

Sexual Boundaries: Who Pushes Them and Why?

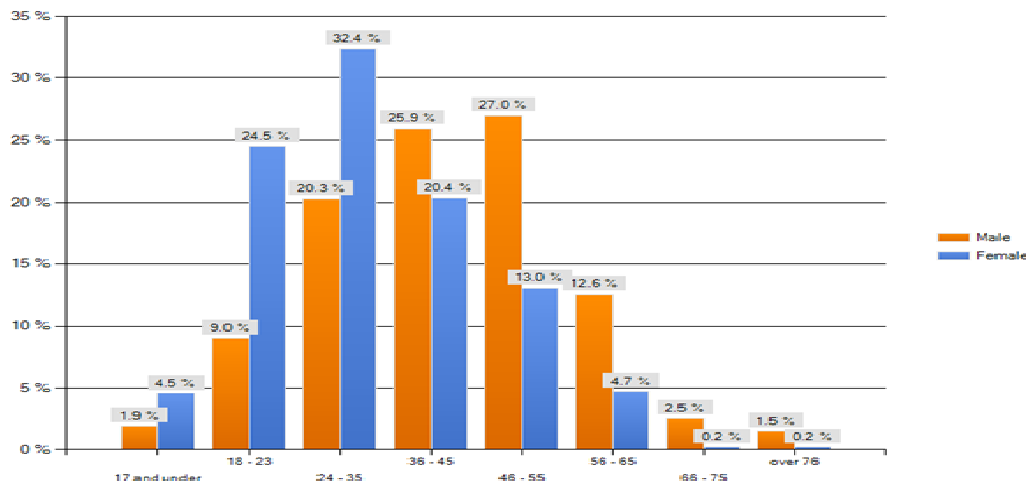
A Loveology University Survey conducted by Leanna Wolfe, Ph.D.

Between April 2008 and July 2009 1,006 men and women completed a 10-question Internet survey that explored the social and emotional context for the engagement of sexual boundaries. Particular focus was directed to the intersection between low sexual desire and appetite for sexual novelty. Respondents were from Loveology University as well as students and associates of Dr. Leanna Wolfe. Participation was voluntary; no financial compensation was offered. The survey was offered in tandem with the Loveology University survey on sexual cheating and attracted many of the same participants. Respondents may have been drawn to the emotionally charged topic of cheating and chosen afterwards to participate in this survey as well. Our completion rate was 99.8% with only two individuals declining to answer all of our questions.

Overview of Respondents

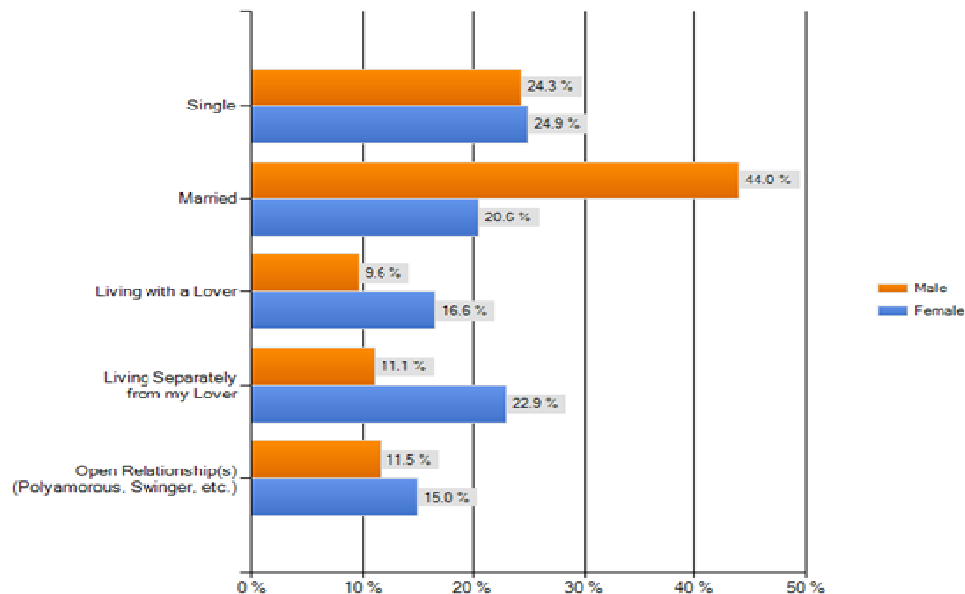
Males	48.0%
Females	51.2%
Transgender	0.8%

Age Distribution of Respondents



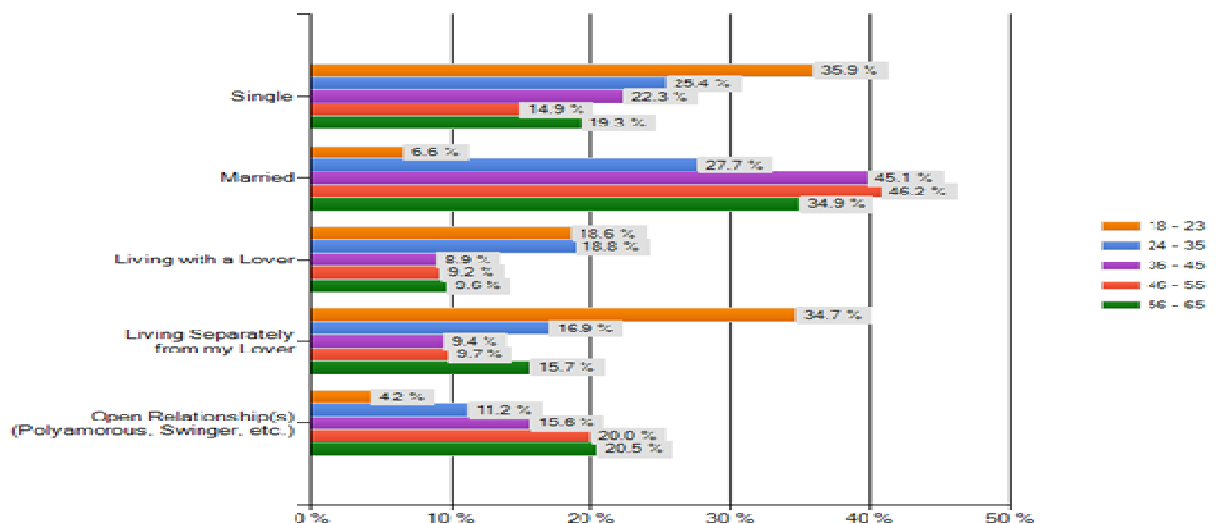
Just over 3% more females than males participated in this survey with 15.5% more females between ages 18-23 and 12.1% more females between 24-35. For those aged 36-45, 5.5% more males participated; while amongst those aged 46-55, 14% more males participated. In that just .8% of the survey's respondents were transgender, their responses were not calculated in gender analyses.

