

7. Sexual trends in the 1990s

Summary of the implementation of the study

The purpose of this book has been to compare sexual life in two Nordic countries and two areas of the former Soviet Union – Sweden (1996) and Finland (1971, 1992 and 1999), Estonia (2000) and St. Petersburg (1996) with the help of survey studies. It has also discussed the ways in which the sex lives of Finnish people have changed from the 1970s to the late 1990s. Certain questions concerning people's behavior in youth have even allowed us to reach farther in time, and these findings present a picture of sexual history in the Baltic area from the 1930s up to the year 2000. The surveys present a picture that is complemented by studies in Finland and St. Petersburg that were based on the sexual autobiographies of different generations (Kontula & Haavio-Mannila, 1995a; 1997; Rotkirch, 2000; Haavio-Mannila et al., 2002) as well as a study on the media spanning from the sixties to the nineties (Kontula & Kosonen, 1994; Kontula & Kosonen, 1996).

In sexological research, it is always necessary to emphasize that not only biological but also social and cultural factors strongly influence local sexual behavior and values. For example, variation in the average age at first intercourse in different parts of the world and between the two sexes was about ten years in the 1990s. Another example is that the impact of the Western sexual revolution has proved minor in the third world (Kontula, 2000a) – Western conceptions of sex remain foreign in many cultures worldwide.

Although sexuality is in part biologically motivated, people in different parts of the world do not act out the sexual instinct in identical ways. It takes form in various customs and beliefs that are shaped by culture and based in emotionally rooted images and needs, and by knowledge of the consequences of certain acts in certain social realities (DeLamater & Hyde, 1998). Different communities have adopted certain language and methods of communication that are used to make choices and commit sexual acts, which are guided by people's needs and the customs and norms of their communities. When people adhere to the customs, beliefs, rules and models (sexual scripts) of their communities, they are able to find partners whose thought and behavior codes are similar. Some behaviors or values may only pertain to certain subcultures or minority groupings. Hence, sex in the different areas surrounding the Baltic Sea may have its own particular characteristics.

The different ways in which the societies and cultures of the three nations in our study and St. Petersburg have developed, and the resulting differences in sexual information and values, gave us an opportunity to examine the role of culture as a regulator of sexual life. At the same time, it was possible to describe recent variations in sexual customs in areas adjacent to Finland. The present study makes available fresh information for comparisons, in the same way that the comparative studies of Lonkila (1999), Alapuro & Lonkila (2000) and Castrén (2001) on networks of Helsinki and St. Petersburg teachers did. Studies like this delve into the tension that exists when models of thought and behavior that have been inherited from the past collide with the demands of the post-socialist order.

Because one of the goals of this study has been to compare temporal changes in Finland, it has been necessary to consider the comparability of the findings. There was no problem in comparing the data sets from 1971 and 1992, because both surveys enjoyed a high response rate and utilized identical methods of information gathering (face-to-face interviews and self-administered questionnaires). Comparisons with the 1999 sample proved more problematic. The data was instead gathered through a mail-in survey, which resulted in a lower response rate. Nevertheless, the representativeness of the sample remained quite good, with the exception of the oldest male respondents. Compared with the earlier studies, the older males who participated in 1999 had undergone sexual initiation later than was average for people in their age range, and were also more likely than average to be of the monogamous or one lifelong relationship types. In other respects, the responses of both men and women regarding sexual experiences in youth were fairly consistent with findings for the corresponding generations of people in the earlier Finnish studies. People's life situation or sexual interests had little impact on their willingness to participate in a sexual survey.

The researchers who conducted the Swedish study in 1996 devoted a lot of time and money into information gathering and attrition analysis. Although the Swedish response rate was lower (59 %) than the Finnish rate in 1992 (76 %), the results from both countries can be considered representative and mutually comparable. The Swedish researchers made use of the Finnish 1992 questionnaire as they designed their study, and therefore formulated many of the questions to match the Finnish questionnaire.

The 1996 study conducted in St. Petersburg mainly used the same questions as the Finnish 1992 questionnaire, and the compilation method of the sample maximized comparability. The response rate (61 %) was close to the Swedish rate. There seems to be no reason to doubt the comparability of the St. Petersburg study's findings.

The Estonian methodology resembled that of the 2000 mail-in survey – the selection of new participants was prolonged until the desired number and distribution of respondents was reached. This method is prone to criticism, if the sexual

behavior of the eventual respondents differs from the behavior of those who declined to participate in the first round (without a request to return the questionnaire). The Swedish study showed that there were no differences in responses that were received without a request to return the questionnaire or that came only after such requests had been made (Lewin et al., 1998). Neither do our experiences with the 1999 study give any indication of a systematic selection of respondents as the proportion of those who decline to participate increases. Thus, there is every reason to trust in the comparability of the Estonian data.

When our previous study was published, a lot of the public attention focused on the finding that men and women had a different number of sexual partners. Some questioned how reliable the findings of the sexual research study really were. The same phenomenon – the difference in number of sexual partners between men and women – has been present in all sexological studies that we are aware of, and also occurred in each geographic location included in the present study. It may be asked whether sexological research findings are ever reliable.

There are many ways to analyze the reliability of the findings. One way is to compare the population groupings used in the study to population statistics, when the same thematic groupings are available in statistical form, for example, abortion statistics. The authors of this study found that Finnish women's survey responses and abortion statistics supported one another well.

A second way to evaluate the reliability of the findings is the same method that we used to assess the comparability of the 1999 survey is presented in the Appendix. The comparisons showed that people answered questions about their childhood and youth in a way that astonishingly matched the responses of people of the corresponding ages seven and 27 years earlier. The responses of people who were born in certain years remained very similar from one survey to the next, indicating that the findings are quite reliable.

