

Voyeurism And Exhibitionism: How Common Are They?

By Michael Castleman

Do you like R-rated movies with steamy sex scenes? Most people do. There's a little bit of voyeur in most of us.

Do you ever wear tight, form-fitting, or revealing clothing? Most people do from time to time at the beach, the gym, or socially. There's a little bit of exhibitionist in most of us, too.

But how many people are really deeply into watching sex or exposing themselves in public? That's been a mystery—until recently, when the journal *Archives of Sexual Behavior* published a Swedish study that investigated voyeurism and exhibitionism.

The researchers at the Karolinska Institute (the university that awards Nobel Prizes) surveyed a random sample of 2,450 Swedes age 18 to 60. Seventy-six (3.1 percent) reported at least one incident of feeling sexually aroused by exposing their genitals to a stranger. Men were more exhibitionistic than women (4.1 percent vs. 2.1 percent).

One hundred ninety-one (7.7 percent) reported at least one incident of being sexually aroused by spying on others having sex. Again men were more voyeuristic (11.5 percent vs. 3.9 percent).

Voyeurs are called peeping Toms, not peeping Tinas. It's no surprise that men are more voyeuristic than women. The audience for pornography is clearly voyeuristic, and according to porn industry estimates, 80 percent of pornography is viewed by men solo. In the study, the single best predictor of voyeurism was frequent use of porn.

It's risky to be an exhibitionist and/or voyeur. It's illegal in most places. Not surprisingly, compared with the general population, voyeurs and exhibitionists were more likely to engage in other risky activities: gambling, heavy drinking, and illegal drug use.

Finally, compared with the population as a whole, voyeurs and exhibitionists are more sexually active. They are more easily aroused, masturbate more often, and have intercourse more frequently. They're more sexual in general, so they're more into exploring the fringes of sexual expression.

Do these results apply to the U.S.? That's not clear. But I suspect they do.

Reference:

Langstrom, N. and M.C. Seto. "Exhibitionistic and Voyeuristic Behavior in a Swedish National Population Survey" *Archives of Sexual Behavior* (2006) 35:427.