

## Fools rush in? Sex early in a relationship linked to later dissatisfaction

December 20 2012, by Alexa Mccourt

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(Phys.org)—The saying "fools rush in" may be true when it comes to sex and relationships, especially for women, according to a new Cornell study.

[Women](#) who have sex early in a relationship are more likely to be dissatisfied later with the quality of the relationship, because sex may have greater symbolic value for women as an indicator of the relationship commitment than it does for men, the study suggests.

The study was published in the August issue of the *Journal of Marriage and Family*.

"Women who entered into sexual relationships with their current partners the most rapidly reported significantly lower levels of relationship satisfaction than those who waited somewhat longer before becoming sexually involved. Women are just more sensitive to [relationship-quality](#) issues than are men," said lead author Sharon Sassler, Cornell professor of policy analysis and management.

Conversely, women who entered [sexual relationships](#) with their partners later in the relationship were happier in the subsequent marriage than those who had rushed into sex. Men who delayed sex also reported higher levels of commitment and less conflict, but the effect was greater for women. According to the researchers, this is consistent with previous studies that have shown that men are not as sensitive as women to the quality of a relationship.

Early sex in a relationship was also associated with living together sooner and less satisfying marriages, the study found. "People who have sex within the first month often move in together quite rapidly," Sassler said. "By diving quickly into living together, they might not be weeding out lower-quality relationships, ones they might decide were not of the highest caliber or that they shouldn't be in."

Couples often don't discuss big issues, like [marriage](#) expectations or the desire for children, in the first few months of a relationship, and so those who move in rapidly may move in together before they know how the other partner feels about those issues. Once living together, she noted, either partner may find it more difficult to end a poorly matched relationship. "It's really how fast you move in with a partner that accounts for these results," Sassler said.

The researchers analyzed data from the 2006 Marital and Relationship Survey, which provides information on nearly 600 married or cohabiting [couples](#) who have minor children and low-to-moderate incomes. Each partner rated various aspects of their romantic relationships, including sexual satisfaction, commitment, intimacy and [relationship satisfaction](#). The researchers then examined how the speed of entry into sexual involvement was associated with higher or lower estimates of these measures of relationship quality.

More than one-third of the people surveyed in the study said that they began having sex within the first month of the relationship. At the other end of the spectrum only about one-quarter reported waiting more than six months before becoming sexually involved.

Unlike previous studies, the research includes men's reports of relationship quality as well as those of women. And it focused on self-reports from low- to moderate-income cohabiting and married women and men with minor children, the population often targeted by programs

designed to strengthen fragile families.

"The speed at which relationships progress—sexually and emotionally—may be a matter of economic opportunities and constraints and other structural or cultural factors, including a highly sexualized youth culture," Sassler said. "Regardless of its causes, however, sex early on in a relationship may have lasting effects on the quality of that [relationship](#)."

Provided by Cornell University

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