

# Middle-aged women missing passion (and sex) seek affairs, not divorce

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When middle-aged women seek extra-marital affairs, they are looking for more romantic passion, which includes sex—and don't want to divorce their husbands, suggests new research to be presented at the 109th Annual Meeting of the American Sociological Association.

"Being happy in marriage is far different than being happy in bed," said Eric Anderson, a professor of masculinity, sexuality, and sport at the University of Winchester in England and the chief science officer at AshleyMadison.com, a popular website for those interested in having extra-marital affairs.

In their study, Anderson and his co-authors focus on 100 heterosexual, married, females between the ages of 35 and 45, and their conversations with potential suitors on AshleyMadison.com, in hopes of determining what drives this subset of [women](#) to infidelity.

The researchers found that the large majority of women—67 percent—were seeking affairs because they wanted more romantic passion, which always included sex.

"But, the most surprising finding is that none of the 100 women were looking to leave their [husbands](#)," said Anderson, who co-authored the study with Matthew H. Rafalow, a [doctoral candidate](#) in sociology at the University of California-Irvine, and Matthew Ripley, a doctoral candidate in sociology at the University of Southern California. "Instead, they were adamant that they were not looking for a new husband. Many

even stated their overt love for their husbands, painting them in a positive light."

According to Anderson, he thought women might be looking for sexual affairs because they were unhappy with their husbands or because they felt unloved by their husbands. "But this was not the case," he said. "Our results reflect not martial disharmony, but the sexual monotony that is a social fact of the nature of long-term monogamous relationships. The most predictable thing about a relationship is that, the longer it progresses, the quality and the frequency of sex between the couple will fade. This is because we get used to and bored of the same body."

While popular culture suggests that men cheat because "they are horny and women cheat because there is something wrong with the emotional aspect of their relationship, our findings challenge these perceptions," Anderson said. "Our research suggests that men and women are not as different from each other as some may think."

One way women seeking affairs may differ from men looking to cheat, however, is in their preferred number of partners, Anderson said. While only 47 percent of women involved in the study discussed the number of partners they were seeking, of those that did, they all wanted an affair exclusively with one man. On the other hand, Anderson's previous research indicates that men seeking affairs are not looking for a single partner.

Anderson said this distinction between men and women seeking affairs may be in part due to the "stud/slut dichotomy" that is so prominent in our society, which can reward men for having multiple sex partners but stigmatizes women. "One way of telling themselves that they are not 'sluts' is to say that they are desiring monogamy with their infidelity, and that monogamy must have passion," according to Anderson, who said another reason why women might seek monogamy within their infidelity

is that some women need to be emotionally connected to a lover in order to have fulfilling sex.

Citing high rates of cheating, divorce, and premarital sex, Anderson said, "It is very clear that our model of having sex and love with just one other person for life has failed—and it has failed massively. Hopefully, this study will help unravel the stranglehold that our culture has on sex and love—showing that just because one cheats, it does not mean that one has failed to love his or her partner."

**More information:** The paper, "Life is Short, Have an Affair: Middle-Age Women and Extra-Marital Affairs," will be presented on Monday, Aug. 18, at 8:30 a.m. PDT in San Francisco at the American Sociological Association's 109th Annual Meeting.

Provided by American Sociological Association

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