

# Eroticism Framework: How to Approach This Mysterious Construct from Both a Concept-based View and a Theoretical-based Perspective

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## Abstract

Eroticism, due to its mysterious, abstract and at first sight sexual meanings, has a controversial renown. Still, it is omnipresent in personal relationships, with almost a universal reach, even though eroticism is lived or understood differently according to cultural specificities. This article presents an intelligible and precise understanding of the construct. Eroticism happens to be related to 57 words, which underscores its versatile and far-reaching significance. The current literature on eroticism highlights mostly typologies and definitions. A more scientific stance is broadly missing. A dual methodological approach based on a construct-based view and a theoretical-based view has been chosen. An extensive literature review from different fields, including sociology, literature, sexology, biology, religion, psychology, anthropology, philosophy, architecture, marketing and art, has helped to conceptualize eroticism into 11 sub-constructs and introduced its interrelationships with 9 major theories. The resulting conceptual and theoretical frameworks were then combined to form the “Eroticism overarching framework”, which constitutes a synthesis of what eroticism is about as well as what it signifies for oneself and towards others. This new state of knowledge should ignite further research in the field of quantitative measurement of the construct to grasp its multifaceted and complex characteristics. Eroticism has still to be discovered in a scientific way.

## Keywords

Eroticism, Construct Framework, Construct Dimensions

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## 1. Introduction

Eroticism has a pivotal role in personal relationships. It therefore belongs to the most spoken about subject in everyday life across cultures, social classes and age groups. Though, it certainly has very different meanings and connotations for each of us: some see it as an escape of the daily routine, some perceive it as a taboo, others as a source of personal freedom. Possibly, some link it with love, sex, sensuality, desire, pleasure, excess. It shares its etymological root with “Eros”, the Greek god of love, who stands for passionate and romantic love. Eroticism’s meaning varies from a range of up to 57 related words. It is at the center of an undying debate about some of the

deepest matters in human condition.

What we know about eroticism is largely derived from definitions and typologies. Surprisingly, eroticism has still not yet been systematically and extensively investigated. Whilst some research has been carried out on eroticism, there is very little detailed understanding of eroticism in the form of frameworks or scales.

The primary aim of this paper is to propose an overarching framework on eroticism based on both a conceptual and theoretical analysis relying on secondary data. This study intends to better understand the varied facets of this construct and to unveil its enigmatic character.

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The central research question in this study asks how could eroticism, a complex and enigmatic construct, be summarized in a complete and intelligible framework? Additionally, two specific questions which drive the research are: In which conceptual context does eroticism evolve? How can theories be insightful in understanding what eroticism stands for?

This paper is divided in three sections. The first section examines the current literature review on eroticism, complemented with the most useful typologies and definitions of the focal construct. Based on the extensive literature review, the second section presents a conceptual framework of 11 hypothetically associated constructs. The third section introduces a theoretical framework, which identifies in a multidisciplinary approach 9 major theories intertwined with eroticism. Finally, both the conceptual and theoretical frameworks are combined to form the “Eroticism overarching framework”.

## 2. Literature Review

Many writers across sciences have produced numerous and various typologies or definitions about eroticism. Whereas few scales, frameworks, or models exist.

Three main typologies that are depicting eroticism

Shilling and Melor [99] classify Bataille’s view of eroticism in three types: the “physical eroticism”, which includes the ‘body’; the “emotional eroticism”, which incorporates the ‘heart’ and the “religious eroticism”, which encompasses the ‘spirit’. Further, the same authors present Weber’s typology of eroticism, which distinguishes its religious aspects from its secular aspects: the “religiously sanctioned physical eroticism within marriage”, the “religiously sanctioned emotional eroticism of unity within marriage” and the “secular physical eroticism in extra-marital relations” [99]. Lastly, according to Ricoeur, eroticism is an ambiguous word, which relates to sexuality and love [92]. He discloses four types of eroticism: the “quantitative eroticism”, where life is built around sexuality; the “refined eroticism”, which strives for diverseness; the “imaginative eroticism”, which confusingly displays its intentions without displaying them; and the “cerebral eroticism”, which acts like a third party into erotic roles [92].

An uncountable number of definitions about eroticism

The definitions about eroticism come from very diverse fields. Here the most relevant definitions were selected.

Duran identifies eroticism’s critical role in personal relationships: “by means of it we recognize the radical ‘otherness’ of the loved one, we agree with it, we accept it and we reject it at the same time, trying to go further” [28]. He insists on eroticism’s unpredictable outcome: if traded down, it points on the obscene and, if traded up, it turns to love [28].

Lorde stresses eroticism’s unique characteristic, as she writes that “when we begin to live from within outward, in touch with the power of erotic within ourselves and allowing that power to inform and illuminate our actions upon the world around us, then we begin to be responsible to ourselves in the deepest sense” [73]. Bataille, in his influential book “L’Erotisme” (published in 1957, translated into English in 1986), highlights that “the whole business of eroticism is to strike to the inmost core of the living being, so that the heart stands still” [4]. To him, eroticism is a so particular phenomenon that cannot be observed in the same way as an object could be [4]. He insists on its complexity as for him “of all problems eroticism is the most mysterious, the most general and the least straightforward” [4]. Additionally, Bataille depicts eroticism as the “other side of a façade of unimpeachable propriety”, which would reveal the “feelings, parts of the body and habits we are normally ashamed of” [4].

According to Habermas and Lawrence, eroticism impacts the writer to reader relationship in an unexpected way: “The erotic writer can still use language in a poetic way, such that the reader, assaulted by obscenity, gripped by the shock of the unexpected and unimaginable, is jolted into the ambivalence of loathing and pleasure” [49]. In his work on the parallelism between eroticism and Malraux’s fiction, Girard with Malraux words describes eroticism as a “humiliation of oneself or of the other person, perhaps of both” [40]. Bauman’s definition of postmodern eroticism highlights its uncontrollable character as it is “free-floating; it can enter chemical reaction with virtually any other substance, feed and draw juices from any other human emotion or activity” [5].

Tagirov asserts that eros equals to “an ascending love, rising upwards”, whereas the object of eros can be physical or spiritual [112]. Just as Bataille, Tagirov depicts bluntly that eros is unproductive as it produces no goods. On the contrary, it creates waste.

As said, the existing literature on eroticism in the form of scales or frameworks have failed to consider the construct wholly (Figure 1). First, few studies have captured the current context in which eroticism operates. These studies, with the exception of the ones around Hakim’s erotic capital [50], were published a long time ago. Customs, habits and traditions have since changed dramatically, which has a tremendous impact on our present relationship to eroticism. Second, existing researches focus mostly on one theoretical field (i.e., sociology or sexology) and do not encompass a wide range of associated dimensions and theories. Therefore, it lacks a multidisciplinary approach and the willingness to consider eroticism wholly, instead of a fragmented way.

