

American women use book club memberships in dating field

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For American women, a book club membership means more than having status as a reader, as it might pay dividends to them in the dating field as well.

A University of Kansas (KU) researcher as part of a study on gendered sexuality compared [women's](#) book clubs in Colorado and Ireland and made the finding regarding how the women in each country used the role of reading in [romantic relationships](#).

"American women utilized their status as readers and book club members to increase their popularity in the dating field and explained that they would never date or marry a non-reader," said Christy Craig, a KU doctoral candidate in sociology. "Irish women did not find this as relevant, and many told me they joined book clubs because their significant others did not spend much time reading."

Craig will present her findings through the paper, "Not Just a Book Club: Gendered Sexual Identity Through the Lens of Women's Book Clubs," as part of the 110th Annual Meeting of the American Sociological Association (ASA).

She attended 36 book club meeting and interviewed 53 women from ages 19 to 80 as part of the project. Separate from the finding about how women view book clubs and the role of romantic relationships, both American and Irish women utilized reading to develop a sense of self, to foster social and cultural capital and to construct their own sexual

identities.

"Conversations at book club meetings served to reinforce women's sense of self as well as provided a place for women to negotiate their sexuality, particularly through conversations about what kinds of women were being portrayed in books read by the group," Craig said.

One book that came up in every interview was the popular erotic romance novel by E.L. James "Fifty Shades of Grey."

"None of the women read Fifty Shades in their book clubs, but it was regularly discussed in that context," Craig said. "Overall, women I talked to about Fifty Shades felt conflicted."

On one hand, they felt the opportunity for women to access literature about sex in a more public way was indicative of great forward progress for women, she said.

"In this way, women saw possibility for empowerment as they felt more comfortable openly reading about sex and sexuality," Craig said.

For instance, seeing other women at the doctor's office reading the same thing put them more at ease, and they began having conversations with one another about a dialogue they would not have openly admitted to reading before.

"At the same time, many felt it was not truly as empowering as they wanted it to be, or as they hoped women's erotic fiction would be," Craig said.

The paper is part of Craig's larger dissertation project, and is aimed at using a comparative sociological examination of contemporary women's fiction and its readers to better understand how women construct

sexuality amidst gendered cultural norms.

Provided by University of Kansas

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