



The male sexual deficit: A social fact of the 21st century

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Catherine Hakim

Civitas, UK

Abstract

Nationally representative interview surveys of sexual behaviour and attitudes proliferated around the globe from 1990 onwards as a result of the AIDS scare, yet are overlooked by sociologists. This article reviews findings from some 30 sex surveys around the world showing that large and substantively important differences between men and women in the centrality of sexuality, sexual desire, sexual behaviour and attitudes persist in the 21st century, long after the contraceptive and sexual revolutions of the 1960s. Women's lesser sexual motivation and interest means that many heterosexual men experience a shortfall in desired sexual activity. A reversal of the sex ratio to a male surplus among prime-age adults and other trends suggest that the sexual deficit among men may increase. The male sexual deficit (or surplus male sexuality) helps to explain sexual harassment, sexual violence, rape, rising demand for commercial sexual services and other behaviours that are almost exclusively male.

Keywords

Attitudes, marriage, sexual harassment, sexuality, surveys

One aim of an international, non-ethnocentric sociology is to establish social facts – statements about social behaviour, social attitudes and social processes that are fairly universally true (and important) rather than valid for a single country. At present, a disproportionate volume of social research deals only with the USA, a distinctive and peculiar culture (Henrich et al., 2010; Nisbett, 2005), and research based on volunteer samples of American college students magnifies the problem. Sexual expression displays substantial variation across cultures, so Puritan Anglo-Saxon perspectives are not necessarily duplicated elsewhere.

Corresponding author:

Catherine Hakim, PO Box 66095, London, W4 9EZ, UK.

Email: hakim@catherinehakim.org

There are three impediments to us establishing a truly international sociology. First, even today, there is far less research evidence available for countries outside the two areas with the highest concentrations of social scientists: North America and Western Europe. Second, language barriers remain important. English has become *de facto* the principal language of scientific research reports as well as in commerce and business. Studies reported exclusively in Chinese, Japanese, French or Spanish will have a smaller international audience, and may not be fully incorporated into the international body of knowledge. Third, all scholars rely on libraries, and most libraries are understandably ethnocentric or nationalistic in the publications they collect. Access to journals is increasingly online, hence borderless, but subscription costs are still prohibitive. Libraries with truly international collections are rare, and attract a large readership in consequence. International social science is still feasible, but it requires more effort and time than purely national studies.

Theoretical developments often rest on library research and cross-national comparisons rather than single-country analyses. This article describes the sexual deficit among men (or surplus male sexuality), a phenomenon that appears to be universal in modern societies (Hakim, 2010, 2011: 38–73, 263–266). It emerged unexpectedly during research on sexual cultures, internet dating and marriage markets (Hakim, 2012). Yet feminists insist that men's greater demand for sexual activity is an outdated myth. Recent sex surveys prove the myth to be a fact, one that the social sciences have yet to address, theoretically and empirically.

Modern research on sexuality

Sexuality, childbearing and family life are dominant themes in social life everywhere, with no shortage of comment and debate, curiosity, speculation and analysis in social anthropology, case studies, literature, history, social philosophy and psychoanalysis, including Freud's theories (Mottier, 2008). However large nationally representative probability sample interview surveys of sexual behaviour and attitudes only started properly in the 1990s, as a result of the AIDS scare, with rare exceptions before that. Sexuality is little studied by mainstream sociologists despite the fact that it is as central to life as birth, death and marriage.¹ The paucity of research leaves sexuality a fertile field for myths and speculative theorizing even today. Kinsey's and Hite's pioneering studies of male and female sexuality in the USA in the 1940s and 1970s challenged several stereotypes and myths, as do the recent surveys (Vaccaro, 2003).

Sexuality straddles the border between physiology and sociology, public and private life. Human sexual response is partly physiological, even though the social expression of sexuality is shaped by the surrounding culture (Kontula, 2009). Sexual expression is to some extent socially constructed, but the sex drive, like hunger, is undeniable even if it varies between individuals and across the lifecycle (Berger and Luckmann, 1972).² Private, solo sex can develop from an early age independently of the social and cultural framework.³ Today, the internet allows a variety of 'private' sexual interests to be explored through online 'public' websites. It facilitates the emergence of new social groups and clubs centred on otherwise arcane and rare sexual tastes – such as BDSM (Bergner, 2009). The distinction between private/solo sexual activities and partnered/social activities is eroding, but both types are more important for men.

The 'sexual revolution' of the 1960s strengthened interest in sexuality. For the first time in history, the pill and other modern forms of reliable contraception controlled by women gave women easier access to recreational sex without fear of pregnancy (Cook, 2004; Szreter and Fisher, 2011), leading to an increase in marital sexual activity.⁴ The uncoupling of sexuality and fertility made premarital sex more common, and eventually facilitated extra-marital sexuality as well (Hakim, 2012). The AIDS scare of the 1980s changed attitudes again, prompting renewed interest in abstinence and fidelity. Western radical feminism exposed the role of sexuality in sexual politics, but it played little role in the new sex survey research. The feminist emphasis has been on ideological, moral and philosophical debates and theory (Jeffreys, 1997, 2005; Shrage, 1994; Soble, 2002; Walby, 1990: 109–127; Wittig, 1992), with a focus on male sexual harassment, violence and rape (Macdowall et al., 2013). Despite this, the idea of sex differences in sexuality is regularly challenged (Schmitt et al., 2012).