Nine attempts of scales or models to understand eroticism scientifically

Construct	Authors	Article's / Book's title	Journal / Book	Year	Relevant findings	Types of output		Types of research	
						Scale / Index / Inventory	Model/ Framework	empirical	theoretical/ conceptual
9 sources									
<b>EROTICISM</b>	Requena	Erotic capital and subjective well-being	Research in Social Stratification and Mobility	2017	Assessment of erotic capital's impact on individuals' well-being. The erotic capital (from Hakim) is defined here by beauty and attractiveness, which influences one's socialization and power over others. It complements the economic, social, and human forms of capital. The findings highlight erotic capital to be the most powerful form of capital without gender distinction.		x	x	
	Sarpila	Attitudes towards performing and developing erotic capital in consumer culture	European Sociological Review	2014	Based on Hakim's work on Erotic capital, Sarpila develops a scale of erotic capital, which relies on 16 attitudinal variables. Using PCA technique 4 factors are extracted: Identity, Fashion, Awareness, and Vanity. The context of this study is the Finnish consumer culture. Identity and Fashion highlights the importance of physical appearance and consumption of fashion.	x		x	
	Green	'Erotic Capital' and the power of desirability: Why 'honey money' is a bad collective strategy for remedying gender inequality	Sexualities	2012	Green put Hakim's work on Erotic Capital into question for being too reductive on physical attractiveness and sexual desirability. To him it is an overstretched and trivial complement of Bourdieu's theory.		x		x
	Hakim	Erotic Capital	European Sociological Review	2010	Erotic Capital is a multifaceted theory with 6 distinct elements: Beauty, Sexual attractiveness, Social, Liveliness, Social presentation, and Sexuality.		x		x
	Bem	Exotic Becomes Erotic: A Development Theory of Sexual Orientation	Psychological Review	1996	Exotic becomes Erotic theory through a process from biological variables to erotic/romantic attraction.		x		x
	Green, Mosher	A causal Model of Sexual Arousal to Erotic Fantasies	The Journal of Sex Research	1985	Causal model of sexual arousal with a structural approach leading to "erotica", which is defined by 4 scenarios: heterosexual recall, masturbation recall, free fantasy, and guided fantasy. The study highlights 5 affects coming from erotic conditions: Excitement, joy, guilt, fear, and disgust.	x		x	
	Freund	A conceptual framework for the study of anomalous erotic preferences	Journal of Sex & Marital Therapy	1978	Scales of Erotic value as a range of sexual behaviors.	x			x
	Spanier	Perceived Sex Knowledge, Exposure to Eroticism, and Premarital Sexual Behavior: The Impact of Dating	The Sociological Quarterly	1976	Erotic Exposure Index (EEI) tested in relationship with the dependent variable "premarital sexual behavior". EEI is presented as a "composite of reported experiences in viewing pornographic photographs, drawings, comic books or cartoons depicting sexual activity; frequency of viewing pornographic or stag movies depicting sexual intercourse; frequency of seeing pornographic writing; number of popular books read from a list of those having sexual content; frequency of reading newstand books dealing with sex; and frequency of reading Playboy" (p.251).	x		x	
	Zetterberg	The Secret Ranking	Journal of Marriage and Family	1966	Erotic Ranking that implies that the individual can seduce and impress a person of the opposite sex.		x		x

Figure 1. Eroticism as a construct.

Zetterberg [119] introduces the concept of 'erotic rank' as the 'Secret Ranking' within a society. The 'erotic rank' refers to a person's ability to emotionally triumph over persons of a different sexual orientation [119]. One can climb up or down this ladder and those ranks are not given by oneself but by others [119]. The 'erotic rank' consists for Zetterberg of a distinct part within the love construct [119].

In order to analyze the premarital sexual behavior, Spanier [106] operationalizes it with the independent variables 'Erotic Exposure Index' (EEI) and the 'Perceived Sex Knowledge Index'. The former is composed among others by all types of "pornographic photographs, drawing, comic books or cartoons depicting sexual activity [...] pornographic or stag movies depicting sexual intercourse [...] books read from a list of those having sexual content" [106]. Unfortunately, two limitations exist: First, the EEI is tested as an independent variable to explain the dependent variable 'premarital sexual behavior'. Therefore, not as dependent variable explained by further variables. Second, the work of Spanier dates back to

1976 and hence the way he depicts eroticism is largely outdated. He presents elements that today would be associated to pornography, which is very different to contemporary eroticism.

Freund [37] aims, at a conceptual level, to operationally define the concepts 'erotic' and 'erotic arousal level' as well as to introduce what he calls the 'scales of erotic value'. The concept of 'erotic arousal level' links 'erotic stimuli' with 'erotic arousal level', which is then followed by an 'erotic behavior' [37]. Regarding the 'scales of erotic value', Freund's point is not to limit an individual to a specific erotic value but that this individual moves with the times within a range of values [37].

Green and Mosher [48] present a structural causal model called "Sexual Arousal to Erotic Fantasies". This causal model of sexual arousal has a structural approach and leads to 'erotica', which is defined by four scenarios: heterosexual recall, masturbation recall, free fantasy and guided fantasy

[48]. The study's main findings are the emergence of five affects coming from the four above-mentioned erotic conditions: excitement, joy, guilt, fear and disgust [48].

In his attempt to develop a theory of sexual orientation, Bem [12] theorizes what he names 'Exotic becomes Erotic' (EBE). His main point is that human beings are attracted to other human beings that were very different to them in their childhood [12]. Bem insists that both physiological arousal and cognitive capability are necessary to experience this shift from the stages 'exotic' to 'erotic' [12].

Hakim [50] publishes a forceful article named "Erotic Capital". It is one of the closest research paper to this present research project, in order to try to truly understand eroticism. She highlights 6 interesting elements of Erotic Capital: beauty, sexual attractiveness, social, liveliness, social presentation and sexuality. She argues that these capabilities can be available from birth but can also be trained throughout life [50]. This theory of Erotic Capital is seen as the fourth element after the three (cultural, social, economic) theorized by Bourdieu in the 1980s. Hakim contends her Erotic Capital theory is applicable to all (homosexuals, heterosexuals), in any situation (commercial, private) and to all age groups [50]. Hakim underlines that women have an advantage over men [50]. Women would work harder on it through training, learning and a deeper focus. She regrets that eroticism has not been at the center of research in the fields of sociology [50]. Though, she argues that it is probably the "most widespread and democratic form of capital" [50]. She stresses eroticism's subversive character and its independence from control elements such as social class and status [50]. Nevertheless, Hakim does not go as far as measuring eroticism empirically with a scale.

The following most recent sources build their articles on the concept brought by Hakim in 2010: Erotic Capital.

Green [47] demonstrates that Hakim's concept is overstretched, not consistent with the sociological and sexual sciences' literature and in fact reduced in her arguments to beauty, sex appeal, sexuality and desirability. In Hakim's work, Green lacks any empirical support and puts in question Hakim's reference of Erotic Capital as a personal asset, a complement to Bourdieu's three forms of capital (cultural, social, economic).

Sarpila [98] is to the author's knowledge the first and only researcher so far, who has developed a scale of Erotic Capital, which relies on 16 attitudinal variables considered to measure the performance and development of Erotic Capital. This scale has then been measured thanks to Principal Component analysis. 4 factors are extracted: Identity, Fashion, Awareness and Vanity. The context of this study is the Finnish consumer culture. In relation with eroticism, the factors Identity and

Fashion highlight the importance of physical appearance and consumption (especially of clothing, fashion, beauty products). Sarpila asserts that erotic capital is less a question of gender but more a question of consumption. Furthermore, financial resources play a critical role to develop one's erotic appeal [98].

Requena [91] studies the phenomenon of erotic capital from a different perspective as he questions its impact on individuals' well-being. The erotic capital is defined here by beauty and attractiveness, which influences one's socialization and power over others. Unfortunately, erotic capital is here measured by only one question ("How physically attractive or good-looking do you consider yourself for your age?"), which appears to be much too limited to grasp Hakim's 6 facets. The findings highlight erotic capital to be the most powerful form of capital without significant gender distinction.

The current stand of the literature review about eroticism is not satisfactory to reach the goal of understanding all the facets of the focal construct. This study aims to exemplify eroticism as precisely as possible through a framework. Therefore, looking at related constructs is helpful in order to better position eroticism within a larger frame of reference of constructs engaged in personal relationships. There is ground to establish eroticism's boundaries within a conceptual framework.

### 3. Eroticism's Conceptual Framework

An extensive and eclectic literature review enables to build the conceptual framework of eroticism, which defines eroticism by 10 and finally 11 hypothetically distinct constructs, also called dimensions:

- a) Sex
- b) Love
- c) Sexual desire
- d) Desire
- e) Arousal
- f) Pleasure
- g) Beauty
- h) Controversy
- i) Sensuality
- j) Mystery
- k) Excess

Within these 11 dimensions, 7 dimensions (in bold) are noteworthy in terms of the literature review (see following analysis)

### 3.1. Sex Dimension

Sex has been extensively studied and measured, especially through scales and inventories based on empirical studies, to operationalize the construct. Furthermore, some frameworks are useful in exploring the facets of sex.

