



**Universiteit Utrecht**

## **Can body image protect women from the effect of sexual explicit material on their sex lives?**

*The relationships between exposure to sexually explicit material, body-image state during sexual activity, and sexual satisfaction.*

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## **Abstract**

The accessibility and use of sexual explicit material has increased the past decade extremely. Most previous research on sexual explicit material focused, till now, mainly on men. It is important to gain more insight about how sexual explicit material influences sexual satisfaction among women, for the sake of knowledge and the ability for women to enhance their well-being. Dutch female college students ( $n = 244$ ), between the age of 18 and 30 years old, completed three self-report questionnaires online, about the amount of sexual explicit material they get exposed to, their body image during sexual activity and their sexual satisfaction. It was expected that exposure to sexual explicit material has a more negative effect on sexual satisfaction if women experience a negative body image state during sexual activities. However, this moderation effect was not found in this study. In line with previous research, there was a relationship found between body image during sexual activity and sexual satisfaction. A more positive body image during sexual activity was associated with more sexual satisfaction. There was also a relationship found between sexual explicit material and sexual satisfaction. More frequent exposure to sexual explicit material was associated with more sexual satisfaction, but this relationship was not significant when body image during sexual activity is included. Additional research is required draw any conclusions about this relationship among women. Finally, the amount of exposure to sexual explicit material had no effect on how women felt about their bodies during sexual activity. Based on this study, creating interventions with a focus on body image of women during sexual activity is advised. Due to the fact that this study cannot conclude anything regarding causality, longitudinal studies are desirable, as well as, more research regarding the influences of sexual explicit material and social media on women their sex lives.

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## **Introduction**

Nowadays, pornography can be used free and anonymous by almost everybody, because of the increased accessibility of the internet. There were over four millions websites with pornographic material in 2012 and this number has most likely increased further the past years (Short, Black, Smith, Wetterneck, & Wells, 2012). Parallel, the use of pornography has increased the past decade extremely. The definition of pornography differs across scientific studies (Short, Black, Smith, Wetterneck, & Wells, 2012). A general accepted definition that would be inclusive of the definitions used in previous studies is: “Any sexually explicit material displaying genitals with the aim of sexual arousal or fantasy”(Short, Black, Smith, Wetterneck, & Wells, 2012). Scientific knowledge about the effects of this kind of material on people’s lives is needed, because of this increased use of sexual explicit material, but a lot of research on sexually explicit media has however become outdated, specifically as a result of the technological shifts (Buzzell, 2005). Recent research indicated that the use of pornography has both negative consequences, like emotional problems and interpersonal impairments, as well as positive consequences, like relieving stress and increased sexual knowledge(Short, Black, Smith, Wetterneck, & Wells, 2012).

Previous research on sexual explicit material focused mainly on men. This may be due to the fact that men use pornography more often than women (Gijs, 2009). Nevertheless the use of pornography by women increased since the turn of the century. Almost 40 percent of the Dutch women watched porn in 2009 (Gijs, 2009). Previous studies were mostly conducted among adolescents and little to none research is available among adult women. This may be due to the fact that during the period of adolescent sexuality mostly develops and a lot of changes take place in this period (Gijs, 2009). This gives further weight to the idea that it is important to study how exposure to sexual explicit material influences young adult women their sexual satisfaction. Sexual satisfaction is defined as a subjective evaluation of the degree to which one is satisfied with his/her sex life (Pinney, Gerrard, & Denney, 1987). Sexual dissatisfaction is a common problem among women all over the world and therefore a valuable subject for research. Women report much more sexual dissatisfaction than men. The incidence of women who have problems having orgasm, for example, is so high that this problem is almost normative (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). Improving sexual satisfaction is an aim on its own, but sexual satisfaction is also related to numerous quality-of-life factors, including psychological health, general well-being and happiness (Pujols,

Meston, & Seal, 2010). Therefore, by improving women's sexual satisfaction, people could also improve their health and happiness and by that probably also save time and money on healthcare. Shortly, it is important to gain more insight about how sexual explicit material influences sexual satisfaction among women for the sake of knowledge and ability for women to enhance their well-being.

From several theories arose the expectation that there could be a relationship between exposure to sexual explicit material and sexual satisfaction. One main theory was the social comparison theory that states that people attempt to enhance self-understanding by comparing themselves to others on various dimensions. If the comparison is made with unrealistic and unachievable models, people use an upward comparison, which will lead to a more negative self-evaluation (Morrison, Ellis, Morrison, Bearden, & Harriman, 2007). Scuglia (2004) reported on the reality of pornography that “An average pornographic scene can take up to eight hours to film. The set has to be dressed and lit properly and the director generally has a mandate to capture certain positions for a certain period of time”. Given such manipulations, it would appear that images contained in pornography are distant from the sex lives of most people (Morrison et al., 2007). Therefore in accordance with the Social Comparison Theory, people comparing themselves to these sort of targets, use an upward comparison, which most likely will result in sexual dissatisfaction.

The cultivation theory enforces this expectation by stating that repeated exposure to this kind of material creates corresponding attitudes and beliefs in those who use it (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan & Signorielli, 1994). On that account, frequent consumers of sexual explicit material most likely cultivate criteria for sexual satisfaction that are similar to those often portrayed in sexually explicit material. These unrealistic criteria that are almost impossible to meet, will probably cause dissatisfaction (Morgan, 2011). In accordance to these theories, a Dutch study revealed that exposure to sexually explicit material on the internet reduced adolescents sexual satisfaction, but lower sexual satisfaction also led to more use of sexually explicit material in turn (Peter & Valkenburg, 2009). Likewise, research among young adults confirmed that higher porn use frequency was associated with less sexual satisfaction (Morgan, 2011).

Besides the expected direct relationship between exposure to sexually explicit material and sexual satisfaction, theories and studies indicated that body image might play an important role in this association. In 1999 Thompson and colleagues already determined

fourteen different terms which were used to refer to body image or dimensions of body image. This number of terms most likely has increased extremely since then. This is one of the reasons why it is difficult to compare with and between previous studies. Body image has been defined in different ways, but there is an overall agreement that body image is multidimensional construct that refers to individuals perceptions of and attitudes towards their own body, especially its appearance (Cash, Fleming, Alindogan, Streadman & Whithehead, 2002). Tiggemann and Lynch (2001) found that women's perceptions of and satisfaction with their bodies varied depending on which situation they were in. Their body image state depended on how social and body focused the situation was. This resulted in the recently developed distinction between (general) trait-level body image and state body image (Cash & Smolak, 2011). A more negative average body-image state is associated with a lower trait body-image satisfaction, more body-image dysphoria, more schematic investment in appearance, more disturbing eating attitudes and the use of maladaptive body-image coping styles (Rudiger, Cash, Roehrig & Thompson, 2007). Even though it is well known that body image experiences vary temporally and in situational context, most researchers focus on body image as a stable trait (Cash, 1990, 1995; Tiggemann, 2001). Therefore, it is important to investigate effects of body image as a state, especially in research that focuses on sexuality, because sexual situations are so specific and different from normal day situations. This research will use a higher degree of self-consciousness during sexual intimacy as a measure for body image state during sexual activity (Wiederman, 2000).

The objectification theory explains how body image may play a role in the relationship between sexual explicit material and sexual satisfaction by pointing out the consequences of being a female in a culture that sexually objectifies the female body (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). Sexual objectification occurs if a woman's body, body parts or sexual functions are separated from her as a person and thereby reduced to the status of mere instruments. This separation often occurs in sexually explicit material (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). Sexual objectification can result in the experience of being treated as a body or collection of body parts with the purpose to be used by others. Sexualization occurs in many forms like gaze or visual inspection of the body (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). Implicit sexual gaze might be the most insidious form of objectifying gaze. This can cause women to use an observer's perspective as a primary view of their physical selves, which in turn can lead to habitual body monitoring (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). If women monitor their

body, they are so intensely aware of their outer body, that it may lead to generalized insensitivity to internal bodily cues, because fewer perceptual resources are available for inner body experiences (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). According to Masters and Johnson (1970), this habitual attentiveness to body appearance during sex indeed hinders women's sexual satisfaction greatly. Dove and Wiederman (2000) also found that appearance-related distracting thoughts during sexual activity were related to lower levels of sexual satisfaction.

The social comparison theory, as already mentioned, can explain the relationship between exposure to sexual explicit material and sexual satisfaction, but it can also explain the association between sexual explicit material and body image. Research had shown that adolescents compare their body characteristics with bodies in the media (Botta, 1999; Richins, 1991). Female performers in porn usually embody hegemonic standards of attractiveness in western culture like being thin, having large breasts and young of age (Morrison et al., 2007). People comparing their bodies to these kind of targets most likely result in a less positive evaluation of their body (Morrison et al., 2007). Interesting, the University of Ireland found no relationship between the degree of exposure to sexually explicit material and body esteem among men (Morrison et al., 2007). Lavine, Sweeney and Wagner (1999) did find that women who were exposed to sexist ads (advertisements displaying women as sex objects), revealed a larger discrepancy between their actual and ideal body size. The relationship between exposure to sexually explicit material and body image remains unclear, because of lack of scientific research among women on this relationship. Previous research did confirm that there is a relationship between media use in general and body dissatisfaction among women (Clark & Tiggemann, 2007; Durkin & Paxton, 2002; Hargreaves & Tiggemann, 2004; Tiggemann & Slater, 2004).

Several studies indicated that there is also a direct relationship between body image and sexual satisfaction and that this relationship exists above and beyond effects of actual body size. This indicates that perceptions cognitions about one's own body size, rather than the actual body size, influences sexuality (Pujols, Meston & Seal, 2010). In accordance Pujols, Meston and Seal (2010) found that sexual dissatisfied women experienced more body image dissatisfaction. In line with this Holt and Lyness (2007) also found a positive relationship between body image and sexual satisfaction among women and men.

Previous research showed that body image was related to the degree of internalization of beauty ideals (Stice, Schupak-Neuberg, Shaw, & Stein, 1994; Thompson & Stic, 2001). Women with more positive body image states internalized beauty ideals less. These beauty ideals, like being thin, having large breasts and young of age (Morrison et al., 2007), are shown in sexual explicit material as discussed earlier. Sexual explicit material might influence women with positive body image states less, because they internalize these ideals not as much as women with more negative body image states. Thus, besides having direct relationships with sexual satisfaction and sexually explicit material, body image could also moderate the relationship between sexually explicit material and sexual satisfaction. Little is known about body image being a protective factor for the influences of sexual explicit material on women's sexlives. In other words, there is no scientific evidence available yet regarding women with a more positive body image who would suffer less from the influence of sexual explicit material on their sexual satisfaction. However, several studies did show that self-esteem is a protective factor for many negative outcomes (Croll, Neumark-Sztainer, Story, & Ireland, 2002) and perceptions of appearance and self-worth are inextricably linked (Harter, 1999).

The aim of this study is to expand our understanding of how the variables "exposure to sexually explicit material", "body-image state during sexual activities", and "sexual satisfaction" are related to each other to enhance insight that can lead to improving women's well-being. Based on the previous discussed findings, it was expected that more frequent exposure to sexual explicit material was related to a more negative body image state during sexual activity. A negative body image state during sexual activity was expected to be related to more sexual dissatisfaction in turn. Frequent exposure to sexual explicit material was expected to be directly related to more sexual dissatisfaction. This relationship was expected to be stronger when women had a more negative body image during sexual activity and less strong when they had a more positive body image during sexual activity. In other words, body image during sexual activity was expected to moderate the effect between sexual explicit material and sexual satisfaction.



## Method

### Procedure and Participants

Participants were recruited by the website of the University of Utrecht and multiple flyers (Appendix A), that were hanging on several bulletin boards in the University of Utrecht. The website, is a special website, only accessible to students listing all available studies. Criteria for participation were being female, university student, between 18 and 30 years old, and with at least one sexual experience with a male partner. The program ‘‘Limesurvey’’ was used to create one merged online questionnaire for this study and other studies from the University of Utrecht about sexuality. The participants completed an informed consent form (Appendix B) and the demographic and personal variables (Appendix C) were registered. The participants were asked to confirm their gender and level of education to make sure that the participants really fitted the chosen sample. The variables measured in this study were body image during sexual activity (Appendix D), sexual satisfaction (Appendix E) and the amount of exposure to sexually explicit material (Appendix F). The questionnaires were presented to the participants in that particular order, the most invasive questionnaires were at the end, to avoid that the influences of invasive questionnaire on the outcomes of less invasive questionnaires. At Utrecht University, bachelor students are required to spend a minimum of ten hours as research participant in scientific studies. Completion of the study automatically resulted in crediting an hour to the account of the participant, if they filled in their student number at the end (Appendix G). They could also leave their email address at the end if they wanted to be informed about the research outcomes later (Appendix G). On average, this merged study took 50 min. to complete.

A total of 244 Dutch female university students participated in this study. Age ranged from 18 to 30 years ( $M = 20,75$ ,  $SD = 1,97$ ). Participants Body Mass Index (BMI) was calculated from self-reported weight and height. The majority of the participants were in the normal weight range, (BMI 18.5–25) (86,9%,  $n=212$ ), 5,7% ( $n= 14$ ) were underweight(BMI < 18.5), 6,6% ( $n= 16$ ), were overweight(BMI 25–30), and 0,8% ( $n= 2$ ) were obese(BMI >30) (Voedingscentrum, 2015). Comparisons with national census data showed that the sample was underrepresented by overweight participants. In the general population of young Dutch women (aged 18–25 years), 27,4 % were found to be overweight and 66,8% were in the normal weight range (Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek, 2011). In the total sample, 91,4% ( $n= 223$ ) were heterosexual, 0,4% were homosexual ( $n= 1$ ), 17% ( $n= 7$ ) were bisexual and

3% ( $n = 1,2$ ) had another form of sexual orientation . At the time of the research 34,4% of the participants were single ( $n = 84$ ), 56,6% were in a relationship, but not living together ( $n = 138$ ), 7,8% were living together with their partner( $n = 19$ ) and 1,2% were married ( $n = 3$ ).

## Measures

### *Demographic questionnaire*

The demographic variables that were asked were the participants age, height, weight, sexual orientation, relationship status, sexual activity, living situation and start year of study (see Appendix C).

### *Body image state during sexual activity*

The body image self-consciousness scale created by Wiederman (2000). The translated version to Dutch by Van den Brink, Smeets, Hessen, Talens & Woertman(2013) was used in this study. The BISC examines self-consciousness during sexual intimacy. The questionnaire consists of 15 items and the responses were assessed by a six-point Likert-type scale ranging from *never-always* (see Appendix D). The possible total scores range from 0 to 75. Women with a higher score on this questionnaire tend to be more self-consciousness during sexual activities and tend to have a more negative state body image during sexual activity (Wiederman, 2000). In earlier research the internal consistency was high with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.94)(Wiederman, 2000). The Cronbach's alpha in the current study was 0.92

### *Sexual satisfaction*

The Golombok Rust Inventory of Sexual Satisfaction (GRISS) was used to measure sexual satisfaction. This questionnaire was created in 1985 by Rust and Golombok and the translation to Dutch of van ter Kuile and colleagues. (1999) was used in this research to assess sexual satisfaction. The term "partner" was changed in "sexual partner(s)" in this research, because single woman were also included. The questionnaire consists of 28 questions. The questions are formulated to elicit information about the way in which a woman relates to her own body and that of her sexual partner(s), including the level of her interest in her sexual life, the quality of her response to sexual excitation, the frequency of her sexual activities, and whether she reaches orgasm. The responses were assessed by a five-point Likert-type scale (see Appendix E). Responses are summed to give a total raw score

(range 28-140). High scores indicate impaired sexual dysfunction, diminished quality of intercourse and more sexual dissatisfaction. A research about the psychometric properties of this test, with Dutch participants, showed that the item-rest correlation and the Cronbach's alpha were satisfactory to good (ter Kuile, van Lankveld, Kalkhoven & van Egmond, 1999). In the present study, the GRISS internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha) was .88.

#### *Exposure to Sexual Explicit Material (SEM)*

Exposure to sexually explicit material was measured by a short questionnaire consisting of five questions created by Peter and Valkenburg (2006). Respondents were asked to indicate how often, in the six months prior to the study, they had been exposed to pictures with clearly exposed genitals, movies with clearly exposed genitals, pictures in which people were having sex, and movies in which people were having sex. To avoid confusion, the definition of genitals (penises and vaginas) was given. The responses were assessed by a seven-point Likert-type scale ranging from *never-several times a day* (see Appendix F). The total score on this questionnaire was calculated by adding up the scores of all the questions. A high total score indicates a high exposure rate to sexual explicit material. This questionnaire has been shown to be valid and reliable in earlier studies from Peter and Valkenburg (2006; 2008). In the present study this questionnaire had a internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha) of .90.

#### Statistical analyses

First, three simple regressions were used to see how the variables were related individually to check if this was in line with previous research. After that, multiple regression was used to calculate the moderation effect between sexual explicit material (independent variable), sexual satisfaction (dependent variable) and body image during sexual activity (moderator) (Universiteit Twente, 2010).

## Results

### Descriptives

First, descriptive analyses were used to get a general picture of the variables (see Table 1). Then a correlation analyses was used to explore how the variables were related to each other (see Table 2).

Table 1. *Descriptives of the variables “amount of exposure to sexual explicit material”, “body image during sexual activity” and “sexual satisfaction”.*

	Min	Max	M	SD
Exposure to sexual explicit material	5	25	9.56	4.33
Body image during sexual activity	0	55	14.58	11.33
Sexual satisfaction	32	111	57.37	12.59

Table 2. *Pearson Correlations between the amount of exposure to sexual explicit material, body image during sexual activity and sexual satisfaction*

	Exposure to sexual explicit material	Body image during activity	Sexual satisfaction
Exposure to sexual explicit material	1		
Body image during sexual activity	-.199	1	
Sexual satisfaction	-.137*	.285**	1

\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$

### Hypotheses

First, the variables were studied individually to see how they are related to each other and to verify if this was in line with previous research. In contrast to the expectations, how often women were exposed to sexual explicit material had no effect in how they felt about their bodies during sex,  $F(1,242) = 3.501, p < .063, \beta = -.119, p = .006$ .

However, in line with previous research, body image during sexual activity did predict sexual satisfaction,  $F(1,242) = 21.399, p < .001, \beta = .285, p < .001$ . Body image during sexual activity explained 8.1% of the variance in the sexual satisfaction score. This indicated that the more self-consciousness women are during sexual intimacy, the less sexual satisfied they are.

In contrast to the expectation, a negative significant regression equation was found between the amount of exposure to sexual explicit material and sexual satisfaction,  $F(1,242) = 4.626, p < .001, \beta = -.137, p < 0.05$ . The amount of exposure to sexual explicit material explained 1.9% of the variance in the sexual satisfaction scores. This indicated that the more women see sexual explicit material the more content they are with their sex lives. Surprisingly, as shown in Table 3, the relationship between the exposure to sexual explicit material and sexual satisfaction was not significant,  $F(3,240) = 8.162, p < .001, \beta = -.111, p = .085$ , when body image was introduced to the model as another predictor for sexual satisfaction.

Multiple regression was used to study the moderation effect between the variables.

In contrast to the expectations, body image during sexual activity was not a significant moderator for the relationship between sexual explicit material and sexual satisfaction,  $F(3,240) = 8.162, p < .001, \beta = -.025, p = .692$  (see Table 3.).

Table 3. *Coefficients of the moderation model of body image during sexual activity (moderator), amount of exposure to sexual explicit material (SEM) and sexual satisfaction*

	B	B	t	p
Constant	57.327		73.515	.000
Body image during sexual activity	.229	.269	4.307	.000
Amount of exposure to SEM	-.324	-.111	-1.730	.085
Body image during sexual activity * SEM	-.007	-.025	-.396	.692

*SEM = Sexual explicit material*

In sum, there was no relationship between the amount of exposure to sexual explicit material and body image during sexual activity. Body image state during sexual activity was a significant predictor of sexual satisfaction. Sexual explicit material was only a significant predictor for sexual satisfaction if body image was not included. Body image during sexual activity did not moderate the effect of exposure to sexual explicit material on sexual satisfaction.

## **Discussion**

Nowadays, pornography can be used for free and anonymous by almost everyone, because of the increased accessibility of the internet (Short, Black, Smith, Wetterneck, & Wells, 2012). Previous research on sexual explicit material focused mainly on men and adolescents. Almost 40 percent of the Dutch women watched porn in 2009 and this number most likely increased the past seven years (Gijs, 2009). It is important to gain more insight about how sexual explicit material influences women their sex lives for the sake of knowledge and ability for women to enhance their sexual satisfaction and well-being (Pujols, Meston & Seal, 2010). The aim of this study was to expand our understanding of how exposure to sexual explicit material influences women their sexual satisfaction and how body image during sexual activity plays a role in this relationship.

Based on the social comparison theory (Morrison et al., 2007) it was expected that more frequent exposure to sexual explicit material was related to a more negative body image during sexual activity. Female performers in porn usually embody hegemonic standards of attractiveness in Western culture like being thin, having large breast and being young of age (Morrison et al., 2007). People comparing their bodies to these kind of targets most likely result in a less positive evaluation of their body (Morrison et al., 2007). There was a lack of scientific research among women regarding this relationship. In this study, there was no relationship found between these two variables. In a study among men from the University of Ireland, there was also no relationship found between the degree of exposure to sexually explicit material and body esteem (Morrison et al., 2007). This indicates that sexual explicit material does not significantly influence both men and women on how they feel about their bodies. These results are in contrast with previous research that did confirm a relationship between media use in general and body dissatisfaction among women (e.g., Clark & Tiggemann, 2007; Durkin & Paxton, 2002; Hargreaves & Tiggemann, 2004; Tiggemann & Slater, 2004). This could be explained by the fact that sexual explicit material is just a little part of the media people get exposed to on a daily basis and therefore sexual explicit material influences body image relatively weakly. Young adult women get more exposure to social media for example. Among Australian students were social networking sites, such as Facebook, the most common used internet sites in 2013 (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2013). In the United states 90% of the young adults between 18 and 29 years old used social networking sites in 2013. Facebook continues to be the most popular form of social media

with over 1.3 billion regular users (Facebook, 2014). Young adult women reported that they spent around two hours per day on facebook in 2013 (Fardouly & Vartanian, 2015; Tiggemann & Slater, 2013). Given that 10 million new photographs are uploaded to Facebook every hour, most of them displaying unrealistic beauty ideals (Mayer-Schönberger & Cukier, 2013), it is no surprise that research confirmed that young women who spend more time on Facebook, feel more concerned about their body. On facebook, and most other social media canals, it is not allowed to show any genitals (Facebook, 2014). Therefore the exposure to sexual explicit material is relatively small in comparison to the amount of exposure to beauty ideal image by social media platforms.

Based on several studies that indicated that there is a direct relationship between body image and sexual satisfaction (Pujols, Meston & Seal, 2010; Holt & Lyness, 2007) and the objectification theory (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997), it was expected that a more negative body image during sexual activity is related to more sexual dissatisfaction. Women who monitor their body are so intensely aware of their outer body, that it may lead to generalized insensitivity to internal bodily cues, because fewer perceptual resources are available for inner body experiences (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). This study indeed found a relationship between body image during sexual activity and sexual satisfaction. Women who were less conscious of their bodies during sexual activity were more satisfied with their sex lives. This is in line with research of Dove and Wiederman (2000) who found that appearance-related distracting thoughts during sexual activity were related to lower levels of sexual satisfaction and Masters and Johnson (1970) who showed that habitual attentiveness to body appearance during sex indeed hinders women's sexual satisfaction.

It was expected that more frequent exposure to sexual explicit material is related to more sexual dissatisfaction. Previous research among adolescents confirmed this relationship (Morgan, 2011; Peter & Valkenburg, 2009). Nevertheless, there was no research available among adult women. Women who were exposed to sexual explicit material more frequently were on the average more satisfied with their sex lives, but this relationship was not found when body image during sexual activity was added to the model. A possible explanation is based on the sexual script theory. Exposure to sexually explicit material might influence the process of creating sexual scripts among adolescents. Adolescents frequently exposed to sexual explicit material might have different scripts about what "good" sex is and what the sexual roles are for themselves and their partner(s). Unrealistic sexual scripts might cause to



interpret normal sex as bad and thereby cause dissatisfaction (Morgan, 2011). However, the sample of this research consists of women who are older and probably more sexual experienced than the adolescents used in previous research. Therefore, they probably have sexual scripts based on multiple real life experiences, instead of sexual scripts based merely on unrealistic porn (Morgan, 2011). Adult women compare their current sexual experiences most likely to a realistic standard and get less influenced by sexual explicit material. Rademakers and Stravers developed a model for sexual development that states that adolescents learn how to be sexual competent for themselves and their partners through step by step sexual interactions (Gijs, 2009). Research among adolescent between 12 and 25 years old confirmed this (Graaf, Meijer, Poelman, & Vanwesenbeeck, 2005). When they emerge adulthood, they are and see themselves as sexual competent and therefore their sexual esteem increases (Gijs, 2009). This increased sexual esteem among adult women may be the reason why sexual explicit material does not influence their sexual satisfaction as much as adolescents. This could be a valuable topic for future research. Sexual explicit material could also educate women about sexual techniques that might enhance their sexual satisfaction. Previous research already showed that more frequent exposure to sexual explicit material is related to more sexual knowledge (Short, Black, Smith, Wetterneck, & Wells, 2012). It could also be that women who watch sexual explicit material more frequently have certain characteristics which are related to sexual satisfaction in turn, like openness to new experiences and being extravert. Previous research already showed that extraverted individuals reported increased drive, more sexual experience, positive body image, and more positive affects. Openness was positively associated with amount of sexual information, range of sexual experiences, liberal attitudes towards sex, sexual drive, sexual fantasy and sexual functioning (Costa, Fagan Piedmont, Ponticas & Wise, 1992). Research on the characteristics of women who watch sexual explicit material more frequently is not yet available and would be an interesting topic for future research.

This direct relationship between sexual explicit material and sexual satisfaction, was expected to be moderated by body image during sexual activities. Women with more positive body image states internalized beauty ideals showed in sexual explicit material less (Stice, Schupak-Neuberg, Shaw, & Stein, 1994; Thompson & Stic, 2001 ;Morrison et al.,2007). Therefore, women with positive body image states probably get less influenced by sexual explicit material. Little is known about body image being a protective factor for the

influences of sexual explicit material on women's sexlives. However, several studies did show that self-esteem is a protective factor for many negative outcomes (Croll, Neumark-Sztainer, Story, & Ireland, 2002) and perceptions of appearance and self-worth are inextricably linked (Harter, 1999). Concluding from the results of this study, body image during sexual activity does not influence the relationship between exposure to sexual explicit material and sexual satisfaction. This could be explained by the fact that body image cannot moderate a relationship between exposure to sexual explicit material if it might not even exist or is extremely small. Body image has a stronger direct relationship with sexual satisfaction. As discussed earlier, social media probably has more influence on women than sexual explicit material. Therefore, it would be valuable to conduct a research about how social media influences sexual satisfaction among women and if body image during sexual activity is a protective factor.

This current study has several strengths, as well as weaknesses. There are several limitations to this study, concerning the generalizability for instance. The participants choose to participate in this study by themselves and therefore this group could have some particular characteristics that differ from the population. Also a relatively large amount of participants did not complete the whole survey (35%). The group that did participate and completed the questionnaire may differ systematically from the average female student. Indeed, previous research suggests that women who volunteer to participate in sex research tend to be more sexually experienced, hold less traditional sexual attitudes, and report higher sexual esteem and sexual sensation seeking (Wiederman, 1999). Therefore people should be cautious when generalizing the information provided from this study to the population. Another weakness of this study is that conclusions about causality cannot be made. A positive body image during sexual activity can lead to more sexual satisfaction, but more sexual satisfaction could also cause women to be more positive about their bodies during sex. Future longitudinal research should indicate the causality of this relationship. Given that the data was collected at one particular point in time, it is very likely that feelings, thoughts and moods could have influenced the way the participants completed the study. The data collected in this study was based on self-reported information and thereby sensitive for social desirability and the challenges of introspection. The fact that this study only used validated Dutch questionnaires as measurements is one of the strong points of this study. Another strength is the way this study recruited the data. The information was provided by the participants through an online

questionnaire. In contrast to face-to-face interviews, this provided considerable protection of anonymity and allowed individuals to participate from the privacy of their home. It has been shown that respondents are more willing to reveal sensitive and highly personal information on a computer than in face-to-face interviews (Cooper, Scherer, Boies, & Gordon, 1999). This is even more important for this study, because a lot of people still struggle to talk about sexuality (Gijs, 2009).

Based on the findings of this study, it can be concluded that the amount of exposure to sexual explicit material does not influence body image during sexual activity. Positive body image during sexual activity is associated with more sexual satisfaction. This study does not provide scientific evidence for the relationship between sexual explicit material and sexual satisfaction, but more research is needed to make final conclusions. Body image during sexual activity does not moderate the relationship between the amount of exposure to sexual explicit material and sexual satisfaction. If the goal is to improve women's sexual satisfaction and well-being, interventions should be created with a focus to improve women's body image during sexual activity. Brief psychosexual intervention (CBPI) is an example of an intervention that focuses on body and sexual problems at the same time. CBPI is designed for women who struggled with breast cancer to deal with sexual and body image problems, as well as psychological distress arising after mastectomy (Kalaitzi, Papadopoulos, Michas, Vlasis, Skandalakis, & Filippou, 2007). The results of this study show why an intervention is needed, like CBPI, for healthy women. Besides that, there is still a lot of insight to gain in how sexual explicit material and social media influences women and therefore valuable subjects for future longitudinal research.

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Appendix A : Flyer/ Poster

**GEZOCHT:**  
**VROUWELIJKE STUDENTEN MET SEKSUELE**  
**ERVARING!**



Aan de hand van een online vragenlijst onderzoek zal er onderzoek gedaan worden naar bepaalde aspecten van seksualiteit, lichaamsbeeld en zelfbeeld. Let op: deze studie is alleen voor **vrouwelijke universitaire studenten van 18 jaar en ouder die in het verleden minimaal één seksuele partner hebben gehad**. De vragenlijst kan online ingevuld worden en zal ongeveer 45 minuten duren. Psychologie Studenten van de Universiteit Utrecht krijgen hiervoor **één proefpersoonuur** toegekend.

Appendix B : Internet Site

Study Information	
Study Name	! Online vragenlijstonderzoek naar seksuele ervaringen van vrouwelijke studenten
Study Type	<div><div></div><div><b>Web Study</b> This is an online study. To participate, sign up, then go to the website listed below to participate.</div></div>
pp-uur	1 pp-uur
Duration	60 minutes
Description	Gezocht: vrouwelijke studenten met seksuele ervaring! Aan de hand van een online vragenlijstonderzoek zal er onderzoek gedaan worden naar bepaalde aspecten van seksualiteit, lichaamsbeeld en zelfbeeld. Let op; deze studie is alleen voor vrouwelijke universitaire studenten van 18 jaar en ouder die in het verleden minimaal één seksuele partner hebben gehad. De vragenlijst kan online ingevuld worden en zal 45-60 minuten duren. Psychologiestudenten van de Universiteit Utrecht krijgen hiervoor één proefpersoonuur toegerekend.
Website	You may not view the website until you sign up for this study.
Researcher	Femke Brink  1470
	<div><div></div><div><a href="#">View Time Slots for This Study</a></div></div>

## Appendix C : Opening message

### **Onderzoek naar seksuele ervaringen van vrouwelijke studenten**

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!

Er zijn 50 vragen in deze vragenlijst

## **Appendix D : Informed consent**

Ik verklaar, op een voor mij duidelijke wijze, te zijn ingelicht over de aard, methode en doeleinden van het onderzoek. Ik weet dat de gegevens en resultaten strikt vertrouwelijk en anoniem behandeld zullen worden. Ik weet dat het meedoen aan het onderzoek geheel vrijwillig is en dat ik deelname op ieder moment kan stoppen. Ik stem geheel vrijwillig in met dit onderzoek en geef hiermee toestemming om mijn gegevens te gebruiken voor wetenschappelijke doeleinden.

**Ik ga akkoord met bovenstaande.**

Kies één van de volgende mogelijkheden:

☐ Ja

☐ Nee

## Appendix E : Demographic information/ Demografische gegevens

Bent u een man of een vrouw?

☐ Vrouw

☐ Man

Wat is uw leeftijd?

Wat is uw lengte (cm)?

Wat is uw gewicht (kg)?

Studeert u aan een Universiteit in Nederland?

☐ Ja

☐ Nee

Wat is op dit moment uw relatiestatus?

☐ Getrouwd

☐ Samenwonend

☐ In een relatie, maar niet samenwonend

☐ Vrijgezel

Wat is uw seksuele geaardheid?

☐ Heteroseksueel

☐ Homoseksueel

☐ Biseksueel

☐ Onbepaald

Heeft u seksuele ervaring met een partner?

☐ Ja

☐ Nee

## Appendix F : Body Image Self-Consciousness scale (BISC)

De volgende lijst bevat stellingen die gaan over hoe u denkt over uw lichaam tijdens de seks met een partner. Kies voor elke stelling het antwoord dat het meest bij u past.

De term 'partner' verwijst naar een persoon waarmee u romantisch of seksueel intiem bent of bent geweest.

Kies het toepasselijke antwoord voor elk onderdeel:

	Nooit	Zelden	Soms	Vaak	Meestal	Altijd
Ik zou me heel zenuwachtig voelen als een partner mijn lichaam zou verkennen voor of na de seks.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Het idee van het hebben van seks zonder lakens over mijn lichaam geeft mij een angstig gevoel.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Als ik seks heb, dan maak ik mij zorgen dat mijn heupen en dijen groter lijken dan ze eigenlijk zijn.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Tijdens seksuele activiteiten maak ik mij zorgen over hoe mijn lichaam eruit ziet voor mijn partner.

☐☐☐☐☐☐

Het ergste aan seks is het naakt zijn in het bijzijn van een andere persoon.

☐☐☐☐☐☐

Als een partner een hand op mijn billen zou leggen dan zou ik denken: 'mijn partner kan voelen hoe dik ik ben'.

☐☐☐☐☐☐

Tijdens seksuele activiteiten is het moeilijk om niet na te denken over hoe onaantrekkelijk mijn lichaam is.

☐☐☐☐☐☐

Tijdens de seks lig ik liever op mijn rug zodat mijn

☐☐☐☐☐☐



buik plat lijkt.

Ik voel mij niet  
op mijn gemak  
als ik naakt  
door de kamer  
loop terwijl mijn  
partner kijkt.

☐☐☐☐☐☐

De eerste keer  
dat ik seks heb  
met een  
nieuwe partner  
maak ik mij  
zorgen dat mijn  
partner afknapt  
als hij/zij mijn  
lichaam ziet  
zonder kleren.

☐☐☐☐☐☐

Als een partner  
een arm om  
mijn middel  
zou slaan, dan  
zou ik denken:  
'mijn partner  
kan voelen hoe  
dik ik ben'.

☐☐☐☐☐☐

Ik voel mij  
alleen op mijn  
gemak tijdens  
de seks als het  
zo donker is  
dat mijn  
partner mijn  
lichaam niet

☐☐☐☐☐☐

duidelijk kan  
zien.

Tijdens de  
seks heb ik  
liever dat mijn  
partner op mij  
ligt zodat mijn  
partner mijn  
lichaam minder  
goed ziet.

☐☐☐☐☐☐

Ik vind het  
moeilijk om  
een douche of  
bad te nemen  
samen met  
mijn partner.

☐☐☐☐☐☐

Ik voel mij  
angstig als ik  
een  
lichaamsmass  
age van mijn  
partner krijg.

☐☐☐☐☐☐

## Appendix G : Sexual Satisfaction (GRISS)

Heeft u in de afgelopen 6 maanden seksueel contact gehad met een man?

☐ Ja

☐ Nee

Er volgen nu een aantal vragen over uw seksleven. Lees elke vraag zorgvuldig door en kies het antwoord dat het beste weergeeft hoe de situatie de afgelopen 6 maanden was. Met sekspartner(s) worden alle personen bedoeld waarmee u de afgelopen 6 maanden seksueel contact heeft gehad. Het gaat dus niet per se om een vaste partner. Denk niet te lang over de vragen na en sla alstublieft geen vragen over.

