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## Are you sexually empowered? Validation of the Female Sexual Subjectivity Inventory for Spanish-speaking women

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### KEYWORDS

Female Sexual Subjectivity Inventory, validity, reliability, sexual functioning, women

**Abstract** The Female Sexual Subjectivity Inventory (FSSI) consists of 20 items that represent three principal elements distributed into five factors that assess: Sexual body-esteem, Pleasure-self, Pleasure-partner, Self-efficacy, and Sexual Self-reflection. The goal was to adapt and examine the psychometric properties of the FSSI. The sample consisted of 278 Ecuadorian adult women. Item analysis, confirmatory factorial analysis, reliability, and evidence for validity were provided by examining associations with socio-demographic variables as well as with body image dissatisfaction and sexual self-consciousness. Using a confirmatory factor analysis, we confirmed a five-factor structure in which items 1 and 6 were deleted. Regarding socio-demographic factors, older women indicated greater sexual self-efficacy, while the women involved in longer relationships indicated less sexual self-efficacy and more entitlement from their partners. The FSSI-factors were associated with body image dissatisfaction and self-consciousness, which revealed that the women reporting greater sexual subjectivity also reported less body dissatisfaction and lower self-consciousness. The reliability of this 18-item version was good, and Cronbach's alpha values ranged from .74 to .86. This study emphasises the need to re-examine the structure and psychometric properties of measures when applied to another context or culture. We provide evidence for the validity and reliability of the FSSI for Ecuadorian women.

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### ¿Sexualmente empoderada?: validación del Inventario de Subjetividad Sexual Femenina en mujeres hispanohablantes

### PALABRAS CLAVE

Inventario de Subjetividad Sexual Femenina, validez, fiabilidad, funcionamiento sexual, mujeres

**Resumen** El Inventario de Subjetividad Sexual Femenina (ISSF) consta de 20 ítems distribuidos en cinco factores que evalúan: la autoestima sexual, placer propio, placer con pareja, autoeficacia y autorreflexión sexual. El objetivo de este estudio fue adaptar y examinar las propiedades psicométricas del ISSF. La muestra consistió en 278 mujeres adultas ecuatorianas. Los cuestionarios se administraron en formato *online*. Se realizaron análisis de ítems, análisis factorial confirmatorio (AFC), se proporcionaron evidencias de fiabilidad y evidencias de validez al examinar las asociaciones con variables sociodemográficas, así como con la autoconciencia sexual y la insatisfacción

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con la imagen corporal. A través del AFC, se confirmó una estructura de cinco factores en el que se eliminaron los ítems 1 y 6. En relación a las variables sociodemográficas, las mujeres de mayor edad indicaron mayor autoeficacia sexual, en tanto que las mujeres que se encontraban en una relación indicaron menor autoeficacia sexual y mayor placer obtenido de la pareja. Los factores del ISSF se asociaron con la insatisfacción con la imagen corporal y la autoconciencia, en concreto, quienes informaron de mayor subjetividad sexual estaban más satisfechas con su cuerpo e informaron de menor autoconciencia sexual. La fiabilidad fue adecuada, oscilando los valores alfa de Cronbach entre .74 y .86. Este estudio enfatiza la necesidad de reexaminar la estructura y las propiedades psicométricas de los instrumentos cuando son aplicados en otro contexto o cultura. Se ofrecen evidencias de validez y fiabilidad para el uso del ISSF en mujeres ecuatorianas.

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A female's sexual subjectivity refers to "multiple aspects of sexual self-perceptions, including sexual body-esteem, perceptions of efficacy and entitlement to sexual desire and pleasure, and sexual self-reflection" (Horne & Zimmer-Gembeck, 2006, p. 315). According to Martin (1996), sexual subjectivity is "the pleasure we get from our bodies and the experiences of living in a body" (p. 10). Taken together, female sexual subjectivity relates to women's focus on the enjoyment of their physical sexual body.

Sexual subjectivity is important for other sexual-related aspects, such as sexual functioning (Satinsky, Reece, Dennis, Sanders, & Bardzell, 2012) and general well-being. For example, the research conducted by Seal, Bradford, and Meston (2009) indicates that having positive feelings towards one's body favours sexual desire and arousal (Graham, Sanders, Milhausen, & McBride, 2004). Therefore, women who feel better about themselves tend to feel aroused more easily during sex, and experience more sexual enjoyment and pleasure (Meana & Nunnink, 2006). Women with greater sexual subjectivity are more sexually satisfied with sexual activity (Satinsky & Jozkowski, 2015). Other authors suggest that women who feel satisfied with their bodies report more sexual motivation, condom use self-efficacy (Schick, Zucker, & Bay-Cheng, 2008), and have more orgasms (Ackard, Karney-Cooke, & Peterson, 2000). Therefore, it is highlighted the association between satisfaction and easiness to reach orgasm (Arcos-Romero, Moyano, & Sierra, 2018). The last point has been recently evidenced through using the Female Sexual Subjectivity Inventory (FSSI) because women with higher sexual subjectivity scores report more frequent orgasms (Bond, Morrison, & Hawes, 2020). Ackard et al. (2000) also showed that women who endorse feminist beliefs have a greater sense feeling of sexual subjectivity. Furthermore, we found a link for both men and women (Emmerink, Vanwesenbeeck, van den Eijnden, & ter Bogt, 2016) between endorsing the sexual double standard—judging sexually active men more positively than women exhibiting the same behaviour (Zaikman & Marks, 2017)—and feelings of entitlement to one's sexual pleasure. Furthermore, sexual subjectivity is also associated with better global psychological well-being, such as higher self-esteem (Zimmer-Gembeck, Ducat, & Boislard-Pepin, 2011).

The FSSI consists of 20 items that measure three core aspects, which are hierarchically distributed along five factors. Although Horne and Zimmer-Gembeck (2006) tested a

five-factor model which obtained the best fit, these authors prefer a hierarchical three-factor structure in which there are five factors but that are distributed hierarchically. From a statistical point of view, the five-factor model shows a slightly better fit than the three-factor model, and factor loadings are similar. This hierarchical three-factor model is more congruent with how the authors conceptualized sexual subjectivity. Thus, the FSSI subscales are: *Sexual body-esteem* (5 items), *Sexual desire and pleasure* and *Sexual Self-reflection* (5 items). The second aspect, *Sexual desire and pleasure*, is divided into three factors: *Pleasure-self* (3 items), *Pleasure-partner* (3 items), and *Self-efficacy* (3 items). The first subscale, *Sexual body-esteem*, measures positive self-perception of attractiveness, which is often associated with the feeling of having the right to feel attractive and sexually desirable. The *Pleasure-self* subscale assesses the sense of entitlement to sexual pleasure from self, *Pleasure-partner* refers to the sense of entitlement to sexual pleasure from a partner, *Self-efficacy* has to do with the self-efficacy in achieving sexual pleasure, and *Sexual Self-reflection* refers to reflecting on one's sexuality and spending time on it.

