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The Other Side of the Double-standard: Sexual Explicit Internet Material and the Sexualization of the Male Body

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The Other Side of the Double-Standard: Sexual Explicit Internet Material and the Sexualization of the Male body

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The purpose of this research was to extend current research regarding the use of sexual explicit Internet material to the sexualization of the male body, since research thus far has mainly focused on the female body. Based on data from the LISS panel of CentERdata among adolescents aged 12 to 21, it can be concluded there is no positive causal relationship between sexual explicit Internet use and the sexualization of the male body. More specifically, my research tentatively suggests it is more likely that more sexual explicit Internet use leads to less sexualization of the male body. Analyses furthermore show that the reasons why people use the Internet and people's insecurity are not significantly related to this relationship. When controlling for social desirable responses when measuring accidentally encountering sexual explicit Internet material, my research shows there is no significant difference between a 6-item scale ranging from 1 to more than 4 times and a 6-item scale ranging from 1 to more than 7 times. My research furthermore shows there is no significant difference between asking respondents for the past 2 or 6 months they viewed films or videos of naked genitals or people having sex through the Internet.

Keywords: Internet, Media, Pornography, Sexualization, Objectification, Adolescents

Sex is a hot issue within media; it is displayed everywhere around us. Sex videos can be encountered on the Internet; sex is visible and talked about within many television programs; and sexy half-naked girls are often used in video clips. However, because within the different media forms there is often a distorted portrayal of sex and gender roles, it is no wonder that parents and guardians are worried about their children's views towards it. Parents feel the urge to protect their children from these supposedly bad influences sexual media content has on their children. This is particularly the case for the Internet where all content is widely accessible in the privacy of one's own room.

That gender roles are misrepresented in the media becomes clear by looking at research done on magazine and television content. Ward (2003) examined 41 studies done on the statistical analysis of television content and concluded that women's bodies are more often portrayed sexualized than men's bodies. It can be expected that this is similar for the video content that is available online. Furthermore, based on the studies on teen girl and women's magazines, Ward concludes that in these magazines there are traditional sexual role portrayals and there is an emphasis on women pleasing men through their bodies by, for instance, the portrayal of women as sexually desirable and attractive for men. In these same magazines, men are portrayed as lacking emotionally who need females to teach them with romantic relationships and emotional intimacy (Ward, 2003). It could be expected that similar portrayals are present on Internet-based versions of teen girl and women's magazines.

If it were just the case that sexuality is misrepresented, this wouldn't raise as much controversy. However, there are reasons to expect that this media use influences our perception of sexuality. While some people argue that in our open society teens and young adults are able to recognize what is good and bad regarding sex, are able to discuss it with their peers, and are able to make a good judgment about it; this does not necessarily mean it won't influence them when they are doing so. While it might be useful to discuss it with peers, these same peers are also under influence of the media. Furthermore, as Hurley (2004) points out in her research on media influence regarding imitation, a large part of the influence could be unconscious. Exactly for this reason, it is important to study to what extent sexual explicit media content influences adolescents in forming their identity and opinions.

Furthermore, the media could also function as a source of information. Adolescents may learn from that what they see within the media intentionally or unintentionally. Arnett (2002) points out that music and music videos could play a significant role in the love-related aspects of identity formation, which includes the development of a sense of one's sexuality and the development of oneself in relation to gender roles. Within music and music videos sexual actions are often portrayed as recreational, meaning that sex is solely plain fun. Furthermore, there are gender differences in these music videos which could promote gender stereotypes. However, we have to keep in mind that although many videos stereotype, there are also some which do quite the opposite and counter the typical stereotypes.

Besides sex being portrayed as recreational, in many videos and other media content, the body is objectified, which could lead to objectification of the body in daily life. Objectification theory occurs when women internalize the idea that women are mainly viewed as object to the men's desire. Sexual objectification can lead to physical consequences such as appearance anxiety, reduced flow, diminished internal awareness, body shame, and anxiety about physical safety. These, in turn, can lead to mental health risks such as disordered eating, depression, and sexual dysfunction. (Szymanski, Moffitt, & Carr, 2011) While most research is focused on women, Heimerdinger-Edward, Vogel, and Hammer (2011) point out that sexually objectifying environments may have a negative effect on men as well. Sexual objectification can decrease relationship intimacy for *both* women and men. In certain situations men might feel the pressure to conform to the dominant male role which objectifies women, while in other situations men are the ones objectified. Frith and Gleeson (2004) note that men are increasingly pressured to have the appearance of an ideal body demonstrated in the media. Although not nearly as much as women, men are increasingly objectified in the media.

LITERATURE OVERVIEW

Sexual objectification and other messages which are intentionally or unintentionally put within media content can influence adolescents' views towards sex and gender. Evidence suggests that there is a relationship between sexual attitudes and sexual stereotypes on the one hand and (sexually explicit) media use on the other hand. I will now elaborate on several researchers who have investigated this from different points of view.

Ward (2002) researched both male and female students aged 18 to 22. By combining experimental research with questionnaires, Ward tried to establish the causal relationship by applying a correlational and experimental method. Among females in the experimental group, who watched videos of sexual nature, sexual stereotypes were significantly more present than among females in the control group who were shown videos with non-sexual content. Furthermore, both the experimental exposure to sexual content and several dimensions of media use significantly predicted sexual attitudes and presence of sexual stereotypes. However, as the group researched only consists of college students attending a psychology class, it is not very diverse and therefore suffers from generalization problems.

In a literature overview Ward (2003) concludes that media exposure is consistently correlated with students' sexual attitudes, expectations, and behaviors. Regarding experimental research done to establish a causal relationship, Ward concludes that although it depends what variables are exactly researched, the general result is that students who are exposed to sexual content are more likely to have sexist and stereotypical ideas about sexual relationships. The question is, however, if these effects are merely temporary or have a lasting effect which is applied within their behaviors.

Research by Peter and Valkenburg (2007) indicates that within the age range of 13-18 year olds being exposed to media content with semi-explicit or explicit sexual content is associated with the idea of women as sex objects. Their research extends to previous research by noting the hierarchical, rather than cumulative, pattern of sexual media. This means that exposure to sexual explicit content and exposure to content in audio-visual format have a more powerful effect than exposure to non-sexual explicit content and exposure to content in traditional and visual media formats.

Gordon (2008) extends the research by focusing on African American female high school students. She discovers that identification with, rather than exposure to, media portrayals of women as sex objects influences Black women's opinion about the importance of being attractive. The question is whether the results are generalizable to all African American girls as the adolescents under study are predominantly living in a Black environment and they may have different appearance issues than African American girls who live in a more multicultural environment. Furthermore the scale of appearance attitudes only has an alpha of 0.65 which might be due to the fact that the scale wasn't adapted to Black girls.

Ter Bogt et al (2010) surveyed 13 – 16 year old Dutch students regarding their exposure and preference to three types of youth media, namely TV, music, and Internet. Media preference is a more important determinant of sexual attitudes and stereotypes than media exposure. However, unclear is whether adolescents with a certain preference adhere to these preferences.

In summary, there seems to be an established link between sexuality and sexual explicit material among adolescents. Adolescents who are exposed to more sexual explicit media are more inclined to stereotype genders and objectify women. Visual media use and the Internet are more

strongly related to these attitudes and intentions. Although it points towards the direction of causal link, based on the experimental studies that are done, this is not yet well established and a limit to most studies. In general, experiments examining the relationship between sexuality and Internet use suffer from the fact that media use and their sexual implications are often seen outside of their context. Furthermore, they fail to establish long term effects and focus moreover on the effect one particular situations has on the individual at that point in time. It may, however, be the case that adolescents need time to process the information and negotiate the meaning of it. Furthermore most experimental research makes use of college students which limits the generalizability to the whole society. Research regarding sexuality in general also suffers from the fact that it is self-reported data and response bias may play a role. Especially with sensitive subjects, people may answer questions based on what they perceive as normal within society.

Research shows that sexual explicit material has a larger effect than sexual non-explicit or semi-explicit material. In research by Peter and Valkenburg (2007), they discover that when including sexual explicit material, the effect of non-explicit material disappears and the effect of semi-explicit material is reduced. While they also include a variable measuring accidentally encountering sexual explicit Internet material in their analysis, they do not pay much attention to it. However, it may be important to consider this variable when determining an approach to reduce influence of sexual explicit Internet material. Regulations by parents, for instance, become more difficult when children accidentally encounter the material on the Internet.

Furthermore, even though it is investigated how the female body is perceived as sex object, this is not investigated for the male body. Indeed, females are more often portrayed as sex objects in the media. As Ward (2003) reports, women's bodies are more often sexualized: they are more often nude, objectified, or depicted as sexual object. However, this does not mean that there could be no consequences for how men are viewed after being exposed to more sexual content in the media. While feminists are outraged about how females are represented in the media, males are forgotten in their misrepresentation. What is the role of sexual explicit Internet material in the sexualization of the male body? In this study, I will use a wide age-range of 13 – 21 year-olds who reside in the Netherlands. Before I move on to the data analysis, I will try to construct a theoretical framework and look at how previous research can help us understand the relationship between media use and the view on the male body.

WE LEARN FROM “OUR SUPER-PEER” THE INTERNET

First of all, we have to realize that there are different agents that can influence adolescents' behavior. Socialization agents – such as family, religion, education, law, and media – play an important role in the development of gender roles. “It is through the process of socialization that boys and girls are encouraged to adopt and develop certain personality traits that are often referred to as masculine and feminine.” (Dietz, 1998, p. 426) Several authors suggest that peers are one of the most powerful social structures that contribute to shaping adolescents' view on sexuality (e.j. Carpenter, 2005 (on virginity); Wetherill, Neal, & Fromme, 2010; Whitbeck, Conger, & Kao, 1993). However, that does not signify that there are no other social structures that are important in youth's take on sexuality.

Research of L'Engle, Brown and Kenneavy (2006) compared media to other socialization agents among 12 – 15 years old in the Southern United States regarding youngster's sexual intentions and behaviors. Media use was measured by the proportion of sexual content in television, music, movies, and magazines youngsters were exposed to. Adolescents who are exposed to more sexual content in the media have higher levels of intention to have sex in the near future and both light and heavy sexual activity. Light sexual activity includes items ranging from having a crush to French kissing, while heavy sexual activity ranges from touching breasts to having sexual intercourse. L'Engle et al. furthermore discovered that media explained more variance of sexual intention and heavy sexual behavior than school and religion and explained the most variance in light sexual behavior. This shows that media is an important socialization agent regarding sexual intentions and behaviors. I expect this is not only the case for sexual intentions and behaviors, but also with regards to the thoughts adolescents have about sexuality and the male body.

Several times it has been suggested that media functions as ‘super peer’ (Escobar-Chaves, et al., 2005; L'Engle, Brown, & Kenneavy, 2006; Ward, 2002). Specifically adolescents who mature earlier than their real-life peers may turn to information or other adolescents they can find on the Internet. The anonymity of the Internet provides them a relatively safe and less embarrassing way to explore their sexuality. Whereas earlier generations had to rely on erotic magazines they first had to buy in a store, in contemporary time teenagers can browse on the Internet while having the comfort and privacy of their own room. (Brown, Halpern, & L'Engle, 2005). With the rise of the videotape, porno theaters had to close because of lack of visitors (Spoormans, 2007),

but with the rise of Internet pornography, privacy gets even more extended as people don't even have to go to a store where they could be seen buying pornographic movies.

We learn from the information and the peers we can find on the Internet which could shape our view on sexuality. Arnett (2002) points out that music and music videos could play a significant role in the love-related aspects of identity formation, which includes the development of a sense of one's sexuality and the development of oneself in relation to gender roles. The sexual content adolescents find on the Internet could counter the messages adolescents learn through the means of other socialization agents such as in the class room and from their family. On the Internet, sex is often portrayed as a risk-free and plain fun activity; only in rare occasions condoms or other contraception methods are used (L'Engle, et al., 2006). Adolescents are more likely to adopt behaviors of characters when they are realistically and attractively depicted and rewarded rather than punished for their behavior. (L'Engle, et al., 2006) The Internet provides this; therefore, based on the information and images they encounter on the Internet, adolescents could be encouraged to be more sexually active (Brown, et al., 2006). Lo and Wei (2005) confirmed this in their research on middle and high school students in Tapei, Taiwan. Students who are more exposed to Internet pornography – more so than pornography in traditional media – are more likely to accept sexual permissiveness and behave in such a way.

