

Sexual Desire by Enneagram Type, Dominant Instinct, and Energy Center

Below are the abridged findings of a recent dissertation study by Sam E. Greenberg. The study used a convenience sample of 830 mostly young white people, so we should interpret the findings with that caveat in mind.

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Type One

Type ones ranked low in sexually explicit materials use, lowest of all types in BDSM participation, low in dyadic sexual desire and low in tolerating time without sex, meaning they can go longer without sex than other types.

Ones also scored low in sensitivity to emotional bonding cues, explicit/erotic cues, visual/proximity cues, and romantic/implicit cues. Ones scored in the middle for sexual assertiveness, although still in the bottom half. Ones also scored in the middle of types for pleasing a partner, indicating that a partner's pleasure is relatively important to type ones.

Ones value responsibility more than indulgence, are fastidious with high standards, and hold a moral absolutist outlook. It follows that type ones might experience barriers to sexual desire, particularly aspects of desire that are sometimes associated with moral judgment such as BDSM and sexually explicit materials use. Further, for many type ones, sex could be considered an indulgence that results in avoiding responsibility, which is anathema to their values.

Despite reporting lower sexual desire than other types overall, type ones are relatively sexually assertive and relatively valuing of a partners' pleasure, indicating that, when they do engage sexually, they are able to communicate their desires to a partner and value the desires communicated by the partner.

Type Two

Type twos ranked in the middle of types for sexually explicit materials use, high in BDSM participation, and in the middle for dyadic sexual desire and time without sex. Twos scored higher than all other types in sensitivity to emotional bonding cues, in the middle for sensitivity to explicit/erotic cues and visual/proximity cues, and high in sensitivity to romantic/implicit cues. Twos scored in the middle for sexual assertiveness and highest of all types for pleasing a partner – a partner's pleasure is always more important to type twos than their own pleasure.

Enneagram theory describes type twos as relationship oriented, with a strong inclination to people pleasing and putting the needs of others before their own. Twos are empathetic, nurturing, and have difficulty expressing their own needs. It follows that twos would be sensitive to emotional bonding cues such as “your partner does ‘special’ or ‘loving’ things for you” and “your partner expresses interest in hearing about you,” both of which entail the partner giving to the type two without being asked, a primary unexpressed desire of twos. Similarly, emotional bonding cues such as “experiencing emotional closeness with a partner” and “feeling a sense of love with a partner” would appeal to the type two's relationship orientation.

Romantic/implicit cues, such as “having a romantic dinner with a partner,” “giving or receiving a massage,” “laughing with a romantic partner,” and “touching your partner's hair or face,” would also appeal to type twos' relationship orientation and desire for romantic reciprocity. Twos would be expected to value a partner's pleasure above their own.

Enneagram theory describes type twos as drawn to qualities of love, closeness, and warmth, so twos would be expected to fall lower in BDSM participation, given that BDSM is not stereotypically associated with warmth and closeness. Future research should seek to ascertain whether twos are the initiators of BDSM participation or have been asked to participate by a partner, which would provide more insight into the reasons twos engage in BDSM.

Given that twos are other-oriented to the point of sometimes neglecting themselves, they would be expected to score low in sexual assertiveness. In fact, twos scored in the middle of types for sexual assertiveness after nines, sixes, fives, and ones, who ranked lower. This indicates that although type twos value partners' pleasure above their own, they can communicate clearly about sex and their sexual desires.

Type Three

Type threes scored lowest of all types for sexually explicit materials use, low in BDSM participation, in the middle for dyadic sexual desire, and low for time without sex, meaning they can comfortably go longer without sex than most other types. Threes scored in the middle for sexual assertiveness and low on pleasing a partner.

Threes scored low in sensitivity to emotional bonding cues, in the middle for sensitivity to explicit/erotic cues, high in sensitivity to visual/proximity cues, and in the middle for sensitivity to romantic/implicit cues.

Visual/proximity desire cues would be likely to appeal to threes because threes are highly status-conscious and tend to focus on image, achievement, and success. Many visual/proximity cues relate to status, achievement, and success, for example, "seeing someone who is well-dressed or 'has class,'" "seeing/talking with someone famous," "seeing/talking with someone powerful," "seeing/talking with someone wealthy."

Type Four

Type fours scored high across almost every measure in this study. Fours scored in the middle on sexually explicit materials use, high on BDSM participation, high on dyadic sexual desire, and high on time without sex, indicating that they are uncomfortable going without sex. Fours scored high in sensitivity to emotional bonding cues, explicit/erotic cues, and visual/proximity cues, and in the middle for romantic/implicit cues. Fours scored high for sexual assertiveness and in the middle for pleasing a partner.

