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**Relationships between Self-Esteem, Casual Sex, and Attitudes towards
Casual Sex among Dutch Female University Students**

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Abstract

Casual sex has become culturally normative. A lot of research has been done in the US, but research in the Dutch population is scarce. The present study consists of two parts. The first part focuses on casual sex among Dutch university students. The second part focuses on self-esteem in relation to casual sex, and attitudes towards casual sex as a possible moderating factor. A sample of 108 Dutch female university students completed an online questionnaire. This questionnaire included the Dutch version of the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale, the Dutch version of the Brief Sexual Attitudes Scale and a set of additional questions about casual sex. Results revealed that 88% of the students engaged in casual sex and thus, having casual sex is very common. Overall, these females were very positive about their casual sex experience. Nevertheless, no relation was found between self-esteem and casual sex. In addition, attitudes towards casual sex turned out not to be a predictor for this relationship.

Preface

For as long as I can remember, I had some interest in psychology in combination with love and relationships. As my bachelor thesis at Maastricht University was based on sexology it was a logical next step to perform my master thesis on sexology as well. My ambition is in specializing on this single topic in the psychology profession.

With this preface, I want to thank Femke van den Brink for being a fantastic supervisor. She was always available for great brainstorm sessions relating to the topics of this thesis and to answer my questions at any time. Next to this, she continued motivating me in finalizing this thesis in time. Besides Femke, I want to thank Anne-Marie, Lieke and Jodie. Together, we made up the questionnaire on lime-survey, we could help each other when necessary and laugh about the statistical troubles.

Table of Contents

1. Introduction	page 1
Self-Esteem	page 2
Attitudes towards casual sex	page 4
2. Method	page 6
Participants and procedure	page 6
Measures	page 7
Statistical analysis	page 9
3. Results	page 9
4. Discussion	page 12
5. References	page 16
Appendix 1	page 20
Appendix 2	page 21
Appendix 3	page 22
Appendix 4	page 23

1. Introduction

In the last century, casual sex has become culturally normative and to have sex outside of traditional romantic relationships is socially accepted (Bogle 2008; Garcia, Reiber, Massey, Merriwether 2012). Perlman (1974) did research among 242 unmarried students from an extremely liberal school in New York and found it very surprising that students accept intercourse between partners who were not in a relationship. In the late twentieth century, only 26% of the sample approved casual sex. Nowadays, more than half of the students notify that they have had casual sex for some time (81% Fielder & Carey, 2010, 70-85% Grello, Welsh, & Harper, 2006, 50-80% Owen, 2011). To conclude, a trend towards more permissive sex is seen over the years.

Casual sex can be defined as sex, ranging from kissing to oral sex, vaginal or anal penetration, with someone whom sexual active people are not dating or in a romantic relationship with at the time. In addition, the sexual partners both understand that there is no mutual expectation of a romantic commitment (Lewis, Granato, Blayney, Lostutter, & Kilmer, 2012). There are a lot of different words for casual sex used in research, like "one-night stands", "hookups", "booty calls" and "friends with benefits", but these concepts are all describing it as a sexual relationship without calling each other boy- or girlfriend or being in a romantic relationship. Casual sex can occur with strangers or with a friend, it can be brief or for a longer time, and it often starts spontaneously based on attraction and sexual desire (Grello et al., 2006). For young people, their first experience with sexual intercourse occurred mostly with a romantic partner. Fielder and Carey (2010) have studied the characteristics of casual sex among 118 female college students. They found that casual sex partners include friends, strangers, ex-boyfriends and acquaintances. Most often casual sex appeared with a friend (47%), followed by acquaintances (23%).

Most studies are conducted among college students from the United States (US), and focus particularly on the negative side of casual sex. Often, sexual risk behaviour, emotional and psychological injuries, STD's, unintended pregnancies and sexual violence were studied (Fielder & Carey, 2009). For example, Garcia et al. (2012) mentioned that having casual sex has "*dramatic*" consequences for someone's physical and mental health. Thereby, Paul and Hayes (2002) stated that having casual sex consequences emotional as well as social risks. An important question is whether these research findings can be generalized with the Dutch student population. Research from Schalet (2004) showed that Dutch society is quite different from US society when considering sexuality. People from the US are known for a more

conservative lifestyle and Dutch people are generally speaking more liberal. It seems that Dutch parents are less controlling of adolescent sexuality. They assume that teenagers can self-regulate their sexual development, and discuss sexuality openly. This is in contrast with the more conservative view on sexuality of US parents (Schalet, 2004). Besides parenting, there are also differences among risk behaviour. US young women are more likely to contract STD's or become pregnant compared to their Dutch peers. These US girls are three times more likely to have an abortion. For both the United States and the Netherlands, one may conclude that there was a steady increase in positive attitudes towards sexual permissiveness from 1965 until 1980. More liberal opinions are increasing and both countries saw a countertrend in the increasing line towards casual sex (Kraaykamp, 2002).

Based on other articles, results showed that the majority of the students participate in casual sex. Adolescents are engaging in casual sex earlier than in the past and students have generally more sexual partners before starting a serious romantic relationship (Feeney, Peterson, Gallois & Terry, 2000). Results indicate that young women have had between two and five partners in the last 6 months (Gullette & Lyons, 2006). But, there is also evidence that only 36,2% had intercourse with someone once (Eshbaugh & Gute, 2008). The period from adolescent to adulthood is a period of exploration and experimentation, thus also experimenting with sexual behaviour. It was examined that people who had their first sexual intercourse at a young age, were more likely to have casual sex in future years (Grello et al., 2006). Females may engage in casual sex because they believe and hope that it turns out in a new romantic relationship (Grello et al., 2006; Impett & Peplau, 2003). Bogle (2008) and Lyons, Manning, Giordano, and Longmore (2013) mentioned that environments of high education support casual sex and sexual freedom. For this reason, college environments are often used for research to casual sex (Bogle, 2008; Eshbaugh & Gute, 2008; Lyons et al., 2013). Many students see their college years as a period of experimentation before they will enter "the serious world of adults". It is clear that students are engaging casual sex more often than in the past, but what are the reasons to become involved with casual sex?

Self-Esteem

The way young women see themselves could be a predictor for engaging casual sex but yet, the relation between self-esteem and casual sex is unclear (Fielder & Carey, 2010; Garcia et al., 2012; Paul, McManus, Hayes, 2000). Grello et al. (2006) suggest that there is a possibility that the negative feelings of self-worth in women could increase their craving to be intimate with someone. The connection of casual sex and low self-esteem in women is taunting and

further investigation is necessary.

Rosenberg defined self-esteem as "the evaluation which the individual makes and customarily maintains with regard to himself, expressed as an attitude of approval or disapproval" (Cole 1997). To understand the background of casual sex and self-esteem among girls better, the Objectification theory of Frederickson and Roberts (1997) is a good framework. This framework explains the consequences for women, when engaging casual sex. In today's culture, men often sexually objectify a females' body. Because of this, women can develop an observer's perspective when looking at themselves which in turn can lead to mental health problems such as shame, anxiety or a lower self-esteem. Briefly said, girls are treated as bodies, bodies which exist for (sexual) pleasure for men. Quantitative studies show a decline in self-esteem, which most women experience in their lifetime, and especially at puberty when bodies are changing (Frederickson & Roberts, 1997). It could be the case that women who are dealing with lower self-esteem at that moment are engaging in casual sex to feel better about themselves and hope for getting compliments from men.

To compare the late twentieth century with today it was suggested that students who had a high number of sexual partners also reported high ratings of self-esteem (Perlman, 1974). Walsh (1991) research found that, in that period, self-esteem in combination with sexual behaviour was more important for men than for women. They suggested that men are, traditionally viewed, the ones who initiate a relationship and for that reason, self-esteem was more important. Women were just the ones pursuing this activity (Walsh, 1991) and nowadays, this idea is still dominating. Recent studies that examined the relation between casual sex and mental health have produced mixed findings. Paul et al. (2000) examined the relationship between psychological functioning and sexual behaviours. They found casual sex is popular on college campuses, and because of the social norms, women accept casual sex more often. Women who have casual sex turned out to have lower self-esteem, which could be caused by higher frequencies of casual sex with mostly acquaintances and friends. Women who had been involved in romantic sexual relationships showed higher rates of self-esteem (Furman & Collibee, 2014; Paul et al., 2000; Vrangalova, 2015). Women also reported, more often than men, feelings of disappointment, shame and self-doubt after having casual sex (Eshbaugh & Gute, 2008). Current notions have been that women with lower self-esteem will be more likely to have more sexual partners and will be more likely to initiate casual sex (Ethier et al., 2006; Fielder & Carey, 2010; Gullette & Lyons, 2006; Lewis et al., 2012). In contrast to these results, Owen, Finchman, and Moore (2011) stated that casual sex could be a solution to feel emotionally better for distressed women, because of the intimate

connection with another person. Young adult women, who did not have casual sex in the latest semester, reported more loneliness than women who did engage in casual sex (Owen et al., 2011). Research of Eisenberg and colleagues (2009) examined different types of sexual partnerships and compared this with psychological well-being among young adults. Surprisingly, this study did not find evidence for the idea that adults who engage in casual sex have lower or higher rates of self-esteem (Eisenberg et al., 2009).

Summarising, it can be concluded that most researchers state that low self-esteem can cause more casual sex and more sexual partners. There might be additional factors that impact associations between self-esteem and engaging in casual sex. Identification of such factors is important since the way people think about sex has changed over the past years. The question rises if self-esteem is the only factor to predict engaging casual sex, or if there is a possibility off a moderating factor.

Attitudes towards casual sex

The first reason to engage in (sexual) behaviour is whether people accept this behaviour or not. Twenge, Sherman, and Wells (2015) studied the change of attitudes towards sexual behaviour from 1972 until 2012. In 1970, only 29% of approximately 33.000 adults believed that sex outside a romantic relationship was not wrong in contrast to 58% between 2010 and 2012. Researchers speak of a sexual revolution between 1960 and 1970. Adults embraced more permissive attitudes towards sex. Even in 1991, Walsh concluded that attitudes towards casual sex were already more permissive then 20-30 years before (Walsh, 1991). After these years, this development remained stable until the acceptance of casual sex began to rise again from 2000 until 2010 (Twenge et al., 2015).

A couple of researchers assume that a biopsychosocial approach is the underlying framework for understanding the culture of casual sex. According to Kraaykamp (2002) attitudes (towards casual sex) are affected by the environment in which a person is raised, and the family structure in a person's childhood, or a college environment in this case. Beside the social context, attitudes towards casual sex and the willingness to participate in casual sex are also shaped by experience, biological factors and culture (Garcia et al., 2012). Another theory, which elaborates more the social aspect of attitude shaping, is the social-cognitive theory of Fielder and Carey (2009). They suggest that especially someone's social environment shapes ones behaviour, also as it regards to sexual behaviour. Social norms are big influencers of attitudes towards casual sex. The idea that "everybody is having casual sex" may encourage adolescents to have casual sex themselves. Students also overrate the frequency of their

friends' sexual behaviour and their number of sexual partners. These misperceptions are connected to increased sexual activity and a higher number of sexual partners. These theories are often used in research on casual sex and attitudes. It seems that the willingness of women to conform to group norms is more an issue than pressure of a group itself. The perception of a friend's attitude towards casual sex and his or her sexual activities influences their own choices in casual sex activities (Paul et al., 2000).

Research from Weaver and Herold (2000), to motivation for casual sex on 230 women from a Canadian University, found that 37% of the research group reported that they found nothing appealing about casual sex. From the women who had casual sex experience, 76% thought casual sex is very enjoyable, compared with 58% of the group of those who did not have casual sex experience. The way women experienced moments of casual sex could predict if these women will engage in future casual sex (Owen et al., 2011). It seems that people with a negative attitude towards casual sex, and thereupon engaged in casual sex, more often create dissonance and negative emotional reactions (Owen et al., 2011). It is to expect that thereby, women's self-esteem would be influenced in a negative way. On the other side, when girls engage casual sex with positive emotional reactions about their prior sexual behaviour, they are more likely to have casual sex again. Thereby, casual sex experience can result in confidence in talking about sex, more comfort in sexual activities and an enhanced awareness of the sexual self (Owen et al., 2011; Owen & Quirk, 2014). Gillmartin (2006) affirmed this. At the start of their first year, most women only focused on the negative aspects of sexual intimacy, at the end they were more confident and comfortable (Gillmartin, 2006).

Referring to the above studies conducted on casual sex, self-esteem and attitudes, it can be concluded that researchers are not yet convinced about the relationship between these constructs. On average, lower self-esteem among young women can consequence more casual sex partners. In addition, positive reactions towards casual sex are more common and stronger than negative reactions as opposed to the disadvantageous characteristics which are produced (Vrangalova, 2015). Kraaykamp (2002) mentioned that Dutch people have become more tolerant towards casual sex as well. But, on the other hand, Allison and Risman (2013) stated that attitudes of students are more conservative than liberal and that students are losing respect to other students who are engaging in casual sex. Together with mental health problems, engaging casual sex can also cause STDs or an unintended pregnancy because of the changing sex partners (Fielder & Carey, 2009). Research among Dutch young women is scarce and it would be interesting for Dutch healthcare, to know more about casual sex and the relationships of self-esteem with casual sex among this population. Identifying such

factors is important in selecting the appropriate targets for prevention in the context of risk behaviour and of improving women's sexual health and well-being.

The current study investigated in research to the relation between self-esteem and casual sex. Thereby, it is renewing to explore if attitudes take up the position of moderator in the relation between self-esteem and casual sex. For the current study, casual sex is defined as having oral, vaginal or anal intercourse with someone without expectations of a romantic commitment. This is because kissing and intercourse could result in both different outcomes for self-esteem, and attitudes towards kissing could differ from attitudes towards intercourse (Bersamin et al., 2014). First, this research examines if results of studies performed in the US can be replicated in the Dutch population. Secondly, it is hypothesized that there is a relationship between lower rates of self-esteem and more casual sex partners, which is based on the majority of US articles (Ethier et al., 2006; Gullette & Lyons, 2006; Paul et al., 2000). It is unknown whether attitudes towards casual sex predict the relation between self-esteem and casual sex. Therefore, this study examines if attitudes toward casual sex moderate the relationship between self-esteem and casual sex. Beside this, it is expected that young women in the Netherlands do have an overall positive attitude about casual sex, based on the numbers of participation in casual sex (Fielder & Carey, 2010; Grello et al., 2006; Owen, 2011).

