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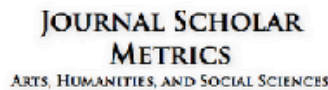
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A Motivational Approach to Sexual Desire: A Model for Self-Regulation

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ABSTRACT

The main objective in this article was to identify the links between classical theories on motivation and postulates on the nature and workings of erotic desire, capturing these links in a model of the motivational processing of desire. The paper reviews the most relevant motivation theories identifying their links to the nature of erotic desire, relating the main variables of these motivation theories to the concept of desire, identifying the similarities between the elements of these constructs. The outcome was a theoretical model of the motivational processing of sexual desire that also includes processes for regulating desire in which a highlight is the interaction between external and internal factors in its development. We understand that these implications underpin the need to adopt a motivational and affective approach to erotic desire, as a process that can be self-regulated. This approach stress the need to continue analyzing the affective experience and the motivational process encapsulated in desire in order to increase our understanding of its activation and development..

Key words: erotic desire, self-regulation, motivation, affect, theoretical study.

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Novelty and Significance

What is already known about the topic?

- Sexual desire is understood as the motivational component of the human sexual response.
- The importance of emotions has been highlighted to understand the development and activation of sexual desire..
- A theory that relates motivation and sexual desire as constructs has not been developed in depth.

What this paper adds?

- This article contributes to the understanding of sexual desire as an affective process.
- This article presents a model of sexual desire derived from classical theories of motivation and emotion, highlighting the evident relationships between the different constructs.
- This article provides theoretical references that indicate the regulation capacity of sexual desire.

The research into human motivation in recent years has involved major studies in the field of psychology (Brown, 2007; Korman, 1974; Maslow, 1991; McClelland, 1987), pedagogy (Banfield & Wilkerson, 2014; Deci, Vallerand, Pelletier, & Ryan, 1991; Ellis, 1986; Wigfield, Cambria, & Eccles, 2012), and even philosophy (Llano, 2009). One of the main difficulties this concept faces is the lack of consensus over its definition (Kleinginna & Kleinginna, 1981), with whatever theories or categories prevailing at any given time taking precedence. The reasoning behind human behavior is intimately linked to the development of the motivational process and understanding it will help us to better comprehend people's behavior.

In the specific field of sexology, understanding the motivational process involved in the development and maintenance of sexual desire contributes to the study of pathological behavior and different kinds of relationships, and even helps to understand the reasons people commit more clearly to sentimental relationships and maintain erotic relationships, among other aspects. From the start, sexual desire has been considered as a drive

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(Freud, 1905), highlighting the more physiological aspects of desire and erotic behavior, rendering it on a par with the basic needs of hunger and thirst. It is now accepted that sexual desire is part of the sexual response, as noted by Kaplan (1979), and it can be understood as a subjective emotional experience (Fuertes, 1995). The underpinnings of these definitions of desire have been based on the explanations that different scholars have contributed to the field, with the majority agreeing on the three levels that form the construct. These include Marañón (1925), who understood desire on a vegetative, psychic, and expressive level; Levine (1984), conceptualizing desire in terms of three components: biological, motivational, and cognitive; through to Fuertes (1995), who has referred to the interaction of a principal triad; a neurophysiological base, an emotional disposition, and the presence of effective inducers. This has consolidated the notion that desire should be studied as the interaction of multiple elements, and its definition is nigh on impossible due to the complexity of its component factors.

Sexual desire has an emotional and motivational component that is vital for its understanding and analysis, and which should be studied for furthering our knowledge of it. It therefore seems evident that when referring to the motivational process of desire we should encounter specific references to what has been called sexual motivation (Kaplan, 1995; Pfaus, 1999; Singer & Toates, 1987; Toates, 2009; Whalen, 1966). We understand it is important here to refer to *sexual motivation* as it is the term used by the aforementioned scholars and studies, although we should like to clarify that what most books and handbooks understand to be sexual motivation will be referred to here as *erotic motivation*. The research purpose is referring more to erotic motivation and not so much to a sexual one, which according to the science of sexology concerns the sexes and their differences.

We may now affirm that sexual motivation in people cannot be understood solely as a basic biological instinct that has to be fulfilled, because the motivation for sex, as Seto (2017) has contended, may influence perceptions, intentions, and other psychological aspects, yet it differs from these phenomena. It would not therefore be appropriate to simply reduce human erotic behavior to that of other more primitive species because the reasons that prompt an individual to generate desire and /or erotic relationships are more complex than in other animals, as human sexuality may be subject to numerous variations of an individual nature because it serves numerous purposes, such as the search for pleasure, the expression of affection, or the affirmation of personal identity, amongst others (García & Díaz, 2011).

It seems obvious that sexual desire cannot be explained solely through biological considerations, or to put it another way, through people's more physiological and reproductive aspects, because although this is an essential component and is part of the process, it would be a mistake to ignore cognitive and affective variables that inform this construct's complexity, besides the situation and context in which it takes place, as it all plays a key role in the generation of erotic desire.

According to the numerous research streams that have studied the nature of motivation and how it develops, it may generally be affirmed that motivation is the study of the "reasons" for individual behavior. The research into motivation over the years has divided it, as noted by Heckhausen (2018), into four basic approaches that have informed the development of the various theories; volitive approaches that respond to the intention and willingness to do something, and therefore to the achievement of a goal. Julius Kuhl, the maximum exponent of this approach, has confirmed that the volitive competence is related to an individual's capacity to stick to a path and shield

it against another tendency to act that may compete with it (Khul, 1996). This theory is especially relevant in this study because this approach gives rise to two central modes of volition: self-control and self-regulation.

