

# 13 FROM THE SEXUAL REVOLUTION TO A SHORTAGE OF SEXUAL INTERCOURSE AND ORGASMS

I have now thematically reviewed the key areas of sexuality, along with their most important characteristics and the changes that have taken place based on data from the FINSEX study. To provide background for the data and findings I have presented various theoretical frames of reference as well as findings from earlier international studies on a number of sexual subjects. In this final chapter, I will go into the issues and changes we have discussed in order to highlight the most important and the most mysterious. Many of the findings and changing trends entail challenges that I will attempt to address here.

One of the biggest mysteries is the substantial difference between men and women in the main theme of this book: sexual desire. Other mysteries in need of a solution include reasons for why sexual intercourse was decreasing in Finland, why there has been an increase in loss of female sexual desire, and why particularly young and middle-aged women are having a harder time experiencing orgasms from intercourse. Is sexual activity in Finland, and possibly in the West generally, decreasing? These are crucial issues for the sexual wellbeing of all couples.

## Mystery of sexual desire

In the summary at the end of the previous chapter, on the main gender differences in sexual issues, it was established that sexual desire is a key factor distinguishing men from women. According to a number of measures, male sexual desire is manifested at least twice as often as female desire, and men would like to have sex twice as often as women. In every age group, the frequency of sexual intercourse that would have sufficed to satisfy male respondents was higher than for female respondents. An additional dimension comes from the repeated lack of sexual desire reported much more frequently by women than men. On the basis of available data it is not possible to make the claim that the gap between male and female desire is shrinking. All of these factors have naturally had practical consequences for sexual interaction between men and women.

A particular challenge lies in solving the problem of the significant increase in women's loss of sexual desire. It is not a case of decreasing desire in long-term relationships, of becoming fed up and bored. The issue of libido loss had also expanded

to the relationships of young adults as well as new relationships. Increasing loss of desire had disproportionately affected young women in the last eight years. Compared with the early 1990s, also middle-aged women were experiencing frequent lack of sexual desire, an increase of more than 60 percent. Only women in the oldest age group reported no increase in loss of desire.

When one in four women in relationships lasting no more than two years and one in two women in relationships of 10 or more years were experiencing recurrent problems with sexual desire, it is impossible to view Finnish relationships on average as particularly passionate. Loss of male desire in the above age groups remained below 10 percent. It should be added that both young and middle-aged women had experienced recurrent loss of sexual desire at a rate four times that of men in the same age groups. The desires of men and women seemed at times to be on different planets. One interesting observation was that the level of sexual desire in men was well matched with that of women who were 20 years their junior, and vice versa. This may be the reason why so many men seek out a significantly younger partner at some point in their lives.

One should note that there are indeed many relationships in which the woman is the partner who desires more sex in the relationship. Also, in relationships that were only a few years old women were almost as likely as men to express a desire for more sex in the relationship. It was not until relationships that had lasted 10 years or more that men's and women's desires for more intercourse diverged in a significant way. It is interesting to speculate why these newer relationships did not contain more sex, even though approximately half of both men and women expressed a desire for more of it.

The first thing that comes to mind is that these individuals have found themselves in a relationship in which their desired intercourse frequency has exceeded their partner's desired intercourse frequency. There is some evidence to back up this supposition, since nearly all men and half of all women who reported wanting a lot more sex in their relationship also reported recurrent lack of sexual desire in their partner. These figures, reported by those who would have preferred to have sex somewhat more often, were one-third and one-fifth, respectively.

For the most part, a partner's loss of sexual desire was the main reason for desiring more sex for respondents who reported that they wanted significantly more sex in their relationship, and even then, it mostly applied to men rather than women. This is, of course, consistent with the finding that loss of sexual desire affected women in far greater numbers than men.

There is an intriguing association behind loss of sexual desire. When the incidence of lack of desire was analyzed in the different surveys by actual frequency of sexual intercourse, it seems that lack of desire did not vary by frequency category. What does this mean? It means that if the actual frequency of sexual intercourse reported by women had not dropped so much in recent years, the incidence of lack of desire

among women apparently would not have been any greater than previously. Lack of intercourse decreases the desire to have intercourse. This suggests that female sexuality is much like an unused machine – it must first be oiled before it is functional again.

The findings in the “15 minutes of happiness” chapter reveal that women were able to fulfil their desires for sexual intercourse more successfully than men, having the frequency of sex in the relationship that they wanted. This suggests that women were more frequently gatekeepers and thus better able to decide when and how often the couple had sex. This role model continues to persist in Finnish relationships.

The desire for more intercourse in the relationship is of course associated with many other factors beyond lack of sexual desire in a partner. One example of this kind of complexity is that of the women who would have preferred much more sex in their relationships, one-third, and up to half of the women who would have preferred to have sex somewhat more often, had experienced fairly frequent lack of sexual desire. A large proportion of such women both wanted to have sex more often and experienced loss of desire. Among men, too, one in ten of those who expressed a wish for more sex were similarly conflicted. One wonders if this had to do with trying to grasp some type of ideal or ideal partner that was out of the reach of the respondents' capacity. The wish for more sex may also have been about a desire to please the partner, which had nevertheless to some extent failed.

What do the theories of sexuality discussed earlier say about gender differences and sexual desire? For the most part they attempt to justify why men want to have sex more often than women. The theory of evolution sees men's stronger sexual urges as a consequence of natural selection. Men with stronger sexual urges, the theory goes, have been more successful in reproducing compared with other men. Regarding this hypothesis, the men in this study who had had a large number of sexual partners had, on average, fewer children of their own than other men. Also men who wanted sex more often than other men were somewhat less likely than others to have several children. Of course, these observations do not exclude the possibility that nature, at some point in human history, selected the men with the strongest sexual urges.

