

Prof Marieke Dewitte

Psychologue clinicienne-sexologue, Professeure adjointe au Département des Sciences Psychologiques Cliniques de l'Université de Maastricht, Secrétaire Générale du European Society of Sexual Medicine,
Rédactrice en chef du Dutch Journal of Sexology

Let's talk about sex(ual pleasure)



Towards a definition of sexual pleasure

- Different meanings of sex
- Different motivations to have sex



Why sex?

237 reasons (*Meston & Buss, 2007*)

- Reproduction -> Why more sex than needed (2 x 30)?
- **Pleasure!**
- Intimacy and love
- Routine
- Stress reduction
- Social status, instrumental motives
- Mate guarding
- Self-esteem boost

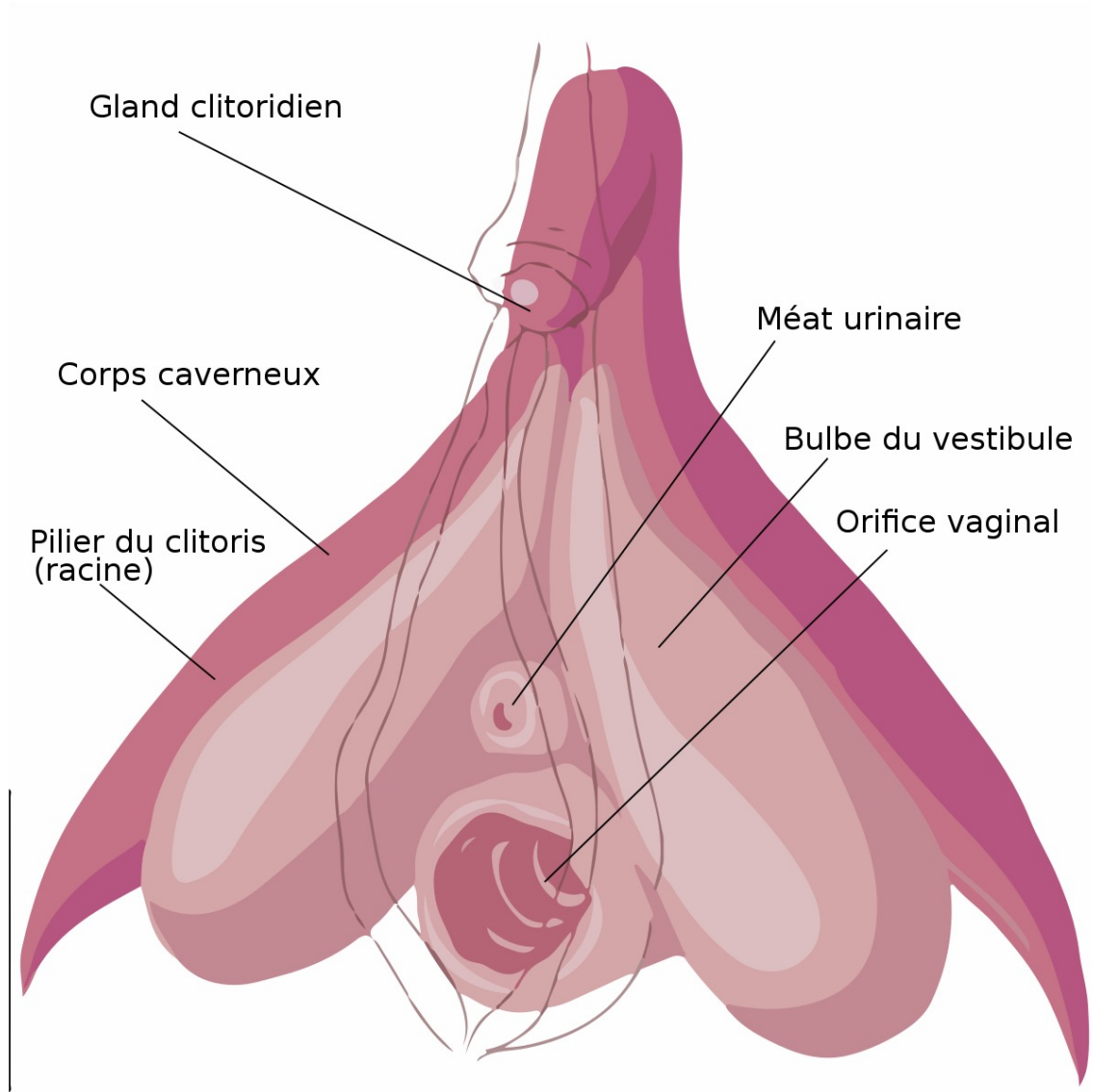
Motives differ and change!

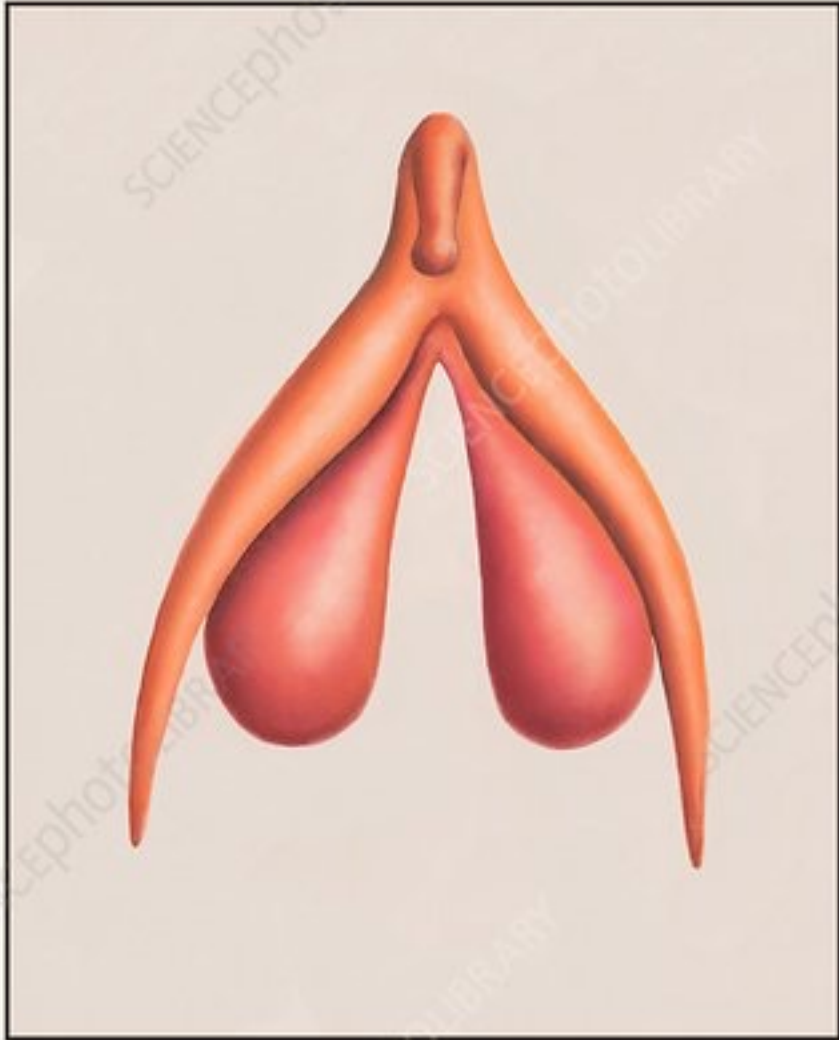


Towards a more inclusive, diverse and biopsychosocial approach to sex

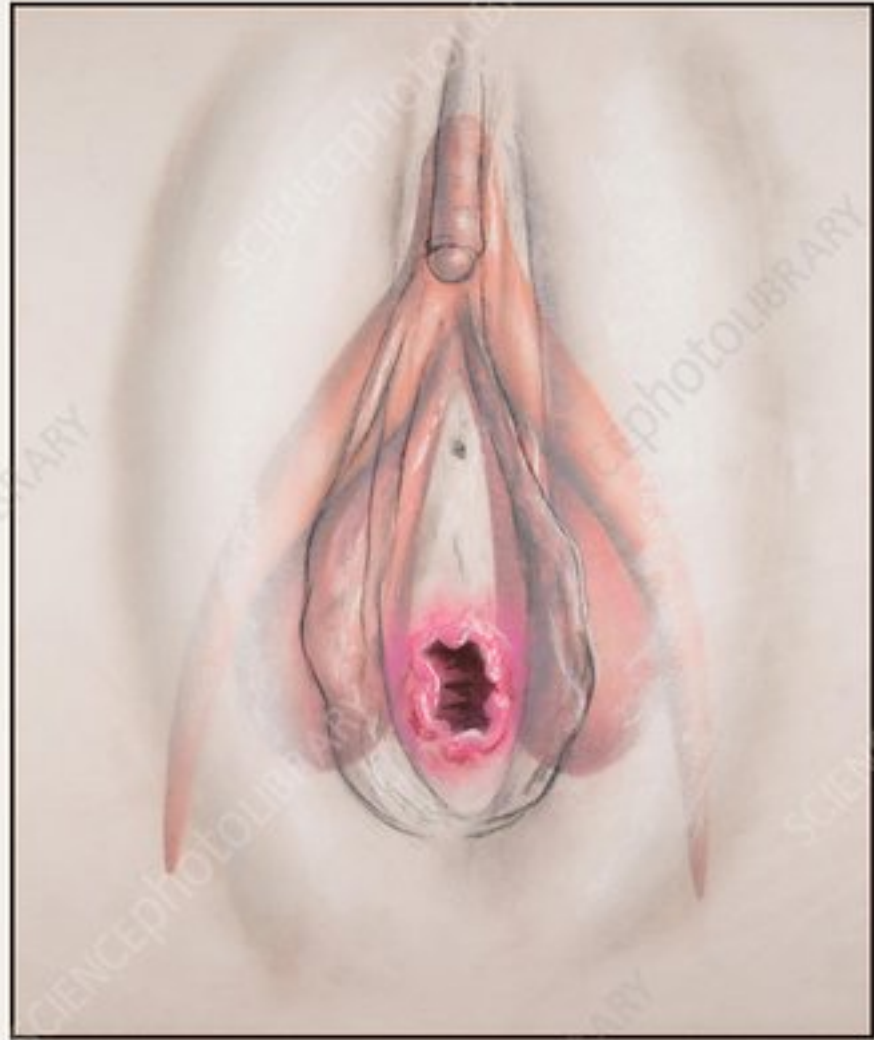
- Biology -> biopsychosocial
- Male gaze -> female gaze
- Penis -> clitoris







Clitoris



Clitoris Behind Vulva

Towards a more inclusive, diverse and biopsychosocial approach to sex

- Gender differences -> gender overlap -> gender equality
- Prevention, illness -> sexual pleasure



Sexual pleasure

- Pleasure as strong motivator for sex -> positive reinforcement
- Pleasure has been neglected for a long time -> focus on sexual function
- Sexual rights are human rights
- WAS: sexual pleasure is key to sexual health and rights



Why longtime no focus on sexual pleasure?

- Sex as an uncontrollable **biological drive**
 - **Repression**
 - Focus on **risks** and potential **negative outcomes** (danger, sin, shame)
 - Sexual desire/pleasure are **dangerous** and a **threat** to social, religious and political order
 - Sexual pleasure as a **pathology** -> masturbation, homosexual desire, overt sexual interest as psychiatric illness and perversion

Why longtime no focus on sexual pleasure?

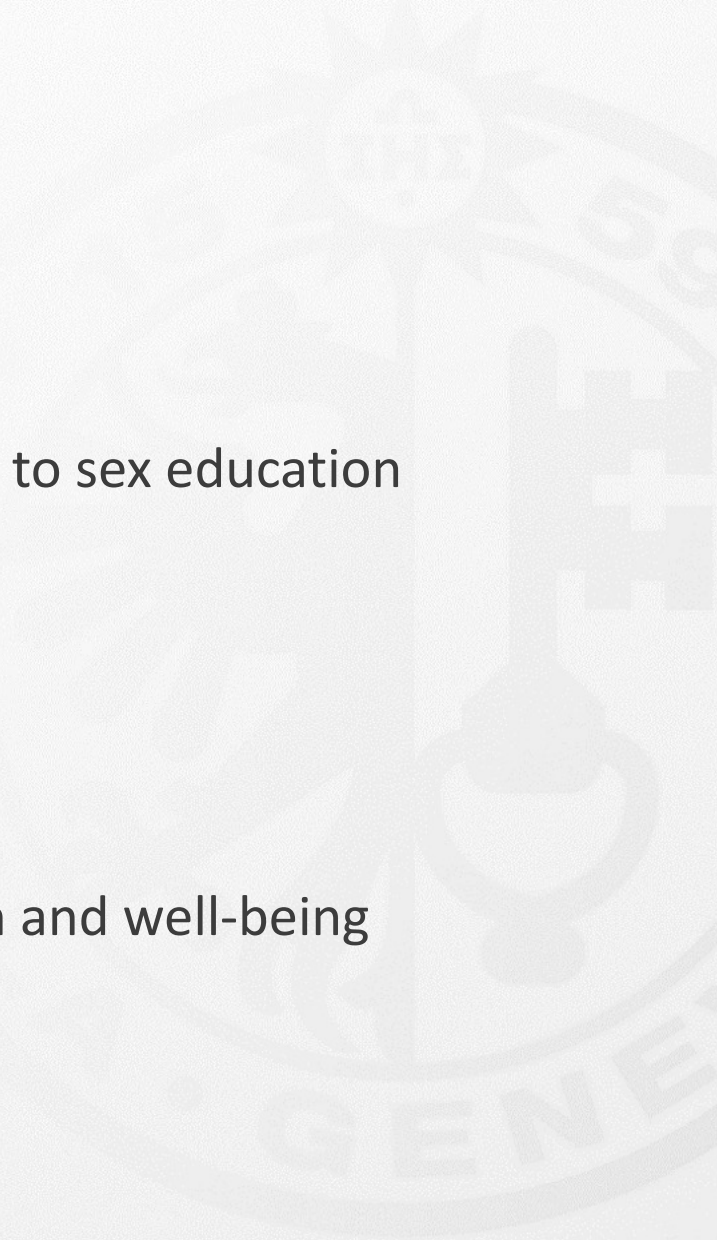
Risk approach (abstinence) vs. **positive approach (pleasure) to sex education**



More sexual risk behavior, lower sexual health



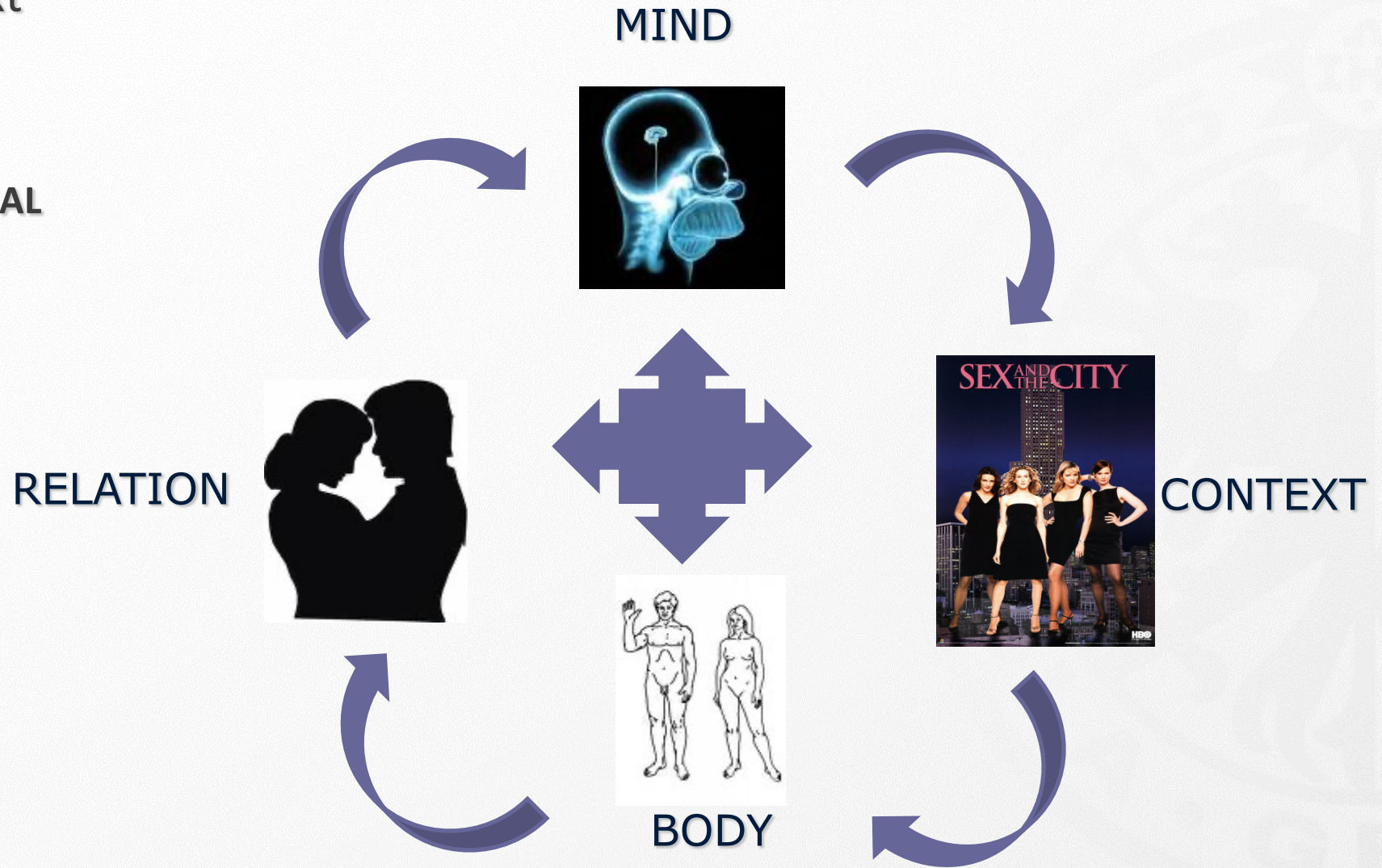
Better sexual health and well-being

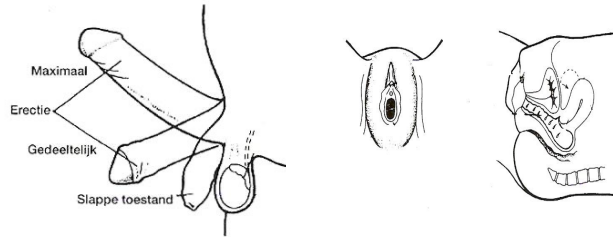
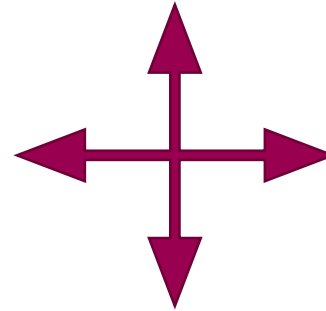
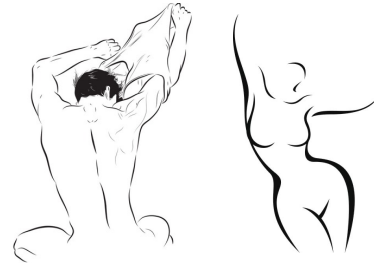
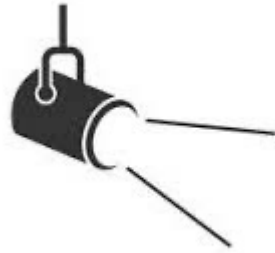


Interplay between body,
mind and context

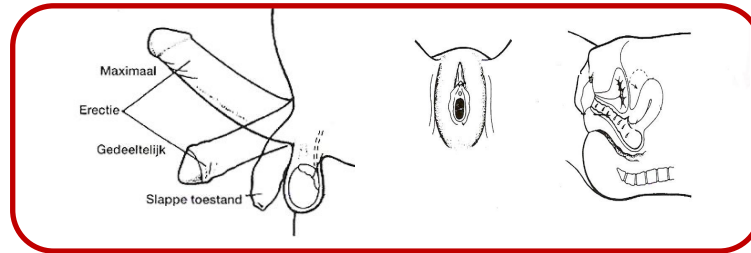
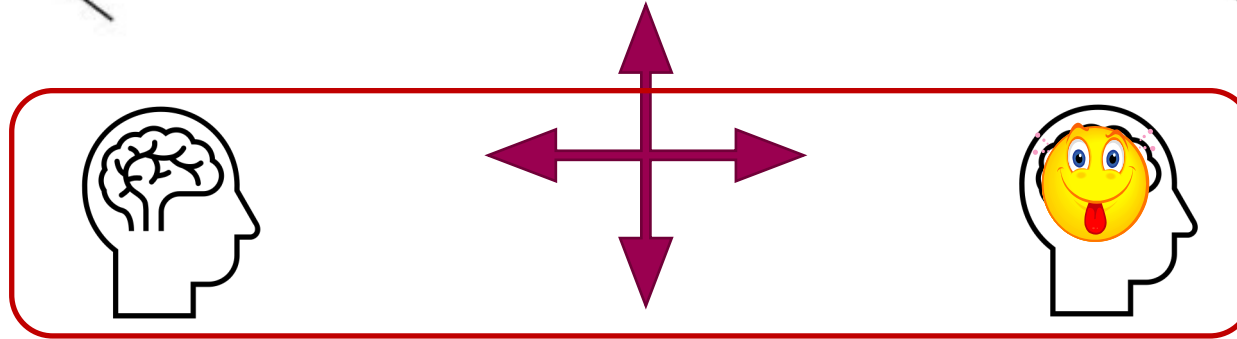
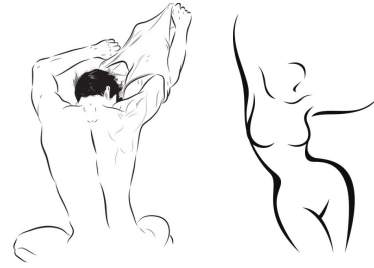
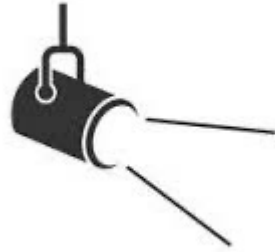


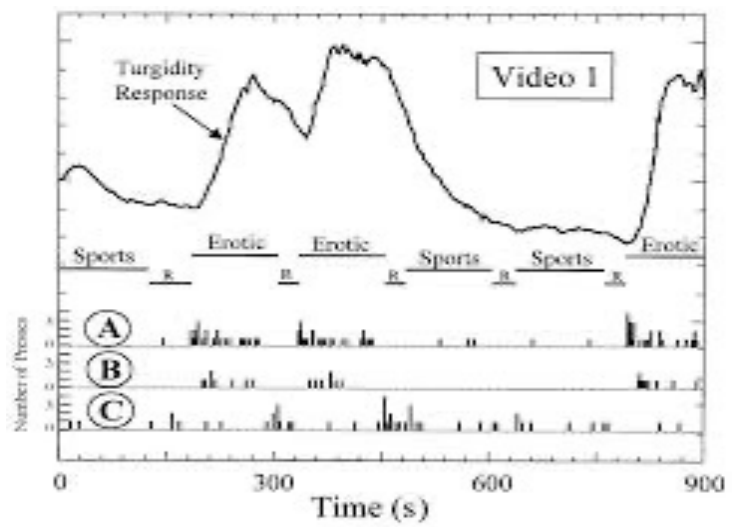
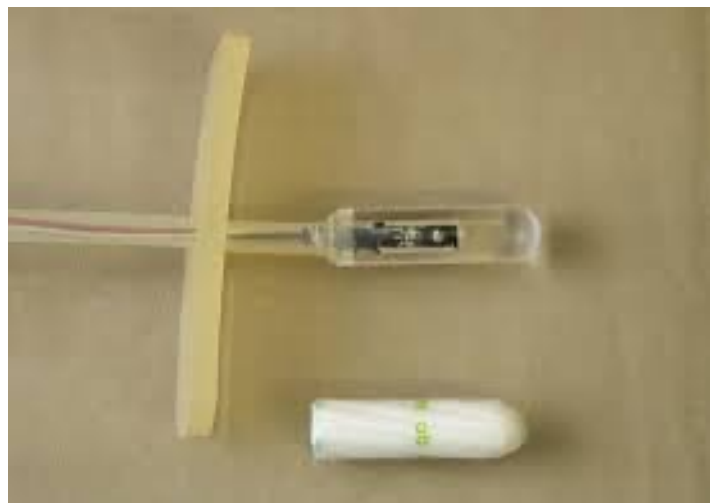
BIOPSYCHOSOCIAL



