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“Let’s Talk About Sex, Baby”: An Explorative Study of Sexual Communication Between Heterosexual Couples in The Netherlands

Maggy Di Costanzo
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“Let’s Talk About Sex, Baby”: An Explorative Study of Sexual Communication
Between Heterosexual Couples in The Netherlands

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Abstract

This is an explorative study of how sexual communication and satisfaction act within a Dutch, mixed-sex, monogamous, long-term relationship. This research also analyzes how roles are developed within a dyad based off gender formation and Social Exchange Theory. I conducted interviews with three couples, one sex coach, and one sexologist in order to research my topic. Data was analyzed through common themes found throughout the narratives of the couples in relation to theory. I found that couples directly associate high amounts of sexual communication with a sexually satisfying relationship. The majority of sexual communication between couples is non-verbal, although partners would like to be able to discuss sex verbally more with their partner. Roles in relationships do not necessarily reflect those of stereotypical gender roles. This study is important for those who are researching sexuality, communications, gender, and identity development.

Key Words: Sexual Communication, Sexual satisfaction, Heterosexual Couples, Social Exchange Theory, Role Development

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Introduction

Sex is arguably one of the most important and unique facets of any romantic relationship. It occurs at one point or another within most amorous partnerships, and often is the driving force of keeping partners together or separating them; sex has a huge impact on the functioning of a relationship. Although it is not the foundation of the partnership necessarily, one of the participants of this study points out that sex is the cement that helps keep the relationship together. However, I believe that for such an important aspect of a relationship, it is not addressed nearly enough by partners. The purpose of this study is to look at the subject of sex, a topic that is not generally discussed in the public sphere, and see how it is discussed within the private sphere of a couple's relationship. I look at how couples are communicating in The Netherlands about sex within their partnership, their sexual desires, and their own sexual satisfaction. Given this information, I explore how relational roles develop within the partnership and how gender dynamics influence communication and satisfaction.

As sex is a topic that is also commonly ignored by most societies, I want to see how it is discussed between partners living in an 'open-minded' city such as Amsterdam. The Netherlands has embraced their identity as a 'tolerant' and 'liberal' society after their legalization of sex work, marijuana, and gay marriage; issues that are controversial in most nations. The Dutch appear to be progressive in their 'sex talk,' which can be seen through their approach to addressing sexual health. According to Dutch researchers, Rebecca Ferguson, Ine Vanwesenbeeck, and Trudie Knijn in "A Matter of Facts...and more" (2008), The Netherlands' comprehensive sex education

program teaches adolescents about sexuality and sexual responsibility in a “sex positive environment” that accepts adolescent sexuality” (93). This greatly differs from the ‘sex-negative’ attitudes of many developed nations, particularly the United States, that promotes abstinence in their sex education curriculum. The positive effects of the Dutch comprehensive program can be seen through their higher rate of contraceptive use in youth and lower rate of teenage pregnancy, in comparison to other developed countries (93).

However, this ‘sex positive’ view extends further than just their public sex education system. The Dutch sexuality organization Rutgers WPF based in Utrecht, develops many educational tools including board games, books, and informational websites to teach children as young as three years old about sexuality. They published the popular children’s sex education book by Sanderijn van der Doef, *Ik Vind Jou Lief* (2012), which translates to ‘I Find You Sweet,’ which is read to an audience between the ages of three and seven. The book describes friendship, puberty, love, and sex in an educational, age-appropriate manner. The book not only gives an overview of these subjects but also explanations of sexual intercourse, and the process of pregnancy and birth. From this information, Dutch residents appear to have a normalized view on sex and sexual communication as it begins for them at a relatively young age from various resources within their parental household and continues through their formal education.

For this study, I research the sexual communication and satisfaction of Dutch, mixed-sex, monogamous, long-term couples. I believe that the topic of sexual communication is important for several reasons. Research on this topic draws on the direct relationship between sexual communication and sexual

satisfaction, Research on role development and gender dynamics provides further insight as to how sexual communication functions within the dyad. This information is important for Communications Studies scholars, Gender Studies scholars, and couples who are looking to improve the communication and sex within their relationship. Through my research, I strive to raise awareness on the importance of effective sexual communication in The Netherlands.

Literature Review/Theoretical Framework

In order to conceptualize how heterosexual couples discuss sex and how individuals develop their own communicative roles within their partnerships in the Dutch context, it is necessary to look at the discourse surrounding sexuality and sexual communication as a whole. It is important to look at how sexual relationships are developed and why they are maintained, what sexual satisfaction is and how important it is for each partner, and how sexual pleasure is disclosed within the dyad. I specifically explore sexual communication and satisfaction between mixed-sex, intimate, monogamous, long-term relationships.

Role Formation

The way one forms their role in a relationship can be understood as a process. According to Gender Schema Theory, in Sandra Lipsitz Bem's work "Gender Schema Theory: A Cognitive Account of Sex Typing" (1981), one's gender is formed through a process and the way that they behave is influenced by the society they grow up in (362). In this way, individuals form identities in their relationships because the relationship that they are in influences the way they behave with their partner. This can be influenced through the discourse and actions they have with their partner. This is relevant to my work as sexual communication and satisfaction can greatly influence the behavior of an individual within an amorous interpersonal relationship. Although an individual forms their identity through a process, Butler argues in her work "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory" (1988) that an individual

performs their gender. In this way, that individual forms their identity through the way they present themselves in the public and private sphere. This can apply to how individuals develop their roles and identities within their personal relationships, specifically amorous relationships. This role can be formed through several means. I will continue to discuss how individuals develop roles in their interpersonal relationships based through the Theory of Social Exchange.

Social Exchange Theory

The American Sociologist Susan Sprecher, analyzes the dynamic of sexuality in relationships through the theoretical framework of Social Exchange in her article "Social Exchange Theories and Sexuality" (1998). The *Social Exchange Theory* posits that self-interest is the driving force for both actors in a didactic relationship and self-interest is what ultimately establishes, maintains, and terminates relationships (Lawler & Thye, 1999). Relationships operate on an exchange of resources that both benefit and disadvantage all individuals involved (Sprecher, 1998, 32). Social Exchange Theory in interpersonal relationships emphasizes the *rewards* and *costs* exchanged between individuals within the dyad (32). Each actor receives "pleasurable and gratifying" resources and "resources that result in loss or punishment" from the relationship (32). Overall satisfaction with a relationship can be determined by the rewards one partner receives from the other and the relationship as a whole minus the costs, or the resources they are willing to give up for their partner. Social Exchange Theory assumes that "(a) Social behavior is a series of exchanges; (b) individuals attempt to maximize their

rewards and minimize their costs; and (c) when individuals receive rewards from others, they feel obligated to reciprocate” (32). In terms of sexuality, according to Sprecher, sexual favors act as resources that are exchanged between the individuals in the relationship (37). When there is an imbalance between the partners -one partner is giving or receiving more than the other - an issue may arise within the sexual relationship. Sexual satisfaction will most likely occur when the rewards minus the costs are positive for both partners (33). I believe that Social Exchange Theory gives insight as to how partners function within the dyad. Whether there is equity in the relationship or an imbalance, this changes the way that each partner functions within the dyad. Each individual develops a role that they perform in their relationship. In my research, I explore how Social Exchange Theory applies to verbal and non-verbal communication between partners and how equity within the dyad affects sexual satisfaction.

In her work, Sprecher highlights how sexuality can function non-verbally within the relationship. People do not need to communicate about every aspect of their sex life in order to be sexually satisfied; partners know when they are sexually over-benefitting from their partner or under-benefitting. The partners may not know why or how they are over-benefitting or under-benefitting (33). Although, they generally know when it is their opportunity to give or receive pleasure from their partner without verbally expressing so (33). However, what is not addressed by Sprecher which I will address with my research is how partners are communicating what resources they would like to be giving and receiving to and from their partner, how they are expressing their overall satisfaction with their sexual relationship, and what role each

partner plays within the relationship in terms of sexuality. I will be not only looking at what resources are exchanged, but how they are exchanged and how they are valued as a cost or benefit within a mixed-sex relationship. What is also missing from Sprecher's article is a sociological point of view. She is looking at sexual exchanges from an essentialist, economic point of view. Sexual relationships are more complicated than exchange of goods and resources; those resources mean different things and have more weight for some than they do for others. It is necessary to have a sociological perspective on this topic because sex discourse functions within human relationships. The discourse can mentally and physically affect both partners involved. This is an important aspect of this study that is an oversight for Sprecher, however my research highlights these details.

Sexual Satisfaction

One resource that is most commonly thought of as important within the mainstream discourse surrounding sexual exchange is the orgasm. American Psychologists C. K. Waterman and E. J. Chiauuzi in "The Role of Orgasm in Male and Female Sexual Enjoyment" (1982) researched the importance of an orgasm in the overall sexual satisfaction of women and men within a relationship. They found that while orgasm is important in the sexual satisfaction in women and men, both genders can be sexually satisfied to a degree without 'achieving' orgasm (Waterman & Chiauuzi, 146). To me, phrase 'achieving orgasm' that is commonly used is problematic in a sense; having an orgasm should not be seen as an achievement. People often think associate 'good sex' with one or both partners having an orgasm. Although,

the authors discuss that when reaching orgasm becomes the goal of sexual acts and there is pressure from either partner to have an orgasm, it significantly detracts from the pleasure and satisfaction of each partner involved (146, 156). In Diane Holmberg and Karen L. Blair's research "Sexual Desire, Communication, Satisfaction, and Preferences of Men and Women in Same-Sex Versus Mixed-Sex Relationships" (2009), they found that "women were much more satisfied with the sexual activities they engaged in than men...orgasmic items tended to receive very high sexual satisfaction ratings" and "women tended to score slightly higher than men on average level of sexual satisfaction across a wide range of non-orgasmic sexual practices"(62 - 63). I believe that how the partner defines sexual satisfaction not only shapes their role in the relationship, but also influences the communication that they have with their partner. Based on what they find sexually satisfying, that is the information that they communicate to their partner when they talk about sex. In my research I address the importance of orgasm for the couples I interview and how orgasm plays a role in their own sexual satisfaction and what sexual satisfaction means for them.

What I also found problematic with Waterman and Chiauuzzi's research was their method. They decided that a written evaluation, specifically the *Sexual Interaction Inventory (SII)*, was the best way to research their topic. The SII asks a series of questions on different topics within sexuality. Although this may be a good method to reach a larger population and have a bigger sample, the value people give to sex and pleasure differs greatly from person to person. It is hard to fully understand how people feel about a certain topic, particularly sex, when they are filling out a form; sex is more personal

than that. Along with this, Waterman and Chiauzzi acknowledge in their research the stereotype of gender in regards to sex; women seem to desire sex less than men. Although they acknowledge this stereotype, they do not argue against it necessarily. They describe that the genders are more alike in this aspect than we may think, however they do not counter this stereotype. My research will critically address this stereotype. I am not using the gender stereotypes as a framework because I believe that my interviewees should construct their own narrative instead of having to abide by a particular script that is pre-determined by society for their gender and relationship. I analyze how gender roles in sexual relationships are constructed rather than how women and men are 'expected' to act in the setting.

Sexual Communication

One way partners develop their roles in a relationship is through the communication that they exchange within the dyad, regardless of the topic. For my purposes, I look at sex discourse within these relationships. Sexual communication influences the relational and sexual satisfaction of the partners, whether negatively or positively. It has been shown that it is important for couples to disclose their own sexual desires and sexual pleasures to their partners. In previous research by Canadian scholars E. Sandra Byers and Stephanie Demmons in their study "Sexual Satisfaction and Sexual Self-Disclosure Within Dating Relationships", they found that if individuals disclose their sexual preferences to their partners they were more sexually satisfied (Byers & Demmons, 187). However, they point out that, individuals who disclose other needs in their relationship are more likely to

disclose their sexual desires to their partner (187). It is for this reason that in my research, I look at how individuals disclose their sexual preferences to their partners. Byers and Demmons' research focused on sexual disclosure within dating relationships because this is when primary sexual scripts are developed between couples (180). According to John H. Gagnon and William Simon's "Sexual Conduct" (1973), referenced in Stevi Jackson and Sue Scott's "Rehabilitating Interactionism for a Feminist Sociology of Sexuality" (2010), sexual scripts refer to how sexualities are developed formed through 'cultural scenarios,' 'interpersonal scenarios', and 'intrapsychic scenarios' (821). An individual's sexual script during the dating stages of their relationship can be significantly different from their sexual script after they have been with the same partner for a long period of time. Although I find this incredibly important to research, I think it necessary to look at how couples who have been together for at least two years talk about sex because they already have a set sexual script. My research looks at how a couple's sexual scripts are established and how they may shift and change over time. This difference in sexual scripts directly effects their sexual communication and sexual satisfaction. This is dependent on their sexual satisfaction in their relationship and how they communicated this to their partner in the past and in the present. The communication that they had with their partner in the dating stages of their relationship could differ significantly from how they communicate now.

Methods

Overview

In order to research my topic, I conducted interviews with three couples, one sexologist, and one sex coach. I chose to interview heterosexual couples between the ages of twenty and fifty who were in a relationship for more than two years. Due to the short amount of time I had to carry out my research I did not want to restrict my target group with limitations on ethnicity, individual sexual orientation, marital status, age difference between the couples, economic status, or religion for practical reasons. I decided on studying couples between the ages of twenty and fifty as to narrow down my population but not restrict myself with the number of people I could interview due to the time frame I was given. Along with this, I believe that communication between couples under the age of twenty and over the age of fifty differ in the style of communication they have about sex due to their age and maturity. I chose to research couples that have been together for at least two years because I believe that sexuality within long-term couples differs significantly than with couples that are in the dating stage of their relationship or have been together for less than two years. While developing and narrowing down my target group for research, I was unsure of the type of couple whose sexual communication I wanted to research, heterosexual or homosexual. Canadian Psychologist Diane Holmberg and American Psychologist Karen L. Blair in their research "Sexual Desire, Communication, Satisfaction, and Preferences of Men and Women in Same-Sex Versus Mixed-Sex Relationships" speculate that "those in same-sex relationships share similar anatomies and gender roles with their partners, perhaps making

explicit sexual communication less necessary” (Holmberg & Blair, 63).

However, I decided on researching heterosexual couples after watching an interview with author Dan Savage. In the interview, he claims that gay male couples have better sex than heterosexual couples because of their differing communication. On the difference between heterosexual and gay male communication Dan Savage states:

[Gay Males] are forced to communicate. When a man and a woman go to bed usually they get to consent...and all communication ceases because vaginal intercourse is the default assumption, and somebody has to speak up if they want to do something else. When two [men] go to bed together...they get to consent and that's the beginning of the conversation; what's going to happen? It is not obvious; It is not 'tab A', 'slot B'...Who is going to get penetrated? Even that has to be negotiated. (Savage, Huffington Post, 2013)

No matter how men and women learn about sex, whether it is from their parents, peers, their education system, or the media, the majority of what is taught is how heterosexual sex is performed. There is limited to no attention given to any other form of penetrative or non-penetrative sex. This forces non-heterosexual couples to communicate with each other about the sex they have, because they are not given an explanation as to how it will happen. In the end, according to Savage, heterosexual sex is discussed less between partnerships than between homosexual couples. I believe that there is not enough communication happening between couples in general. Therefore, I

chose to research heterosexual couples because communication does not necessarily need to exist in order for the partners to have sex with each other.

Procedure

Initially, I attempted to find my participants by asking as many people as I could if they fit my population, or whether they knew someone who does. In addition, I put a sign-up sheet on the front desk of the sex shop, Mail & Female, where I have an internship. In the end, all of my interviewees were couples who I was able to personally talk to and connect with in Mail & Female. I was given the contact information of the sexologist through my ISP advisor, and my boss at my internship gave me the information for the sex coach. My questions

I interviewed each partner separately for about a half an hour to an hour, while my interviews with the sexologist and sex coach lasted between forty minutes to an hour and a half. Initially I wanted to interview both partners at the same time, however, I thought that this could skew my results, specifically with my questions regarding sexual satisfaction. I chose to interview them separately because I wanted each individual to feel as though they can speak freely about their sexual communication and satisfaction within their relationship without feeling pressure from their partner to answer a question in a certain way, particularly in a way to not offend or upset their partner. I do not think that this would have a significant impact on my results in regards to how they describe their sexual communication, however I think couples would have given me different or exaggerated answers when they described their sexual satisfaction. Although, for the purposes of looking at

the couples forming roles within their relationship based on their communication, it would have been interesting to look at how the couples interacted with each other during the interview. Unfortunately, given the time frame I was unable to conduct two interviews with each partner; one individually and one with their partner.

The interviews were either conducted in-person or over Skype. Each interview was recorded with a digital recording device, but I supplemented most of my recordings by taking notes during the interview. I transcribed important quotes and details from these interview recordings to the best of my abilities and have included them in my data analysis. I made two interview guides, one with questions for the couples and the other with questions for the sex coach and sexologist. The interview guide for the couples contained questions about the sexual communication they experienced growing up in their familial relationships, their relationship in general with their partner, how they communicate about sex with their partner, problems they encounter in communicating, and their own sexual satisfaction in their relationship. In the interview guide for the sex experts, I asked them questions on the same themes however the questions were worded so they could tell me what they have noticed with couples in their own work, however, I also told them that they could give me examples from their own experiences in relationships as well. I used these interview guides to help me organize my interviews and remember certain topics that I wanted my interviewees to discuss, although in most interviews I did not ask them every question exactly as I had it written down. I tried to follow the natural flow of the interview and let the interviewee have the control of the conversation. If I wanted more information on a certain

topic they were discussing I would ask clarifying questions in order to get a better understanding of their experiences. Since sex is a relatively difficult topic for most people to discuss, particularly with a stranger, I told them that with any question they could be as explicit with their answer as they felt comfortable. At the end of each interview I gave my interviewee the option to tell me anything else they wanted to share with me or that I should know about their experience.

I was able to interview three couples: Fleur and Maarten, Eva and Jan, Marije and Pieter. All couples are between the ages of twenty-five and forty-five and have been together for at least two years. Only one of the couples is married. I also interviewed sexologist Ilse and sex coach Cora Emens. All of my participants chose to remain anonymous, except for Emens who allowed me to use her name in my research. In order to keep all of my participants completely anonymous, I have given them pseudonyms and omitted any information that would identify them in any way.

Potential Bias and Assumptions

With my research and results I understand that there are several sources of potential external biases that I could not control in my study. First, the couples who I did find to participate in my study were all comfortable talking with me about sexual communication and satisfaction. I know from experience in asking people to participate in my study that not everyone is comfortable discussing sex, especially with an undergraduate researcher. One woman who was invited to participate in my study with her partner declined because she recognized that she has trouble with sexual

communication in her relationship and admittedly felt uncomfortable talking to me about it. Another woman told me that no one would want to participate in my study because “nobody wants to talk about their sex life, at least I would not.” From these examples I could form a conclusion that the people who I did interview are not a representative sample of my population. In addition, all of the couples who I was able to interview I found in a sex shop. This influences my research due to the fact that individuals who willingly go to a sex shop must have a certain level of openness and comfort with the subject of sex, particularly Mail & Female that does not target tourists as their audience unlike most sex shops in Amsterdam. Along with that, if the couple is in the shop together they have to communicate with each other about going to the shop in the first place meaning there is comfort between the partners regarding sex. Also, some of my interviewees are required to discuss sex on a daily basis due to their profession so this could make them more comfortable with communicating about sex with their partner. Another source of bias is that all of my interviews were conducted in English, which is not the first language of any of my interviewees. Therefore, in some cases my interviewees were unable to verbally express their experience to the best of their abilities because they had a less extensive vocabulary in English than in Dutch. In order to avoid this issue, I told them that they could say what they wanted to say in Dutch and I would translate what they said into English. Despite these biases, I think that my research as an explorative study is still relevant and useful for understanding sexual communication between couples in Amsterdam.

There are several assumptions that I made prior to the interviews about the nature of the interviews and the answers I would receive from my interviewees. I assumed that the female partners would talk to me longer during my interviews and would give me more details. Along with this, I thought that the women whose professions require them to discuss sex daily would give me more detailed answers. I found that it was actually the men who talked to me more in depth and explicitly about their sexual communication and satisfaction.

