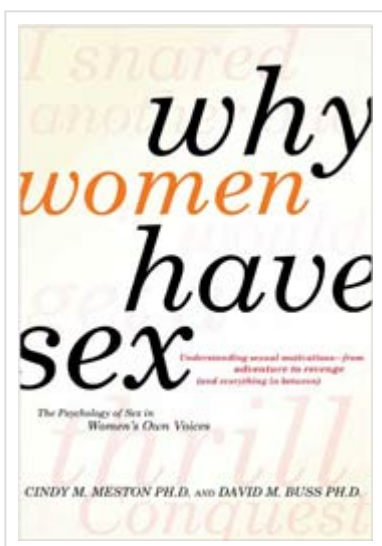


A Q&A with the Authors of "Why Women Have Sex"

Posted on **October 6, 2009** by **Jessica Sinn**



Why women have sex has long been a vexing question. In hopes of providing new insight into this provocative topic, psychologists **Cindy M. Meston** and **David M. Buss** collected candid stories from more than 1,000 women from 46 states, eight Canadian provinces, three European countries, Australia, New Zealand, Israel and China. The findings, detailed in their new book "**Why Women Have Sex**," reveal a shocking array of reasons – from boredom to self-loathing to painful headaches to jealousy. We sat down with the authors to gather more insight into the mystery of women's sexual behavior.

How can women benefit from this research?

Buss: Why women have sex is important from several different perspectives. One is a deeper understanding of the paths to personal happiness. Women's sexual experiences can create soaring heights of ecstasy and deep fulfillment (becoming "one" with another person; transcendental spiritual experiences such as feeling closer to God). Others can lead to the depths of despair. Some women in our studies had sex in order to assuage their loneliness, which works in some cases, but in other cases leads women to feel a sense of self-loathing and social rejection that is truly heart breaking. So understanding why women have sex has many practical advantages for women and their partners.

Meston: I don't think women, in general, spend a lot of time thinking about why they have sex. By reading all the experiences of different women, I believe it may lead some women to think more

about the consequences of their own sexual choices. They might think “when I have sex for x, I feel really good afterward; when I have sex because of y, I feel crappy.” In other words, it might help women to become more informed “consumers” of sex.

What findings surprised you the most?

Meston: We knew motivations were more complex than it feeling good, or trying to have a baby. But we were still astonished by the amazing diversity of sexual motivations – from the mundane to a sense of adventure to borderline evil. It was also interesting to discover how the same sexual motivation could have vastly different consequences for different women – having “revenge sex” led some women to feel less cheated, like the score was now evened. For other women it made them feel cheap and regretful. The outcome of the sexual choice is obviously related to each woman’s unique personal past as well as her current moral, religious and cultural beliefs.

Buss: One thing that surprised me was what I refer to as the “darker” aspects of women’s sexual motivation. Some women had sex to get revenge. For example, revenge against a best friend who had slept with the woman’s boyfriend or husband, or revenge against a partner who had cheated on her. A few women even had sex in order to give someone else a sexually transmitted disease!

Aside from an emotional connection or physical attraction, what are some other reasons for why women have sex?

Meston: So many women responded by saying they were forced into having sex, or that they had no choice, so we thought it was an important topic to cover. It’s important to study women who have experienced sexual abuse because it could have consequences on their sexual satisfaction and functioning into adulthood.

Buss: Another set of findings that surprised me centered on the intensity of women’s sexual competition with other women. Sometimes it’s a battlefield out there, and I think men are largely unaware of the intensity of women’s sexual competition!

In comparison to men, do women have more complex reasons for having sex?

Buss: Women’s sexual psychology is complex, far more complex that I envisioned when Cindy and I first embarked on this project. What turns women on physiologically in terms of sexual arousal, for example, is not necessarily the same as what turns women on psychologically. For men, in contrast, there’s a closer connection between psychological and physiological sexual arousal. This is just one example of how a deeper understanding of women’s sexual psychology, and how it differs from men, can lead to deeper sexual and romantic relationships between women and men.

What sets your research apart from other sexual health studies?

Meston: There has been a lot of research on how people are having sex and how often they’re doing it. But the more important question is why they’re doing it. If we’re going to have any impact

on reinforcing sexual behaviors or techniques that will enhance sexual satisfaction, we need to investigate why women are having sex in the first place. For example, if a woman is having frequent unprotected sex, telling her to use a condom is not going to be an effective intervention if her motivation to do so is to punish herself. We need to understand the underlying sexual motivation if we are to make positive behavioral change.

Do you think this book could help strengthen relationships between men and women, both emotionally and physically?

Meston: Good sex in a relationship isn't talked about that much. But bad sex or low sex drives are the key reasons why people have extramarital affairs – and ultimately for the demise of relationships and marriages. Sex and money are the two top reasons why people get divorced, so this book is a very good resource for married couples.

Buss: Women's sexual motivations, which lead to sexual experiences, touch so many other domains of their lives. They affect women's social relationships with men and with other women; they influence women's social and sexual reputations; they influence women's sense of identity and self-esteem. It's difficult to think of a domain that has more far-reaching consequences than women's sexual experiences, which are driven in large part by their sexual motivations.

Could men benefit from this book too?

Meston: I think by reading this book, men will truly get into the sexual psychology of women. Understanding why women have sex and what makes it a gratifying experience and what doesn't is going to help men become more empathic and good sexual partners in their relationships. A lot of women and men have a hard time communicating about their sexuality, especially for couples in long-term relationships. I think it would be much easier to read a book and gain some insight into some of those mysteries.

Buss: I think it should be required reading for all men. Our book illuminates women's sexuality, ranging from the physiology of sexual orgasm and "sexual healing" to the complexities of women's sexual psychology. It will help men to become better lovers and better partners. The book will also help women to understand their own sexuality, as well as the sexuality of their friends, sisters and other women they care about.

How can this book help women learn more about themselves?

Buss: Some women think that they are alone in the sexual experiences they've had, and in some ways, each sexual experience is unique. But we think that many women will be able to identify with the women in our book, since they too have had similar sexual experiences. Women will also learn a lot about the circumstances that lead to positive sexual outcomes, and just as important, the circumstances that can lead to sexual disasters, which can cause some women to suffer years of sexual regret. Although we did not write the book as a self-help book, we believe that women will learn a great deal of useful information about their own sexuality from reading our book.

About the Authors

Cindy M. Meston is one of the world's leading researchers on women's sexuality and a professor of clinical psychology. She is also the director of the Sexual Psychophysiology Laboratory, a cutting-edge lab on women's sexual experience.

David M. Buss, one of the founders of the field of evolutionary psychology, is a professor of psychology and the author of several books, including "The Evolution of Desire" and "The Dangerous Passion." Their jointly authored article, "Why Humans Have Sex," garnered international attention when it was published in the *Archives of Sexual Behavior*.

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1 THOUGHT ON "A Q&A WITH THE AUTHORS OF "WHY WOMEN HAVE SEX""



James

on **April 21, 2011 at 2:38 pm** said:

There are fascinating research and findings in the article. Especially when the article discusses the motivations for sexual behavior in women. I further appreciate the points in the article that deal with how a better understanding of these motivations can help sexual discourse within marriages.

This is a very important issue in the lives of married people and has far reaching implications when the sexual psychology of the female in the relationship is better understood.

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