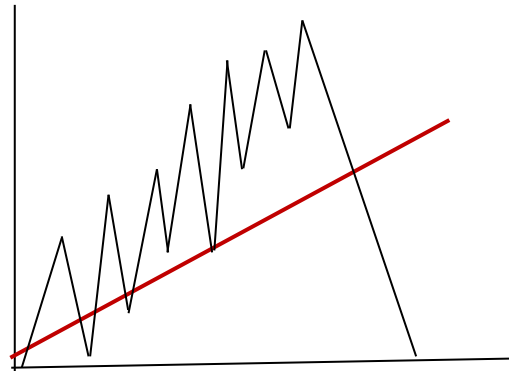


**Men and women:
Same components,
different organisation**

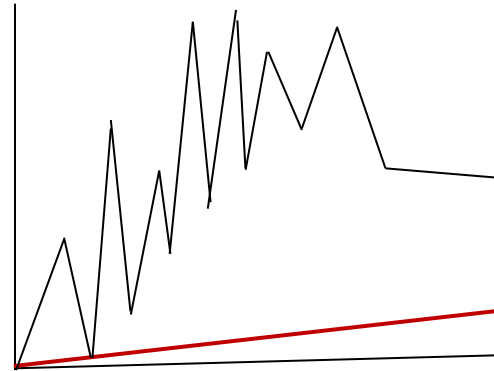




♂

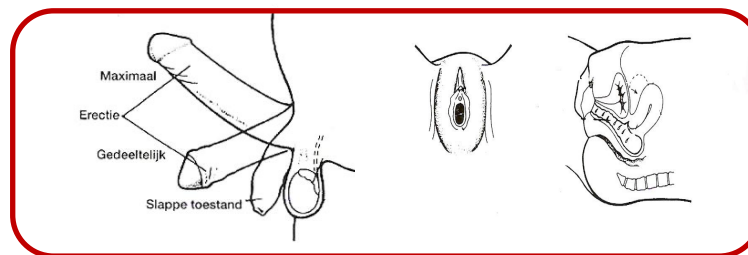
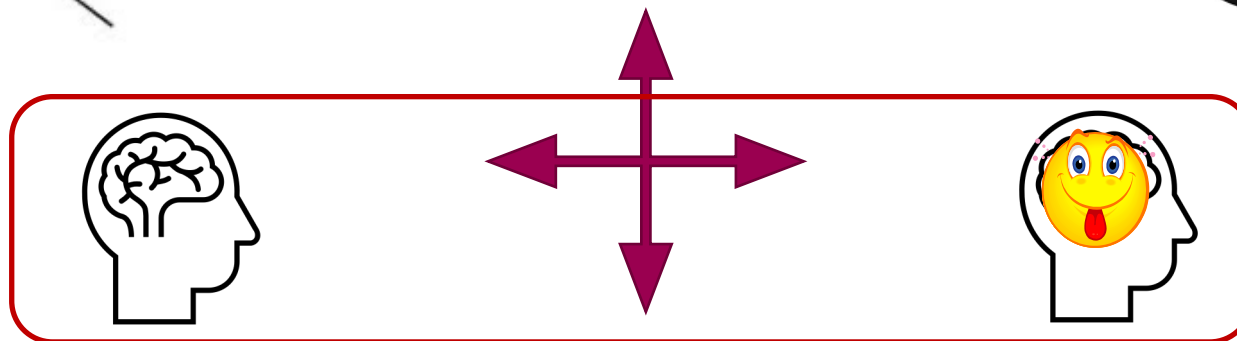
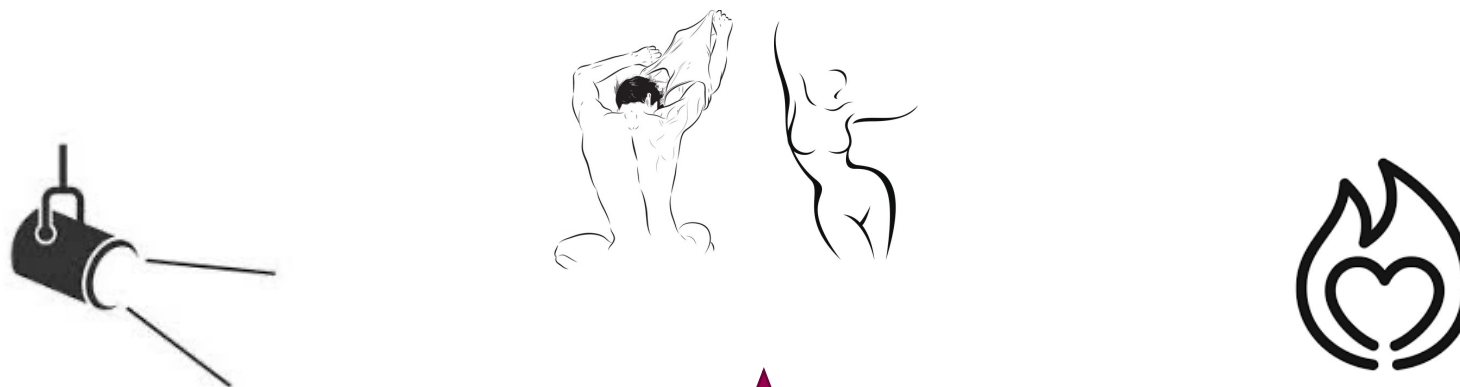


♀



— Genital arousal

— Subjective arousal



Is sex rewarding enough?

Sexual desire

- Women don't have less desire than men -> sex is not rewarding enough
- Male sexual script -> intercourse
- "Foreplay" -> *Sex is more than penetration*
- Less experience with genitals
- Less focused on bodily signals -> context
- Sexual desire is **responsive**, not spontaneous

WHAT'S ON A MAN'S MIND



LIBIDO does not exist

Sexual stimulus

Sexual arousal

Sexual motivation

WHAT'S ON A MAN'S MIND



LIBIDO does not exist

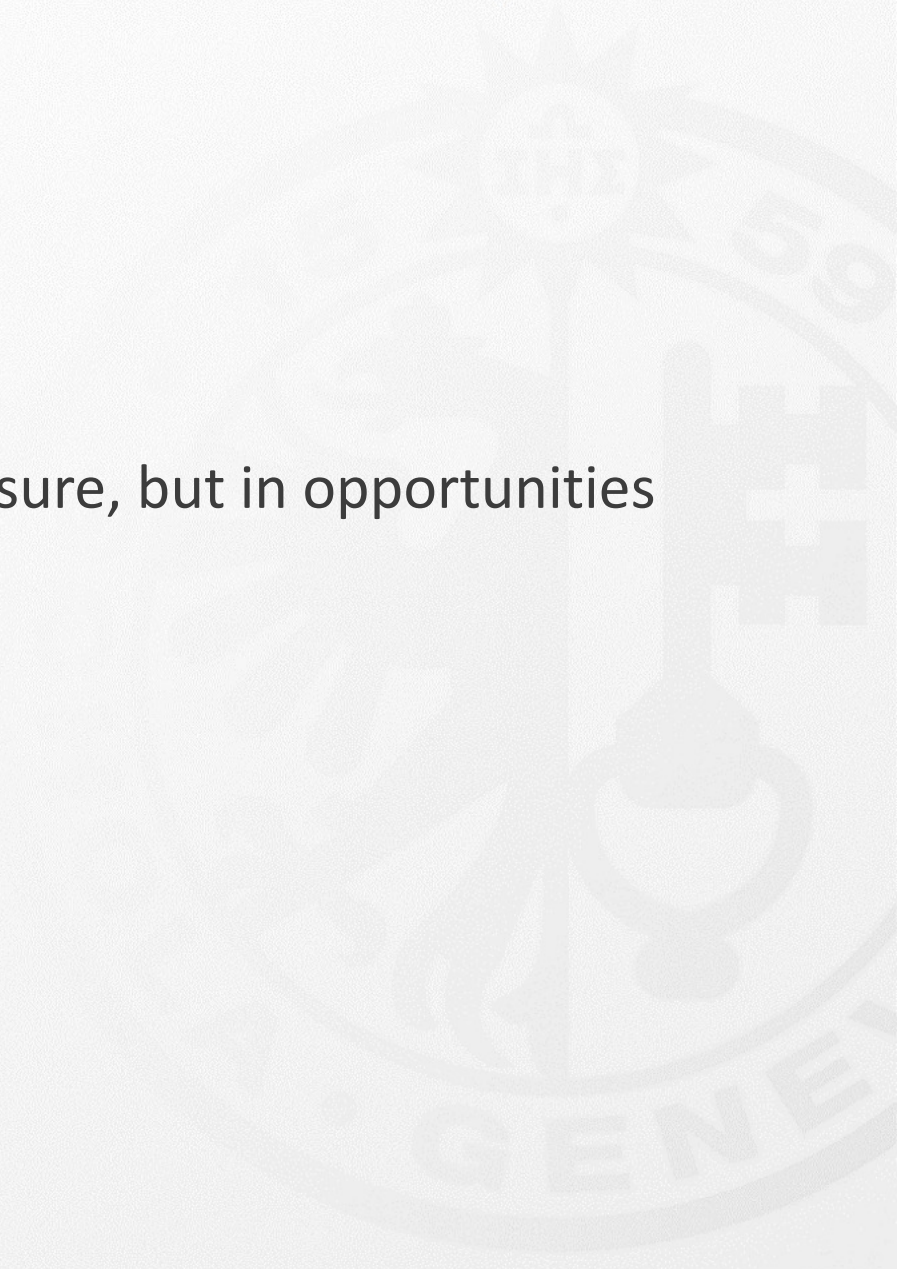
Sexual stimulus

Sexual arousal

Sexual motivation

Previous experiences, also
neurotransmitters, hormones (e.g., T)

