

LELO

LELO sex census 2023

foreword

Britain's sexual landscape is forever evolving. This year, our census explores how sex habits have changed over the past 12 months, beginning by investigating whether the UK is still experiencing a 'sexodus' i.e. decline in sexual activity, as noticed in our 2022 report.

Findings indicate little change over the past year. For many people, it has been a tough period with economic uncertainty, global incidents and a cost of living crisis that is undoubtedly impacting our sex lives. Our research indicates a stagnation in bedroom activities, **with women in particular having less sex and 60% of Brits report sleeping with just one other person in the past year.** This could also be a prolonged reaction to loneliness experienced during the pandemic, with more people opting for long-term partners following a shift in priorities. But there is also a desire for sharing our sexual and romantic partners in new ways; our chapter on consensual non-monogamy explores less traditional relationship set-ups, from swinging, polyamory and more.

However, the country's appetite for pleasure remains as Britain cements its status as a 'masturbation nation', **with almost 70% touching themselves on a regular basis.** This self-pleasure trend follows on previous years' figures, which presented a boom in 'mutual masturbation' and suggests more people are taking the time to explore their own bodies, which in turn could have a healthy impact on their overall sex life.

There has also been an upswing in people utilising tools such as porn and sex toys to get themselves off; **close to half of women participants reported having used a sex toy in the past year.** We do a deepdive into people's attitudes towards

porn, providing statistics on viewing habits and look at generational and gender differences in what people watch and why. In response to these findings and in an effort to tackle feelings of shame surrounding less-mainstream preferences, we provide advice on how to talk about porn with sexual partners. Additionally, we talk about taboo topics like fetishes and fantasies, how makeup can enhance confidence during sex and why the colour red is such a turn-on.

Looking to the future, our final chapter investigates the rise of artificial intelligence in the adult industry and discusses the ethical argument in how such technology could impact social culture and human behaviour, as well as present information on how people are using AI products such as ChatGPT for unintended purposes.

To supplement our quantitative data, we have sought advice and input from a variety of experts, including doctors, researchers and our in-house sex and relationships expert, Kate Moyle, as well as spoken to case studies with the aim to gain a deeper understanding of sexual experiences through first-person accounts.

Studies in sexual behaviour are still fairly new. We hope that our report and the chapters within will act as a helpful guide, shedding light on less-spoken-about topics and breaking barriers in sex science.

Let's jump in.

“Britain cements its status as a ‘masturbation nation’, with almost 70% touching themselves on a regular basis.”



the author and expert

Almara Abgarian is a journalist working full-time as the deputy editor at Jam Press news agency, where she runs multiple departments, and is also Metro.co.uk's resident sex columnist with a weekly op-ed that runs every Friday.

She has specialised in sex, dating and relationship topics for the past decade, writing about this for some of the biggest publications in the world, as well as appearing on broadcast and TV channels such as the BBC, where she is frequently invited as an expert voice.

Almara champions the importance of pleasure and communication in the bedroom, and the need for comprehensive sexual health education across the globe.

She isn't afraid to tackle areas often considered taboo by mainstream audiences, from deep-dives into less common fetishes to interviewing people from all walks of life about their sexual habits and desires, as well as sharing her own experiences, including having recently posed naked for an art class to explore body image.

With a keen interest in finding out what shapes our sex and love lives, Almara has also launched two sex-themed series for Metro.co.uk, and works as a writer and consultant for various dating and adult industry companies.

JOURNALIST
SPECIALISED IN SEX,
DATING AND
RELATIONSHIPS

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what’s going on in **british** bedrooms?

sexodus 2.0

Last year, LELO’s sex census explored how Britain was experiencing a ‘sexodus’; a knock-on effect from the pandemic when many people spent a prolonged period without opportunity for physical intimacy, while mutual masturbation — which could easily be done through a virtual medium — saw a boom, with nearly one in 10 Brits finding it easier to orgasm this way. This year, we have once again asked 4,000 participants in the UK to share their sexual experiences, **discovering that close to a third of women are having less sex now (29%) in contrast to men (24.5%)**. Looking at the net figure for how much sex is being had, taking into account all genders, there appears to only have been a marginal change over the past 12 months.

In his chapter on post-pandemic sex, published in March 2023, Dr Chris Haywood at Newcastle University puts forward two possible narratives that could have occurred; an “orgistastic f**kfest” versus a “disruption” in how we make sexual connections (i.e. we may experience issues in connecting with others). LELO’s findings indicate a stagnation in British sex lives but it’s important not to get ahead of ourselves. Comparative data on a wider timescale is required to fully determine how lockdown experiences will affect sex lives in the long-run. And there is plenty to be excited about, such as the rise in self-pleasure as the UK becomes a ‘Masturbation Nation’, which we touch on in our next chapter.

How much sex are Brits having — 2023 vs 2022:

- I have more sex now (24% vs 21%)
- I have less sex now (27% vs 29%)
- No change in my sex life (33% vs 34%)
- I don’t have sex (15% vs 15%)

g e n e r a t i o n s :
who is having the most and the least sex?

To gain closer insight into how different age groups have sex, we break down the figures further, **as it is discovered that those aged 18-24 are having more sex (38%), while 35-44yos are having less sex (31%) in 2022-23**. A simple explanation could be that Gen Z are in a life stage where they would commonly explore their sex lives and millennials are at the peak of their career and family life, meaning priorities may lie elsewhere. Comparatively, close to half of those aged 55-64 appear settled in their sex lives, reporting no change (47%).

sexual partners

The research reveals over half (60%) of participants only had one sexual partner over the past 12 months. This could serve as additional evidence for sex lives slowing down in the UK or be an indication for people opting for long-term connections. However, there are other components to consider; after all, just because you’re in a relationship or have a casual set-up with one sexual partner i.e., it doesn’t mean you’re having a lot (or any) sex. Our study showed 15% of participants had no sex in the past year, while nearly 1 in 20 men and women had three sexual partners. Of the participants who took part in the census, 28% reported being “single”; divided by gender this was around a third of men (30%) and women (35%). Almost 1 in 5 said they are “dating”, while 51% are married or in a relationship. Additionally, 14% reported currently living with a partner.

¹ Haywood, C. (2023). Post-lockdown Sex: Uncertain Intimacies, Cultures of Desire, and UK Sex Clubs. BRILL eBooks, pp.219–239. doi:https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004536418_013.

Surveying age groups, Gen X (45-55yos) had the least sexual partners; **1 in 7 has only slept with one other person in the past year.** One explanation is that people in this age group are more likely to be in long-term relationships or married. Interestingly, however, this is also when divorce rates peak; 45-49yos have the “most divorces” of any age group, according to 2023 data by research company Nimblefins. It’s harder to ‘get back on the horse’ when you’re going through heartbreak or reevaluating your romantic and sexual life. **On the flipside, 1 in 20 Gen Z’ers and millennials had between 6 to 10 sexual partners in the period 2022-23.**

Additional figures (over past 12 months)

- 14.5% of 18-24yos had two sexual partners
- 62% of 25-34yos had one sexual partner
- 28% of non-binary people had three sexual partners

**s e x u a l
o r i e n t a t i o n**

Sexuality is constantly being redefined. ‘Labels’ change as society becomes more accepting of sexualities beyond ‘straight and gay’, and we remove the stigma attached to who we have sex with. This year, in an effort to be even more inclusive, we have added extra options for participants to choose from with options ranging from straight to heteroflexible, homosexual, bisexual, fluid and more.

In our focus group, 80% identified as heterosexual. Many people chose not to identify with a label at all, with 44 of those surveyed selecting ‘other’ and 120 people would ‘rather not say’. **Younger generations, especially Gen Z, appear to be more open in exploring their sexuality; 1 in 6 identified as heterosexual and 1 in 10 are bisexual. Comparatively, over 90% of those aged 55-65+ identified as heterosexual.**

These statistics should be analysed alongside cultural and historical influences, such as boomers having been

brought up in a time when attitudes towards any sexual orientation differing from the ‘norm’ was condemned or even punished by law. Explaining further, Lyndsey Murray, a certified sex therapist and podcast host at Sexpositivity Unfiltered, tells LELO, “Gen Z was born in a much more progressive time than older generations; while homophobia is still alive and active today, there’s also a continued growing support for queer individuals with a recognition that sexuality is a spectrum and for many people is fluid. I would also attribute this to a decline in the amount of teens and young adults who are religious; Gen Z as a whole is less religious than other generations, therefore less confined to a heteronormative way of living and being.”

Sexual orientation can be a fraught journey, as 30-something-year-old Ellen*, who identifies as queer and is in a relationship with a woman, tells us: “I was raised to believe sex was dirty and that it would immediately lead to me becoming pregnant, and my father was also homophobic. I didn’t dare consider that my future would be anything but heteronormative. When I got to university and started to realise I was no longer under the prison of my parents I started to go out and meet people and saw others around me dating the people they wanted to date, and while it still took me a while to be open about my own feelings, I think it was then that I finally realised that not every girl liked girls the same way I did and from there I started to educate myself and surround myself with people who were further along that journey than me.”

²Yurday, E. (2019). Divorce Statistics UK 2020. [online] Nimblefins.co.uk. Available at: <https://www.nimblefins.co.uk/divorce-statistics-uk>.



masturbation nation

**w h y w e l o v e
t o m a s t u r b a t e**

The UK is a ‘masturbation nation’. **Our sex census reveals that almost 70% of Brits touch themselves on a regular basis, ranging from once a day (11%) to a few times per week (22%) to give but a few examples.** When evaluating why we love masturbating so much, the answer seems easy at first: it feels good. And research certainly supports this statement; in our 2022 report, survey participants told us that sexual pleasure (59%) and relieving sexual tension (45%) was among the top reasons why they masturbate, alongside stress relief (33%).

The real, and more complicated, answer is that perhaps we aren’t masturbating more – maybe we are simply more willing to talk about and own our self-pleasure out in the open. It’s only in recent years that we have begun discussing self-pleasure for all genders, especially women, in a positive light. This is thanks to a variety of factors including a collective shift in mindsets about sex, as well as how sex and masturbation is represented in popular culture and the rise of sex toys and technology, which offers more opportunities for pleasure, as well as privacy for exploring sex solo.

**m a s t u r b a t i o n
h a b i t s :**

how often do Brits touch themselves?

Masturbation habits can vary widely depending on gender and age group. **Women still masturbate less than men, with 30% saying they “never” do so, compared to just 14.5% of men.** For those who do, the recurrence also varies. The most popular

frequency is “a few times per week” for both genders, but men masturbate more often as a whole (see table below). Looking at age groups, **those aged 65+ masturbate the least, while 25-34yos masturbate the most.** Results vary when split into location too. In England, **London leads the way with over 81% masturbating.** Of the remaining United Kingdom nations, Scotland is at the forefront (77%), followed by Northern Ireland (70.5%) and Wales (69.1%).



Masturbation frequency per gender (%)	male	female	other
a few times per day	9.4	2.1	-
once a day	16.4	5.4	28.6
once a week	13.3	12.6	-
a few times per week	26.2	18.4	42.9
once a month	6.9	10	-
a few times a month	7	10	14.3
a few times a year	6.2	10.6	-
never	14.5	30.4	14.3

Masturbation frequency per age group (%)	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+
a few times per day	10.2	7.6	6.3	1.7	2.5	0.8
once a day	16.6	11.6	12.6	9.1	4.8	4.7
once a week	12.5	16.4	12.9	12.9	9.5	10.0
a few times per week	24.5	25.7	23.2	22.9	18.7	12.5
once a month	6.8	9.0	7.9	6.8	12.0	9.2
a few times a month	6.0	8.4	10.2	12.3	8.6	8.2
a few times a year	3.1	5.8	10.3	11.0	12.2	12.1
never	20.4	15.5	16.4	23.3	31.6	42.4

sex toys and self-pleasure

While women masturbate with less frequency than men, as discovered in our 2022 sex census and as seen in this year’s results, we are still finding that they turn to technology more often to boost sexual pleasure. **Nearly half of all women (49.3%) have used a sex toy in the past 12 months.**

This figure sits at 38.5% with men, though encouraging statistics show a rise in usage among a third of male participants (34%) who have used sex toys more in the past year. This trend has been reported in the US too. **A survey carried out by Statista in 2022 and released this year showed around 8 in 10 American women (82%) own a sex toy.** Men are not far behind, at 74%. Overall, research suggests a positive relationship to masturbation, which is encouraging, though it is important to acknowledge that both of these surveys were conducted in Western countries that generally have a more positive stance on sex and pleasure.

