

LUST

*From fornication
to dating apps*

LOTTA
LÖFGREN

RJ 2023

LUST

From fornication to dating apps

LOTTA LÖFGREN

Translated by Clare Barnes

Riksbankens Jubileumsfond
in collaboration with Makadam förlag

MAKADAM FÖRLAG
GÖTEBORG & STOCKHOLM
WWW.MAKADAMBOK.SE

The Deadly Sins in Our Time

is Riksbankens Jubileumsfond's essay collection for 2023

Editor: Jenny Björkman

Editorial board: Ingrid Elam, Lisa Irenius,

Sven Anders Johansson

LUST: FROM FORNICATION TO DATING APPS

© Lotta Löfgren 2023

Graphic design: Johan Laserna

A paper edition is available through bookstores (ISBN 978-91-7061-456-9)

ISBN for this volume: 978-91-7061-956-4 (pdf)

ISSN 2000-1029

This work is licensed under Creative Commons – Attribution 2.5 Sweden.

To view a summary of the licence, go to <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.5/se/> or contact Creative Commons, PO Box 1866, Mountain View, CA 94042, USA.



 creative
commons

Contents

Foreword: The deadly sins in our time	7
From a deadly sin to pleasure	11
“Good” and “bad” practices	15
The pornification of public space	21
Online dating and replaceability	25
From a deadly sin to a human right	29
Lust in modern society	35
References and suggested reading	37
Presentation of Riksbankens Jubileumsfond	41

Foreword: The deadly sins in our time

Envy, gluttony, greed, pride, lust, sloth and wrath – what is the importance of the seven deadly sins, organised 1,500 years ago by Pope Gregory the Great, in contemporary Sweden? Is devoting seven essays to them really justifiable? After all, we live in one of the most secular societies in the world, a society where hell seems more likely to be the name of a nightclub than a place for sinners. Living out your lusts is not just permitted, it is considered healthy. Letting go, feeling pride, earning money and eating well are also things we value – we treat ourselves, and of course we’re worth it!

At the same time, there are indications of a return of morals. The climate crisis and the lifestyle changes that must result from it, increased inequality and people with unimaginable wealth, combined with refugee flows and wars close to Sweden, are contemporary phenomena. They have led to us increasingly talking in terms of morals, at least if we are to judge by the daily press. A simple search of Swedish newspapers shows that the use of the word “morals” has increased tenfold since 2014.

Another sign of the reappearance of morality in public debate is the role played by shame in what is called cancel or call-out culture. There has been an increase in public humiliation, shaming, through the emergence of a new, internet-generated social control. Moreover, online humiliation has become a strategy for various groups to effect change, as a form of modern, shame-driven consumer power. Although most people see dangers in allowing shame to drive public discourse, there are those who argue that it can be a good thing, an effective way of changing people's morals and behaviour.

Good and evil are increasingly referenced in politics, but what some people perceive as good is perceived by others as virtue signalling – and what is that if not pride? Regarding some people as completely shameless can, on the other hand, be seen as part of the same trend. Incidentally, the word shameless was hardly used at all in the early 2000s, but has occurred more frequently since 2014. There are people who argue that we are living in a post-post-political world, a hyper-political era, in which everything is politics and can thus be categorised as good or bad. Involvement is just a click away, but is just as fleeting as love on Tinder. Mass movements die as quickly as they form, and the result is a type of overheated discussion that covers everything but has no depth, which quickly states whether something is right or wrong or good or bad, and where anyone who ends up on the wrong

side of the line can suffer the keelhauling of public opinion.

From this perspective, there is reason to return to the mortal sins and their moral claims. Also, sins and vices are individual; the aim of refraining from sin is personal salvation, not collective change. This emphasis on our own behaviour and our personal morality is symptomatic of the individualism of our time, and the focus on sins thus suits an era that celebrates the ego.

However, the deadly sins have always had an undeniably collective dimension. In 2008, when the Vatican launched seven additional deadly sins, the aim was to adapt them to contemporary global reality and to emphasise the people's social interactions: polluting the environment, morally dubious experiments, bioethical violations, drug abuse, creating poverty, excessive wealth, contributing to social inequality.

It is also worth remembering that the deadly sins are not really about the worst things humans can do, as even in the Middle Ages there were worse things than sloth and lust. Rape and murder were far more serious crimes, but the deadly sins were considered dangerous because they risked enslaving us to our own emotions, destroying our rationality and creating an addiction to the thrill of sin. The deadly sins threatened to consume us. And, like the modern, upgraded deadly sins, the old deadly sins have always referenced the sins and misdeeds that threaten to

tear society apart, and those emotions that threaten to entice us away from the good and the just.