Men and women do not differ in capacity for sexual pleasure, but in opportunities for sexual pleasure (*Laan et al, 2021*)



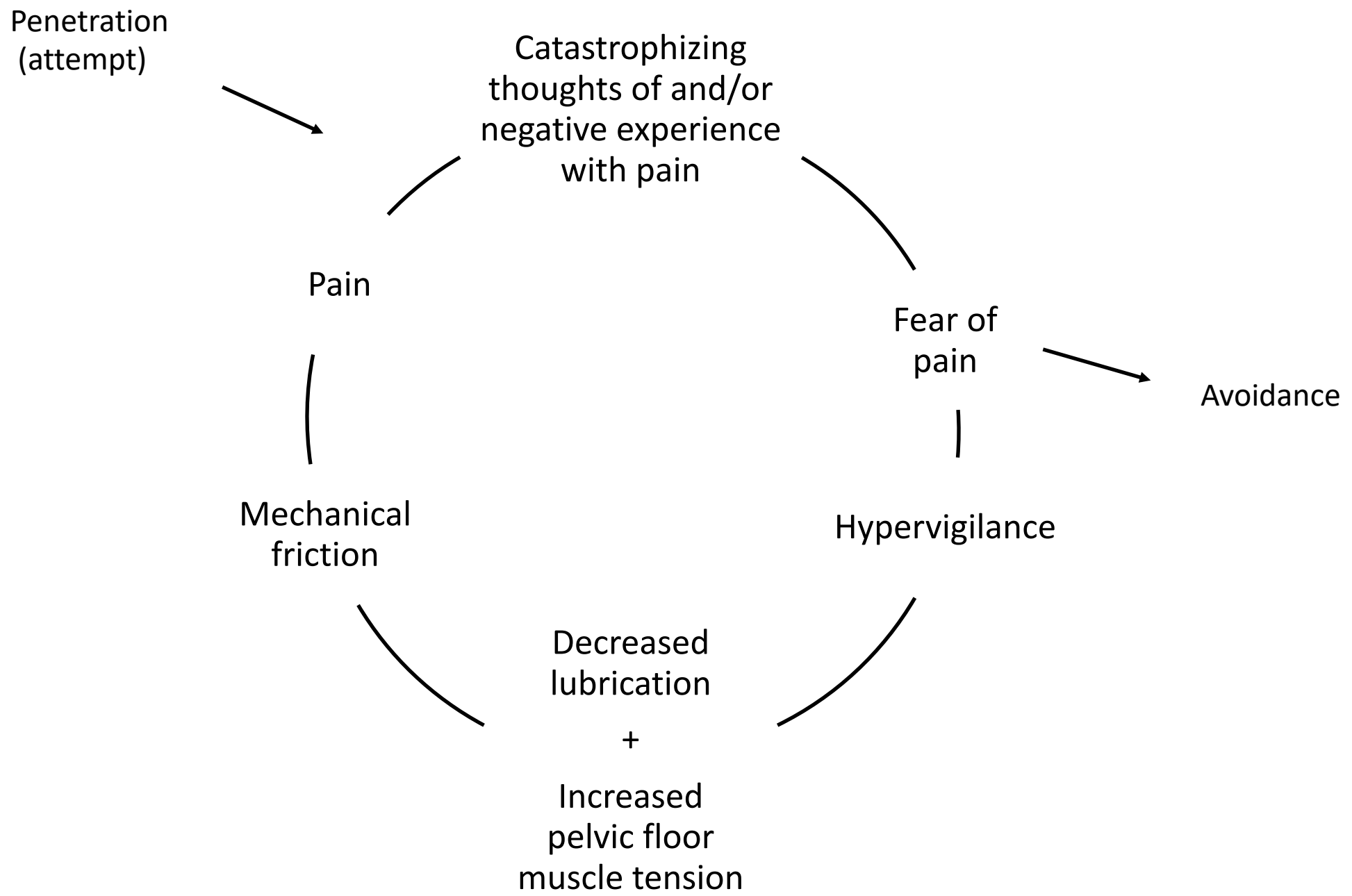
Sexual desire as dyadic process

- Difference between partners in when, how often, and what they desire
- Not pathologize the low desire partner and take the high desire partner as the benchmark -> mismatch in desire
- Tune, compromise, broaden the sexual script
- Good enough sex (*Metz & McCarthy, 2003*)

Sexual arousal

- No button to switch the sexual system on
- Erogenous zones do not exist -> sensate focus
- Tune sexual arousal
- Arousal goes up and down
- Most sexual problems are due to lack of sexual arousal
 - Orgasm
 - Genital pain -> body is not prepared yet for penetration

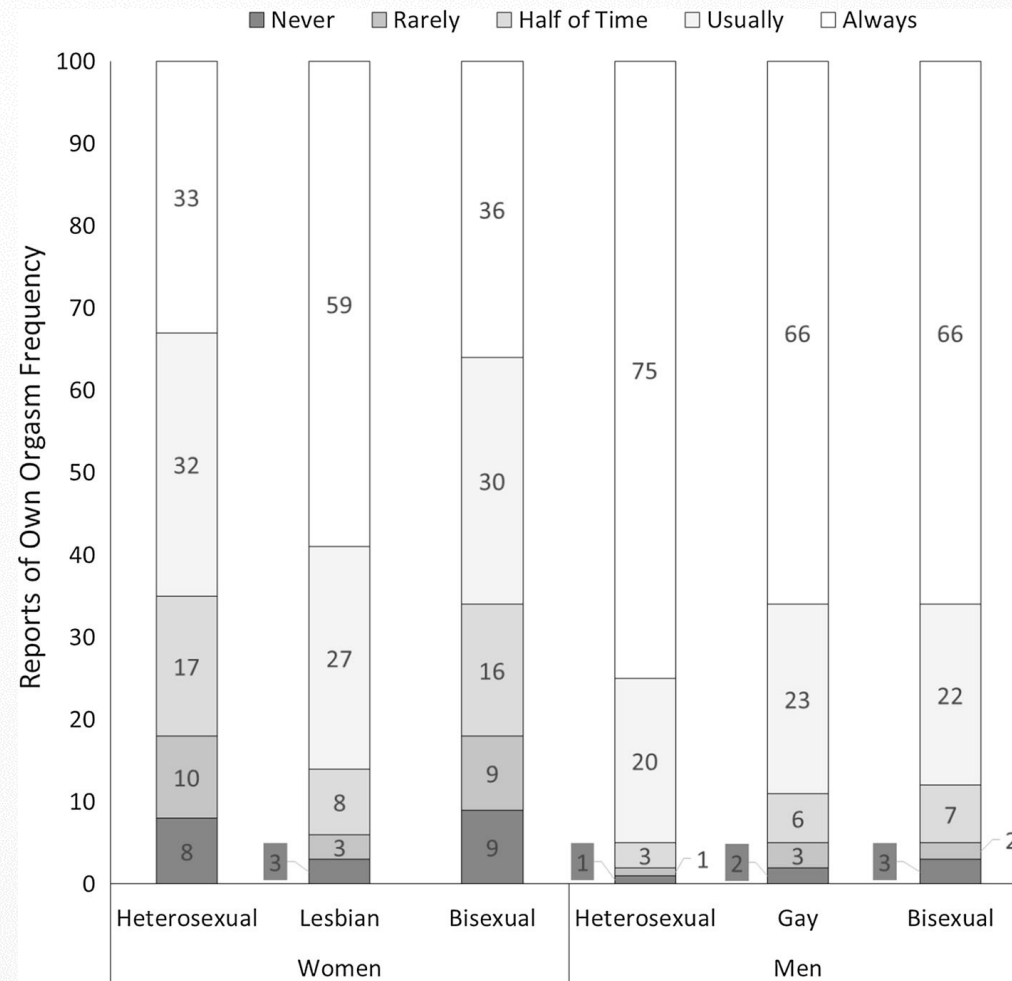




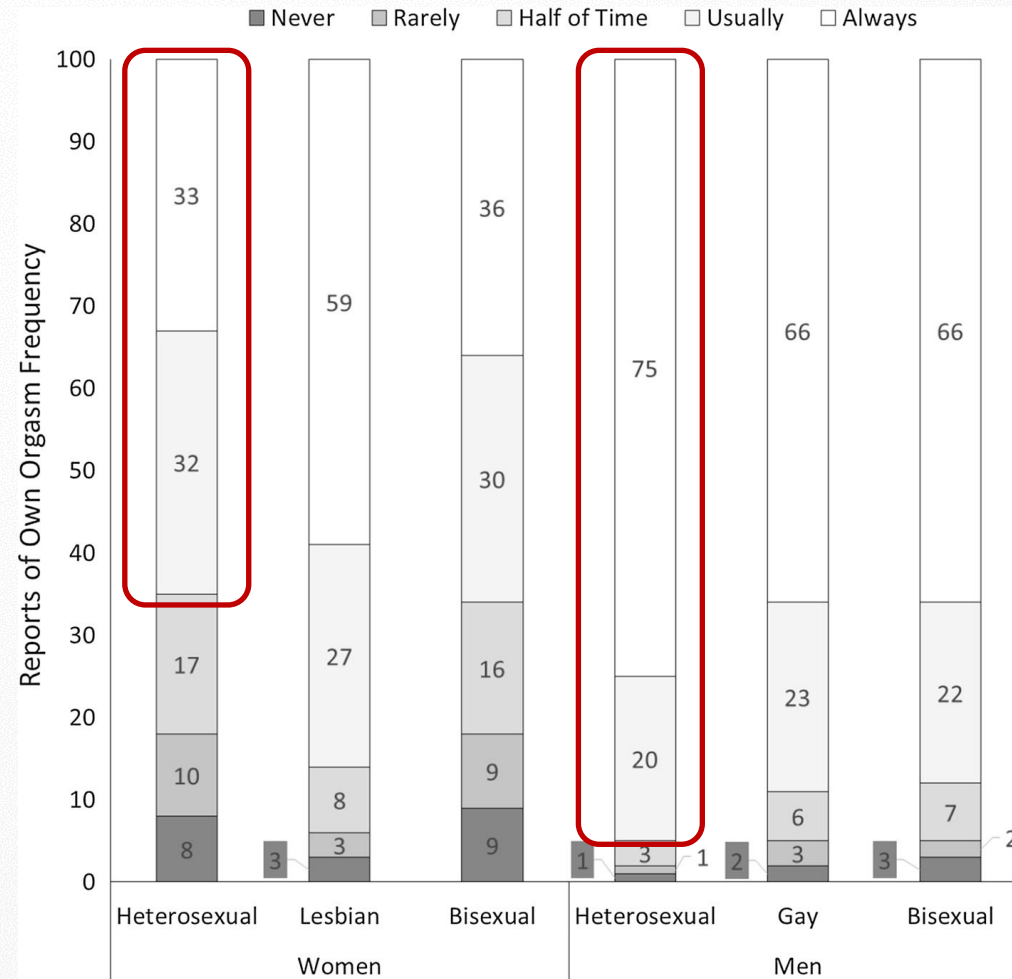
Orgasm

- Orgasm gap -> pleasure gap





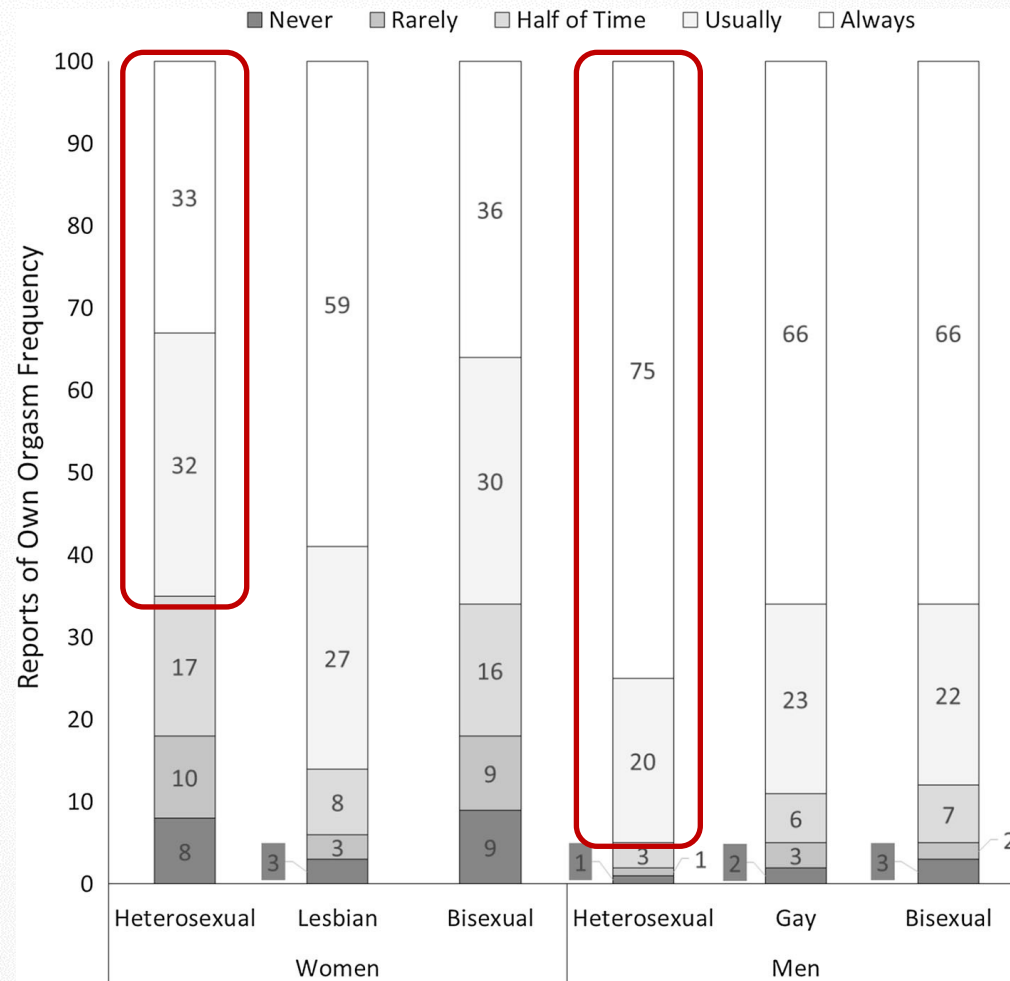
Frederick et al, 2018



Heterosexual couples

95% men
65% women

Frederick et al, 2018



Heterosexual couples
PENETRATION

90% men
30% women

Frederick et al, 2018

Why is there an orgasm gap?

- Women don't get/seek adequate sexual stimulation -> pleasure gap
- Male sexual script -> penetration
- **Wrong definition of sex**
- **Sexual inequality**
- **Sexual myths**

Orgasm

- The vaginal orgasm does not exist!

Only men can have vaginal orgasms

Vagina is birth channel, clitoris is female sex organ

- Penetration WITH clitoral stimulation
- Use fingers, vibrator (women still want to make love) *(van Rees et al, 2016)*

