Sex: What Do Women (and Men) Really Want?

Today it is estimated that half of newly married couples cohabited prior to marriage. In the 2000 Census, there were 5.5 million cohabiting unmarried couples (up from 3.2 million in 1990).

Given these facts, are people happier?

Does this behavior aid growth in emotional or sexual maturity?

Does it make people more generous or better able to persevere in difficult situations?

What impact does this behavior have on marriage and family life?

Are those who have multiple sexual partners better able to form lasting relationships?

Better prepared to put the needs of loved ones above their own desires?

Research provides answers to many of these questions.

Over 25 percent of sexually active teenage girls 14-17 report being depressed all, most or "a lot" of the time, a rate of depression more than three times that of teenage girls who are not sexually active (7.7 percent).

Sexually active boys 14-17 report being depressed all, most or a lot of the time at a...
rate 2 times greater than boys who are not sexually active (8.3 percent vs. 3.4 percent).

"A full 14.3 percent of girls who are sexually active report having attempted suicide [in the past 12 months]. By contrast, only 5.1 percent of sexually inactive girls have attempted suicide."13

The contrast between sexually active boys (6.0 percent of whom attempted suicide in the past 12 months) and boys who were not sexually active (0.7 percent) is even greater – almost 8 times higher.

Do teens regret having become sexually active? 72% of sexually active girls and 55% of sexually active boys said they wished they had waited longer before starting to be sexually active.14

And a 2002 study on the attitude of young men toward marriage is telling. Included in the top ten reported reasons why men won’t commit to marriage are: "they can get sex without marriage," "they fear that marriage will require too many changes and compromises," "they want a house before they get a wife," and "they want to enjoy single life as long as they can."15 Such reasons lend support to the belief that non-marital sexual activity fosters immaturity and materialism.

Current sociological research overwhelmingly demonstrates "strong correlations between the practices of premarital sex and/or cohabitation and divorce."16 Some of the more prominent studies:

- As early as 1974 the correlation between premarital sex and divorce was known. Robert Athanasiou and Richard Sarkin. "Premarital sexual behavior and postmarital adjustment," Archives of Sexual Behavior 3 (May 1974).


- In May 2003, a study concluded that women who had their first sexual experience before marriage with partners other than the man they eventually marry, are about 34% more likely to experience divorce than women who did not. This increased risk is not present with women whose only premarital sex involved the man they married. This study also notes that cohabitation is considered to be "one of the most robust predictors of marital dissolution that has appeared in the literature." Jay Teachmen. "Premarital Sex, Premarital Cohabitation, and the Risk of Subsequent Marital Dissolution Among Women," Journal of Marriage and Family 65 (May 2003).

Bottom line? It seems safe to say that sex outside of marriage causes emotional harm and also seems to harm marriage and the family. Ultimately, for the emotional health of the individual, the family and society itself, only married couples should engage in sexual intercourse...

Endnotes
8. T. Smith, National Opinion Research Center, University of Chicago, American Sexual Behavior: Trends, Socio-Demographic Differences, and Risk