

# DEFINITION OF SEX AND PLEASURE FOCUSES

## **Definition of Sex and its Relation to Focuses of Pleasure**

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### Abstract

Sexual wellbeing is a part of living a healthy life and is increased by pleasurable sex. Focuses on receiving and giving pleasure are thus of importance to examine by research. During this online questionnaire study, self-pleasure focus (SPF) and partner pleasure (PPF) focus are assessed in relation to definition of sex and sexual behaviour. Focusing on either one's self-pleasure or one's partner's pleasure is hypothesised to be correlated to how broad one's definition of sex is. This definition includes various behaviours outside of penile vaginal intercourse (PVI). Two models were tested, having *definition of sex* as the IV, *self/ partner pleasure focus* as the DVs and *sexual behaviour* (excluding PVI) as a moderator. Results found no significant effects of definition of sex on either SPF or PPF and no moderation by sexual behaviour. Due to methodological shortcomings of the measurements used in this study, further research should look for more reliable measurement tools. SPF and PPF should further be studied to discover what influences them, as this study found definition of sex to not influence them.

*Keywords:* definition of sex, self-pleasure focus, partner pleasure focus, sexual behaviour, pleasure prioritization, sexual repertoire

## **Introduction**

When it comes to sexual activity, many factors play a role in how people engage in sex. Emotions, attraction to the potential partner, societal norms, and many others, are either consciously or unconsciously taken into consideration when one engages in sex. Meston and Buss (2007) found 237 reasons for having sex, that differed significantly; from mundane reasons (i.e., “It’s fun”); to satisfying higher psychological needs such as experiencing spirituality (i.e., “To get closer to God”). These intrinsic motives are varying, depending on demographical factors such as age and gender (Giannotta et al., 2009; Gore-Gorszewska, 2021) and personality factors (Meston & Buss, 2007). Regardless of these factors, sexual pleasure and satisfaction are part of the main motivations to have sex. Sexual pleasure can be derived by the bodily function of orgasm but has a cognitive component as well. It can arise through experiencing emotional closeness, feelings of validation and / or social influences (Ford et al., 2021). Sexual satisfaction is very important for one’s mental and physical health (Ford et al., 2021; Herbenick et al., 2022; May & Johnston, 2022). Pleasure contributes to this sexual wellbeing and focusing on receiving and/or giving pleasure during heterosexual sex yields different behaviours for the partners involved. Thus, I will investigate heterosexual women’s pleasure focuses. Specifically zooming in on the focus on one’s own sexual pleasure and the focus of the partner’s sexual pleasure. My aim is to examine women’s self-pleasure focus (SPF) and their partner pleasure focus (PPF) in relation to sex. For this, I will examine the influence of an individual’s definition of sex as well as their sexual behaviour. The results of this work will be beneficial to understanding pleasure mechanisms during sexual activity.

## **Literature Review**

### **Pleasure Focus**

Considering the width of reasons for engaging in sexual activities, experiencing and providing sexual pleasure was often presented as being one of the main motives (Gore-

Gorszewska, 2021; Meston & Buss, 2007). Gore-Gorszewska (2021) conducted qualitative research with participants from older generations and found women to exhibit a common narrative in which their main motive was to sexually please their husbands as part of their duties as a wife. Considering these motives, it is of importance to evaluate the pleasure focuses women exhibit today. Throughout most research findings, researchers used pleasure prioritization as a measurement for these focuses (Carter et al., 2019; Elmerstig et al., 2013; Kettrey, 2018). However, there are flaws in the measurement of pleasure prioritization. Kettrey (2018), for example, reported “high prioritization of orgasm for both her and her partner”, which by definition of the term “prioritization” one cannot prioritize two constructs. I will assess SPF and PPF separately, to avoid any confusion and to enable individuals to display both high focus of pleasure for themselves as well as high focus of pleasure for their partner.

### ***Self-Pleasure Focus (SPF)***

An individual’s SPF describes how much emphasis one puts on receiving pleasure. Orgasm as one measurement of pleasure in sexual activities is defined as an experience of intense sexual pleasure with a short, altered state of consciousness afterwards (Garcia et al., 2014). However, the prevalence of an orgasm during sex differs between populations. One specific example for this difference is the so called “Orgasm gap” between men and women in heterosexual encounters, finding men to orgasm more frequently than women (Blumenstock, 2022; Frederick et al., 2018; Wetzal et al., 2022). One research review found men to orgasm around 70% to 100% during heterosexual sex, whereas women’s range lies between 30% to 60%, the size of the gender orgasm gap being reported as being between -20% and -72% (Döring & Mohseni, 2022). These findings suggest a lowered pleasure experience by women, which is suspected to be caused by an idea that the female orgasm is harder to achieve compared to the male (Frederick et al., 2018), this perception further

leading to women showing lower expectation to orgasm during sex (Blumenstock, 2022; Laan et al., 2021).

