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Women's Experiences With Feelings and Attractions for Someone Outside their Primary Relationship

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Abstract

The purpose of this article is to explore women's experiences with attractions and feelings for people outside their primary romantic relationship. In an anonymous Internet-based survey, 160 women answered open-ended questions about crushes. Women had varied experiences with, and diverse strategies for, managing crushes. The majority of women reported the crush did not impact their primary relationship; participants also reported that these crushes improved their desire for their partner. The majority of women in this sample did not communicate with their partners about their crushes. This research can be used by therapists and counselors working with patients experiencing these feelings.

INTRODUCTION

Adult romantic/sexual relationships and adult romantic/sexual infidelity have been largely addressed in the literature. Within monogamous relationships, infidelity has been found to be a relatively common experience (Moller & Vossler, 2015). The literature is conflicting about what constitutes infidelity in a relationship: some acts, such as extramarital sex, are commonly included, whereas others, such as emotional ties that extend past friendship, are not (Blow & Hartnett, 2005). Other research has relied on if the partner would be hurt by the action to determine infidelity (Mark, Janssen, & Milhausen, 2011). Studies have found that extra dyadic relationships can have multiple sexual and emotional components (e.g., Allen & Baucom, 2006; Buss, Larsen, Westen, & Semmelroth, 1992; Luo, Cartun, & Snider, 2010). Overall, the rationale for and consequences of infidelity have been a large focus of research.

It is also likely that individuals may experience sexual and/or romantic feelings for multiple people throughout the course of a relationship, or “crushes” as they will be referred to in this article, also used in reference to the object or person of these feelings, that they choose to never act on. The idea and use of the word “crush” to describe feelings of attraction have been discussed in adolescent romantic research (Bowker, Spencer, Thomas, & Gyoerkoe, 2012; Bruce & Sanders, 2001; Hurlock & Klein, 1934), but it is conceivable that a crush has the potential to be felt multiple times across the lifespan, including during adulthood. While research shows that extra dyadic relationships may be only emotional and not involve engaging in sexual acts (Buss et al., 1992; Treger, Sprecher, Hatfield, & Erber, 2013), there is a lack of understanding about how common crushes are and how women and men in relationships navigate these feelings and experiences.

Research has only begun to explore crushes in adult relationships. In long-term relationships, an individual might utilize selective inattention toward attractive others (Hofmann, Friese, & Gschwendner, 2009; Koranyi & Rothermund, 2012; Maner, Gailliot, & Miller, 2009) or self-regulation behaviors to maintain their current relationships (Ritter, Karremans, van Schie, 2010). Research has been conducted to examine constructs related to crushes—desire, attraction, attachment, love, and lust, as well as others—which might be examples of what is felt during a crush. Human emotions of lust, attraction, and attachment may or may not operate independently (Fisher, 1998; Fisher, Aron, Mashek, Li, & Brown, 2002), and lust or attraction without attachment bonds may be one operationalization of a crush.

Understanding crushes and associated relationship implications is important for sexual/romantic partners and relationship therapists who deal with these issues. Not surprisingly, attractive other partner alternatives can alter the success of a relationship or make relationships challenging to manage (Gonzaga, Haselton, Smurda, & Poore, 2008; Kenrick, Neuberg, Zierk, & Krones, 1994). The decision to act on a physical attraction or desire can be dependent on the weighing of costs and benefits inflicted on an individual’s current relationship (Maner, Rouby, & Gonzaga, 2008). Disclosure of these relationships can be difficult to convey to main partners (Seedall, Houghtaling, & Wilkins, 2013).

The purpose of this study was to assess women’s experiences with attractions and feelings for people outside their primary long-term relationship. We aimed to understand how women experience and manage these feelings, a gap in current scientific research. Specifically, this research was conducted to explore the following two research questions: How common is it for people in long-term relationships to experience romantic/sexual interest or crushes on others? How do individuals manage romantic/sexual interest or crushes on others outside of their relationship? “Crush” is the term used in this article to signify any thoughts or feelings of physical, emotional, or intellectual attraction that a person has for someone who is not his or her primary partner.