Fours are idealistic in temperament, with a tendency to artistic disposition, and they highly value emotional intimacy. As such, fours would seem likely to be drawn to romantic partnerships and connections, but not necessarily sexual ones. Fours' disinterest in romantic/implicit cues, relative to emotional bonding, explicit/erotic, and visual/proximity cues is also surprising. As sensitive and emotional types, often called "the romantic," fours would seem likely to be interested in romantic bonding cues prior to experiencing sexual desire. However, considering the epithet of "the romantic" in a broader context, one that considers the philosophy of Romanticism, rather than merely romantic love, could provide some insight. Romanticism, a set of philosophies dating from the early 18th century to the mid-19th century, emphasized beauty, emotion, and the importance of the individual: all concepts that are typified in type fours. Further, type fours might eschew clichéd and stereotypical expressions of romance, making them likely to reject romantic sexual desire cues such as "watching a sunset" that seem to them conventional.

The strong sense of something missing within fours may explain the high sexual desire they report. A desire for someone to complete or rescue them, which can be found or imagined in a sexual partner, may be interrelated with sexual desire for fours.

Type Five

Type fives scored in the middle for sexually explicit materials use and BDSM participation, lowest of all types on dyadic sexual desire, and in the middle for time without sex. Fives scored lowest of all types in sensitivity to emotional bonding cues, explicit/erotic cues, visual/proximity cues, and romantic/implicit cues, indicating less sensitivity than other types to all sexual desire cues. Fives scored low in sexual assertiveness and in the middle for pleasing a partner.

Enneagram theory describes fives as extremely self-contained, with the focus of attention located mostly in the head. From this perspective, sexual desire could seem of little interest to fives, as something that often takes place primarily in the body. However, fives also scored low on frequency of sexual thoughts, an aspect of desire that relates directly to the mind.

Another possible explanation for fives' low dyadic desire and low responsiveness to desire cues might be that interacting with others tends to be significantly draining for fives, even if the interaction is pleasurable. However, within this line of reasoning, one would

expect fives to score higher on sexually explicit materials use and solo sexual desire, given fives' desire to experience the world while remaining detached, and in both cases fives scored near the bottom.

Type Six

Type sixes scored low on sexually explicit materials use, BDSM participation, and dyadic sexual desire, and lowest of all types on time without sex, meaning sixes can comfortably go longer without sex than any other type.

Sixes scored in the middle for sensitivity to emotional bonding cues and low in sensitivity to explicit/erotic cues, visual/proximity cues, and romantic/implicit cues. Sixes also scored low in sexual assertiveness, meaning they are less sexually assertive than most other types. Sixes scored high on pleasing a partner.

Consistent with Enneagram theory, sixes may be able to comfortably go longer without sex than other types given sixes' orientation to the security of the relationship. Sixes feel that their own safety and security are contingent upon the assured continuation of the relationship. As such, if a partner does not initiate sex, sixes will continue without sex rather than risk initiating sex and potentially threatening the security of the relationship.

Also consistent with Enneagram theory, sixes value emotional bonding cues above all other sexual desire cues, likely owing to the emphasis of these cues on relationship security, for example, "talking about the future with your partner," "your partner is supportive of you," "feeling a sense of commitment from a partner," "feeling a sense of security in your relationship." Sixes fear rejection and avoid risk, which likely explains their low sexual assertiveness scores.

Type Seven

Type sevens scored high in sexually explicit materials use, in the middle for BDSM participation, high for dyadic sexual desire, and low on time without sex, meaning they can comfortably go less time without sex than most other types. Sevens scored in the middle

on sensitivity to emotional bonding cues, high on explicit/erotic cues, and highest of all types on visual/proximity cues and romantic/implicit cues. Sevens ranked high on sexual assertiveness and lowest on pleasing a partner.

Sevens have a general tendency toward assertiveness, which explains their high ranking on sexual assertiveness measures. Sevens are adventurous and open to new experiences, which might explain their high use of sexually explicit materials and relatively high BDSM participation.

Previous Enneagram research found that sevens score lowest of all types on measures of empathy related to compassionate care for others. Compassionate care could be considered analogous to caring for a partner's sexual needs or placing a partner's pleasure above one's own.

Sevens' high sensitivity to visual/proximity cues and romantic/implicit cues is not predictable, given Enneagram theory. Their interest in visual/proximity cues may arise less from an interest in status but due to the thrill of a new experience, which is a driving motivator for sevens. Sevens' interest in romance may be explained by a similar motivation: romantic/implicit cues might be new and interesting to a seven, different from their typical experiences, and as such may be sexually interesting.

