

Evidence from Australian population studies of health and relationships

Do women really like sex?

Stephen Fry actor and journalist

claimed:

- women don't really like sex
- if they did, they would go cruising for anonymous sex like gay men
- for women, sex is the price they pay to get a relationship



Is this true?

Two national telephone surveys

- Australian Study of Health and Relationships (ASHR)
- Data collected 2001–02
- 19,307 men and women aged 16–59
- Australian Longitudinal Study of Health and Relationships (LongSex)
- Data collected over 5 waves from 2005 to 2010
- Wave 1 had 8656 people aged 16–64

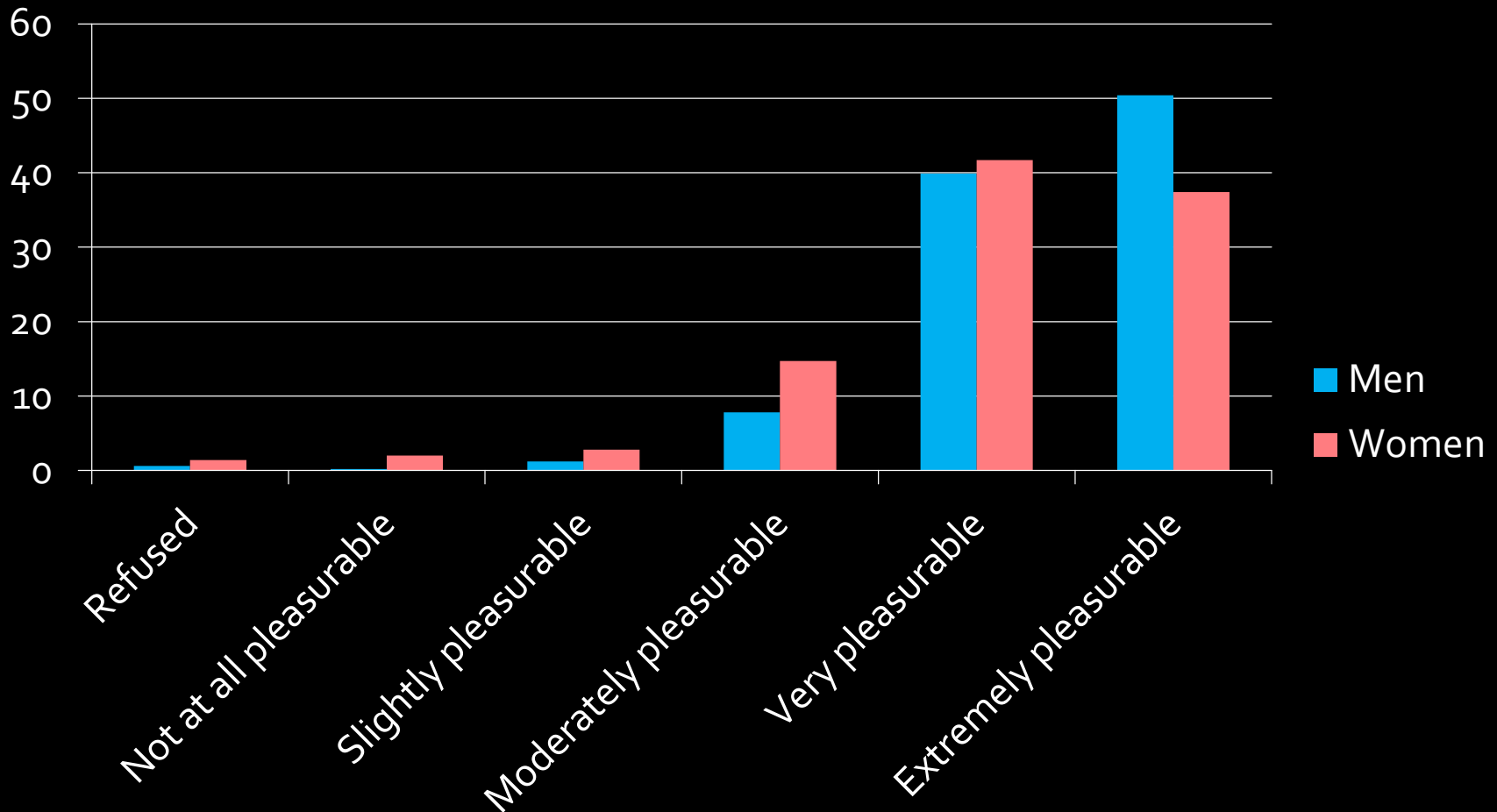


Both studies used random digit dialling to households

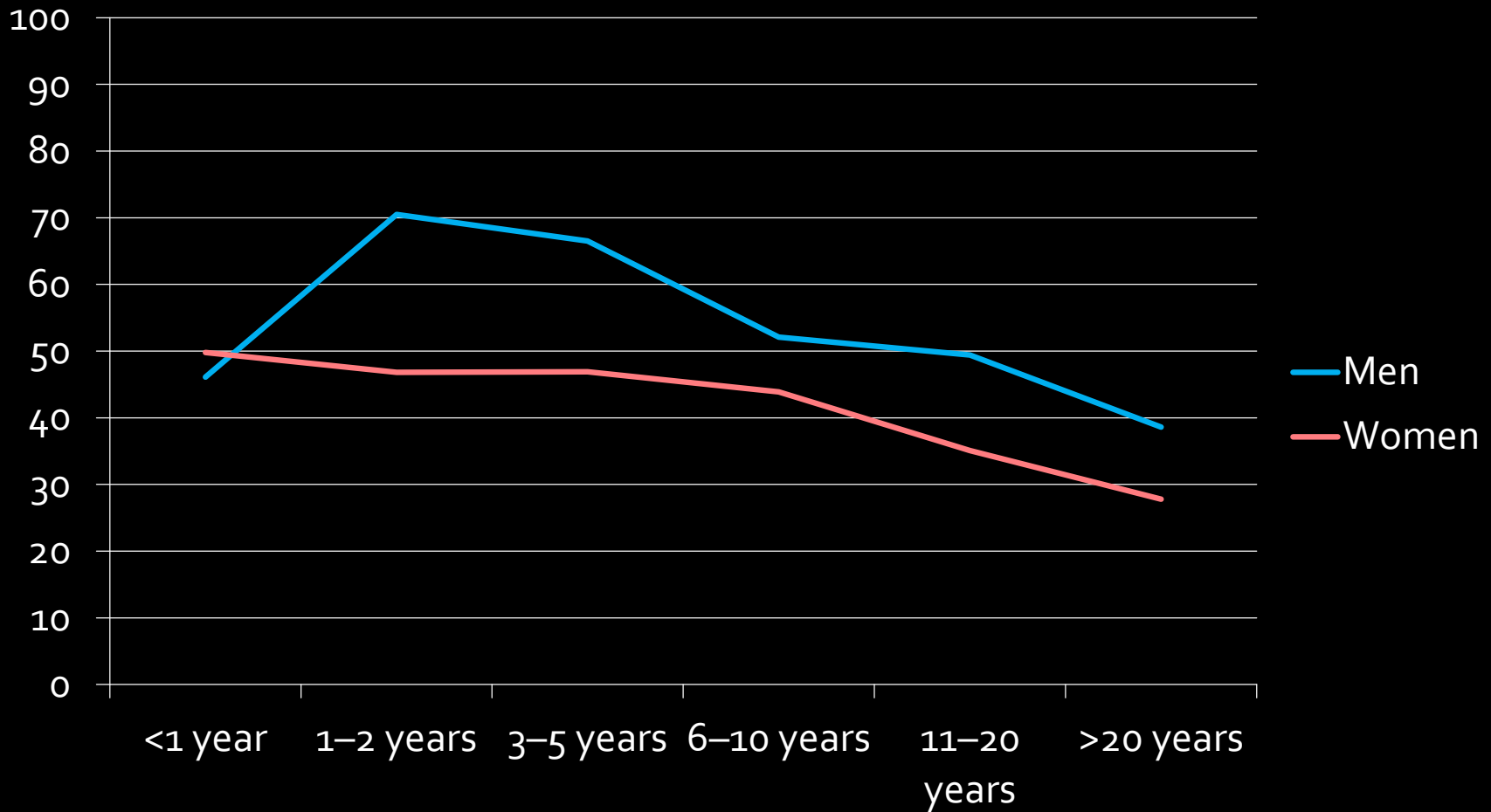
Interviews included questions on:

- sexual practices (manual, oral, vaginal sex)
- physical pleasure in sex
- emotional satisfaction with relationship
- involvement over the previous year in:
 - masturbation
 - viewing pornography
 - using a sex toy (e.g. vibrator or dildo)
 - etc.

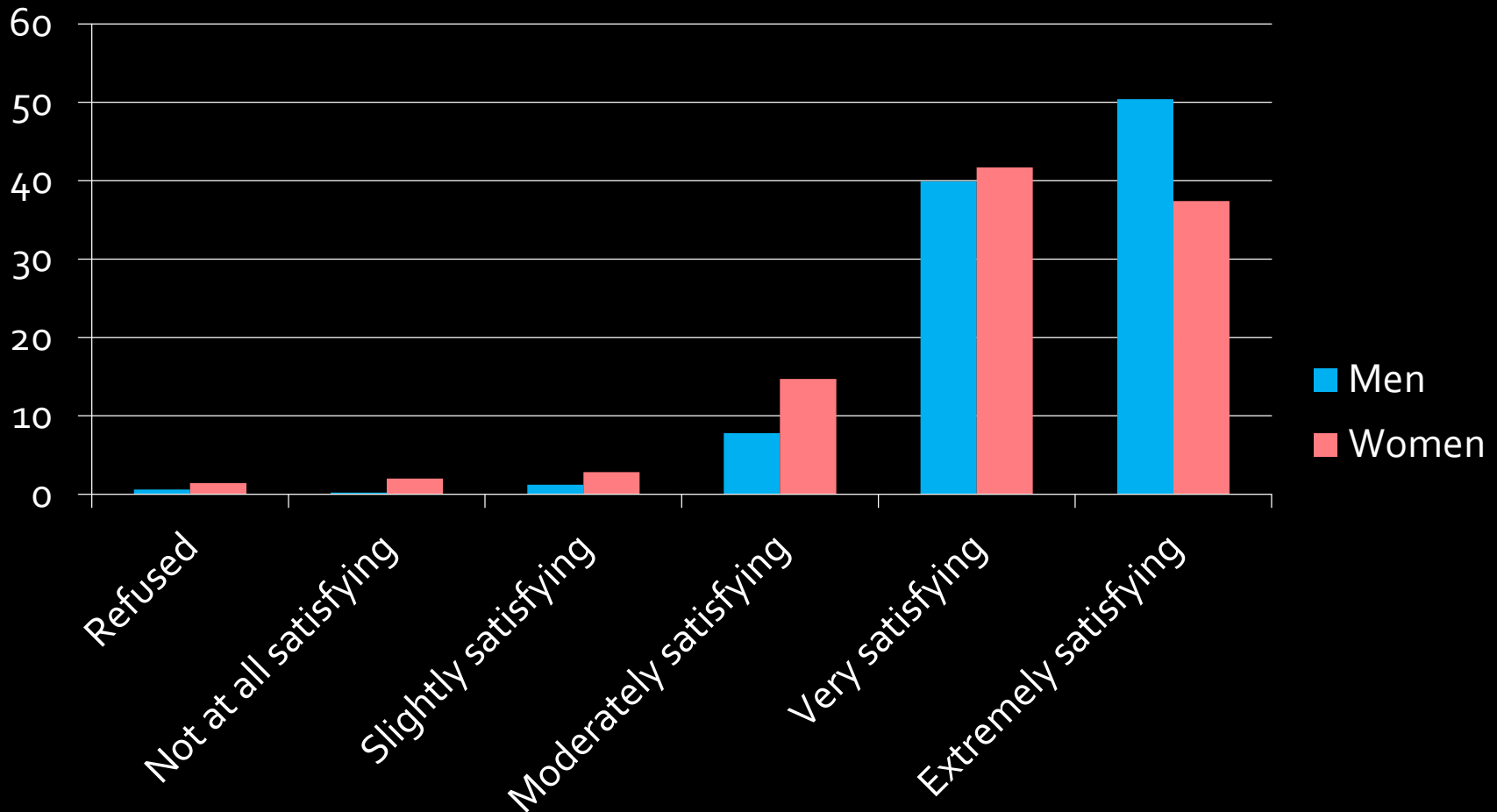
Physical pleasure in sex in M–F regular relationships (ASHR)



