

Relationship Satisfaction Linked with Changing Use of Contraception

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Women's sexual satisfaction in long-term heterosexual relationships may be influenced by changes in hormonal contraceptive use, [research](#) from the University of Stirling shows.

The [study](#), published in *Psychological Science*, a journal of the [Association for Psychological Science](#), was carried out by researchers from the universities of Stirling, Glasgow, Newcastle, Northumbria and Charles University in Prague.



The team looked at a sample of 365 couples, and investigated how satisfaction levels — in both sexual and non-sexual aspects of long-term relationships — were influenced by women's current and historical use of hormonal contraception.

“Our findings showed women who had met their partner while taking the pill and were still currently taking it — as well as those who had never used the pill at any point — reported greater sexual satisfaction than those women who had begun or stopped using the pill during the course of the relationship,” says lead researcher Craig Roberts from Stirling's Division of Psychology.

“In other words, the congruence of women's pill use throughout the relationship had a greater influence on sexual satisfaction levels than either simply being on the pill or not being on the pill.”

The team found there was no difference in the non-sexual aspects of relationship satisfaction between the groups of women. Additionally, women's history of pill use was also found to make no difference to their male partners' relationship satisfaction in both sexual and non-sexual contexts.

“Previous research has shown that hormonal contraceptives, such as the pill, subtly alter women's ideal partner preferences and that often women who are using the pill when they meet their partner find the

same partner less physically attractive when they come off the pill,” says Roberts.

“Our new results support these earlier findings but, crucially, they also point to the impact a change in hormonal contraceptive use during a relationship — either starting or stopping — can have on a woman’s sexual satisfaction with her partner.”

According to Roberts, “The pill has been a tremendously positive social force, empowering women and giving them greater control over their lives, but there is also a lot of controversy surrounding the question of whether hormonal contraceptives alter women’s libido and sexual satisfaction.”

“These results show that examining current use is not enough to answer this question. What seems to be important is whether a woman’s current use matches her use when she began the relationship with her partner. We hope our results will help women understand why they might feel the way they do about their partner when they change use,” Roberts concludes.

Co-authors on the study include Anthony C. Little and Kelly D. Cobey of the University of Stirling, Robert P. Burriss of the University of Stirling and Northumbria University, Kateřina Klapilová and Jan Havlíček of Charles University (Czech Republic), Benedict C. Jones and Lisa DeBruine of the University of Glasgow, and Marion Petrie of Newcastle University.

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