



Masturbation and Steady Relationships in Three Generations

Dipl.-Soz. Arne M. Dekker, Ute Meyerhof

1. Purpose and Method

1.1 Purpose

In 2002 the Institute for Sex Research at Hamburg University and the Center for Partner and Sex Research Leipzig* carried out a computer-assisted interview-study (CAPI) to explore sexual behavior and relationship histories of 30-, 45- and 60-year old men and women. In this paper, the data collected in that study will be analyzed with respect to:

- (1) Changes in early masturbatory experiences
- (2) Masturbation within steady relationships.

2. Changes in Early Masturbatory Experiences

2.1 Age at First Masturbation (Accumulative Incidence, %)



About 90% of men have masturbated by the age of 16, irrespective of the cohort. Significant changes, however, are indicated by the female data. Younger women began to masturbate markedly earlier. Another interesting aspect is the ongoing increase in masturbatory experience among women born in 1942.

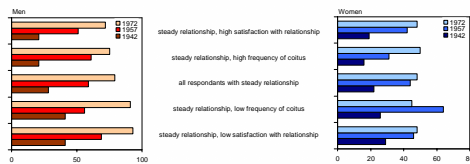
3. Masturbation in Steady Relationships

3.1 Incidence of Masturbation in Past 4 Weeks by State of Relationship (%)



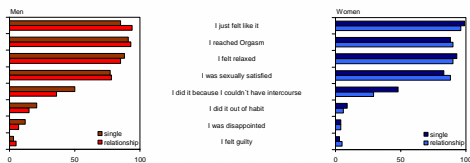
Single men of all cohorts masturbate consistently often, the same holds true for the younger single women. For both men and women the incidence of masturbation in steady relationships is remarkably high in the younger cohorts.

3.3 Incidence of Masturbation in Past 4 Weeks for Different Groups (%)



Masturbation frequencies do not considerably differ with respect to the frequency of coitus and the satisfaction within the steady relationship. At different levels this holds true for all three cohorts.

3.5 Description of Last Masturbation by State of Relationship (%)*



The emotional experience of the last masturbation shows only small differences between men and women living in a steady relationship and those having no relationship. Singles more often justify masturbation with lack of partnersex.

1.2 Sample

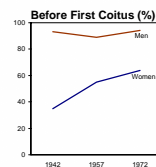
	Men		Women		Total
	Hamburg	Leipzig	Hamburg	Leipzig	
1972	76	47	84	56	263
1957	58	51	80	66	255
1942	73	52	78	55	258
Total	207	150	242	177	776

Data were collected in Hamburg and Leipzig, thus representing bot East- and West-German Cities. The sample consists of 776 men and women from the cohorts 1942, 1957 and 1972.

2.2 First Masturbation

Before Age of 20 (%)	Men	Women	Phi
Kinsey*	90	28	.65
1942	95	33	.64
1957	96	65	.38
1972	98	74	.33

*Goldman & Johnson (1979)



The increase in early female masturbatory behavior has narrowed the gender difference in this respect: The correlation between gender and masturbation has considerably decreased. Also, younger women more often have masturbated by the time of their first coitus – a pattern that used to be typically male.

3.2 Proportion of Masturbation and Sex in Steady Relationships (HH in%)



Of all sexual acts that have occurred within four weeks a significant proportion was masturbatory, especially for the younger respondents. This again points to an increased relevance of masturbation in steady relationships.

3.4 Attitude towards Masturbation in Steady Relationships (%)*

	Men			Women		
	1942	1957	1972	1942	1957	1972
„Masturbation should not occur“	20	6	3	20	7	4
„Masturbation should only be a substitute“	44	26	16	43	27	18
„Masturbation is a form of sex in its own right“	36	68	81	36	66	78

* Only respondents living in a steady relationship

The attitude towards masturbation has changed remarkably: Respondents born in 1972 are much more likely to state that masturbation is a form of sex in its own right and therefore does not interfere with partnersex, while those born in 1942 tend to think that masturbation should be practiced as a substitute at most.

4. Conclusion

There have been remarkable differences in masturbatory behaviour between the three cohorts.

- (1) The younger women started to masturbate earlier, usually before their first heterosexual intercourse, thus adapting a pattern that used to be typically male.
- (2) Masturbation has a new meaning, especially for the youngest cohort. It now peacefully coexists with sexuality in steady relationships.

The study can partly verify findings from an earlier survey among German students. Among the younger respondents masturbation is regarded as a freely available and selfdetermined form of sex, which is no longer only tolerated as a substitute for when no sexual partner is available. It has lost its compensatory character and now exists for many men and women as an autonomous means of gaining sexual satisfaction, irrespective of the state of relationship.

* Team Hamburg: Dipl.-Soz. Arne Dekker, Dipl.-Psych. Margret Hauch, Dipl.-Soz. Silja Mathiesen, Ute Meyerhof, Prof. Dr. Gunter Schmidt, Johannes von Stitzky; Team Leipzig: Prof. Dr. Kurt Biele, Dr. Ute Starke. The survey was funded by Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG)