

Beliefs About Uncommitted Sex May Put Marriages at Risk

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An individual's premarital views about uncommitted sex may make it more difficult to remain blissfully married, according to [research published in Psychological Science](#), a journal of the [Association for Psychological Science](#). The research outlines several factors that can contribute to a marriage's long-term happiness or dissolution, including one big red flag: An individual's behaviors and attitudes about uncommitted sexual relationships even before the marriage.

"Marital satisfaction generally declines over time," said Juliana French, a Florida State University doctoral student and first author on the study. "But what we've found is that when, prior to their marriage, one or both spouses hold generalized beliefs that uncommitted sex is okay, that can contribute to the failure of a marriage."

French, along with fellow graduate student Emma Altgelt and Assistant Professor Andrea Meltzer, collected and analyzed data from 204 heterosexual, newly married couples. They collected information on their behaviors and attitudes prior to marriage as well as numerous factors related to their new marriages including their marital satisfaction.

Over the course of several years, researchers followed up with couples to collect information about their marital satisfaction and catalogued data on which couples separated or filed for divorce.

“We’re generally interested in factors that predict the development of marriage over time and what contributes to marital success,” French said.

In this study, the researchers focused on the degree to which people expressed “unrestricted sociosexual” behaviors, desires, and attitudes prior to marriage, which indicated they were more likely to engage in uncommitted sexual relationships such as one-night stands and generally believed that sex without love is okay.

Of the couples involved in the study, people who were relatively unrestricted were less satisfied at the start of their marriages; moreover, people who had relatively unrestricted partners experienced more rapid declines in satisfaction over the first several years of marriage, which ultimately predicted dissolution.

“What we found most surprising about these results was the fact that both couple members’ sociosexuality play an important role in long-term, marital outcomes,” French said.

The study doesn’t weigh in on whether unrestricted sociosexuality is a negative or positive trait, French said. In fact, there were some contexts in which researchers found that it did not affect the marriage.

“We found evidence suggesting that couples who maintain a consistent, satisfying sexual relationship or couples who maintain low levels of stress are buffered against these negative outcomes,” French said.

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