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Partners of new mothers often experience shifts in sexuality, and these shifts are often unrelated to biological or medical factors pertaining to childbirth. The findings, which are published in a recent issue of *The Journal of Sexual Medicine*, expand current understanding of postpartum sexuality, and may help health professionals as they counsel new parents.

Research on postpartum sexuality has typically focused on female reproductive biology in birth mothers—for example, how hormonal changes that accompany pregnancy, birth, and breastfeeding affect sexual desire, or how birth-related interventions affect sexual activity. Few studies have

looked at sexuality in the partners of postpartum women, even though it may be important for postpartum women's perceptions of their own sexuality.

Sari van Anders, PhD, of the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, and her colleagues designed a study to examine postpartum sexuality as a social and relational process, focusing on co-parents. A total of 114 partners (95 men,

18 women, 1 unspecified) of postpartum women completed an online questionnaire about their sexuality during the three months following their youngest child's birth. Attention was paid to physical, social, psychological, and relational experiences.

The researchers found

that partners experience shifts in sexuality, just as birth mothers do. The changes that they experienced were linked to relational and social processes, not just biological or medical factors. In fact, low desire in partners was largely influenced by

factors related to caring for a new baby—such as fatigue and stress—rather than by factors related to the birth and/or birth mother, as more typically presumed.

“Our findings help to clarify how co-parents experience sexuality in myriad ways that are contextualized within partner and parenting relationships,” said

Dr. van Anders.

“What is of note is that we have come to recognize that sexual health of

one partner may be related to the sexual health of the other, no matter the cause of the change in sexuality. It is important to

publish studies in all aspects of sexual health," explained Irwin Goldstein, editor-in-chief of *The Journal of Sexual Medicine*

