



RESEARCHING ON SEXUALITY FOR PLEASURE

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Program

One question:

HOW DOES SEX RESEARCH CONSIDER THE QUESTION OF PLEASURE ?

- ⊙ In policies
 - ⊙ And in the reality of research
 - ⊙ Fields of research
 - ⊙ Methodologies
 - ⊙ And what to think about that... is there really a place for pleasure and eroticism in sex research?
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POLICIES



Definitions of sexual health

(from a review of the literature by Edwards & Coleman, 2004)

- « Sexually health experience enhance **life quality and pleasure**, personal relationships and communication, and the expression of one's identity » (Lottes, 2000)
- « Sexual health is not limited to the absence of disease [...] ability to integrate their sexuality into their lives, **derive pleasure** from it, and to reproduce if they so choose. » (Satcher, Surgeon General's Report, 2001)



Definitions of sexual health

(from a review of the literature by Edwards & Coleman, 2004)

- « Essential elements of good sexual health are equitable relationships and **sexual fulfillment** with access to information and services to avoid the risk of unintended pregnancy, illness or disease » (The National Strategy for Sexual Health and HIV, 2000)
 - « Sexual health affirms **sexuality as a positive force**, enhancing other dimensions of one's life » (Robinson et al., 2002)
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Definitions of sexual health

(from a review of the literature by Edwards & Coleman, 2004)

- “Sexual health is a state of physical, emotional, mental and social well-being related to sexuality; it is not merely the absence of disease, dysfunction or infirmity. Sexual health requires **a positive and respectful approach** to sexuality and sexual relationships, as well as the possibility of having **pleasurable** and safe sexual experiences, free of coercion, discrimination and violence. For sexual health to be attained and maintained, the sexual rights of all persons must be respected, protected and fulfilled.” (World Health Organization, 2002)
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Sexuality

“Sexuality refers to a core dimension of being human, which includes the individual and social capabilities and conditions for eroticism, emotional attachment/love, sex, gender, and reproduction. It is anchored in thoughts, fantasies, desires, beliefs and values and is expressed through identity, attitudes, values, roles, behaviors, and relationships. Sexuality is a result of the interplay of biological, psychological, socioeconomic, cultural, ethical and religious/spiritual factors.”

(PAHO, regional Office of the WHO, 2000)





From that, we can assume that sexuality is linked with..

- Sexual and personal identity as constructed, in a particular cultural environment
 - Gender and gender role
 - Differential labeling and identifications
 - Sexual scripts
 - Attachment and affective needs
 - Other needs and conscious/unconscious motivation for acting sexually in a certain way
- 



PUBLISHED RESEARCH IN THE DOMINANT PARADIGMS



Pleasurable aspects of sexuality ... the reality of published research...

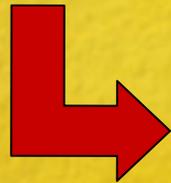
References in MEDLINE (February 2005) :« sexual pleasure » n= 195, « sexual satisfaction » n=517

Covering the following fields of interest:

- Sexual dysfunction and their pharmacological treatments
- Changing in lifespan : menopausal, aging, ...
- Disease and disability
- HIV, STD's (psychosocial and preventive)
- Psychological difficulties, depression
- Reproductive health, infertility
- And some theoretical proposal on sexuality, psychoanalysis

Fields of sex research ... different methods, different pleasures

- Sex research in sexology :



operationalization/restriction
of the idea of pleasure mainly to

- ⊙ Pleasure as orgasm

- ⊙ Pleasure as sexual satisfaction

- (Public) Health problematic linked with sexuality

- Social science on sexuality :

- ⊙ Sexual lifestyle, sexual minorities, queer studies, cultural studies

- ⊙ Descriptive and theory generating



Sex research and operationalization of pleasure

1. Pleasure in the sexual functioning paradigm : **orgasm and arousal**
 2. Pleasure in the appraisal of personal and relational achievement: **sexual satisfaction** (sexual happiness (7), marital satisfaction...)
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Two way of viewing pleasure in two traditions of sex research :

Kinsey and sexual behavior survey

centered on frequency of a particular behavior/ “techniques”, and orgasm

Master & Johnson and the “universalization” of the sexual functioning (Human Sexual Response Cycle)

Physical reactions tested in a laboratory setting

QuickTime™ et un décompresseur TIFF (non compressé) sont requis pour visionner cette image.

Current sex research I: pleasure as a biomedical fact

- Neurosciences
- The “hormone paradigm” of human sexuality (see Laqueur)

**Pharmaceutical therapy and emphasis
on HSRC and dysfunction**





Current sex research I: but also critics of “taken for granted” concepts and methods

● Feminist critic:

- ⊙ The new view of women’s sexual problem (15,16)
- ⊙ Call for a more holistic view on sexuality and pleasure

● Cultural studies and Queer studies :

- ⊙ The neglect of sexual diversity

● Epistemological critic

- ⊙ The construction of pathologies
 - ⊙ The neglect of the meaning
 - ⊙ The scientific paradigms (neopositivist vs. constructivist)
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Current sex research II

Pleasure as sexual satisfaction

- What is sexual satisfaction?
- How is it measured?
- Some findings ...

Satisfaction is not pleasure

- ◎ Satisfaction: “experience of judgment”
- ◎ Pleasure: “judgment of experience”

“The difference between these two -satisfaction and pleasure- is like the difference between doing something that you know to be fun and having fun.” (Simon, 2000:138)

The concept of sexual satisfaction

- Absence of dissatisfaction
- « *An affective response arising from one's subjective evaluation of the positive and negative dimensions associated with one's sexual relationship* » (9, p. 268)
 - ⊙ Relational concept
 - ⊙ Anticipation - actualization
 - ⊙ Exchange economically connoted

Measuring sexual satisfaction

● Theory/function centered:

- ◎ Orgasmic consistency, behavioral and/or physiological symptoms of orgasm
- ◎ Frequency of sexual activities, coitus, ...
(7)

Measuring sexual satisfaction

● Subject centered :

- ⊙ One or two questions, yes or no answer
- ⊙ One or two Likert scale, mixing physiological and emotional components

“Looking back over the past 6 months, how sexually satisfied do you feel overall?” (5 point Likert scale) (13)

⊙ Scales of Sexual Satisfaction

Measuring sexual satisfaction - with sexual satisfaction scales -

- Multi-items scale to address several dimensions of sexual satisfaction; i.e.:

- ⊙ I am satisfied with my spouse as a sexual partner
- ⊙ After sex I feel relaxed, fulfilled
- ⊙ I feel that foreplay with my spouse is very arousing
- ⊙ I am pleased with frequency (and intensity) of sexual activity in which my spouse and I engage
- ⊙ My spouse makes it clear that I provide him/her with a great deal of sexual pleasure

...

11 item scale, 5 point Likert scale, adapted from Sexual Satisfaction Scale of the **Derogatis Sexual Functioning Inventory** (5) by (7)

Measuring sexual satisfaction - with sexual satisfaction scales -

● The Global Measure of Sexual Satisfaction (GMSEX, 10):

→ 1 question : « Overall, how would you describe your sexual relationship with your partner? »

→ To evaluate on five 7 points bipolar scales:

good - bad,

pleasant - unpleasant,

positive - negative,

satisfying - unsatisfying,

valuable - worthless.

(scores from 5 to 35, lower = less satisfaction)



And also...

from Handbook of Sexually-Related Measures

- *Interpersonal Exchange Model of Sexual Satisfaction Questionnaire* (9-10)
 - *Index of Sexual Satisfaction* : 25 Likert scale to measure sexual dissatisfaction in a dyadic relationship (Hudson)
 - *Sexual Satisfaction Inventory* : 32 Likert scale to assess ss in women (Peddicord Whitley)
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Factors commonly associated with sexual satisfaction

- ✓ Quality of the relationship (1-2; 4; 8-11;17)
 - ◎ Emotional closeness, intimacy
 - ◎ Overall satisfaction with marriage/relationship
 - ◎ Communication, sexual self-disclosure

Based on theory that are culturally dependent:

- Interpersonal Exchange Model of Sexual Satisfaction (9-10) based on social exchange theory = rewards and costs that partners exchange
- Dyadic adjustment (3)

Factors commonly associated with sexual satisfaction

- ✓ Sexual activity and performance (4; 7, 8;11)
 - ◎ Consistency and frequency of women's orgasm ...but some researches have found orgasm plays a minimal role for women sexual satisfaction
 - ◎ Frequency of sexual activity and/or coitus; variety of sexual behaviors; positive and open attitudes toward sexuality...
 - ◎ Participation and enjoyment of non-coital sexual activity



Other factors associated with sexual satisfaction (1-3; 7; 9-11; 17)

- ✓ **Religiosity** : perception of God's view on sex (not the other variables of religiosity)
 - ✓ **Age**
 - ✓ **Gender**
- 



Importance and satisfaction with sex life... some results from western surveys and experimental research (is there a gender gap here?)

- Men seem to consider sex life more important
 - Women tend to report that sex is not pleasurable more often than men
 - Little correlation is found in women between subjective rating of arousal and measures of physiological arousal
 - Description of orgasmic experience is similar in men and women
 - Women tend to report less frequent sexual arousal, orgasm and desire
 - Women seem to emphasize more on affective characteristics of sexuality and men more on behavioral ones
 - ...
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- But also: sexuality, eroticism and ability to experience pleasure, feel and enjoy the excitement/arousal and reach orgasm **is not innate and natural**,
 - but **can be improved or repressed** by social conditioning, social learning, good and bad previous experiences, gender role, wishes to please and be loved, perception of the body and genitalia, representations, fantasies, fears, stress...
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Some methodological and epistemological questions...

→ What do we do with...

- ⊙ Gender ?
- ⊙ Culture ?
- ⊙ Non behavioral aspects of sexuality ?

→ And what about the “perceived body”, the embodiment of pleasure?

→ How can we better integrate sexuality and pleasure (the erotic part of sexuality) in sex research ?



« It is in confronting the distinction between the sexual and the erotic that the limitations of a naturalistic behaviorism become apparent. Even within the context of overtly sexual acts, outside of the visible but indeterminate capacities of orgasm, pleasure or satisfaction is determined in critical ways by sociocultural meanings that occasion the sexual event and by the personal meaning occasioned by that event. »

Postmodern sexualities, William Simon, 1996: 29



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