

Love makes sex better for most women

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Love and commitment can make sex physically more satisfying for many women, according to a Penn State Abington sociologist.

In a series of interviews, heterosexual women between the ages of 20 and 68 and from a range of backgrounds said that they believed love was necessary for maximum satisfaction in both sexual relationships and marriage. The benefits of being in love with a sexual partner are more than just emotional. Most of the women in the study said that love made sex physically more pleasurable.

"Women said that they connected love with sex and that love actually enhanced the physical experience of sex," said Beth Montemurro, associate professor of sociology.

Women who loved their sexual partners also said they felt less inhibited

and more willing to explore their sexuality.

"When women feel love, they may feel greater sexual agency because they not only trust their partners but because they feel that it is OK to have sex when love is present," Montemurro said.

While 50 women of the 95 that were interviewed said that love was not necessary for sex, only 18 of the women unequivocally believed that love was unnecessary in a sexual relationship.

Older women who were interviewed indicated that this connection between love, sex and marriage remained important throughout their lifetimes, not just in certain eras of their lives.

The connection between love and sex may show how women are socialized to see sex as an expression of love, Montemurro said. Despite decades of the women's rights movement and an increased awareness of women's sexual desire, the media continue to send a strong cultural message for women to connect sex and love and to look down on girls and women who have sex outside of committed relationships.

"On one hand, the media may seem to show that casual sex is OK, but at the same time, movies and television, especially, tend to portray women who are having sex outside of relationships negatively," said Montemurro.

In a similar way, the media often portray marriage as largely sexless, even though the participants in the study said that sex was an important part of their marriage, according to Montemurro, who presented her findings today (Aug. 19) at the annual meeting of the American Sociological Association.

"For the women I interviewed, they seemed to say you need love in sex

and you need sex in marriage," said Montemurro.

From September 2008 to July 2011, Montemurro conducted in-depth interviews with 95 women who lived in Pennsylvania, New Jersey and New York. The interviews generally lasted 90 minutes.

Although some of the women who were interviewed said they had sexual relationships with women, most of the women were heterosexual and all were involved in heterosexual relationships.

Provided by Pennsylvania State University

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