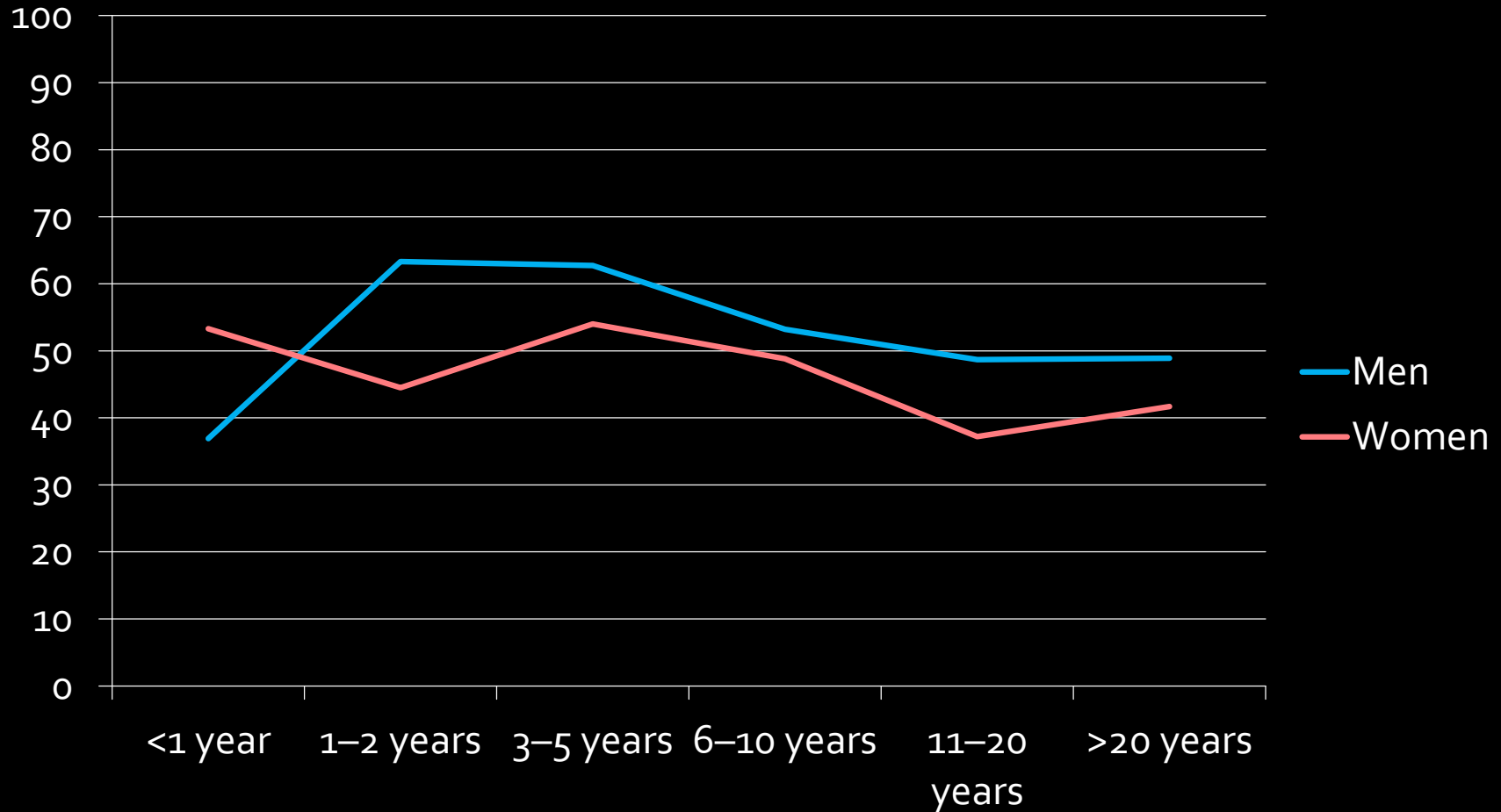
Percentage saying sex in M–F regular relationship is 'extremely' physically pleasurable



Emotional satisfaction with relationship



Percentage saying M–F regular relationship is 'extremely' emotionally satisfying



Why is this so?

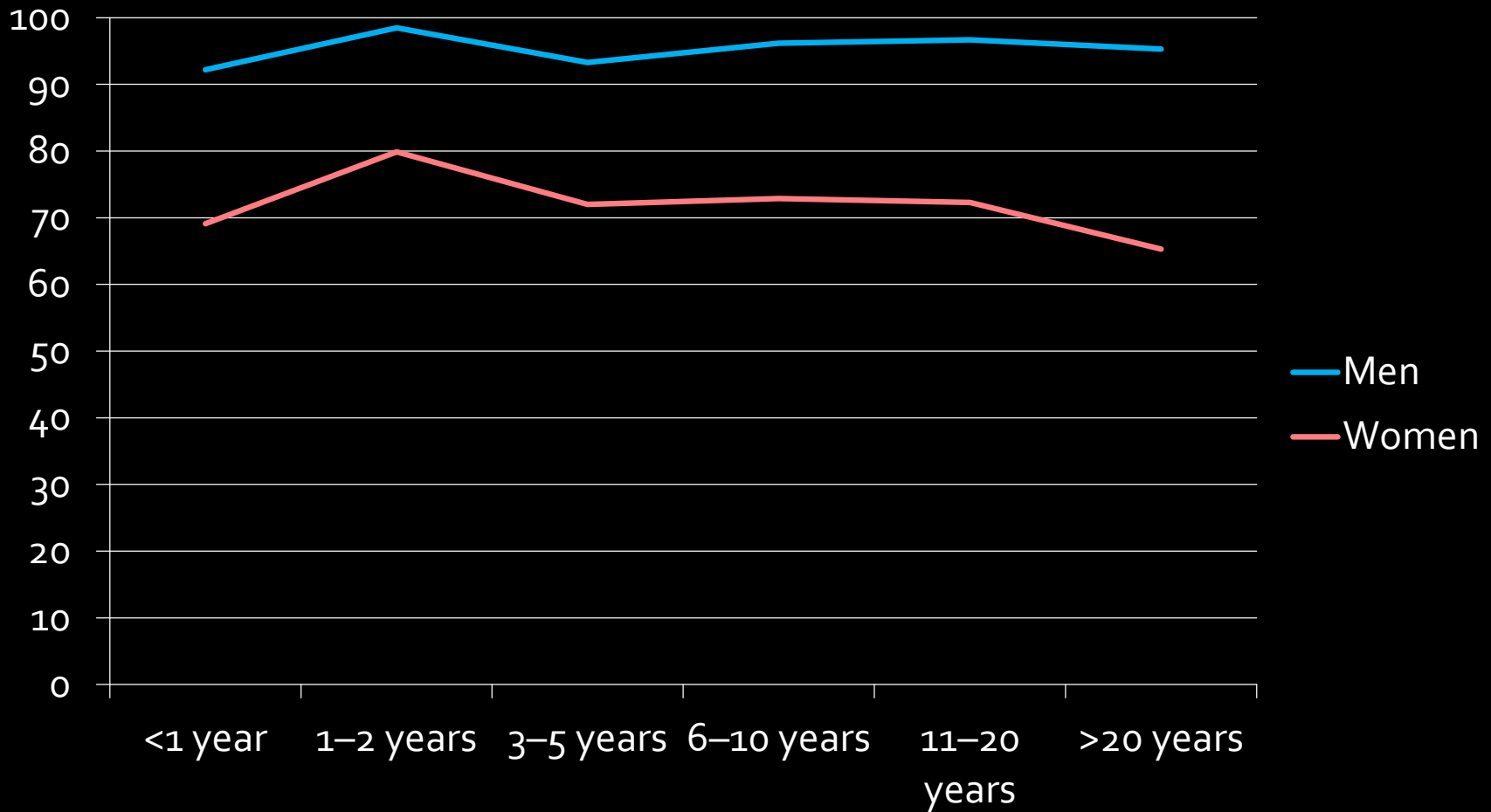
- Are women just harder to please?
- Or are they less keen on sex because the sex they get is less good?
- Declines in 50s may be physiological (menopause for women, erectile and arousal difficulties for men)

Sexual practices and orgasm

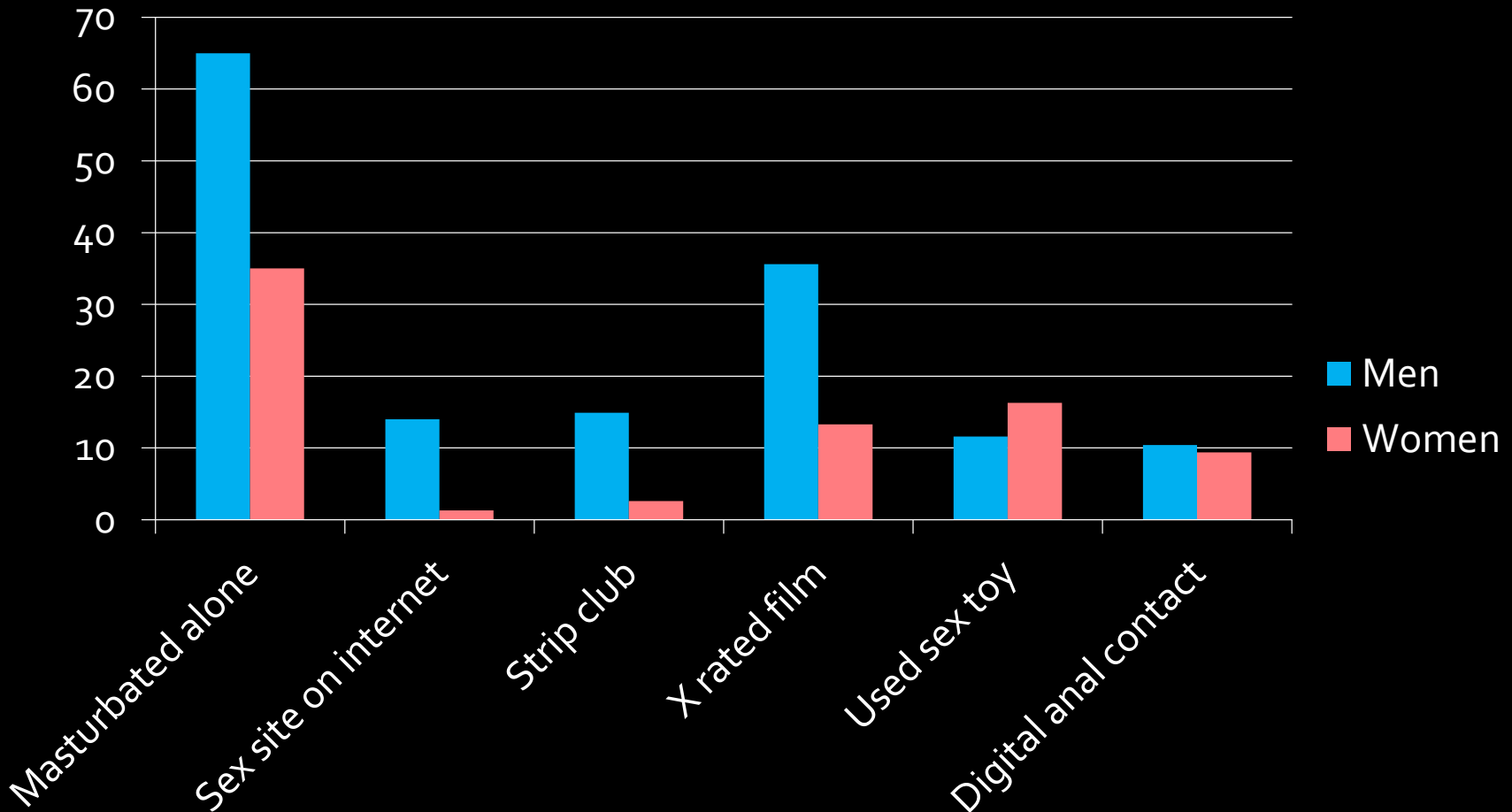
- At last heterosexual encounter, 95% of men but only 69% of women had an orgasm
- Men had an orgasm in almost every encounter that included intercourse
- In 'intercourse-only' encounters, only 50% of women had an orgasm
- Women were more likely to have an orgasm in encounters that included manual and oral sex (esp. cunnilingus)
- (76% of women having sex with a woman had an orgasm)

**So do women go off sex because
they have fewer orgasms?**

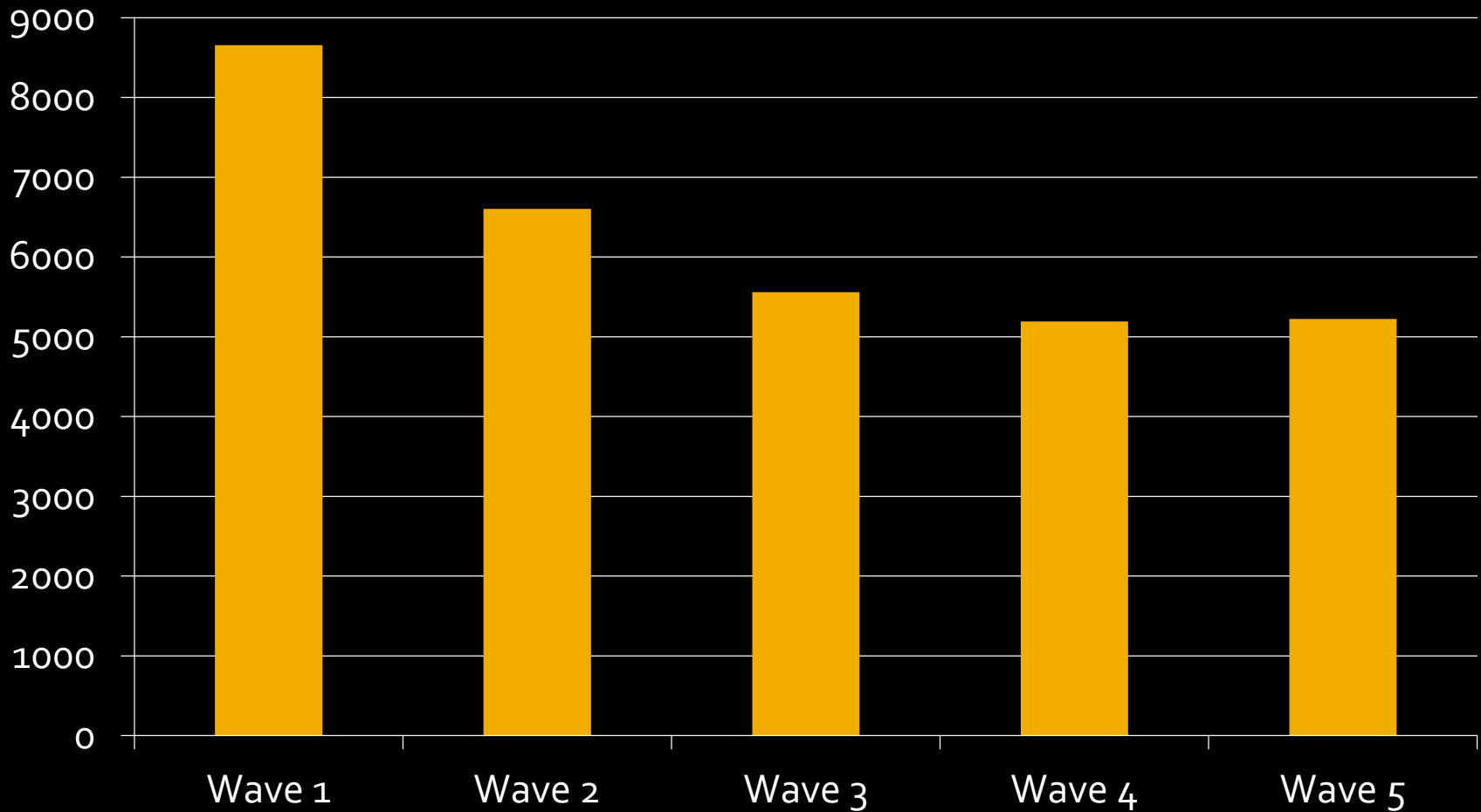
Reaching orgasm at last sexual encounter, by length of relationship



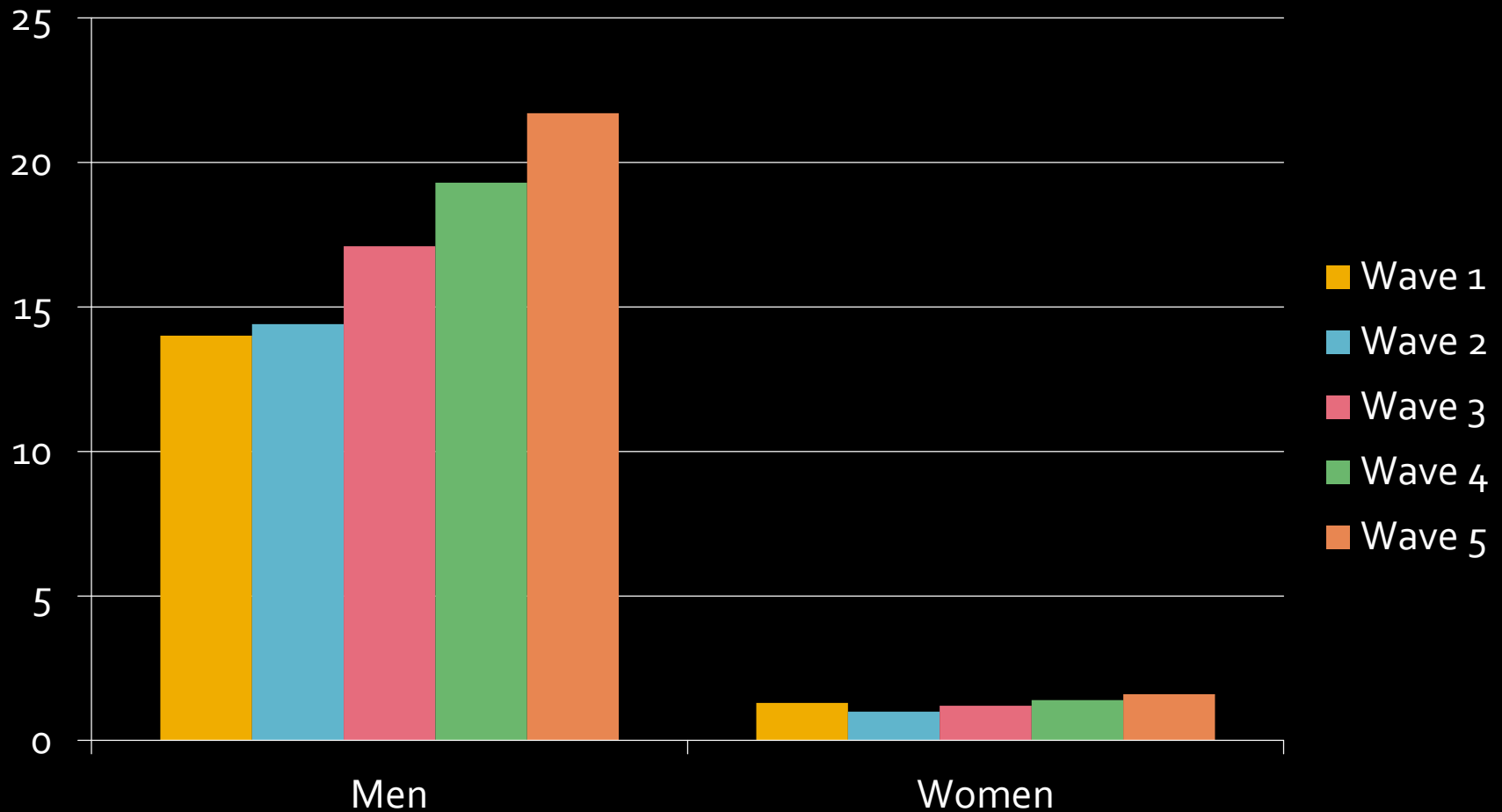
Other non-coital practices in past year (LongSex Wave 1)



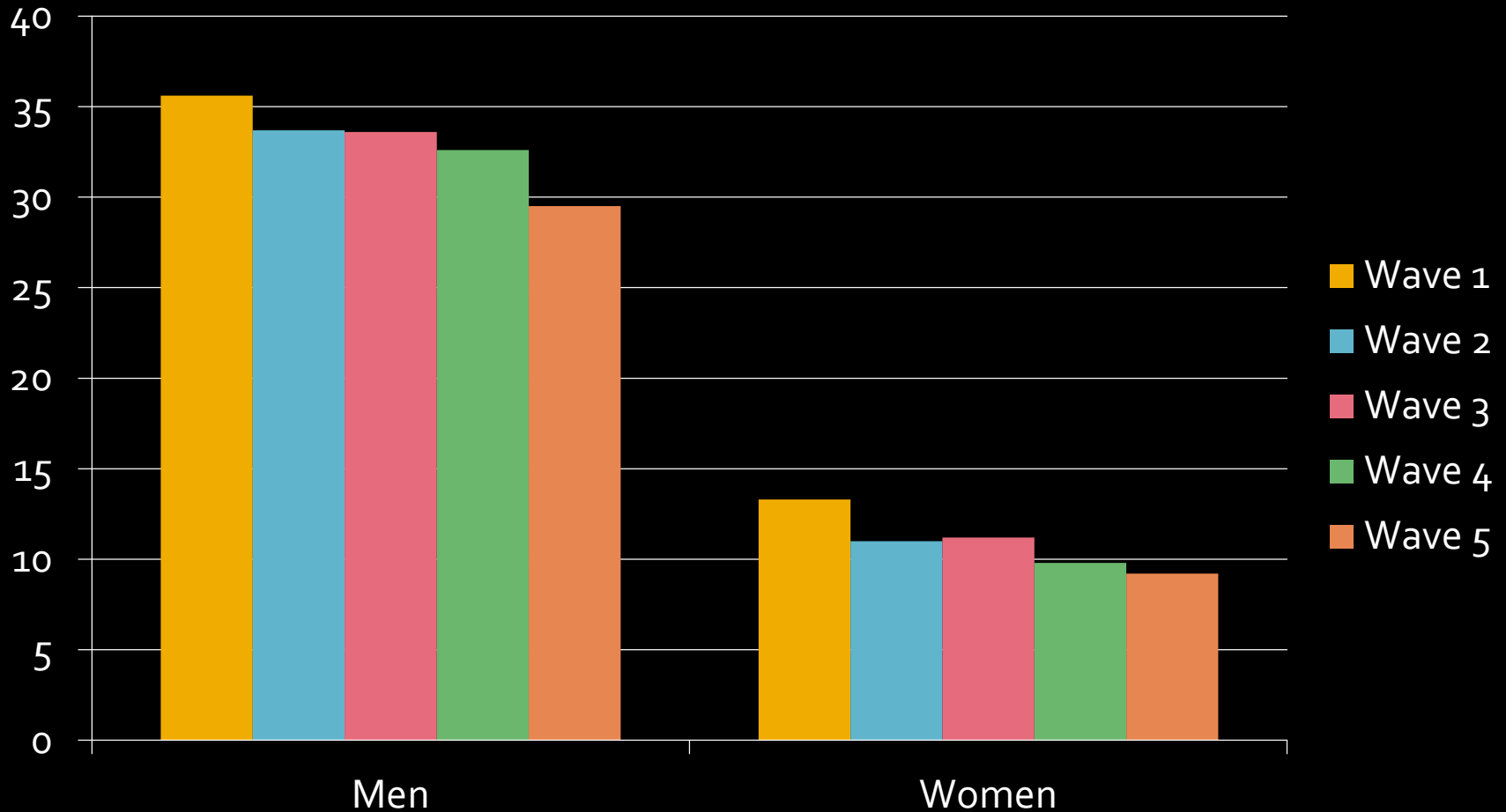
Participants over time (LongSex)



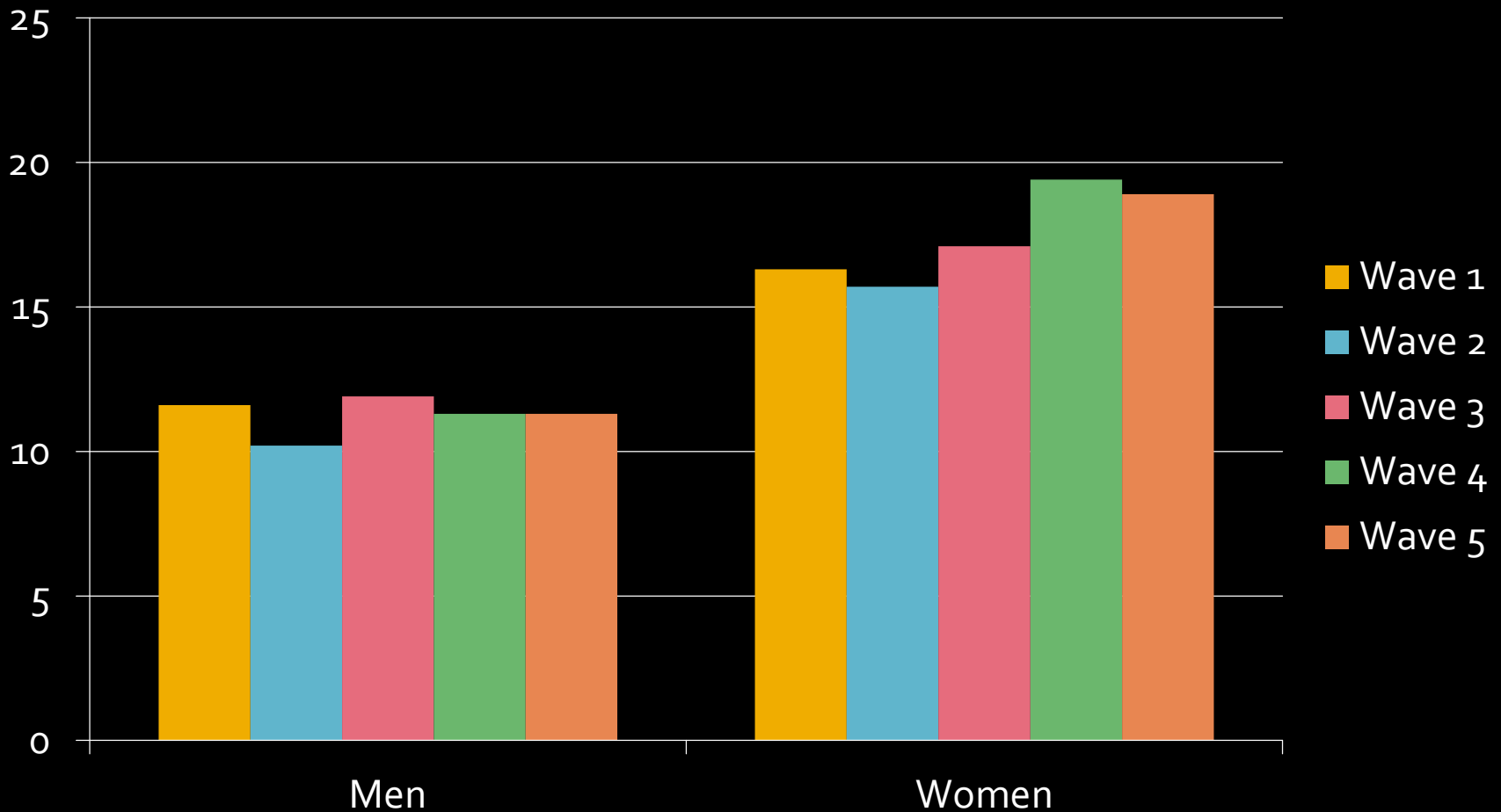
Visited internet sex site (%)



