

Gottman Sex Blog, Interview and Questionnaire

excerpts from The Gottman Institute (gottman.com)

John: Sure. Look, this isn't rocket science. How to be good friends and how to have good sex really comes down to communicating, displaying affection and respect, and turning towards your partner's bids for emotional connection.

Everyone in a committed relationship knows that sex and relationships go hand in hand with one another. It's not too surprising then that couples that can talk about sex usually have happy relationships and better sex lives.

Statistically speaking we know from research that we conducted at our Seattle Love Lab that:

- 50% of women who say that they are able to talk about sex with their partner also say that they enjoy passionate and fulfilling sex lives.
- For those women who don't talk about sex with their partner, the satisfaction rate is only 9%.
- But great sexual relationships are not just about being able to talk about sex, they are about trying new thing and experimenting. "Variety is the spice of life."

Q: *What are the biggest/most shocking statistics with regards to sex life between couples?*

A: First, that 15 to 20% of all couples have no sex at all. NONE. EVER.

Second, approximately 70% of the couples who do have sex, are unhappy with the frequency or quality of the sex. Yet they do not talk about it with each other!

Third, in heterosexual couples, the major complaint of most men is not that they want sex more often. Their major complaint is that they no longer feel DESIRED by their partner. This makes men feel heartbreakingly lonely.

Fourth, the major complaint of women is that they don't feel emotionally connected to their partner, and so sex rarely feels personal or feels like making love. That makes women feel heartbreakingly lonely.

Fifth, gay and lesbian couples are far more comfortable, less defensive, more direct and honest, and they laugh more when talking about sex with their partner than heterosexual couples. They are also more open talking about non-monogamy, so there is less deceit.

- GOTT SEX QUIZ-

Assessing the quality of sex, romance, and passion in your relationship!

For each item, take a pen and check the one box below that applies to your relationship right now:

1. Is the relationship

- A. Romantic and passionate?
- B. Is it becoming passionless, that is, the fire is going out?

2. I would say that

- A. My partner is verbally affectionate.
- B. My partner is not very verbally affectionate.

3. I would say that

- A. My partner expresses love and admiration to me.
- B. My partner expresses love or admiration less frequently these days.

4. I would say that

- A. We do touch each other a fair amount.
- B. We rarely touch each other these days.

5. I would say that

- A. My partner courts me sexually.
- B. My partner does not court me sexually.

6. I would say that

- A. We do cuddle with one another.
- B. We rarely cuddle with one another

7. I would say that

- A. We still have our tender and passionate moments.
- B. We have few tender or passionate moments.

8. I would say that

- A. It feels like our sex life is fine.
- B. It feels like there are definite problems in this area.

9. I would say that

- A. The frequency of sex is not a problem
- B. The frequency of sex is a problem.

10. I would say that

- A. The satisfaction that I get from sex is not a problem
- B. The satisfaction that I get from sex is a problem

11. I would say that

- A. Being able to just talk about sex, or talk about sexual problems is not a serious issue between us.
- B. Being able to just talk about sex, or talk about sexual problems is a serious issue between us.

12. I would say that

- A. The two of us generally want the same thing sexually.
- B. The two of us want different things sexually.

13. I would say that

- A. Differences in desire are not an issue in this relationship.
- B. Differences in desire are an issue in this relationship.

14. I would say that

- A. The amount of "love" in our lovemaking is not a problem.
- B. The amount of "love" in our lovemaking is a problem.

15. I would say that

- A. The satisfaction my partner gets from sex is not a problem.
- B. The satisfaction my partner gets from sex is a problem.

16. I would say that

- A. My partner is still very physically affectionate toward me.
- B. My partner is not very physically affectionate toward me.

17. I would say that

- A. I feel romantic toward my partner.
- B. I do not feel very romantic toward my partner.

18. I would say that

- A. My partner finds me sexually attractive.
- B. My partner does not find me sexually attractive.

19. I would say that

- A. I find my partner sexually attractive.
- B. I do not view my partner as sexually attractive.

20. In this relationship

- A. I feel romantic and passionate toward my partner.
- B. I feel passionless, my own fire is going out.

21. In this relationship

- A. My partner is romantic and passionate.
- B. My partner is passionless, that is, the fire is going out in my partner.

22. I would say that

- A. The satisfaction I get from sex is not a problem.
- B. The satisfaction I get from sex is a problem.

23. I would say that

- A. My partner compliments my appearance.
- B. My partner does not compliment my appearance.

24. I would say that

- A. I am satisfied by how we initiate sex.
- B. I am dissatisfied with the ways we initiate sex.

24. I would say that

- A. It is possible for me to refuse sex and have it be okay.
- B. I am unable to refuse sex and have it be okay with my partner.

25. I would say that

- A. I hardly ever have sex when I don't want to.
- B. It seems as if I often have sex when I don't want to.

26. I would say that

- A. We have many ways to satisfy one another sexually.
- B. We have very few ways to satisfy one another sexually.

27. Overall I would say that

- A. We are good sexual partners.
- B. We are not very good sexual partners.

Scoring

Count all the times you checked "A." Divide that number by 27, and then multiply it by 100. That is your percent score. If you scored greater than 80 percent, your relationship is fine in the areas of affection, sex, romance, and passion. If you scored lower than 80 percent however, there is an issue you should be concerned about. You might want to check out our website, www.gottman.com or our upcoming *Gott Sex Series*, for help improving this area of your personal life.

Back in the 1950's a pair of researchers by the names of William Masters and Virginia Johnson decided to pioneer the first intensive study into human sexuality. At the time, studying sex in a laboratory was a scandalous thing to do, yet what they found has since become the standard way that people all over the world think about sex. Chances are you are familiar with it.

The standard model breaks sex down into four phases:

1. *Foreplay (Erection for males, and lubrication for females)*
2. *Greater excitement, intercourse*
3. *Orgasm*
4. *Resolution*

Seems pretty reasonable right? Unfortunately, thinking about sex in this way creates several **major problems** that will almost certainly affect a couple's relationship in some pretty adverse ways.

Earlier we sat down with Dr. John Gottman and asked him to tell us the single most common piece of advice that he gave to couples in couple's therapy about sex. We were surprised to hear what he had to say.

Dr. John Gottman: It's to move beyond the standard model. Sex is not just about the standard model that Masters & Johnson created, in fact this model is really a roadblock for good sex; it's very limiting. For starters, just look at how medicalized sex has become as a result of it. By assigning the sex act to four stages, competence and incompetence can be defined for each stage. So instead of accurately defining sex it actually *creates* most of the sexual dysfunctions, like performance anxiety and premature ejaculation. If you bust out of that standard model, and you really think of everything that a couple does that's positive together as "sex," chances are the overall relationship will be happier and more fulfilling.

Us: That's an interesting notion; what do you mean, think of everything as sex?

John: Here's what I mean by that. Maybe he is washing the dishes and she comes up behind him and puts her arms around him and says, "*You know, you look so great in this apron, it makes me want to take your clothes off right now.*" That's sex. Or they get up in the morning and they are getting dressed and he says,

"Wow, that is a great color for you, you know it really compliments your eyes" and he gives her a kiss; that's sex.

I mean it really *is* sex because it's *connecting emotionally*, and that's what bonds two people together - the emotional connection - not just the act of sex itself. If you look at sex in this way, then the transition from talking to intercourse doesn't seem that far removed. They just seem like natural extensions of each other, because you are really touching one another's hearts when you ask your partner how he or she is feeling, and you are genuinely interested in the answer.

Us: How could changing the way you think about sex - that is, amending your preconceived notions about sex as a standard model, and instead thinking about it in the way that you suggest where everything is sex - change a couple's intimate life?

John: Well, if everything positive that a couple does to connect emotionally becomes sex, and you don't have these sort of lockstep stages where competence and incompetence are defined, then a lot of the so-called sexual dysfunctions that Masters & Johnson and the whole industry of sex therapists in the seventies created just vanishes. All the dysfunctions except for the ones that involve pain just go away. For example, a couple is making out, and he gets excited and comes "prematurely." Well okay, you know that's nice for him, great. It may raise the question, what about her? Maybe she's fine with it. And if not, he still has hands and a tongue to please her. There are many successful possibilities that don't fall in line with the standard model...