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8. The Sexpo Foundation Promotes Sexual Health

The winds of peace and love

“A balanced sexual life is a central pre-condition for the welfare of both the individual and the society. However, in Finland there is still a sex-negative atmosphere and the general level of information in sexual matters is very poor.” (From the charter of the SEXPO Foundation, the Finnish Association for Sexual Policy, SEXPO, 1970).

The history of SEXPO is a significant part of the Finnish history of sexuality. SEXPO has reflected societal changes and has influenced these changes. Those who were later called “the generation of the sexual revolution“ of the 1960s challenged in many ways the traditional values of the previous generations and started social activities aiming at reform and renewal. The events of the world such as the French student revolts, the occupation of Czechoslovakia, and the Vietnam War also had effects on Finnish society. The occupation of the Old Student house by the students in Helsinki in November 1968 was one of the visible signs of the student movement. The young adults also demanded the right to get more information about sexuality and to make decisions concerning their own sexuality. Neither did they want their children to grow up as uninformed as they had been themselves.

The spring of 1965 in Finland was called “the sex spring“. At that time students from various fields started a wide public debate, which was part of a general European phenomenon and not specifically Finnish. An important starting point for the debate was the study on human sexuality carried out by Alfred Kinsey in the United States. A collection of Finnish articles smashing old taboos was published as a book with the name *Sexless Finland – Matter-of-Fact Information about Sexual Questions* (Tammi 1966).

The student movement created a number of single-issue movements for peace, equal civil rights, and cultural change. One of them was the Association 9, which fought for equality between genders and gave birth to SEXPO in 1969. With regard to sexual issues the founders of SEXPO stated: “The existing national organisations – cannot act efficiently because of their ideological burdens but only support the prevailing trends“. One model for SEXPO was the Swedish RFSU (Swedish Association for Sex Education) with which co-operation was immediately started.

One of the goals of SEXPO was formulated in the following way: "...that people would generally learn to relate to sexuality as a positive part of life, as a value in itself and simultaneously as an important factor in human relationships". The charter of SEXPO emphasises sexuality as a resource in human relationships and its importance as part of human health, welfare and the quality of life in all stages of the life cycle. To emphasise this in 1989 SEXPO created the prize of the "Valentino of the year" or the "Valentina of the year" to be given to individuals or organisations who have promoted a positive attitude towards sexuality.

Practical sexual policy

The new organisation's name included the phrase "sexual policy" to reflect the general belief in the 1960s in political action and improvement of legislation as the moving force behind reforms. It also reflected the definition of sexuality as a larger societal question. In SEXPO sexual politics has been seen as part of socio-political systems, as a large entity which includes laws and other behavioural norms through which the society tries to regulate the sexuality of its members. It also includes the services and support functions of society that enhance the possibilities of people to fully enjoy their lives. Thus, sexual politics covers all sectors of society from social and health policy to criminal, educational and housing policy.

Sexuality is always a current issue requiring constant sexual discourse. The role of SEXPO has, however, all the time been a general sexual political one. That means that it has tackled challenging or new phenomena in Finnish society and tried to perform tasks connected with these as part of the general social and welfare services, educational institutions and even, for instance, prison administration. A number of organisations and service centres, such as the Organisation for Sexual Equality (SETA), the Finnish AIDS Council/HIV Foundation, the rape crisis centre, and the Pro Support Centre for sex workers have originated around specific issues. These have not, however, narrowed the mission of SEXPO. They have collected information and special knowledge and advocated their own important sexual political goals in their own sectors.

In the beginning SEXPO's emphasis was on the then current issues of reproductive health. Problems connected with contraception, abortion and sexually transmitted diseases were seen in a larger context; they had ramifications for mental health and the realisation of sexual rights. In the 1960s fear of pregnancy was common; there was hardly any counselling on contraception and in order to get an abortion it was necessary to obtain a psychiatric statement of "some sort of psychiatric disorder". As a result the future plans of many people were destroyed by compulsory marriages, and the number of illegal abortions was high. A sort of guild of abortionists without medical education was created. In addition to health risks, this led to legal action against those who had undergone abortion, against those who had provided the addresses of abortion providers and against

those who had performed the actual abortions. SEXPO was also worried about the “multi-pregnancy women of rural areas“ whose exhaustion had been discussed as early as during its foundation meeting.