Doesn't this sound urgent? In this essay collection, seven scholars have used their research as a basis on which to tackle a deadly sin, to test the sins' relevance in our time and to discover what they can teach us – about ourselves and about society.

Sexuality researcher Lotta Löfgren's essay focuses on the deadly sin of lust. This is, possibly, regarded by many contemporary Swedes as the least problematic of the deadly sins. Indeed, lust has become part of our general wellbeing. Sex toys can be bought at the pharmacy, and not having a healthy sexuality and a lust for pleasure is regarded as a greater problem.

The editors

From a deadly sin to pleasure

Lust, lasciviousness, lechery. Phenomena that, over time, have been charged with different connotations at societal and individual levels, and which can generate feelings of curiosity and pleasure, as well as shame and guilt. Lust can bind people together with lifelong passion and intimacy, or create huge distances that lead to permanent scars. Lust is both an ordinary and a taboo element of being human. Its complexity and doubleness can be captured in opposing pairs, such as pleasurable/shameful, forbidden/permitted, safe/unsafe and beneficial/risky.

What lust entails as a phenomenon therefore shifts across historical, social and geographic contexts. Of the deadly sins, it is the one that has been most flexible and negotiated. On the one hand, it has been the deadly sin that could be perceived as the most fundamentally human, partly linked to pleasure, partly directly to the survival of our species. On the other, it has also been regarded as the most threatening, associated with liberation beyond fixed categories and hierarchies. It is a deadly sin that carries the promise of freedom and another order.

The list of seven deadly sins was established by St. Gregory the Great in the sixth century. The encyclopaedia *Nordisk Familjebok* from 1907 translates the Latin *luxuria* to “vällust” in Swedish – lasciviousness. At that time, the word had too many positive signals, so in 1935 it was replaced by “otukt” – fornication. In 1991, another Swedish encyclopaedia again translated it as “vällust”. In English, we instead talk about lust or lechery. That *luxuria* has been translated at lust, lasciviousness and fornication says something about the sociocultural negotiation of this deadly sin, as does the virtue that is seen as this sin’s counterpart: chastity. Previously, people travelled as pilgrims to remote places, fasted and made vows of chastity to repent for their sins.

What is our attitude to lust today – in the in many ways sexually open 2020s? Is it a vice? Is chastity in any way something to strive for in contemporary Sweden?

We live in a time when pornography’s representations of sexuality are a common element in advertising and the media, so the question is how much this influences our perception of lust. Can it really still be regarded as a deadly sin, when it is something that everyone now encounters, not least via the internet and social media? Can we really all be doomed to purgatory (punishment for the deadly sins) when opportunities for sexual liaisons are just a click away on contemporary dating apps?

Lust has possibly left restrictive morality behind and is

regarded as part of our general wellbeing, which now includes sexual health, and for which an entire professional group, sexologists, is responsible. Isn't it a lack of lust that is regarded as a problem, rather than lust? Has this former deadly sin actually been transformed into a demand, a form of coercion to which everybody is subordinate?

“Good” and “bad” practices

Historian of ideas and philosopher Michel Foucault’s classic analysis of the history of sexuality, from 1976, shows how societal power structures are closely associated with sexuality. He states that sexuality is controlled implicitly through norms and explicitly via legislation. This control is most tangible for vulnerable or marginalised groups, such as people with intellectual disabilities, single women and homosexuals. One example of this, highlighted by historian Kristina Engwall, is that Swedish women who were regarded as “asocial and imbecilic” were forcibly sterilised in the 1930s and 40s, and institutionalised up until the 1960s. Not everyone could express their sexuality in the way they chose, and this was often most obvious for vulnerable groups.

In a renowned essay from 1984, “Thinking Sex”, cultural anthropologist Gayle Rubin shows that sexuality is a product of social structures – which change over time and space. Shifts continually occur in what is considered permitted or forbidden. Rubin says that sex is usually regarded from a negative perspective, as sinful – but that some

behaviours can be seen as “good” if they are correctly packaged. So lust in a marital relationship, or at least in a monogamous one, for the purpose of reproduction, has been regarded as positive and praiseworthy. Other forms of sexual expression, such as sex outside of marriage, homosexuality, buying sex or various sexual fetishes, have been regarded as “bad”. But problematic sexuality, sinful lechery, sickness or what are considered illegal activities change over time. There are continual negotiations of where, when and how sexuality can occur, and who is allowed to express their sexuality freely and openly.

