

# New Insights Into Female Sexual Desire Disorders

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Disclosures - nil



## Outline

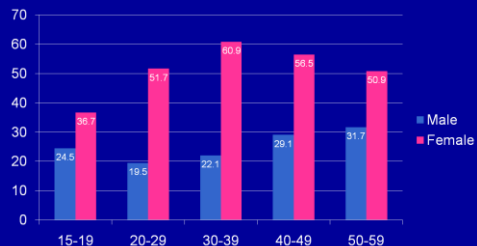
- Prevalence of 'desire disorders' in women
- Libido and limerence
- Unrealistic Sexexpectations – impact of the media
- DSM-V Female Sexual Interest/Arousal Disorder
- New insights into female sexual function

## Sexual desire disorders - common in women

- Most commonly reported sexual complaint in women
- Estimates vary – review of 11 reliable prevalence studies  
**Female desire difficulty – average 64%<sup>1</sup>**
- Australian study of women aged 16 to 59 years  
**Average of 55% of women** lacked interest in sex for at least one month in the past year (cf 25% of men)<sup>2</sup>

1. Hayes RD, Bennett CM, Farley CK, et al. What can prevalence studies tell us about female sexual difficulty and dysfunction? J Sex Med 2006;3:589-95.  
2. Richters J, Rissel C. Australian Study of Sexual Health and Relationships. Doing it down under. 2005. Allen and Unwin.

## Age distribution – lack of sexual interest

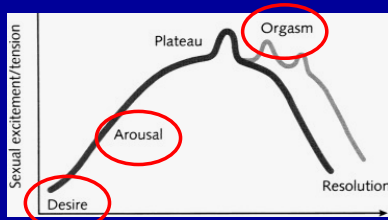


Richters J, Rissel C. Australian Study of Sexual Health and Relationships. Doing it down under. 2005. Allen and Unwin.

## The big question...

- If over half the female population have a problem with low sexual desire how can it possibly be a disorder?
- Is it perhaps 'normal' for many women **not** to feel lashings of lust in long term relationships?

## The traditional model of female sexual response – 1, 2, 3 model



Initial spontaneous desire

- The traditional model of female sexual response has created a widely held social construct:

Initial spontaneous desire/horniness/libido is the norm for both genders

- If you don't experience 'lust' you must be dysfunctional

## Unrealistic 'sexpectations'

- Both men and women believe that to be 'normal' it is essential to feel spontaneous lust, horniness, libido preferably frothing at the mouth wanting sex 24 hours a day 7 days a week regardless of the circumstances
- When men and women don't make the grade, they feel abnormal and dysfunctional and may seek help most commonly at the urging of their frustrated higher drive partner

## Hot to trot in the beginning...

- Both genders are misled by the intense levels of sexual desire experienced in the early passionate phase of romantic relationships

## Limerence phase

- Can you remember when you first fell in love?
  - Romantic and exciting
  - Passionate and euphoric
  - Boundless energy and sleep less
  - Decreased appetite and weight loss
  - Increased sexual desire
- Honeymoon period or 'limerence'

## Limerence: brain is pumped up on 'love drugs'

- Dramatic increase in stimulating neurochemicals in the brain
  - Dopamine
  - Noradrenaline
  - Phenyl ethylamine
- Results in constant state of emotional excitation and sexual passion
- Typically heightened initial spontaneous sexual desire in women
- Desire discrepancy is rare during limerence



## Limerence is temporary



After 6 – 12 months (up to 3 years maximum) couples move from the infatuation to the attachment phase

## From the sexy stiletto phase...



## Comfy slipper phase



## After limerence fades...

- Excitement and novelty wear off
- Female initial spontaneous sexual desire often fades at this point



When women seek treatment for low libido what do they and their partners generally want/expect?

- To be 'normal' again... just like it was during limerence



- To re-experience sustained initial spontaneous desire

## Can you get limerence back?



## The media doesn't help



## Media model of sex

The fantasy man



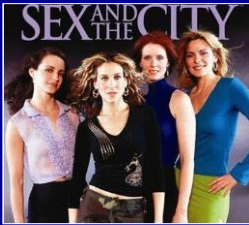
The fantasy woman



Both have bucket loads of initial spontaneous desire

## Media role models

Women's ideas about 'normal' female sexuality typically come from the media



## Women's Magazines



## Internet pornography



## Romance novels in years gone by



## Today's romance novels



No wonder women's expectations of desire are often totally unrealistic



"How come we never collide with the burning heat of a thousand fires?"

To many men and women 'normal' female desire means...



## After limerence fades

- Many women will never again feel sustained, initial, spontaneous desire for sex or feel enough sexual urge to initiate sex
- Need for education for both men and women – men are also exposed to these unhelpful and misleading influences

## Women are brainwashed

- Women take in the media's messages about sex and when they fail to meet their own or their partners' unrealistic expectations they feel inadequate and broken
- Women often diagnose sexual dysfunction when none exists

## The DSM grapples with low desire

- First official recognition of desire disorder: DSM-III 1980 labeled the low sexual desire in women '**Inhibited Sexual Desire**' (ISD)
- DSM-III-R 1987 introduced the term '**Hypoactive Sexual Desire Disorder**' (HSDD)
- Further minor refinements in DSM-III-R, DSM-IV and the DSM-IV-TR (2000)

## DSM IV-TR 2000

- Female hypoactive sexual desire disorder
- Female sexual arousal disorder
- Female orgasmic disorder
- Dyspareunia
- Vaginismus

## DSM V 2013 Female sexual disorders

- **Female sexual interest/arousal disorder**  
Combination of desire and arousal under one disorder is controversial
- Female orgasmic disorder
- Genitopelvic pain/penetration disorder

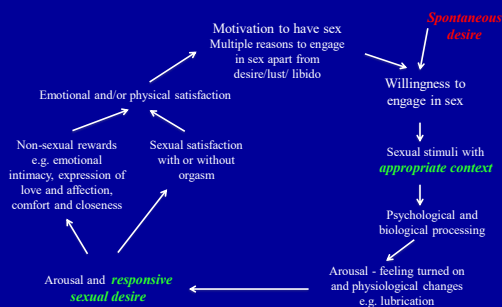
## DSM V definition - 2013 Female sexual interest/arousal disorder

- Absent or reduced (**initial spontaneous desire**)
  - interest in sexual activity
  - erotic thoughts or fantasies
  - initiation of sexual activity
- AND/OR
- Absent or reduced (**responsive desire**)
  - responsiveness (sexual interest or arousal) to sexual cues such as partner's initiation attempts resulting in persistent or recurring inability to attain or maintain sufficient sexual excitement or pleasure during most sexual activity
  - pleasurable genital or non-genital sensations during sexual activity

We need a new version of female sexual response cycle



## Basson circular model of female sexual response

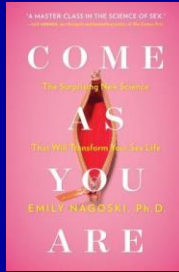


Adapted from Basson R, J Sex Marital Ther 2001;27:33-43

This revised model recognises a new view of female sexual desire

- 1) **Initial spontaneous desire** – desire **before** arousal
  - Sex drive / urge
  - Sexual interest
  - Lust / libido
  - Horniness
- 2) **Responsive desire** – desire arising **concurrently** with arousal after erotic activity has commenced
  - Sexual receptivity
  - Willingness to engage in sex
  - Sexual responsiveness
- 3) **The importance of context** for female sexual response

## Emily Nagoski's *Come as you are*



## New insights into female sexual function

- The majority of men and women experience **initial spontaneous desire** during limerence – desire discrepancy is rare
- About 75% of men continue to experience initial spontaneous sexual desire in long term relationships – men have 10-15x more T
- After the 'honeymoon' stage of relationships fades around 85% of women will seldom or never again
  - feel initial spontaneous desire for sex
  - feel enough sexual drive to trigger initiation of sex with a partner

**This is normal**

Emily Nagoski: *Come as you are*, Simon & Schuster, March 2015

## New insights into female sexual function

- Although many women may not experience initial spontaneous desire, once they become sexually stimulated in an erotic context many women without “lust” will experience **arousal and pleasure along with desire to continue with sexual activity** and this is '**responsive desire**'
- For women to be willing to engage in sex in the absence of spontaneous desire an erotic (sexually relevant) context is crucial – context is generally less important to men
- Depending on the context women will experience initial spontaneous desire, responsive desire or no desire – this is '**contextual desire**'

## What's the difference?

**"Initial spontaneous desire" - 15% of women**

- Spontaneous sexual desire may be triggered by an internal thought: a memory of a sexy encounter, a private fantasy or positive thoughts about partner
- Spontaneous sexual desire may arise out of an external trigger: seeing or speaking with an attractive person, feeling a nice sensation, even hearing a great song can create sexual desire\*

## Initial spontaneous desire



## Responsive desire

- For many women, sexual desire doesn't start until after some kind of sexual initiation/stimulation has begun and they are already in the midst of an erotic act





## What's the difference?

"Responsive desire" – 30% of women\*



- Responsive desire happens when you are willing to receive pleasurable stimulation and let that pleasure trigger the yearning for more stimulation and pleasure
- Once arousal begins there is a **desire to keep going**

## The other 55% of women???

"Contextual desire"- 55% of women

Whether these women experience

- Spontaneous desire and arousal
  - Responsive desire and arousal
  - No desire or arousal
- depends on the **context...**

Husband offers wife a holiday...

"I hope it's a 5 star resort."



## Fundamentally all desire is contextual

- Desire might feel spontaneous
  - while she is falling in love
  - when they're trying to make a baby
  - after a romantic date night and a glass or two of wine
  - when they're on a sexy vacation
- Desire might feel responsive
  - five years into the marriage
  - a year after the birth of the baby
- Neither desire nor arousal if the context is poor
  - Due to the stressful demanding lifestyle that makes her need the 5 star vacation in the first place!

## Many women need an erotic context to be willing to have sex

- Levine (2002) defined desire as the "sum of forces that incline us toward and away from sexual behavior."
- He is talking here about factors that either contribute to an erotic context (accelerators) or detract from it (brakes)
- The more intense the erotic context the more willing a woman will be to have sex



## What constitutes an erotic context?



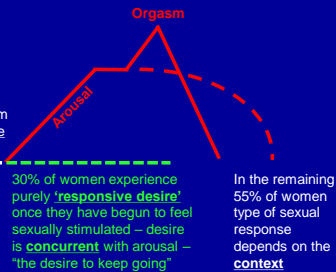
## Variations in female desire

- **Initial spontaneous desire:** desire and arousal both present – 15% of women (vs 75% men)
- **Responsive desire:** inconsistent desire but reliable arousal – 30% of women (vs 5% men)
- **Context dependent:** sometimes desire and/or arousal or neither depending on the circumstances – 55% of women (vs 20% men)
- **Sexual interest/arousal disorder:** rarely or never any desire or arousal/pleasure

Emily Nagoski: *Come as you are*, Simon & Schuster, March 2015

## Understanding female sexual desire

About 15% of women experience purely **initial spontaneous desire** in the long term – desire comes before arousal



<http://www.thedirtynormal.com/blog/2014/06/16/i-draw-this-graph-about-sexual-desire-and-i-think-it-might-change-your-life/>

## She says she lacks desire - does she have FSIAD? Ask her about arousal

- You say you do not desire sex but...
  - Do you find once you start erotic activity that most of the time you can
    - get aroused/ turned on and
    - experience pleasurable sensations in your body and/or genitals?

*(How often do you have an orgasm during partner sexual activity?)*

- *only 29% of women have an orgasm every time they have sex with a partner*
- *30% of women do not climax during partner sex)*

Sexual dysfunction in the United States: prevalence and predictors. *Laumann EO, Paik A, Rosen RC - JAMA. 1999 Feb 10; 281(6):537-44*

## Does she have FSIAD?

- She has no desire for sex but on most occasions in an erotic context she experiences
  - subjective arousal (erotic and sensual pleasure, excitement, feeling turned on and sexually stimulated)
  - objective arousal with vasocongestion, lubrication and pleasurable genital sensations
- She does not have FSIAD - she has responsive desire

## To sum up

- FSIAD is the inability to experience initial spontaneous or responsive desire and sexual arousal **in an appropriate erotic context**
- It is absolutely normal to experience only one type of desire or the other... or both... or none depending on the context
- If a woman doesn't crave sex but most of the time she can get aroused and enjoy sex once she "gets going" she does not have a sexual dysfunction
- If a woman only feels desire/arousal in certain specific sex-positive contexts then she does not have a sexual dysfunction

Emily Nagoski's *Come as you are*