If we are to believe the theory of evolution, sexual desire will be an issue that separates men and women for a long time to come. Evolution entails adapting to new situations, but the process is gradual and would take numerous generations even in the best of cases. The theory of evolution earns some points here in the sense that differences in men's and women's sexual desires have remained rather constant even though the social environment surrounding them and the related roles have changed quite a bit. Men and women have changed their behaviour and values in significant ways, but these changes have not affected gender differences in sexual desire.

A kind of counter theory to the theory of evolution is the theory of social constructionism, which posits that all of sexuality as well as our conceptions of it are products of

society and culture. The theory presumes that the essence of sexual desire is equally strong for both men and women. This is one of the key issues in feminist thinking. According to unconditional feminist interpretations, men's stronger sexual urges expose something that is not in fact sexual; for example, an attempt to exert power over women. According to these theories, the desire for sex in men represents a tool to achieve some different kind of aim.

In light of these results, an evolving society ought to have an effect on sexual desire itself and on gender differences in desire. This perspective into sexuality may be relevant in explaining changes in behaviour, but in terms of sexual desire it does not seem to coincide with the study's findings. Even though the meanings associated with sexuality have changed almost radically in Finland over recent decades, the changes have not extended to female and male desire.

The social exchange theory is better adapted to interpreting differences in sexual behaviour, more so than differences in desire. Within this theoretical framework, however, one could think that the greater rewards that men achieve from sexual interaction could explain their stronger sexual desires. This might make sense in that men experience orgasms so much more often and easily in intercourse compared with women. In other words, men might be more motivated to seek intercourse as something that offers them particular rewards. This viewpoint is supported also by the finding that women who would like to experience more orgasms from intercourse also reported desiring sex more frequently than other women. In addition, women who enjoyed sexual intercourse, and got more pleasure out of their sex lives than other women, were also less likely to experience lack of sexual desire.

This theory of "pursuing rewards" still does not explain the differences between men and women in a comprehensive way, because even women who always had orgasms during intercourse desired to have sex somewhat less frequently than similar men. This perspective nevertheless opens up the possibility of matching male and female desire to suit one another better. If women were to enjoy intercourse more and have orgasms more regularly, the desire gap between the genders should decline.

One alternative is that desire is born to a significant degree in interaction between people, where they in a sense learn situational scripts on how to express sexual desire in a particular situation. Part of this type of script could be, for example, that it is not appropriate in a given moment for a woman to want more than what she has already achieved in her sex life. Men, on the other hand, should fantasize about a more extravagant and plentiful sex life. Cognition plays an important role in fantasies and dreams, and if women simply think about sex less than men, they are less likely to desire it or be motivated to get it as frequently as men. Sexual cognitive processes, then, would produce sexual desire and arousal. We already discussed the importance of cognitive processes in sexual arousal and noted that sexual cognitive processes occurred more actively in men than women.

So why do women think about sex less often than men and fantasize about it less? Are sexual thoughts masculine, shaped by evolution, or is there less reason for women to spend time thinking about sex so intently, when sex offers women lesser rewards than for men? Or has culture taught women that sexual desire is exclusively a by-product of love, and that a proper woman should not desire sex, but only love? The study's findings regarding sexual desire inspire more questions than definitive answers.

## The mystery of decreasing intercourse in Finland

A surprising and thought-provoking finding in the study is the decline in intercourse frequency in the 2000s. For example, from eight years before, there was a 10–15 percent drop in respondents of all ages who reported that they had had sex within the last week. Only 45 percent of men and 40 percent of women had had sexual intercourse in the last week. In terms of frequency figures, Finnish respondents had lost one session of sexual intercourse per month, or 20 percent, compared with figures eight years prior. Also compared to the early 1970s, people were having less sex now. Frequency of sexual intercourse declined most in the age group of 25–40-year-olds. The frequency had remained the same for people aged over 50. What could explain the change?

An especially interesting perspective when considering these findings comes from comparing weekly intercourse frequencies in Finland to those in four Southern European nations as well as Norway, which indicated clearly that Finns were the least active in terms of intercourse frequency. We should note that the surveys in the comparison countries were conducted nearly ten years prior to the most recent Finnish survey. If we use the Finnish results from 1999, the comparison changes so that respondents in Finland reported a similar intercourse frequency as in Norway, but still lower than in the Southern European countries in the comparison. Using the available data, it is not possible to predict whether respondents in the comparison countries were also having less intercourse in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In any case, it seems that sexual activity in the Nordic countries takes other ways of implementation besides intercourse more often than in Southern Europe.

In the present decade, Finns reported having sex on average once or twice a week. Not even young adults reached a full two times a week any longer. The amount of sex declined in all relationship types, including singles, though the greatest drop occurred in cohabiting couples. The latter had lost their status as the relationship type most conducive to sex. Now, couples who were living apart were having sex more than any other relationship group, even though in practical terms their two separate addresses afforded the fewest opportunities for it. Respondents in LAT-relationships reported intercourse on average two additional times per month compared with married respondents, and one additional time compared with cohabiting respondents.

These figures suggest that people in living-apart relationships were richer in terms of sex than other relationships.

The most typical wish expressed by Finnish respondents was to have sexual intercourse twice a week. People who had achieved this rate were also generally happy with the amount of sex they were having. Most respondents came up short, having only half the sex they would have liked. For this reason, more and more Finns expressed dissatisfaction with their sex life as a whole. Quality was no substitute for quantity in this case. The study's results do not support the claim that the frequency of sexual intercourse is not important from the standpoint of sexual happiness. Certainly, there will be individual exceptions to this.

What, then, can be behind the decline in intercourse frequency in Finland? Earlier, I noted that greater intercourse activity was associated with having more sexual desire, desiring sex more frequently, and to fewer instances of loss of sexual desire. As stated above, the drop in intercourse frequency reported in the present study was not a result of people desiring sex less frequently or intensely.

Another possible explanation has to do with how well a relationship functions. Those who rated the importance of sex in their relationship happiness more highly than other people, and who found it easier to discuss sex with their partner, reported the highest frequency of sexual intercourse.