Another way of repackaging sinful lust as desirable sexuality is to regard sexuality as part of our health, a development that began in the latter half of the nineteenth century. In Sweden, historian of ideas Lena Lennerhed has written about the economist and politician Knut Wicksell, who lobbied for the use of contraception rather than abstinence, which he believed could cause nervous disorders and even depression. This led to a medicalisation of sexuality, which – even though it was considered problematic – became less sinful and more pathological, and thus also treatable. Despite Wicksell receiving a great deal of criticism, he continued to campaign for the importance of sexual intercourse for health, although he had no definitive answer about how sexual health should be resolved for both sexes. He was against prostitution, regarding it as a societal problem that severely impacted women

when they contracted venereal diseases and were excluded from society.

Masturbation has also been regarded as a problematic sexual practice. The term onanism comes from the Biblical story about wasting semen, rather than it being used to procreate and ensure the family line. However, as lust began to be regarded as part of personal health, the view of some negative behaviours shifted into the domain of medicine. Physician Henrik Berg's *Läkarebok*, from 1918, was a medical book for the general public rather than for medical students, and described how "self-abuse" caused both mental and physical injuries among those affected, such as palpitations, poor eyesight and hearing, chorea and mental illness. Berg wrote only about male masturbation, because at that time female masturbation was rendered invisible and taboo.

Legislation provides another indication of what has been considered acceptable sexuality. Historical examples of this in Sweden include *lönskaläge* – this was when a couple had sex before marriage which, until 1864, was punishable by fines, whipping or even death. Similarly, *enkelt hor*, when one sexual partner was married but not the other, and *dubbelt hor*, when both people were married to other partners, were punishable until 1937, even if for many years it was unusual for punishment to be meted out. Sexual relations between people of the same sex first became legal in Sweden in 1944; homosexuality remained

a diagnosable disease in the National Board of Health and Welfare's register until 1979.

But not all sexuality is now permitted or accepted. Sex between people and animals, bestiality, was indeed legal from 1944 until the animal protection legislation that was introduced in the 2010s, but has never been regarded as acceptable. Buying sex from another person and having sex with someone under the legal age of consent are not just regarded as immoral acts in contemporary Sweden, but are also illegal.

Nor, of course, do illegal or prohibited actions need to correspond to people's sexual practices. As stated above, there are continual readjustments and shifts in perspectives on what is legitimate pleasure and what is not. In the 1940s and 1950s, the Kinsey reports in the US, *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* (1948) and *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female* (1953), demonstrated the "majority misunderstanding" regarding the experiences and extent of various sexual acts. Based on interviews with almost 18,000 people, zoology professor Alfred Kinsey and his colleagues established that many other ways of expressing sexuality, other than penetrative heterosexual intercourse, were common. For example, oral sex occurred very frequently, despite it being both illegal and considered fornication. Oral sex was actually so common that it would have been impossible to find prison cells for all the Americans who performed it. It was also apparent that there

was a scale between heterosexual, bisexual and homosexual, in that considerably more people than were previously thought to be the case were homosexual, with very few being only heterosexual or homosexual. This also differs from both the public moral code and legislation.

Doing what Kinsey did, observing sexuality as an ordinary object of study and examining society by exposing some of what occurs behind drawn curtains and shut doors, traumatised many conservatives. Behaviours that were regarded as sinful (not only masturbation, oral sex and homosexuality, but also adultery and infidelity) turned out to be common. Kinsey was accused of being the Antichrist, and there were people who believed the US was facing moral collapse and that this could be blamed on the biologist from Indiana University.

This shift in sexuality, and thus lasciviousness, from morality to medicine has thus occurred since the nineteenth century.

In the first decades of the twentieth century, sexual reform movements emerged in Europe and the US. Sweden was the first country in the world to introduce compulsory sex education, in 1955. In the 1960s and 70s, contraceptive pills and legal abortion revolutionised sexuality by differentiating between procreation and sexual pleasure. Quite simply, it became possible to have sex without thinking about consequences in the form of unwanted pregnancies, that had long been the direct, worldly punish-

ment for sin. Demands for liberalising possibilities for sex for the sake of friendship made Sweden famous far outside its borders, as Lena Lennerhed has demonstrated.

It can be argued that this is where lust stopped being a sin, although persistent value structures with roots far back in time still remain. The “ideology of love”, which says that sexuality is primarily permitted in a monogamous relationship between people who love each other has, both historically and in the present day, a strong position in opinions about how people have sex and who should have sex. Parallel and contradictory norms exist in contemporary multicultural society, such as opinions on abortion, homosexuality, sex before marriage, choice of partner and access to contraception. Navigating between these contradictory norms is a challenge, particularly for young people with roots in several cultures.

The pornification of public space

Without examining the boundary between erotica and pornography in detail, we can state that a type of *pornification* of sexuality has occurred in public space, visible in advertising, fashion and the media. Danish media researcher Anette Dina Sørensen talks about three different tendencies.

The first is how the volume of pornography has been dialled up, that its variety and availability have become significantly greater, primarily due to the power of the internet. The web offers porn that is easily available, anonymous and largely free. Also, most young people now encounter pornography, as was made clear in a study by myself and sociologist Sven-Axel Månsson. We conducted interviews and focus groups with 73 young people, and the results showed that porn was found “everywhere, like”, as they expressed it. This easy availability means that young people must learn to navigate this pornographic landscape based on their own values and wishes. However, conditions for dealing with pornography differ depending on the young people’s circumstances and backgrounds.

The second tendency, says Sørensen, is that this is a form of cleaning up, rinsing off what was previously considered shameful, sinful and/or forbidden. This cleansing process transforms and defuses sin. Pornography, whose entire existence was based on it being prohibited and sinful, thus moves from the gutter of society to boutiques at upmarket addresses that sell sex toys and exclusive underwear. Today, “sex aids” are sold at pharmacies, as a way of promoting public health.

The third is a kind of spill-over tendency, where fragments of pornography appear as an integrated part of the content and idiom of fashion magazines, music videos and advertising. Australian media researcher Brian McNair has called this *porno-chic*. Pornography has thus, overall, been defused, normalised and incorporated in the desirable beauty ideal that exists in popular culture. Our research interviews with Swedish youths confirm this. For many young people, pornography is now an influential element of youth culture, influencing both fashion and young people’s sexual attitudes and views on their performance. Many of the young people we spoke to stated that they dressed sexily and in a challenging way, and discussed whether this was inspired by pornographic images or by what is regarded as sexually attractive. Others spoke about comparing their own sexual performance with pornographic depictions, and how their images of how sex was and should be largely came from porn. Some of the inter-

viewees were also critical of pornography's representations and stated the impossibility of the physical ideals and sexual performances it shows.

However, young people are not the only ones to consume pornography or be affected by what it offers. The Swedish Internet Foundation's statistics for 2022 show that half of all men surfed for porn during the past year, and one in ten women did so; surfing for porn is also tending to increase slightly. Men born in the 1990s porn surf the most, with 80 per cent having done so in the previous year.

The widespread use of pornography among the young is causing concern among adults. No previous generation has grown up with pornography as easily accessible as it is today, or with its simultaneously over-explicit and subtle representations of gender, sexuality and physicality. Are young people capable of navigating between parallel and contradictory messages about sexual openness and restriction in contemporary multicultural society? And how do these representations of sexuality and sexual fantasies affect "real" sexuality and opinions about "normal" bodies?

Our research shows that most young people can deal with pornography without it negatively affecting their self-image. They describe positive role models, good family relationships and social contacts as important factors for wellbeing – but there are problems. A small group,

more vulnerable young people with low self-esteem, experience more difficulty finding themselves, their sexuality and their place in the world. This latter group describe a more problematic use of pornography, which can lead to abuse and which is often associated with loneliness and social isolation. Catching this early is important in reducing poor sexual and mental health.

Online dating and replaceability

The internet has created new arenas and meeting places for temporary sexual encounters and long-term relationships. Can online dating be regarded as a new kind of drug, one to which people risk becoming addicted?

In the early twenty-first century, I helped compile a national survey study, which showed that internet sex was seen as the next major revolution. Along with researchers in social work, we examined how over 1,800 Swedes used the internet to find love and sexual relationships. This research was the first of its kind to show what people actually do on the internet and how they use the new websites. Just like barn dances, discotheques, workplaces and colleges previously functioned as arenas for potential encounters, early dating sites supplemented and partially replaced these traditional meeting places. The internet also seemed to erase geographic, temporal and hierarchical boundaries between people. It provided opportunities for rural residents to meet people in the big cities, perhaps in another country or on another continent. This was particularly true for people with disabilities or different

sexual identities, who were otherwise socially isolated. The internet's utility for people who otherwise may have limited opportunities to expand their social networks was partially confirmed by a study of people with intellectual disabilities, their relatives and care staff, which I later conducted with colleagues at University West. There is however increasing discussion of the digital divide, where not everyone has access to the technology, can understand it and use it.

