

### **3. Couple formation and sexual relationships**

Sexual relationships are always analogous with being part of a couple. At least they require that an individual finds a partner who is willing or agreeable to make love. Even a temporary sexual relationship is a relationship between two (or more) individuals. The motives, commitment and quality of relationships vary.

The needs, opportunities and situations that are associated with couple formation are different for different people. Some are not in a couple relationship because they cannot find a suitable partner. Others do not want to be in a sexual relationship at a particular time. Someone else would prefer to have a regular partner, but continues to live alone nonetheless. Yet, another could not imagine being without a partner, and demands solid commitment to the relationship from both parties. Then, there is the person who would like to live with a steady partner but who retains the right to occasionally form other relationships. This list of differing desires and situations could go on.

In this chapter, we will offer a summary of the development of couple formation in Finland from the early 1970s until the end of the 1990s. We will also examine the form and quality of couple relationships in Finland and its neighboring countries. Then, we will study the kinds of relationships people have wanted, and the extent to which they have succeeded in making their wishes come true. The chapter will also report the number of marriage or cohabitation relationships that people have entered into in their lifetimes, the number of sexual partners, and the proportion of people who have sought various parallel relationships. Finally, based on the permanent life choices made by our respondents, we will draft lifetime sexual relationship types.

#### **Current forms of couple relationships**

##### **Marriage, cohabitation, living apart together (LAT), and living single**

Western Christian culture has upheld the ideal of ‘no sex before marriage’. This custom has basically disappeared: in 1999, only one percent of young Finnish women waited until becoming engaged or married to have sexual intercourse.

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Nearly all Finns live with a spouse or partner at some point in their lives. Apart from the youngest age groups, the proportion of men and women who do so has ranged from 90 % to 95 %. Demographically, marriage surpasses cohabitation, being together but living apart, or living single as the most popular form of a couple relationship (Table 3.1). In 1999, every second 18–74-year-old Finn was married. The proportion of married people declined during the 1990s in all gender and age groups, except among older women. In Sweden, the proportion of married men and women was 48 % and in Estonia 41 %; in other words, lower than in Finland in 1999. Among St. Petersburg residents, 62 % of men but only 52 % of women were living with a spouse.

One in three or four young respondents in Finland, Sweden and Estonia was living with a spouse, but in St. Petersburg as many as four in ten were living with a spouse. The result emulates the findings of a comparative study of Helsinki, the capital of Finland and St. Petersburg. According to it, 40 % of St. Petersburg's 20–24-year-old women were living with a spouse, while the corresponding figure for female residents of Helsinki was only seven percent (Lankinen, 2000, 62).

Cohabitation has become increasingly common in the Nordic countries since the late 1960s (Aromaa et al., 1981). At the end of the 1990s, one out of every six Finnish residents was cohabiting. The proportion of cohabiting individuals rose in Finland in the 1990s in all gender and age groups, with the exception of young men. Before, cohabitation as a relationship form was mainly a prelude to marriage, and therefore concentrated in youth. Now, cohabitation is common in other age groups too, though it is still most prevalent among people under 30. The highest frequency of cohabitation among men occurs between ages 25–29, one-third of who were in a cohabiting relationship in 1999 (the same is true for women). For women, cohabitation occurs most frequently between ages 20–24; of this group nearly half were cohabiting.

In Sweden and Estonia, the proportion of cohabiting people was higher than in Finland, one-fifth. In St. Petersburg, there was a much lower prevalence of

**Table 3.1 Type of present couple relationship (%)**

Type of couple relationship	Men					Women				
	Finland 1992	Finland 1999	Sweden 1996	Estonia 2000	St. Petersburg 1996	Finland 1992	Finland 1999	Sweden 1996	Estonia 2000	St. Petersburg 1996
Marriage	57	51	47	43	62	53	50	49	39	52
Cohabitation	13	15	20	20	8	13	17	20	20	7
LAT	11	16	10	15	12	12	14	10	13	11
Single	19	18	23	23	18	22	19	22	28	30
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
(N)	1100	687	1468	768	394	1142	725	1332	615	115

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cohabitation compared with the Nordic countries and Estonia. Only eight percent of St. Petersburg men and seven percent of women were living with a partner without being married.

Cohabitation seems to be a relationship form favored more in the Nordic countries and Estonia than in St. Petersburg. Approximately one-fourth of the youngest age group (aged 18–34) were in a cohabiting relationship in Finland, Sweden and Estonia, but this was true of only one-tenth of St. Petersburg respondents. Among middle-aged Nordic and Estonian respondents, about 15 % had chosen to cohabit, while only six percent of those in St. Petersburg had opted similarly. In all the areas studied, a maximum of ten percent of the oldest age group (aged 55–74) were cohabiting.

The proportion of people in relationships considered ‘living apart together’ (LAT) in Finland grew somewhat during the last decade: for men, the figure rose from 11 % to 16 %, and for women from 12 % to 14 %. Of all the partnership types, being together but living apart represents a growing trend. Approximately one-fifth of the youngest age group and more than one-tenth of the middle-aged group were in a steady relationship while living apart. Among people under 30, LAT was even more prevalent, but coincided with steady relationships while the partners were still living in parental homes. In Estonia, the proportion of those in steady relationships while living apart was the same as in Finland in 1999. In St. Petersburg and Sweden the proportion of people in steady relationships living apart was slightly lower.

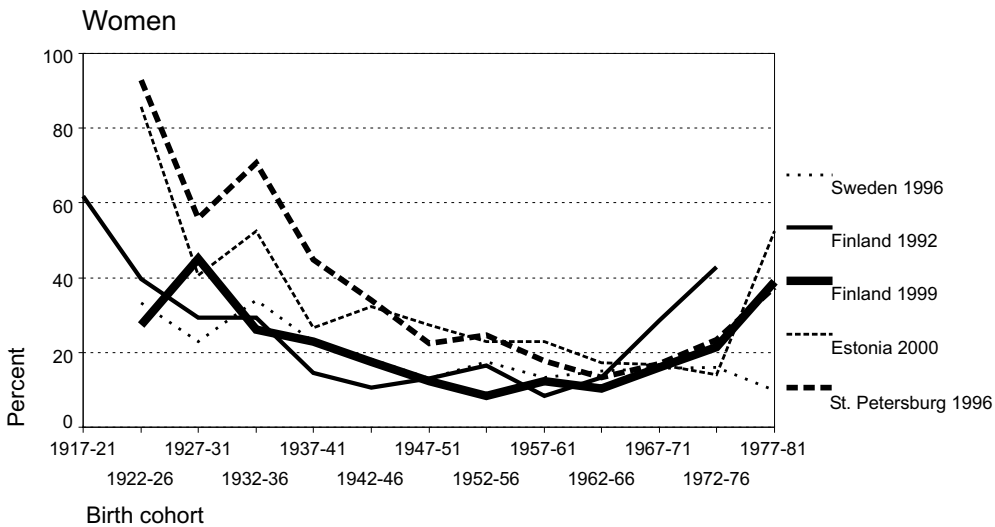
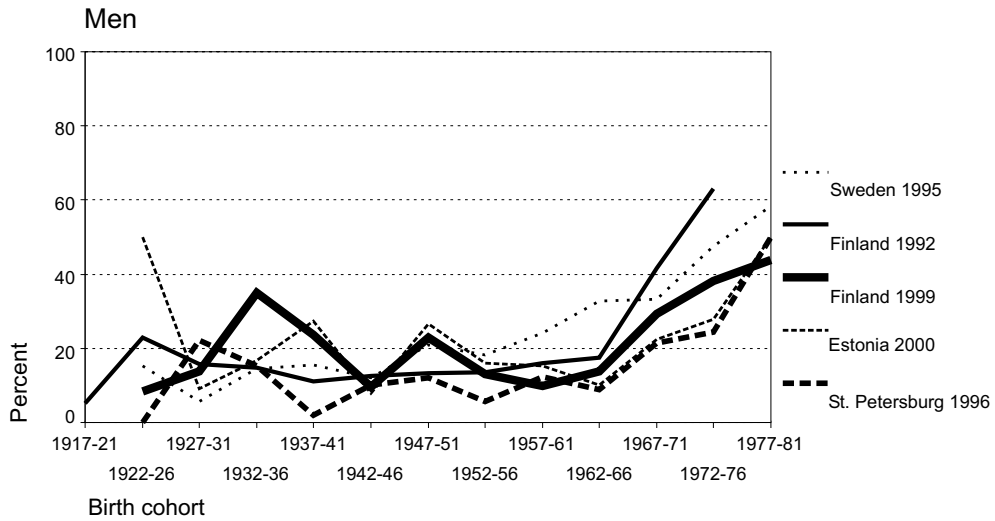
In 1999, approximately one in five Finns were living without a regular sexual relationship. When those who are together but live apart are added to this number, it becomes apparent that one in three Finns was not living with a spouse or cohabiting. The share of singles declined somewhat in Finland during the 1990s, with the exception of the oldest women born before 1932 and men born in 1927–1946, of whom more were now single (Figure 3.1).

There were significantly more singles, i.e., people living without a regular sexual relationship, among the younger generation than among the middle-aged or older generations. Among people under 30, one in four were single in Finland. All of four out of ten young Swedish men were single, while their share in other groups of young people ranged between 20 % and 30 %. Compared with young people in the other regions, young Swedish males seemed more likely to shun sexual commitment.

Among middle-aged Finns, a little more than one-tenth were single people without a regular sexual relationship. Half of all Finnish women 70 years or older were not in regular sexual relationships. Nearly one-third of women in St. Petersburg and Estonia were single. Being single was more common in these areas than in Finland and Sweden. In all of the regions studied, the oldest women were more likely to be single than the oldest men.

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Figure 3.1 Lives as a single



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Half of all Finnish singles had been married or cohabited at one point in their lives. Six out of ten singles that had never been married or cohabited had had at least one sexual partner during their lifetime, and usually more. One-tenth of singles that had never been married or cohabited had had only one partner, one in three men and nearly half of women had had 2–9 partners, and one-third of men and slightly less than one fifth of women had had at least ten partners. Among all men and women, 2–3 % had had numerous sexual partners but had never moved in with anyone.

In a comparison between age groups, marriage proved to be the life style of the middle-aged generation. Cohabiting was common among the young generation in Finland, Sweden and Estonia and – in Finland and Sweden – also among the middle-aged generation. In St. Petersburg, cohabiting was rare in all generations. Young respondents in St. Petersburg, however, were frequently in a relationship while living apart.

#### **Love and the couple relationship**

The feeling of being in love is an important factor that motivates people to form and maintain relationships. Our studies explored love through this question: “At the moment, is there a man or a woman whom you really love?” In addition, subjects were asked: “Is there a man or a woman who you think really loves you?” The question did not address whether the love was directed at the present-time regular partner, or at someone else, nor did it specify whether the person toward whom the respondent felt love was male or female or whether the loving person was male or female.