One of the first practical projects of the new organisation was the founding of a sexual counselling clinic in Helsinki for the demand for services was high. In the beginning counselling was given by nurses because information was especially needed on contraception, abortion, and sexually transmitted diseases. Counselling service by a psychologist and a physician were started soon. Also legal advice was given to clients.

SEXPO argued that it is the duty of society to take care of sexual education and counselling as part of preventive public health work. Pilot programmes for young people were developed in the 1970s and various lectures were held in schools, youth clubs, and student organisations. The National Board of Education founded a working group at the initiative of SEXPO to plan the integration of sex education in the curricula of the comprehensive school. The work of many years led to the definition of sex education as an integrative subject. That means that information about sexuality must be disseminated in various different subjects in suitable connections. A problem that remained was the capability of the teachers to provide sex education.

Many of SEXPO’s original goals began to be realised in the 1970s. The term “sexual politics“ was no longer widely used in public debates on themes concerning sexuality. That was replaced by discussion about single themes, such as the position of gays and lesbians in Finland and the threat posed by AIDS. A book published by SEXPO, *Awareness raising – information and views on sexual politics* (Gaudeamus 1988) defines as its goal to remove the fallacy that the only current sexual political problems involve AIDS.

In the beginning of 1997 the Association for Sexual Policy (SEXPO) founded the Sexpo Foundation (Finnish Foundation for Sex Education and Therapy) and transferred all professional activities to it. All the work has been made possible by state funding from the National Lottery Machine Association and by selling its own services. Additional funding has been obtained from health education funds and the City of Helsinki.

Health and rights

A central background factor in defining the principles of sexual health and sexual rights is a person’s conception of the basic nature of human beings. This conception guides all activities, and it defines the way one treats oneself and others and the way situations and solutions to problems are perceived. This perception is culturally defined and it also strongly influences views about sexuality. If the human being is perceived as basically evil, then feelings and sexuality are often perceived as dangerous and the purpose of

education is to repress feelings and needs. This may lead to perceiving sexuality in a very narrow way so that attitudes, values and norms are associated with sexuality in a negative way. In turn this negativity affects the whole sexual culture and thus also sexual politics.

A fundamental principle in the sexual political activities of SEXPO throughout the years is the intention to promote sexual health and the fulfilment of sexual rights and thus increase the opportunities to enjoy sexuality. The definition of sexual health and sexual rights is in a constant state of flux, and it often takes a long time to put principles into practice. In the following I shall combine aspects of the charter of sexual and reproductive rights of the International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF 1995) and the declaration of sexual rights given by the World Association for Sexology (WAS 1983 and WAS 1998-1999).

The right to enjoy sexuality and control one's own sex life

- The right to all sexual thoughts, fantasies and desires
- The right to sexual enjoyment and pleasure, the right to sexually stimulating material
- The right to participate in all sexual activities which take place with mutual consent and without violence, pressure or deceit
- The right to refuse to participate in any sexual activities
- The right to get neutral and understanding professional help and support in problems related to sexuality

Many clients of sexual counselling only need a verbal or non-verbal assurance that their activities, thoughts, feelings, desires and fantasies are permitted or common. Giving permission means the normalisation of them. For many it is important to hear that they are not alone with their worries; many others may have similar hopes or fears. The counsellor, however, cannot give permission to just anything; laws are one source of norms. It is equally important to consider what is socially acceptable behaviour. However, to what permission can be given depends to a great degree on the knowledge and values of the counsellor. An attempt to transfer one's own values to the client is unprofessional behaviour. The more information the counsellor has about the variations of sexual behaviour in his or her own culture and other cultures, the more naturally he or she can give permission to various forms of sexual behaviour.

Getting permission can help clients get rid of false beliefs and myths about gender roles, distortion of models, and simplistic dichotomous right-wrong judgements. It can help them find an individual way to function sexually and accept their sexuality in a way suitable to their life situation. Sexual self-determination is part of finding oneself.

Everybody has to identify what he or she likes, and it is not necessary to like everything. Everybody also has the right to refrain from sexual activities.