With regard to considering sex important for the relationship, there had been a change in that fewer young and the middle-aged men and women than in 1999 were now likely to say that sex was very important in their relationship. This might have explained some of the behavioural change, if it were not for the fact that the 1999 results largely mirrored those of 1992, when respondents reported a significantly higher frequency of sexual intercourse. Therefore, the predictive value of this particular change is rather insignificant.

In terms of communicating with one's partner about sex, there was no change that could explain the decline in sexual intercourse frequency. There was almost no change compared to 1999. It is true that in both 2007 and 1999 respondents reported greater difficulties discussing sex with their partner than in 1992. Over the long term, more problems were beginning to creep into couples' sexual interaction. If this had had a significant impact on intercourse frequency, it should have been reflected in the survey results already eight years before it emerged.

Other aspects of a well-functioning relationship could not account for the decline in the opportunities for having sexual intercourse. Twenty-first century men and women were reporting a level of relationship happiness that was at least as high as before. One perspective comes from the finding that in 2007, the number of people who considered their relationship very happy was significantly higher than in the early 1970s, but intercourse frequency was much lower than in the 1970s, particularly

among young adults. Respondents' reports of mutual love in their current relationship were on a par with earlier surveys. And in cohabiting couples, whom the decline in sexual intercourse had affected most in relative terms, there were greater mutual feelings of love than ever before.

This may give the impression that frequency of intercourse should not be held up as a particular measure of a well-functioning relationship. The truth is that those who were reportedly in very happy relationships were having sexual intercourse approximately twice as often as those in relationships that were neither happy nor unhappy. Also, the difference in intercourse frequency was substantial when comparing people who reported having a very happy versus a fairly happy relationship. How well a relationship is functioning will continue to be an especially important predictor of the two partners' motivation to have sexual intercourse.

In addition, respondents' satisfaction with their sex lives was critically dependent on intercourse frequency. The decline in the latter was associated with a simultaneous drop in levels of satisfaction with one's sex life, of approximately ten percentage points among both men and women.

Returning to the topic of looking for possible explanations for the decline in sexual intercourse in the latest study, among women, higher frequency of sexual intercourse was correlated with more regular orgasms and active watching of porn. The watching of porn had in fact increased somewhat, so that at least could not be the reason behind less intercourse. Young men were also watching porn so much more frequently now that, conceivably, it could be a response to the decline in intercourse. The shortage had been addressed by masturbating more frequently, with the help of visual aids. In terms of sexual attitudes, it was noteworthy that in spite of the at-times critical public debate concerning pornography, four-fifths of men and half of all women found it very arousing to watch porn.

Earlier it was noted that difficulty experiencing orgasms regularly is increasingly affecting young and middle-aged women. Among men, too, orgasms from sexual intercourse experienced a similar drop. This may explain some of the latest study's declines in sexual intercourse. With the pleasure derived from sexual intercourse being less certain, people may have found it harder to invest more in intercourse in their relationships.

The motivation to have sex was not affected by any deterioration in the quality of intercourse, except on the part of orgasms, and did not cause people to invest less in intercourse. In 2007, the same proportion of women as in earlier surveys had found their latest sexual intercourse very enjoyable, and the proportion of men who did had actually grown. In practice, Finnish intercourse was equal to "15 minutes of happiness". That was its average duration. The more frequently people had intercourse, the more time they spent each time. Unfortunately, the data does not permit comparing possible changes in time use, or its effect on the motivation to have sexual intercourse.

More recently, respondents have reported using different sexual positions and new techniques more than before. Also, the by-now more traditional manual and oral stimulation had gained even more ground. One would think that these changes had increased people's desire to have intercourse, but this had not occurred.

The decline in intercourse frequency that has taken place in Finland is not entirely unique. For example, researchers in the United States and Germany found already in the 1990s that when measured by intercourse frequency, people were not very sexually active. The finding conflicts with the media images that depict passionate, tempestuous sex lives, and the worry about the over-sexualisation of our lives. The sex lives of most real people are somewhat modest.

The image that emerges from this study may bring solace to many who can now see that numerous others are just as inactive in bed as themselves, and that the sex other people are having isn't that exotic. The label of postmodernism that accompanies sex in social discourse is absent in people's real, everyday lives.

The chasm between the sometimes offensive sex depicted in public discourse and ordinary people's sex lives can be almost grotesque. Human sex is now approach an ascetic dream: "We are transported to the sea of sex without the emotions that we used to call sexual passion, without any danger of indecency, and without having to do any real battle against temptation." And: "In a world of shameless nudity, naked bodies leave us cold." Public sexuality and the ever-present nudity in advertising, which many find excessive, do not lure people to have more sex, no matter how healthy it might be.

## Masturbation saves the day in Finland

Slowly, people have begun to emancipate themselves from their feelings-based relationships, moving from shared sex toward a more individualistic experience of sexual pleasure – masturbation. Masturbation has its own justification, and it is increasingly practiced alongside established relationships. With its help, some people are able to escape the high demands imposed by our modern sexual etiquette, with its joint negotiations and situational considerations of the appropriateness of taking sexual initiative. For these people, masturbation is not a substitute for too little sex, but a different and easier form of sexual pleasure. To some extent, this is also a manifestation of a partial distancing between sex and love.

In this study as well as the previous ones, one of the major changes concerned the fast growth of masturbation that was taking off from the younger age groups. Each new generation has masturbated more actively than the last one and also maintained the habit actively into adulthood. In the 2000s, the age at which people began masturbating fell by up to several years.