Data Analysis Strategy

In order to analyze my data, I organize it by common themes. First, I introduce each couple in order for the reader to understand each partner's background and narrative. I present each partner's experience with sexual communication, whether it is through their profession or their familial background. I address their individual experience and their sexual communication with their partner in the initial dating stages of their relationship. This gives the reader context as to understand each partner's individual narrative and how the narratives function within the dyad.

Data Analysis

Overview of the Couple's Relationships

Eva and Jan live in an apartment in Amsterdam and have been together for about four years. When Eva was growing up, her parents were very open about sex and sex was discussed between her and her parents. Her parents often made jokes about sex as well. Jan learned about sex initially from educational sex and relationship books for children and pre-teenagers, as sex was never discussed between him and his parents. Eva is training to be a sexologist and both she and Jan have very busy work schedules. Initially they met several times through a mutual friend while Eva was in another relationship. They eventually met one another once again after Eva and her previous partner had broken up. They have been together ever since. They began discussing sex on their first date amongst a group of friends before they had sex.

Marije and Pieter are married and live in a home they purchased together and remodeled in Amsterdam. Marije learned about sex through an educational book and her mom was opened to answering questions that she had about sex, but it was never a topic that was discussed often at home. Sex was also never discussed with her sister who is less open about sex than she is. Pieter never discussed sex with his parents, but his parents were relatively open particularly in regards to nudity at home when he was growing up. Marije is the ex-girlfriend of Pieter's best friend. They were friends with each other before they started a relationship together. It took them longer to become intimate partners out of fear that it could ruin their relationship and their other

friendships. They did not discuss sex within the dating stages of their relationship.

Fleur and Maarten have been together for two years and live separately from each other. Fleur grew-up in a family that discussed sex often and openly, while Jan had a more troubled childhood. Fleur works in a sex shop in Amsterdam and Maarten is a musician. They met through Fleur's workplace and Maarten asked her for a date when he came into the sex shop on Valentine's Day. They began talking about sex very early in their relationship, prior to their first date, due to the nature of Fleur's career.

Terms and Language

It is important to look at how the couples understand 'sexual communication' and 'sexual satisfaction' because this influences and shapes how they respond to questions regarding these themes. Fleur described sexual communication as "a skill I have developed now that I feel more comfortable with myself and sex," as well as an ability that she is able to perform better now than in her early twenties. While Marije describes sexual communication as something that "would be really good to talk about and discuss," Pieter sees it as necessary "when things are not going well for the two of you," it is important for both partners to "sit down and say 'okay, what is the problem?'" In contrast, Holmberg and Blair (2009) define 'sexual satisfaction' as "the process of discussing aspects of one's sex life with one's partner" (59). In addition, Maarten describes it as "either outside of sex, it being open and totally discussable" and "non-verbal communication during

sex.” Similarly to Maarten, Jan describes sexual communication as sex talk that occurs during sex and outside of sex, verbally and non-verbally:

It encompasses all the explicit and implicit communication between the two. Not just the conversations that you have about sex but also the signs that you give off non-verbally or in your body language about whether you're feeling up to it or not, what you like, what you dislike, what turns you on, even the sounds, the moans and breaths that you make during sex. So that whole range.

What Holmberg and Blair dismiss in their definition of sexual satisfaction are the aspects of verbally and non-verbally communicating, which Maarten and Jan highlight in their definitions of the phrase.

The phrase 'sexual satisfaction' had a wide range of meanings for the individuals in my study. Overall, sexual satisfaction for men was almost directly related to orgasm, while the women emphasized the relational aspect of sex in order to be sexually satisfied. In Holmberg and Blair's study (2009), they notice "women scored higher than men on general sexual satisfaction within the relationship" (63). However, in my study, there was overlap between the two groups. Fleur described sexual satisfaction as "it means having fun, and really having a connection with the other partner, you have to understand each other, also physically not just mentally." The men would often discuss the satisfaction they receive from their own orgasm first and then add the satisfaction they get from being with their partner during sex. Jan and Maarten both mention the fact that because they are men, they are

inherently supposed to think sexual satisfaction stems from orgasm. Although they both agree that satisfaction is not achieved primarily through orgasm. Maarten elaborates on his definition to say that it is also a “dual experience, I enjoy her orgasm to some degree almost as much as I enjoy my own.” Jan says having a one night stand can be sexually satisfying for him as well as having sex within a long-term relationship: “ I think that conquest is an element of sexual satisfaction for me, and the other one is ‘gezellig,’ which is more what I’m getting now – safety and utter intimacy, it is very satisfying as well.” Jan points out that now in his relationship with Eva his interpretation of sexual satisfaction has shifted. Previously, sexual conquest was an element of satisfaction, although now that he is in a long-term relationship and there is less sexual conquest in the relationship, he appreciate a different aspect of sexual satisfaction.

Marije and Pieter had similar definitions of sexual satisfaction. They both discussed how everyday what they need to be sexually satisfied can differ, from having an orgasm to being with their partner. Marije explains, “you just want it just to get the orgasm or just to get the feeling, I think I am really in search for the contact, just like the body contact.” While Marije and Pieter emphasize the daily change in sexual satisfaction, sex coach Cora Emens defined it as fluid; it changes as you grow, get older, and have more experiences. To describe the fluidity of sexual satisfaction she explained how older couples generally have sex differently than younger couples because “they might not have the same strength and aggression, so kissing and touching can be satisfactory for being sexually satisfying.” What satisfies you when you’re older might not satisfy you when you are younger, and vice

versa. This means that orgasms might be more or less sexually satisfying at different times in a person's life, or an individual can be satisfied by something completely unrelated to having an orgasm. Sexologist Ilse has similar beliefs to Emens on sexual satisfaction. For Ilse, sexual satisfaction could not be related to having an orgasm for someone at all. Although the general belief is that the orgasm is at the heart of 'good sex,' as I briefly mentioned earlier, Waterman and Chiauzzi's research (1982) found that men and women found most sexual activities more pleasurable when orgasms do not occur, which could be a result of 'orgasm as the goal' orientation. This is because when an orgasm becomes the purpose of sexual activity, the pressure of having an orgasm by either partner detracts from the pleasure they are experiencing (156). Subsequently, as Maarten discussed in his perception of sexual satisfaction, Waterman and Chiauzzi mention that a partner's orgasm can influence an individual's sexual enjoyment (156). These differing experiences with sexual satisfaction show how individuals are shaped by their relationships. Their satisfaction shapes the sexual discourse, verbal or non-verbal, they have with their partner.

Verbal Communication Within the Relationship

Generally, when people think of communication they immediately think of verbal communication. In my study, there are three primary aspects of individual's sex lives that they convey to their partners through verbal communication: sexual preferences, desires, and dislikes. Although, it is important to note that couples differed in how they communicated these desires and which methods were more effective for them. Along with this,

when couples communicated verbally with their partner, some methods of communication were more effective in communicating these issues than others. When partners communicate it often depends on the nature of the issue they are trying to tell their partner. Eva notices that,

If I want to try something new, most of the time I say it right before we are going to have sex. If I do not like something then most of the time I tell it immediately but sometimes I realize 'oh we are doing a lot of the same stuff and then I say that afterwards or whenever I think of it, on the couch when we watch television.

