

The most sexually satisfied age group are...

the 18 to 24-year-olds; 76% of these women told us they were satisfied with their sex life. But they aren't having the most orgasms: that accolade goes to women aged 45 to 54, 54% of whom told us they orgasm every time or most of the time.

Q. Are you satisfied with your sex life? 61% of women said YES!

1 in 5

women admit they're too exhausted to have the sex life they want

'Organising sex feels like another bit of domestic labour that's fallen to me'

The stress of trying to conceive affects women far more than men (30% of 25 to 34-year-old women and just 18% of men). For chartered legal executive Lydia Williams*, 36, the 'intimate labour' that comes with conception sex goes some way towards explaining why.

'Sex with my husband used to mean lust. We didn't have a schedule; one of us would initiate it if we were tipsy after Friday-night drinks or if the mood struck following a gym session. On the flip side, sometimes we'd go for weeks without sex, maybe even months if work was

flat-out, and that was fine. Sex was spontaneous, laid-back and pressure-free.

We've been trying to start a family for nine months now (the irony isn't lost on me) and the mood is one of obligation. I'm the one tracking my ovulation, my temperature and supposedly fertile windows. Calculations and timetables fall to me, along with the guilt – like the time I forced my partner to come home early from a work trip in Paris because I was ovulating.

It's reached the point where, during sex, I'm not really present – I'm in my head. Even though we both feel the physical and emotional exhaustion of all it, organising sex feels like another bit of domestic labour that's fallen to me, then a work task I'm getting evaluated on, while he gets another orgasm.'



Missing: the female orgasm 15% of women climax 'rarely' or 'never' during partnered sex

Closing the orgasm gap



While sexual satisfaction is high, when it comes to that big finish, we found a collective feeling of: oh. Only 19% of women in heterosexual relationships orgasm every time, compared with 39% of men, with younger women missing out most – a quarter of 18 to 24-year-old women climax 'rarely' or 'never'. While sexologist Madalaine Munro commends the fact that most people now know what the orgasm gap is, she blames on-screen antics for stalling progress in closing it – both porn's aggression-masquerading-as-intimacy (found in 88.2% of clips, said one study), plus TV sex, which skews the ease of the female orgasm so you feel like the only one not coming at the drop of a tongue.

'I wish I could reassure all women that there's nothing wrong if you're struggling to orgasm, and if you don't know what type of intimacy may support your orgasm,' says Munro, who recommends a self-pleasure practice, where you pay attention to what strokes and pressure feel good, how lube or oil enhances that, and if music and scent relax you. 'But to receive the pleasure you want in partnered sex, you must also stop enduring the touch you don't want,' she insists. Which means calling time on that loathed move, even if your partner's been doing it for years. Try helpful phrases such as 'This isn't what I had in mind, can we try something different?', 'I'm in my head, can we pause', or well-directed praise – 'I love it when you touch me like *this*.' More feel-good news is that when we expanded the survey criteria from orgasming 'every time' to 'most of the time', 51% of you said yes-yes-yes.

Body image blues

Feeling negatively about our bodies is the biggest barrier to women having the sex life we want, in all age groups.

51%

of women are comfortable asking for the kind of sex they want. The figure is almost 60% among 35 to 44-year-olds and WH readers.

'The way I felt about my body held me back'

Low body confidence affects the sex lives of almost half of 18 to 24-year-old women, but the issue improves with age. Gillian Myhill, 43, a tech co-founder from Sydney who lives in London, shares the tools in her sexual confidence kit.

'Having small breasts has always been a confidence issue for me, especially when I was younger. During adolescence, I was constantly waiting for them to grow and I was preoccupied with their size well into my thirties, in a way that meant I struggled to enjoy myself sexually.

I felt insecure about my shape, like I wasn't feminine, and there were times when I kept my bra or clothes on during sex to avoid feeling exposed. I even considered surgery. I've never been shy about the act of sex, but it felt hard to accept myself when it came to sex and intimacy.

The biggest lesson in getting older is that no one cares. It's not the shape or size of your

breasts that draws people to you; and it's not the number on the scales, nor the colour of your hair or skin. People just want to connect with you as a person.

These days, I'm much more aware of my low-confidence triggers: bloating, bad skin and hormones have a powerful effect on my appearance and my emotions, which then directly influences my body image.

On those down days, I'm far more gentle with myself. I also masturbate frequently, because it reminds me that I'm a sexual and desirable person.

Affirmations feed into my feelings about my body, too ('I have a good life, good health, and good friends who are there to support me when I need them'), making me feel better at 43 than I ever did at 20. I now feel sexually driven, not sexually judged. I've even felt confident enough to attend a sex party.' ➔

32% of single women have 'no interest' in dating, compared with just **12%** of men

1 in 10 women have had sex with more than one person at the same time.

