

Sexual Motivation in Women as a Function of Age

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ABSTRACT

Introduction. Women's motivations to engage in sex are likely influenced by their past sexual experiences, the type of relationship in which they are involved in, and numerous lifestyle factors such as career and family demands. The influences of these factors undoubtedly change as women age.

Aim. This study aimed to examine potential differences in sexual motivation between three distinct age groups of premenopausal women.

Methods. Women aged 18–22 years (N = 137), 23–30 years (N = 103), and 31–45 years (N = 87) completed an online survey that assessed the proportion with which they had engaged in sexual intercourse for each of 140 distinct reasons.

Main Outcome Measures. The YSEX? Questionnaire by Meston and Buss [1] was used to measure sexual motivation. The items of this questionnaire were composed of four primary sexual motivation factors (physical, goal attainment, emotional, insecurity), and 13 subfactors.

Results. Women aged 31–45 years reported a higher proportion of engaging in sex compared with one or both of the younger age groups of women for nine of the 13 YSEX? subfactors: stress reduction, physical desirability, experience seeking, resources, social status, revenge, expression, self-esteem boost, and mate guarding. At an item level, the top 25 reasons for having sex were virtually identical across age groups.

Conclusion. Women aged 31–45 have more motives for engaging in sex than do women aged 18–30, but the primary reasons for engaging in sex do not differ within this age range. Women aged 18–45 have sex primarily for pleasure, and love and commitment. The implications for diagnosis and treatment of women with sexual dysfunctions were discussed. **Meston CM, Hamilton LD, and Harte CB. Sexual motivation in women as a function of age. J Sex Med **;**:**_**.**

Key Words. Sexual Motivation; Age; Sexual Behavior; Reasons for Sex; Premenopausal Women

Introduction

Recently, Meston and Buss [1] published a study that identified 237 distinct reasons for why men and women engage in sexual intercourse. The reasons were compiled from open-ended responses given by individuals aged 17 to 52 years and then administered to over 1,500 undergraduate students for the purposes of conducting factor analyses and frequency distributions. Of the 237 distinct reasons reported, 142 loaded onto four primary factors that were equivalent in men and women: physical reasons, goal attainment reasons, emotional reasons, and insecurity reasons. Separate principal component analyses conducted on

each of these primary factors revealed between two and four independent subfactors for each of the primary factors.

With respect to the four primary factors characterizing motivations for sex, the women in the study reported engaging in sexual intercourse most frequently for emotional reasons, followed by physical reasons, insecurity reasons, and goal attainment reasons, respectively. Although the compilation of reasons for having sex were attained from a wide age range of individuals (17–52 years), the factor analyses findings reported by Meston and Buss[1] were based on self-reported frequencies from 1,046 women with a mean age of 19 years and 96% of whom fell

between the ages of 18 and 22 years. Although this provided an excellent foundation to begin systematically exploring women's motivations for sex, more data are needed on how these phenomena operate across the lifespan. It is expected that what motivates women to engage in sex changes across the lifespan as women gain more sexual experience, form more committed and long-term relationships, and experience life changes that undoubtedly impact sexuality such as giving birth, raising a family, and focusing on career goals [2].

To our knowledge, studies examining age differences in why women have sex focused almost exclusively on sexual motivation in adolescents and young adults, with an emphasis on how motives for sex predict sexual risk-taking. To this end, in a longitudinal study of girls aged 12 to 16 years, Rosenthal and colleagues [3] reported that younger girls were less likely to report love or attraction as motives for engaging in first sexual intercourse, and more likely to report having sex because of peer influences. Older girls, on the other hand, were more likely than younger girls to engage in sex because they were in love, physically attracted, too excited to stop, drunk or high, and feeling romantic. In a study of sexual motivation among 1,666 young men and women (mean [M] age = 21.5 years), motives comparable to Meston and Buss' love and commitment subfactor (e.g., "I have sex to feel emotionally close to my partner"), as well as motives comparable to Meston and Buss' pleasure subfactor (e.g., "I have sex because it feels good"), were more strongly endorsed by older adolescents compared with their younger counterparts. Partner pressure motives were less strongly endorsed by older than younger respondents. Cooper and colleagues [4] also found that young adults were more likely to engage in sex for intimacy-based reasons than adolescents.

The present study is the first to examine sexual motivation between several distinct age groups of premenopausal adult women: ages 18–22 years, ages 23–30 years, and ages 31–45 years. We believe these age groups roughly approximate three developmental periods in women's lives. The youngest group (aged 18–22 years)—which mirrors the age distribution of the participant sample from Meston and Buss' [1]—represents a population of young women who are most likely undergraduate students and have not yet been married or committed to long-term relationships, had children, or chosen career paths. The middle range (23–30 years) reflects a group of women in which a small proportion will likely have been married or formed

long-term sexual relationships, entered the work force, and begun to have children. The oldest group (31–45 years) captures women who we expect a majority would have been married or formed long-term committed relationships, progressed in their careers, attained some degree of financial stability, and had children.

It is well known that underlying sexual motivations profoundly shape the expression of sexual behavior [5] but to date, little is known about the degree to which sexual motives impact a woman's sexual function or satisfaction. The prevalence of sexual concerns in women differ substantially by age, with women in their late teens and early twenties reporting more sexual pain and sexual anxiety, less sexual pleasure, and greater difficulty lubricating and achieving orgasm than women in their early to mid-40s [6]. Women in their mid-30s and 40s report more disinterest in sex than women in their late teens and early twenties [6]. By documenting whether sexual motives differ according to particular developmental periods, the present study will serve as a foundation for future exploration into the link between sexual motivation and sexual function and pleasure in women.

Method

Study Population, Subject Recruitment, and Data Collection

A cross-sectional sample of female participants aged 18 years and older were recruited nationally via online classified advertisements (e.g., <http://www.craigslist.com>) between January 2008 and May 2009. Respondents were asked to participate in a survey about "reasons why women have sex." The participants first viewed an online cover letter that informed the respondents that they would be asked to fill out a demographics questionnaire, including information on their age, sex, ethnicity, education, family income, relationship status, and sexual orientation, and would then be presented with a list of reasons why people engage in sexual activity and asked to indicate how frequently they engaged in sexual activity for each of the reasons presented. They were informed that the survey would take between 30 and 45 minutes to complete and that they could choose not to answer any of the questions in the survey.

All participants were required to read and agree to an online consent form before gaining access to the anonymous survey. This method of acquiring an informed consent is in line with the recommendations of the Board of Scientific Affairs' Advisory

Group on the Conduct of Research on the Internet [7] and has been used in a number of other recent scientific studies [8–10]. The survey was hosted by Psychdata, which uses a 128-bit encryption technology and Secure Survey Environment technology to protect the anonymity of participants and integrity of the data. The survey did not use cookies and did not collect users' Internet Protocol addresses. Following completion of the survey, the participants were asked to release their responses for the purposes stated in the cover letter, and a debriefing screen appeared advising the participants to contact the principal investigator if they had any concerns about the study. Each participant was given a random identification number that served as a confirmation that she had completed the survey. The participants were given the option of emailing these identification numbers to the principal investigator such that they may be entered into a monthly raffle where one participant was randomly selected each month and mailed a check for \$50. The protocol was approved by the University of Texas at Austin Institutional Review Board.

Main Outcome Measures

Participant Demographics

The participants completed a general demographics questionnaire that included items that assessed age, gender, race/ethnicity, religious denomination, level of education, country of birth, current province or state of residence, family income, relationship status and length, whether they had children and if so, how many, and sexual orientation.

Sexual Motivation

Sexual motivation was assessed using the 142-item version of the YSEX? Scale [1] (see Appendix).¹ This scale lists 142 reasons why people have sex. The respondents were asked to indicate the proportion of how frequently they have had sex for each of the 142 reasons on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 ("none of my sexual experiences"), to 5 ("all of my sexual experiences"). The 142 items fell into four factors analytically derived as primary motives (pleasure, goal attainment, emotional, insecurity) and 13 subfactors. The physical reasons subfactors included stress reduction, pleasure, physical desirability, and experience seeking. The goal attainment subfactors included resources, social status,

revenge, and utilitarian. The emotional subfactors included love and commitment, and expression, while the three insecurity subfactors included self-esteem boost, duty/pressure, and mate guarding. The scale has been shown to be internally reliable with subfactor alpha coefficients ranging from 0.70 to 0.89 [1].

Results

Participant Characteristics

Over the 17 months that the survey was active, 430 women initiated the online survey. Of these women, eight exited the survey without answering any items, leaving 422 that participated in the survey to various extents. The participants ranged from 18–66 years in age. Ninety-seven percent of the sample fell between the ages of 18–45 years; participants outside of this age range ($N = 23$) were excluded from further analyses. To calculate the descriptive statistics (i.e., the top 25 reasons women gave for engaging in sexual activity), we excluded participants who had not completed at least 75% of the survey ($N = 72$), resulting in a sample of 327 women. For inferential analyses, we used a final sample of the participants who completed all questions in the YSEX? Questionnaire that was composed of 94 women aged 18–22 years ($M = 20.3$, standard deviation [SD] = 1.19), 83 women aged 23–30 years ($M = 26.1$, SD = 2.62), and 80 women aged 31–45 years ($M = 36.6$, SD = 4.58).

The participants resided in 37 states within the United States and in two Canadian provinces. The sample was composed of 82.4% who identified herself as white/Caucasian, 3.5% as African-American, 5.1% as Hispanic/Latina, 5.9% as Asians, 1.2% Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander, and 2.0% other. The participants' economic statuses were as follows: 16.8% reported a household income <\$25,000, 30.5% were between \$25,001 and \$50,000, 33.6% were between \$50,001 and \$100,000, and 19.1% reported a household income >\$100,000. The majority of the sample (76.2%) identified herself as a heterosexual, 3.1% as a lesbian and 12.9% as a bisexual; approximately 4% identified as unlabeled and 3.9% identified as other.

As expected, differences emerged between the groups in terms of the percentage of women who were married, in long-term relationships, and had children. Only 2% of the 18–22 age group was married compared with 19% of the 23–30 age group and 48% of the 31–45 age group. Twenty-four percent of women aged 18–22 years reported

¹Because two items were erroneously included twice in the original YSEX? questionnaire, these redundant items were removed, resulting in a modified 140-item version of the YSEX? that was used in the current study.

being in a relationship for at least 2 years compared with 46% of 23- to 30-year-old women and 48% of 31- to 45-year-old women. Only 3% of women aged 18–22 reported having a child compared with 12% of women aged 23–30 and 45% of women aged 31–45. These findings supported our belief that these age groups represent different lifestyle and relationship experiences.

Factor Reliability Analyses

To verify that the factors derived from Meston and Buss [1] were applicable to older populations, we first conducted a factor analyses of the 140 sexual motives using the combined sample of 327 women. As was the case with Meston and Buss' [1] sample, items differed in their variances, and consequently, all factor analyses were conducted on *z*-score transformations standardized on the combined sample of women. Principal component analyses were conducted using direct oblimin with Kaiser normalization, both to replicate Meston and Buss' methodology and because we expected the factors for having sex to be related. A four-factor solution yielded a consistent pattern of loadings and accounted for 36% of the total variance. Meston and Buss reported these same four factors accounted for a comparable 35% of the total variance among women. As seen in Table 1, the factor structure among women aged 18–45 years was identical to that reported by Meston and Buss among 18- to 22-year-old men and women with the following exceptions: two of the goal attainment items loaded similarly on the goal attainment and physical reasons factors and two items loaded highest on other factors, and two of the insecurity items loaded highest on other factors.

Next, we calculated Cronbach's coefficient alphas for the four primary factors and 13 subfactors separately for each of the three age categories. As seen in Table 2, the values exceeded 0.84 for each of the physical, goal attainment, emotional, and insecurity factor scores, indicating high internal consistency. High internal consistency was also noted for subfactors in the 18–22 and 31–45 age groups. The values ranged from 0.79 for the pleasure subfactor among 18- to 22-year olds, to 0.93 for the revenge and experience seeking subfactors among the 31–45 age group. Values indicated high internal consistency for all of the subfactors among the 23–30 age group with the exception of three of the goal attainment subfactors (resources: $\alpha = 0.54$; social status: $\alpha = 0.67$; revenge: $\alpha = 0.70$), which were in the modest range. An inspection of the data revealed that one item in each of these

three subfactors had zero variability thus contributing to the lower alpha coefficients for these subfactors. As seen in Table 2, the coefficient alphas for both the primary factors and subfactors were surprisingly similar between those reported here among 18- to 22-year-old women and the sample of comparable-aged women reported by Meston and Buss [1]. Together, the almost identical results between the factor analyses conducted here and that reported by Meston and Buss, and the high coefficient alphas on all of the primary factors and on the majority of subfactors indicate that the YSEX? Questionnaire is reliable across the age groups used in the present study.

Analyses of Age Differences in Sexual Motivation

To analyze the differences in reasons for having sex across the age groups, a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was run for each individual primary factor using the respective subfactors as dependent variables and the three age groups (18–22, 23–30, 31–45) as independent factors. If the MANOVA for a particular factor was significant at $P < 0.05$, univariate ANOVAs were conducted for each corresponding subfactor. Then, if the ANOVA for a particular subfactor was statistically significant, post hoc tests—corrected using Tukey's Honestly Significant Differences (HSD) to control for family-wise error at $\alpha = 0.05$ —were conducted to determine which groups were significantly different from one another. Only the participants with complete data sets were used for these analyses (i.e., women aged 18–22 years, $N = 94$; 23–30 years, $N = 83$; 31–45, $N = 80$).

For the physical reasons factor, the overall MANOVA was significant, $F_{8,504} = 2.30$, $P = 0.02$. The stress reduction ($P < 0.01$), physical desirability ($P < 0.01$), and experience seeking subfactors ($P < 0.01$) all showed significant differences between the age groups, while the pleasure subfactor ($P = 0.59$) did not. Post hoc tests showed that for the stress reduction and physical desirability subfactors, the 31–45 age group was significantly higher than the other two groups. For the experience seeking subfactor, the oldest group scored significantly higher than the 18–22 age group. There were no significant differences between the two younger groups (Table 2).

The MANOVA for the goal attainment factor was also significant, $F_{8,504} = 2.85$, $P < 0.01$. Resources ($P < 0.01$), social status ($P = 0.05$), and revenge ($P = 0.03$) showed significant differences between the age groups, while the utilitarian ($P = 0.30$) subfactor did not. For the resources sub-

Table 1 Factor analysis of the modified 140-item YSEX? Questionnaire within the total sample of women (ages 18–45 years; N = 327)

Item no.	Item description	Factor			
		Physical	Goal attainment	Emotional	Insecurity
34	I wanted to experiment with new experiences.	0.72			
37	I wanted the adventure/excitement.	0.69			
39	I was curious about what the person was like in bed.	0.68			
32	I was curious about my sexual abilities.	0.65			
17	I wanted the pure pleasure.	0.65			
19	It is exciting, adventurous.	0.64			
36	I wanted to see what it would be like to have sex with another person.	0.61			
42	I wanted to try out new sexual techniques or positions.	0.60			
38	I wanted to improve my sexual skills.	0.58			
30	The person was too "hot" (sexy) to resist.	0.57			
33	I wanted the experience.	0.57			
40	I wanted to lose my inhibitions.	0.57			
28	The other person was too physically attractive to resist.	0.56			
3	I wanted to release tension.	0.56			
44	I wanted to act out a fantasy.	0.55			
22	The person had a desirable body.	0.55			
16	It is fun.	0.55			
41	I wanted to get the most out of life.	0.55			
15	I was "horny."	0.53			
21	The person had an attractive face.	0.53			
25	The person's physical appearance turned me on.	0.52			
43	The opportunity presented itself.	0.51			
45	I wanted to see whether sex with a different partner would feel different or better.	0.51			
6	I thought it would relax me.	0.51			
24	The person smelled nice.	0.51			
2	I wanted to release anxiety/stress.	0.49			
1	I was frustrated and needed relief.	0.48			
26	I saw the person naked and could not resist.	0.47			
13	It feels good.	0.46			
31	I was curious about sex.	0.46			
18	I wanted to achieve an orgasm.	0.46			
14	I wanted to experience the physical pleasure.	0.45			
11	I had not had sex for a while.	0.44			
7	I am addicted to sex.	0.41			
27	The person was a good dancer.	0.40			
23	The person had beautiful eyes.	0.40			
10	I thought it would make me feel healthy.	0.38			
20	It was "in the heat of the moment."	0.38			
5	It seemed like good exercise.	0.37			
12	I wanted to satisfy a compulsion.	0.35			
8	It would allow me to "get sex out of my system" so that I could focus on other things.	0.35			
35	I wanted to see what all the fuss is about.	0.33			
9	I am a sex addict.	0.33			
29	The person wore revealing clothes.	0.32			
4	I was bored.	0.31			
48	I wanted to get a job.		-0.89		
50	I wanted to get a promotion.		-0.88		
51	I wanted to give someone else a sexually transmitted disease (e.g., herpes, AIDS).		-0.81		
77	I wanted to break up a rival's relationship by having sex with his/her partner.		-0.77		
46	I wanted to get a raise.		-0.76		
57	It was an initiation rite to a club or organization.		-0.75		
54	I wanted to make money.		-0.72		
66	The person was famous and I wanted to be able to say I had sex with him/her.		-0.70		
58	The person offered to give me drugs for doing it.		-0.69		
75	I wanted to even the score with a cheating partner.		-0.63		
52	Someone offered me money to do it.		-0.60		
68	My friends pressured me into it.		-0.59		
80	I wanted to breakup another's relationship.		-0.59		
72	I wanted to get back at my partner for having cheated on me.		-0.58		
70	Someone dared me.		-0.55		

Table 1 Continued

Item no.	Item description	Factor			
		Physical	Goal attainment	Emotional	Insecurity
62	I wanted to enhance my reputation.		-0.52		
63	I wanted to have more sex than my friends.		-0.51		
49	I wanted to hurt/humiliate the person.		-0.50		
76	I wanted to make someone else jealous.		-0.47		
90	I wanted to get a favor from someone.		-0.44		
67	I thought it would boost my social status.		-0.43		
119	I wanted to manipulate him/her into doing something for me.		-0.43		
71	I wanted to brag to friends about my conquests.		-0.42		
69	It was a favor to someone.		-0.42		
73	I was mad at my partner, so I had sex with someone else.		-0.41		
53	I wanted to feel closer to God.		-0.39		
74	I wanted to get even with someone (i.e., revenge).		-0.36		
59	I wanted to end the relationship.		-0.35		
82	I wanted to get out of doing something.		-0.35		
64	I was competing with someone else to "get the person."		-0.35		
61	I wanted to be popular.		-0.35		
55	I wanted to have a child.		-0.34		
87	I wanted to change the topic of conversation.		-0.33		
86	I wanted to get rid of a headache.		-0.33		
89	I wanted to become more focused on work—sexual thoughts are distracting.		-0.31		
56	I wanted to reproduce.		-0.29		
81	I wanted to hurt an enemy.		-0.28		
91	I wanted to defy my parents.	0.33	(-0.27)		
84	I wanted to keep warm.		-0.27		
85	The person had taken me out to an expensive dinner.		-0.27		
78	I was on the "rebound" from another relationship.	0.30	(-0.26)		
47	I wanted to punish myself.		(-0.25)		-0.40
83	I wanted to burn calories.		-0.20		
60	I wanted to be used or degraded.		-0.20		
88	I thought it would help me fall asleep.	0.27	(-0.14)		
95	I wanted to express my love for the person.			0.75	
93	I wanted to increase the emotional bond by having sex.			0.71	
94	I wanted to communicate at a "deeper" level.			0.68	
96	I wanted to show my affection to the person.			0.67	
101	I realized I was in love.			0.65	
92	I wanted to feel connected to the person.			0.65	
99	I wanted to become one with another person.			0.63	
110	I wanted to say "I have missed you."			0.58	
98	I desired emotional closeness (i.e. intimacy).			0.54	
109	I wanted to celebrate a birthday or anniversary or special occasion.			0.53	
97	I wanted to intensify my relationship.			0.51	
105	I wanted to welcome someone home.			0.48	
108	I wanted to say "goodbye."			0.47	
111	I wanted to lift my partner's spirits.			0.46	
107	I wanted to say "thank you."			0.40	
106	I wanted to say "I am sorry."			0.38	
104	I wanted the person to feel good about himself/herself.			0.37	
103	I wanted to get a partner to express love.			0.37	
100	It seemed like the natural next step in my relationship.			0.35	
123	I felt obligated to.				-0.76
130	It was expected of me.				-0.75
125	I felt like it was my duty.				-0.69
132	I did not want to disappoint the person.				-0.69
127	My partner kept insisting.				-0.68
135	I wanted to get my partner to stay with me.				-0.67
140	I did not want to "lose" the person.				-0.67
121	I did not know how to say "no."				-0.64
128	I felt like I owed it to the person.				-0.63
133	I wanted to be nice.				-0.62
137	I wanted to prevent a breakup.				-0.60
126	I wanted him/her to stop bugging me about sex.				-0.60
120	I felt insecure.				-0.57
134	I wanted to keep my partner from straying.				-0.56
141	I wanted the person to love me.				-0.56
122	I was pressured into doing it.				-0.55

Table 1 Continued

Item no.	Item description	Factor			
		Physical	Goal attainment	Emotional	Insecurity
139	I wanted to ensure the relationship was "committed."				-0.53
136	I wanted to decrease my partner's desire to have sex with someone else.				-0.53
138	I was afraid my partner would have an affair if I did not have sex with him/her.				-0.53
124	I was verbally coerced into it.				-0.50
116	I wanted my partner to notice me.				-0.47
142	I thought it would help "trap" a new partner.				-0.47
131	I felt guilty.				-0.45
117	I wanted the attention.				-0.43
114	I wanted to boost my self-esteem.				-0.41
113	I wanted to make myself feel better about myself.				-0.41
115	I wanted to feel attractive.				-0.37
65	It would damage my reputation if I said "no."				-0.36
118	I wanted to "gain control" of the person.				-0.32
112	I wanted to feel powerful.	0.45			(-0.21)
129	I was physically forced to.		-0.28		(-0.20)

Items are listed under the factor headings derived by Meston and Buss [1].

Only the highest factor loadings are reported for each item with the exception of items that loaded higher on factors different from that reported by Meston and Buss in which case, factor loadings for the factor under which they are listed are also presented in brackets.

factor, the 31–45 age group had a significantly higher mean than both of the two younger groups. For revenge and social status, the oldest group was only higher than the middle group. Again, there were no significant differences between the two younger groups (Table 2).

The MANOVA for the emotional factor was significant, $F_{4,508} = 4.00$, $P < 0.01$. Only one of the subfactors (expression) showed a significant difference between the age groups ($P = 0.01$). Love and commitment reasons did not show significant dif-

ferences across the three age groups ($P = 0.23$). For the expression subfactor, the oldest group scored significantly higher than the 18–22 age group (Table 2).

Finally, for the insecurity factor, the MANOVA was also significant, $F_{6,506} = 3.10$, $P < 0.01$. Self-esteem boost ($P < 0.01$) and mate guarding ($P = 0.04$) both showed significant differences between groups, while duty/pressure did not ($P = 0.55$). Within the self-esteem boost subfactor, the oldest age group scored higher than both of the younger

Table 2 Internal consistency of the modified 140-item YSEX? factor and subfactor items by age group

Factor	Age group (years)			
	18–22*	18–22	23–30	31–45
Physical	0.94	0.93	0.95	0.95
Stress reduction	0.82	0.87	0.88	0.87
Pleasure	0.81	0.79	0.84	0.88
Physical Desirability	0.79	0.86	0.83	0.90
Experience Seeking	0.86	0.85	0.93	0.93
Goal Attainment	0.91	0.90	0.85	0.95
Resources	0.73	0.86	0.54	0.92
Social status	0.72	0.80	0.67	0.90
Revenge	0.70	0.88	0.70	0.93
Utilitarian	0.74	0.82	0.80	0.81
Emotional	0.86	0.84	0.89	0.93
Love and commitment	0.81	0.83	0.87	0.91
Expression	0.76	0.82	0.87	0.90
Insecurity	0.90	0.96	0.94	0.93
Self-esteem boost	0.71	0.89	0.90	0.90
Duty/pressure	0.86	0.90	0.92	0.91
Mate guarding	0.77	0.90	0.91	0.91
	N = 835–895	N = 94–137	N = 83–103	N = 80–87

Numbers represent Cronbach's alphas.

*Internal consistencies based on the 142-item YSEX? Questionnaire as reported in Meston and Buss [1].

Table 3 140-item YSEX? factor and subfactor score differences as a function of age

Factor	Age group (years)					
	18–22 (N = 94)		23–30 (N = 83)		31–45 (N = 80)	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Physical	2.17	0.44	2.20	0.51	2.41	0.58
Stress reduction*	1.71	0.52	1.76	0.52	1.97	0.65
Pleasure	3.43	0.65	3.48	0.72	3.51	0.77
Physical desirability*	1.98	0.65	1.93	0.59	2.22	0.79
Experience seeking [†]	2.00	0.46	2.08	0.66	2.28	0.71
Goal attainment	1.13	0.18	1.14	0.15	1.22	0.28
Resources*	1.05	0.11	1.08	0.14	1.15	0.25
Social Status [†]	1.09	0.21	1.06	0.14	1.15	0.32
Revenge [†]	1.16	0.27	1.14	0.19	1.26	0.41
Utilitarian	1.27	0.34	1.30	0.34	1.36	0.39
Emotional	2.48	0.51	2.51	0.61	2.69	0.68
Love and commitment	2.86	0.64	2.81	0.75	3.00	0.72
Expression [†]	1.84	0.53	1.99	0.62	2.16	0.76
Insecurity	1.51	0.47	1.48	0.45	1.67	0.45
Self-esteem boost*	1.56	0.58	1.59	0.60	1.88	0.60
Duty/pressure	1.53	0.48	1.49	0.54	1.58	0.53
Mate guarding [†]	1.46	0.58	1.35	0.56	1.58	0.62

Mean scores for all items are based on a scale of 1–5, with higher scores reflecting increased proportions of engaging in sexual activity.

*Women aged 31–45 were significantly different from both the 18–22 and 23–30 age groups at $P < 0.05$.

[†]Women aged 31–45 were significantly different from women aged 23–30 at $P < 0.05$.

[‡]Women aged 31–45 were significantly different from women aged 18–22 at $P < 0.05$.

groups. For mate guarding, the oldest group only scored higher than the 23–30 age group. The two younger groups were not significantly different on any of the insecurity subfactors (Table 3).

Item Level Analyses

For descriptive purposes, we listed the top 25 reasons why women engaged in sex separately for each of the three age groups. As seen in Table 4, the items were remarkably similar across the age groups. Of note, the top two reasons for all women were “it feels good” and “I wanted to experience the physical pleasure,” and all eight of the items that fall under the pleasure subfactor were included in the top 25 reasons for women in each of the three age groups. Also noteworthy, 10 of the 13 items that fall under the love and commitment subfactor were listed among the top 25 reasons for having sex among 23–30 and 31–45 years, and nine of the 13 were listed among 18- to 22-year olds. Three of the remaining seven items that made up the top 25 list were from the physical desirability subfactor for each age group of women, two items were from the experience seeking subfactor for 23–30 and 31- to 45-year olds (three for the 18–22 age group), and the final remaining items were from either the expression or the stress reduction subfactors.

Discussion

The current study examined potential differences in sexual motivation between three age groups of

premenopausal women with the YSEX? Questionnaire, which was composed of four primary sexual motivation factors and 13 subfactors. A number of interesting findings emerged. First, at a subfactor level, the M of nine of the 13 subfactors showed significant differences between age groups. In all cases, women in the oldest age category (31–45 years) reported higher proportions of having sex for each of the subfactor reasons than did one or both of the younger groups of women. One obvious explanation for this finding is that older women are likely to be more sexually experienced than younger women and thus would have been exposed to sexual scenarios within a breadth of different contexts that, ipso facto, would involve more reasons for engaging or not engaging in sex. However, given that the YSEX? Questionnaire does not specifically ask the frequency of how often women engage in sex but, rather, the proportion of their total sexual experiences for which each reason accounts, a greater number of sexual experiences can not fully explain these findings. Instead, the fact that older (versus younger) women reported that more of the reasons for having sex represented many or all of their sexual experiences suggests that when the older women engaged in sexual acts, their underlying sexual motivations may be relatively greater in quantity. In other words, a woman in her twenties might have sex because she wants to have an orgasm, whereas a woman in her early forties may have sex to achieve orgasm, express

Table 4 Top 25 reasons why women have sex stratified by age group

Item	Item Description	M	SD
18–22 years (N = 137)			
1.	It feels good.	4.05	0.95
2.	I wanted to experience the physical pleasure.	4.03	0.90
3.	I wanted to show my affection to the person.	3.98	0.89
4.	It is fun.	3.83	1.07
5.	I wanted to express my love for the person.	3.70	1.11
6.	I desired emotional closeness (i.e., intimacy).	3.40	1.04
7.	I was "horny."	3.39	1.10
8.	I wanted to achieve an orgasm.	3.26	1.09
9.	I wanted to feel connected to the person.	3.21	1.13
10.	I realized I was in love.	3.11	1.20
11.	I wanted the pure pleasure.	3.05	1.17
12.	The person's physical appearance turned me on.	3.00	1.22
13.	I was "in the heat of the moment."	2.95	1.05
14.	It is exciting, adventurous.	2.89	1.07
15.	I wanted to increase the emotional bond.	2.84	1.17
16.	The person had an attractive face.	2.71	1.26
17.	I wanted the adventure/excitement.	2.62	1.11
18.	It seemed like the natural next step in my relationship.	2.61	1.12
19.	I wanted the experience.	2.55	1.11
20.	I wanted to intensify my relationship.	2.52	1.13
21.	The person had a desirable body.	2.50	1.20
22.	I wanted to try out new sexual techniques or positions.	2.41	1.02
23.	I wanted to communicate at a "deeper" level.	2.39	1.25
24.	I wanted to release anxiety/stress.	2.29	1.00
25.	The opportunity presented itself.	2.26	0.98
23–30 years (N = 103)			
1.	I wanted to experience the physical pleasure.	4.08	0.81
2.	It Feels good.	4.07	0.90
3.	I wanted to show my affection to the person.	3.99	0.85
4.	It is fun.	3.88	1.05
5.	I wanted to express my love for the person.	3.65	1.03
6.	I wanted to achieve an orgasm.	3.54	1.18
7.	I was "horny."	3.38	0.88
8.	I desired emotional closeness (i.e., intimacy).	3.34	1.01
9.	I wanted to feel connected to the person.	3.12	1.13
10.	I wanted the pure pleasure.	3.09	1.18
11.	I realized I was in love.	2.99	1.23
12.	The person's physical appearance turned me on.	2.95	1.24
13.	It is exciting, adventurous.	2.78	1.14
14.	I was "in the heat of the moment."	2.77	0.93
15.	I wanted to increase the emotional bond.	2.75	1.17
16.	It seemed like the natural next step in my relationship.	2.70	1.12
17.	I wanted to intensify my relationship.	2.57	1.15
18.	I wanted the adventure/excitement.	2.49	1.04
19.	The person had an attractive face.	2.46	1.18
20.	The person had a desirable body.	2.42	1.15
21.	I wanted to celebrate a special occasion.	2.42	0.81
22.	I wanted to try out new sexual techniques or positions.	2.41	0.98
23.	I wanted the experience.	2.38	1.02
24.	I wanted to become one with another person.	2.36	1.32
25.	I wanted to communicate at a "deeper" level.	2.34	1.25
31–45 years (N = 87)			
1.	I wanted to experience the physical pleasure.	3.92	0.88
2.	It Feels good.	3.88	0.95
3.	It is fun.	3.62	1.01
4.	I wanted to show my affection to the person.	3.55	0.84
5.	I wanted to achieve an orgasm.	3.54	1.20
6.	I wanted the pure pleasure.	3.52	1.09
7.	I wanted to express my love for the person.	3.52	0.83
8.	I was "horny."	3.46	0.97
9.	I desired emotional closeness (i.e., intimacy).	3.44	1.00
10.	It is exciting, adventurous.	3.20	1.11
11.	I wanted to feel connected to the person.	3.16	0.92
12.	It seemed like the natural next step in my relationship.	3.12	1.05
13.	I wanted to intensify my relationship.	3.10	1.02
14.	The person's physical appearance turned me on.	3.08	1.12

Table 4 Continued

Item	Item Description	M	SD
15.	I wanted to increase the emotional bond.	3.02	0.95
16.	I Realized I was in love.	3.00	1.04
17.	I was "in the heat of the moment."	2.89	0.98
18.	I wanted the adventure/excitement.	2.80	1.04
19.	I wanted to become one with another person.	2.80	1.30
20.	I wanted to communicate at a "deeper" level.	2.78	1.16
21.	The person had an attractive face.	2.63	1.11
22.	The person had a desirable body.	2.63	1.08
23.	The opportunity presented itself.	2.58	1.05
24.	I wanted to celebrate a special occasion.	2.58	1.03
25.	I wanted to say "I have missed you."	2.52	1.02

These reasons are from the current 140-item modified YSEX? Questionnaire, which is based on the original 142-item YSEX? Questionnaire. Mean scores for all items are based on a scale of 1–5, with higher scores reflecting increased frequencies of engaging in sexual activity.

her love, and to celebrate a special occasion, for example.

It is worth noting the four subfactors that did not show age-related changes: pleasure, love and commitment, utilitarian, and duty/pressure. Two of these, pleasure and love/commitment, were rated as describing a high proportion of sexual experiences for all women, and thus, little variability existed between age groups. The other two, utilitarian and duty/pressure were reported by all women as describing a small proportion of their sexual experiences and, similarly, little variability existed between the age groups.

At an item level, it is interesting to note that for all women, the top two reasons for having sex related to pleasure, and 18 of the top 25 reasons pertained to either sexual pleasure or love and commitment. That love and commitment are primary motives for women having sex has been well documented in the literature [11,12] and is central to many evolutionary-based theories [13]. By contrast, having sex purely for pleasure is something that past research has commonly discussed as a significant motivator for men but not women [11–13]. The finding reported here—that having sex "because it feels good" and because "they wanted to experience the physical pleasure" were the top two sexual motivators for women of all age groups—is both clinically meaningful and noteworthy. Consistent with Meston and Buss' [1] findings, the mean of the emotional factor was only slightly greater than that of the physical factor, and the rank order of the primary factors was the same for each of the three age groups and consistent with that reported among women by Meston and Buss [1] (emotional, physical, insecurity, goal attainment). This suggests that although older women tend to have more reasons for engaging in sex, the primary reasons for doing so differ little with age among premenopausal adult women.

Within the lowest ranked goal attainment factor, the subfactors resources and social status were endorsed as representing the smallest proportions of sexual motivators for women of all age groups. If one looks at the items constituting these subscales, the fact that they represent a small proportion of sexual events is not surprising. Reasons such as "I wanted to get a raise" and "I wanted to have a child," which are part of the resources subfactor, and reasons such as "someone dared me," and "it was a favor to someone," which are part of the social status subfactor, involve contexts for sexual activity that are likely presented only infrequently. That said, it is important to keep in mind that although the items constituting these subfactors were endorsed at a low base rate, the nature of some of these items could lead to deleterious or unjust consequences. Most notable in this regard is the resources item "I wanted to give someone else a sexually transmitted disease (e.g., herpes, AIDS)" but also sexual motivators such as "I wanted to get a job," and "I wanted to get a promotion" may well lead to unfairness in the workplace by displacing more qualified candidates who are unwilling to exchange sex for career advancement. Thus, although these subfactors ranked lowest of all the sexual motivators endorsed by women in our study, they should not be considered unimportant.

In the present study, we replicated the factor structure reported by Meston and Buss [1] and noted comparably high reliability coefficients for both the primary factors and subfactors. With factor validation being extended to a wider age range of women, we propose that the 140-item version of the YSEX? Questionnaire may be useful for clinicians treating premenopausal women with sexual dysfunctions, particularly Hypoactive Sexual Desire Disorder, which is innately linked to a motivation to have or not have sex. At an item level, the questionnaire could serve as a useful

qualitative tool to help facilitate a dialog between treatment providers and female patients with self-reported sexual complaints. That is, clinicians may acquire a better understanding of the reasons (and associated affect of) why women have sex, or the underlying functions served by sexual activity, which may be a critical first step toward understanding and altering problematic sexual patterns.

A strength of the current study was the use of a geographically diverse North American sample that was diverse with regard to age, socioeconomic status (SES), and sexual orientation. Several study limitations also warrant mention. First, the number of stable traits that are known to be related to sexual decision making was not assessed, and these variables may have differed between age groups. These include personality factors such as perfectionism [14] and sensation seeking, religiosity [15], and sexual liberalism [16]. Second, health factors and levels of sexual function in either, or both, the women or her partner may also have differed between age groups and consequently moderated some of the study findings. Also worth noting is the fact that both the original compilation of reasons for engaging in sex, and the documentation reported both here and by Meston and Buss [1] of the frequencies and proportion of sexual activity the motives represent were conducted solely on North American women. Cross-cultural studies would possibly reveal different motives for engaging in sexual activity and/or different frequencies with which women engage in sex for various motives. Finally, because participants provided their responses via self-report on the Internet, the individuals' data cannot be verified, and therefore, the responses are not as reliable as data collected via face-to-face interviews. It has also been reported that the Internet population may have skewed demographic attributes (e.g., higher SES, younger age) [17]; however, our intentional recruitment of various age groups and the wide range of participants' economic statuses most likely preclude these biases.

Conclusions

The results of the present investigation indicate that women aged 31–45 years have more motives for engaging in sexual intercourse compared with women aged 18–30 years, but the primary reasons for engaging in sex do not differ within this former age range. Although women's motivations for sex were quite multifaceted, women aged 18–45 years reported having sex primarily for pleasure, and love

and commitment. The current investigation serves as a starting point for future studies on sexual motivation in women. Needed now are studies comparing sexual motives between premenopausal and postmenopausal women, and between sexually functional and dysfunctional women. With regard to the latter, information on motives for engaging in sex that differ between, for example, women with and without sexual desire concerns could have both diagnostic and treatment implications. Lastly, cross-sectional studies, such as the current one, do not account for the huge variability between women with respect to past sexual histories and/or individual sexual preferences. Of great value would be longitudinal research that monitors changes in sexual motivations as women age and pass through important life markers such as marriage, childbirth, and menopause.

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Appendix**Factor and Subfactor Items within the YSEX? [1]****Physical Reasons Factor**

Item	Item Description
<i>Stress Reduction subfactor</i>	
1.	I was frustrated and needed relief.
2.	I wanted to release anxiety/stress.
3.	I wanted to release tension.
4.	I was bored.
5.	It seemed like good exercise.
6.	I thought it would relax me.
7.	I'm addicted to sex.
8.	It would allow me to "get sex out of my system" so that I could focus on other things.
9.	I am a sex addict.
10.	I thought it would make me feel healthy.
11.	I hadn't had sex for a while.
12.	I wanted to satisfy a compulsion.
<i>Pleasure subfactor</i>	
13.	It feels good.
14.	I wanted to experience the physical pleasure.
15.	I was "horny."
16.	It's fun.
17.	I wanted the pure pleasure.
18.	I wanted to achieve an orgasm.
19.	It's exciting, adventurous.
20.	I was "in the heat of the moment."
<i>Physical Desirability subfactor</i>	
21.	The person had an attractive face.
22.	The person had a desirable body.
23.	The person had beautiful eyes.
24.	The person smelled nice.
25.	The person's physical appearance turned me on.
26.	I saw the person naked and could not resist.
27.	The person was a good dancer.
28.	The person was too physically attractive to resist.
29.	The person wore revealing clothes.
30.	The person was too "hot" (sexy) to resist.
<i>Experience Seeking subfactor</i>	
31.	I was curious about sex.
32.	I was curious about my sexual abilities.
33.	I wanted the experience.
34.	I wanted to experiment with new experiences.
35.	I wanted to see what all the fuss is about.
36.	I wanted to see what it would be like to have sex with another person.
37.	I wanted the adventure/excitement.
38.	I wanted to improve my sexual skills.
39.	I was curious about what the person was like in bed.
40.	I wanted to lose my inhibitions.
41.	I wanted to get the most out of life.
42.	I wanted to try out new sexual techniques or positions.
43.	The opportunity presented itself.
44.	I wanted to act out a fantasy.
45.	I wanted to see whether sex with a different partner would feel different or better.

