p.816).

The dimension of arousal focuses upon a sensory stimulation that allows an individual to experience something to the fullest (Stebbins, 1997). Within a leisure experience people are able to engage and ignite their senses to “eat, drink, touch, see smell, hear or feel coolness or warmth” (Stebbins, 1997, p. 20). Arousal seeking can also lead to unpleasant or dangerous leisure experiences where risk is associated with the leisure pursuit (Unger & Kernan, 1983). Lyng (1990) coined the term edgework for leisure experiences that exist on the edge of everyday life. Edgework reflects people who engage in risky leisure behaviours for fun, such as skydiving or extreme sports (Lyng, 1990). Edgework showcases how some leisure participant’s desire for thrill and arousal can be coupled with a degree or element of risk.

The dimension of mastery is closely related to arousal seeking, as one strives to master conditions of high arousal to achieve success (Berlyne, 1969). Within a leisure

context mastery is the central force that makes an individual push him or herself, or the drive to conquer the leisure environment (Murphy, Williams, Niepoth & Brown, 1973).

The final dimension associated with leisure experiences is spontaneity. Spontaneity has been viewed as a dimension of a leisure experience as it is “the ability to do things of one’s own accord on the spur of the moment and without advance preparation” (Parker, 1981, p. 323). This dimension of leisure allows for the opportunity for excitement, fun and added enjoyment. Since leisure activities are not always routine, planned or anticipated, spontaneity adds a unique dimension allowing for a personalized experience (Unger & Kernan, 1983).

Each of the aforementioned dimensions of leisure contributes to understanding the necessary components which make up a leisure experience. However, ultimately the definition one ascribes to leisure is deeply personal based on their conceptualization of the experience. As such leisure experiences have been known to take on various forms.

2.3 Forms of Leisure

Leisure has been known to take on a variety of forms for leisure participants. For some, leisure provides the opportunity to partake in a leisure career (Stebbing, 1997), provide a diversion (Stebbing, 1997), participate in abnormal or deviant activities (Rojek, 2000) while for others leisure provides a therapeutic escape (Caldwell, 2005). Below four forms of leisure will be examined including: serious, casual, deviant and therapeutic leisure.

For some in our society, paid employment has become less meaningful opening the possibility for serious leisure to fulfill the gap (Best, 2010). Serious leisure has been defined as “the systematic pursuit of an amateur, hobbyist, or volunteer activity sufficiently substantial, interesting, and fulfilling for the participant to find a (leisure) career there acquiring and expressing a combination of its special skills, knowledge, and experience” (Stebbing, 1997, p. 17). Serious leisure experiences are deeply personal and contribute to one’s sense of self (Best, 2010). Stebbings (1997) outlined six characteristics of serious leisure experiences including: perseverance, following a ‘career’, personal effort, benefits to the individual, identification with the activity and ethos of the activity (1997). For some, serious leisure is running a marathon (Baldwin, Ellis & Baldwin, 1999), barbershop singing (Stebbing, 1996) or even participating in an American Civil War re-enactment (Hunt, 2004). In sum, serious leisure showcases the ongoing devotion to a leisure experience (Best, 2010).

In contrast to serious leisure, casual leisure is also an important form that leisure experiences can take. Casual leisure has primarily emphasized the personal diversion of a leisure experience (Best, 2010). Stebbings (1997) conceptualized casual leisure through six headings: play, relaxation, passive entertainment (e.g. watching television or reading a book), active entertainment (e.g. games of chance or party games), sociable conversation and sensory stimulation (e.g. sex, eating or drinking). Casual leisure is hedonistic in nature as self-gratification and pleasure are at the root of casual leisure choices (Best, 2010). Casual leisure is more frequent than serious leisure opportunities and can draw upon the deviant components of leisure (Stebbing, 1997). For example, playing Grand Theft Auto (a video

game) represents a casual leisure pursuit, yet it encompasses virtual car theft, random killing and other deviant behaviours as a method of fun (Best, 2010).

Leisure is traditionally viewed as being inherently positive or good for participants and for society, but this is not always the case (Dumazedier, 1974). Curtis (1974) coined the term 'purple recreation' as "acts or pursuits that bring a degree of pleasure or escape to participants, but which suggest great self-indulgence, greed, immorality, or cruelty and arouse repugnance in most of the remainder of society" (p. 283). Throughout the years 'purple recreation' has taken many names such as deviant leisure, dark leisure, or taboo leisure. Through deviant leisure participants are able to develop a sense of being and belonging through the creation of alternative cultural values within a new community (Reible, 2006). Examples of deviant leisure pursuits include: cross-dressing, swinging, social nudism or group sex, heavy drinking, gambling and illegal drug use (Stebbins, 1996). Gunn and Caissie (2006) studied the foundations of deviant leisure through serial murder. Their study found that serial killers spend excessive time preparing, committing and reliving the events of the murder during their free time (2006). It was determined that for serial killers murder was found to be a deviant and non-traditional form of leisure (2006).

Rojek (2000) identified that leisure can be classified as either normal or abnormal. Abnormal leisure involves pursuits which are morally wrong and consists in three unique forms. Rojek defined these three forms in Best, 2010 stating:

Invasive: this is where individuals withdraw from social networks and engage in leisure activities associated with self-loathing and self-pity in which people push themselves beyond the limits to turn their back on reality.

Mephitic: these are morally questionable leisure activities that involve gaining pleasure and satisfaction at the expense of others, such as engaging in prostitution or, in more extreme cases, engaging in acts of terrorism or serial killing as a source of pleasure.

Wild: this form of leisure also involves going beyond the limit of what is commonly understood as acceptable behaviour, but it often involves engaging in the activity with similar-minded leisure partners in a carnivalesque spirit. Wild leisure activities include football hooliganism and rioting (p. 12).

Each of these forms of abnormal leisure represents a degree of liminality where the activity goes beyond the normal behaviour acceptable in society (Best, 2010). Those who participate in abnormal leisure revel in solidarity by rebelling against the traditional moral codes and norms of society (Best, 2010). While purple recreation is gaining interest from leisure scholars (Williams; Rojek; Reible); some individuals prefer to focus upon the therapeutic nature of leisure experiences.

Caldwell (2005) acknowledges that leisure has the potential to: prevent negative life events, be used as a coping strategy for negative life events, and finally be therapeutic for leisure participants. In Wong's (2003) study it was determined that for older adults, walking for leisure not only increased cardio-vascular function but also assisted in preventing

mobility problems in later life. Leisure experiences provide the opportunity to act as a distraction, buffering negative life events for the participants (Kleiber, 2004). Iwasaki and Mannell (2000) identified three leisure-based coping strategies: palliative coping (when leisure provides respite from a primary issue of concern), mood enhancement and companionship. These coping strategies allow individuals to mediate negative life events through participation in leisure activities (Iwasaki & Mannell, 2000). Finally, leisure has been known to be therapeutic in nature providing a multitude of benefits for overall health and wellbeing (Best, 2010).

While this study seeks to further understand sexual experiences within a leisure context, it is important to have a keen understanding of the definitions, dimensions and forms of leisure. As such, for the purpose of this study leisure will be defined as an experience which produces intrinsic rewards and provides the participants with meaning and a sense of pleasure (Reid, 1995). This definition highlights the flexibility needed to define the leisure experience based on the individual's thoughts, feelings and experiences of the participants. This definition also takes into account the dimensions of leisure and the variety of forms which leisure can take. Overall, this definition of leisure highlights some elements which may or may not be pivotal in defining a sexual experience.

2.4 Understanding Sexuality

Sexuality is defined as a core dimension of being human and includes numerous components (Seidman, Fisher & Meeks, 2005). In particular, one's sex (male or female),

gender (condition or character of being female or male), sexual identity (how individuals define sexuality) and gender identity (the way in which an individual identified with being male, female or neither (Seidman, Fisher & Meeks, 2005). Sexuality also includes, sexual orientation (the inclination of an individual with respect to heterosexual, homosexual, and bisexual behaviour (Merriam-Webster's Medical Dictionary, n.d.).), eroticism (excitement or sensual desire (Pearsall, 2002).), emotional attachment/love, and reproduction (Pan American Health Organization, 2010). Similar to leisure, one's sexuality is an expression of the inner self and can change over the lifespan as a result of lived experiences (Seidman, Fisher & Meeks, 2005). For example, half of women who have experienced long-term treatment for reproductive organ and breast cancer reported long-term sexual problems, as did their male counterparts who had experienced treatment for prostate cancer (National Cancer Institute, 2010).

Sexuality is a part of the biological and social spheres; it is a part of our everyday experiences and learned through the process of socialization (Kelly, 1996). That is, sexual scripts and sex roles are socialized (Gagnon & Simon, 1973). Seidman (2005) states: “sexual scripts tell us with whom we're supposed to have sex (based on age, race, or class), where, when, and what it means when we do” (p. 8). These sexual scripts are developed through the process of social construction and impact the way one's sexuality is expressed (Gagnon & Simon, 1973).

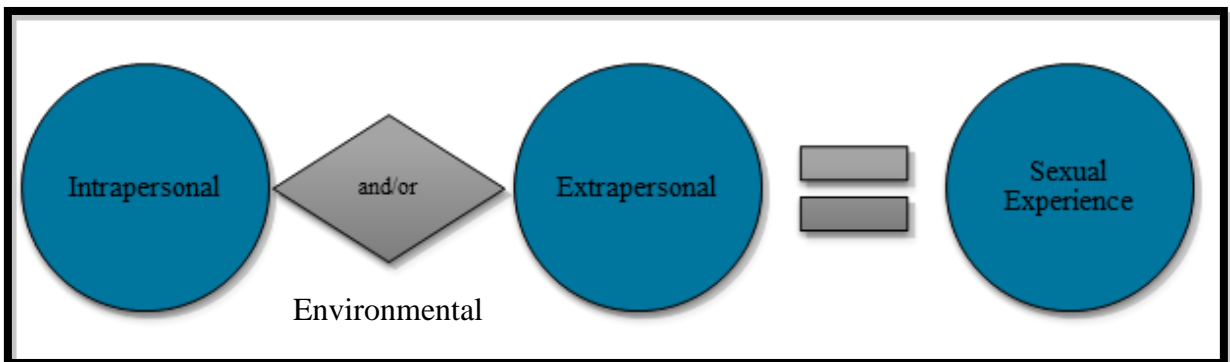
Also socially constructed are sex roles – the social expectation associated with sexual identification (Kelly, 1996). Sex roles provide expected guidelines on how someone should

act based on their biological sex. For example, males are socialized to be dominant, aggressive and decisive while females are socialized to be passive, responsible and supportive (Kelly, 1996). Although social and societal norms exist in the area of sexuality – many individuals identify as a sexual minority within the gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, two spirited, queer and questioning (LGBTQQ) community. The complexities associated with sexuality remain and provide great insight into the subjective way of expressing one’s self sexually (Rye & Meaney, 2007). While this section discussed sexuality it is also noteworthy to examine the understanding of sexual experiences.

2.5 Understanding the Sexual Experience

As mentioned previously sexual experiences involve three core components: intrapersonal, extrapersonal and the environmental spheres. In order to clarify the relationship between the constituent elements of the sexual experience and to define it as a whole, the following diagram is helpful. Within this diagram it is important to note that the term “personal” is in reference to the distinction between non-physical and physical sexual experiences.

Figure 1: Defining the Sexual Experience



The intrapersonal sphere consists of sexual thoughts and feelings including sexual arousal, sexual desire and lust (Ridley et. al, 2008). Sexual arousal is defined as “physical and psychological responses to mental or physical erotic stimulation” (Medical Dictionary, 2007, p. 1). Sexual arousal is located within the intrapersonal sphere as it is the mental thoughts that contribute to a physical chain reaction and outward expression of sexual arousal. For females this arousal is often characterized by an increase in cortical responsiveness to sensory stimulation while male arousal is often experienced through penile sensitivity (Miracle, Miracle & Baumeister, 2003). The desire for sexual intimacy (sexual desire) is the thought process that indicates that one would like to engage in sexual experiences, while lust is the intense emotional force associated with thinking or fantasizing about sexual desire (Lazarus & Lazarus, 1994). There are unique gender differences which exist between men and women regarding sexual thoughts. That is, research demonstrates that for men sexual thoughts are commonly focused upon sexual fantasies (Ellis & Symons, 1990) including dominating sexual positions (e.g. male on top) (Byers, Purdon & Clark, 1998), and multiple partners (Ellis & Symons 1990). Along this line of research, Laumann et. al (1994) determined 97% of men fantasized about sex a few times a month. In contrast, women’s sexual thoughts emphasize emotional and romantic situations with submissive sexual positions (Hsu et.al, 1994). There are similarities, however, regarding sexual fantasies. For example, both men and women enjoy fantasizing while in public places such as a coffee shop, movie theatre or library (Little & Byers, 2000), and more than 60% of men and women have fantasized while engaging in sexual activities with a partner (Meaney &

Rye, 2007). In addition, research demonstrates that over 90% of both genders fantasize during masturbation or sexual self-stimulation (Meaney & Rye, 2007). Overall, the intrapersonal sphere emphasizes the important role that thoughts and feelings play within a sexual experience.

The extrapersonal sphere is comprised of specific sexual act(s). Such acts include “hugging/cuddling, kissing, sexual touching, sexual penetration including sexual intercourse, oral sex, or anal sex” (Ridley, Ogolsky, Payne, Totenhagen & Cate, 2008, p. 305). Within North America, there is a sexual script outlining the sequence of sexual behaviours (Meaney & Rye, 2007). This sequence “proceeds from kissing and touching (“petting” above the waist) to more intensive touching (“petting” below the waist or manual stimulation of the genitals) to oral sex to genital-to-genital contact to vaginal or anal intercourse” (Meaney & Rye, 2007, p. 33). The occurrence of sexual behaviours can vary from the traditional sexual script outlined above to include ‘spicy’ sex, which places an emphasis on pleasure seeking sexual activities where greater resources (both physical and financial) and thought may be required (Meaney & Rye, 2007). According to Meaney and Rye (2007) ‘spicy’ sexual occurrences could include sex toys, sexually explicit material, sadomasochism, sex on vacation, group sex and swinging, cross dressing, other commercialized sex and/or sexual tourism. The extrapersonal sphere focuses upon the physical components of the sexual experience – the doing which can be done individually, with a partner, or in a group.

The final component which plays a role in understanding the sexual experience is the environmental sphere. This sphere is unique in that it encapsulates the cultural, spiritual,

moral and ethical considerations of sexual experiences (Canadian Federation for Sexual Health, 2008). Additionally, it is this component which represents the unique socialization process of a person along with sexual scripts and sexual roles. The environmental sphere differs for each person as it encompasses an eclectic grouping of experiences and factors, which contribute to the intrapersonal, extrapersonal and sexual experience as a whole. It is within this sphere where life changes (i.e. birth of a child or chronic illness) would be represented as impacting the sexual experience as a whole. For this study it will be essential to remain open to understanding the environmental sphere of each participant as this sphere will not only impact a person's sexual experiences, but also their leisure experiences. In sum, the interconnection between the interpersonal, extrapersonal and environmental spheres is critical to this study because it is the combination of the three which make up and define the unique sexual experiences for the participants.

2.6 The Four Sexual Meanings

The intrapersonal, extrapersonal and environmental spheres contribute to conceptualizing the sexual experience. However, historically there have been four meanings which underlie the act (Seidman, Fisher & Meeks, 2005). These four meanings include: procreation, power/control, love, and rite of passage.

Seidman, Fisher and Meeks (2005) state: “the link between sex and procreation seems to be universal. That is, all societies understand sex to be meaningful at least as an act of reproduction... typically linked to making a family” (p. 27). The meaning of procreation was

traditionally focused upon heterosexual sexual experiences whereby a lifelong monogamous union was formed and children conceived (Sullivan, 2005). This notion of procreation highlights Cater and McGoldrick's six stage family cycles (1999) whereby the following six stages were present for families: 1) leaving home: single young adults, 2) the joining of families through marriage: the new couple, 3) families with young children, 4) families with adolescents, 5) launching children and moving on, and 6) families in later life. While many families progress through the six stages of the family cycle, a more liberal stance on sexual experiences has been adopted (Henderson, Bialeschki, Shaw & Freysinger, 1999). For example, in America there is a growing demographic of couples who are choosing not to have children (American Demographics, 2001). In the 2011 Canadian census it was noted that 29.5% of households have no children (Statistics Canada, 2011). This statistic includes couples who are choosing to not have children and other childfree households such as senior citizens. Although being childless is still considered to be socially taboo, organizations such as Childfree.net has grown in popularity (American Demographics, 2001). Childfree.net states: "we choose to call ourselves "childfree" rather than "childless," because we feel the term "childless" implies that we're missing something we want - and we aren't" (p.1). While this organization has grown, women who choose not to have children can face disadvantages in the workplace with respect to scheduling preferences as well as the need to explain their decision to remain childless to outsiders (Ward & Belanger, 2012; Abma & Martinez, 2006; Stobert & Kemeny, 2003). Although the historical meaning of procreation remains predominant, alternative lifestyles and choices are also gaining interest.

Another meaning associated with sexual experiences is that of power and/or control (Meaney & Rye, 2007). This meaning emphasizes the possibility for sex to be viewed in relation to social power (Barber, 2005). Historically, sexual power existed for men within a patriarchal society that controlled women's sexual limits and freedoms (Califia, 1994). For example, men were encouraged to "sow their wild oats." However, their female counterparts heard the narrative that a future husband "won't buy the cow if he can get the milk for free" (Crawford & Unger, 2000, p. 288). This double standard remains guiding the sexual actions of both men and women today (Crawford & Popp, 2003). For example, women may be judged more negatively than men for having had sex outside of a committed relationship (Foschi, M. 1996). Likewise, Martin (1996) found that adolescent girls were labeled 'a slut' if they were believed to be sexually active 'too young' by their peers. Although these double standards still exist within society there have been some changes allowing women the opportunity to liberate themselves sexually and explore and discover themselves and their partners (Califia, 1994). Through sexual experiences, an individual is able to try new roles, new positions and further explore their bodies (and/or partners) response to sensation and pleasure (Meaney & Rye, 2007).

The meaning of love within sexual experiences emphasizes the feelings of interest and pleasure for someone (Seidman, Fisher & Meeks, 2005). How love is expressed is socially constructed and guided by both social norms, cultural and gender roles (Meaney & Rye, 2007). For example, in some cultures marriages are arranged by parents or matchmakers with some couples learning to love one another over time (Medora, 2003).

While in North America, “we are socialized from childhood to believe in love matches” (Ward & Belanger, 2011, p. 57). Sternberg (1986) suggests that love is composed of three components: intimacy, passion and decision/commitment. Intimacy described within a relationship focuses on feelings of bondedness, closeness, and connectedness (1986). Passion emphasizes that drive and motivation leading to sexual arousal within the relationship, and decision/commitment showcases the decision to commit to the relationship over a period of time (1986). Sexual relationships are deeply personal and intimate, yet provide the possibility to be rich and rewarding (Kelly, 1990; Henderson, Bialeschki, Shaw & Freysinger, 1999). Within this meaning sexual experiences allow for the individuals involved to connect and express themselves in an intimate way.

The final meaning associated with sexual experiences involves sex as a rite of passage (Seidman, Fisher & Meeks, 2005). For many heterosexuals this rite of passage involves the first sexual experiences, which is often viewed as a transition into adulthood (Meeks, 2005). More specifically, it is often a first sexual experience that moves a person into the category of ‘adult’. For gays and lesbians ‘coming out of the closet’ can be an example of a unique rite of passage through the claiming of one’s sexual orientation (Meeks, 2005). During a rite of passage, the individual’s sense of self as separate fades, as their membership in a broader collective takes over. “Rites are emotional events because when we participate in them, we are participating in a drama that transcends our own particularity as individuals” (Cheek, 2005, p. 66). The meaning of sex as a rite of passage varies according to various religious and cultural beliefs within our society. This relates to the environmental

sphere of a sexual experience highlighting the unique components which impacts the sexual experience.

The four meanings associated with sexual experiences provide important insight to the foundational roots of a sexual experience. Hill and Preston (1996) developed a theoretical perspective of dispositional sexual motives, which include eight reasons why people have sex. These include: feeling valued by a partner, expressing value for a partner, obtaining relief from stress, nurturing one's partner, enhancing feelings of personal power, experiencing a partner's power, experiencing pleasure, and procreating (1996). Meston and Buss (2007) studied undergraduate students and the reasons why they engaged in sexual intercourse. The study developed a list that represents the most frequently endorsed reasons for having intercourse including: (1) pure attraction to the other person in general; (2) physical pleasure; (3) expression of love; (4) feeling desired by the other; (5) escalation of the depth of the relationship; (6) curiosity or seeking new experiences; (7) marking a special occasion for celebration; (8) mere opportunity; and (9) sex just happening (due to seemingly uncontrollable circumstances) (Meston & Buss, 2007). Although it is important to understand the reasons why one may engage in a sexual experience, it is equally important to recognize the societal shift that has taken place in understanding a sexual experience.

2.7 A Shift in Understanding Sexual Experiences

Effective birth control methods have contributed to a shift from the traditional procreation focused meaning of sexual experiences to a pleasure seeking focus (Seidman,

Fisher & Meeks, 2005). Pleasure seeking experiences emphasize relationship intimacy, which involve commitment, affective intimacy, cognitive intimacy, physical intimacy, mutual connection and passion (Moss & Schwebel, 1993). This focus overshadows the traditional procreation position providing opportunity for personal pleasure and self-discovery. One major component of the pleasure seeking movement within a sexual experience is the Kama Sutra. 'Kama' represents one of the three goals in Hindu life – sensual and/or sexual pleasure whereas 'Sutra' refers to aphorism in the form of a manual (Carroll, 2009). Kama Sutra is most commonly known as a sex manual, though traditionally it acted as a guide to living by addressing topics such as: the nature of love, family life and other pleasure oriented components of human life (Carroll, 2009). In conceptualizing sexual experiences as pleasure oriented, the linkages between leisure become apparent, as most leisure activities are also pleasure based and provide numerous benefits and/or rewards (Best, 2010).