#### Human sexual functioning

More than 70 years ago, the major work “Sexual Behavior in the Human Male” from Kinsey, Pomeroy and Martin [67] puts human sexuality at the forefront of the academic literature provoking a mix of incomprehension and astonishment. Among others, the authors acknowledge nine sources of sexual outlet for men. A few years later, after this monumental work, they focused on the female aspect of the same subject. In their work “Sexual Behavior in the Human Female” [66], Kinsey, Martin, Pomeroy and Gebhard argue that nine types of sexual activity exist among women. In their seminal book “Human Sexual Response”, Masters and Johnson [79] present men’s and women’s reaction to sexual stimuli in 4 distinct phases (excitement phase, plateau phase, orgasmic phase and resolution phase) and their physiologic responses according to each phase. Equally important, Derogatis and Melisaratos [25] develop a robust multidimensional model measuring human sexual functioning with the use of 7 factors.

#### Sexual behavior

Harbison, Graham, Joan, Quinn, McAllister and Woodward [52] measure sexual interest based on 5 sexual behavior concepts: kissing, being kissed, touching sexually, being touched sexually and sexual intercourse. Moreover, Byrne [18] goes further and gives birth to a framework, the “Sexual Behavior Sequence”, composed of 10 constructs.

#### Sexual orientation

Feldman, MacCulloch, Mellor and Pinschof [32] characterize humans’ sexual orientation by 2 concepts: ‘men are sexually to me’ and ‘women are sexually to me’. Later on, Berkey, Perelman-Hall and Kurdek [13] identify 9 categories of sexual orientations: six are bisexual, one is exclusively heterosexual, one is exclusively homosexual and one asexual [13]. These categories are each rated along five items covering sexual behavior, sexual attraction, arousal to erotic arousal, emotional factors and sexual dreams and fantasies [13]. According to the authors, sexual orientation cannot fall into two categories (heterosexual and homosexual). It should be visualized as a continuum taking into account the time perspective [13].

#### Sexual motivation

Human’s motivation for sex is a central element for scholars. Singer and Toates [103] establish a sexual motivation model and conclude that sexual motivation can be assessed to be

either an internal drive or coming from an external stimuli. In addition, Hill and Preston [61] present the AMORE scale (Affective and Motivational Orientation Related to Erotic Arousal), which suggest 8 dispositional sexual motives: valued by partner, value for partner, relief from stress, providing nurturance, enhance own power, power of partner, pleasure and procreation. Moreover, the Sex Motive Scale from Cooper, Shapiro and Powers [24] highlights 6 sex motives factors: enhancement, intimacy, coping, self-affirmation, partner approval and peer approval.

#### Attitudes towards sexuality

Hendrick and Hendrick [57] stress the importance of measuring attitudes towards sexuality. For this purpose, they develop the 43-item Sexual Attitudes Scale as a multidimensional instrument from which 4 factors emerge: permissiveness, sexual practices, communion and instrumentality. Later on, they propose a shorter version of this scale reduced to 23 items the “Brief Sexual Attitudes Scale” [56]. Aiming to discover the intentions behind sexual relationships, Marks and Sartorius [76] contribute to the measurement of sexual attitude in constructing 4 semantic differential scales to be used in a sexual context: seductive-repulsive, sexy-sexless, exciting-dull and erotic-frigid. Likewise, Harnish, Bridges and Rottschaefer [53] develop the Sexual Intent scale. It reveals 3 components: sexual facility, friendship facility and sexual empathy. With the Sexual Opinion Survey, Fisher, White, Byrne and Kelley [35] investigate participants’ opinions on sexual themes. 3 factors are extracted: open sexual display, sexual variety and homoeroticism. The search towards ones’ sexual self has been studied first for women by Andersen and Cyranowski [1] and 3 dimensions emerge: passionate-romantic, open-direct and embarrassed-conservative. Similarly, the research object has then been adapted to men by Andersen, Cyranowski and Espindle [2]. 3 dimensions for men’s sexual self-schema appear and interestingly they are different from those of women as three different dimensions are presented: passionate-loving, powerful-aggressive and open-minded-liberal. Nonetheless, sex can also be negatively associated and measured. For instance, Mosher [90] identifies three aspects of guilt in forms of 3 scales among which the sex-guilt scale.

Sex as a construct has been extensively studied and should hypothetically explain some but not all facets of eroticism.

### 3.2. Love Dimension

From an etymological standpoint (‘erotique’ in French and ‘erotikos’ in Greek), eroticism implies love and particularly ‘passionate love’, which is at the root of eroticism. The academic literature shows also great interest in the construct of love.

### Love styles, scales and models

Lee [70] makes a breakthrough in research as he proposes a taxonomy of 6 love styles. 'Eros' or the passionate love, 'Ludus' or the game-playing love, 'Storge' or the friendship love, 'Mania' or the possessive, dependent love, 'Agape' or the altruistic type of love and 'Pragma' the type of love based on objectivity and logic. Equally important, Hendrick and Hendrick [59] develop a scale to tap types of love attitudes. They use Lee's conceptualization as the basis for their development of a 42-item Love Attitudes Scale. Their research confirms Lee's 6 love styles split in two groups: 3 primary types of love styles (Eros, Ludus and Storge) and 3 secondary types (Mania, Pragma and Agape). Hendrick, Hendrick and Dicke [55] then proposed 2 shorter forms of the scale, which both show stronger psychometrics properties than the 42-item scale original one. A few years later, Hendrick and Hendrick [58] study both love and sex in tandem. They formulate the 'Perceptions of Love and Sex scale' with 4 subscales: love is most important, sex demonstrates love, love comes before sex and sex is declining.

Sternberg and Grajek [111] identify 3 alternative models of love: a Spearmanian model (with love as a unitary, undifferentiable emotion), a Thomsonian model (with love as a sampling of many overlapping bonds) and a Thurstonian model (with love as a set of several primary factors). Later on, Sternberg [110] presents a conceptual framework, the Triangular Theory of Love, that illustrates 3 components of love: intimacy, passion and decision/commitment. Furthermore, he formulates a taxonomy of 8 kinds of love: nonlove, liking, infatuated love, empty love, romantic love, companionate love, fatuous love and consummate love [110]. Along these lines, Fehr [31] suggests 15 types of love (passionate, romantic, sexual, familial, sibling, platonic, friendship, maternal, sisterly, parental, brotherly, committed, affection, infatuation and puppy). In his attempt to measure romantic love, Rubin [95] develops the love and liking scales to ultimately distinguish both constructs.

Hatfield and Sprecher [54] propose the Passionate Love Scale in two lengths (20-item and 15-item) to capture passionate love's cognitive, emotional and behavioral components. Later, Sprecher and Fehr [108] present the Compassionate Love Scale with two versions (one for close others and one for humanity/strangers), which assesses among others tenderness, helping, caring as key elements of compassionate love. Importantly, Berscheid [14] manages to reduce love to a 4 candidates temporal model: companionate love, romantic love, compassionate love and adult attachment love. Finally, Langeslag, Muris and Franken [68] develop 2 scales: an infatuation scale (similar to passionate love) and an attachment scale (similar to companionate love).

### Love factorized and meta-analyzed

Fehr [31] proposes a factor analysis with, at that time, relevant love scales. The factors obtained were: romantic beliefs, compassionate love, experience of passionate love and pragmatic love. Two additional major meta-analysis about general research on love were published. First, Masuda [80] synthesizes 33 empirical studies on love and concludes that two types of love can be observed: Erotic Love (E-Love, which is linked to the sexual desire for the partner) and Companionate Love (C-Love, which represents the platonic love towards a partner). Second, in his meta-analytic factor analysis, Graham [44] identifies 3 main factors of love: general love, romantic obsession and practical friendship.