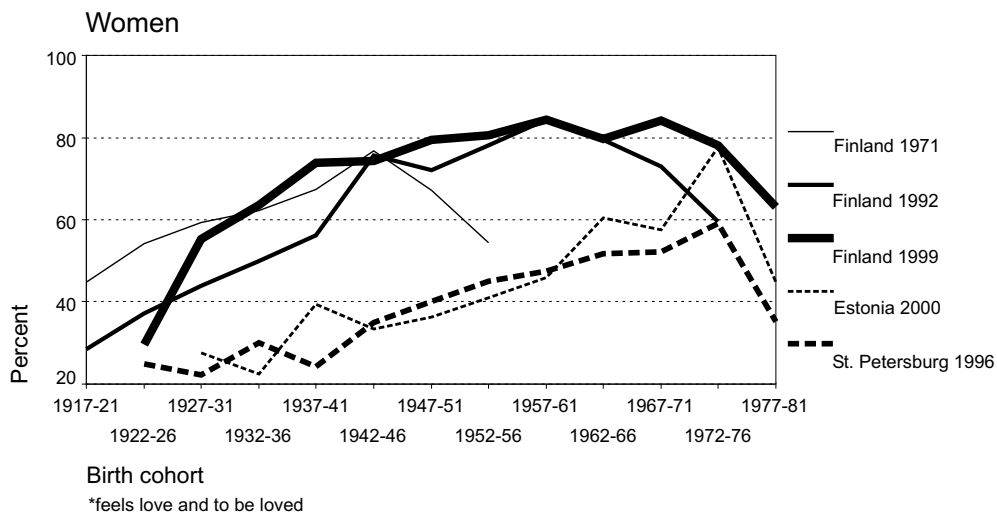
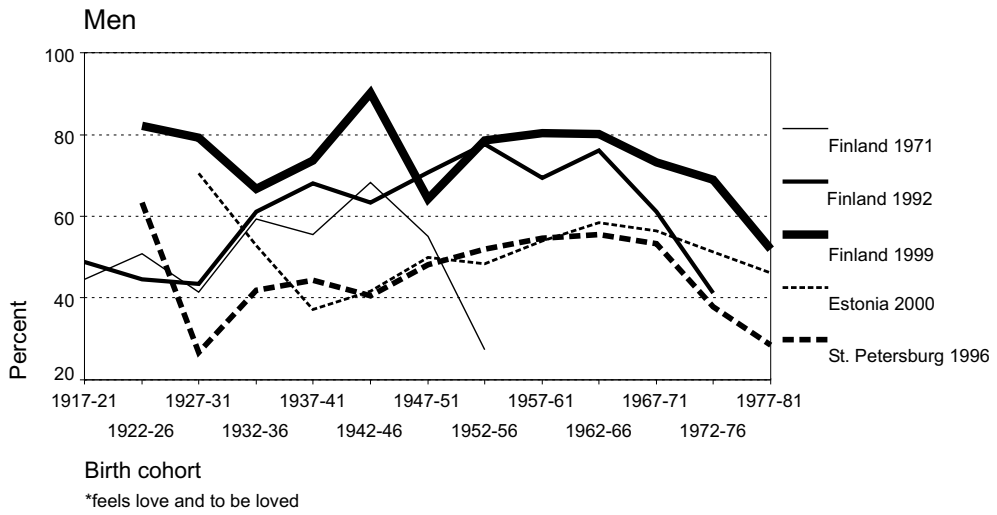
From the seventies to the nineties, the proportion of people who felt love toward a man or a woman or received love increased among people aged 18–54. At the end of the 1990s, four out of five Finns both felt love and considered themselves a recipient of love. Among men and women in St. Petersburg and Estonia, only 60 % had a loved one and felt loved by someone else, as the study was being conducted. (The ‘can’t say’ responses of the Finnish 1971 and 1992 studies and the same responses in the St. Petersburg study were categorized into the group of those who did not feel or receive love).

Men and women felt love and loved equally. People surveyed in Finland in 1971 formed an exception. A little over thirty years ago only two-thirds of men but three-fourths of women reported loving some man or woman, and less than 60 % of men and two-thirds of women speculated that they were truly loved by someone. Unrequited love was more common in 1971 than it was in the 1990s.

Feelings of mutual or reciprocated love (loving and feeling that one is loved in return) became more common during the 1990s among men in all birth cohorts, and women remained by and far the same as before (Figure 3.2). Presumptions or assertions concerning the increased misery of Finnish men (Roos & Peltonen,

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Figure 3.2 Mutual love\*



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1994) did not therefore appear to be a result of any growing feelings of not being loved by anyone.

A comparison of birth cohorts affords an accentuated image of the infrequency of feeling among men and women in St. Petersburg and Estonia that their love was mutual, compared to Finns. The result does not appear to be due to a different meaning of the word ‘love’ in the Russian or Estonian languages (which are very different from each other) compared with Finnish, since in St. Petersburg and Estonia, members of the younger generation there were just as likely to feel love for some man or woman as the youngest generation in Finland. Middle-aged and older men and women in St. Petersburg and Estonia perhaps felt a certain disappointment with their lives, in which they felt love did not play a part.

The presence and type of relationship had a strong impact on feelings of love. In the early and late 1990s, nine out of ten Finns aged 18–74 living with a spouse or partner reported that they truly loved some man or woman (Table 3.2). During that time, the proportion of those living with a spouse who also felt loved swelled from 80 % to over 90 %. According to these figures, however, people in nearly ten percent of relationships did not experience love. In Estonia and St. Petersburg, only 65–79 % of those living with a spouse or partner reported they experienced love.

**Table 3.2 Feeling and receiving love in different types of couple relationships (%)**

Love by type of couple relationship	Men		St. Petersburg		Women		St. Petersburg	
	Finland 1992	Finland 1999	Estonia 2000	Petersburg 1996	Finland 1992	Finland 1999	Estonia 2000	Petersburg 1996
<i>Marriage</i>								
Loves	90	93	70	73	87	93	67	65
Is loved	75	94	70	62	82	94	71	64
(N)	629	352	193	473	604	366	203	575
<i>Cohabitation</i>								
Loves	92	92	72	77	90	92	73	79
Is loved	86	92	76	71	87	93	74	73
(N)	144	89	81	62	151	113	97	75
<i>Steady relationship</i>								
Loves	84	76	64	51	82	82	69	57
Is loved	84	83	51	56	85	82	68	68
(N)	116	97	65	96	131	84	66	123
<i>No couple relationship</i>								
Loves	21	31	23	22	19	28	15	14
Is loved	24	31	16	16	20	26	14	18
(N)	212	150	91	135	258	150	148	334

Over four-fifths of Finns, and 51–69 % of people in St. Petersburg and Estonia, who were in steady living-apart relationships reported truly loving and being loved by someone. For people in living-apart together relationships, in other words, feelings of love occurred slightly less frequently than for those who were living with a spouse or partner.

The proportion of single people who loved and felt loved by another person rose in Finland during the 1990s from about 20 % to approximately 30 %. In Estonia and St. Petersburg, their proportion was slightly lower at 14–23 %. Compared with people who were living with a partner, only few singles loved someone. Love and a steady sexual relationship, then, were connected. It is noteworthy, however, that nearly one-third of single men and more than one-fourth of single women felt love toward someone and also felt loved by someone. At the time of conducting the study, though, this love had not resulted in a steady sexual relationship. The object of their love is assumingly a person who is engaged in some other relationship.

## **Sexual partners and lifetime relationships**

During a person's life cycle, he or she goes through several turning points in sexual life. Such turning points include first intercourse, marriage and the formation of the first parallel relationship. They indicate points at which people begin a new life phase in their sexual and couple relationships. For some, each sexual partner represents some kind of turning point in their sexual and couple relationships. This applies particularly to those who have formed a steady, long-term relationship with each sexual partner.

In this sub-chapter, we will present data on the number of sexual partners in a life cycle and in the last one-year period, as well as changes in the number of sexual partners in recent decades. One point of interest is the different manner in which men and women define and report the number of partners. The number of marriages and parallel relationships provides a perspective on the number of sexual partners.

We will also assign lifetime sexual relationship types to respondents. These types are based on the number of marriages, sexual partners and parallel relationships.

### **Number of sexual partners**

To establish the number of sexual partners, each study asked those who had experienced intercourse another question concerning the number of sexual partners they had had in their life-time: "Altogether in your life so far, with how many partners have you had intercourse?" In the Finnish survey of 1999, the question about



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number of sexual partners was asked for the last five years as well as for the last twelve months (the latter question was also put to respondents in 1992), with the additional note ‘even if only once’. This was done to emphasize that the question also applied to temporary partners.

In order to make possible a comparison with the Finnish data from 1971, the first analyses were conducted among age group 18–54. For those Finns who had experienced intercourse, the median number of sexual partners during a life cycle (less than half of the respondents fit into this category) in 1971 was five for men and only one for women (Table 3.3). In 1992 and 1999, the median number of sexual partners was seven for men and four for women. In other words, the number of partners had increased. Relatively, the number of women’s sexual partners had increased more than that of men’s. Nonetheless, the number of women’s sexual partners was still significantly and, in a statistical sense, illogically lower than that of men.

**Table 3.3 Number of sexual partners during lifetime, 18–54-year-olds (% , means<sup>1</sup> and medians)**

Number of sexual partners	Finland 1971	Finland 1992	Finland 1999	Sweden 1996	Estonia 2000	St. Petersburg 1996
<i>Men</i>						
1	18	13	13	11	12	14
2–4	30	24	22	22	29	25
5–9	22	17	23	22	21	23
10–19	16	21	16	23	18	19
20–	15	25	27	22	20	19
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100
Mean	11.0	13.8	15.8	13.6	13.4	12.1
Median	5	7	7	8	6	6
N	885	790	465	1 079	252	490
<i>Women</i>						
1	51	24	23	18	17	27
2–4	37	34	28	27	37	42
5–9	9	24	24	28	27	19
10–19	3	12	15	19	12	9
20–	1	6	10	8	7	3
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100
Mean	2.6	6.0	7.3	7.4	6.2	4.5
Median	1	4	4	5	4	3
N	890	763	477	986	417	697

<sup>1</sup> When calculating means, 100+ = 100.

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In Sweden, the median number of sexual partners was eight for men and five for women – slightly above Finnish figures. In St. Petersburg and Estonia men's median was six sexual partners in a lifetime. Women in St. Petersburg had only had three partners, but women in Estonia had had the same number as women in Finland (four). In all of the areas studied, men reported significantly more sexual partners than women. A similar difference has been observed in representative sexual surveys conducted in all countries.

Using arithmetic averages as a measure, respondents had had significantly more partners than the medians reveal, because some people had had a very high number of sexual partners, raising the averages above the median numbers. The average number of partners during a life cycle varied by region from eleven to sixteen for men, and two to six for women.

In the following, we will put aside the Finnish data from 1971 and move on to compare results for the entire age groups of people aged 18–74. In this comparison, Finnish, Swedish and Estonian men had 14 sexual partners (seven was the median in Sweden and Finland [1992 survey]; six in Estonia and Finland [1999]) during their life cycle, when using the arithmetic average as a measure. Among women, the average number of lifetime partners was five in Estonia and in Finland in 1992 (three was the median in each), six in Finland in 1999 (three was the median), and seven in Sweden (five was the median). In St. Petersburg, the number of partners was smaller on average: 11 for men and four for women (the medians were five and three, respectively).

Spurred on by European cooperation in the field of sexological research, we included in the 1999 survey a question about the number of new sexual partners in the last year: “During the last year, have you had one or more *new sexual partners*, with whom you had not sexual intercourse before (even if you have been acquainted for a longer time)?” In 1999, 24 % of men and 17 % of women had had one or more new sexual partners in the past year. New partners were anticipatedly more prevalent among single people than among people in couple relationships. Among single men, 41 %, and among single women, 34 % reported having sexual relations with a new partner in the past year.

Among men who were in a relationship but lived apart, all of 56 %, and of women, 43 % had had at least one new sexual partner during the past year. This points to the short duration of relationships where the couple lives apart and also in part to the polygamy of those who are in such relationships. The result is connected to reports by 40 % of men and 19 % of women in LAT relationships that they had simultaneously had two or more sexual relationships during the last twelve months. Only 11–15 % of men who were single or living with a spouse or partner, and only 4–8 % of such women had had multiple sexual relationships in the last one-year period.

Among men living with a partner, 16 %, and among women, 14 % mentioned having at least one new sexual partner in the last year. Among men and women

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living with a spouse, the same figures were 10 % and 4 %, respectively. In most cases, the relationships were parallel relationships.

When life-time number of sexual partners is analyzed, more than one half of 18–54-year-old Finnish women had had only one sexual partner during their life cycle in 1971. By the 1990s, the proportion of such ‘one-man-women’ in the corresponding age group among females in Finland and St. Petersburg was approximately one-fourth, but only one-sixth among women in Sweden and Estonia.

In the different age groups, one-man-women made up about half of the young and middle-aged groups in Finland in 1971. In the later years, the proportion of one-man-women hovered around one-fifth in the youngest age group, close to one-fourth among middle-aged women, and approximately 40 % among older women. In the space of two decades, women’s complete monogamy underwent a radical decline. The change has not been as marked for men, because only a fifth of men in 1971 had had only one partner. The proportion of middle-aged men who had had only one sexual relationship fell by half between the 1970s and 1990s.

The growing sexual liberation of Nordic women was manifested in an increasing number of sexual partners, so that by the late 1990s, one in four Swedish and Finnish women aged 18–54 had had a minimum of ten sexual partners. In Estonia, women in the corresponding age group who had had multiple partners constituted about one-fifth. In Finland in 1971 and in St. Petersburg in 1996, the proportion of women with at least ten sexual partners was much lower than the same figure in the nineties’ Finland, Sweden or Estonia. Internationally, these countries seem to be the forerunners in women’s growing sexual polygamy.

Polygamous men with a minimum of twenty sexual partners constituted about 30 % of middle-aged Finnish and Swedish men of the 1990s. This age groups experienced youth during the sexual revolution, when a large number of sexual partners was in fact held up as the ideal. The proportion of women who had had at least twenty sexual partners did not exceed ten percent in any age group.

The expansion of the sphere of women’s sex partners means that gender differences in terms of the number of sexual partners have diminished. The differences between 18–54-year-old men and women who had had sex with a minimum of ten partners was 26–28 percentage points in Finland (in 1971 and 1992) and St. Petersburg, but by the end of the 1990s, the difference had dwindled to only 18–19 percentage points in Finland, Sweden and Estonia. In the Nordic countries and in Estonia, the way men and women define a sexual partner and report on it is becoming closer.

Compared with women, men have much less frequently contented themselves with just one sexual partner during their lifetime. In all groups in the study, only about 15 % of 18–54-year-old men had had only one sexual partner in their lifetime. The middle-aged generation had the highest number of lifetime sexual partners. The youngest generation had the highest prevalence of sexual partners, when controlling for the past five years and the past 12-month period.

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The average number of sexual partners for men in all age groups, all study years, and all regions varied between ten and twenty partners during the life cycle (Figure 3.3). Only the very youngest had not yet had time to accrue many partners. As men aged, the number of their sex partners had increased slightly in nearly all birth cohorts in Finland. Older men, in 1999 study, formed an exception – their group contained a disproportionate share of one-woman-men, as is discussed in the Appendix.

Ageing did not significantly contribute to an increase in the number of sex partners for Finnish women born before 1947. As recently as the 1990s, they had considerably fewer sex partners than younger women, in spite of the fact that they had lived longer and would have had time to engage in sex with more partners. Finnish women of the older generation have not sought new relationships as they age to any appreciable degree. The attitude toward casual sexual relationships in this generation of sexual restraint were the most condemnatory, and many women were socialized into believing that a spouse's death also spelled an end to their sexual lives.

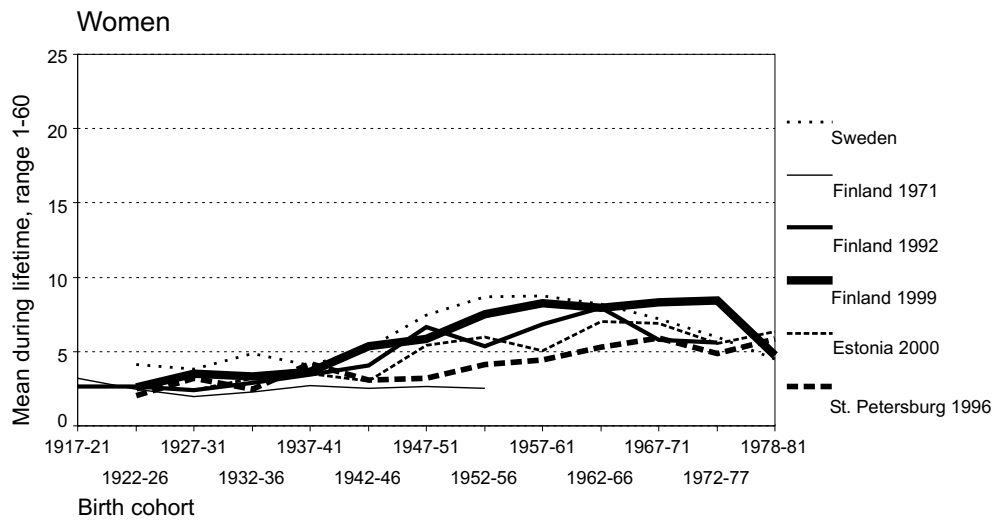
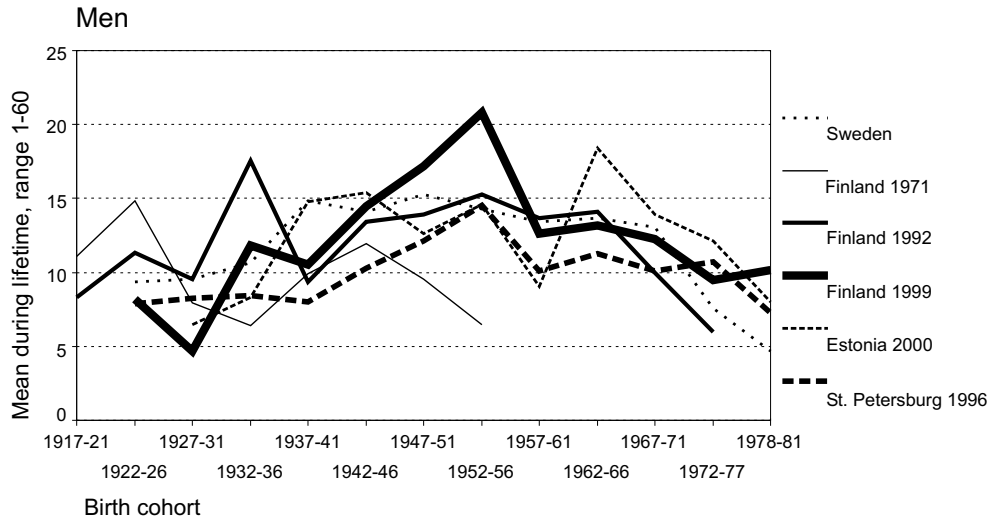
The differences that were found between study regions – Sweden, Finland, St. Petersburg and Estonia – were concentrated among women. Female representatives of the middle generation (especially those born in 1942–66) who lived in Finland, Sweden or Estonia had had more sexual partners than women who resided in St. Petersburg, where only young women reported the same number of partners as their counterparts in the west.

Swedish women of the middle and older generations had had more sexual partners than their counterparts in other regions. The finding supports the internationally held view of a liberal Swedish sexual morality.

The large discrepancies in the number of sexual partners reported by men and women are partly connected to the differing lifestyles of the two genders. Men's sexual and other lives contain many more characteristics that are connected to multiple relationships than women's polygamy. A greater proportion of men than women never marry or live with a partner. The absence of commitment offers opportunities for intercourse with multiple partners. Men have been more likely than women to engage in intercourse, parallel relationships, paying for sex, and drinking themselves to intoxication, and are more likely than women to consider themselves sexually skilled. When the effect of these factors was controlled for by using the General Linear Model, gender differences in the number of life-time sexual partners narrowed significantly, as can be seen in the following:

Average number of sexual partners	Study and gender			
	Finland 1992		Finland 1999	
	Men	Women	Men	Women
Unadjusted numbers	13.7	5.2	14.5	6.3
Adjusted numbers	11.0	7.8	11.7	8.4

Figure 3.3 Number of sexual partners



According to the unadjusted averages, men had 14 and women had six sexual partners during their life cycles. When the effect of other factors was controlled for, the number of sexual partners among males dropped to eleven and among women, rose to nine. If men's and women's lifestyles had been equivalent (one lifelong relationship or marriage, parallel relations, paying for sex, frequency of intercourse and drinking to inebriation), men would have had more than two partners fewer during their life cycle and women would have had over two partners more than was the case in actuality.

Even after controlling for the effect of lifestyle factors connected to the number of partners, characteristic of men in particular, men still had more sexual partners than women. One explanation for this illogic may be that men and women interpret the concept of sexual intercourse in different ways. It may be that men define sexual intercourse more loosely and count as sexual intercourse even *attempts* at intercourse and oral or manual stimulation, whereas when women count the number of partners, they only include those occasions that resulted in a dating relationship and/or vaginal intercourse. We analyzed the responses using this premise on a question that was presented in the 1999 Finnish survey: "We ask you now to describe freely, the MINIMUM that had to take between you and your partner for you to have thought of it as sexual intercourse". The definitions mentioned in the survey clearly guided people's free-form responses. The instructions specifically emphasized that sexual intercourse was a broader concept than just the act of intercourse itself. People's opinions regarding the meaning of sexual intercourse varied from intercourse to oral and anal sex, caressing and touching. Many felt that only if they had reached orgasm was it really sexual intercourse.

Without exception, vaginal intercourse was considered a form of sexual intercourse. Conversely, attitudes toward oral sex or 'doing a Clinton' were more cautious. Men in particular did not nearly always consider oral sex sexual intercourse. Instead, men were more likely than women to emphasize ejaculation and orgasm as criteria for what constitutes sexual intercourse.

All in all, men's and women's definitions of sexual intercourse resembled each other to such a degree that they do not help explain why men repeatedly report in various studies that they have had more sexual partners in their lives than women report having. It is not impossible that men are using a broader, more 'Clintonesque' interpretation of sexual relations than women. Women in turn may forget or invalidate relationships, especially those that proved disappointing. It is also probable that women with multiple relationships, including prostitutes, did not respond to the surveys. In addition to these explanations, another frequently presented interpretation concerning the significant gender differences in number of lifetime sexual partners is that for men, a high number of sexual partners is something to boast about, whereas for women, it is something to hide.

Whatever the reason, we find relief in the knowledge that the large gender discrepancy in the number of sexual partners is not an exclusively Finnish phenomenon. It reappears time and again in sex studies conducted in different countries and is a source of puzzlement for researchers all over the world (for example, Wellings et al., 1994, Laumann et al., 1994, Lewin et al., 1998).

### **Loving and sexual relationships**

Sexuality can be divided into the physical and mental spheres. The present study focuses rather pointedly on the actualization of physical sexuality, concentrating less on eroticism. The connection between sex and love was, however, examined through a statement in the survey “Sexual intercourse without love is wrong.” In Sweden it was more common to agree with loveless sex than in Finland, St. Petersburg, or in particular, Estonia. Especially older Estonians were very romantic and commonly considered it wrong to have sex without being in love (Figure 3.4). In all three geographic areas, men were much more likely than women to find sex without love acceptable.

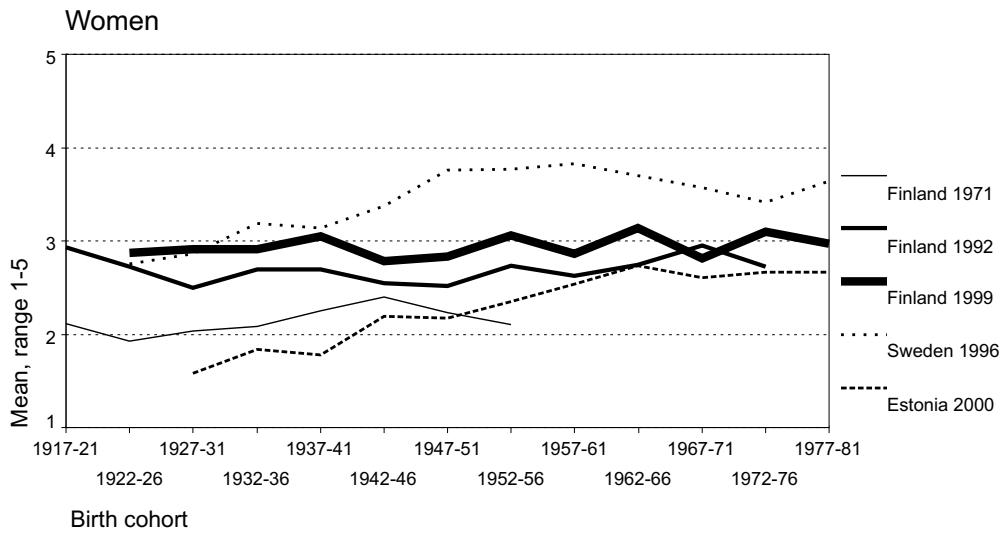
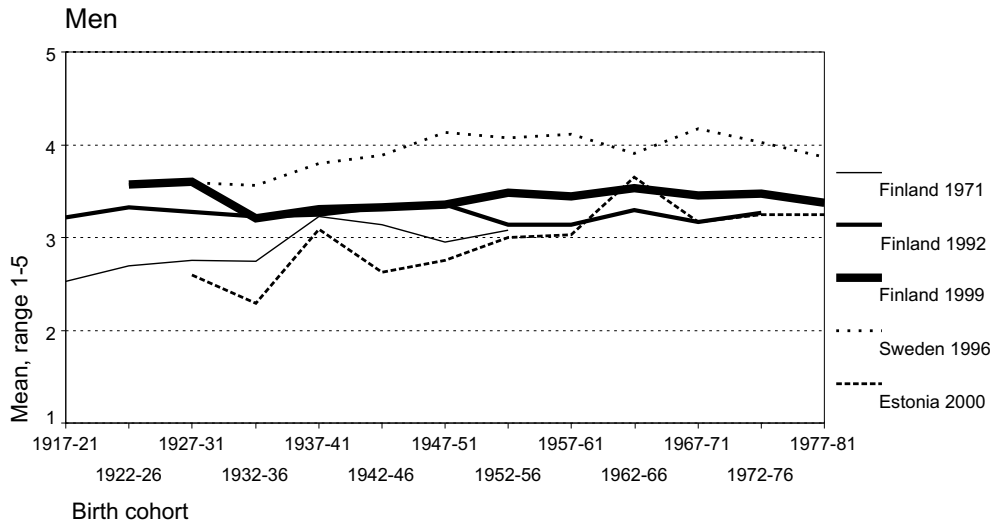
The relationship between love and sex may also be studied by looking at behavior. We asked people how many they had “really loved” during their lives and compared the number of loved ones to the number of sexual partners.