The instinct theories approach, which focuses on understanding people's instincts as the drivers of behavior, understands that such instincts are much more than the tendency or innate readiness for action, as even the most innate action is the outcome of a mental process that may be described solely according to three aspects: cognitive, affective, and conative (McDougall, 1908).

The personality theories approach in which personality is understood to be a key domain for understanding the human personality and for explaining individual differences (Heckhausen, 2018). The pioneer in this approach was Sigmund Freud, who contended that unconscious processes were responsible for guiding behavior and influencing conscious thought.

Finally, the association theories approach, which underscores an individual's interaction with the milieu, understanding that the most appropriate and successful behaviors are associated with pleasant feelings (Heckhausen, 2018). They can be divided into theories of learning and theories of activation.

Motivation refers to an individual's internal states that interact with outside factors that may sometimes even be induced by them (Aguado, 2005), with the need to pay attention to these internal states and their role in behavior (Herrera, Montebelli, & Ziemke, 2007) and in the scientific study of motivation (Heckhausen & Heckhausen, 2018).

Understanding motivation as an internal state is one of the points of departure for numerous theories, and that characteristic is currently undeniable. Thus, referring to motivation is to refer to activation (Lindsley, 1951; Malmö, 1959; Duffy, 1962), understanding this term to mean the processes that occur continuously and generally, being considered necessary for understanding an individual's behavior (Palmero, 1995). The term activation may be somewhat contentious, although this study is based on that conception to explain the relationship between desire and motivational processes, as well as their regulation, assuming activation's motivational value (Cannon, 1932; Lacey, 1967). The individual should therefore be understood as a causal agent of behavior; that is, as the one that intentionally makes things happen through their actions (Bandura, 2001), thereby explaining the relationship between activation and intrinsic motivation.

One of the more salient characteristics in the explanations of motivation, and which we aim to highlight in this study, involves an individual's internal motives when behaving in a certain way, as motivation tends to be triggered by an individual's physiological needs (Schultheiss & Wirth, 2018). Nevertheless, we cannot simply link internal states to physiological activation. Some of the more accepted theories in the field single out aspects of an individual's internal state as the main sources of behavior. Bandura's Self-Efficacy Theory focuses mainly on how an individual's motivation and behavior are affected through the perception of self-efficacy and their own capabilities (Bandura, 1982). Self-Determination Theory and Cognitive Evaluation Theory, both formulated by Ryan and Deci (2000), focus on self-motivation or intrinsic motivation, emphasizing the role on an individual's own internal resources and innate psychological needs when self-regulating their own behavior. Finally, note should be taken of Palermo's perspective on motivation, as the starting point for the model introduced here and which considers motivation to be an adaptive process that needs to be understood in terms of sundry components (Palmero, 2005).

This study sets out to identify the links between these classical theories on motivation and the postulates on the aforementioned nature and workings of erotic desire, grouping these links into a model for the motivational processing of desire.

THEORETICAL DEVELOPMENT OF SEXUAL DESIRE AND MOTIVATION AS RELATED CONSTRUCTS

Understanding sexual desire as an affective process requires studying motivation, emotion, and their interaction, together with the way these variables influence the activation and development of the experience of desire in individuals. Analyzing and exploring desire through its affective characteristics will support intervention in clinical practice involving inhibited sexual desire (ISD) among couples, understanding the complex mechanism of its activation and development.

Desire needs to be addressed from what we consider to be its core components to continue unravelling the mechanisms that potentially make sexual desire the most complex aspect of the human sexual response (HSR). In sum, this research makes further progress in the study of the motivational process of desire and the importance of linking the construct to classical theories of motivation, as already reported in a recent theoretical study (Salguero, Pérez, & Sáez, 2019), which laid the foundation for the work presented here.

Motivation and erotic desire. Detail of characteristics

The link between the origin and development of sexual desire and human motivation has long been established (Bockaj, Rosen, & Muise, 2019; Everaerd, Laan, Both, & Spiering, 2001). Understanding that there is a motivational process behind an individual's behavior is something that psychology has been studying for some time, but as for the sexual response, and specifically erotic desire, research requires further studies on the topic. There is therefore a need to continue investigating the processes underlying individuals' sexual behaviors because a knowledge of sexual motives is needed to understand and predict sexual behavior (Browning, Hatfield, Kessler, & Levine, 2000).

In view of the complexity involved in defining a construct such as sexual desire and the difficulty in briefly describing the key aspects that will help us to consider and study it, the concept of desire has a series of limitations that hinder its analysis. One such aspect that we understand restricts a broader understanding and conception of desire is the scarcity of research that sheds light on and links the concept of sexual desire and existing theories on motivation. If we stress that sexual desire is the motivation component of the HSR, that notion should be explained according to classical theories on the psychology of motivation.

We know that desire is not a behavior (Brotto, 2010; Clement, 2002; Gómez-Zapiain, 1994), and although a model of the motivational process is set out below that includes erotic desire's line of development through to the origin of behavior, the first step involves highlighting the importance of the core of the construct that concerns us here from the perspective of classical motivational theories, and thereby explain that desire may be partly understood as a motivational process. Nevertheless, there are studies that sometimes highlight certain basic characteristics of motivation on an independent basis, being summarised here in the following four aspects: internal origin (Hull, 1943; Scheffer & Heckhausen, 2018), interaction with external factors (Beckmann & Heckhausen, 2018; Locke & Schattke, 2019), motivated behavior (Baumeister & Vohs, 2007; Heckhausen, 1977), and regulation capacity (Ryan & Deci, 2000). These

ideas studied in relation to human motivation are not so clear regarding the activation and development of erotic desire, whereby it needs to be stressed that the construct of desire, like motivation, upholds those characteristics.

