

Characterological exploration of intimacy and sex in gay men

By

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“Intimacy means that we are safe enough to reveal the truth about ourselves in all its creative chaos. If a space is created in which two people are totally free to reveal their walls, then those walls in time, will come down”

Marianne Williamson

1. Introduction

Three of the forces that connect humanity are the forces of erotic, love and sex. Pierrakos believes that the three forces of erotic, love and sex appear to be separate, have separate characteristics and should be studied separately, but that they operate on all levels of human existence. One of the primary objectives of a core therapist is to uncover the blockages to the flow of the three forces in order to liberate them ^[13].

Gay male relationships are often thought to differ from their heterosexual counterparts in the way they approach sex. Studies from the San Francisco State University and Alliant International University showed that around half of gay relationships are open – a rate which is higher than for heterosexual and lesbian couples ^[7]. It is therefore often thought that gay men can separate sex from love more easily. When working with gay men, it is important for a core therapist to make gay men conscious that, while sex and love could be experienced separately, their unification can be a source of creativity and growth.

This paper does not focus on the nature of gay men's relationships; a research topic we believe would benefit from a more in depth study in the future. The objective of this paper is, however, to study the link between Reich's character structures and gay men's approach to intimacy and sex, focusing on preferences and practices during sex.

2. Background to my personal interest in this study

The choice of the topic for this study comes from my own relationship towards intimacy and sex and my longing to work with gay men around this topic. I discovered that for most of my life, my approach to intimacy and sex was ruled by my character defences with an "in order to" statement influencing my sexual preferences and how I was being during sex. The consequence of this approach has been to conflate intimacy with sex, thus limiting my choices in sexual self-expression.

Everything I knew about intimacy and sex I either taught myself or I received from television, pornography and mirroring friends. I only came out as a gay man at the age of 26, and although for most of my life before this I knew I was gay, I did not accept I had been born as such.

For a long period of my life prior to coming out as a homosexual man my sensuality, sexuality and sexual energy was dormant and unexplored. I was 'hiding in the closet' grappling with my internal conflicts as I realised that my sexual attraction towards men counter to the socially accepted norm of heterosexuality. My fear of being discriminated against as well as the potential disappointment I could cause my parents kept me from exploring and experimenting.

My first encounters with the gay world left me disappointed and I felt rejected. I had so many fantasies about being gay, but none were grounded in my own sense of self-discovery, as everything was based on what I had learned from other men. Accompanying onset of puberty developed coping strategies to protect a nascent gay identity that was unrecognised and unknowledge within an environment of which such way of being implicitly transgressive. As adolescent I never felt that I received healthy validation of my masculinity and appearance. From my earliest sexual exploration and relationships, at the age of 12, I was continually seeking such validation from other men and if it did not come, I would break the connection. One particular coping strategies was to adopt the persona of an over the top, grandiose, confident, feminine and funny gay man.

I lost connection with my more dominant traits and lived my life through the submissive persona, which rapidly became the foundation of my approach to intimacy and sex. I labelled myself as being a passive-submissive man, and my choice in sexual partners and relationships was governed by this label. As my life progressed, I increasingly internalised this as who I am as a gay man, thus further burying acknowledgement of the impact of my early constraining belief systems.

My choices in my approach to intimacy and sex were not influenced by how I was feeling but rather from my own learned behaviour, as a protective response against being hurt. My strategies ranged from wanting salvation by being in a relationship, successful seduction to provide validating evidence that I am good looking, being in control during sex to prove that I matter or allowing my boundaries to be breached to avoid rejection or humiliation. I was often left feeling fearful and frozen, unable to voice my affirmative and declination, or to express my deep rooted longings. My personal observation informed my feeling that these experiences and more are shared by many gay men across the globe.

The study was therefore borne from my curiosity to examine how the character defenses of gay men impact on their approach to intimacy and sex. As this study has not previously been undertaken in Core I identified an opportunity to bring insight to Core Therapists wanting to work with gay men and their issues around intimacy and sex. By developing both the character structures and the sexual preferences and practices questionnaire, it could serve as a valuable tool for a core therapist, supporting her or him in asking specific questions, to generate a clearer understanding of the world inhabited by their client.

Since January 2018, I have been running monthly workshops for men. The monthly Touch, Massage and Intimacy Workshops for gay men are based on a body of work that has its roots in western neo-Tantra and psychotherapy. Although not therapeutic in nature, it focuses on creating an opportunity for men to share a space within which they can explore topics around touch, intimacy, sensuality and sexual energy.

Every workshop has a different theme of structured teaching, techniques and exercises. All the workshops are designed to allow men to discover new potentials of sensuality, sexual energy, an awakened body state, and to feel more free, relaxed, alive and connected to other men. It is an opportunity to connect with other men in a loving and sensual way that is more intimate than they would typically experience.

Every workshop is a three-hour guided exploration of Touch, Massage and Intimacy. The content and practices vary but all focus on aspects of sensual rather than sexual connections. Creating the awareness of old patterns, to move beyond being hidden by a mask, exploring boundaries, being able to claim their 'Yes' and 'No', and thus express articulations of choice, consent, control and design, to bring men to a state of embodied awareness and vulnerability.

The workshops are attended by men of all shapes, sizes, ages, races and all the character structures. During every evening, different patterns emerge. It is informative to reference some common patterns that arise, the first pattern being in relation to choosing a partner to work with in exercises. Some men find this challenging as their choices are clouded by preferential judgments on shape, size, age or race as a prerequisite before entering intimate touch and connection.

I observed their struggle to set aside their conscious bias but in observing this there is a reflective coincidence with my own projections around judging and being judge.

A further pattern observed is that sexual energy is awakened during techniques, exercises and massage. Some men find it difficult to restrain the desire to act out sexually rather than exploring and allowing the flow of sexual energy, as a new way to connect to their life force. Both these patterns originate in their character defences, in wanting to be in control, not wanting to be rejected, not wanting to connect and not surrendering.

Over the past months, these workshops have provided me with valuable understanding of how gay men long for a different way of connection, that is separate from the world of online dating applications. Group members voiced that it was the first time they could practice setting boundaries around touch that did not originate from a defensive stance. They also expressed relief there was no expectation to be a certain way to make contact. Some realised how their patterns have excluded them from open and authentic connection.

Although not therapeutic, I use my knowledge as a Core Therapist and the four stages of Core energetics to support and strengthen the process.

During every workshop I aim to penetrate the mask using sound, breath and movement involving teaching techniques and exercises bringing awareness to patterns attached to the mask that no longer serve them, I furthermore encourage them to bring forward their voice expressing their demands with the aim to bring

forward and release of the lower self, thereby bringing them in contact with their Higher Self.

The rest of this paper is structured as follows: Section 3 gives an overview of the primary character structures and Section 4 summarises the approach taken to determine the primary character structures of gay men and to record their sexual preferences and practices. Section 5 summarises the findings of the study and Section 6 concludes.

3. Overview of the character structures

A character structure is a system of traits that are manifested in the ways that we relate and react to others, as well as to various kinds of stimuli and our environment. Wilhelm Reich's early work laid the foundation for the classification of five character structures, which was further developed by Alexander Lowen, John Pierrakos and others ^[10] ^[13] ^[14].

The character structures relate to patterns that are most often developed in childhood, to protect ourselves from challenging life experiences. In essence, Reich's character structures are based on perceived blockages that exist within the body, which result in certain character traits. Reich argued that each character structure has its own body type and was developed because of the particular blockages that arose due to deprivation or frustration of a child's needs:

- The schizoid (creative) structure – is the result of not feeling wanted by hostile parents. There is a fragmentation of both body and mind with this structure.
- The oral (lover) structure – is an adaptation to an early wound of deprivation around the basic need for nourishment. The oral structure as an adult will sometimes adopt an attitude of 'you do it for me' as a reaction to not having been nurtured when young. At other times the defence is one of suppression where the individual denies their own needs in the belief that needing will result in abandonment.
- The masochist (endurer) structure – is wounded when the parent refuses to allow the child to say 'no', the first step in setting boundaries. The child seeks relief from the rage that builds up underneath bounded muscle and fat, by provoking punishment from others.

- The psychopath (challenger/defender) structure – is a wound resulting from parental manipulation, emotionally seducing them into feeling ‘special’ for the parent’s own narcissistic needs. The child resolves to never again permit themselves to be vulnerable, and so decides to instead manipulate and overpower others with their will.
- The rigid (achiever) – the child’s sexuality is not affirmed by the parent, but instead shamed or denied. This structure seeks to prove to the parents and others that the child is worthy of love. This person has trouble with being aware of their emotions, which are strong, yet buried.

These character structures can play a significant role in therapy because they can help serve as a foundation for better understanding clients’ needs.

4. Approach taken

To be able to study the link between the primary character structures of gay men and their sexual preferences and practices, we designed a survey consisting of two parts. (See Appendix 1 for the full questionnaire.) The first part is a series of statements. For each character structure we designed eight statements that relate to their primary fears, primary longings, energetic condition and operating modes of the mind, emotions and will.

Respondents were asked to indicate to what extent each of the statements is true in their lives by choosing one of the following options:

- Not at all true
- Seldom true
- Somewhat true
- Generally true
- Very true

Each option is assigned a score, with ‘not at all true’ assigned a score of 1, through to ‘very true’, which is assigned a score of 5. For example, the statement ‘I often wish that I was more independent in life’ relates to the primary longing of the oral

character structure. A response of 'not at all true' will count as a value of 1 to a person's score towards identifying with the oral character structure while 'very true' will count as a value of 5 towards a person's score of identifying with the oral character structure. The largest sum-total of each section is then assumed to indicate the primary character structure of a person.

The second part of the questionnaire is a series of questions relating to the relationship status of respondents and their sexual preferences and practices. The sub-categories of the questions revolve around:

- The role in sex (active/passive/versatile) and preferred activity (dominant, submissive/a combination);
- Sense preferences focussing on touch, vocal expressions, smell, eye contact, breathing;
- Orgasm during sex and masturbation;
- Kinks and fetishes focussing on exhibitionism and voyeurism;
- Energetic condition during physical intimacy and sex, i.e. sensual, passionate, detached, etc.

The survey design and distribution was done using the online service [surveymonkey.com](https://www.surveymonkey.com). The survey was completed by a total of 395 gay men across the UK, US and Australia.

5. Findings of the study

This section summarises the findings of the study. It identifies the primary character structure of the respondents and investigates the linkages between character structure and sexual preferences. Each character structure, beginning with the psychopath structure, will be explored in detail, outlining significant patterns emergent in the survey data.

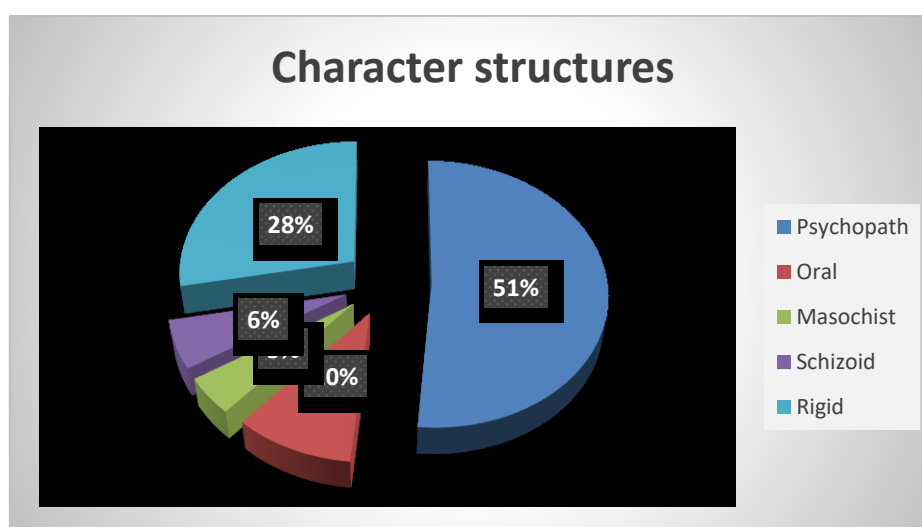
5.1 The psychopath characteristics in gay men

Most homosexual men share certain common characteristics and many faced similar childhood, parental and social challenges. For example, many homosexual men are forced to grapple with the internal conflicts that arise as a result of realising their sexual attraction runs counter to the socially accepted norm of heterosexuality. Moreover, they must face the fear of being discriminated against due to the nature of their sexual attraction, as well as the potential disappointment they could cause their parents. It is, therefore, entirely likely that a large proportion of gay men have developed similar character traits to deal and cope with the challenges necessary to protect themselves and, in some cases, to remain 'hidden in the closet'.

A prominent finding from our characterological study of gay men is that a large proportion of gay men (51%) identify with the psychopath structure as their primary character structure. This is followed by the rigid character structure (28%), oral (10%), schizoid (6%) and masochist (5%). See Figure 1 for the distribution of the identified primary character structures of the gay men participating in the study.

Figure 1:

The distribution of the primary character structures in gay men



A number of character traits of the psychopath character structure are commonly believed to exist in gay men and have been studied and published in the literature¹. A few examples of these traits include:

- Conflicts with authoritative figures and / or legal systems;
- Typical masks of grandiosity, self-dramatization and narcissism;
- A childhood history of spectacular overachievement;
- Absence of the same-sex parent from childhood.

These characteristics and the research surrounding them will be explored in more detail below.

Conflicts with authorities

One of the presenting problems of a psychopath character structure is conflict with authority such as employers, institutions and the legal system.

Historically, and to a degree in some current social environments, societal situations prevent gay men from enjoying equal rights and freedoms because of their sexuality, which is often seen as opposed to the societal norm of heterosexuality. Gay men are sometimes regarded as second class citizens, which can lead to an internalisation of

¹ See for example Eguchi ^[4], Mallard ^[11], Rubinstein ^[15] and Seutter ^[16].

homophobia. This can, in turn, result in intrapersonal conflicts within gay men, which then manifest as conflicts with authoritative or belief systems ^[4]. A good example of this conflict with authority is involvement in LGBT rights organisations. These organisations not only provide emotional support to the LGBT community, but, significantly, also actively campaign for equal rights for LGBT communities worldwide. In group therapy this sometimes manifests itself as a person who will want to 'take over', by challenging a therapist's role or approach and by trying to be the smartest, most advanced and dramatic member of the group.

Grandiosity, self-dramatization and narcissism

One of the typical masks of a psychopath character structure is that of grandiosity, self-dramatization and narcissism. In essence, it is the 'I am the one and only of my kind, the greatest, the best, the most, the first, there's nobody like me' characteristic. According to orthodox psychoanalytical theory, narcissism and homosexuality are strongly associated².

A study based on the Freudian connection between narcissism and homosexuality has shown that gay men score higher in measures of narcissism compared to their heterosexual counterparts ^[15]. The study compared self-esteem and two measures of narcissism among 90 homosexual and 109 heterosexual male students, who filled in a demographic questionnaire based on Rosenberg's Self-Esteem Scale, the Narcissistic Personality Inventory and the Pathological Narcissism Inventory. The questionnaires address both the grandiose and vulnerable subtypes of narcissism. The hypothesis of a connection between narcissism and homosexuality is supported by the results, indicating that the homosexual students score higher in both measures of narcissism and lower on the self-esteem measure, compared to their heterosexual counterparts. The same pattern is observed with respect to the vulnerable as well as the grandiose aspects of narcissism.

'Best little boy in the world' hypothesis

The childhood history of a psychopath character structure often includes spectacular over achievements in school, in sports and / or in the arts. It is a general belief in the 'coming-out' narrative of homosexual people that they hide their insecurities over being a 'closeted' gay by investing themselves into their studies, sports or hobbies.

A study by Mallard contains statistical proof in support of this connection. His "Best Little Boy in the World" hypothesis has been tested in a study published in the academic journal *Basic and Applied Social Psychology* ^[11]. According to the author,

² See for example Rubinstein ^[15].

researchers interviewed 195 male college students who identified as either heterosexual or a 'sexual minority'. Not only did gay male students tend to be more likely overachieve, there was a positive correlation between how much they felt like they had to hide their sexuality and how well they did in school and extracurricular activities, and how much they based their self-worth on things like academics, appearance and competition.

The 'weak or absent father' theory

One of the early environmental factors shaping the psychopath character structure is the significant absence of a parent of the same sex in the child's early life; either due to work, illness, death or divorce.

A study conducted in 2003 explored emotionally absent fathers as one variable in the understanding of homosexuality [16]. The levels of father-son and mother-son emotional connectedness and distance, measured in terms of intimacy and intimidation, were studied among male Catholic seminarians in Canada. The results of the study indicated that men who identified their sexual orientation as homosexual scored significantly lower on their level of intimacy with their fathers than did heterosexual men. No such differences were found in the relationship of men and their mothers. The authors of the study argue that the results lend new credence to the "weak father" theory of homosexuality and to the importance of same-sex emotional connectedness in the psychosexual gender development of individuals.

The 'weak or absent father' theory, however, continues to be a source of heated debate within the LGBT community and published literature. The absent father theory is often used by religious conservatives to justify the use of so-called 'conversion therapy' which aims to change the sexual orientation or gender identity of LGBT people. Johan Meyer, Health Manager at OUT LGBT Well-being in Pretoria states³:

'Major medical and mental health organisations around the world have condemned the practice [conversion therapy] as ineffective and harmful. There is enough scientific evidence to show that people are in fact born gay. It's not an absent father that makes one gay.'

³ 'Gay because of absent father' theory makes headlines (2017),

(<http://www.mambaonline.com/2017/06/26/gay-absent-father-theory-media/>)

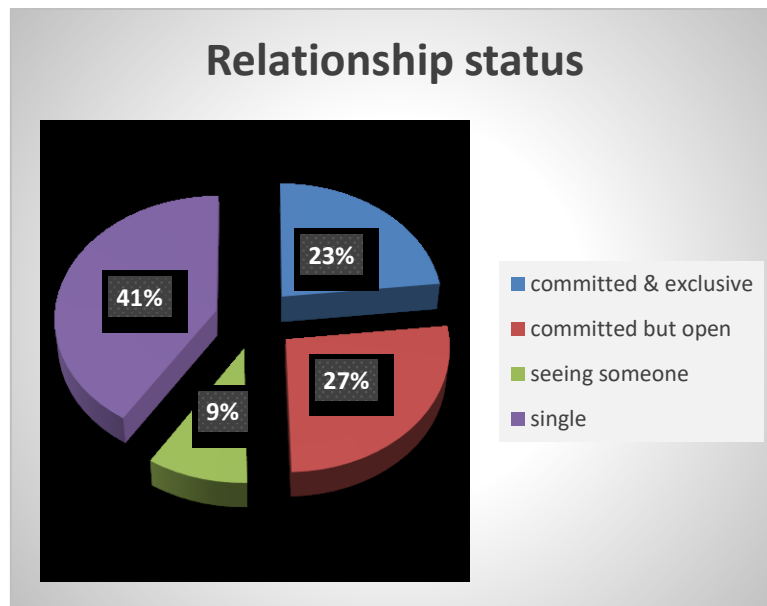
In the absence of any published research on the distribution of character structures in social and other environments, it is difficult to conclude from our comparatively small sample size whether gay men are truly more likely to identify with the psychopath character structure, or whether this is an aberration in the data. However, the fact that homosexual men share several common challenges and internal conflicts during childhood and adolescent life do lend some credence to this hypothesis.

5.2 Relationship types of the Oral and Rigid character structures

Based on the responses received, an equal proportion of gay men are currently in a committed relationship (50%) in contrast to those who are not in a committed relationship (50%). Of the latter group, approximately 41% are single and 10% of the respondents stated that they are seeing someone, but are not in a committed relationship. Of the gay men in committed relationships, 47% are in an exclusive (monogamous) relationship and 53% have an open relationship (non-monogamous). Figure 2 gives a graphical breakdown of the relationship status of the respondents.

These findings correspond with studies conducted elsewhere on the proportion of gay relationships that are non-monogamous. Over the past decade and a half, studies from San Francisco State University and Alliant International University have found that around half of gay relationships are open ^[7].

Figure 2:
Relationship status of gay men

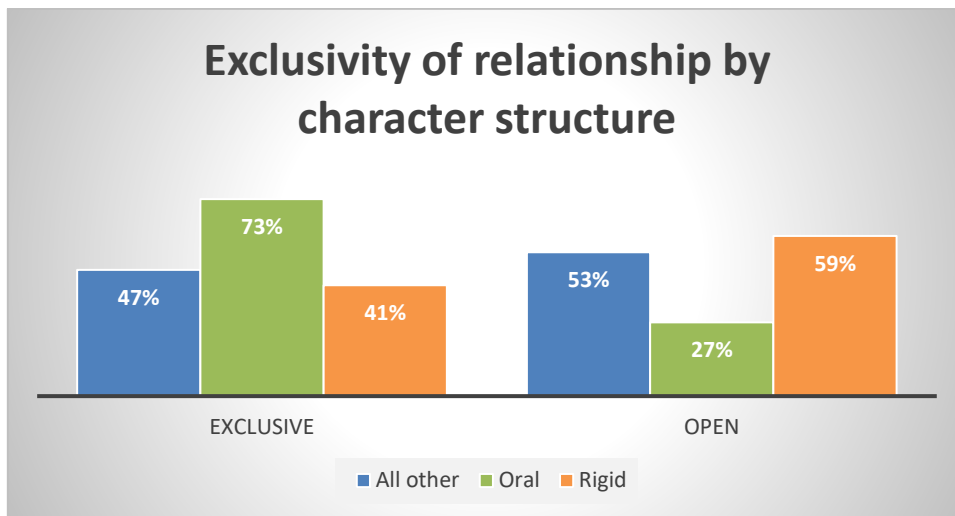


Compared to heterosexual couples, gay male couples tend to approach sex differently and are much more likely to entertain the idea of a non-monogamous relationship. Part of this is in the nature of men's sexuality in general. Gay men are much more likely, in general, to not only be open to the idea of another person (man) having sex with their partner/spouse, but to be turned on by it [5].

In our study, however, we found that the relationship preference of gay men who identify with the oral and rigid character structures deviate from the general trend of other gay men. Figure 3 depicts the proportion of gay men in open or exclusive relationships from the oral and rigid character structures, compared to the other character structures.

Figure 3:

Proportion of committed relationships that are exclusive or open



The oral structure's approach to relationships is influenced by the mothers' connection during the first year and a half of child's life where she offered some warmth and nurturance, but it was not consistently available, or it was prematurely taken away. The mother was uncomfortable allowing the child to bond with her symbiotically and so pushed the child away prematurely, or she was unwilling to separate and held onto the child. The child was left alone for long periods and cries were not heard or answered. Both parents overly relied on the child's premature independence and precocious development [8].

The need for an oral character structure to be in an exclusive relationship could be based on the predominant intense motivation to receive love, be supported and to be taken care of and not shared. Choosing to be in an open relationship could possibly recreate their childhood dynamic in having unavailable 'mothers' around them who cannot give back, and who fail to tend to their needs.

Meanwhile, the rigid character structure's preference towards an open relationship could be due to the distortion that occurred when the child's natural erotic strivings and expressions were greeted with anxiety, rejection, severe disapproval or punishment by sexually repressed parents.

During childhood their united sexuality and love, as symbolised by their pelvis and heart, was made wrong, and became the basis for humiliation, shame, punishment and exploitation. As part of shutting down their feelings and creating defences against being hurt again, they split their love and sexuality between two people in all

future situations. As adults they would tend to have a 'confidante' with which they can have 'heart to hearts' but no sex, and then have a separate partner to whom they submit sexually but will withhold their heart [8].

In a relationship a rigid character tends to shut their heart down and be actively sexual for a period but not really open their heart, since they fear emotional intimacy. They experienced the painful rejection and criticism in childhood as heart breaking and so as a defence is now closed off to being hurt in that vulnerable way again. They instead only offer part of themselves to a partner, typically their thinking intellect and sexuality, while keeping their heart closed. However, outside their romantic relationship, they are more likely to open their hearts.

Our study, therefore, shows that, even though gay men are equally likely to be in exclusive or open relationships, men identifying with the oral character structure prefer to be in an exclusive relationship, while men identifying with the rigid character structure are more open to non-monogamous relationships.

5.3 The sensory experience of the Schizoid character structure

As part of the study we investigated the sensory experiences of gay men during physical intimacy and sex. Across most character types, the sensory preferences of gay men are similar. An exception to this is gay men that identify with the schizoid character structure. Our findings are summarised below:

- Touch – during foreplay 36% of the men surveyed prefer soft touching. During sex this changes to 38% of the men preferring firm gripping. A deviation from this trend is men who identify with the schizoid character structure. Within this group, more than 50% are indifferent to touch or don't like to be touched, both during foreplay and sex.
- Vocal expression – approximately 70% of all respondents prefer moaning during sex, while only 14% of men are put off by vocal expressions.
- Smell - more than half of the respondents (56%) prefer clean / fresh smelling partners during sex, while only 13% of respondents do not have a preference.
- Eye contact - the vast majority of the men (75%) prefer to have eye contact during sex while only 6% of respondents prefer not to have eye contact. However, there is an exception: of the gay men surveyed who identify with the schizoid character structure, 24% prefer not to have eye contact during sex.

- Breathing - most of the men do not have a preference towards breathing during sex.
- Orgasm – the largest proportion of the men in the study (75%) believe they can control the time it takes to reach an orgasm or that it depends on the circumstances or person, both during sex or masturbation. A significantly larger proportion of men identifying with the schizoid character structure, however, believe it takes them longer than they want to reach an orgasm; 28% during sex and 22% during masturbation.
- Physical intimacy – almost all of the men participating in the study (97%) describe themselves as intimate, sensual, passionate or sexual during physical intimacy with only 3% describing themselves as detached. One in four of the men that identifies with the schizoid character structure, however, describe themselves as detached during physical intimacy.
- Sexual intercourse – only 9% of all the men prefer not to engage in sexual intercourse. This proportion, however, is significantly larger for the men that identifies with the schizoid character structure (22%).

While the sensory preferences of gay men are not materially different across most of the character structures, the significantly different preferences of the schizoid character structure towards touch, eye contact, orgasm and physical intimacy and sex is evident.

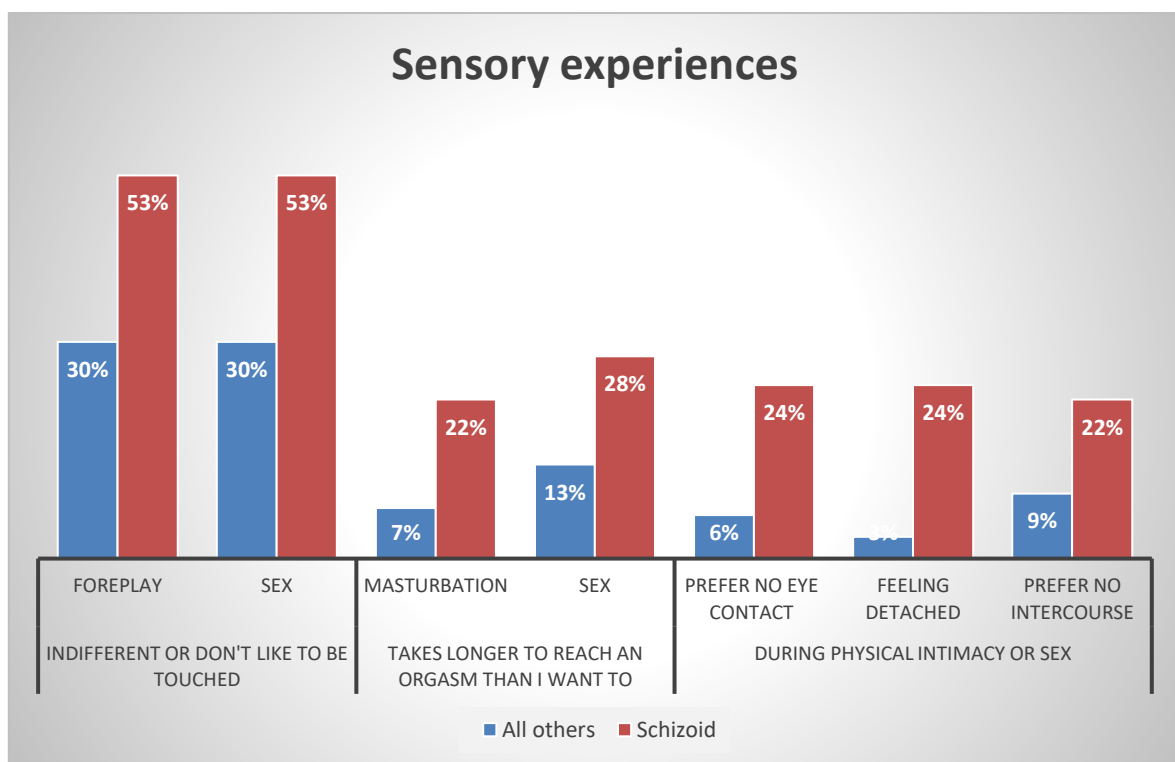
Individuals who associate with the schizoid character structure will often describe themselves as disconnected and not part of the world, feeling as though they're drifting through life and life seems boring or meaningless. The schizoid is often a loner and feels emotionally isolated. The body structure of a schizoid is characterised by deep holding patterns in the core of the body and there's a withdrawal of (sexual) energy which leaves the skin and the extremities cold ^[8]. They often appear aloof and detached, almost always choosing solitary activities and, as the survey has demonstrated, nearly a quarter of them have little or no interest in sexual experiences with another person.

The eyes of the schizoid are striking as they express the frozen shock and terror they faced in the womb. The eyes lack warmth, or are unresponsive, and stays frozen or fixed as they go vacant when they dissociate or 'split off', therefore making eye contact with another person challenging or impossible ^[8].

More than half of the men in the study who identify with the schizoid character structures are indifferent towards touch or prefer not to be touched, and approximately a quarter of the men believe it takes them longer than they want to achieve an orgasm (both during sex or masturbation). Interestingly, a quarter of them prefer not to have eye contact during sex, would describe themselves as detached during physical intimacy, and prefer not to engage in sexual intercourse. Figure 4 compares the proportion of men that identify with the schizoid character structure in these areas with the proportion across the other character types.

Figure 4:

Difference in sensory experience of schizoids vs. the other character structures



It is clear from the data analysis that the schizoid character structure's detachment, preference for no eye contact and lack of interest in sexual experiences also applies to gay men who associate with this character structure.

5.4 The Masochistic character structure, masturbation and exhibitionism

In relationships, the masochistic character structure is consciously or unconsciously trying to get appreciation and approval. This is attempted either through exaggerated pleasing or submissive behaviour. The masochist tends to constantly whine and

complain about how they have been misfortunate, which shows the self as miserable and is often seen as masked exhibitionism [2].

The masochist has a strong sexual drive and an intense preoccupation with sex and frequent masturbation. The masochist continuously seeks pleasure and release which are often accompanied by shame and self-punishment. There is also often a fascination with pornography [8].

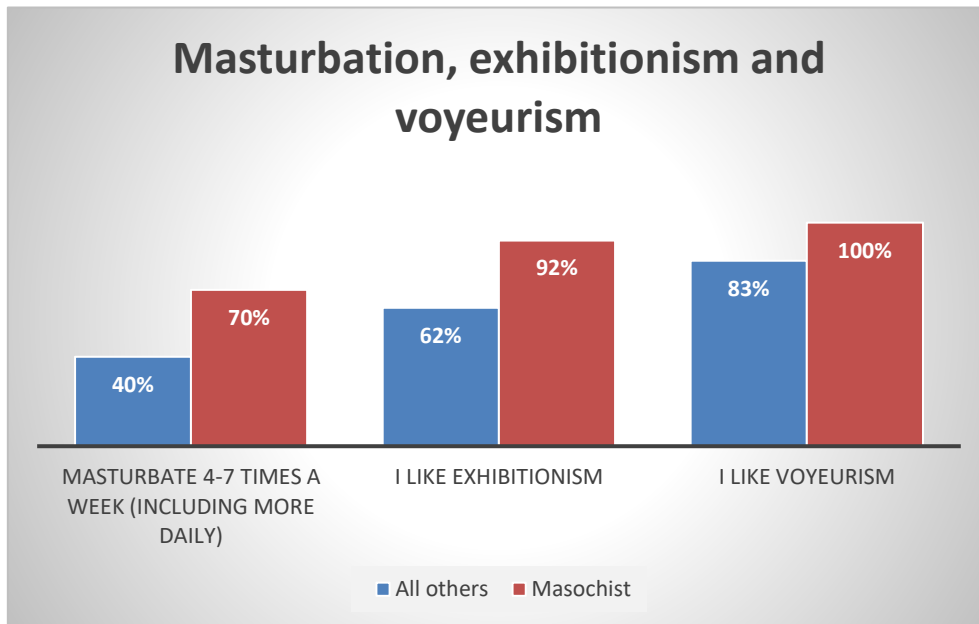
In our study we found that a larger proportion of the gay men (45%) are excited by fetishes / kink, compared to the 34% who are not. When focussing on exhibitionism (exposing oneself) and voyeurism (watching others in sexual acts), more than half of the gay men are open to acts of exhibitionism (62%) and 83% of men are open to voyeurism.

The preoccupation with sex and masturbation of the masochist character structure is evident in the data. A significantly larger proportion of gay men who identify with the masochistic character structure are excited by exhibitionism and voyeurism, compared to the other character structures. Also, the masochistic character structure's excessive masturbation is evident: 70% of gay men who associate with the masochist character masturbate between 1 and 7 times a week (including more than once daily) compared to only 40% for the other character structures who masturbate this frequently.

The differences between the frequency of masturbation and the preference for exhibitionism and voyeurism between the masochistic structure and other character structures are depicted in Figure 5.

Figure 5:

Masturbation frequency and preference towards exhibitionism and voyeurism



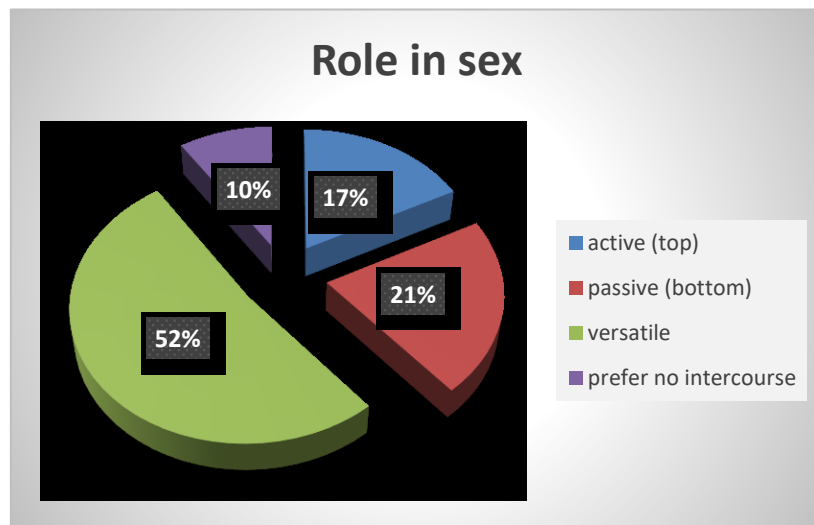
It is clear from the data analysis that the preoccupation of the masochist with masturbation, exhibitionism and voyeurism also applies to gay men that associates with this character structure.

5.5 The self-identified roles of gay men in sex

A number of sociological, psychological and public health studies ^[12] report that many gay men self-identify by their anal penetrative roles, i.e. bottom or exclusively receptive, top or exclusively insertive, or versatile, which is both receptive and insertive during anal intercourse. These studies have found that many gay men actually self-identify as versatile. For a small minority, the distinction doesn't apply since some gay men lack any interest in anal sex and instead prefer different sexual activities ^[3].

Our study confirms these findings. Figure 6 represents the distribution of gay men who self-identify with the role of top (17%), bottom (21%) or versatile (52%), with only 10% of gay men stating that they prefer not to engage in anal intercourse.

Figure 6:
Self-identified role in sexual intercourse



In previous studies, dominance (power) and submissiveness have been suggested as potential indicators of penetrative roles [12]. These studies suggested that men who prefer insertive anal intercourse like to exert power over their sexual partners during sexual intercourse. Erect penis size may represent the degree of conquest a top can inflict and may represent a sense of accomplishment the receptive partner might receive from anal intercourse. However, others argue that such assertions may be inconsistent and that the self-identified roles of gay men in sex rely almost entirely on the dynamics between sexual partners and correlates with differences in physical preferences for a sexual partners [17].

The psychopath character structure has an innate fear of being controlled or humiliated. The psychopath demands to be seen as special and unique which in turn leads to the exertion of power and influence over other people. They are therefore often seen as constantly striving for power and control [8].

If the hypothesis that dominance or power are leading indicators of gay men self-identifying as tops is correct, then it should be simple enough to demonstrate that there is a connection between gay men who identify with the psychopath character structure and also self-identify as a top. However, our study yielded no evidence for a clear link between gay men identifying with the psychopath character structure and assuming the role of a top during sex. This is also the case for all other character structures considered in our study.

What orients men to think of themselves as tops, bottoms or versatiles is poorly understood and its relation to the development, social behaviour and biological

constructs of men is still being debated. Also, the fact that many gay men go one step further and use secondary self-labels such as 'power bottom' (a pairing in which the top is actually submissive to the bottom) adds an additional layer of complexity to the study of the roles of men in sex. Our study has shown that there is no link between the self-identified roles of gay men in sex and the primary character structures they identify with.

6. Concluding remarks

The aim of this study was to investigate the link between the character structures and intimacy and sex in gay men, with a focus on their sexual preferences and practices. The findings of the study are based on a data analysis of a survey completed by 395 gay men and some common threads emerged.

Our analysis showed that there is a greater likelihood that gay men would identify with the psychopath as their primary character structure. This is borne out of the common challenges and internal conflicts faced by gay men as children and throughout adolescent life. These include, but are not limited to, the need to stand up for themselves and clash with authorities and / or legal systems to fight against discrimination and for equal rights. Responses to these challenges can also manifest as acts of grandiosity, self-dramatisation and narcissism, spectacular over achievements in school, in sports and / or in the arts to hide their sexuality. Significantly, our data has shown that the pursuit of power and control in the psychopath character structure is not an indicator of the choice of a man's role in sex.

While gay couples are equally likely to be in an open or exclusive relationship, men identifying with the oral character structure are more likely to prefer an exclusive relationship because of the need to be loved, supported and taken care of, and not to be shared. Men identifying with the rigid character structure, however, are more likely to entertain an open relationship because of the split in their love and sexuality and their decreased interest in maintaining a monogamous relationships.

Gay men who identify with the schizoid character structure are more likely to be indifferent towards touch, prefer no eye contact and prefer not to engage in sexual intercourse. Meanwhile, gay men identifying with the masochist are more likely to exhibit an interest in masturbation, exhibitionism and voyeurism.

The themes that have emerged from the survey data are certainly compelling and suggest that there is more work that can be done in this area. The distribution of

character structures in social environments, economic conditions, genders and sexual orientation would be an interesting topic to investigate. To our knowledge, no such study has been conducted or published in academic literature. It is, however, doubtful that character structures in a population would be uniformly distributed where people share similar socio-economic environments, because the character traits we develop to deal with imperfect childhoods and imperfect parents should in theory be influenced by culture, nationality and tradition in which we are raised. This should surely be equally true with regards to people's sexual preferences.

We believe the information on the primary character structure of gay men and the commonalities in the traits of the character structures relating to psychological and sexual functioning in gay male relationships presented in this paper are valuable information for core therapists that work with gay men and their sexuality.

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Appendix 1 – Survey questions

Characterological exploration of intimacy and sex in gay men

This study investigates the possible link between the character structures (personality types) of gay men and their sexual preferences and practices.

A character structure is a system of traits that are manifested in the ways that we relate and react to others, to various kinds of stimuli, and to the environment. Wilhelm Reich's early work laid the foundation for the classification of 5 character structures, which was further developed by Alexander Lowen, John Pierrakos and others. These relate to patterns that are most often developed in childhood as a way to protect ourselves from challenging life experiences. The character structures are: schizoid (creative), oral (lover), masochist (endurer), psychopath (challenger/defender) and rigid (achiever).

The following questionnaire aims to identify your primary character structure (first part) and ask a series of questions relating to your sexual preferences and practices (second part). It takes approximately 12 minutes to complete the questionnaire. Responses are anonymous and cannot be identified.

Part 1: Character structures

For each of the questions in part 1, please indicate to what extent the statement is true in your life. Choose only one answer.

	<i>Not at all true</i>	<i>Seldom true</i>	<i>Somewhat true</i>	<i>Generally true</i>	<i>Very true</i>
1 My biggest fear is to be controlled	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
2 I sometimes think I should have more compassion towards people or situations	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
3 Energetically I feel highly charged and need stimulation	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
4 On an emotional level I often get bored	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
5 When completing a task I take control to ensure that things get done	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
6 It's easy for me to argue different points to convince people of my point of view	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
7 I get really angry when I'm criticised and take it personally	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
8 I trust the ideas in my head rather than my feelings when things gets tough	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
9 I'm afraid to be abandoned and be alone	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
10 I often have a desire to be more independent	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
11 I am often irritable, tired and have mood swings	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
12 I often feel emotionally unfulfilled	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
13 I would typically invest a lot of energy in a special project but then struggle to complete it	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
14 I would rather give in to a disagreement with someone in order to avoid any conflict	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
15 I get angry when I'm not appreciated	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

	<i>Not at all true</i>	<i>Seldom true</i>	<i>Somewhat true</i>	<i>Generally true</i>	<i>Very true</i>
16 I never seem to have enough money, time or energy	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
17 I will often complain a lot about my work, relationships or life	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
18 I wish that I was more free and spontaneous	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
19 I often feel that I'm physically suffering and struggling to cope	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
20 I feel emotionally trapped and stuck in life	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
21 When having to complete a task I often feel there's just not enough time to finish it	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
22 When I disagree with someone, I will be excessively kind to hide it	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
23 I often explode (unexpectedly) with anger and then feel guilty about it	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
24 When I'm in a stressful situation I will organise my mind to gain order	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
25 I'm often afraid my whole world will collapse or fall apart	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
26 I wish that my life was closer to being whole and complete	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
27 I often feel numb, and that there's no joy in life	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
28 I find it difficult to focus when I'm busy with a project or task	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
29 I feel emotionally empty and that life is meaningless	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
30 When I disagree with someone I tend to disengage from the conversation	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
31 When I get really angry I will just passively withdraw	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
32 I feel that I'm not part of this world and don't want to cope with stressful situations	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
33 One of my biggest fears is to look foolish	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
34 I often wish that I can accept life as it is	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
35 I feel very anxious when things aren't done	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
36 I will make every effort to ensure success is achieved in a project or task	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
37 Despite achieving successes in life, I still feel unsatisfied	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
38 It is difficult for me to be spontaneous and just be silly	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
39 I find it difficult to express my feelings	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
40 I am stubborn and will deal with stressful situations head on	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Part 2: Sexual preferences and practices

This part is a series of questions relating to your sexual preferences and practices. Please choose only one option unless specified otherwise.

- 41 I am currently,
 in a committed relationship and exclusive seeing someone but not committed yet
 in a committed, but open relationship single
- 42 Which gay tribe would you identify yourself with (choose only one option)
 Bear - A large, hairy and usually bearded older man Cub - A big and hairy young man
 Daddy - An older man who prefers younger men Otter - A furry, athletic, thinner man
 Jock - An athletic man who, particularly macho / into sports Twink - A young, slim and smooth man
 The guy next door Geek - A man obsessed intellectuality, electronics, etc.
 I do not identify myself with any of the gay tribes Wolf - A semi-hairy, lean, muscular, aggressive man
 Other (please specify)
- 43 Which of the gay tribes are you sexually attracted to (select all applicable)
 Bear - A large, hairy and usually bearded older man Cub - A big and hairy young man
 Daddy - An older man who prefers younger men Otter - A furry, athletic, thinner man
 Jock - An athletic man who, particularly macho / into sports Twink - A young, slim and smooth man
 The guy next door Geek - A man obsessed intellectuality, electronics, etc.
 I do not identify myself with any of the gay tribes Wolf - A semi-hairy, lean, muscular, aggressive man
 Other (please specify)
- 44 During physical intimacy, I would describe myself as being
 intimate sexual
 sensual passionate
 detached other (please specify)
- 45 Choose one option that best describes your sexual preference
 passive (bottom) versatile (depending on the situation / person)
 active (top) prefer not to engage in intercourse
- 46 During sex, I like to be
 dominated a combination of the above two
 submissive none of above
- 47 My preferred sexual position is,
 missionary sitting
 on all fours kneeling
 standing no preference
- 48 When engaging in sexual activity,
 I like to participate in groups (3 or more) I prefer phone sex
 I prefer one on one it depends on the mood
 I prefer online sex
- 49 During foreplay, my preference to being touched is
 firm gripping I don't have a preference
 soft touching I don't like to be touched
 light stroking

- 50 During sexual intercourse, my preference to being touched is
- | | | | |
|----------------|-----------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------|
| firm gripping | <input type="radio"/> | I don't have a preference | <input type="radio"/> |
| soft touching | <input type="radio"/> | I don't like to be touched | <input type="radio"/> |
| light stroking | <input type="radio"/> | | |
- 51 My preference towards oral sex is,
- | | | | |
|-------------------|-----------------------|----------------------------------|-----------------------|
| I like to give | <input type="radio"/> | I like both giving and receiving | <input type="radio"/> |
| I like to receive | <input type="radio"/> | I do not like oral sex | <input type="radio"/> |
- 52 I masturbate,
- | | | | |
|--------------------|-----------------------|------------------------|-----------------------|
| once or more daily | <input type="radio"/> | 1 - 3 times a month | <input type="radio"/> |
| 4 - 6 times a week | <input type="radio"/> | less than once a month | <input type="radio"/> |
| 1 - 3 times a week | <input type="radio"/> | never | <input type="radio"/> |
- 53 When masturbating, I use sexual toys
- | | | | |
|-----|-----------------------|-----------|-----------------------|
| yes | <input type="radio"/> | sometimes | <input type="radio"/> |
| no | <input type="radio"/> | | |
- 54 I watch pornography,
- | | | | |
|--------------|-----------------------|------------|-----------------------|
| all the time | <input type="radio"/> | not at all | <input type="radio"/> |
| sometimes | <input type="radio"/> | | |
- 55 When having sex,
- | | | | |
|---|-----------------------|--|-----------------------|
| it takes me longer than I want to reach an orgasm | <input type="radio"/> | I can control the time it takes for me to achieve orgasm | <input type="radio"/> |
| I orgasm more quickly than I want to | <input type="radio"/> | the time it takes me to achieve an orgasm depends on t | <input type="radio"/> |
- 56 When masturbating,
- | | | | |
|---|-----------------------|--|-----------------------|
| it takes me longer than I want to reach an orgasm | <input type="radio"/> | I can control the time it takes for me to achieve orgasm | <input type="radio"/> |
| I orgasm more quickly than I want to | <input type="radio"/> | the time it takes me to achieve an orgasm depends on t | <input type="radio"/> |
- 57 My preference towards mutual masturbation is,
- | | | | |
|------------------|-----------------------|---|-----------------------|
| I like it | <input type="radio"/> | it depends on the person or circumstances | <input type="radio"/> |
| I do not like it | <input type="radio"/> | | |
- 58 When having sex, my preference regarding vocal expression is
- | | | | |
|-----------|-----------------------|------------------------------|-----------------------|
| moaning | <input type="radio"/> | humming | <input type="radio"/> |
| screaming | <input type="radio"/> | vocal expression puts me off | <input type="radio"/> |
| panting | <input type="radio"/> | | |
- 59 My preference towards exhibitionism (exposing oneself) is,
- | | | | |
|------------------|-----------------------|--|--|
| I like to do it | <input type="radio"/> | | |
| I do not like it | <input type="radio"/> | | |
- 60 My preference towards voyeurism (watching others) is,
- | | | | |
|------------------|-----------------------|--|--|
| I like to do it | <input type="radio"/> | | |
| I do not like it | <input type="radio"/> | | |
- 61 During sex, my preference towards smell is
- | | | | |
|---------------|-----------------------|---------------------------|-----------------------|
| sweaty | <input type="radio"/> | sour | <input type="radio"/> |
| musky | <input type="radio"/> | sweet | <input type="radio"/> |
| fresh / clean | <input type="radio"/> | I don't have a preference | <input type="radio"/> |
- 62 During sex, my preference towards eye contact is
- | | | | |
|------------------------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|-----------------------|
| I like looking in their eyes | <input type="radio"/> | I have no preference | <input type="radio"/> |
| I prefer not to look in their eyes | <input type="radio"/> | | |

63	During sex, my breathing is			
	shallow	<input type="radio"/>	slow	<input type="radio"/>
	deep	<input type="radio"/>	holding in	<input type="radio"/>
	fast	<input type="radio"/>	a combination of the above	<input type="radio"/>
64	I am into fetishes and / or kink,			
	yes	<input type="radio"/>	I don't know	<input type="radio"/>
	no	<input type="radio"/>		
65	My preference regarding safer sex (wearing condoms for penetrative anal sex),			
	always wear a condom	<input type="radio"/>	it depends on the person	<input type="radio"/>
	never wear a condom (bareback)	<input type="radio"/>		
66	During sex, my preference regarding recreational drugs is			
	I will only do poppers	<input type="radio"/>	I prefer not to take any kind of recreational drugs	<input type="radio"/>
	I like doing it with recreational drugs	<input type="radio"/>	it really depends on the circumstances	<input type="radio"/>
67	After sex, my preference is to (select all applicable)			
	cuddle	<input type="radio"/>	leave	<input type="radio"/>
	kiss	<input type="radio"/>	sleep	<input type="radio"/>
	talk	<input type="radio"/>	it depends on the moment or person	<input type="radio"/>
68	I find the following parts of my body erogenous (select all applicable)			
	Hair	<input type="checkbox"/>	Chest	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Ears	<input type="checkbox"/>	Nipples	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Cheeks	<input type="checkbox"/>	Arm pits	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Nose	<input type="checkbox"/>	Back	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Eyebrows	<input type="checkbox"/>	Legs	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Forehead	<input type="checkbox"/>	Toes	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Lips	<input type="checkbox"/>	Feet	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Neck	<input type="checkbox"/>	Anus	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Shoulders	<input type="checkbox"/>	Penis	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Arms	<input type="checkbox"/>	Scrotum	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Hands	<input type="checkbox"/>	Perineum (between anus and testicles)	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Fingers	<input type="checkbox"/>	Stomach, around belly button area	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Other (please specify)	<input type="checkbox"/>		
	<input style="width: 300px; height: 15px;" type="text"/>			