Relationship Status by Gender



While there was an equal proportion (24%) of single male and female participants, there were more than twice as many married males (44%) relative to married females (20.6%). More females than males were either living with a lover or living separately from their lovers, while the percentage of respondents in open relationships was high (13.6%) relative to the U.S. national average of between 1.7% and 6% (Wikipedia, 2009). This skewed distribution reflects the voluntary nature of the survey wherein people interested in sex and relationships chose to participate.

Relationship Status by Age

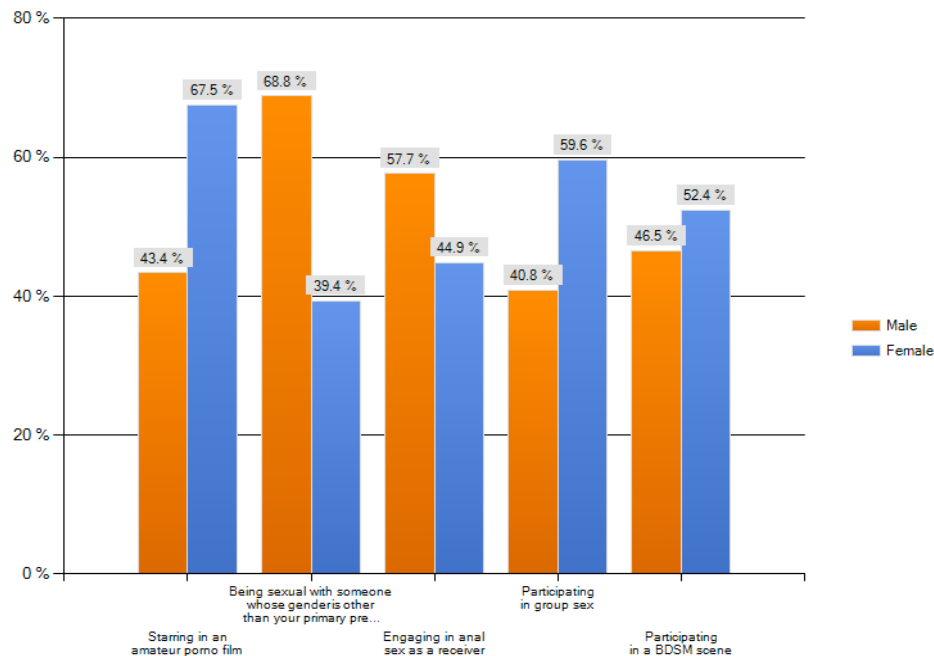


Respondents under 23 were most likely to be single or living separately from their lovers, while married respondents were most often between the ages of 36 and 55. Our high proportion of people in open relationships tended to be between 36 and 65.

Does Pushing/*Breaking* Sexual Boundaries Increase Sexual Excitement?

Jack Morin (1995) in his book, *The Erotic Mind*, contends that the breaking of sexual boundaries can be an important source of heightened eroticism. Certainly, some of what can make sex interesting are its taboo aspects. To explore this, we surveyed which boundaries might be exciting to break as well as those that would not be. Here we uncovered some distinct gender differences.

Activities Most Outside of Personal Sexual Boundaries



While we queried about 13 activities that could be outside of one's personal sexual boundaries, those that implied male-male sexual behavior were most often selected by male participants. Here 68.8% of males reported that they considered being sexual with someone whose gender is other than their primary preference to be beyond their sexual boundaries. Likewise 57.7% of males reported that engaging in receptive anal sex was also outside of their personal sexual boundaries. Female boundaries were more pronounced in exhibitionist behaviors including starring in an amateur porno film (67.5%) and participating in group sex (59.6%).

Taboo Activities that Sound Exciting

Next we invited participants to speculate about which of these same 13 activities (whether they'd done them or not) *sound* exciting. While each of the top five taboo activities, garnered some takers, only group sex enticed relatively high numbers of potential explorers.

Sexual Activity	Outside Personal Sexual Boundary	Consider Exciting
Star in Amateur Porno Film	55.7%	41.7%
Same Gender Sex	53.1%	36%
Receptive Anal Sex	51%	37.5%
Group Sex	50.5%	56.7%
BDSM	49.8%	38.9%

In considering why group sex was the most exciting taboo behavior, it may be most fruitful to consider why the others were not. The other four activities may involve a deeper psychological commitment that ultimately defines both sexual orientation and identity. In that amateur pornography stars are still pornography stars, for many of our respondents this would be completely inconceivable and thus uninteresting. For males, especially, activities that in any way imply a homosexual identity (here being same-gender sex and receptive anal sex) cannot be considered in any way erotic or pleasurable. As for BDSM, the distinctive behaviors and appetites as well as the investment in accoutrements, keep it in the realm of taboo for the majority of our respondents. Thus group sex has the least psychological and identity undertow. One can partake in a *ménage a trois* and ultimately maintain a non-kinky heterosexual identity. A couple can explore swinging for the adventure of it and leave with their identity intact. People only become *swingers*, if they participate repeatedly.