As for sex, the love construct will possibly highlight some interesting facets of eroticism.

### 3.3. Sexual Desire Dimension

In his work "An Essay on the Nature of Sexual Desire", Levine [71] points out succinctly the 3 key components of sexual desire: a biological drive (starting at the adolescence), a psychological motivation (linked to the willingness) and the cognitive aspiration (wish for sex). According to Birnbaum [16], desire acts as a "powerful motivator in humans, one that can induce ecstatic pleasure and profound connections".

#### Numerous scales and inventories about sexual desire

The Sexual Desire Inventory (SDI-1) brought up by Spector, Carey and Steinberg [107] is a multidimensional scale based on 5 factors: one general construct "sexual desire" and 4 related constructs (interest in masturbation, interest in using erotic material, sexual dreams and interpersonal attraction). In the same article, they build up on the above-mentioned inventory to establish a second Sexual Desire Inventory (SDI-2) simplified to 2 factors: dyadic sexual desire and solitary sexual desire. Likewise, Mehrabian and Stanton-Mohr [84] develop a 12-item sexual desire scale with 3 dimension poles: pleasure-displeasure, arousal-nonarousal and dominance-submissiveness. Equally important, Beck, Bozman and Qualtrough [8] present for men and women 8 indices of sexual desire: sexual dreams, sexual fantasy, day dream, intercourse, masturbation, non-intercourse sexual contact, genital arousal and a separate "other" category. Hill [60] develops a Global Sexual Desire composite, which shows correlations with the 8 AMORE motives from Hill and Preston [61] and is significantly correlated with three of them: pleasure, value for partner and partner power.

#### Some works on sexual desire are dedicated to women

Kaplan and Harder [65] develop the Sexual Desire Conflict scale for women with 33 items measuring their discomfort and conflict in sexual desire state or environment. Likewise, a

strong resonance has been the research from Rosen et al. [93], which presented The Female Sexual Function Index, a 6-domain structure: sexual desire, subjective arousal, lubrication, orgasm, satisfaction and pain. Moreover, Goldhammer and McCabe [41] propose the Female Sexual Desire Questionnaire to assess levels of sexual desire among partnered heterosexual women. 6 types of sexual desire are revealed: dyadic desire, solitary desire, resistance, positive relationship, sexual self-image and concern.

### 3.4. Desire Dimension

This construct has a long scholastic tradition, typically in psychology, literature and marketing.

Starting with Freud

In his dynamic model, where mental life deals with a conflict of drives, Freud distinguishes sexual instincts from death instincts. Desire is a function of the sexual instincts that Freud named libido. Later in his works, he renamed desire into “Eros”, which underlines its closeness to eroticism.

Literature enthralled by the phenomenon of desire

Brooks, an American writer, defines desire as a “creative force aligned with Eros or the life instincts (as cited in Clayton [22]). While this is true, Bersani, an American literature Professor, is more critical as he considers “desire as determined by a lack that lies at its origin, the absence of any possible object of satisfaction”. He adds that desire is an insatiable human element (as cited in Clayton [22]). Clayton warns that desire, in a narrative context, is “free floating, mobile, subject to no law” [22]. Lacan adds that desire is to be considered as a “derangement of instinct”, which leads to an eternal quest towards something else (as cited in Clayton [22]). Brooks and Bersani stress the universal characteristic of desire as it would be “ahistorical, a timeless phenomenon, which has taken the same shape in all people, places, nations and cultures” (as cited in Clayton [22]).

Desire underpins many marketing techniques

Hofmann, Baumeister, Förster and Vohs [62] present a conceptual framework of desire, which highlights its uncomfortable nature. Desire here is based on 3 elements: conflict, resistance and behavior enactment. In their seminal article “The Fire of Desire: A Multisited Inquiry into Consumer Passion”, Belk, Ger and Askegaard [10] aim to make the distinction between 3 essential constructs desire, need and want. According to these authors, desire is to be found primarily in a social context, is almost infinite and in which imagination plays a central role [10]. They perceive desire as a cycle, The Cycle of Desire, which is based on 3 elements: self-seduction, longing and processes sustaining/accelerating/reinitiating desire [10]. According to

them, human beings desire to desire and fear of being without desire [10]. Additionally, they develop the concept of “The Phenomenon of Consumer Desire” [10], which consists of 5 elements: embodied passion, desire for otherness, desire for sociality, danger and immorality and distance and inaccessibility.

The combination of the constructs sexual desire and desire is presumably a driver for understanding eroticism completely.

### 3.5. Arousal Dimension

The attempt to define and to measure both arousal and sexual arousal is not a new phenomenon in research, especially for scholars in psychology.

What are arousal and sexual arousal about

According to Whalen [118], sexual motivation is based on 2 components: sexual arousal (current level of sexual excitation) and sexual arousability (the propensity for arousal). Arousal's determinant is the presence or absence of relevant stimuli. Arousability is determined by hormones, prospect of sexual intercourse and experience.

Numerous scales and models

Numerous scales and models have been developed, whereby 5 are being considered as most relevant to this research. First, Mehrabian and Russel [83] introduce a 40-item scale measuring individuals' arousal seeking tendency, which highlights the preferred arousal levels of human beings. 5 factors emerged from this scale: arousal from change, unusual stimuli, risk, sensuality and new environments. Second, Derryberry and Rothbart [26] position arousal as one of the 3 factors (along with emotion and self-regulation) measuring the central concept of temperament. Arousal is there assessed by 8 sub-scales. Third, arousal was theorized in a prominent emotional state model “Pleasure-Arousal-Dominance Temperament” model from Mehrabian [82]. It consists of poles: state pleasure, state arousal and state dominance. Fourth, Arousal is also linked to the concept of “positive affectivity”, a higher-order dimension, formalized and then summarized by Clark and Watson [21]. Last, the framework “Arousal Potential, Arousal and Stimulating Evaluation”, conceived by Steenkamp, Baumgartner and van der Pulp [109], puts additional light on the importance of arousal in psychological research, as moderators such as need for stimulation are critical to assess arousal as a construct.

Some approaches are specific for women

Hoon, Hoon and Wincze [63] introduce a Sexual Arousability Inventory for women. For that purpose, they use 28 erotic experiences and conclude that 5 factors can be retained: "foreplay (dancing, caressing and kissing)", "vicarious arousal mediated by erotic visual and verbal stimuli in different media

forms", "breast stimulation", "preparation for and participation in intercourse", "genital stimulation by or genital stimulation of a partner" [63]. Similarly, Morokoff [89], demonstrates the relationship between female sexual arousal, sexual behavior and erotic stimuli for women.

Arousal and desire are intertwined

More recently, Toledano and Pfaus [114] merged 2 dimensions of interest for this paper, namely sexual arousal and desire. They build the Sexual Arousal and Desire Inventory, a 54-item multidimensional scale both for men and women. Thereby, 4 interrelated factors emerge: evaluative (cognitive and emotional), physiological (endocrine, autonomic), motivational and negative/aversive (inhibitory).

Arousal and sexual arousal are clearly linked and should play a role in helping human beings to track eroticism closely.

### 3.6. Pleasure Dimension

Pleasure has been mostly studied through scales and inventories relying on empirical studies. The understanding of this dimension is predominantly based on the concepts of affect and motivation. Pleasure is shown primarily as a sequential process within a social context.

Affects lead us on the track of pleasure

Academic literature on affect helps to approach the concept of "Pleasure-Displeasure". In order to study the 2 primary dimensions of mood (positive affect and negative affect) Watson, Clark and Tellegen [116] propose the Positive and Negative Affect Scale. Pleasure would be close to positive affect and displeasure close to negative affect. Similarly, Russel, Weiss and Mendelson [96] introduce the Affect Grid to assess 2 dimensions: pleasure-displeasure and arousal-sleepiness.