The market for dating apps has developed enormously over the past decade, as has their use. Searching for love, sex, intimacy and relationships online has simply become mainstream. The latest statistics from the Internet Research Foundation (from 2022) also show that 4 in 10 people met their partner on the internet. Among people born in the 1990s, half of all singles, both men and women, date by using apps. The majority, over 80 per cent of all singles, wish to live with a partner. This was shown by a study of sex habits in southern Sweden, in a survey study with interviewees aged 35 to 55 that I conducted with colleagues at Malmö University's Centre for Sexology and Sexuality Studies.

Online dating is a global phenomenon. In 2019, Tinder, one of the most rapidly expanding and popular dating sites globally, had 50 million users, 10 million actively dating and 20 billion matches(!), or approximately 26 million daily, according to researchers Yu-Chin Her and Elisabeth

Timmermans. However, online dating also entails a risk of disappointment and unachievable dreams. Self-esteem can take a knock and many people experience that they are rejected. Others feel tricked by the offer of a seemingly endless number of potential and expectant partners out there. “No one wants me, not even here,” as a young woman with an intellectual disability phrased it in a study about love on the internet, in which I interviewed people with disabilities.

Due to the internet, the conditions for love, sex and intimacy have changed radically in a short period of time. Dating sites pull people in with new ways to meet, but do these new ways of communicating also entail a transformation and even digitalisation of intimacy and sexuality? And does this mean that things that were previously regarded as sinful have become generally socially acceptable behaviour?

The Polish-British sociologist and philosopher Zygmunt Bauman stated that relationships that were previously linked to experiences of security, sustainability and a long-term perspective have now become transient, through increased individualisation and technological development. In the digital consumption society of love, Bauman believed that we become “goods” in which the need for closeness, companionship and intimacy are u(tili)sed on an increasingly commercialised market. Dating platforms not only require new users, but also create

a need in their existing ones to stay put. Meanwhile, when people do find each other in cyberspace, a sense of uncertainty can arise. Is there anyone else on the internet who is a better match for my requirements for closeness, companionship and love? Perhaps this is creating a new deadly sin – constant dissatisfaction, which leads to a reluctance to get to know each other at a deeper level and difficulties in becoming attached to another person.

Israeli sociologist Eva Illouz says that the sexual offering now on the internet entails increased difficulty with relationships. The apparently endless variety of potential partners instead seems to lead to insecurity, a feeling of replaceability and low self-esteem. Illouz thus believes that online dating apps like Tinder are destructive for lasting love, transforming sex into a commodity that is not really any different to a take-away pizza. Sex has, she believes, simply been demystified and become something that should be neither restricted via religion nor spiced up by romance. Sex has quite simply become part of our health, transformed into a solely physical pleasure.

And if our lust is now primarily to be regarded as part of our physical health, perhaps it is not so surprising that lust and lasciviousness are no longer a deadly sin?

From a deadly sin to a human right

The changing view of lust, in which sexuality is instead regarded as an important and socially accepted element of a healthy life – even as a human right rather than a deadly sin – also leads to new expectations about sexuality. This is noticeable in the increased need for sexology experts; these may involve discussing moral and existential attitudes and the varying degrees of sexual freedom experienced by individuals, couples and groups. Due to this societal demand, there is now academic education in sexology and increasing numbers of people are training as sexologists, or building upon previous qualifications in nursing, midwifery, social work or teaching to become sexologists.

When sexuality starts to be regarded as a right, demands on healthcare services and sexual health also change. I have interviewed Swedish sexologists who can testify to this. They saw shifts and changes in the sexual problems their patients asked for help with. The societal view of sexual performance and physical ideals also affects an individual's perception of themselves and their sexuality.

From previously encountering questions about bodily functions, sexologists are now frequently asked about lust – and the lack of it. These questions are often gender related; for example, it still appears taboo for men to express low levels of sexual desire.

Questions about a lack of sexual desire are also seen in societal concern about how surveys of sexual habits show that couples, particularly young couples, are having less frequent sex. A “sexual recession” among the young is spoken of, not only in Sweden, but also in countries like Japan, the UK and the USA. That young people have fewer sexual contacts is incontestable, but this does not have to be a problem. Instead of asking how often people have sex, sex surveys have recently begun to ask how satisfied people are with their sex lives; a less extensive sex life can be more satisfying. There are many reasonable explanations for abstinence, such as increased stress and pressurising ideals. Abstinence can also be interpreted as an expression of increased equality. Perhaps not as many people today feel pressured to “do their duty” in a sexual relationship and perhaps not feeling desire has become more permissible? In addition, concern about a reduction in lust can itself be an expression of the view of a lack of sexual desire as the “new” shameful element of sexuality.

