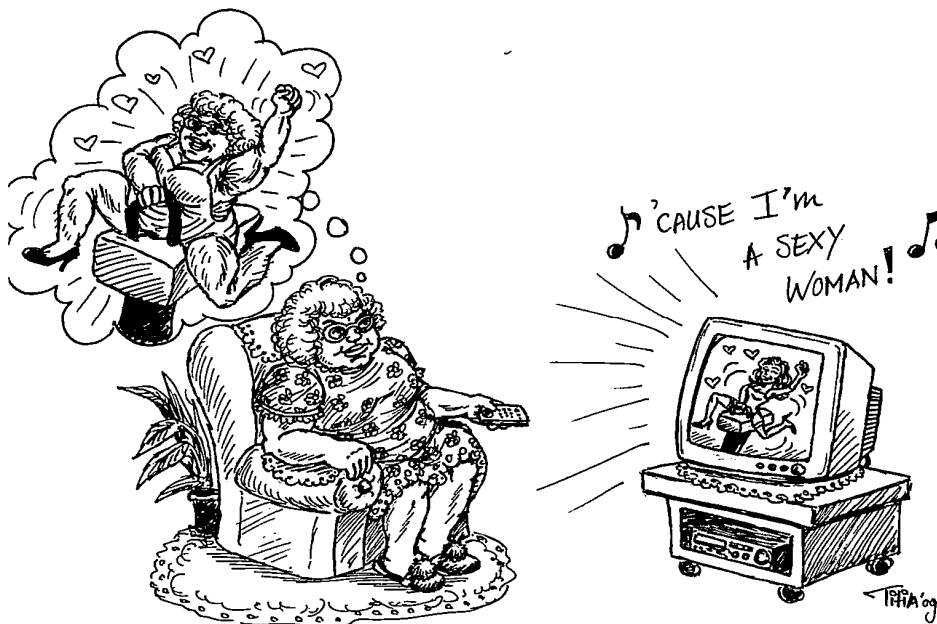




Universiteit Utrecht

The effects of a sexualized media environment on women's sexual self-views and men's sexual views of their partners



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Preface

This thesis was written upon our graduation of the master Clinical and Health Psychology at the Universiteit Utrecht. As bachelorstudents of the study Psychology we were introduced to the interesting world of sexuality and intimate relationships which fueled our curiosity and lead us to do our masterthesis on the subject.

The media are an undeniable and integral part of today's society and as young women who are on a daily basis confronted with media messages, we were interested in the effects of a sexualized media environment on women's sexual self-schemata. Not only women are confronted with media every day, men are also readily confronted with images of sexy women. Therefore we were also interested in the effects of this sexualized media environment on men's sexual views of their partners. By examining these influences, we perhaps were able to make a contribution to women's sexual wellbeing.

Although writing this thesis has at times been a challenging task, it was educational and we have enjoyed it. We'd like to take this opportunity to thank a few people who guided and assisted us along the way. First of all, we owe our thanks to T.J.A. van Aerts, M. Häfner and I. Hooge for their help with programming our experiment and the analyses of the data. They were always quick to respond to our mails and our visits to their offices have profoundly contributed to our research process. Second, we would like to thank J. Wassenberg-Severijnen of the Methods and Statistics Group. She was genuinely interested in our research and her advise and expertise have made important contributions to our statistical analyses. T. Hoogeveen was so kind to design a custom made front for our thesis and L. Firet has been facilitating in lending us her laptop so we were mobile enough to get on the road and visit our participants. Also, we want to thank our participants, without whom this study wouldn't have been possible. They have devoted their time and energy to participate in the experiment.

Finally, we are very much obliged to our guidance counselor, Lisalotte Verspui. Through her we learned to have a broader view of research and to get a higher level; and she has guided and structured our thought processes and thesis. Her enthusiasm, knowlegde and energy has been a motivating force and because of her we got just as excited as her. Without her this thesis wouldn't have been the same. Thank you.

We would like to conclude this preface by saying we are proud of our research and are content with the work that is in front of you.

Saskia van Nostrum & Lieke van de Laar

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Abstract

The debate on the sexualization of the media and its possible negative influences on young people is booming. So far most research has focused on children and adolescents, thereby neglecting the adult age group. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to examine the influence of a short exposure to sexually tainted material on adult women's sexual self-view. The effect was expected to be reflected in a greater discrepancy between actual and ideal sexual self-view. The second goal of this research was to investigate the relations between sexual self-schemata and sexual and relationship satisfaction. In addition, it was investigated if a short exposure to sexually tainted images effects men's views of their female partner. The effect was expected to be reflected in a greater discrepancy between actual and ideal sexual partner. Moreover, it was expected that men's sexual views of their female partners would be more positive than the views women have of themselves.

Results indicated that, independent of condition, women did exhibit a partial discrepancy between actual-ideal sexual self. This discrepancy seems to be influenced by positive attitudes toward erotica and comparison orientation. Viewing sexually tainted material did not increase this discrepancy, relative to a control condition. In men, viewing sexually tainted material did significantly effect actual-ideal discrepancies in partner-schemata. Men did not rate their partners any different than do the women themselves. Further, length of relationship and age were negatively correlated to openness and directness in women, which may be explained by established patterns of interaction between partners. In men sexual and relationship satisfaction may be negatively connected to discrepancies in actual-ideal partner. This relation may be explained in that men who have more satisfying (sexual) relationships may have partners which closely resemble their ideal view of a partner. Further research needs to be done, with larger samples and paying attention to an equal variance of the sample and maybe using the bipolar instead of the bivariate model of sexual self-schemata.

Samenvatting

Het debat over de seksualisatie van de media en eventuele negatieve gevolgen hiervan op jonge mensen staat op dit moment erg in de aandacht. Tot nu toe heeft het meeste onderzoek zich gericht op kinderen en adolescenten, waardoor de volwassen leeftijdsgroep grotendeels onderbelicht is gebleven. Het doel van deze studie was daarom om te onderzoeken of een korte blootstelling aan seksueel getinte beelden een effect heeft op seksuele zelfschema's van volwassen vrouwen. Verwacht werd dat dit effect zichtbaar zou worden in een grotere discrepantie tussen het actuele en ideale seksuele zelfschema. Het tweede doel was om de samenhang tussen seksuele zelfschema's en seksuele en relatiesatisfactie te onderzoeken. Daarnaast werd onderzocht of een korte blootstelling aan seksueel getinte beelden invloed heeft op het seksuele beeld dat mannen hebben van hun vrouwelijke partners. Verwacht werd dat dit effect zichtbaar zou worden in een grotere discrepantie tussen het actuele en ideale beeld van een seksuele partner. Bovendien werd verwacht dat mannen over het algemeen positiever over hun partners zouden oordelen dan de vrouwen over zichzelf.

