“Sexual pleasure on equal terms”: Young women’s sexual situations

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WHICH FACTORS INFLUENCE?

Central nervous system
Hormones
Emotions
Cultural conceptions
Relationship
Sexual experience
Physiological process
Anatomical structures
Cognitions
Gender norms
Social context

Pain during vaginal intercourse
The cause of pain during vaginal intercourse is likely to be multifactorial, with physical as well as psychosocial components
Women who continue to have vaginal intercourse despite pain run an increased risk of developing a chronic pain problem associated with vaginal intercourse.


Striving to be affirmed in their image of an ideal woman

- being willing to have sexual intercourse
- being perceptive of their partner’s sexual needs
- being able to satisfy the partner

Qual.Interviews 16♀ 14-20 years, with pain during vaginal i.c. Youth center

"...a guy should like to have sex often in a way, and I think many guys are like that and...I think when you are a girl that you don’t want to go against it, because then you are not a good girlfriend, you don’t want to refuse too often, or you never want to refuse at all…”


"...but this feeling of not being a good enough girlfriend, and not being a good woman at all in a way. It feels like, that you are less good than someone else. It is difficult to explain though, that you are not capable of something you should manage …”

14-20 years, with pain during vaginal i.c.
Youth center

Elmerstig et al. PRIORITIZING THE PARTNER’S ENJOYMENT
A population-based study on young Swedish women with experience of pain during vaginal intercourse. 2013 In press. Journal of Psychosomatic Obstetrics & Gynecology

47% continued to have vaginal i.e. despite pain

41% “Did not want to spoil sex for partner”
39% “Did not want to hurt the partner”

“The body… like breathe hard or feign enjoyment…”

They feigned enjoyment to protect the partner from feeling foolish, inadequate or offended

They considered their own experience of pain insignificant compared with the partner’s sexual pleasure

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Continuing to have vaginal intercourse despite pain was associated with feelings of being inferior to the partner during sex, dissatisfaction with their own sex lives, and feigning enjoyment while having pain.

"Inadequate woman/sexual partner"

Inadequate woman/sexual partner

Adequate woman/sexual partner

TWO POSITIONS


- Qualitative interviews
- 14 women aged 14-20 years
- Youth centers

Can you tell me...

Yeah, when I...

It is relevant for professionals working with young women such as physicians, psychologists, social workers and midwives to highlight the importance of young women’s own satisfaction and discuss other sexual activities than vaginal intercourse which are less likely to cause pain.

AIM

To identify young women’s ideal images of sexual situations and expectations on themselves in sexual situations

RESULTS

The women’s ideal sexual situation in heterosexual practice was characterized by sexual pleasure on equal terms, where no one dominates and both partners get pleasure.
Social Norms and Demands

- Described as expectations of what a woman should be like, i.e. the unequal gendered societal norms of the obliging woman who is always willing to satisfy everyone.

Sexual Pleasure on Equal Terms

- "...from porn movies and everything, that you should be in a special way as a girl, that you are inferior in a way. That it is the woman’s task to satisfy the man, and the woman gets nothing back, in a way... It is that image you get in the society, it is impressed in one’s mind. It is like that on the whole, the male-dominated society is everywhere, and that image is there also, the whole world... everywhere... on companies, in family life, everywhere. It is an image you learn from when you are young... you take part in those roles, that a man is more worth... than a woman..."

Partner’s Own Run

- Based on their own experiences or on what they learnt from peer groups.
- A partner who were totally focused on themselves and their own pleasure, without taking notice of the female partner’s wishes or needs.

When you feel as if being used in a way. You feel that you are not allowed to bring anything by yourself; you just became, yes a hole. You are just lying there and don’t supply anything by yourself. The guy just doing his own run, when you feel as cheap and used... Yes, you have no say or, he doesn’t care. You could have a plastic bag over the head and he won’t even notice it, he just doesn’t think about who he has sex with. You feel as being used. You don’t do resistance, or you don’t say no, but still it feels as the guy doesn’t care with whom he has sex, it’s just someone he can have sex with, you happen to be that girl..."
A conflict inside the women

Being critically aware of social norms and demands, the women wanted to both resist their impact and stick to their wish for sexual pleasure on equal terms. Still they needed to feel appreciated as women and partners in their cultural context.

How do these expectations influence sexual response, such as desire, arousal and possibilities to have orgasm?

“A well of pleasure

- They enjoy the sensual pleasure of being touched and feel it pleasurable to be themselves without the demand of fulfilling someone’s expectations

“The sexual thing stands above, because it becomes even more... it is sort of both caress and closeness, and everything. It becomes so greatly, closeness, you strike each other gently, he is inside you. Someone comes inside you... it is almost like someone listening to you...”
Women at a non-conscious level associated sex with submission and not with dominance.


This sex-submission association affected the women’s sexual functioning negatively. Associating sex with submission predicted reduced subjective ability to become aroused, and reduced ability to achieve orgasm.


Promote sexual and reproductive health

- Gender equality in different areas is improving—but in a sexual situation it is possible that you are more vulnerable
- To increase knowledge-empowerment
- Point out the influence of stereotyped gender norms for example in various forms of media
- Promote autonomy
- Anatomy, Physiological-Psycho-social aspects

THANK YOU FOR LISTENING!

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