Pleasure as a motivation system

Carver and White [20] build up on Gray's works ([45], [46]) about the BIS (Behavioral Inhibition System, an aversive motivation; connected to displeasure) and the BAS (Behavioral Activation System, an appetitive motivation; related to pleasure). They establish 4 scales to measure BIS (one unidimensional scale) and BAS (3 scales: reward responsiveness, drive and fun seeking).

Pleasure: a social, multicultural and sequential phenomenon

Gard, Gard, Kring and John [38] make a distinction about the experience of pleasure by distinguishing anticipatory from consummatory experience of pleasure. This scale is named the Temporal Experience of Pleasure scale. This scale has been continuously reused by scholars to identify specificities across time and culture, such as the work of Li et al. [72] on the model fit to China or the work of Simon et al. [100] with a

German sample. Gooding and Pflum [42] expand on Gard's work by linking pleasure with social and interpersonal interactions. They distinguish anticipatory social pleasure (looking forward to social exchanges with people) from consummatory social pleasure (experiencing pleasure from social interactions). Their study highlights three factors: intimate social interactions, group social interactions and social bonding and making connections [42]. Focusing solely on pleasure, Snaith, Hamilton, Morley, Humayan, Hargreaves and Trigwell [104] develop the Snaith-Hamilton Pleasure Scale, which reveals 4 domains of pleasure response: interest/pastimes, social interaction, sensory experience and food/drink.

### 3.7. Beauty Dimension

Beauty as a construct has been analyzed in multiple ways. According to Brielmann and Pelli [17], beauty fascinates humans since ancient times and is very much linked to the concept of "aesthetics".

Various approaches of beauty

Biaggio and Supplee [15] analyze the dimensions of Aesthetic Perception, which are summarized by 3 factors: hedonic value, arousal and uncertainty. Moreover, Webster and Driskell [117] associate beauty with status. To them, attractiveness is a status element, which is assessed by 2 elements: general ability and scholastic ability. The Body Esteem Scale from Franzoi and Shield [36] offers a multidimensional construct of 3 factors, which differs among men and women. For men, the 3 factors are: physical attractiveness, upper body strength and physical condition. Whereas for women, these are: sexual attractiveness, weight concern and physical condition [36]. Menninghaus et al. [85] distinguish 3 aspects of beauty: its 'cultural pole' (illustrated by the term "elegance"), its 'natural sexual pole' ("sexiness") and its 'in motion pole' (exemplified by the term "grace").

External and internal aspects of beauty

Some scholars point on the distinctions between external and internal aspects of beauty. Langmeyer and Shank [69] factor analyze 40 items describing beauty and conclude 2 main factors: non-physical and physical. The former depicts "the way one acts and the way one sees the world" and can be summarized as the "internal aspects of beauty" [69]. The physical factor relates to "what can be seen externally" (face, body proportions and body shape) and can be the encapsulated in "external aspects of beauty" [69]. Similarly, but for women only, Tylka and Iannantuono [115] present an unidimensional Broad Conceptualization of Beauty Scale, which measures how women perceive beauty from an external and internal view. Finally, Diessner, Solom, Frost, Parsons and Davidson [27] design the Engagement with Beauty Scale, which results



in 3 distinct factors: natural beauty, artistic beauty and moral beauty.

The 11 hypothetical dimensions related but distinct from eroticism presented in this section are helpful in positioning eroticism in a conceptual context. This is summarized as the

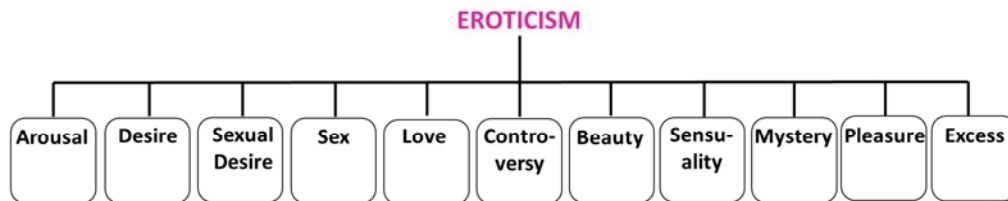


Figure 2. Eroticism conceptual framework - 11 hypothesized dimensions.

## 4. Eroticism's Theoretical Framework

Eroticism, is a broad and very difficult construct to grasp and has influenced as well as is influenced by numerous major theories. Here, the author proposes 9 major theories intertwining with the focal construct of eroticism, of which two represent the most reciprocal influences, namely sexology and sociology.

- a) Sexology
- b) Sociology
- c) Religion
- d) Psychology
- e) Biology
- f) Anthropology
- g) Morality
- h) Architecture
- i) Philosophy

### 4.1. Sexology

Sexology is “the study of sex or of the interaction of the sexes especially among human beings” (Sexology. In The Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary. Retrieved January 13, 2020, from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/sexology>).

Sexuality as a starting point

The two Kinsey reports, “Sexual behavior in Human Male” [67] and “Sexual behavior in the Human Female” [66], provide a real breakthrough in the research on sexual behaviors and desires. De Beauvoir [7], author of “The Second Sex”, attempts to deconstruct major frameworks in a concise manner, relevant for this paper. For instance, she describes the enterprise that leads to the “debunking of love

“Eroticism conceptual framework” (Figure 2).

Though, according to the author, this does not capture the complete significance of eroticism. In the following section, after an additional literature review, the major theories, which intertwine with eroticism are reviewed.

and eroticism” (as cited in Coffin [23]) and she regrets that sex is too much related to love (as cited in Coffin [23]). For a long time, sexuality has been reduced to the reach of an orgasm. It was the unit of measure to assess successful sexual life and was a driver of human well-being [9]. Masters and Johnson, two leading scientists in sexology, agree and consider in fact orgasm, for both men and women, as a “truly egocentric matter” [9].

Sex, a deep and profound experience

Sexual encounters are central to most of us, as they “involve the deepest corners of ourselves and are among the most intense, powerful, emotional and profound experiences we have” [74]. Similarly, Fellmann argues that sex is perceived as a highly pleasurable activity. While this is true, he underlines that it is also the source of deep pain and grief [33]. Ricoeur depicts sexual experiences as connected to easy to reach, common, biological encounters that lead to the process of dehumanizing sex [92].

Eroticism takes it all

Money [87] analyzes that at his time there were only five words derived from “sex” namely “sexing, sexual, sexuality, sexualize and sexualization”, which is limited compared to the words derived from “sense” (he evokes twenty-four). Because of the lack of appropriate and precise words, he mentally turns to the construct of eroticism. Likewise, Weber notes that “as conventions increase, sexuality is repressed and eroticism develops as the sublimation of sexual expression” (as cited in Falco [30]). Bauman posits that eroticism’s birth takes place thanks to a “cultural trick”, which divides the sexual experience from the pleasure associated [5]. This pleasure revealed is, for Fellmann and Walsh, at the source of the act of separating sexuality from procreation and in creativity and procreativity [34]. Bataille supports this argument as he argues that eroticism’s soul is based on the puzzlement human beings face when they interact with sexual pleasure and taboo [4]. Furthermore, Money [88] asserts that eroticism is included in the broader construct of sexuality, making eroticism one of

many factors of sexuality. This view is only partly supported by Fellmann and Walsh. Even though they see eroticism as a “feeling founded in sexuality”, they go further as they visualize eroticism “transcending the evolutionary goal of sexuality” [34]. Moreover, Octavio Paz, poet and laureate of Nobel prize in literature, makes a luminous comparison of sex, eroticism and love (as cited in Bauman [5]): to him, “the primordial fire of sex”, “the red flame of eroticism” and “the blue flame of love” exist simultaneously; the least human is the sex aspect, as other species such as animals also master it. Overall, Fellmann and Walsh [34] argue that there is a shift from sexuality to eroticism, especially when imagination and sexual arousal are present. To conclude, switching from a “sexual body” to the “erotic self” implies the use of “fantasy, desire, heightened emotion, and strong physical sensations” [75].

#### 4.2. Sociology

As a fundamental personal relationship-based construct, eroticism can affect the relationship of the individual with the social order and of the unconscious with the social structure. Thereby, eroticism is strongly linked to sociology.

Eroticism, a paradox as fundament

Eroticism has either an ignitable potential or on the contrary a specificity of adding oil in the system (the society). Shilling and Mellor reinforce eroticism’s standing, which results both in asserting life at the individual level and in disturbing the social functioning of a society [99]. Eroticism’s undomesticated and rebellious attributes are also underlined by Girard [40], as he confirms that domesticating eroticism is illusory. According to Heiman, the paradox of eroticism lies in the fact that it must probably be “socially unacceptable or norm-breaking, in order to be maximally arousing” (as cited in Meana [81]).

Eroticism, a symbolic and inmost element

According to Falco, eroticism has a “signifying function” and represents the “symbolic order” [30]. Moreover, the Bataillan concept of “inner-experience” is transposed to eroticism, as Bataille asserts that eroticism is one angle of the inner life of individuals [4]. Similarly, Sorensen [105] argues that the permission of transgression is driven by the inner experience of men and women.

Eroticism: a social and political force

According to Martin and George, the “Hobbesian problem of order” is directly linked to the undersupplied desired possessions [77]. Furthermore, Bataille emphasizes that the combination of the two irrepressible contradictory forces of transgression and taboo, which both are strongly linked to eroticism, leads to what social is about [4]. Weber perceives

eroticism along with aesthetics, intellectualism, politics and religion, as a “value-sphere” (as cited in Shilling & Mellor [99]). He conceptualizes this into the “Erotic Sphere” (as cited in Bellah [11]). According to Martin and George, this sphere defines the spreading rationalization of life across societies [77]. For Weber, this is precisely the specific ability of eroticism to own its regulatory system (as cited in Martin & George [77]). In addition, in eroticism lies “a formidable revenge, not only of leisure on work, but of private life on public life as a whole” [92]. Ricoeur insists on the necessity to socialize eroticism by domesticating the disorderly human’s instincts with interdictions and prohibitions [92]. Further, according to Marcus, eroticism has the unique characteristic to “flourish in the shade of the state’s neglect” [75]. Additionally, Meana [81] argues that eroticism shows rebellious stances against politics, which wants to ensure “strict versions of egalitarianism and any number of codes of conduct in the bedroom”. Finally, Bataille [4] insists on eroticism’s ability to dissolve the constraints of regulated societies.

#### 4.3. Religion

The Latin etymology of religion is “religare”, which refers to “reconstituting a spiritual bond between humans and incomprehensible and threatening forces of nature” [97].

Eroticism epitomized as “hell”

For a long time, Christianity related eroticism to evil. This is further emphasized by Bataille as he mentions that eroticism is a pointless phenomenon depicting both Evil and Satan [4]. Similarly, Ricoeur sheds negative light on eroticism as it is compared to a demon and is considered to be harmful aspect of life [92]. Eroticism is also associated with sin and temptation such as the biblical story of Adam, Eve, the apple and the snake in the Garden of Eden. Furthermore, Ricoeur distinguishes the “sins of the flesh” from the “sins against the spirit” [92]. Given eroticism’s body and imaginative characteristics, both types of sins apply to it. As Bataille [4] puts it, the flesh is considered to be an antagonist to Christians’ values and principles as it represents a freedom, which is looming. The flesh corresponds to an erotic symbol and is therefore real and undeniable [4]. Finally, Weber underscores the role of religion in restraining eroticism’s threat (as cited in Shilling & Mellor [99]).

Eroticism, a symbol for pain

Going back to more ancient times, religion played with the exuberant touch of eroticism, especially if one looks back for instance to Egypt, Pagan or Greece [97]. For Christians, pleasure was long associated with pain, suffering and sacrifice. It is illustrated by Catholic religious iconography, which portrays death, martyrdom and crucifixion [39]. Foremost, Jesus’ crucifixion is a sacrifice for all who believe in him.

Hence, as Garrigos puts it, eroticism is linked to God via pain, which enables to reach transcendence [39].

Though, eroticism and religion can be seen as complementary. Mishima and Ontani share the vision that “eroticism and faith intermingle in the most peculiar way” (as cited in Santos [97]). This underscores the Bataillian view that eroticism and religion are complementary constructs (as cited in Santos [97]). In the context of nature, Weber introduces the concept of “erotic sacrament”. He defines the erotic sacrament as the “direct breaking through of the boundaries between souls, from human being to human being” (as cited in Falco [30]). Bataille sums up the interrelationship between eroticism and religious aspects, as he writes “what mysticism cannot put into words, eroticism says” [4].

#### 4.4. Psychology

According to the American Psychology Association (APA), psychology is the study of the mind and the behavior (Psychology. Retrieved January 16, 2020, from <https://dictionary.apa.org/psychology>). The discipline embraces all aspects of the human experience including feelings, the way we think, the concepts of consciousness and unconsciousness, all particularly relevant to our research.

**Eroticism: a life-long experience**

According to Calderone one experiences eroticism through dreams, reflections, sensations or experiences from early childhood [19]. According to her, eroticism can also, at a later stage in life, be linked to eccentric behaviors such as sadomasochism, fetishism, voyeurism or exhibitionism [19].

Consciousness, unconsciousness and guilt are critical to experience eroticism

Both the concepts of consciousness as well as unconsciousness are key to getting a deeper understanding of eroticism. Freud on this topic delimited the consciousness, “here and now”, from the unconsciousness, “andere Schauplatz, the other scene” (as cited in Teysot [113]). Moreover, in order to dig into the reason of unhappiness, it is not sufficient to look at sin but also to explore guilt. Consequently, Freud analyzes that “the sense of guilt is an instrument that the punishing superego employs to control the tumultuous id” (as cited in Rubin [94]). Furthermore, Freud’s vision of sexuality is to capture it as “vast continent” [23]. In the author’s opinion, eroticism could easily be compared to an “ocean” due to its immensity, deepness and availability to humanity.

**Eroticism rooted in feelings, senses, emotions and thoughts**

One side of eroticism is linked to passion. It comes from the Greek “pathê”, which means for the Epicureans the experience made by human beings mixing delight and

suffering as well as what humans feel and sense [6]. Furthermore, Lorde points out that eroticism is “firmly rooted in the power of our unexpressed or unrecognized feeling” [73]. According to her, eroticism is the “nurturer or nursemaid of all our deepest knowledge” [73]. Fellmann and Walsh emphasize human’s mind unique specificity to possess properties such as feelings, cognitive capabilities and reflective skills [34]. In addition, they state that human beings doubt and have ambivalent and contradictory attitudes [34]. All of these are critical and invaluable resources to engage with the fascinating topic of eroticism and to enjoy its “power” as Lorde puts it [73]. In addition, human beings have the advantage to have a brain configured for high plasticity. This allows to deal with complex, contradictory, abstract emotions, feelings and thoughts. This ability is a pre-condition to engage with eroticism to its full. This is why Fellmann concludes in his forceful article “Eroticism: Why it still matters” that eroticism constitutes the “hallmark of behavioral and mental plasticity in human evolution” [33].

#### 4.5. Biology

**The body is definitely related to eroticism.** For the famous physician Ellis, the erotic personality “rests on a triangular association between the cerebrum, the endocrine system and the autonomic nervous apparatus” [29].

**Brain and hormones: a prerequisite for approaching eroticism**

The brain is the key organ and it has to be fed by the body with energy. Fellmann and Walsh confirm by stating that the brain is predominantly a sexual organ, where love is located [34]. Emotions are created by hormones, which have an exciting influence and by chalone, which have on the contrary an inhibitory impact. The thyroid, often expressed as “the gland of creation”, is critical to reproduction and to creative and intellectual performance [29]. Hormones do play a big role in this context. Adrenaline has a decisive impact on the heart’s activity and salivary glands, both needed to experience sexual emotions [29]. Androgen is the libido hormone both for men and women and allows sexual organs to experience a significant dilation of vasculature and an increase in size [87].

