

Master thesis Clinical Psychology

Feminist beliefs and sexual satisfaction in women: The mediating role of positive body image and sexual assertiveness

Armanda A.A. Neelen (4280962)

University Utrecht, Department of Social Sciences

Supervisor: Dr. Femke van den Brink

Date: 18-06-2018

Abstract

Where previous research indicated that many women are dissatisfied with their sexual lives, feminism tries to promote greater sexual satisfaction among women by fighting against the objectification of the women's body and sexually disempowering gender norms. To further investigate the positive influence of feminism on sexual satisfaction, the present study investigated the association between feminist beliefs and sexual satisfaction, and the mediating role of positive body image and sexual assertiveness. In a cross-sectional design, 150 Dutch women completed an online survey measuring feminist beliefs, positive body image, sexual assertiveness, and sexual satisfaction. Hypotheses were tested using correlation analyses and a mediation analysis with feminist beliefs as predictor, positive body image and sexual assertiveness as mediators, and sexual satisfaction as outcome. Correlation analyses showed that higher feminist beliefs were significantly related to greater sexual satisfaction. The mediation analysis revealed that feminist beliefs were positively related to sexual satisfaction through positive body image and sexual assertiveness. These findings indicated that the awareness and implementation of feminist beliefs in society and among women might play a positive role in enhancing positive body image and sexual assertiveness, which may ultimately increase sexual satisfaction in women.

Keywords: feminist beliefs, sexual satisfaction, positive body image, sexual assertiveness

Introduction

In the past decades, a large number of studies have been conducted on sexual satisfaction in women. Results showed that many women report being dissatisfied with their sexual lives within their romantic relationship (27%; Frederick, Lever, Gillespie, & Garcia, 2017), and in terms of sexual dysfunction (43%; Schick, Zucker, & Bay-Cheng, 2008). Despite these findings, the majority of women find that sexual satisfaction and intimacy are important to a general feeling of well-being (Rutgers Nisso Groep, 2017; Van den Brink, Smeets, Hessen, Talens, & Woertman, 2013). Penhollow and Young (2008) defined sexual satisfaction as a multidimensional experience involving positive thoughts, feelings, attitudes, and beliefs regarding sexual experiences. Since sexual satisfaction could lead to more sexual activity in relationships, a better self-image, higher ratings of emotional satisfaction, and better quality of life (Laumann, Paik, & Rosen, 1999; Rosen & Bachman, 2008) identifying determinants thereof is important.

In an attempt to identify these important determinants, feminist theorists have frequently associated feminist beliefs to greater sexual satisfaction in women (Schick et al., 2008). Feminism is defined as a set of beliefs and ideas for social and political movement to achieve greater equality for women (Fiss, 1994). In the sexual context, one goal of feminism is to fight against sexual subordination of women (Papadaki, 2007). For example, Bay-Cheng and Zucker (2007) describe how female sexuality is usually explained by traditional gender norms and in terms of asexuality or only passive-recipients sexuality, in which women's sexual desire is never spontaneous or initiating. Moreover, it is traditionally viewed as manifesting only in response to the seemingly irrepressible male sex drive (Morokoff, 2000). Therefore, it seems clear, that in the sexual context, feminism tries to combat these traditional gender norms and sexual scripts, in order to protect and enhance sexual satisfaction among women.

A mechanism through which feminist beliefs might be linked to sexual satisfaction can be found in Fredrickson and Roberts' (1997) objectification theory. This theoretical framework explains how Western society emphasizes women's beauty and how this leads to self-objectification, which means, the view of oneself primarily in terms of physical appearance, and to adopt an observer's perspective on the physical self. Self-objectification is manifested as dissatisfaction with physical appearance and persistent consciousness of the body. Research has shown that self-objectification has been related to negative outcomes for

women, of which low sexual satisfaction is one (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997; Sanchez & Kiefer, 2007). While previous research and theory supports that self-objectification is very common among women and is related to low sexual satisfaction, research also showed the important role of body image in the sexual context and in the overall self-image of women (Van den Brink, 2017). Therefore, when viewing the sexual context, it seems important to not only investigate which factors can decrease body dissatisfaction but can also enhance a more positive body image among women.

With regard to potential protective factors, it seems plausible that feminist beliefs can play a protective role through positive body image because they see the objectification and thin ideal as sources to develop body dissatisfaction, and therefore are more likely to appreciate their bodies and have a positive body image (Murnen & Smolak, 2009; Peterson, Grippo, & Tantleff-Dunn, 2008). In this respect, positive body image is described as a having favorable opinions, acceptance, and appreciation of the body in spite of weight, shape, and imperfections. It is not only the absence of body dissatisfaction but also the presence of respect of the body by attending to its needs, and a positive body image in more ways than only the physical appearance (Avalos, Tylka, & Wood-Barcalow, 2005). Two theoretical models that further explain positive body image in the sexual context are the acceptance model of intuitive eating (Avalos & Tylka, 2006) and the embodiment model of positive body image (Menzel & Levine, 2011). These models describe that individuals with a positive body image are attentive and connected to their bodies, as a direct alternative to a self-objectified body, explained by Fredrickson and Roberts' (1997) objectification theory (Van den Brink, 2017). When applying these models to sexual satisfaction, a positive body image may protect women from having negative thoughts and appearance-related self-consciousness during sexual activity, which in turn enhances positive sexual experiences and thus sexual satisfaction. This positive perspective shows how a positive body image might have a unique beneficial effect on sexual satisfaction (Van den Brink, 2017). Despite the evidence for an existing connection between feminist beliefs and sexual satisfaction (e.g., Schick et al., 2008) little is known about how feminist beliefs translate into sexual satisfaction. Nevertheless, it seems plausible, based on the objectification theory, the acceptance model of intuitive eating and the embodiment model of positive body image, that positive body image may explain the relationship between feminist beliefs and sexual satisfaction.

Previous research seems to support this assumption by providing empirical evidence of the relationship of positive body image with both feminist beliefs and sexual satisfaction. First, Peterson, Tantleff-Dunn, and Bedwell (2006) demonstrated the protective role of feminist beliefs in enhancing positive body image. The study examined how exposure to a feminist perspective could provide alternative interpretations of cultural messages, and thereby increase positive body image. In this study, participants assigned to the feminist intervention indeed showed greater appearance and positive changes in body image in contrast to the control group. In turn, Satinsky, Reece, Dennis, Sanders, and Bradzell (2012) found that positive body image predicted greater sexual satisfaction in women. Likewise, Woertman and Van den Brink (2012), Van den Brink et al. (2013), and Van den Brink, Smeets, Hessen, and Woertman (2016) found that reported overall positive body image was associated with better general sexual satisfaction. To summarize, the results suggest that higher feminist beliefs are related to a positive body image, which, in turn, is an important determinant of sexual satisfaction among women.

Furthermore, feminist theorists frequently associated feminist beliefs to sexual assertiveness (Schick et al., 2008). Sexual assertiveness refers to a dispositional tendency of being assertive about the sexual aspects of one's life. People who are sexual assertive have a behavioral predisposition to be agentic and instrumental in the fulfillment of their sexual desires and motivations. They also tend to take an instrumental, self-directed orientation to their sexuality and they tend to rely more on themselves than on others in making decisions about their sexual behaviors (Snell, Fisher, & Miller, 1991). Study results of Schick et al. (2008) showed that women with higher feminist beliefs tend to make safer and better decisions regarding their sexual experiences. The results further suggested that feminist beliefs were indirectly related to sexual satisfaction via sexual assertiveness. Feminist beliefs, with its critique of gender norms and objectification, and support of sexual assertiveness, is likely to empower women in the sexual context, and making them more satisfied sexually. These findings may provide further insight in how feminist beliefs and positive body image can help ensure that women express themselves more in sexual situations, and makes it conceivable that the relationship between feminist beliefs and sexual satisfaction via positive body image, can further be explained by sexual assertiveness. In addition, research by Yoder, Perry, and Saal (2007) has shown that egalitarian role expectations in relationships are positively correlated with sexual assertiveness, where they argue and underline the importance of feminist identification in a satisfying egalitarian relationship and sexual

assertiveness. Likewise, Van den Brink et al. (2013) found that women with a positive body image were less aware of their bodies in sexual situations, which in turn, was related to more sexual assertiveness.

To summarize, there is a growing body of evidence suggesting that feminist beliefs are associated with greater sexual satisfaction among women, and that this relationship can be explained by positive body image and sexual assertiveness. However, this has not yet been empirically tested. Since sexual dissatisfaction is common among women (Frederik et al., 2017, Schick et al., 2008), further research focusing on predictors of positive sexual experiences is valuable as the results may offer implications for effective interventions in building a pleasurable and more satisfying sex life.

The present study

The present study investigates the relationships between feminist beliefs, positive body image, sexual assertiveness, and sexual satisfaction in women. First, in line with previous findings (e.g., Schick et al., 2008; Yoder et al., 2007), it is hypothesized that higher feminist beliefs will be associated with greater sexual satisfaction. Second, based on prior research (e.g., Van den Brink et al., 2013, 2016; Yoder et al., 2007), it is hypothesized that positive body image and sexual assertiveness would mediate the relationship between feminist beliefs and sexual satisfaction. More specifically, it is expected that higher feminist beliefs will be associated with positive body image, which in turn will be associated with higher levels of sexual assertiveness, which in turn, is related to higher levels of sexual satisfaction. The proposed hypotheses are summarized in Figure 1.

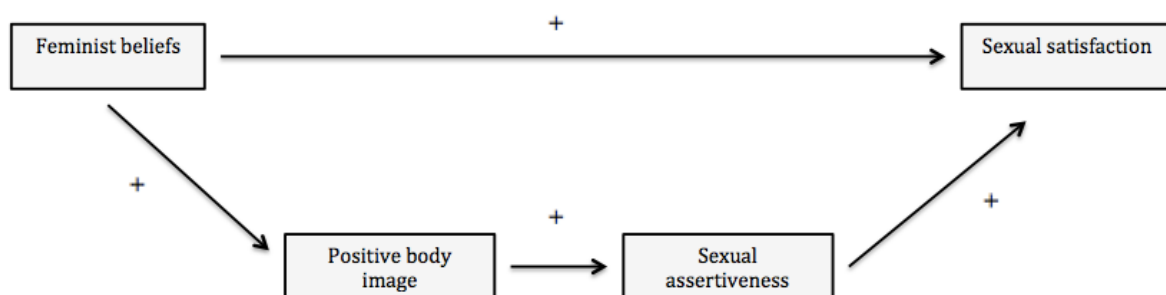


Figure 1. Schematic summary of the hypothesized relationship between feminist beliefs and sexual satisfaction, through positive body image and sexual assertiveness.

Method

Participants and Procedure

Participants were recruited through the internet. The program Limesurvey was used to create the online questionnaire and provided a link that was distributed on Facebook and the student website of Utrecht University. Criteria for participation were female gender, between 18 and 35 years old, and sexually active in the last 4 weeks with a partner (it was not required to be in a romantic relationship). After assessing the present study on “Body experience and sexual experiences” [Lichaamsbeleving en seksuele ervaringen], participants were given information about the study and were asked to give informed consent in order to proceed. The voluntary participation and the anonymity on the survey were explicitly mentioned. Subsequently, demographic questions regarding age, sexual orientation, current/highest level of completed education, and relational status were asked. In turn, the questionnaires about positive body image, sexual satisfaction, sexual assertiveness, and feminist beliefs were presented. At the end, social science students from Utrecht University were given the opportunity to receive course credits for participation. There was no compensation given for the other participants. On average, it took 45 minutes to complete the questionnaire.

A priori sample size calculations (Faul, Erdfelder, Lang, & Buchner, 2007; Fritz & MacKinnon, 2007) revealed that 148 participants would be required in order to detect small to medium effects (under guidelines from Cohen, 1988, p. 412) with a power of .80 and an alpha of .05. The estimated effect size was based on effects found in similar past research (Peterson et al., 2006; Sanchez & Kiefer, 2007; Satinsky et al., 2012).

A total of 150 women fully completed the study. Age ranged from 18 to 33 ($M = 23.22$, $SD = 2.84$). Highest level of education (completed or current) was higher vocational education/university in 77.3% ($n = 116$), higher secondary school in 16% ($n = 24$), lower vocational education in 4.7% ($n = 7$), and lower secondary school in 2% ($n = 3$) of the participants. The majority of the participants self-identified as heterosexual (90%, $n = 135$), 7.3% as bisexual ($n = 11$), 2.1% as homosexual ($n = 3$), and 0.7% as not specified ($n = 1$). Most participants reported having a current romantic relationship (72.7%, $n = 109$).

Measures

Positive body image. Positive body image was assessed by using the 10-item Dutch version (Alleva, Martijn, Veldhuis, & Tylka, 2016) of the Body Appreciation Scale-2 (BAS-2; Tylka & Wood-Barlow, 2015). One example of an item is: "I appreciate the different and unique characteristics of my body". Each item was rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = never to 5 = always. Scores were averaged to obtain an overall body appreciation score, with higher scores indicating greater body appreciation. High reliability ($\alpha = .97$) and good validity of the BAS-2 has been demonstrated (Tylka & Wood-Barcalow, 2015). Cronbach's alpha in the current study was $\alpha = .93$.

Sexual satisfaction. Sexual satisfaction was measured using the 30-item Sexual Satisfaction Scale for Women (SSS-W; Meston & Trapnell, 2005). The scale was translated from English to Dutch using the translate-retranslate method. One example of an item is: "I feel content with my present sex life". Each item was rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. Items were recoded if appropriate and subscale scores were computed according to the Meston and Trapnell (2005) SSS-W scoring guidelines. Higher scores indicated greater sexual satisfaction and lower sexual distress. Previous research indicated good internal consistency ($\alpha = .94$) and test-retest reliability ($\alpha = .87$) (Meston & Trapnell, 2005). Cronbach's alpha in the current study was $\alpha = .94$.

Sexual assertiveness. Sexual assertiveness was measured using the 25-item Dutch version (Meinema, 2016) of the Hurlbert Index of Sexual Assertiveness (HISA; Hurlbert, 1991). One example of an item is: "I approach my partner for sex when I desire it". Each item was rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 0 = never to 4 = always. Items were recoded if appropriate and averaged, with higher scores representing greater sexual assertiveness. Previous research indicated good overall test-retest reliability ($\alpha = .85$), and face, predictive, and discriminant validity (Pierce & Hurlbert, 1999). Cronbach's alpha in the current study was $\alpha = .92$.

Feminist beliefs. Feminist beliefs were assessed using the 5-item synthesis subscale of the Feminist Identity Composite (FIC; Fischer et al., 2000). Using the FIC-SYN subscale was based upon the meta-analytic findings of Murnen and Smolak (2009). The FIC-SYN subscale was translated from English to Dutch using the translate-retranslate method. One example of a FIC-SYN-item is: "I enjoy the pride and self-assurance that comes from being a strong female". Each item was rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. Higher mean scores for the synthesis subscale indicate greater agreement

with the corresponding feminist identity stage. The FIC is the most used and recommended questionnaire for assessing feminist identity style (Erchull et al., 2009). Moradi and Subich (2002) found Cronbach's alpha coefficients ranging from .73 to .84, and Fischer et al. (2000) demonstrated a good content validity for the FIC. Cronbach's alpha for the FIC-SYN in the current study was $\alpha = .74$.

Statistical analysis

All statistical analyses were performed with IBM SPSS Statistics version 24. In a first step, bivariate associations between the study variables were analyzed using Pearson correlation coefficients. In a second step, a serial mediation analysis was conducted with feminist beliefs as independent variable, body appreciation and sexual assertiveness as mediators, and sexual satisfaction as dependent variable. The mediation analysis comprised a number of sub analyses that estimated the total, direct, and indirect effects of feminist beliefs on sexual satisfaction. The total and direct effects were estimated by means of a stepwise multiple regression analysis in which feminist beliefs was entered in the first step and body appreciation and sexual assertiveness were entered in the second step. The total effect refers to the relationship between feminist beliefs and sexual satisfaction (step 1), and the direct effect refers to the relationship between feminist beliefs and sexual satisfaction while controlling for body appreciation and sexual assertiveness (step 2).

As recommended by Hayes (2015), the indirect effect of feminist beliefs on sexual satisfaction through body appreciation and sexual assertiveness, and their significance were determined by means of bootstrap analysis with 10000 bootstrap samples to calculate bias-corrected 95% confidence intervals (BCa 95% CI). Specifically, the total indirect effect, and the indirect effect via mediator 1 (i.e., body appreciation, IND1), both of the mediators (IND2) and via mediator 2 (i.e., sexual assertiveness, IND3) were assessed, and compared (pairwise) if significant. Significance was determined based on the presence or absence of the value 0 within the CIs. The serial mediation analysis was conducted using Hayes' Process Macro model 6 (Hayes, 2015). All coefficients will be reported in standardized form.

Results

Bivariate associations between feminist beliefs, body appreciation, sexual assertiveness, and sexual satisfaction

The results of the correlation analyses of the study variables are presented in Table 1.

Consistent with the expectation, higher feminist beliefs were significantly related to greater sexual satisfaction. Also, both body appreciation and sexual assertiveness were positively and significantly related to sexual satisfaction.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics and Bivariate Correlations Among Study Variables (N=150)

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Min.	Max.	Scale range	1	2	3
1. Feminist Beliefs	3.88	0.61	2.00	5.00	1-5	-	-	-
2. Body Appreciation	3.58	0.65	1.50	5.00	1-5	.24**	-	-
3. Sexual Assertiveness	2.92	0.56	1.16	3.92	0-4	.25**	.30**	-
4. Sexual Satisfaction	17.89	3.03	8.42	21.83	6-30	.18*	.39**	.69**

Note. Higher scores indicate greater levels of the construct they are intended to measure. Feminist Beliefs was measured by the Synthesis subscale of the Feminist Identity Composite (FIC), Body Appreciation by the Body Appreciation Scale-2 (BAS-2), Sexual Assertiveness by the Hurlbert Index of Sexual Assertiveness (HISA), and Sexual Satisfaction by the Sexual Satisfaction Scale for Women (SSS-W). ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$.

Total, direct, and indirect effects through body appreciation and sexual assertiveness of feminist beliefs on sexual satisfaction

The standardized regression coefficients are presented in Figure 2. A significant total effect (step 1) of feminist beliefs on sexual satisfaction was found (Adj. $R^2 = .02$, $F(1,148) = 4.72$, $p = .031$). No significant direct effect (step 2) of feminist beliefs on sexual satisfaction was found. Additionally, the analysis revealed a significant direct effect (step 2) of body appreciation on sexual satisfaction, and also found a significant direct effect (step 2) of sexual assertiveness on sexual satisfaction. Fifty-one percent of the variance of sexual satisfaction was explained by feminist beliefs, body appreciation, and sexual assertiveness ($\Delta R^2 = .48$, $F(2,146) = 70.19$, $p < .001$; adj. $R^2 = .51$, $F(3,146) = 49.83$, $p < .001$).

Furthermore, the bootstrap analyses revealed a significant total indirect effect, .20, bias corrected BCa 95% CI [.069, .351]. Consistent with the expectations, the bootstrap analyses revealed a significant indirect effect of feminist beliefs on sexual satisfaction through both body appreciation and sexual assertiveness, .04, bias corrected BCa 95% CI [.009, .098] (IND2). Thus as expected, higher feminist beliefs were related to more body appreciation, which in turn was associated to higher levels of sexual assertiveness, which, in turn, was related to greater sexual satisfaction.

Moreover, the results revealed a significant indirect effect of feminist beliefs on sexual satisfaction through body appreciation alone, .05, bias corrected BCa 95% CI [.011, .119] (IND1), and through sexual assertiveness alone, .12, bias corrected BCa 95% CI [.011, .225] (IND3). Subsequently, the pairwise comparisons revealed no significant differences between the indirect effects, with, (IND1-IND2), .05, bias corrected BCa 95% CI [-.201, .364], (IND1-IND3), -.034, bias corrected BCa 95% CI [-.856, .196], and (IND2-IND3), -.36, bias corrected BCa 95% CI [-.917, .216].

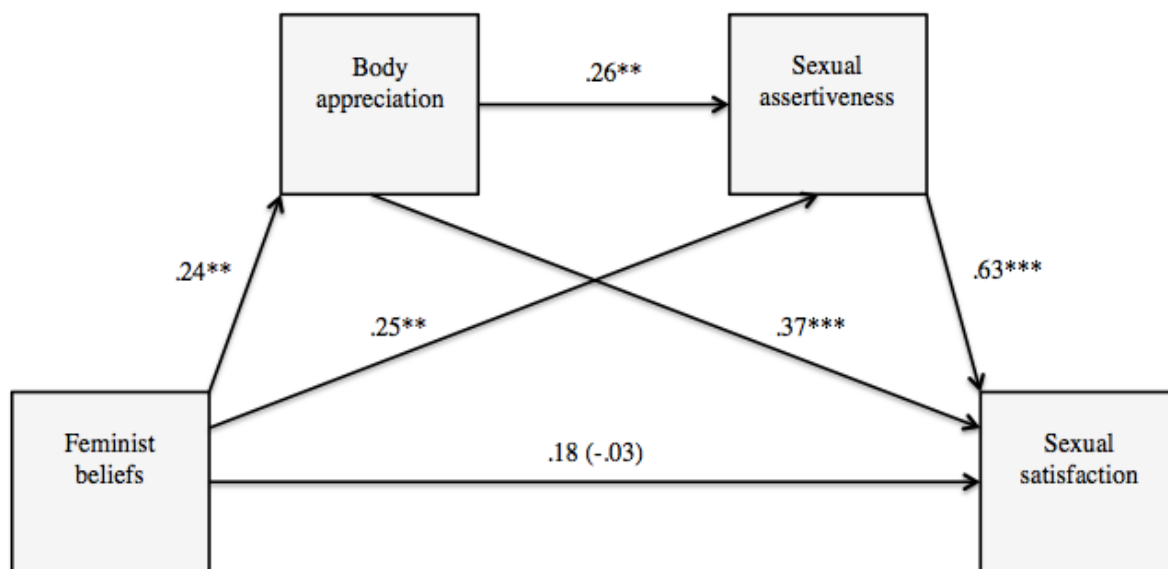


Figure 2. Standardized coefficients for the original model. Total effects are displayed in parentheses. *** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$.

Discussion

The present study investigated relationships between feminist beliefs, positive body image, sexual assertiveness, and sexual satisfaction. As expected and in line with previous studies (e.g., Schick et al., 2008), higher feminist beliefs were significantly related to greater sexual satisfaction. The current study expands previous studies on the relationship between feminist beliefs and sexual satisfaction by targeting the role of positive body image and sexual assertiveness in this relationship.

The results revealed that, as expected and in line with the objectification theory, the acceptance model of intuitive eating, the embodiment model of positive body image, and previous findings (e.g., Murnen & Smolak, 2009; Peterson et al., 2008; Schick et al., 2008) feminist beliefs were significantly associated with greater sexual satisfaction mediated via both positive body image and sexual assertiveness. This, however, is not surprising since research has frequently shown how self-objectification and body dissatisfaction in women can translate in lower sexual satisfaction and that on the contrary, feminism fights for the prevention of body dissatisfaction and the realization of a more positive body image. In addition, sexual assertiveness has already been associated with both feminist beliefs and greater sexual satisfaction for several times, which makes it plausible that these two determinants can logically explain the relationship between feminist beliefs and sexual satisfaction. To summarize, the results of the mediation analysis suggest that higher feminist beliefs might enhance positive body image, which in turn may activate sexual assertiveness, which, in turn, leads to greater sexual satisfaction.

Interestingly, the relationship between feminist beliefs and sexual satisfaction turned out to be mediated by positive body image separately from sexual assertiveness. Thus, having a positive body image may directly be related to greater sexual satisfaction. It can be speculated that the relationship between positive body image and sexual satisfaction particularly results from having attention to the needs and feelings of the body, which is a part of body appreciation and is used to measure positive body image in the current research. Previous research showed that women who are attentive to the needs of the body are more likely to feel the signals of their body in general (Avalos et al., 2005). With regard to the sexual context, it could therefore be suspected that specifically the intrapersonal character of positive body image could help one to focus on one's needs and sensations during sexual activity, which, in turn, would directly translate into greater sexual satisfaction. However, this explanation remains hypothetical and needs further investigation.

The results of this study may have potential implications. Previous research showed that there are disruptive societal factors of gender equality in general and within the sexual context, and that women daily receive signals that are contradictory with the equality that society would strive for (Bay-Cheng & Zucker, 2007; Murnen & Smolak, 2009). Therefore, this study combines with previous research by showing how feminist beliefs, with its critique of sexually disempowering gender norms, can be beneficial for the sexual well-being of women in a unique way. Hence, present research shows that bringing awareness for feminist beliefs in for example educational interventions, may not only shape culture standards in striving for gender equality, but can also have positive consequences for body image and sexual experiences for women in general. Whereas the potential impact of incorporating feminist beliefs as an effective intervention component merits continued investigation, it is proposed that the development of feminist beliefs can help girls and women develop critical consciousness to resist unrealistic beauty ideals and sexually disempowering gender norms, and will eventually encourage them in exploring their own sexuality in a healthy and equal way.

Despite the above given potential implications, the results may also have potential implications for clinical practice. For example, previous research showed that many women are dissatisfied with their bodies (Murnen & Smolak, 2009) and sexual lives (Frederick et al., 2017). Because the results showed how feminist beliefs might have a positive influence on improving sexual satisfaction via positive body image and sexual assertiveness, this new positive perspective may be beneficial for clinical practice in treating sexual problems. It might therefore, be useful to further investigate how feminist beliefs can be incorporated in existing efficient sexual problem and body image treatments, because of the fact that the development and maintaining of a positive body image may be additionally helpful in enhancing sexual satisfaction (Van den Brink, 2017). For example, in their embodiment model or positive body image, Menzel and Levine (2011) showed how “mind-body integration activities” could improve one's body image, while Peterson et al. (2006) revealed how body image can also be improved through the exposure to feminist beliefs through text. Therefore, the results of this study adds to the existent literature by offering more insights in how incorporating feminist beliefs with existing effective body image interventions, might ultimately result in a more powerful and lasting treatment of sexual problems. For that reason, it would be interesting to further investigate the potential impact of feminist beliefs as an effective intervention component in future research.

Limitations

There were several limitations to this study that warrant acknowledgement. The present sample consisted of heterosexual and primarily highly educated young women with most of them being in a romantic relationship. Furthermore, the sample was mainly composed of students, which is often criticized in social science (Peterson, 2001). Important differences have been demonstrated in how women with higher educational qualifications would have a more positive body image (Swami, Hadji-Michael, & Furnham, 2008), and often have higher feminist beliefs (Ropers-Huilman & Winters, 2011). Because of these previous findings and the homogeneous nature of the sample, the results of this study may not be representative for the general population of women. Future research would benefit from more heterogeneous samples.

Furthermore, only one aspect of positive body image (i.e., body appreciation) was assessed in the present study. For example, only one aspect of body appreciation was measured, including respecting and being satisfied with one's body. It can be speculated that other aspects of positive body image, such as being mindful and more focused on one's physical sensations, can result in a better sexual response during sexual activity and thus enhance sexual satisfaction. Therefore, future researchers may use more comprehensive positive body image measures in order to differentiate between the role of various aspects of positive body image in associations with sexual experiences.

Moreover, in the present study, within-person effects were investigated. As sexual assertiveness and sexual satisfaction are dyadic in nature, perceptions and behaviors of the sexual partner might be of importance with regard to the quality of sexual experience (Zhaoyang & Cooper, 2013). Future studies should use dyadic designs to take the interdependence of partners into account.

Lastly, given the cross-sectional nature of the present study, direction of causality could not definitely be determined. Even though previous studies have shown that more positive body image predicts higher sexual satisfaction (e.g., Satinsky et al., 2012; Van den Brink et al., 2013, 2016), other studies suggest a reversed causal direction, where sexual satisfaction might result in a more positive body image (Tantleff-Dunn & Gokee, 2002). Although mediation analyses are common statistical procedures on cross-sectional data, further longitudinal studies are needed to further address these issues (Maxwell, Cole, & Mitchell, 2011).

Conclusion

The present study adds to the literature with a positive perspective on how feminist beliefs translate into sexual satisfaction in women, by targeting the mediating role of positive body image and sexual assertiveness in this relationship. Given the fact that feminism tries to promote greater sexual satisfaction among women (Murnen & Smolak, 2009; Peterson et al., 2008), this study combines with previous research and proposes that the awareness and implementation of feminist beliefs in society and among women might play a positive role in enhancing positive body image and sexual assertiveness, which may ultimately increase sexual satisfaction in women. Therefore, understanding how feminist beliefs enhance aspects of positive body image and sexual assertiveness will be valuable in selecting appropriate targets for both educational and sexual problem interventions, and thus, offers a positive perspective on how feminist beliefs may play an important role in the promotion of women's sexual satisfaction.

References

- Alleva, J. M., Martijn, C., Veldhuis, J., & Tylka, T. L. (2016). A Dutch translation and validation of the Body Appreciation Scale-2: An investigation with female university students in the Netherlands. *Body Image, 19*, 44-48.
doi:10.1016/j.bodyim.2016.08.008
- Avalos, L. C., & Tylka, T. L. (2006). Exploring a model of intuitive eating with college women. *Journal of Counseling Psychology, 53*, 486. doi: 10.1037/0022-0167.53.4.486
- Avalos, L., Tylka, T. L., & Wood-Barcalow, N. (2005). The Body Appreciation Scale: development and psychometric evaluation. *Body Image, 2*, 285-297.
doi:10.1016/j.bodyim.2005.06.002
- Bay-Cheng, L. Y., & Zucker, A. N. (2007). Feminism between the sheets: Sexual attitudes among feminists, nonfeminists, and egalitarians. *Psychology of Women Quarterly, 31*, 157-163. doi:10.1111/j.1471-6402.2007.00349.x
- Cohen, J. (1988). *Statistical power analysis for the behavioral sciences*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Erchull, M. J., Liss, M., Wilson, K. A., Bateman, L., Peterson, A., & Sanchez, C. E. (2009). The feminist identity development model: relevant for young women today?. *Sex Roles, 60*, 832-842. doi:10.1007/s11199-009-9588-6
- Faul, F., Erdfelder, E., Lang, A. G., & Buchner, A. (2007). G* Power 3: A flexible statistical power analysis program for the social, behavioral, and biomedical sciences. *Behavior Research Methods, 39*, 175–191. doi:10.3758/BF03193146.
- Fischer, A. R., Tokar, D. M., Mergl, M. M., Good, G. E., Hill, M. S., & Blum, S. A. (2000). Assessing Women's Feminist Identity Development Studies of Convergent, Discriminant, and Structural Validity. *Psychology of Women Quarterly, 24*, 15-29.
doi:10.1111/j.1471-6402.2000.tb01018.x
- Fiss, O. M. (1994). What is feminism. *Arizona State Law Journal, 26*, 413.
- Frederick, D. A., Lever, J., Gillespie, B. J., & Garcia, J. R. (2017). What keeps passion alive? Sexual satisfaction is associated with sexual communication, mood setting, sexual variety, oral sex, orgasm, and sex frequency in a national US study. *The Journal of Sex Research, 54*, 186-201. doi: 10.1080/00224499.2015.1137854