METHOD

Procedures

As part of a larger study, women completed an anonymous online survey about sexual desire. The institutional review board at the school where the study was conducted approved all study protocol. Participants had unlimited time to complete the survey and were not provided an incentive to participate. The study was advertised through flyers posted on the campus of a large Midwestern university, e-mails sent to electronic mailing lists, and online advertisements placed on multiple social media sites (e.g., Facebook, Twitter). Eligibility criteria included being female, at least 18 years of age, and in a current relationship with a man for a minimum of five years. Women who met these criteria were provided with a link to the study website where they could learn more about the study and consent to participate. A few ($n = 9$) women in three- to five-year-long relationships ended up taking the survey. Since the current topic of crushes was not dependent upon being in a five-year relationship, their data were included in the final sample. In total, 229 women consented to participate. However, not all participants answered every crush-related item, thus limiting the analytic sample for each question; the sample size for each item is provided below. Every item had at least a 70% response rate.

Measures

The survey began with collection of demographic data including age, race, length of relationship, and frequency of sexual behaviors (e.g., sexual intercourse with their current partner and masturbation). Women also completed quantitative data on sexual and relationship satisfaction and sexual desire.

During the section related to crushes, women were first asked this close-ended question: "It's common for people who are in long-term relationships or who are married to have feelings, attractions, or curiosities toward other people. Can you think of a time when you may have had a crush on someone else?" with the response options of "Yes," "No," or "I don't know." Of the total 229 participants, 160 (69.9%) women said they had experienced a crush during their long-term relationship. Affirmative-response participants were then asked to elaborate on the experience through a series of four open-ended questions: (1) "Please tell us about this experience in the space below" ($n = 113$); (2) "How did you manage those feelings?" ($n = 112$); (3) "Did those feelings you had for someone else impact the level of desire you had for your current partner?" ($n = 113$); and (4) "Did you tell your current partner about the feelings you had for someone else? Why or why not?" ($n = 114$).

Data Analysis

Due to the open-ended survey design, post-data collection qualitative analysis procedures were followed (Charmaz, 2006). Descriptive statistics were used to present demographic data. A modified grounded theory approach was employed in the thematic analysis of the open-ended question responses entered by each participant; specifically, no hypothesis was generated prior to data collection; rather, codes were created based on the themes that emerged from the data.

Categories and Coding

A thematic content analysis was conducted to create categories of similar responses, and the initial content analysis was exploratory in nature. A dialogic, iterative process was utilized to bring meaning to and find patterns in statements within each category. Responses to each of the four open-ended questions were compiled into a single list in an Excel spreadsheet. After multiple readings of these responses to gain an understanding of emerging themes, a codebook was created. The codebook focused on the most salient content that emerged from the responses, and was designed based on the 10 to 15 most common responses for each open-ended question. Given that many participants listed multiple categories in one response, codes were not mutually exclusive.

Interrater Reliability

Content analyses of the open-ended data responses were conducted by two trained independent coders based on the codebook (Weber, 1990). The two coders provided insight on emergent themes based on their readings and finalized consensus on the themes to be used for coding. Coding was conducted using Microsoft Excel and codebooks were merged to identify any disagreement between the two coders. Any codes that did not match were recoded by a third independent coder for the final frequency counts. Finally, all three coders met to discuss the results of an initial frequency analysis. The resulting categories were then tied back to participant statements that were most illustrative of the identified meaning by the creator of the codebook.

Participant Demographics

As shown in Table 1, participants ranged in age from 19 to 56 ($M = 34.37$, $SD = 8.25$; $Mdn = 33.00$). Most women reported high levels of formal education and were employed at least part-time or were stay-at-home mothers. About three-quarters of participants identified as heterosexual. Most participants had been in their current relationship for five to 10 years, were married, lived with their partner, and were in a monogamous relationship in which they were “committed to only each other both sexually and emotionally.” Only slightly more than half had children.

Based on a quantitative measure of desire (“over the past 4 weeks, how would you rate your level of desire”), 36.6% ($n = 60$) of the sample rated their level of sexual desire or interest as none to low, 43.9% ($n = 72$) as moderate, and 19.5% ($n = 32$) as high to very high. The participants also reported satisfaction levels with their sexual relationship with their partner in the past month. The majority of women 51.3% ($n = 77$) were moderately or very satisfied, 30.7% ($n = 46$) were moderately or very dissatisfied, and 18.0% ($n = 27$) were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied.

RESULTS

Although the majority of participants had experiences with a crush, these experiences were varied in almost every way—from the object of desire to how the crush was managed and what impact it had on their current relationship.

Experiences With Crushes and the Person of Attraction

First, women were asked to elaborate on their experiences with crushes during their long-term relationship. In response, participants noted the regularity of having crushes, how they knew the crush, and the types and depth of feelings the participant had for the crush.

While some participants reported having a crush on one specific person, others reported feeling attraction to several people during their long-term relationship. It is important to note that several of the women used this space to clarify that even though they had a crush, they had never acted on their feelings or attraction (12.5%, $n = 20$). For example, women made comments such as, “It’s constant, but I won’t have any kind of sex with someone else” or “I’ve been attracted to the body type of other men, but not enough to ever cheat on my partner emotionally or physically.”

The women in the study also had a wide range of how they met or interacted with their crush. Most often, women described that the person they had an attraction to was a coworker, 22.5% ($n = 36$), an old boyfriend, 21.3% ($n = 34$), or a close friend, 18.8% ($n = 30$). Five women (3%) specifically mentioned reconnecting with old boyfriends through Facebook.

When the participants were describing their experiences with crushes, they also described what drew them to the person and the types of feelings they felt for their crush (see Table 2). The word “attraction” was used by 18 women, and the majority of these women simply stated having an “attraction” to someone. Of those who specified the root of the attraction, the majority spoke about a physical attraction—describing good looks, a nice body, or a handsome appearance. To a much lesser extent women described an emotional attraction or an intellectual attraction. These categories, like all of the themes, were not mutually exclusive (i.e., women described both physical and emotional attraction). For example, one woman described, “Oh my, he was beautiful. I worked on a project with a very attractive man: pretty to look at, smart, a reader, and into a lot of the same issues that I am.” A few women attributed the attraction to either problems in their primary relationship, including sexual dissatisfaction, or spatial distance from their main partner.

The extent or depth of the feelings described by women was diverse. Participants frequently used language meant to suggest the crush was very casual, or nothing serious; as exemplified in several of the quotes already presented, women often strove to downplay their crushes. Within this theme, some responses described general mental fantasies that were not acted upon in any way—for example, with a celebrity or a person on the street. Often participants described a “flirtation” or that they enjoyed “flirting” with a person.

Managing the Crush

The participants were also asked to describe how they managed the feelings related to their experienced crushes. Women had complicated mental processes for dealing with a crush that ranged from thinking and talking about the person, to avoiding thinking and talking about the person. Women also worked to mentally reframe their thoughts in order to deal with the crush.

The most common approach to managing the crush was communicating with the primary partner about the feelings. Several of the women said that they discuss any crushes or fantasies with their main partner. However, disclosure may be limited; oftentimes the women would clarify that not all details or the identity of the crush were revealed. Many of the women described conversations as teasing or joking. For example, one woman described, “My partner and I talk about the people we are attracted to, often tease each other about them/argue relative hotness/make jokes about backup spouses, and then remind each other that we are the ones we come home to.” The women described the partner communication as building trust and confidence in the relationship. Being open was considered a mechanism for reducing the threat another person might pose to the relationship.

The second most common response related to managing the crush dealt with thinking about the crush. When discussing thinking about the crush, participants described fantasizing about and masturbating to thoughts of the crush. A couple of women wrote that they fantasized about the other person during intercourse with their primary partner. In contrast, a few of the women used this space to say they avoided thinking about their feelings.

The third most common theme related to managing the crush was participants’ attempt to focus on the qualities they like about their partner—be they emotional, a love connection, or respect. Similarly, several women who answered this question documented thinking through the reality of the crush and the consequences of acting on their feelings. Beyond just cognitive reframing, participants would avoid the person they had a crush on or set boundaries in order to increase distance from that person. For example, a participant might try to avoid spending a lot of time with the object of her desire or being alone with that individual. Only a few women described acting on their feelings, and not all were explicit about what this meant (e.g., engaging in kissing, sexual intercourse).

Impact on Relationship

Additionally, women were asked to respond to how the crush impacted their level of desire for their current partner. The majority, about one third of participants, who answered the question asking about the impact on desire for their current partner said the crush had no impact on their relationship and resulted in no changes (see Table 3). More participants said the crush increased their desire for their primary partner than participants who reported decreased desire for their partner. Women who reported an increased desire described transferring the emotion from the crush to the partner and acting on this with their partner. Women described how the crush increased their sexual desire in general and their sexual thoughts in a way that could be positive for their primary relationship.

On the other hand, for some participants their feelings for a crush resulted in decreased desire for their long-term partner. The crush was described as being more exciting or more attentive than their primary partner, which led the women to feel disappointed or disgruntled with their primary relationship partner. Some women also reported mixed emotions about how the crush affected their desire or felt that it only affected desire sometimes. These women admitted that the crush changed their desire, but felt that it depended on how desired they felt by their partner or how happy they were in the current relationship. Approximately the same number of women described that the crush helped their primary relationship as

those who said it led to the end of the relationship. However, very few women directly commented on relationship dissolution.

Disclosure to Partner

Finally, women were asked to elaborate on discussions with their current partner about the crush. The majority of women answered that they had not communicated with their primary partner about the other person, while only a few participants responded that they had talked with their partner about the crush. Most respondents who talked about their crushes described themselves as telling their partners all details of their lives. As mentioned previously, several participants qualified that communication in general was acceptable, but that they did not reveal all the details.

Still, many women did not discuss crushes at all. A few women elaborated more in their response on why they did not talk about their feelings, saying they did not want to hurt or upset their partner, or that there was no need to tell their partner because the crush was not important. Overall, of the women who did not disclose the crush to their main partners, participants expressed the idea that because there was no intent of action, communication would lead to unnecessary worry, hurt feelings, and threats to the relationship.

DISCUSSION

The present study highlights women's experiences of feeling attraction and/or romantic/sexual interest in others outside of their long-term relationship, including how they have experienced, managed, and/or disclosed such feelings. This research fills a gap in empirical knowledge about what having these feelings is like for women and deepens our understanding of how women manage these feelings. Findings from this study reinforce the normalcy of attraction to other people, even when people are in a happily committed relationship. A large majority of women discussed experiencing feelings or attraction for someone other than their primary partner during their long-term relationship. It is important to note that only a few women attributed this to relationship issues; rather, attraction was something the women experienced irrespective of interpersonal dynamics with their long-term partner.

There was no simple formula for how women met or developed feelings for their crush. However, given the encouragement by social media outlets to maintain contact with old partners and friends, future research might investigate the connection of social media to sexual behaviors and relationship satisfaction. While some research has investigated the use of social media to seek sexual partners outside of marriage (Cravens, Leckie, & Whiting, 2013; Wysocki & Childers, 2011) and the increase of jealousy with Facebook use (Muisse, Christofides, & Desmarais, 2009), little research has investigated the way social media systematically affects relationships and relationship development.

Recent research has attempted to enrich and provide more nuanced models of women's desire (Basson, 2000; Basson et al., 2003) and to include the emotional, intellectual, and social context of women's desire (Baumeister, 2000; Baumeister, Catanese, & Vohs, 2001). The Basson model (2000 (2003) offers an important reconceptualization of women's desire.

However, the majority of the women in this study framed crushes in terms of physical attraction. A focus on comparing men and women's sexual desire may result in an underemphasis on women as sexual beings. Furthermore, social pressures that may have led women in this study to emphasize not acting on crushes, even when they were simply asked about what drew them to a crush, may also hinder women's ability to fantasize. Given that sexual fantasies are considered one of the better indexes of sexual desire (Baumeister et al., 2001), the ways in which women express their experiences with crushes may be an important but underexamined aspect of women's desire. This is reinforced by the finding that women often funneled increased sexual desire from a crush into their primary relationship.

It is important to note that there are likely a variety of factors that influence women's attention or attraction to alternatives, and not all of them are entirely determined by cognition or emotions. For example, previous studies have found ovulation impacts initial sexual attraction for attractive others (Pillsworth & Haselton, 2006). Heterosexual-identified women may be more visually attentive to attractive men during ovulation and may suppress such thoughts, without rebound effect or an increase of the thought after suppression, if they are in a current relationship (Anderson et al., 2010; Gonzaga et al., 2008).

Women's experiences communicating about crushes pose an important area of consideration for therapists. Although communication was used to defuse the threat of the emotions, it was also seen as threatening to the primary relationship for some women. Couples, especially couples who already struggle with open communication, may not have the tools to negotiate this topic of discussion. To aid communication, first it is important to normalize these feelings, especially among women. Findings from this study showing that crushes can increase desire for one's current partner and often have no impact on the relationship can help facilitate more dialogue about these experiences between partners.

The absence of a dialogue about the normalcy of these feelings may also impact women's ability to manage feelings associated with a crush. Most women in the current study attempted to deny their feelings and remove themselves from situations in which they were exposed to the object of their desire. These may be effective strategies for many women (and men) and may help women maintain their commitment to their partner. However, it may also be important for women to understand that, if monogamy is desired for one's relationship, our findings indicate that feelings for an outside person do not inevitably lead to infidelity. Outside crushes can impact a relationship negatively for some women and positively for others. These findings indicate a need for a larger dialogue on relationship dissatisfaction, couples' expectations, and the role of couples therapy in relationship maintenance.

Our findings should be taken within the context of the limitations of the study. We limited our convenience sample to women who were in relationships for at least three years. Although generalization is not a goal of qualitative data, it does offer a starting point for distribution to a more diverse sample of women and aids in the development of additional research questions. Another limitation is that the open-ended items relied on women's responses. For example, more women may have contacted or been contacted by old flames through Facebook, but did not think to mention this detail. Future research may want to

utilize this study to create close-ended surveys on this theme. Because data collection occurred via a questionnaire and not through in-person interviewing techniques, we are also limited in our understanding of women's intended meanings. In part, lack of detail in some responses is a consequence of this. For example, one woman said she struggled with monogamy, but provided no other information. Given this, the percentages are provided only to help describe the data and should not be extrapolated. Subsequent research might consider how people's feelings of attraction to or interest in attractive alternatives shapes their choices about possibly opening their relationship up, as infidelity is not the option nor is staying in a monogamous relationship. Additionally, research is inconclusive on gender difference in rates of extra dyadic experiences and attitudes toward them, and future research should include men and women.

CONCLUSION

Overall, this study furthers our empirical understanding of women's experiences with attractions and feelings for people outside of their primary relationship. Findings indicate a need for future research in this area in addition to a call for dialogue on the normalcy of women to experience crushes. Clinicians who work with individuals experiencing crushes may want to explore the various ways their clients are, or are considering, managing their feelings; what's right for one client won't always be right for another. Therapists are encouraged to utilize these data to address these issues and provide evidence to their clients of the normalcy of the experience of crushes.

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TABLE 1

Participant Sociodemographic Characteristics

<i>Variable</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>(n)</i>
Age (years)		
18–23	3.4	(6)
24–29	27.4	(49)
30–39	31.8	(57)
40–49	18.4	(33)
50–59	6.1	(11)
Education		
High school/secondary school or less	4.5	(8)
College or associates (two-year) degree	20.1	(36)
College graduate	34.6	(62)
Higher degree/professional (master's/doctorate)	40.8	(73)
Employment status		
Unemployed	10.6	(19)
Stay-at-home mother	21.2	(38)
Self-employed	10.1	(18)
Employed part-time	20.7	(37)
Employed full-time	36.9	(66)
Annual household income		
Less than \$12,000	3.9	(7)
\$12,001–\$20,000	10.6	(19)
\$20,001–\$40,000	12.8	(23)
\$40,001–\$60,000	20.8	(37)
\$60,001–\$80,001	15.6	(28)
\$80,000–\$100,000	15.6	(28)
More than \$100,000	20.7	(37)
Sexual orientation		
Heterosexual/straight	78.6	(141)
Bisexual	14.0	(25)
Queer	3.4	(6)
Uncertain	3.4	(6)
Other	0.6	(1)
<i>Participant relationship characteristics</i>		
Length of current relationship		
3 to 5 years	5.00	(9)
5 to 10 years	52.00	(93)
10 to 20 years	31.8	(57)
More than 20 years	11.2	(20)
Relationship status		
Married	73.8	(132)

<i>Variable</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>(n)</i>
Engaged	8.9	(16)
Living together	9.5	(17)
Other	7.8	(14)
Children		
Yes	55.9	(100)
No	44.1	(79)
Live with partner		
Yes	88.8	(159)
No	11.2	(20)
Monogamous (committed to only each other, both sexually and emotionally)		
Yes	88.8	(159)
No	6.1	(11)
I'm not sure	4.5	(8)

Note. Totals that do not equal 100% represent missing data.

TABLE 2

Responses Regarding Experiences With and Managing Crushes (n = 160)

<i>Emergent themes</i>		<i>Example responses</i>		
<i>Experiences with crush and rationale for the crush</i>	<i>% (n)</i>			
Physical attraction	13.8 (22)	I'm very attracted to a colleague of my husband's, who fortunately does not live in the same state. It's just a physical reaction when I'm near him.	I've been attracted to the body type of other men, but not enough to ever cheat on my partner emotionally or physically.	Just a physical attraction.
Emotional attraction	6.9(11)	I fell in love with someone else once, and it was a very painful experience. It wasn't just sexual, but emotional and mental as well. However, I made the choice to end this affair I had, though every now and then I still think about him.	I will sometimes get mini emotional crushes on other guys. It's generally not a sexual attraction—although I often find them cute, I generally don't want to have sex with them.	I put more distance between the two of us. I decided we should live separately. I started spending more time with friends and meeting new people. I met someone, I'll call him "S," who I had a strong physical, emotional, and mental connection with.
Intellectual attraction	5.6 (10)	I felt an intellectual and emotional connection, so I would want to explore it. Plus, being in a long-distance relationship, I'd begin to yearn for physical closeness and sex.	It was a guy who was in a class I was taking, he was funny and so smart and I thought we had chemistry as we seemed to flirt a lot together.	Oh my, he was beautiful. I worked on a project with a very attractive man: pretty to look at, smart, a reader, and into a lot of the same issues that I am.
Relationship problems/long-distance	6.3 (10)	I wouldn't necessarily call it desire but more interest. I think it was because I had doubts about the relationship so was more open to feeling that way about others.	There was a time several years ago when I felt my husband wasn't very interested or appreciative of my physical appearance and found myself attracted to ... He was a single dad who usually seemed interested in talking to me. It was nice to have a man notice me.	I have desire for an ex-boyfriend all of the time because my husband is away so much ... So when I am away from my husband ... I long for being taken care of and comforted ...
Did not act	% (n) 12.5 (20)	I've seen/met people who I've been attracted to. However, I've never acted on those thoughts or feelings.	I regularly meet new people and some of them is more attractive than others. These feelings are all right to me, as long I don't cross the line having sex with them.	I've been attracted to the body type of other men, but not enough to ever cheat on my partner emotionally or physically.
<i>Extent of feelings</i>				
Casual	16.3 (26)	It was more of just fantasy sexual desires. There is no specific experience to describe.	Never anything serious... just some crushes, some daydreaming about men and women. I have never felt that I was going to act upon the feelings, I think sometimes it is just normal to think of someone else.	It isn't anything serious, just silly crushes on random people I know or meet.
Flirtation	6.3 (10)	I had a crush on a coworker, we had chemistry—flirted a bit.	An old boyfriend "friend-ed" me on Facebook. Nothing really happened, but I once had a non-sexual dream about him, which I e-mailed him about. He replied to the e-mail... This opened a dialogue which happens only every few months and in which nothing sexual is ever said explicitly, but there may be an undercurrent of flirtation there.	It was a guy who was in a class I was taking, he was funny and so smart and I thought we had chemistry as we seemed to flirt a lot together.

Emergent themes		Example responses		
Managing the crush				
Communication	13.1 (21)	My partner and I talk about the people we are attracted to, often tease each other about them/argue relative hotness/make jokes about backup spouses, and then remind each other that we are the ones we come home to.	I am open to being with other people sexually and have talked to my partner about this. I wouldn't say the particular person because it may be awkward, but it caused me to tell him that I would like to try a threesome, swing, etc. at one point in our lives. He is open to this idea.	We discuss them openly and in as much detail as we feel comfortable with. Because human attraction is natural, we recognize that it is better to be open and honest about these feelings and deal with jealousy through reassurance and trust.
Thinking about the crush	11.9(19)	Tried not to show anything outwardly, but did think about it a bit when masturbating.	I sometimes fantasize about what life would be like with this other man. I don't want to change my life though and my feelings are enjoyable for fantasies but I don't have a great urge to act on them.	I indulge in some daydreaming, sometimes use the visualization during sex with my husband and then it's fulfilled its useful purpose and it's gone.
Avoid thinking about the crush	5.0 (8)	Try to ignore them. Occasionally e-mail my old friend, but never talk directly about my feelings. I make mental lists of my current partner and the old friend and compare. I remind myself of what I could potentially lose.	Mainly just put it out of my head. I have no interest in acting on those desires.	I talked with my best friend about them and then buried them.
Focus on positives of main relationship	8.8 (14)	I love my partner and would never want to do anything to hurt him or break his trust. So... I've had thoughts, but never acted in any way that could be interpreted as inappropriate.	I talk to my friends, meditate, try to realize that my current partner is a good man and that he is just too nice, think of the good things my current partner has to offer me.	I usually snap out of it and realize I wouldn't really want to be with or see that person and try to really think about what I am missing and how much I appreciate my husband and all of his attributes and the healthy balanced relationship we have.
Passage of time	% (n) 7.5 (12)	I've never been in a situation where I was close to cheating or seriously considered it. I think the attraction just passes and I lose interest.	No way in particular. Over time they kind of went away.	If it's someone I actually know in real life, I make sure I don't spend too much time alone with them until the feelings subside. If it's someone I'll never meet, I enjoy the feelings until they go away.
Think about consequences	7.5 (12)	Process the factors that lead to those feelings. Spending more time with partner. Typically projecting expectations on to husband that isn't realistic and realize some of it is from having young kids.	Oftentimes I have crushes on people who have qualities that I find desirable that my partner does not have. Just thinking through things works for me.	I enjoy them and have fun flirting but also know that those feelings are somewhat of a fantasy unhampered by real life.
Set boundaries	6.3 (10)	I try to avoid him for fear that I'll act on my desires.	The fleeting desire I feel for hot guys I see is no big deal. The desire I feel for men I know is more difficult to deal with. The best thing for me is to just avoid being around those guys and try to re-focus on my partner. Certainly I don't put myself into "dangerous" positions by spending time alone with men	I try to avoid him. I especially avoid being alone or drunk around him.

<i>Emergent themes</i>			<i>Example responses</i>	
Act on feelings	5.0 (8)	I acted on them and have had other sexual relationships besides my partner.	I'm attracted to, since I don't really trust myself not to cheat. I knew I would never see him again, so I went with it and enjoyed feeling wanted and passionate again.	I let it get a bit out of hand, but I refuse to feel bad about it now that several years have passed. I don't ever plan on doing anything like that again, but at the same time I have to acknowledge that my desire for other people did not disappear when I got married, and that I am capable of crossing a line when that happens.

TABLE 3

Impact on Primary Relationship (n = 58)

<i>Emergent themes</i>		<i>Example responses</i>		
<i>Impact on relationship</i>	<i>%(n)</i>			
No impact	33.8 (54)	No. I still wanted sex with my partner absolutely. When we'd physically be together I wouldn't even think about the other interest.	Not really. I never felt less attracted to my husband even in spite of attraction to someone else.	Not really, the feelings were more of this novelty of someone who was very interesting and engaging in a particular way I had not met before, so although I felt things about them it didn't affect my core relationship with my partner and my feelings for him.
Increased desire	15.0 (24)	Yes, often my partner benefits from my increased desire because I will act on it with him.	Positively. It's affirming to know that we are confident in our relationship, and there's really not been a time when thinking about hot people hasn't been a turn-on. I've never been jealous of anyone else, but I'm jealous of my partner, and that's a turn-on for both of us	Once I talked about it with my husband, we made more of an effort to include the things I found so attractive in the other man into our relationship. We set aside time to be husband and wife again, to laugh and to flirt with each other. To increase the amount of affection and compliments.
Decreased desire	7.5 (12)	Only twice. I was getting more attention from the other person and my husband and I were distant anyway.	Yes, I no longer had a desire for my partner.	Yes, since I had had sex with the other person and the sex was different and more satisfying I was not having sex as long or as intensely as I had. I kept comparing my current partner and how he lacked romanticism and passion.
Sometimes	6.3 (10)	Yes and no. The feelings may have been real, however it is merely interest in the unknown.	Yes and no—I don't believe I would've had those feelings in the first place if my partner and I hadn't been having problems.	Sometimes, especially when I feel desired by the other person but not my partner.
<i>Disclosure to partner</i>				
No communication	45.0 (72)	No, it would have sparked conflict.	No. Not worth it	No, he wouldn't understand.
Did not want to hurt partner	21.9 (35)	No. I thought it would hurt him as I had no intention of ending our relationship to act on it.	No. I don't want him to feel insecure about our relationship, and I don't see any need to tell him.	No! It would hurt his feelings!
No reason	12.5 (20)	No, not necessary to share what is merely passing fancy. I may express my appreciation for another's beauty however not in the context of wanting to be intimate with them.	No, I did not think there was a need to. I believe it is normal to be attracted to others.	No. It doesn't pose a real threat to our relationship and I don't want him to worry unnecessarily.
Communication	20.0 (32)	I will tell him about other people I find attractive, but not about more emotional aspects of it.	We talk about every aspect of these relationships inside and out.	As discussed above, we discuss our feelings as openly and honestly as possible, because it's just easier that way. There's no secrecy, no deception, and no guilt.