Internal origin. This aspect is related to those biological and physiological factors that control sexual desire (Kaplan, 1995; Pfaus, 2009; Schiavi & Taylor, 1995), and may acquire a psychological aspect that involves what Levine (1984, 1987, 1988, 2003) has termed “Drive” and “Motivation”, affirming that, among other factors, biology and personal mental states, respectively, interact to generate desire. This is clearly related to Hull’s Theory (Hull, 1943), which addresses human motivation, coining the term drive as the general state of activation required for this behavior. Although we find the relationship that the author considers between drive and the process of reinforcement insufficient for explaining the natures of sexual desire as a whole, we understand there is a need to mention it as a theoretical grounding in the explanation of motivation’s internal origin.

The behavior observed, whereby we infer individuals’ internal states, is furnished with motivational characteristics (Scheffer & Heckhausen, 2018). Understanding that an individual’s motivation for aspiring to a given goal is influenced by personal and situational factors, as well as the expected results of their actions and their ramifications (Heckhausen & Heckhausen, 2018), desire would, in part, a motivational state that is activated and develops according to different variables, such as prior experiences, mood, biological components and environmental factors.

Motivation refers to an individual’s internal states that we infer through the observation of changes in behavior (Aguado, 2005). Schultheiss and Wirth (2018) have reported that the motivation stage is characterized by, amongst other aspects, observable behaviors, whereby it may be stated that motivational processes occur, above all, as subjective feelings (Berridge, 2018). These processes are internal influences that lead to diverse results (Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2020) and this makes it impossible to understand motivation assuming the individual to be a passive agent in the process. At this point, sexual desire should be understood in the same way, being meaningless to conceptualize it detached from the individual, as its entire development will take place within them. This characteristic makes erotic desire, and all motivational processes in general, a unique and subjective phenomenon, thereby explaining once more the peculiarities in the experience of desire.

We deem it highly expedient to single out the recent statement made by Schunk and DiBenedetto, “Key internal motivational processes are goals and self-evaluations of progress, self-efficacy, social comparisons, values, outcome expectations, attributions, and self-regulation” (Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2020, p. 1) as a concise summary of the notion this study seeks to convey.

Interaction with External Factors. Sexual desire is understood through clinical practice by acknowledging the relevant social context (Levine, 2002), and as a motivational process it cannot be studied or analyzed by ignoring the influences of external factors that acquire considerable importance. Investigations such as the one conducted by Nimbi, Tripodi, Rossi, Navarro-Cremades, and Simonelli (2019) on male erotic desire, confirm the importance in the study of desire of relational, situational and cultural factors, besides biological ones. In turn, Mark and Lasslo (2018) have created a conceptual model of the maintenance of desire in long relationships, highlighting the

importance of interpersonal and social factors in understanding desire, concluding that desire is molded through cultural and developmental factors (Schiavi & Taylor, 1995).

Accordingly, desire has been considered the outcome of relational aspects within a broad context (DeLamater & Sill, 2005), even affirming an individual's sexual reaction to their partner depends on the context (Birnbaum, 2017), which helps us to understand that said desire could only be an atmosphere with which to interact.

The detail of internal and external factors will give rise to the different natures of sexual desire which, as we have seen on numerous occasions, may differ depending on everyone. Studies have shown that sexual desire may mean different things for different people, as well as for different relationships (Birnbaum, 2017; Mark, Herbenick, Fortenberry, Sanders, & Reece, 2014; Brotto, Heiman, & Tolman, 2009; Mitchell, Wellings, & Graham 2014) and the specialists in the field should therefore seek to integrate all these aspects, assuming that give it is a subjective experience with different natures it will be almost impossible to provide a single, comprehensive definition. Erotic desire, therefore, is not badly interpreted in the definitions or approaches, but rather different people experience desire in different ways and at different times (Mark *et alia*, 2014).

People's processes and experiences cannot be understood without considering the environment and a given situation, recognizing that the models that focus solely on personality variables in the study of behavior are somewhat limited (Beckmann & Heckhausen, 2018). This is highlighted by certain studies in the field of motivation (Corr & Krupić, 2017; Derryberry & Tucker, 2015) and neuroscience, positing that the study of human personality requires the simultaneous analysis of psychological and biological variables (Cicchetti & Tucker, 1994; Montag & Panksepp, 2020). It is thus understood that human consciousness always interacts with the environment, which is why the factors related to motivation have both an internal and an external aspect (Herrera *et alia*, 2007; Locke & Schatke, 2019; Scheffer & Heckhausen, 2018). This means that although there may be an internal origin for the motivational process and its development, the interaction with external factors will be essential for understanding the individual's role. The now classical and central theory in studies on motivation, and already mentioned here, namely, Hull's Theory, was extended in the 1950s with the concept of incentive, understanding it to be the external factor required in motivation, highlighting the need for a relationship between drive and incentive (Hull, 1952). Motivation, therefore, is the outcome of the interaction between situational incentives and individual dispositions (Scheffer & Heckhausen, 2018).

In our opinion, the key to understanding erotic desire, as in the case of motivation, undoubtedly lies in not restricting it to a single aspect. We need to accept its complexity and its numerous component variables, for as Levine (2003) has established: "Clinicians cannot afford to simplify desire's inherent contradictions. Researchers must simplify desire in order to measure it. In both the clinician's and the researcher's hands, sexual desire is a slippery concept" (p. 279).

Motivated behavior. Sexual desire is channeled toward a goal (Mitchell *et alia*, 2014) and serves to generate actions of an erotic nature that whether or not they take place will be the purpose for the triggering of desire, as the motivational component encompasses the capacity for desire for preparing and inciting what in this case is erotic behavior (Hofmann, Kotabe, Vohs, & Baumeister, 2015). Erotic desire, therefore, has the ability to attract an individual to sexual behavior or distance them from it (Levine, 2002), and is related to the behavioral step of sexual activity (Mark *et alia*, 2014).

It seems contradictory to state that the purpose of desire is solely to generate erotic behavior, as the experience of desire and its entire development involve a much more complex process, whereby reducing it all to erotic behavior seems simplistic, to say the least, yet we should not forget that each one of the factors and characteristics of desire is relevant and provides us with the information required for understanding it, and they are not mutually exclusive. We may now, therefore, defend the multifaceted nature of sexual desire (Mark *et alia*, 2014), assuming that erotic behavior may have its origin in other motives and not solely in the desire for sexual activity *per se*. Herbenick, Mullinax, and Mark (2014) have studied women's desire in long-term relationships, often finding that women said they initiated sexual relationships in the hope of arousing sexual desire once the activity had begun, which is consistent with the results reported by Basson (2000) when explaining her model of female desire, and which often remind us that the direct relationship between sexual desire and sexual behavior may be moderated, albeit not significant (Dewitte & Mayer, 2018; Regan, 2000).

A large part of the study of human motivation involves understanding it as the process that underpins behaviors and therefore prompts them, rendering it impossible to refer to motivation without therefore speaking of motivated behavior (Palmero, 2005). Back in the 1960s, scholars such as Young were already reporting that the study of motivation required finding the determinants of human and animal activity (Young, 1961). We may basically affirm that referring to motivation means taking about any kind of drive or inclination to do something (Baumeister & Vohs, 2007); it is the focus on a behavioral objective in general (Heckhausen, 1977).

Sexual desire is the sum of forces that incite an individual toward sexual behavior (Levine, 2002) and therefore, as an affective process, it is triggered with the ultimate purpose of generating erotic behavior that attenuates the initial determinants that have led to its activation. Erotic behavior will sometimes be undertaken, thus reducing that desire and reinforcing the activation of that process for subsequent occasions if the evaluation is a positive one or, by contrast, the erotic behavior will not take place, and in that case the process either ends or it continues until the activity itself is achieved or until the fulfilment of certain mechanisms that regulate it.

Regulation capacity. Regulation capacity is one of the main features of motivation, and this is revealed by the Self-Determination Theory propounded by Ryan and Deci (2000). There are reasons of an individual and social nature that explain why people's capacity for regulating desires is so important today (Hofmann *et alia*, 2015), which means that sexual desire is no different.

On this point, we are not referring solely to the control of erotic behavior, but also to the actual regulation of the motivational process included in the development and maintenance of desire. Thus, an individual's regulation capacity may involve biological, cognitive and affective variables and take place within a specific environment at a given time.

Although we do not wish to focus this theoretical analysis on behavioral control, it does need to be stated that the regulation of erotic behavior is part of the self-regulation of the motivational process. Thus, in relation to the regulation of the desire phenomenon, Hofmann *et alia* (2015) have focused on the importance of self-control as a system for inhibiting or annulling behavior, as well as on emotional regulation.

One of the more relevant theories on the regulation of behavior, and which is related to the motivational process explained here, is Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory

(Bandura, 1991). It considers motivation to be an internal (personal) process, expressed in target-based actions (Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2020). Bandura contends that human behavior is motivated and regulated by the exercise of self-influence. This means that regulation depends on three mechanisms: self-control, judging behavior in relation to certain personal standards, and affective self-reaction. These aspects are easily linked to the stages of the motivational process described here, for as commented a few lines further down, desire's entire motivational process is triggered with the intention of generating erotic behavior, with the process's regulation contemplating a goal or ideal state and ending with an appraisal of the process and the affective experience.

We consider this to be one of the main aspects to be highlighted in our understanding of erotic desire, namely, its regulation, as it once again considers the individual to be an active agent in the process of such importance in studies on sexual behavior and arousal in the field of hypersexuality and pathological behavior (Garofalo, Velotti, & Zavattini, 2015; Moholy, Prause, Proudfit, Rahman, & Fong, 2015), and reveals the importance of each and every one of its variables, as its regulation involves the interaction of all its component aspects. Basson (2000) highlighted the individual's importance when she described the model of female sexual response, stressing the significance of motivation in desire for subsequent erotic encounters and the individual's conscious choice of stimulating experience throughout the entire process. Also focusing on the individual's active role, Kaplan (1995) has highlighted its physiological role by confirming the importance of people's motivation in the lessening of desire, possibly due to an imbalance in the regulation mechanisms controlled by the central nervous system (CNS).

PROPOSED MODEL OF THE MOTIVATIONAL PROCESS OF EROTIC DESIRE

There is no doubt about the motivational component in the experience of desire. This motivational component encompasses desire's power to prepare and induce behavior (Hofmann *et alia*, 2015).

Since Kaplan (1979) introduced sexual desire as the motivational stage of the HSR, it has been accepted that sexual desires, amongst other factors, the motivation that gives rise, as corresponds, to erotic behavior. The same scholar went on to affirm years later that the pathological lessening of the patients' libido she had studied was due to a dysfunction in the expression of the regulation of sexual motivation, specifying that such motivation was regulated by mechanisms in the CNS and that the system's deficiency would disrupt desire (Kaplan, 1995).

