

# Review of: "Exploring Perceptions on Sexual Empowerment Among Heterosexual Black Women in Braamfontein, Johannesburg"

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Potential competing interests: No potential competing interests to declare.

## Overall

I enjoyed reading through this paper and learning more about sexual empowerment as I did so. However, I think there are some areas that require strengthening, which I have outlined below. You present a lot of good ideas, but at times I got lost in the concepts and how they contributed to the larger importance of what was being discussed. Addressing the points below will help make the paper stronger and also help bring out some of your core messages a bit more.

## Introduction

1. Citation is needed for: "African cultures where there is gender inequality."
2. Current second sentence, starting with "*Literature shows that most researchers and theorists,*" leaves the reader wondering why it is that women's sentiments around sexual empowerment are being questioned. Please explain why a bit further.
3. "This paper seeks to explore South African women's views of sexual empowerment as this has been lacking in the literature." Despite this, a definition of how sexual empowerment is never really described in the introduction. Adding this, perhaps as the second sentence in this section, would help the reader know what is meant every time sexual empowerment is raised. I know that later authors define sexual empowerment from the perspective of participants, but I think it is important to have some sort of reference point up front so that the audience has an idea of what is being discussed and also so that we can see how definitions may be nuanced and different. I also think this is important as several topics are raised in the introduction, including debate over sexual empowerment's importance and gender inequality, all of which are important, but I still don't understand how it is defined based in the literature up front. Your argument that this needs to be defined from the perspective of Black women still holds, as this could be a gap in the literature that your study aims to fill.
  - a. Can the core concepts of the literature review presented later in this section be condensed a bit and raised earlier in the introduction so that the reader doesn't have to wait until after the significance section to understand sexual empowerment as a concept?

## Significance of the study

1. I am unsure as to what the second sentence in this section is intended to add to the paragraph. Please clarify.
  - a. Sentence being referenced: “There is little research done in South Africa, and research on sexual empowerment done in Europe only and focusses on female adolescents.”
2. Suggest adding “Black, South African” before women’s perspectives in this sentence: ” The findings of this study will help social workers and public health policymakers to understand sexual empowerment from women’s perspectives.”

## Literature Review

1. In the *Socio-cultural portrayals of sexual empowerment* section, the first sentence of the paragraph needs to be clarified further. Why is the intersection between sociocultural factors and sexual empowerment contested? This would help to bridge the first and second sentences in this section a bit better.
  - a. Sentences being referenced: “The intersection between socio-cultural factors and sexual empowerment is contested. Studies show that particular socio-cultural norms influence sexual empowerment among females (Fay & Yanoff, 2000; James-Hawkins et al., 2018; Makama, 2013; Murnen & Smolak, 2012; Tolman, 2012).”
2. Citation needed for the following sentences:
  - a. Sentences being referenced: “In the African culture, female sexuality is in the hands of males. The patriarchal nature of African societies has shaped and perpetuated gender inequality to endorsing male domination and female subordination.”
3. Is the word ‘society’ missing after the word patriarchal in this sentence, and should the word practices be removed?
  - a. Sentence being referenced: According to Figueroa et al. (2016), a patriarchal practices
4. Did the *Empowerment Theory* you describe in the literature review section inform/guide how you carried out your research or how you analyzed your data? If so, I would shift this section to the methods section and describe how this theory was used for either data collection or analysis.

## Methods

1. How is the first sentence different from the second sentence?
  - a. Sentences being referenced: This study took a qualitative approach to explore females’ perceptions of sexual empowerment. Given the nature of the inquiry, the qualitative research approach was used.
2. First paragraph in this section: You don’t need to define the qualitative approach
3. *Population, sample, and sampling techniques section:*
  - a. Please describe how you decided to exclude someone from the study?
  - b. Please describe how data was collected (e.g., Who conducted interviews?, how long were interviews? Were

interviews in-person or virtual?

4. *Sampling Method Section:*

- a. If snowball sampling is a type of purposive sampling, then why is it being referenced as another type of sampling used?
- b. Since you snowball sampled, how did you decide to stop recruiting people?

5. *Data Analysis Section:*

- a. Please describe whether a code book was developed. What was the background of coders? How many people coded? Was consensus coding performed? How did you resolve any conflict between coders?

## Results

1. Is there a diagram or figure that can bring all of the results together more visually?
2. This sentence is also described in the methods. Don't need to repeat in both places. The results section seems to be the better location for this.
  - a. Sentence being referred to: Eight heterosexual black females between the ages of 22-30 were interviewed for this study.
3. Please be more specific in how you are defining a long time.
  - a. Sentence being referenced: The table shows that the majority of participants in our study have been living in Braamfontein for a long time.
4. There are sections in the results which bring in outside research and seem more relevant to the Discussion section
  - a. Example 1: Prevailing gender norms portray men as superior, dominant, and decision-makers during sexual activities, while women are considered subservient, passive, and obedient (Figueroa et al., 2016). Thus, women have difficulty negotiating their sexual desires for fear of questioning male authority (Bandali, 2011; Machel, 2001) and being regarded as promiscuous (Bagnol & Mariano, 2008). These gender norms reveal the extent to which sexual knowledge and actions have historically been classified by gender, and how women are expected not to know more than men. A study conducted among South African men and women showed that men felt threatened by women who had sexual knowledge and experience (Makhubele et al., 2012).
  - b. Example 2: According to Lamb and Peterson (2012), young women look to other women in the media for information about their sexuality. Sexual empowerment begins when young women start learning about their sexuality, which is associated with positive sex outcomes (Lamb 2010). Social media has been the greatest influence on sexual behaviour/practices in the 21st century; however, in more recent years, peers and the media have emerged as two of the strongest influences, particularly among young adults (Ashurst & McAlinden, 2015). Social media has given people the platform to express their sexuality freely, and be able to share information regarding sex without shame or fear of judgement (Wright, 2019). Through social media, participants learn about

how to treat men and how women should be treated in bed. According to Lamb (2010), female sexual empowerment has been associated with positive sex outcomes.

5. This sentence in the results is mentioned as part of the study aim, but it is not mentioned in the background significance section...was this an actual aim of the study?
  - a. Sentence being referenced: This study sought to establish how social media influences women's sexual knowledge.
6. What is the citation for the self-efficacy definition?
  - a. Sentence being referenced: Self-efficacy looks at a person's ability to be confident in his/her capabilities to perform a task. In this study, participants mentioned the importance of being confident in their sexual abilities, and how having positive self-esteem is beneficial in sexual pleasures
7. Several different concepts are described throughout the results section. However, one doesn't get a sense for how they all connect back to sexual empowerment. I suggest introducing all of these concepts at the beginning of the results section after the demographics are described so that the reader knows what concepts to expect and how these contribute to the sexual empowerment definition. Additionally, I'm unsure as to what the patterns across all 8 participants are and what the contradictions between participants were. Would suggest also mentioning this.

## Discussion

1. Were there any issues that the participants didn't agree on that needed to be highlighted or discussed further?
2. Also, the introduction & significance point to a gap in the literature of sexual empowerment not being defined by Black women themselves. How did the results fill this gap? What nuances do they add to the sexual empowerment definition that wasn't previously there? Is there anything about these women's identities (race, nationality, gender, sexual orientation, age, etc...) that adds to the definition?
3. What are some of the study limitations?