Other explanations for the shift from issues relating to the body’s appearance and function to questions of sexual

desire involve the increased availability of both sex aids and sex toys, as well as pharmaceuticals that affect potency.

The change to a more rights-based view of sex also applies to sex as we age. The World Health Organisation and the Public Health Agency of Sweden highlight everybody's right to sexual health, regardless of age, gender, sexual identity, disability, ethnicity or social class. Also, as regards age, people are increasingly divorcing after many years of marriage. This is a relatively new phenomenon, partly related to greater longevity, but also to the perspective where sexuality is a factor in quality of life, throughout life. This change is demonstrated in the design of the most recent national population study of sexual and reproductive health, which has no upper age limit, unlike previous reports – from 1967, which had 64 as the end point, and from 1996, which stopped at 74. Nurse Nils Beckman shows that the quality of older people's sex lives has also improved since the 1970s.

Six in ten women and seven in ten men over the age of 70 state they have a high level of satisfaction. Half of today's 97-year-olds have a positive attitude to sexuality and talk about sexual dreams, even if most of them are no longer sexually active, so expressing that they miss having sexual contact.

So, if there used to be a focus on “treatment” of what was perceived to be sexually deviant behaviour, there is now a desire to achieve the ideal lustful sexuality through-

out life, which can be linked to the media image of lust as part of the good life. Lust is regarded as something desirable that is also linked to high social and financial status, far from the idea that lust is a deadly sin.

Sexual lust is also now associated with overarching societal assertions in which sexual and reproductive health are seen as integral to human rights. Sexual and reproductive health and rights are a separate branch within healthcare, abbreviated as SRHR. The Guttmacher-Lancet Commission, which comprises commissioners from Africa, Asia, Europe, the Middle East, North and South America and multidisciplinary expertise, is also working for a wider definition of SRHR. They say that inequalities in sexual and reproductive health and rights have a major negative impact on individual, groups and societal economies, so investing in “health and human rights for all” is a pressing issue in health, education and economics. Here, we see sexual desire as an element in developing the global welfare system.

However, like Foucault, we could also ask ourselves how sexologists can affect opinions about sex. What new sexual diagnoses and behavioural patterns will be regarded as problematic or need therapy or cures in the future? Who or what decides where the limit is for what is regarded as permissible or not? And on what basis are those judgements made? Here, perhaps new behaviours and ideas will influence how we regard fornication, to use an

old-fashioned word for non-acceptable sexuality and the deadly sin of lust.

Sometimes, there is talk of sex addiction. One way of defining “hypersexuality” is that the lust for sex, such as through compulsive masturbation or surfing for porn, takes so much time and space in an individual’s life that it becomes a barrier to other social activities, relationships and interactions. Researcher and clinician Katarina Görts-Öberg describes how the condition is characterised by these people losing control, taking great risks and continuing despite their behaviour having negative consequences. Could it be that lust in itself is no longer a sin, while an empty but exaggerated, mechanical, solipsistic lust without emotional contact (or tenderness) with a partner is evolving into the new deadly sin?

Lust in modern society

So, what can we conclude about the deadly sin of lust in contemporary Western society? For someone today, it may be that the rejection of lust is seen as problematic. When young people are said to be having less sex, it immediately causes concern and talk of a recession, although it is unclear whether this is actually a problem or the expression of a greater degree of satisfaction.

What we can definitely say is that sexuality is now regarded as part of our health and there are thus new demands on lustful sexual encounters. We are expected to live our lives to the full, and so sexual satisfaction becomes regarded as a type of right we can demand. At the same time, lust can be perceived as an unobtainable dream of pleasure and abandonment for the modern, stressed individual. At the same time, what was historically regarded as a deadly sin has become commodified in modern consumer society, like so much else. We can buy vibrators, lubricant and Viagra at the pharmacy and swipe for new sex partners with a couple of clicks. And we are absolutely entitled to. We move through a public sphere

that is full of naked bodies, where pornography is just a click away. We also display ourselves like goods on dating apps, selecting photos and writing presentations so others perceive us as attractive, while we browse a range of potential partners just like we choose a product from the shelves of a store.

Seen as a sin, lust carries an ambiguity that the other deadly sins do not; without sex, humanity will die out, but too generous a sexuality once put societies at risk of conflicts and problems, such as with unwanted children. Contraception, increased sex education and better health-care have partially remedied these dangers that lurked in a free and easy sexuality. Perhaps this is why it is now so difficult to regard lust as a deadly sin.

