



MEDIA RELEASE

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Researchers looking to uncover the real experience of women's sexual desire

Deakin University researchers are trying to determine once and for all exactly what is 'normal' for women when it comes to sexual desire.

Clinical psychology doctoral student, Denisa Goldhammer, under the supervision of Professor Marita McCabe, has recently conducted interviews asking women about their experiences of sexual desire.

The women, all of whom were in a committed heterosexual relationship, were asked to discuss what sexual desire means to them, to explain how they experience sexual desire, and to comment on the factors in their daily lives that increase or decrease their level of sexual desire. Their responses have prompted Ms Goldhammer to explore whether current definitions of 'normal' sexual desire are wrong.

"We have to wonder if we really understand what sexual desire is and how it is experienced by women. That is what I wish to explore further," Ms Goldhammer said.

"It is interesting to note that it is women themselves who perceive they have abnormally low levels of sexual desire. That is when one begins to consider the influence of the media in establishing this idea that women should desire sexual experiences frequently and strongly, and that there is something inherently abnormal about them if they do not."

Ms Goldhammer's study will contribute to a better understanding of what a 'normal' experience of sexual desire is, which has implications for our understanding of the associated sexual dysfunction of Hypoactive Sexual Desire Disorder; an abnormally low level of sexual desire.

"With prevalence estimates of this sexual dysfunction sometimes quoted as almost 50 per cent of the population, one starts to wonder if we are over-pathologising or medicalising something that is a normal experience for women," Ms Goldhammer said.

Findings from the interviews conducted earlier this year have been used to develop an on-line questionnaire to further explore the meaning of sexual desire for women, and the factors associated with sexual desire.

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This questionnaire asks women about their sexual experiences in order to determine whether they indeed have problems with their desire levels, or alternatively, if their sexual desire is being negatively influenced by a variety of other factors within their daily lives or relationships.

The researchers are looking for women over the age of 18, who are currently in committed heterosexual relationships, to complete an anonymous on-line questionnaire about their sexual experiences over the last four weeks. Taking part in this research will assist in developing a scale for use by clinicians to assess whether a woman is experiencing low desire. For further information, or to take part in this research, please visit <http://www.deakin.edu.au/psychology/research/desire/> or contact Denisa Goldhammer at desirestudy@yahoo.com.

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