### ***Partner Pleasure Focus (PPF)***

Focusing on one's partner's pleasure can be coined negatively. An example of this is the perception of pleasuring a man as a duty that women of previous generations felt they had to fulfil to be seen as a good wife (Gore-Gorszewska, 2021). These ideas of prioritizing male pleasure in heterosexual sex and being seen as a "pleasing woman" are nowadays further perpetuated through hook-up culture (Carter et al., 2019; Pham, 2017). Hook-up culture is defined as a social surrounding that approves sexual encounters between partners that share the understanding of these encounters to not have relationships, emotional involvement, or commitment as an outcome (Zheng, 2022). During these sexual encounters, men show a higher frequency in taking a role of the pleasure receiver, receiving more oral sex without reciprocating it (Jozkowski & Satinsky, 2013). Jozkowski and Satinsky (2013) found women to be more active in giving their partners' pleasure attention, in comparison to men, leading women to prioritizing their partners' pleasure. However, it needs to be understood that not every sexually active person engages in "hook-ups". A cross-cultural study of long term relationships found women, compared to men, to have a lower sexual satisfaction in the beginning of the relationship which increases over the time to a somewhat higher sexual satisfaction than men, whereas men show a smaller increase of this measure (Heiman et al., 2011). These findings imply that female sexual satisfaction is more influenced by the length of the relationship compared to male sexual satisfaction, considering the short-lived nature of most "hook-ups", male satisfaction comes out higher. The male prioritizing influences of hook up culture might create an imbalance between SPF and PPF. Such imbalances should be avoided, as having equalized SPF and PPF has been shown to have positive outcomes on

satisfaction and minimized engagement in undesired activities (Kettrey, 2018). Thus, it is of importance to measure the interplay of both focuses.

### **Definition of Sex**

As a potential predictor of SPF and PPF, I will examine the subjective definition of sex. The following concerns the definition of heterosexual sex. Sanders and Reinisch (1999) conducted a study in the US titled “Would you say you had sex if...?” asking participants, women, and men, to categorize researcher chosen sexual activities as “had sex” or “not have had sex”. Their results showed a consensus on penile vaginal intercourse (PVI) being classified as sex by 99.5% of participants. However, when it came to other behaviours such as mutual masturbation, deep kissing, and oral sex, the discrepancy between people’s definition of sex increased (Sanders & Reinisch, 1999). These results resonate with the notion that PVI is perceived as being “real sex”, more so than oral sex, manual genital touching, breast and nipple touching and kissing (Horowitz & Bedford, 2017). Horowitz and Bedford (2017) describe this order of classifying actions as “having sex” as the hierarchy for definitions of sex which holds constant when controlling for cultural differences, age, or context. Diorio (2016) explains how historically, PVI was seen as the only sexual activity that was sex, as heterosexuality was the only socially accepted sexual orientation, due to sex only being conceived as acceptable when done for reproduction. Nevertheless, they argue, that this “PVI-only” view is changing over time, through sexual liberation and non-heterosexual couples bringing different practices into the heterosexual mainstream (Diorio, 2016).

Sex is not only defined by actions alone, as one study found the occurrence of an orgasm to be a factor that influences whether students rated a behaviour as sex (Byers et al., 2009). Participants were asked to define 17 behaviours as “having sex” or counting as “sexual abstinence”. Results showed that bidirectional genital stimulation was defined as sex more in comparison to no genital stimulation or unidirectional genital stimulation, which

were more likely to be viewed as “sexual abstinence”. The aforementioned hierarchy of definitions of sex was also reflected in these findings (Byers et al., 2009). This hegemonic status of penetrative sex does not only show in young people’s definition but was also found in older generations (Gewirtz-Meydan et al., 2019). Having a PVI focused definition linked with continued sexual desire and a loss of sexual function, e.g., because of erectile dysfunction, relates to negative psychological consequences (Gewirtz-Meydan et al., 2019). Such consequences include heightened distress, feelings of disappointment, frustration, and failure (Bergeron et al., 2020).

Due to the common acknowledgement of PVI as sex (Diorio, 2016; Gewirtz-Meydan et al., 2019; Horowitz & Bedford, 2017; Sanders & Reinisch, 1999), I will specifically analyse participants definition of other sexual behaviours, excluding PVI. Concentrating on non-PVI sexual behaviours takes the divergence of consensus, and the possible mental health benefits of a broader non-PVI definition into account. These factors are of importance when evaluating an individual’s SPF and PPF.

### **Sexual Behaviour**

The definition of what counts as sex has an influence on sexual behaviour. In sexual abstinence cultures, it is important which behaviours an individual sees as being sex, for them to not engage in these as part of their religion or culture (Byers et al., 2009). Researchers assessed participants sexual repertoire through data from the National Survey of Sexual Health and Behaviour (Herbenick et al., 2022). The hierarchy of definition (Horowitz & Bedford, 2017) is reflected in this analysis of sexual repertoire, showing PVI to be engaged in more often compared to non-PVI behaviours (Herbenick et al., 2022). However, engaging in a greater variety of sexual behaviours, including non-PVI activities, was found to positively relate to female orgasm (Silverberg, 1981).

Again, the high frequency of engagement in PVI behaviours and the importance of non-PVI activities for female pleasure leads me to focus on these non-PVI behaviours. As having a broad definition of sex does not directly mean that one engages in the behaviour, they deemed as “sex”, it is important to take behaviour into account when assessing one’s definition’s relationship to SPF and PPF. The broadness of non-PVI behaviours will be assessed and their connection to SPF and PPF examined.

### **Research Question**

Having done a thorough literature review, I will examine the relationship between the broadness of definition of sex (excluding PVI) and SPF and PPF. The overarching research question for this thesis is thus: How does definition of sex relate to the focuses of pleasure? I will be using definition of sex as the independent variable and self and partner pleasure focus as the dependent variables. Furthermore, I will include actual behaviour as a moderator (Figure 1, Figure 2). Through my literature review I arrived at three different hypotheses for the relations in these models:

**Hypothesis 1.** The broadness of definition of sex will correlate positively with SPF. Research on the hierarchy of definition of sex puts penetrative sexual activities on top (Horowitz & Bedford, 2017), however, these are not always leading to female pleasure, see orgasm gap (Blumenstock, 2022; Frederick et al., 2018; Wetzel et al., 2022). I derive that the inclusion of different forms of stimulation of the clitoris reflected through a broad definition of sex, leads to higher SPF.

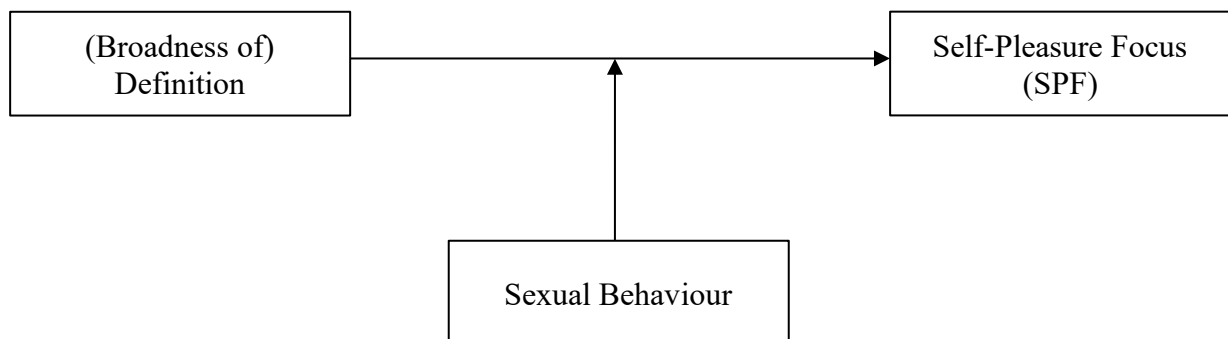
**Hypothesis 2.** The broadness of definition of sex will negatively correlate with PPF. This would mean that a narrow definition would be related to higher PPF. This could reflect the notion of hierarchy of sexual definition stating penetrative sexual activities to always be considered as sex (Horowitz & Bedford, 2017), which often leads to pleasure and orgasm of the male involved.