This notion of motivation in the study of desire has subsequently been corroborated in studies such as those by Fuertes (1995), Levine (2002), Toates (2009) and Basson (2000), whose approach to the female sexual response stressed the importance of considering motivation as a key element in female desire.

Although there is no longer any doubt about the presence of motivation as a key factor in the activation and development of desire, this premise has been unanimously accepted without any specific references to theoretical or empirical ties to the psychology of motivation (e.g., Levine, 1984; Fuertes, 1995), which we consider to be a requirement that will help to further our understanding of the construct's workings.

Following the study of the different motivation theories, we can now stress the importance of the model proposed by Palmero (2005), extracting part of it for building a model of the motivational process of sexual desire that we shall be presenting forthwith together with a relational analysis of the author's model alongside our own proposal.

It is crucial to understand motivation as a process, and specifically as a dynamic process (Schultheiss & Wirth, 2018). Palmero (2005) stresses that motivation is an adaptive process in which it is essential to consider the existence of sundry components. Motivation thus implies dynamism.

Referring to dynamism means talking about movement or the production of the same. It is therefore understood that motivation in itself involves generating behaviors, assuming that the presence of a given behavior indicates the existence of a certain level of motivation, although this premises does not hold true the other way around, as the absence of observable behavior does not mean the absence of motivation (Palmero, 2005; Rabideau, 2005). In the field of eroticism, in other words, regarding observables behaviors in relation to sexuality, this notion will be significant, as the presence of erotic behavior in an individual implies the presence of motivation, which may be extrinsic or intrinsic.

Going one step further in the entire process, as noted by Palmero (2005), we need to consider two sections; decision-making and the choice of objective, on the one hand, and control over the action being performed, on the other. Figure 1 shows the diagram of the motivational process.

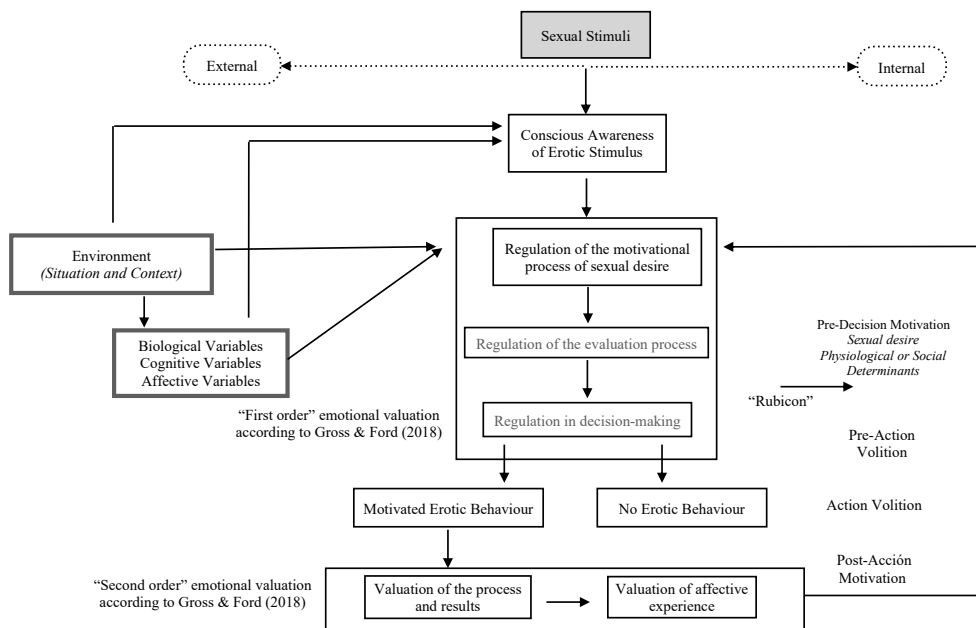


Figure 1. Diagram of the motivational process.

As with the appearance of the stimulus in Palmero’s model (Palmero, 2005), where it is defined as the element that can trigger the motivational process, the stimulus in our model will always be erotic and will be required for activating desire. From a traditional perspective, the origin and activation of sexual desire is understood spontaneously, but the models of recent years have been in charge of specifying that sexual desire responds to sexual stimuli (Goldey & Anders, 2012). This may be external or internal,

as sexual thoughts or desires are naturally stimulated by internal or external signals that indicate a sexual opportunity (Gailliot, 2005). It is obvious that sexual desire can be triggered within the mind (Toates, 2009), in this sense, when the erotic stimulus is internal it will refer to fantasies, desires and erotically charged images that can generate enough motivation in an individual to prompt erotic behavior. In the case of external erotic stimuli, these will involve individuals or situations upon which the sexual desire is focused. In this case, other people or situations trigger the motivational process in a specific individual.

Conscious Perception of Erotic Stimulus. The presence of an erotic stimulus will not be enough, as this stimulus may go unnoticed by the individual unless it becomes conscious. Palmero (2005) states that perception requires the presence of a stimulus, the existence of appropriate receptors and the stimulus's sufficient presential intensity to ensure it is captured by the receptors (p. 17), with this notion being related to the contribution made by Salti, Harel, and Marti (2019), who contend that according to the hypothesis whereby conscious perception is a dynamic process, its updating is informed by three main factors: the context, the relevance of the stimulus and the perceivers' goals.

Research in the field of perception and motivation finds that people are not aware of everything that goes on around them because perception is selective and tends to be biased (Balciotis & Dunning, 2006), which leads us to contend that the stimuli people receive every day, such as erotic stimuli, will not be perceived in the same way or with the same erotic charge across the board. A study conducted by Laan and Janssen (2007) that sexual stimuli among women, more than among men, convey different meanings, with subjective experience being influenced by different factors.