SEXUAL EXPLICIT CONTENT ON THE INTERNET

Sexual explicit media use can contribute to create a gender distortion and sexist notions (e.g. Escobar-Chaves, et al., 2005; Peter & Valkenburg, 2007; ter Bogt, Engels, Bogers, & Kloosterman, 2010). According to Spoormans, in contrary to the romantic story pornography is depicted by the lack of a narrative (2007). It's the genre that focuses on the depiction of lust. Pornography on the Internet becomes precisely interesting because of its wide accessibility. As mentioned by MacKinnon, "Pornography in cyberspace is pornography in society -- just broader, deeper, worse, and more of it." (1995, p. 1959) She also notes that "pornography on computers is part of real life, not apart from it" (1995, p. 1962). It is commonly noted that pornography materializes sexual gender inequality; women are subordinated (Lo & Wei, 2002). The focus is on the act, the pleasure of the body, and not on the romantic story and love between two people. The sexual content on the Internet – and pornography in particular – marks the society we live in and what is normal and appropriate with regards to our intentions and thoughts towards sexuality.

In pornography it is all about sex, about the body, about being good-looking, and it's not about the character of a person. When such an idea is frequently exposed to adolescents, they could internalize this idea and as a result find the bodily image more important. To illustrate and understand this process better, I try to look at the processes that possibly explain and mediate the relationship between Internet use and the sexualization of the male body.

WE IMITATE WHAT WE SEE AROUND US

In her study on the imitation of media violence, Hurley (2004) emphasizes the unconscious influences the media can have on us. She explains that part of being human, of learning about life, is imitating those we see around us. This can happen by imitating the means, the ends, or the means and ends. In case of full-fledged imitation, one copies the means and ends. In this case, one imitates someone else's goal and also the manner in which the goal is achieved. If one would only copy the goal, we speak of emulation. It is also possible that one only copies a certain behavior without achieving the actual goal or with a different or no goal in mind. Hurley points out that humans tend to copy the means regardless of whether it seems the most efficient manner of achieving the goal or not.

Hurley furthermore emphasizes in her research on imitation of media violence, that a large part of media effects could be unconscious. The act of performing more violence after seeing more violence in the media is a largely unconscious effect that "bypass[es] processes of autonomous deliberation and control, in terms of which we normally conceive our actions." (Hurley, 2004, p. 184) Besides that we do not recognize this automatic response, we do not acknowledge the effect exists either. This is also illustrated in the third-person effect. This effect states that people are inclined to think the mass media has a larger effect on others than on themselves. In socially less desirable topics such as pornography this effect appears to be stronger (Lo & Wei, 2002).

When copying the means, the ends, or the means and ends of viewing sexual explicit Internet material, several effects could occur. As mentioned before, in pornography there is an explicit focus on the body and the sexual actions. In this aspect, adolescents could copy the actions they encounter, which would result into being more sexually active. Research shows this is indeed the case (L'Engle, et al., 2006; Lo & Wei, 2005). Besides copying the actual behavior, they could also copy the ideas displayed in the material, such as the bodily focus that is predominantly displayed within pornography. Research shows this is the case for objectifying the female body

(Peter & Valkenburg, 2007) and I think this is extendable to the male body. Therefore, I would like to propose the following hypotheses:

1a. Viewing more sexual explicit Internet material will lead to a greater sexualization of the male body.

1b. Accidentally encountering more sexual explicit Internet material will lead to a greater sexualization of the male body.

1c. More intentional viewing of sexual explicit Internet material will lead to a greater sexualization of the male body.

It is assumable that when one is more engaged in the intentional viewing of sexual explicit Internet material than when one accidentally encounters photos or films with sexual content on the Internet. A study by Peter and Valkenburg (2010) shows that when one is more involved in sexual explicit Internet material, one is more uncertain about one's sexual beliefs and thoughts. It is not unlikely this is also the case for the sexualization of the male body. When one is more involved in material, one becomes less critical towards the content and is less likely to counter a message that is delivered within the content. (Peter & Valkenburg, 2010; Slater & Rouner, 2002). In this lesser state of awareness, one is thus more vulnerable to media influences. Therefore, because when one is intentionally viewing sexual explicit Internet material, one is more likely to be more involved than when one accidentally encounters the material, I would like to propose the following hypothesis:

1d. The effect of 1c is larger than the effect of 1b.

It becomes clear that adolescents use the Internet in several ways. As mentioned before, the Internet – as “super peer” – can provide adolescents the information they are lacking. One could imagine that if you see the Internet mainly as information source, sexual explicit Internet material could play a larger role on the sexualization of the male body. It is through the Internet that you could learn about what is important within a sexual relationship and you can be taught about how to see yourself in relation to your sex partner. If you think viewing sex on the Internet can teach you things about sex you otherwise wouldn't learn, it may teach you about the relationship between two (or more) persons maintaining a sexual relationship and it may also teach you about how to see their bodies in relation to this. While if you think people view sex on the Internet because it is arousing, you may be encouraged to think in purely bodily terms and carry this value on in your thoughts on the male body in relation to sexuality. Thus, these

different reasons to view sex on the Internet could encourage the sexualization of the male body. Therefore, I propose the following two hypotheses:

- 2a. *The reason people use the Internet mediates the relationship between sexual explicit Internet material on the objectification of men.*
- 2b. *The reason people view sex on the Internet mediates the relationship between sexual explicit Internet material on the objectification of men.*

RESORTING TO THE MEDIA WHEN WE ARE INSECURE ABOUT OURSELVES

Research shows that we do not blindly tend to accept what we hear in the media, rather, we select information with what matches our view (Mcquail, 2010). This does not only illustrate itself in the fact that sexually oriented people might be more inclined to view more sexual explicit Internet material, but this information will probably also be reinforced through the material they encounter. Thus, I expect that if one is more insecure and has a less stable image of sexuality and one's own body, one is more likely to be influenced by its surroundings. Besides the influence of peers, media could play a role in this too. Therefore, I would like to propose my final hypothesis:

3. *When one is more insecure, there is a stronger positive effect of sexual explicit Internet material on the sexualization of the male body.*

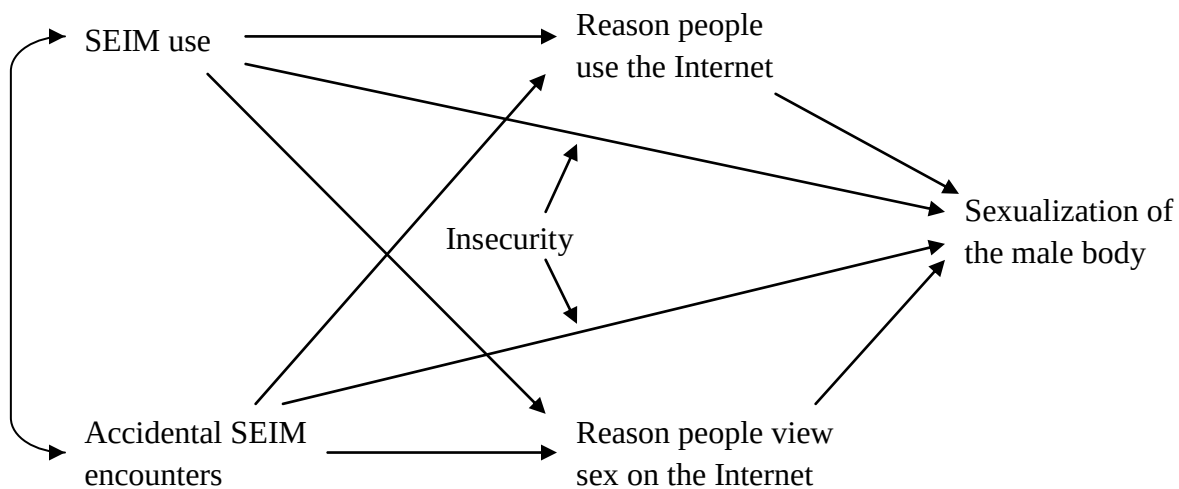


Figure 1. Proposed model of the effect of Sexual Explicit Internet Material (SEIM) use on the sexualization of the male body with its mediating and interacting variables

CONTROLLING THE EFFECTS AND BIASES

When analyzing the relationship between Internet and the attitude toward the sexualization of the male body, it is important to realize that people might be biased in answering questions. Some adolescents may not be comfortable expressing how often they watch sexual explicit Internet material. In multiple choice questions, respondents may not be comfortable filling in the largest number on a scale as they might feel it indicates they watch a lot of pornography. Respondents tend to use the scale provided as a frame of reference of what is normal in society and base their answer on this (Schwarz, Hippler, Deutsch, & Strack, 1985). This could mean that respondents underreport the amount of sexual explicit Internet material they view. To control for this influence, two different scales were used. Furthermore, memory bias could play a role, which is why responses to both two and six months are used. In an earlier study, Peter and Valkenburg (2006) indicated that with the lack of previous research indicating a specific time frame, they decided to opt for six months as period because it is not too long to for the respondent not to recall the amount of material they have seen and not too short to not have enough variance. In my research, part of the respondents were indeed exposed to a time-frame of six months and another part of the respondents were exposed to two months to see whether this generates a difference in response.

Furthermore it is important to look at some control variables that could influence the relationship between sexual explicit Internet material and the sexualization of the male body. First of all, gender could play an important role. Not only because we are looking at the objectification of a particular gender, which may differ precisely because it is not the human but the male body which is taken into account, but also the effect that gender plays within this effect. Females are generally known for viewing less pornography (e.j. Lo & Wei, 2005; Peter & Valkenburg, 2007) and it is possible females might be inclined to sexualize the male body more than males themselves. Previous research indicates that women are less likely to see women as sex objects (Peter & Valkenburg, 2007). Furthermore, sexual orientation could play a role because we are talking about the sexualization of a particular gender. Being attracted to males may lead to a greater sexualization of the male body. Age is another control variable that is important to consider. Younger adolescents may still be more influenced by the environment, whereas older adolescents may have already internalized messages delivered by the media, which would

illustrate in the effect that for younger adolescents the effect of media use on the sexualization of the male body is greater.

Furthermore, the data used in this research is conducted among Dutch adolescents. The Netherlands is known as a society with an open attitude regarding sexuality. This mostly results in a high use of contraception and therefore low rates of teenage births and abortions among girls younger than 20 years. However, that does not make the Netherlands unique in Europe as similar conclusion can be drawn about the Scandinavian countries (Unicef, 2001). These characteristics of the Netherlands only seem to benefit the present study as Dutch adolescents are sexually educated and might be more open about expressing their use of sexual explicit Internet material. Furthermore, while in the Netherlands there is a relatively high number of Internet users¹ (International Telecommunication Union, 2009), their Internet use does not seem to significantly differ from use by adolescents in other Western countries (Peter & Valkenburg, 2007).

SAMPLE AND PROCEDURE

This paper draws on data of the LISS panel of CentERdata, which is a study conducted in the Netherlands. The particular study used is called *sexuality and media use* and was conducted in September 2009 (wave 1) and March 2010 (wave 2). These two waves are used to optimally study the causal relationship. Individuals who participated in this study are based on a true probability sample of households drawn from the population register by Statistics Netherlands. The sample of this particular study consisted of the panel members aged 16 years or older and children of panel members between 12 and 15 years of age, whose parents gave consent for their participation in the study. The questionnaires are filled in on-line and for those who do not own a computer, a computer with Internet was provided to ensure this random sample.

The response rate was 4979 (62%). After limiting the respondents to being 21 years old or younger at the moment the first wave was conducted, there were 568 respondents left. Females are slightly overrepresented with 322 females (56.7%) against 246 males (43.3%). Only half of these respondents were confronted with sexual questions, whereas the other half was asked neutral questions. Analysis shows that the groups in which respondents were randomly assigned to do not significantly differ from each other in terms of age, gender and education. Some respondents did not complete both waves, to better compare the initial models to the models

¹ 88.6% of the population

using the two waves combined, I reduced the respondents to the 206 respondents who filled in the questionnaires concerning the variables I used completely. Analysis shows that they do not differ significantly from the tot 568 respondents in terms of age, gender, and education.

MEASURES

Sexualization of the male body. Respondents were asked to what extent they agreed with a number of statements about men. The statements are: (1) There is nothing wrong with a woman being interested in a man because he is good-looking. (2) An attractive man invites sexual advances from women. (3) If a man is sexually active, it makes him more attractive. (4) Men subconsciously always want to be persuaded to have sex. (5) There is nothing wrong with a women being especially interested in a male body. Respondents indicated to what degree they agreed with these five statements on a scale from 1 (disagree entirely) to 5 (agree entirely). The average of these five items together created a reliable scale with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.720 where all items contribute positively to its reliability.

Intentional Sexual Explicit Internet Material use (Intentional SEIM). Respondents were asked if they had intentionally viewed on the Internet (a) photos showing naked genitals; (b) films showing naked genitals; (c) photos showing people having sex; and (d) films showing people having sex. The variable *Intentional SEIM* is computed out of the average of these four items. In coherence with previous research, this is very reliable scale with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.917. To control for the memory biases mentioned earlier a quarter of the total respondents – thus half of the 206 respondents – were asked how often they had viewed sexual explicit Internet material the past two months on a scale from (1) never (2) Less than once a month (3) 1-3 times a month (4) once a week (5) Several times a week (6) Every day (7) Several times a day (8) I would rather not say, another quarter was confronted with the same scale but was asked to answer it for the past six months. An independent t-test shows they do not significantly differ from each other².

Another measure used for sexual explicit Internet use (which I called *Intentional SEIM types of sex*) is a scale composed out of the average of four items concerning the content of the photos and films people have come across during the past 6 months. These four items are: *showing sexual intercourse, showing group sexual intercourse, showing women having sex with other women, showing men having sex with other men*. The range of the scale is the same as for the

² Significance level is 0.338

other question ranging from never to several times a day and has an internal validity of 0.843. Though the item *showing men having sex with other men* does not positively contribute to the Cronbach's alpha, I decided to leave it in the scale because the scale is still sufficiently reliable and I believe it adds to the content and should be included in a general measure of sexual explicit Internet material.

Accidental Sexual Explicit Internet Material. Where Sexual Explicit Internet Use focuses on the *intentional* viewing of sexual content in the media, this variable measures *accidentally* encountering sexual explicit Internet material. This could, for instance, be spam e-mails, pop-ups, or sexual encounters among searches done on the Internet. While these pages might be closed rapidly and thus barely read or seen, it could indicate the sort of environment adolescents are exposed to in contemporary time. Respondents were asked to indicate how often over the past six months they were accidentally confronted with the following items on the Internet: (a) photos showing naked genitals; (b) films showing naked genitals; (c) photos showing people having sex; (d) films showing people having sex. The averages of these four responses generated the variable *Accidental SEIM*.

To see the effect of socially desirable response, two different scales were used. One scale consists of (1) Never (2) Once (3) Twice (4) 3 times (5) 4 times (6) More than 4 times (7) I would rather not say, whereas the other consists of (1) Never (2) 1-4 times (3) 5 times (4) 6 times (5) 7 times (6) More than 7 times (7) I would rather not say. The first scale (never to more than 4 times) ranged from 1 to 6 with a mean of 1.70 and standard deviation of 1.16 and a Cronbach's alpha of 0.878. The second scale (never to more than 7 times), which ranged from 1 to 4.5 with a mean of 1.46 and standard deviation of 0.78, has a Cronbach's alpha 0.805 and when combining them together³ a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.860 was found. When comparing the two different scales with the Pearson chi-square test, there is no significant difference in case of photos showing naked genitals⁴; no significant difference in case of films showing naked genitals⁵; no significant difference in case of photos showing people having sex⁶; and no significant difference

³ (1) Never (2) 1 – 4 times (3) 4 or more times

⁴ Value of 3.622, df =2, significance 0.163

⁵ Value of 2.956, df = 2, significance 0.228

⁶ Value of 0.810, df = 2, significance 0.667

when comparing these groups in case of films showing people having sex⁷; and when comparing the whole scale also no significant difference was found⁸.

Purpose of the Internet. Part of the respondents had to indicate to what degree ranging from disagree entirely (1) to agree entirely (5) they thought why people use the Internet. The only relevant reason I used in the analysis is to what extent the respondents agreed with *people use the Internet to find information*.

Purpose of Sex on the Internet. Part of the respondents had to indicate to what degree ranging from disagree entirely (1) to agree entirely (5) they thought why people views sex on the Internet. A first variable consists of the average of three recreational reasons generating a reliable scale with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.890. These three reasons are: *because it's arousing*, *because it's exciting*, and *because it's fun to do*. Additionally I included two other reasons separately in my analysis namely: *because practically everyone does it* and *because you can learn things about sex that you otherwise wouldn't learn*. The pleasure reasons correlate with an r of 0.426 to the learning reason and with an r of 0.393 to because everyone does it. Viewing sex on the Internet because it teaches you correlates with 0.431 to viewing sex because everyone does it.

Insecurity. Respondents indicated to what extent they feel related to statements related to making a good impression and insecurity. Based on 13 items related to insecurity and making a good impression, factor analysis shows three reliable components can be derived from these items. One scale, which I won't include in my analysis because of its lack of focus on insecurity, focuses on whether or not respondents think things thoroughly through. From the two components that I do use, one scale focuses on insecurity regarding the impression one makes or wants to have in front of others and has a Cronbachs alpha of 0.903 It is based on the average of the following five variables: (1) *I am concerned about the way I present myself*, (2) *I feel insecure about my appearance*, (3) *I am concerned about the way I do things*, (4) *I often worry whether I'm making a good impression*, (5) *I am concerned about what others think of me*. The other scale focuses more on the insecurity in relation to oneself and has a Cronbach's alpha of 0.768 and is based on the average of the following six variables: *I often think about why I feel the*

⁷ Value of 1.022, df = 2, significance 0.600. 1 cell (16.7%) has expected count less than 5.

⁸ Value of 5.598, df = 8, significance 0.692. 10 cells (55.6%) have expected count less than 5.

way I do, (2) I pay attention to my mood changes, (3) I spend a lot of time thinking about myself, (4) I often fantasize about myself, (5) I always wonder why I do certain things, (6) I sometimes feel as if I'm observing myself from a distance. The two scales significantly correlate with each other with an r of 0.524.

Age and gender. I used age as continuous variable, the age range used varied from 12 to 21 during the first wave. Female adolescents were coded 0; male adolescents were coded 1.

Attractiveness to women. As a control variable, respondents were asked for their sexual preference. This five-pointed scale consisted of the following items: (1) only to men/boys (2) especially to men/boys but to some extent also to women/girls (3) as much to men/boys as to women/girls (4) especially to women/girls, but to some extent also to men/boys (5) only to women/girls. Additionally there were 9 respondents who would rather not say it, and were therefore considered missing for this variable.

Internet use (days per week). Respondents were asked how many days a week they used the Internet ranging from 1 to 7.

Among the data gathered, 93 % of the respondents are attending school or still studying. Almost three quarters of the respondents uses the Internet every day of the week. Two third of the respondents admitted to watch sexual explicit Internet material on at least either of the two variables measuring the intentional viewing of sexual explicit Internet material. Almost two third of the respondents did not intentionally view photos or videos of naked genitals or sex based on the variable *Intentional SEIM*, and 42.6 % of the respondents admitted to watch one of the four types of sexual intercourse mentioned in *Intentional SEIM types of sex*. Almost half of the respondents accidentally encountered sexual explicit Internet material. Females significantly viewed less sexual explicit material on the Internet both intentionally⁹ and accidentally¹⁰. Whereas almost two thirds of the males admitted to watch sexual explicit Internet material, only one third of the females did so. Furthermore, as can be derived from Table 1, we can see that on average there was no increase in the sexualization of the male body; adolescents vary in increasingly seeing the male body sexualized from a decrease of 3 points on the initial scale from 1 to 5 to an increase of 2.4 points.

⁹ Standardized coefficient regression analysis gender on intentional SEIM: 0.399, significant on 0.000 level

¹⁰ Standardized coefficient regression analysis gender on accidental SEIM encounters: 0,253, significant on 0.000 level

Table 1. *Descriptive Statistics*

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Sexualization of the male body wave 1	206	1.00	4.20	2.8184	.70111
Sexualization of the male body wave 2 - wave 1	206	-2.60	2.40	.0146	.76278
Intentional SEIM wave 1	206	1.00	6.00	1.5667	1.04915
Intentional SEIM types of sex wave 1	206	1.00	5.00	1.5291	.86377
Accidental SEIM wave 1	206	0.00	2.00	.3471	.50089
Intentional SEIM wave 2 - wave 1	206	-2.25	3.25	.1153	.69956
Intentional SEIM types of sex wave 2 - wave 1	206	-3.25	3.00	.0316	.65628
Insecure towards others	206	1.00	4.80	2.8456	.89424
Insecure towards oneself	206	1.00	5.00	2.9725	.66487
Intentional SEIM * Insecure towards others	206	1.00	24.00	4.6905	3.49614
Intentional SEIM * Insecure towards self	206	1.00	25.20	4.5403	3.83954
People use the Internet mainly to find information.	111	2.00	5.00	4.14	.737
People view sex on the Internet because you can learn from it	95	1.00	5.00	3.13	1.003
People view sex on the Internet because practically everyone does it.	95	1.00	5.00	2.55	1.070
People view sex on the Internet because of recreational reasons	95	1.00	5.00	3.3965	.84397
Age	206	12	22	17.18	2.889
Gender (Female = 0)	206	0.00	1.00	.4612	.49970
Attractiveness to women	206	0.00	4.00	1.9369	1.97568
Internet use (days per week)	206	1	7	6.44	1.153

ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

SEXUAL EXPLICIT INTERNET MATERIAL AND THE SEXUALIZATION OF THE MALE BODY

In my first hypothesis, I theorized a causal relationship between sexual explicit Internet material and the sexualization of the male body. To test whether there indeed is a significant relationship between the two variables, I first ran a regression analysis in which all variables are taken from the first wave, as can be seen in table 2. The first model includes the variable of accidentally encountering Sexual Explicit Internet Material (SEIM). The second model considers intentionally viewing photos or videos of naked genitals or people having sex. This measure correlates highly ($r = 0.848$) with a third variable introduced in model 3 to measure sexual explicit Internet material which focuses moreover on viewing different types of sexual intercourse, such as group and homosexual sexual intercourse. As the two measures of intentionally viewing sexual explicit Internet material correlate highly, merely the first of these two is introduced in the fourth model, which still correlates with an r of 0.515 to encountering sexual explicit Internet material by accident.

Table 2. *Regression analysis of Internet use on sexualization of the male body taken from wave 1 (standardized coefficients)*

	Model I	Model II	Model III	Model IV
Accidental SEIM	0.224**			0.144
Intentional SEIM		0.262**		0.193*
Intentional SEIM types of sex			0.244**	
Internet Use (days per week)	0.047	0.038	0.034	0.034
Male	-0.091	-0.196	-0.063	-0.185
Attractiveness to women	0.026	0.090	-0.024	0.067
Age (12 – 22)	0.136	0.112	0.100	0.109
Adjusted R ²	0.057	0.065	0.058	0.076
N	206	206	206	206

* $p < 0.05$ ** $p < 0.01$

When looking at these models we notice for all three of the variables a positive relationship which suggests that more sexual explicit Internet material is associated with a greater sexualization of the male body. As all variables are taken from the same wave it indicates

nothing about a causal relationship that may be present. Considering my last part of my first hypothesis I indicated that the effect of intentionally viewing sexual explicit Internet material is larger than accidentally encountering. When we look at model IV in which both variables are taken into account we see intentionally viewing has a slightly higher coefficient. However, when comparing the first three models, accidentally encountering sexual content on the Internet has a larger explanatory value.

When considering the control variables only age has a significant effect on the sexualization of the male body. Further analysis shows, however, that while in this regression analysis a significant effect occurs, the effect of age is not linear, but moreover fluctuates. The other control variables do not significantly contribute to the sexualization of the male body. It is not important whether you are female or male and whether you are attracted to male or female regarding the extent to which one sexualizes the male body.

To further explore the causality of the relationship I decided to include variables of a second wave conducted 6 months after the first wave. While all independent variables remained from the first wave, the dependent variable was composed by the two waves combined. Two methods for studying effects and transitions are the change score (CS) method and lagged dependent variables (LDV) method. In the CS method a new variable is created that measures the difference between the same variable measured in wave 2 and wave 1. In the LDV method the analysis is run with the dependent variable taken from the second wave and this same variable from the first wave added into the regression analysis as independent variable. (Johnson, 2005) Both methods have its advantages and disadvantages and in this study I decided to apply the change score method because it is the better method to use if variables are more prone to measurement error which is the case with such a sensitive subject as sexuality.

The results of this regression analysis can be found in Table 3. When we look at the first three models in which I analyzed the three different measures of viewing sexual explicit Internet material, we notice in two cases no and in one case a negative relationship. This tentatively suggests that watching more sexual explicit Internet material *reduces* the sexualization of the male body in the long run, which means that an increase of watching sexual explicit Internet material results in lower rates of sexualization of the male body. However, it has to be noted that the models in table 3 have little to no explanatory value.

Looking again at the control variables, we see all of them have an insignificant influence on the sexualization of the male body. Whereas previous research indicates that on the objectification of the female body, gender plays a role, this is not the case for the sexualization of the male body. Age also does not play a role on the sexualization of the male body illustrating that there is a similar idea of sexualization about the male body present among all adolescents.

Table 3. *Regression analysis of Internet use on the increase of the sexualization of the male body applying the change score method (standardized coefficients)*

	Model I	Model II	Model III	Model IV
Accidental SEIM	-0.085			-0.022
Intentional SEIM		-0.163*		-0.153
Intentional SEIM Content			-0.128	
Internet use (days per week)	-0.031	-0.021	-0.022	-0.021
Male	0.177	0.253	0.169	0.252
Attractiveness to women	-0.136	-0.172	-0.107	-0.168
Age	0.035	0.055	0.057	0.056
Adjusted R ²	-0.014	0.001	-0.007	-0.004
N	206	206	206	206

*p<0.05 **p<0.01

To explore the relationship regarding the influence of direction even further, I decided to also run a regression analysis in which sexual explicit Internet material is the dependent variable which is illustrated in Table 4. Similar to how I computed the dependent variable in Table 3, I used as dependent variable the increase of intentionally viewing sexual explicit Internet material by subtracting the variable of intentionally viewing sexual explicit Internet material from the first wave from this same variable taken from the second wave. The two models in Table 4 show there is no causal relationship of the sexualization of the male body operating on exposure to sexual explicit Internet material. We can thus conclude that having a sexualized viewpoint on the male body does not lead to viewing more sexual explicit material on the Internet. Thus, it seems more likely that there is no causal relationship between the two variables. While we stated before that gender had a significant impact on the amount of sexual explicit Internet material viewed, it does not influence an *increase* in viewing this kind of material.

Table 4. *Regression analysis of the sexualization of the male body on increased Internet use (standardized coefficients)*

	Model I	Model II
	(Intentional SEIM wave 2)	(Intentional SEIM Types of sex wave 2)
Sexualization of the male body	0.026	-0.008
Internet use (days per week)	-0.083	-0.081
Male	-0.194	0.248
Attractiveness to women	0.272	-0.218
Age	-0.122	-0.139
Adjusted R ²	0.013	0.014
N	206	206

*p<0.05 **p<0.01

THE EFFECT OF THE PURPOSE OF INTERNET USE

As hypothesized, I theorized that using the Internet as information source mediates the relationship between Internet use and the sexualization of the male body. To explore these relationships I decided to run some regression analyses. The first two models only make use of the variables from the first wave while the third to seventh model use the Change Score method to explore the causal relationship. I decided to only include the variable of *Intentional SEIM* because this is the only significant variable found Table 3 and the three variables to measure sexual explicit Internet material correlate with each other. As mentioned before, respondents were separated in different groups and only a part of the respondents had to answer particular questions. Respondents either had to answer why they considered people use the Internet *or* why they thought people view sex on the Internet. As a result, the regression analysis is run on two separate groups and could not be performed with *all* variables included in the regression analysis.

The results in Table 5 suggest that the variables are not able to explain variance when looking at the change in adolescents view regarding the sexualization of the male body. The only significant effect on the sexualization of the male body is viewing sex on the Internet because of recreational reason. It is not unlikely to assume this is a spurious relationship as we see this association does not occur when we look at the change of the sexualization of the male body signifying it is not a causal relationship.

Table 5. *Regression analysis of Internet use on sexualization of the male body (standardized coefficients)*

	Model I (wave 1)	Model II (wave 1)	Model III (wave 2 – wave 1)	Model IV (wave 2 – wave 1)	Model V (wave 2 – wave 1)	Model VI (wave 2 – wave 1)	Model VII (wave 2 – wave 1)
Y (Sexualization of the male body)							
Accidental SEIM							
Intentional SEIM	0.179*	0.129	-0.144	-0.144	-0.182	-0.161	-0.143
Intentional SEIM content							
Using the Internet to find information.	0.073		0.069				
Viewing sex on the Internet:							
because practically everyone does it		0.200				-0.063	-0.090
because you can learn things about sex that you otherwise wouldn't learn		0.113			0.093		0.148
because of recreational reasons (fun, exciting, and arousing)		0.272*		-0.068			-0.085
Internet use (days per week)	0.071	-0.076	-0.148	0.187	0.161	0.180	0.176
Male	-0.198	0.030	0.152	0.286	0.339	0.321	0.249
Attractiveness to women	0.079	-0.093	-0.046	-0.268	-0.308	-0.279	-0.229
Age	0.087	0.007	0.048	0.035	-0.013	0.026	0.013
Adjusted R ²	0.032	0.173	0.001	-0.003	0.001	-0.003	-0.008
N	111	95	111	95	95	95	95

*p<0.05 ** p<0.01

Table 6. *Regression analysis of Internet use on the increase of the sexualization of the male body (standardized coefficients)*

	Model 0	Model I	Model II	Model III	Model IV	Model V
Intentional SEIM		-0.131	-0.157	-0.375	0.063	0.041
Insecurity towards others	-0.153	-0.110		-0.218		-0.351*
Insecurity towards oneself	0.018		-0.029		0.038	0.242
Insecurity towards others *				0.287		0.634
Intentional SEIM						
Insecurity towards oneself					-0.237	-0.770
* Intentional SEIM						
Internet use (days per week)	-0.031	-0.020	-0.022	-0.021	-0.024	-0.027
Male	0.131	0.215	0.253	0.206	0.259	0.213
Attractiveness to women	-0.156	-0.181	-0.183	-0.174	-0.189	-0.177
Age	0.003	0.033	0.055	0.031	0.054	0.022
Adjusted R ²	-0.006	0.006	-0.003	0.007	-0.007	0.009
N	206	206	206	206	206	206

* $p < 0.05$ ** $p < 0.01$ **THE EFFECT OF THE CONSCIOUSNESS OF YOUR BODY**

In my last hypothesis I theorized that people who are more insecure will experience a larger effect of sexual explicit Internet material as because of their insecurity they can be influenced more by the media. While I also ran a regression analysis where the dependent variable is from wave 1, this did not generate significant effect among the insecurity variables and as the main focus is on the causal relationship, I decided not to include these tables in my text. In Table 6 the regression analyses with insecurity as interacting variable can be found. We have to keep in mind that the measures of insecurity are correlated with an r of 0.524, and thus relate to each other as well. We notice that the effect of intentionally viewing sexual explicit Internet material is only present when insecurity towards oneself is introduced in the model with all variables included. This illustrates insecurity probably does not play a role to the influence sexual explicit Internet use has on the sexualization of the male body.

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

Internet is used frequently by young adolescents; almost three quarter of our sample used the Internet every day. The nature of the Internet gives adolescents the freedom to look at sexual images and videos in the privacy of their own home. In our sample, almost half of the adolescents admitted to at least intentionally watch some form of sexual explicit Internet material. The media is frequently named as having a socializing function regarding sexual attitudes. Research has shown that sexual media content influences the way we sexualize and objectify the female body (Peter & Valkenburg, 2007; Ward, 2002; Ward & Friedman, 2006); with the increasing amount of objectification of the male body in the media, I wanted to extend this hypothesis to the male body.

My research initially shows that there is a positive relationship between the sexualization of the male body and the use of sexual Internet material, but not indicating any direction of causality. However when using the change score method to test its causality, it can be seen there is no positive causal relationship, and in fact in case of a particular measure of intentionally viewing sexual explicit Internet material the association turns into a negative causal relationship. This would suggest that, contrary to what is usually thought, watching sexual explicit Internet material *reduces* the sexualization of the male body. Therefore, this research calls to the attention to look at the long-term effect and the direction of influence regarding sexual explicit Internet material and adolescents' sexual attitudes. This suggests that while viewing pornography could create a stronger sense of sexuality, this view is balanced out by other factors. While I theorized that adolescents could be influenced (unconsciously) by the media and copy the values expressed within the material viewed, it is more likely that adolescents do not blindly take over what is in the media, but negotiate the meaning of what they encounter.

Furthermore, my research also suggests that when setting up experimental designs, we have to take into account the long term effect. If it is the case that adolescents need time to negotiate the meaning of what they encounter on the Internet, there might be a different short term effect than a long term effect of media exposure. Experimental research often focus on short term effect by showing two groups of people a different set of images and looking at the different set of opinions they have almost immediately afterwards. In this case it could be important to have a follow up questionnaire in these cases to show that the effect actually lasts. Except for the long-

term effect of media-use on sexual attitudes, my research also indicates we have to be careful regarding the direction of influence. Many researches indicate they have difficulties establishing a causal relationship and refer to experimental designs to illustrate it is not unlikely to assume there is a causal effect.

Another possible explanation why there is no relationship between sexualization of the male body and watching sexual explicit Internet material is that, although the objectification of the male body is increasingly present within the media, this is not enough to generate a lasting effect. With the current research setup, it is not clear what exactly adolescents viewed on the Internet. While a difference can be made between viewing photos or films showing sexual intercourse, showing group sexual intercourse, showing women having sex with other women, or showing men having sex with other men, it is impossible to determine whether the content people watched was really objectifying the male or female body.

Regarding variables that could possibly mediate this relationship; I looked at the reason why people use the Internet and the reasons why people view sex on the Internet. I found that none of these variables have a significant causal influence on the sexualization of the male body. It is possible that the only significant effect, which occurs regarding viewing sex on the Internet because of recreational reasons when considering the variables from the same wave, is due to a spurious relationship with the variable influencing both being a particular attitude towards sex, such as sex is purely for recreational reasons. With a mind-set in which one thinks of sex as purely recreational and sees the (attractive) body as an instrument for this, one could be more inclined to sexualize both the male and female body. At the same time, I expect that these people are more likely to view sex on the Internet for recreational reasons. Furthermore, as can be seen in Table 1, most respondents considered that an important reason to use the Internet is for information. Not even a single respondent disagreed entirely with this statement. Respondents may have, moreover, referred to the search engines and the broad amount of information that is available on-line when one actively looks to be educated rather than the subtle implicit information that is carried out within sexual explicit Internet material. Furthermore, it could be the case that people who think you can learn from watching sex on the Internet moreover refer to more practical and explicit concerns, such as different ways of having sex, rather than to the implicit behavior rules while being engaged in a sexual relationship. Thus, it may be that for

these reasons these variables did not mediate the relationship between the exposure to sexual explicit Internet material and the sexualization of the male body. Furthermore, a limitation to this question is that it states “Why do you think *people* view sex on the Internet?”¹¹ rather than why these *particular individuals* view sex on the Internet. As can be shown with the third person effect, people are more likely to think others do particular kind of things. Therefore, it could also be that people are more inclined to think *others* view sex on the Internet for recreational reasons, while not doing so themselves.

Next to some of the limitations already mentioned, it might be better to have a larger number of cases. As the research was designed in a way to control for a number of options, in some cases the number of respondents was relatively low. If there were more cases, it would also be possible to generate two different age-groups. While I initially intended to do so, the limited number of cases stopped me from doing so. A large part of existing research only focuses on a particular age-group, but it might be interesting to compare younger adolescents with older adolescents and perhaps even adults. Though my research shows age did not seem to have a significant effect on the sexualization of the male body, I do not see it as impossible that there are differences between different ages because of the different stages of life they are in. When comparing different age groups, developmental trends could be developed and it could be discovered whether the association between media use and sexual attitudes remains present throughout adult life. As Ward points out it may be the case that “with more opportunity, less parental constraint, and more sexualized peer norms, the contributions uncovered here may be more influential among emergent adults than among younger adolescents. Additional work is needed, examining developmental trends in these issues.” (Ward, 2002, p. 13)

In my research I controlled for response and memory bias. To control for the effects category range has on responding, respondents were confronted with a 6-item scale that ranged from 1 to more than 7 times *or* a 6-item scale that ranged from 1 to more than 4 times. Analysis showed that the two scales did not significantly differ from each other, which illustrates that while it is a sensitive subject both scales can be used to measure sexual explicit Internet use. To control for memory bias respondents reported how often they viewed photos or film of naked genitals or

¹¹ Italics added for emphasis

people having sex either in the past 2 *or* past 6 months. Analysis shows there is no significant difference between these two periods of time, illustrating that both can be used in future research.

While the females in this study reported watching less sexual explicit Internet material and also encountering less often sexual explicit Internet material by accident, there is no gender difference regarding the sexualization of the male body. This is contrary to what is found regarding the notion of women as sex object, which is to a smaller extent present within girls (Peter & Valkenburg, 2007) This indicates once again that the double standard is present in daily life. While my research tried to look at the other side of the double standard, I notice that the consequences of watching pornography on the Internet is not as serious for males as it is for the view on females indicated by previous studies. Perhaps, future studies could examine this difference more by including influences on both genders in one study and explore the differences women and men experience. While most studies focus merely on females, it might be good to include males to explore better what is the difference between the genders.

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