A considerable body of research has established numerous health benefits associated with engaging in sexual experiences including relieving stress, boosting immunity, improving cardiovascular health, increasing self-esteem, improving intimacy, reducing pain, improved sleep, an increased strength in the pelvic floor muscles for women, and for men a decreased risk of prostate cancer (Chang, 2011). The benefits are linked to holistic health or wellness. That is, from a wellness perspective, human sexuality has been determined to be a key component to lifelong wellness (Hacker, 1992). Wellness advocates for a realistic and self-directed lifestyle where one is able to experience intellectual, spiritual, physical, social,

emotional and occupation wellbeing (Ansuini, Fiddler-Woite & Woite, 1996). The need for people to understand and view themselves as sexual beings not only contributes to intrinsic well-being, but also opens up the need for sexual education throughout the lifespan (Haffner, 1992). Hacker (1992) defined sexual wellbeing as “the lifelong process of acquiring information, which influences the formation of attitudes, beliefs, and values about identity, relationships, and intimacy” (p.4). While there are numerous benefits of engaging in sexual experiences, there are also a number of risk factors to consider.

These risk factors include: unplanned pregnancy, sexually transmitted infections and the emotional risks associated with engaging in sexual activity. Half of all pregnancies in the United States are unplanned according to the National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy (2008). Based on their 2001 study, it was determined that 65 percent of pregnancies for 25 – 29 year olds and 54 percent of pregnancies of 30 – 44 year olds are unplanned (2008). Once a women is pregnant three options maybe available depending on her geographic location: parenting the child, abortion or adoption (National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy, 2008). Through the use effective birth control or abstinence unwanted pregnancy risks can be decreased or avoided altogether. Another common risk factor in engaging in sexual experiences is conducting a sexually transmitted infection (STI). STIs contribute to global acute illness, infertility, long-term disability and death (World Health Organization, 2011). STIs are transmitted through person-to-person contact and includes over 30 different types of bacteria, viruses and parasites (World Health Organization, 2011). Common STIs include: gonorrhoea, syphilis, HIV, herpes, Hepatitis B

and *Trichomonas vaginalis* causing vaginal trichomoniasis (World Health Organization, 2011). In addition to unwanted pregnancy or STIs, emotional risks exist when individuals engage in sexual experiences before they are ready. Hallfors (2005), found that teens, especially girls, who engaged in sexual intercourse are at a greater risk of depression, which can lead to excessive drug and alcohol abuse. Studies also found that two out of three sexually experienced teens wished that they had waited longer before engaging in sexual intercourse (Albert, 2007). Other emotional risks can also be associated with sexual trauma, rape, sexual assault and/or abuse (Campbell, Sullivan & Davidson, 1995).

For this study, it was important to acknowledge and obtain a holistic understanding of each participant and couple to identify and understand both leisure and sexual experiences. While both sexual experiences and leisure experiences are traditionally viewed as being inherently good or positive, it is important to understand the negative side of these two subject areas, which may also shape the participants conceptualizations and experiences. Yet, it is also important to consider the unique relationship within which the sexual experience takes place.

2.8 Understanding Relationships

Almost every single aspect of human behaviour and development takes place in the context of relationships with other people. These relationships have an enormous impact on human health and well-being and shape the character of a person (Regan, 2011, vx). While relationships are a necessary component of human existence and individuals rely upon them

for survival, aid and comfort (Berscheid & Peplau, 2004). However, relationships are complex and take place within a hierarchy of other systems including the physical environment, social environment, larger society and culture (Regan, 2011). The physical environment speaks to the temperature, geography, crowding, and economic conditions while the social environment consists of neighbourhoods, family and other people in one's life. One's culture (e.g. Western) and the larger society (e.g. Canada) also play a critical role and impact the nature and function of relationships (Regan, 2011). While this study seeks to understand the leisure and sexual experiences of couples in committed relationships, the term 'committed' can take many forms within the context of a loving relationship.

Cohabitation or 'consensual unions' have gained popularity and have become socially acceptable within Westernized countries (Baker, 2010). In Canada the number of couples cohabitating has increased from 6.3 per cent of all couples in 1980's to 15.5 per cent in 2006 (Statistics Canada, 2007). Increased cohabitation rates have been linked to numerous factors including, access to contraceptives, increased employment of women and individualism which is encouraged amongst couples in today's society (Baker, 2010). While cohabitation is primarily viewed as a temporary arrangement, it's prevalence amongst younger couples traditionally takes the form of conjugal life during a childless phase (Baker, 2010).

Cohabitation is twice as likely to end in separation as first marriages in part due to instability and the youthfulness of the cohabitating partners (Statistics Canada, 2007). More recently, a new type of relationship has emerged 'living apart together' (LAT) whereby couples may be married or cohabitating, but spend regular intervals apart (Levin, 2004). For example, the

couples may live apart during the work week and cohabit on weekends or special occasions. This type of relationship is indicative of those who commute for employment or workers who are placed far away from their homes such as military, forestry workers and sailors (Barker, 2010). In Canada, 7 percent of people age 20 and over were a part of LAT relationship (Statistics Canada, 2011). This type of relationship is most common for Canadians between age 20 – 24 (31 percent) and 25 – 29 (17 percent) (Statistics Canada, 2011). With cohabitation and LAT couples on the rise, countries have been tasked with developing legal policies to support economic, medical and social policies indicative of the rights of partners in these types of unions.

While policies for cohabitation and LAT couples are still in development, legal marriage and the policies surrounding it are clearer. The decision to legally marry could reflect the desire to produce children which are viewed as ‘legitimate’ by family members and the law (Baker, 2010). “Historically, both the church and the state viewed marriage as an economical and sexual partnership between husbands and wives that involve mutual dependency in the common endeavors of earning a living and raising children” (Funder & Harrison, 1993, in Baker, 2010 p. 65). Marital relationships are a valued component of Western culture and considerable social pressure exists for individuals to conform to this value (Tower, 2003). In Canada, couples have free choice of their marital partner, yet this is not the case in all cultures. Within an arranged marriage, a marital partner can be selected based on various criterion including: similarity of background, horoscopes, financial and social position and in some cases the wishes of the bride and groom (Ward & Belanger,

2011). Within an arranged marriage importance is placed upon financial security, potential heirs, and solidarity amongst extended family as opposed to the sexual attraction, or love within a traditional marriage (Baker, 2010). In Canada, marriage rates are on the decline in part due to the increase of cohabitation couples (Statistics Canada, 2007). Yet, statistically married people are healthier, happier and live longer than never-married people (Waite, 2005). Research indicates that marital satisfaction is influenced by a combination of individual factors, family variable and life events (Karney & Bradbury, 1995). Within the marriage each spouse brings a number of different strengths and weakness to the relationship as a result of their upbringing, social backgrounds and attitudes (Baker, 2010). As life events take place the marriage endures stress and adaptive processes are developed to encourage communication and support amongst the partners (Baker, 2010). One such stressful life event is that of child-bearing and child-rearing.

When children enter the lives of parents, a dramatic shift takes place as nurturing and rearing the child becomes the core priority (Tower, 2009). Although raising children is a difficult task, research suggests that most Canadian view having children as the natural outcome of adulthood and marriage, as opposed to a conscious choice (Baker, 2010). Historically, having children was perceived as a sign of maturity, sexual competence and normality (Baker, 2010). Most recently, research suggests that childrearing provides the opportunity for one to relive the joys of their childhood, share the values and knowledge and receive unconditional love (Baker, 2010). Despite the positive shift in having children, Canada has experienced a decline in family size and a decrease in fertility rate (Gray et. al,

2007). This shift is due in part to women bearing their first child later in life (age 31) as a result to educational and career opportunities (Castles, 2002). With child bearing taking place in later life, more couples are seeking medical assistance to assist them in the process of conceiving. In the 2009-2010 Canadian Community Health Survey, it was determined that 1 in 7 couples seek help to conceive and age was a significant factor. The study found that women age 35 to 44 were two times more likely to see out medical support to help them conceive (Tough, 2010). Yet having children can have a significant impact on the couple, including caregiver burnout and isolation (Tower, 2009). When the relationship fails, this leads in some cases to single parenting, shared custody and conflict for the parents of the child (Tower, 2009). Studies show that in Canada, four in 10 marriages end in divorce (Statistics Canada, 2004). For the children in these marriages, research show that they do not recover quickly from a marital breakup and that the effects may last into early adulthood (Tower, 2009). Yet not all romantic relationships lead to biological children. As mentioned previously, in the 2011 Canadian census it was noted that 29.5% of households have no children (Statistics Canada, 2011). This statistic includes couples who are choosing to not have children and other childfree households such as senior citizens. Although being childfree is still considered to be socially taboo, organizations such as Childfree.net has grown in popularity and providing advocacy for this life choice (American Demographics, 2001).

Clearly, committed relationships come in various forms, including cohabitation, living apart together and marriages. While some couples make the choice to have children,

others may be delaying or deciding to not have children all together. For the participants in the current study, relationships served as the context within which each of the sexual experiences took place. By conducting this study and honoring the unique relationships between each of the couples, greater insight can be gained in understanding the linkages between leisure and sexual experiences.

2.9 Sex and Leisure: An Integrated Perspective

Sexual experiences and leisure have most frequently been viewed as two different subject areas. More recently, a greater theoretical understanding of the linkages between these two topical areas has been a focus amongst researchers.

Sexual experiences have been defined as a leisure activity in two ways: recreational and relational (Kelly & Freysinger, 2000). From a recreational perspective, sex becomes a focus for pleasure and the immediate experience. Kelly and Freysinger (2000) noted that sexual experiences could contain a number of elements similar of that to a sport (i.e. mastery, diversion, communication and physical expression). Likewise, it has been implied that sexual experiences could also be identified as flow experiences¹ creating the potential for novelty, arousal, perceived freedom and/or intrinsic motivation. When viewing sexual experiences through this framework it becomes evident that one or many of the

¹As mentioned previously, flow experiences are those in which there is a match between ones skill and the challenge within an experience (Csikszentmihaly & LeFevre, 1989).

characteristics mentioned above could exist within the sexual experience. This study seeks to explore these ideas further.

The second way in which sex has been conceptualized within a leisure context is as relational sex. In relational sex a focus on the fulfillment of a relationship drives the sexual encounter (Kelly & Freysinger, 2000). Under this definition of sex, there is a deep affection and intimacy amongst the partners which is expressed in the sexual experience (Kelly & Freysinger, 2000). In relational sex, each partner brings to a sexual encounter, sometimes unconsciously, a motive (pleasure, reconciliation, procreation, duty), a psychological state (love, hostility, boredom, excitement), and a physical state (tense, exhausted, relaxed, turned on) the combination of these factors will change from one encounter to another” (Kelly & Freysinger, 2000, p. 301).

The choice of partner is a distinct decision and serves as the foundation of relational sex (Kelly & Freysinger, 2000). In relational sex novelty could be a problem as there is the possibility for couples to experience a rut or falling into the “same old routine” potentially making the sexual experience no longer fun or leisurely.

While the focus of this study looks at understanding the linkages and connections between sexual experiences and leisure, it is equally important to examine the instances where sexual experience may not be conceptualized as leisure. These instances include: when sexual experiences are exploitive, involve coercion, when viewed as an obligation or as a societal expectation.

In the event a sexual experience becomes exploitative of one or both of the individuals, there is the possibility for that experience to not be viewed as leisure (Seidman, Fisher & Meeks, 2005). Sexual exploitation has been defined as: an “exploitative pattern, practice or scheme of conduct, which may include sexual contact that can be reasonably construed as being for the purposes of sexual arousal or gratification or sexual abuse of any person” (Department of Family and Protective Services, 2010). Within Canada, sexual exploitation is refers to section 153 of the Criminal Code: “If you are 16 years old or older, but under 18, it is a criminal offence for someone in a position of trust or authority to have sexual contact with you even if you consent to it. For example, someone in a position of trust or authority such as a minister, coach, employer, teacher, etc” (R.S., 1985, c. C-46). Another instance when sexual experiences may not be viewed as leisure is if coercion is involved. Coercion over steps one’s personal wishes or boundaries there is the chance not only for abuse, but also for the social, economic or physical power over someone, which would hinder the opportunity for experience to be defined as leisure (Seidman, Fisher & Meeks, 2005). In Canada, the Criminal Code protects individuals from sexual assault, aggravated sexual assault, sexual interference, invitation to sexual touching, sexual exploitation, anal intercourse and indecent acts involving a minor (Criminal Code of Canada, 2009). In any sexual experience it is essential that the act take place amongst two consenting adults (over the age of 16 in Canada).

Within the confines of a marriage or committed relationship there is the possibility for the sexual experience to be viewed as contextual or obligatory component of that union

(Meaney & Rye, 2007). As such there may be the pressures to conceive or have a sexual experience as a result of the social dynamics of the relationship. In the instance above, there is the possibility that one or both parties would not view that sexual experience as leisure as it may lack the spontaneity or freedom associated with the leisure experiences (Seidman, Fisher & Meeks, 2005).

As mentioned previously, sexuality is learned in part through the process of socialization (Kelly, 2009). As such there are instances where the societal pressures or expectations could dictate the norms of sexual experiences. In doing so, an individual may participate in their current sexual lifestyle yet desire pleasure from an alternative lifestyle. For example, in the United States it is estimated that there are over four million women who are married or have been married to a gay man (Kaye & Dittmer, 2011). In this instance, for the gay man societal expectations may be keeping him from engaging in sexual experiences that he may define and leisurely.

Finally, for those individuals who work in the sex industry there is the possibility for sexual experiences to be viewed as work rather than leisure (Meaney & Rye, 2007). This conceptualization could be contributed to the great deal of cross over with their daily work obligations and leisure time (Meaney & Rye). As a result these sex workers may not wish to participate in sexual experiences as it may lack the novelty necessary for a pure leisure experience, or the leisure experience could feel like work.

Overall, it is important to understand the theoretical linkages which have been made between sexual experiences and leisure. Through the information presented herein it is apparent that both sexual experiences and leisure experiences are complex and individual in nature. This study focuses upon those participants in the life span stage of young adulthood and as such it is important to understand the unique factors which may impact their leisure and sexual experiences.

2.10 Early Adulthood: Understanding Life, Leisure and Sexual Experiences

Numerous theorists have worked to describe and understand the components and stages of the lifespan. Lifespan research is rooted in acknowledging that people experience similar life events around the same time (Towler, 2003). For this study, the participants are in the life stage of early adulthood characterized as someone being between 25 – 40 years of age (Towler, 2003). What follows is an overview of the life stage early adulthood along with a description of how one in this life span may experience leisure and sexual experiences.

Early adulthood is a time when individuals have established a sense of identity, and are looking for intimacy and partnership (Erikson, 1975). In Erikson's stages of human development early adults embark upon the developmental task of intimacy vs. isolation (1975). During this stage, individuals seek out partners with whom they are able to experience intimacy. Erikson refers to intimacy as the ability to become close with another person through friendship or by becoming a romantic partner with another person (1975). When intimacy is developed sexual relationships may grow providing the opportunity for

intimacy, love and compassion (1975). Likewise there is the possibility of becoming too intimate too early leading individuals to be promiscuous (Towler, 2003). Yet, avoidance of developing romantic partnership and friendships can lead to a deep sense of isolation and consequently self-absorption as one feels excluded from the life experiences of dating, matting and mutual loving relationships (Chapman, 2011).

Levinson (1978) furthered the work of Erikson, and developed ‘The Seasons of a Man’s Life’². His work emphasized that early adulthood ended at age 30 at which point a transition took place until age 38 allowing one to “become one’s own man”. During age 30 – 38 career, family and home take on a new meaning emphasizing the ability to settle down and raise children (1987). Havighurst (1970) identified the following developmental task for early adults to accomplish: selecting a mate, learning to live with a partner, starting a family, rearing children, managing a home, getting started in a career, finding a congenial social group and finally taking on a civic responsibility. These developmental tasks created in the 1970s emphasize the traditional nuclear family and speak to the time frame when developed (Towler, 2003). Towler (2003) stated that the following tasks might also be prevalent for today’s young adults: developing competencies (i.e. acquiring refining skills), achieving autonomy, developing and living by a value system, forming an identity, managing money, deciding where to live, integrating sexuality into life, and finally learning to use leisure time.

² This source is gendered in nature due to the date of publication and societal attitudes of that time period.

This life stage is filled with new experiences, new relationships, new jobs, new living conditions and of course, many new adjustments (Towler, 2003).

Leisure is a developmental issue in which the behaviour, motivations, values, and attitudes are affected by developmental stages, social roles, and psycho-social preoccupations that change across the lifespan (Henderson, Bialeschki, Shaw & Freysinger, 1996). Leisure for individuals in the early adulthood stage start out as typically being school based such as university or college sports team, clubs or political associations (Hammersley, 2011). Once individuals enter the phase of establishing families and rearing children, recreation shifts to becoming home based sacrificing the individual's leisure time to meet the demands and needs of others (Henderson et. al, 1996). Once children reach school age, family-centered activities contribute to leisure time both in and outside of the home (1996). If the family is financially privileged, assistance with childrearing and household work could increase the quantity of family leisure and also open up the possibility for greater individual leisure choices (1996).

For those in the early adulthood stage, sexual activity is at its highest frequency than at any other point in time (Seidman, Fisher & Meeks, 2005). The need to establish intimacy during this developmental stage leads some young adults to engage in sex with casual partners early on until a suitable partner is found (Kan, Cheng, Landale & McHale, 2010). Once in a committed relationship, as time passed (either age or duration of marriage) so does frequency of marital sex (Laumann et al., 1994). McCarthy & Bodnar (2005) explain that marital sex is a shared pleasure allowing for partners to reinforce intimacy, which in turn,

assists reducing both marital and life stressors. In cases where there is sexual dysfunction and/or inhibited sexual desire, marital viability is threatened (Heinman, 2002). Additionally, extra-marital affairs, unplanned and unwanted pregnancy and infertility also threaten the viability of the partnership (McCarthy & Bodnar, 2005). Finally, this developmental stage is also when sexual preferences are explored and accepted enabling individuals to make their choice of partner through the traditional heterosexual union or through identifying with the LGBTQQ community (Seidman, Fisher & Meeks, 2005).

2.11 Summary of Literature

The literature reviewed in the proceeding paragraphs represents a glimpse into the academic research within leisure and sexuality. This study contributes to better understanding the linkages between these two fields, and the meanings those in the early adulthood developmental stage ascribe to their sexual experiences. Clearly, there is much to be learned about sexual experiences within a leisure context and the factors that assist in defining and claiming one's sexual experiences. By understanding this phenomenon, knowledge can be linked between the leisure and sexuality fields, further understanding sexual experiences and its contribution to overall quality of life and lifelong wellness. I turn next to the methods of the study.

Chapter 3: Methods

This chapter will outline the methods I followed throughout the research process. I begin with an overview of my methodology including my world view and approach. Next, I describe the recruitment and the data collection processes and conclude with an overview of the couples who participated in the study.

3.1 Qualitative Research Methodology

Research methodologies refer to “types of qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods designs or models that provide specific direction for procedures in a research design” (Creswell, 2009, p. 11). It outlines how a researcher understands the world, which ultimately guides the purpose of the research (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006). As a researcher, I value interpersonal relationships and the opportunity to learn from those with diverse experiences and backgrounds through dialogue and discussion. Based on my passion for people, a qualitative methodology served as the ideal research methodology where I was able to understand the “lived experiences, emotions and feelings” of the participants (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 11). Through inductive data analysis I conceptualized the experiences of the participants and developed patterns, categories and themes, which clarified the linkages between sexual experiences and leisure for the participants (Creswell, 2009). The qualitative method allowed for rich data to be gathered reflecting my interpretive worldview.

3.2 Interpretive Worldview

The interpretive worldview emphasizes the ability to understand the world through the experiences and meanings of the participants (Creswell, 2009). Max Weber contributed to this view through his description of Verstehen: an “intimate and empathetic understanding of human action in terms of its interpretive meaning to the subject” (Palys, 1997, p. 18). Within the interpretive worldview participants are viewed as experts of their own experiences (Creswell, 2009). As a researcher, my worldview guided the research process and reinforced the need to comprehend the unique experiences, meanings and understandings that each individual participant had of the phenomenon. I was then tasked with interpreting the participants’ meanings that they attributed to leisure and sexual experiences through a grounded theory method wherein I established a narrative reflecting their experiences.

3.3 Research Method: Grounded Theory

Grounded theory focuses on the lived experiences of the participants and is grounded in their unique responses (Charmaz, 2006). Meaning is derived through identifying categories that are grounded in the views of the participants rather than the prescribed ideas of the researcher (Creswell, 2009). Charmaz (2006) stated that grounded theory “favours analysis over description, fresh categories over preconceived ideas and extant theories, and systematically focused sequential data collection over large initial samples” (p. 187). The constant comparison method serves as a means to analyze data at various levels. Data is examined incident to incident and category to category creating themes, which reflect the

experiences of the participants (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Traditionally, the research themes are represented in a theory which provides insight and understanding to the research question at hand. While Grounded theory served as a research method, which reflected my worldview, themes rather than a theory were utilized to make sense of the linkages between leisure and sexual experiences. What follows is an understanding of the research process that I employed from data collection to analysis.

3.4 The Research Process

The research questions that guided this study were:

1. What are the connections between sexual experiences and leisure?
2. Do couples utilize leisure and sexual experiences to navigate the life stage of early adulthood?
3. Do linkages exist amongst the intrapersonal, extrapersonal and environmental spheres of the sexual experience?
4. In what ways do sexual and leisure experiences contribute to a sense of wellness?

To answer my research questions, I recruited people in committed relationships (6 months or longer) between the ages of 25 – 40. Committed relationships were the context of this study as I was interested in the relational linkages which impact the sexual experiences. I selected this age group because I was interested in the life milestones and stress that is associated with this life stage. Moreover, I wanted to explore the roles of leisure and sexual

experiences throughout early adulthood and the associated milestones/stress at the individual and couple level. With my focus on early adulthood, I recruited graduate students through the University of Waterloo as they fell within my required age category. This population was a convenient sample that provided diversity in economic status, values, experiences, ethnicity and outlook on the world. To recruit participants, an email (see Appendix A) was distributed through the Graduate Studies Office to all current graduate students at the University of Waterloo. Email communication provided the opportunity for potential participants to review the study information in a non-threatening way, which was important given the sensitive nature of the topic. That is, an email offered potential participants the opportunity to mull over the nature of research without feeling pressured to participate. This initial recruitment email yielded eight email inquiries requesting additional information around compensation, location of the interviews, and criteria of the study. After further information was provided, one couple agreed to participate. I suspect the poor response was due, in part, to the timing of my initial email. More specifically, the initial email was sent out during the month of August when many graduate students were on vacation or working hard to graduate. In addition, the incoming fall 2011 graduate students had not been added to the listserv, which meant that they did not receive the recruitment email. Consequently, one month later, I resent the email to the updated Graduate Studies Office listserv, which yielded two additional couples and elicited three additional inquiries. Of these three inquiries, two individuals were very interested, but their partners refused to participate. The last inquiry was from a single person interested in participating, but this research was focused on couples

so he was not eligible. I also utilized snowball sampling as a means to capture additional participants from the three couples who did participate in the study. But this method was not successful in recruiting additional participants.

Given that I was looking for approximately 5-7 couples to participate, I contacted the Applied Health Sciences Alumni Officer to see if I could recruit participants through their monthly e-newsletter. Unfortunately my request was denied as “participant recruitment is not the purpose of the monthly e-newsletter”.

With limited success in the recruitment process, I met with the Office of Research to obtain further assistance. It was determined that couples research is oftentimes a difficult recruitment process as the efforts rely initially on contact with one member of the couple, but requires joint participation. In the end, modifications were made to the email script to further clarify the purpose of the study and assure potential participants that they would not need to discuss specific sexual acts and/or preferences (see Appendix B). This revised email was sent to the Applied Health Sciences graduate student listserv, the Graduate Association of Recreation and Leisure Studies listserv and the GLOW (The Queer and Questioning Community Centre) listserv adding one additional couple to the study. I later forwarded the revised email script to all 12 individuals who had made inquiries about the study throughout the entire email recruitment process. This resulted in one additional couple agreeing to participate.

Despite the additional participants, I still required two to four couples. Instead of my previous recruitment techniques, I drafted a personal email that I sent to 20 acquaintances as a means to recruit participants through my social network (see Appendix C). Glesne and Peshkin (1992) coined the term ‘backyard’ research in which the researcher recruits from within her or his social network. While this method can be a successful manner in which to garner participants, it can also lead to compromises in the research. For this research, I felt uncomfortable interviewing my friends or co-workers. Therefore, I turned down the offers of participation from three acquaintances, but encouraged them to forward the study information along to any couples who they thought would be interested in participating. Through this modified snowball sampling method I welcomed two additional couples bringing the total number of participants to 12 individuals and six couples in total. Thank you cards were mailed to the personal acquaintances that were successful in recruiting couples to participate as a token of my appreciation.

All of the six couples who participated in the study were heterosexual and between the ages of 25 – 37. Each couple lived together within one hour driving distance from the University of Waterloo. Of the twelve participants, six were graduate students at the University of Waterloo, three had full-time employment and two were unemployed. Ten participants were born in Canada (one participant identified as being a visual minority) and two of the participants were born in Iran. Three of the six couples owned their own homes and the remaining rented. One couple had children (expecting their fifth child) while another

had a child from a previous relationship that visited on weekends. Compensation for childcare was offered to the two couples with children, but neither utilized this option.

Data collection consisted of in-depth, semi-structured interviews that started in the fall of 2011 and was completed in the winter of 2012. I selected interviews for the data collection method as they provided “an opportunity for detailed investigating of each individual’s personal perspective and for an in-depth understanding of the personal context within which the research phenomenon is found” (Creswell, 2003 p. 153). Because the study focused on couples, both individual and couple interviews were utilized. The couple interviews provided an opportunity to further explore and understand the shared realities of the participants (Valentine, 1999) (see Appendix H). Valentine (1999) explained the benefit of joint/couple interviews as: “at a most basic level, couples can corroborate each other’s stories, both directly (through comments such as ‘yes I was there’), or indirectly (not by contradicting the other, or by supplementing the other’s account)” (p.67). The individual interview guide provided baseline questions that were asked to all of the participants (see Appendix E). Yet, the guides served as a living document as the questions and probes evolved organically based upon the experiences of each individual and couple. For example, when I was interviewing the couple who were expecting the fifth child, the interview focused around the experience of having children. This iterative and progressive process also took place for the other couples in the study by focusing on their current life stage and various experiences including: infertility treatments, becoming a new Canadian, being a part of an interracial couple and overcoming negative relationships and abuse. The interviews took

place in the couples' homes and lasted approximately 50 – 60 minutes in length. Because the interviews took place in the homes of the participants it was important to ensure my personal safety as the researcher. Before each interview, I provided a family member with an interview preparation sheet documenting the participant's names, address and telephone number and the anticipated start and end time of the interviews (see Appendix D). I also carried a cell phone during the interviews in the event of an emergency. Participants were notified of these procedures prior to the interview starting.

The data collection process began with individual interviews with each partner and concluded in a couple interview. Individual interviews commenced with participants reviewing the introductory letter, outlining the nature of the study and affirming that approval had been granted from the Office of Research Ethics at the University of Waterloo (see Appendix F). Following this, the participants completed a consent form (see Appendix G), outlining their ability to end the interview at any point in time, for consent for the interviews to be audio recorded and finally, for quotations to be used in future research and/or publications. Each of the 12 participants agreed to these conditions and signed the associated documents.

The individual interview focused on three areas: leisure and its role in daily life, personal experiences and values and finally the participants' values and attitudes towards sexual experiences. Because I was also interested in the roles that leisure and sexual experiences played in health and wellbeing, this theme was integrated into all three areas of the interview guide. To ensure the comfort of the participants, I reiterated that they were able

to leave questions unanswered or withdraw from the study before asking the sexual experience related questions. In the end, all participants answered the individual interview questions and the associated probes, which evolved as the conversation developed. Upon completion of each individual interview, I asked the participants if there was any information that they did not feel comfortable discussing in their couple interview. This provided a safeguard for the participants and fostered respect and confidentiality for their unique experiences. Only one participant utilized this safeguard to avoid discussing a previous marriage during their couple interview.

The couple interviews started with a reminder about the option to pass on any questions that made them uncomfortable. I also explained that in the event that one partner would like to answer a question and the other partner would like to pass, that I would move onto the next question in the interview guide. This process was set up as a safeguard for the couples yet none of the six couples utilized this option.

There were a few observations that I had during the couple interview process. In some instances, one partner would dominate the interview. I negotiated this through probing and asking questions to the other member of the couple. I also observed the body language of the couple as the interview progressed: were they holding hands, cuddling or displaying affection? Or, were they looking at each other or at me (the researcher)? I documented these observations in my research journal, which enabled me to reflect upon completion of each interview. For example during my very first interview, I met with a couple who had recently

moved in together, I wrote the following regarding their body language in my research journal:

I felt a little awkward interviewing Stan and Caitlin in their apartment today. The couple clearly can't get enough of each other with the kissing, the handholding, playing with each other's hair, caressing... It made me feel a little sick – but after all I was in their home so I guess it doesn't really count as a public display of affection. I wonder if all the couples I interview will be as affectionate as these two?

After reflecting on my research journal I found that those couples who were sitting close together most frequently collaborated in their responses making the interview flow like a natural conversation. I also noticed there were a number of discrepancies or differing values amongst the couples. Although no arguments took place, there were instances when one would try to debate or persuade the other participant to agree or take their side. As the researcher I interjected and assured the couples that there was no 'right' response to the questions that were being asked.

Once the couple interviews were completed, participants were thanked for their time and provided with a movie gift certificate and a list of community resources that could be accessed if desired (see Appendix I). Following the interviews, each conversation was transcribed and provided to the participants for review and feedback. Eight participants responded and were generally supportive. Some of the comments I received were as follows: "I didn't realize that I said right so much"! Another participant found a few spelling errors

that were corrected before the data analysis process took place. The process of sending the transcripts to the participants acted as a member check and assisted in making sure that I had accurately documented my time with the participants. Once the data analysis was completed, I emailed the findings to the participants to obtain their feedback (see Appendix M). None of the participants responded to this request to provide feedback. Since this study was completed on a part-time basis, the time between the data collection process and the final member check was lengthy and as such, this may have decreased participant's interest in the study as a whole.

3.5 Data Analysis

Once the interview transcripts were reviewed by the participants, I began the data analysis process, which allowed me to ask questions of the data including: “what’s really being said here?”, “is this discrepant information?” or “does this couple link to the other couples in that way?” These questions enabled me to critically think about the data which I had gathered and led me to the three phase coding process associated with grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006).

The data analysis process began with open coding which allowed me to assign initial codes to the participants' words (Neuman, 2004). This was my first attempt to categorize the 18 transcripts into manageable chunks furthering my conceptualization of the phenomena at hand. I engaged in the open coding by printing the interview transcripts with a one and a half inch margin on the left hand side. I went through the data line by line documenting

important codes in the margin. As I moved through the data, I developed short forms that assisted me. For example, the letter ‘L’ in the left hand margin stood for the word leisure. Below is an example of the open coding process that I conducted with David’s individual interview transcript:

<p>L to relax mentally</p> <p>L as a diversion</p> <p>Life stressors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Money • Work <p>L (watching hockey) as an escape</p>	<p>Jessica: what role does leisure play your day to day life?</p> <p>David: what role? I would say just helps me relax a little bit and when I can you know watch TV it takes my mind off other things.</p> <p>Jessica: what are those other things that it takes your mind off?</p> <p>David: money, job, the upcoming week stuff like that. So for the two hours or whatever the game is, it just takes you away into another place.</p> <p>Jessica: so, it provide a little bit of an escape for you?</p> <p>David: yes.</p>
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Once I had completed the opening coding process for the individual transcript, I drafted a summary of the key codes under the research headings of leisure, wellness, life

milestones and sexual experiences in my research journal. I then completed the coding process for the other partner's individual transcript before moving onto the couple transcript. When open coding the couple transcripts, I utilized the male (♂) and female (♀) symbols to associate the codes to each partner. Once the couple transcript was coded I summarized the similarities and difference amongst the couple in my research journal. I completed this process for each of the six couple transcripts before embarking upon axial coding.

“Axial coding is the process of relating codes (categories and properties) to each other, via a combination of inductive and deductive thinking. To simplify this process, rather than look for any and all kind of relations, grounded theorists emphasize causal relationships, and fit things into a basic frame of generic relationships” (Borgatti, 2008, p.1). During the axial coding process I reviewed each of the transcripts again by reading paragraph by paragraph and underlining key phrases. I colour coded the transcripts by underlining using a light colour for the female partner and a darker colour for the male partner. This process assisted me in becoming more familiar with the data and worked well with my visual learning style. Once this process was completed, I cut out key sentences or phrases from the transcripts and categorized them based on the general themes from within the initial coding process. For example, phrases from the individual and couple interviews were placed into four initial categories: leisure, interpersonal, life milestones, and sexual experience. Once this process was complete, I refined each of the categories breaking them down even further. For example, the category leisure was broken down into the following smaller categories: leisure interests, leisure constraints, family/couple leisure, decreased frequency of leisure,

gendered leisure, impact of leisure and components of leisure. Thus, axial coding allowed me to break down the data and visually see the representation of each couple under the key categories.

I concluded my analysis stage with selective coding, which is “the process of choosing one category to be the core category, and relating all other categories to that category. The essential idea is to develop a single storyline around which all everything else is draped. There is a belief that such a core concept always exists” (Borgatti, 2008, p.1). During the selective coding process I needed to make decisions about the data and how I would present the research findings. By utilizing the pre-established groupings created in axial coding, in addition to my research memos, I was able to creatively approach the data to establish overarching themes that reflected the participants’ experiences. For example, I developed the key theme of “**Who am I?**” which describes the participants’ introspective process of defining one’s self and making choices for the future.

Despite the development of themes, I struggled to find a the best way to link each individual theme together in a collective manner (see Appendix L). The following excerpt from my research memo highlights the frustration I experienced while trying to develop a final ‘theory’:

I’m really struggling to understand what’s really happening here. I’ve got some themes, but I can’t seem to fit them altogether. It’s like I have one piece left to a

puzzle and I'm trying to jam it into place. I keep sketching but I keep coming up with the same pieces that I can't connect together. GRRRR

After a vast amount of sketching, linking and organization, I made the decision to portray the findings as concepts rather than in a traditional theory. A concept approach provided me flexibility to address the vast scope of my research questions while grounding the findings in the participants' experiences. Charmaz (2006) provided support for this approach as thematic categories were utilized as a way to represent the research questions and experiences of the participants. Once I had completed this process, I listened to three interviews that were audio recorded (determined at random), which further reiterated the concepts that I had discovered. Following this process, I sent an overview of the research findings to the participants for input, ideas, and recommendations (see Appendix M). None of the participants responded to this email request and as such a final member check did not take place.

3.6 Documenting the Research Journey

Traditionally, "memos are the theorizing write-up of ideas about substantive codes and their theoretically coded relationships as they emerge during coding, collecting and analyzing data, and during memoing" (Glaser, 1998, p. 11). I found memoing provided me the opportunity to capture relationships in the data, but also capture my feelings, thoughts and emotions regarding the research process. Through written memos I was able to fully reflect on the research experience and the interactions that I had with the participants

involved in the study. For example, initially, I was nervous embarking upon the interview process:

What if the participants don't answer the questions or don't feel comfortable sharing their experiences with me?... What if a couple gets into a fight in front of me or even worse what if the couple is broken up once I send the transcripts to them?

I worried about what I might hear and how I would manage my facial expressions/reactions to the participants. However, after my first interview, I quickly gained confidence in my ability to relate to the participants and create a safe environment where they could share their experiences freely. By the end of the data collection process I felt a connection with each of the participants and was truly grateful that our paths crossed. The following is an entry that I wrote reflecting on the research process and the connection I felt for Zana, a new Canadian who was born in Iran:

Although I found the recruitment process for my thesis to be extremely draining on top of my other day to day responsibilities, the participants in my study are amazing. I've felt for each and every one of them in some small way. With Zana it's because the challenges that she's experienced as a result of being an Iranian women and navigating the sexual expectations and obligations that come with being married... She's lucky to have Samir as her husband. He's so understanding of what she's been through and although he had needs, I can tell that he unconditionally loves Zana and

seems willing to help her work through these challenges... I can't believe that they participated.

The participants in the study shared intimate details, personal challenges, and let me into the most intimate aspects of their relationships. I was overwhelmed with their openness and ability to share their experiences freely.

I also found memo's helpful in arranging themes and developing the concepts and images that represented the findings. During the data analysis stage, I sketched images, which ranged from happy faces, to tree like structures to flow chart diagrams. By referring to these memo's I was able to make modifications as the data analysis process continued.

3.7 Evaluating the Research Process

In the grounded theory method the researcher becomes deeply immersed in the process (Charmaz, 2009). As such it's important to evaluate the grounded theory study at a distance utilizing the following four criteria: credibility, originality, resonance and usefulness of the work (Charmaz, 2009). Credibility focuses on the need for qualitative research to reflect the 'true' experiences of the participants (Letts, Wilkins, Law, Stewart, Bosch & Westmorland, 2007). This can be achieved in numerous ways including: collecting data from a range of participants, using a variety of data collection methods, triangulation, member checking and reflective memoing by the researcher (Letts et al., 2007). In addition to credibility, originality also serves an important role in evaluating grounded theory research. Originality is shown through unique categories that are developed as a result of the

research process. This criterion also emphasizes the social and theoretical significance of the research by challenging or extending what is known about the phenomenon (Charmaz, 2009). Originality is closely linked to resonance as it's essential that the researcher focus on portraying the fullness of the phenomenon studied (Charmaz, 2009). By understanding the "taken for granted" meanings from a phenomenon, it's critical that the researcher strives for an analysis that offers insight about the participants' unique life, meaning and reality (Charmaz, 2009, p. 183). The final criterion that grounded theory is evaluated upon is usefulness. Focusing on the ability to contribute to further knowledge and identify areas for further research, it is essential that the finding from the study can be used in one's everyday experience (Charmaz, 2009). Credibility, originality, resonance and usefulness are important components, which assist in evaluating a grounded theory study.

Applying these criteria to my own study, I think my research meets the need for originality. Overall, scant research exists to support the linkages between leisure and sexual experiences. As such, this study has great originality and usefulness as it is one of the first empirical studies that provides support for leisurely dimensions to be evident in some sexual experiences. The key themes and categories within the study are direct reflections of the 12 participants as a result of the member checking and reflective memoing, which was employed throughout the research process. Also, the data collection method used individual and couple interviews, is not often seen within leisure studies. I am confident in the evaluation of my study and its ability to provide credible and original findings reflective of the participants' experiences.

What follows is a description of each couple who participated in the study highlighting their occupation, leisure interests and values. These descriptions provide further understanding of the participants as individuals while providing a glimpse into their dynamic relationships as a whole. In order to protect the anonymity of the participants pseudonyms have been adopted.

3.8 Amanda and David

Amanda (33) and David (34) are a common-law couple living in a townhouse in the Region of Waterloo. As a doctoral student at the University of Waterloo, Amanda gains valuable experience by also working as a teaching assistant for an undergraduate course. This assistantship provides some nominal income, which supplements the scholarship she was awarded during the first year of her PhD. As a lifelong learner, Amanda spends most of her time reading, writing and conducting her own academic research. This student lifestyle allows Amanda the much desired flexibility to put her family first on a long list of priorities. For Amanda, family consists of her partner David and his son Trevor (5), but also her parents and extended family. With a close knit family, Amanda spent much of her childhood with her relatives, whether for major holidays like Christmas or Thanksgiving or just playing cards during the summer. Amanda has a strong passion for travel and has seen most of the United States of America and participated in a French exchange during her high school years. Travel continues as a driving force in Amanda's daily life, yet finances act as a barrier towards engaging in these leisure experiences. Consequently, Amanda spends much of her leisure time playing games, watching television, walking, connecting with friends and family

members and going on day trips with David and Trevor. This leisure time provides Amanda the opportunity to get away from the stresses of everyday life and feel relaxed and connected to those around her.

Amanda's partner David enjoys participating in physically active leisure where his competitive spirit can overshadow his shy and reserved personality. As an avid sports fan, David enjoys playing and watching sports of all kinds including: hockey, baseball, football, basketball and rugby. David identifies with the values of family and responsibility which his parents instilled in him at a young age, which guide his decision making process. David plays an active role fathering his son on the weekends and although his experiences with his former partner can be emotional, he tries to have a cordial relationship.

Amanda and David met each other at a unique point in their lives. Amanda had just recently been divorced from her first husband and was looking to have causal relationships. During this time she met David and the relationship quickly developed. Eventually the two decided to live together. Currently the couple is undergoing infertility treatments with the hopes of conceiving a child. These treatments are taking its toll on the relationship as a result of the hormone therapy and timed intercourse, which make the sexual experience feel "kind of forced". The couple recently experienced a miscarriage, but remain hopeful that one day they will have a child of their own.

3.9 Zana and Samir

Zana (30) and Samir (31) are a married Iranian couple that immigrated to Canada two years ago when they were accepted into Masters programs at the University of Waterloo. Zana enjoys living in Canada, but misses her parents, brothers and friends back home. As a new immigrant to Canada, Zana takes pride in her Iranian heritage despite the immense pressure to be successful. Zana's parents come from a lower social status and hold high school diplomas. They encouraged their daughter to achieve the highest level of education so the family would be "respected" and so Zana could get a "good job" and be a "good parent". Zana sees academic success as a driving force in her life and this pressure caused her to seek medical attention for depression. Having come from a culture wherein women take on subordinate roles and wherein strict rules govern behavior and dress, she feels lost on Canadian soil. Zana explains: "Iranians (in Canada) are definitely judging me based on what I'm wearing. It is something very simple, like a sweater, I know Canadian's won't judge me, but Iranians will". Sex is a taboo topic in Iranian culture and although Zana's "not a big fan of sex" she understands the obligation that she has to her husband Samir. Zana does not find pleasure in sexual experiences; however, she made an effort to work through these concerns with a sexologist in Iran. Amongst the day to day pressure and reevaluation of her values and culture, Zana finds joy in life through adventure recreation activities such as: sky diving, bungee jumping and treetop walking. These leisure activities provide Zana with the opportunity to concentrate on the activity itself rather than worry about the day to day

stressors of life. Zana also enjoys leisure activities that she can do with Samir including salsa dancing and playing tennis.

Samir, on the other hand, enjoys more creative or meditative leisure pursuits such as painting, contemplating, reading poetry or playing cultural musical instruments. Leisure provides Samir the opportunity to “feel alive” and gives him the energy he needs to carry on with his studies. Samir also finds that sketching is a great way to reflect on experiences and further develop his understanding “of other aspects of life”. Living in Iran Samir always experienced a low level of terror and fear in the everyday experience despite the moderate level of safety provided by his families’ social status and name. Family is one of the key values that Samir holds, which is coupled with respect. Being Kurdish, there is a high respect for mother and father and the role they play in your life as a young adult. For Samir, it was important that his parents approve of his wife Zana. Their approval was challenging to achieve given that he and Zana come from different classes, religions, cultures and speak a different mother tongue.

Samir’s sister introduced him to Zana and they developed an immediate friendship. Due to the cultural norms, their relationship caused many “headaches” amongst their families as Samir’s sister spread lies about Zana to the family, which made them question her ‘fit’ for the family name. Through the conflict, Samir was able to convince his family that Zana was worth marrying and the two celebrated a fresh beginning in a traditional Iranian ceremony. Samir is empathetic to Zana and her feeling around the sexual component of their relationship. Although he would like to see changes in their sex life, he understands the

deeply rooted cultural double standard that exists in Iranian culture: “If a father hears that his son has had sex with a girl he’s kind of proud of that. But if it’s his girl he’s so ashamed”. Zana and Samir continue to develop their sexual relationship by taking things slowly, accessing resources and seeking help and knowledge from experts such as sexologists and psychologists.

3.10 Jill and Caleb

Jill (28) and Caleb (27) are a married couple who live together in a small town about one hour from Waterloo. Jill is a doctoral student studying at the University of Waterloo and spends much of her time reading, writing and conducting her own academic research. As a student, Jill is able to have the flexibility to work from home and occasionally make the drive to Waterloo to meet with her supervisor. With this flexibility Jill is able to take time for herself to engage in a number of leisure activities including: cooking, going to the gym, hanging out with friends, walking the dog, reading magazines or going shopping. Being in a small town Jill found that many of her favourite leisure activities were not offered. Wanting to play herself, Jill took on the administrative responsibilities to support the development of a women’s hockey league, which is now in its third year. Although Jill does not enjoy the administrative component of organizing the league it was an important step for her to be able to feel at home, connect with women who have similar interests, and have fun.

