

Research explains why sexual arousal can turn men off long-term relationships

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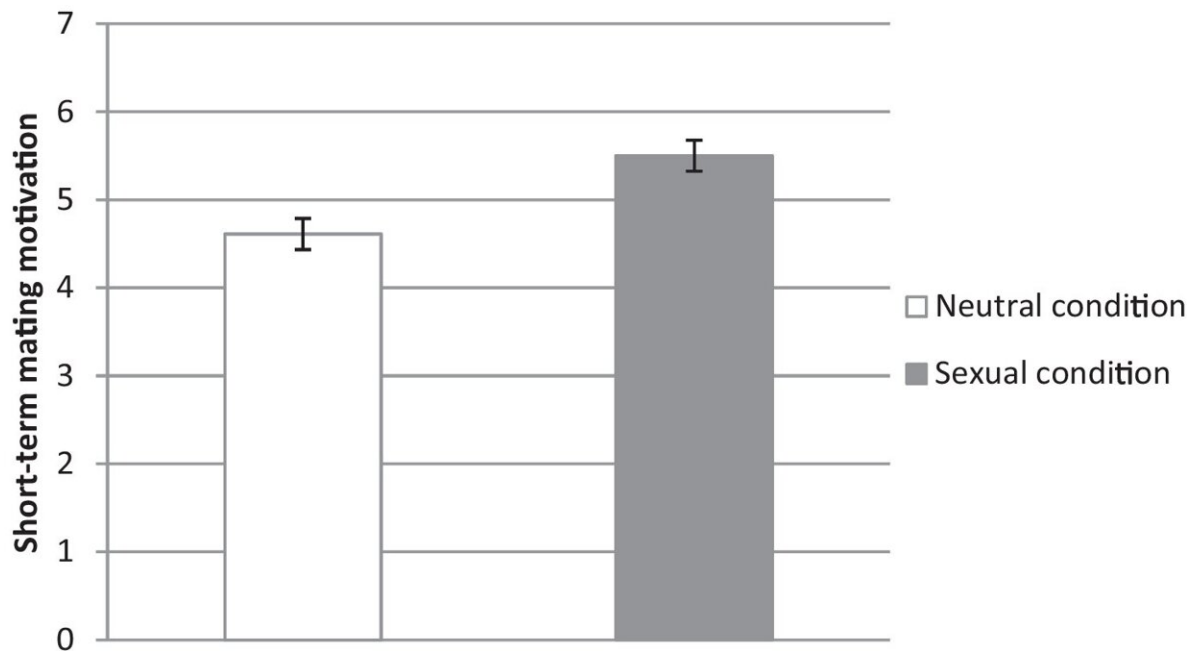
New research has revealed that sexual arousal leads to an immediate preference in short-term mating in men over more long-term committed relationships, such as marriage.

Short-term [mating](#) preferences include one-night stands, "flings" or "situationships."

Dr. Andrew G. Thomas, a senior lecturer in [psychology](#) at Swansea University, and co-author Dr. Arnaud Wisman from the University of Kent, found through a series of experiments that men, when in a state of [sexual arousal](#) (as opposed to men not sexually aroused), were more likely to desire casual, non-committed sex with a partner, regardless of their [relationship](#) status, as well as a decreased desire for long-term mating.

The team also tested whether personality type and the amount of pornography the study participants usually watched influenced their preferences. In the same way that relationship status played no role in the results, they found that [personality type](#) and the amount of pornography consumed also did not alter the results. The drive for more casual sexual encounters was purely the result of the participants' heightened state of arousal.

Psychology lecturer Dr. Wisman said, "There is a lot of research into so called human sexual mating strategies, and how our preferences for a partner might be influenced by factors such as beauty, wealth and age. It is understood that both men and women have mixed preferences when it comes to dating—some people are more inclined to remain with one person, others prefer shorter relationships, and some prefer a mixture of the two. It also depends on context too; on a night out, individuals may look at [potential partners](#) differently than when they would when browsing a dating site.



Note: Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals.

Male short-term mating motivation as a function of condition (sexual vs neutral) (Experiment 1). Credit: *Evolutionary Psychological Science* (2022). DOI: 10.1007/s40806-022-00347-8

"Our study is among the first to look at men's mating preference in the context of sexual arousal. We found that most men when aroused preferred a short-term date, like a one-night stand, over something more long term. Interestingly, it also did not matter if men were in a long-term relationship or not, sexual arousal still increased the desire for a 'fling.'"

Dr. Thomas said, "What surprised me with this research was the consistency of the effect. Sexual arousal increased interest in short-term mating regardless of personality or relationship status. Put another way, just like their single peers, when men in relationships became aroused, they showed increased interest in having sex not within a committed

relationship but outside of one. I think this research is useful for raising men's self-awareness over the forces that guide and bias their mating decisions, ultimately giving them greater control of their mating destiny."

These findings are the first in a series of studies which looks at how our preferences can be altered by conditions such as sexual arousal. The research teams is also looking at how different factors in women, such as the [menstrual cycle](#), hormonal birth control, and age, might also influence the type of romantic relationships individuals look for and their preference in partners.

The paper, "In the Heat of the Short-Term: Evidence that Heightened Sexual Arousal Increases Short-Term Mating Motivation Among Men," is published in *Evolutionary Psychological Science*.

More information: Arnaud Wisman et al, In the Heat of the Short-Term Moment: Evidence that Heightened Sexual Arousal Increases Short-Term Mating Motivation Among Men, *Evolutionary Psychological Science* (2022). [DOI: 10.1007/s40806-022-00347-8](https://doi.org/10.1007/s40806-022-00347-8)

Provided by Swansea University

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