- Fredrickson, B. L., & Roberts, T. A. (1997). Objectification theory: Toward understanding women's lived experiences and mental health risks. *Psychology of Women Quarterly, 21*, 173-206.
- Fritz, M. S., & MacKinnon, D. P. (2007). Required sample size to detect the mediated effect. *Psychological Science, 18*, 233–239. doi:10.1111/j.1467-9280.2007.01882.x.
- Hayes, A. (2015). An index and test of linear moderated mediation. *Multivariate Behavioral Research, 50*, 1-22. doi:10.1080/00273171.2014.962683
- Hurlbert, D. F. (1991). The role of assertiveness in female sexuality: A comparative study between sexually assertive and sexually nonassertive women. *Journal of Sex & Marital Therapy, 17*, 183-190. doi:10.1080/00926239108404342
- Laumann, E. O., Paik, A., & Rosen, R. C. (1999). Sexual dysfunction in the United States: prevalence and predictors. *Jama, 281*, 537-544. doi:10.1001/jama.281.6.537
- Maxwell, S. E., Cole, D. A., & Mitchell, M. A. (2011). Bias in cross-sectional analyses of longitudinal mediation: Partial and complete mediation under an autoregressive model. *Multivariate Behavioral Research, 46*, 816-841. doi:10.1080/00273171.2011.606716
- Meinema, L.E. (2016). *State body image during sexual activity and sexual risk behaviour in Dutch female university students: the mediating role of sexual assertiveness*. [Unpublished master's thesis], University of Utrecht, Utrecht, Netherlands
- Menzel, J. E., & Levine, M. P. (2011). Embodying experiences and the promotion of positive body image: The example of competitive athletics. In R. M. Calogero, S. Tantleff-Dunn, & J. K. Thompson (Eds.), *Self-objectification in women: Causes, consequences, and counteractions* (pp. 163-186). Washington, DC, US: American Psychological Association.
- Meston, C., & Trapnell, P. (2005). Development and Validation of a Five-Factor Sexual Satisfaction and Distress Scale for Women: The Sexual Satisfaction Scale for Women (SSS-W). *The Journal of Sexual Medicine, 2*, 66-81. doi:10.1111/j.1743-6109.2005.20107.x
- Moradi, B., & Subich, L. M. (2002). Feminist identity development measures: Comparing the psychometrics of three instruments. *The Counseling Psychologist, 30*, 66-86.
- Morokoff, P. J. (2000). A cultural context for sexual assertiveness in women. In C. B. Travis & J. W. White (Eds.), *Sexuality, society and feminism* (pp. 299–319). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

- Murnen, S. K., & Smolak, L. (2009). Are feminist women protected from body image problems? A meta-analytic review of relevant research. *Sex Roles, 60*, 186. doi: 10.1007/s11199-008-9523-2
- Papadaki, E. L. (2007). Sexual objectification: From Kant to contemporary feminism. *Contemporary Political Theory, 6*, 330-348.
- Penhollow, T. M., & Young, M. (2008). Predictors of sexual satisfaction: The role of body image and fitness. *Electronic Journal of Human Sexuality, 11*. Retrieved from <http://www.ejhs.org/volumell/Penhollow.htm>
- Peterson, R. A. (2001). On the use of college students in social science research: Insights from a second-order meta-analysis. *Journal of Consumer Research, 28*, 450-461. doi:10.1086/323732
- Peterson, R. D., Grippo, K. P., & Tantleff-Dunn, S. (2008). Empowerment and powerlessness: A closer look at the relationship between feminism, body image and eating disturbance. *Sex Roles, 58*, 639-648. doi: 10.1007/s11199-007-9377-z
- Peterson, R. D., Tantleff-Dunn, S., & Bedwell, J. S. (2006). The effects of exposure to feminist ideology on women's body image. *Body Image, 3*, 237-246. doi:10.1016/j.bodyim.2006.05.004
- Pierce, A. P., & Hurlbert, M. K. (1999). Test-retest reliability of the Hurlbert Index of Sexual Assertiveness. *Perceptual and Motor Skills, 88*, 31-34.
- Ropers-Huilman, R., & Winters, K. T. (2011). Feminist research in higher education. *The Journal of Higher Education, 82*, 667-690. doi:10.1080/00221546.2011.11777223
- Rosen, R. C., & Bachmann, G. A. (2008). Sexual well-being, happiness, and satisfaction, in women: The case for a new conceptual paradigm. *Journal of Sex & Marital Therapy, 34*, 291-297. doi: 10.1080/00926230802096234
- Rutgers Nisso Groep. (2017). Seksuele gezondheid in Nederland 2017. Retrieved from https://www.rutgers.nl/sites/rutgersnl/files/PDF-Onderzoek/Seksuele_Gezondheid_in_NL_2017_23012018.pdf
- Sanchez, D. T., & Kiefer, A. K. (2007). Body concerns in and out of the bedroom: Implications for sexual pleasure and problems. *Archives of Sexual Behavior, 36*, 808-820. doi: 10.1007/s10508-007-9205-0
- Satinsky, S., Reece, M., Dennis, B., Sanders, S., & Bardzell, S. (2012). An assessment of body appreciation and its relationship to sexual function in women. *Body Image, 9*, 137-144. doi:10.1016/j.bodyim.2011.09.007

- Schick, V. R., Zucker, A. N., & Bay-Cheng, L. Y. (2008). Safer, better sex through feminism: The role of feminist ideology in women's sexual well-being. *Psychology of Women Quarterly, 32*, 225-232.
- Smolak, L., & Murnen, S. K. (2007). Feminism and body image. In V. Swami & A. Furnham (Eds.), *The body beautiful* (pp. 236–258). London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Snell, W. E., Fisher, T. D., & Miller, R. S. (1991). Development of the Sexual Awareness Questionnaire: Components, reliability, and validity. *Annals of Sex Research, 4*, 65-92.
- Swami, V., Hadji-Michael, M., & Furnham, A. (2008). Personality and individual difference correlates of positive body image. *Body Image, 5*, 322-325.
doi:10.1016/j.bodyim.2008.03.007
- Tantleff-Dunn, S., & Gokee, J.L. (2002). Interpersonal influences on body image development. In T. F. Cash & T. Pruzinsky (Eds.), *Body image: A handbook of theory, research, and clinical practice* (pp. 108-116). New York: Guilford Press.
- Tylka, T. L., & Wood-Barcalow, N. L. (2015). What is and what is not positive body image? Conceptual foundations and construct definition. *Body Image, 14*, 118-129. doi: 10.1016/j.bodyim.2015.04.001
- van den Brink, F. (2017). *Body Image in a Sexual Context: The Relationship between Body Image and Sexual Experiences* (Doctoral dissertation, Utrecht University).
- van den Brink, F., Smeets, M. A., Hessen, D. J., & Woertman, L. (2016). Positive body image and sexual functioning in Dutch female university students: The role of adult romantic attachment. *Archives of Sexual Behavior, 45*, 1217-1226. doi: 10.1007/s10508-015-0511-7
- van den Brink, F., Smeets, M. A., Hessen, D. J., Talens, J. G., & Woertman, L. (2013). Body satisfaction and sexual health in Dutch female university students. *Journal of Sex Research, 50*, 786-794. doi:10.1080/00224499.2012.684250
- Weaver, A. D., & Byers, E. S. (2006). The relationships among body image, body mass index, exercise, and sexual functioning in heterosexual women. *Psychology of Women Quarterly, 30*, 333–339. doi: 10.1111/j.1471-6402.2006.00308.x
- Woertman, L., & Van den Brink, F. (2012). Body image and female sexual functioning and behavior: a review. *Journal of Sex Research, 49*, 184-211. doi: 10.1080/00224499.2012.658586

Yoder, J. D., Perry, R. L., & Saal, E. I. (2007). What good is a feminist identity?: Women's feminist identification and role expectations for intimate and sexual relationships. *Sex Roles, 57*, 365-372. doi: 10.1007/s11199-007-9269-2

Zhaoyang, R., & Cooper, M. L. (2013). Body satisfaction and couple's daily sexual experience: A dyadic perspective. *Archives of Sexual Behavior, 42*, 985-998. doi:10.1007/s10508-013-0082-4

Informed Consent

Welkom bij dit onderzoek.

Dit onderzoek is opgesteld in het kader van mijn master Clinical Psychology aan de Universiteit Utrecht. **Voor mijn onderzoek ben ik op zoek naar vrouwen tussen de 18 en 35 jaar die in de afgelopen 4 weken seksueel actief zijn geweest** (bijvoorbeeld knuffelen/vrijen zonder kleding, orale seks, geslachtsgemeenschap).

In dit onderzoek wordt gebruik gemaakt van verschillende online vragenlijsten die gericht zijn op hoe je over je lichaam en je seksuele ervaringen denkt en wat jouw visie ten aanzien van jezelf als vrouw is. Het invullen van de vragenlijsten zal ongeveer 45 minuten duren.

Deelname aan dit onderzoek is vrijwillig en je kunt op ieder moment zonder opgave van reden stoppen. Er wordt op vertrouwelijke wijze met je gegevens omgegaan. De resultaten zullen niet voor andere doeleinden dan wetenschappelijk onderzoek worden gebruikt en uw gegevens zullen niet aan derden worden verstrekt.

Wanneer je bij het einde van de vragenlijsten bent gekomen, krijg je de gelegenheid het emailadres te noteren waar je mij op kan bereiken voor eventuele vragen en/of opmerkingen.

Studenten van de Universiteit Utrecht kunnen 1 PPU verdienen door aan het einde van de vragenlijst je Solis ID en UU Solis e-mailadres in te vullen.

Nogmaals hartelijk dank voor je deelname.

Ik ga akkoord met deelname aan dit onderzoek.

Ja Nee

Demographics

1. Om aan dit onderzoek te kunnen deelnemen, dien je van het vrouwelijk geslacht te zijn. Klik 'ja' om te bevestigen dat je een vrouw bent.

Ja Nee

2. Om aan dit onderzoek te kunnen deelnemen, dien je tussen de 18 en 35 jaar te zijn. Wat is jouw leeftijd?

3. Wat is je seksuele geaardheid?

a. Heteroseksueel

b. Homoseksueel

c. Biseksueel

d. Niet gespecificeerd

4. Wat is je hoogst genoten of afgeronde opleidingsniveau?

a. Geen opleiding

b. Lagere school (incl. speciaal onderwijs, bv. LOM, BLO)

c. Lagere Beroepsonderwijs (LBO, LTS), VMBO basisberoepsgerichte-
of kaderberoepsgerichte leerweg

d. MAVO, VMBO theoretische of gemengde leerweg, ULO, MULO

e. HAVO, VWO, Gymnasium, HBS, MMS

f. Middelbaar beroepsonderwijs (MBO, BOL, BBL)

g. HBO, Universiteit

5. Heb je op dit moment een romantische relatie?

Ja Nee

Zo ja, Hoe lang ben je op dit moment in een vaste relatie?

- a. Korter dan 1 maand
- b. 1 tot 6 maanden
- c. 6 maanden tot 1 jaar
- d. 1 tot 2 jaar
- e. Langer dan 2 jaar

The Body Appreciation Scale-2 (BAS-2; Tylka & Wood-Barlow, 2015)

De volgende 10 stellingen gaan over je gedachten, gevoelens en mening over je lichaam. Geef voor elke stelling aan in hoeverre ze voor jou waar zijn.

Antwoordmogelijkheden:

1. Nooit
2. Zelden
3. Soms
4. Vaak
5. Altijd

1. Ik respecteer mijn lichaam.
2. Ik voel me goed over mijn lichaam.
3. Ik vind dat mijn lichaam op zijn minst een aantal goede kwaliteiten bezit.
4. Ik heb een positieve houding ten opzichte van mijn lichaam.
5. Ik besteed aandacht aan wat mijn lichaam nodig heeft.
6. Ik voel liefde voor mijn lichaam.
7. Ik waardeer de verschillende en unieke eigenschappen van mijn lichaam.
8. Uit mijn gedrag blijkt mijn waardering voor mijn lichaam; bijvoorbeeld, ik loop met een opgeheven hoofd en glimlach.
9. Ik voel me op mijn gemak in mijn lichaam.
10. Ik vind mezelf mooi al zie ik er anders uit dan de beelden in de media van aantrekkelijke mensen (bijv. modellen, actrices en acteurs).

The Sexual Satisfaction Scale for Women (SSS-W; Meston & Trapnell, 2005)

De volgende 30 stellingen gaan over je gedachten, gevoelens en mening in seksuele situaties. Kies voor elke stelling het antwoord dat het meest bij je past. Nota: Mocht je op dit geen partner hebben, neem dan de meest recente partner in gedachten.

Antwoordmogelijkheden:

1. Erg mee oneens
 2. Een beetje mee oneens
 3. Noch mee oneens, noch mee eens
 4. Een beetje mee eens
 5. Erg mee eens
-
1. Ik voel me tevreden met hoe mijn huidige seksleven is.
 2. Ik heb vaak het gevoel dat er iets mist in mijn huidige seksleven.
 3. Ik heb vaak het gevoel dat ik niet genoeg emotionele nabijheid in mijn seksleven heb.
 4. Ik voel me tevreden over hoe vaak ik momenteel seksuele intimiteit (zoenen, geslachtsgemeenschap etc.) in mijn leven heb.
 5. Ik heb geen enkele belangrijke problemen of zorgen over seks (opwinding, orgasme, frequentie, compatibiliteit, communicatie etc.).
 6. **Over het algemeen, hoe bevredigend of onbevredigend is jouw huidige seksleven?***
 7. Mijn partner gaat vaak in de verdediging als ik het over seks probeer te hebben.
 8. Mijn partner en ik bespreken seks niet open genoeg met elkaar of hebben het niet vaak genoeg over seks.
 9. Ik voel me normaal gesproken compleet op mijn gemak om seks te bespreken wanneer mijn partner dat wil.
 10. Mijn partner voelt zich normaal gesproken compleet op zijn gemak om het over seks te hebben wanneer ik dat wil.
 11. Ik heb er geen moeite mee om over mijn diepste gevoelens en emoties te praten als mijn partner dit graag wil.
 12. Mijn partner heeft er geen moeite mee om over zijn diepste gevoelens en emoties te praten als ik dat graag wil.

13. Ik heb vaak het gevoel dat mijn partner niet gevoelig is voor, of zich niet bewust genoeg is van mijn seksuele voorkeuren en verlangens.
14. Ik heb vaak het gevoel dat mijn partner en ik seksueel niet genoeg overeenstemmen.
15. Ik heb vaak het gevoel dat de overtuigingen en attitudes van mijn partner tegenover seks te veel verschillen van die van mij.
16. Ik denk soms dat mijn partner en ik niet bij elkaar passen in behoeftes en verlangens met betrekking tot seksuele intimiteit.
17. Ik heb soms het gevoel dat mijn partner en ik lichamelijk niet voldoende tot elkaar zijn aangetrokken.
18. Ik denk soms dat mijn partner en ik niet bij elkaar passen als het om onze seksuele stijlen en voorkeuren gaat.
19. Ik maak me zorgen dat mijn partner gefrustreerd zal raken over mijn seksuele moeilijkheden.
20. Ik maak me zorgen dat mijn seksuele moeilijkheden mijn relatie negatief zullen beïnvloeden.
21. Ik maak me zorgen dat mijn partner een affaire zou kunnen hebben vanwege mijn seksuele moeilijkheden.
22. Ik maak me zorgen dat mijn partner seksueel onbevredigd is.
23. Ik maak me zorgen dat mijn partner me als minder vrouwelijk ziet vanwege mijn seksuele moeilijkheden.
24. Ik heb het gevoel dat ik mijn partner teleurgesteld heb door seksuele moeilijkheden te hebben.
25. Mijn seksuele moeilijkheden zijn frustrerend voor mij.
26. Mijn seksuele moeilijkheden geven me een seksueel onbevredigd gevoel.
27. Ik ben bang dat mijn seksuele moeilijkheden er voor zouden kunnen zorgen dat ik seksuele bevrediging buiten mijn relatie zoek.
28. Ik ben zo van slag van mijn seksuele moeilijkheden dat het mijn gevoel over mezelf beïnvloedt.
29. Ik ben zo van slag van mijn seksuele moeilijkheden dat het mijn eigen welzijn beïnvloedt.
30. Mijn seksuele moeilijkheden irriteren me en maken me boos.

*** Antwoordmogelijkheden: 1 = helemaal niet bevredigend, 2 = niet zo bevredigend, 3 = redelijk bevredigend, 4 = erg bevredigend, 5 = heel erg bevredigend.**

The Hurlbert Index of Sexual Assertiveness (HISA; Hurlbert, 1991)

De volgende 25 stellingen gaan over je gedachten, gevoelens en mening in seksuele situaties. Kies voor elke stelling het antwoord dat het meest bij je past. De term 'partner' verwijst naar een persoon waarmee je romantisch of seksueel intiem bent of bent geweest.

Antwoordmogelijkheden:

6. Nooit
7. Zelden
8. Soms
9. Meestal
10. Altijd

1. Ik vind het ongemakkelijk om tijdens de seks te praten.
2. Ik voel me verlegen wanneer het op seks aankomt.
3. Ik benader mijn partner voor seks wanneer ik ernaar verlang.
4. Ik denk dat ik naar mijn partner toe open ben over mijn seksuele behoeften.
5. Ik geniet van het delen van mijn seksuele fantasieën met mijn partner.
6. Ik vind het ongemakkelijk om met mijn vrienden over seks te praten.
7. Ik communiceer mijn seksuele verlangens naar mijn partner toe.
8. Het is moeilijk voor mij om mijzelf aan te raken tijdens seks.
9. Het is moeilijk voor mij om nee te zeggen zelfs wanneer ik geen seks wil hebben.
10. Ik zou mijzelf niet beschrijven als een seksueel persoon.
11. Ik vind het ongemakkelijk om mijn partner te vertellen wat goed voelt.
12. Ik kom op voor mijn seksuele gevoelens.
13. Ik ben terughoudend in het verzoeken van mijn partner om mij te bevredigen.
14. Ik heb seks terwijl ik dat niet echt wil.
15. Wanneer een seksuele handeling niet goed voelt, dan vertel ik dat aan mijn partner.
16. Ik voel mij op mijn gemak wanneer ik seksuele lof geef aan mijn partner.
17. Het is gemakkelijk voor mij om seks met mijn partner te bespreken.
18. Ik voel mij op mijn gemak wanneer ik seks initieer met mijn partner.
19. Ik doe seksuele handelingen met mijn partner die ik niet fijn vind.
20. Mijn partner tevreden stellen is belangrijker dan mijn eigen seksuele plezier.

21. Ik voel mij op mijn gemak wanneer ik mijn partner vertel hoe hij/zij mij moet aanraken.
22. Ik geniet ervan mijzelf tot een orgasme te masturberen.
23. Als iets goed voelt tijdens de seks dan geef ik aan het nog een keer te willen doen.
24. Het is voor mij moeilijk om eerlijk te zijn over mijn seksuele gevoelens.
25. Ik probeer het bespreken van het onderwerp 'seks' te vermijden.

The Synthesis subscale of the Feminist Identity Composite (FIC; Fischer et al., 2000)

De volgende 5 stellingen beschrijven verschillende houdingen die je ten aanzien van jezelf kan hebben als vrouw. Er zijn geen foute of slechte antwoorden. Probeer zo goed mogelijk aan te geven in hoeverre je het eens/oneens bent met elke stelling en probeer het antwoord op de ene stelling niet te laten beïnvloeden door een antwoord op een andere stelling.

Antwoordmogelijkheden:

1. Erg mee oneens
 2. Een beetje mee oneens
 3. Noch mee oneens, noch mee eens
 4. Een beetje mee eens
 5. Erg mee eens
-
1. Ik ben van mening dat mijn vrouwelijke eigenschappen en unieke persoonlijke kwaliteiten met elkaar vermengd zijn.
 2. Ik ben trots dat ik een competente vrouw ben.
 3. Ik heb vrouwelijkheid en feminisme geïntegreerd in mijn eigen unieke persoonlijkheid.
 4. Ik geniet van de trots en zelfverzekerdheid die je krijgt van het zijn van een sterke vrouw.
 5. Naarmate ik meer geloof in mijn overtuigingen, ben ik me gaan realiseren dat het belangrijk is om een vrouw te waarderen als individu en niet als lid van een grotere groep vrouwen.