Yet another method of evaluating the reliability of the findings is to compare the responses of men and women to questions that concern sexual issues involving interaction between men and women, and since men and women gave nearly identical responses to questions about factual sexual events, this points to a good level of reliability. Such events include monthly intercourse frequency, oral sex, manual stimulation, anal intercourse, male erection dysfunction, and venereal diseases. Men and women also provided similar interpretations of sex education at home and at school, the degree of ease in discussing sex with a partner, the sufficiency of touching in their couple relationship, and the healthfulness of masturbation. In addition, they described the duration and quality of couple relationships, satisfaction with their sex lives, and feelings of loving and being loved very similarly.

The fact that men's and women's responses remained identical – for decades in some case – is a strong indication of the reliability of the findings of the sex studies. This degree of reliability is rare in other fields of research. The only exception

to the overall reliability of the data is in the variation in the number of sexual partners reported by men and women. This difference shrank somewhat in the 1999 study, but remained significant nonetheless. In Chapter 3, some of the relevant explanations were already discussed. Male and female cultures seem to continue to view the number of sex partners differently. Men and women may define 'sex partner' differently, and the motivation to stop and actually tally the number of partners may be different, particularly if there have been many. It is important to point out that prostitutes were almost exclusively in the attrition group in this study. Had prostitutes participated, the information given by men and women regarding the number of sexual partners would have been significantly more balanced.

Regional differences in sexual life

Comparable data for Sweden, Finland, Estonia and St. Petersburg varied. In the following, we will present data already discussed in previous chapters of this book, and compare the ways in which sex is different or similar in the different areas.

Sex in youth

Many of the findings indicate that people in Nordic countries start their sex lives earlier than people in the former socialist countries. Finns started their first steady relationship at a younger age than Estonians, whose starting age was comparable to that of Finns in the 1970s. Swedes were younger than anyone else when they first had sex, at 17 years of age, and Finns were next, at 19 years of age. Among the young generation, differences between these two countries are disappearing, however.

Young men in St. Petersburg and Estonia began their sex lives at the same age as Finns, while Estonian women started on average one year later and St. Petersburg women two years later. The latter reported the same age at first intercourse as Finnish women had 25 years ago.

Until the 1990s, Estonians were more likely than their Finnish counterparts to marry their first sex partner, but the proportion of people who still do so declined noticeably thereafter – in other words, there is now no difference between these two countries. In both, one-quarter of men and approximately 40 % of women married their first sex partner.

In 1996, women in St. Petersburg held the same opinion regarding sexual relations between young people as people in Finland in the 1970s and 1980s. Russians required a much higher level of relationship commitment among young people to

find sex between them permissible. One in four St. Petersburg respondents only approved of sexual intercourse if it occurred in marriage, while attitudes among Estonians were somewhere in the middle between Finland and St. Petersburg.

Finns were somewhat more likely than Estonians, and particularly St. Petersburg respondents, to think that the sexual education that they had received at home was sufficient. School sex education revealed an even greater gap. In Estonia, schools did not really begin teaching about sex until the 1990s, and in St. Petersburg, sex education was even less frequent, and no discernible effects of school sex education appear there at least among people who were students during the 1980s.

Sexual relationships

In Sweden and Estonia, approximately 30 % of people who had either married or cohabited had done so at least twice, while in Finland and St. Petersburg, this proportion was only 25 %. When looking at the type of couple relationship, the incidence of cohabitation was lower in St. Petersburg than in the other areas. Estonia and Finland had approximately the same prevalence of living-apart-together relationships, but there were fewer of them in Sweden and St. Petersburg. There were more single women in Estonia and St. Petersburg than in Finland or Sweden.

When comparing lifetime sexual relationship types in Finland and Sweden, there were fewer Swedish women who belonged to the one lifelong relationship category, but more women who were classified as monogamous. This difference illustrates the fact that Swedish women have been more likely to engage in premarital relationships, and that Swedish attitudes regarding sex without love are more permissive. The prevalence of consecutive relationships was higher in Sweden, while the prevalence of parallel relationships was lower, meaning that Swedes have been somewhat more faithful than Finns in their relationships. On the other hand, the proportion of respondents whose sexual relationship type was classified as polygamous was the same in Finland and Sweden.

Swedes and Finns, more than Estonians or St. Petersburg residents, expressed a preference for faithful marriage or cohabitation. In fact, Estonian men were twice as likely as Finns or Swedes, and even Estonian women were more likely than other women, to prefer an open relationship (allowing outside relationships). Compared to Finns, Swedes were a little less likely to express a preference for a living-apart-together relationship, while Estonians were as likely as Finns to prefer it.

The proportion of people who had engaged in parallel relationships grew west to east. Sweden had the fewest, while St. Petersburg had the greatest proportion. Most parallel relationships had been of a temporary nature – only one in 20 respondents had experienced a steady parallel relationship. Approximately one-

third of Finnish and Estonian men and one in two men in St. Petersburg had had a parallel relationship, but only one in six Finnish women and one in four women in Estonia or St. Petersburg had had a parallel relationship.

Both Finland and Sweden had data for parallel relationships during the entire life cycle. The proportion of respondents who had experienced a parallel relationship in their lifetime increased greatly from the 1970s to the 1990s in Finland, and surpassed Swedish levels in the 1990s. Swedes were more likely than Finns to report that the person with whom they had last had sex was their own steady partner.

Finnish attitudes concerning parallel relationships have become stricter, particularly among young people. A more conservative shift in extramarital attitudes has also been found in some other countries. Ira Reiss (2001) assumes that the fear of HIV/AIDS may play a role in this. He suggests that negative experiences with extramarital sexuality during the era of rapidly increasing divorce rates in the 1970s may also have contributed to this conservative trend. A double standard in attitudes toward infidelity of a husband and a wife was very common among men in St. Petersburg and to some degree in Estonia, whereas Finns judged both genders equally.

Kontula and Haavio-Mannila (2003) argue that the trend toward increasing expectations of marital faithfulness represents a renaissance of romanticism in a time of increasing individualism. Sex currently belongs to a romantic script in which sexuality is highly valued, and, according to this approach, individual pleasures get integrated into romantic relationships. This romanticism does not mean an orientation toward partner at the expense of oneself. The romantic ideas highly valued in traditional female culture have become transformed into valuing the relationship between the partners, particularly among the youngest generation.

In pleasure-seeking romanticism family formation occurs at an older age and partner selection takes a longer time. Pleasure-oriented romantics are often people with higher education and income. They expect that the partner is a good lover who is capable of giving them sexual enjoyment and seriously desires only them. The pleasure-oriented romantic looks for a high-quality relationship that gives him or her both intimacy and enjoyment. Thus, sex symbolizes the connection between two partners.

In Finland, two-thirds of men and four-fifths of women who had engaged in parallel relationships said that in the future they would prefer a faithful relationship. An even greater proportion of unfaithful Swedes than Finns desired a faithful relationship in the future. Conversely, only one-third of Estonian men and two-thirds of women who had been unfaithful wanted fidelity in the future.

Lifetime number of sexual partners was very similar in Finland and Sweden, whereas respondents in Estonia and St. Petersburg had had fewer partners. The proportion of polygamous women in Finland, Sweden and Estonia surpassed that

of St. Petersburg. In the two Nordic countries, one out of four women had had a minimum of ten sex partners. One-fifth of Estonian women had had at least ten partners, but only one-tenth of women in St. Petersburg had had that many partners. Women who had only had one, lifelong monogamous relationship comprised one-fourth of Finnish women, whereas only one in six women in the other studied areas belonged in this category. The great gender gap in the number of sexual partners diminished when certain lifestyle factors were controlled for (intercourse frequency, paying for sex, intoxication, sexual self-esteem). Had women's activity in these regards been as high as men's, the gender difference in number of sex partners would have been lesser.

Sexual activity

Between Finland and its neighbors, the only difference in terms of intercourse frequency was the finding that older respondents in Estonia and St. Petersburg and young men in Sweden had engaged in sexual intercourse less frequently than others. Estonians expressed a wish for more frequent intercourse at a rate that was ten percentage points higher than that expressed by respondents in Finland or St. Petersburg. Such unfulfilled desires may have been reflected in the rather negative assessments that Estonians made regarding their relationships and sex lives.

Nine out of ten Finnish women, and seven out of ten Estonian and St. Petersburg women supported women's right to initiate sex. In this, the 1990s in Estonia and St. Petersburg resembled the situation Finland in the 1970s. Men were more likely than women themselves to approve of women initiating sex. The attitudes of men in St. Petersburg, however, were more negative in this regard than those of men in Finland or Estonia.

St. Petersburg and Estonian respondents were less likely to report the use of multiple sexual positions than Finns in 1999, although at a rate that was similar to Finland in 1992. Manual stimulation in sex was much more prevalent in Sweden than in Finland, or particularly Estonia. Swedes and Finns practiced oral sex significantly more frequently than respondents in Estonia or St. Petersburg.

Finns and Estonians held very similar views about homosexuality as everyone's private affair. Women in St. Petersburg were somewhat more reserved toward homosexuality than women in the other areas. In terms of sexual orientation, Estonians (11 %) and St. Petersburg residents (8–11 %) considered themselves homosexual somewhat more frequently than Finns (7 %). The homosexual identity was on average as prevalent in Sweden as in Finland (5 % of men and 10 % of women). Same-sex sexual experiences were somewhat more common in Estonia than in Finland.

Men in Finland and Estonia were more positively inclined toward the sex trade than men in St. Petersburg. Young Estonian women, on the other hand, approved

of the sale of sexual services more frequently than young women in Finland or St. Petersburg. By a difference of several percentage points, Finnish and Swedish men were more likely than men in the other areas to have paid for sex. In general, though, national differences in use of sexual services were minor.

Masturbation was almost equally common in Finland and Sweden, but significantly less common in St. Petersburg, where the level resembled that of Finland in the 1970s. Estonians practiced masturbation at a frequency that was somewhere between that of Finland and St. Petersburg.

Swedes reported the use of pornographic materials less frequently than Finns. Attitudes differed greatly in that Swedes were much less likely to consider porn sexually exciting. Estonians and Finns considered porn exciting at nearly the same rate.

Sexual wellbeing

Orgasmic frequency was fairly similar in all four regions. Swedes experienced erection and lubrication problems less frequently than Finns. Occasional erection dysfunction was more common in Estonia than in Finland.

The proportion of respondents who were at least fairly satisfied with their sex lives was approximately three-quarters in Finland and Sweden, 60 % in Estonia, but only 50 % in St. Petersburg. The proportion of respondents who considered their sex lives satisfying was 10–20 percentage points lower in Estonia compared with Finland. Estonians' assessments of the satisfyingness of their sex lives resembled the situation in Finland in the 1970s. St. Petersburg respondents reported satisfaction levels that were similar to Estonian levels.

Estonians and St. Petersburg respondents considered their relationships happy at a rate that was approximately 20 percentage points lower than in Finland. The difference in the quality of sex relationships seems, then, to be reflected onto the quality of the relationship as a whole. There was very little difference between Finland, Estonia and St. Petersburg in terms of how respondents evaluated the ease of talking about sex with their steady partners. Estonians were less likely than Finns to consider themselves sexually active, by a difference of 20–30 percentage points. On the other hand, they considered themselves sexually skillful and attractive at rates that resembled Finnish responses.

Contraception and sexually transmitted diseases

Use of contraception was vastly different in the Nordic countries and the former Soviet areas. Whereas approximately 85 % of Finns had used contraception the first time they engaged in sexual intercourse, only one in four Estonians had used it. This major difference remained even among those who began their sex lives in the 1990s. Among adults, too, differences were significant – few Estonians had

used contraceptive pills, and one-third had used the rhythm method or coitus interruptus the last time they had sex. Respondents in St. Petersburg had also relied on coitus interruptus or 'safe days' much more frequently than Finns. Condom use was, however, more prevalent in St. Petersburg than in Estonia.

Unreliable contraceptive methods had meant that over half of women in Estonia and St. Petersburg had had an abortion. In St. Petersburg in particular, attitudes regarding abortion were much more accepting than in Finland. Only one-fifth of Finnish and slightly more Swedish women had had an abortion. Contraception use was similar in Finland and Sweden, though Swedes used condoms slightly less frequently.

Venereal diseases were somewhat more common in Sweden than in Finland, but respondents reported approximately the same frequency of HIV testing. Unfortunately, the studies conducted in Estonia and St. Petersburg did not gather data about sexually transmitted diseases.

Sexual culture in the east and west

In some respects, a kind of east-west dimension is discernible in the differences in sexual life between the three countries and St. Petersburg. In this trend, Estonia is situated somewhere between Finland and St. Petersburg (Table 7). The emphasis on sexual rights and developments in contraception has been part of the western sexual culture, which has in some cases entered Finland through Sweden. During the Soviet period, cultural exchange between Estonia and the west was more active than between Russia and the west, and hence Estonian sexual behavior differs from Russian behavior in certain ways, forming a kind of hybrid between Finnish and Russian customs. This is one way for sexual culture to spread.

Of all factors that were studied in all three countries and in St. Petersburg, six indicated that the change occurred first in Sweden and proceeded from there to Finland, and that Estonia was situated between Finland and St. Petersburg. These issues were: openness about sex in the childhood home, sexual initiation at a young age, acceptance of sex without love, lifetime polygamy among women, scarcity of parallel relations, and masturbation.

The continuum between the areas studied is more discernible in the older generation than in the younger. Age at first intercourse declined first in Sweden, and parallel relationships also declined there first. Swedish women of the older and middle generations had the greatest numbers of sexual partners, whereas women in St. Petersburg had the fewest, but among the younger generation, the number of sex partners was the same everywhere. Masturbation decreased going west to east, with the exception of the youngest generation, where there was no difference between Finns and Swedes.

Table 7. Regional differences in the characteristics of sexual life

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| <p>COMMON SEXUAL CULTURE in the four studied regions</p> |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engaging in sexual relationship • Time elapsed from most recent sexual intercourse • Experiencing workplace romance • Position in most recent intercourse • Paying for sex • Frequency of orgasm from intercourse |
| <p>TWO SEXUAL CULTURES: characteristics that are more common in Nordic countries than in Estonia or St. Petersburg</p> |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Loving and being loved • Multiple sex partners • Proportion of people who have been married or who have cohabited • Being faithful in the couple relationship • Heterosexual orientation • Finding it easy to discuss sex with a partner • Accepting women's sexual rights • Negative attitude to prostitution • Sexual wellbeing: describing the couple relationship as happy, sexual intercourse as pleasurable, and sex life as a whole as satisfying • Use of contraceptive pills • Absence of abortion |
| <p>CONTINUUM OF SEXUAL CULTURES: these characteristics diminish going from west to east</p> |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acceptance of sex in non-committed relationships among the young • Childhood home that was open and informative about sex • School provided sex education • Sexual intercourse occurred at a young age • Not marrying the first sex partner • Acceptance of sex without love • Not accepting marital infidelity • Not accepting money in return for sex • Practicing manual sex • Practicing oral sex • Practicing masturbation • Less erection difficulties |

A second type is comprised of differences where Finland and Sweden greatly resemble each other (or the Swedish data is missing), and where Estonia is situated between Finland and St. Petersburg. Such issues include acceptance of sexual relations among young people in the presence of a steady relationship, receiving sufficient school sexual education, positive attitude toward prostitution among men, and level of satisfaction with one's sex life. In other words, these are issues where Estonia received more western influences than St. Petersburg. They were mainly manifested in a slight liberalization of attitudes and the spreading of certain types of information, which may have had increased somewhat the level of satisfaction that Estonians experienced regarding their sex lives.

A third type occurred where sexual issues in Finland and Sweden resemble each other (or the Swedish data is missing), and where Estonia and St. Petersburg also resemble each other. These include: feeling love and loved, considering a faithful couple relationship the ideal, being exclusively heterosexual, acceptance of women's sexual initiative, oral sex, women accepting money in exchange for sexual services, considering sexual intercourse pleasurable, happiness of the couple relationship, erection difficulties, use of contraception, and abortion. The differences between western and socialist sexual cultures are manifested more concretely here – socialist sexual culture has emphasized sexual inequality, more repressed sexual behavior, unreliable contraceptive methods, and low level of satisfaction with one's sexual relationship.

It is noteworthy that people in the west permit sex without love but at the same time require and nurture marital fidelity more than in the east. This kind of moral of negotiations seemed to become weaker going west to east.

A fourth type consists of sexual issues where all four locations resembled each other very closely. They include: proportion of married or cohabiting people, workplace romance, annual intercourse frequency, sexual positions, regularity of women's orgasms, proportion of men who have purchased sexual services, the level of ease of talking about sex with one's partner, and sexual self-esteem. These are the issues where culture has had the least impact, because although culture can powerfully influence the quality of sexual experience, it seems to play little role in the quantity of sexual experiences. Culture has had very little impact on women's orgasmic frequency, men's level of desire for sex, or their ability to purchase sexual services. These are issues that unite the western and socialist sexual cultures.

Certain data was only available for *some* of the areas, so that it is impossible to make generalizations. For example, the St. Petersburg study did not ask about pornography, but in Sweden, Finland and Estonia, the rate at which respondents considered it exciting declined going east. Only Sweden and Finland asked about problems with vaginal lubrication, and the problem was equally common in both countries.

There were certain sexual issues that did not vary in continuums or dichotomies, and in which Estonians differed from both east and west. Thus, there were

more Estonians than either Finns or St. Petersburg respondents who wanted more frequent intercourse in their couple relationship and were also negatively inclined toward abortion. The anti-abortion stance may be connected to a desire to cease its use as a contraceptive method, and develop new methods of birth control.

Another issue in which Estonians deviated from all the others was the fact that young Estonian women accepted prostitution more frequently than young women in Finland or St. Petersburg. This may have to do with the passionate liberalism of Estonian youth rebelling against the sexual puritanism of the socialist period.

Gender similarities and differences

In addition to biological differences between the sexes, society's gender division, including the models and conceptions of the sexual needs and aspirations of men and women, guides sexual attitudes and behavior. Sexual scripts or operational models, and the resulting expectations on the part of one's self and the opposite sex, guide men and women according to their sex into behaving identically or differently. In some instances men have more sexual rights and obligations, and in others, women do. The extent of gender differences varies in different life stages, historical periods and social environments.

In the following, we will discuss issues that did not vary by gender in any of the countries that were studied. A discussion will follow on issues where the gender difference repeated itself in each country. Finally, we will examine differences between the studied areas in terms of the size of the gender gap. The focus will be mainly on ages 18–54 to include the Finnish data from 1971 in the comparison.

Gender similarities

Certain sexual attitudes and behaviors resembled one another among both men and women and in all areas. With the exception of Sweden, the sexual atmosphere in the childhood home was similar for both men and women; Swedish women felt that it had been more open than men did. There was hardly any difference between genders in assessments regarding school sex education.

Men and women began dating at about the same age. Only in the 1999 Finnish study did women report starting to date one year earlier than men (probably with older boys). The proportion of respondents who had experienced sexual intercourse at some point in their lives was the same for men and women with the exception of the 1992 Finnish study, when slightly more women than men said that they had experienced intercourse. Also, the proportion of men and women who said that they were presently married or cohabiting was the same, with the

exception of Finland in 1971 and Sweden, where slightly more women said that they were married or cohabiting.

When examining couple formation and sexual relationships, it was found that the same proportion of men and women had had multiple marriages or cohabitations. The duration of the present relationship did not vary much by gender, with the exception of Estonia, where women reported that their relationships had lasted a couple of years longer than men. Workplace romance and lesbian or homosexual sex was equally common for both sexes.

In terms of issues that are connected to sexual activity, men and women reported the same levels of ease in talking about sex with their partner, as well as the practice of manual, oral or anal sex. Both sexes reported equally that the contraceptive pill had been the method used in the most recent sexual intercourse.

Sexual wellbeing did not reveal gender differences, when happiness of the couple relationship was used as an indicator. Men and women were also equally likely to consider their sex lives satisfying in all groups, with the exception of St. Petersburg, where men were significantly more likely than women to consider their sex lives satisfying.

There was an equal proportion of men and women in Finland and Sweden who reported that they had contracted a sexually transmitted disease or been tested for HIV.

Gender difference similarities in different areas

Some gender gaps adhered to the same trend and proportion in each of the groups in the study. Men everywhere were more understanding than women toward young people's non-committed sexual relations. More characteristic of women was to marry the first sex partner, and marrying or moving in with someone at a young age. A clearly greater proportion of women than men had at one point in their lives been married or cohabited.

Men, on the other hand, had had more sex partners than women, wanted greater intercourse frequency in their couple relationship, and were more likely to approve of casual and non-love-related sexual relations and prostitution.

Men were more negatively inclined than women toward homosexuality. Men were also more likely to have consumed alcohol before last having sex, made use of pornographic materials, and engaged in sex for money more frequently than women. More men than women reported use of condom in the most recent intercourse.

With regard to sexual wellbeing, compared to women, men were more likely to have experienced orgasm the last time they had sex, thought of themselves as sexually more active, but were less likely to see themselves as sexually attractive.

International variation in gender differences

Some of the gender gaps varied on the basis of region. First, we will take a look at the issues where the differences between men and women pointed in the same direction in all four study areas. In such cases, only the degree varied. We will then examine the issues where gender differences went in opposite directions in different areas.

Reciprocal love in Finland was reported more often by women than men. In St. Petersburg and Estonia, there were significantly fewer people who experienced love, but gender differences were not remarkable in that regard.

In St. Petersburg and Estonia, there was a noticeable gender difference in that men were much more accepting than women of male infidelity. In addition, men in St. Petersburg felt more negatively about female infidelity than women themselves. Finnish men, on the other hand, were somewhat more accepting of female infidelity than women themselves, but men's opinions did not vary much when asked about unfaithfulness on the part of the man or the woman. The responses of St. Petersburg men – though not women – revealed an obvious double standard, according to which men could be unfaithful, but women could not.

In Sweden and St. Petersburg, homosexual or bisexual orientation was more common among women than among men, while in Finland and Estonia, there was no difference between the genders. The proportion of respondents who had engaged in sexual intercourse within the last week did not vary by gender among respondents who were aged 18–54, with the exception of St. Petersburg, where men reported a greater frequency of intercourse than women. In Estonia and St. Petersburg, men were more supportive of women initiating sex than women themselves. In Finland, this gap between the genders was less significant, though still statistically relevant.

In Sweden in particular, but also in Finland, men found pornography sexually more exciting than women, whereas the gender difference was lesser in Estonia. In St. Petersburg and Estonia men estimated their sexual skillfulness much more highly than women. In Finland, the difference between genders was minor.

Estonian and Swedish men were more likely than their female partners to report trouble getting an erection (Lewin et al., 1998). Conversely, the answers of Finnish men and women corresponded on this issue. In Estonia, the rate of abortions reported by men and women differed widely: 62 % of Estonian women said they had had an abortion, but only 37 % of men were aware of a partner's abortion.

There was a greater gender gap with regard to erection difficulties and abortion, then, between Estonian men and women than among any other group. Part of the explanation for this difference may lie in the politeness that is common to Estonians, which may prevent respondents from mentioning characteristics in their

partners that they consider difficult. Another possibility is that Estonians, more than their neighbors, have attempted to keep these issues from their partners.

There were two issues in which the difference between men and women took opposing turns in different areas. First of all, in Finland in 1971 as well as in St. Petersburg men were one and a half years younger than women when they first had sexual intercourse. In Finland, on the other hand, the 1999 study found that women were six months younger than men when they first had sexual intercourse. Gender differences in age at first intercourse in Sweden, Finland in 1992, and Estonia were not significant.

Second, men in Finland in the 1990s were more likely than women to accept freely available abortion. In Estonia and St. Petersburg the situation was reversed, and women supported the right to free abortion more frequently than men. Had abortion not been available in the former Soviet Union, it would have been catastrophic for many women as other contraceptive methods were so rare. For this reason, it is quite rational that women are so positively inclined toward abortion in these areas. In Finland, men, even more so than women, seem to view abortion as an issue of rights, and they felt that women should have the right to terminate their pregnancies.

What are the future sexual trends?

Many of the findings in this book indicate that sex gained in appreciation in Finland in the course of the 1990s. Manifestations of this were that respondents indicated an increased desire for more sexual intercourse, masturbated more, experimented more, had improved sexual self-esteem, and found pornographic materials more exciting than previously. The presence of sex as a part of everyday desires and images has grown. Expectations and demands on sexual partners and on interaction with them increased as well. This observation corroborates the findings from young women's sexual autobiographies, which revealed all-new meanings of sex – eroticism and sexual tension were ever-present in the lives of many young women, unlike among women of older generations (Haavio-Mannila et al., 2002).

In many respects, this trend corresponds with research data compiled previously in Europe on the same topic (Sandfort et al., 1998). The broader shift that has occurred in the west has meant a greater number of sex partners before forming a committed relationship, lower level of commitment in relationships, increased masturbation, increase in lifetime partners and parallel relationships, more frequent intercourse, increasing commonness of oral and anal sex, and increased condom use. Finland has deviated from European trends only in that neither intercourse frequency nor condom use has increased.

A trend is that the genders have begun to resemble one another more in terms of sex. In Finland in the 1990s, this was manifested in that men's and women's responses resembled each other more and more, for example in the following contexts: first intercourse occurring with a steady partner, women's right to initiate sex, finding porn sexually exciting, the proportion of respondents who crave fidelity, the desired frequency of intercourse, parallel relationships, number of sexual partners, masturbation, and assessments of one's sexual competence. In many cases, there is absolutely no difference between the responses of men and women.

Being erotically and sexually charged had in fact brought people qualitatively better sexual experiences than before, but Finns' satisfaction with their sex lives and couple relationships decreased nevertheless during the 1990s. Not even the increasing prevalence of reciprocal love alleviated dissatisfaction – it seems that people have not been able to realize their new sexual desires and images sufficiently. A fast-paced lifestyle and growing psychological pressures do not allow for enough time or energy for forming love and sex relationships or for making love. In addition, the economic recession of the 1990s may have stopped people who were dissatisfied with their relationships from parting for economic reasons. Christopher and Sprecher (2000) have suggested that married couples only seem happy because the unhappy ones have already divorced.

The growing pressures imposed on people were partly manifested in a growing lack of sexual desire. Intercourse frequency and number of sex partners in the last year had remained nearly the same. Simultaneously, competition to find good sex partners grew as both genders invested more of their lives in sex and in finding the partner who fulfilled their desires (Buss, 1998). Orgasm became the sign of sexual competence (Potts, 2000); people sought competent partners who wanted the same things as they themselves in order to experience the sexual enjoyment that they craved (Michaels, 2000).

As values that emphasized the sexual rights of individuals gained in strength in the 1990s, life became increasingly erotic. The strengthening of such values was already apparent on the basis of our previous study. The concept of sexual rights in this context means the right to sexual self-determination, which was also the guiding principle in the overhaul of the sexual crime legislation at the end of the 1990s. Sexual rights may also be equated with individual and western morality. The economic aspect is also involved in the ideology of the free market. Media, too, has been a powerful proponent of the development of this individualistic morality.

It is particularly easy for young people to assume that the sexual relationships and experiences of each individual are private in nature, that are unconnected to the opinions of others. The justification for these experiences or relationships may not have anything to do with, for example, age, gender, love, commitment,

life stage or sexual orientation. The idea of sexual rights has promoted gender equality in emphasizing women's sexual rights. People have come to respect other people's sexual rights more seriously. It is not acceptable to pressure another person to do something that he or she does not want to do. When one finds a person who is looking for the same kind of relationship or experience as oneself, it is for these two people to determine what they will do together and how they will shape their relationship.

Some have seen the increase in masturbation as a particular sign of sexual emancipation (Schmidt, 1998). Masturbation is autonomous sexual expression and does not require extensive negotiation or interaction with a partner. It is therefore easy and without performance pressure. Masturbation is well suited to the fast-paced lifestyle and to the culture of communication that requires ever-sophisticated sexual acts. As sex becomes more and more important for people, the importance of masturbation will unavoidably grow, as our findings indicate. Sigusch (1998) thinks that sex is undergoing an emancipation even from the body itself. Manifestations of this are phone sex, virtual sex and the search for partners via personals ads and the Internet.

People of the oldest generation have found it difficult to accept a sexual morality that is independent of external control. Some saw sex not as a right but as a kind of social obligation. Respectable behavior was more important than a good relationship or sexual satisfaction. In the past, individual choice was given less heed and the good of the community surpassed the good of the individual. This kind of thinking, where the individual is closely bound to family, relatives and monitoring by the immediate environment has also been called collective moralism, and it remains strong, for example, in Arab and Far Eastern cultures, where sex is strictly connected exclusively to marriage.

As people have adopted the morality of sexual rights and as sexual inventions have spread, our conceptions of what is perverse have also been modified (Longmore, 1998). Things that in the past were rejected or just unknown are now part of people's sexual sphere of interest. Prior to the 1990s, one example was oral sex, and during the 1990s, anal sex. In recent years sadomasochism has emerged from sphere of the forbidden, and as a result, bondage for example has gained popularity among young people. People who follow trends such as these are those with a particularly strong interest in sex or high desire, as well as the willingness to experiment with their fantasies.

In 1992, we asked people to describe things that they considered sexually perverted or sick. (Unfortunately, this question could not be included in the 1999 survey.) At the top of the list were child sex abuse, sexual violence and sexual relations with animals. These are issues that legislation enacted in Finland in early 2001 defines as categorically forbidden in videos and films that are circulated among the public. The law draws the line that it is currently unacceptable to cross

in our society. Children and animals are not equal partners to an adult person, and sexual violence violates another individual's right to self-determination. Other types of sexual behavior are considered the private matter of one, two or several consenting individuals.

A certain agreement is always formed when people engage in sexual relations. In some cases, people make the agreement verbally, whereas in others a person may express his or her willingness to make love merely by not resisting the partner's advances. In the latter scenario, the absence of verbal agreement may lead to misinterpretations that result in sexual abuse.

In the past, almost everyone entered into a formal and external agreement – marriage – when entering into a relationship. Later, it has become common to form an agreement that is informal and only between the two parties in the relationship. Sometimes only the couple itself knows about the agreement, particularly when one partner is already committed to somebody else. A reliable partner has become increasingly important, as the partner is not legally or even socially bound to the partner's relatives or friends. When people are planning to or have already had children with such a partner, or have joint ownership of property, they have to trust that the partner will not suddenly break the agreement.

The strength of an informal agreement has, on the one hand, become a kind of measure of the success of a relationship. A successful relationship is also evaluated on the basis of how much time and resources the partner is willing to invest in the relationship and in satisfying the partner's needs. On the other hand, being sexually satisfied with a relationship provides both partners with the inspiration and motivation to invest more time and other resources into the relationship (Sprecher, 1998).

The change that has occurred in the structure of couple relationships has resulted in a so-called moral of negotiations (Schmidt, 1998), which is particularly significant for young people. For example, living-apart-together relationships and cohabitation are as common among the young generation as marriage. Moral of negotiations can also be called consensus morality. Issues are evaluated in light of certain acts, not as more general actions. For example, anal intercourse in itself is not abominable, but forcing someone to engage in it is.

Giddens (1992) speaks of 'pure,' emotion-based relationships, which last as long as both partners are happy and satisfied. This kind of pure relationship is becoming more common as gender equality grows. Even fidelity is connected to feelings toward another person, not to force. To ensure the continuation of a relationship, partners need to develop negotiating skills with one another. Erotic experiences, sexual interest and sexual satisfaction have become increasingly important for the success of couple relationships. As relationships become free from formal limits, the risk of increased divorce and separation grows, as practice has shown. People are less likely today to continue relationships that seem limited.

The strengthening of the moral of negotiation among the young is manifested in the trend that fewer and fewer people are prepared to accept sexual flings or parallel relationships. People see a partner's two-timing as strong evidence that he or she is not trust-worthy. Infidelity also carries the risk that the partner forms a similar or better agreement with the third party. To accept a partner's infidelity requires exceptionally strong self-esteem and faith in another man or woman not having anything to offer that would attract one's partner so powerfully that he or she would abandon the existing relationship.

Liu's (2000) interpretation is that the decline in parallel relationships, also observed in the present study, is due to people's lack of time to engage in parallel relations, because their time get taken up by increased career investment and other time constraints. Also, as men and women expect more and more of the quality in secret relationships and the accompanying sex, fewer people have managed to form hidden relationships that they consider satisfying enough to be sustainable. Such relationships would require more investment than before, making them easily more of a burden than a treat.

One exception to the morality that emphasizes relationship fidelity are young couples who live a lifestyle filled with sex, and where sexual experimentation is more important than the potential risk of breaking up. Such couples often seek a third party in their bed, or have swapped partners or engaged in group sex. The risks that such relations entail help maintain continued passion and sexual excitement. People may also feel that when they satisfy such sexual desires together, their relationship is reinforced. The fact that one's partner has the opportunity to experiment with others but remains eager to continue the relationship may be viewed as strong evidence of that relationship's special character and strength.

Some people feel such strong sexual interest that they would risk much to obtain the experiences and satisfaction that they crave (DeLamater & Hyde, 1998). For these people, sexual feelings and sensations play a significant role in their emotional lives. People with such strong desires may risk family, reputation and even health for the sake of a passing moment. Even in these cases, people attempt to restrict the relationships to the most appropriate partners. Measures that are developed for the promotion of public health issues do in fact vary greatly depending on to what extent we think that people act rationally in sexual matters and to what extent they are guided by their emotions (Reiss, 1999). Were we to view people as rational beings, merely providing the pertinent information would be enough. But when people allow emotions and immediate situational factors to guide their actions more than rational thought, it is more important to develop people's ability to communicate than to disseminate information (Ingham & Zessen, 1995).

The older generations based their sexual morality on the legal institution of marriage and appreciation of established traditions. Marriage was seen as secure and safe, also because of the social sanctions that were connected to its possible

dissolution. The moral of negotiations or denouncing infidelity was therefore less important. Infidelity was not permissible with regard to marriage, but they were not generally considered a serious threat to it (particularly when the unfaithful party was a man). The generation that grew up during the sexual revolution particularly learned that a spouse may have flings, but that this may even inject new life into a couple's perhaps somewhat lagging sex life and relationship. In a so-called open relationship, people agree to permit such flings.

Nowadays the ethics of couple relationships is individualistic even after a 'third party' enters the scene (Jallinoja 2000, 99). The needs of both partners have to be taken into account and balanced so that one partner does not feel that they are getting less. This is a question of implementing the principle of reciprocity in couple relationships through special efforts, following the passing of the passionate phase; mutual love creates this kind of reciprocity.

In Estonia and St. Petersburg this kind of moral is not as prevalent as in the Nordic countries. Men's infidelity is still more acceptable in the two former Soviet areas, and parallel relationships are also more common there. The explanation for this seems to be in the fact that the institution of marriage (as opposed to cohabitation or living-apart-together relationships) occupies a much stronger position in those countries than in Finland or Sweden. As new relationship types become more common, men's attitudes regarding infidelity will probably become more reluctant in Estonia and St. Petersburg, and simultaneously the double moral standard that favors men will weaken.

In recent years, Nordic sexual culture has actively produced sexual stimuli and practically useful information particularly through the media. There is greater temptation to seek the rewards that sexual relationships bring, and people are in possession of more of the resources that are useful in sexual interaction. At the same time, the costs of forming relationships have diminished as a result of the development and proliferation of new relationship types. People do not necessarily have to commit to their relationships or invest as many resources into them as previously. Together, these changes increase people's motivation to form different kinds of relationships. This has made for a more active market in relationships. Programming and services that facilitate the formation of relationships are gaining in popularity. People have been craving information about the new forms of the kind of communication that they desire, and on how they can find partners who share similar communication views.

According to Hardy (2000), love and relationships have come to mean more for people because people live increasingly separate lives in the western culture. Connections to relatives and childhood friends are less and less frequent. This can be seen, for example, in research by Castrén (2001), which found that the core of Helsinki teachers' social circle was the nuclear family – children and spouse – whereas in St. Petersburg, work colleagues, relatives and friends were more cen-

tral partners in social life. The importance of spouse and sexual partners has also increased in the west from the standpoint of satisfying needs of social solidarity that people used to be able to do in the context of their broader social life. Many people define themselves and build their self-esteem specifically on the basis of their couple relationship.

As a result of people's increased demands, some people have been eliminated from the sexual market almost completely. They have not been successful in forming or maintaining the kind of relationship they would like, and some have solved the issue by finding a partner from abroad. Some Finnish men have found wives in St. Petersburg or Estonia. Relationships such as these may have felt easier in the sense that gender roles are more traditional and therefore seem clearer in those countries. The comparisons in this book may be useful in trying to increase understanding toward relationships formed by representatives of these neighboring cultures. The western and socialist sexual cultures do not always correspond yet.

The comparable survey results showed that in the 1990s the two Nordic countries represented a more feminine sexual culture than either Finland in 1971 or the two former Soviet areas. These latter areas manifested more of a masculine culture as defined by Hofstede (1998). Due to the different timing of the sexual transition in the Nordic countries and in the former Soviet areas, the sexual history of the young generation in Estonia and St. Petersburg resembles that of middle-aged and even older western generations. There is a cultural lag of 20–30 years in the transition to more feminine sexual culture from west to east. This was true for some attitudes and behaviors as well as for assessment of experiences. According to several indicators, the sexual transition that started in the Nordic countries in the late 1960s started in Estonia and St. Petersburg in the end of the 1980s (Haavio-Mannila & Kontula, 2003).

The masculine sexual culture in Russia and partly also in Estonia limited female sexual expression and allowed males to be sexually freer in their relationships. In Sweden and Finland the transition had taken place towards a feminine sexual culture where women and men have equal rights to have sexual pleasure. This transition is in line with the new international approach to sexual health, where sexual satisfaction has been defined as a crucial part of sexual health and sexual rights (Lottes & Kontula, 2000).

In addition to the lack of sex education before the time of *glasnost* in the former Soviet Union, differences in the sexual culture in east and west may also be due to different economical standards. The border between the Nordic countries and the former socialist countries is also a dividing line between affluence and the lack thereof. As Hofstede (1998) has found, growing affluence gives women more opportunities to move around freely and also secures better health services, including contraception. Women in the former Soviet Union societies have been without these opportunities for much longer than women in the Nordic countries. In the

future, Estonia will probably catch up to the economic standard of its northern and western neighbors.

In the Nordic countries, some of the goals and even the dreams of the feminist movement have been achieved. For example, present-day young Finnish women found sexual intercourse as pleasurable as young men. The same was found in the United States by Laumann et al. (1994, 116). The free 'circulation' period between first intercourse and first cohabitation or marriage was about the same for young Finnish women and men. But masturbation among Finnish and Swedish women still lags behind that of men, the same as in the United States (Laumann et al., 1994, 82). Women are not yet able to enjoy masturbation as actively and without guilt as advocated by Menard (1997).

Some Nordic men have adopted the caring, feminine characteristics of the 'new man' ideology (Hearn & Morgan, 1990). They do not follow the macho sexual scripts still played out by many men in the east. As one consequence of this in the Nordic countries, there was relatively more gender equality in sexual activity, marital fidelity and sexual satisfaction than in St. Petersburg or Estonia. The feminine sexual culture seems to diminish the sexual double standard and increase gender equality and sexual wellbeing.

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Authors

Elina Haavio-Mannila (born 1933) is professor emerita of sociology at the University of Helsinki, Finland. She doctorated on an ethnographic study on village fights in 1958. After that she conducted some studies in medical sociology, immigration and history of sociology. However, her main research interest has been to compare men and women in work, politics, family and sexual life. Since 1991 she has focussed on comparative sex research in the Baltic Sea area.

Her major books in English include *Women in Nordic Politics* (1985, with Drude Dahlerup et al.), *Work, Family and Well-Being in Five North- and East-European Capitals* (1992), *Sexual Pleasures* (1995 with Osmo Kontula) and *Sexual Lifestyles* (2002 with Osmo Kontula and Anna Rotkirch). Her total publication list includes about 250 entries.

Elina Haavio-Mannila has been active in several state committees and sociological associations. She is an honorary doctor of the universities in Kuopio and Uppsala.

Osmo Kontula, Ph.D, is Senior Researcher at the Population Research Institute of the Family Federation of Finland, and Docent at the University of Helsinki. He has been involved with sex research and active in the sexological organizations for the past 20 years. His list of publications includes over 250 entries on sex research and sexual issues, and research on illicit drugs, public health and criminology. He has authored 22 books and over 100 book chapters or journal articles on sexual issues and presented over 50 papers in international conferences.

For the last ten years he has been a member of expert groups in the European Union in both quantitative and qualitative sex research and a consultant of European Population Committee in sexual and reproductive health. He is a President of the Finnish Foundation for Sex Education and Therapy (SEXPO). He was the President of the Finnish Association for Sexology, 1997–2002, and the President of the Nordic Association of Clinical Sexology (NACS), 2001–2003. Osmo Kontula is a Chair of International Task Force Committee in the Society for the Scientific Study of Sexuality (SSSS). He hosts together with Elina Haavio-Mannila the Annual Meeting of the International Academy of Sex Research (IASR) in Helsinki in 2004.