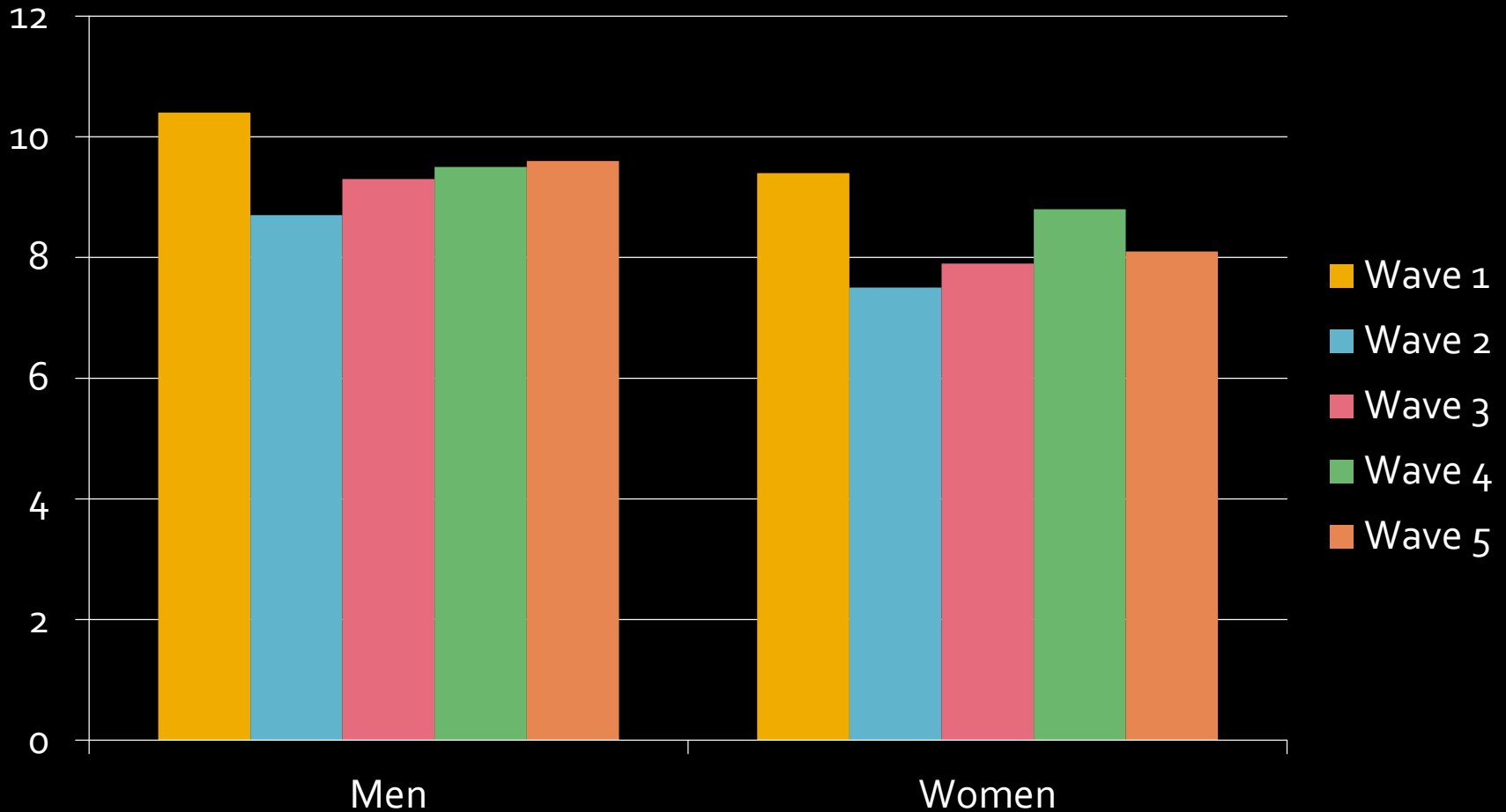
Watched X-rated film



Used sex toy (e.g. dildo or vibrator)



Digital stimulation of anus (his or hers)



Do men like sex?

- They masturbate more
- They use more sex substitutes that do not involve a partner, e.g. watching other people having sex
- Are they just wankers?
- They report more sexual partners
- They are more likely to cheat, i.e. have sex with an outside partner when in a supposedly exclusive relationship
- Do they simply seek variety?

Why is it so?

- Evolutionary theorists posit that males (any species) benefit by increasing their chance of successful reproduction
- They always interpret this as meaning males seek to optimise insemination
- Actually females in many species play around
- Reproductive partner is not always the same as 'social' (e.g. nest-building) partner

But ...

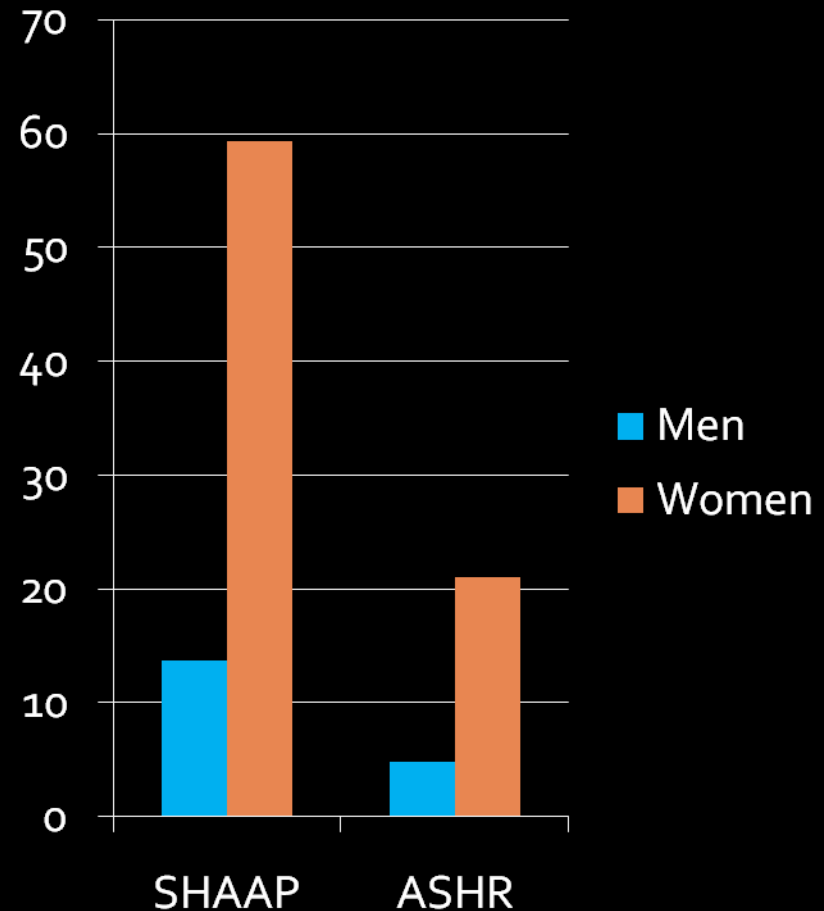
- Evolutionary theorists of sex tend to ignore the other effects on successful reproduction
- Offspring survival may be more crucial than number of conceptions
- Factors: functioning of group, successful childbirth and breastfeeding, keeping children safe ...
- Women's sexual responses may be selected for by child survival (e.g. breastfeeding, ease of childbirth)
- This tends to be ignored by evo-theorists, who focus on the male contribution to reproduction (=impregnation)
- Culturally, who defines what counts as 'sex'?

Empiricism or androcentrism?

- Stephen Fry and others are wrong
- Women do go out looking for sex, but they tend to do it in safer group environments
 - Darling Harbour
 - backpacker hostels
 - residential colleges
- Men make sex dangerous for women

Sexual forcing

'Have you ever been forced or frightened by a male or female into doing something sexually that you did not want to do?'



Conclusions

- No evidence that men want sex and women want relationships. Men are more pleased with both
- Men keener on sexual imagery (=non-sex?)
- Sex theorists still promote stories that are not empirically supported
- and tell women how they should be and what they should like

The 'LongSex' team for this paper

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