LELO’s 2022 sex census discovered a boom in ‘mutual masturbation’ (playing with yourself with a sexual partner, whether offline or online) with close to one in 10 Brits finding it easier to orgasm this way. Mutual masturbation is still a popular sexual activity; **around a quarter of men (25%) and women (27%) use sex toys with a partner.**

Other interesting sex toy findings:

- Women are ‘more likely’ to masturbate solo (22%)
- 17% of men only use sex toys with a partner
- Nearly 10% of male and female participants who didn’t use sex toys in the past year wanted to do so
- 26% of women only orgasm through using a sex toy

LELO asks: what was your first sex toy?

‘I bought a fleshlight on a dare when I was drunk’

Speaking about his first experience with sex toys, a bisexual man in his 30s, who is in a relationship, tells us: “The first sex toy I bought for myself was a fleshlight, when I was in my early 20s. While drinking with my best friend and his girlfriend, we were looking up sex toys and they dared me to get one. I was single and had gone through a dry spell for a long time, so I thought, why not? I didn’t do much research beyond looking at the reviews and the price. There’s a sense that men using sex toys is something that only desperate or lonely men do; a nonsensical patriarchal concept that single men should always ‘be on the pull’ and that using a sex toy is an admission of being lonely, which isn’t the case. Once I’d figured out how to use my fleshlight, it felt amazing. Now I’m in a relationship, I like to use toys with my partner too.”

‘I have loved sex toys since I tried my very first one’

"My first experience with a sex toy was the best orgasm I've ever had," a queer woman, who has three toys in her goodie drawer says. “A friend got it for me for my 16th birthday; a bright pink bullet-shaped plastic ‘dildo, if you can call it that. It was the size of my thumb in terms of girth and about four inches long. I really enjoy sex but for the pure enjoyment of an orgasm nothing beats the efficiency of a sex toy. Even better when you're with someone who is secure enough to enjoy them with you. I use my favourite sex toy almost daily as it’s great for stress, it’s a sucker thing that mimics oral sex. If my house was on fire, it would be one of the top five things I would save from the flames.”

‘I’ve never used a sex toy’

Jane* is 32 years old and has just moved from London to go travelling. She has never used a sex toy, saying it’s just “never occurred to me to buy one”. “It’s so my vibe but I haven’t gotten around to it,” she adds. “I’ve always been pretty great with my

fingers and never felt anything is missing so it’s not been that high on my list, so far. When I do buy one, I would definitely want clit action rather than purely penetrative, and a sex toy created by a woman rather than a man. I just feel like women know better how to pleasure a woman.”

³ Statista. (n.d.). United States: share of people who own sex toys in the U.S.2022. [online] Available at: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1305978/share-of-people-who-own-sex-toys-in-the-us-by-gender/> [Accessed 19 Aug. 2023].

‘DIY dildo’: masturbating using household items

The sex toy industry is booming, offering a seemingly-endless array of products to maximise pleasure for users. Despite this plethora of options, **our sex census has revealed that nearly 1 in 20 Brits (4.7%) currently use or have used household goods to masturbate.** Applied nationwide, this would represent more than three million people.

Topping the list of items includes penis-shaped goods such as hair brushes, rolling pins, carrots and cucumbers for penetrative pleasure. Some participants reported using electric toothbrushes and shower heads, most likely for vibration capacities, and ‘softer’ goods like pillows, teddy bears, furniture and lingerie for stimulation. Most of the food references were for fruit and vegetables, however one participant used a “chocolate bar” with their partner and a few others opted for “mayonnaise” and “coconut”.

why you should never use a ‘homemade’ sex toy

Using household goods, food or other items during sex is not recommended as these products were not designed for this purpose and some of them – especially when used during penetration – could have harmful effects, from allergic reactions to more serious conditions. To get more insight, we hear from Dr Shirin Lakhani, the intimate health expert of Elite Aesthetics.

“I would never recommend using anything other than a legitimate sex toy to masturbate with as it can be extremely harmful to the genitals,” she says. “For example, fruit and vegetables will fall apart quickly and if you are inserting them into your vagina, for example, you are exposing yourself to infections and your vagina could get irritated and inflamed. They can disrupt the vaginal pH and cause yeast infections. They could also break off inside you. I have heard of people also using electric toothbrushes, which is dangerous in so many ways, due to causing trauma to sensitive areas, battery-acid leakage as well as bacteria from the mouth being passed to the genitals. Battery-operated sex toys are specifically designed to be used on genitals and are sealed and watertight.

“It’s very common and perfectly normal to masturbate but please only use items designed for the purpose and not general household goods. For example, if you insert something into the anus, which is not designed for that purpose, you can cause serious damage as the anal canal keeps going into the rectum, colon and digestive system. The sex toy needs to have a flared base to stop it travelling higher into the body.”

If you spot bleeding, signs of infection such as unusual discharge or swelling, experience issues with urination, pain during bowel movements or other unusual symptoms after masturbating or having sex with an item that is not a purpose-built sex product, Dr Lakhani recommends getting medical advice immediately.



how to choose a sex toy

Selecting a sex toy can be an empowering experience, but also an intimidating one, especially if you have never used one before. There are tens of thousands of options, with myriad settings, so it can be difficult to know what will work best for your body and needs. Whether you’re looking to try something new or are dipping your toe in for the first time, here is some advice on how to choose a sex toy.

ask yourself: ‘What do I want?’