Respondents are given a score after considering a 5-point Likert scale which ranges from 1 (*Strongly disagree*) to 5 (*Strongly agree*). The FSSI has adequate reliability values that range from .78 (*sexual self-reflection*) to .85 (*self-efficacy*). It has shown convergent validity through positive correlations with sexual consciousness, safe sex self-efficacy, self-esteem, identity achievement, and resistance to the sexual double standard. Negative associations have also been found between most of the FSSI scales and self-silencing in intimate relationships. The highest scores are found between sexual body-esteem and self-esteem, self-efficacy in achieving sexual pleasures and safe sex self-efficacy, as well as for self-silencing in intimate relationships (in a negative direction) (Horne & Zimmer-Gembeck, 2005).

Several samples have provided psychometric properties based on the FSSI. However, most have been conducted with white populations, such as women from Australia (see Horne & Zimmer-Gembeck, 2006; Zimmer-Gembeck, See, & O'Sullivan, 2015) or from the United States (Bowman, 2014). Therefore, no representative samples from other cultures have been analysed: neither the psychometric properties of the FSSI nor the association between sexual subjectivity and other related variables. Research from an Australian sample (unmarried women) reports that all three FSSI factors are related to higher positive emotional reactions to

recent sexual encounters, less negative emotions reactions, higher sexual satisfaction and romantic satisfaction, and romantic status (Zimmer-Gembeck, See, & O'Sullivan, 2015). In the United States, Bowman (2014) concludes that higher FSSI scores, particularly from sexual entitlement and sexual efficacy, predict feelings of sexual empowerment from masturbation. Regarding gender, although most of the research conducted to evaluate sexual subjectivity has focused on women, a recent study worked with a sample of 295 young men and women from Australia on the issue (Hewitt-Stubbs, Zimmer-Gembeck, Mastro, & Boislard, 2016).

## The Current Study

Female sexual subjectivity has been the focus of recent debate in the field of sexuality (see Basson, 2019; Calogero & Siegel, 2018; Cherkasskaya & Rosario, 2018). The study conducted by Cherkasskaya and Rosario (2017) has contributed to broaden discussion on female sexual desire through an integrative approach in which sexual body self-representations such as *sexual subjectivity* play an interesting role. These authors emphasize that the fact some women focus on their sexual body is a psychological factor that impacts motivation for sex. In the same vein, Basson (2019) highlights the role of awareness of the physical sexual body on sexual desire. However, the implications for therapeutic interventions are still unknown as this construct should be tested in relation to other women's sexual health aspects (Basson, 2019). Cherkasskaya and Rosario's approach (2017, 2018) still needs to benefit from empirical evidence, such as exploring the role of "wanting to be an object of desire" (Bogaert, Skorska, & Modica, 2019) or certain spontaneous or responsive desires (Nichols, 2019).

The country in which the FSSI was developed, Australia, and the country where we aim to validate this measure, Ecuador, are clearly different in several ways (United Nations Organization, 2012). According to the Pan American Health Organization, Latin American youngsters are currently coping with several sexual and reproductive health issues (2020). Some involve risky sexual behaviours that lead to certain negative consequences, such as sexually transmitted infections and unplanned pregnancies. Moreover, rates of gender violence in Latin America are among the highest worldwide (Barredo-Ibáñez, 2017). In Ecuador, for example, 64.9% of women report having suffered some form of violence: i.e., psychological, physical, sexual, economic, or patrimonial (Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Censos, 2019). Conversely, in Australia, physical and sexual violence are reported by 22.8% of women (United Nations Organization, 2016). Therefore, the sexual subjectivity concept relates to women's empowerment, which is far removed from the sexist forms of sexual objectification (Sheff, 2005). Therefore, countries where gender-based roles still persist, including in Latin American countries, are less likely to allow women to develop their sense and entitlement to enjoy their own body. The sexual subjectivity needs, which come from women's sexual agency, are still crucial to negotiate sexual consent (Burkett & Hamilton, 2012). In Latin America, social norms regarding sexual behaviour are complex (López-Alvarado, Van Parys, Cevallos-Neira, & Enzlin, 2020), and sex is still a taboo because patriarchal ideologies that control and supervise women's sexuality persist. Hence, each country has

differences in attitudes toward sex (Pascual-Soler et al., 2017). However, there is some interesting recent research because it indicates that some Latin American women have started supporting more freedom for themselves, unlike the traditional sexual double standard in which women are expected to accept the sexual shyness society expects of them (Sánchez-Fuentes, Moyano, Gómez-Berrocal, & Sierra, 2020). Studying female sexual subjectivity would be useful to reflect certain changes in cultural sexual behaviour beliefs.

As previously described, another line of research on female sexual subjectivity has been more frequently conducted with adolescents and very young adults, except the study by Satinsky and Jozkowski (2015), which used a sample of women aged up to 71. Analysing young-adult women samples would be interesting if we consider that the FSSI is useful to assess the development of women's sexual subjectivity (Bond et al., 2020). Therefore, data from different age cohorts would enrich our understanding from an evolutionary point of view. In addition, sexuality evolves in adulthood and sexual subjectivity may have several implications for the individual's sex life that better represent young women *versus* adolescents. In particular, when young Ecuadorian women (22-30 years old) are asked to define the influence of their social context on their sexuality, they indicate concerns about their partner's thoughts and reactions, and some gendered attitudes toward the use of specific methods of contraception still persist (López-Alvarado, Van Parys, Cevallos-Neira, & Enzlin, 2020).

Therefore, the goal of the present study was to adapt and examine the psychometric properties of the FSSI (Horne & Zimmer-Gembeck, 2006) in a sample of adult women from Ecuador to obtain a specific version of the measure for this population. For the validation process, we conducted an item analysis and performed a Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) in which two models deriving from the original proposal (Horne & Zimmer-Gembeck, 2006) were tested: (a) a hierarchical second-order factor model composed of a core set of three factors with a higher-order structure and (b) a five-factor model in which items followed the same distribution as for the previous model. We provided reliability (Cronbach's alpha) as well as evidence for validity.

## To evidence validity, we aimed to:

1. Examine the relation between the FSSI and some socio-demographic variables: age, relationship status, and relationship length. Regarding age, there are mixed findings. The study by Satinsky and Jozkowski (2015) indicate no differences between women older than 39 and their younger counterparts. However, the study by Hewitt-Stubbs et al. (2016) shows that age is positively associated with some FSSI factors, such as greater sexual desire and pleasure, and two of its corresponding subfactors: entitlement of pleasure from the self and one's partner. Regarding the status and length of relationships, previous findings indicate that individuals in a steady relationship, and involved in a one lasting more than 18 months, report higher levels of sexual body-esteem, self-efficacy in sexual pleasure, and sexual self-reflection (Boislard & Zimmer-Gembeck, 2011).
2. Analyse the relation between the FSSI and body image dissatisfaction. Body image dissatisfaction has been de-

defined as the negative assessment of body, shape and weight, which can range from a negative evaluation of some specific body parts to an extreme obsession of one's body appearance (Baile, Raich-Escurrel, & Garrido, 2003). Previous research on body image indicates that women who negatively self-evaluate their body find it hard to concentrate and experience pleasure during sexual activity. In particular, with Ecuadorian women, body-image dissatisfaction has been positively associated with measures of embarrassment and negative self-focus (Moyano, Did-Fayad, & Vélez-Schemankewitz, 2017). Considering that sexual subjectivity is the pleasure and enjoyment that women are able to get from their bodies, we expected a negative association between the FSSI and body image dissatisfaction.

3. Explore the relation between the FSSI and sexual self-consciousness. It has been found that body self-representations are associated with entitlement of sexual pleasure, and the FSSI indicates that low scores for body representations are associated with low FSSI scores (Cherkasskaya & Rosario, 2017).

We tested the following research question and hypotheses:

RQ1. To what extent will the FSSI factors be associated with age?

H1. We expect the women involved in a longer-lasting relationship to report higher scores with the FSSI.

H2. We expect the women who report higher levels of body image dissatisfaction to report lower scores with the FSSI.

H3. We expect the women who indicate greater sexual self-consciousness to report lower scores with the FSSI.

## Method

### Participants

Data from 278 Ecuadorian women, whose ages ranged from 18 to 55, were examined ( $M = 24.52$ ;  $SD = 5.84$ ). As seen in Table 1, most of the sample had completed university studies (89.5%) and the most frequent ethnic group was Mixed (*mestizo*) (80.2%). Approximately 95.7% of the women reported being exclusively heterosexual, and 59.7% stated being involved in a relationship. Relationship length went from 1 to 396 months (33 years) with a mean of 50.25 months ( $SD = 65.28$ ), i.e., a relationship lasting about four years. When considering the National Institute of Statistics and Census from Ecuador (INEC, 2010), the most prevalent ethnic population was Mixed (*mestizo*) (with a roughly 72% distribution based on the age in the cohort: ranging from 15 to 64 (62.8%). However, regarding university degrees in urban areas, our data are not representative of the number of women who have university degrees, which was 34.6%.

### Instruments

A socio-demographic questionnaire was used to collect information about gender, nationality, age, level of education, sexual orientation, as measured by the Heterosexual-Homosexual Rating Scale (Kinsey, Pomeroy, & Martin, 1948). They were provided with a list of options

Table 1 Sociodemographic characteristics of the participants ( $N = 278$ )

	<i>n</i>	%
<b>Education</b>		
Secondary school	15	5.4
University degree	248	89.5
Master's or Ph.D.	14	5.1
<b>Ethnic group</b>		
African-Ecuadorian	2	0.7
White	41	14.7
Indigenous	2	0.7
Mixed ( <i>Mestizo</i> )	223	80.2
Other	6	2.1
<b>Sexual orientation</b>		
Exclusively heterosexual	266	95.7
Bisexual	8	2.9
Predominantly same-sex orientation, although with sporadic heterosexual contacts	4	1.4
<b>Relationship status (involved in a relationship)</b>		
Yes	166	59.7
No	111	39.9
	<b><i>M</i></b>	<b><i>SD</i></b>
Age (range = 18 to 55 years old)	24.52	5.84
Relationship length (number of months) range (months) = 1 to 396 months	50.25	65.28

ranging from “exclusively heterosexual” to “exclusively same-sex orientation”, which was their relationship status according to the question *Are you currently involved in a steady relationship?* They answered on a dichotomous scale (yes/no) and relationship length (*number of months*).

**The Sexual Self-Consciousness Scale (SSCS)** (van Lankveld, Geijen, & Sykora, 2008). The Spanish version was administered, which has been recently validated in Ecuadorian women (Moyano et al., 2017). The SSCS consists of 12 items distributed along three dimensions: *Sexual Embarrassment* (5 items), *Sexual Self-Focus* (3 items), and *Sexual Partner-Focus* (4 items). *Sexual Embarrassment* measures the feeling of shyness during sexual interactions and, therefore, the difficulties to let oneself go. *Self-Focus* assesses the tendency for introspection and to monitor body sensations, thoughts, and feelings during sexual interaction. *Partner-Focus* refers to concerns about the impressions of one's partner. A 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 0 (*Strongly disagree*) to 4 (*Strongly agree*), was used. Higher scores indicate higher sexual self-consciousness. The Cronbach's alpha values reported by Moyano et al. (2017) in a sample of Ecuadorian women were .90, .72 and .83, respectively.



**The Body Shape Questionnaire (BSQ)** was developed by Cooper, Taylor, Cooper, and Fairburn (1987). This scale measures body image dissatisfaction. We administered the Spanish version that was validated by Raich et al. (1996). It consists of 34 items that assess several worries about one's body and physical appearance, such as fear of being overweight, desire to be thinner, and avoidance of some social situations due to body dissatisfaction in the last four weeks. Some items state "*Has feeling bored made you brood about your shape?*" or "*Have you worried about your flesh being dimply?*". Respondents provide an answer on a 6-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = *Never* to 6 = *Always*. Scores range from 34 to 204. Higher scores indicate more body image dissatisfaction. Reliability and validity were good, and Cronbach's alpha was .96 for the present study.

## Procedure

The study was approved, as part of a larger research project, by the Consultative Board of Research from the University of Especialidades Espiritu Santo (UEES). Primarily, the English FSSI version was translated into Spanish and then back translated (Muñiz, Elosua, & Hambleton, 2013; Sidani, Guruge, Miranda, Ford-Gilboe, & Varcoe, 2010). Three native Spanish experts in the area of Psychology and sexuality research, who were fluent in English, independently translated the FSSI. Later, they discussed the adequacy of the translation and created a first version of the scale in Spanish. A native Ecuadorian and professional English translator then conducted a back translation from the first Spanish version to the original source (English). Five expert judges were then engaged: three had knowledge of psychometry and two were two native-Ecuadorian psychologists. We took their percentage of agreement to be  $\geq 85\%$  for clarity, relevance, and representativeness. Finally, all the individuals participating in the adaptation met and discussed the final version of the FSSI. Then a pilot study was conducted with a sample of 17 Ecuadorian undergraduate students to detect any ambiguous terms or difficulties in comprehending the items. None of the items received suggestions to be improved, and only two students indicated some changes that had not been considered. Therefore, no changes were made. Both the English and Spanish versions can be seen in the *Appendix*.

Later, an online version was built. The link to access questionnaires was distributed through several social networks (e.g., Twitter, Facebook), and announcements were placed at the university. Only those participants who gave their informed consent by checking a box, with which they had to confirm their willingness to take part in the study, were able to access the questionnaires. The inclusion criteria were as follows: (a) women older than 18 years old, (b) who were Ecuadorian by nationality. Anonymity and confidentiality were guaranteed. The estimated time required to complete questionnaires was 30-45 minutes. The participants received no compensation.

## Data analysis

The following analyses were carried out:

1) Item analysis and CFA on the FSSI items in which the following models were tested: Model 1 (M1), which considered a second-order factor model that was derived from the original proposal (Horne & Zimmer-Gembeck, 2006) and

comprised a core set of three factors with a higher-order structure to Factor 2: Sexual desire and pleasure. Therefore, Factor 1 was Sexual Body-esteem (items 1, 6, 11, 16, 19); Factor 2 was Sexual desire and pleasure, divided into Entitlement of pleasure from the Self (items 2, 7, 12), Entitlement of pleasure from the Partner (items 3, 8, 13, 17), Sexual Self-efficacy (items 4, 9, 14); and Factor 3 was Sexual Self-reflection (items 5, 15, 18, 20). Model 2 (M2) was tested and a five-factor model was considered. The distribution of items was the same as for M1. A CFA was conducted using the AMOS 7.0 (Arbuckle, 2006) software package. The method was Maximum Likelihood. The fit indices included: (i) the *Root Mean Square Error of Approximation* (RMSEA), (ii) the 90% confidence interval for RMSEA, (iii) the *Comparative Fit Index* (CFI), (iv) the *Tucker-Lewis Index* (TLI), and (v) the *Goodness-of-Fit Index* (GFI). RMSEA values lower than .06 indicate a good fit, and values under .10 can be considered an acceptable fit (Browne & Cudeck, 1993). Higher values for the 90% confidence interval of less than .08 also indicate a good fit. CFI and TLI values above .90 are usually interpreted as indicators of an acceptable fit (Kline, 2011), and the same is true for GFI (Schermelleh-Engel, Moosbrugger, & Müller, 2003).

2) In order to test the relation between the socio-demographic variables (age, relationship status, and relationship length) and the FSSI factors, we conducted partial correlations in which relationship length was controlled for when analysing age, and *vice versa*. The FSSI scores were compared by relationship status (involved in a relationship; yes/no) by a MANCOVA, in which we established relationship status as the predictor and the FSSI factors as the dependent variable by controlling for age to avoid the likely confounded effect of age.

3) Finally, in order to provide more evidence for validity, Pearson correlations were performed among all the examined variables.

## Results

We used data from 376 individuals. The data from 15 participants were discarded because the participants were men or were non-Ecuadorians. The data from 67 participants were also discarded because there were at least 25% of the values missing in the FSSI items. These missing data did not follow a particular or specific pattern to infer any likely cultural sensitivity with the topic because some participants started filling in the questionnaires but left before finishing. The data from 294 Ecuadorian women, whose ages ranged from 18 to 55, were considered ( $M = 24.57$ ;  $SD = 5.86$ ).

### Item analysis and Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA)

Prior to any analysis, we considered skewness and kurtosis for the FSSI items. Items showed normality as values between -1 and 1 (skew = -.94 to 0.03 for items 4 and 2, respectively). However, items 3 and 8 showed some skewness (-1.01 and -1.25, respectively). Kurtosis appeared for items 2, 3, 7, and 8 (kurtosis = -1.26, 1.26, -1.03 and 2.04, respectively). Taken together, the participants' responses to the above indicated items were right-skewed. Following the recommendations of Tabachnick, Fidell, and Ullman (2007), the data from all the measurements were screened

for multivariate assumptions by entering all of them into a multiple regression analysis and computing Mahalanobis distance, which is a sensitive test. We used a chi-square cut-off of  $p < .001$  to identify multivariate outliers. We considered sixteen cases from the sample of 294 data to be multivariate outliers, and they were deleted prior to further analyses. This deletion diminished item skewness and kurtosis, and although some kurtosis was still noted in items 2 and 8, no further indication of outliers was yielded. Table 2 contains the descriptive statistics for the FSSI factors. As observed, the lowest scores were shown for item 1 (the sexual body-esteem factor) and for items 2 and 7 (the sexual entitlement from the self), while the highest scores

went to items 3, 8, 13, and 17 (the sexual entitlement from one's partner).

As seen in Table 3, the hierarchical three-factor model (M1) did not show a good fit. Modification indices suggested the errors from item 2 and 7 are correlated. Both items were the only ones that referred to masturbation as a way to satisfy one's own sexuality. Therefore, this conceptual reason also supported this statistical suggestion and, once the errors from items 2 and 7 had been correlated, the fit of the model improved (M1a), but it still did not fit. No other modification indices suggested any improvement.

Table 2 Item analysis: Mean (M), Standard Deviation (SD), item-total corrected correlation (rit), and Cronbach's alpha if item deleted ( $\alpha-i$ ) ( $N = 278$ )

Items	M	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis	rit	$\alpha-i$
<b>Factor 1. Sexual body-esteem</b>						
FSSI 1	2.63	1.14	0.40	-0.54	.41	.71
FSSI 6	3.13	1.24	-0.06	-0.97	.38	.74
FSSI 11	3.88	0.77	-0.48	0.56	.59	.65
FSSI 16	3.74	0.88	-0.28	-0.51	.58	.65
FSSI 19	3.77	0.81	-0.31	-0.16	.58	.65
Total	17.15	3.43	-0.26	-0.26	–	.72
<b>Factor 2. Sexual entitlement-self</b>						
FSSI 2	2.88	1.41	-0.02	-1.21	.82	.74
FSSI 7	2.67	1.29	0.13	-1.00	.79	.77
FSSI 12	3.70	1.20	-0.59	-0.54	.64	.90
Total	9.25	3.48	-0.14	-1.00	–	.86
<b>Factor 3. Sexual entitlement-partner</b>						
FSSI 3	4.01	0.90	-0.68	0.36	.62	.67
FSSI 8	4.11	0.89	-0.92	1.27	.63	.66
FSSI 13	3.98	0.94	-0.72	0.19	.48	.75
FSSI 17	4.27	0.74	-0.64	-0.12	.52	.72
Total	16.37	2.67	-0.35	-0.38	–	.76
<b>Factor 4. Sexual self-efficacy</b>						
FSSI4	3.93	0.95	-0.79	0.54	.73	.65
FSSI9	3.80	0.97	-0.60	0.06	.68	.71
FSSI14	3.77	0.88	-0.40	-0.16	.57	.82
Total	11.50	2.39	-0.52	0.02	–	.81
<b>Factor 5. Sexual self-reflection</b>						
FSSI5	3.49	0.09	-0.60	0.35	.53	.78
FSSI10	3.37	1.04	-0.17	-0.33	.48	.79
FSSI15	3.57	0.97	-0.35	0.08	.63	.75
FSSI18	3.40	0.99	-0.15	-0.18	.66	.74
FSSI20	3.49	1.02	-0.39	-0.27	.62	.75
Total	17.31	3.73	-0.08	0.05	–	.80

The five-factor model (M2) was then tested, which did not initially show a good fit (Table 3). Modification indices suggested that the elimination of item 6 would improve the fit. The five-factor model without item 6 (M2a) showed a good data fit although GFI was below .90. When observing standardized loadings, item 1 had the lowest value (.33). In addition, we checked Squared Multiple Correlations (SMC), which ranged from .10 (item 1) to .87 (item 2). Thus, it was very low for item 1. The reliability values were then checked for the factor accounted for by item 1 (Body esteem). Cronbach's alpha with items 1, 11, 16, and 19 equalled .75. However, if item 1 was deleted, Cronbach's alpha improved to .85. This was probably due to the high correlation between item 1 and item 6. Thus, after deleting item 6, item 1 had very little to do with the remaining items (11, 16,

and 19), and item 1 was deleted. The reliability values for the other factors did not alter when any item was deleted. The fit of this model (M2b) improved. SMC were rechecked. The lowest value was .24 (item 13) and the highest value was .87 (item 2). The global value of SMC was .585. On average, this indicated that 58.5% of the variance in the variables was accounted for by latent factors.

Figure 1 shows the path diagram of the final five-factor model. The correlations between factors ranged from .18 between Sexual body-esteem and Entitlement pleasure-self and between Sexual body-esteem and Self-reflection to .72 for Pleasure-partner and Self-efficacy. The standardized loadings ranged from .49 (item 13 from factor Pleasure-partner) to .93 (item 2 from factor Pleasure-self).

Table 3 Fit indices for M1 and M2 and their subsequent models

	CFI	TLI	GFI	RMSEA	CI RMSEA
M1	.70	.66	.73	.129	.11-.13
M1a	.80	.77	.79	.101	.09-.11
M2	.90	.88	.86	.077	.06-.08
M2a	.93	.91	.89	.067	.05-.07
M2b	.94	.93	.91	.063	.05-.07

Note. M1 = Hierarchical three-factor model; M1a = Hierarchical three-factor model in which errors from items 2 and 7 were correlated; M2: Five-factor model; M2a: Five-factor model without item 6; M2b: Five-factor model without items 6 and 1.

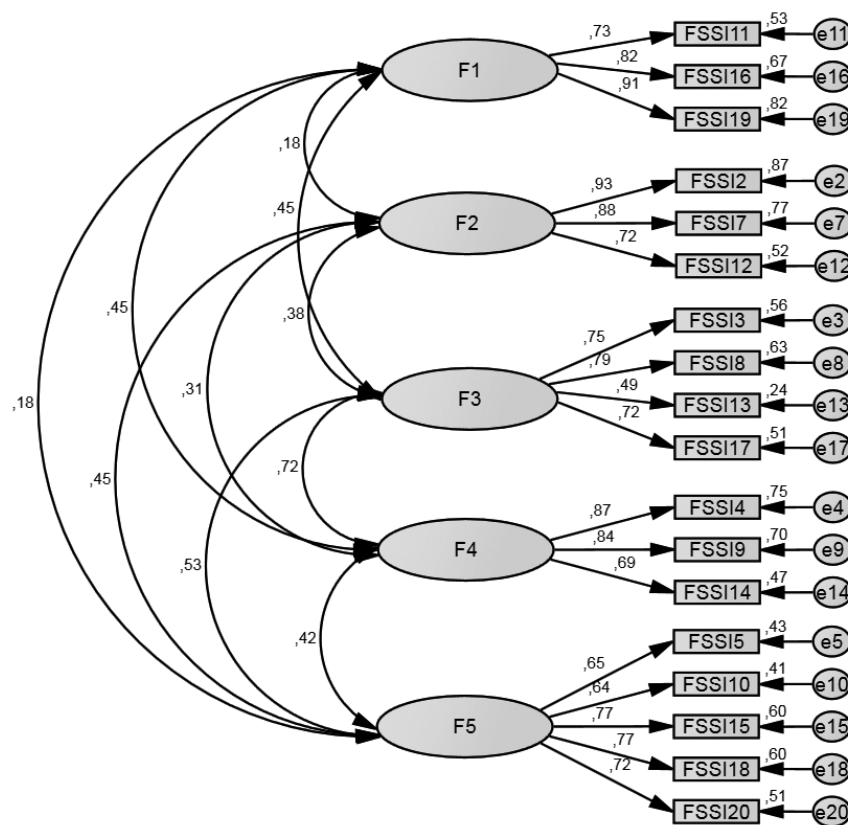


Figure 1. Standardized loadings of the five-factor structure of the FSSI. F1: Sexual body-esteem; F2: Sexual entitlement-self; F3: Sexual entitlement-partner; F4: Sexual self-efficacy and F5: Sexual self-reflection.

## Evidence for Validity

### Relation that Age, Relationship Status, and Relationship Length have with the FSSI

When analysing the association between age and relationship length with the FSSI factors, only a significant positive correlation appeared between age and Entitlement pleasure from the self ( $r = .33, p < .001$ ). For relationship length, a significant negative correlation appeared between length and Entitlement pleasure from the self ( $r = -.36, p < .001$ ) and Entitlement pleasure from the partner, but it was low ( $r = -.16, p = .035$ ).

For relationship status, as seen in Table 4, only significant differences were found for Sexual Self-efficacy ( $t_{(275)} = -2.14, p = .033$ ). Thus, the women in a relationship reported feeling more sexual self-efficacy ( $M = 11.79, SD = 2.11$ ) compared to women not currently in a relationship ( $M = 11.16, SD = 2.58$ ); the differences were significant at  $p < .05$ . In the other analyses, no distinction based on relationship status was made.

### Relation between Body Image Dissatisfaction and Sexual Self-Consciousness with the FSSI

As seen in Table 5, the five FSSI factors were positively associated with one another, which supported construct

validity. Although all five factors were related to one another, they are distinct, which also supports construct validity. We also considered the evaluation of Factor 1 Sexual body-esteem with items 1 and 6, which were candidates to be dropped. As we can see, Sexual body-esteem did not correlate with two of the FSSI factors, namely sexual entitlement-self and sexual self-reflection.

Regarding associations with body image dissatisfaction, only two FSSI factors were significantly associated. That is, being more satisfied with body image was related to both better Sexual body-esteem ( $r = -.22$ ) and less Sexual self-reflection ( $r = .17$ ). As for the correlations between the FSSI and all three factors shaping sexual self-consciousness using the SSCS, greater Sexual body-esteem was related to less sexual embarrassment ( $r = -.48, p < .001$ ) and to less sexual partner-focus ( $r = -.29, p < .001$ ). In contrast, Sexual body-esteem, together with items 1 and 6, showed higher negative correlations with body image dissatisfaction and all the sexual self-consciousness factors. Sexual entitlement from the partner was related to less sexual embarrassment ( $r = -.12, p < .05$ ), but also to more sexual self-focus ( $r = .21, p < .001$ ). Sexual self-efficacy was negatively associated with sexual embarrassment ( $r = -.40, p < .001$ ). Finally, sexual self-reflection correlated positively with both sexual partner-focus ( $r = .29, p < .001$ ) and self-focus ( $r = .42, p < .001$ ).

Table 4 MANCOVA results and descriptive statistics for FSSI factors by relationship status and controlling for age

	No relationship (n = 111)		Relationship (n = 166)		F	n2
	M	SD	M	SD		
1. Sexual body-esteem	11.21	2.21	11.43	2.16	0.40	.09
2. Sexual entitlement-self	9.52	3.39	9.23	3.52	0.44	.10
3. Sexual entitlement-partner	16.18	2.61	16.69	2.38	2.27	.32
4. Sexual self-efficacy	11.16	2.58	11.79	2.11	4.56*	.56
5. Sexual self-reflection	17.72	3.53	17.37	3.74	0.22	.07

Note. \* $p < .05$ .

Table 5 Zero-order correlations between the five factors of the FSSI, body image dissatisfaction, and sexual self-consciousness

	Range	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Sexual body-esteem	5-15	11.36	2.19	.14*	.34***	.41***	.15*	-.22***	-.48***	-.29***	-.08	
1. Sexual body-esteem with items 1 and 6	7-25	17.13	3.45	.04	.15**	.34***	-.06	-.49***	-.56***	-.52***	-.32***	
2. Sexual entitlement-self	3-15	9.34	3.46		.32***	.29***	.41***	.05	-.10	.03	.11	
3. Sexual entitlement-partner	9-20	16.49	2.48			.59***	.43***	.14*	-.12*	.06	.21***	
4. Sexual self-efficacy	5-15	11.54	2.32				.37***	-.00	-.40***	-.10	.03	
5. Sexual self-reflection	5-25	17.51	3.65					.17**	-.04	.29***	.42***	
6. Body image dissatisfaction	35-183	98.87	33.81						.36***	.51***	.37***	
7. Sexual embarrassment	0-20	7.80	4.81							.57***	.34***	
8. Sexual self-focus	0-16	7.76	3.78									.58***
9. Sexual partner-focus	0-8	4.94	1.87									

Note. \*\*\* $p < .001$ , \*\* $p < .01$  \* $p < .05$ .



## Discussion

This study adapted and examined the factorial structure and psychometric properties of the FSSI. In our sample of adult Ecuadorian women, the findings suggest that a five-factor FSSI scale, as opposed to the hierarchical three-factor scale originally validated by Horne and Zimmer-Gembeck (2006), gave a better fit. The data from Horne and Zimmer-Gembeck (2006) also obtained a good fit for both a five-factor model and a three-factor model. However, these authors prefer their conceptualized model made up of three-factors. In our study, this five-factor structure accounted for 58.5% of variance. The five-factor FSSI comprised 18 items of the original 20 items, and it has good psychometric properties, as reflected by Cronbach's alpha values that ranged from .76 to .86. Construct validity was supported as all five factors were positively associated with one another. To support the five-factor structure that better fitted our data, and although factors 2 and 3 were strongly associated, no distinguished higher correlations were found among factors 2, 3, and 4; in the original version they all belonged to a first-order factor labelled "Sexual pleasure and entitlement". Convergent evidence of validity was also provided.

From the original 20-item version, items 1 and 6 were removed in our study. They were meant to belong to Factor 1 (Sexual body-esteem). It is likely that an artefact effect took place as they are both the reverse items from this factor. Nevertheless, other reverse items from the scale did not seem to yield any of the statistical limitations yielded for these two items. Moreover, while items 11, 16, and 19 establish statements such as "*I am an attractive person*", items 1 and 6 assume that respondents already feel non-desirable and, therefore, they are bothered and worried about this. Thus, these discarded items clustered both how women considered themselves and how they felt about it. This elimination did not seem to diminish the validity of this dimension because, as expected, Sexual body-esteem showed a strengthened construct validity. Conversely when adding both items, construct validity vanished as no associations were found with two of the FSSI factors: Sexual entitlement from the self and Sexual self-reflection. In addition, when both items were included, Sexual body-esteem seemed to be more of an overlap with body image dissatisfaction and sexual self-consciousness constructs, which were shown by the moderate correlations, unlike the low to moderate correlations revealed by Sexual body-esteem without these two items. A particularly relevant association emerged between Sexual body-esteem and factor 3 of sexual self-consciousness: Sexual partner-focus. Together, this could indicate that the content of items 1 and 6 more likely reflected concerns about the body and worries about the impression made on one's partner, respectively. This is the opposite to the conceptual development of sexual body esteem, which is the *right* to feel attractive and sexually desirable (Tolman, Striepe, & Harmon, 2003).

### Sexual Subjectivity and Age, Relationship Status, and Relationship Length

Regarding evidence for convergent validity with the socio-demographic variables, we found that older women were more ready to satisfy their sexual needs through

masturbation compared to younger women. This is consistent with previous research carried out using the FSSI, in which sexual subjectivity is assumed to form part of autonomy and identity (Kroger, 2004), and has been shown to be higher in older adolescents (Horne & Zimmer-Gembeck, 2005). Older women seem less vulnerable to concerns about their body than younger women (Romo & Mireles-Rios, 2016; Træen et al., 2017). However, unlike this age-effect, the women in a long relationship reported to satisfy their sexual needs less through masturbation, and also attached less importance to their partner meeting their sexual needs. Previous research shows that masturbation in women in steady heterosexual relationships is less common than for men (Kontula & Haavio-Mannila, 2003; Waterink, 2012). For women, perhaps aspects other than the sexual are more important in the relationship, for example intimacy (Graham, Sanders, & Milhausen, 2006; Laan & Janssen, 2007). Conversely in the study conducted by Boislard et al. (2011), women in longer relationships displayed higher sexual self-efficacy but lower self-reflection. It is likely that their sample was not comparable to ours because the age of the females recruited for their study went from 16 to 25. However, as they mention, it is necessary to further explore other aspects, such as the quality of the relationship (Boislard et al., 2011). In our study, the women in a relationship were more likely to ask their partner to provide sexual stimulation, probably due to their better communication and commitment compared to those women who were not in a relationship. Similarly, previous research that has employed the FSSI with female and male adolescents reveals that individuals with more sexual experience report higher self-efficacy (Hewitt-Stubbs et al., 2016). Although no hypothesis for age was put forward, our findings about relationship status and relationship length were coherent with H1.

### Sexual Subjectivity and Body Dissatisfaction

Convergent validity with body image dissatisfaction is shown for the dimensions Sexual body-esteem and Self-reflection, which partially supports H2. In particular, and as expected, a higher Sexual body-esteem is linked with greater body image satisfaction (e.g., Cash, Maikkula, & Yamamiya, 2004; Wiederman, 2002). However, women who are more dissatisfied with their bodies report spending more time thinking about their sexuality. In line with this, Bond et al. (2020) mention the possibility of women with sexual issues spending more time thinking about sex because they are worried about sex. Thus, the sexual self-reflection factor had the potential for duality.

### Sexual Subjectivity and Sexual Self-Consciousness

As expected in H3, sexual subjectivity is linked with sexual self-consciousness. In particular, women with better Sexual body-esteem feel less sexually embarrassed and care less about the impression their partners have of them within sexual interactions, which is consistent with previous research (Ackard et al., 2000; Maass, 2006; Wiederman, 2002). Higher expectations of partners providing sexual pleasure and being willing to ask partners for sexual stimulation come over in less sexually embarrassed women. Previous findings reveal that Sexual self-efficacy

cy is associated with higher sexual assertiveness (Mastro & Zimmer-Gembeck, 2015). As previously shown, sexual assertiveness is relevant for sexual self-esteem (Torres-Obregon, Onofre-Rodríguez, Sierra, Benavides-Torres, & Garza-Elizondo, 2017) and for the prevention of risky sex (Granados, Moyano, & Sierra, 2020). Therefore, this dimension, sexual self-efficacy, may play a relevant protective role for several risky sexual behaviors, also due to the relationship between sexual self-esteem and sexual arousal (Sierra, López Herrera, Álvarez-Muelas, Arcos-Romero, & Calvillo, 2018). Expectations of pleasure from partners and spending time thinking about one's sexuality relate to higher self-focus: that is, being more aware of one's bodily sensations and cognitions. These dimensions (entitlement to pleasure from the partner, self-reflection, and self-focus) may share an emphasis being placed on cognitions and self-assessment. It is worth mentioning the distinction that culturally emerged from the SSCS in the Spanish validation (Moyano et al., 2017) between Sexual self-focus and partner-focus, which herein provides an interesting interpretation for our FSSI findings. In particular, the FSSI dimensions that were differently associated with the SSCS dimensions were Sexual body self-esteem (FSSI1) with Self-focus (SSCS2), while Sexual entitlement from one's partner (FSSI3) was linked with partner-focus (SSCS3). Together they indicate from which point of view women look at themselves: from themselves or from their partner. The latter has more to do with women's self-objectification and women being portrayed from a "spectatoring role" (e.g., Meana & Nunnink, 2006; Moyano et al., 2017; Wiederman & Sarin, 2014).

### Sexual subjectivity and culture

As indicated by Satinsky and Jozkowski (2015), culture shapes sexual subjectivity. Therefore, the authors emphasize the need for interventions in which building friendly environments for women would help them to express their sexuality in many ways. This consideration should be linked with the theoretical framework from which the authors of the original FSSI version started because sexual behaviour emerges as being "associated with a range of individual attitudes and beliefs, and social experiences in the family, with peers, and within the wider community" (Mastro & Zimmer-Gembeck, 2015, p. 580). In Ecuador, as with many other Latin American countries, a patriarchal ideology still persists with gendered attitudes in which society controls and supervises women's sexuality (Sánchez-Fuentes et al., 2020). Many young women in Ecuador are concerned about openly discussing sexuality (López-Alvarado et al., 2020) and marriage is seen beneficial for them (Goicolea, Öhman, Salazar-Torres, Morrás, & Edin, 2012). Although further research is needed to explore the connections between sexual subjectivity and women's ideas and beliefs about sex in Ecuador, the women in our sample reported low levels of sexual entitlement from the self. This was especially true for the items related to enjoyment of masturbation, which contrasts with them being more in agreement with meeting their partner's sexual needs. However, other studies show a similar distribution of scores between these two factors (see Boislard et al., 2011; Bond et al., 2020; Zimmer-Gembeck & French, 2016). What this emphasizes is that Ecuadorian women may have a more erotophobic view of their own erotization activities, while sexuality within a relationship

context may be seen more favourably. This has been shown in other Latin American countries such as Colombia, where men and women are erotophobic, i.e., they hold more negative attitudes of sexuality compared to other countries (Vallejo-Medina et al., 2016). Further research would be useful to reflect on some of the changes in cultural beliefs about sexual behaviour.

### Limitations and Conclusions

This study has several limitations. First, the psychometric properties of the FSSI are based on data acquired from highly-educated women from Ecuador. Although this is actually the novelty of our study, and as this is the first time that the FSSI has been validated in this population, the generalization of our findings may be limited due to our sample's homogeneity. Future studies could extend the application of this measure to women with diverse socio-demographic characteristics. The extent to which the five-factor structure of the FSSI might be consistent with characteristics of other samples and other cultures is still unknown. By considering the INEC data from Ecuador (2010), although our sample is representative and is based on ethnicity and age cohorts, most of our sample members have a university degree (approximately 95%), unlike the majority of the population from Ecuadorian urban areas (34.6%). In addition, we established no gender differences. Further research should explore the factorial structure in men by measurement invariance tests. Moreover, given the study's correlational nature, no cause-effect relationships were established. Therefore, prospective and longitudinal studies are needed to test some of the interpretations made herein. Some particular aspects of sexual subjectivity in this population may not be completely represented by their items because no qualitative research was collected to examine women's in-depth feelings and sense about their bodies. This study consisted in validating an existing measure, but is not an instrumental study in which a measure is developed. Therefore, we highly recommend conducting more research on this topic with Latin America women. Finally, as we could prove no discriminant evidence for validity, future research should collect this information to support the evidence for validity shown herein.

Nonetheless, this study emphasizes the need to re-examine the structure and psychometric properties of measures when they are applied to another context or culture. Furthermore, this research provides a reliable valid measure to evaluate sexual subjectivity in Ecuadorian women. Besides, this study is the first to address an area of research that has scarcely been explored in Latin America by providing data to be used and compared with other countries. Although this measure provides a version of the inventory for Spanish speakers, it is necessary to revise the psychometric properties of the measure when using samples from different countries (Vallejo-Medina et al., 2017). In the last few years, much attention has been drawn to the construct of female sexual subjectivity as a relevant component of women's sexual desire (Cherkasskaya & Rosario, 2017, 2018), which undoubtedly broadens a new continuum of women's sexuality to be explored. After taking into account that more cultural evidence is needed to better explore women's sexuality, this measure extends new research possibilities. In summary, this study provides evidence for the validity and reliability of the self-reported Spanish version

of the FSSI and its use with Ecuadorian women. Further evidence for validity would better guarantee its use.

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## Appendix. The English and the Spanish version of the FSSI

1 = Strongly disagree, 2= Disagree a little, 3 = Neither agree or disagree, 4 = Agree a little, 5 = Strongly agree.

1 = Completamente en desacuerdo, 2 = Algo en desacuerdo, 3 = Ni de acuerdo ni en desacuerdo,

4 = Algo de acuerdo, 5 = Completamente de acuerdo.

English version	Spanish version
1. It bothers me that I'm not better looking	1. Me molesta no tener un mejor aspecto físico.*
2. It is okay for me to meet my own sexual needs through self-masturbation	2. A mi parecer, está bien satisfacer mis necesidades sexuales masturbándome.
3. If a partner were to ignore my sexual needs and desires, I'd feel hurt	3. Me lastimaría que mi pareja ignorase mis deseos y necesidades sexuales.
4. I would not hesitate to ask for what I want sexually from a romantic partner	4. No dudaría en pedir lo que deseo sexualmente a mi pareja sentimental.
5. I spend time thinking and reflecting about my sexual experiences	5. Suelo pensar y reflexionar sobre mis experiencias sexuales.
6. I worry that I am not sexually desirable to others	6. Me preocupa no ser sexualmente deseable para los demás.*
7. I believe self-masturbating can be an exciting experience	7. Pienso que masturbarme puede ser una experiencia emocionante.
8. It would bother me if a sexual partner neglected my sexual needs and desires	8. Me molestaría que mi pareja sexual descuidase mis necesidades y deseos sexuales.
9. I am able to ask a partner to provide the sexual stimulation I need	9. Soy capaz de pedirle a mi pareja la estimulación sexual que necesito.
10. I rarely think about the sexual aspects of my life	10. Rara vez pienso en los aspectos sexuales de mi vida.
11. Physically, I am an attractive person	11. Soy una persona atractiva.
12. I believe self-masturbation is wrong	12. Creo que la masturbación es algo malo.
13. I would expect a sexual partner to be responsive to my sexual needs and feelings	13. Esperaría que mi pareja sexual responda a mis necesidades y sentimientos sexuales.
14. If I were to have sex with someone, I'd show my partner what I want	14. Si tuviese sexo con alguien, le haría saber lo que deseo.
15. I think about my sexuality	15. Pienso sobre mi sexualidad.
16. I am confident that a romantic partner would find me sexually attractive	16. Estoy segura de que cualquier compañero sentimental me encontraría sexualmente atractiva.
17. I think it is important for a sexual partner to consider my sexual pleasure	17. Pienso que es importante que mi pareja sexual considere mi placer sexual.
18. I don't think about my sexuality very much	18. No pienso mucho sobre mi sexualidad.
19. I am confident that others will find me sexually desirable	19. Estoy segura de que otras personas me encontrarán sexualmente deseable.
20. My sexual behavior and experiences are not something I spend time thinking about	20. No suelo pensar en mi comportamiento sexual ni en mis experiencias sexuales.

Factor 1 (Sexual body-esteem) items 11, 16, and 19; Factor 2 (Sexual entitlement-self) items 2, 7, and 12; Factor 3 (Sexual entitlement-partner) items 3, 8, 13, and 17; Factor 4 (Sexual self-efficacy) items 4, 9, and 14; and Factor 5 (Sexual self-reflection) items 5, 15, 18, and 20.

\* These items were dropped from the final version.