She also explains that,

There are certain things and you get kind of uncomfortable with them and then I sometimes have to collect some courage. Most of the time I know, it will always work out but sometimes I just have to think 'okay how am I going to tell thing? Sometimes if I saw a patient with a problem then I tell him this story first for to say 'yeah, I would like to do that as well' or 'oh that is a little bit of a problem with us as well.'

Eva and Fleur both described that for them it was easiest to tell their partner before sex if there was a desire that they want to try. All partners said that during sex they would immediately express to their partner if they like what their partner is doing, whereas they would save their dislikes until after sex, unless they find what their partner is doing intolerable. For example, Fleur

discussed the instance when her partner started 'dirty talking' to her during sex. It was making her uncomfortable and un-aroused so she told him to stop in the moment. This shows that for Fleur, she has tolerance levels for certain topics and aspects of sexual activity. For some of these subjects, she feels the need to interrupt sex and verbally tell her partner her dislikes. However, there may be sexual actions that she dislikes but either tells her partner non-verbally or not at all during sex. When she verbally told her partner her that she does not like his dirty talking, this had a greater impact on the sex that she and her partner had. It was clear to her partner that he needed to stop dirty talking and do something else. This may not have been translated to her partner in the same way if she were using non-verbal communication.

Along these lines, there are some topics that are easier to discuss than others. Maarten explains that for him, it is easier to discuss g-spot stimulation than anal sex:

G-spot orgasms is something that I find a lot easier now to discuss because it is kind of, it is not as invasive. You do not particularly need tools or anything like that. It is just something that I can try with her or something that we are aware of when we are having 'regular' sex.

In this case, Maarten describes anal sex as more difficult to discuss with his partner because it is more 'invasive' than discussing g-spot stimulation. He also describes it as something that he can try with her during 'regular sex' or vaginal intercourse. This shows that the subject of the desire that one partner wants to communicate within the dyad can directly affect their discourse on

personal desires. Perhaps this is why, in general, many couples do not discuss their fantasies with each other, as Cora Emens points out. They are afraid that their partner will find it strange or disturbing because it differs from vaginal intercourse. Therefore, the amount of verbal communication is greatly affected by the subject that one partner wants to communicate with the other. The more 'normal' the desire is, the more likely an individual will be willing to share it with their partner.

Non-Verbal Communication Within the Relationship

When I first asked couples to describe the non-verbal sexual communication that they have with their partner I found that most interviewees paused longer after this question than with any other question I asked them, even the participants who described non-verbal communication in their definition of sexual communication. They had to think more about how people can communicate non-verbally because communication without words is often a hard subject to grasp. Once they thought of one way they communicate non-verbally, then it was easier for them to think of more examples of non-verbal communication in their relationship. Almost all of the partners stated that the majority of their sexual communication to their partner and in their relationship was non-verbal. There were two main themes surrounding non-verbal communication: initiating sex and easily communicating about sexual likes and dislikes during sex.

When initiating sex, Pieter notices tonal changes in Marije's voice and although he describes her as "always the cuddly type" he notices that there is a "a different type of holding each other before you're going to have sex than

normal.” When he wants to non-verbally communicate his desires for sex, he says that he will come to Marije and touch her. He says that Marije notices these advances because he never acts that way when he does not want sex. He is aware of his own shift in behavior when he wants to initiate sex with Marije. Jan describes that when he wants to have sex he will communicate it by touching his partner as well, however, these advances are, as he describes, more inherently sexual. He will start “grabbing or caressing her breasts or her buttocks, fondling might even go on to the point where I put my hand down her pants or she’ll put her hand against my groin.” Although, he also describes “kisses with tongue for a long period of time” an indicator that both partners want to have sex. Fleur notices that the non-verbal communication does not have to be directly sexual, “you can have that look in your eyes and the other person knows what you want.” Thus, the type of non-verbal communication affects what the person is trying to communicate. When initiating sex, the majority of the communication is centered around touching. However, Fleur makes the point that she can communicate to her partner, and her partner to her, the desire for sex without physically touching.

The men in this study addressed non-verbal initiations of sex more than the women. When the women did discuss non-verbally communicating that one partner wanted to have sex, they put more emphasis on how their partner does so. In the work “Sexual Compliance: Gender, Motivational, and Relationship Perspective” by American Psychologists Emily A. Impett and Letitia A. Peplau (2003), they address how gender influences the initiation of sexual interactions. They discuss the findings of previous research that suggests that women are less likely than men to initiate sex throughout the

many stages of a relationship (90). Perhaps it is for this reason that the men in my research put more of an emphasis on sexual initiation cues in their non-verbal communication than the women. Although it should be noted that according to Impett and Peplau (2003), “many women do initiate sex, but they do so less frequently than their male partners” (90). I did not ask my participants a question on who initiates sex more in the relationship but this would be an interesting factor of the relationship to look into.

For Maarten, non-verbal communication makes it easier for him to communicate. He explains that more of his communication is non-verbal because “I tend to think about what I say and how I word it, during sex it is not really the time or the place to think to myself, ‘how do I word this’.” Non-verbal communication also allows him to recognize signs with his partner that he would not otherwise notice through verbal communication:

I am a musician, so I like to work with sounds so if there is a certain sound that she makes when she almost comes or when she really does or does not like a certain thing then I tend to remember the sounds. It is kind of clearer than words because words, sometimes you will say something that you are not really feeling but you do not want to rock the boat. Sounds are more like body language like people will say yes but they will shake their head no; it is hard to lie with that.

Through the sounds and body movement Fleur gives off during sex, Maarten can understand what she likes and dislikes. Similarly with Jan, he has learned to “recognize signs” with Eva while they are having sex. Not only are her

'signs' centered around the sounds she makes, but in her body position: "I can sort of tell when, not when she is about to have an orgasm but when the clock starts ticking." In addition he said that he does not know his own non-verbal 'signs' that he communicates to Eva during sex, but he does not think she knows hers either. It is interesting to see that Jan notices her non-verbal communication more than his, and he believes that Eva feels the same about her non-verbal communication during sex.

Maarten also explains how non-verbal cues allow him to talk about certain topics verbally. He gave the example of when he wanted to bring up the topic of anal intercourse with Fleur:

Sometimes you are in the vagina and then it goes out. Then you kind of move it towards the anus, and it is kind of a playful thing but I also think that it gave Fleur an idea of 'okay maybe, you want to try that.' In that sense it became discussable.

He is non-verbally able to communicate a desire to Fleur so that they can later verbally discuss the subject between themselves. For him in their relationship, this works as a way to communicate desires. Through this method he was able to communicate his desire outside of the sexual activity with his partner. This was a clear indicator for Fleur that Maarten had a desire. It is unclear who started the discussion on trying anal sex, however they were able to further discuss Maarten's desire.