Along these lines, the erotic stimulus should be furnished with meaning by the individual, for as Jackson (1978) notes, sexual desire is not awoken simply through the activation of a stimulus-response mechanism, but instead requires the individual's attribution of sexual meaning to specific stimuli. As clearly affirmed by the models explaining behavior based on "free will", it is found that the individual acts as an agent and active organism and not merely in response to a stimulus (Garrido, 2000). Motivational states therefore have a major influence on the perception and selection of stimuli (Raymond, 2009), as there appears to be greater perceptive sensitivity toward relevant visual stimuli for drivers or desires of a biological nature (Balciotis & Dunning, 2006).

Nevertheless, contrary to the position held by Jackson (1978) affirming that desire in itself will not prompt sexual behavior, we understand that the activation of the process of sexual desire is indeed enough to generate erotic behavior, regardless of whether or not it can be generated, as we contend that the purpose of sexual desire is to trigger behavior.

Some studies on the processing of the erotic stimulus focus on sexual arousal (Janssen & Bancroft; 2006; Janssen, Everaerd, Spiering, & Janssen, 2000), This means it is essential to highlight what we understand to be a clear difference with the processing of stimuli in relation to desire. Some scholars defend the presence of automatic cognitive processes and controlled processes in the perception of stimuli in terms of arousal (Janssen *et alia*, 2000; Toates, 2009), but we can detect clear differences with said cognitive processes regarding the activation of erotic desire. If we assume that arousal and sexual desire are not the same thing (Bozman & Beck, 1991; Cabello, 2010; Kaplan, 1979), then neither will cognitive processes be, and we are inclined to think that the

perception of an internal or external erotic stimulus required for triggering sexual desire must always be conscious, and it cannot be activated or developed through automatic processes, as would indeed be the case with arousal.

Regulation of the motivational process of erotic desire. This point lies at the core of our proposed model because it involves the possibility of regulating erotic desire, making it clear that the possibility, or not, of regulating this process will depend on the individual and their motivation for self-regulation. Self-regulation can generally be understood as an individual's capacity for marshalling their thoughts, feelings or emotions and behaviors in a way that facilitates the achievement of a goal (Luchies, Finkel, & Fitzsimons, 2011; Oyserman, Lewis Yan, Fisher, O'Donnell, & Horowitz, 2017).

As Baumeister and Vohs (2007) have proposed, motivation is a major feature of regulation in an individual provided that they want to achieve a clear standard. If this is not the case, the individual might not self-regulate because they are not interested in whether or not they achieve a goal, thereby understanding the regulation of motivation as the process through which an individual seeks the level and type of motivation required for achieving the proposed goal (Miele & Scholer, 2018).

As noted earlier, we understand desire as an affective process whose purpose is to develop erotic behaviors that "attenuate" prior motivational components and determinants. This possible development of erotic behaviors for attenuating motivational determinants is part of the regulation per se. This involves the conception of self-regulation proposed by Baumeister and Vohs (2007), who contend that self-regulation is the ego's ability to modify or alter behaviors and thereby enable individuals to adjust their actions depending on social demand and the situation, as people's motivational systems, which involve regulation systems that are designed to be adaptive, work to coordinate the activity of the body and brain (Derryberry & Tucker, 2015).

As regards the regulation of desire, we need to focus specifically on the regulation of the motivational process as part of the experience of desire. Kaplan (1995) reported that disorders affecting sexual desire are the result of the dysfunction of self-regulation mechanisms that generally modulate desires and adjust them to the opportunities and threats in the environment. Kaplan focuses on explaining the physiological and cerebral mechanisms underlying all regulation processes. Although this is beyond the scope of our study, her findings help us to justify the importance of studying regulation once again in the analysis of desire and its workings.

We understand that this regulation consists of the following two key elements: a regulation of the evaluative process, and a regulation of decision-making.

Palmero's model of the motivational process (Palmero, 2005) does not use the term regulation, but it does refer to two fundamental aspects; evaluation and valuation and decision-making, understanding that when an individual detects the stimulus in question, they have to decide what they should or should not do.

Before describing the regulation model proposed here, we deem it expedient to specify the emotional experience that is present throughout the process and which connects with the explanation provided on the regulation of the motivational process.

Gross (2015) has proposed a process model in which all emotion involves a comparative valuation between the perception of the world as it is and the image or perfect state of the world as it should be (Gross & Ford, 2017). According to the theory these scholars propose, an emotional valuation is of the "first order", while emotional valuation is of the "second order". This means that the emotional valuation system

would involve the following four aspects: an individual's exposure to the world, a world view, an appraisal of whether the world is good, bad or irrelevant, depending on how the individual thinks the world should be, and finally, a motivation for action in order to reduce the difference between their perception of the world and its ideal state.

Therefore, besides the regulation process we propose in the model, there would be emotion and its valuation that would subsequently, if necessary, give rise to its regulation, which would begin at the end of the motivational process described here; that is, coinciding with the evaluation of both the process and the affective experience.

The regulation process proposed here has two stages:

Regulation of the evaluative process. This stage of regulation enables the individual to assess the stimulus and the various goals proposed. This is related to the first process in the motivation regulation model proposed by Miele and Scholer (2018), referred to as *motivational monitoring*, which involves appraising the amount and quality of motivation.