What has been positive in this change is, for example, that earlier research has shown that people who masturbate more actively have less fear of intimacy with a

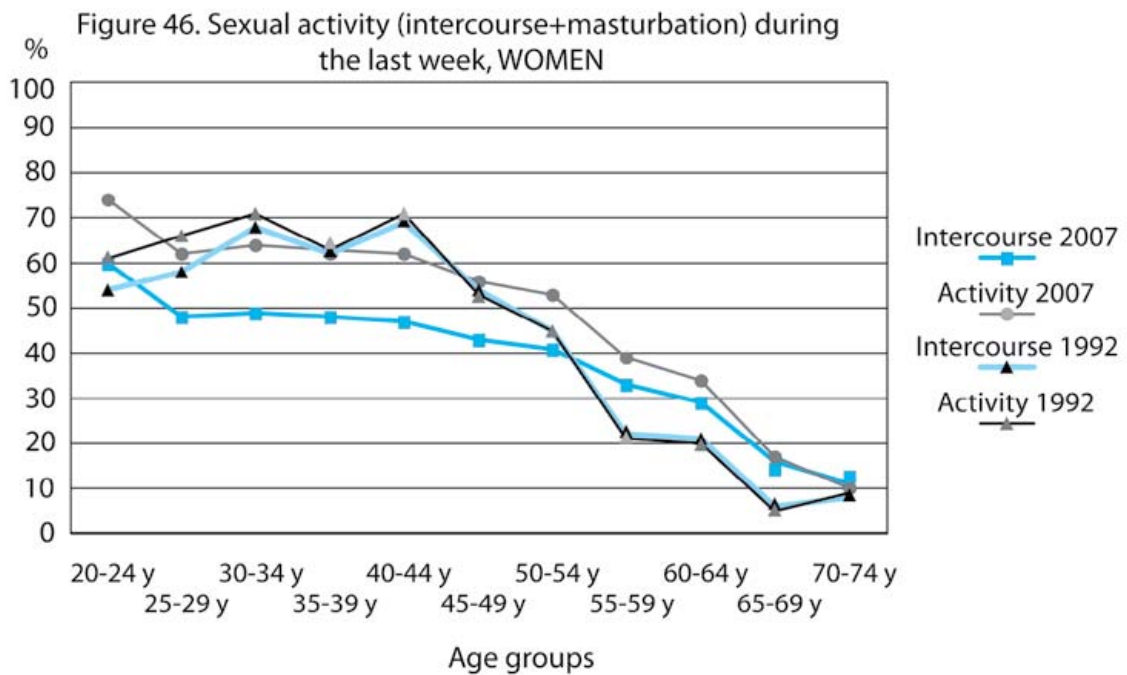
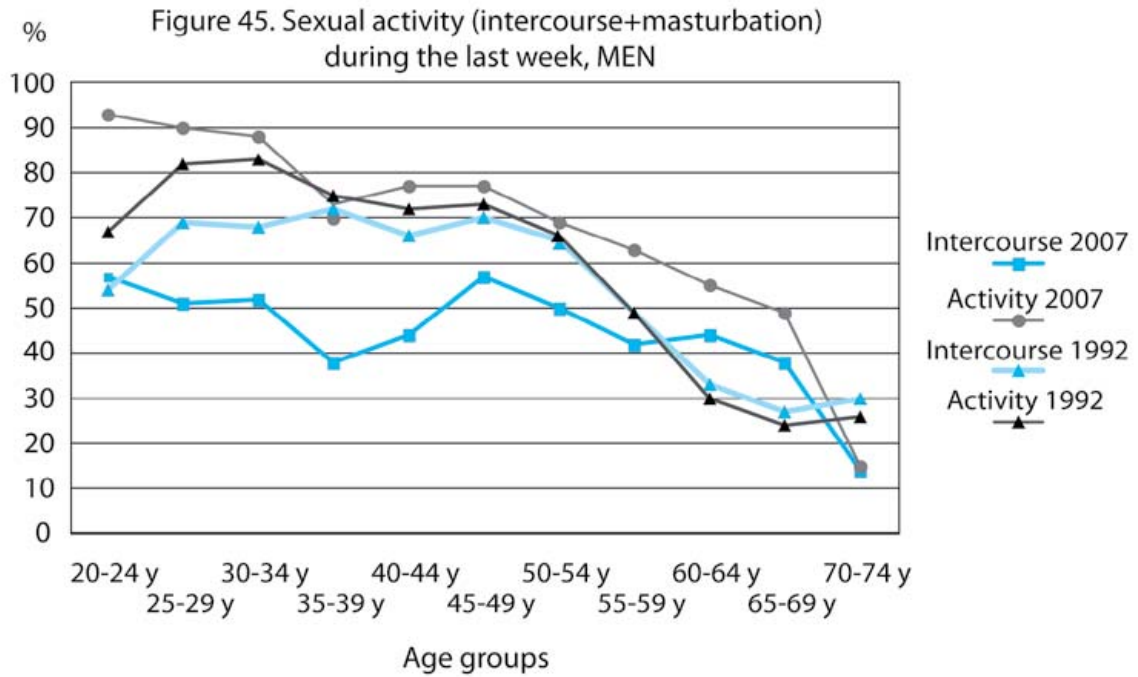
partner. From the standpoint of sexual technique, masturbation-related fears have no doubt inhibited people from using manual stimulation in sex with a regular partner. People who have not learned to properly stimulate their own genitals have also had difficulty stimulating a partner.

One of the most significant findings in the present study is that masturbation does not necessarily decrease in the course of the lifespan. It is not a youthful activity that is later forgotten. Decades later, masturbation remained at approximately the same levels in different birth-year cohorts in all four surveys that asked about masturbation. What you learn when you're young, you don't unlearn. And now people masturbate in the absence of unnecessary fear or anxiety. This finding also reflects the major and permanent impact that proper education and high-quality information can have on sexual matters.

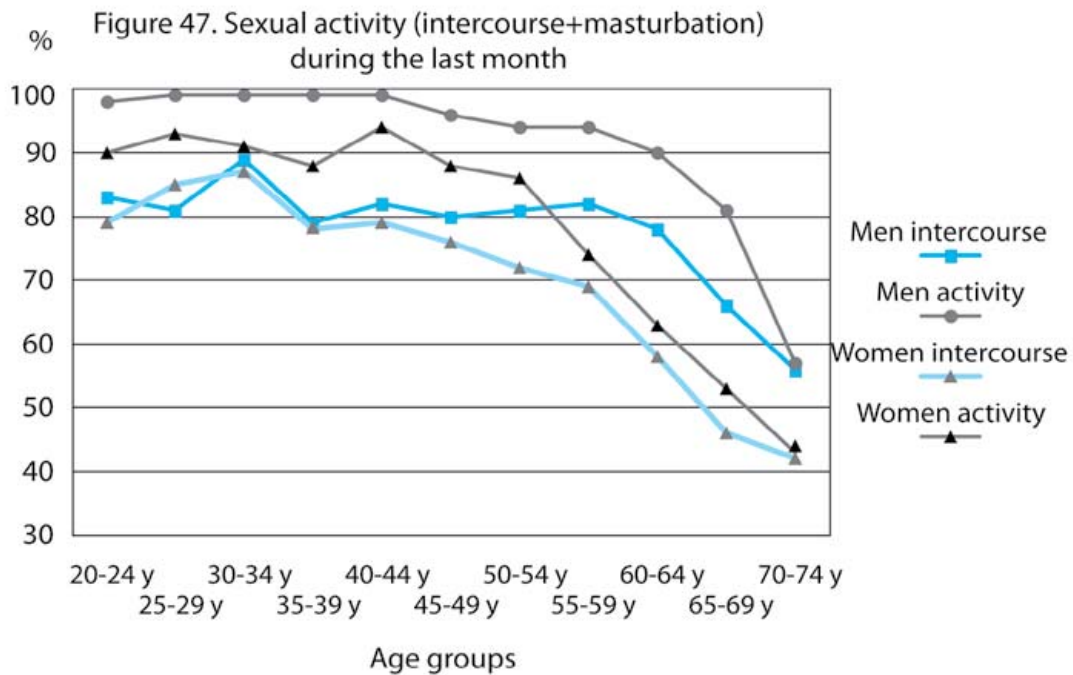
Another noteworthy aspect of masturbation was its rapid and sizable growth in couple relationships. The practice has doubled from the early 1990s, becoming an important part of a couple's sex life. Women, however, were lagging about 20 years behind men in this change. The difference was associated, among other things, with the increasing proportion of orgasms through masturbation in different age groups. A new observation was that masturbation had become increasingly common among women who reported having trouble with orgasms from intercourse. People considered the ability to experience sexual pleasure more and more important.

When measured through the frequency at which Finns had intercourse, their sex lives seemed on their way to growing passivity. The picture looked different when using another measure of sexual activity on a par with sexual intercourse – masturbation. When looking at how many men and women of various ages had been sexually active (sexual intercourse or masturbation) within the last week, it turned out that, in 2007, Finnish men and women were approximately as sexually active as they had been according to the two previous surveys conducted in the 1990s. Compared with middle-aged respondents in the 1970s, people were clearly even more sexually active. Further, respondents aged 55–74 years proved to be more sexually active in the last two surveys, compared with the early 1990s.

Approximately three in four young and middle-aged men had been sexually active within the last week. About two-thirds of women had been sexually active in the last week. The gender difference comes from the lower rate of masturbation among women, when not having sexual intercourse.



Nearly all young and middle-aged men and about 90 percent of women of the same age had been sexually active in the last month. Sexual activity among men aged 55 and over within the last month even reached record levels in 2007 when compared with the 1990s surveys. Among women of the same age sexual activity within the last month was at about the same level as in 1999, i.e. much more active than in the early 1990s.



Sexual activity among Finns remained largely stable in the 2000s thanks to those who had newly embraced masturbation to fill in for lack of sexual intercourse, say, within the last week. Among young men this “masturbation supplement” in relation to activity on the intercourse front represented up to about 40 percent of their sexual activity in the last week, approximately 30 percent among middle-aged men. Among women, “the supplement” was only about 15 percent in both age groups. Among men aged 60 and over, masturbation increased sexual activity in relation to intercourse by approximately 10 percent, but played only a minor role among older women.

The supplementation provided by masturbation to sexual activity within the last week has grown significantly among men in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In 1999, instead of the 40 percent in 2007, it was approximately 15 percent and in 1992, it was only discovered among young men as a supplementation of about 10 percent. Among women, the activity edge brought on by masturbation within the last week was approximately 10 percent in 1999, and in 1992, only slightly affected respondents under the age of 30.

In relation to intercourse, sexual activity within the last month was boosted among young and middle-aged men by approximately 20 percent by masturbation. Among men older than that masturbation increased sexual activity by approximately 15 percent but only by about five percent for older women. For example, in the age group of slightly below 70, four-fifths of men and half of women had been sexually active in the last month. In the same age group, one in two men and one in five women had been sexually active within the last week.

One of the study’s key findings was that sexual activity among Finnish people was shifting to a significant degree from sexual intercourse to masturbation, also among

couples. Although the frequency of sexual intercourse has dropped, the increase in masturbation has stepped in to make up for the difference. Naturally, this invites questions as to why it has happened. Is there less intercourse because sexual gratification is more easily and conveniently achieved by masturbating? At least in those relationships where both partners are busy with work, possibly on different work schedules, this may be the case. In part, though, masturbation serves to compensate for the decrease in intercourse. The scope is not very broad, based on the finding that masturbation was already increasing fast at the time when the frequency of intercourse in relationships had not yet significantly changed.

There are those who see the proliferation of masturbation as a sign of sexual emancipation. Masturbation is autonomous sex and does not require a demanding level of interaction with a partner. It's easy and presents no performance anxiety. Masturbation is suited to busy lifestyles and a culture of interaction that demands ever higher levels of sexual performance. As sexual gratification is nevertheless becoming increasingly important to people, the role of masturbation inevitably grows, as indicated by the findings of this study.

The most commonly applied theories of sexuality offer very little in the way of tools for interpreting this change. The theory of evolution cannot respond effectively to why people are having less sex than before. We can speculate as to whether men and women who are highly sexually motivated have reproduced less in recent decades as a result of more effective contraception. In this case, the process of selection might have affected the new generation. The items available for measuring sexual desire do not, however, support such assumptions. It would be more consistent with evolutionary theory that people seek an alternative in masturbation for declining opportunities for intercourse. People's biological instincts, it could be said, are looking for a new outlet for release.

Within the framework of social constructivism it might be thought that the increase in masturbation as a supplement to sexual intercourse could be a consequence of public discourse in which masturbation and its importance for individual identity have been raised to a cult-like status. This may have an element of accuracy, since both sex therapy and feminism have provided a lot of support for masturbation among the public. Masturbation has been represented as the key to one's sexuality and as a way of claiming one's own body, as well as a kind of safe sex in an era of various health risks. Masturbation has also perhaps been marketed to women as a way of claiming ownership of their sexuality and emancipation from men. Masturbation may have been interpreted as an expression of self-care and self-love. There is now an almost romantic relationship with the self. In comparison, a strife-ridden sexual relationship with a partner may come in second.

Many people are anxious about how they are perceived in bed. Most long to hear an assessment of their prowess from a new sexual partner. The media and film industry

persist in creating role models for what is an ideal lover or an astounding love-making experience. Attaining such levels in everyday life may seem overwhelming. A reflection of this is that the proportion of respondents who considered themselves sexually skilled decreased over eight years among both sexes, more so among women. One tactic may have been to invest more in fewer occasions of sexual intercourse and obtain the remainder of sexual gratification by masturbating.

The social exchange theory evaluates sexual interaction through the costs and rewards associated with it. A comprehensive assessment of recent sexual intercourse does not indicate that people have been finding sex less satisfying, although it is true that women are experiencing greater difficulty having orgasms. Lack of sexual enjoyment on the part of a female partner may also lessen men's motivation to have intercourse. From the social exchange perspective, this may be associated with increased costs. Attaining sexual gratification may require a greater effort than before. Further, the significant differences in the levels of sexual desire between men and women may be creating more situations in which the partner who wants sex more often feels like he or she is using the other, less desirous partner. Masturbation, on the other hand, need cause no guilt feelings. It may even feel like a service to benefit the partner who is less eager to have sex.

## Toward sexual relationships or romance?

At the core of sexuality naturally is sexual interaction with different partners. Major changes have occurred in relationships both in recent years and decades. A particularly strong transition has resulted among women who no longer retain their sexual inexperience for a future husband. It has been some time since virginity was a characteristic that had an especially positive exchange value when entering marriage. To the contrary, inexperience is now often seen as a negative feature, and a risk to the functioning of a new relationship. As the old saying goes, people no longer want to buy a horse without checking its teeth. People hope that and try to guess whether a partner has acquired the skills in previous relationships of how to be a satisfying lover.

The new criteria for sexual relations are manifested as particularly big changes in the number of sexual partners women today have. Thanks to this, the gap between men and women has shrunk considerably. In the early part of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, women's numbers of sexual partners were up to five times higher than what they had been in the 1970s. During the same time, men's number of sexual partners grew only slightly, but because of large differences at the starting line, men continued to report a greater number of sexual partners than women.

With regard to sex partners, the youngest cohort of women was exhibiting "man-like" behaviour. Sexual relationships by women that were not based on love have increased since the 1970s. The rise has been especially radical in recent years and the figures

are now approaching men's. Several decades ago women would frequently find themselves walking up to the altar with their first sexual partner. Now, the women at the altar have already "tested" a number of men. Young couples are now rather equal in this regard. In part, this is because young men are having fewer relationships even than they used to. As a result of this change, in a European-wide comparison of several countries Finnish women had the largest number of sexual partners.

It may seem paradoxical that at the same time as women in particular are going from one partner to the next and entering into sexual relationships with men whom they do not love, the demand for faithfulness in the relationship is increasingly essential, and monogamy has indeed mounted. The sexual relationships of the early 21<sup>st</sup> century are more established than before and the people in them have in fact had fewer parallel relationships than previously. Also, fewer and fewer respondents were engaging in relationships with entirely unknown partners. For women in relationships, the bar for entering into a new relationship purely for the sake of sexual desire, or even lack of sexual desire on the part of a partner, has been very high.

A partial explanation for this seemingly contradictory finding is that people have been forming more and more consecutive relationships. Serial monogamy developed into the typical relationship model among the younger generation. The relationships have been reportedly quite faithful, but more short-term than previously. If one relationship did not bring the desired emotional and sexual satisfaction, respondents moved onto the next one. When people are equal and independent, neither partner can pressure or extort the other for reasons such as earning a livelihood to remain in a relationship that does not satisfy.

There were signs of a certain renaissance of romanticism in the finding that attitudes toward infidelity and parallel relationships had become more restrictive. One of the key factors behind this shift has been that the highly educated, who were previously more tolerant than the population in general in their attitudes toward parallel relationships, had changed their minds. The significance of this change in attitude becomes highlighted in a comparison between Finland and six other European countries (Switzerland, Spain, Italy, Greece, Portugal, Norway), where Finns' attitudes toward infidelity proved by far the most stringent. The requirement to remain faithful seems to be on its way to becoming the new Nordic relationship model, and Finland leads this development.

Surprisingly, Finns are also the least tolerant of sexual relationships among teenagers of 14–15 years. Finns were, though, more likely on average to accept sexual relations between adults who were not in love. Positive attitudes toward tolerance and official status for homosexual relationships had advanced most rapidly in the 2000s, in relative terms.

Beyond the renaissance of romanticism, described in greater detail above, the decline in the acceptance of parallel relationships may derive from a situation in which people

who are investing hard in their careers and are otherwise busy may have had less time to engage in parallel relationships. As expectations among both men and women regarding the quality of secret sexual liaisons and the sex therein have increased, fewer people have been able to engage in clandestine relationships that are satisfying enough as well as long-lasting. The need to make greater investments in such relationships may more easily turn them into a burden. In this context too, masturbation may seem like an easier and less risk-prone method for attaining sexual gratification.

The generous increase in masturbation may have played a role in a decline in the demand for paid sex directed at particularly young women. The demand fell by up to half in the course of the early 21<sup>st</sup> century. Simultaneously, the use of paid sex fell off among young and middle-aged men. Considering the wealth of public discourse on the subject, this may come as a surprise.

A new 21<sup>st</sup> century phenomenon is the major increase in young women's sexual interest in one another. Compared to women in other age groups, they were twice as likely to have experienced at a minimum some sexual caressing with another woman. This seems to suggest a new role-taking by these women on the sexual stage. Embracing and caressing other young women is fun and enjoyable, and at the same time, invites positive attention from young men. In this dual role, women have greater sexual freedom than men.

In earlier periods of history individuals were able to rely on familial relations and same-sex friends as a safeguard against loneliness. In today's society, these options are more limited. The result of a lack of a long-term romantic relationship is presumably loneliness. Lack of alternative targets of emotional expression and affection has raised the personal stakes for finding and choosing the kind of partner who offers the promise of continued emotional fulfilment. Forming and maintaining a high-quality relationship has been elevated into a singular life goal, along with the attendant consequences for individual identity. In this sense, romanticism is the sales agent of today's individuality.

Because of women's economic independence women now have the tools to work out and express their sexuality. Well-educated women have been able to make choices and rely on social services at times such as child rearing. Privacy has increased, offering the framework and the time to engage in sexual experimentation. Some women have felt proud of being able to enjoy sex.

The problem is the increasing competition for good sexual partners. Both men and women have had to make more of an effort to find a partner who fits their needs. People give serious consideration to whether the grass on the other side of the fence might indeed be greener.

## Unravelling the difficulty of experiencing sexual pleasure

The goal of sexual activity is sexual pleasure. And thus, this book will conclude by examining pleasure and the issues that feed into it. The World Health Organization (WHO) states that an essential part of sexual health is the ability to enjoy sexual activity that is mutually satisfying. Many studies have confirmed that sexual activity and having orgasms have beneficial consequences for human health. The main findings of research on the health impacts of sexual activity were summarized in the first chapter of this book.

Social and public discourse on the subjects of gender and sexuality have for some time underscored women's right to sexual enjoyment. This enjoyment is often linked to the positive context of a couple relationship and the promotion of sexual wellbeing. At the same time, public discourse loads additional expectations on men to offer their female partners proper sexual fulfilment. Men's obligation to please their spouse is already paralleled by their earlier obligation to bear responsibility for the family's livelihood.

The great mystery of Finnish sexuality is why difficulty having orgasms has increased in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, at a time when information about how to better achieve orgasms proliferates. Women's and health magazines are full of instructions for the pursuit and cultivation of sexual pleasure.

The proportion of young and middle-aged women who had orgasms through sexual intercourse nearly always or most of the time had fallen by ten percentage points, and even among men, the proportion of men who always reach orgasm through intercourse had dropped by 15 percent. There was up to a 20 percent drop in cohabiting women who had orgasms through intercourse most of the time. In young women, this was associated with the clearly increasing difficulties of having orgasms in the first years of a relationship. Hence, fewer young women considered their sexual relations "highly enjoyable".

Among young women, 10 percent fewer than previously had an orgasm the last time they had sex. Orgasms have become an increasingly difficult issue for young women. The result is that up to one in two single women experienced orgasms through sexual intercourse fairly infrequently at most. Sex among singles was not nearly as marvelous as popular television shows would have us believe.

A new trend has been that women who more rarely have an orgasm during sexual intercourse began to masturbate more actively in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In fact, both men and women who were otherwise unhappy with their sex lives had begun to masturbate more actively than before.

The growth trend in young women's problems with their sexuality was not limited to orgasms.

In the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, they were also experiencing arousal and lubrication problems at twice the earlier rates. Young women suffered from these issues more than middle-aged women. The problems were also affecting more and more new and cohabiting relationships. Arousal difficulties among women were twice as common as among men (male arousal problems refer to erectile problems).

What could be the reasons for women's growing problems particularly with orgasms? Sexual interaction with the partner has a crucial impact on the ability to have an orgasm. Because most such interaction occurs with an established partner, quality of the relationship is a key factor in creating the conditions that promote orgasms. If the relationship runs into problems, difficulty with orgasms may follow.

Men and women in all age groups evaluated their relationship happiness at least at the levels of previous surveys. No change had occurred either in the ease or difficulty of discussing sexual matters with a partner over the eight intervening years. Touching and physical intimacy were present in relationships at the same levels as before. These measures of relationship interaction offered no hint for understanding why orgasms had become harder to come by. Moreover, orgasm problems had also increased in relationships where partners experienced mutual love.

The only apparent change was that young and middle-aged women and men were slightly less likely than before to consider sex very important for the happiness of their relationship. It remains an open question whether this small shift in values has been reflected on sexual interaction in relationships, or whether the change derives from the decline in intercourse frequency and intercourse-orgasms, which happened for some other reason. People appreciate less the things they cannot attain.

In addition to relationship factors, other issues important for having orgasms are sexual desire and sexual self-image. The growing lack of sexual desire in young women has most certainly had an impact on how they experience orgasms. On the other hand, fewer orgasms may also impair the desire to have intercourse.

Sexual self-esteem does not explain the mystery of the missing orgasm. Women's assessment of their own attractiveness and activity has not really changed. Their evaluation of their own sexual skill had fallen somewhat, but nevertheless was better than it had been in the early 1990s, when women still experienced significantly more orgasms than in recent times.

For women, one recurrent reason for elusive orgasms in intercourse is premature ejaculation on the part of a male partner. This does not explain the growing problem with orgasms, because premature ejaculation actually decreased in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. For women to experience pleasure and to have orgasms, manual stimulation and

caressing as well as cunnilingus were also very essential. These methods of love-making have gained in popularity somewhat, and hence, as far as a partner's sexual repertoire and the development of his love-making techniques, one would expect that women's orgasmic opportunities would have been somewhat improved at this point. In practice, however, the reverse was true.

Women's responses indicated that they experienced more orgasms when they felt that the sex was initiated together with the partner. This may represent one key reason for why women are finding it more difficult to have orgasms. Among young women in particular, more and more felt that the latest sexual intercourse had not been initiated together, but that the impetus had come solely from the partner. Of course, this also speaks to the decline in the willingness of these women to initiate sex to their partner. Add to this young women's growing difficulties becoming aroused and the decline in the frequency of sexual intercourse, and we are approaching the core that reflects toward both sexual desire and the ability to have orgasms. When someone is not fully engaged in love-making, it is no surprise that the enjoyment it brings is not what it used to be.

Some women have compensated for their inability to have orgasms from intercourse or love-making by masturbating more; there is a better guarantee of sexual pleasure. The findings offer a frank prognosis that future generations will practice masturbation to a much greater extent even through older adulthood. They have come of age in a community in which masturbation represents a real option even among couples. The significance and role of masturbation will be emphasized greatly in the future also among older people who have been widowed and have trouble finding a new, steady partner.

Gradually, sexuality has changed shape in Finland, as Western individualistic values gain a greater foothold. These values focus on individual rights, personal goals, as well as the right to happiness. As a consequence, the sexuality of women has emerged in recent decades from the protection of intimacy to a social and human rights issue, moulding people's conceptions of what is appropriate and inappropriate, desirable and to-be-avoided, as well as the meaning of sex in general in the life of a woman. Sexuality has come to occupy an essential part of a woman's role and identity, and an important source of her physical and spiritual wellbeing. It is regrettable that the findings of this study reveal growing problems in the pursuit of this wellbeing.

International discourse in particular increasingly makes mention of sexual rights. Sexual rights are divided into negative rights and positive rights. In light of public discourse it has been easier to define and advocate on behalf of negative rights, such as freedom from violence and abuse, compared with positive rights, including the right to be different and to express oneself sexually. It has been suggested that positive sexual rights enable the conditions necessary for sexual difference, wellbeing, and pleasure. Positive rights enable expression, and negative rights repair damage that

has been done. In Finnish discourse, the problem is the over-emphasis on negative rights in relation to positive rights.

Women have played an active role in public discourse about sexuality. Many of these activists have repeatedly brought up the risks and problems associated with sexual interaction. Some seem to have considered nearly every form of sex discussed in the public sphere as a problem. According to them, women must be careful at all times to protect themselves from various forms of abuse, rape, and various threats of infection.

The persistent risk discourse may have created a situation in which women increasingly view sexual interaction through a more rational lens, rather than casting themselves body and soul into enjoying sexual experiences with a partner and realizing their own desires. Excessive rationalism is the biggest enemy of orgasms. Simply put, thinking does alight desire, but orgasms come when thinking ceases. The inability to implement this formula may be a key cause for the trouble that young women especially are increasingly having with orgasms.

The so-called sexual revolution at the end of the 1960s and beginning of the 1970s introduced a drop of masculinity into the lives of women. Women were supposed to know what they wanted of sex, and they were to enjoy it as much as men had always enjoyed it. Many women learned to be sexually active and to initiate sexual intercourse and masturbation. For some women, sex became a particular area of personal validation. But for many women, the change has brought anxiety. New values and the permission to engage in a more open pursuit of sexual pleasure have not matched the image of femininity that they have adopted.

Up to this moment, some women have kept constructing their lives according to the so-called nice girl image, or even a true straitjacket of nicety. Through this, they have sought acceptance from their surroundings and attempted to avoid feelings of guilt. It hasn't been appropriate for nice girls to even really be aware of what sexually interests or arouses them. Acting out and expressing sexual desires has perhaps felt selfish, unfeminine, unseemly, and inappropriate for a decent woman.

A nice girl is permitted to express sexual desire only when she is madly in love and in the grips of passion toward a partner. Love and the right kind of romantic relationship have been and remain for many women the only gateway to sexual activity. Love frees a woman and allows her to be erotic. Combining sexual pleasure with love may spiritually take the edge off the guilt associated with sexual experiences.

A woman who is in the grips of the kind of passion that comes with love is helpless in the face of her feelings and unable to exert real control over what happens. For this reason it was thought that women could not be in charge of their sexual desire. The responsibility lay with her skilful lover (the man), who managed to awaken the burning desire within her. In fact, it was only the man who was sexual, not the woman herself. Behind the growing sexual problems that young women are experiencing

could be that they are only now increasingly taking sexual responsibility for their own sexual desire. Perhaps the responsibility weighs so much that it does not always permit one to be pulled into the throes of passion.

The greatest challenge for the future and an open question regarding female sexuality is its relationship, on the one hand, to the relationship model, and on the other hand, to the model of “just having fun”. In the relationship archetype, female sexuality continues to be submissive to the conditions of a faithful, monogamous relationship, whereas the “just have fun” ideal says that sex is stylish in itself, it’s a form of physical enjoyment, a tool in identity building, getting to know one’s body, a way to express yourself, and part of the pursuit of individual fulfilment. The experience of sex in the absence of all the demands associated with couple relationships helps to open the gates to the source of personal enjoyment.

Studies show that sexual desire, and particularly the feeling that one’s partner feels sexual desire, is at the core of relationship happiness. A journey into the key factors of your own desire is a great opportunity and a gateway to a happier life.