Uit de resultaten bleek dat, onafhankelijk van conditie, vrouwen een gedeeltelijke discrepantie in actueel en ideaal zelfschema vertonen. Deze discrepantie lijkt te worden beïnvloed door positieve attitudes ten opzichte van erotica (pornografie) en vergelijkingsoriëntatie. Seksueel getinte beelden hadden geen verdere invloed op deze discrepantie, in vergelijking met een neutrale controleconditie. Bij de mannen hadden seksueel getinte beelden een significante invloed op de discrepantie tussen actuele en ideale partner. Daarnaast beoordelen mannen hun vrouwen niet anders dan de vrouwen zichzelf beoordelen. Relatieduur en leeftijd zijn beide negatief gecorreleerd aan openheid en directheid in vrouwen, een mogelijke verklaring hiervoor zijn eventuele vastgeroeste interactiepatronen tussen partners. Voor mannen bleek dat seksuele en relatiesatisfactie negatief correleren met discrepanties in actuele en ideale partner. Deze samenhang wordt mogelijk verklaard doordat mannen die een meer bevredigende (seksuele) relatie hebben, een partner hebben die dicht in de buurt van het beeld van hun ideale partner komt. Verder onderzoek is nodig met grotere en meer gevarieerde steekproeven, waarin meer aandacht is voor een gelijke variantie in de steekproef, en waarbij eventueel het bipolaire model van seksuele zelfschema's wordt gebruikt in plaats van bivariate model.

Introduction

The pornification of today's society is a hot topic in that debate about the sexualization of the media and its possible negative influences on young people is booming (OCW, 2007). Moreover, the American Psychological Association Task Force¹ (APA Task Force; 2007) supposes that sexualization (or sexual self-objectification) has a particular strong influence on girls and women. These groups are assumed to be vulnerable to sexualization, because of the way they are portrayed in the media, namely (often) as strongly sexualized objects. The APA Task Force (2007) presumes that sexualization is increasing because of the growing amount of finite, stereotype, sexualized views in the ever expanding amount of media expressions and media forms. Indeed, research shows that there is a positive relationship between the ideas of some young people about sexuality and their sexual behavior on one hand and the time they spend on listening to the radio, surfing the internet and their interests for sexual contents in the media on the other hand (Nikken, 2007).

The APA Task Force (2007) expects that the sexualization will increase in the future and posits that this will occur within three interrelated spheres. First, sexualization influences sociocultural attitudes, which are represented in the media. Second, it may influence interpersonal processes. In other words, in real life, girls and women (just as in the media) may become more and more objectified and not seen as individuals with their own thoughts and feelings. Finally, sexualization may be visible on an intrapersonal level: women (especially at a young age) may internalize these images and define sexual behavior (as portrayed in the media) as the standard for themselves.

So far most research has focused on the influence of the media on children and adolescents (Hargreaves & Tiggeman, 2003; OCW, 2007). This is no surprise given the fact that these age groups are more vulnerable to media influences because they are still in the process of forming their own personalities and identities. However, research until now has thereby neglected the adult age group. There are several reasons to presume that media has an impact on the adults life as well. First the older people get, the more their bodies deviate from the young sexy body which is the ideal standard for men and women in Westernized societies. It seems credible that sexually tainted images, which usually portray the young sexy ideal, exacerbates negative sexual self-views of adults. Second within the older age group relatively long-term relationships are more common, simply because of the longer lifespan individuals have. In a new relationship people are mostly obsessively in love and find their partners sexually attractive. However, after a period of time – usually a few years – this obsessive attraction may lessen and accordingly passion declines which may lead to more interest in alternative

¹ The APA Task Force on the Sexualization of Girls was established in February 2005 to examine and summarize the psychological theory, research, and clinical experience addressing the sexualization of girls via media and other cultural messages, including the prevalence of these messages and their impact on girls, and include attention to the role and impact of race/ethnicity and socioeconomic status. Members included: Eileen L. Zurbriggen, PhD (Chair); Rebecca L. Collins, PhD; Sharon Lamb, EdD; Tomi-Ann Roberts, PhD; Deborah L. Tolman, EdD; L. Monique Ward, PhD; and Jeanne Blake (Public Member, Blake Works, Inc.). Jessica Henderson Daniel, PhD, served as liaison from the Board of Directors. Janet Shibley Hyde, PhD, and Louise B. Silverstein, PhD, served as liaisons from CWP.

partners. So, video images of sexy women may represent these alternatives and consequently influence adults' attitudes and (self)views. Given this ignored research group, the main goal of the current study was to investigate what the effect is of implicit sexual messages on actual and ideal sexual self-views among adult women.

The second aim of present study was to investigate the associations between sexual self-schemata on one hand and sexual satisfaction and relationship satisfaction on the other hand. Sexual satisfaction was chosen because a satisfying sexual life has been found to be associated with overall quality of life and relationship adjustment (Byers, 2005), as well as mental and physical health (Fugl-Meyer & Sjogren Fugl-Meyer, 1999; Leiblum & Rosen, 2000; Stevenson, 2004; Ventegodt, 1998). Negative sexual self-schemata may be related to a less satisfying sexual life, conversely positive self-schemata may be linked to increased sexual satisfaction.

In addition, numerous studies have linked sexual satisfaction to relationship satisfaction: these two variables have been found to change concurrently (Newcomb & Bentler, 1983; Frank, Anderson & Rubenstein, 1979; Health, 1978; Darling, Davidson & Cox, 1991; Rosenzweig & Dailey, 1989; Hurlbert, Apt & Rabehl, 1993; Lawrance & Byers, 1995; Oggins, Leber & Veroff, 1993). So, relationship satisfaction was included in the present study.

The above two mentioned goals of the study were all about the women, but then, what about the men? Do men have actual and ideal sexual views of their partners? As a given fact, if media messages may influence how people feel and think about themselves, this may as well have an effect upon the way men think and feel about their female partners. So, the third objective of the current study entails the sexual views men have of their actual and ideal partners. And more specifically, does viewing erotic material increase this discrepancy?

Sexual media messages and discrepancies in sexual self-schemata

Sexual self-views or sexual self-schemata are cognitive representations about the self as a sexual person (Andersen & Cyranowski, 1994). These views are derived from past experience, are manifest in current sexual cognition, and are supposed to guide sexual behavior. According to Andersen and Cyranowski (1994) women with positive sexual self-schemata view themselves as emotionally romantic or passionate and as women who are behaviorally open to romantic and sexual relationships and experiences. These women tend to be liberal in their sexual attitudes and are generally free of such social inhibitions as self-consciousness or embarrassment. Conversely, women holding clear negative self-views of their sexuality tend to describe themselves as relatively emotionally cold or unromantic, and, by their own admission, they are behaviorally inhibited in their sexual and romantic relationships. These women tend to espouse conservative and, at times, negative attitudes and values about sexual matters and may describe themselves as self-consciousness, embarrassed, or not confident in a variety of social and sexual contexts.

Not only do people possess (sexual) self-schemata, but also do we – according to Higgins' self-discrepancy theory (1987) – possess self-guides in the form of ought and ideal selves which may serve as the personal standards individuals strive for. The author theorizes that the difference between our self concept and our self-guides, the ought and ideal self, determine how we feel about ourselves. In addition, these self-guides form the standards against which the actual self is evaluated.

Higgins' suggests that discrepancies between actual self-views and peoples' ought selves lead to emotional distress in the form of agitation and anxiety. Discrepancies between the actual self and these self-guides can lead to emotional problems, embarrassment and guilt for example, which are anxiety related. Actual-ideal discrepancies can lead to feelings of disappointment and lack of pride, which in turn cause depressive feelings. Many studies have linked actual-ought discrepancies to clinically relevant outcomes, including diagnosable anxiety disorders (Scott & O'Hara, 1993; Strauman, 1989), subclinical anxiety symptoms (Hankin, Roberts & Gotlib, 1997), and body image disturbances and eating disordered behavior (Strauman, Vookles, Berenstein, Chaiken & Higgs, 1991). It seems reasonable that these self-guides are also manifest in people's sexual self-views.

