

Women reject promiscuous female peers as friends, study finds

May 31 2013, by Ted Boscia

(Medical Xpress)—College-aged women judge promiscuous female peers – defined as bedding 20 sexual partners by their early 20s – more negatively than more chaste women and view them as unsuitable for friendship, finds a study by Cornell developmental psychologists.

Participants' preference for less sexually active [women](#) as friends remained even when they personally reported liberal attitudes about casual sex or a high number of lifetime lovers.

Men's views, on the other hand, are less uniform – favoring the sexually permissive potential friend, the non-permissive one or showing no preference for either when asked to rate them on 10 different friendship attributes. Promiscuous men favored less sexually experienced men, however, if they viewed other promiscuous men as potentially interested in stealing their girlfriends.

The findings suggest that women still face a double standard that shames "slutty" women and celebrates "studly" men, said lead author Zhana Vrangalova, a graduate student in the field of human development in the College of [Human Ecology](#). The study, "Birds of a Feather? Not When It Comes to Sexual Permissiveness," published online May 19 in the *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, reports that promiscuous women, therefore, are at greater risk for [social isolation](#) and poor psychological and [physical health](#).

"Sexually permissive women are ostracized for being 'easy,' whereas

men with a high number of [sexual partners](#) are viewed with a sense of accomplishment," Vrangalova said. "What surprised us in this study is how unaccepting promiscuous women were of other promiscuous women when it came to friendships – these are the very people one would think they could turn to for support."

She added that prior research shows that men often view promiscuous women as unsuitable for long-term [romantic relationships](#), leaving these women outside of many social circles.

"The effect is that these women are really isolated," Vrangalova said.

For the study, 751 college students provided information about their sexual experience and views on casual sex. They read a near-identical vignette about a male or female peer, the only difference being the character's number of lifetime sexual partners (two or 20). When asked about the person on a range of friendship factors, female participants – regardless of their own promiscuity – viewed sexually permissive women more negatively on nine of 10 friendship attributes, judging them more favorably only on their outgoingness.

Permissive men only identified two measures, mate guarding and dislike of sexuality, where they favored less sexually active men as friends, showing no preference or favoring the more promiscuous men on the eight other variables. Even sexually modest men preferred the non-permissive potential friend in only half of all variables.

The authors posit that evolutionary concerns may be leading men and women to disapprove of their bed-hopping peers as friends. They may actually be seeking to guard their mates from a threat to their relationship, Vrangalova said.

In the case of promiscuous women rejecting other women with a high

number of sexual partners, Vrangalova suggested that they may be seeking to distance themselves from any stigma that is attached to being friends with such women.

The authors report that the findings could aid parents, teachers, counselors, doctors and others who work with young people who may face social isolation due to their sexual activity.

Provided by Cornell University

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