It would appear from this sample that non-verbally communicating desires and pleasures most often occurs during sex. All three partners who

reported having insecurities with communicating their desires verbally about sex said it was easier for them to communicate their pleasures - or displeasures – through non-verbal cues.

Difficulty in Verbally Communicating

Cora Emens says that the majority of couples who she sees in her practice have a communication issue of some sort. When asked to describe the communication she has seen between couples in her practice she says,

It is bad most of the time. I think women try in the beginning, but if they do not get feedback then they shut up. Also men maybe they try a couple of times. [Partners] are very protective of each other and protective of the relationship, so if the rest is okay they just shut up. They think 'let's keep it this way, I have a good marriage, we have a house together, we have kids together, do not shake the boat too much.' So I cannot say it is more women or more men; both try and easily give up.

Along with this, she explains that a lot of women who come to her do not know what they want, in terms of desires or pleasures, so they can not communicate to their partner. In addition, according to Emens, men do not ask women what they would like. In the end, these couples develop problems in their sex life due to lack of communication.

Whether it is verbal or non-verbal, every partner who I interviewed discussed some sort of discomfort or difficulty expressing themselves to their

partner. Both Marije and Pieter have their own discomforts discussing sex with each other stemming from not knowing how to communicate with each other. Marije points out that the most difficult aspect of communicating about sex with Pieter is:

I am afraid that it is insulting. I am afraid that he will think that he did not do it good, or he does not know how, or that it will be this embarrassing moment. I do not want to make him feel bad. I do not really know how to bring it up, how to say stuff so it is not insulting and that he does not feel bad about it.

For Marije, the difficulty in communicating is less surrounding the topic of sex and her own discomfort with the subject of sex itself, but more with how her partner would respond to what she tells him. Holmberg and Blair (2009) state, “women are also sometimes hesitant to bring up sexual issues” (63). In this case, Marije is more hesitant to bring up sexual desires in fear that she will negatively affect her partner. Although Holmberg and Blair do not explain in their research the primary cause of this hesitation is for women. This hesitation could be caused by an individual’s discomfort with the topic, the reaction of their partner, or general discomfort with discussing sexual issues. On the other hand, for Pieter, the difficult with communicating lies in the timing of the discussion:

It is easier if someone is already into the sexual act to really think about ‘would I like this or wouldn’t I like this? I would not go up to her while

she is brushing her teeth like 'Hey baby, want to do this?' We would not sit down at this table and discuss sex acts. We would not say, 'What did you think of last night? Did doggy style position work for you?' No. We do not do that. I do not know if people do that, but we do not.

They experience that if one of them has a sexual desire, it is brought up during sex. Marije does not find that this is an effective way for her partner to communicate desires to her:

When you are having sex and he has a thing that he wants and he asks it and I do not feel like it, it becomes a discussion while you are having sex and that is not really nice. Then my whole mood is like totally gone. That is what is hard about really communicating about it when you are having sex.

For both partners, the timing of the discussion is an issue because Pieter does not know when he would bring up the topic of sexual desires, during sex is easier for him. The second issue that arises when Pieter discusses desires to Marije while having sex is the nature of the desire. If Pieter's desire is something that Marije is not interested in doing, it is difficult for her to say no to him, particularly if he is using an approach to convince her to do something. In this way, verbal communication is not used in an effective way within the dyad.

For Pieter, there is a lack of experience with discussing sex. He says that this is due to never learning how to communicate about sex. In his first

long-term relationship, he never discussed sex with his partner and he was never taught how to sexually communicate from his parents. With both partners, the problem lies in not knowing how to communicate with their partner; this involves when to discuss the subject and what they discuss. For Marije, the problem is not bringing up the subject of sex, it is how to communicate her thoughts and feelings without them being interpreted in a negative fashion by her partner. On the other hand, as I mentioned previously, Pieter finds difficulty in bringing up the topic of sex outside of having sex. The way this couple communicates about sex is not effective for either partner and problems stem from multiple aspects of the way they communicate. Neither partner in this dyad has training with sexual communication, unlike the other two couples in this study. It is possible that many couples who are in a similar situation to Marije and Pieter have similar difficulty in their communication, although it is illogical to make any conclusions based off of this sample size.

Discursive Strategies, Sexual Satisfaction, and Role Development

I found that discursive strategies, particularly non-verbal, affect sexual satisfaction. In Maarten's previous relationship, he describes that he understood that the sex that he and his partner were having was good. However, because he did not make any sound during intercourse, his partner thought that he was not enjoying the sex; she thought that the sex was bad. In this way, his lack of communication was interrupting the discourse. She was not completely satisfied with their sex life because she thought he was not satisfied. It was her understanding that having 'good sex' required both partners to make sound. After verbally communicating this concern to

Maarten, he clarified that the lack of sound did not stem from dissatisfaction with their sexual activity. From then on, in order to communicate his satisfaction with sex, he made a conscious effort to make more sounds during sex. Now, in his relationship with Fleur he realizes that the sound that he makes directly correlates with his level of comfort with his partner. He explains that in this way, the sound that he makes indicates the satisfaction he is getting from the sexual activity with partner. He said that he is sexually satisfied in his relationship with Fleur. Thus, non-verbal communication, in this case sound, can have an impact on the discourse between two partners.

Pieter also uses non-verbal communication – touch – to change a discourse. As previously mentioned, in order for Pieter to initiate sex, he often non-verbally communicates this desire by coming up to Marije and touching her. He only acts this way when he wants to have sex with her. He emphasized his non-verbal cues to initiate sex more than those of Marije. He explained that she is always more cuddly and touchy than he is. In previous research, it has been shown that men often initiate sex more than women, this could either be because men have more desire for sex than women or that they “act in accordance with conventional scripts that men as the initiators of sexual activity (Impett & Peplau, 2003, 90). Therefore, Pieter could have more desire than Marije to have sex in their relationship or he could be emphasizing this aspect of their sexual relationship because that is how he is supposed to act according to the stereotypes of men and their desires, although these two explanations for his behavior are not mutually exclusive.

Initiation of sex, from a Social Exchange Theory perspective, can also indicate equity within the relationship. According to Sprecher (1998), equity in

a relationship can be determined by the inputs and outcomes of both partners and their perceived balance within the dyad (33). The Social Exchange Theory can be directly applied to the initiation of sex (37). While Pieter admitted to often initiating sex, both him and Marije admitted to refusing sex for a variety of reasons. Marije describes, “we have these periods that he really does not feel like it, and that can be long time, like weeks. At a certain point I really get tired of that”. Both partners express that these ‘periods’ are frustrating for them. According to Social Exchange Theory,

Partners who take turns initiating sex and are also relatively equal in the number of times they refuse sex because of headaches and not being in the mood no doubt are likely to feel balance and thus contentment in their sexual relationship (Sprecher, 37).

Pieter feels as though these periods happen to both partners equally as frequently, whereas Marije stressed her frustration when he does not want to have sex. Each partner can perceive equity in the relationship differently because the value of rewards and costs differ for each individual (40). While Pieter may feel contentment in his relationship with Marije, Marije might feel as though there is an imbalance with the amount of times she desires sex and he does not. This situation is addressed by Sprecher (1998) as research shows “initiating sex often was moderately valued, but women valued partner’s efforts at initiating frequent sex more than their own, whereas men valued own initiation and partner initiation equally” (38). Therefore, Pieter finds the amount he initiates sex and the amount that Marije initiates sex as

equivalent, whereas Marije is more aware of when she has to initiate sex. It is less 'valuable' from Marije's perspective for her to initiate sex. It is also possible that Marije desires sex more than Pieter, even though it is generally men who have more of a desire for sex than women.

All of the participants in my study said that verbal sexual communication directly influenced their own sexual satisfaction. Holmberg and Blair (2009) find that in most ongoing relationships men and women would both say that they are sexually satisfied within the dyad (63). Eva, who states that she is sexually satisfied in her relationship with Jan, says that sexual communication affects her overall relationship because "although it is not the foundation, sex is the cement in your relationship. It is important to discuss what you like and what you do not like and how you feel about it." On the other hand, Marije who says she is sexually satisfied in her relationship with Pieter says that there are "things she can not find with her partner." She continues to explain that she can be interested in other women, which is something she cannot get from her relationship with Pieter. They discussed her interest in other women in the beginning of their relationship and although at the time he said this was okay with him "it has changed." Now, she says, he is not open to the idea of her seeing other women; "he would not like that". By no longer discussing this dissatisfaction with her partner, she is complying with her partner and his needs. According to Impett and Peplau (2003), "conventional gender roles may...foster greater compliance among women...women are generally more likely than men to provide social support to others" (91). They also found women "emphasized wanting to satisfy a partner's needs...avoid tension in a relationship, and avoid rejecting a partner"

(91). Marije is putting Pieter need of keeping a monogamous relationship before her own need of getting sexual satisfaction from another woman. In order to not disrupt their relationship, she no longer talks about this desire with her partner. Perhaps she is afraid that if he knows she is still interested in other women, she is rejecting Pieter as her partner. In addition, men are generally thought of to have more sexual desires and needs than women. In this case, the woman is the partner who has a desire to have a sexual experience outside of the relationship.

From a Social Exchange perspective, research on marital dissatisfaction in the Netherlands shows that “for women only, inequity was associated significantly with both actual and desired extra-dyadic involvement...underbenefited and overbenefited women had been involved in more extramarital relationships and desired them more than men in equitable relationships” (Sprecher, 1998, 39). Therefore, this could indicate that Marije is either underbenefiting or overbenefiting in her relationship with Pieter. Although this would need to be examined further because individuals who are in equitable relationships also desire affairs outside of their committed relationship (39). Thus, this does not conclude that Marije is in an inequitable relationship, or unhappy or dissatisfied with the position in her relationship. Through communication, or lack of communication regarding satisfaction within a relationship, an individual’s role in their dyad can develop and be understood.

In all of my interviews, the men were more explicit when discussing their sexual communication and satisfaction in their interviews as opposed to the women. All of my interviews with the male partners lasted longer than my

interviews with their female partners. The women, particularly the women who discuss sex in their profession, gave me short and concise answers for the questions I asked them. The men on the other hand, gave me explicit examples from their relationship and sex life in order to answer my questions. This is perhaps due to them performing according to their traditional social script, because women and men are socialized differently when it comes to sex (Impett & Peplau, 89). In general, men are often seen as more interested in sex and have more sexual desire, while women are supposed to suppress their sex drive and desires (90). As a result, the men are more willing and open to discussing sex whereas the women were hesitant to share details of their sex life with me.

Although the women spoke less than the men in my interviews, Maarten and Jan find that their partners are the ones who will bring up the topic of sex more often than they do. While both men feel as if they are free to talk about sex with their partner, Maarten prefers if his partner is the one who initiates discussing sex. He explains that in most of his relationships, he has to become comfortable enough with his partner in order to actually discuss sex, particular what he prefers sexually:

It takes quite a while for me to be wanting to discuss it and it usually comes from her because I have kind of resigned myself to generally...with most of my relationships, I have had, sort of ending the same with that, I do not really bring it up. It is kind of like 'I am cool' but if it is from her than it is kind of like I am willing to discuss it.

In his relationship with Fleur, this works well for him because she is the one that initiates the discussion, although he says that he has “resigned” himself when it comes to bringing up the topic of sex. Similarly, according to Jan, Eva will discuss sex with everyone. When it comes to discussing sex between the dyad, Eva is the one who will start the conversation and ask questions. He says that this is due to training as a sexologist. She will often bring up the topic in a “casual day to day manner.” She tells him what she likes and does not like, and asks him questions about what he likes or what he would like to try. On this subject Eva says,

Sometimes I have the feeling that I talk a little bit too much about sex. Sometimes I think to myself, ‘okay, this a little bit too much. I have to slow it down a bit and stop talking.’ I am afraid that because I talk so much about it that his self-confidence will – he will feel insecure about himself, and I do not want that and that sometimes makes me stop talking about sex.

She explains that she has to control the amount she talks about sex and by talking about sex too much it could have a negative effect on her relationship Jan. This is in opposition of what Impett and Peplau (2003) say about gender roles of men and women. They claim that “traditional gender roles cast men as independent agents and women as submissive followers”(91). In both couple’s cases, in terms of discussing sex, the women perform the role as the ‘independent agents’ whereas the men are more submissive to what and when they discuss. The women are the ones who discuss sex freely and

openly while the men wait for the women to bring up the topic. Thus, the roles of the women and men in their relationships do not abide by the typical non-sexual social standards of their gender.

Conclusion

Sexual communication and satisfaction are subjects that are widely seen as important, however they are significantly understudied, particularly within long-term relationships. This research strives to explore how long-term, mixed-sex, monogamous couples in the Netherlands communicate about sex and how this communication affects their personal sexual satisfaction. This information can give insight to the roles that partners develop within their relationships based on previous communication and socio-cultural research.

My research finds common themes between the sexual discourse individuals have with their long-term partners. First, the majority of communication is translated through non-verbal communication to indicate sexual pleasure during sex or to initiate sex with their partner before sexual activity occurs. Both partners initiate sex with each other non-verbally, however the male partners emphasized initiation when discussing non-verbal sexual communication more than their female partners. Second, the majority of partners find it difficult to communicate about sex with their partner for a variety of reasons. This difficulty often stems from lack of knowledge on how to communicate with their partner. This includes when to initiate the discussion, where to discuss sex with their partner, verbalizing their own desires and fantasies, and communicating a criticism to their partner. Although most individuals do not know how to talk about sex with their partner, the majority of my participants wanted to increase the amount of sex talk that they have in their relationship. Third, all partners explained that sexual communication is important and necessary for their own sexual satisfaction.

Although I do not think my sample is large enough to make any conclusions about sexual discourse between couples in the Netherlands, I hope to provide some insight into the communication that does occur. I believe, along with my participants, that sexual communication is important for a healthy, successful, and satisfying sexual relationship to occur, regardless of the amount of time partners have been together. I know that my research has made a positive impact on sexual communication in the Netherlands, as one of my interviewees explained to me that participating in my research gave her a reason to discuss sex with his partner.

For further research, I would like to look at different populations and how sexual communication differs depending on the background of the partners and the structure of the relationship. It is important to look at sexual communication and satisfaction within same-sex couples, partners who identify as religious, and between differing socio-economic backgrounds. I would like to explore sexual communication and satisfaction between couples that have had children. It would be interesting to look at how their communication has changed because of it. Along these lines, I would like to see how women communicate desires during menopause or after menopause, if at all and whether menopause has affected communication within the dyad. Primarily, I would like to research communication between polyamorous or BDSM relationships, as these types of relationships generally require more communication between the partners in order for the relationships to function successfully. In addition, the partners involved in these relationships may have a better understanding of their sexual interests and desires. I think that in order for any of this research to be successful, two

interviews would have to take place for each partner: one individual interview, and one interview where both partners (or multiple partners) are present.

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Appendix A - Oral Consent Form

You are invited to take part in an interview about sexual communication and satisfaction. This interview will take no longer than 1 and a half hours. There are no known risks or discomforts associated with this survey. Results from this study will be used solely for this academic project. Taking part in this study is completely voluntary. If you choose to be in the study you can withdraw at any time. Your responses will be kept strictly confidential, and data will be stored in secure computer files and devices. All identifying material will be kept strictly private, and will be destroyed at the end of this study (December 15, 2013). Any report of this research that is made available to the public will not include your name or any other individual information by which you could be identified. If you have questions or want a copy or summary of this study's results, you can contact the researcher at the email address above. If you have any questions about whether you have been treated in an illegal or unethical way, contact SIT Academic Director, Yvette Kopijn (yvette.kopijn@sit.edu).

Do you have any questions about the above information?

If you agree to the above statement, please give your verbal consent to participate in this interview.

Appendix B - Written Consent Form

I am a student at the University of Puget Sound studying abroad with SIT: Netherlands and I am conducting interviews for my research on sexual communication between couples in the Dutch context.

During this study, you will be asked to answer some questions regarding your experience communicating with your partner about sex and sexual satisfaction. This interview was designed to be approximately an hour in length. However, please feel free to expand on the topic or talk about related ideas. Also, if there are any questions you would rather not answer or that you do not feel comfortable answering, please say so and we will stop the interview or move on to the next question, whichever you may prefer.

All the information will be kept confidential. I will keep the data in a secure place. Only myself will have access to this information. Upon completion of my research, all data will be destroyed or stored in a secure location.

Participant's Agreement:

I am aware that my participation in this interview is voluntary. I understand the intent and purpose of this research. If, for any reason, at any time, I wish to stop this interview, I may do so without having to give an explanation.

I am aware the data will be used in a research project that will be presented. I have the right to review, comment on, and/or withdraw information prior to the research paper submission. The data gathered in this study are confidential with respect to my personal identity unless I specify otherwise. I understand if I say anything that I believe may incriminate myself, the interviewer will immediately rewind the tape and record over the potentially incriminating information. The interviewer will then ask me if I would like to continue the interview.

If I have any questions about this study, I am free to contact the student researcher (06.1706.6481, mdicostanzo@pugetsound.edu) or the Academic Director (Amsterdam@sit.edu).

I have been offered a copy of this consent form that I may keep for my own reference.

I have read the above form and, with the understanding that I can withdraw at any time and for whatever reason, I consent to participate in today's interview.

Appendix C - Interview Guide for Couples

- When you were growing up, how was sex discussed in your parental family? Did you discuss sexuality openly with your parents and siblings? If so/if not how was that for you?
- How did you meet your partner?
- What did you find attractive about your partner initially? What do you think they found attractive about you?
- Did you discuss sex when you started to date? When did you first start discussing sex?
- Could you tell me a little bit about the dynamic between you and your partner? Who does what in the relationship?
- When you hear the phrase “sexual communication,” what do you think of?
- How important is it for you to communicate your sexual desires with your partner?
- Could you describe the communication you have with your partner regarding sex? How do you think you communicate? How does your partner communicate?
- How often would you say you talk to your partner about sex?
- Who brings up the topic of sex the most, you or your partner? And what provokes the conversation?
- How would you go about talking to your partner about sex?
- When you talk about sex, what topics arise?
- Is there any factor in your relationship that stops you from talking to your partner about sex? Or what do you perceive as a difficult topic to discuss with your partner?
- Are there any ways that you nonverbally communicate about sex? What happens? When does it happen?
- What does ‘sexual satisfaction’ mean to you?
- How do you communicate to your partner about sexual satisfaction? Do you notice any difference in the way that you communicate about sex and your sexual desires and the way your partner does?
- Would you say that in your relationship with your partner you feel like you are sexually satisfied? If so, do you think that communicating your sexual desires helped you to become sexually satisfied?
- Do you have any suggestions for couples who find it hard to communicate about sex in their relationship?
- Is there anything else that you want to tell me?

Appendix D - Interview Guide for Sexologist/Sex Coach

- Could you tell me a little bit about your career? How did you start your career as a sex coach? Is there any reason you chose Amsterdam?
- Why do people come to you? When do you think a couple should come to you?
- When you were growing up, how was sex discussed in your parental family? Did you discuss sexuality openly with your parents and siblings? If so/if not how was that for you?
- When you hear the phrase “sexual communication,” what do you think of?
- How important do you think it is for couples to communicate with each other about their sexual desires and satisfaction? Why?
- Could you describe the communication you have noticed between couples about sex? How do you think they communicate?
- How often would you say partners should talk about sex?
- What is a good way to bring up the topic of sex with a partner?
- Who brings up the topic of sex the most, men or women? And what provokes the conversation?
- How would you go about talking to your partner about sex?
- How do you think, in a heterosexual relationship, men and women communicate differently, from what you’ve seen?
- When couples talk about sex, what topics arise?
- What factors in a relationship stop partners from talking about sex? Or what do you perceive as a difficult topic for partners to discuss?
- What are common ways to communicate sex nonverbally? Do you think verbal or nonverbal communication is used more often?
- What does ‘sexual satisfaction’ mean to you?
- How have you seen partners communicate about sexual satisfaction? Do you notice any difference in the way that men and women communicate about sex and sexual desires ?
- Do you have any suggestions for couples who find it hard to communicate about sex in their relationship?
- Is there anything else that you want to tell me?