A theory which describes the processes of internalizing sexual media messages in self-views is developed by Fredrickson and Roberts (1997). They propose that Westernized societies sexually objectify the female body. In other words, when objectified, women are treated as bodies, and in particular, as bodies that exist for the use and pleasure of others. An analysis of girls and women revealed that they, to some degree, do view themselves as objects or "sights" to be appreciated by others (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). This perspective on self can lead to a form of self-consciousness characterized by careful monitoring of the body's outward appearance. Furthermore, this particular perspective on the self is considered to increase the opportunity for negative emotions such as shame and anxiety.

The perceived pressure to look good is, according to Fredrickson and Roberts, so pervasive and strong, that many women internalize the prevailing sociocultural attitudes. That is, they self-objectify, they take on the perspective of others, and therefore come to believe that they are defined by how they look. The authors suggest that women experience this objectification primarily through perceived evaluation, or the so-called men's gaze (Kaschak, 1992), and idealized images of bodies that are constantly presented in the advertising and entertainment media. So, the sexual objectification of women in the media may lead to an internal process called self objectification, which negatively influences women's self-view. In fact, Roberts and Gettman (2004) indicated that priming women with words related to the body's physical appearance increases appearance anxiety, shame and disgust; and decreases appeal of physical sex. These results suggest that a state of self-objectification can be activated automatically for women by merely encountering words that highlight the body's physical appearance, as opposed to words that highlight its health and functioning. A possible explanation is

that women were reminded by the prime of the greater cultural demands placed on them to live up to culturally prescribed standards of beauty and of their ongoing “failure” to be able to do so.

If only reading sexual objectifying words can create a state of self-objectification, what are the consequences if the same sorts of images are found on billboards, magazines and television every day? It seems plausible that just seeing one image can put even the most casual female viewer in a state of self-objectification. For instance, women know that commercials selling sexual services are aimed at men, and therefore conclude that it depicts the ideal sexual woman. In this way, commercials are expected to cause a discrepancy between a female perceiver's conception of her own sexuality and the standard set by society, which is similar to the hypothesized cause of self-objectification. As Roberts and Gettman's study shows that subtle exposure can be sufficient to produce adverse effects on the self-attitudes and the emotional experience of women. Therefore, it stands to reason that a lifetime of exposure to media may even produce more severe consequences.

The only research on the effect of a sexualized media environment on actual-ideal discrepancies in sexual self-schemata is recently done by Prinsen and Rooijens (2009). The purpose of their study was to examine the influence of a short exposure to sexual explicit material on women's sexual self-view, using a video containing commercials selling sexual telephone services. A total of 124 adult females participated in this study. The results demonstrated a discrepancy in actual-ideal self-schemata. However, – not in correspondence with the expectations – viewing sexual images did not significantly increase this discrepancy in comparison to a control condition.

Although not according to our point of view, these findings may reflect the genuine reality in that there is no association between sexual explicit material and discrepancy in actual-ideal sexual self-schemata. However, given methodological shortcomings in the Prinsen and Rooijens' study it still seems too premature to abandon the basic ideas of the current study. A likely confound in the aforementioned study may have been the type of commercials that were used to manipulate sexual self-views. The commercials used were aimed at selling sexual telephone services. These are broadcast late at night on Dutch commercial television networks and therefore widely available to the public. Downsides to these ads are the cheap look of the videos, the fact that they are specifically aimed at men and the association with prostitution (selling sexual services). Women in the general public may look down on these women, and thus do not identify with this commercials. Therefore, the present study will employ a different kind of commercial, which does not aim to sell sexual telephone services. Instead television ads are used which sell more commonday products like lingerie, hamburgers and an internetdownloading service in a sexy manner. Because the products in itself are not sex or sexual services, the association with prostitution is avoided, thus making it more plausible for women to identify with the images. Moreover, lingerie is a product specifically designed for and bought by women, therefore this commercial also targets the female public and not just men, again

making it more plausible that women will identify with this type of woman. Finally, the look of these commercials is more luxurious and classy, thereby making it more appealing to the public.

In sum, people possess a self guide in the form of an ideal self against which the behaviors, attitudes, thoughts and feelings of the actual self are evaluated. Consequently a discrepancy exists between the actual and ideal self. Sexual media messages represent the ideal sexy woman which, through the process of objectification, may become internalized in women's sexual self-views. In turn, this internalization may be reflected in a increased discrepancy between actual and ideal sexual self. Therefore, we expect a short exposure to sexually tainted images will have an effect on women's sexual self-view. This effect is expected to be reflected in a greater discrepancy between actual and ideal sexual self-view.

Sexual self-schemata and sexual satisfaction and relationship satisfaction

Little research has been subjected to sexual self-view and sexual satisfaction. Supporting data that might indicate an relation between sexual self-schemata on sexual satisfaction comes from Andersen and Cyranowski (1994). They found that women with positive self-views not only have entered sexual relationships more willingly in the past than have negative schema women, but, on reflection, they anticipate doing so in the future. Positive sexual schema may have affect or emotion regulating properties in those women and consequently they are more likely to experience positive emotions, sexual arousal, love or both, with sexual experiences. Women with a negative self-view have a very different history, with fewer sexual experiences and relationships, weaker positive affects, and more negative and conservative attitudes toward sexual matters. When asked to make predictions about their sexual future, they are less confident. It cannot be firmly stated that positive sexual self-schema women are more satisfied than negative sexual self-schema are, but there is an indication that the first group has more satisfying sexual experiences and thus more motivation for sex than the latter.

Sexual satisfaction will be troubled if women feel they must perform certain sexual roles and thus feel pressure to act in certain ways that feel inauthentic or unsatisfying. They may fear that if they not conform to gender norms, they will lose others approval and will feel worthless as a result. Consequently, women may sacrifice their own needs and desires which can prevent the development of satisfying and authentic intimate relationships with others.

Next to a less satisfying sexual life, negative sexual self-views may also generalize to other life domains which may affect well-being. A domain which is closely related to sexual satisfaction is relationship satisfaction. Several studies have shown a positive association between sexual satisfaction and closeness or quality of relationship (Newcomb & Bentler, 1983; Frank, Anderson & Rubenstein, 1979; Health, 1978; Darling, Davidson & Cox, 1991; Rosenzweig & Dailey, 1989; Hurlbert, Apt & Rabehl, 1993; Lawrance & Byers 1995; Oggins, Leber & Veroff, 1993). The exact connection

between relational and sexual satisfaction, however, is unclear in that causality has not yet been firmly established. Byers' (2005) analyses suggests that the direction of the relationship is dependent on initial states. Initial low levels of sexual satisfaction were related to decreases in relationship satisfaction across time; high initial relationship satisfaction was linked to later increases in sexual satisfaction. Although the nature of the correlation is unclear, it's apparent that these two variables are linked. Therefore, both variables were included in the present study. Figure 1 is a schematic overview of the variables in the current study.

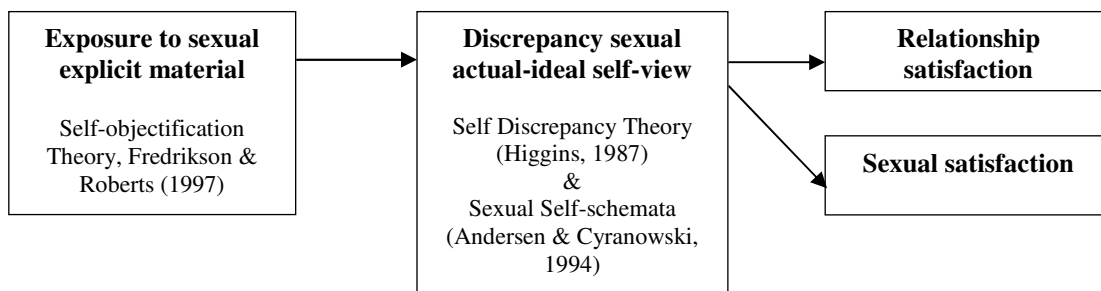


Figure 1. Schematic representation of the variables in the present study.

In sum, little research has focused on sexual self-schemata and sexual and relational satisfaction. Given the fact that sexual schemata may have an effect on attitudes toward, motivation for and ability to enjoy sex we expect that sexual self-views are positively correlated to sexual satisfaction. In addition, because a satisfying sex life has repeatedly been linked to relationship satisfaction, we expect a positive correlation between sexual self-views and relationship satisfaction.

Male partners discrepancies in sexual views of their female partners

And then the men: Does media-exposure of sexual women influence their attitudes toward their female partners? Media-exposure has repeatedly been linked to men's attitudes toward real-life women. For instance, in the extreme case of pornographic material, increased exposure has been reliably associated with poorer evaluations of a sexual partner (Barak & Fisher, 1997; Jansma, Linz, Mulac & Imrich, 1997). In an experimental study, Kenrick, Gutierrez and Goldberg (1989) found that men who were exposed to erotic images of women reported being less attracted to and loving their mates less than men who were exposed to abstract art images. These findings seem to point to a negative correlation between increased media exposure of sexual and/or beautiful women and men's ratings of real-life women. Therefore, we expect a discrepancy between men's actual and ideal sexual views of their partners in both conditions. Moreover, we expect that this discrepancy to be greater in the experimental condition (viewing a sexy video) relative to the control condition.

Although viewing images of the ideal, sexy woman seem to influence ratings by men of their female partners' attractiveness, it is suggested that they are more positive in their judgements than are the women themselves. Evidence for this point of view can be derived from results of research done on body satisfaction. Markey et al, (2004) indicated that 1) wives were much more dissatisfied with their bodies than were their husbands and 2) that wives thought their husbands were much more dissatisfied with their bodies than the husbands actually were. Of more relevance to the present study, Barelds-Dijkstra and Barelds (2008) recently examined both members of 93 hetero-sexual couples' ratings of self and partner physical attractiveness. On the basis of the theory of positive illusions, the authors expected that individuals would rate their partners as more attractive than their partners would rate themselves. According to the theory of positive illusions self-perceptions may be seen as a 'reality' benchmark. As a consequence, positive illusions can be considered to occur when individuals perceive their partner to be physically more attractive than their partners perceive themselves (Murray, Holmes, Dolderman & Griffin, 2000). Results in the Barelds-Dijkstra and Barelds study did support the theory that individuals hold positive illusions about their partner's physical attractiveness.

In sum, media-exposure has a negative influence on men's views of real-life women. Nonetheless, men are less critical in their ratings of their female partners than are the women themselves. A possible explanation is that people tend to have positive illusions of their partners. Accordingly, in the present study it is expected that exposure to erotic commercials will be reflected in a increased discrepancy in actual-ideal sexual partner in the experimental condition relative to control. Even so, we expect that men will view their female partners more positive than women do themselves.

Overview present study

In short, in the present study three goals are investigated. The first goal is to investigate if a short exposure to sexually tainted images will have an effect on women's sexual self-view. This effect is to be reflected in a greater discrepancy between actual and ideal sexual self-view. More specifically, we expect that a certain discrepancy already exists, independent of whether or not women are exposed to sexual material. Viewing sexual material is expected to increase this discrepancy.

The second goal is to examine the associations between sexual self-views and sexual satisfaction and relationship satisfaction. Sexual self-schemata are expected to positively correlate to sexual satisfaction. Because a satisfying sex life has repeatedly been linked to relationship satisfaction, we expect a positive correlation between sexual self-views and relationship satisfaction.

The third goal is to investigate the effect of a short exposure to erotic commercials will influence men's ratings of their female partners. This is supposed to be reflected in a increased discrepancy in actual-ideal sexual partner in the experimental condition relative to the control condition. Even so, we expect that men will view their female partners more positive than women do themselves.

Methods

Participants

A total of 33 adults participated in the research. Participants were recruited through the social network of the researchers. The age of the respondents ranged from 25 to 54 years (table 1). All participants were in a current heterosexual relationship that lasted 4 years or longer ($M = 10.42$; $SD = 6.54$).

Table 1. Mean and standard deviation of age for men and women in the present study.

	<i>N</i>	Age	
		<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
<i>Men</i>	14	35.21	8.36
<i>Women</i>	19	34.21	8.40
<i>Total</i>	33	34.71	8.38

Materials

Videos

The purpose of the study was to examine the effect of sexualized media on women's sexual self-schemata discrepancy. In order to do so, participants in the experimental condition were exposed to a comprised video of three somewhat erotic commercials, which lasted around 3.5 minutes. The first commercial showed a wellknown popsinger in lingerie (product) riding a mechanical bull. The second featured a female semi-celebrity washing a car in a bathing suit; the aim of the commercial was to sell a particular kind of hamburger. The last commercial featured a female model performing a striptease, which was an ad for internet downloading service. To avoid any distraction of the images, spoken language was edited out of the material, so only the images remained. No naked breasts or genitalia were shown in any of the commercials. Participants in the control condition saw a video of a neutral car commercial in which no humans or sexual references were shown.

Questionnaires

Sexual Self-schemata discrepancy was assessed with the *Sexual Self-Schema Scale* (SSSS; Anderson & Cyranowski, 1994). The SSSS is a measure of a women's cognitive representation of herself as sexual and consists of 50 trait adjectives (26 scored and 24 fillers) that are evaluated by the participant on a 5-point, Likert-type scale, ranging from 1 "not at all descriptive of me" to 5 "very descriptive of me". Many of the methodological problems associated with more traditional measures of sexual attitudes, including social desirability considerations, are avoided through the unobtrusive format this scale employs. Importantly, the construct is related to intrapersonal and interpersonal aspects of

sexuality across time – past, current and future self-views. Factor analysis indicates that the scale taps three dimensions of women’s sexual self-views. The first two factors are positively valenced. Factor 1 taps views of the self as *romantic/passionate*, whereas factor 2 taps views of the self as *open/direct* sexually. Factor three is negatively valenced and taps views of the self as sexually *inhibited, embarrassed and conservative*. In order to assess participants’ sexual self-schemata based upon their ‘ideal’ self, the original measure was modified by providing the following instructions: ‘*Can you also indicate what your view of an ideal sexual woman is?*’. *It is about your view how an ideal sexual women should be, so not what kind of sexual person you are*’. To calculate the discrepancy between actual and ideal sexual self-schemata, total scores for both were first calculated by adding up factor 1 and factor 2 and subtracted by factor 3. Next, the discrepancy score was measured by subtracting the total ideal score by the total actual score.

Previous studies have indicated high internal consistency ($\alpha = .82$) for this scale (Cyranski & Anderson, 1994). The current study found moderate to high internal consistencies; .84, .76 and .70 for actual sexual self-schemata factor 1, factor 2 and factor 3 respectively. Internal consistencies for ideal sexual self-schemata were .80, .76 and .51 for factor 1, factor 2 and factor 3 respectively.

Quality of the relationship was measured by the *Relationship Satisfaction scale of the Investment Model Scale* (IMS; Rusbult, Martz & Agnew, 1998). The five items are rated on 5-point likert scale. The present study found a high internal consistency for this scale .93.

Sexual Satisfaction was assessed using the *General Sexual Satisfaction Scale* (Dutch: Algemene Seksuele Satisfactieschaal) (ASS; Vennix, 1993), which consists of a total of six items. Participants rated the first five items from 1 (*beslist niet*) to 5 (*beslist wel*). The last item contains nine statements which assess dissatisfaction with different aspects of the respondents’ sexlife (i.e. “*my partner lacks enthousiasm in our sexlife*”; “*my partner wants too much sex*” or “*my partner doesn’t want enough sex*”). Participants were asked to indicate if the statement applied to them. Internal consistency is .93 in the present study.

The *Attitudes Towards Erotica Questionnaire* (ATEQ; Lottes, Weinberg & Weller, 1993) was administered to examine attitudes towards erotica. It contains 21 statements and the response options to each statement are on a 5-point, Likert-type scale, ranging from 0 “strongly disagree” to 5 “strongly agree”. The ATEQ includes three scales measuring attitudes about (1) harmful and (2) positive effects of erotica, as well as attitudes toward its (3) restriction and regulation. Factor analysis indicated one major factor, which suggests that attitudes toward erotica are organized along a simple binary good-bad dimension. The construct validity of the scales was supported by statistically significant results for predicted correlations and group differences (Lottes, Weinberg & Weller, 1993). A total score is computed by subtracting the scores on the Harmful and Restrict scale from the Positive scale. A high score indicates a pro-erotica attitude, a low score indicates an anti-erotica attitude.

A previous study found internal consistencies of .90, .78 and .85 for Harmful Effects, Positive Effects and Restriction respectively (Lottes, Weinberg & Weller, 1993). Current study found sufficient internal consistencies for Harmful effects (.90) and Positive effects, (.84) and an almost sufficient internal consistency for Restriction (.55). We decided to still use this construct because this construct is only used in combination with the two other constructs of the ATEQ, which do have sufficient reliabilities.

The *Iowa-Netherlands Comparison Orientation Measure* (INCOM; Gibbons & Buunk, 1999) was administered to examine the control variable comparison orientation. It consists of two subscales, Ability ($\alpha = .85$) and Opinions ($\alpha = .59$). These scales measure a total of 11 statements and the response options to each statement are on a 5-point, Likert-type scale, ranging from 0 “strongly disagree” to 5 “strongly agree”.

The last questionnaire contained demographic variables, including gender, age, education level and questions about present relationships. Historically, sociodemographic variables such as age, education level, and religious background have been correlated with sexual variables (Andersen & Cyranowski, 1994). For this research we also add the variables, length of relationship and sexual partners in lifetime. These variables might be correlated with sexual self-view. So, we examine if these variables are possible covariates.

Procedure

The researchers visited respondents at their own homes to minimize any discomfort and inconvenience for participation in the study. Participants were assigned to either one of the experimental conditions or the control condition by randomization. Each group was first introduced to the study by a standard protocol. The participants were told that the subject of the study was on women's sexuality. Additionally, it was assured to them that all answers would be handled as confidential information and processed anonymously.

First, they were asked to complete the SSSS to measure actual self-schemata, followed by the questionnaires on Relationship Satisfaction and Sexual Satisfaction. Next, the video was shown, followed by the questionnaire on ideal self-schemata. The experiment ended after the demographic questions.

After answering the questionnaires participants were thanked for their participation. If they would like to be debriefed, they could fill out their e-mailaddress.

Design

The research included an independent between subjects design. The independent variable was the condition, participants in the experimental condition were shown a video containing sexual explicit material. Participants in the control condition did see a video of a neutral car commercial. Dependent

variables were discrepancies in sexual self-schemata, sexual satisfaction and relationship satisfaction. The analyses were controlled for age, education, length of relationship and sexual partners in lifetime.

Statistical Analyses

To determine the reliability of the questionnaires, a reliability analysis was used to gain Chronbach's alpha. The effect of watching sexual explicit material is tested with an ANCOVA. Next, group differences on discrepancy scores are analyzed using Kruskal-Wallis and ANCOVA's.

To examine the relationship between discrepancy scores and sexual satisfaction and relationship satisfaction Spearman correlations are conducted. The effects from demographic variables (age, education) and length of relationship, sexual partners on outcome variables (e.g. sexual satisfaction) are analyzed using Spearman correlations.

Results

Preliminary analyses

Investigation of the variance in the sample revealed that the data in the sample did not resemble a normal distribution. Also, several possible outliers were identified. To minimize the effect of these possible outliers and to get more normal distributed data, a logtransformation of the raw data was conducted.

Length of relationship and age did not significantly correlate with total discrepancy scores. Further investigation of three separate factors revealed a significant positive correlation of length of relationship with the discrepancy scores of the scale Directness/Openness ($r = .486$; $p = .034$). This means that a longer relationship is related to a *greater* discrepancy between women's actual and ideal sexual self-view with regard to Directness/Openness. The positive correlation of age and discrepancy scores for the same scale were marginally significant ($r = .453$; $p = .52$). This seems to indicate that with age women tend to view themselves as *less* open or direct. Furthermore, Relationship Satisfaction and Sexual Satisfaction were positively correlated among the women ($r = .774$, $p = .000$),

Among the men, Relationship Satisfaction and Sexual Satisfaction were also positively correlated ($r = .82$, $p = .000$). However, age, length of relationship or education were not related to partner-discrepancy scores.

Discrepancies in actual and ideal sexual self-schemata

First, analyses were conducted to test for an overall discrepancy in actual and ideal sexual self, independent of condition. Initially, a Repeated-Measures-analysis of the total actual and total ideal scores, revealed a significant effect ($F(1, 18) = 26.027$; $p = .000$, partial $\eta^2 = .591$). It appeared women manifest a difference between actual and ideal sexual self, independent of condition. However, after conducting the same analysis with controlling for the influence of the questionnaires INCOM (Comparison Orientation scales) and the ATEQ (Attitudes Toward Erotica Questionnaire), the significant difference disappeared. This means that - independent of condition - women showed no difference between total actual and ideal sexual selves in this study.

However, further investigation of the three factors separately, did yield one significant result. A Repeated-Measures-analysis – which controlled for INCOM and ATEQ – revealed a significant discrepancy on the Passionate/Romantic-factor ($F(1, 16) = 6.893$; $p = .019$, partial $\eta^2 = .299$). This means that women in this study showed a significant difference between actual and ideal self with regard to the Passionate/Romantic-factor. Two covariates were of significant influence: first, the Ability scale of the INCOM ($F(1, 16) = 9.29$; $p = .006$, partial $\eta^2 = .383$). Second, the Positive Effects scale of the ATEQ ($F(1, 16) = 10.716$; $p = .005$, partial $\eta^2 = .401$).

The Ability scale of the INCOM has a negative influence on actual Passionate/Romantic self ($b = -.851$). This means that, for women, comparing yourself to others negatively predicts actual sexual self-schemata. In contrast, the Positive Effects scale of the ATEQ has a positive influence on actual Passionate/Romantic self-schemata ($b = .753$): women who hold the belief that pornographic material has positive effects on society, score higher on actual sexual self with regard to the Passionate/Romantic-factor. Both covariates interacted only significant with the measurement of actual self and not with ideal self.

Spearman correlations revealed more of the nature of the relations between these variables and sexual self-schemata. First, the INCOM-Ability is positively related to total discrepancy scores ($r = .483$, $p = .036$) and to the discrepancy scores of Directness/Openness-factor ($r = .513$, $p = .025$). This means that women who frequently compare themselves to others, manifest greater discrepancies on the Directness/Openness-factor: they want to be more open or direct; relative to women who compare themselves less to others. Second, the ATEQ-Positive Effects scale was negatively connected to discrepancy scores on the Passionate/Romantic-factor ($r = -.550$, $p = .015$). This means that the more women believe that erotic or pornographic material manifests positive effects, the greater they exhibit discrepancies on the Passionate/Romantic-factor. In other words, women who have positive attitudes toward erotica, want to be more passionate or romantic than they are.

Effect of watching sexually tainted material on sexual self-schemata discrepancy for women

To test the hypothesis that watching sexually tainted commercials (experimental condition) would lead to a greater discrepancy between actual and ideal sexual self-schemata, an ANOVA was conducted. Because Levene's test proved to be significant, which means the error of variance was not equal among the two groups, a Kruskal-Wallis-Test was performed. This is a non-parametric test which can be used to test for group differences when the error variance among groups is not equal. The outcomes of this test were non-significant for the total discrepancy scores and the scores of all the subscales (Passionate/Romantic, Direct/Openness and Embarrassed/Conservative). This means that viewing erotic material does not have an effect on women's sexual self-schemata.

To test for other influences on the dependent variables, an ANCOVA was conducted with the ATEQ and INCOM scales as covariates. In this analysis Levene's test was non-significant, which means the error of variance among the groups was equal. Again – as in the initial analyses to test for an overall difference in actual and ideal sexual self independent of condition – two of the covariates were of significant influence: the INCOM scale Ability ($F(1,18) = 14.10$; $p = .003$, partial $\eta^2 = .54$) and the ATEQ scale Positive Effects ($F(1,18) = 15.166$; $p = .002$, partial $\eta^2 = .558$). However, condition still wasn't significant after controlling for these variables. So, viewing erotic material did not significantly effect discrepancies in women's sexual self-schemata.

Relating women's sexual self-schemata scores to sexual and relationship satisfaction

To test the hypothesis that sexual satisfaction and relationship satisfaction would be related to self-schemata discrepancy scores, we first conducted Spearman correlations. Since no significant correlations between total discrepancy scores were found for either sexual satisfaction or relationship satisfaction, we investigated the Spearman correlations of the discrepancy scores of the three scales separately. A marginal significant negative correlation was found between Sexual Satisfaction and Factor 1 (Passionate/Romantic) ($r = -.42$; $p = .07$): higher scores on Sexual Satisfaction might be related to smaller discrepancies in Factor 1 (Passionate/Romantic). This may mean that women who are more sexually satisfied, may tend to view their actual passionate or romantic self as relatively close to their ideal passionate or romantic sexual self. In contrast, women who may be less sexually satisfied, may tend to view their actual self (as passionate or romantic) as relatively far from their ideal sexual self. Interpretation of these findings need to be treated with caution because the correlation was only marginally significant.

Effect of watching sexually tainted material on sexual partner-schemata discrepancy of men

Because the error of variance was not distributed equally among the men in both conditions, a Kruskal-Wallis-Test was conducted to test the hypothesis that watching sexually tainted commercials would lead to greater discrepancy between actual and ideal sexual partner-schemata. A significant difference between the experimental condition (Mean Rank = 10.14) and the control condition (Mean Rank = 4.86) (Kruskall-Wallis-Test $\text{Chi}^2 = 5.59$; $\text{df} = 1$; $p = .017$) was found. This means that watching erotic commercials increases men's ratings of their ideal partner relative to neutral material.

Further investigation of the discrepancy scores on the subscales revealed two significant effects. Men's view of their ideal partner as passionate or romantic increases after viewing sexually tainted material (Mean Rank = 9.71) relative to neutral material (Mean Rank = 5.29) (Kruskall-Wallis-Test $\text{Chi}^2 = 3.91$; $\text{df} = 1$; $p = .049$). Second, their view of their ideal partner as embarrassed or conservative declines after viewing the erotic video (Mean Rank = 5.14) relative to the neutral video (Mean Rank = 9.86) (Kruskall-Wallis-Test $\text{Chi}^2 = 4.45$; $\text{df} = 1$; $p = .038$).

Next, it was investigated if men view their actual partners more positive than do the women themselves. An ANCOVA on total discrepancy scores and total actual scores showed no significant effect. Further investigation of the three factors also showed no significant results. This means that men do not view their partners any different than the women do themselves.

Spearman correlations were conducted to test the relation between sexual partner-schemata and sexual and relationship satisfaction for the men. Total partner discrepancy scores are negatively correlated to sexual satisfaction ($r = -.71$, $p = .00$): low sexual satisfaction is strongly related to an increased discrepancy between actual-ideal partner. Further investigation of the correlations of the three separate factors with sexual satisfaction produced no significant results, although the factor

Passionate/Romantic was marginally significant ($r = -.494$; $p = .73$). Higher sexual satisfaction might be related to smaller discrepancies in the Passionate/Romantic-factor in men. In other words, men who are more sexually satisfied, seem to be inclined to rate their female partner as relatively close to their ideal partner, concerning the Passionate/Romantic-factor. Conversely, men who are less sexually satisfied, might rate their partner further from their passionate or romantic ideal partner.

Relationship Satisfaction is negatively correlated to discrepancies in factor 1 (Passionate/Romantic) ($r = -.745$; $p = .002$): a more satisfying relationship is related to a small discrepancy in actual-ideal passionate or romantic partner. This means that men who have a satisfying relationship tend to view their partner as approaching their ideal with regard to passion and romance. Conversely, men who have a less satisfying relationship tend to rate their partners as further from their ideal (with regard to the Passionate/Romantic-factor). For the other factors or total discrepancy scores no significant correlations with Relationship Satisfaction were found.

Conclusions and discussion

In this study the influence of sexually tainted images on women's sexual self-views and men's sexual views of their partners were investigated. Next to this main goal, the relation between sexual self-schemata and sexual partner-schemata on one hand and sexual and relationship satisfaction on the other hand were examined.

General outcomes

Discrepancies in actual and ideal sexual self and the influence of sexually tainted material

The present study did only find partial evidence for the existence of actual and ideal sexual self-schemata in women: they appear to have a significant discrepancy between actual and ideal self, concerning views of themselves as passionate or romantic. This discrepancy seems, among other things, to be influenced by their attitudes toward erotica: women who hold the belief that sexually explicit material has positive effects on society have more positive self-schemata. An explanation for this finding may be that women who are more open to sexually explicit material hold less traditional sexual attitudes and consequently may have more positive sexual experiences, which in turn may lead to more positive sexual self-views.

Paradoxically, the belief that sexually explicit material has a positive influence on society is positively correlated to discrepancies in actual and ideal self-schemata, concerning passionate or romantic self-views. It may be that this subgroup of women have more positive actual self-schemata, but also exhibit higher ideals, which causes an increased gap between actual and ideal self. In this view, pornographic material may lead to more awareness of sexual practices which increases standards for sexual interaction. These increased standards may lead to an increased discrepancy in actual-ideal Passionate/Romantic sexual self.

Next to the belief of the positive effects of sexually explicit material on society, comparing oneself to others also seems to influence the view of the actual sexual self as passionate or romantic, but in contrast, this relation is a negative one. Women who compare themselves to others have a less positive view of the actual self as passionate or romantic. Comparing oneself with others may reinforce existing insecurities, which may lead to more negative self-evaluations. In this view, the positive relation with discrepancies in the Direct/Openness-factor, is not an odd finding: women who are insecure may be more restrained in their behavior and would like to be more free spirited and direct.

However, viewing sexually tainted material did not have an effect on total discrepancies between actual and ideal sexual self. Further investigation of the separate factors also did not produce any significant effects. Therefore, it can be concluded that the present study was not able to create a state of self-objectification among the female participants.

Relating women's sexual self-schemata scores to sexual and relationship satisfaction

The hypothesis that sexual satisfaction and relationship satisfaction would be related to self-schemata discrepancy scores, may be partially supported. A marginal significant negative correlation was found between Sexual Satisfaction and discrepancies in passionate/romantic sexual self-schemata, meaning that higher scores on sexual satisfaction might be related to smaller discrepancies between actual and ideal sexual self. Women who have a more satisfying sexual life may have more positive sexual experiences and this may be related to their sexual self-schemata: either their actual sexual self-view may increase or their ideal sexual self-view may decrease or both. However, interpretations of these findings need to be treated with caution, because the findings were only marginally significant.

Sexual self-schemata and relationship satisfaction are not linked in this study. Sexual satisfaction and relationship satisfaction have consistently been found to correlate with each other and it seems plausible that sexual self-schemata are more strongly connected to sexual satisfaction than to relationship satisfaction. Perhaps the connection between quality of relationship and sexual self-schemata only becomes apparent when sexual self-schemata are overly negative or positive. Strong sexual self-views may in that case not only effect the sexual life between partners, but also 'spill over' into other areas within in the relationship and consequently have an effect on relationship satisfaction. In this view, sexual self-schemata may have been not 'extreme' enough in this study to have an effect on relationship satisfaction.

Effect of watching sexually tainted material on sexual partner-schemata discrepancy of men

Our third goal was to investigate that watching sexually tainted material would lead to a greater discrepancy between actual and ideal sexual partner-schemata. Watching erotic commercials significantly increases men's total ratings of their ideal partner. Further investigation of the discrepancy scores on the subscales revealed significant effects for factor 1 (Passionate/Romantic) and for factor 3 (Embarrassed/Conservative). Men's view of their ideal partner as Passionate/Romantic increases after viewing sexually tainted material relative to neutral material. In addition, their view of their ideal partner as Embarrassed/Conservative declines. Images of a sexual woman may remind men of their ideal sexual partner and consequently their standards may (perhaps temporarily) increase.

Next, it was investigated if men view their actual partners more positive than do the women themselves. Examination of the effect of sexually tainted material on total discrepancy scores and total actual scores did not produce significant results. Further investigation of the three factors also showed no significant results. Also, age, length of relationship or education were not related to partner discrepancy scores. It seems that then men – in terms of sexual partner – do not view their female partners more positive (or negative) than do the women themselves.

In sum, this research was able to detect a discrepancy between actual and ideal sexual self among women, concerning the Passionate/Romantic-factor. However, viewing sexually tainted

material did not increase this discrepancy. Further, it appears that a satisfying sexual life is related to decreased discrepancy scores among women. In contrast to women, men do seem to be influenced by sexy images: their view of the ideal sexual partner does increase after viewing erotic material. Furthermore, there appears to be no difference between men's sexual views of their female partners and the views of the women themselves.

There are multiple possible explanations for the outcomes of this study. First, our research was based on previous studies on discrepancies between actual and ought self-views, which may be intrinsically different from ideal self-views, producing other outcomes we did not take into account. Second, we tried to get more insight by investigating an relatively unexplored link between discrepancies in sexual self-schemata and sexual satisfaction and relationship satisfaction. This goes together with a greater risk of not finding significant results.

Outcomes besides the results of the state hypotheses

The present study yielded some significant findings which fall outside the scope of the state hypotheses. Length of relationship and age did not significantly correlate with total discrepancy scores for women. Further investigation of three separate factors revealed a significant correlation of length of relationship with the discrepancy scores of the scale Directness/Openness. Put otherwise, a longer relationship is related to a *greater* discrepancy between women's actual and ideal sexual self-view with regard to Directness/Openness. This finding does not seem logical: in the beginning of a relationship people try to be at their best; in other words, try to showcase an ideal version of themselves. Also, new partners need to get to know and adjust to each other. In general, after a while partners become more comfortable with each other, dare to be more vulnerable and share more of themselves. In other words, openness is supposed to increase in long-term relationships. Alternatively, partners in a longer relationship may have, over time, developed a comfortable routine and invest less energy in each other than in the beginning of the relationship. Gradually, this routine may lead to a strong decrease in communication with each other: living in the same house, but leading separate lives. This may explain the increased discrepancy in Directness/Openness.

The positive correlation of age and discrepancy scores in Directness/Openness was marginally significant. This indicates that with age women tend to view themselves as *less* open or direct, which appears to be counterintuitive: with increasing age people tend to have more self-knowledge, get a better understanding of their own needs and desires and be better at communicating these needs to their loved ones. But again alternatively, people may have developed a comfortable routine, are consumed by day-to-day life and may have, to put it bluntly, become lazy and do not really communicate anymore with each other. Another explanation comes from Andersen & Cyranowski (1994): there may be a more restricted range of sexual activities in older women, because of such

factors as sexual maturation, intact longterm relationships, and established patterns of sexual interactions with a partner. Such factors may render the relationships between sexual schema and sexual behavior less robust than those for younger women whose behavior may be less constrained and more apt to reflect their sexual self-views.

In men, total partner discrepancy scores are negatively correlated to sexual satisfaction. High sexual satisfaction is related to a decrease in difference between actual-ideal partner. In other words, the female partners of sexually satisfied men seem to approach the men's sexual ideal. Discrepancies in both the Passionate/Romantic and Embarrassed/Conservative factor were marginally related to Sexual Satisfaction: smaller discrepancies in Passionate/Romantic and larger discrepancies in Embarrassed/Conservative are related to more satisfying sexual experiences.

Finally, Relationship Satisfaction in men is negatively correlated to discrepancies in factor 1 (Passionate/Romantic): a small discrepancy in actual-ideal passionate or romantic partner is related to a more satisfying relationship.