**Senses are irreplaceable for enjoying eroticism**

Fellmann and Walsh insist on the essential transformation of sexuality to eroticism, relies on humans’ sensations and sensibilities [34]. Senses are central to gain an understanding of eroticism. In that respect is touch the foremost sense and skin underpins it. As stated by Ellis, touch “is at once the least intellectual and the most massively emotional” of the five human senses [29]. To illustrate this, Ellis adds that there is “no such channel for directing nervous force into the sexual sphere as the kiss” [29]. The sense of smell triggers imagination, a driving force of desire and eroticism.

According to Ellis, it has a power of suggestion and has the ability to change emotions [29]. Consequently, it plays a considerable role in sexual attractions, as odors are powerful stimulants for sexual nearness. In sexuality, hearing is crucial in order to get to a fusion of body and mind. As Ellis puts it, sexuality is “probably the first source of speech” [29]. The scope of vision is limitless. It is definitely the utmost sense from a mating perspective [29]. Singer underlines that in eroticism men rely more on their visual ability than women, who are more internal-focused [102].

#### 4.6. Anthropology

Anthropology is the “study of human beings and their ancestors through time and space and in relation to physical character, environmental and social relations and culture” (Anthropology. In The Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary. Retrieved January 16, 2020, from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/anthropology>). Due to the subject of this research, we will focus on the cultural and social part of anthropology.

Humans’ unique ability to turn to eroticism

Fellmann and Walsh define anthropology as they write that the theory “becomes the study of mutual understanding, mind-reading and caring about what others feel and intend” [34]. The key corresponding question is what makes us human? Fellmann refers to three characteristics: the anatomy (upright gait), the behavioral patterns (child-rearing) and the mental attitudes as for instance curiosity [33]. The ability to consciousness is also a distinctive element for human beings versus animals. Therefore, Fellmann and Walsh affirm that consciousness is a “quantum leap” from animals’ ability to the human’s psyche [34]. According to Fellmann and Walsh, precisely eroticism allows human beings a cultural malleability [34], which is decisive to apprehend the world around us.

Conditioning leads humans to eroticism

Gooren underlines that erotosexual interrelationships between men and women are crucial for the survival of the species [43]. Conditioning is largely impacted by cognitive processes and accounts for the development of sexual preferences. It triggers and colors every emotional encounter [102]. According to major writers in human sexuality such as Kinsey, Whalen or Byrne, conditioning appears to be a major factor explaining eroticism’s direction and magnitude [101]. Clearly, one of the most noticeable aspects of the human mind is its ability to shift from sexuality to eroticism [34].

#### 4.7. Morality

In short, morality can be defined by either a way regulating human conduct or by a judgement about good or bad [94].

Eroticism is closer to morality than expected

Eroticism is linked to morality at least for two reasons. First, one needs the ability to take a step back from involved situations and second, the other in the relationship should be both taken responsibly as a “means for pleasure and at the same time as an end in itself” [33]. Morality is in constant evolution. Evans claimed that “people in the West suffered more in their personal lives from ‘love’ than from any other single ideology” (as cited in Miller [86]). This shows greatly that emotional relationships are as critical as moral and political principles, at least on a personal level.

Two forms of moral systems in Western societies

One can sketch two major moral systems in Western societies: “the morality of higher purposes” and “the morality of self-fulfillment”. The former was particularly observed between the Middle Age and the Enlightenment. It has the following three characteristics: salvation is people’s main objective, the rejection of the material world is a key religious principle and sins are proscribed as they lead to damnation [94]. Furthermore, desires are seen as allurements to stave off from Christ and sex is not held to be essential to life [94]. Whereas the morality of self-fulfillment dominates since the twentieth century in Western societies. According to Rubin [94], in this moral system, sex is appreciated as a pleasurable and merited. Sex is present across all levels of society, in every social class group and avoidance of sex will be scrutinized negatively. This type of modern morality allows more permissive attitudes and sees sex as part of one’s daily life. Eroticism can particularly thrive within this self-fulfillment morality.

In a large-scale study, Atari, Lai and Dehgani [3] underscore the importance of moral judgements with regards to differences in sex perceptions. Women scored higher than men on “Care, Fairness and Purity”. Differences among gender on “Loyalty and Authority” were very limited. Overall, the cultural context was said to play an important role in explaining perceptions’ difference on sex.

#### 4.8. Architecture

As architecture has conquered most of the cities across the globe, it is interesting to investigate its role in the field of eroticism. For Teyssot, architecture has two main characteristics: it should call accepted values into question and it should have the ambition to reflect present times [113].

Architecture and eroticism unexpected siblings

According to Barthes, there is a parallel between architecture and parts of cities, which are kept secret and reveal their erotic angle (as cited in Martin [78]). Tschumi, a leading Franco-Swiss architect, publishes in 1977 “The Pleasure of

Architecture” presenting the concept of “architectural eroticism”. In Martin’s article “Transpositions: On the intellectual origins of Tschumi’s Architectural Theory” written in 1990. Tschumi argues that “architecture should be built and burned just for pleasure. By using Hollier’s model, he defends the view that architecture consists of three “spaces”. First, the “conceived space” (with the pyramid as analogy – ‘space of reason’). Second, the “perceived space” (a labyrinth – ‘prison of sensations’). Third, the “experienced space” (similar to the Bataillian ‘inner experience’). The only way to reconcile the first two mentioned spaces is for Tschumi to accept one’s personal experience and to ascertain architecture’s eroticism.

**Architecture: an abstract of eroticism**

Tschumi (as cited in Martin [78]) defines architecture both as a “seductive representation of order” and as a “seductive illusion of an absolute order”. To him, a pleasurable architecture affects senses and the mind. According to Jamiesen and Roberts-Hughes [64], architecture hides a revolutionary temperament and is here to transgress the limits established by rules, laws and custom. They assert architecture’s capability to foster social and political changes [64]. For all these reasons, architecture reveals its parallelism with core features of eroticism. In conclusion, Tschumi (as cited in Martin [78]) concludes that architecture portrays “the

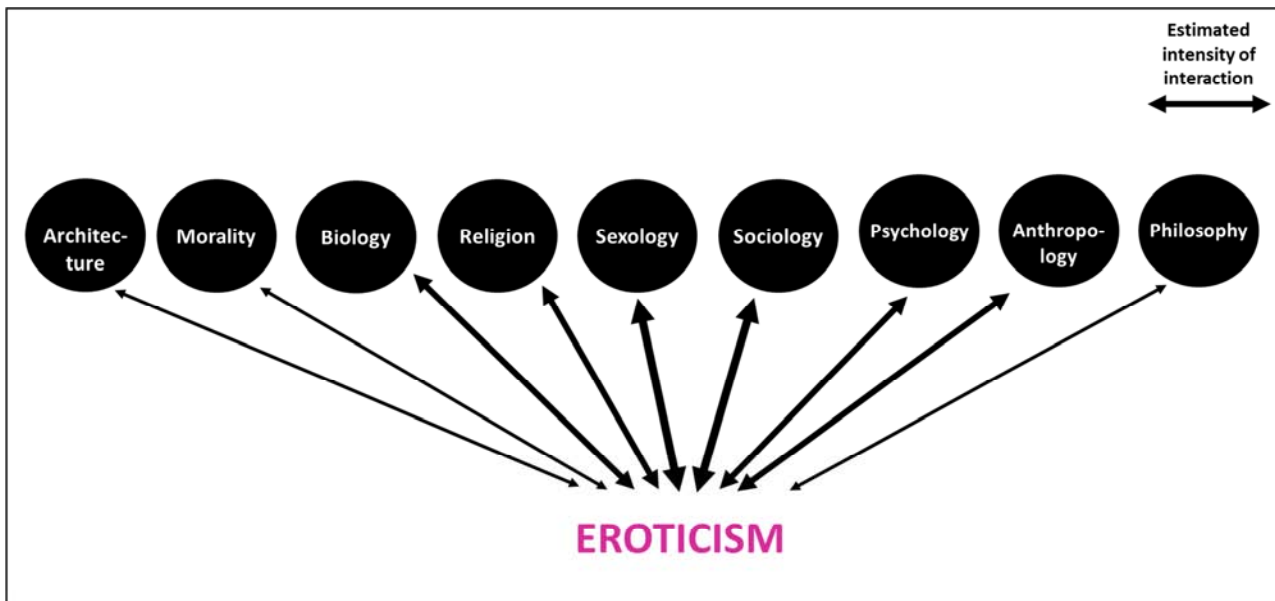
erotic object par excellence” as it connects feelings and cognitive capabilities.

**4.9. Philosophy**

Philosophy, from Greek over Latin, philosophia, “love of wisdom”, is the rational, abstract and methodical consideration of reality as a whole or of fundamental dimensions of human existence and experience. (Philosophy. In Encyclopædia Britannica. Retrieved January 18, 2020, from <https://www.britannica.com/topic/philosophy>).

Philosophy studies are particularly interested in the fields of reason, mind and existence. According to Girard, eroticism happens to be “the raison d’être of man” [40] and has therefore to be considered at the center of human’s mind and destiny. Moreover, eroticism has the specific ability to estimate the gap “between the beginnings of our sense of self and the chaos of our strongest feelings” [73]. Consequently, eroticism allows us to be satisfied and to fully experiment what we deserve [73]. To conclude, eroticism, as a cornerstone in our live, “pulls us out of isolation and overturns us onto the world” [28].

9 major theories are critical to dig into the profoundness and versatility of eroticism as a construct. These theories interact with eroticism in multiple and meaningful ways. It is summarized in Figure 3 as “Eroticism theoretical framework”.



**Figure 3.** Eroticism theoretical framework - 9 major theories intertwining with eroticism.

**5. Limitations**

A number of limitations need to be noted regarding the present study.

a) First, understanding eroticism depends greatly on cultures

(i.e. Western, Asians). For some of them, eroticism is taboo but lived anyway at a personal level. For others, it is outspoken in public but misunderstood individually or as a couple. Due to the researcher’s nationality and background, a Western bias is inevitable.

b) Second, eroticism could be pictured like an ocean, in all its

immensity. Therefore, a complete understanding is out of reach. It is specific to every individual, it evolves over time and it adapts itself to counterparts and the social context.

c) Third, both studies (conceptual and theoretical) rely only secondary data. Primary data and an empirical research would consolidate the findings.

## 6. Further Research

According to the author, the next logical and promising step would be to measure eroticism on the whole in an empirical way. To the author’s knowledge, only Sarpila [98] has conducted such a study, though partially as the research only measured eroticism with sixteen items. Such an undertaking would fill the white spot exemplified in our literature review. This sounds challenging and promising at once.

Some scholars have highlighted the difficulties that researchers would face in measuring eroticism in all its dimensions. Bataille, already in 1957, is convinced that “eroticism has a significance for mankind that the scientific attitude cannot reach” [4]. Later, Zetterberg in his article “The Secret Ranking”, which deals with the concept of “erotic rank”, writes “at some future day researchers may actually have found a way to measure it [theory of erotic ranking] objectively and study it directly” [119]. More recently, Meana

[81] highlights the richness of human sexual response but regrets that one construct is absent on the research on sex and desire: namely, eroticism. She acknowledges that eroticism presents some “considerable research challenges” but to her, it is worth the try [50]. Hakim, in her influential article “Erotic Capital”, encourages sociology to treat eroticism both theoretically and empirically [50]. One year later, in the adaptation of her academic article in a library’s best seller, she emphasizes that “so far, no one has ever measured erotic capital in the round” and acknowledges that many studies measure some but not all dimensions [51]. She insists on the availability of numerous sex surveys and related topics but stresses that “there are real opportunities for methodological development and innovation in future years” [51]. Fellmann in his brilliant article “Eroticism: Why it still matters” recognizes that a “scientific definition of eroticism is very difficult to formulate” [33]. Finally, Fellmann and Walsh [34] stress the difficulty to capture eroticism “in a formula”, just as it would be almost impossible for sexuality.

For all these reasons, further research should focus on measuring eroticism. The author does not deny the difficulty of the task but sees an enormous potential both in research and in practical implications to measure the construct empirically, probably at best with a scale.

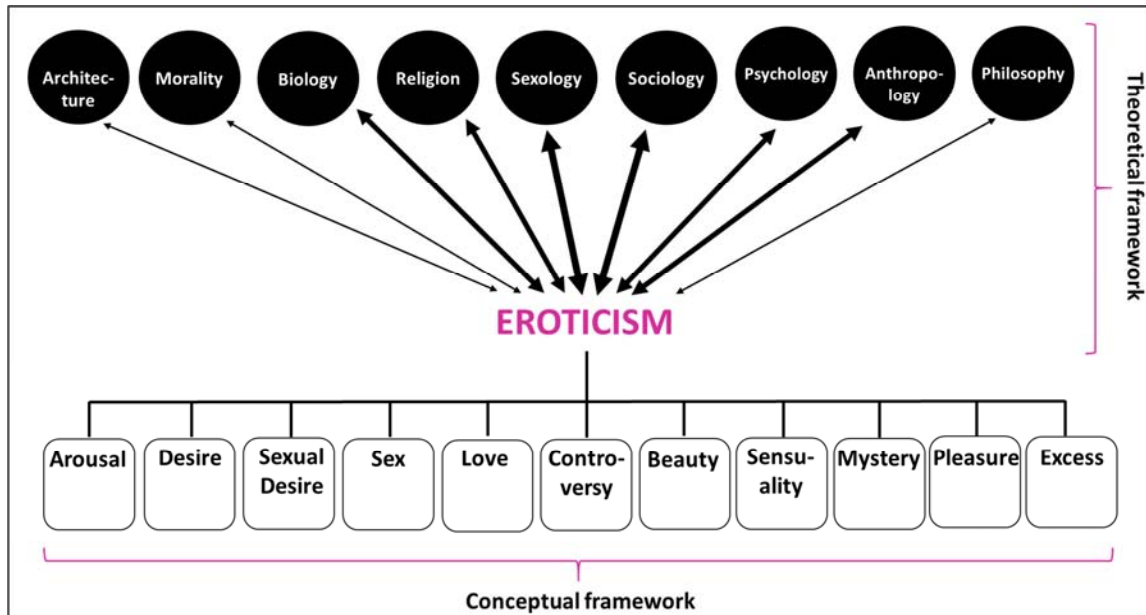


Figure 4. Eroticism overarching framework.

## 7. Conclusion

The aim of the present research was to propose an overarching framework on eroticism based both on a conceptual and theoretical analysis. This study has first examined the

literature on eroticism to find out that few studies have systematically and extensively investigated this construct. Apart from typologies and definitions, to date, few studies have shown a detailed understanding of eroticism in the form of scales or frameworks. The author opted for the following strategy: taking eroticism without any prejudice from two

main angles: from the conceptual construct- view and from a theory-view. This paper's findings have offered 3 frameworks for the exploration of eroticism as a construct. An "Eroticism conceptual framework" (Figure 2) and an "Eroticism theoretical framework" (Figure 3), which rely respectively on 11 dimensions and 9 theories have been proposed. Combined they form the "Eroticism overarching framework" (Figure 4), which is helpful to get a very intelligible and complete understanding of this enigmatic construct. Overall, these findings show that eroticism is a universal and multi-faceted construct to be given free rein for it to deliver its full and almost unlimited potential.

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