Pushing Sexual Boundaries

We explored the pushing of sexual boundaries in several ways. First we wanted to find out how it feels to push beyond one's boundaries. Respondents were asked to pick between "Interested," "Uncomfortable," "Scared," "Excited," "Violated," and "Never do this." Altogether the most popular choice was "Excited" (42.4%), while "Interested" (22.2%) was a distant second and "Uncomfortable" (18.3%) was a close third. Here are some comments that were shared in regards to the experience of pushing boundaries:

I NEVER BREAK my personal boundaries, but I will stretch on them to see if I am willing to go further in the moment. Female, 58

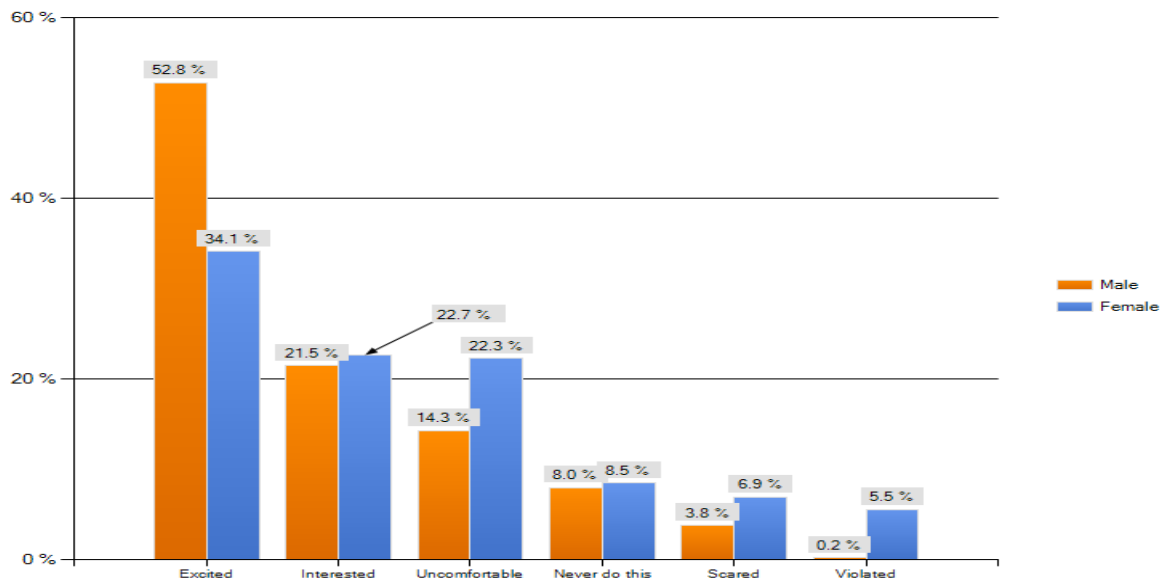
One of the boundary zones for me is aggression and pain. With a partner who WANTS to role-play and explicitly requests that I be aggressive, give them pain, etc. I will do that and can enjoy fulfilling the role. But it is a strong boundary for me NOT to do that without explicit agreement, even though I think that some partners WANT it but aren't willing to take responsibility for saying so. Male, 59

Those things listed here that I consider outside my boundaries are based in large part on my personal ethical code and my status as a professional in the community. Female, 23

I'm comfortable pushing boundaries in a structured environment - e.g., a workshop. Male, 50

The following graph illustrates gender differences in this regard wherein 52.8% of the males consider pushing sexual boundaries to be exciting while just 34.1% of females see it that way. In contrast females were more likely to report pushing sexual boundaries to be uncomfortable (22.3%), scary (6.9%) and violating (5.5%).

Gender Differences Regarding How it Feels to Push Sexual Boundaries



There are dramatic differences between males and females in regards to *excitement* over pushing sexual boundaries.

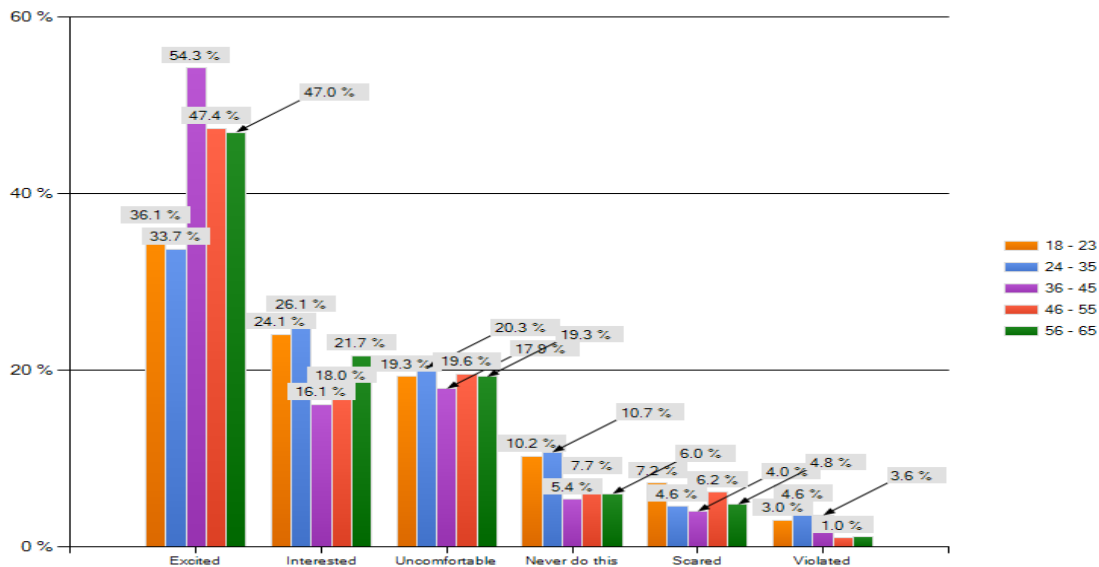
Here are comments from our respondents that illustrate these gender differences:

While sex on a first date seems very exciting, it rarely turns out to be very good. It turns out that an emotional connection is necessary for me to have very fulfilling sex. Female 53

My sexual boundaries were much narrower until I was about 33, then they became much broader for five years while I was being poly, and now I'm tightening them up again, partly to be consistent with monogamy and partly because I feel like I explored widely, and once the novelty is gone, there are some things I honestly don't enjoy, and so I've defined them as outside my boundaries again Male 44

My sexual boundaries are set by me. I don't want to be in porn because I teach kids, or I don't want to have an illicit affair because I think it's unethical. I'm not interested in having anyone push those boundaries. That said, there are definitely things that scare me but are also really hot, like being submissive, and exploring those edges with my (BDSM) Daddy is really fun. But that doesn't feel like my boundaries are being violated or even pushed, because it's all consensual and he doesn't play with edges I don't want him to play with. Female 35

How Age (and Experience) Impact the Pushing of Sexual Boundaries



We found that respondents over 36 are most likely to experience the pushing of sexual boundaries as *exciting*, while younger respondents were more likely to find it *interesting*. This may largely be a reflection on the impact of having had more years to become comfortable with sex and one's own sexuality. There was little difference amongst our age cohorts in regards to considering it *uncomfortable* to push one's of sexual boundaries.

New Partner vs. Known & Trusted Partner

To better understand the context for pushing/breaking one's sexual boundaries we had respondents address the impact of a new partner vs. a known and trusted partner. In that respondents could select more than one choice, 71% of those who selected "when I'm with a new partner" also selected "when I'm with someone I know and trust." Nonetheless there were differences between these two groups in that only 25.2% of those who selected the known and trusted partner also picked the new partner. Certainly these can be very different experiences. A new partner might trigger one to do and try things that had previously seemed taboo, dissipating feelings of guilt and shame. Meanwhile a familiar and trusted lover can become a co-conspirator in sexual exploration. Exploratory couples can generate a context for both novelty and emotional/physical safety. Comments from respondents:

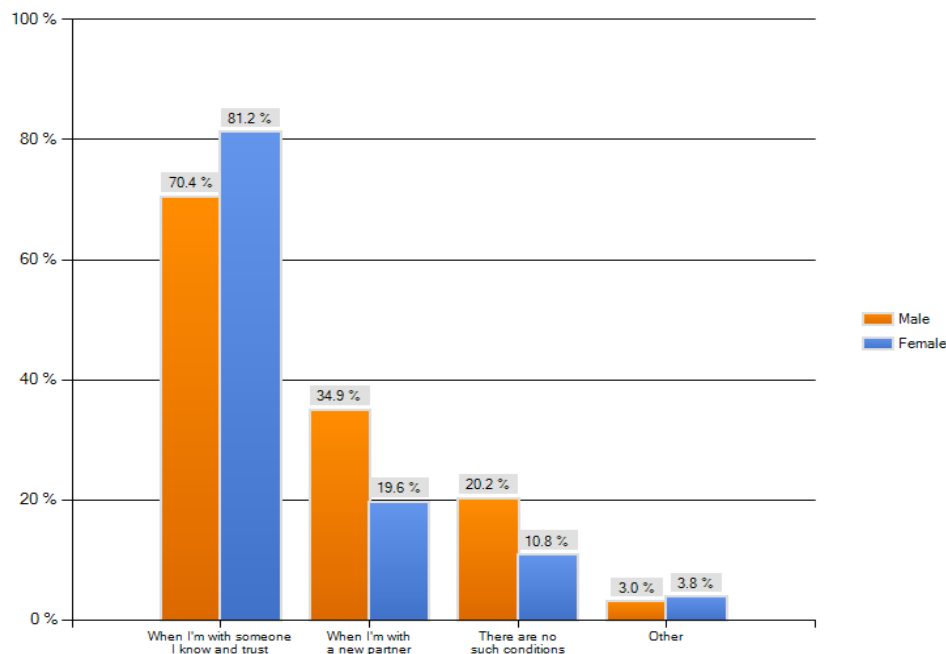
It is easier to get excited with a new partner because there is no baggage. Male 54

I think it depends on the situation. In some instances I would want someone known and trusted. In others I would prefer someone more anonymous so I wouldn't have to worry about being judged. Female, 33

New stuff is fun and exciting, but a mutually comfortable sexual ritual is, too. I don't lose interest in partners I've developed a ritual with. By ritual I mean doing sex the same way each time without a lot of variation. What turns me on most with my long term partners is that they desire me. Male, 60

Here, too, there were gender differences. Females were 10.8% more likely to prefer a known and trusted partner while males were 15.3% more likely to find that a new partner offers an appropriate context for pushing and/or breaking sexual boundaries.

The Impact of Gender on the Context for Pushing Sexual Boundaries



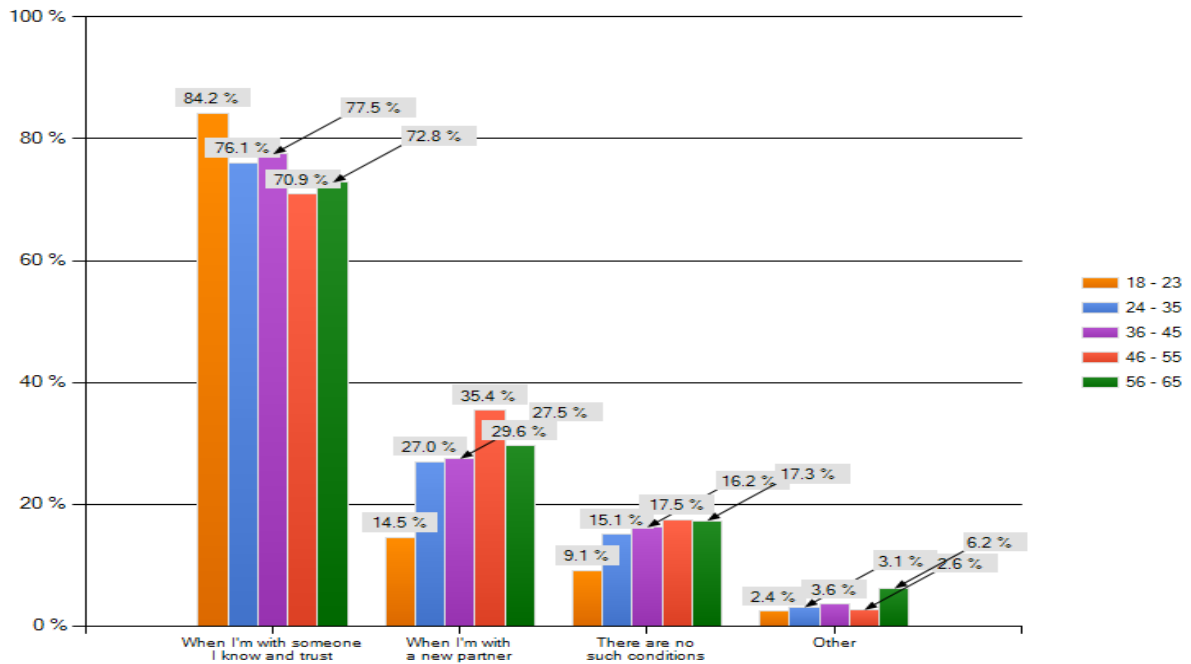
There are marked gender differences regarding the context for excitement. Males were much more drawn to the new partners becoming avenues towards heightened exploration and excitement. We can't say much about those who selected "There are no such conditions" in that this could mean they are uninterested/uncomfortable with breaking sexual boundaries or it could mean that they were so open to breaking boundaries that the context of a new vs. trusted partner was irrelevant.

If a hard limit is something that I am genuinely hurt or frightened of doing and a soft limit is something I dislike, I have very few hard limits, but many soft limits. I'm comfortable pushing and testing soft limits often (particularly if my lover is interested in something which is beyond those soft limits) because I believe I can learn to move past them and eroticize new experiences. Occasionally, I will even test my hard limits to reevaluate my feelings about them. Female 27

Some of my boundaries are boundaries in relation to a particular person . . . I suppose others are independent of the other person(s) if any. Male 57

My personal boundaries are VERY few, and limited only to things I will not do or find personally offensive. I do not break these boundaries. I guess a good analogy would be.... having a 'boundary' about not eating peanuts because you HATE peanuts.... You wouldn't break this 'boundary' because it is of absolutely no interest for you to do so. Female 33

Age As A Factor in Pushing/Breaking Sexual Boundaries



Age can certainly be a factor in assessing an appropriate context for the pushing/breaking of sexual boundaries. Younger people tend towards preferring a trusted partner while those between 46 and 55 are more likely to consider that a new partner could trigger heightened exploration and excitement. For this survey, participants in this age group tended to be married men whose passion for sexual novelty may be higher than their female counterparts.

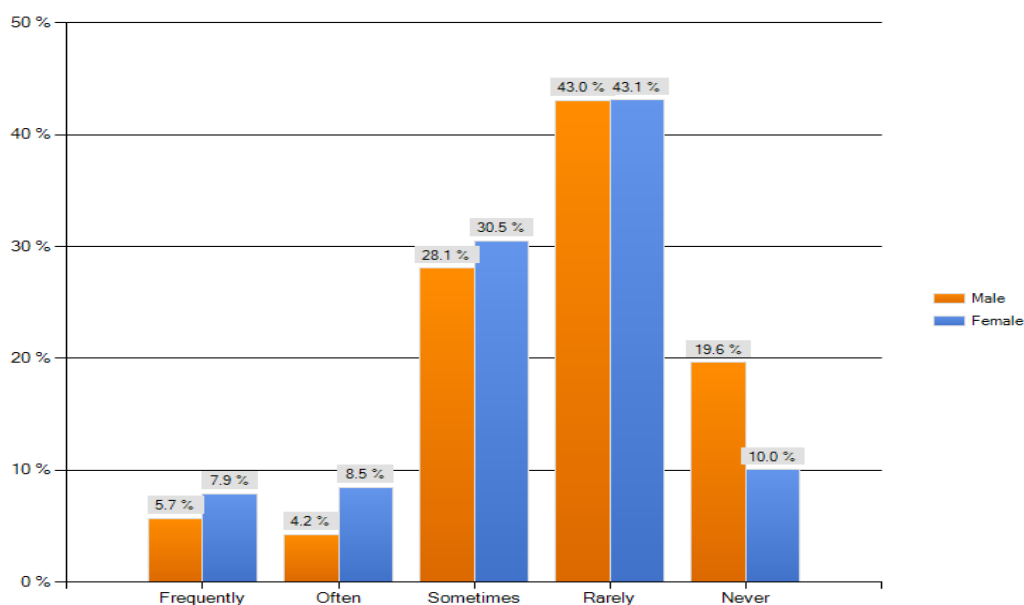
Low Sexual Desire

Finally we wanted to find out how people who report low sexual desire differ in their appetite for sexual novelty from those who do not. Sexological research has concluded that 31% of men and 43% of women suffer from low sexual desire (Laumann, Paik and Rosen, 1999). This has been expressed in low levels of sexual arousal and sexual excitement. For women, especially, its causes are a confluence of both physical and socio-psychological factors (Basson, 2005). Aging-related drops in testosterone levels can be a major physiological cause (Heiman, 2008). Our sample followed the trend with women reporting a greater frequency of low sexual desire than men, though altogether only 13.5% of our respondents reported significant low sexual desire relative to American average of 37%.

When I have low sexual desire, it is generally due to my being in a particular part of my hormonal cycle. All I have to do is wait, and desire returns. Female 28

As long as there's some physical attraction and all activities are negotiated and consensual...I'm game. Male, 46

The Impact of Gender on the Frequency of Low Sexual Desire



Following the trend, female rates for low sexual desire are higher than male rates. Nonetheless, 56.3% of our respondents report that they encounter low sexual desire rarely or never.

The Impact of Age on the Frequency of Low Sexual Desire

In that aging (re: testosterone loss) is considered a co-factor in low sexual desire, we expected to see a drop in desire amongst our older respondents. Interestingly, we our 56-65 cohort did not stand out from the survey average in its reporting of low sexual desire. Being a self selected cohort, clearly these individuals are interested in having sex! The one cohort that stood out (though slightly) in its frequency of reporting low sexual desire were those aged 24-35. Considering that these respondents are likely to be parents of babies and young children, a hearty appetite for sex may be on the back burner.