The goal of SEXPO is to ensure that everybody has the right and possibility to get support and help with concerns and problems related to sexuality. This requires that the personnel working in the fields of social work and health care, youth work, and education have sufficient information and preparation for sex education and counselling.

The right to equality and freedom from discrimination

- The right to equality between the genders
- The right to express one's sexual preference, gender identity and variations of sexual pleasure
- The right to self-chosen sexual behaviour without prosecution, condemnation or discrimination
- The right to get help and assistance to realise sexual desires when restricted by a disability or disease

In its first charter SEXPO stated: "Marital status, gender, age or other such property must not be an impediment to the realisation of basic sexual rights. Education about attitudes must emphasise the individual's responsibility for his or her own deeds, respecting the rights of others, and the sexual equality of all people". Gender equality means that laws, customs, and cultural models are not based on the superiority of either gender or stereotypical perception of gender roles. Although problems still exist, one may consider the Nordic model internationally quite progressive. The fact that equality became an official principle in Finnish legislature required years of hard work, strongly influenced by the human rights fight of gays and lesbians and the issues raised by the women's movement. At the same time the pioneers of health care and social policy formulated new principles in the field of family policy, and women's and men's studies produced new information and views, the effect of which on attitudes has been slow but clearly evident. Also women's magazines have introduced themes related to sexuality and equality into public discussion. The greatest credit for the fact that the Finnish man today participates in childbirth and child care, however, should be given to the men themselves.

The first charter of SEXPO stated that "the societal position of sexually discriminated groups of people must be improved by changing general attitudes into a more tolerant direction" and by decriminalising homosexuality, which took place in 1971. SEXPO noted the position of transsexuals at the end of the 1980s and pointed out the difficulties transsexuals have had to get proper treatment, causing this group to suffer from serious social and mental health problems. Seminars were arranged dealing with this question, and in the beginning of the 1990s groups for transsexuals and transvestites were also organised.

SEXPO argues that everybody ought to have a possibility to get support in efforts to clarify one's gender and sexual identity and the right to live according to this identity. However, people in the fields of social work and welfare and education still do not have sufficient information about sexual and gender minorities and variations of sexual pleasure. This lack of information contributes to discrimination against members of such minorities who need to use these services.

The sexology course in the United Nations year of the disabled people in 1976 demanded equal opportunities for the handicapped to use public services and the right to human relationships and sexual life. The first guide book called *Disability and sex life* was published jointly by the National Association of the Disabled in Finland, the Association of Psychologists in Health Care and SEXPO. The training courses of SEXPO continually address the needs of physically challenged individuals or people with a long-term illness. Issues connected with physically challenged people, people with intellectual disabilities or long-term illness are also the most frequently requested in tailored supplementary training. However, sex education and counselling does not always reach those who need it. Also family members of disabled people need support, counselling and help with problems. Equality also requires the development of both supervision and training of personnel.

The realisation of the sexual health and sexual rights of ageing people and especially persons living in institutions, such as prisoners, also requires both empirical information and training of personnel.

The right to self-determination in founding a relationship or family and in ending a relationship

- The right to choose a partner without outside pressure
- The right to decide about legalisation of a partnership, founding a family and having children
- The right to a good divorce

Couples who intend to begin or terminate a relationship should have the right and possibility to discuss problems related to the partnership. "Marriage schools" could be organised to prevent various problems connected with the partnership and sexuality. Groups for the divorced could help in dealing with the process of divorce and healing painful experiences. In the case of a separation professional help may be especially needed to organise agreements on alimony and to ensure that the resolution is as advantageous as possible for any children involved. Thus, attempts should be made to protect children from conflicts.

SEXPO argues that heterosexual and same-gender partnerships ought to be treated equally under the law. Practices similar to those in heterosexual partnerships should be created in order to formalise same-gender partnerships. The right to adoption in same-gender partnerships also needs to be included for the realisation of equality.

The right to life and the right to family planning

- No woman's life ought to be put at risk or endangered because of pregnancy
- Nobody must be forced to pregnancy, sterilisation or abortion
- Everybody has the right to independent choice of contraception and family planning

The first charter of SEXPO stipulated the right of every child to be born as a desired child. In the new law on abortion (1970) social reasons were added as grounds for abortions, and one of SEXPO's goals had thus been realised. SEXPO's proposal to distribute contraceptives free of charge has not been realised with the exception of some given to the youngest age groups.

Forced sterilisation and castration had been used in the 1950s for reasons of racial hygiene and as a "treatment" for sexual criminals. In the proposal for a new law on sterilisation SEXPO considered it a progressive step to increase the rights of the individual to make decisions about his or her sterilisation. SEXPO also stated that unfortunately, at least so far, sterilisation had been used almost solely for women. It was thought that the low rate of sterilisation of men was caused by the misunderstanding that sterilisation would adversely affect sexual capability.

SEXPO considers it important to provide more therapeutic counselling for women before and after abortion. The experience of abortion may raise controversial feelings that may return even years after an abortion. When members of the couple don't agree with the decision on abortion or sterilisation, there ought to be ways to clarify and resolve the situation. In the case of people with intellectual disabilities, it is important that they understand the implication and meaning of an abortion or sterilisation procedure.

The right to privacy, sexual health care and protection of health

- All services connected with sexual and reproductive health must be confidential.
- All clients have access to information and services, alternatives, dignity, comfort, continuity and the right to express their own opinions
- All clients have the right to access the latest, safe and acceptable methods developed by reproductive technologies.

It has been possible to come anonymously to the counselling clinic of SEXPO from the beginning and information about the clients has not been given to outsiders. This has made it easier for many to come to the clinic. Clients appreciate the sensitivity of the counsellors who talk with them about their problems related to sexuality. Many have come from far away. SEXPO also considers it extremely important to create a system that would facilitate the treatment of persons who are guilty of sexual crimes.

One of SEXPO's goals is to guarantee the right to treatment childlessness for lesbian couples and couples becoming a same-gender female couple through a gender reassignment process. This is part of the realisation of equality and the prevention of discrimination.

The right to freedom of thought

- All human beings have the right to be free from the restrictive interpretations of religious texts, philosophies, and customs as tools to curtail the freedom of thought on sexual and reproductive health care and other issues.
- All human beings must have the right to seek to influence governments to place a priority on matters of sexual and reproductive health and rights.

The effect of beliefs connected with sexuality may be imperceptible, and it is difficult to see the myths internalised by one's own culture. Myths and beliefs control sexual behaviour by informing what is permissible and what is forbidden, and they provide models on how to behave as women or men. Myths simplify matters, situations and human relationships and easily produce situations of right/wrong and either/or, which are easier to handle than actual reality. Recognising one's own beliefs is an important starting point for the reassessment of attitudes and also for interacting with people coming from other cultures.

In today's Finland there are more immigrants and refugees than earlier. However, workers in the fields of social work and welfare, education, and justice are often inadequately prepared to sensitively consider the background of people coming from different cultures. Finns need information and practical experience from countries where effective multicultural methods have been developed for providing sex education and sexual health services. Goals are to enhance interaction by acquiring information about beliefs, habits, and norms connected with sexuality in different cultures and to develop skills in dealing with these issues.

The right to information and education

The lack of information and unchecked beliefs may have a devastating effect on the sexuality of both the individual and the couple. The dissemination of information is an important part of both sex education and sex counselling.

Sexuality information and education for children

The sexuality education for children is expected to take place in connection with sexual socialisation. Goal-oriented sex education and systematic guidance for parents have not been realised in Finland, and the contents and methods of sex education have not been developed and tested. The Children's Self Protection Programme is one of the few methods tested in practice. The sex education of children has not really been researched; for instance, the importance of the Finnish sauna culture in sexual socialisation and education would be worth examining. In some cultures merely seeing one's own parents naked is classified as incest, which is important to bear in mind when interpreting, for instance, American studies.

One problem with material that has been available for children in Finland is that it has often been based on adult sexuality, especially reproduction. Although this theme also interests children, the experience of and response to the sexual world are different for children and adults. In addition, it is difficult to discuss matters associated with the great mysteries of life only on the basis of factual information. Fairy tales are especially important when a child integrates his or her sexuality and associated feelings. Already small children are thinking about the basic questions of existence that do not have scientific answers.