Buying a sex toy can be a very personal experience. Before you begin looking at products, ask yourself what you hope to achieve by buying a sex toy, such as clitoral stimulation, suction, penetration, vibration or something else. Not all people can or want to climax, so the aim doesn’t have to be orgasms, it could simply be about enhancing your overall pleasure or experimenting.

consider experience levels

If you are looking for your first-ever sex product, it’s advisable to start with a ‘basic’ item, working your way up to more advanced technology. But this decision is entirely up to you. Set your own limitations but be honest with yourself about your knowledge level. For instance, certain types of sexual play may require a lubricant alongside the toy. Similarly, if you’re buying an item to use with a partner for the first time, it is useful – and respectful – to ask for their input. It can be fun to surprise someone with a sexual gift but if you have never used such products together, this could be intimidating for the other person involved.

research, research, research

When it comes to sex toys, one size might fit all but that doesn’t mean you should follow the crowd, so take online reviews with a pinch of salt. Read product descriptions thoroughly including how many settings or ‘modes’ the toy has, so that you know what to expect when the goodies arrive.

Other factors to consider include if the product is battery-driven or rechargeable (the latter is usually less costly over time), what material it is made from and how it will be delivered. These days, most companies use discreet packaging but check the fine print to avoid any surprises.

don’t be afraid to step out of your comfort zone

Trying your way with sex toys can be an expensive endeavour but if you are willing to spend some money, it can be useful to buy a few products to test which one works best for you. Different items may offer various levels of pleasure. Some people also like to use more than one toy at a time, such as combining a dildo with a vibrating ‘bullet’ or cock ring, or something else entirely. Listen to your body and test the waters, but do so safely.

have fun!

Sex toys can be an incredible way to improve your sex life, solo or with someone else. Try to relax, have fun and try to not put too much pressure on yourself. Some toys might not be for you and that’s completely normal.

*extra tip: ask a professional

Don’t be afraid to ask for help. While it is more common to purchase sex toys online these days, if you have the time and are feeling brave, it could be worth seeking advice from a professional by visiting a sex toy shop or similar establishment in person. If anything, this will allow you to view – and in some instances touch – a variety of products.



porn, fetishes and fantasies

the world is obsessed with porn

It’s very difficult to quantify how much the porn industry is worth globally. A recent report from Gitnux, which accumulated data from 20 pieces sources, puts this figure at \$97bn, while another source claims Pornhub’s parent company MindGeek alone sees similar numbers in annual revenue. Whatever the monetary value, one thing is for certain; people like porn. Last year, we reported that 4 in 10 Brits consume porn; **in 2023, this figure has risen as over half of Brits now report watching porn while masturbating (54%).**

Talking to LELO about why porn is rising in popularity, certified sexologist at BedBible.com, Rhiannon John explains that this can be attributed to factors including “decreasing stigma” and “advancement in technology and widespread availability”, as well as “the porn industry’s efforts to cater to diverse audiences”, which she describes as “significant” in recent years.

“With the additional content being produced that appeals to women and members of the LGBTQ+ community, the industry has attracted new consumers and expanded its overall audience,” she tells us, adding that “the emergence of ethical porn has also opened up possibilities for individuals previously deterred by the industry’s often unethical practices. Ethical porn allows them to enjoy watching without feeling guilty about the treatment of sex workers or other ethical concerns associated with traditional pornography. As a result, the growing availability of inclusive and ethical content has played a vital role in reshaping the perception and consumption of adult entertainment.”

porn habits

Men are the biggest consumers of porn; 33% said they ‘almost always’ watch porn while touching themselves, 38% ‘occasionally’ do so. Comparatively, among women, the figures are 9.9% and 28.7% respectively. Nearly a third of women said they don’t watch porn while masturbating (31%) or don’t masturbate at all (30.4%). Our focus group of non-binary people was unfortunately too small to offer conclusive results. LELO’s investigation does not sit in a vacuum; research conducted by other sources show similar patterns to varying degrees; as one example, last year, findings by YouGov suggested half of British men and 15% of British women consume porn.

Examining porn viewing across age groups, 60% or more of those aged 18-44 watch porn regularly during masturbation, with the number dropping the older the participants are. Those aged 60+ watch more porn than they did last year, but still watch the least porn (30.5%) of any age group. Meanwhile, millennials have overtaken Gen Z and now watch the most porn (66%).

The complexities behind porn viewing go far beyond what happens on the screen. There are a myriad of factors to consider including lack of content aimed at women, and serious ethical and safety concerns due to lack of regulation. However, some film-makers and producers have been trying to tackle these issues in the past decade (see further below for suggestions on ethical porn resources).

porn and partners

Despite being such big consumers of porn, Brits are still reluctant to divulge their desires to their sexual partners. **Over half of participants (57%) do not feel comfortable discussing their porn preferences with the person or people they sleep with (49.2% men and 63.8% women).** This discovery is unsurprising if we consider how personal fantasies are and how a negative reaction

to a person’s tastes could impact them. From a more positive standpoint, **close to a third of participants do discuss porn habits with partners.**

*Anon, (2023). Pornography Industry Statistics And Trends in 2023 • GITNUX. [online] Available at: <https://blog.gitnux.com/pornography-industry-statistics/>.

unusual kinks:

from lipstick to step-sibling/parent porn

As the saying goes, ‘If you can think of it, someone has probably made porn about it’. A key component in conversations around porn is which category you enjoy but this can often be tied to feelings of shame. As an example, our data reveals that many participants like genres such as lipstick and step-sibling/parent porn but are reluctant in sharing this information in bed. **Around 1 in 10 men and women said they would only discuss ‘socially-accepted’ sex acts with a sexual or romantic partner**, such as threesomes, girl-on-girl and cream pie [ejaculating inside a sexual partner].

In this section, we unearth attitudes towards a variety of kinks, from the more mainstream to the unconventional, and how participants related to these, reviewing gender and age groups, as well as hearing a first-hand account from someone who watches less mainstream porn.

top 10 types of porn

We asked participants to share personal preferences from a list of porn genres and choose all that apply. The following categories were also included but were viewed by less than 10% of participants overall: pregnancy, hairy, food, foot fetish and AI porn.