Concluding, the present study found partial evidence for the existence of actual and ideal sexual self-schemata in women: a discrepancy concerning the Passionate/Romantic-factor was found. This discrepancy seems to be influenced by positive attitudes women have toward erotica and if women are in the habit of comparing themselves to others. Viewing sexually tainted images did not increase this existing discrepancy. In contrast, men do seem to be influenced by watching sexually tainted material relative to watching neutral material. However, they do not seem to judge their romantic partners any different than the do women themselves. Further, in women directness and openness may decline with age and within longterm-relationships. This may be explained by established patterns of interaction between partners. Finally, in men sexual and relationship satisfaction may be connected to discrepancies in actual-ideal partner. Smaller discrepancies are related to more satisfying (sexual) relationships. This relation may be explained in that women may come more close to their male partner's ideal.

Methodological issues and future directions

Several limitations in the current study must be acknowledged. First, the generalizability of the findings is limited due to the very small sample size. It's possible this research only sampled a restricted section of the distribution and therefore, it may not be representative of the general population. So, in reality an effect may exist and therefore it seems too premature to abandon this line of research.

Furthermore, most female participants have had some form of higher education (college or university). Women who agree to voluntary participate in a research on sexuality may also differ in their responses to questions pertaining to sexuality. Wiederman (1999) examined biases in a study

involving 399 college women and found that students who volunteered to participate in sex research were more sexually permissive, held less traditional sexual attitudes, demonstrated higher sexual esteem and had more sexual experience. So, this may have also influenced the findings.

Second, it is important to note that the results of the present study are constrained by the operational definitions underlying the questionnaires administered and the self-report nature of the data. Not all scales of the questionnaires had high internal consistencies. The self-report nature might provide the opportunity for interpretation difficulties which could lead to measurement error.

Furthermore, we used the bivariate model of sexual self-schemata, which only differentiates between positive and negative dimensions of self-schemata. The bipolar model adds two additional schema typologies: the a-schematics and co-schematics, the first group scores low and the latter group scores high on both dimensions. The bipolar model may have some advantages over the bivariate model, because it clarifies sexual schemas for women who score in the middle of the distribution. By using the bivariate model we may have limited ourselves.

Next, sexuality measures inevitably contain explicit and direct items. Although items of this sort may be a necessary evil to accurately assess sexual attitudes, behaviors and responses with any specificity, sex researchers (Abrahamson, 1990; Catania et al., 1990) are understandably concerned that the effectively loaded and intrusive nature of the items may have paved the way for measurement error and participation bias.

The purpose of the present study was finding support for restricting the media in depicting women in ways which compromise women in their sexuality. Experimental sex research, in comparison to empirical research, is sparse. Our attempt at providing substantial evidence for the negative effects of the sexualization of the media failed with regard to women, but we did find substantial support that men's sexual views of women are influenced by a sexualized media environment. A potential risk of this sexualized media environment is that men may develop unrealistic standards concerning their sexual partners. Consequently, this may lead to discontentment with men's sexual life and decreased sexual satisfaction.

A strategy to protect men's sexual wellbeing is educating men to critically evaluate their daily exposure to objectifying images, so they learn to identify and target the connections of social-cultural influences and (sexual) perception. This also includes informing men about the negative consequences of objectification early on in their physical, social and emotional development.

Not only may men develop unrealistic standards which may influence their sexual wellbeing, but these standards may also effect the way men interact with women, which in turn may negatively influence women's sexual self-views. So, women need to be educated too about the negative consequences of objectification early on in their physical, social and emotional development. If women can develop an empowered sense of self, they may be more likely to resist negative influences

of sexual objectification the media and create more space for them to experience their sexual selves in more positive ways.

Because of the methodological issues and suggestions, further research needs to be done, paying attention on to the correlates of women's sexual self-schemata within larger and more varied samples, and also maybe using the bipolar model of sexual self-schemata instead of the bivariate model. Future researchers should consider other possible mechanisms in the proposed pathway between exposure to sexual explicit material and the outcome measures of sexual wellbeing like sexual functioning, sexual satisfaction and relationship satisfaction. Finally, it is hoped that increased acknowledgement of the media's adverse influence on women's sexual wellbeing, particularly the negative effects of portraying women as sex-objects, will stimulate further theoretical development in this area.

Appendix: Descriptive statistics

Descriptive statistics of the demographic variables (age, education), length of relationship and sexual partners are provided in table 2 for the female participants and in table 3 for the male participants.

Table 2. Demographic variables, length of relationship and sexual partners of the female participants.

		N	%	M	SD	Range
<i>Age</i>		19	100	34.21	8.4	25-54
<i>Education</i>	Middelbaar algemeen voortgezet onderwijs (zoals MAVO, (M)ULO)	3	15.8			
	Middelbaar beroepsonderwijs en beroepsbegeleidend onderwijs (zoals MBO-lang, MTS, MEAO, BOL, BBL, INAS)	3	15.8			
	Hoger beroepsonderwijs (zoals HBO, HTS, HEAO, HBO-V, kandidaats wetenschappelijk onderwijs)	5	26.3			
	Wetenschappelijk onderwijs	8	42.1			
<i>Length of relationship (in years)</i>		19		9.21	5.13	4-23
<i>Sexual partners in lifetime</i>	1	5	26.3			
	2	5	26.3			
	3 to 5	6	31.6			
	6 to 10	3	15.8			
<i>Religion</i>	Catholic	3	15.8			
	Protestant	8	42.1			
	No religion	7	36.8			
	Other	1	5.3			
<i>Children</i>	1 child	4	21.1			
	2 children	3	15.8			
	3 children	1	5.3			
	4 children or more	1	5.3			
	No children	10	52.6			

Table 3. Demographic variables, length of relationship and sexual partners of the male participants.

		N	%	M	SD	Range
<i>Age</i>		14	100	35.21	8.36	27-49
<i>Education</i>	Lager of voorbereidend beroepsonderwijs (zoals LTS, LEAO, LHNO, VMBO)	1	7.1			
	Middelbaar algemeen voortgezet onderwijs (zoals MAVO, (M)ULO)	1	7.1			
	Middelbaar beroepsonderwijs en beroepsbegeleidend onderwijs (zoals MBO-lang, MTS, MEAO, BOL, BBL, INAS)	3	21.4			
	hoger algemeen en voorbereidend wetenschappelijk onderwijs (zoals HAVO, VWO, Atheneum, Gymnasium, HBS, MMS)	2	14.3			
	Hoger beroepsonderwijs (zoals HBO, HTS, HEAO, HBO-V, kandidaats wetenschappelijk onderwijs)	4	28.6			
	Wetenschappelijk onderwijs	3	21.4			
<i>Length of relationship (in years)</i>		14		12.07	7.99	4-23
<i>Sexual partners in lifetime</i>	2	2	14.3			
	3 to 5	6	42.9			
	6 to 10	3	21.4			
	11 to 20	3	21.4			
<i>Religion</i>	Catholic	3	21.4			
	Protestant	1	7.1			
	No religion	9	64.3			
	Other	1	7.1			
<i>Children</i>	2 children	3	21.4			
	3 children	3	21.4			
	4 children or more	2	14.3			
	No children	6	42.9			

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