Type Eight

Type eights scored highest of all types on sexually explicit materials use, BDSM participation, dyadic sexual desire, and time without sex, meaning they are more uncomfortable going without sex than all other types. Eights scored high on sensitivity to emotional bonding cues, highest of all types on sexual assertiveness, sensitivity to explicit/erotic cues, and high on sensitivity to visual/proximity cues and romantic/implicit cues.

Eights ranked low on pleasing a partner.

Eights' high scores on all measures are consistent with Enneagram theory. Although their passion of lust is typically defined beyond sexual appetites, it stands to reason that lust would be demonstrated in the sexual arena as well. Eights are the most assertive type of

the Enneagram, which explains their high score on sexual assertiveness. Eights' high scores on all desire measures are also explained by their tendency to have a high "appetite for satisfaction" and to be driven by a relentless need for intensity.

Given eights' high scores on all measures of desire cues, it appears that eights demonstrate a preference for explicit/erotic cues over emotional bonding, visual/proximity, and romantic/implicit cues. Explicit erotic cues, as the name implies, are explicitly sexual in content, for example, "watching an erotic movie," "watching or listening to other people engage in sexual behavior/activity," "asking for or anticipating sexual activity," "talking about sexual activity or 'talking dirty'," or "sensing your own or your partner's wetness, lubrication, or erection." Eights' preferences for these cues are consistent with Enneagram theory, which describes eights as straightforward and able to ask for what they want with little to no subtext or mystery beneath their words. Eights likely prefer straightforward and easy-to-interpret sexual cues, just as they prefer straightforward communication in everyday life.

Type Nine

Nines scored high among types on sexually explicit materials use and for pleasing a partner. Nines scored in the middle for BDSM participation, dyadic sexual desire, time they can comfortably go without sex, and for sensitivity to emotional bonding cues, explicit/erotic cues, visual/proximity cues, and romantic/implicit cues. Nines scored lowest of all types on sexual assertiveness.

Nines tend to merge with others and lose touch with their internal environment so much as to be unable to report their desires. It stands to reason that this pattern would continue in sexuality, with nines reporting low sexual assertiveness; nines are loath to express, or perhaps even identify, their sexual desires. This might explain nines' rankings in the middle of types for almost every measure. Nines would be more likely to report a middle score rather than taking a strong stance on any particular sexual desire question. Further, nines are generally happy to put partners' pleasure ahead of their own both within and beyond the sexual arena.

Nines' high sexually explicit materials use would not be predicted by Enneagram theory, given that nines tend to be relatively passive. High sexually explicit materials use and relatively high solo sexual desire may be explained by the fact that in these arenas nines do not need to involve another person in actualizing their desires so are able to avoid potential conflict.

Sexual Desire by Dominant Instinct

Sexual Instinct

Individuals with sexual instinct dominant scored highest compared to other dominant instincts on dyadic sexual desire, solo sexual desire, and limited tolerance for time without sex. Sexual instinct dominant individuals also scored highest in sensitivity to explicit/erotic cues.

People with the sexual instinct dominant are oriented to the attention of others and typically find sexual interest from others and sex with others as important for validation of their worth. As such, it makes sense that individuals with sexual instinct dominant would report high overall dyadic sexual desire and limited tolerance for time without sex.

Social Instinct

Individuals with the social instinct dominant scored lowest on dyadic sexual desire and sensitivity to explicit/erotic cues. Social instinct dominant individuals scored in the middle on solo sexual desire and tolerance for time without sex.

Due to social instinct dominant individuals' focus on connection and maintaining relationship, they are likely to exhibit dyadic desire more responsively than the other instincts and to be comfortable without sex as long as their partner is comfortable as well.

Self-Preservation Instinct

Individuals with the self-preservation instinct dominant scored in the middle on dyadic sexual desire, tolerance for time without sex, and sensitivity to explicit/erotic cues, and lowest on solo sexual desire.

People with the self-preservation instinct dominant would be expected to report that they can go longer without sexual activity than people of other instincts, due to the self-preservation's belief that an excessive focus on intimacy can undermine access to resources. Self-preservation dominant people would also be predicted to score higher than others on solo sexual behavior, owing to this instinct's focus on self-reliance and tendency to view sexual release a biological need rather than a means to intimacy. It may be that, in fact, self-preservation dominant individuals view solo sexual behavior, as well as dyadic sexual behavior, as an energy expenditure. Conversely, self-preservation instinct dominant individuals may view dyadic sex as a means to fulfilling a biological need and thus be less comfortable going without sex than social dominant individuals.

Sexual Desire by Energy Center

Body Center

Body types, the triad composed of types eight, nine, and one, scored highest on sexually explicit materials use and responsiveness to genital sensations, tied with thinking types on sexual assertiveness, and scored in the middle on frequency of sexual thoughts.

Results are somewhat consistent with Enneagram theory. Body types might not be expected to score highest on sexually explicit materials use, as this could be considered a head-centered expression of sexual desire. It is likely that type eights' high score on this measure artificially elevated the results for the body triad.

Body types would be expected to be most responsive of all triads to genital sensations, owing to the tendency of body types to identify with the body, as well as the tendency to resist being affected by factors outside their own body.

Feeling Center

Feeling types, the triad composed of types two, three, and four, scored lowest on sexually explicit materials use, highest on sexual assertiveness and frequency of sexual thoughts, and in the middle on responsiveness to genital sensations.

Results are somewhat inconsistent with Enneagram theory. Feeling types would be expected to use sexually explicit materials least due to the value they place on emotional and romantic aspects of connection. However, feeling types would be expected to score lowest rather than highest on sexual assertiveness because they tend to seek approval from others and are therefore less likely to be assertive. Perhaps the feeling triad's ability to know their own emotions supports them in sexual assertiveness because they are able to more clearly understand their positive and negative feelings related to sexual activity and, by understanding, can better communicate.

Feeling types would be expected to score lower than thinking types on frequency of sexual thoughts, given that thinking types are most preoccupied with thinking of all the triads. It is possible that feeling types report higher frequency of sexual thoughts due to their tendency to fantasize, particularly in the type four.

Thinking Types

Thinking types, the triad composed of types four, five, and six, scored in the middle on sexually explicit materials use, tied with body types on sexual assertiveness, and scored lowest on frequency of sexual thoughts and responsiveness to genital sensations.

Results are somewhat inconsistent with Enneagram theory. Thinking types would be expected to have low responsiveness to genital sensations due to their tendency to locate attention and perception in the head. However, thinking types would be expected to use sexually explicit materials most and to have greatest frequency of sexual thoughts, based on the tendency of thinking types to rely on their thoughts, concepts, and visualizations. It is possible that the location of attention in thinking types causes a dissociation from the body and, as such, decreases interest in sex overall, extending to both sexually explicit materials use and sexual thoughts. This idea is supported by the low sexual desire reported by types five and six but is confounded by the high desire reported by sevens.

Summary and Interpretations

When interpreting results, it is important to keep in mind that measures included in this study are not fully discrete and may have been influenced by one another. For example, types eight, four, and seven all expressed high desire across measures, and these types also reported high desire related to all desire cues. This is not necessarily because eights, fours, and sevens specifically feel desire related to all cues, but

because they feel high desire generally. The converse is also true; sixes and ones expressed low dyadic desire and did not report high desire related to any type of desire cue. This outcome is not necessarily because sixes and ones do not experience desire related to cues, but because they experience relatively

low desire overall. For this reason, it is important to consider each type's score relative to its own average. For example, sixes scored in the middle of types for sensitivity to emotional bonding cues but toward the bottom of types for every other measure. This indicates that sixes experience high desire related to emotional bonding cues relative to their average desire level. Type threes scored high in sensitivity to visual/proximity cues but in the middle or bottom of types for other measures. This indicates that relative to their average desire, threes are highly sensitive to visual/proximity cues.

Many of this study's conclusions about type, dominant instinct, and triad could have been predicted by Enneagram theorists and practitioners, given the fixations and habits common within the Enneagram system. However, a notable number of study results differ from what could have been predicted. In these

cases, it is helpful to consider several principles. Much about Enneagram type and dominant instinct remains unknown. This is particularly true in the realm of sexuality, which has not been studied in association with Enneagram type and dominant instinct until the present. Anomalous results and outliers exist in much quantitative research and may explain results that run counter to hypotheses.

Alternatively, surprising study results might inspire Enneagram theorists to reconsider what is understood about type and instinct.

Fours are classified as "the romantic," but appear less interested in stereotypical romantic desire cues than one would predict. Perhaps fours' internal definitions of romance are more

complex than is currently understood. Fours may even be suspicious of traditional romantic cues, feeling that these are too common or lacking in depth. Twos are often described as not easily knowing what they want, but they score in the middle of types for sexual assertiveness. It is likely that twos actually do know what they want and are relatively comfortable communicating it but are willing to defer to their partner's pleasure in most cases, giving the appearance that they lack access to knowing their own desires. Sevens' interest in a variety of desire cues from visual/proximity to romantic/implicit demonstrates a complexity within sevens' preferences for which they are not commonly credited.

It is notable that the types that expressed highest desire across measures, types eight, four, and seven, represent all three Enneagram triads. This raises the question of whether sexual desire is experienced the same way for body types, thinking types, and feeling types. Most likely, sexual desire is experienced by eights as bodily sensations and sexual energy, by fours as emotional and sexual longing, and by sevens as a head-centered excitement and desire for new and diverse experiences.