So is everything hunky-dory? Have we reached paradise? Of course, it's not that simple. Perhaps this ever-present sexuality will lead to fatigue, or even ennui, in the face of lust, where we instead look to other pleasures – training, cookery, art or music? If so, we are heading for a more restrained, and celibate, future.

References and suggested reading

- Andersson, Stina & Sjö Dahl, Silvia, *Sex: En politisk historia*. Gothenburg: Alfabetanamma/RFSU, 2003.
- Bauman, Zygmunt, *Liquid Love: On the Frailty of Human Bonds*. Cambridge: Polity, 2003.
- Beckman, Nils, *Epidemiological Studies of Sexuality in Old Age*. Gothenburg: Institutionen för neurovetenskap och fysiologi, Sahlgrenska, 2015.
- Berg, Henrik, *Läkarebok*. Stockholm: Nordiska Förlags AB, 1918.
- Blackburn, Simon, *Lust: The Seven Deadly Sins*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004.
- Engwall, Kristina, “*Asociala och imbecilla*”: *Kvinnorna på Västra Mark 1931–1967*. Örebro: Institutionen för historia, Örebro University, 2000.
- Folkhälsomyndigheten, *Sexuell och reproduktiv hälsa och rättigheter (SRHR) i Sverige 2017: Resultat från befolkningsundersökningen SRHR 2017*. Stockholm: FHM, 2019.
- Foucault, Michel, *The History of Sexuality 4: Confessions of the Flesh*. London: Penguin, 2023.
- Illouz, Eva, *The End of Love: A Sociology of Negative Relations*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2019.
- Internetstiftelsen, “Nätdejting och nätporr”, chapter 4 of *Svenskarna och internet 2022*. <https://svenskarnaochinternet.se/rapporter/svenskarna-och-internet-2022/> (accessed 17 October 2022).
- Kinsey, Alfred C., Pomeroy, Wardell B. & Martin, Clyde E., *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male*. Philadelphia: Saunders, 1948.

- Kinsey, Alfred C., Pomeroy, Wardell B. & Gebhard, Paul H., *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female*. Philadelphia: Saunders, 1953.
- Lennerhed, Lena, *Frihet att njuta: Sexualdebatten i Sverige på 1960-talet*. Stockholm: Norstedts, 1994.
- Lennerhed, Lena, *Sex i folkhemmet: RFSUs tidiga historia*. Hedemora: Gidlunds, 2002.
- Lundberg, Per Olov & Löfgren-Mårtenson, Lotta (eds.), *Sexologi*. Stockholm: Liber, 2016.
- Löfgren-Mårtenson, Lotta, *Kärlek.nu: Om internet och unga med utvecklingsstörning*. Lund: Studentlitteratur, 2005.
- Löfgren-Mårtenson, Lotta, *Sexualitet. BeGrepbart*. Malmö: Liber, 2013.
- Löfgren-Mårtenson, Lotta, *Sexualitet. BeGrepbart*. Stockholm: Liber, e-book, 2021.
- Löfgren-Mårtenson, Lotta, "Sexuell och reproduktiv hälsa och rättigheter: Nationella och internationella perspektiv", in Pernilla Ouis (ed.), *Sexualitet och migration i välfärdsarbete*, pp. 61–74. Lund: Studentlitteratur, 2021.
- Löfgren-Mårtenson, Lotta & Elmerstig, Eva, *Sex i Sydsvrige 2016: Sexuella handlingar och livsstilar i Skåne*. Malmö: FoU-rapport Hälsa och samhälle, 2018.
- Löfgren-Mårtenson, Lotta & Månsson, Sven-Axel, "Sex överallt, typ?!" *Om unga och pornografi*. Stockholm: Gothia, 2006.
- McNair, Brian, *Striptease. Culture. Sex: Media and the Democratization of Desire*. London: Routledge, 2002.
- Molin, Martin, Sorbring, Emma & Löfgren-Mårtenson, Lotta, *Delaktighetens digitalisering: Om identitetskapande aktiviteter bland unga med intellektuell funktionsnedsättning*. Rapport 2019:5. Trollhättan: University West, 2019.
- Månsson, Sven-Axel, Daneback, Kristian, Tikkanen, Ronny & Löfgren-Mårtenson, Lotta, *Kärlek och sex på internet: Nätsexprojektet 2003:1*. Gothenburg & Malmö: University of Gothenburg & Malmö University College, 2003.