A goal of the project for sexual growth (1996-1999) was to produce material needed for the sex education of children. The book *Children and sexuality* (Kirjayhtymä 1999) by Gertrude Aigner and Erik Centerwall, translated from Swedish into Finnish, provides information about the sexual behaviour of children and discusses problems of multi-cultural backgrounds in, for instance, day-care centres. The first publication of the project *Critical Views on the Evaluation of Sexual Abuse of Children* (Edita 1997) was seen as necessary and important. Findings from this project indicated that there are unduly sensationalised aspects about the issue of child sexual abuse which may have a harmful effect on the environment of children and, more generally, on the reasonably healthy and open Finnish sexual culture. When adults fear showing affection for children or the young or when children's normal sex play or drawings of naked people are labelled as evidence of sexual abuse, sex educators are also forced to think what can be said about sexuality without the possibility of misinterpretations.

Sexuality information and education for young people

The different capabilities of providing sex education of various teachers are still visible, and there are great differences in the content and quality of school sex education. The overall responsibility for development has not been assigned to the teacher of any subject, and many teachers feel their knowledge and skills are inadequate. At the same time the number of hours assigned to physical education and home economics have decreased, and family education and health education have been changed from compulsory subjects to optional subjects.

SEXPO collected views and experiences on sex education for the young for the book *About sex – how to talk to the young?* (Otava 1991). SEXPO also participated in the production of an information database labelled “Love and sex“ for the Finnish Centre for Civic Education in the beginning of the 1990s. The fact that this package proved to be the most popular of all packages published by the organisation indicates the great need and demand for this type of information

According to SEXPO the goals of sex education for the young include improving the quality of dating and sexual relationships, encouraging growth as a man or a woman, and providing a wide range of information about many sexual concerns. Adolescents need factual information about contraception and sexually transmitted diseases as well as discussions about more personal issues involving relationships. There is a special need to develop educational materials and teaching methods for children, young people, and adults who are physically challenged or have intellectual disabilities. More attention should be paid to the kinds of representations of sexuality that are constructed by sex education instruction and materials.

The right to be free from all exploitation

- All human beings have the right to protection against rape, sexual assault, abuse and harassment.
- Nobody should be forced into prostitution and existing legislation must be developed to prevent the traffic in human beings.
- Children especially have the right to be protected against sexual exploitation and abuse.

Perceiving sexuality also as a means of power, both on a cultural and an individual level, provided an opportunity for dealing with sexual abuse. In the field of sexuality there are, however, still strong taboos which make it difficult to discuss these matters from different points of view. There is often a panic reaction to sexual abuse when it is first acknowledged and revealed. Sexual abuse, especially when the victim is assumed to be a child, combines three taboo areas: sexuality, a child’s innocence and violence.

This often causes strong emotional reactions and demands for a strict control policy. In these cases there is a danger that the effects of various actions remain unanalysed, and even good intentions may have bad consequences.

SEXPO has emphasised the importance of sexual self-determination. Already in connection with the reform of the Criminal Code on Sexuality in 1971 it was suggested that rape within marriage ought to be criminalised, but this reform occurred only recently, in 1995. Also in the recommendations of SEXPO to the committee report of The Council for Equality between Men and Women on violence against women in 1992 the starting point was the right to self-determination. At the same time SEXPO criticised the view in which, for instance, pornography and prostitution were seen only as questions of women's position and rights. The view conceals the many dimensions of these phenomena. Therefore, the need for thorough and versatile research was emphasised. Additionally, SEXPO suggested the founding of support centres for victims of sexual abuse and offering therapy for people sentenced for sex crimes.

SEXPO considers the safety education of children an important part of sex education. Although it can not prevent abuse, it would prepare the child to describe what has happened and to ask for help.

Crimes connected with abuse ought to be investigated by the police in the same way as other crimes are investigated, and legal authorities ought to use experts in forensic psychology in order to examine the reliability of the narratives of different parties. Experts in forensic psychiatry, however, are not generally used in child abuse cases in Finland. Knowledge of the basic principles of the Western legal system should also be included in the basic training of professionals in social and welfare and educational fields.

In the early 1990s, immigrants from Africa came to Finland and Finnish society had to face a new phenomenon, the "circumcision" of women, about which there was hardly any information available. SEXPO suggested the criminalisation of this kind of mutilation, and this was accomplished rather soon. In addition, the importance of education for health care workers was emphasised. SEXPO translated a publication of the international organisation against women's mutilation and produced an educational video. Also today information materials and meetings are needed for immigrants coming from societies which still have the tradition of genital mutilation. The material and activities ought to be jointly planned together with the immigrants themselves.

Information and skills

“Of course it is absolutely necessary to change the school textbooks in such a way that, for instance, in describing human anatomy it no longer is necessary to leave out the genitals. Today the atmosphere in many teacher training institutes is so conservative that the students can be satisfied if their own genitals are not removed” (Miettinen 1965).

SEXPO has been a pioneer in producing sexological literature. Members of SEXPO participated in producing the book *Sexology* (Tammi 1974), which was the only basic book in Finnish for a long time. The publication project produced several books in the beginning of the 1990s in fields where they were needed. Of these books *Sexual Pleasure* (Kirjayhtymä 1990) was honourably mentioned in the national competition of textbooks. An important accomplishment was the bibliography of Finnish sexological literature, published in 1991 in co-operation with the Kellokoski mental hospital comprising the references in literature and articles in Finnish from 1549 to 1989.

SEXPO was for a long time the only organisation to provide training in sexology. Sexuality courses of one week started in early 1970s. Also shorter thematic courses started to be organised. The first training period of one year in sexual counselling and therapy began in 1980. The British National Marriage Guidance Council offered their training expertise to a Finnish group who had to pay only travel costs and daily allowances. This training was organised and planned by the Family Federation of Finland, the family counselling service of the Lutheran state church, and SEXPO. Two similar training periods were organised with Finnish resources in the 1980s, and thereafter these have been organised at intervals of a couple years. Various organisations have been responsible for the training, but SEXPO has always been one of the organisers.

The basic contents of the one-year-long training programmes of SEXPO's courses have been quite similar, but the emphasis changes depending on whether they are sex education and counselling courses, sex therapy training or sexual counselling training focused on working with physically challenged people or people with intellectual disabilities. The themes which the courses have dealt with have included the following: myths, taboos and fantasies, sexuality in various age periods, the many forms of sexuality, treatment possibilities of sexual problems, sex toys, and disability and sexuality. In addition to practical training seminars students get acquainted with literature, work in self-regulating job supervision groups, and write a final thesis. Participants in these courses are mostly professionals in social and welfare fields, youth work and education. Others taking the programme are students.

An important starting point for these courses is the sexual attitude reappraisal and modification of attitudes of those in the training programme. This requires the

normalisation of many phenomena, such as masturbation and sexual fantasies as well as the problematisation of, for instance, gender, heterosexuality and various myths.

In addition to long training periods (4-10 credit weeks) short courses are organised, such as Basic Sexology (5 days), Sexual Issues in Mother and Baby Clinics (4 days), Sexually Transmitted Diseases (3 days) and Evaluating Sexual Abuse (3 days). Supplementary education has also been provided for various organisations. Those who provide services for people with intellectual disabilities have been active clients of SEXPO. A pioneer among the educational institutes has been the Kätilöopisto Maternal Hospital, whose students were offered a 20-hour long basic course in sexology. Further educational programmes designed to meet the needs of clients are frequently organised.

From problems to solutions

The majority of the clients in sexual counselling throughout the years have been young adults or adults: the age group of 20 to 40 comprises about 60% of the clients. In the beginning of the clinic the majority of the clients were women, whereas today the majority of callers are men. Women tend to more often prefer a personal visit in addition to the phone conversation. The number of calls coming to the counselling service varies depending on the length of the hours on duty of the phone service. The number of calls has steadily increased as resources permit the time of the phone service to increase. In 1998 about 1000 phone calls were received during the counselling hours.

The problems of the callers have remained similar throughout the years. The largest category of problems is simply the need for information. The next largest category of problems concerns sexual dysfunctions, men's problems related to erection or too rapid or retarded ejaculation, and women's problems related to orgasm, dyspareunia or vaginismus. Common problems also include the lack of sexual desire and various relationship crises. In some years a large number of problems are called in by gender and sexual minorities or by people who ask about variations in sexual pleasure experiences. In other years, problems of callers more often involve sexual abuse.

In the 1970s therapy was based on the psychoanalytic framework. Therapy was mainly psychodynamic, focused psychotherapy or crisis therapy. The treatment model of the American sexual therapists Masters and Johnson was used in the 1980s. In the 1990s the main therapeutical methods have been solution-oriented brief therapy and Gestalt therapy. Typical therapy clients are men suffering from rapid ejaculation and women suffering from problems related to orgasm. Couple therapy is requested because of a lack of desire by a person or his/her partner or because of conflicts in the couple relationship. The number of clients who have undergone individual or couple therapy has remained rather stable during the past years, around 300 clients per year.

The goal of the treatment project of sex criminals and victims (1992-1995) was to develop treatment methods for special groups for whom there were no suitable methods available in Finland. The sexual counselling clinic of SEXPO was the first one in Finland to organise groups intended for the victims of sexual abuse. This project also organised individual and group therapy for persons sentenced for sex crimes in prisons or after their release. Negotiations were started to organise treatment and also the training of the personnel. The project contributed to the establishment of a treatment unit intended for sex criminals founded by the prison authorities.

Important principles of SEXPO's counselling work

The words we use. The language used in counselling influences the way the client perceives his or her situation. The expression "foreplay" leads to patterns of thought where coitus is the goal and a certain path is followed to attain it. Terms like "impotence" and "frigidity" are very emotionally loaded terms. It would be better to talk about a sensitive erection or ejaculation and everybody's personal way to react to stimuli.

Giving permission. We try to move from symptom and problem-centred to neutral or positive definitions which normalise the situation and give permission. Often questions of insecurity arise as well as questions of whether certain fantasies and variations in sexual pleasure are "right" or "perverse" or, for instance, am I gay because I get excited when I think of people of my own gender. Simply getting permission for individual sexuality and arousal is a relief for many clients.

The importance of relaxation. Trying hard blocks enjoyment and coitus-centred sexuality leads to performing, not enjoyment. Stress may become evident in the holding of breath or hyperventilation. It is important to learn various relaxation techniques so that one can concentrate on enjoying one's feelings and not turn love making into a performance.

The most important form of play of an adult. Sexual communication by enjoying all sensations is the adult's form of play. There are no standards dictating how much and what kind of sexual communication should take place in a partnership. Often the partners compare themselves with an imagined "mean value" or believe that the sex lives of others are much more active and satisfactory than their own.

I would desire to desire. When one partner lacks desire, he or she would often desire to desire and feels guilty because he or she has to disappoint the partner. The other one experiences the situation as stressful and thinks he or she is a poor lover or thinks that the other one does not love him or her because there is a lack of desire. This problem is often treated by prohibiting coitus and with touching exercises to treat this "sex allergy". It is surprising how often it helps that one does not have to think about love making as

a responsibility. Quite often the couples report that they spent a wonderful night together after the consultation.

Hooray for masturbation! Masturbation is important in learning to recognise the feelings and enjoyment of one's own body. It is not a substitute for coitus but something that can be valued and seen as an important source of pleasure in itself. It is important to make this clear, especially if a temporary ban on coitus is recommended to the couple.

A problem in the head or the body? It is important for women, who have lost their interest in sexual interaction or who react to the surroundings so sensitively they cannot reach an orgasm, to visit a physiotherapist trained in this area. The problems may be due to diminished sensitivity caused by physiological reasons or dysfunctions of the pelvic floor muscles that can be treated with various exercise methods.

The telephone counselling service and appointment reservation of SEXPO are available by telephone for the price of a normal phone call for 3 to 4 hours during working days. Consultation is also given via SEXPO's home page. In addition, SEXPO gives consultation and job advice for a consultation fee to individuals, couples, or groups of professionals in various fields.

SEXPO's office, counselling and training: Malminkatu 22 E, 00100 Helsinki, Finland. Telephone: (+358-0) 6866 450, telefax: (+358-0) 6866 4544. Email: toimisto@sexpo.pp.fi. Home page: <http://www.health.fi/sexpo>. The home page also includes SEXPO's library listing.

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