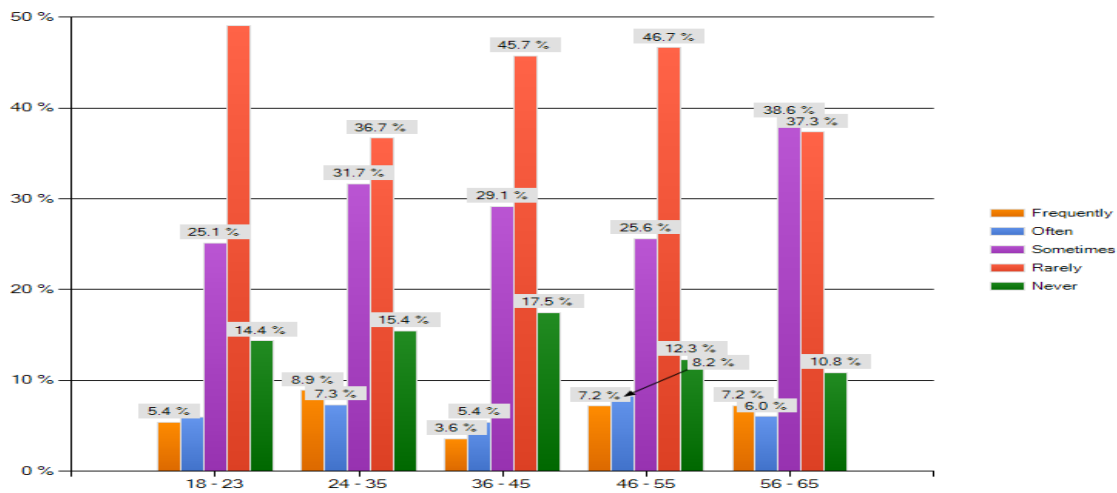
I sometimes have low sex drive, but I do not feel like I "suffer" from it. Female, 25

My partner and I have been together 23 years and I love that we have an open relationship, our sex seems to get better all the time, deeper, more loving, more bodily exciting and pleasurable. We most like to explore together, the two of us alone and with another person or two and in rituals and workshops. Female, 58

I'm in an 11 year relationship and my partner is lacking sexual drive. This is hard on me because I love sex with her and it makes me worry that we won't be able to rediscover the passion. Male, 36

I actively try to push my sexual boundaries. Both my partners are dragged along by this (as their boundaries are behind mine) which causes tension. This tension is not good for anyone's sexual well-being. Female, 23

How Age Impacts the Frequency of Low Sexual Desire

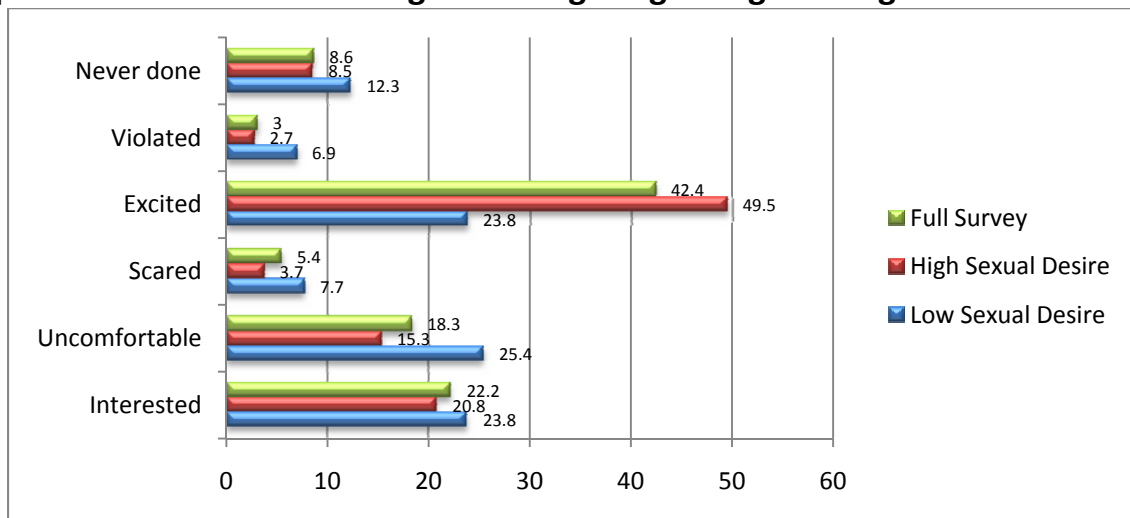


Young parents (aged 24-35) are the only respondents whose reports of low sexual desire were higher than our survey average.

Low vs. High Sexual Desire and Interest in Pushing Sexual Boundaries

We then compared the differences in response between those who reported “rare” or “no” low sexual desire with those who reported “frequent” or “often” low sexual desire. First we looked at how these selected cohorts feel about pushing beyond their sexual boundaries.

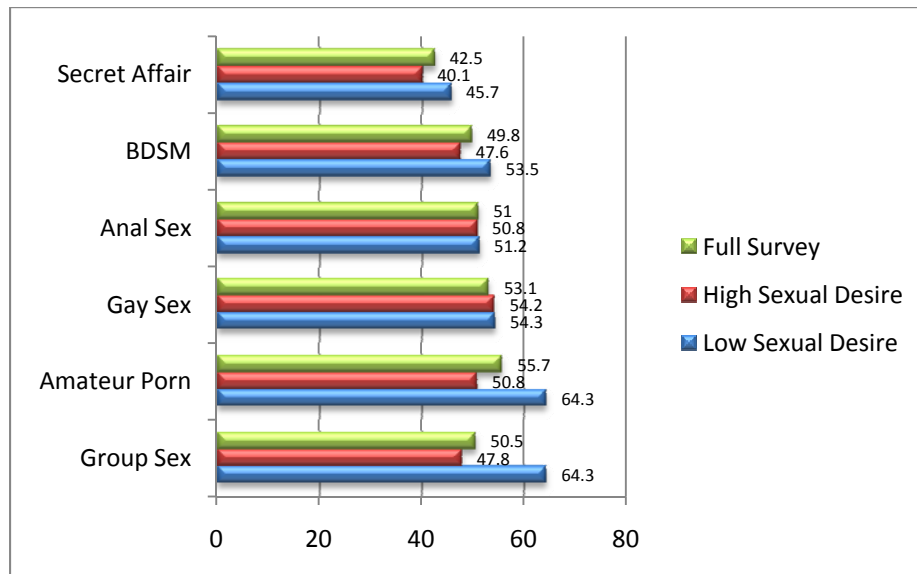
Impact of Sexual Desire Rating to Feelings Regarding Pushing Sexual Boundaries



Respondents reporting high sexual desire are most likely to consider the breaking of sexual boundaries to be exciting, while those reporting low sexual desire are more likely to consider breaking boundaries to be scary, violating and uncomfortable.

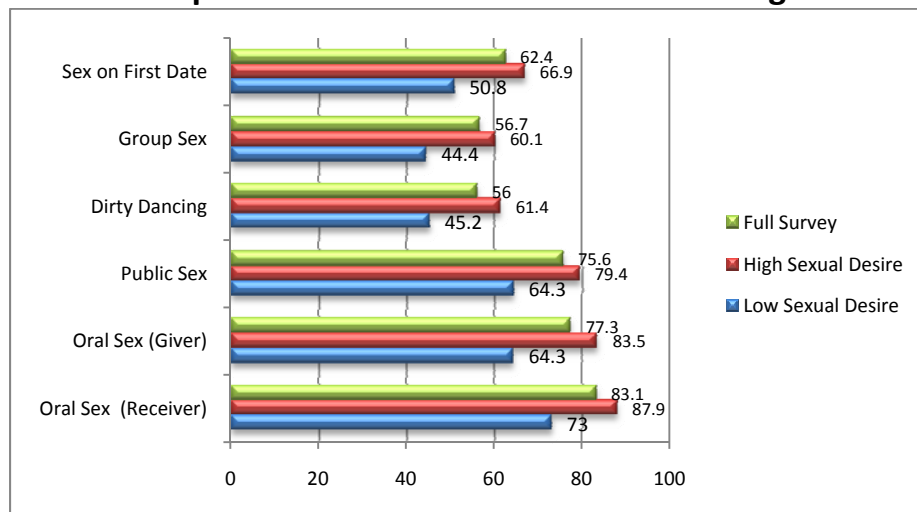
When we compare levels of sexual desire to activities that are considered *outside* of personal sexual boundaries, we find few differences amongst our three cohorts.

Activities Outside of Personal Sexual Boundaries



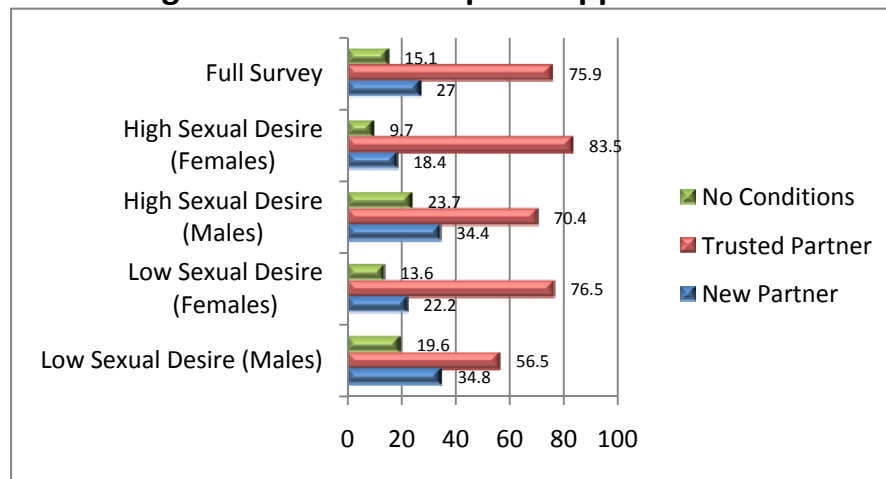
The areas where we see differences between those with high and low sexual desire are starring in an amateur pornography film and participating in group sex. For male-male sexual behaviors there are truly no differences between these two cohorts. High sexual desire respondents are just slightly more open to engaging in BDSM and secret affairs.

Top Sexual Activities That Sound Exciting



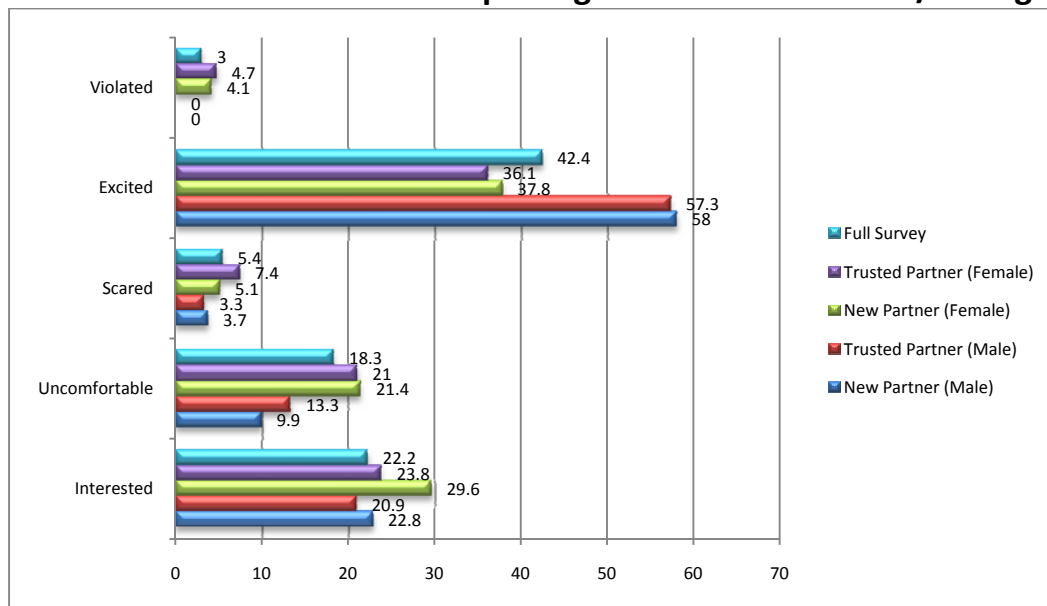
We see pronounced differences between respondents reporting high and low sexual desire for the six top areas of potential sexual excitement. Those reporting low sexual desire are between 16 and 19 percentage points lower than those reporting high sexual desire. The most dramatic difference is in giving oral sex, where low sexual desire respondents are 19.2 percentage points lower than those reporting high sexual desire.

How Low vs. High Sexual Desire Impacts Appetite for Sexual Novelty



Males, regardless of whether they report low or high sexual desire, have a dramatically higher preference for new partners while all females and high sexual desire males found value in exploring with trusted partners. Low sexual desire males have the least interest in trusted partners, perhaps hoping that a new partner might generate the excitement they otherwise don't access. Interestingly the high sexual desire females have the biggest interest in exploring with a trusted partner.

How People who Prefer Exploring Sexual Frontiers with a Trusted Partner Differ from those who Prefer Exploring with a New Partners/Strangers



Males are most likely to experience the pushing of sexual boundaries as *exciting*, whether they are with a new (58%) or trusted (57.3%) partner. Females, in contrast consider the pushing of sexual boundaries *exciting* on average, 20 percentage points less than males do. Altogether males found the most value in pushing boundaries new partners, with 80.8% finding it either *exciting* or *interesting*. Meanwhile, females are most likely to find it *uncomfortable* to push such boundaries, irrespective of whether they are with new or trusted partners. Females are also most likely to find it *scary* or *violating* to push new boundaries, with little difference between new or trusted partners.

Conclusions

Male-male sexual behaviors were most often outside of the personal sexual boundaries of male respondents.

Female sexual boundaries were most pronounced in exhibitionist behaviors including starring in an amateur porno film and participating in group sex.

Group sex was the one sexual behavior that was both outside of the personal boundaries of most participants and considered exciting.

Males are most likely to experience the pushing of sexual boundaries as exciting, whether they are with a new (58%) or trusted (57.3%) partner. Females, in contrast, consider the pushing of sexual boundaries exciting on average, 20 percentage points less than males do.

Females were more likely to report pushing sexual boundaries to be uncomfortable (22.3%), scary (6.9%) and violating (5.5%), regardless if they are with new or trusted partners.

Females (81.2%) were more likely than males (70.4%) to prefer a known and trusted partner for pushing and/or breaking sexual boundaries

Males find the most value in pushing boundaries with new partners, with 80.8% finding it either exciting or interesting.

*Those over 36 are most likely to experience the pushing of sexual boundaries as **exciting**, while younger respondents were more likely to find it **interesting**.*

Younger people tend towards preferring a trusted partner while those between 46 and 55 are more likely to consider that a new partner could trigger heightened exploration and excitement.

Those reporting high sexual desire are most likely to consider the pushing/ breaking of sexual boundaries to be exciting, while those reporting low sexual desire are more likely to consider pushing/breaking boundaries to be scary, violating and uncomfortable.

There is a 17.5% difference between those reporting high vs. low sexual desire for the six top areas of potential sexual excitement: giving and receiving oral sex, sex in a public place, sex on a first date, dirty dancing with a stranger and group sex. The most dramatic difference is in giving oral sex, where low sexual desire respondents are 19.2 percentage points lower than those reporting high sexual desire.

Males, regardless of whether they report low or high sexual desire, have a dramatically higher preference for new partners while all females and high sexual desire males find value in exploring with trusted partners. Low sexual desire males have the least interest in trusted partners, while high sexual desire females have the greatest interest in exploring with a trusted partner.

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Appendix

Sexual Boundaries Survey Questionnaire

Sexual Boundaries

1. Sexual Boundaries Survey

At Loveology University we're exploring the connection between sexual excitement and the breaking of sexual boundaries. Considering how often long term couples report having low sexual desire, we're wondering whether the pushing of personal sexual boundaries can provide a valuable antidote. Please help us by answer the following questions! Do note that the information you share here will remain completely anonymous; your personal answers will be disclosed to no one.

2. Sexual Boundaries Survey

1. How often do you suffer from low sexual desire?

☐ Frequently

☐ Sometimes

☐ Never

☐ Often

☐ Rarely

2. How do you feel when you push beyond your sexual boundaries?

☐ Interested

☐ Scared

☐ Violated

☐ Uncomfortable

☐ Excited

☐ Never do this

3. Which of these activities are outside of your personal sexual boundaries? (select all that apply)

☐ Having sex on a first date

☐ Engaging in anal sex as a receiver

☐ Being sexual with someone whose gender is other than your primary preference.

☐ Dirty dancing with a stranger

☐ Engaging in anal sex as a penetrator

☐ Starring in an amateur porno film

☐ Participating in group sex

☐ Receiving oral sex

☐ Having a secret affair

☐ Participating in a BDSM scene

☐ Giving oral sex

☐ Having sex in a public place

☐ None of these

☐ Engaging in cyber sex with a stranger

Sexual Boundaries

4. Which of these activities (whether you've done them or not) sound exciting? (select all that apply)

☐ Starring in an amateur porno film

☐ Engaging in anal sex as a penetrator

☐ Engaging in cyber sex with a stranger

☐ Having sex on a first date

☐ Receiving oral sex

☐ Being sexual with someone whose gender is other than your primary preference

☐ Dirty dancing with a stranger

☐ Giving oral sex

☐ Participating in a BDSM scene

☐ Participating in group sex

☐ Having a secret affair

☐ Other

☐ Engaging in anal sex as a receiver

☐ Having sex in a public place

Other (please specify)

5. Under what conditions does breaking/pushing your personal sexual boundaries excite you? (select those that apply)

☐ When I'm with a new partner

☐ There are no such conditions

☐ When I'm with someone I know and trust

☐ Other

Other (please specify)

6. When I have sex I most often want it to be:

	very	somewhat	barely	not at all
Exciting	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Nurturing	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Loving	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Safe	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Emotionally Fulfilling	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

7. Tell us your sex.

☐ Male

☐ Female

☐ Transgender

Sexual Boundaries

8. How old are you?

☐ 17 and under

☐ 36 - 45

☐ 66 - 75

☐ 18 - 23

☐ 46 - 55

☐ over 76

☐ 24 - 35

☐ 56 - 65

9. What best describes your relationship status?

☐ Single

☐ Living Separately from my Lover

☐ Married

☐ Open Relationship(s) (Polyamorous, Swinger, etc.)

☐ Living with a Lover

10. Your Comments?