1. Girl-on-girl (37.5%)
2. Lesbian porn (36.1%)
3. Group sex (33.6%)
4. Step-sibling/parent porn (22.5%)
5. Vintage porn (17%)
6. Swinging (16.7%)

7. Cosplay (12.8%)
8. Gay porn (11.7%)
9. Cuckolding (11.4%)
10. Lipstick/makeup porn (10.8%)

Momentarily disregarding the top three types of porn, which had similar results across all genders and age groups, analysis of the sex census results showed **the most popular porn among men is step-sibling/parent porn and swinging for women.** From a generational perspective, over 30% of boomers aged 55-65+ prefer ‘vintage porn’ – which ranked much lower with Gen Z (9%), who prefer cosplay (18%). Swinging saw a jump among 35-64yos, which supports previous research setting the median age at 45 (see our chapter on ‘sharing during sex’). **Non-binary people overwhelmingly enjoyed gay or lesbian porn genres (60%),** and none of these participants reported watching vintage or cuckolding porn.

Discussing his preference for pregnancy porn, a male case study from the UK, who is in his 30s, told us: “Why do I like this type of porn? I suppose it’s never going to be my baby, so the thought of sleeping with someone who is carrying another man’s baby is hot, and I suspect it has to do with ‘claiming’ them. Having grown up in an era where porn wasn’t as freely available as it is now, I started exploring less mainstream at a young age. It may sound weird but people I knew would download videos and share them with each other. Personally, I do share my porn preferences – no shame here.”

“Around one in 10 men and women said they would only discuss ‘socially-accepted’ sex acts with a sexual or romantic partner”

sex, makeup and confidence

For anyone not familiar with lipstick porn, this traditionally involves a woman wearing colourful lipstick, particularly in a shade of red, while giving a blowjob. With the aim to unearth further results, we did a deepdive into this porn genre as well as looked at how wearing makeup impacts confidence in the bedroom.

Of the survey participants, enjoyment of this kink is most prevalent among men and when split per age group, appears to be most common for 35-44yos (12.7%), closely followed by Gen Z (12.3%). Few studies have been published on the link between ‘attractiveness’ and makeup in a sexual scenario, however, according to researchers Ian D Stephen and Angela Mc McKeegan, red lips in particular “have been considered attractive [...] possibly because they mimic vasodilation associated with sexual arousal”. The colour red has also long held associations to sex and marriage (in Eastern cultures) and is frequently used by ‘sex symbols’ in popular culture and by porn stars. This may serve as part of the explanation for why (red) lipstick or makeup is sexually arousing. However, further examination is needed.

Beyond being a turn-on, makeup can also serve as a powerful tool for the wearer. Nearly 25% of all participants said cosmetics makes them feel “more confident” during sex – including 1 in 10 men. Additionally, 1 in 20 people feel “less confident” when going bare-faced in the bedroom and a small minority use makeup as a way to excite their other half.

Other interesting facts:

- Over 50% of Gen Z and millennials use makeup during sex to boost their confidence, comparatively this figure stands at 14% for those aged 65+
- Participants based in North East England are more likely to wear makeup in the bedroom than in any other area of the UK

how to introduce porn with sexual partners

Talking about porn can be a tough task, as many people worry about how their preferences will be perceived. It may seem scary but if you watch and enjoy adult films, opening up about this could bring you closer together, build trust and have a positive impact on your sex life. Let’s begin with a few simple tips on how to introduce porn with your partner.

don’t rush into the conversation

Imagine standing in the kitchen as your other half says “honey, fancy watching porn about a woman licking a man’s hairy chest tonight?”. There is nothing wrong with the request itself but if you have never discussed porn with your partner before, this is a pretty jarring way to bring it up into conversation. Timing and execution is important. Depending on how well you know the other person, it’s advisable to start by suggesting watching porn together, to see if they are into the idea. As for the when and where, we recommend choosing a private space where you both feel comfortable.

tread carefully and respect boundaries

If the other person reacts positively to your suggestion, follow this up by discussing genres that you both like or scroll or alternatively, if this feels too intense, talk about fantasies before potentially moving on to viewing at a later stage. If your sexual partner reacts in a negative way, always respect their boundaries. Give them some breathing space and, once the dust has settled, you could broach the topic again gently. However, instead of asking them to watch porn with you, ask how they feel about porn so you can better understand each other. Keep a friendly tone and avoid negative or accusatory phrasing.

choose your porn carefully

Let’s say you’re both onboard with watching porn – great stuff. Perhaps you have a go-to website or film that you like, but a word of warning: choose

carefully or risk killing the mood. The best way to avoid any issues is to select the porn together. Unless you’ve both expressed interest in more extreme or ‘unusual’ porn, it is recommended to begin with something more mainstream. Once you’re in the swing of things, you could ‘challenge’ each other to find a film you believe would turn the other person on (though this can be a risky move if you are in a casual or new relationship so do so with caution).

leave shame out of it

Porn is complex and people’s preferences even more so. Your desires may not line up with your partner’s but that doesn’t make them any less valid. Shame has no place in the bedroom (unless it’s part of a fantasy scenario that you enjoy, of course).



ethical porn resources

Make Love Not Porn

Erika Lust’s XConfessions

Ferly

tips for trying fetishes safely

Porn can serve as inspiration for your own sex life, which is great, but safety is paramount. Remember, there are usually dozens of people on set to help the porn stars. More extreme fantasies such as breath play can be harmful if executed by people who are not experienced with them. Sexual acts like these carry higher risks than other, less physical fetishes, so educate yourself on it beforehand, maintain open communication with your partner and make sure to have a ‘safe word’ (if there is a gag involved, consider a ‘safe movement’ such as tapping each other in a particular way). If there are safety concerns, stop and consider seeking assistance from a professional such as a sexologist, sex therapist or medical professional.

⁵Stephen, I.D. and McKeegan, A.M. (2010). Lip Colour Affects Perceived Sex Typicality and Attractiveness of Human Faces. Perception, 39(8), pp.1104–1110. doi:https://doi.org/10.1068/p6730.

⁶Wreschner, E.E., Bolton, R., Butzer, K.W., Delporte, H., Häusler, A., Heinrich, A., Jacobson-Widding, A., Malinowski, T., Masset, C., Miller, S.F., Ronen, A., Solecki, R., Stephenson, P.H., Thomas, L.L. and Zollinger, H. (1980). Red Ochre and Human Evolution: A Case for Discussion [and Comments and Reply]. Current Anthropology, [online] 21(5), pp.631–644. Available at: https://www.jstor.org/stable/2741829?seq=1 [Accessed 19 Aug. 2023].

