

The Normality of Sexual Fantasies

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Do you ever picture yourself in a hot tub surrounded with lit candles and through the door walks in the most gorgeous person that you have ever seen and they're butt naked? Or have you ever wished that those pants would fall off of that gorgeous person in front of you? Have you ever imagined yourself as an irresistible sex god whom could overtake the world with their superb sexual manner? Sexual fantasies are a normal, integral part of the daily lives of every man and woman.

Sexual fantasies are defined as, "any erotic or sexually arousing mental imagery that a person has while awake. It can be an elaborate story, or it can be a fleeting thought of some sexual activity" (Hicks and Leitenberg, 2001). Sexual fantasies are free from outside criticism, embarrassment, and/or scrutiny. They allow one to escape from their repressive sexual desires and allows for experiences to be had through imagery rather than through taboo societal actions. Types of sexual fantasies not only involve normal sexual partners, but can also involve strangers, people

of the same sex, group sex, violent sex, and even people of power. The thoughts are endless. "In fantasy, people are relatively free to indulge their primitive lusts and brutish impulses in ways that might be unacceptable in reality" (Wilson, 1997).

There are three primary types of fantasies outside of the normal, everyday scenarios of common partners and bedroom scenes. The first scenario deals with "forbidden imagery." This imagery includes unusual partners such as strangers and relatives and unusual positions. "Or as Dr. Seuss once asked (albeit in a somewhat different context): 'Would you, could you, in a boat? Could you, would you, with a goat?'" The second scenario is of sexual irresistibility. This deals with sheer animal magnetism, seductiveness, and multiple partners. The third scenario involves dominance and submission fantasies. These include power fantasies such as rape, bondage, etc. (Doskoch, 1995).

Research shows that men and women differ in how they sexually fantasize (Table 1).

Table 1: The "Tattle of the Sexes" shows the differences between men and women and how they think about sex (Doskoch, 1995).

	Men	Women
Think about sex 1 or more times a day	54%	19%
Have had imaginary sexual encounters with 1000 or more partners	32%	8%
Have fantasized during masturbation	86%	69%
Focus on visual imagery during sexual fantasy	81%	43%
Focus on feelings or emotions	19%	57%
Began fantasizing during intercourse the first time I had sex	36%	18%
First fantasy inspired by a relationship	6%	31%
First fantasy inspired by sexy older person like a teacher	27%	7%

According to Doskoch (1995), men fantasize or think about sex 7.2 times a day, while women tend to do so 4.5 times a day. A potential reason for this was proposed by Wilson (1997) and deals with the theory of evolution. Since women have far fewer eggs than men do sperm, women want to make their fantasies of quality, while men of quantity. This idea leads to the suggestion that women would be more inclined to have sexual fantasies of those who are genetically fit,

or of higher power/authority. This also suggests that men would be more inclined to have sexual fantasies of group sex or with multiple partners. According to Wilson's survey conducted in Britain, men were found to sexually fantasize about group sex much more than women, by a ratio of 4.2:1 or 42% of men reported it compared to 10% of women. Sex with strangers was also higher in men (33% men vs. 25% women). Although nearly equal amounts of men and

women reported having sexual fantasies with famous persons (16% men vs. 17% women), when this data was rearranged into total amounts of fantasies, it accounted for 16% of male fantasies and 27% of female fantasies. Homosexuality was also fantasized more often by women, 19% of women's total fantasies, but only 10% of men's total fantasies.

Sexual fantasies begin at an early age. They begin, for most people, between the ages of 11 and 13. In one study, 57% of boys and 42% of girls between the ages of 14 and 15 said that they had thought of sex within the five minutes prior to the survey. Only 19% of men and 12% of women thought of sex within the last five minutes if they were between the ages of 56 and 64 (Doskoch, 1995). The duration of sexual fantasies shows that it is a vital component of almost all human beings at every stage of life following puberty, but the frequency, not necessarily quality, seems to decline with age and possibly experience.

Wilson (1997) also considered how sexual fantasies were affected by age. Most types of sexual fantasies were consistently stable at ages 17 through 57. The greatest age difference seen was in group sex. In men, group sex fantasies peak at the ages of 28-37 and sharply decrease after that point. In women, there is a slow decrease in group sex fantasies throughout the age span, but a larger dive after the 38-47 year bracket. Fantasies of authoritative figures also declined as women got older, while interest in strangers and homosexual partners remained nearly constant regardless of age. One possible suggestion, is that the age differences in peaks and declines between men and women are due to hormonal changes.

According to recent studies (C.C., 2000), violent sexual fantasies are normal. These violent sexual fantasies can range from actions such as spanking to tying someone up. It is normal to have both positive and negative sexual thoughts, although most people admit to having positive sexual fantasies. Even though most people see their violent fantasies in a positive light, it strongly depends on whom the person is fantasizing about. For example, being spanked by Brad Pitt or Angelina Jolie could be seen as positive, whereas, being spanked by your less than interesting math professor could be seen as less

positive. While the violence is equivalent in both scenarios, the person makes the difference.

Most of our sexual fantasies are "ordinary, non-kinky intercourse with a past or current lover" (Doskoch, 1995). However, on occasion sexual fantasies can concern an outside person. According to a study conducted by Hicks and Leitenberg (2001), 98% of men and 80% of women had sexual fantasies about people other than their current partners in the two months prior to their study, regardless of marital status. It was also found that women who have cheated on their partners had a 50% increased chance of having fantasies about someone other than their partners. An increase in the number of past sexual partners correlates to an increase in fantasies about someone other than their partners in women, but the correlation does not prove true for men, who continue this behavior at a steady pace.

In an article featured in the Los Angeles Times, Carey (2003) looks at recent studies concerning the issues of marital affairs. Noted in this article, is that sexual fantasies are almost always the trigger that leads to an affair. This may cause some concern considering that over 20% of Americans and 10% of Canadians have marital affairs. Also noted was that women had affairs more often in their first five years of marriage, while men are more apt to have affairs at two peaks in their lifetimes: the first five years and after 20 years. It is not currently known whether more sexual fantasies occur during these years, but affairs have been tied to rebellion against marriage vows.

So how does society feel about sexual fantasies? A poll featured in the New York Times indicated that "48% of respondents did not think it was 'okay' to fantasize about having sex with someone else even if they were faithful to their partner" (Hicks and Leitenberg, 2001). The study conducted by Hicks and Leitenberg (2001) showed that 87% of people admitted to having sexual fantasies about people other than their sexual partners in the past two months. According to Leitenberg, "one in four people feel strong guilt about their fantasies." Most of this is due to fantasizing about people other than current partners. Even young college-age people feel guilty: 22% of college-aged women and 8% of men admit to repressing their fantastic desires. This repression or guilt can lead to an unhappy sex life,

regardless of the similarity of the fantasies to those who are guiltless (Doskoch, 1995).

Throughout history, there has been a suppression of revealing sexual fantasies in general and even more so those including someone other than current partners. Possibly, if people were more aware of the commonness of sexual fantasies, they may not be so quick to criticize. This may also help to open up sexual communication between partners in relationships. If partners can be open about their sexual fantasies and desires, it may help them to fulfill each others fantasies.

The topic of sexual fantasies was ignored nearly completely by the field of psychology for the first half of the twentieth century. Much of this ignorance was due to early psychological philosophy. In 1908, Freud “declared that ‘a happy person never fantasizes, only a dissatisfied one’.” This theme continued in psychology and became known as the deficiency theory, the idea that one fantasizes only if there is a deficiency in their lives (Doskoch, 1995). But according to Leitenberg and Henning, “frequent fantasizers are having more than their share of fun in bed. They have sex more often, engage in a wider variety of erotic activities, have more partners, and masturbate more often than infrequent fantasizers” (Doskoch, 1995). According to Doskoch (1995), “the association between fantasies and a healthy sex life are so strong, in fact, that it’s now considered pathological not to have sexual fantasies.”

Sexual fantasies aren’t always harmless though. The line is not always clear to where a fantasy ends. This is true of Graham Coumts of Northern Ireland who in 2003 fulfilled his sexual fantasy by strangling a special needs teacher. Coumts, a musician, strangled the teacher using a pair of tights and kept her body in a spot only known to him for 11 days. He then transferred the body to a storage unit, where he visited the body every few days. Once the body began to smell and attract attention, he lit it afire at a bird sanctuary. The trial continues today (Man, 2004).

According to Doskoch (1995), “the path from fantasy to deviance is anything but direct.” Sexual fantasies are not necessary for sexually offensive acts to occur. Only 22% of child molesters admitted to having sexual fantasies of minors prior to the offensive action. “Unusual fantasies are a concern

only when they become compulsive or exclusive, or for individuals ‘in whom the barrier between thought and behavior has been broken’” (Doskoch, 1995).

There is no doubt that sexual fantasies are an integral part of our society and of our personal lives. However, there is still much more to know about sexual fantasies. In the past century, we have come a long way in understanding these often hot, naughty and very private moments in one’s mind. What was once considered a neurotic activity, sexual fantasies are now considered a necessary, adamant, and normal component of our everyday lives. Sexual fantasies open a door to a heightened sexual nirvana, often not attained in reality.

As we have seen, through the above mentioned studies, men and women differ in their approaches to sexual fantasies, or at least in what they are willing to admit. Although different, the same psychological and physical purpose is achieved through sexual fantasy in both sexes. It is interesting to note the evolutionary importance of this idea. This evolutionary perspective may also help us in the future to understand more basic differences and commonalities between men and women.

It is important to note that although significant differences were observed between different age groups, this may possibly be attributed to different societal trends affecting the various age groups. For example, a 45 year old person born in the liberal 1960s may be more open to their sexuality, than an 80 year old person born in the conservative 1920s. All the above data reflects only what one is willing to admit.

Society still has strong feelings about sexual expression. People feel that they must repress their inner desires to satisfy societal barriers. This repression can often backfire and leads to unsatisfying sexual relationships and lives in general. Opening up is strongly encouraged as are sexual fantasies. Both can lead to better communication, therefore better relationships, self confidence and sexual pleasure.

Much of our repression may spawn from the fear that admission will lead others to think that we may cross the line between fantasy and behavior. No one wants to be considered a sexual offender. It is important to realize that violent fantasies are not abnormal for most people, only when they are no

longer fantasies or when the fantasy becomes the focus of one's life. Sexual fantasies alone do not cause violence. Certain psychological states must be present for violence to occur.

So, as a population let's strap on our sex harnesses. Let's dream up our Playboy Bunnies and Chip and Dale Dancers. Let's reach our Seventh Heaven. Let's spank our Brad Pitts and Angelina Jolies, or better yet, let's be spanked by them. Let's bring out the peaches and cream. Let's get naked and roll around in chocolate syrup. Let's get the whips ready, don't forget the leather, and hand-cuffs are a must. After all, studies show that this is a healthy lifestyle. So close your eyes, invite whom you wish, hop in the hot tub, no swim suits allowed and get busy.

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