The national sex surveys

The AIDS scare gave governments and research foundations a legitimate reason for taking an interest in what people do in the privacy of their beds at night. It became easier to talk about sexuality, condom adverts were displayed openly, and sexuality came out of the closet. Sex surveys became 'medical' and 'public health' studies, so funding was easier to obtain. The downside of this was that many surveys concentrated on casual sexual encounters, promiscuity and condom use, without first obtaining a broad understanding of sexual desire, its expression, and the social constraints on it. Nonetheless, the plethora of national sex surveys carried out around the world in the two decades between 1990 and 2010 greatly increases our knowledge and understanding of human sexuality (Wellings et al., 2006). For example, the surveys show that the vast majority of men and women self-identify and act as heterosexuals: 97% in Britain, the USA, Australia, Scandinavia and Western Europe generally, whereas academic sexuality journals often focus on tiny sexual minorities.

The USA has a varied series of sex surveys, starting with Kinsey's pioneering scientific studies of male and female sexuality in the 1940s and 1950s. Hite's studies of female and male sexuality in the 1970s and the Janus and Janus (1993) report on the 1980s describe the American sexual landscape after the sexual revolution. But the first interview survey to provide data that is fully nationally representative for the USA was only done in 1992 (Laumann and Michael, 2001; Laumann et al., 1994). This first survey covered people aged 18–59 years. Subsequently, other surveys covered adults aged 40–85 (Laumann et al., 2006; Lindau et al., 2007).

European survey research on sexuality started earlier with Zetterberg's 1967 Swedish survey, which was not repeated until 1996, almost 30 years later (Lewin, 2000; Zetterberg, 2002 [1969]). The first Swedish survey was sociological and inspired others, notably a series of national surveys carried out in Finland in 1971, 1992, 1999 and 2007, which were then copied in Estonia and St Petersburg (Russia) to provide comparisons of sexual cultures across Northern Europe. Carried out by Haavio-Mannila and Kontula, the Finnish research programme is especially valuable because it seeks to understand sexual desire and sexual expression in the round from a multidisciplinary social science perspective.

The national surveys were complemented by the collection of sexual autobiographies from men and women of all ages, giving a fuller picture of how sexuality develops over the lifecycle and is affected (or not) by the local social environment, opportunities and constraints (Haavio-Mannila and Kontula, 2003; Haavio-Mannila and Rotkirch, 1997, 2000; Haavio-Mannila et al., 2001, 2002; Kontula, 2009; Kontula and Haavio-Mannila, 1995). The Finnish research programme culminated in one of the best analyses yet published on changes over the past half century; key features of modern sexuality; celibacy, fidelity and promiscuity; autoeroticism (solo sex); and continuing differences between male and female sexuality (Kontula, 2009).

France ran major national surveys in 1972 and 1992, supplemented by sexual life histories collected by Mossuz-Lavau (2002). The French research produced some of the most sophisticated analyses of sexual interest and activity, and of the relative importance of sexuality for men and women (Bajos et al., 1998; Groupe ACSF, 1998; Hubert et al., 1998; Simon et al., 1972; Spira and Bajos, 1993). Surveys elsewhere in Europe often followed the 'medical' model, including the EU-funded NEM surveys carried out in eight European countries (Hubert et al., 1998; Kontula, 2009: 27). One of the biggest was the 1990 British survey, which conducted face-to-face interviews with almost 20,000 people about their sex lives and sexual attitudes (Wellings et al., 1994). This was repeated in 2000 and 2010 to monitor trends over time (Mercer et al., 2013; Mitchell et al., 2013).

Most countries had only one national sex survey of the adult population. Some of the least well-known surveys, including the German, Norwegian and Greek surveys, are summarized in a comparative report on 12 European countries (Hubert et al., 1998). A late addition to the series was the 2002 Australian telephone survey, asking almost 20,000 people about their sex lives (Richters and Rissel, 2005).

Some countries relied on a combination of local studies, surveys of particular age groups or groups of special interest (such as people selling sexual services) and social attitude surveys to build up a picture of the national sexual culture. The biggest exercise of this type was the 1989–1990 Chinese sex survey of 20,000 men and women. This consisted of six separate surveys of three main groups: high school students, college students and married couples, including samples in urban and rural areas in each case, plus a study of people with criminal records for sex offences such as prostitution or rape (Liu et al., 1997). Occasionally, scholars collate the patchy evidence available – including Kon's (1995) history of sexuality and sexual cultures in Russia, Malo de Molina's (1992) report on Spain, Lafayette de Mente's (2006) essay on Japanese sexuality and El Feki's (2013) summary of surveys in the Arab world. Despite interest in all things sexual, no published sex survey report was found for Japan, although other surveys include questions on sexual topics.

Pharmaceutical companies and condom manufacturers periodically conduct surveys of sexual behaviour around the world, usually with a focus on condom use, or what are now labelled as 'sexual health' problems, such as lack of desire in women, impotence and menopausal difficulties. The Global Study of Sexual Attitudes and Behaviour collected data on almost 14,000 women aged 40–80 in 29 countries (Laumann et al., 2006). The Women's International Study of Health and Sexuality, funded by a pharmaceutical company, covered 952 women in the USA and 2467 women in Europe, all aged 20–70 years (Dennerstein et al., 2006; Leiblum et al., 2006). Durex has commissioned many

Table 1. Sexual desire within relationships, France, 1992.

Which partner had the strongest sexual desire (%) at the last sexual event?

		Duration of life as a couple		
		0–2 years	5–10 years	Over 15 years
<i>First marriages/partnerships</i>				
Men:	The man	27	39	49
	The woman	10	17	4
	Both	52	44	47
	Neither	10	0	0
Women:	The man	48	34	61
	The woman	10	12	4
	Both	42	55	35
	Neither	0	0	1
<i>Second marriages/partnerships</i>				
Men:	The man	43	53	42
	The woman	24	8	13
	Both	33	34	43
	Neither	0	4	1
Women:	The man	22	49	49
	The woman	6	8	0
	Both	71	40	45
	Neither	0	2	0

Base = 100% men and women living as a couple aged up to 45 years in January 1992.

Source: Extracted from Table 11 in Bajos et al. (1998: 212).

surveys of its customer base over the years. The National Survey of Sexual Health and Behaviour was funded by the Trojan condoms company. This survey covered almost 6000 adults aged 14–94 resident in the USA, and was carried out online (Herbenick et al., 2010). This may have made honesty easier, but it must also have produced some bias in the people choosing to participate. People with liberal attitudes, an interest in sexuality and the sexually active are more likely to respond to sex surveys, so celibacy is usually understated in results (Dunne et al., 1997).

There is no synthesis of the results of all these studies around the world to identify the universal constants in human sexuality in modern societies. The diversity of the surveys makes that effectively impossible. The surveys cover different topics, social groups and age groups. They use different concepts, question-wording, metrics and time reference periods for sexual activity (last month, last year, last 5 years, or last 10 years). Questions routinely included in European surveys could not be asked in China in 1990. (Orgasm was a taboo subject, and questions on varieties of sexual activity were redundant.) Some analyses focus on the couple as the unit of analysis instead of individuals (see Table 1).

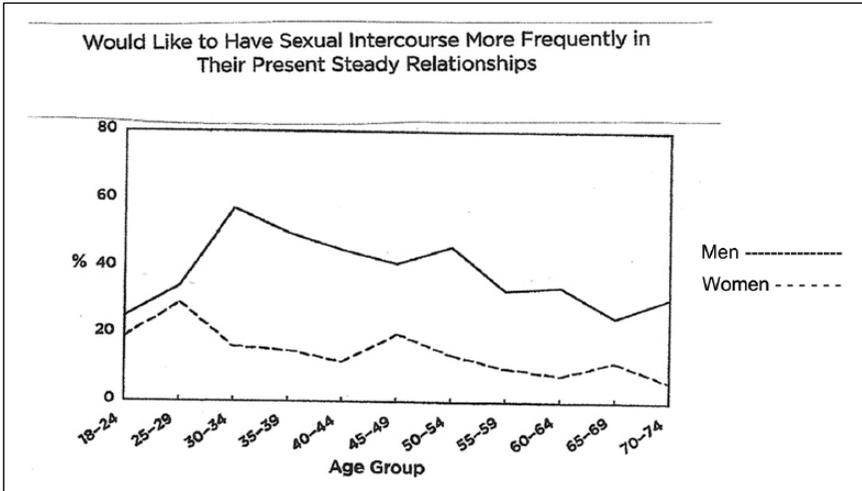


Figure 1. Sex differences in unmet sexual desire by age, Finland, 1992.
 Source: 1992 national survey in Finland reported in Kontula and Haavio-Mannila (1995: 105).

Table 2. Lack of interest in sexual activity (%) by age, Britain, 2010.

Age	16-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65-74	16-74
Males	11	15	17	15	16	14	15
Females	25	32	37	38	39	34	34

Source: Extracted from Mercer et al. (2013).

The focus of this study was the differences between male and female sexuality, especially sexual desire,⁵ which turn out to be important, even in the 21st century. Differences between men and women are always reported, so the study was feasible. But meta-analysis is ruled out, and as Hubert et al. (1998) found, comparative tables can pose insurmountable problems, especially on sexual attitudes. Reports sometime present results in the text, figures and graphs rather than tables, using different age bands, as shown in Figure 1 and Table 2. There is no standardization of sex survey topics and methods, in contrast to the arrangements for harmonizing national surveys on the labour force, households, fertility, literacy and time budgets, through the UN, ILO, OECD and EU. The Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS) programme sponsored by USAid as a follow-up to the World Fertility Survey promotes standardization of questions on sexual activity. However the DHS website (www.dhsprogram.com) does not list sexuality as a research topic; many countries omit this module; and the fertility focus means that samples are often restricted to (married) women of childbearing age (Wellings et al., 2006).

Sex survey reports are not easily identifiable. They are dispersed across library classifications and disciplines; are classified as medical, public health, demographic or social

psychology reports rather than under sociological headings; and can be published in therapy journals (Raboch and Raboch, 1989) and epidemiology journals (Dunne et al., 1997). The focus on promiscuity, casual sex and commercial sexuality, and the routine exclusion of solo sex (masturbation practices), was due to concern with the health risks posed by people with multiple partners, more than any interest in the sociology of sexual expression.

This study relied on the library and expert librarians at the London School of Economics, which meant that medical publications were often overlooked. Normal catalogue and database searches proved the least productive, even when carried out by an experienced specialist librarian. Database search routines that work well for journal articles do not work for books. Book titles can be poetic rather than factual, and no keywords are listed. Finding data on sexual behaviour in less developed countries was even more time-consuming. Data for South America and African countries south of the Sahara involved searches in social anthropology research reports. Sex research as it has now developed in modern countries is virtually non-existent in third world countries. Most of the international comparative fertility surveys offer little information on the sexual behaviour required to generate babies.

The time and effort required to locate equivalent studies for diverse countries and cultures is substantial. But it is essential for the development of a genuinely international sociology.

Sex differences in sexuality

The original reason for consulting the sex surveys was to check whether celibate marriages are at all common. A study of people using dating websites for married people threw up many men, but few women, stating that they were in a celibate, or almost sexless, marriage (Hakim, 2012). The sex surveys provided a check on whether this pattern was plausible, the usual triangulation in a case study (Hakim, 2000), and confirmed the finding. For example, the British, American, Finnish and Italian surveys all report a minority of men and a larger group of women aged over 35 years saying they were celibate – no sex at all in the last month or the last year (Hakim, 2011: 41–43, 2012: 65–70). By 2007, the frequency of sexual intercourse had declined another 20% in Finland (Kontula, 2009: 130). By 2010, well over one-third of adults reported no sexual intercourse in the past month in Britain (Mercer et al., 2013), but the proportions are invariably higher for women.

In Finland and other countries that have conducted a series of sex surveys, reports note increasing similarity over time in the number of sexual partners for men and women (Haavio-Mannila et al., 2002; Kontula, 2009: 112–114; Mercer et al., 2013), with similar results from meta-analyses (Petersen and Hyde, 2010). However, the final conclusion is always the large and continuing differences between men's and women's perspectives on sexuality (Bajos et al., 1998: 174–232; Kontula, 2009: 215–227, 231; Laumann et al., 1994: 547; Lewin, 2000: 117–136; Mercer et al., 2013; Wellings et al., 1994: 100, 246–247, 252, 261, 265). The sex differentials in sexuality remain large, substantively important, and are found in all cultures, including the sexually liberated societies of Scandinavia. They cannot be dismissed as an outdated patriarchal myth as argued by feminists (Buss and Schmitt, 2011), especially as these national surveys were carried out long after the

sexual revolution of the 1960s. Continuing sex differentials in sexuality in the 21st century include the following:

- At all ages, the majority of women regard love as a precondition for sex, while a majority of men reject the idea (Sweden 1996).
- Two-thirds of men accept, and two-thirds of women reject the idea of sexuality without love (France 1992). At all ages, men engage in sexual intercourse without any feelings of love two to four times more often than do women (Sweden 1996).
- Men express two to ten times more enthusiasm than women for trying every variation in sexual activity.
- The average number of sexual partners over a lifetime has fallen from two to three times higher among men to around 50%–100% higher today, so remains substantial.
- When asked about their ideal sexual lifestyle, men are three times more likely to prefer several concurrent lovers: 20% vs 6% for women (Sweden 1996), 27% vs 7% for women (Estonia 2000).
- Regular masturbation is two to three times more common among men, even among married men, and even in Sweden. A two-thirds majority of men masturbated in the last month, week or year compared to a one-third minority of women (Australia 2002, Finland 2007, Britain 2010).
- Men are three times more likely to have frequent sexual fantasies, and to use erotica of all kinds. In Finland, a four-fifths majority of men find porn very arousing compared to half of women.
- Two-fifths of men compared to one-fifth of women have an additional non-marital sex partner (Sweden 1996). Men report extra-marital affairs twice as often as women, even when they condemn affairs as morally wrong (Hakim, 2012). This pattern is observed both in villages and cities in China, where between one-quarter to half of divorces are now due to adultery. Only in France, Spain and Italy do men and women begin to converge in their acceptance (and practice) of affairs.
- Casual sex was regarded as acceptable by a two-thirds majority of men vs a one-third minority of women in Britain in 1990. In 2010, twice as many men as women regarded one-night stands as ‘not wrong at all’: 18% vs 9%, or 20% vs 13% for people aged 16–44.
- Around the world, customers for commercial sexual services and erotic entertainments are almost invariably male. Male prostitutes have more male than female clients. In Australia, 16% of men have paid for sex compared to 0.1% of women, with similar figures for Northern Europe. Across Northern Europe, men are equally or more likely to have sold sexual services. In Greece and Italy, around 40% of men have bought sexual services compared to less than 1% of women.
- Men are four times more likely than women to always gladly agree to sexual approaches from their partner: 38% of men vs 11% of women (Finland 2007).
- When asked about the ideal frequency of sexual activity, one-quarter of men but only 8% of women say they prefer sex at least once a day or more (Australia

2002). In Finland, men's ideal frequency is around twice a week vs once a week for women.

- Twice as many men as women experience frequent sexual desire: half vs one-fifth of women in Sweden.
- One-third of women vs one in ten men have never had an erotic fantasy; one-third of men but only one in ten women have regular erotic fantasies (Italy 2000).
- The most commonly reported sexual problem is lack of interest in having sex. In Australia, over half of all women report this compared to one-quarter of men. In all countries, the rate for women is at least double the rate for men, at all ages. In Finland, one-third of women but only 13% of men report lack of interest. Even in France, 8% of husbands compared to 41% of wives aged up to 45 years reported lack of desire as a problem in 1992.

A cross-cultural study of 29 countries shows that sex differences in desire and sexual interest are universal, but the gap between men and women is larger in male-dominated cultures than in liberal western societies. For example, the proportion of women reporting no interest in sexual activity rises from the average of around 30% to 50% among Japanese women (Meana, 2010: 108). A European comparative study treated sexual desire and interest as a control variable, so no comparative results are reported. However it noted that the large cultural-legal differences between European countries were not reflected in differential behaviour, so that differences between men and women remain the dominant story (Hubert et al., 1998: 193–194).

Scholars argue that large sex differences in sexual activity are not plausible. However sexual markets are not closed systems, and all surveys have refusals and non-response, especially among outliers, and especially for 'private' topics. There are several explanations for men reporting more sexual partners than women:

- Women who sell sexual services do not participate in sex surveys.
- Sex tourism to Thailand and other countries means that men can report female sex partners living in foreign countries, as illustrated by sex memoirs (Thomas, 2006) and the Swedish and Finnish surveys.
- Some men living as (married) heterosexuals also participate (secretly) in the gay scene, where numerous pairings are common – between men.
- Although gay men remain a tiny minority (3%) of the male population, like sexual superactives generally, they account for a high proportion of all male sexual activity – with other men, obviously.

Women's propensity to minimize the number of sexual partners, and men's tendency to exaggerate the number is another factor, probably less important, although cited most often.

The contraceptive revolution of the 1960s eliminated the fear of pregnancy among women – always a powerful demotivator (Cook, 2004; Szreter and Fisher, 2011). In the 1960s, over one-third of women with three or more children deeply regretted each new pregnancy (Cartwright, 1978). Yet sexual interest/desire seems to be surprisingly constant across generations. The 2010 British survey provides the most up-to-date information on

sexual expression. It shows that in all age groups, females are more than twice as likely as men to lack interest in sex (Table 2). From their twenties onwards, one-third of women say they lack interest in sexual activity compared to one in seven men. They are also twice as likely to say they lack enjoyment in sex (12% vs 5% of men), but these are small minorities.

