

# Three Special Valentine's Day Releases

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## On Love and Sex

by Reginald W. Bibby

This Valentine's Day, a lot of couples are going to be exchanging cards and gifts, and words. But the results of a recent national survey provide us with insight into which couples are also going to be having sex.

The survey of close to 2,100 Canadians, carried out for the Vanier Institute of the Family by University of Lethbridge sociologist Reginald Bibby, has confirmed something that most of us suspect. **An excellent predictor of sexual activity is the balance between enjoyment and strain that we are experiencing in our relationships.** As enjoyment drops and strain increases, we are having less sex. Put bluntly, couples who are maximizing enjoyment and minimizing strain are having the most sex.

Some 75% of Canadians who say they are receiving **"lots of enjoyment and very little strain"** from their relationships are engaging in sex at least once a week. But that weekly-plus figure drops to about 55% when the **enjoyment level drops**, even when partners are not experiencing very much strain.

When Canadians are in relationships that bring them a **high level of enjoyment but also a high level of strain**, less than 1 in 2 (45%) are having sex once a week or more.

And, as would be expected, in cases where **relational strain is high and relational enjoyment is low**, weekly-plus sex is out of the question for all but about 10% of couples. In fact, 4 in 10 people in such situations admit that they never have sex.

That's even lower than the levels of sexual activity reported by people whose relationships have bottomed out – individuals who **neither experience much joy nor strain** – people who seem to be pretty emotionally empty. Perhaps surprisingly, about 25% of the individuals in this category still somehow manage to work up enough energy to have sex once a week or more.

**Table 1. Sexual Activity by the Quality of One's Relationship**

*% Reporting Engage in Sex*

	Weekly+	Never
<b>Nationally</b>	<b>59%</b>	<b>9</b>
Lots of enjoyment, very little strain	75	4
Quite a bit of enjoyment, very little strain	56	9
Quite a bit of enjoyment, quite a bit of strain	45	12
Not very much enjoyment, very little strain	24	19
Not very much enjoyment, quite a bit of strain	12	42

Source: Reginald Bibby, Future Families Project. Vanier Institute of the Family, 2004.

**The correlation between sexual activity and enjoyment/strain is high among both women and men.** Clearly, when relationships are strained, both women and men are less inclined to be intimate sexually. Conversely, when the relationship is good, frequent sex tends to follow for both sexes.

**And such a pattern is also found among individuals of all ages.**

- For example, almost 9 in 10 Canadians who are under the age of 30 and have positive relationships are having sex at least once a week, compared to about 6 in 10 people with less satisfying ties.
- Similarly, people in their 60s who are experiencing good ties are twice as likely to be having weekly-plus sex than people their age whose relationships are strained.

	% Indicating Engaging in Sex Weekly	
	<i>Lots of Enjoyment &amp; Very Little Strain</i>	<i>Other</i>
<b>Nationally</b>	<b>75%</b>	<b>49</b>
Women	80	53
Men	72	44
18-29	86	52
30-39	88	59
40-49	81	59
50-59	78	49
60-69	53	27
70-plus	38	9

Source: Reginald Bibby, Future Families Project. Vanier Institute of the Family, 2004.

**If anything, the enjoyment/strain factor becomes even more important in predicting sexual activity as people get into their 50s and beyond.**

- Up through age 49, individuals who are experiencing lots of enjoyment and little strain from their relationships are about one and a half times more likely than other people to be having sex anywhere from daily to weekly.
- But when Canadians are in their 60s, couples who are experiencing high enjoyment and low strain are twice as likely as others to be engaging in weekly-plus sex; when they are in their 70s and beyond, that likelihood increases to four times that of other couples.
- And just in case you were wondering...43% of males and 23% of females in their 60s say they are having sex at least once a week; for males and females who are 70 and over, the weekly-plus figures are 22% and 19% respectively – about 1 in 5 people.

**These findings point to a fairly obvious and yet important ongoing reality: sex, for many if not most Canadians, is tied to significant relationships.** To the extent that people are involved with partners who are enriching their lives, women and men are responding by having sex fairly frequently. Anything less dulls the inclination to be sexual.

This takes me back to where I began. **Who will be having sex on Valentine’s Day?** The findings are clear: women and men of all ages who are involved with people whose cards and gifts symbolize their effort to add rather than subtract from their partners’ lives.

These are among the findings of Vanier’s national survey of 2,093 Canadians who expressed their hopes and dreams concerning relationships and family life. The findings have been released recently in a report entitled, *The Future Families Project*. The survey results are accurate within approximately 3 percentage points either way, 19 times in 20.

**Media contacts:** Bob Cooney, Communications Office, University of Lethbridge  
 (403) 382-7173 or (403) 330-4609 [robert.cooney@uleth.ca](mailto:robert.cooney@uleth.ca)

Reginald Bibby (on sabbatical leave from the university)  
 (403) 381-0151 [bibby@uleth.ca](mailto:bibby@uleth.ca)

More information on *The Future Families Project* is available at both  
[www.vifamily.ca](http://www.vifamily.ca) and [www.reginaldbibby.com](http://www.reginaldbibby.com).