Caleb is a college educated electrician who works at a local University during the day and picks up various side jobs during the evening. A self-proclaimed “workaholic” Caleb

enjoys the value of a hard day's work and the financial security that comes along with taking on additional jobs outside working hours. This strong value on work has created some challenges in his relationship with Jill as she very much values the leisurely aspects of life. Caleb explains the revelation that he came to as a result of working two jobs: "I started working a lot and I wasn't really making time for friends and family and so then you realize that if you lose that what your life would be like. You get a taste of that and identify what's more important". Since getting married over a year ago, Caleb has made a concerted effort to limit the number of side jobs he completes so he is able to spend his evenings and weekends with Jill. Caleb enjoys leisure activities that allow him the opportunity to take his mind off work and money. The need to relax, be social and play sports is something that Caleb has developed as a result of his relationship with Jill.

Jill and Caleb met through a mutual friend during Jill's undergraduate studies. With Caleb living in the small town and Jill in Waterloo the couple began a long distance relationship. Caleb talks about the challenges of the long distance relationship: "I'm surprised it was manageable because back then I was working every weekend and she would want me to come down (to visit her) but it was tough because I wasn't good at handling leisure and work". Now married and living together, the couple finds great joy in their relationship and the leisure activities and sports tournaments that they participate in together. Jill and Caleb have similar values when it comes to their sexual relationship and the connection which exists between the two of them. Although Caleb has a lower threshold for public displays of affection the couple enjoys being able to express their love to one another

through their sexual experiences. From Jill's perspective, "sex is an important part of (the) relationship I think it makes us closer, it makes us happy".

3.11 Beth and Carter

Beth (36) and Carter (38) are a married couple living in a small community who are expecting their fifth child. Beth has a master's degree in music and teaches at a College where she can enjoy the flexibility of being able to manage her career while also home schooling her children. Beth puts family first and has seen a shift in her leisure lifestyle as a result. More specifically, she focuses more on family or couple leisure rather than her individual pursuits or interests. Despite this shift in her leisure, Beth still enjoys creative leisure such as scrapbooking, painting and writing music when she gets the time. Coming from a large family of 13 adopted brothers and sisters, Beth was one of two biological children. Being the oldest Beth "developed a lot of leadership" supporting and caring for the family in general and younger children in particular. Beth remains close with her family and sees her siblings and parents every week at church on Sunday mornings. As a Christian, Beth was able to rely on her relationship with God and her relatives to move past the suicide of one of her sisters. Family and faith are the key values that Beth lives her life by as she strives to place others above herself and to live a holy life.

Like Beth, Carter also views God as the cornerstone to his life. Currently unemployed and "waiting for the next thing from God" Carter takes pride in his ability to develop a business. As a family oriented person, Carter's unemployment provides him the

chance to spend time with his family and focus on his new passion of recording Christian music. For leisure, Carter enjoys mentoring younger men at the church and playing hockey. Due to his growing family, Carter took on the administrative duties of a recreational shinny league to ensure a level of commitment to his personal leisure. As a reward based person, Carter loves working as a part of a team, but most importantly scoring a goal. His passion for hockey came from his father who also loved ice hockey. Carter's childhood was a major influence on his attitudes, values, and approach to life. More specifically, when Carter was 14 or 15, his mother started drinking heavily. When he was twenty, their house burned down. During this stage in his life, Carter "gave into temptation", but at 27 he accepted Christ into his life allowing him to become "a new creation with a fresh start."

It was this fresh start which led him to the community church where he met his wife Beth. At the time Beth was preparing for her master's program. The couple dated for the summer and three months later they were engaged and in a long distance relationship. Through the distance Beth and Carter attended premarital counseling, which had a big impact on their understanding and conceptualization of sexual experiences. They agree they "have an obligation to each other to fulfill each other sexually" so they can be "obedient to God's word". The couple quickly became pregnant with their first child. Beth struggled with a complicated pregnancy during which she was placed on medication and given orders not to have sexual intercourse. Although a trying time for the couple, they were able to connect in other ways and after the birth of their child rekindled their intimate relationship.

3.12 Alexis and Rex

Alexis (28) and Rex (29) are newlyweds who live together in the city of Cambridge. Having completed her master's degree in counseling psychology, Alexis is currently working as a clinical associate, which counts towards her mandatory placements hours required to become a clinical psychologist. Alexis leads a busy life and says that "leisure is something that I often feel like I need to fight for it to keep in my life, but it is very important to me". As a competitive curler Alexis enjoys the social relationships, team dynamics and skill required in the sport. When she's not curling Alexis enjoys going to the gym and taking hot yoga. Alexis also likes to be exposed to new cultures and ways of life something she attributes to her upbringing in the United Church and her diverse community. Having a number of friends from different cultural backgrounds Alexis took it upon herself to become the minority and attend different religious ceremonies and cultural traditions. In the end Alexis feels that "every culture has really good parts and not so good parts. They all have beauty and in the end they're all the same... doing good for other people". Alexis's value of harmony and diversity led her to connect with Rex.

Rex has a four year college degree and previously worked as a manager for a sports retailer. When the store closed he was laid off and given a compensation package for his dedication to the company. Being a workaholic Rex's recent unemployment has created a dramatic shift in his lifestyle providing the opportunity for leisure. Recently, he has taken up reading, gardening, and catching up on television shows as a way to decompress. As a child, Rex played football with the support of his father. Rex identifies the impact that football had

on his life: “I realized my athletic ability, and with my athletic ability I overcame my shyness of being a visible minority if anything, that's just something that just made it so much more better and maybe leveled the playing field”. Rex continued to play football until 1999 when he injured his knee and was unable to continue playing. Raised Hindu, but also exposed to Christianity from his relatives, Rex lived a different world than his peers by abstaining from eating meat, drinking alcohol, and attending church two or three times a week. Today, Rex still feels conflicted with his culture given that he married a Caucasian woman. Alexis met Rex during a high school fashion show. The couple dated long distance for a number of years while Alexis completed her schooling. Alexis moved back to Cambridge and the couple moved in together. The couple enjoys their sexual relationship and the connection it provides. According to Rex sexual experiences “make you feel happier, it makes you feel adequate cause you're able to share something so special with someone you love”. Alexis finds that sometimes she and Rex get a little out of touch being so busy but “a good sexual experience kind of brings you back together”.

3.13 Stan and Caitlin

Caitlin (26) and Stan (27) met at the University of Waterloo and have been dating for 8 months. As a mature undergraduate student, Caitlin appreciates the independence that her student lifestyle brings her. “I did have a bit of a hard childhood and upbringing with all kinds of family issues and now at this stage in my life for example I’m able to control a lot of things”. As an atheist, Caitlin isn’t sure there’s a God so she lives her life one day at a time trying to make every day count. Living by the motto “the most important things in life should

never be given second place”. Caitlin prioritizes her life placing an emphasis on her leisure, school and relationships. For leisure, this self-proclaimed Trekkie (someone who deeply admires Star Trek) loves playing billiards, attending fitness classes, rock-climbing, going to movies and concerts. Leisure allows Caitlin to feel refreshed and energized and regain perspective on her day to day responsibilities: “leisure it’s really about focusing on enjoying life and experiencing those things that make life worth living”. By taking calculated risks in her day to day life Caitlin seeks to try new things and meet new people. One risk that she took was asking a professor if she could work part-time with him as a research assistant. It was this risk that introduced Caitlin to her partner Stan.

Stan is a master’s student who enjoys simulating conversation, learning and thinking about abstract concepts and theories. As a true academic Stan spends much of his time conducting his own research and finds that walking provides him the opportunity to be distracted so his subconscious can process complex problems. These walks put Stan in a “quazi meditative state” where he is able to get in the “correct zone” to complete his work. In addition to the hours of walking he does each day, Stan also finds joy in playing strategic video and board games, surfing the internet and watching sci-fi movies or television shows. As a “cynical optimistic realist” Stan enjoys breaking things down and “seeing behind the smoke and mirrors” and this is what led him to identifying as an Atheist.

As mentioned previously, Stan and Caitlin met while working together in a research lab. The two became friends and spent countless hours talking about their upbringing, faith, experiences and desires. Stan had experienced a few bad relationships including his most

recent partner who viewed sexual experiences to be a chore. Caitlin has also had negative sexual experiences having gone through the trauma of sexual abuse. Caitlin “didn’t want to give up on all sexual intimacy because it would be a huge loss.” As Stan and Caitlin’s friendship developed the lines blurred towards a romantic relationship. After a few months the couple moved in together and experienced the need to negotiate a number of issues including: the temperature of their apartment, personal hygiene, chores, and determining a sleep/leisure/work schedule that worked for both of them. This negotiation process led them to develop a list of “rules and regulations” for their relationship. This document (which is reviewed by the couple weekly) consists of guidelines for their relationship and lists personal and relationship goals. Caitlin and Stan define their relationship as being each other’s “primary” partner. Although not exercised as of yet, both are free to have casual sexual relationships outside their “primary” relationship. Toward this end, a friend of Stan’s was also interested in joining the couple, sexually. At this moment, Caitlin is not interested in this option as she has no emotional connection to this friend.

The participants in the study have diverse experiences, values and upbringings. Their perspectives of leisure and sexual experiences are represented in the following chapter, findings.

Chapter 4: Findings

As noted in the methods chapter, the findings of this study take the form of themes. Through my analysis of individual and couple interview data, four major themes were identified. These themes reflect the purpose of the study which was to explore the linkages between leisure and sexual experience for couples in committed relationships within the life stage of early adulthood. The first theme, **“Who am I?”** describes the participants’ introspective process of defining one’s self and making choices for the future. This theme characterizes the life stage of early adulthood, providing context to the challenges and experiences of the participants’ daily lives. The second theme, **“Expressing Love”** describes how sexual experiences establish feelings of belonging and connection. The sexual experience when housed within a loving relationship served as a mechanism for interpersonal communication for the participants, and a means of expressing the value each placed on their partner. The third theme, **“Leisurely Experience”** speaks to the leisurely dimensions evident in sexual experiences. These three themes begin to fill a significant gap in leisure research, providing support for the interpretation of sexual experiences as leisure in some instances.

4.1 Who Am I?

Early adulthood served as a time of increased independence wherein, for the first time, choices and decisions were made by participants with little advice or input from parents. New found independence provided the participants opportunities to take on various

roles as a means to define themselves. Roles including that of a parent, a spouse, a practitioner, a business owner, a lover and a student provided participants opportunities to experience new things and come to terms with the associated expectations inherent in these roles. For example, in Caleb's case, taking on the role of a new homeowner was a multifaceted and layered role:

You can't really just come home and go off and do whatever with friends or you know you got to come home and make dinner. You've got to clean the house, you got to keep the upkeep of the property, you got to shovel the laneway. So I guess it makes less time for leisure because you do that stuff around the house. It [homeownership] really opened my eyes to the bills that you get once a month. I might've been naive thinking that you know a water leak in the basement might never happen but you have to expect those types of things. You know maybe I didn't expect all of the bills and stuff you know water, sewage, hydro and all that stuff adding up but I guess the main thing that I was naive about was the budgeting and being able to sustain a budget.

Through his decision to buy a house Caleb acquired new knowledge while grappling with the responsibilities of his new role. While each of the participants in this study took on new roles during early adulthood, these roles were not the only way participants sought to answer the question "who am I"? In fact, the increased independence of early adulthood provided the participants the opportunity to become privy to different ways of life further aiding in their development of self.

Through the experience of post-secondary education or employment, the participants interacted with diverse groups of people with experiences, values and cultural upbringing different from their own. These interactions prompted the process of self-discovery whereby participants reflected upon their own upbringing, values, beliefs, gender, and previous experiences. This process either reinforced the participants' understanding of self or provided a new means to define one's self. For Carter, the process of understanding who he was involved looking back to understand the experiences that previously defined him; for example, his mother's alcoholism and a house fire wherein he lost all his possessions. These experiences contributed to Carter making a series of "bad decisions," which for him included having pre-marital sex. At age 25 through exposure to the Christian faith, Carter realized that he had the opportunity to start fresh by rededicating himself to God:

Basically, once we accept Christ into our lives you know, you become basically a new creation. You know the old is gone and that person is gone and you start afresh with a new beginning and a new attitude of seeking Christ in your life and adhering to what the Scriptures tell us to do and that is really being pure and holy and striving to you know, striving for things that normal society doesn't understand.

Through engaging in the process of self-discovery, Carter came to terms with his difficult childhood, and found an avenue where he could redefine himself. Like Carter, the other participants also engaged in this process of personal redefinition, allowing them to further understand who they are – something which ultimately impacted upon their dreams for their future.

Serving as the final component in understanding “**Who am I?**” the participants spent early adulthood striving to realize their dreams for their future. These dreams served as a roadmap for early adulthood, guiding the choices and decisions that the participants made. This roadmap ended in one of three ways: the dream was realized, the dream was reevaluated, or in some cases, the dream was not obtained leaving participants dissatisfied. Zana’s experience highlights the sense of accomplishment that she experienced when she realized her dream of obtaining a master’s degree. Education provided her the opportunity to marry outside of her class, something not common within the cultural norms of Iran:

Samir, my husband, he's from a very good family and his father is a lawyer and his mother is a teacher and they are a good family in terms of financial. In Iran again it's different. For example if you are from a good family you would get married to someone who is from your social class not from lower, and I was lower than him. But anyways, I had a good education and so I could you know his family actually agreed to have him get married to me because he liked me and it was the second accomplishment for me.

Education allowed Zana to marry for love rather than ascribe to her cultural upbringing, yet education continues to be a part of Zana’s dreams for the future with respect to her unborn children. Having grown up with parents who had high school education, Zana felt their embarrassment as they were unable to assist in her academic development:

I could sometimes feel that they [parents] are embarrassed in front of others because they can't help us in some academic life. You know they can't be a role model... So always I thought that I should get and reach to the highest level of education that there is so that I can be good parent for my child.

Zana's words showcase how her previous experiences impacted upon her dreams for the future. These dreams in turn served as a roadmap for her academic choices, preparing her to be a role model to future children. Unlike Zana, not all of the participants were able to realize their dream for the future. Alexis engaged in the process of reevaluating her dream of becoming a doctor:

I have a theory that anyone that's really good at science as a kid they [teachers] tell them to become a doctor. And I can remember my very first semester chemistry was awful for me, I didn't get it... So I was looking at other options that I had with biology and I didn't want to do chemistry again... Someone told me that I should just switch into psychology and then minor in biology and so that's how I ended up on that track... You know getting back to those decisions that you made it's like wow that changed my entire path.

Although her dreams changed, Alexis found a new passion, which lead to a satisfying career as a clinical associate in the field of psychology. Not all of the participants, however, were able to reevaluate their dreams so successfully. For example, Samir held a passion for sketching and drawing, which led him to pursue his cousin's footsteps and become an

architect. Due to the competitive nature of architectural programs, Samir was not admitted into the undergraduate program. Instead, Samir was forced to pursue another major and he selected engineering for his undergraduate education. He described this experience: “[for] all of the bachelor degree I was suffering. I was feeling like I wasn’t in the right place”. Samir continued his education in engineering at the master’s level and moved to a school which also housed an architecture program. This experience brought up many difficult feelings for Samir:

I wasn't satisfied [in the master’s program]... you know I suffered big. I was always really... depressed. I was thinking about it [architecture]. I was reading about it. I was even, you know even as an engineering school you know I was taking classes talking with them [architects] and having fun with them and I was always jealous. You know I was always wondering where will I land up? It was a bad feeling and it really affected my life a lot.

Samir’s experience highlights the dissatisfaction that can come with not realizing a dream for the future. Samir continues to question “who am I” as a result of not attaining his dream of becoming an architect. Clearly early adulthood is a dynamic time where disappointment and accomplishment are experienced.

In sum, early adulthood was a time where the participants sought to answer the question “**Who am I?**” This process involved reflecting on their past and auditing their life’s path against their original goals. While each of the participants’ dreams for the future

was unique so was their level of success in achieving those goals. The process of evaluating their life path and updating them with plans to build on success, redefine success or overcome failure, enabled the participants to start adulthood and seek a committed and loving relationship. The next theme, “**Expressing Love**” references the realization of the participants’ dreams of finding a committed and loving relationship.

4.2 Expressing Love

Dating and courting served as a way for the participants to gain relationship experience and further understand their own wants and needs within the context of a relationship. Relationships held value for the participants, due to the possibility of marriage, childbearing and lifelong companionship. These dreams were common for all of the participants in the study and sexual experiences within a committed relationship served as an avenue whereby these dreams could be attained. As each relationship developed a “*Foundation for Love*” was established wherein exclusive monogamy was practiced sexually. With love being the root of each of the relationships, sexual experiences served as a way to “*Nurture the Relationship*” and “*Enjoy one Another*”.

4.2.1 A Foundation for Love

As individual participants sought to realize their dreams of lifelong companionship, they experienced the following three stages: partner selection, obtaining commitment, and establishing relationship norms. The combination of these components provided the framework for a committed relationship and a foundation for love.

Selecting a partner was the first step in establishing a relationship. While physical attractiveness initiated the “spark” for Jill and Caleb, the partner selection process was complex and unique for each participant. Potential suitors were examined like a multifaceted algorithm in the areas of physical appearance, ambition, values, upbringing, personality, family, lifestyle, sexual attraction, previous experiences and various other factors. Participants determined what was most important to them and sought out partners that had those qualities or attributes. For example, Carter thought it was important to find a partner who practiced within the Christian faith, while Jill thought it was important to find a partner who appreciated the active lifestyle she lived. Ultimately, the partner selection process was impacted by the participants themselves. Having come from a failed marriage defined as “crummy” and “asexual”, Amanda took time to understand her wants and needs for an intimate relationship. She dated casually with the hopes of finding a partner where lifelong love and motherhood could reside. For Amanda, David held this possibility:

Well obviously when you first meet someone you are just basing it on first impressions. But I think that my first impressions of him were valid and then over the years they have gotten more cemented or reinforced... the more comfortable you are with someone the more their true colours show, which again can be good or can be bad. When again I compare it to other relationships I've had... I'm like, is this his worst quality? This is nothing compared to the worst qualities of my ex-husband... Very rarely does David ever exhibit any actions or words or phrases that remind me of my former partner...I've come to realize that I'm this kind of person and that's the

kind of person that complements me and that I need to have in my life... I wouldn't have known that if I hadn't had that relationship [previous marriage].

As evident through Amanda's experience, the process of selecting a partner is complicated. Getting to know a partner takes time, which allowed Amanda and many of the other participants the opportunity to reevaluate their own wants and needs for an intimate relationship. Time was also an important component for Alexis and Rex who met in high school but endured a six year long distance relationship. Attending separate post-secondary institutions allowed the couple the opportunity to further their personal development while reevaluating the needs of the relationship. Alexis found that university provided her with independence and the stability of having a partner: "I was still independent and I could go out with my girlfriends but also knowing that I had the comfort of a boyfriend. So I really liked that. I think it was really good for that phase of my life". As participants experienced early adulthood and gained further insight into one's partner compatibility was weighed, which led to one of two choices: to dissolve the relationship or commit.

Commitment served as the second stage in establishing a foundation for love. While each of the participants had been in previous relationships that dissolved, this study focused on committed relationships. Commitment came in various forms for the each of the couples in this study. A token was given in the form of an engagement ring for Beth and a pendant was provided to Stan. For other couples commitment was less memorable as in the case of Amanda and David: "we kind of both came to a point... I was like I want what you have because for me you're the best of the crop". Regardless of how commitment was achieved, it

was critical in fostering exclusive sexual monogamy. While sexual monogamy was practiced by each of the couples in the study, Stan and Caitlin discussed the possibility of bringing another partner into their sexual relationship. Caitlin described this experience stating, "I've thought about it and it's not something that I wanted to do because with her I don't have that emotional component". Caitlin's response highlights one of the values she and Stan established for their relationship "if it's not right for one person it's not right for both people" showing the respect the couple has for each other. The exclusivity of the participant's relationships provided the foundation for mutual and consensual sexual experiences to take place. For Rex, engaging in a sexual experience with Alexis was special as "it's something that we share. It's your own personal time with someone that you love". Participants were able to express their sexual wants and needs making them vulnerable to a trusting partner. Caitlin's experience with her partner Stan highlights the importance of commitment within the context of the relationship:

Well, unfortunately I did go through some abuse which, was quite traumatizing but I didn't want to give up on all sexual intimacy because it would be a very huge loss. I think what's help me more than anything is Stan, my partner, right now he's just been amazing and I guess he's helped me with being able to be open about what I want, when I want, but he's also really respecting of me and being able to explore or change my mind about what I like, what I don't, and all that stuff and being able to go as fast or as slow. There's no expectations it's all centered around communication and it's okay if wants and needs change.

Having experienced sexual abuse, Caitlin found comfort in Stan's approach to sexual experiences within the context of their committed relationship. Commitment provided a level of trust whereby the participants were able to express their most intimate self to their partner yet this was not the only impact commitment had on the couple.

The final stage in establishing a foundation for love took place in the development of relationship norms. Norming served as a way for the participants to support one another by putting the relationship at the forefront of decision making. Jill and Caleb experienced this decision making with respect to their leisure time, as once they were in a relationship they were more likely to socialize with other couples rather than participate in gendered specific nights out. By wanting to spend time together, Jill and Caleb made choices which put their time together first, creating an expected pattern of behaviour for their relationship. As the norming process took place, the female participants were more likely to experience misunderstandings around their partner's expectations. Alexis explained her experience of moving in with Rex and how she grappled with traditional gender roles and what she thought her partner's expectations were:

One thing that I found difficult is that I got mixed up regarding what Rex's expectations of me were and what I thought his expectations of me were and so I guess kind of those traditional female roles. I expected that he would want me to fully take those on and I was putting pressure myself to have dinner on the table when I got home from work. And while he didn't care about that I would get upset if I didn't and

that was me thinking that he had that expectation but he didn't and so it took me a while to figure that out but once I did it was good.

