

# Bare'ing it all for the camera: Exploring women's experiences of having erotic photographs taken

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# Agenda

- Background
- Purpose
- Literature Review
- Research Questions
- Method/Participants
- Analysis/Results
- Discussion/Conclusions

# Background

- Traditionally women's sexuality has been more restricted in society than men's (Harris 2005; McCormick 1994)
- Recent research on societal trends indicates that many women are interested in expressing themselves sexually (Rathus, et al., 2005)
- Anecdotal evidence suggests that having erotic photographs taken is a form of sexual expression that is growing in popularity (Latimer, 2007)

# Purpose

- To understand the experience of having erotic photographs taken from the perspective of women clients

# Literature Review

- Eroticism as the intent to arouse (Kleinplatz, 1996)
- Lingerie can be used to provide a fantasy experience or explore one's sexual identity (Jantzen et al., 2006)
- Highly sexual women report a greater comfort using a variety of sexually explicit materials for sexual pleasure (Morrison et al., 2004; Wentland et al., unpublished manuscript)

# Research Questions

- What do women describe as their motivations for having erotic photos taken?
- How do they describe this experience?
- What effects do they feel this has had on their sexuality and relationships?

# Method

- In-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 15 women who have had erotic photographs taken by a professional photographer
- The interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006)

# Participants

- All have had photos taken with a women photographer
- Ranged in age from 25 to 61 (M = 37)
- Majority were heterosexual
- More than half had children

# Results

- Seeing yourself as sexual
- Documentation
- Realistic images of women
- Identity in the photos
- Increasing body esteem and confidence
- The sexual nature of the experience
- Empowerment (beyond sexual)

# Seeing yourself as sexual

“It is hard to see yourself sexually, especially if you are not so confident, and also because you are only looking down at your body or seeing yourself in the mirror. In the pictures you are able to see your likeness and can be like, ‘yeah I am that!’”

“I think it is really important for everybody to be able to see themselves sexually. Nude pictures of yourself can give you that. I think it is a really important thing, especially for women.”

“To be honest when I first saw them I didn’t really think they were me because I didn’t think I looked like that. It was a different image than I had in my head.”

# Documentation

“So 30 years from now I can look back and go “yeah this is what I looked like and why.” It is really telling a story more or less.”

“Now they are a keepsake, something I wanted from this stage of my life. When I am 70 or 80 I can look back and say I am glad I did that.”

“And looking at the photos, it is concrete evidence that I am attractive.”

# Realistic images of women

“And even though I am not a perfect model body, I still feel really good about the way I look. We need more images like that!”

“You almost feel like you shouldn’t be allowed to be nude in front of a camera because you don’t look like the media images we see of nude women, like Playboy and Maxim. But the thing is that we need more images of real women, like the Dove beauty ads...those pictures show that it doesn’t matter how old you are or what you look like, you are a beautiful person.”

# Realistic images of women

“The one person I really want to understand is my daughter. It is really important that I have these to show her so she can see that her mother had the confidence to do this and is comfortable with her own body. I don’t want my girls to grow up the way I did with the inhibitions and lack of confidence.”

“I think that there is a good lesson here. Be proud of who you are. I think it is a good lesson to teach your kids.”

# Identity

“It was surreal, it was another part of me, something I didn’t even know existed.”

“In the photos it feels like another person, like my secret identity.”

“I think that it helped turn things around in our relationship because it was very very out of character for me. I think he maybe started to see me in a different way.”

# Identity

“People looking in would say she has it all together, she is a business woman, conservative. But, no it is not out of character for me privately. For sure other people would be surprised.”

“People really think that I am miss goody two shoes, I don't do this, I don't do that. I clearly don't swear or anything like that. They think I would never even think of doing something like this.”

# Body esteem

“I think my body image has improved big time through this. I am way less concerned about that stuff.”

“The photos gave me self-esteem and made me feel good about myself.”

“I gained more confidence from it. And because of that it enhanced our sexual relationship for sure.”

# Body esteem

“So after doing the photo shoot I have noticed that I am far more confident naked than I was prior to the shoot, and you would think it would be the reverse. You know that you would be more self-conscious because you would see all of your flaws, but you don’t see your flaws at all.”

“I was worried that I was going to see everything in the photos that I didn’t like about my body, you know the stretch marks and stuff like that. But when I looked at the photos I liked the way I looked and saw things about my body that I do like.”

# The sexual nature of the experience

“Afterwards I had to go out and buy a pack of cigarettes. It was like having sex! It was that great!”

“I have to be honest, the sexual arousal was much more seeing the photos after. Seeing them after, with your partner, is very arousing.”

# Empowering (beyond sexual)

“She was able to bring something out that I had completely lost. I lost it through my marriage, I lost it through other relationships. It was the most lifting and empowering experience I have had.”

“I think it is not just about the pictures themselves, it is a whole mind set that you go through. There is acceptance after you do something like this, both physically and emotionally.”

“If I was going to end up on my own that would be okay, I am strong and I can do this. That was more what I got out of it. I am strong and healthy and I can take on the world. It was very empowering.”

# Discussion

- “Eroticism involves the intent to arouse another, but goes beyond sexual activity or sexual pleasure”  
(Kleinplatz, 1992, p. 133).

# Discussion

- Women can create a sexual image on their own terms (Jantzen et al., 2006)
- Reclaiming of women's sexuality

# Conclusions

- Acknowledgement and documentation of the diversity of women's sexuality
- Can have positive implications for women's sexual and body esteem

# Questions?

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