57%

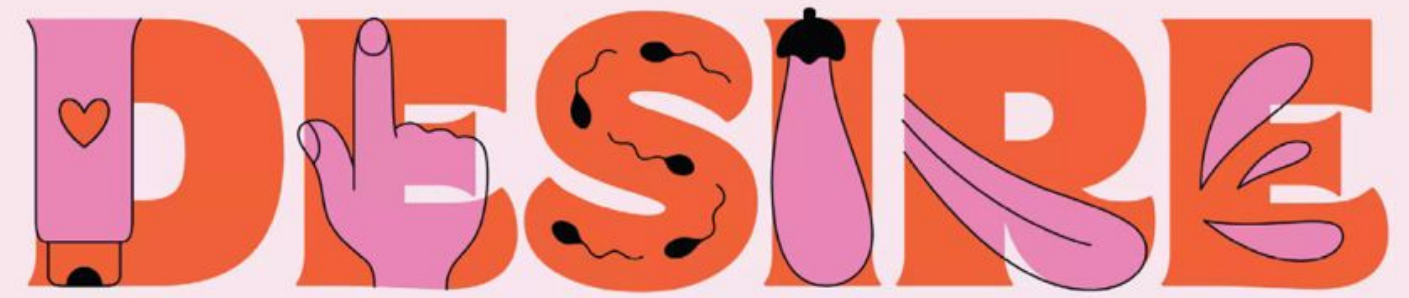
Of the singles we polled, the age group most interested in meeting someone new were those aged 55 to 64. Almost three out of five of these women said they were open to the prospect.

Q. Can a relationship ever fully recover from infidelity?
24% of women said yes, versus a more optimistic **42%** of men

Reconsidering monogamy

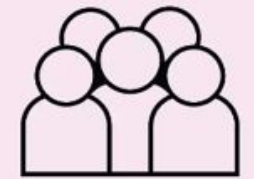
While only 7% of women have been in a consensual non-monogamous (CNM) relationship, 14% would be open to one; this figure rises to almost a quarter of women aged 25 to 35 (24%) and a similar number of *WH* readers (23%). This breakaway from the default of long-term monogamy is due to two factors, says Dedeker Winston, co-host of the *Multiamory* podcast and author of *Multiamory: Essential Tools For Modern Relationships*. 'A decade of visibility of queer relationships since the legalisation of gay marriage [in 2014 in Great Britain] has coincided with young people questioning whether dominant structures are really working, such as mental healthcare, election cycles, corporate behaviours and, now, relationships.' Winston finds men are slightly more open to CNM due to 'positive-seeming patriarchal polygamy' – essentially, the idea of a man surrounded by wives or in threesomes with two women. But women may be more likely to initiate CNM, as studies suggest that female desire wanes the longer monogamy lasts (unlike men's). While Winston praises the excitement of custom-making a relationship, she has one caveat. 'Most people think that more than one partner means non-commitment or screwing around, but non-monogamy requires a high degree of commitment – to care for all partners, create safety and be able to communicate about uncomfortable feelings such as jealousy, envy or loneliness.'

As the cost of living crisis makes it harder for couples to split up for financial reasons alone, and apps such as Feeld facilitate connecting the sexually like-minded, some experts believe that creative relationships could become increasingly mainstream, such as coupling to start a family while continuing to pursue personal sexual interests outside the arrangement.



Q. Would you feel comfortable seeking support from a sex and relationships professional?

The jury's out on this one. While almost 30% of women said they would feel comfortable, 35% said they wouldn't.



1 in 10
The number who told us they'd be open to a sex club, sex party or a group sexual experience



of women enjoy using sex toys, rising to just over half of those aged 18 to 34 and *WH* readers.

Porn in a post #MeToo world

Predictably, women watch less porn than men: only 17% of women said they like porn and feel no guilt using it, versus 40% of men. But it's not necessarily the viewing stats that are intriguing, it's the guilt. Our survey found that younger women are more likely to feel bad about X-rated viewing, with guilt peaking among those aged 18 to 25. While Ness Cooper, a clinical sexologist at the luxury sex toy retailer Je Joue, believes #MeToo may play a part in this unease. With much material still having a skewed portrayal of consent, guilt is usually a hang-up of watching something you're not 'supposed' to like. 'Porn

is still seen as an erotic tool for men, so heteronormative cultural expectations influence women to look for porn they think male partners would enjoy above what they actually enjoy,' she says. A study by behavioural neuroscientist Katherine Goldey found that when women had free reign over their porn choice, they felt more arousal and enjoyment – but also more disgust, guilt and embarrassment – than when researchers assigned erotica to them. 'Guilt is almost like an emotional tax for liking something that might go against social and moral structures,' says Cooper, adding that it's normal to enjoy porn as well as sex, and for the fantasies in each to be different. If it's the way porn's created that leaves you feeling bad, try ethical platforms such as Erika Lust, Frolic Me and Make Love Not Porn. [WH](#)

*NAME CHANGED. SOURCE: VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN