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Hands On: Sexual Satisfaction, Communication, and Clay-work

Capstone Thesis

Lesley University

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Abstract

The topics of sexual satisfaction, communication, and behaving communally towards each other piques the interest of lay people and academics alike. Yet, what is less researched is the potential of art making with clay to influence sexual communication and satisfaction. The innate physicality of (co-) creating has the potential to increase our attunement with our own and each other's bodies. This in turn has the possibility to directly affect sexual satisfaction and communication. Through the creation of a method and its implementation with three couples and one individual, presented as case studies, this thesis investigates clay-work's ability to influence sexual satisfaction, promote communication, and encourage communal behaviors. The use of clay-work was found to have varying effects on the participants. Themes of communication styles, the dynamic of sexual communication and satisfaction, verbal and non-verbal communication, unstructured play, and trauma arose during the interviews. Ultimately, this study's method highlighted a unique spectrum of effects clay-work can have on individuals and couples.

Keywords: sexual satisfaction, sexual communication, communication, clay-work, communal behaviors, Index of Sexual Satisfaction, Mutual Communal Behaviors Scale, couples therapy, marital therapy, sex therapy, art therapy

Hands On: Sexual Satisfaction, Communication, and Clay-work

As social beings living in concert with ourselves and each other, the need for valuable communication is paramount. We communicate using negotiation, implicit and explicit dialogue, and attentive consideration. Those same qualities can be located in making and observing art. Expression, in its various forms, is given a space and focus during the act of engaging with art materials.

Given the guidance to incorporate expression into an intimate space, artistic creations have the potential to intensify communication between both the maker and a partnership. The inherent physicality of art making, specifically clay-work, opens the doors to sexual communication and ultimately sexual satisfaction. Touching, the body, the verbal, the non-verbal, and connection becomes intertwined while we make art.

How does the process and intimacy of (co-) creating with clay have an effect on sexual communication as it relates to sexual satisfaction? When we are focused on our bodies in those distinctively intimate and physical ways, can we communicate better with ourselves and each other? Can making and observing art making be the gateway to greater satisfaction when experiencing the other? This researcher sought to examine these questions by creating a method to address the dynamic between sexual satisfaction, sexual communication, and clay-work.

The concept and practice of sexual satisfaction is deeply intertwined, if not synonymous, with sexual pleasure. To feel satisfied is to experience pleasure. Pascoal, Narciso, and Pereira (2014) found that mutual pleasure is the predominant factor to sexual satisfaction. With the ability to identify what brings you pleasure, the doors of engagement open. A unified understanding of sexual satisfaction and pleasure between partners is the conduit to fully utilizing and effecting sexual communication.

Sexual communication, as it differs from other forms of communication, plays a significant role in sexual and relationship satisfaction. Jones, Robinson, and Seedall (2018) defined sexual communication as the “communicative dynamics behind sexual conversations” (p. 607). Therefore, sexual communication is conversation around personal sexual preferences and desires. Yoo and Bartle-Haring (2014) concluded that communication influences both the emotional and sexual facets of a relationship, ultimately influencing relationship satisfaction.

Under the framework of a communal model, relationship dynamics influences the motivations from which a partner behaves. Sexual communication around content and processes is paramount to sexual satisfaction. Positive sexual communication and a collective adherence to a communal model behave as components of sexual satisfaction.

Clark, Dubash, and Mills (1998) found that a mutual desire for a communal relationship increases consideration to each other’s needs. (Co-) creating mimics and stimulates the paralleled interplay in a communal relationship. The process and success, identified broadly as a positive outcome, in artistic creation is often tied to a consideration of the other.

Sholt and Gavron (2006) wrote “clay... can echo our primitive modes of existence and communication” (p. 69). Clay-work caters to a unique and distinct experience of embodiment that perhaps is unmatched in other worldly interactions. The act of touching is characteristic of art making, more specifically clay-work. Exchanges made with clay can evoke intimacy, new words and speech, and a bridge from the non-verbal to the verbal.

Literature Review

Sexual Satisfaction

Sexual satisfaction is deeply personal, embedded in our bodies and minds. Finding language that both describes and expresses can often be elusive. Pascoal et al. (2014) researched

the question: “How do individuals in committed, exclusive, heterosexual relationships define sexual satisfaction?” (p. 23). Pascoal et al. (2014) utilized an online survey to ask men and women who identified as being in committed, cohabitating, heterosexual relationships.

Ultimately, Pascoal et al. (2014) found that mutual pleasure is central to sexual satisfaction.

The crux of the survey was the open-ended question: “How would you define sexual satisfaction?” (Pascoal et al., 2014, p. 24). From the participants’ responses, various themes were identified in language choice. Keywords were divided into three levels of themes. The main level included personal sexual well-being and dyadic processes. Subthemes of dyadic processes included intimacy, ludic sexuality, and frequency. The more specific themes of positive feelings, pleasure, orgasm, sexual openness, arousal, desire, romance, expression of feelings, mutuality, creativity, and acting out desires were included in the first of level of codes (Pascoal et al., 2014, p. 27). Pascoal et al. (2014) concluded that for “heterosexual people in an exclusive dyadic, cohabitating relationship the concept of sexual satisfaction could be defined as the emotional experience of frequent mutual sexual pleasure” (p. 27).

Rye and Meaney (2007), through their own research and review of Canadian and U.S. literature on sexual activity and behavior, compiled an extensive (but not exhaustive) list of various sexual activities. Rye and Meaney (2007) aimed to show “how pleasure is a primary motivator for sexual activity and how social constructions of sexuality are built around this fundamental desire for sexual pleasure” (p. 29). Their findings echoed Pascoal et al.’s (2014) conclusions.

From their compilation, Rye and Meaney (2007) drew some thought-provoking conclusions. They found that “of all sexual behaviors, masturbation seems most clearly motivated by pleasure, or at least release of tension” (p. 33). In reference to casual sex that can

occur while on vacation, such as spring break, Rye and Meaney (2007) wrote, “the fact that some will go through so much trouble for the purpose of having sex lends credence to the unspoken value we place on sexual pleasure” (p. 44). Rye and Meaney’s (2007) and Pascoal et al.’s (2014) results illustrated and enhanced the notion that pleasure is the primary motivation of sexual activities and ultimately sexual satisfaction.

Hudson, Harrison, and Crossup (1981) created the Index of Sexual Satisfaction (ISS), “a 25-item self-report scale that measures the degree or magnitude of sexual discord or dissatisfaction of one’s relationship with a partner. The ISS was specifically developed for ... evaluating the quality of the sexual relationship between partners” (p. 157). The ISS is “short, easy to administer and score, relevant to treatment outcome, applicable for use in repeated administrations, and ... indicate instrument reliability and validity” (p. 157). The creation of the ISS was to offer therapists and researchers a tool to measure these qualities, which had been lacking in previous measurements.

Sexual Communication

As mentioned, communication centering around the sexual aspects of a relationship, greatly influences sexual and relationship satisfaction. Jones et al. (2018) utilized six different assessments to measure sexual self-disclosure, communication patterns, sexual and couples’ satisfaction, sexual intercourse frequency, and relationship duration. Among the many results, they found that “sexual communication content and processes were significantly associated with sexual satisfaction” (p. 618). Topics addressed in sexual conversations were identified as the content. Attitudes towards sexuality, power dynamics, and emotional safety were incorporated in sexual communication processes.

In relationship to the presence of objects within an intimate space, Jones et al. (2018) wrote, “while couples may commonly employ new sexual accessories or acts to improve their sexual relationship, we can infer from our findings that the very discussion of novelty (e.g., sex toys, new positions, role plays) might possibly be the vehicle of increasing sexual function and satisfaction in couples” (p. 619). This result is echoed by McCarthy and Fucito (2005, as cited in Jones et al., 2018) by reporting that novelty was found as less effective when it is not integrated through communication and negotiation. Further research to include hand-made objects will expand and personalize this finding.

Yoo and Bartle-Haring (2014) investigated the interplay between couple communication, emotional intimacy, sexual satisfaction, and relationship satisfaction. Previous research, as highlighted by Yoo and Bartle-Haring (2014), found that communication is a paramount factor to intimacy in a romantic relationship. When communication thrives so does intimacy and vice versa. The purpose of Yoo and Bartle-Haring’s (2014) study addressed the limitations apparent in previous research. Their study intentionally considered the overlap of emotional and sexual intimacy as opposed to separating the two. The study also adjusted the scope of focus from an individual level to a dyadic one.

Yoo and Bartle-Haring’s (2014) goals were to “first to assess emotional intimacy and sexual satisfaction in relationships separately, to test their respective influences on relationship satisfaction in a sample of different-sex married couples” and examine “whether emotional intimacy and sexual satisfaction were reciprocally related within spouses” (p. 277). Using a sample group of 335 couples, Yoo and Bartle-Haring (2014) measured couple communication, emotional intimacy, sexual satisfaction, and relationship satisfaction.

Yoo and Bartle-Haring's (2014) results indicated that "the influences of sexual satisfaction emotional intimacy were significant for both husbands and wives, while emotional intimacy did not seem to have significant influences on sexual satisfaction" (pp. 287-288). They also found that "spouses were more likely to feel emotionally and sexually intimate with their partners when they perceived that their partners' communication style was more positive, and their increased intimacy, in turn, increased relationship satisfaction" (p. 288). Yoo and Bartle-Haring (2014) drew the conclusion that "the reason partners are not satisfied with their relationship may be specifically due to their low levels of emotional intimacy and sexual satisfaction, which may have been affected by their partners' ineffective communication patterns" (pp. 288-289). Ultimately, Yoo and Bartle-Haring's (2014) study continues to validate the assumption that a partner's communication influences emotional and sexual aspects of intimacy, "while their sexual aspect of intimacy influences their emotional aspect of intimacy; partners' perceptions of emotional and sexual aspects of intimacy are then associated with their relationship satisfaction" (p. 290).

Litzinger and Gordon (2005) hypothesized that for couples who communicate constructively "sexual satisfaction fails to contribute to marital satisfaction. Alternatively, if couples have difficulty communicating but are sexually satisfied, they will experience greater marital satisfaction than if they have a less satisfying sexual relationship" (p. 409).

Utilizing a variety of measurements, the Inventory of Specific Relationship Standards, Communications Patterns Questionnaire, and the Dyadic Adjustment Scale, Litzinger and Gordon (2005) surveyed 387 married couples. The couples were mailed questionnaires to answer separately, given the opportunity to note their responses, and then mailed back.

Litzinger and Gordon (2005) verified their claims. They found that “sexual satisfaction and constructive communication patters were both strongly predictive of marital satisfaction... sexual satisfaction my indeed mitigate the effects of destructive communication on marital satisfaction and vice versa” (p. 417). These results made several assertions. In terms of martial satisfaction, strong communication skills could decrease the need and reliance upon a strong sex life. Although the alternative could also be true. “Sexual satisfaction may be able to compensate for some of the negative effects that poor communication may have on relationship satisfaction” (p. 419).

Communal Model

The discussion of a communal model versus an exchange model within relationships is an ongoing one within the field. Exchange relationships rely upon concepts of rewards, costs, expectations, and benefits. “The rules governing exchange relationships do not involve a concern for needs” (Clark et al., 1998, p. 248). Communal relationships, though, focus on mutual interests in another’s welfare while also considering their own needs. “Benefits are given in response to needs to demonstrate concern for the other” (Clark et al., 1998, p. 247). In a communal relationship, benefits do not create debts. Clark et al. (1998) found that a mutual desire for a communal relationship increases consideration to each other’s needs.

Muise and Impett (2014) investigated the hypothesis that “people should feel especially satisfied with and committed to their relationships if they have a partner who is highly motivated to meet their sexual needs” (p. 164). This claim was framed within the context of a communal model. Muise and Impett (2014) tied the idea of “communal strength” to sexual desire and marital satisfaction (p. 165).

Muise and Impett (2014) ran their study using 118 heterosexual couples. All of the couples were living together, with majority married or engaged. Utilizing online surveys, Muise and Impett (2014) measured sexual communal strength, relationship satisfaction, commitment, daily relationship satisfaction, and daily commitment. They found that sexual communal strength was significantly correlated to daily relationship satisfaction, commitment, and general communal strength.

In response to these initial results, Muise and Impett (2014) conducted a second study to “test the prediction that people higher in sexual communal strength have partners who report higher daily relationship quality because they are perceived by their partners as more responsive to their needs during sex” (p. 167). Muise and Impett (2014) discovered that “individuals with higher in sexual communal strength had partners who tended to have higher relationship quality” (pp. 168-169). Muise and Impett (2014) made the point that “although sexual communal strength and communal strength are overlapping to a certain extent, communal motivation in the specific domain of sexuality was a unique predictor of the quality of intimate bonds” (p. 169).

Pascoal et al. (2014), as previously mentioned, echoed the idea of the communal model in their research. Pascoal et al. (2014) found that the participants “focused on the positive aspects of sexuality (e.g., pleasure, well-being); in other words, they focused on rewards rather than on the absence of negative aspects or sexual costs” (p. 27). This finding could potentially support a more communal model of sexual satisfaction rather than an exchange based model.

The Mutual Communal Behaviors Scale (MCBS) was created by Williamson and Schultz (1995) as a way to measure the concept of the communal relationship theory. “Communal relationships are exemplified by behaviors that are responsive to (or indicative of a desire to respond to) a partner’s needs” (p. 94). The MCBS, while created in this context to address the

dynamic of caring for a family member with cancer, was ultimately found to be “psychometrically sound in terms of assessing a unitary construct, producing reliable results over time... [also] the added advantage of being brief and easy to administer” (pp. 111-112).

Sexuality and Clay-work

In the workshop titled ‘Am I a Lesbian’, Ellis (2007) invited several women to use art materials to answer, “What is your experience of your sexuality now?” (p. 62). Ellis (2007) found that “through their artwork the women in the group discovered an embodying language for their ambiguity and uncertainty and, through describing their imagery, they found new words and new speech” (p. 62). The interconnection of language, discovery, expression, art making, and sexuality is apparent. It was through both the non-verbal interaction with the materials and subsequent describing that the women found new words and new speech.

Ellis (2007) distilled this concept down further to the very act of touching. Ellis (2007) wrote “as a gestural language of touching, artmaking is particularly valuable language for the exploration of sexualities. Art media are extensions of our embodied subjectivities” (p. 65). Ellis (2007) also wrote, “touching is not an external expression of an inner feeling of intimacy; touching *is* that intimacy” (p. 65). Often a component and facet of sexual communication and satisfaction is physical connection, touching. Touching is intimacy made flesh. This act is found in both sexual connection and in art making.

A pillar and often origin point for Ellis’s (2007) research is located in Merleau-Ponty’s contributions. Integrating Merleau-Ponty’s philosophical concepts, Skaife (2001) synthesized and expanded upon the idea of “intersubjectivity”, “the centrality of the body”, and “art-making

is to be understood as inseparable from our relations with others and the world, and in making it we are engaged in an interactive process of becoming” (p. 40).

Skaife (2001) wrote, “Merleau-Ponty is talking about things *becoming* visible, a dynamic interchange between the visible and invisible” (p. 44). Skaife (2001) also noted, “it is in the making of something, that is in-between the visible and the invisible, that a person ‘becomes’. And, in making something an individual contributes to what is in the world and therefore becomes connected” (p. 45). Again, through the act of making, individuals connect themselves to the world and those around them. The verbal, non-verbal, visible, invisible is made tangible and a tool to connection.

Particularly investigating health care professionals, Acai, McQueen, McKinnon, and Sonnadara (2016) focused on the dynamic between teamwork and communication skills by reviewing the current literature. Both components are of the utmost importance when considering patient care and safety. Acai et al. (2016) asked the question: “Should we make greater use of the arts in the development of teamwork and communication skills among health professionals, and if so, why?” (p. 63).

Research, as highlighted by Acai et al. (2016), asserted that the “fostering of an empathetic imagination” aids in interpersonal connection and insight (p. 62). Although teamwork and communication skills are difficult to teach, the inclusion of the visual and performing arts allow for creative teaching techniques to stimulate the empathetic imagination.

Drawing from a variety of databases, Acai et al. (2016) focused on the visual arts and the performing arts. Previous research made various thought-provoking conclusions concerning the inclusion of the visual arts. In reference to group work, Acai et al. (2016) wrote “engaging in art as a group can help reveal strengths and weaknesses of the team and help participants feel more

comfortable addressing these areas” (p. 65). In a different study, following an art intervention, participants “felt they had gained valuable interpersonal skills including learning to appreciate multiple points of view... listening skills... collaboration and the group process... learning not to jump to conclusions” (p. 65).

In terms of the performing arts, Acai et al. (2016) noted that surgical performance and improvisation are strongly correlated. Participants engaging in a workshop titled “Performing Medicine”, reported the following themes after the session: interpersonal skill development, broader awareness of others, and communication skills. Dramatic arts have been found to promote trust, camaraderie, vulnerability, sense of belonging, and movement outside of your comfort zone.

Acai et al.’s (2016) concluded that the positive outcomes of “arts-based development opportunities” were: “work effectively with individuals from different backgrounds; notice and appreciate multiple perspectives; understand group processes, including sources of team conflict and dysfunction; and listen to and provide empathy and support to others” (p. 69).

Through the inclusion of case study reports and a literature review, Barth and Kinder (1985) dove into the impact of art therapy within marital and sex therapy. Sarrel (1981, as cited by Barth & Kinder, 1985) noted, “the primary purpose of using these [art therapy] techniques in couples therapy is to highlight the interactional processes underlying the relationship between the spouses” (p. 193).

Although referring to picture making techniques, Wadson (1972, as cited by Barth & Kinder, 1985) identified five unique advantages of including art in marital therapy: immediacy, genuineness, spatial expression, permanence, and shared pleasure. Immediacy and shared pleasure are of particular interest. Immediacy acknowledges that “since both members of the

couple are engaged in a concurrent task, they are able to examine their own and each other's manner of handling it" (p. 195). Shared pleasure acknowledges that "making seems like play or a game and has an aspect of fun... the shared spontaneity of creativity may produce for the couple an experience of togetherness which they had been unable to find elsewhere" (p. 196).

Immediacy and shared pleasure can also be found in clay-work. Clay-work finds its roots deeply embedded in history and our bodies. Clay-work can evoke what Kaplan (1983, as cited by Barth & Kinder, 1985) identified as "the clients' wish to merge – a basic human desire to relate to another person on a fundamental level" (p. 197). Sholt and Gavron (2006) wrote "clay-work involves a very primal mode of expression and communication. Touch in clay-work also requires body movements in endless opportunities for touching and modeling. Thus clay-work makes possible an entire non-verbal language or communication for the creator" (p. 67).

Sholt and Gavron (2006) reflected upon the "diagnostic and therapeutic qualities" of clay-work through a review of the current literature (p. 66). Sholt and Gavron (2006) highlighted six major therapeutic factors: facilitating expression of emotions, facilitating catharsis, revealing unconscious materials, facilitating rich and deep expressions, facilitating verbal communication, and concretization and symbolization: the embodiment of inner representations in visual images. A couple of points were of particular note: Jorstad (1965, as cited in Sholt & Gavron, 2006) wrote that with the inclusion of clay-work "verbal communication often became easier and the patients' possibility of emotional experience and insight increased in the therapy-situation" (p. 70). Also, the act of concretization, "the process in which thoughts, feelings, fantasies, and conflicts are embodied in concrete objects, and also in the process of sculpting and through observing the product because of its facilitating symbolization" (Sholt & Gavron, 2006, p. 70), arises when engaging in clay-work.

The conclusion that art therapy can be effective with communication and sexual satisfaction is potentially obvious in previous research. Yet, although quite dated, as Barth and Kinder (1985) noted, “very little has been published... thus, the literature as a whole is limited and somewhat redundant” (p. 196). This still remains true in the present time.

Methods

Participants

This study consisted of seven self-selected participants: MS, RB, MM, JG, JJ, TB, and BB. These participants were known to the researcher prior to the study. Six of the seven participants were in a relationship with each other. One of the participants identified as single. There were four male-identified and three female-identified participants. Their ages ranged from 27-53 years old.

MS and RB. MS was a “mixed race/Asian and Filipino-American”, 30-year-old male. He identified his relationship status as “married, open, non-monogamous” and sexual orientation as “gay”. MS was partnered with RB. RB was a “Caucasian”, 33-year-old male. His relationship status was “married with a baby” and considered himself a “gay man”. MS and RB have been together for 11 years and married for 5 of those years. MS and RB were interviewed together.

MM and JG. MM was a 27-year-old male of “White/European descent”, in a dating, monogamous relationship. He identified as “straight”. MM was dating JG. JG was a 33-year-old female of “White/European descent”. She was in a “committed relationship” and identified as “straight”. MM and JG have been in a relationship for almost 2 years. MM and JG were interviewed separately.

TB and BB. TB was a 31-year-old, “AfroCaribbean POC” (person of color) female. She described her relationship status as “partnered” and her sexual orientation as “bi or queer”. TB

was partnered with BB. BB was a 53-year-old “White/Caucasian” male, in a “partnered relationship”, and identified as “bi”. TB and BB have been together for 2 years. TB and BB were interviewed together.

JJ. JJ was a 29-year-old, “white” female. She identified as “single” and “straight”. JJ was interviewed alone.

Procedures

The participants and researcher met for an initial interview. The researcher organized meetings with either the couple together or separately. The researcher interviewed the participant who identified as single, alone. All interviews were held either in person or via the video chatting site, Zoom. The structure of the initial interview was loosely based upon questions found in the Index of Sexual Satisfaction (ISS) (Hudson et al., 1981) (See Appendix A), the Mutual Communal Behavior Scale (MCBS) (Williamson & Schulz, 1995) (See Appendix B), and questions catered specifically to the participants’ responses. As the participants answered, the researcher made notes of the responses. The quotations used have been edited for clarity.

After the initial interview, the researcher then either mailed the couples and single person 5 pounds of clay or gave it to them in person. The participants were given the instructions: “Before an intimate interaction, play with the clay in a communal way”. To encourage creative and spontaneous responses, the exercise was not given specific rules and regulations. The participants were not given further instructions, including a time limit, environment requirement, specific art directive, or instructions about what to do with the creations afterwards. When directly asked, the researcher emphasized it was up to the participants’ discretion.

Majority of the participants expressed some familiarity with clay-work. Those that did not have prior experience with clay were given an introductory opportunity to familiarize

themselves with the clay with the researcher present. After the study, the participants were encouraged to keep the clay block for their future personal use.

The researcher reached out the participants several weeks later to schedule a follow up interview to discuss the interaction. The questions used in the follow up interview was again structured using the Index of Sexual Satisfaction (ISS) (Hudson et al., 1981), the Mutual Communal Behavior Scale (MCBS) (Williamson & Schulz, 1995), and questions catered specifically to the participants' responses. Emphasis was placed on a discussion around the process and product of the clay-work, communal behavior when directed towards clay-work, and the level of sexual satisfaction after the intimate act and clay-work. A flow chart of this method's data collection progression can be found in Appendix C.

The collected data is divided into case studies of three couples and one individual. The purpose of the case study format is to better identify the unique interpersonal and intrapersonal effects the clay-work had on sexual satisfaction and communication.

Results

The following are the results from the initial interviews and the follow up interviews with the participants. Several themes emerged from the conversations with the participants that connected to the categories of the Index of Sexual Satisfaction (ISS), Mutual Communal Behaviors Scale (MCBS), sexual satisfaction, and communication.

MS and RB

MS and RB have been together for 11 years, have a 1 year old son, and identified as being in a "non-monogamous relationship". The theme of differing communication styles was present during both the initial and follow up interviews. This difference affected the matching of their sexual energy timing, negotiating styles, and ultimately the impact of the clay-work on their

sexual satisfaction. In particular, MS and RB had diverging understandings of the clay-work directive. Although they communally interacted with the clay, the clay-work session did not result in an intimate interaction. Their 1 year old's bedtime also contributed to the absence of an intimate interaction.

Refer to Table 1 for a brief summary of the themes. For a full description of MS and RB's themes and quotations, refer to Appendix D.

MM and JG

MM and JG have been together for almost 2 years in a monogamous, committed relationship. The method in which MM and JG communicate around sexual satisfaction was particularly present during our initial interview. MM shared he would voice reactions to "something that feels better or something that does not feel good". JG expressed wanting "verbal confirmation" and personally connected "sexual arousal being a factor of sexual communication". In the follow up interview, JG spoke to the effect "delaying" the sexual interaction had on increasing excitement and satisfaction.

Refer to Table 1 for a brief summary of the themes. For a full description of MM and JG's themes and quotations, refer to Appendix E.

TB and BB

TB and BB have been together for 2 years in a partnered relationship. The interplay between communication and sexual satisfaction was a theme present during our interviews. In the initial interview, TB described communication's ability to permeate other facets of their relationship, particularly sexual connection. BB echoed this sentiment saying, "communication can potentially directly affect whether or not we have sex". Post clay-work, TB and BB spoke to

the art making session adding fun and unstructured play. This new element supported TB and BB's communication and ultimately their intimate interaction and sexual satisfaction.

Refer to Table 1 for a brief summary of the themes. For a full description of TB and BB's themes and quotations, refer to Appendix F.

JJ

JJ has been single for 5 years. The theme of past trauma and experiences having an effect on sexual satisfaction was present during our discussions. JJ reported that addressing "satisfaction also requires addressing past trauma". After the clay-work, unwanted imagery that typically shows up for JJ during an intimate experience was exchanged with imagery of the clay making experience. This exchange had a positive effect on JJ's sexual satisfaction and excitement.

Refer to Table 1 for a brief summary of the themes. For a full description of JJ's themes and quotations, refer to Appendix G.

Table 1

Table of participants' themes and direct quotations

Participants	Pre-Clay- Work Themes	Post Clay- Work Themes	Direct Quotations
MS and RB	Differing communication styles	Communication styles as influenced by life circumstances	MS: "We had two ideologies [that were] clashing or more like relationship communications". RS: "I do want to negotiate and I really want to make everybody happy, but then lately I've been trying to know my own

			<p>limits and hard negotiations, like not selling yourself out completely”.</p> <p>MS: “It might have been the timing and having a baby. It was kind of an hour or two before his [their baby’s] bedtime.</p> <p>After that interaction with the clay, we went straight into baby/parenting mode”.</p>
MM and JG	<p>Verbal communication as tied to sexual satisfaction</p>	<p>Non-verbal communication as tied to sexual satisfaction</p>	<p>MM: “Well, if there's something that feels better or something that does not feel good, I will voice that. If something hurts then I'm going to be like ‘Ouch don't do that’. I believe that goes both ways”.</p> <p>JG: “There’s been a certain amount of me explicitly wanting to communicate things and then him being like ‘Yeah, yeah, that’s what I like’. So, he’s physically indicating something he feels, whereas I would like a verbal confirmation. There’s the factor of sexual arousal being a factor of sexual communication”.</p> <p>JG: I think like delaying it [having an intimate encounter] definitely did</p>

			something. The delay, the anticipation, that sort of thing, like that buildup, was there”.
TB and BB	Dynamic of sexual communication and satisfaction	Unstructured play’s effect on sexual communication and satisfaction	TB: “Having a scheduled time together to do kind of an unstructured activity that’s creative lends itself to intimacy and positive shared experience just on its own”. BB: ““It [the clay play] helped create an intimate environment where we’re communicating and focusing on each other”.
JJ	Sexual satisfaction as tied to past trauma and experiences	Imagery of the clay replacing unpleasant imagery	JJ: I think some of it [sexual satisfaction] has to do with what else is entangled with it. Addressing that satisfaction also requires addressing past trauma and experiences and it's not been easy. JJ: I switched to the image of working with my hands in the clay and I would say it decreased the unpleasant imagery”.

Discussion

General Observations

All of the couples reported working separately with the clay. Only some of the couples, RB, MS, MM, and JG, ended the clay-work session by having the creations interact. The clay-

work was an initially solitary exercise with the potential and possibility of coming together once finished. Although the participants described their relationships as fairly communal in nature, the manner in which they interacted with the clay was individualistic.

Often the couple's conversation focused on process and logistics around the clay-work. While the participants understood the directive would conclude in an intimate interaction, reported conversation during the clay-work did not specifically touch upon sexuality and sexual satisfaction. In reference to Yoo and Bartle-Haring's (2014) finding, it would be worthwhile to assess whether or not their problem-solving conversation was expressed in a positive manner, and therefore influenced and increased intimacy.

The element of fun, playfulness, novelty, and unstructured activity was mentioned by both RB/MS and TB/BB. The clay-work's playfulness had the ability to be a conduit for communication. This result is congruent with Jones et al.'s (2018) finding that novelty could increase sexual function and satisfaction. Future exploration, discovery, and inclusion of clay-work as novelty could have an impact on sexual satisfaction and communication.

Both JJ and BB noted an increase in physical, tactile sensitivity. JJ said, "I was just moving along with sensations that felt good" and being "very aware of the sensations" in her hands. BB reported that, "there was something about touching" and "smoothing" the clay that overlapped with "touching a person". TB interacted with the clay by "just playing around with it".

Case Studies

MS and RB. In the initial interview RB and MS expressed a desire and need to be more explicitly communicative, as a way to manage expectations and identify needs. RB had identified himself as a "people pleaser" and MS mentioned needing time to fully understand another's

perspective. Both responses indicate a level of consideration for each other's needs, in line with Clark et al.'s (1998) model of a communal relationship. RB and MS expressed clashing ideologies during the clay-work though. In spite of the differing of opinions, RB and MS were able to co-create, perhaps indicating a maintained adherence to their communal relationship.

Timing of the clay-work and the presence of their child had a greater effect on MS and RB's communication and sexual connection than the clay-work. MS said, "after that interaction with the clay, we went straight into baby/parenting mode". The use of "we" could be considered a communal model behavior. It is interesting to note, though, the impact of childcare, or any other pressing caretaking obligations, has upon sexual satisfaction and interaction. This was a factor that was not accounted for in this method's creation.

MM and JG. To summarize, there was no pronounced and noted effect reported by either participant on communication and sexual satisfaction after the clay-work. MM mentioned not recognizing "any differences [in sexual satisfaction] in any way, shape, or form".

One result that did arise was the movement from verbal to non-verbal communication. In the initial interview, both MM and JG noted explicit verbal communication as a way to enhance sexual satisfaction. In the follow up interview, JG identified delaying and anticipation as having a significant impact on sexual excitement. The act of delaying and anticipation could be construed as non-verbal communication and behavior. Rye and Meaney's (2007) and Pascoal et al.'s (2014) found pleasure to be the primary motivator for sexual activities and satisfaction. Perhaps for this couple, pleasure was found in both explicit verbal communication and non-verbal communication.

TB and BB. Both TB and BB reported the clay-work having an effect on sensitivity towards each other, increasing communication, and focus on each other. Perhaps the stimulation

and engagement of an empathetic imagination, as identified by Acai et al. (2016), contributed to an increase of sensitivity, communication, and attention.

TB specifically mentioned unstructured play in the follow up interview. TB's observation echoes Jones et al.'s (2018) finding that "novelty (e.g., sex toys, new positions, role plays) might possibly be the vehicle of increasing sexual function and satisfaction in couples" (p. 619). BB's report that the clay-work positively affected communication and focus parallels McCarthy and Fucito's (2005, as cited in Jones et al., 2018) finding that novelty is more effective when integrated communication and negotiation.

JJ. A theme in JJ's initial and follow up interview is that of trauma and unwanted imagery. JJ reported that after the clay-work, she was able replace the unwanted imagery with her clay experience. She reported that it "decreased the unpleasant imagery". The exchange of unpleasant imagery for her tactile experience with the clay could be construed as a desire for increased pleasure and sexual satisfaction. The desire to seek out pleasure corresponds to Rye and Meaney's (2007) finding that masturbation "seems most clearly motivated by pleasure" (p. 33).

Limitations

As reported by several of the participants, the openness of the clay-work instructions led to confusion and potentially a source of miscommunication. A modified and more specific art directive could guide the participants into working more solidly under a mutual communal behaviors model.

Future Research

A longitudinal study that incorporates a variety of art materials could help identify the particular effect clay-work has on sexual satisfaction and communication. The use and reporting

of validated rubrics and measurements would also help to concretely assess an effect on sexual satisfaction and communication.

There are several noteworthy themes that arose during the interviews. Further investigation and research is needed to draw those forth. Also, an increase in participants could help to better pinpoint specific themes, so that broader conclusions could be made. These conclusions can be applied to therapeutic work with couples, individuals, and the synthesis of sex therapy and art therapy.

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Appendix A*The Index of Sexual Satisfaction (ISS)*

Answer each item carefully and accurately. There are no right or wrong answers.

1=Rarely or none of the time

2=A little of the time

3=Sometimes

4=Most or all of the time

1. It is easy for me to get sexually excited by my partner. _____
2. I feel that our sex life really adds a lot to our relationship. _____
3. My partner does not sex when I do. _____
4. My partner is sexually very exciting. _____
5. I feel that my partner wants too much sex from me. _____
6. Sex is fun for my partner and me. _____
7. My sex life is monotonous. _____
8. I feel that my sex life is lacking quality. _____
9. My partner observes good personal hygiene. _____
10. My partner dwells on sex too much. _____
11. I think that sex is wonderful. _____
12. My partner is too rough or brutal when we have sex. _____
13. I would like to have sexual contact with someone other than my partner. _____
14. I feel that my partner is sexually pleased with me. _____
15. I feel that I should have sex more often. _____
16. My partner is very sensitive to my sexual needs and desires. _____
17. I feel that my sex life is boring. _____

(more questions on the back...)

18. I feel that my partner enjoys our sex life. _____
19. I feel that my partner sees little in me except for the sex I can give. _____
20. My sex life is very exciting. _____
21. I feel that sex is dirty and disgusting. _____
22. When we have sex, it is too rushed and hurriedly completed. _____
23. I feel that sex is something that has to be endured in our relationship. _____
24. I feel that sex is a normal function of our relationship. _____
25. I enjoy the sex techniques that my partner likes or uses. _____

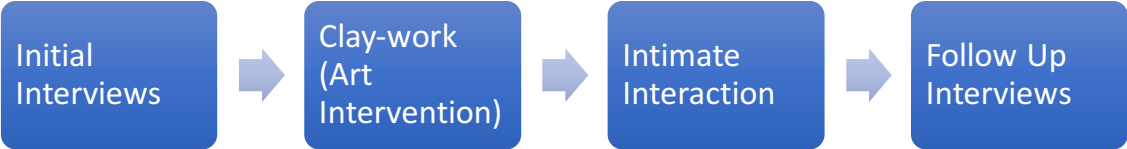
Appendix B*Mutual Communal Behavior Scale (MCBS)*

The following statements have to do with the type of interactions you usually have with your partner. Try to think back over the course of your relationship and indicate the response you feel most accurately describes how you and your partner interact.

- 1=Almost Never
- 2=Sometimes
- 3= Often
- 4=Almost Always

1. When my partner is feeling bad, I try to cheer him/her up. _____
2. My partner seems to enjoy responding to my needs. _____
3. My partner does things just to please me. _____
4. When my partner has a need, she/he turns to me for help. _____
5. My partner goes out of his/her way to help me. _____
6. My partner responds to my needs. _____
7. I enjoy helping my partner. _____
8. I go out of my way to help my partner. _____
9. When making a decision, I consider my partner's needs and feelings. _____
10. My partner would do almost anything for me. _____

Appendix C



Appendix D

MS and RB

Initial Interview

MS and RB were interviewed together in person with the researcher. Their 1 year old was present.

Responding to each other's needs. MS: "Understanding what those needs are in the first place can be difficult. I need a lot of communication".

RB: "I think in terms of needing closeness and needing separateness and independence".

Enjoyment when responding to the other's needs. MS: "When I respond to RB's needs, I feel like I'm happier, there's less tension, anxiety, and jealousy".

RB: "I don't always think that doing something to please your partner is always a positive. Like, if you're doing something to please them, but you're not happy about it yourself, it could be a bad thing. I think there's enjoyment in it and knowing that your partner would be happier, knowing that you're the source of that happiness to some degree, the mutual satisfaction of it".

Communication style. MS: "I tend to try and think more about what I'm going to say. I have very open and honest body language. I think if I am like having a crappy time or if I'm enjoying myself, it really shows in my face and my body language, well, it's just what I feel right now".

RS: "Yeah, I think I don't need as much time or I don't take as much time rather to think about what I'm going to say next".

Negotiation style. MS: "I think from what I've noticed works is that it just takes time to try to fully understand someone's perspective".

RS: "I'm a people pleaser. I do like to compromise. I do want to negotiate and I really want to make everybody happy, but then lately I've been trying to know my own limits and hard negotiations, like not selling yourself out completely".

Sexual satisfaction. MS: "You know, I think the first thing that comes to mind is that like, our sexual energy through the day isn't matched. RS has the highest sexual energy in the evening at like 10:00 p.m. and that's when I go to bed. I just shut down".

RS: "I do think our open relationship has been good in that I see that [the non-monogamous partnership] as part of our sexual satisfaction. The fact that we're able to, I guess 'allow' could be the word, allow each other to have these other experiences. That's part of our sexual satisfaction. My partner understands that I won't do this or that he can't be the only source of sexual satisfaction for each other".

Dynamic between communication and sexual satisfaction. MS: "In becoming more sexually satisfied, communicating about what those needs are, what we want to see changed. To us, this hasn't been a priority".

RS: "If we're not fully satisfied, it's not actually like happening to our level of satisfaction, maybe we do have to communicate and say, 'OK, this is like we want to do this time or this'. We at least have to want it to happen at all on some degree. So, I think we do have to be more communicative, not plan things out on the calendar, but, you know, 'Hey, is this happening tonight? No. OK'. Then, at least my expectations are set because, I know sometimes my expectations can be disappointed or fulfilled. I think we both have expectations. We just don't communicate those".

Follow Up Interview

MS and RB were interviewed together using the video chatting website, Zoom. Their 1 year old was present during the interview.

Interaction with the clay. MS: “I guess that was the first thing, is that in my approach, we were like doing it and I was like, ‘Oh, yeah, we’re using this to communicate relationship stuff’. But, RB was like, ‘Why don’t you make something phallic and I’ll make something’. We divided up the clay, broke it in half, sitting across from each other, working mostly in our hands. We did things separately but meant to be put together”.

RB: “We’re sitting around the living room and we had time. We were just in conversation mode. So, it’s like, ‘Yeah, let’s do it now’. We did two rounds. One of the rounds I made a flower holder. MS made something that could be put in it, in a phallic way. In the second round [I said]: ‘Let’s make what our buttocks would feel like’”.

Sensitivity towards each other. MS: “I think so” in response to whether or not it affected sensitivity towards each other.

RB: “I think because we were doing complementary shapes, or trying to, we had to be sensitive to what the other person was doing”.

Clay-work and communication. MS: “I would say that our language was maybe like a little more playful as opposed to complete seriousness”.

RB: “I remember talking about the purpose of what we were doing. I know we were conversing during all that, but I don’t remember what it might have been about. I would say [the clay-work] facilitated talking. I think that kind of busyness, we’re better at talking. We’re doing something”.

Negotiation. MS: “We had two ideologies [that were] clashing or more like relationship communications. RB is like, ‘No, it's supposed to be more sexual’. It kind of became a mixture of both. Not entirely purely sexual, but also like, a little bit of both”.

RB: “I think it [the process of negotiation] was just me saying the purposes were sexual. Maybe I tried to convince [MS] a little bit more that way.

Sexual satisfaction and excitement. MS: “I would say no” in response to the clay-work affecting sexual excitement.

RB: “I was thinking about that [sexual excitement] when we were doing it I think the environment made that difficult. I was asking myself, ‘What would that be like [to be in a different environment]?’ I was just thinking, ‘I don't know”.

Dynamic of communication and sexual satisfaction. In response to the clay-work affecting fun, MS: “The whole playfulness aspect of it, [the clay-work] was providing another avenue for communicating or a welcome break, a change”.

RS: “[I liked] the change, like it’s ok to try something new. I think that was nice”.

Intimate experience. MS and RB reported that the clay-work did not result in an intimate experience. We discussed the future potential of incorporating clay-work into times of communication and intimate interactions. When asked to describe the reasons why it did not lead to a sexual experience:

MS: “It might have been the timing and having a baby. It was kind of an hour or two before his [their baby’s] bedtime. After that interaction with the clay, we went straight into baby/parenting mode”.

Appendix E

MM and JG

Initial Interview

MM and JG were interviewed separately using the video-chatting website, Zoom.

Responding to each other's needs. MM: "I believe I am attentive".

JG: "I think that we're able to be really in tune to the other one's needs, especially when it comes to like being stressed out or like needing comfort of some kind. Being really in tune to wanting to care for the other person or support emotional needs".

Enjoyment when responding to the other's needs. MM: "Very high. I enjoy being around happy people".

JG: Audibly affirmed enjoyment.

Communication style. MM: "I'd say I'm very malleable in the ways that I communicate. It greatly depends on the situation. If something is very, very important to me, I will express that and share the reasoning behind that and the logic behind that. Then, just follow it up with patience and understanding.

JG: "I figure things out separately first before communicating things".

Negotiation style. MM: "I just like to feel heard. Whether or not things go my way, it is all about whether or not I feel like my point has come across, my point is understood and whether or not that point is valid or not. If that's expressed to me then I'm willing to change their mind on something".

JG: "Presenting a problem or an idea, and then either like texting it ahead of time and being like, 'Hey, I thought about this part. Let's talk more about that later' or 'I want to talk more

about this' and then we'll even start talking about it or we'll both kind of like go off for a little bit and then come back together".

Sexual satisfaction. MM: "I feel like my needs are met and when I'm alone, I'm totally fine with masturbating. Sex is a healthy thing and we're very open about talking about it. I'm very open about everything".

JG: "It's grown into more than just like, 'You are an exciting sex partner' and being like, 'You're an exciting partner and sex is a part of that'".

Dynamic between communication and sexual satisfaction. MM: "Well, if there's something that feels better or something that does not feel good, I will voice that. If something hurts then I'm going to be like, 'Ouch don't do that'. I believe that goes both ways".

JG: "There's been a certain amount of me explicitly wanting to communicate things and then him being like, 'Yeah, yeah, that's what I like'. So, he's physically indicating something he feels, whereas I would like a verbal confirmation. There's the factor of sexual arousal being a factor of sexual communication".

Follow Up Interview

MM and JG were interviewed separately using the video-chatting website, Zoom.

Interaction with the clay. MM: "So we got the clay out and just went to it and did our own things. We both ended up making animals and we didn't go in with a plan, or at least I didn't go in with a plan. I never had more of a more than a handful in my hand at any given time. I think that I was pretty gentle. I kept it in my hands. I didn't throw it around on the table. I tried to make it smooth. I didn't want it to be rough. I thought about warming it up first".

JG: "We had like breakfast and we were just sitting on the couch and he took my hand and started kissing my arm like a Gomez, Morticia kissing thing. I'm like, 'Huh?'. So, I was like,

‘Well, let's do the clay’. I broke it up into smaller pieces and I just started kind of like rolling it in my hands. I was like, ‘Do we have a plan or are we gonna make it together, or like make our own things and put them together?’. He's like, ‘Yeah, both’. So, I was just kind of playing with it. I was textually moving with it and I wasn't planning anything, but I made like a shell thing. I was like, ‘I made a thing. Now it's over there on the tray’. Then, neither of us interacted with it again for some time. We did not make like a big structure together or anything. We just did our own things in the same space”.

Sensitivity towards each other and yourself. MM: I feel like I'm pretty in tune with myself to begin with. I didn't have any moments of clarity. I also wasn't sitting there thinking like, ‘Well, how long are we going to be playing with the clay?’ It was just like, ‘This is what I'm doing right now and I'm going to enjoy it”.

JG: “I don't know. I don't think so” in response to “did it affect your sensitivity to your partner?”.

Clay-work and communication. MM: “[We would say], ‘What are you making? I'm making this’. [Our language was] more bare bones”. In response to what he attributed this form of communication to, MM: “Just not knowing where anyone's going. An exploration and that it's a time to be like, ‘This is happening, or this is what my goal is and this is what I'm trying to do’ and not a time for miscommunication”.

JG: “We talked about clay and ceramics and different art things. We were pretty quiet most of the time. It wasn't like a huge flow of conversation. It tended to be like, stop and start. We were also trying to play music. We eventually turned it off. It led to other conversations about things we were watching and stuff like that”.

Negotiation. MM: I don't feel like decisions were really made. Well, at some point, the scrap clay, the clay that was not going to be used or clay that was a mistake got put back in the bag, I decided that it should come back out. [It was] to show that the final product had a lot of discarded stuff. At some point, a theme of animal circus animals came about. Everything went together, but we didn't plan it”.

JG: [We negotiated] only to be like, ‘Should we decide what we're gonna make and then make it or just see what happens?’. I was like, ‘OK, we'll just see what happens’. That was the only negotiation. I was like, ‘I don't have any ideas already, so let's just play with it’. Our objects were built separate. I think they're really defined as being separate objects”.

Sexual satisfaction and excitement. MM: I didn't recognize any differences [in sexual satisfaction] in any way, shape, or form. I believe that I could do literally anything before it [an intimate experience]. It's like two different mindsets”.

JG: I think like delaying it [having an intimate encounter] definitely did something. The delay, the anticipation, that sort of thing, like that buildup, was there. Being together, but not interacting physically with one another”.

Dynamic of communication and sexual satisfaction. MM: “There is no way to gauge that in my head [the effect of the clay-work on sexual satisfaction and communication]. To be like, ‘Well, with the clay, things would be different than without’ because every time it's different. I couldn't say that playing with the clay had any effect. There's the creative and explorative side of the clay and then just more animalistic sex. I'm sure the connector there is that for both of them I feel like exploring just whatever urge was more in charge”.

JG: “I think the delay might be inhibiting my being able to interact to easily. It could be having my hands dirty and being focused on this thing. Kind of like when you're out somewhere

and if someone like touches you and you're like, 'Oh!', but you're in public with friends or whatever, [so we] gotta wait. I felt kinda like that, the waiting and anticipating, but I am not going to right this minute".

Appendix F

TB and BB

Initial Interview

TB and BB were interviewed together using the video-chatting website, Zoom.

Responding to each other's needs. TB: "I think just discussing, clarifying, and listening, making sure we have a shared language".

BB: Audibly agreed with TB's statement.

Enjoyment when responding to the other's needs. TB: "I would say I enjoy responding to his needs".

BB: "Meeting those needs is like the greatest because I like to please her, but if it's an area, like I said, where our needs clash, then it's usually that we have to communicate about it and sometimes you just have to get used to sitting with discomfort".

Communication style. TB: "I can be kind of direct at times, verbally direct. I think I'm even more direct in my relationship than I am other times. I'm more direct with BB and diplomatic in other contexts".

BB: "I'm going to communicate a lot more and be more direct with TB than in other relationships".

Negotiation style. TB: "I'd say compromise".

BB: "We talk, I don't know what else we would do other than talk about it. It doesn't feel lopsided one way or the other".

Sexual satisfaction. TB: "I think it's [sex and sexual satisfaction] an important part of being a happy, healthy human being. I definitely think it can impact other areas of our relationship. It can lead to greater disconnection or be a part of or maybe a byproduct of other

disconnection due to other circumstances. It can also be the opposite. It can be a point of connection and I like being able to reconnect in a lot of other ways in the relationship, too”.

BB: “I agree with all that”.

Dynamic of communication and sexual satisfaction. TB: “I think it's [communication and sexual satisfaction] really important. I think they kind of go hand-in-hand. I would say across all facets of our relationship, though. If we're not getting along in some other way, it ain't happening. It [sexual interaction] always prevents us from arguments if we can get there. Also, there's a 24-hour effect of greater kindness, generosity and compassion”.

BB: “Extremely important, we're not mind-readers, communication can potentially directly affect whether or not we have sex. I think if we get to the point that we're having sex, I don't think any other problems are gonna really interfere. It's a question of whether they're going to actually prevent us from having sex or not”.

Follow Up Interview

TB and BB were interviewed together using the video chatting website, Zoom.

Interaction with the clay. TB: “Well, we like kind of did it side by side, but we didn't engage with the material with each other. We had a conversation and we were each doing something different with the clay. I just made and I just put the clay back. I didn't really create a product”.

BB: BB showed me the object he had created. It was hand-held sized and in the shape of a face.

Sensitivity towards each other. TB: The clay-work “definitely” affected sensitivity “in terms of listening, open to being close, and having an intimate interaction”.

BB: “It just helps to get into this zone, where it was like we were creative and we were sharing experience and communicating”.

Clay-work and communication. TB: “I think sometimes I’ve noticed, like when we’re having conversations about a harder topic, BB doesn’t like to maintain consistent eye contact a lot of the time. So, I think that because we were doing this, I didn’t feel as weird about that because when he wasn’t looking at me, he was engaging with the clay. I didn’t feel like he was disengaging”.

BB: “I just think that it [the clay-work] helps create a situation that was conducive to talking, just relaxing and we’re next to each other and we had stuff to talk about”.

Negotiation. TB: In response to how she negotiated with the clay, “I just played around with it”.

BB: “I just grabbed a piece and started playing with a little bit and then I was like, ‘Yeah, I’m gonna make some kind of a skull type, creepy looking face’”.

Sexual satisfaction and excitement. TB: “I don’t know about sexual excitement, but [the clay-work] definitely [affected] communication, and that level of intimacy that contributes to sexual excitement and intimacy. We did some things we hadn’t done in a while. There was an increased level of novelty”.

BB: “It [the clay-work] helped create an intimate environment where we’re communicating and focusing on each other. There’s something about touching it and smoothing it [the clay]. [There’s] something about the tactile. You’d be touching the clay and then touching a person”.

Dynamic of communication and sexual satisfaction. TB: When discussing the element of fun, “I wonder if it was because we did something we’d never done before. We were doing

something new together. So, I don't know if that was what it may be and it carried over a little bit into what happened afterwards. We were already trying something. We'd never sat down and played with clay together before".

TB: Discussing unstructured play time, "It was just nice to have scheduled time to play together, even though it was an unstructured activity, even if we weren't going in with the intention of being intimate. Having a scheduled time together to do kind of an unstructured activity that's creative lends itself to intimacy and positive shared experience just on its own".

Appendix G

JJ

Initial Interview

JJ was interviewed alone using the video-chatting website, Zoom.

Responding to other's needs. JJ: "I'm open and receptive to others' needs and typically try to help fulfill them, but typically with a good amount of self-preservation and maintaining what I know that I also need as well. Sexual relationships in the past, I would say I have an over need to meet fulfillment for an individual".

Enjoyment when responding to other's needs. JJ: "Yeah, I can't say that it was necessarily a healthy type of enjoyment [in past relationships], but that it was coming from like an unmet need kind of way. I was helping them because it made me feel like I was more valuable in the situation, like less dispensable, like I had a role that they needed filled. If I met it to the very best that I could, it would mean that like we would stay in a relationship".

Communication style. JJ: "I think I'm pretty transparent. I think for sexual needs being met, that's an area of pretty decent amount of insecurity and shame, though, that has been its own development of being able to have that same transparency with other needs".

Negotiation style. JJ: "I think I actually probably negotiate with myself similar to how I negotiate with unhealthy romantic partners. To be completely honest, I do think sometimes in romantic partnerships I negotiate with the mindset of 'this is what I want the outcome to be' and then negotiate from there. Despite that sounding rather manipulative, which I guess it might be, I feel like with friendships, relationships there's a lot more flexibility for me to put aside what my interests are for my friends' interests".

Sexual satisfaction. JJ: “I think for me, the sexual satisfaction in partnership means feeling comfortable and safe with the other person, being in a relationship where you feel comfortable to express what you need and you're both responsive to each other's needs. I think for me a lot of the other relationship aspects need to be being fulfilled for me to have satisfaction with the sexual relationship”.

Dynamic between communication and sexual satisfaction. JJ: “I think some of it [sexual satisfaction] has to do with what else is entangled with it. Addressing that satisfaction also requires addressing past trauma and experiences and it's not been easy. Those [past trauma and experiences] are present. When I'm thinking about and addressing those things, though, it's been easier to not focus on them and to just be moderately satisfied. I do think that a good amount of my communication was with my ceramic work, like I think tactile things were helpful for me to dialogue with myself of past experiences. Outside of that, I would say that it more happens in response to trauma responses like I have a trauma response and then I need to respond back to it”.

Follow Up Interview

JJ was interviewed alone using the video chatting website, Zoom. J.J was interviewed on two separate occasions with a day break in between.

Interaction with the clay. JJ: “I set a timer for 20 minutes and just sat and focused on the clay. I really tried to be focused on what I was doing in that moment. [The clay-work] actually was after an incident at work. I had that [the clay-work] scheduled into my schedule so I continued it with it anyway, even though I kind of just wanted to go to sleep and not think about anything. After the 20 minutes, I definitely felt more relaxed and like I wasn't holding as much stress and a burden”.

Sensitivity towards yourself. JJ: “I feel like it was still stepping back and having myself have that time to have patience with myself and patience with the clay and that process kind of carried over. Having more patience that way, like acknowledging that, like, ‘Yes, you have to take the space to connect with yourself and feel present, and that's not a deficit’”.

JJ: “I think there were a few things that I took note of. After the clay, I really had to wash my hands and clean the clay off and I put moisturizer on them and I was massaging them. That was a nice, pleasant process to lead into sensations in other parts of my body because I was very aware of the sensations in my hands”.

Clay-work and communication. JJ: “Things that were coming up for me were similar to the things that come up for me with sex and masturbation, like images and things that I don't want to be focusing on, that I do associate with sex and masturbation and those were still coming up. I'm thinking probably because I knew that was something [an intimate experience] that was gonna follow”.

Negotiation. JJ: “I'd say mostly I was moving along with sensations that felt good and I think as a sculptor, when there were things that I just really didn't like. I was mitigating that too. I think working with the clay myself, I didn't find myself having to negotiate in the same way I think you would with someone else, because it was up to me”.

Sexual satisfaction and excitement. JJ: “It was really neat to see when I started to have imagery during masturbation, which unfortunately usually at some point in the process I'm going to have an image that flashes that I don't want there, I just ignore them because, like, I'm not going to never masturbate again. I've just kind of accepted that. It's not something that I want there. It's something that makes me feel repulsed inside. Whatever is going on with the imagery I'm seeing I can't necessarily make it go away. I started to focus on the imagery of the clay, and I

did notice that I was able to quickly switch that imagery to that. I typically like for that [unwanted imagery] I try to replace it immediately with something that I do find appealing sexually. I switched to the image of working with my hands in the clay and I would say it decreased the unpleasant imagery”.

JJ: “I think having it [clay-work] increased it [sexual excitement] because I had that space to be present and anticipate and kind of build up for something”.

Dynamic of communication and sexual satisfaction. JJ: “I think it was beneficial to be present for a certain amount of time with something before kind of like asking myself to be present with my body”.

THESIS APPROVAL FORM

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Student's Name: Courtney Kim Morgan

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In the judgment of the following signatory this thesis meets the academic standards that have been established for the above degree.

Thesis Advisor: Kelvin Ramirez