In 1992 in Finland, 71 % of men had had more sexual partners than love partners. In 1999 the proportion had increased to 73 %. Among women, the proportion of those who had had sex without love increased somewhat more during the same period, from 53 % to 57 %. In 1992, 13 % of men and 26 % of women reported exactly the same number of love partners and sexual partners. In 1999, the corresponding figures were 16 % and 28 %.

The proportion of respondents who had fallen in love more times than they had had a sexual relationship declined from 21 % to 15 % among women and from 16 % to 11 % among men. Regardless of the fact that the love partners and sexual partners were not necessarily the same people, it does seem that sex without love became somewhat more common during the last decade.

People who had had more sexual partners than love partners had more positive attitudes toward sex without love than did those who had the same or lesser number of sexual partners compared with love partners. As a matter of fact, those who had exactly the same number of love partners and sex partners were most strongly opposed to sex without love. For them, sexual intercourse and falling in love seemed to mean one and the same thing.

**Figure 3.4. Accepts sex without love**





### **Social factors that contribute to the number of sexual partners**

People's sexual behavior and aspirations differ significantly when examined in terms of the number of their sexual partners. Some had not experienced sexual intercourse at all, and a significant proportion had had only one sexual partner in their lifetime, whereas others had had dozens, if not hundreds, of partners. What do such huge differences mean? Do they describe individual differences that are connected to sexual desire, the opportunities to enter into sexual relationships, or the moral acceptance of multiple relationships? We cannot provide definitive answers to these questions here, but in the following we will analyze the factors that explain differences in the number of sexual partners by using Finnish data from 1992 and 1999 on social background and sexual life, given as responses to survey questions.

To study the social factors that affect the number of sexual partners, we used Multiple Classification Analysis. MCA was used to test whether the seemingly significant impact of social and sexual factors on number of sexual partners is a result of other factors that have a simultaneous impact on number of sexual partners, or if the impact of each individual variable remains significant also when controlling for all the other variables.

Age, relationship type and gender (combined), length of relationship, age at first intercourse, sexual desire, own opinion of one's sexual skills, years of education, importance of religion in life, frequency of drinking to intoxication, and study years, 1992 or 1999, together, these factors explained 22 % of the variation in number of sexual partners.

According to MCA, middle-aged respondents had a slightly higher prevalence of polygamy. The youngest respondents, aged 18–34, had had 10, the middle-aged had had 11, and the oldest had had 6 partners during their lives. When the effect of the other factors with a possible impact on number of sexual partners, mentioned above, was controlled for, differences between age groups changed. When the other social background and lifestyle factors were controlled for (with the assumption that they would carry the same significance in every age group), it looked like young people had had the fewest partners and the oldest respondents the most. Differences between the numbers of partners in different age groups therefore have to do with many lifestyle changes, which had an impact, among other things, on the opportunities that were available to members of different generations at different points of their lives for forming sexual relationships.

Men had more partners than women in all relationship types. Gender and relationship type affected the number of lifetime sexual partners in that married and cohabiting women had had the fewest and men in LAT relationships had had the greatest number of partners. For women, marriage to a spouse, then, had a strong, restrictive impact on polygamy. On the other hand, women not interested in multiple relationships may have chosen in favor of marriage.

The longer the duration of the current relationship, the fewer sexual partners people had had. Those whose relationship had lasted less than five years had had an average of 13 partners, but those who had been with the current partner for at least 25 years had had only five. In other words, a long-term relationship stopped people from forming multiple sexual relationships. Many had already formed the long-term relationship with a first or second sexual partner, meaning that they had had relatively few sexual partners during their lives.

Age at first intercourse was also directly connected to the number of sexual partners. People who experienced first intercourse before age 17 had had 16 partners during their lives, while those who experienced first intercourse at the standard age – at age 17–19 – had had eight partners, and those whose first experience of intercourse occurred only after age 20 had had five sexual partners during their lives. These results seem to indicate that being sexually active in youth results in multiple sexual relationships in later life. Experiencing first intercourse at a young age also speaks of a higher than average sexual interest, expressed in part as various sexual experimentation with multiple partners.

People with strong sexual desire (see Chapter 4) had had an average of 15 partners in their lives, while for people with weak libidos the number was six. Differences in the number of partners between people of strong and weak desire diminished somewhat when the effect of other factors in the model was taken into account in the averages. People with very strong desire were more active than others, for example in drinking to intoxication. The model assumes that if they would drink the same amount as other people, they would have fewer partners.

People who considered themselves sexually very skillful (see Chapter 6) had had an average of 16 sexual partners, whereas people who considered themselves sexually very unskillful had had four partners. In this case, the impact is two-way. People who consider themselves sexually competent venture to form more sexual relationships, and when these succeed it added to their sexual self-esteem.

In addition to strong sexual desire and good sexual self-esteem, achievements in other areas of life, besides sexuality, were also connected to the number of sexual partners during life. Higher education increased the number of partners. People with a maximum of eight years of schooling had had an average of eight partners, while those with a higher education had had an average of ten partners. The differences increased when age was standardized in the MCA. One explanation may be that those with a higher education had more opportunities to meet sexually attractive people.

The assumption was also made that values and morals had some impact on the number of sexual partners. This was explored through valuing religion. Those who considered religion very important in their lives had had an average of six sexual partners, whereas those who did not consider it at all important had had 14 partners. The vast difference in the number of sexual partners between religious

and non-religious people resulted in part from the fact that religiosity was connected to social factors that were in turn connected to the low number of sexual partners. Religious people were often women, and they did not generally drink to intoxication. Therefore, standardizing the rest of the lifestyle factors yielded the result that religion in itself did not meaningfully explain the number of sexual partners. Not even the requirement of marital fidelity contained in religion was instrumental in guiding people's choices in their sexual lives.

Apart from religion, this study has mapped out another factor that describes lifestyle and values, which is also connected to the number of sexual partners: the frequency of drinking to intoxication. Those who have never been drunk on alcohol had had an average of five sex partners during their lives, those who reached intoxication once a year had had nine, those who got drunk once a month had had 15, and those who drank to intoxication on a weekly basis had had 17 sexual partners. Accounting for the effect of other factors decreased but did not eliminate the independent effect of intoxication on the number of sexual partners. On the basis of our results, then, having multiple sexual partners seems to be connected to a secularized, hedonistic lifestyle, using religiousness and use of alcohol for intoxication as indicators.

There was strong connection, then, between the number of lifetime sexual partners and, on the one hand, level of sexual desire and activity, and, on the other hand, secularized lifestyle of young, educated men who used alcohol to become intoxicated.

The number of sexual partners remained approximately the same during the 1990s, when taking into account the effect of the sexual and social factors analyzed above. The same result applied to men even without the assumptions used in the model (averages of 13,8 and 14,6; a statistically non-significant difference), but among women the unadjusted average number increased during the 1990s from 5,3 to 6,3 (a statistically significant difference). In the case of women, the increase in number of sexual partners could be explained through other changes that had occurred simultaneously in their social backgrounds and lifestyle. Compared with Finns in the early 1970s and today's St. Petersburg residents – but not with Swedes or Estonians – Finns in the 1990s had a significantly higher number of sexual partners.

### **Marriage and cohabitation**

In 1971, cohabiting was still not common in Finland, and so the study from that period only asked respondents about number of marriages. Later studies conducted in Finland, as well as in St. Petersburg, Sweden and Estonia, asked this question: "How many times have you been married or lived with a partner (cohabited)? Include your current marriage/cohabitation".

## Sexual Trends in the Baltic Sea Area

In all six studies, most people between the ages 18–54 – of men, approximately 75 % and of women approximately 80 % – had either married or cohabited at some point in their lives. Men studied in Finland in 1971 formed an exception in that only 63 % of them had ever married (no data was collected on cohabitation).

The proportion of people aged 18–74 who had married or cohabited at some point was nearly identical with the rate among people aged 18–54, with the exception of residents of St. Petersburg, where the proportion of people who had been married was a few percentage points higher in the broader age group.

In Finland, the proportion of lifelong single people was highest in the youngest generation, where people had not yet married. The proportion of single young people grew in the 1990s. There were slightly more singles among the older generation than among the middle generation. The proportion of single people also varied by gender; young men were more likely than young women to have lived their lives thus far without a steady sexual relationship.

Age at first marriage or cohabitation was higher among men than women (Table 3.4). In Finland, among men aged 18–54, it came down from 25 years in the 1970s to 24 by late 1990s, but remained the same, age 22, for women. In St. Petersburg and Estonia men married or began to cohabit when younger, on average at age 23, while women began at age 21–22 – the same age as Finnish women.

The ideal sexual lifestyle in Western countries has been to have one, lifelong marriage. Out of the population aged 18–54, approximately 60 % had in fact been married only once. In 1971, only about three percent of Finnish people had married more than once, but in 1992 nearly one out of six people had done so, and by 1999 almost one out of five (Figure 3.5). People who married more than once were still in the clear minority.

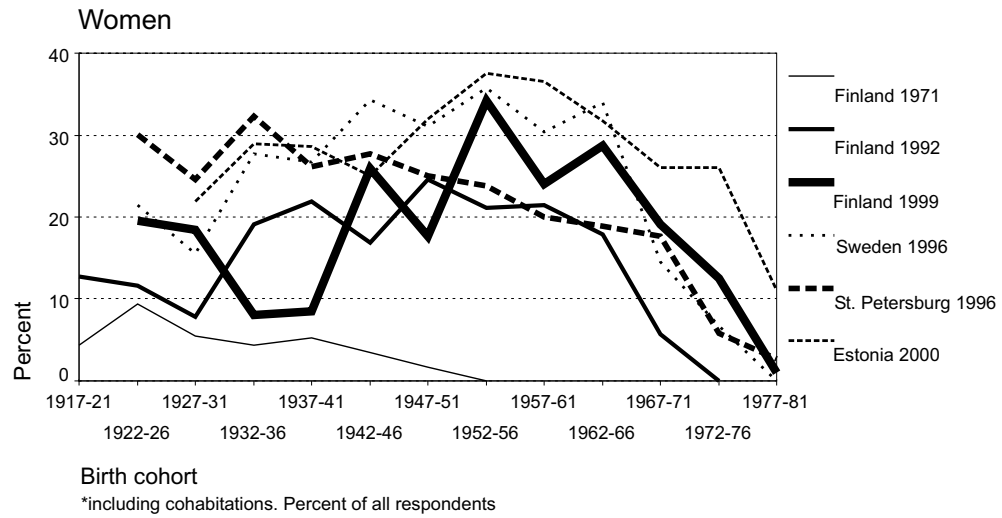
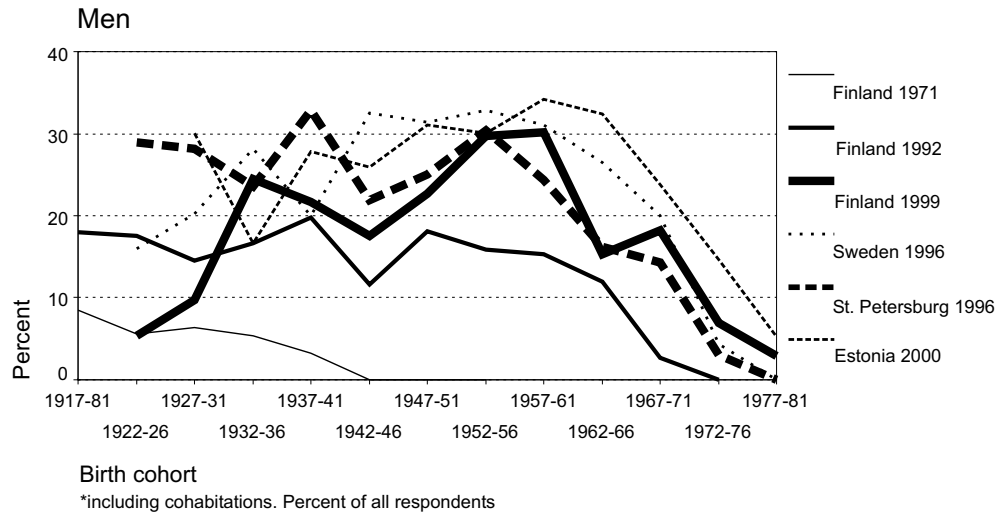
In Sweden and Estonia, marrying more than once was more common than in Finland in 1999 or in St. Petersburg: approximately one-fourth of all 18–54-year-olds had married more than once. In Finland and St. Petersburg, those who had married more than one time made up about one-fifth of the population of people aged 18–54.

**Table 3.4 Age at first marriage or cohabitation (means and medians, years)**

Study	Men			Women		
	Mean	Median	(N)	Mean	Median	(N)
Finland 1971	24.6	24	(712)	22.2	21	(775)
Finland 1992	23.7	23	(662)	21.8	21	(676)
Finland 1999	23.8	23	(375)	22.0	21	(394)
St. Petersburg 1996	23.2	23	(518)	21.8	21	(719)
Estonia 2000	22.9	23	(218)	21.2	21	(376)
Total	23.8	23	(2 485)	21.9	21	(2 940)

3. Couple formation and sexual relationships

Figure 3.5 Several marriages\*



When viewed by birth cohort, the proportion of people who marry more than once increased in Finland with ageing, with the exception of older men in the 1999 study. The situation of these older men is a result of their selection into the study. The matter is discussed in more detail in the Appendix.

As divorce has become more common, 'consecutive monogamy,' or having consecutive relationships, has become more widespread in Finland during the past 30 years. It was more common, however, for people in Sweden and Estonia to have multiple marriages and cohabitations than it was for people living in Finland and St. Petersburg.

### **Workplace romance**

People often find sex partners in the context of entertainment events – for example, at a restaurant or a dance club (Kontula & Haavio-Mannila, 1993), but frequently also within the sphere of the everyday. One important place that offers opportunities to meet others is the workplace, whose contacts offer opportunities for making friends, becoming infatuated, or falling in love with a coworker or other people one meets through work. It is also easier to arrange meetings in the context of work. Probably, romantic liaisons have always been present in the workplace, but they did not become the subject of study in sociological research into the workplace until the 1980s (Hearn & Parkin, 1987).

Of the residents of Finland, St. Petersburg and Estonia who had been employed for the two years preceding the study, one in two had at some point in his or her life been infatuated or in love within a work-related context (Table 3.5). These loves had been, however, short-lived, because at the time of the study, only about five percent of employed respondents were in love with a coworker or another person met through work.

The proportion of people who had experienced love in the workplace was similar in all three study locations and among both genders. It is true, however, that in 1992 Finnish women had experienced workplace love somewhat less frequently (40 %) than other groups (47–52 %).

All in all, falling in love at work seems to be a common phenomenon in our corner of the globe. An indication of this is the fact that in Denmark, Sweden and Finland, in the 1980s there were approximately the same proportion of people who had fallen in love in a work-related context as there were in the 1990s in Finland, St. Petersburg and Estonia (Haavio-Mannila, 1992).

The proportion of people who fell in love in the workplace was higher among the middle generation in all study locations and for both genders than it was among the oldest or youngest generations. The young generation had not yet been employed for long enough, and the older generation represented a time period where women were not as likely as today to be employed and thus had not had the

**Table 3.5 Love at work during past 24 months (people who have ever been working (N))**

Love at work	Finland 1992	Finland 1999	St. Peters- burg 1996	Estonia 2000
<i>Men</i>				
Is in love at present	4	6	5	6
Has been in love earlier	42	42	42	41
No love at work	53	52	48	51
No coworkers	1	0	5	2
Total	100	100	100	100
(N)	1 102	511	791	368
<i>Women</i>				
Is in love at present	3	5	4	5
Has been in love earlier	36	45	46	44
No love at work	59	49	45	46
No coworkers	2	1	5	5
Total	100	100	100	100
(N)	1 143	468	1 121	597

same opportunities for meeting people with whom they could become infatuated or fall in love. The presence of both men and women in the workplace is obviously the single most important factor that explains love relationships in the workplace (Haavio-Mannila, 1988).

The consequences of workplace romances were also analyzed in the cases of Finland and St. Petersburg. Among the positive consequences, a pleasant friendship was the most common, and was reported by over three-quarters of Finnish respondents, but only two-thirds of St. Petersburg respondents. A workplace romance had brought happiness to approximately 60 % of Finnish men and 70 % of Finnish women, but to only one out of three St. Petersburg men and one out of four women. In Finland, experiencing happiness through workplace romance declined in the course of the 1990s.

People also had negative experiences with workplace romances, though positive experiences were far more common. About one-fourth of Finns, women more than men, had experienced sorrow as a consequence. In St. Petersburg, 30 % of men and 45 % of women had experienced sorrow because of a workplace romance.

Approximately one out of five people had also experienced jealousy because of a workplace romance. Envy and ill feeling in the workplace had resulted from the romance of only one out of ten people. Jealousy and envy in the context of a workplace romance were equally rare in Finland and St. Petersburg. All in all,

Finnish respondents viewed the consequences of workplace romances somewhat more negatively in 1999 than in 1992.

Approximately one out of four reports of workplace infatuation or love had resulted in a sexual relationship in both Finland and St. Petersburg. Marriage or cohabitation with a partner originally encountered at work was equally rare in both of those areas: approximately one in eight workplace romances had led to marriage or cohabitation.

Workplace infatuation and love seemed to be a permanent phenomenon and to occur just as commonly in all of the geographic areas that surround the Gulf of Finland. Finns held a more positive view of workplace romances than St. Petersburg residents. During the 1990s, however, emphasis on the positive aspects declined and it became increasingly common to underscore the negative consequences of workplace romances. Turning points in sexual life that occurred as a result of a workplace romance that turned into a marriage or cohabitation were as common in Finland as in St. Petersburg.

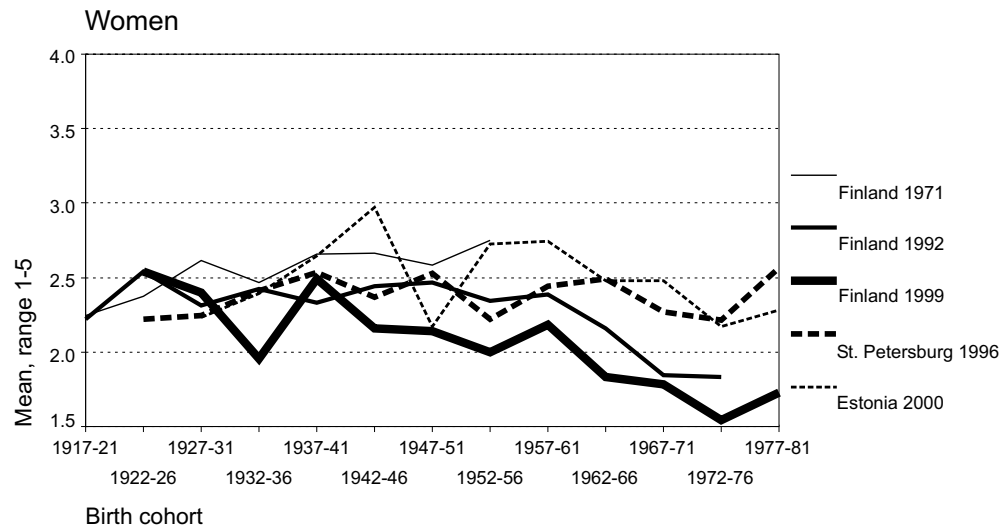
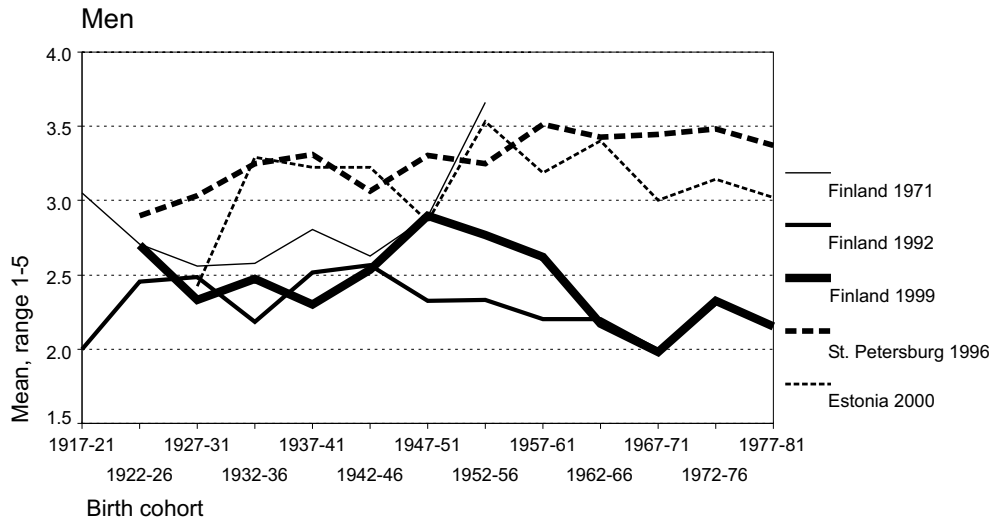
### **Parallel relationships**

In this volume, we will use the term ‘parallel relationship’ for all sexual relationships that people maintain while they are in a relationship with a(nother) steady partner. Such relationships are sometimes also called extramarital relationships (Kontula & Haavio-Mannila 1993, 187), but we settled on the neutral term ‘parallel relationships’ that has become fairly standard in recent Finnish usage. Infidelity and flings are also connected to parallel relationships. Infidelity is a more loaded concept morally speaking, while flings refer to occasional or temporary sexual relationships with a person other than a steady partner. All of the concepts used here are connected to a lack of commitment in the couple relationship, and we will use that concept in the following as a kind of general term as we discuss parallel relationships and infidelity.

Attitudes connected to the commitment of sexual relationships were studied in Finland, St. Petersburg and Estonia by presenting the respondents with three statements: “One must be able to accept a husband’s/wife’s temporary infidelity” and “Completely temporary sexual relations can be happy and satisfying for both partners.” In each area, a majority of respondents rejected marital infidelity and parallel relationships (Figures 3.6 and 3.7), but at the same time, a large proportion held the view that temporary sexual relations can bring happiness and satisfaction (Figure 3.8). In other words, faithfulness was valued, but no expectation of commitment per se was required of sexual relationships. In all three areas, generational differences were vast and very similar. The young generation was more likely than the old to reject marital infidelity but to find temporary relationships acceptable (young people who were surveyed in 1999 also approved of parallel relationships).



Figure 3.6 Accepts husband's infidelity



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Figure 3.7 Accepts wife's infidelity

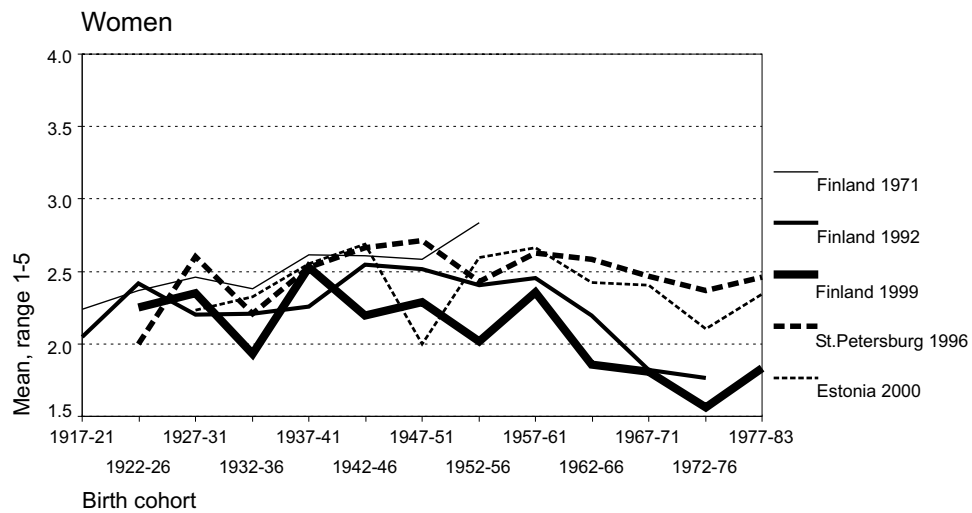
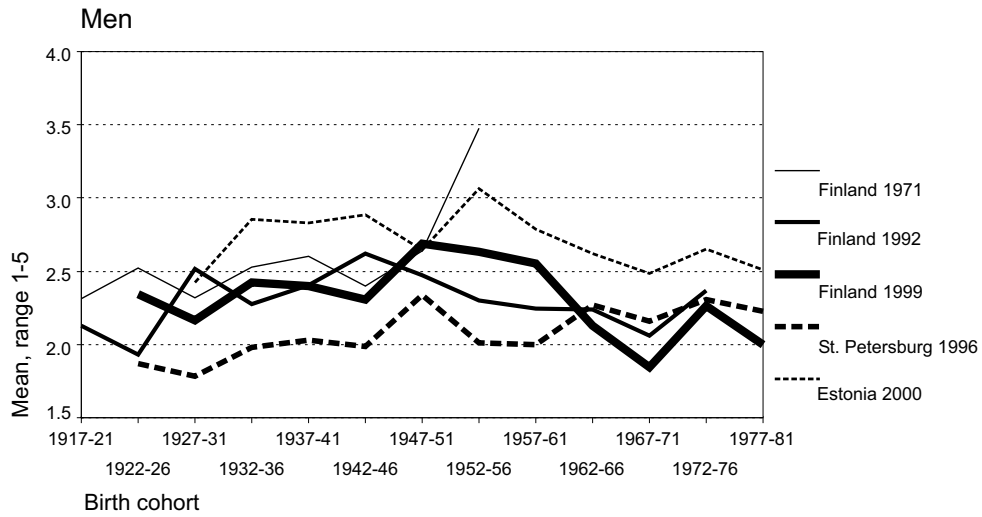
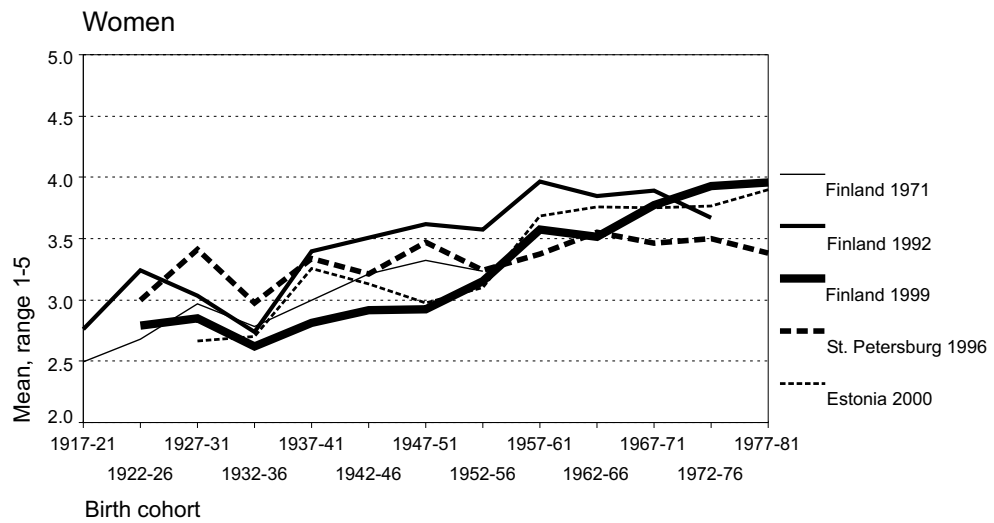
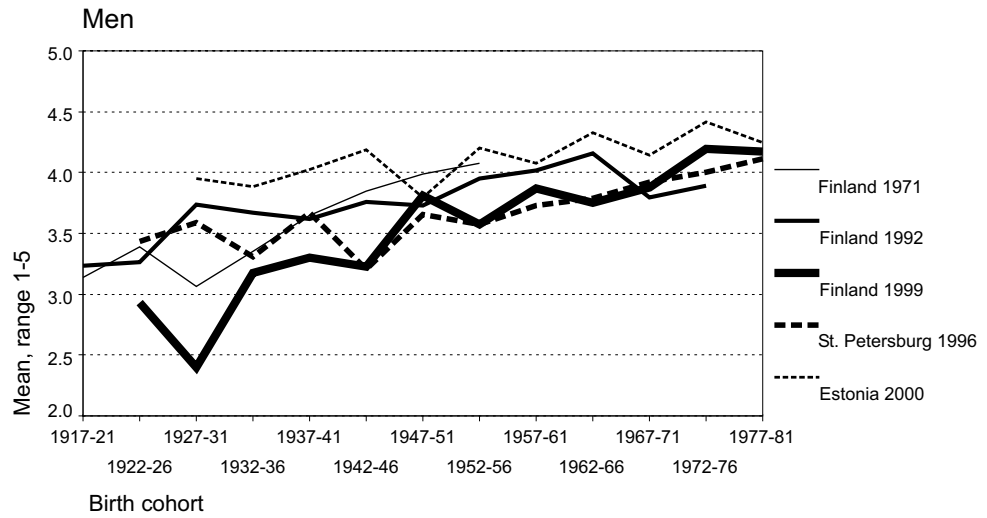


Figure 3.8 Casual relations can be happy



A broader trend was that Finns were more unyielding about marital fidelity than men and women in St. Petersburg or Estonia. Older generation men in St. Petersburg, however, were more likely than Finns and especially Estonians to reject marital infidelity on the part of a wife. The traditional moral double standard prevailed in St. Petersburg, where men were granted more sexual freedom than women. Finns were very gender equal in this respect: men and women had the same attitude toward infidelity by either a husband or wife.

Attitudes toward temporary sexual relations were quite similar in Finland, St. Petersburg and Estonia, and there were very few gender differences. In this issue, generation was the determining factor: young people were more liberal than older people.

The occurrence of parallel relationships was studied through two different questions. The 1971 survey asked: "Have you ever had sexual relations with someone other than your spouse?" The alternative answers were: I have never been married; Yes, before I got married; Yes, before and during my marriage; or No, never.

In 1992 and 1999, another question was added: "How many extra (parallel) sexual relationships have you had while being in a steady relationship with a current or past partner? Please include all previous relationships and the extra (parallel) sexual relationships that took place during them." The surveys that were used in 1992 and 1999 mentioned that "a steady relationship can be a marriage, cohabitation or a steady sexual relationship where the partners do not live together." The Swedish study posed the question "Have you ever, while married or cohabiting, had sexual relations with someone besides your steady partner?"

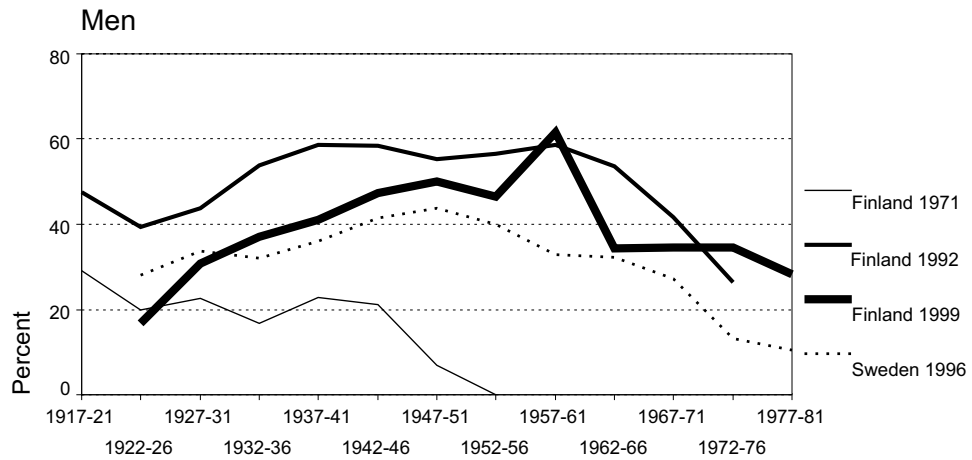
Parallel relationships became more common in Finland between the 1970s and 1990s (Figure 3.9). Among 18–54-year-old men in a couple relationships (in 1971, meaning marriage), the proportion of those who had at some point had a parallel relationship increased from 17 % in 1971 to 39 % in 1992. In 1999, the corresponding proportion was 34 %, lower than in 1992. The proportion of unfaithful women grew in 21 years' time from 7 % to 34 %, and then declined to 30 % by 1999.

Of Swedish men and women aged 18–54, 32 % of men, and 22 % of women had had sexual relations with someone who was not their steady partner while married or cohabiting. These figures are lower than in Finland. Parallel relationships occurred more frequently among the older Swedish generation than their Finnish counterparts, whereas younger Swedes had been more faithful than their Finnish counterparts.

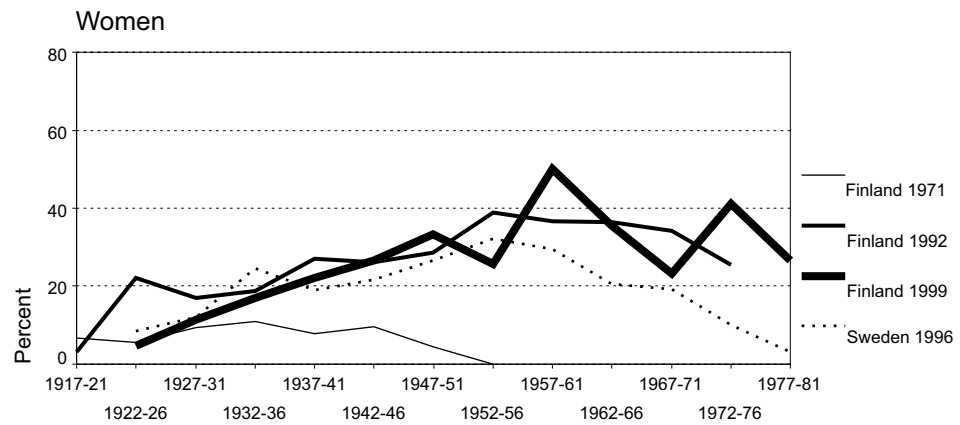
As people age, many more end up experiencing parallel relationships. Finns within the same birth cohort were more likely in the 1990s than the 1970 to report that they had been unfaithful at some point in their lives.

The proportion of older men with parallel relationships changed illogically with time. From 1971 to 1992, there was an increase in the number of men who

Figure 3.9 Parallel relations during lifetime



Birth cohort  
Percent of people having lived with a partner



Birth cohort  
Percent of people having lived with a partner

reported forming parallel relationships at some point in their lifetime. Older male respondents in the 1999 survey reported less infidelity than men who were born in the same years and participated in the 1992 survey. In other words, the 1999 response rate among men who had been unfaithful was lower than it had been in the 1992 survey.

The St. Petersburg and Estonian surveys did not include questions about parallel relationships during a person's life cycle; rather, they only asked about parallel relationships that had occurred during the present marriage or cohabitation. The same question was also included in the Finnish survey. The highest proportion of men who had experienced parallel relationships was of the middle generation, and the highest proportion of women who had done so was of the younger generation (Figure 3.10).

A comparison of parallel relationships during ongoing marriages shows that parallel relationships were significantly more common among St. Petersburg residents (52 % of men and 24 % of women) than among Finns. Estonian men had engaged in them less frequently (36 %) than men in St. Petersburg, but at approximately the same rate as men in Finland (30 % in 1999). Estonian women had been unfaithful at the same rate as women in St. Petersburg (24 %), and more frequently than women in Finland (17 %).

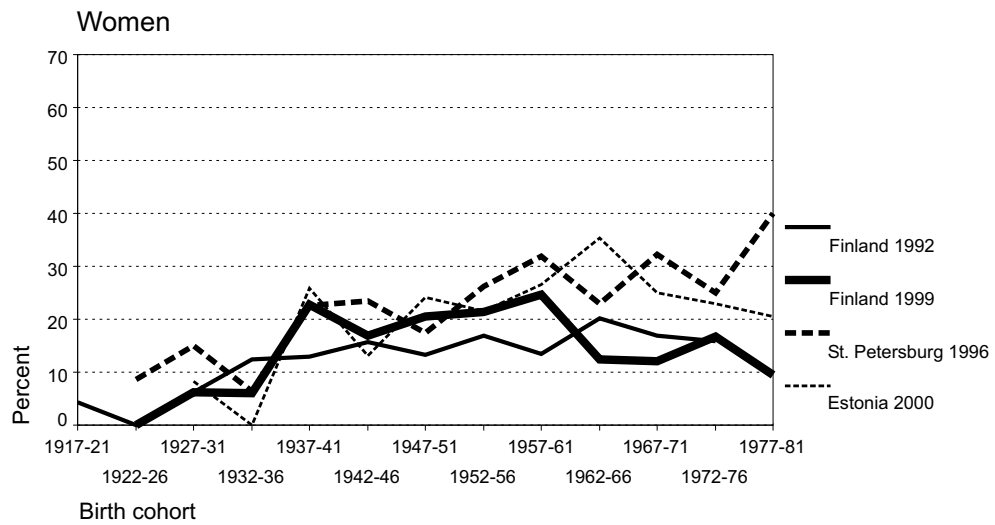
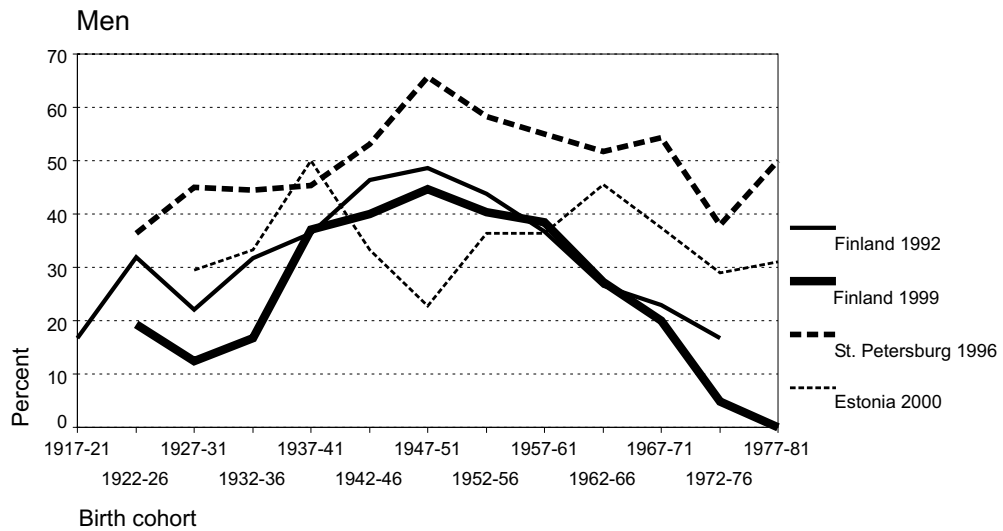
At the time the study was conducted, a majority of the parallel relationships that were formed during ongoing marital or cohabiting relationships were temporary. Only 5–9 % of men and 3–6 % of women (Table 3.6) had (also) had steady, long-term parallel relationships. In the case of such relationships one could also speak of lovers. In Finland during the 1990s members of the sexual restraint generation in particular had had steady parallel relationships.

In a comparison of countries and generations, the occurrence of infidelity was higher particularly among younger Estonians and St. Petersburg residents than among Finns. Also, middle-generation men in St. Petersburg were more likely to have been unfaithful in their present marriage than their Finnish counterparts.

**Table 3.6 Parallel relations during present marriage or cohabitation (%)**

Parallel relations	<i>Men</i>				<i>Women</i>			
	Finland 1992	Finland 1999	St. Petersburg 1996	Estonia 2000	Finland 1992	Finland 1999	St. Petersburg 1996	Estonia 2000
No	64	70	48	64	86	83	76	76
Temporary	31	23	43	27	11	12	20	18
Steady	2	3	4	3	2	3	2	3
Both temporary and steady	3	4	5	6	1	2	2	3
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
(N)	757	400	541	284	765	559	712	421

Figure 3.10 Parallel relations during present marriage or cohabitation



Compared with Swedes, young Finns in particular had had parallel sexual relations while in steady relationships.

There was a fairly strong correlation between engaging in parallel relationships during a steady relationship and people's sexual and other lifestyles. In a MCA, age, gender and relationship type (combined), length of relationship, age at first intercourse, sexual desire and self-assessed sexual skill, education, religiosity, drinking alcohol to become intoxicated, and years of education all explained 17 % of the variation in infidelity in the Finnish combined data of 1992 and 1999.

Middle-aged people were more likely than young or older people to have engaged in parallel relationships during their present relationship. Standardizing the factors that affect infidelity also revealed that if the oldest respondents' other lifestyle factors had been the same as those of other people, they would have had the highest infidelity frequency (though this, in fact is not the case). This indicates that social and lifestyle changes have created more opportunities for engaging in parallel relationships than before.

The prevalence of parallel relations was significantly higher among men than women. A partial explanation is that men displayed more sexual desire, their sexual self-esteem was better, and their lifestyle included more drinking to intoxication than women's. Another explanation is that men more frequently than women formed parallel relationships with a single partner. For a man, this still represents a parallel relationship, while for a woman it may be a case of a casual or a LAT relationship.

Married and single people, women in particular, were more faithful during their life cycle than people in other relationship types. Only one out of four married women had been unfaithful, while nearly 40 % of women in LAT or cohabiting relationships had.

Only 32 % of those who had been in a relationship of at least 25 years had had parallel relationships, whereas over 40 % of those in shorter relationships had. The difference can be explained by faithful relationships' better ability to remain intact, and by the fact that the people in such long relationships belong to a generation where parallel relationships in general are more rare.

The younger a person at first intercourse, the more common it was for her or him to have been unfaithful. Fifty-six percent of those who experienced first intercourse before age 17 had been unfaithful, but only 25 % of those who experienced intercourse after turning 20 had had parallel relationships. Age at first intercourse, then, has a fairly high predictive value for later parallel relationships.

More than half of the people who had strong sexual desire had engaged in a parallel relationship during one of their relationships, 39 % of people with average sexual desire had done so, as had 30 % of those with a weaker sexual desire.

Sexual self-esteem increased the probability of parallel relationships very strongly. Of those who considered themselves sexually very skillful, 52 % had



### 3. Couple formation and sexual relationships

engaged in parallel relationships during a steady relationship, while only 26 % of those who did not consider their sexual skills at all good had done so. Apparently, those who considered their skills good had wanted to test their skills even outside of the steady relationship. They also frequently received positive feedback on their lover's skills from sexual partners.

Parallel relationships were correlated with years of education, not considering religion important, and frequent alcohol use and frequent intoxication – in other words, parallel relationships were part of a secularized lifestyle. These factors became more common and reinforced in the 1990s, while relationships became longer and sexual desire increased. If these factors had not been reinforced, the rate of parallel relationships would have decreased even more than it did in reality. Figures adjusted for the impact of other factors reveal that the proportion of people who engage in parallel relationships would have declined from 44 % to 33 %, if other lifestyle factors had remained constant. The actual proportion of people who engaged in parallel relationships during their life cycle decreased in the 1990s only from 42 % to 36 %. The increased level of sexual commitment in the 1990s also became apparent in sexual expression – all of it connected to the more exacting attitudes regarding faithfulness that were already discussed above.

The proportion of those who had been unfaithful at some point during their life cycle declined in Finland in the 1990s, mostly in the older birth cohorts (and for women, also in the middle cohort). The result is in part a consequence of the selection of male respondents in the 1999 mail-in survey data. Another explanation may be that parallel relationships are nowadays considered less socially acceptable than in the beginning of the 1990s. This is apparent in the strengthening of attitudes that emphasize fidelity, as discussed above.

#### **Lifetime relationship types**

The sexual biography includes certain key events that augur transferring to a new stage. Such events are, for example, becoming infatuated and falling in love, forming a sexual relationship, moving in together, the birth of children, marriage, devitalization of a marriage, forming parallel relationships, divorce, settling down again, and the death of a partner. These events are unique, and they come with more permanent characteristics that combine with each other, and together make up what are different relationship types. Indeed, based on number of sexual partners, spouses, and parallel relationships, we divided the Finns and Swedes of the 1990s into seven different sexual relationship types that cover a person's entire life cycle.

1. One great lifelong monogamous relationship: a person who had only one faithful marriage or cohabiting relationship with the only person with whom they had a sexual relationship.

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2. Monogamous relationship: a person who had one faithful marriage or cohabiting relationship, but several sexual partners, usually prior to living with a spouse or partner.
3. Consecutive relationships: a person who had many faithful marriage or cohabiting relationships.
4. Parallel relationships: a person who had other sexual partners during their one (and only) marriage or cohabiting relationship.
5. Polygamous: a person who had many unfaithful marriages or cohabiting relationships.
6. Searching: a person had experienced sexual intercourse, but had not married or cohabited.
7. Person who had not experienced intercourse.

The most absolute form of one great lifelong monogamous relationship means here that a person only had one lifelong sexual partner with whom he or she had lived in a faithful marriage or cohabiting relationship. This corresponds to the fundamental ideal of Christian sexual morality.

Men were less likely than women to have one great lifelong monogamous relationship, but approximately as likely to be monogamous (Table 3.7). A comparison of sexual relationship types between the three generations showed that the proportions of people who had one great lifelong relationship or were monogamous in Finland in the 1990s remained the same in nearly all birth cohorts. The only exception was older men. In 1992 merely 11 % of them had experienced only one sexual relationship that had consequently resulted in marriage, but in 1999, 20 % reported the same. This result, too, is caused by the over-representation of elderly men of the one great lifelong monogamous relationship style in the 1999 study.

**Table 3.7 Sexual relationship type (%)**

Sexual relationship type	<i>Men</i>			<i>Women</i>		
	Finland 1992	Finland 1999	Sweden 1996	Finland 1992	Finland 1999	Sweden 1996
One lifelong love	8	11	8	23	22	15
Monogamous	25	26	31	27	27	36
Consecutive relations	4	7	11	10	9	15
Parallel relations	32	21	19	17	15	11
Polygamous	9	12	12	7	9	10
Searching	19	18	16	13	15	11
No intercourse	3	5	3	3	3	2
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100
(N)	1 045	690	1 452	1 061	720	1 304

### 3. Couple formation and sexual relationships

Consecutive relations, or faithful marriages or cohabitations that follow one another, were fairly rare: about five percent of Finnish men and ten percent of women represented this sexual lifestyle. The ratio of people whose sexual life course was characterized by consecutive relations remained at previous levels in all three age groups in 1990s' Finland.

The proportion of people who had parallel relations but only one marriage or cohabitation declined during the 1990s. When, in 1992, nearly one-third of Finnish men were in steady relationships with parallel relations, their share in 1999 was only slightly over one-fifth. The decline was less radical among women, from 17 % to 14 %. The result for men is somewhat affected by the self-selection of elderly men in the 1999 data by monogamous lifestyle.

The proportion of persons who engaged in consecutive and parallel relations, or polygamy, grew during the 1990s among Finnish men, from 9 % to 12 % and among women from 7 % to 9 %. For the most part, the increase in the proportion of polygamous respondents occurred among the middle-aged group.

Seekers, or people who had experienced sexual intercourse but had never married or cohabited made up approximately one-sixth of men between the ages of 18–74, and slightly less women. The greatest proportion of those who were searching was present in the group of respondents 35 years and under, and there was no notable change in their proportion during the 1990s. The proportion of older men and women in this sexual lifestyle type grew between 1992 and 1999.

There were less monogamous people in Sweden than Finland: only 8 % of men and 15 % of women fell into this category. Swedes were more likely, however, to be monogamous in consecutive relationships. The proportions of seekers and people with parallel relations were lower in Sweden than in Finland.

The distribution of young Swedes into the different sexual lifestyle categories closely resembled the situation in Finland, with one exception: there were slightly more faithful monogamous people and those who engaged in consecutive relations. Among middle-aged Swedes there were fewer one great lifelong loves, but more faithful monogamists and those who engaged in consecutive relations than was the case among their Finnish counterparts. Older Swedish people were also less likely to have had just one lifelong partner. On the other hand, older Swedes were more likely than older Finns to be in the category of people who were either monogamous or those with consecutive relations.

Having one lifelong partner or engaging in parallel relations, then, was less frequent among Swedes than Finns, and Swedes were more likely than Finns to belong to the categories of faithful monogamy or consecutive relations. This indicates that premarital relationships and remarrying were more common in Sweden than Finland, where infidelity occurred more frequently.

## Preferred sexual lifestyle

### Form and commitment of preferred sexual relationships

Reality does not always measure up to dreams when it comes to relationships and sexual relations. We wanted to examine the discrepancies between dreams and reality by asking respondents to describe the kind of relationship and sexual lifestyle they considered ideal at that point in their lives. Alternatives included the scale of commitment of relationships, and its relationship to the monogamy or polygamy of their lifestyle. We were able to compare these desires to the actualized sexual lifestyles discussed in the previous section. We also ran comparisons between Finland, Sweden and Estonia in the 1990s (Table 3.8).

By far, the most popular sexual lifestyle was a faithful marriage or cohabiting partnership (The Swedish survey used a term for the partner (“stadigvarande partner,” or steady partner) in the relationship, meaning either a spouse, live-in partner, or living-apart steady partner. In Finland and Sweden, approximately 70 % of men and about 80 % of women preferred a faithful marital or cohabiting relationship (in Sweden, a couple relationship) in their present lives. In Estonia only 56 % of men and 65 % of women agreed with this. Finns and Estonians elected a faithful marriage over a faithful cohabiting partnership by a clear margin.