⁷www.psychologytoday.com. (n.d.). Are Women More Attractive in Red Lipstick? | Psychology Today United Kingdom. [online] Available at: https://www.psychologytoday.com/gb/blog/why-bad-looks-good/202109/are-women-more-attractive-in-red-lipstick#:~:text=Research%20indicates%20that%20red%20lips [Accessed 19 Aug. 2023].



consensual non-monogamy (cnm)

what is CNM?

Our research has found that 1 in 10 Brits is currently considering some form of consensual non-monogamy, also referred to as ethical non-monogamy. Sharing in the bedroom can be extremely pleasurable but it’s a tricky landscape to navigate. Done without forethought, the situation could end badly with one or more people getting their feelings hurt and (potentially permanent) friction in your relationship. There is a lot of grey area to cover in consensual non-monogamy, which is the umbrella term for these types of relationships – you and your partner(s) set the parameters for what is permitted.

polyamory, open relationships and swinging

Unfamiliar with the terminology? Here is a quick rundown of some of the most common CNM set-ups:

polyamory: This involves having consensual emotional (and sometimes sexual, though this is not always the case) relationships with multiple people. Set-ups can vary; some people have a ‘primary’ and/or ‘secondary’ partner (i.e. a hierarchical system), others do not. There are many types of polyamorous relationships, but a common denominator is that all parties are aware and accept the couple dynamics.

open relationships: Unlike polyamory, open relationships are when a couple allow one or both parties to have sex with or date other people. Some couples may want complete honesty on what their

other half is up to, others may prefer to have a ‘day’ where their partner can go on dates or a different arrangement entirely. People in open relationships who are married might use the term ‘open marriage’ instead.

swinging: Swinging includes sharing a partner sexually. You could ‘swing’ in your home, at a sex club or party or elsewhere. Any restrictions are up to you. For instance, some swingers give each other a ‘hall pass’ i.e. are allowed to have sex with someone else when their partner is not present. Others have strict rules such as only swapping with other couples, only having sex with single people or only swinging if their partner is in the same room and/or is also having sex.

sex and sharing

— by gender

At a glance, **findings reveal men are more likely to suggest CNM than women**, with this gender scoring ‘higher’ in every category. For instance, 14% of men are currently considering this type of relationship, compared to 5.7% of women. Of those ‘opposed’ to CNM, the majority were women (42.5% versus 31.7% of men). **Additionally, of the participants who are part of a couple, this is a potential source of conflict as close to 1 in 10 people (8%) said they are ‘open’ to trying CNM, but their partner is not.** The interest in CM was highest among non-binary people, at 28.6%, however, this figure should be considered with caution due to the focus group being much smaller.

sex and sharing

— by age group

Having grown up in an era that is more familiar with and open to ‘alternative’ relationship set-ups, **Generation Z is more interested in sharing their sexual partners (14.7%), though closely followed by millennials (12.7%).** People in their early 40s were not far behind, with 12.3% reporting that they are considering a CNM arrangement. Considering

the ‘traditional’ relationship structures they were brought up with, baby boomers were the least interested in CNM (2.5%) and the most opposed to it, with over half saying they do not ‘believe’ in this form of romantic or sexual structure.

Consensual non-monogamy can have great benefits for a relationship, from reigniting a sexual or emotional connection to improving overall wellbeing. To find out more, we hear from Andrew*, a man in his 20s, who is in an open relationship. He says: “I started swinging two years ago when I moved to Manchester, initially doing so on my own. I didn’t have many friends when I arrived in the city, and wanted to meet people, which worked out well as swinging was also something I always wanted to try. I then got into a relationship and brought it up with my partner immediately, she was into Crossbreed [sex party that has since closed down] so was very open to the idea. We have since attended and hosted [swinging] parties. My advice would be to never rush into this with somebody like you would in normal life [when having non-swinging sex]. Ultimately it’s still an intimate experience. On a more fun note, I would recommend swinging with people from different age groups. I’ve learnt a lot and it’s definitely benefited my sexual experiences.”

sex parties & clubs

Consensual non-monogamy scenarios do not have to involve a relationship or long-term set-up, but can be utilised for just one evening. For example, through swinging at a sex event, which in turn comes in many forms, a few examples include threesomes, swapping partners and cuckolding. **Brits like their sex parties, with over 1 in 10 people having attended this type of event at least once (14.7%).** What’s more, of those who haven’t, 20% want to do so. Men are more likely to attend a sex party with 1 in 10 (9.7%) doing so regularly, in contrast to 3.1% of women. Additionally, of the male participants who have never visited a sex club or party, 24% ‘would like to’. The research did not present a corresponding figure for non-binary people.

most popular places to swing

LELO’s sex census asked participants who take part in swinging to share details on where they engage in this type of sexual activity. The table below outlines survey results by gender, as well as provides a net figure, which reveals **the most popular places to swing across genders include private sex parties, while on holiday, sex festival or a friend’s house.** A minority of men (1.9%) chose ‘other’; when asked to elaborate, participants said they had engaged in swinging at other adult venues such as brothels and strip clubs. No results were provided by non-binary participants in this category.

Type of swinging event also varied depending on where participants are based in the UK. It’s plausible to assume this may be due to accessibility, with big cities offering a higher volume of organised sex events. As an example, **Scots are more likely to attend a private sex party (51.3%) than an organised event. What’s more, close to half of those based in East England (46.9%) and 60% of Northern Irish participants prefer to swing while on holiday.** Religion may also play a part in the choice of venue with people feeling more comfortable with or finding like-minded communities abroad. For instance, 2021 statistics by NISRA report shows 42.3% of the Northern Ireland population is Catholic, a religion that has a tougher stance on sex.

⁸Lawrence, I. (2022). London sex party Crossbreed has closed for good. [online] Time Out London. Available at: <https://www.timeout.com/london/news/london-sex-party-crossbreed-has-closed-for-good-112822> [Accessed 19 Aug. 2023].

⁹Main statistics for Northern Ireland Statistical bulletin - Religion. (2022). Available at: <https://www.nisra.gov.uk/system/files/statistics/census-2021-main-statistics-for-northern-ireland-phase-1-statistical-bulletin-religion.pdf>.

Types of swinging events	Total (NET)	Man	Women
private sex party	32.4%	31.7%	34.1%
on holiday	32.1%	30.8%	35.3%
sex festival	24.3%	25.1%	22.4%
at friend’s house	24.1%	22.7%	27.6%
at sex/swinger’s club	20.4%	17.7%	27.1%
at stranger or loose acquaintance’s house	20.0%	21.0%	17.6%
VIP/invite-only sex party	18.0%	15.3%	24.7%
fetish event	14.4%	12.9%	18.2%

“Scots are more likely to attend a private sex party (51.3%) than an organised event. What’s more, close to half of those based in East England (46.9%) and 60% of Northern Irish participants prefer to swing while on holiday”

resources

Some people prefer to swing in the comfort of their home, others like to venture further afield. There are plenty of venues and events to choose from, with a few example including:

- Swing Fest, Hull
- Club Lash, Manchester
- Killing Kittens, London + more
- Pleasure Island, Brighton

advice on non-monogamy: where to start and what to say

Taking the first step towards non-monogamy can be tricky, particularly if you’ve never touched on the topic with your other half before. Thankfully, Kate Moyle, LELO’s in-house sex and relationships expert, is here to share some advice for newbies.

But remember, there is no black and white route to sharing a partner sexually or romantically, and each person’s experience is different.

talk it through as many times as is needed

“Talking to your partner about opening up your relationship isn't as simple as a one off conversation: it’s hundreds of small and some bigger conversations,” Kate tells us. “Whilst theoretically the fantasy may work perfectly for you, it doesn't always so seamlessly work in practice, which is why it's important to have talked things through before trying anything, as human emotions are one of the subjective things that we can't always rely on to act predictably in the moment. If you want to start the conversation with your partner, give them a heads up first rather than just landing it on them – whilst you may have been thinking about it for a while, it's new information to them so you may be a stage ahead. It's just as important for you to listen to what they have to say, as you saying it [your thoughts] – if you are going to open up your relationship and bring in other partners you will both be involved, even if you have different roles.”

keep an open mind

“Also being open with your questions,(ex. 'I've been thinking about X recently, is that something that you have ever been interested in?') and then listen to their answer – don't just shut down if it's not the one you want. Often exploring what it is that someone is worried, nervous or scared about can bring up further useful discussions between you about how you feel about opening up your relationships, what you think you might like and enjoy about it and what you don't like about the idea.

set the rules

Discussions around the rules of relationships have to be clear and unambiguous and as in any relationship model or set-up, boundaries are key. Infidelity and consensual non-monogamy are not the same thing. You'll also want to talk about what happens if it goes a variety of ways e.g. what if one of us likes it and the other doesn't, are we we going

to share full details with transparency about what happened, or adopt a 'don't ask don't tell' approach, do we have rules about only having sex and/or relationships with people outside our friendship group / close circle of people we know. “In terms of practicalities, couples should always have a word or safeword which can be used in the moment to let their partner know that they don't want to carry on or are feeling uncomfortable – and this should be a word that's unrelated to the scenario or context so it can't be misconstrued. Being able to talk about boundaries, and also when they are broken, is critical to making ethical non-monogamy work. Also being able to express your feelings and what's going on for you – it's a myth that those in non-monogamous relationships don't get jealous sometimes, it's just that the context is different and relationship scenarios are consensual and agreed.”

follow your own path

Also remember that there are an unlimited number of ways that you can open up your relationship – and so trying things or 'dipping your toe in' can mean attending a sex party and only touching each other whilst being visible to others and in a scenario where other people are having sex. Taking it step-by-step and at your own pace is going to be important as you expand your comfort zone and each step can be exciting, fun and pleasurable in its own way. There isn't a hierarchy – it's about finding what works best for you and your relationship.

¹⁰Skiddle.com. (n.d.). Hu9 Club, Hull. [online] Available at: <https://www.skiddle.com/whats-on/Hull/Hu9-Club/> [Accessed 19 Aug. 2023].

¹¹mancunion.com. (2023). Club Lash: An inclusive space for everyone to explore their sexuality freely in Manchester - The Mancunion. [online] Available at: <https://mancunion.com/2023/04/08/club-lash-an-inclusive-space/> [Accessed 19 Aug. 2023].

¹²www.killingkittens.com. (n.d.). World-Famous Hedonistic Parties. [online] Available at: <https://www.killingkittens.com/sex-parties> [Accessed 19 Aug. 2023].

¹³Eventbrite. (2023). Pleasure Island - Friday 22nd Sep - Brighton. [online] Available at: <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/pleasure-island-friday-22nd-sep-brighton-regi-stration-483114828457?aff=ebdssbdestsearch> [Accessed 19 Aug. 2023].

future of sex

t h e r i s e o f A I

The idea of inviting an AI-powered machine into your bedroom might seem far-fetched but many of us already use this type of technology in our day-to-day lives, like when you ask your phone for the weather report or use a sex toy with AI capabilities. Although we are a long way away from a comprehensible and affordable AI companion, there are some products available on the market today. For example, the Soulmate Ai, an app and chatbot created by EvolveAI LLC. The system uses GPT neural network and scripted AI, and is described as “a person you can rely on 24/7 [...] an AI that will only aim to pleasure you... [...] Another company, Very Intelligent Ecommerce Inc has created the Autoblow A.I+, which reportedly uses this type of technology to enhance sexual experiences, with the machine replicating oral sex (though it is only suitable for people with penises). Owner Brian Sloane also recently shared news about a study where test subjects masturbated with an AI product hands-free, reportedly using their minds to get themselves off. Additionally, another sex business has launched a service where your AI can read erotic or romantic stories to you as you masturbate. It is likely that the future of sex tech will involve more AI-driven technology and as we see in the next chapter, LELO’s sex census indicates a desire for such products among consumers.

b r i t s u s e A I f o r s e x a d v i c e , c h a t s a n d p l e a s u r e

People are already using artificial intelligence for sexual purposes, including products that were not originally intended for this type of service. **As an example, nearly 1 in 10 Brits told us that they use**

(1%) or would like to use (7.8%) AI bots such as ChatGPT for sexual purposes. Elaborating further, one person asked for tips on “the best way to have sex”, while someone else wanted “ideas” for the bedroom. Others enjoyed “online chats” with the bots to satisfy their sexual needs or asked for assistance in ‘sexting’ a human partner. These results indicate that there is a need for further education or easily-accessible resources on pleasure and sex for adults.

The interest in AI-linked sexual experiences is fairly evenly divided among men and women, with a slight upswing among the former. **Of the survey participants who told us they would be interested in trying some form of sexual activity with an AI bot, around 60% were men.** Age-group-wise, Gen Z and millennials are more likely to give this a go, with Gen X and boomers reporting they have never had sexual contact with an AI-powered machine in any form. When reviewing results for those who have already had some form of sexual conversation with an AI bot, the gender split was 56% men, 41.5% women and 2.5% non-binary people.



s e x r o b o t s

In 2022, LELO did a deepdive into British people’s attitudes towards sex robots – not to be confused with sex dolls, such as inflatables – with examples including Henry and Harmony 3.0, created by Realbotix, a company that specialises in artificial intelligence and robotics. **Last year, we discovered that 2 in 10 people (22%) would consider using a sex robot.** Although there have been few advancements in the past 12 months and retail costs remaining in the tens of thousands, our 2023 census shows interest for such products remains high. **A third of Brits said they have used, would use or would ‘maybe’ consider using a sex robot if an affordable option was released.** Split among genders, these figures sat at 43.9% for men, 21% for women. It was highest among non-binary people (71.%) but it must be noted that this finding was from a much smaller focus group.

¹⁴play.google.com. (n.d.). Soulmate: Your AI Companion – Apps on Google Play. [online] Available at: https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.evolve.ai.soulmate.chatbot&hl=en_GB&gl=US&pli=1 [Accessed 19 Aug. 2023].

¹⁵Kamps, H.J. (2023). This sex toy company uses ChatGPT to whisper sweet, customizable fantasies at you. [online] TechCrunch. Available at: <https://techcrunch.com/2023/07/05/lovense-chatgpt-pleasure-companion/> [Accessed 19 Aug. 2023].

¹⁶Bondade, N. (2019). Meet Autoblow The World’s First Artificial Intelligence Powered SEX TOY. [online] Techgrabyte. Available at: <https://techgrabyte.com/1155-2/> [Accessed 19 Aug. 2023].

¹⁷Anon, (n.d.). Realbotix – Artificial Intelligence. [online] Available at: <https://realbotix.com> [Accessed 19 Aug. 2023].

t h e e t h i c a l a r g u m e n t :

how will AI affect our sex lives?

With new advances seeing AI potentially playing a bigger part in our sex lives very soon, it is important to take into account how the use of this technology could impact our experiences in the short- and long term.

Speaking to Dr Joseph Walton, a research fellow at the University of Sussex, he explains that concerns

that have become apparent with “machine learning” such as privacy and data surveillance, algorithmic bias, long-term psychological impacts of data-driven personalisation and more, is “applicable to within the sex industry”.

There is also the potential danger that advanced AI products could be used for sexually violent or other harmful scenarios, or have long term effects on our ability to form connections as human beings. As an example, Dr Walton discusses issues such as consent, with “strong concerns relating to objectification” and “the risk that policies which appear sensible have hidden harmful side-effects for marginalized groups” such as LGBTQ+ communities and sex workers. “Mainstream pornography has long been criticised for promoting degrading and disempowering ideas of women,” adds Dr Walton. “There are concerns that sex AIs (e.g. chatbots, VR experiences, sex bots), completely subordinated to the user’s commands, may make this trend worse. The long-term psychological and social impacts of romantic AI companions are uncharted territory. Concerns have been expressed that AI-driven interactions might diminish human capacity for connectivity and intimacy, driving social atomisation.”

On a more positive note, advanced AI products could be helpful for people struggling with things such as social anxiety, or – as it has for some of the participants in LELO’s sex census – provide an educational or informative sex education tool. Additionally, when applied to sex toys, this tech could provide a more personalised experience to consumers.

¹⁸Coursera (2023). Machine Learning vs. AI: Differences, Uses, and Benefits. [online] Coursera. Available at: <https://www.coursera.org/articles/machine-learning-vs-ai>.



conclusion

Human behaviour is linked to emotions; our sex lives are unique, so when it comes to pleasure, numbers can only tell us so much. However, there is still much we can learn from analysing data, as has been discovered in our research. Key findings from this year’s sex census focus heavily on changing attitudes towards who we have sex with, how much sex we have and how we feel about our sexual desires.

Younger generations are making their mark with signs of a sexual revolution that champions the right to enjoy sex freely and without prejudice, and detaching shame from these experiences – though there is a long way to go. Gen Z and millennials appear more willing to experiment with sex toys, sexuality and relationship dynamics. With more people choosing to share details of their sex and love lives on social media and beyond, this is an anticipated discovery but a positive one nonetheless. Discussing all types of sex and relationships in the mainstream assists in normalising non-traditional couple set-ups, while promoting inclusivity and acceptance.

Self-pleasure is also increasing. As the world moves on from several years of lockdowns and social distancing, it is still too soon to fully comprehend how these events will impact our sex lives in the long-run, but it is clear that our masturbation habits have changed as more people embrace their own pleasure, and women especially discovering how sex toys can assist in expanding this further.

We must acknowledge that feelings of shame are still holding people back but this is expected, as society, culture and religion, to name but a few factors, impact perspective and self-view. As an example, porn and fantasies remain a contentious issue that divides audiences, as we discover 1 in 10 Brits worry about how their viewing habits will be perceived by others. Most of us carry an ‘internal’

image of who we are in a sexual sense, which can be challenged by what our mind and body responds to in the bedroom.

Finally, it is becoming more evident that technology will play a big part in shaping how we have sex in the future. Last year, we reported on a rise in interest for products such as sex robots and virtual reality, and the want for such advanced sex tech has only risen in the past 12 months, particularly among men, who are leading this trend.

Hopefully, in time, and by opening up conversations around sex, porn, pleasure and other areas of our lives without judgement, we can remove the stigma surrounding less-conventional lifestyles or desires, as well as kinks and fetishes, allowing people to enjoy their sex lives fully.



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t h a n k y o u



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