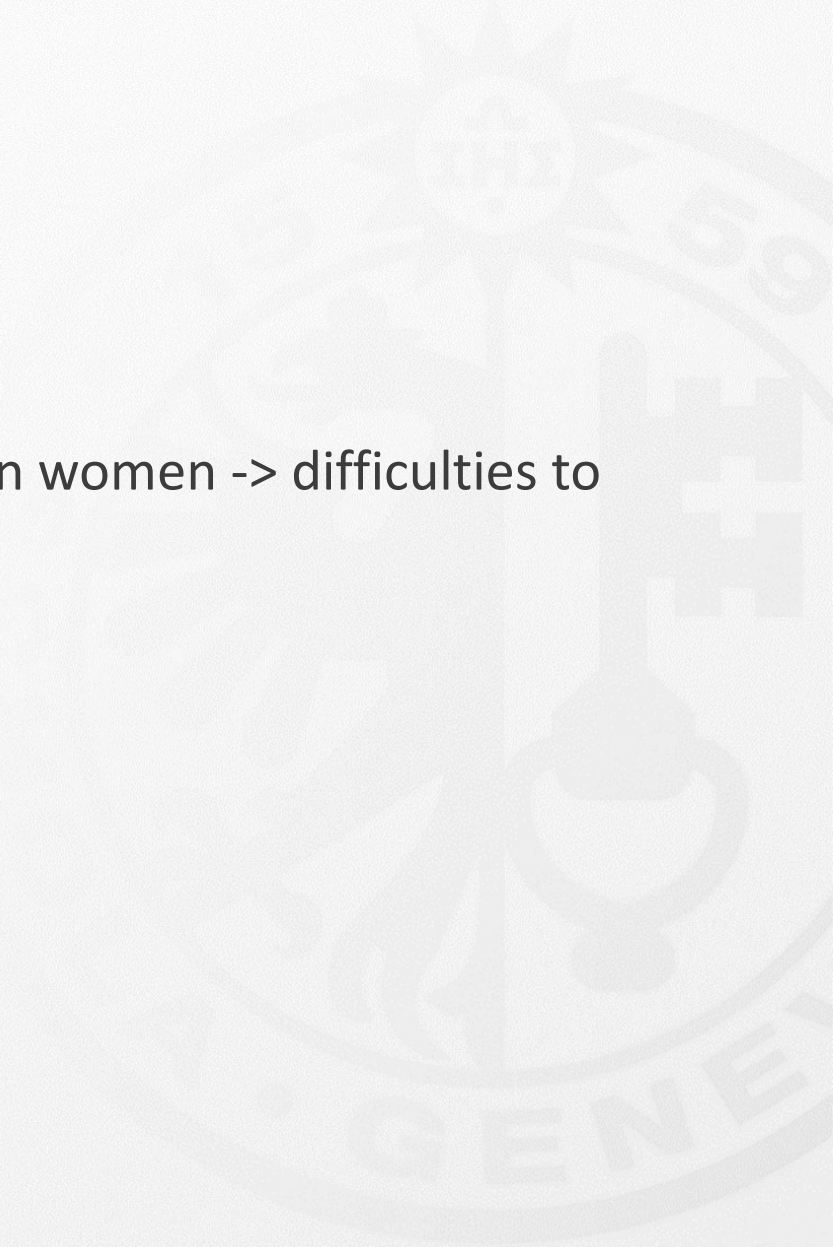
Orgasm

- Myth: Sex = penetration
- Myth: Satisfying sex = climaxing
- Women feel pressured to orgasm
- Women also want to climax (*cognitive dissonance*) (Laan & Rellini, 2012)
It is not less important, it is not only about intimacy
- Foreplay is main course, penetration is dessert

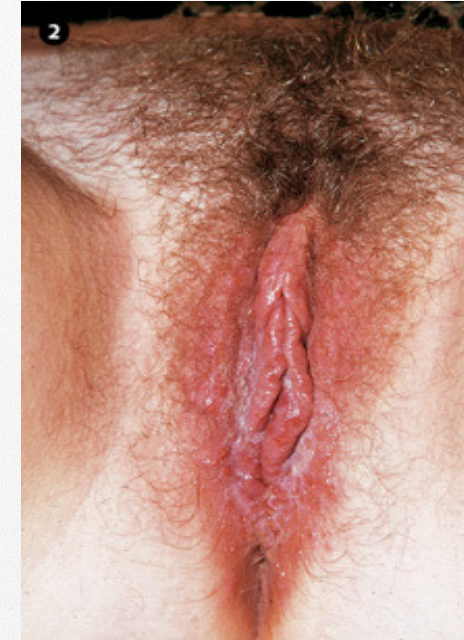


Implications for sex education

- Slut shaming -> women learn to inhibit sexual expression
- Mass media with thin-ideal body: more body image concerns in women -> difficulties to relax and let go
- Dilemma of desire: being sexy vs. not being too sexy



What is normal?



Inner and outer labia

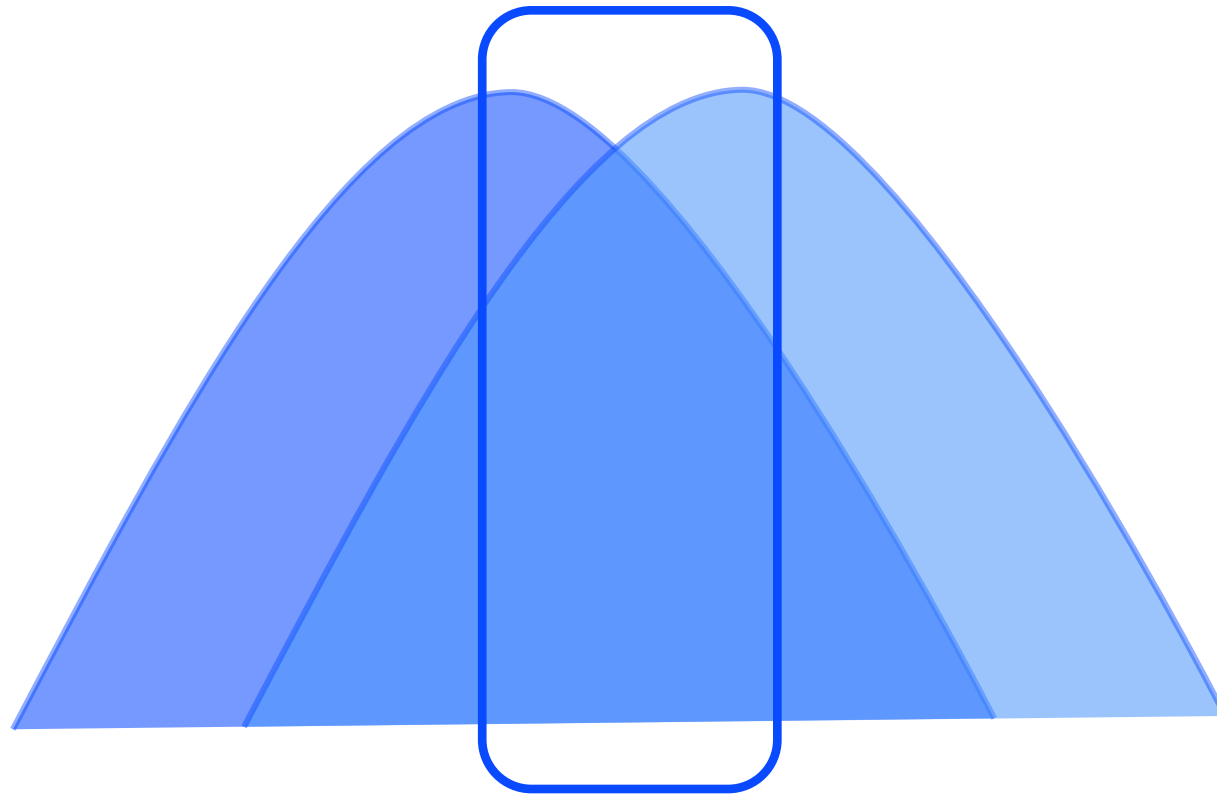
Comprehensive sex education

- Sex education disregards pleasure
 - Consequences of orgasm via penetration
 - Prevention -> pleasure (*Mark et al, 2021*)
 - Education about clitoris, self-stimulation, values, consent, empowerment, sexual diversity
 - Focus on communication, autonomy, self-esteem, assertiveness (*Reis et al, 2021*)
 - Building sexual and relational skills

Comprehensive sex education

- Teach women to say yes
 - Men transgress, women keep the guard
 - Educate the boys
- Sexual violence due to gender inequality
- More overlap than differences between men and women (*Petersen & Hyde, 2000*)



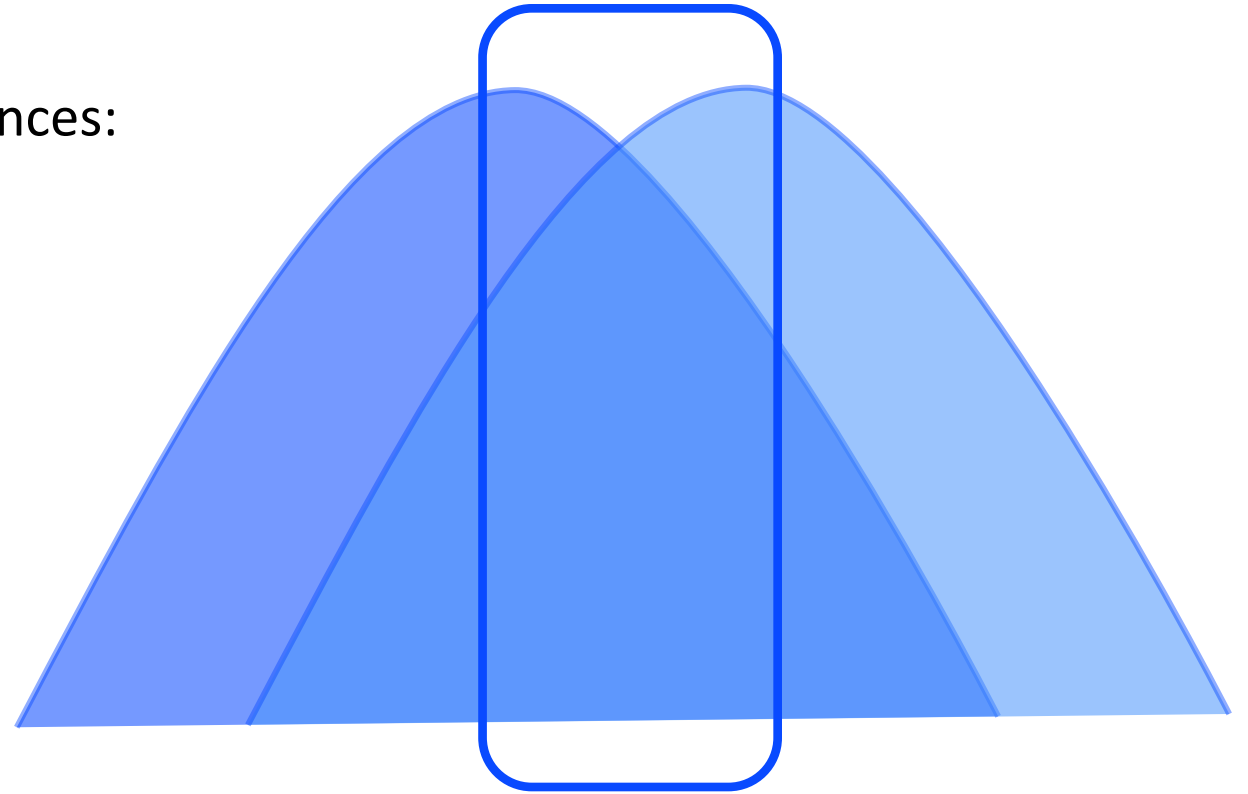


80.26 % overlap

Petersen & Hyde, 2010

Of 30 behaviors there were 4 'medium' differences:

- Men watch more porn
- Men masturbate more
- Men have more sexual partners
- Men are more interested in casual sex



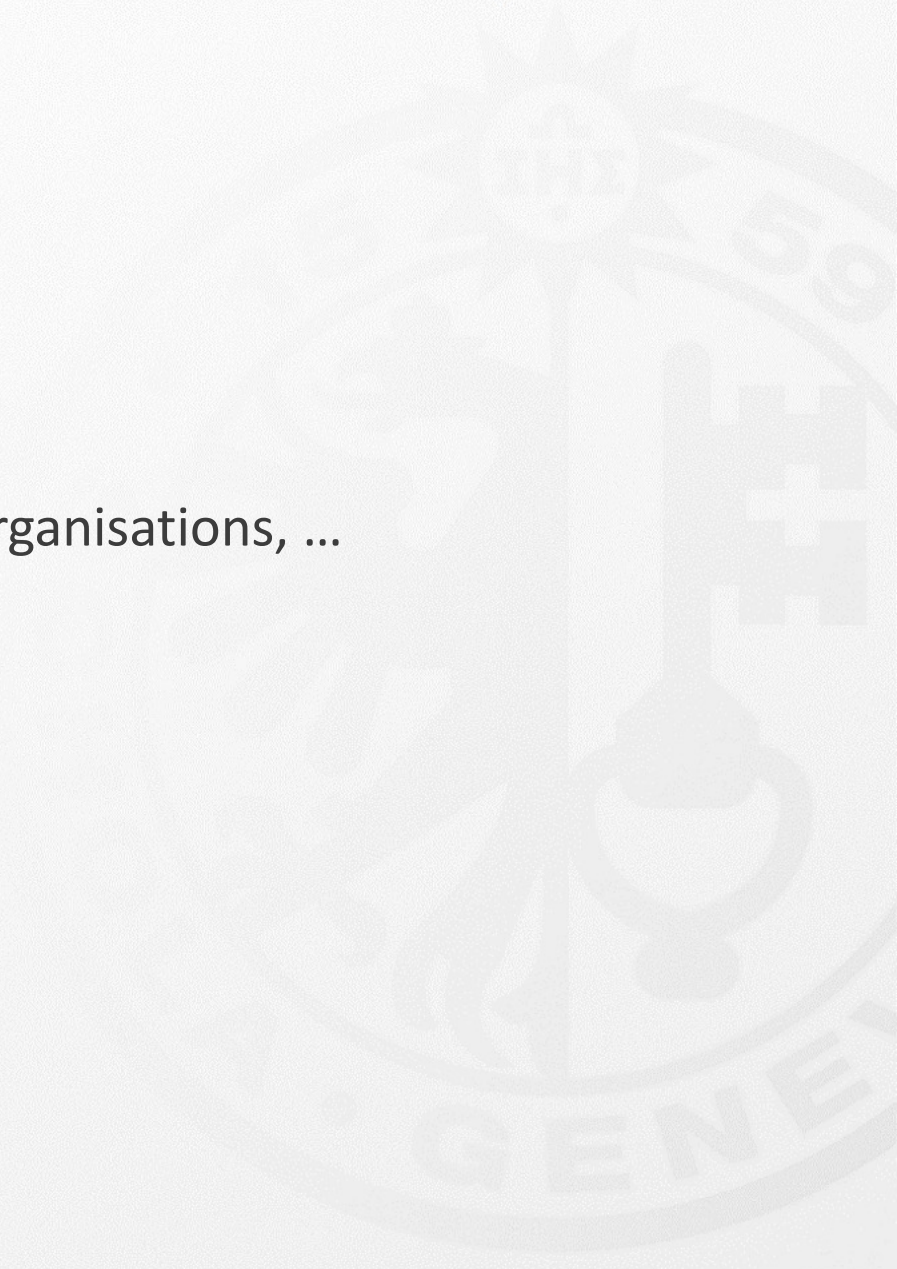
Petersen & Hyde, 2010

Tips

- Sexual desire -> make sex rewarding
- Relax, focus on what you feel
- Explore sexual stimuli that work for YOU
- No arousal -> no penetration
- **Sex = sexually pleasurable experience among equals**
- **Sex = stimulus + context + communication**
- **Communicate -> what you like and don't like**

Communicating about sex

- Learning to talk about sex starts in childhood
 - Important role of parents, caregivers, teachers, youth organisations, ...



Sexuality in children

- Litte children
 - Look at each other's body
 - Touch each other's naked body
 - Touch own and other's genitals
 - Kiss each other
 - Talk 'dirty', talk about sex
 - Fall in love and want to marry with each other
- Sexual sensations are present from birth, but need to develop
 - => explore their own body and feelings, no relational and sexual meaning



It starts in the womb



Sexuality in children

- From 2 years: repetitive behavior to elicit pleasant sensations
= auto-erotic behavior
- Do NOT forbid or punish < otherwise you learn children that sexual feelings are prohibited
- Do NOT disapprove the behavior, but set rules for time and place

Talking with a child about sex and relationships: What can you gain?

- Increases the chance that (s)he will **seek help in case of sexual problems**
- Treating the child as an equal conversation partner -> increase their **self-worth**
- **Stay informed** about the sexual knowledge and development of your child
- Facilitates a warm family context => **prevents against sexual problems** and sexually unhealthy behavior during puberty
 - => Decreased risk on sexual problems, more sexual satisfaction, more self-confidence, start with intercourse at later age, more safe sex, less coercive sex, more open and positive attitudes regarding sexuality

Porn and (Social) media: 2 sides to every story

RISKS

- **Miseducation** about sex -> imitation of sexual behavior
- Endorsing rape myths, **objectifying women** as sexual objects
- Positive attitudes regarding **casual sex** and infidelity -> break-up/divorce
- **Sexual problems**
- **Unrealistic expectations** and sexual ideals
-> genital image and body image

Porn and (Social) media: 2 sides to every story

BENEFITS

- **More accurate knowledge** about sexual anatomy and function
- Sex education is not inclusive and diverse -> search info on the internet
- Source of **inspiration** (therapeutic tool) -> **variation in sexual script**
- **Learn** what you like and don't like and learn to **communicate** about it
- Dealing with **discrepancies in sexual desire**

What we should tell our children, students, clients, peers, colleagues, ...

- Be open to
 - **Explore** sexual stimuli
 - **Communicate** about sexual likes and dislikes
- In a **safe context** , based on **(gender) equality and consent**
- Have fun
 - Learn to **say yes** to sex (especially women)
 - Boundaries, consent, safety **AND** curiosity, fun, openness



Thank you



Marieke.Dewitte@maastrichtuniversity.nl



9H45 PAUSE – CAFÉ, DANS L'ENTRÉE

N'HÉSITEZ PAS À VISITER LES STANDS

RETOUR À **10H15**