**Hypothesis 3.** Sexual behaviour (non-PVI) plays a moderating role in these two relationships. Having a broad definition does not mean it is also reflected by one's behaviour. Engagement in a broad variety of non-PVI behaviours is related to increased female pleasure experience (Silverberg, 1981). I thus hypothesize that sexual behaviour will positively influence the strength of the relationship of broadness of definition and SPF and PPF.

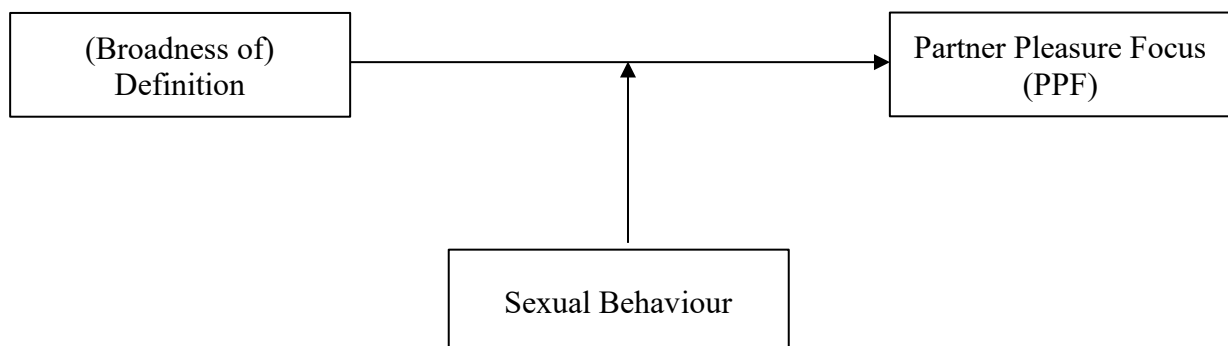
**Figure 1**

*Hypothesized Moderation Model Concerning SPF*



**Figure 2**

*Hypothesized Moderation Model Concerning PPF*



## **Method**

### **Participants**

A total of 273 participants were eligible for analysis, as they completed the survey, identified as female and predominantly heterosexual. Due to missing values, 31 participants were excluded, leaving 242 participants' data analysed. The sample had a mean age of  $M = 21.39$  ( $SD = 3.15$ ). Participants were recruited through the SONA-platform, which is directed towards first-year psychology students at the University of Groningen, who receive credit for their partaking. Furthermore, the study was advertised on Instagram and LinkedIn. The advertisement stated that our research team was "Exploring Meaning and Expectations of Sex" and looking for women over the age of 18 who have had sex before. This advert was also shown on screens on campus, namely the University Library. The study has been approved by the Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Behavioural and Social Sciences at the University of Groningen (PSY-2223-S0281).

### **Research Design and Procedure**

The data used for this study is taken out of the responses of the Meaning and Expectation of Sexual Activity (MESA) questionnaire. This measurement tool is designed to quantify the meaning of sex per individuum. It was constructed using the Hite Report of Female Sexuality (Hite, 1979) as a framework for finding important subthemes, mentioned frequently in connection to meaning of sex. This report concerns itself with female sexuality including preferences, behaviour, and orgasm, as well as, social aspects that influence female sexuality (Hinchliff, 2004). The MESA questionnaire was constructed based on the questions and responses included in the Hite Report. Three important factors included in the survey are definition of sex, pleasure focuses and sexual behaviour. Participants were to report some general descriptive data about themselves and were then asked to fill out the MESA survey. For another study, assessing possible factors relation to vulvodynia,  $n = 156$  participants

additionally completed multiple questionnaires after MESA. However, this difference in procedure can be disregarded, as it was ensured that all participants answered the same items in the same order until the end of the MESA measurement.

## Measures

### *Broadness of Definition of Sex*

Eight items measure whether participants consider eight different non-PVI behaviours as "having sex" on 5-point Likert scales (Appendix A): "I consider the following behaviours as "having sex" (please indicate regardless of whether you engage in them or not): oral sex (fellatio), oral sex (cunnilingus), giving anal sex, receiving anal sex, kissing, mutual masturbation, masturbation, and intimacy and physical touch without penetration" ( $0 = strongly disagree$ ,  $4 = strongly agree$ ). The broadness of definition is being measured by adding each score of the eight behaviours together. This creates a measurement that ranges from 0 to 32, with 32 being the highest score, reflecting that all eight behaviours are strongly agreed as being sex. Cronbach's alpha for these eight items is  $\alpha = .78$ .

### *Self-Pleasure Focus*

A participant's SPF is being assessed by 14 items (Appendix A). All response options were on 5-point Likert scales. These are: "I decide when sex is over" ( $0 = strongly disagree$ ,  $4 = strongly agree$ ), "I take time in sexual play which may not be stimulating to my partner" ( $0 = never$ ,  $4 = always$ ), "My partner takes time in sexual play to stimulate me / provide pleasure, without being specifically stimulated themselves" ( $0 = never$ ,  $4 = always$ ), and "The following aspect of sex give me pleasure: receiving pleasure" ( $0 = strongly disagree$ ,  $4 = strongly agree$ ). Furthermore, the congruence between the behaviours one sees as pleasurable and the behaviours one engages in was calculated. This was done by calculating the difference between pleasurability of and engagement in ten behaviours. Measurements of pleasurability of ten various sexual behaviours are: "I find the following behaviours

pleasurable: Penile-Vaginal Intercourse (PVI) with orgasm, PVI without orgasm, oral sex (fellatio), oral sex (cunnilingus), giving anal sex, receiving anal sex, kissing, mutual masturbation, masturbation, and intimacy and physical touch without penetration” ( $0 = \textit{never}$ ;  $4 = \textit{always}$ ). The engagement of these ten behaviours is measured with “I engage in the following behaviours during sex: ...” ( $0 = \textit{never}$ ;  $4 = \textit{always}$ ). The absolute differences between pleasurability and engagement in each of the ten sexual behaviours are calculated and reverse coded. This way, a high score reflects that a person’s pleasurable score on one behaviour is congruent with their engagement in this behaviour ( $0 = \textit{large difference}$ ,  $4 = \textit{no difference}$ ). These ten congruence scores are added to the other items assessing SPF. Adding all SPF measurements together results in a continuous score from 0 to 56. Cronbach’s alpha for these 14 items is  $\alpha = .48$ .

### ***Partner Pleasure Focus***

The PPF of each respondent is measured with 13 items (Appendix A). It is noteworthy that these are not measurements of the partner, but of the same individual that responded to the other parts of the survey. All responses were given on 5-point Likert scales. The items are: “My partner decides when sex is over” ( $0 = \textit{strongly disagree}$ ,  $4 = \textit{strongly agree}$ ), “I feel guilty about taking time in sexual play which might not be stimulating to my partner” ( $0 = \textit{never}$ ,  $4 = \textit{always}$ ), “The following aspect of sex gives me pleasure: giving pleasure” ( $0 = \textit{strongly disagree}$ ,  $4 = \textit{strongly agree}$ ), and ten items assessing various sexual activities that “I engage in [] solely in order to provide pleasure to my partner” ( $0 = \textit{never}$ ,  $4 = \textit{always}$ ). The sum of these items creates a continuous score from 0 to 52 for PPF. Cronbach’s alpha for these 13 items is  $\alpha = .81$ .

### ***Sexual Behaviour***

Non-PVI behaviour is measured in the questionnaire to assess the influence sexual behaviour has on the relationship between broadness of definition of sex and pleasure

focuses: “I engage in the following behaviours during sex: oral sex (fellatio), oral sex (cunnilingus), giving anal sex, receiving anal sex, kissing, mutual masturbation, masturbation, and intimacy and physical touch without penetration” ( $0 = \text{never}$ ,  $4 = \text{always}$ ) (Appendix A). The sum of these eight items will be used for the analysis, it ranges from 0 to 32. Cronbach’s alpha of the eight items is  $\alpha = .48$ .

### **Data Reduction and Statistical Analysis**

#### ***Exclusion***

After merging all samples into one data file in SPSS, excluding participants who were not female, and not predominantly heterosexual, I ran a missing values analysis, which found 31 participants whose data had missing values. Respective participants were excluded. Furthermore, one participant was excluded, as they had reported to be 10 years old.

#### ***Statistical analysis***

To test hypothesis one and two, assessing the relationship between definition and SPF and PPF, bivariate correlation was used. Process Hayes Model 1 in SPSS was used (Bolin, 2014) to assess the third hypothesis, testing sexual behaviour as a moderator of the relationships tested in hypothesis one and hypothesis two. For both models (Figure 1, Figure 2), linear regression analyses were performed. The correlational relationship between SPF and PPF was assessed.

### **Results**

I assessed the linear relationships between all variables of the model, calculating Pearson’s coefficients (Table 1). The pattern of correlations presented in Table 1 suggest that, in contrast to hypothesis 1, there is no significant correlation between broadness of sex definition and SPF. Hypothesis 2 is also not supported by the data; definition of sex does not significantly correlate with PPF.

**Table 1.**

*Means, Standard Deviations and Pearson correlation coefficients between of the variables of the Model*

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1. Definition	2. Behaviour	3. SPF	4. PPF
1. Definition	18.44	5.49	-	-	-	-
2. Behaviour	15.92	3.46	.135*	-	-	-
3. SPF	40.56	4.72	.015	.201**	-	-
4. PPF	16.59	8.28	.009	.202**	.079	-

Note: \* $p < .005$ ; \*\* $p < .01$

For the analysis of hypothesis three, I conducted a simple moderation analysis using Process Hayes Model 1 in SPSS (Bolin, 2014). The study analyses the potential relationship between broadness of definition of sex and SPF and PPF. Thereby, broadness was the independent variable and SPF and PPF the dependent variables. The moderation analysis adds sexual behaviour to the proposed model.

### ***Self-Pleasure Focus***

Firstly, I analysed the effect of broadness of sexual definition on SPF, assessing sexual behaviour as a moderator (Table 2). The outcome variable SPF, the predictor *definition*, and the moderator *sexual behaviour* were evaluated in this analysis. The interaction between *definition* and *sexual behaviour* was found to be non-significant  $B = .025$ ,  $CI (-.010, .060)$ ,  $p = .156$ . Furthermore, neither *definition*  $B = -.412$ ,  $CI (-.978, .154)$ ,  $p = .153$ , nor *sexual behaviour*  $B = -.205$ ,  $CI (-.893, .483)$ ,  $p = .558$ , were found to significantly predict SPF. These results suggest that sexual behaviour does not have a moderating role in the relationship between definition and SPF.

**Table 2.***Moderation Analysis: Broadness of Definition and Broadness of Behaviour on SPF*

Effect	Estimate	SE	95% CI		p
			LL	UL	
Fixed effects					
Intercept	44.001	5.626	32.923	55.091	.000
Definition	-.412	.287	-.978	.154	.153
Behaviour	-.205	.349	-.893	.483	.558
Definition X Behaviour	.025	.018	-.010	.060	.156

***Partner Pleasure Focus***

Secondly, I examined the effect broadness of definition of sex has on PPF, again assessing sexual behaviour as a moderator (Table 3). The outcome variable PPF, the predictor *definition* and the moderator *sexual behaviour* were evaluated in this analysis. The interaction between definition and sexual behaviour was found to be non-significant  $B = -.047$ ,  $CI (-.107, .014)$ ,  $p = .132$ . Furthermore, definition  $B = .719$ ,  $CI (-.271, 1.710)$ ,  $p = .154$ , was found to be non-significant in this moderation model. Sexual behaviour  $B = 1.386$ ,  $CI (-.180, 2.591)$ ,  $p = .025$ , was found to be significantly associated to PPF. These results identify definition as a non-significant influence on the dependent variable and sexual behaviour to have a positive influence on PPF.

**Table 3.***Moderation Analysis: Broadness of Definition and Broadness of Behaviour on PPF*

Effect	Estimate	SE	95% CI		p
			LL	UL	
Fixed effects					
Intercept	-4.952	9.854	-24.365	14.462	.616
Definition	.719	.503	-.271	1.710	.154
Behaviour	1.386	.612	-.180	2.591	.025
Definition X Behaviour	-.047	.031	-.107	.014	.132

### Discussion

This study's purpose was to examine possible relations between an individual's definition of sex and their SPF and PPF. Sexual behaviour was assessed as a possible moderator in these hypothesised models (Figure 1, Figure 2).

The first hypothesis suggesting that a broad definition of sex will be related to a high SPF, is not significantly supported by the data. Pearson's correlation coefficient was minimally positive and not significant. This does not support my hypothesis which was constructed in consideration of the hierarchy of definition of sex (Horowitz & Bedford, 2017) as well as the literature reporting on the orgasm gap (Blumenstock, 2022; Frederick et al., 2018; Wetzel et al., 2022). Thus, the data implies that the broadness of a person's definition of sex does not correlate with their SPF.

Also, the second hypothesis was not supported by the findings of the analysis. This prediction stated that a broad definition of sex would be negatively related to PPF. As a narrow definition of sex usually reflects sex to mainly consist of penetrative sexual activities, often ending in male orgasm (Horowitz & Bedford, 2017), I expected broadness of definition,



excluding PVI activities, to negatively correlate with PPF. The correlation coefficient of these variables was found to be marginally positive and non-significant. Showing that a broad definition of sex does not correlate with one's PPF.

Lastly, the third hypothesis tested the moderating role of sexual behaviour. This prediction was based on the possibility of a broad definition of sex, which might not reflect itself in the behaviour engaged in. Moreover, Silverberg (1981) found a positive correlation between engagement in a variety of non-PVI activities and female pleasure. Moderation analyses of both models (Figure 1, Figure 2) did not support this hypothesis.

All three hypotheses are rejected, and the predicted models were not found to be significant. Broadness of definition does neither relate to SPF nor to PPF. Sexual behaviour was not found to moderate SPF or PPF's relation to definition of sex. Findings that are not related to the hypothesis are significant correlations between sexual behaviour and SPF, PPF, and definition. These correlations are all positive. The significant positive correlation between behaviour and PPF is furthermore reflected by the findings of the moderation analysis, with sexual behaviour showing a positive association with PPF.

Possible reasons for the non-significant effects of the analysis, assessing the hypotheses are methodological limitations of this study that possibly had an impact on the findings.

### **Limitations and Further Direction**

One major limitation of this study is the reliability of the measurement tool used, as the MESA questionnaire is not yet validated. It is conceptualized to gain an understanding of a person's pleasure focuses, their behaviour, and their definition of sex. For this study, the items included in making up the variables were chosen by face validity. This type of validity is also known as validity by assumption, and carries many methodological issues when research is solely based on it (Downing, 2006). Downing (2006), in his comment on face

validity, states this type of validity to be “the weakest of all arguments for interpretative meaning”. To balance out this methodological issue, Cronbach’s alpha, a reliability measure was used to assess how reliable the items measure the constructs they have been ascribed to. This common method of assessing reliability has a threshold of  $\alpha = 0.7$  as a rule of thumb (Christmann & Van Aelst, 2006). For this study, I analysed the reliability of eight items assessing definition and 13 items assessing PPF which were both found to be reliable. The eight items assessing behaviour had a score of  $\alpha = .48$ . As the goal of these behaviour items was to assess different behaviours, their low Cronbach’s alpha reflects their ability to measure items that are not of one construct. Thus, the behaviour items reflect the variability of behaviours engaged in. However, the 14 items for SPF had a Cronbach’s alpha of  $\alpha = .48$ , these reliability measures can be interpreted as being unreliable by common standards (Christmann & Van Aelst, 2006). Combined with the limitations of face validity, this lack of reliability could be an explanation for SPF not being assessed accurately and thus the model not showing any significant effects on SPF. Possibilities for improvement arise out of these limitations of the SPF measurement. Firstly, prior to utilizing the MESA questionnaire, it requires validation through thorough exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses. Secondly, measurements used to assess pleasure prioritization (Carter et al., 2019; Elmerstig et al., 2013) could be transformed to reliably assess SPF and PPF. However, studies concerning themselves with pleasure prioritization often use qualitative data collection methods such as interviews (Carter et al., 2019; Nicolson & Burr, 2003) or assess it merely in combination with pain during sex (Elmerstig et al., 2013). Concluding, this study’s measurement tool for assessing SPF was not reliable and thus poses as a major limitation to the interpretability of the herein presented results. When a measurement does not reliably test what it is supposed to test, one has to be careful deriving significant findings out of its analysis (Christmann & Van Aelst, 2006). Future research should concern itself with finding a valid and reliable

measurement and could take suggestions of pleasure prioritization research tools into account.

Another threat to the finding's validity is the social desirability factor influencing results of sexual behaviour survey studies (King, 2022). Social desirability is the tendency of participants to answer a question in an untruthful way, as they want to present themselves in a better fashion (Holden & Passey, 2009). King (2022) states that items assessing sexual behaviours were found to be influenced by the social desirability of the behaviour. Additionally, another study found that people's definition of sex is influenced by social desirability, participants who reported not having had sex but having engaged in oral-genital contact were found to be higher in social desirability than those who reported having had sex when engaging in the same behaviour (Den Haese & King, 2022). Considering the effect of social desirability in sexological research, the variables in this study are at high probability to be influenced by this. As an improvement of this study, a measurement tool for social desirability could be included in future research (King, 2022).

Next to this limitation, studies that focus on sensitive topics such as sexual activities are often criticized for being unrepresentative of the general population through sampling bias (Brecher & Brecher, 1986). This study's sample relied on self-selected sampling and convenience sampling, which resulted in a very young sample, including many psychology students. Strassberg and Lowe (1995) found samples of sexology research to have a more positive attitude towards sexuality, less sexual guilt and to be more sexually experienced than the general population. Concerning the external validity of these findings, one needs to consider that these sampling biases will have an impact on the study's ecological validity. Taking this bias into account, the sample of heterosexual women might not reflect the general population's SPF and PPF, as they are more likely to be progressive, and sexually liberated (Strassberg & Lowe, 1995). Viewing the means of SPF and PPF (Table 1) SPF is

considerably higher than PFS, which could imply the presence of a ceiling effect. A ceiling effect could negatively influence the measurements reliability and validity (Schweizer et al., 2019).

Moreover, focusing solely on female predominantly heterosexual participants reinforces a binary perspective of sexes in scientific research. It also perpetuates the heteronormative view which systematically excludes people within the LGBTQIA+ community (Herek et al., 1991). Further research should include a broader sample and assess possible differences in SPF, PPF, definition of sex and congruence between behaviour and definition.

### **Implications**

Despite the limitations of this study, its findings are not to be completely disregarded. They suggest that SPF and PPF are not significantly influenced by an individual's definition of sex. However, correlations between sexual behaviour and SPF, PPF, and definition of sex were found to be positive and significant. These results imply the role of sexual behaviour to positively influence both assessed types of pleasure focus. As, to my knowledge, there are no studies that examine sexual behaviour in relation to pleasure focuses, I will hypothesise possible justifications for the correlations found. One possible explanation would be that women who engage in multiple sexual behaviours do so because of high SPF and PPF. Furthermore, engaging in various behaviours could be connected to higher frequency in sexual activity, this heightened experience could influence or be influenced by SPF and PPF, potentially implying a directional influence of SPF and PPF on sexual behaviour. A suggestion for future research is to examine broadness of sexual behaviour in greater depth, and possibly taking experience or frequency into account. Examining potential influences on SPF and PPF is of importance as a balance in pleasure focus is related to a healthy sex life (Kettrey, 2018).

**Conclusion**

The present research aimed to investigate the possible connections between the definition of sex, sexual behaviour, SPF and PPF. A simple moderation model was hypothesised with definition as the IV, SPF and PPF as DVs and sexual behaviour as a moderator (Figure 1, Figure 2). While no significant effects for the proposed models were found, it is noteworthy that a significant effect emerged between sexual behaviour and PPF, suggesting that behaviour relates positively with PPF. There is no direct effect of definition on SPF and PPF, as well as no moderation effect of behaviour. However, methodological limitations possibly contributed to the non-significant findings. The low reliability of SPF could have added to these, nonetheless, is not able to account for the other non-significant effects. Future research is recommended to focus on finding reliable and valid measurement tools for SPF and PPF, as well as gathering data from a more diverse sample.

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**Appendix A**

I consider the following behaviours as "having sex" (please indicate regardless of whether you engage in them or not):

	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Undecided	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
Penile-Vaginal Intercourse with orgasm	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Penile-Vaginal Intercourse without orgasm	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Oral sex (Fellatio)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Oral sex (Cunnilingus)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Giving anal sex	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Receiving anal sex	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Kissing	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Mutual masturbation	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Masturbation	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Intimacy and physical touch <b>without</b> penetration	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other: <input type="text"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

I engage in the following behaviors during sex:

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
Penile-Vaginal Intercourse with orgasm	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Penile-Vaginal Intercourse without orgasm	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Oral sex (Fellatio)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Oral sex (Cunnilingus)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Giving anal sex	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Receiving anal sex	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Kissing	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Mutual masturbation	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Masturbation	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Intimacy and physical touch <b>without</b> penetration	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



The following aspects of sex give me pleasure:

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly agree	⊙ Not applicable
My partner's orgasm	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My own orgasm	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
I take time in sexual play which may not be specifically stimulating to my partner	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel guilty about taking time in sexual play which may not be specifically stimulating to my partner	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My partner takes time in sexual play to simulate me/provide pleasure, without being specifically stimulated themselves	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Please rate the following statements:

	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Undecided	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
I decide when sex is over	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My partner decides when sex is over	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>