Kies het toepasselijke antwoord voor elk onderdeel:

	Nooit	Af en toe	Regelmatig	Meestal	Altijd
Heeft u zin in seks?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Vraagt u uw sekspartner(s) wat hij prettig en niet prettig vindt op het gebied van seks?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Zijn er weken waarin u helemaal geen seks hebt?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Raakt u gemakkelijk seksueel opgewonden?

☐☐☐☐☐

Bent u tevreden met de hoeveelheid tijd die u en uw sekspartner(s) aan voorspel besteden?

☐☐☐☐☐

Is uw vagina zo nauw dat de penis van uw sekspartner(s) niet naar binnen kan?

☐☐☐☐☐

Probeert u seksueel contact te vermijden?

☐☐☐☐☐

Bent u in staat om een orgasme te ervaren bij uw sekspartner(s) ?

☐☐☐☐☐

Geniet u van het knuffelen en liefkozen van het lichaam van uw

☐☐☐☐☐

sekspartner(s)

?

Vindt u de  
seksuele  
relatie(s) met  
uw  
sekspartner(s)  
bevredigend?

☐☐☐☐☐

Kunt u,  
zonder  
ongemak, uw  
vinger  
inbrengen in  
uw vagina?

☐☐☐☐☐

Vindt u het  
vervelend om  
de penis van  
uw  
sekspartner(s)  
te strelen en  
te liefkozen?

☐☐☐☐☐

Wordt u  
gespannen en  
angstig als uw  
sekspartner(s)  
seksueel  
contact  
wil(len)?

☐☐☐☐☐

Kunt u een  
orgasme  
krijgen?

☐☐☐☐☐

Heeft u vaker dan 2 keer per week geslachtsgemeenschap?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Vindt u het moeilijk om uw sekspartner(s) te zeggen wat u prettig en niet prettig vindt op het gebied van seks?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Kunt de penis van uw sekspartner(s), zonder ongemak, uw vagina binnen?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ervaat u een gebrek aan liefde en genegenheid in de seksuele relatie met uw seksuele partner(s)?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Geniet u van het strelen en liefkozen van uw geslachtsdelen door uw seksuele partner(s)?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Weigert u seksueel contact?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Kunt u een orgasme bereiken wanneer uw sekspartner(s) tijdens het voorspel uw clitoris stimuleert?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Voelt u zich tevreden over de hoeveelheid tijd die uw sekspartner(s) besteedt/besteden aan gemeenschap op zich?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Heeft u gevoelens van afkeer over wat u doet tijdens het vrijen?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Is uw vagina nogal nauw, zodat de penis van uw sekspartner(s) niet erg ver naar binnen kan?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Vindt u het vervelend om door uw sekspartner(s) geknuffeld en geliefkoosd te worden?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Wordt uw vagina vochtig tijdens het vrijen?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Geniet u van geslachtsgemeenscha p met uw sekspartner(s)?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Lukt het u om een orgasme te krijgen tijdens geslachtsgemeenscha p?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

## Appendix H : Sexual explicit material (SEM)

Er volgen nu een aantal vragen over hoe vaak u in de afgelopen zes maanden seksuele beelden in de media heeft gezien. Lees elke vraag zorgvuldig door en kies het antwoord dat het beste weergeeft hoe de situatie de afgelopen zes maanden was. Denk niet te lang over de vragen na en sla alstublieft geen vragen over.

Met genitaliën worden de penis en de vagina bedoeld.

Onder de term seks valt zowel vaginale penetratie, als anale en orale penetratie.

Kies het toepasselijke antwoord voor elk onderdeel:

	Nooit	Minder dan 1 keer per maand	1 tot 3 keer per maand	1 keer per week	Meerder e keren per week	Elke dag	Meerdere keren per dag
Hoe vaak heeft u de afgelopen 6 maanden naar foto's van duidelijk zichtbare genitaliën gekeken?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



Hoe vaak heeft u de afgelopen 6 maanden naar een filmpje/filmpjes gekeken waarbij genitaliën duidelijk zichtbaar waren?

☐☐☐☐☐☐☐

Hoe vaak heeft u de afgelopen 6 maanden naar foto's van mensen die seks hebben gekeken?

☐☐☐☐☐☐☐

Hoe vaak heeft u de afgelopen 6 maanden naar filmpjes van mensen die seks hebben gekeken?

☐☐☐☐☐☐☐

Hoe vaak  
heeft u de  
afgelopen 6  
maanden  
een erotische  
site bezocht?

☐☐☐☐☐☐☐

## Appendix I: End message

### Einde van het onderzoek!

Bent u momenteel bachelorstudent psychologie aan de Universiteit Utrecht en wilt u een proefpersoonuur ontvangen?

Vul dan hieronder uw studentnummer en solis e-mailadres in.

Studentnummer

Solis e-mailadres

Hartelijk dank voor uw deelname.

Bij verdere vragen of interesse naar de uitkomsten van dit onderzoek, kunt u contact opnemen met de onderzoeksters via het volgende e-mailadres:

s.c.vandebrug@students.uu.nl

Met vriendelijke groet,

Jodie Stormmesand, Lieke Meinema, Anne-Marie van der Klugt & Stephanie van de Brug