Goal Attainment Factor

Item	Item Description
<i>Resources subfactor</i>	
46.	I wanted to get a raise.
47.	I wanted to punish myself.
48.	I wanted to get a job.
49.	I wanted to hurt/humiliate the person.
50.	I wanted to get a promotion.
51.	I wanted to give someone else a sexually transmitted disease (e.g., herpes, AIDS).
52.	Someone offered me money to do it.
53.	I wanted to feel closer to God.
54.	I wanted to make money.

Appendix Continued

Item	Item Description
55.	I wanted to have a child.
56.	I wanted to reproduce.
57.	It was an initiation rite to a club or organization.
58.	The person offered me drugs for doing it.
59.	I wanted to end the relationship.
60.	I wanted to be used or degraded.
<i>Social Status subfactor</i>	
61.	I wanted to be popular.
62.	I wanted to enhance my reputation.
63.	I wanted to have more sex than my friends.
64.	I was competing with someone else to "get the person."
65.	It would damage my reputation if I said "no."
66.	The person was famous and I wanted to be able to say I had sex with him/her.
67.	I thought it would boost my social status.
68.	My friends pressured me into it.
69.	It was a favor to someone.
70.	Someone dared me.
71.	I wanted to impress friends.
<i>Revenge subfactor</i>	
72.	I wanted to get back at my partner for having cheated on me.
73.	I was mad at my partner so I had sex with someone else.
74.	I wanted to get even with someone.
75.	I wanted to even the score with a cheating partner.
76.	I wanted to make someone else jealous.
77.	I wanted to break up rival's relationship by having sex with his/her partner.
78.	I was on the "rebound" from another relationship.
79.*	I wanted to make someone else jealous.
80.	I wanted to breakup another's relationship.
81.	I wanted to hurt an enemy.
<i>Utilitarian subfactor</i>	
82.	I wanted to get out of doing something.
83.	I wanted to burn calories.
84.	I wanted to keep warm.
85.	The person had taken me out for an expensive dinner.
86.	I wanted to get rid of a headache.
87.	I wanted to change the topic of conversation.
88.	I thought it would help me to fall asleep.
89.	I wanted to become more focused on work—sexual thoughts are distracting.
90.	I wanted to get a favor from someone.
91.	I wanted to defy my parents.
Emotional Factor	
Item	Item Description
<i>Love and Commitment subfactor</i>	
92.	I wanted to feel connected to the person.
93.	I wanted to increase the emotional bond by having sex.
94.	I wanted to communicate at a "deeper" level.
95.	I wanted to express my love for the person.
96.	I wanted to show my affection to the person.
97.	I wanted to intensify my relationship.
98.	I desired emotional closeness (i.e., intimacy).
99.	I wanted to become one with another person.
100.†	It seemed like the natural next step in my relationship.
101.	I realized I was in love.
102.†	It seemed like the natural next step in the relationship.
103.	I wanted to get a partner to express love.
104.	I wanted the person to feel good about himself/herself.
<i>Expression subfactor</i>	
105.	I wanted to welcome someone home.
106.	I wanted to say "I'm sorry."
107.	I wanted to say "thank you."
108.	I wanted to say "goodbye."
109.	I wanted to celebrate a birthday or anniversary or special occasion.
110.	I wanted to say "I've missed you."
111.	I wanted to lift my partner's spirits.

Insecurity Factor

Item	Item Description
<i>Self-Esteem Boost subfactor</i>	
112.	I wanted to feel powerful.
113.	I wanted to make myself feel better about myself.
114.	I wanted to boost my self-esteem.
115.	I wanted to feel attractive.
116.	I wanted my partner to notice me.
117.	I wanted the attention.
118.	I wanted to "gain control" of the person.
119.	I wanted to manipulate him/her into doing something for me.
120.	I felt insecure.
<i>Duty/Pressure subfactor</i>	
121.	I didn't know how to say "no."
122.	I was pressured into doing it.
123.	I felt obligated to.
124.	I was verbally coerced into it.
125.	I felt like it was my duty.
126.	I wanted him/her to stop bugging me about sex.
127.	My partner kept insisting.
128.	I felt like I owed it to the person.
129.	I was physically forced to.
130.	It was expected of me.
131.	I felt guilty.
132.	I didn't want to disappoint the person.
133.	I wanted to be nice.
<i>Mate Guarding subfactor</i>	
134.	I wanted to keep my partner from straying.
135.	I wanted to get my partner to stay with me.
136.	I wanted to decrease my partner's desire to have sex with someone else.
137.	I wanted to prevent a breakup.
138.	I was afraid my partner would have an affair if I didn't have sex with him/her.
139.	I wanted to ensure the relationship was "committed."
140.	I didn't want to "lose" the person.
141.	I wanted the person to love me.
142.	I thought it would help "trap" a new partner.

Respondents indicate on a 5-point Likert scale the proportion that each of the items reflects their total sexual experiences. Scale anchors are (1) None of my sexual experiences, (2) A few of my sexual experiences, (3) Some of my sexual experiences, (4) Many of my sexual experiences, (5) All of my sexual experiences. Subfactor scores are computed by adding the scores of the individual items that comprise the subfactor. Factor scores are computed by adding the scores of the items that comprise each of the subfactors under that specific factor.

*Because this item was erroneously included twice in the original YSEX? Questionnaire, one of these redundant items was removed from the current 140-item version of the YSEX?

†Because this item was erroneously included twice in the original YSEX? Questionnaire, one of these redundant items was removed from the current 140-item version of the YSEX?