2. Method

Participants and procedure

The participants of this research were recruited via the internet and flyers. A link to the questionnaire was provided by the website of Utrecht University. The program Lime Survey was used to create this online questionnaire. Students signed up to participate via a special website, only accessible to social sciences students listing all available studies. At Utrecht University bachelor, students are required to spend a minimum of ten hours as research participant in scientific studies. Completion of this study automatically resulted in crediting one hour to the account of the participant. Students from other universities could follow the link to the website of the questionnaire to participate. This link was sent to the students via internet, like social media. When opening the link, participants first completed an informed consent. General information is collected regarding participants' age, educational status, relationship status, living situation, sexual inclination and sexual risk behaviour. Criteria for participation were female gender, university student, age between 18 and 30 years old, not being in a romantic relationship, and sexually active (now or in the past). On average, it took

45 minutes to complete the questionnaire.

Participants were 126 female college students from the Netherlands who completed the questionnaire. 8 participants were excluded because of male gender, 7 participants were excluded because they did not study at a university, 3 participants were excluded because they did not have any sexual experience. This means that there was a total participant group of 108 female college students. Age ranged from 18 to 30 years ($M = 20.92$, $SD = 2.21$).

Approximately, 87% ($N = 94$) of the participants reported that they are heterosexual, 2.8% ($N = 3$) participants were homosexual, 8.3% ($N = 9$) participants were bisexual and 1.9% ($N = 2$) reported undecided. These demographic characteristics are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Demographic characteristics ($N = 104$)

Measure	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	%
Age (years)		20.92	2.21	
Sexual inclination				
straight	94			87.0
homosexual	3			2.9
bi-sexual	9			8.7
undecided	2			1.9
Living situation				
away from home	88			81.5
living with parents	20			18.5

Comparisons with national census data showed that this research sample was almost in line with the general population of young Dutch women. 8.6% of the young Dutch women is possible homosexual or bi-sexual (Felten & Boote, 2015). 21% had one sexual partner in total, 40 percent between two and five partners and among 16 percent have had more than five different sexual partners in total (Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek, 2009). In this sample 14.8% reported that they have had one sexual partner in total, 44.5% have had between two and five partners and 28.7% have had more than five different sexual partners.

Measures

Self-Esteem

The Dutch version (Everaert, Koster, Schacht & Raedt, 2010) of the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES) (Rosenberg, 1965) was used to measure self-esteem in young women.

Participants answered ten questions using a 4 point scale ranging from 1 (*totally agree*) to 4 (*totally disagree*). An example of an item is: "On the whole, I am satisfied with myself". Reverse-scored items were recoded before summing, this were five items. A high total score indicated a high level of self-esteem. Previous research has supported the reliability and psychometric validity. Cronbach's alpha for the translated version of the RSES is 0.89, what makes the intern consistency high (Everaert et al., 2010). Everaert measured a strong correlation between the total scores of the RSES and theoretical related scales like for example depressive symptoms, $r(214) = -.62, p < .001$, and anxiety $r(214) = -.51, p < .001$. These results underpin the validity of the translated version of the RSES (Everaert et al., 2010). In the present study, Cronbach's alpha for self-esteem was 0.87. This questionnaire is attached in appendix one.

Attitudes towards casual sex

The Dutch version (van Lankveld et al., 2015) of the Brief Sexual Attitudes Scale (BSAS) (Hendrick, Hendrick & Reich, 2006) was used to measure attitudes towards casual sex. The BSAS list different statements about sexual attitudes with a 5 point likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly agree*) to 5 (*strongly disagree*). Statements like "casual sex is acceptable" were requested (Hendrick et al., 2006). Summing all the scores will give the total score. The higher the score, the more positive the attitude towards casual sex. Previous research has supported the reliability and psychometric validity. Cronbach's alpha is 0.86 (Hendrick et al., 2006) In the present study, Cronbach's alpha for attitudes was 0.78. This questionnaire is attached in appendix two.

Casual Sex

To measure casual sex in young women, a questionnaire was developed, based on different articles about casual sex (Bersamin et al., 2014; Lewis et al., 2012; Lyons et al., 2013). This questionnaire involved open questions. Participants had to fill in with how many partners they have had a casual sex experience during their life and during the past year. Because the sexual experience could be influenced by the kind of partner (Vrangalova, 2015) participants were asked to report this kind of partner. Participants had to fill in how often their casual sex partner was a stranger, an acquaintance, a friend or an ex-partner. Response options to these questions were numbers. For the analysis, the answers on the question "*With how many people did you have casual sex during the past year?*" were used. Based on the work of Lewis et al. (2012) participants were also asked to rate their overall experience with casual sex on a

scale from 0 (*very negative*) to 10 (*very positive*). Cronbach's alpha for this study was 0.69. This questionnaire is attached in appendix three.

Risk behaviour

Because a lot of US articles are about the risk of engaging in casual sex, this study also asked their participants to their risk behaviour. These questions were asked to compare the answers with US statistics and to make sure, if having casual sex do have consequences among the Dutch students. Questions about condom use, STD's, birth control, pregnancies, and alcohol and drug use were asked, answers had to be from last year.

Statistical analysis

Data analyses were performed using SPSS Version 21. Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk tests were conducted to examine the normality of all the tests. For some of the variables, the normality tests showed non-significant results. Q-Q plots of the tests showed a relative/almost straight line and the research population was high, indicating that the normality assumption was proved. To test the first hypothesis (*Results of US articles are in line with results of the Dutch population*), descriptives about the number and the kind of casual sex partners were determined. To test whether there was a relationship between low self-esteem and a high number of casual sex partners (hypothesis 2), a linear regression was conducted with casual sex as dependent variable and self-esteem as independent variable. To test the last hypothesis (*Attitudes towards casual sex form a moderating factor to predict the relation between self-esteem and casual sex*) a moderating analyses was implement. The scores of the RSES and the BSAS were centralised so that the new predictor can be calculate. With the centralised data a linear regression could be done with casual sex as dependent variable and the centralised data of the RSES and BSAS as independent variable.

3. Results

Table 2 shows the numbers of casual sex, sexual partners and the overall casual sex experience among the research population. Overall, girls have had 4.57 casual sex partners in their life, so far. In the previous year, participants had, on average, 2.12 casual sex partners. 21.3% ($N = 23$) did not have casual sex last year. It is remarkable that in only 5.8% of the times that these women engaged in casual sex, the partner was an ex boy/girl friend. Most of the times, the sexual partner was a stranger (41%). Apparently, Dutch students are very positive about their casual sex experiences. 66.7% gave their experience a score of five or

higher. Even though, 31.3% scored their experience with an eight, which is very high and positive.

Table 2. *Casual sex, sexual partners and overall experience*

Measure	<i>N</i> (%)	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Range
Overall casual sex partners	494	4.57	4.77	1 - 24
Casual sex partners last year	229	2.12	2.01	1 – 10
Casual sex partner				
stranger	121 (41.0)	1.12	1.63	0 – 8
acquaintance	103 (34.9)	0.95	1.42	0 – 8
friend	54 (18.3)	0.50	0.97	0 – 7
ex boy/girl friend	17 (5.8)	0.16	0.43	0 – 3
Overall experience with casual sex		6.92	1.38	0 – 10
negative (<5)	13 (12.1)			
positive (>5)	72 (66.7)			

Among the general information were also questions about sexual risk behaviour. From the adult women of this research group, 46.3% ($N = 50$) did not use a condom for at least one time in the previous year. However, 90.7% ($N = 98$) of these Dutch women used other manners of birth control. 35.2% ($N = 38$) mentioned that they have had varying casual sex partners last year. 38% ($N = 41$) of the participants underwent a STD test, thereupon three participants (2.8%) reported that they have got a STD out of these varying casual sex partners. However, none of the girls got pregnant. It is very remarkable that 78.7% ($N = 85$) of the participants used alcohol for some time during the casual sex and 17.6% ($N = 19$) used drugs for at least one time.

Self-Esteem and Casual Sex

For both tests a total sum score was implemented. These outcomes are shown in Table 3. Participants could score self-esteem from 10 (*low self-esteem*) to 40 (*high self-esteem*) points. The range of the scores were 11 to 40 points ($M = 30.03$, $SD = 4.69$). 55.6% ($N = 60$) of the participants scored between 30 and 40 which means that they have a high self-esteem. Results of the linear regression analysis showed that the regression model was not significant, ($F(1,106) = 3.669$, $\beta = 0.108$, $p < .058$), with an R^2 of 0.033. In contrast with the hypothesis, there is no relation between self-esteem and casual sex.

Attitudes towards Casual Sex as a Moderator of the relation between Self-Esteem and Casual Sex

Participants could score the BSAS from 15 (*extremely negative*) to 75 (*extremely positive*). The range of the scores were 24 to 62 points ($M = 45.38, SD = 7.77$). 75% of the participant had a score of 40 points or more, which means that these participants have an overall positive attitude towards casual sex. Results of the linear regression analysis showed that a significant regression equation was found ($F(1,106) = 25.530, \beta = -.420, p < .00$), with an R^2 of 0.194. To measure the overall experience with casual sex, participants were asked to give this experience a rate from 0 (*very negative*) to 10 (*very positive*). Only 13 participants rated their casual sex experience with 5 or less. This means that 84.7% ($N = 72$) women rate their experience positive. Out of these findings, it can be conclude that the overall attitude towards casual sex is very positive.

To test whether attitudes towards casual sex was a moderator of the coherence between self-esteem and casual sex a moderator analysis was performed. Results showed that attitudes towards casual sex do not moderate the relationship between self-esteem and casual sex ($F(3,104) = 9.45, \beta = -.087, p < .00$), with an $R^2 = 0.214$. When looking at table 3, only the regression of *BSAScentr* is significant. Thus, higher scores of the BSAS are related to more casual sex partners. No coherence was found between self-esteem and casual sex. These findings also indicate that the relationship between self-esteem and casual sex will not be predicted by participants' attitude toward casual sex.

Table 3. Moderator analysis

<i>Model</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SEM</i>	β	<i>t</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
RSEScentr.	0.046	0.038	0.108	1.221	0.225
BSAScentr.	- 0.109	0.023	-0.420	- 4.767	0.00
RsesBsas	- 0.005	0.005	-0.087	- 1.001	0.319

Note. Constant = casual sex, RSEScentr. = sum scores Rosenberg self-esteem – mean RSES, BSAScentr. = sum scores BSAS – mean BSAS, RsesBsas = regression RSES and BSAS.

Table 4. Anova table moderator analysis

<i>Model</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
Regression	3	9.45	0.00
Residual	104		

Note. Dependent variable = "with how many people did you have casual sex during the past year". Predictors = (constant), RsesBsas, BSAScentr, RSEScentr.

4. Discussion

The goal of this study was to examine casual sex behaviour among young Dutch women, because scientific research in the Netherlands is scarce. Investigation in research is relevant for healthcare institutions in order to become a better interlocutor in situations regarding sexual behaviour of young women. The first aim of this study was to explore casual sex among a Dutch research population and to examine if these outcomes are about the same as casual sex among US college girls. The idea that casual sex is very common these days is prevailing the literature, but often it is explored in combination with risk behaviour (Fielder & Carey, 2009; Garcia et al., 2012; Paul & Hayes, 2002). When comparing the results of US articles with this Dutch research, it can be concluded that these numbers are approximately in line with previous research. According to the literature, more than half of the students reported that they have had casual sex for some time, had between two and five partners the last six months and it occurred most often with a friend (47%) (Fielder & Carey, 2010; Grello et al., 2006; Owen, 2010). In this research the percentage of engaging casual sex for some time is 88% ($N = 95$), 44.5% have had between two and five partners in the previous year and the casual sex mostly appeared with a stranger (41%). Only 18.3% of the casual sex experiences occurred with a friend. When looking at these general numbers of casual sex, it can be concluded that, with respect to US research, US numbers can be generalized to the Dutch population. Thereby, it looks like the phenomenon of casual sex has become normative and accepted in the Netherlands. The biggest remarkable difference between the US and the Netherlands is the manner of informing young adults and teenagers about sex. According to Schalet (2004), healthcare authorities try to regulate sexual behaviour strictly. The idea that adults are having a lot of casual sex without parental control and/or other protection is dominating in the US. Having casual sex is dangerous and adults behave immoral regarding engaging casual sex (Schalet, 2004). Were US parents dramatize casual sex, Dutch parents try to normalize sexual behaviour. They emphasize sexual development and mention that sexuality always can be discussed within the parental home. As mentioned in the introduction, American adults undergo an abortion more often than the Dutch girls. In this research, none of the girls did get pregnant. However, this does not mean that there is no risk behaviour among the research population. One girl reported that she had 10 casual sex partners during the past year. With this amount of varying partners the risk on STD's or an unintended pregnancy rises, especially when taking into account that almost half of the participants (46.3%) did not use a condom for some time. There is an increased risk of STD's among

people under the age of 25. University lifestyle plays a role in facilitating sexual encounters. According to Chanakira, O'Cathain, Goyder and Freeman (2014), students state social expectations, independent living, alcohol use and increased sexual opportunities can contribute to a more risky sexual lifestyle. In this study, participants were also asked to their alcohol use during casual sex. 78.7% mentioned they used alcohol for some time during the sex. Alcohol use and intoxication decreases especially the use of protective behaviour, rather than the decision to participate in casual sex. (Chanakira et al., 2011; Fielder & Carey, 2010; Lewis et al., 2012; Neal & Fromme, 2007).

The second aim of this study was to examine the relationship between self-esteem and casual sex. Although most articles state that low self-esteem cause higher rates of casual sex (Ethier et al., 2006; Gullette & Lyons, 2006; Paul et al., 2000), no association was found in this Dutch study. This outcome was not to expected, so how can these differences be account? Only one girl showed low self-esteem, when looking at the results of the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale. Total scores can vary from 10 to 40 points and this girl scored 11 points. The second last lowest score of this test was 20 points, so a relatively big difference is seen. On the other side, two participants scored the maximum number of points, namely 40 points. Either these participants are very high on self-esteem and lucky with themselves or they scored only five points per item because of convenience. Overall, the participants scored a mean to high self-esteem with varying scores of casual sex, so the hypothesis does not hold. This study mentioned the objectification theory as a framework for self-esteem and casual sex (Frederickson & Roberts, 1997). This framework explained the idea that women are often be sexually objectified by men which can lead to mental health problems like low self-esteem. These problems can in turn lead to more casual sex so that women feel wanted. Because there is only one woman with low self-esteem in the results, nothing can be concluded about the framework in this research. In addition, Casual sex is very popular at college campuses, which is mentioned by different articles (Garcia et al., 2012; Grello et al., 2006; Paul et al., 2000). From the US literature articles one can expect that engaging casual sex can cause mental health problems like feelings of shame, self-doubt, disappointment and low self-esteem. When looking at the results of this research 86.1% ($N = 93$) of the participants scored high level of self-esteem. These results suggest that for the Dutch adult women, engaging casual sex does not have negative consequences for their mental health. A qualitative research of Kalish and Kimmel (2011) can account for this finding. The state that women who are positive about casual sex can engage casual sex without developing negative consequences. Important things for women when engaging casual sex are learning about their

own sexuality and learn what to expect in sexual interactions (Kalish & Kimmel, 2011). Casual sex occurs in a period when women are developing themselves and in a period where experimenting is important (Grello et al., 2006; Kalish & Kimmel, 2011). Experimenting with and engaging in casual sex does not only result in problems, it provides also autonomy before marriage, enjoying relationships. After this period, women can choose wisely with whom to spend the rest of their lives. Summarizing, no relation between self-esteem and casual sex was found and this finding can be account by the idea that engaging casual sex often can result in positive things for self-development.

The last aim of this study was to explore if attitudes towards casual sex could moderate the relation of self-esteem and casual sex. Environments shape ones behaviour and attitudes towards casual sex (Fielder & Carey, 2009; Garcia, 2012; Kraaykamp, 2002). Beside this, the way women experienced casual sex could predict future casual sex (Owen et al., 2011). In this research, findings indicated that attitudes towards casual sex has no influence on the relation of self-esteem and casual sex. A reason for this result could be that there was already no relation between self-esteem and casual sex. In contrast with most US articles, the article of Goodson, Buhi and Dunsmore (2006) state that researches connect self-esteem to almost everything like emotions, personal satisfaction, social relationships and sex related factors. They concluded 60% of empirical tests of the relationship between sexual behaviour and/or sexual attitudes and self-esteem show no statistically significant associations (Goodson et al., 2006). Thereby, it seems like self-esteem does not have a protective effect. Because self-esteem is a wide concept, reviewers affirm that studies to self-esteem and its impact on varying subjects suffer from lack of conceptual or measurement specificity and uneven methodological quality. They suggest that, on average, studies to relationships between self-esteem and adolescents sexual behaviour and attitudes need room for improvements (Goodson et al., 2006). These findings can account for the fact that there was no relation found between self-esteem and casual sex, and the absence of attitudes towards casual sex as a moderator of this relationship. At last, where US articles are in general negative about casual sex, findings of this research show the opposite. Results of the Brief Sexual Attitude Scale showed that 75% of the participants had an overall positive attitude towards casual sex. Only 15% gave their experience with casual sex a negative score. The idea that "everybody is having casual sex" could predict engaging casual sex. This could also count for this research population. This study did not examine the reasons for engaging casual sex, so further research is necessary. It could be interesting to know if girls engaging casual sex because they like having casual sex and have good experience with it or that they engage casual sex

because of social pressure. This study only used a questionnaire about attitudes towards casual sex but a qualitative study to these attitudes could be a good addition.

The results must be considered in light of study limitations. This research examined on a homogeneous group (i.e., psychology students, high education, sexually experience, and single women), thus these findings are not representative for the general Dutch female population. Thereby, previous research state that women who volunteer in participating sex research tend to have more sexual experience, report higher self-esteem and hold more permissive attitudes towards sex (Wiederman, 1999). To measure casual sex, a non-validated questionnaire was used. This does not have to be a problem because it was based on a variety of articles (Lewis et al., 2012; Lyons et al., 2013; Bersamin et al., 2014), which also used self-constructed questionnaires. With the use of questionnaires, data could be biased because of self-reporting. Participants had to fill in a questionnaire, however this is one of the most reliable measurements, socially desirable answers could not be excluded. In addition to these limitations, it could be that some statistical flaws occurred during the analysis. The relation between self-esteem and casual sex is correlational. In other words, the direction of causation could go from self-esteem to casual sex, as well as vice versa. Future research could set up a follow-up study for a better understanding of the relation between self-esteem and casual sex.

Despite the limitations, this study adds to the better understanding of casual sex among Dutch young adult women. It seems that engaging casual sex brings risk behaviour with it but no mental health problems. Actually, the Dutch women are very positive about their experience with casual sex. Identifying these factors about casual sex could help the health authorities in the Netherlands, like the GGD, to take up a way of information spreading.

5. References

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Appendix 1 – Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale translation (Everaert et al., 2010)

Onderstaande vragen gaan over uw zelfbeeld. Het is de bedoeling dat u de antwoorden omcirkelt die het meest op u van toepassing zijn. De antwoord opties zijn; 1=helemaal mee eens, 2=mee eens, 3=mee oneens, 4=helemaal mee oneens.

1 Over het algemeen ben ik tevreden met mezelf	1	2	3	4
2 Bij momenten denk ik dat ik helemaal niet deug	1	2	3	4
3 Ik heb het gevoel dat ik een aantal goede kwaliteiten heb	1	2	3	4
4 Ik ben in staat dingen even goed te doen als de meeste andere mensen	1	2	3	4
5 Ik heb het gevoel dat ik niet veel heb om trots op te zijn	1	2	3	4
6 Het is ongetwijfeld zo dat ik me bij momenten nutteloos voel	1	2	3	4
7 Ik heb het gevoel dat ik een waardevol iemand ben, minstens evenwaardig aan anderen	1	2	3	4
8 Ik wou dat ik meer respect voor mezelf kon opbrengen	1	2	3	4
9 Al bij al ben ik geneigd mezelf een mislukking te voelen	1	2	3	4
10 Ik neem een positieve houding aan ten opzichte van mezelf	1	2	3	4

Appendix 2 – Brief Sexual Attitudes Scale

Hieronder staan een aantal stellingen, die verschillende attitudes weergeven ten aanzien van seksualiteit. Voor elke stelling kunt u aangeven in welke mate u het ermee eens of oneens bent.

Antwoord opties zijn; 1 = helemaal mee eens 2 = mee eens 3= neutraal 4 = mee oneens 5 = helemaal mee oneens.

1. Ik hoef niet verbonden te zijn met een partner om seks met hem/haar te hebben.	1	2	3	4	5
2. Seks zonder relatie is acceptabel.	1	2	3	4	5
3. Ik zou graag seks hebben met veel partners.	1	2	3	4	5
4. Van one-night stand kun je soms erg genieten.	1	2	3	4	5
5. Het is prima om tegelijk meerdere seksuele relaties te onderhouden.	1	2	3	4	5
6. Seks als simpele uitwisseling van gunsten is prima als beide personen het hier mee eens zijn.	1	2	3	4	5
7. De beste seks is zonder verplichtingen.	1	2	3	4	5
8. Het leven zou makkelijker zijn als mensen vrijer seks zouden kunnen hebben.	1	2	3	4	5
9. Het is mogelijk om van seks met iemand te genieten zonder deze persoon te mogen.	1	2	3	4	5
10. het is prima om seks als puur fysieke uitlaatklep te gebruiken.	1	2	3	4	5
11. Seks is het beste als je jezelf laat gaan en focust op je eigen plezier.	1	2	3	4	5
12. Seks is op de eerste plaats gezien het plezier beleven aan een ander.	1	2	3	4	5
13. Het belangrijkste doel van seks is om jezelf te vermaken.	1	2	3	4	5
14. Seks is op de eerste plaats iets fysieks.	1	2	3	4	5
15. Seks is allereerst een lichamelijke functie, net als eten.	1	2	3	4	5

Appendix 3 – Casual Seks Vragenlijst

Onderstaande vragen gaan over casual seks. Casual seks betreft orale, vaginale en anale seksuele activiteit met iemand waarmee je geen relatie hebt en er geen sprake is van verwachting tot een relatie. De relatie tot uw casual seks partner kan per keer verschillen. Denk hierbij aan vrienden, kennissen, iemand die u net hebt ontmoet of een ex-partner.

1. Met hoeveel mensen heeft u ooit casual seks gehad?
2. Met hoeveel mensen hebt u casual seks gehad in het afgelopen jaar?

De volgende vragen hebben betrekking op het afgelopen jaar. Graag in cijfers antwoorden. Wanneer de vraag niet op u van toepassing is, dan kunt u 0 invullen.

3. Hoeveel van deze casual seks partners:
 - Had u maximaal een week voorafgaand aan de casual seks ontmoet?
 - Waren op dat moment kennissen van u?
 - Waren op dat moment vrienden van u?
 - Waren op dat moment een ex-partner van u?
4. Op een schaal van 0 (= zeer negatief) tot 10 (= zeer positief), hoe beoordeelt u uw ervaring in casual seks?

Appendix 4 – Briefing

Welkom bij dit online vragenlijstonderzoek naar seksualiteit, lichaamsbeeld en zelfbeeld.

Dit onderzoek wordt uitgevoerd door de Universiteit Utrecht in het kader van een masteronderzoek. Let op: voor deze studie zijn wij alleen op zoek naar vrouwelijke universitaire studenten van 18 jaar en ouder die in het verleden minimaal één seksuele partner hebben gehad.

De vragen zullen gaan over bepaalde aspecten van seksualiteit, en gedachten en gevoelens die u heeft over uzelf en over uw lichaam. Er bestaan geen goede of foute antwoorden. Het invullen van de vragenlijsten zal ongeveer 45 minuten van uw tijd in beslag nemen.

Psychologiestudenten aan de Universiteit Utrecht krijgen één proefpersoonuur toegekend wanneer zij aan het eind hun studentnummer en solis e-mailadres invullen.

Het meedoen aan dit onderzoek is op vrijwillige basis en deelname kan op ieder moment beëindigd worden. Wanneer deelname vervroegd wordt beëindigd, wordt er geen proefpersoonuur toegekend en zal de gegeven informatie direct worden verwijderd. De informatie die u verschaft blijft geheel anoniem en zal enkel en alleen gebruikt worden voor wetenschappelijke doeleinden.

Alvast bedankt voor uw deelname!