

Is spontaneous sex better? New research casts doubt on commonly held belief

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The idea that spur-of-the-moment sex is the most passionate and satisfying is a deeply ingrained one in popular Western imagination, but new research from York University calls this into question. In their latest study, psychology researchers from the Faculty of Health found that planning ahead can be just as sexy as sex that "just happens."

"There can be a lot of resistance to asking clients to talk about and plan sex more, to work as a sexual team. I think it's because of what we see in the media, but the funny thing about that is there's so much planning that goes into those scenes—a whole production team is there, actors memorize their lines," says Katarina Kovacevic, a registered psychotherapist specializing in [romantic relationships](#) and sexual issues, and Ph.D. student at York's Sexual Health and Relationship Laboratory.

"What our new study found was that while many people do endorse the ideal of spontaneous sex, there was no difference in their reported satisfaction of their last actual sexual encounter—whether it was planned or unplanned."

For this research, published today in *The Journal of Sex Research*, two studies were conducted by Kovacevic, her supervisor, York University Psychology Professor Amy Muise, and their collaborators. The first looked at more than 300 individuals in romantic relationships and asked them questions via an online survey.

The second, had more than a hundred couples respond to daily surveys about their romantic and [sex lives](#) for three weeks. In both cases, they wanted to look at people's beliefs about planned versus spontaneous sex, but also if these beliefs would translate into satisfaction with actual sexual encounters.

In the first part of the study, they did find that endorsing the idea of spontaneous sex being better, did correlate with reported satisfaction. While in the second study, when looking at participants' last sexual encounter, they found there was no difference in how satisfying a sexual encounter was reported to be—based on whether it was planned or happened spontaneously—regardless of people's beliefs.

"Generally, we did find that people endorsed the spontaneous sex ideal,"

says Muise. "But, despite these beliefs, across our two studies we did not find strong support that people actually experience spontaneous sex as more satisfying than planned sex."

Kovacevic says when therapists like herself talk about planned sex, they don't necessarily mean scheduling it, and while planning sex may seem like a chore to some, anticipation can also sometimes lead to desire.

"When we suggest that couples or other romantic configurations carve out that time, we're not necessarily saying you put it into a calendar—like 7 p.m. on a Tuesday, after putting dinner in the oven and before folding the socks," she says. "But the intentionality behind it can be transformative in the sense that we don't wait around for the right moment, because sometimes the mood just never strikes, really, for some people, and that might deter them."

Additionally, Muise and Kovacevic remind us of how much planning goes into the important and enjoyable aspects of our lives, like going on vacation or pursuing a rewarding career, and that there is no reason sex cannot be the same. Since sex is important to many people, and has many health and relationship benefits, it makes sense to prioritize and approach sex in the same way.

With Valentine's Day approaching, some folks might want to plan for sex ahead of time, but the key is "intention, versus expectation."

Kovacevic says expectations for sex during holidays, anniversaries, and birthdays can lead to folks feeling pressure.

Instead, she recommends that romantic partners plan to regularly spend quality time together, without distractions, to keep the spark alive. If you are planning to have sex this Valentine's Day, Muise says to "try to have it before the big meal and glasses of wine."

More information: Katarina Kovacevic et al, Is Spontaneous Sex Ideal? Beliefs and Perceptions of Spontaneous and Planned Sex and Sexual Satisfaction in Romantic Relationships, *The Journal of Sex Research* (2023). [DOI: 10.1080/00224499.2022.2163611](https://doi.org/10.1080/00224499.2022.2163611)

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