**Table 3.8 Preferred sexual lifestyle (%)**

Preferred sexual lifestyle	<i>Men</i>				<i>Women</i>			
	Finland 1992	Finland 1999	St. Petersburg 1996	Estonia 2000	Finland 1992	Finland 1999	St. Petersburg 1996	Estonia 2000
No sexual experiences	8	6	6	8	9	8	4	13
Some steady partners	2	2	2	4	0	1	1	1
Living apart together (LAT)	7	10	10	8	14	15	12	15
Open cohabitation	4	4	-	9	0	2	-	2
Faithful cohabitation	18	19	-	20	19	18	-	20
Open marriage <sup>2</sup>	10	7	12	14	2	3	4	4
Faithful marriage <sup>3</sup>	51	52	70	37	56	53	79	45
Total (N)	100 933	100 537	100 1 414	100 314	100 973	100 607	100 1 274	100 528

<sup>2</sup> In Sweden couple relationship  
<sup>3</sup> In Sweden couple relationship

### 3. Couple formation and sexual relationships

In spite of the overwhelming popularity of the ideal of a faithful marriage or cohabitation, in practice, this dream does not often become reality. In the 1990s, only slightly over one-quarter of Finnish men had actually had one or more faithful marriages or cohabiting relationships and the same was true for one-third of women, and over 40 % of Swedes. People had indeed formed numerous relationships, but they had often either ended or ceased to be faithful.

An open relationship, whether a marriage or a cohabiting relationship – “I would prefer to have married/living with my partner (not married), with some extra sexual partnerships” – was much less popular than a faithful marriage. About one out of ten men and several percent of women preferred it in Finland and Sweden. In Estonia, all of 24 % of men and six percent of women reported that an open relationship was their ideal. Estonian men were clearly more likely than Finnish or Swedish men to express interest in living together with a partner in an open relationship.

The alternative “I would prefer to have one regular partner, but not living together” was almost equally popular in all three countries. Slightly over one-tenth of women and less than one-tenth of men chose this type of faithful LAT relationship as the ideal in their lives at present.

Only a few percent of Finns, Swedes or Estonians reported that they would, at this stage in their sexual life course, prefer temporary, casual relationships, several simultaneous but steady relationships, or complete abstinence from sexual experience or relationships. Estonian women formed an exception – one-tenth of them chose “No sexual activity” as the best alternative for them.

The survey question about preferred sexual lifestyle (No. 126 on the form) was two-dimensional. The first dimension had to do with the relationship type, and the other to faithfulness in the relationship. These dimensions were used to construct three types of categories, which did not take into account people’s wishes regarding faithfulness:

1. Favoring marriage or cohabitation. Respondents in this category expressed their preference by marking the option “I would prefer to be married...” and “I would prefer to have a partner (not married).”
2. Favoring LAT. People in this category chose one of the following options as their preferred lifestyle at that point in their life course: “I would prefer to have one regular partner, but not living together” and “I would prefer to have a few regular partners.”
3. Abandoning couple relationships. People who chose one of the following options were categorized as having given up on relationships: “I would prefer to have no sexual activity,” “I would prefer to have no regular partners but casual partners when I feel like it” or “I cannot say what would be my ideal.”

The second dimension of the question on preferred lifestyle dealt with faithfulness in the partnership or sexual relationship, and values connected to polygamous relationships. Three types were constructed on the relationship's level of commitment:

1. Prioritizing a faithful relationship. Choosing one of the following alternatives placed respondents in this category: "I would prefer to have one regular partner, but not living together," "I would prefer to live with a partner (not married) and no other sex partners" or "I would prefer to be married with no other sex partners."
2. Preferring an open relationship. The individuals who preferred open relationships chose one of the following answers: "No regular partners but casual partners when I feel like it," "A few regular partners," "Living with a partner (not married) with some extra sexual partnerships" and "Married, with some extra sexual partnerships."
3. Abandoning sex. The people in this category chose one of two alternatives to best describe their preferred sexual lifestyle: "No sexual activity" or "I cannot say what would be my ideal."

The above type categories will be used to analyze how the preference for different relationship forms varies in different age groups and different types of relationship types.

### **Preferred types of sexual relationships among different age groups**

As stated already, by far the most popular relationship forms were marriage and cohabitation. Particularly middle-aged and older men valued it highly. People long to have a steady relationship and to live with their partner. At issue here is the comprehensive lifestyle that is connected to free time, where many kinds of things are shared with the partner. The partner provides steady companionship and prevents feelings of loneliness.

A LAT relationship appealed to middle-aged and older women slightly more frequently than it appealed to men in those age groups. LAT relationships were most popular among young women in Finland in 1999 (23 %). This points to a new trend in young people's thinking about relationships, indicating a desire for greater independence for oneself than a marriage or cohabiting relationship can offer. In other groups, the popularity of LAT relationships reached a high of one-sixth of respondents. LAT relationships were also of interest to all relatively equally, unlike cohabitation, which continues to attract young people at a particularly high rate.

Less than one-tenth of respondents reported that they preferred the option of abandoning relationships altogether. An exception was the oldest Finnish women,

### 3. Couple formation and sexual relationships

of whom 29 % in 1992 and 18 % in 1999 considered a lifestyle without a steady relationship to be the most desirable. In Sweden, the same rate among the oldest of women was only about ten percent, whereas in Estonia a whopping 43 % of the oldest women opted for abandoning relationships.

In terms of commitment to a relationship, a clear majority of Finns and Swedes, but only one out of two Estonians, felt that the best lifestyle for them at the present time was to live in a faithful marriage or cohabiting relationship. Living-apart-together was more popular among women than men, however.

Older men valued faithful relationships more than younger men did. This may be an indication of an increasing need for safety among men as they age. Conversely, older women in Finland were less likely to appreciate faithful relationships than middle-aged or young women. This is because many of them found value in living totally without any sexual relationship.

In Estonia, particularly older-generation respondents were apt to choose other alternatives besides a faithful relationship: one out of four older Estonian men idealized an open relationship. In other words, they longed to have extra sexual relationships. Nearly four out of ten older Estonian women were prepared to give up sex altogether.

An open (unfaithful) sexual relationship was more popular among men than women in all age groups. In Sweden and Finland, 10–20 % of men preferred it to any other alternative, while the same was true of 1–8 % of women. In Estonia, approximately one-third of men and about one in ten women preferred an open relationship. Middle-aged men were relatively more likely to prefer open sexual relationships, whereas among women there were no differences between age groups.

#### **Compatibility of preferred and actual sexual lifestyle**

We were able to compare the extent to which the relationships and sexual lifestyle people realize in their actual lives corresponded to their wishes and ideals – in other words, to what extent people's lives matched their desires as they lived in different types of relationships: marriage or cohabitation, LAT, or no relationship at all.

Almost without exception, people who were living with a spouse or partner considered their current relationship form to be the best of all possible ones. In Sweden and Estonia, though, several percent reported that they would have preferred to live apart from their partner, indicating a yearning for more independence in their lives. Seven percent of Estonian married women would have preferred to live without a steady relationship.

Only one-third of Finnish men but half of women considered LAT the most suitable relationship type for themselves. The rest of the Finns who were in a

LAT relationship would have preferred to marry and live or cohabit with their partner. For these people, a LAT relationship represented a temporary solution. Swedish and Estonian men in a LAT relationship greatly resembled their Finnish counterparts. They too were often prepared to switch from a LAT relationship to moving in together. Swedish women in particular, but also Estonian women, did not consider living apart from their permanent partner as attractive a solution as did Finnish women, and were more likely than Finns to prefer marriage over LAT. Based on this, the institution of marriage was in a stronger position in Sweden and Estonia than in Finland.

Almost the same proportion of singles would have opted for marriage or cohabiting relationships, living apart from a partner, or abandoning relationships altogether. In other words, living single was not a conscious choice for most; rather, it was a transitional stage before having a steady living-apart relationship or moving in together with a partner. Single men were more likely than women to prefer living with a spouse. Single women were more likely to express a preference for a steady LAT relationship or not having a steady relationship at that particular point in their lives.

Single people in Finland gave preference to their own lifestyle more frequently than singles in Sweden or Estonia, where single people were more likely to choose living with a spouse or partner as a top preference. Are Finnish singles parts of a new relationship trend, or will they look for role models in neighboring countries? The coming decades will reveal where this trend will turn.

The other dimension of an ideal lifestyle was the relationship's level of commitment, i.e. whether one yearned for other relationships in one's primary relationship or not. In all of the countries where we studied this dimension – in Finland, Sweden and Estonia – approximately 90 % of those in faithful relationships considered their own, present lifestyle the best possible lifestyle for themselves. A great majority of people who had committed to a steady relationship did not yearn for other relationships (Table 3.9).

Even people who were presently in an unfaithful relationship favored a faithful partnership when expressing a preference: two-thirds of Finnish men with parallel relations and more than four-fifths of such women saw a faithful relationship as the best goal in their present lives. These people were, in other words, living in contradiction to their own ideals. It is not possible to interpret whether the conflict arose because they would have wanted to remain faithful to a partner who would be somehow different (an ideal partner whom they had not yet found), or whether they had merely deviated from their ideal because of an opportunity produced by a certain moment and temptation.

Swedes engaged in parallel relations during a steady relationship preferred the faithful relationship model more frequently (69 % of men and 90 % of women) than Finns (67 % of men and 83 % of women in 1999), and especially Estonians



3. Couple formation and sexual relationships

**Table 3.9 Preferred sexual lifestyle according to present relationship type (%)**

Present relationship type/ Preferred sexual lifestyle	Men				Women			
	Finland 1992	Finland 1999	Sweden 1996	Estonia 2000	Finland 1992	Finland 1999	Sweden 1996	Estonia 2000
<i>Lives in a faithful couple relationship</i>								
Prefers a faithful relationship	94	96	88	83	97	97	94	91
Prefers unfaithful relationships	4	3	10	15	1	2	5	2
Prefers no or temporary relationships	2	1	2	2	2	1	1	7
Total (N)	100 392	100 245	100 696	100 180	100 566	100 344	100 776	100 244
<i>Lives in unfaithful couple relationship</i>								
Prefers a faithful relationship	65	67	69	41	88	83	90	64
Prefers unfaithful relationships	33	29	27	52	9	15	8	27
Prefers no or temporary relationships	2	4	4	7	3	2	2	9
Total (N)	100 380	100 179	100 393	100 112	100 232	100 136	100 228	100 69
<i>No couple relationship</i>								
Prefers a faithful relationship	63	70	74	57	56	59	82	63
Prefers unfaithful relationships	3	2	9	18	1	1	4	3
Prefers no or temporary relationships	34	28	17	25	43	40	14	34
Total (N)	100 92	100 67	100 258	100 83	100 143	100 75	100 226	100 151

(41 % of men and 64 % of women). Slightly less than one-third of Finnish men in unfaithful relationships and about one-tenth of such women wanted to continue their present lifestyle of having parallel relations. Men who engaged in parallel relations were more likely, then, than similar women to be living in accordance with their own preferences. In Sweden, only one out of four men who engaged in an unfaithful relationship considered it their preferred lifestyle, and even fewer women did so – only eight percent. Conversely, Estonians in unfaithful relationships often felt that their current sexual lifestyle matched their preferences: 52 % of men and 27 % of women in unfaithful relationships favored them.

Approximately 70 % of Nordic men who were not in a relationship and 57 % of such women reported preferring a faithful relationship as the best sexual lifestyle for themselves. Faithful relationships were preferred by 83 % of Swedish women

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who were not presently in a relationship, while only about 60 % of similar Finnish and Estonian women would have preferred them.

Among single people, only a few percent of Swedish, Finnish and Estonian women considered open relationships the ideal. Single males in Finland and Sweden were not very interested in them either, but 18 % of single Estonian men would have preferred an open relationship. In Finland and Sweden, single women were more likely than men to express a preference in their present lives for no sexual relations at all or only having casual sexual relations. Finland and Estonia contained a higher proportion of people who were single on principle than did Sweden.

The number of relationships and sexual partners in a lifetime indicates a seismic generational shift that has occurred in sexual matters during the last few decades. The sexual morality that is bound up with marriage was first replaced by valuing sexual rights and sexual self-determination, and recently, more and more people have relied on a so-called moral of negotiation (see Schmidt, 1998). All of these trends have resulted in more variable processes of relationship formation and an increase in the number of partners during a life cycle.