In turn, an individual needs to rate the goals' satisfaction, which includes a cognitive and affective appraisal (Aguado, 2005). In this evaluation process, the individual rates and appraises the situation, the chances of gratification at the end of the process, and the mechanisms that need to be used to reach the desired state. This desired state is what Baumeister and Vohs (2007) have referred to as "standards", as one of the four components of self-regulation. These standards should be clearly defined to enable the individual to begin a regulation process

Regulation in decision-making. This moment of regulation would refer to what Palermo has called the decision and choice of goal (Palmero, 2005), and as he explains, there is a need to understand the interaction between three aspects: the individual's desire, value and expectations. In this case, as in the previous point, we relate this moment in the regulation to the second process in the model proposed by Miele & Scholer (2018), referred to as *motivational control*, which is required for selecting and implementing strategies that maintain or modify motivation towards the goal. In relation to the theory of self-control and risky sexual behavior, as a decisive example when studying decision-making in the field of erotica, it predicts that risky sexual behavior is related to variables that reflect the capacity self-regulation such as emotion or cognition. (Wills *et alia*, 2003).

It is now clear that individuals function as a self-regulating system with the ability to follow behaviors designed to achieve a goal after an exercise of free will (Garrido, 2000). Future goals or objectives, which in these cases involve eroticism and the individual's ideal state as regards their desire are, according to Miller and Brickman (2004), self-relevant and self-defined goals that incentivize action.

For this regulation to be developed and, therefore, for the individual to make the decision whether or not to undertake the action and why, there is a need to consider the need or the desire generated by the erotic stimulus, the value given to the goals considered in the previous point, that is, the rating of the satisfaction that may be achieved through the action and the consequence of those goals, and finally, the expectation arising from those goals or objectives. It is at this point that the motivated erotic action should take place; otherwise, the process would end.

Motivated erotic behavior. Once an individual has decided to undertake the erotic behavior, they have to choose its type depending on such variables as the context or situation. An individual's motivated behavior directed towards a specific goal necessarily requires coordinating different processes such as motivation or executive function, thereby facilitating their interaction with the milieu (Berridge & Arnsten, 2013). It is important to clarify that sexual desire should not be seen as a goal, but instead as a much more complex process involving an affective-motivational phenomenon, thereby enabling a more detailed analysis to be made of its functions and how they should be regulated (Hofmann *et alia*, 2015).

The individual, therefore, decides which of the possible behaviors is the most pertinent one, considering the present situation, circumstances, and moment (Palmero, 2005). As some authors comment, it will be relevant, in the study of sexual behavior, to take into account factors such as the situation, including previous experience (Wiederman, 2004). It is important to stress that sexual desire is maintained and evolves throughout the entire process and does not end when the erotic behavior begins. If it did, that behavior might not achieve the proposed goal and/or the process might be rated as negative in subsequent stages, which would not strengthen the motivation for subsequent situations.

Process valuation and results. Palmero (2005) states that throughout the process and as the individual develops the behaviors, they appraise whether there is a narrowing of the gap in the differences between the current situation and what they hope to achieve. This is indeed the case in our rating of the process and its results: as the individual undertakes the erotic behavior, such behaviors are expected to bring them close to the final situation they expect to achieve.

Valuation of affective experience. Emotions are incited and differentiated based on a subjective appraisal of the personal meaning of a situation or purpose (Scherer, 1999).

In addition to the previous stage, the individual assesses the “cost-benefit” until they have reached the situation established as the goal. If the affective experience is positive and pleasant together with the outcomes, the individual’s motivation will be reinforced for future situations.

At this point, and together with the rating of the process and its results, an emotion is triggered in the individual that the latter needs to assess. Gross and Ford (2017) report that the first step involves perceiving the emotion in order to subsequently decide whether or not it needs to be regulated. The emotional regulation process begins as soon as the emotion is perceived, and the decision is made to activate its regulation. It is important to take note of this moment given that together with the appraisal of the affective experience of the motivational process, the emotional perception and its possible regulation will either facilitate or hinder the process’s activation on subsequent occasions. In relation to this point and specifically to the study of self-control in sexual consultation, Wiederman (2004) stated that self-control of feelings, thoughts and sexual behaviors implies the motivation to exercise said self-control and therefore reinforce the cycle for subsequent situations and being able to explain in this way, part of the origin of the motivation to participate in self-control.

The model shows that the purpose of sexual desire to trigger and guide erotic behavior, regardless of how it is generated. Based on this model of sexual desire and in relation to the definition provided here of the concept in question, we understand that erotic behavior is always accompanied by desire. In other words, whenever an individual undertakes erotic behavior, even though that behavior may not initially appear to be motivated, it is activated and guided by a motivational process.

We therefore use the term *Intrinsic Sexual Desire* to refer to the affective process of internal origin whose purpose is the development of erotic behaviors due to the pleasure and satisfaction that these behaviors prompt in themselves, thereby attenuating the prior *physiological determinants*. By contrast, *Extrinsic Sexual Desire* refers to the affective process of an external origin whose purpose is to develop erotic behaviors that attenuate the prior *social determinants* with a view to benefitting or avoiding punishment.

We consider it extremely important to analyze desire from this perspective, whereby clinical practice will find it useful to understand that those individuals that want to increase their own or their partner's desire and who view the situation as an inhibition of sexual desire because they do not experience *intrinsic erotic desire*, are not appreciating other forms of desire. It is therefore essential to understand motivation as intrinsic and extrinsic and address the lessening of desire according to the situation and the context, and not solely in terms of the frequency of erotic activity.

We do not therefore agree with the terminology of hypoactive sexual desire (HSD), which suggests that this concept refers to a lack of erotic activity or even, what we consider to more erroneous, as a lack of activation of desire. We understand it is more appropriate to refer to intrinsic inhibited sexual desire (IISD) or extrinsic inhibited sexual desire (EISD). In our opinion, this means a lessening of the erotic motivation to generate and/or maintain erotic behaviors that attenuate motivational determinants of both a physiological and social nature within the appropriate context and situation for its development. This reduction should be noted in comparison to other similar situations and contexts, whereby we may not refer to a lessening or absence of sexual desire when the environment is radically different to the one taken as a reference.

CONCLUSION

Our quest to address the construct of sexual desire and improve our understanding of its workings has involved numerous investigations and studies that have proposed definitions and theories as we have sought to explain how desire is activated and how it develops (Basson, 2000; Fuertes, 1995; Kaplan, 1979; Levine, 1984; Lewis *et alia*, 2010; Lief, 1988; Mark *et alia*, 2014). Although it is true that further research is called for in this field, and it is complicated to reach a single and adequate definition such a broad concept, the contributions different scholars have made over the years have undoubtedly been necessary for furthering the state-of-the-art on our understanding of desire, whereby each and every one of them has played a vital role in continuing to broaden and study the construct.

Considering that the aim here has been to analyze the importance of the affective process in our understanding of sexual desire and propose a model for its motivational process, there is a need to understand two fundamental aspects that already reflect their importance in a prior study on the experience of desire in the choice of erotic stimuli (Salguero, Pérez, Sáez, & Gordillo, 2020); on the one hand, the motivational nature of the development of desire, and on the other, the emotional experience of that process.

This proposal understands sexual desire to be an affective process whose purpose is the pursuit of erotic behaviors that “attenuate” prior motivational components and determinants of both a physiological and social nature, and which could therefore be regulated. Referring to desire as an affective process, we cannot avoid highlighting the concept of emotion that lies behind that definition concept of emotion. Although it is complicated to provide a clear and concise definition of an emotion, it seems clear that emotions are more than just an individual's reactions. Emotions are made up of myriad factors (Aguado, 2005) that need to be studied in interaction. As Lang (1968) stated, emotions can be understood as an individual's reactions and may be expressed in the following three systems: subjective, somatic, and motor-observable.

The relationship between emotion and sexual desire seems clear, as evidenced by Fuertes (1995) when defining sexual desire as a subjective emotional experience, and

although understanding desire as such helps us to clarify part of its workings, singling out solely the emotional component might not be entirely appropriate and may induce us to ignore other fundamental aspects in its construction. There is a need at this point to understand the interaction between motivation and emotion, and thus determine the affective process that has been addressed in this study.

Motivation is largely understood to mean the forces that the organism uses to initiate or direct behavior (Palmero, 1995), therefore being associated with events that are external or internal to the individual. In its broadest sense, we may affirm that being motivated involves having a reason to do something (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

As regards this notion of motivation and in the field of concern to us here, sex as a basic need has been related to the reproduction of the species, and although the drive of erotic behavior is part of the analysis of the sexes in the field of sexology, in this case the study purpose does not involve analyzing sexual behavior *per se*, but instead the underlying process. This process, which leads to possible sexual behaviors, is the combination of emotion and motivation, resulting in an evaluative processing that involves an affective meaning of the stimulus, in this case of an erotic nature, and cognitive activities for analyzing the meaning within a given context and moment (Aguado, 2005). Motivation is therefore influenced by personal and situational factors (Heckhausen & Heckhausen, 2018).

All this informs the model of the motivational process of sexual desire considered here, which seeks to provide a theoretical explanation of the workings of desire by likening that development to a general motivational process in an individual's behavior. This development begins with an erotic stimulus that the individual needs to perceive and should be classified as internal or external (Gailliot, 2005). The individual is therefore understood to be an active agent and not a passive one with no decision-making ability. Hence the reasons for emphasizing the process's internal nature, which together with external factors lead to its development.

As already specified in the model, the milieu or environment, understood here as the combination of situation and context, will be decisive both in the conscious perception of the erotic stimulus and in the entire regulation process. There will be a need within clinical practice to understand the environment in which the individual's or the couple's desire develops (Levine, 2002) to conduct the diagnosis and arrange the treatment in cases of ISD.

Besides the environment, there is also a need to consider individuals' biological, cognitive, and affective variables because of their influence on the regulation of the process and the conscious perception of the stimulus.

This amalgam of factors explains the impossibility of considering that people experience only kind of desire, and it will therefore be essential to study each variable to arrange the right treatment to meet the needs of individuals and couples alike.

The regulation process, which is also influenced by external factors, is one of this study's core concerns, as it considers the possibility of regulating desire in two ways, an evaluation and decision-making regarding erotic behavior. The regulation of the motivational process once again explains the part an individual plays in their own erotic desire, evaluating the erotic stimulus, the environment, and the possible benefits at the end of the process. Furthermore, decision-making as part of the regulation provides a goal and a direction for behavior.

The regulation of the motivational process is included in what has been termed emotional valuation of the first order, as reported by Gross and Ford (2018), and the model introduced here includes the presence of emotions throughout its entire development.

Once the decision has been made to proceed with the erotic behavior, the process ends with an appraisal of the outcomes and the subsequent assessment of the affective experience. The individual will decide whether this pursuit of erotic behavior brings them any closer to their ideal state, finally weighing up the cost-benefit and the resulting affective experience.

This last point involving the appraisal of results and affective experience is framed within what we have here referred to as “emotional regulation” based on the valuation of the second order reported by Gross and Ford (2018), highlighting the importance of emotions in the motivational process.

To conclude, we emphasize our understanding of sexual desire through the interaction of an emotional component and a motivational one, which will provide us, on the one hand, with the direction of the erotic behavior (motivation), and on the other, the affective experience throughout the entire process (emotion).

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