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Abstract

I created this body of work because I was curious as to why women might have problems connecting to their partners and to themselves during sex. I am a Sociology major and understanding how people connect and interact has always fascinated me. My research is about how women connect to themselves, their senses, their mind, and their spirit during sexual activity as well as well as how they connect to their partner. I performed this research to discover the deeper aspects of sex beyond orgasm, physicality, and performance. My main research questions include: How do women connect during sex? What factors keep them from connecting? Is sex a felt experience, a spectatored experience or a performance? What makes sex a positive experience for women?

This area of research has been explored by researchers such as Masters and Johnson (1970), who studied “spectatoring,” the idea that one internally observes the happenings of sex instead of connecting and being present during the experience. How women define ‘good’ sex has also been researched (Fahs and Plante, 2016) as well as the idea of feeling pleasure versus performing pleasure (Orenstein, 2016). My research covers these topics and extends to provoking women to think about their own pleasure and what connection really means to them. My work adds the potential to help women prioritize their pleasure, be mindful of their pleasure, and truly ask themselves what they need in order to connect. I created this work through analyzing and reviewing existing research and then through an interview process. My research is grounded in sexual script theory, which is the idea that people gain a script on how to act

sexually in the bedroom throughout their socialized lives. I wanted to dig deeper into what possible cultural and social influences could be possibly keeping women from connecting fully to their sexual experiences, whether that be from their learned sexual scripts, body image shame, religious beliefs, social expectations and social judgement, performance anxiety, shame, guilt, or past sexual trauma.

My research is significant because it reveals that women's desire for connection as well as what connection means to them does not align with how they interact with their partner during sex, and especially how they see themselves playing a role in that connection. The women I interviewed described connection using words like mutual understanding and loving intimacy. But instead of proceeding to talk about pleasure and enjoyment of sex as something that was also mutual, and understood by both partners, the women talked only of their partners and most had never considered themselves or their pleasure before this interview. Here lies the point and purpose of my research. With this subtle yet upsetting misalignment with women's idea of sex and their reality. Their desire to please, serve, entertain, perform and succeed during sex hugely overcomes their preference for mutual connection and intimacy, but even further than that they believe to an extent that connection lies in making their partner feel good. That a successful interaction involves intimacy but must involve the partner (always a man in the case of these interviews) reaching climax.

This discrepancy is what matters in my research. The discrepancies women face every day surrounding sex, expectations and behavior. Should they be sluts or prudes? Should they be educated about sex or steer clear of it? Should they be sex revolutionary feminists or plane Janes that have sex but do not speak of it? Do they hook up or find partners? Do they wear whatever

they want or cover themselves up? These hypocritical inconsistencies that paint the messages women receive all their lives have led to the discrepancy I found in my research. The feminist messages my respondents have been receiving recently mixed with years of incomplete sex education and shame messages from family and teachers early on have led to this discrepancy. I conclude that the implications of my research are that women do not think of themselves as equals in the bedroom and people should care about this because women matter, because sex is a part of everyone's lives and because women need to speak for themselves. This research matters because disconnection is rampant everywhere, not only within women's sex lives. It is increasingly becoming a problem throughout every aspect of people's lives, which will only make it worse within the bedroom. Understanding why women do not connect and how they want to connect can help bridge the disconnection gap, and I hope to contribute to that bridge as much as I can.

Works Cited

Fahs, Breanne and Rebecca Plante. 2016. "On 'Good Sex' and Other Dangerous Ideas: Women Narrate Their Joyous and Happy Sexual Encounters." *Journal of Gender Studies* 26(1):33–44.

Orenstein, Peggy. 2017. *Girls & Sex: Navigating the Complicated New Landscape*. New York, NY: Harper, an imprint of HarperCollinsPublishers.