Alexis's experience of not knowing her partners expectations was common and communication proved to be critical in establishing relationship norms and reevaluating partner expectations. As the circumstances in life changed so did the norms for the relationship. For example, Beth found that "with each new thing that happens there's always a change of habits within your relationship... I feel like we've often been re-evaluating as the changes happen, you know just talking about it". Beth was referring to having children and how the habits in her relationship have changed to accommodate their needs. For example, before the couple had children they had fewer concerns around engaging in sexual experiences. However, now that there are multiple children in the home, the couple uses "nap time" as an opportunity to connect sexually while ensuring adequate privacy. In sum, the process of establishing relationship norms was a task in communication and decision making for the participants. By understanding partner expectations, reevaluating as circumstances arise and putting the relationship first the couples were able establish a foundation for love. It was this foundation of a loving relationship that aided the participant's conceptualization of sexual experiences as a way to nurture their relationship.

4.2.2 Nurturing the Relationship

For the participants in the study, their relationships held immense value for their emotional well-being. Romantic partners not only supported one another through difficult

times such as the loss of a sibling, unemployment or a miscarriage, but provided a companion with whom to experience life. These relationships were a cornerstone in the participant's lives and an avenue where sexual experiences took place. While each relationship was unique, as was their sexual frequency, acts and preferences, commonalities existed amongst the participants. In particular, sexual experiences served as a way to nurture the relationship.

As mentioned previously, relationships allowed for sexual monogamy to be established through commitment of both partners. This commitment highlighted the specialness of the sexual experiences as it was something experienced by the couple only. For Rex, this exclusivity of the experience was of personal value:

For me what I value is that for Alexis and I, it's something that only we share... It's something that connects us in a more personal way than they would be able to share with anyone else. It's something sacred. If you were to do it with someone else, you would definitely hit a nerve in your relationship.

Clearly, sexual experiences are deeply rooted as a part of an intimate relationship. As such, these experiences served as a way to nourish the relationship by partners sharing in the experience together. In most cases this togetherness allowed for partners to reconnect as Alexis described: "you know as a couple who are busy like Rex and I are sometimes you can get a little out of touch and you have a good sexual experience and it kind of brings you back together". The ability to connect or reconnect with one's partner during a sexual experience

was vital in ensuring the wellbeing of the relationship. Sexual experiences allowed the couple time to regain their sense of intimacy with their partner further nurturing the relationship at its core.

In addition to establishing intimacy, the sexual experience was also a way for the participants to communicate their love. Early adulthood was a busy time for the participants, and sexual experiences allowed partners to communicate their love by carving out time and by putting the relationship first. Jill and Caleb poignantly described how sexual experiences play a role in nurturing their relationship:

Jill: I think it's [sex] an important part of our relationship. I think it makes us closer, it makes us happy... I think it just you know, it really does establish that emotional connection that you can sometimes you lose in the hustle and bustle of everyday life and so at the time you kind of push everything away and you just focus on each other and that's all that matters in the moment...

Caleb: I agree, I think it does you know that there is a connection ...

Jill: I think it's just taking time for each other you know action speaks louder than words. You can tell him that you love him, but showing him that you love him, it just means more.

For the couples, sexual experiences were inherently linked to their relationships and allowed partners to communicate their love through a physical expression. By taking time,

sharing in the experience and connecting or reconnecting the participants relationships were nurtured as a result of the sexual experience.

4.2.3 Enjoying one Another

In addition to nurturing the relationship, sexual experiences also served as a way for participants to enjoy themselves and their partner. While masturbation fell outside of the scope of the study, many of the participants spoke to the physical, emotional and/or spiritual connection present in relational sexual experiences. That is, as a couple sexual experiences allowed the partners to enjoy themselves individually and within the context of their relationship.

The physical connection of a sexual experience was gendered in its understanding. As Rex explained, a male “perception of sex is very different than a woman's because it's very physical as opposed the emotional side”. Indeed, a number of the male participants focused on the physical pleasure associated with sexual experiences. Males in the study identified pleasure in two forms: personal and partner pleasure. This may support the finding in the study that males were more likely to express their sexual needs than their female counterparts. For example, Carter found that sexual experiences modified his emotional state, so the couple accommodated accordingly: “we make sure it [sex] happens at least once a week just so that we keep a habit of it, so it doesn't go to three weeks then you know Carter's grumpy”. For Carter, communicating his needs sexually served as a way to ensure he could experience the personal pleasure of a sexual experience. However, males also took

the onus for ensuring that their partner was also satisfied sexually. To ensure partner satisfaction, Stan found it essential to understand himself and his partner's needs: "a lot of people out there don't really understand what they like, or what they need or what their partners want... not knowing what you enjoy, or not being able to explore it blows my mind". Knowing sexual wants and needs increased the likelihood of an enjoyable experience by one's partner, something valued by some of the male participants in the study. For example, David described his mission as a lover as to "try and help them satisfy their needs and wants, to make them feel good, to make sure that the person I'm with is happy and glad that they've have that sexual experience with me and enjoyed it". While this may have implications for David's ego, the statement highlights the conceptualization the male participants had of sexual experiences encapsulating both personal and partner pleasure.

The females in the study inextricably linked the physical and emotional connection to their understanding of sexual experiences. "Closeness" was something each of the women felt from a sexual experience. While it was labeled differently: "physical closeness", "intimacy" or "being together", the women enjoyed their partner through their sexual moments together. For Zana, this closeness was fostered through sexual foreplay with "touching, hugging and kissing" while Jill indicated a look from her partner could also establish an emotional connection and feelings of love. This emotional closeness was often the gateway to the physical closeness of the sexual experience itself. For Beth, sexual experiences provided a dynamic closeness unattainable outside of the experience: "physically that is the most close well, the closest, you can really get. But there's an intimacy that comes

out that you can't get in any other way". The closeness of a sexual experience allowed the women to enjoy themselves and their partner as a result of the love shared. However, engaging in sexual experiences was not a passive matter for the women in the study. Some of the women expressed taking on a more assertive role in the bedroom through trying new experiences or by coaching their partner to best meet their sexual wants and need. Alexis explained how it took confidence for her to overcome the societal expectations of her as a woman:

I think that there's a little bit of the expectation of women to be a little bit more reserved sexually. I think as I've grown up I become a little more confident in myself and I'm not really reserved, I know that sounds bad, it makes the sound like.. But just to take charge little bit, do the things that you enjoy... You know that's not really expected of women and I think women should do that.

As some of the women took on active roles in the bedroom they were able to enjoy themselves and pleasure their partner while still feeling the physical and emotional connection of the sexual experience. There was one woman whose experiences were different than the others in the study. Having grown up in a society where sex was taboo, Zana was "not a big fan of sex". She did, however, enjoy sexual foreplay where she and Samir kissed, hugged, and touched one another. While Zana's conceptualization of the sexual experience is different, she still finds enjoyment for herself and her partner in some component of the experience. She also desires to one day find enjoyment in sexual intercourse: "I see people enjoying sex and I don't have that experience. You know I would

really like to have that experience. You know and I really wish that I could”. Although her preferred sexual acts are different than others in the study, Zana experiences the emotional connection while engaging in intimate time together. Her experience highlights the unique and complicated nature in understanding the sexual experience for couples in a committed relationship.

Zana was not the only person who reported a somewhat unique experience of sexual experiences in the study. One couple found that sexual experiences elicited a spiritual component due to their faith based background. Carter felt that a sexual experience is “something that goes deep into the creatures that God designed us to be”. His partner Beth also described sexual experiences as being spiritual in addition to the physical, emotional components that the other participants indicated: “You know we are all spiritual beings and so anytime there is any type of sexual experience you know it affects all three of those parts”. This spiritual connection experienced by this couple allowed them to enjoy one another while being “obedient to God’s word”. As children came along, they were considered by the couple as a blessing from God: “you know it’s amazing and it’s a reward. Children are rewards from God and it’s a blessing that we fully accept”. Carter and Beth were the only couple who reported such a strong spiritual connection to their sexual experiences, but they were also the only couple that had children together in the study. Moreover, none of the other participants acknowledged that they practiced a faith of some sort.

For all of the couples, sexual experiences were a way to express love to one’s partner and the relationship as a whole. Through the physical, emotional, and in some cases spiritual

connection, participants were able to share intimate moments together. While sexual experiences provided fundamental benefits to the relationship, they also served as a multidimensional experience at the individual level eliciting leisure dimensions and various benefits to one's personal wellbeing.

4.3 Leisurely Experience

At a micro or individual level it was clear that leisurely dimensions were present in the sexual experiences described by the participants. Not only did these experiences take place during free or leisure time, but a distinctive choice was made by participants to engage in a sexual experience over other types of experiences. While sexual intercourse required both partners' involvement, masturbation could be a means to have sexual pleasure without the other partner. Although masturbation falls outside the scope of the study, many participants discussed self-stimulation when they were asked to define a sexual experience. For example Caitlin stated: "I think it [sex] can be with just one person and themselves or could be with two or more people". Also reflective in Caitlin's definition, is the decision she was faced with by her partner Stan to add a third person to their sexual relationship. Clearly, sexual experiences, like leisure experiences, can have diverse partners. Whether done independently, as a dyad, triad or in group settings depending on sexual preferences partnerships can take numerous forms. Yet, diverse partnerships were not the only commonalities between the leisure and sexual experiences for the participants.

As mentioned previously, a dimensional approach to leisure included the following components: intrinsic motivation, perceived freedom, involvement, arousal, mastery and spontaneity (Unger & Kernan, 1983). For the participants, intrinsic motivation came in the form of “being in the mood” and the desire to have a sexual experience. The relational aspect of a sexual experience further complicated the motivation for the participants. More specifically, a number of participants mentioned times when they engaged in sexual activity, but it felt more like work or obligation, rather than leisure. Amanda experienced the extrinsic nature of a sexual experience as she and her partner David shifted from a pleasure seeking experience to a procreation focus. Having little success with their procreation efforts, the couple underwent infertility treatments, which impacted the leisurely dimensions evident in Amanda’s sexual experience:

well, when I'm on the drugs we have to time intercourse it needs to be every other day at a certain time and so that kind of takes the spontaneity and excitement out of it and it feels a lot of the time or some of the time kind of forced... this isn't ideal but whatever, we get the job done.

The motivation to conceive changed the nature of the sexual experience for Amanda. The spontaneity of the act was decreased due to treatment requirements, making Amanda describe the experience as being “job” like rather than leisurely. Amanda was not alone in characterizing some sexual experiences as work-like, in fact most of the female participants expressed elements of this in their sexual relationship. For Beth, pregnancy also brought this

work-like dimension to the sexual experience: “when I’m pregnant, if you’re not feeling well or something like that. Yeah [sex] requires a little more effort”. Caitlin found that there were instances when she could be persuaded into having sex with her partner Stan: “never once have we had sex, if I’m not willing because obviously that’s not us... but there are some instances when I’ve been able to almost be persuaded”. Whether due to pregnancy, not feeling well or having other things to do, the female participants experienced times where the sexual experience had been extrinsically motivated diminishing the leisurely dimensions present in the experience itself.

Although many of the female participants spoke to extrinsic motivation or the work-like nature of their sexual experiences, perceived freedom remained critical in the defining the sexual experience as leisurely or not. For example, Amanda described how engaging in timed intercourse increased her chances to conceive yet took the “spontaneity and excitement” out of the sexual experience. For Amanda, the desire to conceive trumped her enjoyment of the sexual experience highlighting the lack of perceived freedom in her current sexual experiences. For the other couples in the study, the leisurely nature of the sexual experience was at the forefront and perceived freedom was critical in defining the experience as leisure. For example, perceived freedom took many forms including decisions around the frequency of sexual experiences, the type of sexual acts, and the pace of the sexual experiences. Jill described the importance of perceived freedom when it comes to the frequency of her sexual experiences with her partner Caleb. She stated that the couple engages in sexual experiences:

whenever the moment strikes whether it's morning, noon or night. Whether it's once a week or seven times a week... You know you do it when you feel like doing it but there's no rule... If we didn't for two weeks you don't feel bad or guilty, no one is keeping score.

The ability for Jill and her partner Caleb to engage in sexual experiences' "whenever the moment strikes" speaks to the choice each partner has to engage in a sexual experiences. This choice provided consent and also made each partner an active member in determining the sexual acts themselves and the pace of the experience. For many of the participants, perceived freedom reflected the loving nature of the relationship and provided the context for the sexual experience to be a leisurely and enjoyable experience.

In some instances, the sexual experiences of the participants became so enjoyable that they experienced a suspension of time and temporarily withdrew from reality (Gordon, Gaitz & Scott, 1976; Piaget, 1963). As a result of expressing sexual desires/wants/needs effectively to their partners, participants felt sexually satisfied and fully engaged in the act itself thereby withdrawing from their current reality and suspending time. Jill described how a sexual experience allowed her to: "put everything out of your mind by focusing in on the activity at hand". Jill's ability to block out other stimuli during a sexual experience highlights the presence of involvement in the sexual experience. For Beth and Carter to be totally immersed in the sexual experience was important to minimize interruptions from their five children. Prior to having children Beth indicated that there were fewer barriers in her sexual relationship: "it didn't matter where you were, what time of day it was, as long as

the front door was locked”. When the children were younger, the couple utilized naptime as a way to carve out time for their sexual relationship allowing Beth and Carter the opportunity to become fully immersed in their sexual relationship.

The immersion of oneself in the sexual experience highlights the arousal seeking dimension of leisure experiences. With pleasure at the forefront of many of the participant’s sexual experiences, the intimate time together relied on the interaction with their partner through touch, smell, sound and sight. David found “the mood and the music” as elements that aided his arousal seeking, while other participants experienced the warmth of a partner’s body or the smell of a partner’s perfume. Clearly, the sexual experience involved the stimulation of senses in an intimate way. As a woman, Alexis found that over time she became more comfortable with her partner Rex, and was less “reserved” sexually. She became more confident in her sexual wants and needs and found it important to “take charge” of the experience and do things that she enjoyed or desired. Alexis, was not the only participant who communicated her sexual needs, in fact some couples sought out new positions as a means to keep things “fresh”. For Stan, novelty served an important role in his sexual experiences:

I'm a little heavy on novelty. You know I love the saying if you're not living on the edge you're taking up too much space. I definitely am always on the edge of something. I think that component you know of being on the edge is something that I value. But, if you're on the edge you can be in a dangerous spot or place because you don't know what's over the edge... for me that's a good place to be.

As mentioned previously, male participants took ownership to ensure their partner enjoyed the sexual experience. In doing so, participants would seek feedback to enhance the sexual experience and experience a high level of arousal. For Caitlin it was important that she knew the things her partner liked: “I like to be the kind of person who does like to try new things or change, you know if something works I'll keep doing it. If something doesn't work then I'm gonna try not to do that”. The desire to satisfy one's partner not only speaks to the relational elements of the sexual experience, but to the element of mastery commonly associated with leisure experiences.

Perhaps, the most critical leisurely dimension that was present in the participant's sexual experiences was spontaneity. Each of the couples spoke to the importance of spontaneity in their sexual relationships. David highlighted the importance of spontaneity stating: “there's a fun aspect to it, there's the not knowing aspect to it, there's lots of different variables. I guess it's a lot of just reacting to what the other person is doing and how you go about doing things with your partner”. For Amanda the lack of spontaneity in their current sexual relationship was due to the planned intercourse to increase their chances to conceive. Likewise, Beth reflected upon her sexual experiences and found that having children impacted the spontaneous aspect of the sexual experience with her partner Carter: “you know, that's the thing that change is the spontaneity of your sexual relationship because you have kids and suddenly it's restricted to your bedroom when the children are sleeping”. As noted by Beth, barriers such as infertility treatments and or children hindered the spontaneous nature of the sexual experience making it more “routine” or “work-like” in nature. While it

is evident that some sexual experiences described by the participants had leisurely dimensions present, complexity remains rooted in the sexual experience itself.

To fully understand the sexual experiences for the participants in the study, it is important to identify that they brought their own unique set of intrapersonal factors to each sexual experience. These intrapersonal factors could include: their core values, personality, physical, mental, emotional, spiritual and relational elements and also previous experiences. As participants took time during early adulthood to define who they are (i.e. the intrapersonal factors) participants also brought along a desired motivation for the experience itself (i.e. to express love, procreate, meet a biological need etc.). It is the combination of these two factors which allow for the individual participant to describe the experience as being more work-like or leisurely in nature. In Zana's case, her previous experiences and Iranian upbringing impacted upon her sexual experience:

Sex is something it's taboo before getting married we are not comfortable to talk about that we are not even in our family or even with our friends. We are not comfortable to talk and therefore we are not comfortable with sex. Even most of us have problem after we are you know we get married we cannot connect with our husbands in a good way like maybe a Canadian woman can do.

Zana's previous experiences and her cultural upbringing impacted upon her understanding of the sexual experience itself making her more likely to define sexual intercourse as an obligation of her marriage and thus work-like. Zana described this stating:

You know it's actually one of the things in our life and in our relationship and you know most of the time we fight. The first three years of our marriage and we had lots of problems. I remember for the first year and a half of my marriage I had serious problems with depression and I even had to go on lots of medication and so those years really affected my sexual relationship and after that I think that I was in a stage of recovery from those situations. And still I have to work on it. It's not a thing that I like to do, I look at it and I think that I should do.

While Zana's description refers to sexual intercourse, the intrapersonal factors and motivation may be different for each sexual experience. For example, if the sexual experience consisted of sexual foreplay rather than intercourse, Zana may be more likely to define the experience as leisurely as there may not be pressure for the act to progress to intercourse. Clearly, the complex and multidimensional aspects of a sexual experience is another linkage with its friend leisure.

Since sexual experiences are deeply personal, there was little consensus from the participants to the question "is sex leisure?" For example, Jill defined the sexual experience as leisure, as "it does all of the things that my leisure does, except it's not depressing when it's over". For Jill, this definition speaks to the fun, enjoyment, satisfaction and pleasure that she receives from her leisure and sexual experiences. David also agreed with Jill's understanding of sexual experiences to be leisure. Yet, the remaining 10 participants had a similar response as Caleb's who stated, "well yes and no". The waffled responses on sex as leisure speaks to the relational context within which this study took place. David's response

speaks to the intertwined nature of leisure and relational sexual experiences: “sex can be leisure because to me it's done in spare time or time that you have alone from other things. So I would say it's always leisure, but it's also part of a relationship where you have active role to take”. Stan and Caitlin also viewed sexual experiences as a part of the relationship rather than a leisure experience, yet their description says otherwise:

Caitlin: it's interesting being with one another. It's not about getting the other person to orgasm. It's just relaxing having fun and enjoying yourself.

Stan: we just enjoy yourselves and have fun you know and play. You know if one or both of us don't finish off that's perfectly fine you know it's no big deal. I imagine there would be some people thinking that it's a problem but doesn't seem to be a problem for us.

Although Stan and Caitlin both viewed sex as a part of their relationship, the description above highlights the leisurely elements of a sexual experience. In particular, the couple use terms commonly associated with leisure such as: “fun”, “play”, “relaxing” and “enjoying yourself” while also showcasing the intrinsic motivation to engage in the experience itself. This quotation also speaks to the process of enjoying oneself and one's partner rather than the outcome of achieving orgasm. Yet, most of the couples in the study chose to define sexual experiences as a critical component of their relationship rather than viewing the linkages to leisure. One might imagine that if the participants were single, there could be the possibility for sexual experiences to be conceptualized differently as singles

might engage in casual sex where exclusive monogamy may or may not be practiced. There is also the possibility that singles may be more likely to describe their sexual experiences as leisure as the relational component may not be as significant a factor. This however, was not the case for the participants in the study and as a result of the sexual experience participants experienced numerous benefits.

The participants obtained numerous personal and relational benefits from the sexual experience with the partner. On a relational level, sexual experiences provided a deep connection with one's partner as the experience in many instances reflected the love between two partners. Rex described this relational benefit stating:

You know it makes you happier knowing that you have this connection, this really deep connection with someone. You know it's great to know that someone feels the same way. You know it definitely makes you feel happier, it makes you feel adequate too you because you're able to share something so special with someone you feel this love for.

Rex's statement speaks to the emotional connection that each of the couples expressed as a benefit of engaging in sexual experiences. For the participants, sexual experiences served as a time to nurture the relationship and feel the love from one's partner while also expressing love to their partner. Carter also expressed the relational benefits that sexual experiences had on his relationship with his wife Beth and how this impacted upon the mood or tone of their relationship:

my wife and I we both realize that having sex is a necessity in marriage because you need it as a couple together to you know to get that closeness. We can be mad at each other one August day, we can have sex and then you know you're nicer to each other and you know that's a really great thing about sexual relationships.

Clearly, sexual experiences play an important role in maintaining and/or improving the wellbeing of the relationship as a whole. While couples expressed relational benefits from the sexual experience, there were also personal benefits that the participants received from the sexual experience.

In fact, many of the male participants found sexual experiences as a way to decrease the stress of everyday life. Caleb stated “you know it [sexual experiences] really relieves stress from the everyday and you know it's nice knowing that you have someone”. While Alexis indicated “I usually feel relaxed afterwards”, this sentiment was also shared by the other women in the study. Jill found that sexual experiences were dynamic, provoking various feelings: “it’s fun, it's relaxing, it’s social, it’s exciting, it makes me happy”. Regardless of gender, sexual experiences impacted upon one’s emotional state as Caitlin described:

It makes life a lot nicer and more fun and more relaxed. It makes my baseline emotional state better. It's also it can be a pretty good workout and suddenly you're much more relaxed. Because before I had that[sex] in my life I’d... spend my free time doing things that was probably worrying and those types of things and now I

spend a lot of my free time cuddling for example and that's a much nicer state to be in.

Like leisure experiences, the participants in the study attained both personal and relational benefits from a sexual experience further highlighting the similarities between these two areas of study.

This research sought to better understand the linkages between leisure and sexual experiences for couples in a committed relationship and in the life stage of early adulthood. Findings suggest that early adulthood was an exciting time for the participants. By answering the question “who am I?” participants took on new roles, realized dreams and came to terms with the expectations of adulthood, including that of finding a partner. Romantic relationships fostered sexual experiences where participants expressed love by nurturing the relationship and enjoying one’s partner. While the relational elements of the sexual experience were evident at a personal level leisurely dimensions were observed. Yet, not all sexual experiences were the same, depending on the intrapersonal factors and motivation of the experience the participants ascribed various meanings and levels of enjoyment. In sum, sexual experiences, like leisure, are multidimensional and operate as microcosms within relationships.

Chapter 5: Discussion

The purpose of this study was to explore and understand the linkages between leisure and sexual experiences for couples within the developmental stage of early adulthood.

Within this study, leisure experiences were defined as an experience which produced intrinsic rewards and provided the participants with meaning and a sense of pleasure (Reid, 1995). The findings from this research suggest that like leisure, sexual experiences are deeply personal and reflect one's gender, values, culture and previous life experiences. The multifarious nature of the sexual experience highlights relational elements whereby partners expressed love, yet at times also had obligatory underpinnings. This study provides empirical support for sexual experiences to be defined as leisure in some instances.

As a researcher, I acknowledge how my positionality impacts the findings and discussion chapters of this research. Chiseri-Strater (1997) states: "researchers are positioned by age, gender, race, class, nationality, institutional affiliation, historical personal circumstance, and intellectual predisposition" (p. 115). As a Caucasian, Anglican and married female, I have much in common with the participants in the study. I spend much of my days working with young adults in an academic institution and enabling them to develop the skills to become self-directed in their academic and personal experiences. I believe in the personal journey that young adults experience during early adulthood, and as one myself, I acknowledge the growing and learning that takes place through day to day experiences. As someone who married her first love, I believe in romantic relationships and view

communication as an essential tool in negotiating the constraints that impact the wellbeing of the individuals and relationship as a whole. As a wife and lover, I view sexual experiences as a critical component to a loving and committed sexual relationship. I acknowledge the impact my faith based upbringing has on my values and attitudes towards sexual experiences and how in my opinion, sexual experiences are best demonstrated between two loving and consenting adults. Finally, I have studied and practiced in the leisure field and I value the importance of leisure and have experienced first-hand the therapeutic impact it can have on one's health and wellbeing. It is my hope that through explaining my positionality that the reader can bear in mind the impact I may have had on the research. In particular, this study spawned from my personal experiences as a recreational co-op student and my genuine curiosity. It was my hope to provide empirical research and further explore and understand the linkages between the leisure and sexual experience fields.

Before exploring this relevance of the findings of the current research, it is important to further explore and understand the theoretical studies which guided this research (Kelly & Freysinger, 2000; Meaney & Rye, 2007). Previous literature on sexuality and leisure highlighted possible linkages between leisure and sexual experiences, in particular the relational and recreational aspects. From a recreational standpoint, Kelly and Freysinger (2000) noted that sexual experiences could contain a number of elements similar of that to a sport (i.e. mastery, diversion, communication and physical expression). Likewise, it has been implied that sexual experiences could also be identified as flow experiences creating the potential for novelty, arousal, perceived freedom and/or intrinsic motivation. From a

relational standpoint, Kelly and Freysinger (2000) identified that sexual experiences provide opportunities for deep affection and intimacy amongst the partners.

In light of the theoretical contribution of this research, the discussion chapter will ground the findings in earlier literature to reveal the leisure continuum upon which sexual experiences can be plotted. This chapter will also highlight limitations of the research and areas for future exploration. I begin by exploring the developmental stage of the participants, namely early adulthood and its links to sexuality and leisure.

According to psychologist Erick Erickson (1968) the timing of early adulthood is unique due to the maturation process across various indices including: legal, maturational, occupational, emotional, and most important for the current study, sexual. Towler (2003) stated that the following tasks are prevalent for today's young adults: developing competencies (i.e. acquiring refining skills), achieving autonomy, developing and living by a value system, forming an identity, managing money, deciding where to live, integrating sexuality into life, and finally, learning to integrate leisure time with other responsibilities and time demands. Although the participants in the current research encountered many of the tasks Towler (2003) identified, early adulthood was primarily a time for personal learning and maturation (Tanner, Arnett & Leis, 2009). Within lifespan research, it was determined that 'accepting responsibility for one's self' and 'making independent decisions' were the two main components for early adulthood (Arnett, 1997, 1998; Greene et al., 1992; Scheer et al., 1994). My analysis of the data revealed early adulthood to be a self-directed time that was evident as participants made decisions on their own (without the help of family) that led

to new roles such as: homeowner, student, or business owner. While the participants experienced this increased independence, not all young adults in Canada have this same experience. In fact, the term Boomerang Generation has been used to refer to young adults within Western culture who return home to cohabitate with their parents after living independently (Ridout, Bartlett & LeRose, 2012). In Canada, 51 percent of 20 – 29 year olds return home, which is double the number of young adults who did so 25 years ago (Ridout et. al, 2012). While none of the participants in this study are a part of the Boomerang Generation, this is in part due to their committed relationships and the cohabitation which took place with one's partner.

Early adulthood for the participants was also a time wherein goals and direction in life were determined through the process of dream attainment, re-evaluation and/or disappointment (2009). Supported by Arnett's (2004) work, failure and disappointment during early adulthood lead the participants to better understand themselves and engage in the process of self-discovery. As participants engaged in this process, they reexamined their upbringing, values, culture, and previous life experiences, which revealed the depth and breadth of growth these participants experienced during early adulthood. The self-discovery process closely aligns with Erikson's fifth stage of development, which takes place between late adolescence and/or early adulthood. It is during this stage when "knowing who one is in relation to others is key to the process of identity formation, where one attempts to construct a coherent sense of self that embodies physiological, psychological, and social-emotional attributes" (Cook & Jones, 2002, p. 912). It is evident that this life stage was filled with

growth in a variety of interpersonal capacities for the participants, which ultimately impacted intimate relationships.

Erikson (1968) identified the establishment of intimacy as the primary developmental task for those between the ages of 25 – 40. Through establishing friendships or sexual-romantic relationships, early adulthood is a time when people express their innermost self to another, leading to feelings of intimacy (Ward & Belanger, 2011). For the participants in the current research, the establishment of sexual-intimate relationships took place through courtship and selecting a mate (Ward & Belanger, 2011). While the majority of couples in the study were free to choose their mate, one couple was more strongly influenced by extended family. Huston (2000) indicated that families have their own ecological niche whereby one's social, cultural and physical environment and functions of day-to-day life are established. As such, some cultures ascribe to a familial understanding of intimate relationships. In these families, intimate relationships are seen as impacting upon the well-being of the entire family, not just the couple involved (Medora, 2003). Within this study, Zana and Samir's experience of courtship reflects this familial understanding of intimate relationships. That is, their families were active contributors to the decision of the couples courtship and marriage. Within an arranged marriage, eligibility reflects numerous factors including: similarity of background, horoscopes, financial and social position and in some cases the wishes of the bride and groom (Ward & Belanger, 2011). Although Zana and Samir did not define their marriage as being arranged, the level of family involvement reflects this type of marriage. Yet, Zana and Samir were not the only couple to experience

external influences in their mate selection process. Socialization played a role for each of the participants as they entered into intimate relationships.

North American children are socialized to believe in love matches and marriages not only due to cultural norms, but also due to the media and advertising surrounding love (Ward & Belanger, 2011). For example, fairy tales like Cinderella, Beauty and the Beast and Sleeping Beauty speak to the notion of ‘happily ever after’ (Sanchez & Kwang, 2007). In fact, these fairy tales can serve as representations of gendered sexuality which can be further replicated within society (Jorgensen, 2008). By defining one’s partner as “a dream come true” or by experiencing “happily ever after” through marriage, the participants in this study reflected the romantic notions of love from mainstream media. Yet, tremendous societal pressure and stigma can exist in the search to find one’s prince or princess (Holland, 1992; Conley & Collins, 2002). In the current study, Carter experienced societal pressure for being a single male Christian in his early thirties. Carter’s peer group got married in their late twenties and the social clock and societal scripts of his peers suggested Carter was behind schedule. As a result, Carter’s peers questioned his sexual identity (whether he was gay or straight). Carter’s experiences in this regard reflect singlism, which is the stigmatization of adults who are single (DePaulo, 2008). Yet, socialization not only impacted upon the participants understanding of love and desire to get married, but also guided the dating process as it is inextricably to marriage in a love-based marriage society.

Historically in North America, dating took place at community functions and in the homes of parents and was linked to an expectation of marriage (Ward & Belanger, 2011).

The changes associated with industrialization within Canada, however, also changed the way young adults dated. That is, by 1918 heterosexual young adults were able to date outside the expectation of marriage (Ward & Belanger, 2011). As casual dating increased, individuals were exposed to the norms, roles, and values that govern heterosexual relationships (Schwartz & Scott, 2006). The competitive nature of finding a partner can take place informally or through intermediaries such as matchmakers or online dating services (Vaillant, 2004). For young adults, dating provides opportunities for one to refine their interpersonal skills and experiment sexually. In the current study, many of the participants started by casually dating their partner and the relationship progressed from there. This experience provided participants the opportunity to explore and understand their sexual wants, needs and desires. Additionally, dating provided some of the participants, the opportunity to develop a sexual competency by learning how to pleasure a partner, or gain experience in a variety of sexual acts (Toscano, 2006). While some of the participants gained sexual competency through casual dating, each of the participants in the study utilized dating as a way to get to know their partner primarily through leisure activities.

Leisure activities provided the backdrop for the participants in the current study to better understand their partner as an individual. Whether through adventure activities such as tree top walking, playing pool or just ‘hanging out’, participants utilized leisure as a means to further explore their partner and the viability of the relationship. In particular, the mate selection process reflected in the current study speaks to various sociological theories that can be applied to understand how commitment was established by the participants.

One such sociological theory is exchange theory. It speaks to the notion that individuals utilize a cost benefit analysis in searching out a partner, maximizing rewards and minimizing the associated costs in intimate relationships (Schwartz & Scott, 2006). Edwards (1969) coined the term “exchange theory of homogamous mating” to reflect the mate selection process whereby individuals develop relationships with those who have equivalent resources. Homogamy continues to be one of the strongest predictors of marital satisfaction today (Annett et. al, 1999). In contrast to exchange theory, filter theory identifies the filtering process that occurs during the partner selection process. Developed by Kerckhoff & Davis (1962) three stages of filtering exist: social attributes (religion, education and social class), value consensus (attitudes and values) and need complementarity (complementary traits, behavioural characters and interpersonal styles) (Regan, 2008). As courtship evolves, partners utilize this filtering process to determine the fit or viability of their mate and the relationship. Both filtering and exchange processes were demonstrated by the participants in the current study and worked in tandem with the self-directed characteristics of early adulthood. That is, as participants further developed a holistic understanding of themselves, they reflected upon the three filtering stages: social attributes, values consensus and need complementary. This provided the participants the opportunity to identify “**Who am I?**” and understand the competencies they and their partner could each bring to the relationship.

Through courtship, the participants in the current study became acquainted with their partner and utilized filter theory by establishing a level of commitment. In particular, each of the participants was required to reformulate their individual identity to include a significant

other (Cook & Jones, 2002). This process jeopardized one's sense of self as they learned to function as a dyad (rather than an individual) to navigate the world around them (Cook & Jones, 2002). In the past this process used to take place during the early years of marriage, but with delays in education and subsequently marriage, today many couples experience this process through cohabitation or long-distance relationships (Rhodes, 2002; Stanley et. al, 2006). For the participants in this study, establishing relationship norms served as way to change one's mind frame from individual to dyadic context. Within the current study, the filtering process was successful, and each of the partners in the couples made a commitment. Once a level of commitment was developed by the couples, whether through cohabitation, marriage or mutual understanding, a "*foundation for love*" was established. Exchange and filter theory provide support to the underlying social, economic and political factors evident in the partner selection process for the participants in the study and provides a foundation where relational sexual experiences took place.

To understand the meaning participants' ascribed to sexual experiences, a holistic view is required to acknowledge the various components of each unique participant (i.e. previous experience's, cultural background, upbringing, educational, values, beliefs etc.). The concept of sexual scripts best supports this approach, while reflecting the unique meanings and symbols associated with one's sexuality (Gagnon & Simon, 1973). Sexual scripting takes place at three levels: culture scenarios, interpersonal scripts and intrapsychic scripts (1973). First, the cultural scenarios serves as a guide to sexual behaviour reflecting the society, culture or subculture defining the symbolic meaning of the experience (Hynie et.

al, 2001, p. 371). It is this dimension which provided the context for defining acceptable partners, the relationship between partners, appropriate acts, and the timing and location of acts (2001). For those in the current study, this script reflected heterosexual, loving partnerships with exclusive sexual monogamy. Second, interpersonal scripts spoke to the participants understanding of the cultural scenarios that reflected their personal history, experiences and motives within a relationship (2001; Simon & Gagnon, 1984). For Caitlin, this script is where her previous experience of being sexually abused was housed. It is within the interpersonal script where Caitlin's desire (personal motive) to establish an adult loving relationship would trump her previous experiences of sexual abuse. The final script, intrapsychic, speaks to the internalization of the socially shared scripts and scenarios (Hynie et. al, 2001). For the participants, internalization took place with the rehearsal of interpersonal scripts and this is what shaped their individual attitudes, values, and beliefs around the sexual experience (2001). As evident from the findings of the current study, sexual relationships are deeply personal and are a direct expression of who the participants are at their core. Sexual scripts provide context to the individualized nature of a sexual experience, however, it is also important to consider the relational elements as well.

For the participants in the current study, their relationships served as the context within which loving sexual experiences took place. Kelly (1996) stated that "sexual relationships involve two persons, not just two bodies" (p. 393). To truly understand the complexity of the sexual experience it is important to consider the relational elements embedded in the experience. In the current study, participants viewed sexual experiences as

a way to “**Express Love**” by “*nurturing the relationship*” and “*enjoying one another*”.

These themes support the research of Seidman, Fisher & Meeks (2005), whereby love serves as an underlying meaning to the sexual experience. Participants expressed feeling of interest and pleasure for their partner and it was evident that this was at the root of the couple’s sexual experiences (Seidman, Fisher & Meeks, 2005).

With love being at the core of the participants sexual experiences, it was clear there were various motives for the sexual experiences themselves. Hill and Preston (1996) developed a theoretical perspective of dispositional sexual motives which included eight reasons why people have sex. These include: feeling valued by a partner, expressing value for a partner, obtaining relief from stress, nurturing one’s partner, enhancing feelings of personal power, experiencing a partner’s power, experiencing pleasure, and procreating (1996). While elements of each of these motives were collectively mentioned by the participants in the current study, the motive played a key role in defining the sexual experience as work like or leisurely.

Neulinger’s Paradigm of Leisure provides a framework for understanding the experiences of those in the current study while speaking to the linkages between leisure and sexual experiences. Neulinger identified six types or activities classified as leisure and nonleisure with perceived freedom and motivation distinguishing between the two (1981). Perceived freedom versus perceived constraints determines if the activity is leisure or non-leisure, while intrinsic, extrinsic or both determines that type of motivation for the activity

(Leitner & Leitner, 2012). Neulinger’s paradigm identifies six types of activities which can be applied to the participant’s sexual experiences (See figure 2).

Figure 2: Neulinger’s Paradigm of Leisure

(Neulinger, 1981 in Leitner & Leitner, 2012, p. 6)

Perceived Freedom = Leisure			Perceived Constraint = Nonleisure		
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Pure Leisure (intrinsic motivation)	Leisure-work (both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation)	Leisure-job (extrinsic motivation)	Pure work (intrinsic motivation)	Work-Job (both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation)	Pure Job (extrinsic motivation)

Within the context of the current study, a pure leisure sexual experience is one that an individual would engage in freely for the positive feelings that result. This type of experience highlights the arousal seeking dimension of leisure whereby participants experience pleasure. Although experienced equally by both sexes, studies show that the urge for sexual pleasure is primarily acted upon by men through casual sex (Conely, 2011). Within the current study, Stan and Caitlin described their sexual experiences as being pure leisure. For them, a sexual experience was not about the pressure of achieving orgasm, but rather enjoying one another in the experience itself. This couple’s conceptualization is indicative of a pure leisure experience whereby the participants engaged in a sexual experience for the positive feelings that result (Leitner & Leitner, 2012). With high levels of intrinsic motivation and perceived freedom present, Stan and Caitlin use many of the terms consistent in defining leisure experiences including: play, fun, relaxing and enjoyment. But not all couples described pure leisure in their sexual experiences.

On the opposite side of the leisure spectrum, is pure job. This speaks to activities that one is constrained to participate in and is motivated purely by external factors. Within this study, many of the women described work like elements to their sexual experiences. In particular, Zana's description of sexual experiences best highlighted the pure job side of the leisure continuum. For her, sexual experiences were viewed through an obligatory lens not just a result of her marriage but also impart due to her cultural upbringing. For Zana, sex would be plotted on the work-like side of the leisure continuum as she received little enjoyment from the experience and felt extrinsically motivated.

As demonstrated by Zana, Stan and Caitlin, the sexual experiences of the participants in this study can be plotted on Neulinger's continuum. Like leisure, the sexual experiences were deeply personal. Consequently, each partner could plot his or her experiences on different parts of the work/leisure continuum depending on their unique level of intrinsic motivation and perceived sense of freedom. The plotting of a sexual experience takes place each time and by each partner providing flexibility in understanding the various intrapersonal, extrapersonal and environmental factors which influence the sexual experience as a whole. The intrapersonal sphere consists of the ones sexual thoughts and feelings including sexual arousal, sexual desire and lust (Ridley et. al, 2008). This sphere emphasizes the important role that thoughts and feelings play within a sexual experience. The extrapersonal sphere is comprised of specific sexual act(s). Such acts include "hugging/cuddling, kissing, sexual touching, sexual penetration including sexual intercourse, oral sex, or anal sex" (Ridley, Ogolsky, Payne, Totenhagen & Cate, 2008, p. 305). While the

environmental sphere encapsulates the cultural, spiritual, moral and ethical considerations of sexual experiences (Canadian Federation for Sexual Health, 2008). It is the environmental sphere which represents the unique socialization process of a person along with sexual scripts and sexual roles. These three spheres play an important role in determining where each participant would plot a unique sexual experience on the leisure continuum. For example, Zana's experiences would be plotted in the work-job or pure job sections of the spectrum, while her partner Samir's experiences reflect the pure leisure side of the spectrum: "I like it, you know I love sex. I would do it every day if I could even a couple of times a day". The leisure continuum provides a framework in understanding the complexity of the sexual experience and provides an opportunity to capture each partner's individualized conceptualization of the encounter.

While sexual experiences were different for each individual in the study, some consistencies emerged amongst the participants. In particular, the women in the current study often indicated that there were times when the sexual experience had work-like elements present. For example, Amanda described how infertility treatments required timed intercourse, which decreased spontaneity. In Parry's (2004) work it was noted that infertility, lead to feelings of failure in as women were unable to experience the social expectation of motherhood. The study also found that sex for women undergoing infertility treatments was more work-like in nature rather than a leisurely experience. This finding helps to provide support to the feelings that Amanda experienced and the work-like nature of her sexual experiences. Amanda was not alone in this respect; in fact many of the women in the study

succumbed to external factors (i.e. partner's desire for sex, sex to conceive, etc.) and participated in extrinsically motivated sexual activity. Although unwanted sexual activity is considered criminal in Canada, studies show that within the context of heterosexual relationships unwanted sex takes place. In a survey of 433 Canadian college students, O'Sullivan, Byers, and Finkelman (1998) found that 24% of men and 42% of women reported being pressured or forced into sexual contact in a heterosexual dating context. Coercion tactics varied by gender, but Koss et al (1987) determined that college women reported men using verbal coercion (reported by 25% of women in the study), threatened or used force (9%), had been given alcohol or drugs (8%) and misuse of authority (2%) respectively. O'Sullivan & Byers (1993) looked at coercive practices that women employed on their heterosexual male partners, noting that flirtation, touching, compliments and removing clothing (was utilized by 45 to 54% of women in the study), drug and alcohol related acts (5%) and physical force by 3% of women in the study. Despite each participant in the current study indicating that their sexual experiences were mutual and consensual, clearly this was not always the case.

This finding speaks to Motley (2008)'s research that has identified sexual experiences take place on a willingness continuum, with simultaneous mutual consent at one end of the spectrum and physical force at the other. Between these two poles hold various levels of unwanted sexual experiences such as 'giving in' against one's will or at least against one's preferences (Christopher, 1988). Within the context of this study, Caitlin found that there were instances when she could be persuaded into having sex with her partner Stan: "never

once have we had sex, if I'm not willing because obviously that's not us... but there are some instances when I've been able to almost be persuaded". Caitlin's experience supports the notion of a willingness continuum which is captured in leisure paradigm that sexual experiences can be plotted upon as perceived freedom/perceived constraint (Neulinger, 1981).

Closely linked to the willingness continuum is the notion of emotional labour. Coined by Hochschild (1983), emotional labour reflects a way to manage personal emotions by disassociating from one's authentic self. Rojek (2009), applied this concept to the leisure sphere providing support for leisure activities to display elements of emotional labour and in turn, a labored performance where by one displays a "spray-on sincerity" during a leisure experience when an individual is feeling the opposite (p. 22). For the participants in the current study, the concept of emotional labour can be theoretically linked as a result of the committed relationships within which sexual experiences were housed. As mentioned previously, committed relationships provided a degree of sexual obligation for the participants and as such there is the possibility for a labored performance as a result. For example, Beth and Carter's values of "there's no denying one another" could result in a labored sexual performance in the event one partner is not intrinsically motivated to engage in the sexual experience. The labored experience and dissociation of ones authentic self could have possible negative consequences at an individual and relational level. Ultimately, the notion of emotional labour provides and another linkage in understanding how sexual experiences can be defined as work-like in nature for the participants in the study.

Another important theory which further supports the work-like elements of sexual experiences is constraint theory. Crawford & Godbey (1987) proposed the presence of three distinct types of constraints in leisure experiences these include: structural, intrapersonal and interpersonal. Structural constraints speak to challenges within the external environment, intrapersonal constraints reflects the limitations within the individual themselves, while interpersonal constraints speaks to the social interaction amongst leisure partners or groups (Crawford, Jackson & Godbey, 1991). When applying this theory to the participants in the current study, it is evident that these three constraints impacted the participants and their understanding of a sexual experience to be leisurely in nature. Beth and Carter demonstrated a structural constraint of having 'older' children in the home which restricted sexual experiences to the bedroom. Intrapersonally, Zana demonstrated challenges in finding pleasure in sexual intercourse due to her cultural values and lack of enjoyment in sexual intercourse. Finally, many of the couples experienced interpersonal constraints as a result of the life stage of early adulthood and the various stressors and schedules which existed amongst the individuals within the couple. While leisure constraints were observed by the participants, the couples also took measures to negotiate these three types of constraints. Hubbard and Mannell (2001) determined four negotiation strategies as a means to overcome leisure constraints: time management, skill acquisition, financial strategies, and interpersonal coordination. Most applicable to the participants in the current study is interpersonal coordination with their sexual partner through ongoing communication. As the couples experienced challenges engaging in their sexual experiences, communication served a

primary role in further connecting the couple and working collaboratively to overcome leisure barriers which impacted their sexual experiences. For example, Zana and Samir worked as a dyad to discuss their sexual relationship and seek out educational resources and support from a sexologist. While constraint and negotiation was not the primary focus of the study, the participants provide some examples of how leisure constraints further perpetuate the work-like dimensions of the sexual experience.

In contrast to negotiating leisure constraints, the participants also identified having optimal sexual experiences, which were characteristic of higher degrees of perceived freedom and presence of leisurely dimensions. Kleinplatz & Menard (2007) investigated optimal sexual experiences and determined six characteristics including: being present, authenticity, intense emotional connection, sexual and erotic intimacy, communication and transcendence. These characteristics were also described by the participants in this study and speak to the presence of leisurely dimensions in sexual experiences. First, being present is closely related to Csikzentmihalyi's (1990) concept of flow whereby participants become completely absorbed in the sexual experience itself. Jill described her sexual experiences touching on flow and elements of being present in the experience: "it [sex] allows you to experience flow. You know that time when you put everything out of your mind and focusing in on the activity at hand. I think that sex does that very well". The flow-like nature of the sexual experiences also speaks to the pure leisure component of Neulinger's leisure paradigm where intrinsic motivation and perceived freedom are high. Being present in a sexual

experience reflects one's ability to be in the moment with themselves and their partner. This is closely linked to the second element of an optimal sexual experience, authenticity.

Authenticity within a sexual experience speaks to being oneself in the experience (Kleinplatz & Menard, 2007). When applied to leisure, authenticity highlights the diversity of activities and experiences that one may find meaningful based on the individual and their personal preferences (Kelly, 1996). When one is engaged in meaningful leisure, the experience itself can become a journey filled with personal growth (Kelly, 1996). McCarville (2007) described how completing in an Ironman race "represents an effort to escape the ordinary within defined, but extreme, limits. It is part of a larger search for complexity and most of all, balance" (p. 159). For McCarville, Ironman competitions provided him an opportunity to be himself and engage in a personal journey. Within the current study, many of the participants spoke to the deeply personal aspects of a sexual experience. In particular, Caitlin's experience with sexual abuse was something that she brought to the experience as was her desire to overcome and have a loving sexual relationship. Caitlin's experiences to being open to her partner regarding her sexual past allowed her the opportunity to engage in an authentic sexual experience where she was able to be herself.

The third element of an optimal sexual experience is intense emotional connection. This element was something described by each of the couples in the current study as evident through the participant's description of the mutuality, trust, sharing and nurturing that took place. Findings from this study spoke to the notion that the participants utilized the sexual

experience as an opportunity to spend time with their partner and connect/re-connect. Alexis described this element stating: “you know as a couple who are busy like Rex and I, sometimes you can get a little out of touch and have a good sexual experience kind of brings you back together”. Couples used intimate experiences as a way to spend intimate time together something that nurtured the relationship at its core. Yet, the participants in the current study also used communication as a means to establish intimacy with their partner.

Kleinplatz & Menard (2007) found that sexual and erotic intimacy was an important component of an optimal sexual experience. This element was demonstrated by the participants in the current study through the communication of the participant’s sexual wants, needs and desires. This notion speaks to the leisurely dimension of mastery whereby leisure participants acquired skills to master the leisure experience or landscape (Meaney & Rye, 2007). Within this study, the experiences of Stan and Caitlin best highlight the couples desire to pleasure ones partner. This couple discussed openly their sexual wants and need to one another, demonstrating not only the sexual erotic element but also, the importance of communication. For Stan, novelty served an important role in his sexual experiences and while this aligns with sexual and erotic intimacy, it also reflects Lyng’s (1990) notion of edgework whereby one’s desire for thrill and arousal can also be coupled with an element of risk. In a sexual context, risk could take many forms including that of contracting a sexually transmitted infection, embarrassed, experiencing rejection by ones partner or being caught during the act itself. While risk may be involved for some participants like Stan, the sensory stimulation of the sexual experience mirrors those found in leisurely experiences. Stan was

the only participant to discuss sexual novelty, while the other participants spoke to communicating their sexual wants and needs more broadly. However, the element of communication for the participants' in the study was also important factor in the theme "*nurturing the relationship*" and "*enjoying one another*" highlighting the need for relational sexual experiences to have a strong foundation.

The final element present in optimal sexual experience is transcendence which involved a "heightened mental, emotional, physical, relational, and spiritual state in unison" (Kleinplatz & Menard, 2007, p. 75). Transcendence is akin to Maslow's (1971) description of self-actualization whereby one realizes personal potential, experiences self-fulfillment, seeks personal growth and has peak experiences. Within the current study Beth and Carter displayed elements of transcendence in their description of sexual experiences speaking to the integration of various elements in the experience itself:

Beth: I think the physical aspect is obvious and the emotional you know I think you can't deny that either, your uniting emotionally. You know spiritually, we are spiritual beings and so anytime there is any type of sexual experience you know it affects all three of those parts.

Carter: sometimes it feels like we are making love you know and other times it's just like we haven't done this in a long time and we should do it.

Beth: sometimes the physical aspect is more just a part of our physical makeup sometimes it is a lot more emotional and spiritual

As evident from the excerpts above, Beth and Carter experienced times when the sexual experience displayed elements of self-actualization and peak experiences. For this couple a sexual experience had a spiritual component. Spirituality can be seen as “a core dimension of humanity that seeks to discover meaning, purpose, and connectedness with self, others, and ultimately God” (MacKnee, 2002, p. 234). As devote Christians, Beth and Carter viewed their relationship as an example of God’s love and as such their sexual experiences had spiritual overtones (Stayton, 2002). While none of the other couples in the current study spoke to a spiritual component of their sexual experiences, they did identify instances of peak or optimal sexual experiences.

Clearly, Kleinplatz & Menard’s (2007) work provides an important framework in linking leisure and sexual experiences through the lens of optimal experiences. Clearly, these six elements represent the leisurely aspects of the sexual experience and play an important part in how participants would define or plot their sexual experiences on the leisure continuum.

The findings of this study provide empirical support to the theoretical understanding that Kelly & Freysinger (2000) identified with respect to relational sex. Participants described how sexual experiences were an act of love highlighting the intimacy and affection between partners. Likewise, the authors indicated: “In relational sex, each partner brings to a sexual encounter, sometimes unconsciously, a motive (pleasure, reconciliation, procreation, duty), a psychological state (love, hostility, boredom, excitement), and a physical state (tense, exhausted, relaxed, turned on) the combination of these factors will change from one

encounter to another” (Kelly & Freysinger, 2000, p. 301). The participants’ experiences support this theoretical notion, and findings from this study show that each sexual experience, for each partner is unique. The leisure continuum captures the dynamic and individualized nature of the experience providing an important linkage between these two fields.

While relational sexual experiences were the primary focus of the study, it is also necessary to extrapolate the findings to a procreation understanding of sex. Seidman, Fisher and Meeks (2005) state: “the link between sex and procreation seems to be universal. That is, all societies understand sex to be meaningful at least as an act of reproduction... typically linked to making a family” (p. 27). Within the current study, two of the couples actively engaged in sexual experiences as a means for procreation. When Beth was pregnant with her first child she had complications which limited her ability to engage in sexual intercourse. Alternatively, Amanda and David experienced the challenge of engaging in timed intercourse as a result of infertility treatments. As sexual intercourse shifts to a procreation focused initiative there is an impact on the experience itself. In particular, sexual experiences are restricted to “fertile days” thus reducing the spontaneity of the experience (Marci et. al, 2012). Partners may also become sexuality deprived of the recreative and erotic notions of the experience as the motivation shifts to conceiving (Nene, Coyaji & Apte, 2005). Furthermore, sexual intercourse may also become associated with a sense of failure for an individual and impact one’s body image (Marci et. al, 2012). In Amanda’s case, undergoing infertility treatments could have resulted in various side effects as a result of the hormone

therapy including: mood swings, weight gain, altered sexual behaviour and experience of sexuality (Wischmann, 2010). Engaging in “sex by the clock” can also have a negative impact on male partners who may feel degraded and view their role as a “sperm donor” rather than a meaningful and loving partner (Marcia et. al, 2013). Coping strategies for couples experiencing difficulties conceiving differ by gender. Men seek to deny sexual intercourse to their female partners, while women, struggle to come to terms with the possibility of living life without children and in turn develop depressive reactions (Write et. al, 1991; Laffont & Edelman, 1994). While much research has documented the impact of procreation sex, Parry’s (2004) work is one of few studies which sought to understand the leisure consequences for infertile women and the work-like elements of the experience itself.

While procreation focused sexual experiences shed a light on the work-like dimensions of the sexual experience it is also important to understand when the experience may be recreational in nature. For the participants in the current study, their sexual experiences elicited the key dimensions of the leisure experiences including: intrinsic motivation, perceived freedom, involvement, arousal, mastery and spontaneity (Unger & Kernan, 1983). A few of the participants also expressed ‘flow like’ elements as a result of their sexual experiences where the desire for novelty, arousal, perceived freedom and/or intrinsic motivation were present (Csikszentmihaly & LeFevre, 1989). When considering sexual experiences as being recreational, pleasure becomes the primary focus of the experience (Kelly & Freysinger, 2000). Kelly (1996) stated that the satisfaction from a recreational sexual experience “combines elements of pleasurable physical sensations, skill

mastery, diversion from the required aspects of life, and opportunity to be with and communicate with another person. The satisfactions are both intrinsic and social, but the experience itself is foremost” (p. 392). Within the current study, the couple that most exemplifies the recreational notion of sexual experiences are Stan and Caitlin. Their sexual experiences speak to the exploratory and playful nature of the experience where pleasure seeking and novelty were described. In part, this couple had been together for eight months at the time the research was conducted and as such this may have impacted their sexual experiences as having a recreational element over the other couples who had been together for many years. While the other couples in the current study spoke primarily of relational sexual experiences this could be due to a limitation of the study.

Although this study was thoughtfully developed and carried out, there are several limitations. First, all of the couples in the study were heterosexual. It is unclear if these findings reflect the experiences of couples within the LGBTQQ community and as such, further research is justified. Second, each of the couples at the time of the study were sexually monogamous; therefore, further research is warranted to understand if these findings can be applied to those with multiple romantic partners or those who are single. In particular, these populations may be more likely to engage in casual sex which has been defined as “a personal mindfully engaging in sexual activities (such as mutual stimulation, oral sex, or sexual intercourse) outside of a –formal relationship (dating, marriage, etc.), without a –traditional reason (such as love, procreation, or commitment) for doing so” (Hatfield, et. al, submitted, p. 4). With the definition of casual sex, the relational elements evident in this

study may not be applicable as such further investigation is required. Third, the recruitment of participants took place in an urban Canadian city with many of the participants completing some form of post-secondary education. In particular, all but one of the participants had completed some form of post-secondary education, which may have influenced the study. It is also important to note, that this study took place within a Western context. While there was some diversity amongst the participants, it is important to note that the norms of a Western culture may have contributed to the participants understanding of sexual experiences, leisure and relationships as a whole. As discussed previously, one's culture, values, beliefs and previous experiences impact ones understanding of a sexual experience. Therefore it is unclear if the findings could be applied internationally or within rural settings, which is also an interesting area for future study. Fourth, the data collection method consisted of both individual and couple interviews. This method of data collection may have provided participants a relationship lens in which they shared their experiences. It is unclear if participants only completed an individual interview if they would have experienced the same relational elements of those in the study. Finally, each of the participants were able-bodied; therefore the findings may not be applicable to those with disabilities due to the challenges these individuals experience sexually (Shakespeare, 2006). In particular, people with disabilities have been infantilized sexually, leading to sociocultural barriers with respect to rights, access, attitudes and parenting (McRuer & Mollow, 2012). While further work is required to alleviate the stigma for people with a disability, it is unclear if the findings of this study are applicable to this population (McRuer & Mollow, 2012). Despite these limitations,

this study has unique contributions and provides empirical support for the preliminary linkages between leisure and sexual experiences warranting further research.

Much is to be learned with respect to the relationship between leisure and sexual experiences. While this study provides empirical support for sexual experiences to be defined as leisure in some instances, further investigation is needed to isolate these components for various populations. Future research should investigate relational sexual experiences for various age groups, life stages, abilities and sexual preferences. Alternatively, the notion of sexual experiences as recreational fell outside the scope of this study yet warrants further research. It is my hope that this study will serve as a backdrop to further discoveries between the leisure and sexual experiences and that over time additional knowledge is gained around this subject matter.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

Through my initial research questions from this study I hoped to provide insight into the linkages between leisure and sexual experiences for couples in a committed relationship between the ages of 25 – 40. Upon analysis of the 12 individual interview transcripts and six couple interview transcripts, I found that early adulthood was a time of immense self-discovery. The participants took on new roles, evaluated their values and beliefs and worked to realize their dreams for the future. The theme **“Who am I?”** provided a context for the study and spoke to the multifarious nature of early adulthood and the personal growth that each of the individual participants experienced. This study contributes to life span research on early adulthood and supports the notion that role taking serves as a meaningful opportunity to develop one’s personal identity. These roles also assisted the participants in the study with coming to terms with the responsibilities and ownership inherent in adulthood. Yet the primary developmental task experienced by those in the study was the establishment of meaningful and adult sexual relationships.

As participants learned about who they are, and what they want to become they sought out intimate and sexual relationship as a means to experience companionship, emotional support and physical pleasure. As relationships developed overtime, a level of commitment was established and a shift towards couple decision making was fostered. The relationship norms and expectations of partners within the relationship served as a framework for each couples unique romantic relationship. It was through the context of the relationship

where sexual experiences were housed and love express. The theme “**Expressing Love**” spoke to the romanticized understanding of relationships that the participants ascribed to and the primary role it played in each of the six relationships. This study supports the relational understanding of sexual experiences and the nurturing and enjoyment that took place for the participants at the personal, partner and relationship levels.

Most notably, this study provides support for sexual experiences to be defined as leisure in some instances. By identifying the numerous factors which impact ones conceptualization of a sexual experience as leisure, namely, “**Who am I?**” (consisting of the intra, extra, and environmental spheres), the motivation behind the experience and the status-quo of the relationship itself. It is the combination of these three elements which contribute to one defining a specific sexual experience as being leisurely or work-like in nature. This study provides support for sexual experiences to be plotted on Neulinger’s (1981) Leisure Continuum based on the perceived freedom and type of motivation experienced by the individual. It is also important to note that this study provides empirical examples of the six dimensions of leisure being present in sexual experiences (involvement, intrinsic motivation, perceived freedom, arousal, mastery and spontaneity). These findings provide an important first step in understanding the linkages between leisure and relational sexual experiences.

Although this research filled certain gaps in the leisure literature, further research is warranted. In particular, this study focused of those who engaged in relational sexual experiences, rather than casual sex. Additional research is warranted in understanding how those who participate in casual sexual experiences may be similar or different than the

participants in the current study. In tandem, it would be important to also understand the experiences of those who participate in ‘spicy’ sexual pursuits such as swinging, Sado-Masochism, or sex on vacation to further explore and understand the community aspects or potential for serious leisure to be imbedded in these phenomena’s. Yet, most poignant due to the changing demographics in Canada, is the aging population. I would recommend a holistic approach in understanding and exploring the meanings and experiences of seniors and the impact sexual experience have on their overall health and wellbeing.

As I embark upon my next challenge in early adulthood, it is important to reflect upon the unique contributions that this study has provided to the recreation and leisure field. I started out on this journey interested in understanding the sexual experiences of people with physical disabilities and the meanings they ascribe. Due to a dearth of empirical research linking the human sexuality and leisure fields, I opted to further investigate these linkages. It is my hope that this study can provide a background for further investigation into disability and sexuality whether initiated by myself or other keen researchers filled with questions and a desire to know more about the world around them.

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Sage.

Appendix A: Email Script

Hi There,

My name is Jessica Bondy and I am a Masters student working under the supervision of Dr. Diana Parry within the Department of Recreation and Leisure Studies at the University of Waterloo. I am contacting you because you are a graduate student at the University of Waterloo and I thought you might be interested in participating in the study I am conducting.

The purpose of this study is to conceptualize the shared understanding and meanings that couples attribute to both sexual and leisure experiences. I am currently seeking couples between the ages of 25 – 40 to participate in the study from the Waterloo Region. Individuals between the age of 25 – 40 experience a number of fundamental relationship components including: “selecting and courting a mate, learning to live with someone, starting a family, rearing children, managing a home, getting started in a career and finding a congenial social group” (Towler, 2003, p. 118). The navigation of these life events can be difficult contributing to an increase in life stress (Towler, 2003). As such, this study seeks to understand the role and meaning that leisure and sexual experiences play for couples within this life stage.

Participation in the study involves engaging in a three part interview process. In the first hour, I will interview one member of the couple. In the second hour, I will meet the other member of the couple. In the third hour, I will engage in an interview with the couple together. The interviews will focus upon sexual experiences and leisure. For instance, we will discuss the following themes and questions: What impact do your sexual and leisure experiences have on your life? How do your leisure and sexual experiences contribute to lifelong wellness? And so on. Participants will be provided with a detailed list of questions and have the choice to leave any question unanswered. At no point in time will you be asked to describe a specific sexual experience, as this study focuses upon understanding the meaning of sexual and leisure experiences as an individual and as a couple.

Compensation for childcare will be provided (if requested) and in appreciation of your time you will be given a gift certificate for Galaxy Cinemas (valued at \$26.00).

It is important to note that if you and your partner agree to participate in the study, the researcher will not provide advice and/or recommendations for your relationship. Following the interview process, each couple will be provided with a list of community resources that can be utilize to obtain further professional council (if desired).

It is my hope that by participating in the study that you and your partner will feel as though you have benefited from sharing your experiences with me and subsequently the larger academic community. I would like to assure you that this study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through the Office of Research Ethics.

However, the final decision about participation is yours.

If you and your partner would like any additional information or are interested in participating in the study, please contact me at jrbondy@uwaterloo.ca. It is important that both members of the couple discuss and mutually agree to participate in the study, and that both sets of contact information are provided for the purpose of participant identification.

Sincerely,

Jessica

Jessica Bondy
MA Candidate
Department of Recreation and Leisure Studies
University of Waterloo
jrbondy@uwaterloo.ca
(519) 888-4567 ext. 31380

Thesis Supervisor
Diana Parry, Ph.D.
Department of Recreation and Leisure Studies
University of Waterloo
dcparry@uwaterloo.ca
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Appendix B: Revised Email Script

Hi there,

My name is Jessica Bondy and I am a Masters student working under the supervision of Dr. Diana Parry within the Department of Recreation and Leisure Studies at the University of Waterloo. I am contacting you because I thought you and your partner might be interested in participating in a study that I am conducting on the links between leisure and sexuality.

As an individual between the ages of 25 – 40 you experience a number of fundamental relationship components including: selecting and courting a mate, learning to live with someone, starting a family, rearing children, managing a home and getting started in a career (Towler, 2003). These events can be difficult to navigate, and as a researcher I'm interested in understanding the role that leisure and sexual experiences play for couples during this life stage.

Participation in this study involves a one hour individual interview with each partner. This interview will focus on the following three areas: leisure and the role it plays in your daily life, your personal experiences and values and finally, your attitudes towards sexual experiences. Upon completion of the individual interviews, the study includes a couple interview, which I anticipate will last about an hour. This interview will focus on: your leisure pursuits as a couple, life experiences that have impacted upon your relationship (i.e. moving in together, having children, starting a career etc.) and, the importance of sexual experiences in your relationship. You will NOT be asked to describe specific sexual experiences or provide intimate details of your sexual preferences or history. Participants will be provided with a detailed list of questions before the interviews take place and you will have the choice to leave any question unanswered.

Compensation for childcare will be provided (if requested) and in appreciation of your time you will be given a gift certificate for Galaxy Cinemas (valued at \$26.00).

I would like to assure you that this study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through the Office of Research Ethics. However, the final decision about participation is yours. If you and your partner would like any additional information or are interested in participating in the study, please contact me at jrbondy@uwaterloo.ca.

Sincerely,

Jessica

Jessica Bondy
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Appendix C: Personal Email Script

Hi (insert name here),

I hope this message finds you well! As you know I'm slowly working away on the thesis which focuses on understanding the links between leisure and sexuality for couples between the ages of 25 - 40. I am currently in the process of recruiting participants and I was wondering if you would be willing to forward along the email below on my behalf to any couples who you think might be interested in participating?

Thanks for your consideration (name), I really do appreciate it!

Jessica Bondy

Hi there,

My name is Jessica Bondy and I am a Masters student working under the supervision of Dr. Diana Parry within the Department of Recreation and Leisure Studies at the University of Waterloo. I am contacting you because I thought you and your partner might be interested in participating in a study that I am conducting on the links between leisure and sexuality.

As an individual between the ages of 25 – 40 you experience a number of fundamental relationship components including: selecting and courting a mate, learning to live with someone, starting a family, rearing children, managing a home and getting started in a career (Towler, 2003). These events can be difficult to navigate, and as a researcher I'm interested in understanding the role that leisure and sexual experiences play for couples during this life stage.

Participation in this study involves a one hour individual interview with each partner. This interview will focus on the following three areas: leisure and the role it plays in your daily life, your personal experiences and values and finally, your attitudes towards sexual experiences. Upon completion of the individual interviews, the study includes a couple interview, which I anticipate will last about an hour. This interview will focus on: your leisure pursuits as a couple, life experiences that have impacted upon your relationship (i.e. moving in together, having children, starting a career etc.) and, the importance of sexual experiences in your relationship. You will NOT be asked to describe specific sexual experiences or provide intimate details of your sexual preferences or history. Participants will be provided with a detailed list of questions before the interviews take place and you will have the choice to leave any question unanswered.

Compensation for childcare will be provided (if requested) and in appreciation of your time

you will be given a gift certificate for Galaxy Cinemas (valued at \$26.00).

I would like to assure you that this study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through the Office of Research Ethics. However, the final decision about participation is yours. If you and your partner would like any additional information or are interested in participating in the study, please contact me at jrbondy@uwaterloo.ca.

Sincerely,

Jessica

Jessica Bondy
MA Candidate
Department of Recreation and Leisure Studies
University of Waterloo
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(519) 888-4567 ext. 31380

Thesis Supervisor
Diana Parry, Ph.D.
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dcparry@uwaterloo.ca
(519) 888-4567 ext. 33468

Appendix D: Interview Preparation Sheet

Participants

- Participant 1
- Participant 2

Contact Information

- Telephone: 000-000-0000
- Email:
 - Participant 1: _____
 - Participant 2: _____
- Address
 - Street number, Street name, city, postal code

Anticipated Start Time: 00:00 PM/AM

Anticipated End Time: 00:00 PM/AM

Jessica's Cell Phone Number: 000-000-0000

Driving Directions

- Step by step directions using Google Maps

Interview Materials

- Confidentiality agreement
- Information letters
- Interview questions
- Notebook to document themes
- Cell phone
- Recording device
- Extra batteries
- Thank you card with gift certificate
- Community services/resources

To Do

- Select alias for transcripts
- Send transcripts for review
- Send feedback letter

Appendix E: Individual Interview Guide

First of all I would like to thank you for participating in this study that I am conducting as a part of my Masters of Arts program at the University of Waterloo. As you will recall, the purpose of the study is to explore and understand the linkages between sexual experiences and leisure for couples in a committed relationship between the ages of 25 – 40. As you know by signing the consent form, your confidentiality and anonymity will be protected. It is my hope that our time together can be relaxed and casual, allowing me to better understand both your leisure and sexual experiences. As such, if at any point in time if you feel uncomfortable, or that you would prefer to not answer a question simply say “pass” and we will move on to the next question. Also I would like to mention that if at any point in time you would like to withdrawal from the study you can do so without any judgments or consequences. It is also important to note that as the researcher I will not provide any advice and/or recommendations for you or your relationship. If you wish to seek council from a trained professional, I will provide you with a list of community resources at the end of the couple interview.

Are there any questions or items that you would like to talk about before we begin? (Student investigator to answer any questions, concerns or items that come to the surface for the participant)

So to start off our time today, I would like find out about the things you like to do during your spare time.

1. Tell me about some of the things that you like to do for fun
 - How do you feel before, during and after engaging in this pursuit?
 - What components make up a leisure experience for you?
2. What roles does leisure play in your day to day life?
 - How satisfied do you feel with the amount of fun in your life?
 - What do you value the most about leisure?
 - How do these pursuits impact your health and/or wellbeing?

Now I would like to take some time to better understand your personal experiences and beliefs.

3. Can you tell me about your values and beliefs? For example your: cultural and/or religious affiliation(s), upbringing and/or family life, or other groups which you identify with?
 - How have these values impacted your day to day life?

4. What major experiences have impacted your life? For example, graduating from university, getting started in a career, getting married, having children or any other experiences that have impacted or shaped you?
 - What change occurred as a result of this experience?
 - Has this change impacted your leisure time in anyway?

Let's continue on to discuss your values and attitudes towards sexual experiences.

5. How would you define sexual activity?
 - What components does a sexual experience include?
6. What has shaped or impacted your understanding of sexual experiences?
 - i.e. for example your: cultural and/or religious affiliation(s), upbringing and/or family life, or previous positive and/or negative experiences
 - How do these components inform your values towards sex?
7. What do you most value about the sexual experience?
 - What impact does this have on your day to day life?
 - What would an ideal sex life look like for you?
8. How important is sex to your relationship?
 - Does your partner view the importance of sex?
 - How has your perspective of your partner changed as a result of your sexual relationship with him/her?
 - Are there any current challenges with the sexual component within your relationship?
 - How do you foresee overcoming these challenges?

Finally,

9. Tell me a little bit about the relationship between leisure activities and sexual experiences for you.
 - What factors influence the connection between the two?
 - Are there any differences between these two areas?
 - How, if at all, does your gender influence your understanding of these two components?
10. Is there anything else that we didn't touch upon during our time together that you would like to highlight?
11. Are there any items that you would prefer for me to not discuss and/or mention during our couple interview?

Appendix F: Introductory Letter

University of Waterloo

(Date)

Dear (insert name here),

This letter is an invitation to consider participating in a study I am conducting as part of my Master's degree in the Department of Recreation and Leisure at the University of Waterloo under the supervision of Professor Diana Parry. I would like to provide you with more information about this project and what your involvement would entail if you decide to take part.

Over the years, speculation has been made between the potential linkages which may exist between sexual and leisure experiences. Although many academics have implied numerous connections between the leisure studies and human sexuality fields, these examples remain theoretical in nature. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to conceptualize the shared understanding and meanings that couples between the ages of 25 – 40 attribute to both sexual and leisure experiences. Through individual interviews with both members of the couple followed by a one hour couple interview, I hope to develop a theory which provides greater understanding amongst these two areas.

Participation in this study is voluntary. It will involve three separate interviews lasting approximately one hour in length. For the first hour, I will interview one member of the couple. In the second hour, I will meet the remaining member of the couple. The individual interviews will provide me with the opportunity to understand the unique thoughts and meanings that each member of the couple attributes to both sexual and leisure experiences. In the third hour, I will engage in an interview with the couple together. The couple interview will allow me to understand the shared thoughts and understandings of leisure and sexual experiences within the context of your unique relationship. The interviews will take place in mutually agreed upon location. You may decline to answer any of the interview questions if you so wish. Further, you may decide to withdraw from this study at any time without any negative consequences by advising the researcher. Examples of the types of questions that will be asked include: what impact do your sexual and leisure experiences have on your life? How do your leisure and sexual experiences contribute to lifelong wellness? And so on. I have attached copies of both the individual interview and couple interview guide for your review. At no point in time will you be asked to describe a specific sexual experience, as this study focuses upon understanding the meaning of sexual and leisure experiences as an individual and as a couple. With your permission, the interview

will be audio recorded to facilitate collection of information, and later transcribed for analysis. Shortly after the interview has been completed, I will provide each member of the couple a copy their individual transcript and a copy of the couple interview. This provides the participants the opportunity to confirm the accuracy of our conversation and to add or clarify any additional items. All information provided is considered completely confidential. Your name will not appear in any thesis or report resulting from this study; however, with your permission anonymous quotations may be used from your individual interview and attached to a pseudonym. Likewise, with the couple's permission anonymous quotations will also be utilized. Data collected during this study will be retained for seven years in a locked filing cabinet in the researcher's home. As remuneration for your participation in the study you will be provided with a Galaxy Cinemas gift certificate valued at \$26.00. Additionally, compensation will be provided to cover the associated costs of childcare allowing both members of the couple to participate in the interview process (if requested). The amount received is taxable. It is your responsibility to report this amount for income tax purposes.

Although no research project is without risks, the study has been designed to minimize them. One risk is that by participating, you may experience feelings about yourself, your partner, or your relationship that you did not expect. Thinking about and responding to some of the interview questions may lead you or your partner to think about problem areas or expectations that you had not considered before, which in turn could lead you to re-evaluate your relationship in a way you may not otherwise have done. However, discussing certain topics may also provide couples with an opportunity for healthy exploration of values, desires, and feelings. As second risk, given the personal nature of some of the questions, is that you may feel uncomfortable discussing certain topics and you may not wish to talk about certain aspects of your relationship. If this were to occur, we anticipate these reactions would be temporary. You will not be unduly pressured to provide a response to a question. Feel free to decline to respond to any question by letting me know that you do not wish to answer. You may also discontinue participation at any time without any negative consequences.

If you have any questions regarding this study, or would like additional information to assist you in reaching a decision about participation, please contact me at 519-888-4467 ext. 38294 or by email at jrbondy@uwaterloo.ca. You can also contact my supervisor, Professor Diana Parry at (519) 888-4567 ext. 33468 or email dcparry@uwaterloo.ca

I would like to assure you that this study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through the Office of Research Ethics at the University of Waterloo. However, the final decision about participation is yours. If you have any comments or concerns resulting from your participation in this study, please contact Dr. Susan Sykes of this office at (519) 888-4567 Ext. 36005 or ssykes@uwaterloo.ca

I hope that the results of my study will provide greater insight and understanding between the areas of sexual and leisure experiences. For the participants, this study will provide the opportunity for personal reflection and sharing opening up a dialogue amongst both members of the couple.

I very much look forward to speaking with you and thank you in advance for your assistance in this project.

Yours Sincerely,

Jessica

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(519) 279-4369

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Appendix G: Consent Form

By signing this consent form, you are not waiving your legal rights or releasing the investigator(s) or involved institution(s) from their legal and professional responsibilities.

I have read the information presented in the information letter about a study being conducted by Jessica Bondy of the Department of Recreation and Leisure Studies at the University of Waterloo. I have had the opportunity to ask any questions related to this study, to receive satisfactory answers to my questions, and any additional details I wanted.

I am aware that I have the option of allowing my interview to be audio recorded to ensure an accurate recording of my responses.

I am also aware that excerpts from the interview may be included in the thesis and/or publications to come from this research, with the understanding that the quotations will be anonymous.

I was informed that I may withdraw my consent at any time without penalty by advising the researcher.

This project has been reviewed by, and received ethics clearance through, the Office of Research Ethics at the University of Waterloo. I was informed that if I have any comments or concerns resulting from my participation in this study, I may contact the Director, Office of Research Ethics at (519) 888-4567 ext. 36005.

With full knowledge of all foregoing, I agree, of my own free will, to participate in this study.

YES NO

I agree to have my interview audio recorded.

YES NO

I agree to the use of anonymous quotations in any thesis or publication that comes of this research.

YES NO

Participant Name: _____ (Please print)

Participant Signature: _____

Witness Name: _____ (Please print)

Witness Signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix H: Couple Interview Guide

First of all I would like to thank you both for participating in the previous interviews. I very much appreciate your time and effort on my behalf. During the couple interview I would like to further explore the connection between leisure and sexual experience for you both as a couple.

As you know both of you have signed consent forms and as such your confidentiality and anonymity will be protected. Through our conversation, if there are any questions that you would prefer to not answer simply say “pass” and we will move on to the next question. In the event that one partner would like to answer a question and the other partner would like to pass, I will simply move onto the next question in the interview guide. As you both know, your participation is voluntary in this study and as such if you would like to withdrawal from the study you can do so at any time without judgment or consequences. As mentioned previously, I will not be providing any advice or recommendations for your relationship. Following our time together, I will provide you with a list of community resources which can be utilized if desired.

Are there any questions or items that you would like to talk about before we begin? (Student investigator to answer any questions, concerns or items that come to the surface for the participant)

To begin, let’s focus on your leisure.

1. What leisure pursuits, activities and experiences do you enjoy as a couple?
 - How do these experiences, pursuits, activities contribute to your relationship?
 - How do you combine your personal leisure interests within your relationship?
 - How important are your leisure pursuits, experiences, activities in your relationship?
 - What constraints or barriers do you face as a couple in your leisure?
 - If you could change one thing about your current leisure lifestyle, what would it be?

Now, I would like to talk a little bit about your life experiences and how this impacts your day to day life.

2. What are some of the experiences that have impacted your relationship as a couple?
For example getting married, having children, finding employment etc.?
 - As a couple, did these experiences impact your relationship in any way?
 - Did these experiences impact your leisure in any way?

- Did these experiences impact your sexual experiences in any way?
- How did you overcome these challenges as a couple?

Now, I would like to talk a little bit about the importance of sexual experiences within your relationship. As mentioned previously every relationship is unique and different. As such the value and importance that couples and the individuals within that couple place on sex can greatly vary in regards to significance and importance. As such...

3. How important is sex in your relationship?
 - How do sexual experiences contribute to your relationship?
 - How important is your sex life within your relationship?

Finally, as a couple, I would like you to reflect upon your leisure and sexual experiences as a whole.

4. Are there any connections between leisure and sexual experiences?
 - What effect do these two areas have on your life?
 - How do both sexual and leisure experiences contribute to your sense of well-being as a couple?
 - Do you consider sex to be a leisure experience?
 - Why or why not?

5. Is there anything else that we didn't touch upon today during our time together that you would like to highlight?

Thank you again for taking the time to participate in this study. Your ideas, experiences and time have been greatly valued. Moving forward, I am hoping to transcribe these interviews within the next two week and send them for your review. Are there any final questions that you had for me? (Answer questions from the participants).

As a token for your participation in the study, I have thank you card for you. In the card you will find a list of community resources that can be utilized if you wish. Thanks again for all of your assistance with the project, and I will connect with you shortly regarding your interview transcripts.

Appendix I: Community Resources Information Sheet

During our individual and couple interviews we spoke about a number of significant items which may trigger further thoughts, feeling and emotions. There are many services in our own community which you are able to access if you would like additional information or council.

Sexual Support Services

- Sexual assault support centre: (519) 741-8633
- Women's crisis center: (519) 653-2522 or (519) 742-5894
- Advocates for male sexual abuse: (519) 744-7645 Ext. 320
- Waterloo Region Sexual Assault Treatment Centre: (519) 749-6994

Community Counselling

- Catholic Family Counselling Centre: (519) 743-6333
- Family Counselling Centre of Cambridge and North Dumfries (519) 622-9394
- Lutherwood Family Counselling Services: (519)-622-1670 Ext. 200
- Community Justice Initiatives Waterloo Region 'Revive Program': (519) 744-6549

LGBTQ Resources

- Peer support phone line: (519) 888-4569
- PFLAG- Parents, Families, and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (Bi, Trans, Intersex, Queer and Questioning too): 1-888-530-6777

Family Services

- Family & Children's Services of Waterloo Region Sexual Abuse Treatment Program (519) 576-0540
- Domestic Violence Treatment Centre: (519) 749-6994
- Woolwich Community Services, Family Violence Prevention Program: 1-800- 661-7918

Police Resources

- Victim Services of Waterloo Region (519) 585-2363
- Victim/Witness Assistance Program (519) 741-3351

Appendix J: Open Coding

Below is a list of key codes that developed as a result of the open coding process

- Leisure for exercise
- Social or solitary leisure
- Personality types (extravert/introvert)
- Comparing self with others
- Leisure as a break
- Leisure as something to look forward to
- Disappointment with leisure
- Risk with leisure
- Leisure as a way to feel refreshed
- Leisure to increase ability to focuses
- Busy lifestyle as a way to manage time
- Lack of leisure
- Work leisure dichotomy
- Diversion
- Trying other partners leisure
- Being connected through leisure
- Different abilities amongst the couple
- Barriers – pace of life/money/time/
- Variety
- Passive/active leisure
- Work together through leisure
- Bonding through leisure
- Spending time together
- Culture
- Kindness
- Challenge self
- Open
- Lacking control in life
- Family challenges
- Needing to be in control
- Atheist
- Muslin
- Moto to live by
- Life is fragile
- Risk of dying/getting old
- Self-reflection

- Overcoming
- Taking chances/calculated risks
- Gender norms
- Social pressures
- Success
- Started as friends
- Norms for the relationship
- Trust
- Respect
- Shifting priorities
- Guilt
- Overcoming parents expectations
- Managing relationship with parents
- New social group
- Opportunity
- Independence
- Manage money
- Defining who you are
- Social pressures
- Diverse leisure/social opportunities
- choice
- Balance work, school, leisure
- Tests/pressure
- Fear of failure
- Making family proud
- Different values
- Different perspective
- Pressure
- Effort
- Special
- Comforting
- Family/in-laws
- Acceptance
- Fear of failure
- Making family proud
- What God has in store
- Family first
- Physical
- Partner(s)/individual/multiple

- Masturbation
- Emotional connection
- Trust
- Feeling connected
- Can be disconnected
- Safety/emotional security
- Fear of embarrassment
- Abuse/negative experiences
- Sex as valuable/not valuable (different perspectives)
- Choice to be single
- Communication
- Shared ideas/values
- Norms for the couple
- Enjoying the moment/no pressure
- Mutuality
- Hedging bets (managing risk of being in a relationship)
- Emotional
- Feels good/pleasure/“go”/release
- Feeling loved
- Vulnerability
- Being in the mood
- Variety/novelty/new things
- Feeling guilty/obligated
- Excuses
- Wellbeing
- Culture shapes view(s)
- Children
- Interracial couple

Appendix K: Axial Coding

Below is a list of the key codes developed as a result of the data analysis process.

Leisure

- Leisure interests
- Leisure constraints
- Family/couple leisure
- Decrease in leisure frequency
- Leisure and gender
- Impact of leisure
- Components of leisure

Intrapersonal

- Upbringing
- Faith and religion
- Values
- Culture
- Impact of values on leisure and sexual experiences

Life Milestones

- School
- Living on your own
- Meeting a mate
- Career
- Marriage or living together
- Having children
- Life milestones changing priorities
- Negotiating life milestones
- Negotiating life milestones and sexual experiences
- Negotiating constraints because of life milestones
- Life milestones other

Sexual Experiences

- Knowledge and awareness of sex
- Definition of sexual experiences
- Sex as an obligation
- Relationship and sexual experiences
- Being single
- Frequency of sexual experiences

- Sexual experiences and gender
- Relationship norms

Appendix L: Selective Coding

Who Am I?

- A time of self-discovery
- Taking on new roles
- Reflection on personal values, beliefs, upbringing and experiences as a means to define oneself
 - Cement what one has experienced
 - Incorporate new ideas to define self
- Dreams for the future
 - Realizing dreams
 - Reevaluating dreams
 - Disappointed with dreams not attained, continue searching for meaning

Expressing Love

- Foundation for love – framework for a committed relationship
 - Partner selection
 - Examination of suitors based on appearance, ambition, values, family, lifestyle, attraction, experiences etc.
 - “who am I” influences partner selection
 - Obtaining commitment
 - Physical form (rings, moving in etc.) or informal
 - Level of trust where intimate self can be expressed
 - Establishing relationship norms
 - Shift to couple thinking/decision making
 - Communicating expectations and roles
- Nurturing the relationship – companionship, emotional connection and support
 - Connecting or reconnecting through the experience
 - Putting the relationship first
- Enjoying one another
 - Pleasure
 - Personal pleasure – expressing wants, needs, desires sexually
 - Partner pleasure – enjoying the experience
 - Emotional closeness
 - Being together, exclusivity and mutuality
 - Spiritual closeness
 - God and sexual experiences

Leisurely Experience

Leisure dimensions

- Involvement – choice to participate over other activities
 - Escape reality (flow)
- Intrinsic motivation
 - Dependent on motive for sex (desire to conceive vs. pleasure)
 - Can have work-like aspects
- Perceived freedom
 - Choice of sexual act(s)
 - Frequency
 - Pace of the experience
- Arousal
 - Ignite the sense (music, mood, novelty)
- Mastery
 - Desire to satisfy personal or partners needs
- Spontaneity
 - Overcome barriers (infertility treatment, kids in the home etc.)

The Sexual Experience

- Intrapersonal factors – “who am I”
- Motivation for the experience – express love, biological need, procreate
- Combination leads to work-like or leisurely experience

Health and Wellbeing

- Improves emotional state (relaxed, decreased stress)
- Improved relationship connection

Appendix M: Feedback Email

Dear Participant,

Several months ago, you participated in a study which sought to understand the meanings that couples between the ages of 25 and 40 attribute to both sexual and leisure experiences. The study consisted of an individual and couple interview in which we spoke about the life stage of early adulthood, your leisure lifestyle and sexual experiences.

I wanted to thank you again for your participation in the study. To close our research process, I am writing to provide you with an overview of my key findings, which I arrived at by synthesizing the high volume of interview data you provided through your participation. The findings can be categorized into three themes.

Who Am I? (This theme speaks to the life-stage of early adulthood.)

- Interview data revealed that early adulthood was a time when the participants in the study engaged in an introspective process to define one's self and make choices for the future. In particular, participants engaged in the process of self-discovery to further cement their values and beliefs or redefine who they are. Ultimately early adulthood was a time that the participants spent striving to realize their dreams for the future. In some cases these dreams were realized, other instances the dreams were re-evaluated and in some cases the dream was unattainable leading to feelings of disappointment. Early adulthood was also a time when the participants sought out a committed and loving relationship.

Expressing Love (This theme speaks to the role sexual experiences play in committed relationships.)

- A common dream that the participants had was finding a partner and engaging in a loving relationship. Each relationship developed a foundation wherein exclusive monogamy was practiced sexually. Couples developed relational norms and decision making shifted, keeping the relationship at the forefront. Within the relationship, sexual experiences served as a way to nurture the relationship. These experiences provided opportunities for partners to communicate their love while also enjoying one another. A gender difference between males and females was found with respect to the sexual experiences. In particular, males experienced pleasure in two forms both personal pleasure and partner pleasure. Whereas females, inextricably linked the physical and emotional connection with their partner to the sexual experience. For each of the couples, sexual experiences served as a way to experience love, express love to one's partner and nurture the relationship as a whole.

A Leisurely Experience (This theme speaks to the leisurely components embedded in the sexual experiences.)

- At a micro level it was evident that leisurely dimensions were present in the sexual experiences described by the participants. These dimensions include: intrinsic motivation, perceived freedom, involvement, arousal, mastery and spontaneity (Unger & Kernan, 1983). Although these leisurely elements were described, some participants also identified work-like components to their sexual experiences such as feeling extrinsically motivated to participate. In order to fully understand the sexual experiences of the participants in the study it is important to note that they each had their own unique set of intrapersonal factors which they brought to the sexual experience. These include: their core values, personality, physical, mental, emotional, spiritual and relational elements and also previous experiences. As participants took time during early adulthood to define who they are (i.e. the intrapersonal factors) participants also brought along a desired motivation for the experience itself (i.e. to express love, procreate, meet a biological need etc.). It is the combination of these two factors which allow for the individual participants to describe the experience as being more work-like or leisurely in nature. As such, this study provides support that sexual experiences can sometimes be leisurely experiences. This study also found that sexual experiences play an important role in maintaining and/or improving the wellbeing of the relationship, however personal benefits such as relieving stress, feeling relaxed and increasing mood also resulted.

If you have any comments about how your participation in the research process has been reflected in these key findings, I invite you to email me at jrbondy@uwaterloo.ca with any questions, reflections, comments or concerns.

I want to reiterate that all information you provide is considered completely confidential; indeed, your name will not be included or in any other way associated, with the data collected in the study.

This project has been reviewed by, and received ethics clearance through, the Office of Research Ethics. In the event you have any comments or concerns resulting from your participation in this study, please contact Dr. Maureen Nummelin, the Director, Office of Research Ethics, at 1-519-888-4567, Ext. 36005 or maureen.nummelin@uwaterloo.ca.

If you think of some other questions regarding this study, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

Jessica

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