

"8 or 9 maybe in the last 2 to 3 years. Maybe more.
I can't add up before that"

(Woman, 23 yrs, single, unattached)

"I couldn't say. It could be 50, 80, 150. I can only say...
dozens. I'd need an evening to tot it up."

(Man, 52 yrs, divorced)

One gay man estimated at least a thousand partners, because

"If you go cruising, that could be 7 in one night"

(Man, 38 yrs, single, unattached)

Early memories and experiences are difficult to describe with any accuracy for many people. Some people did have clear memories of particular incidents, and had reflected on them because their descriptions were articulate and not at all hesitant. For many, however, their view was rather blurred, they talked in a generalised way, and could not remember any particular event or experience. For some, sexual experience meant sexual intercourse, and they did not classify earlier experiences as sexual.

Frequency of sex could not be estimated by some respondents for a number of reasons: they were not in a regular relationship and sex was a question of opportunity; frequency was too erratic by virtue of working hours, tiredness, separation, or opportunity in terms of place; sex was too infrequent to generalise - this usually applied to people who had sex less than once a month. Even where people did estimate frequency, the feeling of interviewers was that this was very much a 'rough guess'. We have one opportunity in our sample of comparing two different accounts of frequency of sex¹. Two respondents interviewed were having a relationship with each other; the man claimed they had sex about 10 times a week, and the last time they had sex had been on the morning of the interview; the woman claimed they had sex every night or every other night, and the last time they had sex had been the previous evening. It is impossible to assess whether or not the man was overclaiming, or the woman underclaiming, but this example raises some doubts about the accuracy of estimates of frequency of sex.

¹The two respondents knew each other was taking part, and, indeed, were enthusiastic about each other's participation. They were interviewed on the same morning by two different members of the research team.