The sexual deficit among men

The imbalance in sexual interest at the macro-level is repeated at the micro-level, within relationships. Graphs for unmet sexual desire in an existing relationship show a large gap between men and women that starts at age 30 and grows quickly: around half of all men report unmet sexual desire compared to around 10% of women in Finland (Figure 1). The gap had reduced a little by 2007, but men still remain twice as likely to want more frequent intercourse (Haavio-Mannila and Kontula, 2003: 81; Kontula, 2009: 41–42, 135, 222–229). The pattern seems to be universal. Despite a culture that welcomes female sexuality, French men and women are clear that male desire outweighs female sexual desire most of the time, and becomes the main driving force in longer-duration relationships, as women's sexual desire wanes over time (Table 1). In Britain, among couples aged 25 and over, one-quarter of men and one-third of women report an imbalance in sexual interest with their partner in 2010. The imbalance is smallest in the 16–24 age group: 15% of young men and 20% of young women report the problem, and it grows thereafter (Mitchell et al., 2013: Table 3). Even in the 21st century, one-third of women report no sexual interest and/or an imbalance of sexual interest in a current relationship. From three different cultures, using different indicators, the patterns in Tables 1 and 2 and Figure 1 tell the same story.

Summarizing four decades of sex research in developed countries, Kontula (2009: 39–44, 215–230) notes that men report substantially more unsatisfied sexual desire, even today, because:

- Women's loss of sexual desire is four times higher than among men in the same age group.
- Younger men experience sexual desire twice as frequently as women; older men experience sexual desire four times as often as women in the same age group.
- As a result, male sexual desire is compatible with the level of desire in women approximately 20 years younger.
- Overall, male sexual desire is manifested at least twice as often as female desire, and men would like to have sex twice as often as women.
- The gap in sexual desire between men and women is growing over time.

Puritan Christianity constrained sexual expression. Possibly capitalism also encourages sexual restraint. Studies of the spirit of capitalism and the Puritan ethic reveal the promotion of chastity even within marriage. Sexual indulgence was to be used purely for health or for offspring – not merely for pleasure, which was a waste of time (Dickson and McLachlan, 1989: 88). Compared to countries in Africa south of the Sahara, sexual activity in Europe and North America remains a relatively rare entertainment, despite the

'sexual revolution'. The frequency of intercourse within married couples is four to 18 times higher, on average, in certain African societies (Hakim, 2011: 64) and is also higher among 'sexual superactives', to use the label in the 1996 Swedish report (Lewin, 2000). Within Europe, sexual activity remains greater in Southern Europe than in sexually liberated Scandinavia (Hubert et al., 1998; Kontula, 2009: 127–129). In China, regular sexual activity is regarded as healthy and a psycho-physical need, rather than as a marital duty, so most couples report having intercourse weekly or more often. But frequencies are lowest in the big cities, especially Shanghai, where one in seven couples is celibate (Liu et al., 1997). Among never-married Japanese people aged 18–34, two-thirds of men and half of all women are not in a relationship, an increase on previous years, and around one-quarter do not want any relationship (National Institute of Population, 2011), prompting media comment on why young Japanese have lost interest in sex. Any reduction in the frequency of sexual intercourse hits men harder than women, who are rarely distressed by celibacy (Meana, 2010).

The permanent sex difference in sexual interest and sexual exploration is shown also by sex differences that are substantially larger among homosexuals than among heterosexuals. Sex surveys show gay men (but not lesbians) to be much more active than heterosexual men, because the constraint of lesser female interest is removed. One indicator is the number of sexual partners in the last year, last five years, or ever. Among heterosexual men, numbers over a lifetime are typically in the range 10–11 compared to 17–35 for gay men. Maximum figures of 1000+ and 5000+ are reported for gay men vs 8–90 for lesbians (Leridon et al., 1998: Table 5.5; Messiah, 1998). American gay men report 200–300% more partners than lesbian women, and men are more likely than women to espouse the recreational-libertarian sexual ideology – 20% vs 14% (Laumann et al., 1994: 314–334). In the USA in the 1990s, promiscuity was a stronger differentiator than frequency of sexual encounters, but in other cultures (Japan, the Philippines, Brazil and Guatemala) the two are associated (McLelland, 2000; Whitam and Mathy, 1986).

The sexual deficit can affect men of any age. The largest numbers experiencing it seem to be in the prime-age group, roughly 30 to 50. Qualitative research and sex memoirs show that the problem is felt keenly, affecting behaviour and relationships among those who experience it (Arndt, 2009, 2010; Thomas, 2006). Among young men under 30, the desire for a variety of partners and sexual exploration looms as large as any absolute shortage of sexual activity (Anderson, 2012).

Sex drive and motivation

The broad results of the national surveys on sex differences in sexuality around the globe are corroborated by more detailed studies of the sex drive by Baumeister and other social psychologists (Baumeister, 2000, 2004; Baumeister and Twenge, 2002; Baumeister and Vohs, 2004, 2012; Baumeister et al., 2001; see also Schmitt, 2005). They show the differences are not due to socialization, the repression of female sexuality, or women's lesser sexual enjoyment, and may be due to the female sex drive being more plastic, malleable, responsive to social influences, whereas the male sex drive is less compliant (Baumeister, 2000, 2004).

Meta-analyses by Oliver and Hyde (1993) and Petersen and Hyde (2010) review 177 and 1586 studies respectively. Many of these were based on convenience samples of American college students, so the results have an undue concentration on young, unmarried white North Americans aged 14–30 years. The second analysis incorporates data for another 86 countries, covering Africa, the Middle East, East Asia and Latin America as well as Europe, Australia and New Zealand. Between them, the two analyses cover publications over the 40 years from 1966 to 2007 – the period following the contraceptive revolution of the 1960s. Analyses examine sex differences in attitudes to sexuality and self-reported behaviour. The authors discover no definite trends – sex differences in sexuality remain fairly constant across time, with the gap narrowing on some indicators and widening on others. Overall, the differences between men and women are small, with a few significant exceptions. Large and important differences between men and women persist in attitudes to casual sex, casual sex practice, pornography use and masturbation practice. Sexual desire or sexual interest are not studied directly, but these other measures reflect continuing differences in sex drive and motivation. Men are much more accepting of casual sex ($d = 0.81$) and endorse sexual permissiveness ($d = 0.57$) in 1993. By 2010, men's use of pornography has become more salient ($d = 0.63$ and 0.46), probably linked to masturbation practice. Although men and women have similar attitudes accepting masturbation as normal rather than deviant, there are large differences in actual practice (average $d = 0.96$ in 1993, 0.53 and 0.58 in 2010) among white people, and smaller differences among black Americans. Solo sex is of special importance as an indicator of sexual desire, because there are no financial costs and no partner is required, so it is an 'equal opportunity' practice.

Petersen and Hyde (2010) analyse the results of several national surveys in the USA and Britain, and note a close correspondence between survey findings and the results of social psychological studies reported in academic journals. More importantly, sex differences in sexuality are repeated across the various countries and cultural groups the authors cover, although they conclude that sex differences tend to be smaller in cultures where men and women have greater equality of social status.

Meana (2010) provides a valuable review of the clinical research on women's lack of sexual desire, and addresses the argument that female sexual response works differently from the dominant male model. She shows that the distinction proposed between (male) 'spontaneous' and (female) 'responsive' sexual arousal founders because all sexual desire occurs in response to stimuli (either internal or external). The idea of female sexuality being tied into relationships is contradicted by the decline in desire, frequency of intercourse and sexual satisfaction in both men and women over the course of a relationship, even among college students, and also by the fact that both men and women report fantasies of sex with a stranger. She concludes that discrepancies of sexual desire within relationships are the norm rather than the exception, generally due to the woman's lower interest in sexual activity, but that clinicians should not treat this as a sexual disorder since very few women are distressed by their lack of desire *per se* rather than worried about the impact on their relationships. The nationally representative data from sex surveys show this sexual imbalance to be a general pattern in all societies, even in Scandinavia – a social fact rather than a minority problem, confined to the self-selected group who resort to relationship and sex counsellors.

The male sexual deficit is most visible and largest in the heterosexual community, but may occur also in the gay community. Women's lesser sexual interest acts as a brake on male heterosexual activity, unless men are prepared to offer women financial and other inducements. This barrier is removed in the gay community, where men have substantially higher numbers of partners and, often, frequency of sexual activity in consequence – another robust finding of the sex surveys. Sexual adventure and sexual expression is facilitated by the greater acceptance of spontaneous and anonymous casual sex, assisted by social institutions such as gay bars and bathhouses (Weinberg and Williams, 1975). The main constraint on gay sexuality is the emphasis placed on physical appearance, good looks and sex appeal. Men who are old, fat, unfit, or otherwise not physically attractive have a restricted choice of sexual partners and may attract none at all (Green, 2008). Even in the gay community, men may experience sexual frustration. Lower sexual desire among lesbians is rarely problematic, and this group generally has sex less often than gay men or heterosexuals (Peplau, 2003). The 2002 Australian survey found gay men had an average of 80 partners compared to 17 for heterosexual men and 20 for lesbians, but in Europe lesbians report the lowest numbers of partners: 4 vs 12 for heterosexual women (Hubert et al., 1998: 180; Richters and Rissel, 2005).

Future trends

Several factors suggest that the male sex deficit will not disappear, and might even grow in the 21st century. First, surveys find a widening sex differential in desire in Finland (Kontula, 2009: 223, 225), and a decline in the frequency of sexual intercourse (inside and outside marriage) in Britain, the USA, Germany and Finland (Kontula, 2009: 236; Mercer et al., 2013) as well as Japan, which is known to have the lowest frequency of sexual intercourse in the developed world. Second, women's increasing economic independence allows them to withdraw from sexual markets and relationships that they perceive to offer unfair bargains, especially if they do not want children. Third, changes in national sex ratios towards a numerical surplus of men helps women to re-set the rules in their own favour in developed societies (South and Trent, 1988).

Changes in the sex ratio are an invisible macro-level factor affecting gender roles and couple relationships (Guttentag and Secord, 1983). The surplus of males in China and India is large and well known. However the absence of major wars that traditionally eliminated the 6% surplus of male births is slowly changing sex ratios in western countries as well. A fundamental change in the sex ratio was identified in the 1970s in Britain. Whereas the 1951 Census showed women to outnumber men from age 18 onwards, the 1971 Census showed that men outnumbered women up to age 40, and would outnumber women up to age 60 by 2011 (OPCS, 1978: 11). This report prompted discussion of the likely social consequences of the reversal of the sex ratio in the prime-age group, including: greater investment in careers and delayed marriage for women; the choice of (marital) partner passing over to women; the age gap between spouses narrowing as men cease to be able to attract much younger women; greater male investment in their own grooming and an attractive appearance; an increase in sexual activity outside marriage; and an increase in homosexuality among men. All these social consequences have materialized to some extent. An additional consequence must be a growing male sexual deficit.

However, international migration and other factors disrupt demographic trends; and as life expectancy increases, more females outlive males. Nonetheless, it appears that in some societies and age groups the female surplus is shrinking to give equal numbers, or a male surplus in adult populations. This would be a dramatic change in the sex ratio, with social consequences for mating and marriage markets, *inter alia* (Dyson, 2012).

The sex ratio is known to affect animal behaviour. Experimental studies also find effects on men's competition for mates, short-term thinking and willingness to invest resources in courtship (Dyson, 2012; Griskevicius et al., 2012; Székely and Székely, 2012; Weir et al., 2011). South and Trent (1988) found that the sex ratio affects women's social status in developed economies far more than in developing societies.⁶ The impact on social relationships and mating markets may be just as important. In China, policy-makers took it for granted that the surplus of males would result in more aggression from sex-starved unmarried men. The male surplus in China also contributed to the commercialization of sexuality and marriage markets: rising demand for commercial sexual services, bride kidnapping, mail-order brides from adjacent countries, marriage by purchase and compensated dating (Greenhalgh, 2012; see also Barber, 2000, 2003).

Implications of the sexual deficit among men

The sexual deficit among men is of theoretical and practical interest. It could be the root cause of patriarchal ideology and institutions that prioritize male activities and interests (Baumeister and Vohs, 2012; Hakim, 2011). It magnifies the value of women's erotic capital in private relationships, and potentially in the public sphere also (Hakim, 2011, 2012). It helps to explain why some behaviours are almost exclusively male, such as the purchase of commercial sexual services and erotic entertainments of all kinds. The surplus of male desire must affect daily interactions and relationships between men and women, to some extent, consciously or subconsciously, as some men admit.⁷ It helps to explain the everyday sexism of male sexual harassment of women even in the 21st century (Bates, 2014), rape, sexual coercion and violence against women, including during war (Jukes, 1993; Macdowall et al., 2013; Scully and Marolla, 1990). Sexual violence is about sex rather than power games. The sexual deficit helps explain why masturbation is increasingly important for men (Kontula, 2009: 236).

We can expect men to deny, hide or trivialize the sexual deficit. It is not in men's interest to let women know that they have any advantage that shifts the balance of power in private relationships in favour of women. As economists point out, the principle of least interest gives women an advantage in sexual markets. American academics argue that it would be unethical for women to exploit men's 'weakness' (Baumeister et al., 2001: 264). French scholars recognize the power it gives women (Bajos et al., 1998: 222–232). South and Trent (1988) point out that men use their structural power to prevent women exploiting any advantage from high sex ratios (masculinized populations with a shortage of women). Similarly, men use their power to prevent women exploiting the male sexual deficit – or even becoming aware of it. Feminist claims that men and women have 'equal' sex drives play into the hands of patriarchal men.

Commercial sexual services have existed in all societies with a coinage, whether they are treated as legitimate or not. An International Labour Office (ILO) study of the sex

industry, the largest such study ever undertaken, found that demand for erotic services grows as a country (or individual) becomes more affluent, so that overall demand is rising inexorably (Lim, 1998: 10, 73, 88–90, 106, 135, 210). The male sexual deficit explains why, in all societies, customers for the sex industry are men almost exclusively, and why demand is rising steadily. For example it doubled from 2% to 4% of men in Britain between 1990 and 2000 (Ward et al., 2005), and rose from 10% to 14% in Finland from 1992 to 1999 (Haavio-Mannila and Kontula, 2003: 127). Demand for such services from women is minuscule in all cultures, and this is not due to women's lack of economic resources. Even poor men find the money if necessary; even affluent women are rarely tempted (Hakim, 2011: 42–43; Kontula and Haavio-Mannila, 1995: 126; Lim, 1998: 210). The sex industry has always been highly stratified, with a diversity of services at all price levels, because male demand exists at all income levels. Men's ambivalence towards women working in the sexual entertainments industry may be because they exploit men's 'weakness' so effectively – women can earn 10–40 times more than in conventional jobs (Egan, 2006; Frank, 2002; Hakim, 2011: 158; Lim, 1998: 33–34, 45, 53–57, 88–90, 115, 155, 207). Male prostitutes do not feel stigmatized, like women; on the contrary, they regard their work as demonstrating their masculinity and power.

In sum, surplus male sexuality provides a parsimonious macro-level explanation for several puzzles concerning relationships between men and women, sexual politics, sexual violence and the universal character of commercial sexual services. Yet sociologists pay little attention to sexuality. Only evolutionary psychology offers a central focus on sexuality, sexual violence, sex ratios and sex differences in sexuality, as illustrated by sexual strategies theory and parental investment theory (Buss and Schmitt, 1993; Schmitt, 2005). However, even in this discipline the male sexual deficit escaped attention. Evolutionary psychology has been more concerned with speculative theorizing about the prehistoric origins of human sexuality – a period not open to modern social science research. Also, it relies on the assumption that sexuality, reproduction and parental investment are inextricably linked. In modern societies, most sexual activity is purely recreational; a large minority (over 20% in Britain and Germany) remain childfree; and some people reject marriage. It is not certain that reproductive concerns mould sexual behaviour and negotiations in modern societies (as Schmitt, 2005: 273 recognizes).⁸ In the modern context, social exchange theory and erotic capital theory provide a better basis for theory development and research on the social and economic relations of sexuality. The male sexual deficit fits in here as a key social fact that colours social interaction around sexuality, and gives women an important advantage.

Conclusions

History of ideas texts demonstrate the abundance of theorizing, stereotypes and myths surrounding sexuality (Mottier, 2008). The male sexual deficit in developed societies is an incontrovertible universal social fact, possibly of growing importance, yet is regarded as an outdated myth in radical feminist ideology and much public opinion. The public health orientation of many national sex surveys, the difficulty of identifying survey reports, language barriers, the paucity of cross-national comparative analyses, the unpredictable classification of these reports in library catalogues – all these factors ensure that

the findings of recent sex surveys remain unknown to many sociologists, to scholars in other disciplines, and even to sexuality specialists.

The sex deficit among (heterosexual) men helps to explain many puzzles, including why men are the principal customers for commercial sexual entertainments of all kinds, are most likely to have affairs, sometimes rape unwilling partners, offer other sexual violence against women, engage in sexual harassment in workplaces and public places, and respond poorly to having female colleagues in teamwork occupations such as the police or armed forces.⁹ (A scientific explanation for sexual violence does not constitute a moral justification, of course.) It offers a new theoretical perspective on the sexual segregation of occupations, sexual violence and sexual politics. It warrants more attention in social science research.

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Notes

1. This may be changing. The American Sociological Association chose Sexuality as the theme for their 2015 annual conference.
2. Sexuality cannot be entirely socially constructed. Hunger, like sexual desire, is a basic human need, despite the infinite social variation in national cuisines and the etiquette surrounding meals. Similarly, variations in sexual cultures and etiquette do not deny the universal reality of sexual desire as a powerful human motivator, as Berger and Luckmann (1972) recognized.
3. Sexologists have observed baby girls who have learned to masturbate by four months of age. Sex surveys and qualitative studies find people who report having learned to masturbate by the age of four (Fennell in Zetterberg, 2002 [1969]; Lewin, 2000). Solo sex often develops independently of any socialization process.
4. Udry (1993: Table 6.1) found a steady increase in the frequency of marital intercourse among women aged 20–45 years from 6.9 times a month in 1965 to 9.5 by 1974 in the USA. He found frequencies ranged from 6.42 for Thailand and 8.3 for Japan to 10.03 for Belgium.
5. Surveys variously ask about sexual desire, sexual interest and sexual motivation – in effect the motivation to engage in sexual activity. Kontula (2009: 36) identifies 12 measures of sexual desire: thoughts, fantasies and spontaneous arousal; desired frequency of sex; desired number of sexual partners; masturbation; continuous willingness to engage in sex; emergence of sexual desire in youth; seeking out experiences and initiating them; desiring a variety of experiences; investing resources for sex; attitudes favourable to sexuality; infrequent absence of sexual desire; self-assessed degree of desire. The medical orientation of many sex surveys means that sexual desire attracts uneven coverage in terms of questions asked and analyses.
6. Several studies show sex differences to be greater in developed societies than in developing economies. Paradoxically, the more egalitarian a society, the more genetic factors differentiate people (Hakim, 2013; Schmitt et al., 2008).

7. Jon Snow, a famous and attractive British TV presenter of mature years, told an interviewer that when a man meets a woman for the first time, 'Sex comes into every evaluation of a woman ... It's there. Once you have established a friendship or a working relationship with a woman, it's parked ... It's a delicious thing ... "what might have been?" or "what could be?"' (Edwardes, 2014). See also Thomas (2006).
8. The distinction between recreational and reproductive sex is different from the distinction between long-term and short-term mating used by evolutionary psychologists. In modern societies, both types may occur (at different times) in the same relationship.
9. This explanation is more parsimonious than those offered by feminists who impute a *collective* male motivation to demean, control and subordinate women to male power in all sexual encounters. See for example Brownmiller (1975), Pateman (1988) and Walby (1990).

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Author biography

Catherine Hakim is Professorial Research Fellow with Civitas, a London think tank. While at the London School of Economics she developed a theory of Erotic Capital. She has published over 100 journal articles, several textbooks and monographs. See www.catherinehakim.org

Résumé

En raison de la peur du sida, les enquêtes représentatives au niveau national sur les mentalités et les comportements sexuels se sont multipliées à partir des années 90 dans le monde entier, mais continuent à être négligées par les sociologues. En analysant les résultats de quelque 30 enquêtes sur la sexualité réalisées dans différents pays, cet article montre que de fortes disparités entre hommes et femmes perdurent au XXI^e siècle en matière de centralité de la sexualité, de désir sexuel, de mentalités et de comportements sexuels, et ce longtemps après la révolution contraceptive et sexuelle des années 60. La moindre motivation et le moindre intérêt des femmes en matière de sexualité ont pour conséquence que beaucoup d'hommes hétérosexuels ressentent un manque par rapport à l'activité sexuelle désirée. Le renversement du sex-ratio qui a conduit à un surplus d'individus mâles parmi les jeunes adultes ainsi que d'autres évolutions portent à croire que le déficit sexuel risque d'augmenter parmi la population masculine. Le déficit sexuel des hommes (ou sexualité masculine excédentaire) permet de mieux comprendre des phénomènes comme le harcèlement sexuel, la violence sexuelle, le viol, la demande croissante de services sexuels marchands et d'autres comportements presque exclusivement masculins.

Mots-clés

Enquêtes, harcèlement sexuel, mariage, mentalités, sexualité

Resumen

Como consecuencia del miedo al SIDA, a partir de los años 1990, proliferaron por todo el mundo las encuestas representativas de ámbito nacional sobre comportamientos y actitudes sexuales pero todavía siguen siendo pasadas por alto por los sociólogos. Este artículo revisa los hallazgos de 30 encuestas sobre sexo en todo el mundo que muestran que, en el siglo XXI, mucho después de los anticonceptivos y las revoluciones sexuales de los años 1960, persisten grandes diferencias sustantivas entre hombres y mujeres en cuanto a la centralidad de la sexualidad, el deseo sexual,

el comportamiento sexual y las actitudes. La menor motivación e interés sexual de las mujeres significa que muchos hombres heterosexuales experimentan un déficit en la actividad sexual deseada. Una inversión en la proporción de sexos hacia un superávit de hombres entre los adultos jóvenes y otras tendencias sugieren que el déficit sexual entre los hombres puede aumentar. El déficit sexual masculino (o el superávit de sexualidad masculina) ayuda a explicar el acoso sexual, la violencia sexual, la violación, la creciente demanda de servicios sexuales comerciales y otros comportamientos que son casi exclusivamente masculinos.

Palabras clave

Acoso sexual, actitudes, encuestas, matrimonio, sexualidad