- Rubin, Gayle, "Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality", in Roger Parker & Peter Aggleton (eds.), *Culture, Society and Sexuality: A Reader*, pp. 143–178. Oxon & New York: Routledge, 2007.
- SCB, Hushåll i Sverige, 2021. Stockholm: Statistiska centralbyrån. <https://www.scb.se/hitta-statistik/sverige-i-siffror/manniskorna-i-sverige/hushall-i-sverige/> (accessed 7 December 2021).
- Starrs, Ann M. m.fl., "Accelerate Progress – Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights for all: Report of the Guttmacher-Lancet Commission". *The Lancet*, vol. 391, no. 10140, 2018, pp. 2642–2692.
- Sørensen, Anette Dina, "Pornografi och køn i massekulturen", *NIKK magasin*, no. 1, 2003, Seksualitet og identitet, pp. 32–24.
- Sørensen, Niels Ulrik, Löfgren-Mårtenson, Charlotta & Månsson, Sven-Axel, "Unge i klemme: Nye udfordringer, grænser og gråzoner", in Line Anne Roien, Venka Simovska & Christian Graugaard (eds.), *Seksualitet, skole og samfund: Kritiske perspektiver på seksualundervisning*, pp. 209–232. Copenhagen: Hans Reitzels Forlag, 2018.
- "Vad räknas som sexmissbruk?", interview with Katarina Görts-Öberg, Karolinska Institutet 2019, <https://ki.se/forskning/vad-raknas-som-sexmissbruk> (accessed 15 February 2023).
- WHO, "Sexual and Reproductive Health and Research (SRH)", 2019, [https://www.who.int/teams/sexual-and-reproductive-health-and-research-\(srh\)/overview](https://www.who.int/teams/sexual-and-reproductive-health-and-research-(srh)/overview) (accessed 15 February 2023).
- Yu-Chin Her & Timmermans, Elisabeth, "Tinder Blue, Mental Flu? Exploring the Associations Between Tinder Use and Well-being", *Information, Communication & Society*, vol. 24, no. 9, 2021, pp. 1303–1319.

Riksbankens Jubileumsfond: promotes, inspires and participates

Riksbankens Jubileumsfond (RJ) is an independent foundation with the goal of promoting Swedish research in the humanities and social sciences. The foundation was established through a resolution in the Swedish Riksdag in 1964, when a donation from Riksbanken (the Swedish Central Bank) was approved and the statutes adopted. RJ's establishment was part of the tercentenary celebrations of the world's oldest, still operating, central bank. These celebrations also included the Prize in Economic Sciences in Memory of Alfred Nobel and the bank building on Brunkebergstorg, Stockholm. By establishing a foundation, the Riksdag and the Riksbank hoped to benefit a pressing national cause: scientific research linked to Sweden.

For more than fifty years, the foundation has promoted research in the humanities and social sciences.

In 2022, total funding for research and collaboration amounted to more than SEK 500 million. Hundreds of researchers in these disciplines have received grants for conducting research, building infrastructures and networks, establishing new contacts and participating in conferences and seminars, as well as in public debate.

RJ 2023

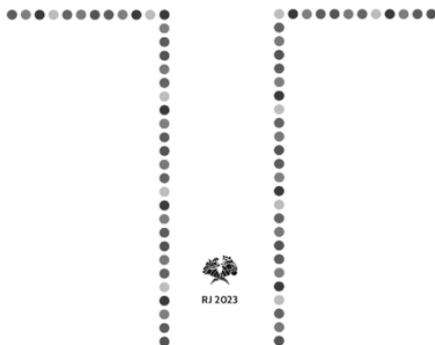
The Deadly Sins in Our Time

Editor: Jenny Björkman

Editorial board: Ingrid Elam, Lisa Irenius,
Sven Anders Johansson



THE DEADLY SINS
IN OUR TIME



Although lust was once classed as a deadly sin, a lack of desire is now considered problematic. Reports that young people are having less sex are met with concern. Since the nineteenth century, as sexuality has moved from the field of morality to that of medicine, it has come to be regarded as part of our health, something necessary – even a human right.

At the same time, lust has become a product; sexuality has undergone a form of pornification in the public space, and dating apps such as Tinder have produced a market with a vast offering. Is there a risk that sexuality's constant presence risks resulting in general fatigue in the face of lust?

In 2023, Riksbankens Jubileumsfond is issuing a collection of essays on *The Deadly Sins in Our Time*. Sexuality researcher Lotta Löfgren writes about perspectives on lust in the sexually open 2020s.

RJ 2023: *The Deadly Sins in Our Time*
Riksbankens Jubileumsfond
in collaboration with Makadam förlag



ISBN 978-91-7061-456-9



RIKSBANKENS
JUBILEUMSFOND

FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF
THE HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES