

Beliefs about uncommitted sex may put marriages at risk

September 5 2019, by Kathleen Haughney



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A group of Florida State University researchers has found that an individual's premarital views about uncommitted sex may make it more difficult to remain blissfully married.

In a study published today in the journal *Psychological Science*, researchers outline several factors that can contribute to a marriage's long-term happiness or dissolution. 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. "But what we've found is that when, prior to their marriage, one or both spouses hold generalized beliefs that uncommitted sex is OK, 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 cataloged 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, meaning they were more likely to engage in uncommitted sexual relationships such as one-night stands and generally believed that sex without love is OK.

Of the couples involved in the study, people who were relatively

unrestricted were less satisfied at the start of their marriages; moreover, people with 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.

More information: Juliana E. French et al. The Implications of Sociosexuality for Marital Satisfaction and Dissolution, *Psychological Science* (2019). [DOI: 10.1177/0956797619868997](https://doi.org/10.1177/0956797619868997)

Provided by Florida State University

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