

WOMEN'S SEXUALITY AND FEAR OF INTIMACY ACCORDING TO THEIR MARITAL STATUS

Delia Maria Orțan¹

¹Caras-Severin County Centre Of Resources and Educational Assistance

Corresponding author: Delia Maria Orțan, ailedortan@yahoo.com

ABSTRACT: This research mainly seeks to find out if there are significant differences between married and unmarried women, but in a relationship. Self-esteem, fear of intimacy and sexual motivation were underlined in this study. The method: the total range is of 60 women, divided into two equal lots. The first lot of 30 married women, and the second lot of 30 women in a relationship, but unmarried. Their age is between 18 and 40 years.

The inquiry was used a research method, and the tool is the questionnaire. The tools we used are: the Rosenberg scale, indicating the level of self-esteem, the fear of intimacy scale (Descutner and Thelen, 1991) indicating the level of fear of intimacy and the sexual motivation questionnaire (Neston and buss 2005) indicating types of sexual motivation.

The results didn't confirm the hypotheses, which stated the existence of significant differences between married and unmarried women, but in a relationship.

By analysing the four hypotheses, one can draw the conclusion that there are a number of advantages given by the choice of being a married woman, but one cannot draw conclusions that may be accepted by everyone, because all the variables analysed are also influenced by other factors that weren't introduced in this study.

KEYWORDS: relationship, marriage, self-esteem, fear of intimacy, sexual motivation

1. INTRODUCTION

The subject of this study refers to women who naturally enter relationships, without major difficulties on approaching "the other one" and women who, on the contrary, don't succeed in establishing satisfactory relationships. As a consequence, there are women who obtain a level of intimacy and a satisfactory motivation in couples without special efforts, transforming them into deep relationships, even marriages, and women who, in spite of all effort, cannot get satisfaction from this type of romantic relationship

There are women who are prepared to take the "big step" – marriage, but there also are women who from different reasons keep postponing this step endlessly. "Life in a couple" represents a deeply discussed subject, especially for women, because most of them

are interested in finding a partner in order to form a couple. And often what really matters isn't the way one finds his partner, with whom one can establish a relationship, but what one does to take care of, to maintain this relationship.

Self-esteem is based on the persons' choices of exterior norms, which the latter finds achievable or not. It can also come from comparing more self images coexisting in the same person. On the one hand the proper Self, on the other hand the ideal Self, the Self that should be the image the person supposes others have of him. A way of expressing self-esteem as a source of personal energy is the following: "When I have a good opinion about myself and I like myself, I am likely to face the events of life with dignity, honesty, force, love and realism". This is a high self-esteem. (André, Lelord, 2003).

On the other hand, if someone thinks low about himself, describing his limits, disgust or any other negative opinion, energy gets diffused and fragmented. The self weakens and becomes a victim defeated by life: "If I don't like myself, then I depreciate and punish myself. I face life from a position of fear and helplessness, thus creating the attitude of a victim and acting consequently. I punish myself and I also blindly punish the others. I am at times a tyrant, at times a servant. The others seem, in my opinion, to be responsible for my actions". (André, Lelord, 2003).

On a psychological level, such a person feels completely unimportant, constantly fears rejection, cannot look at people and events in perspective. This is a low self-esteem. A person who doesn't appreciate himself will expect the others – wife, husband, son, and daughter – to be responsible for giving him his real value. The consequence is a long series of manipulations that usually have a negative outcome for both parts.

Good human relations and proper and warm behaviour come from persons that have a strong sense of their own value. Or else, persons who love themselves and appreciate themselves are capable of

loving and appreciating the other ones and of having a proper attitude towards reality. A strong feeling of self-esteem is the solution for becoming fully human, healthy and happy, for the establishment and maintaining of a satisfactory relation, being proper, efficient and responsible.

Strenberg and Grajek (apud Mitrofan, 1996) considered that intimacy, along with passion and self knowledge and knowledge of the other one are the couple's components of harmony and longevity, and Jacque Salome (2002) puts the development of intimacy on top of the hierarchy of aspects that contribute to the development of an erotic couple. For J. Salome (2002, p.237-255) the development of intimacy can be achieved by a real preoccupation of giving value, esteem and appreciation to the other one. Intimacy lived, opened, supposed overcoming mistrust, closure and aggressiveness. Intimacy refers to an equality that has nothing in common with wiping out the differences. "Intimacy is perceived by an understanding far beyond words, without making a specific request". (Salome, 2002, p.240).

Morrie & Arrleach Shechtman (2007) consider that in order to be satisfactory, relationships suppose the existence of essentially identical values for both partners. "Love means a lot of wonderful things, but it isn't a solution. When a marriage gets stuck in destructive patterns rooted in the deep past, common values are the ones that push you further, to a happier present" (Shechtman, 2007, p. 46). In addition, the best relationships are maintained with little effort and lots of intimacy. And true intimacy needs clear cut boundaries and constant challenges. "In order to have authentic intimacy you have to set boundaries, to mark borders, to challenge your partner and to express requests" (Shechtman, 2007, p. 108).

As a consequence, intimacy plays an essential role in the existence and development of a couple, as it is the tie that maintains this strong bond, but also the aspect favouring the revitalising of their passion. Intimacy can be considered a constant supply of affectedness for the couple, a long term supply, assuring the affective well-being of the couple even in its most difficult moments.

Intimacy in relationships is sometimes mistaken for sexuality, at least in phrases such as "private life", "intimate relations", both of them referring to the couple's sexual life. But intimacy is different from sexuality; still this doesn't suggest the lack of connections between the two relational fields, even if these differ in their essence, in what defines each of them.

Intimacy supposes establishing an emotional close connection, openness, safety and trust between two

persons, and sexuality is made up of the feelings and behaviours belonging to two persons, connected to the sexual field, whether they are part of some kind of relation or not. Sexuality usually is a fine detector of the relationship quality, and sexual difficulties usually are symptoms of relational problems. "In order to have a healthy and fully functional sexual relation, partners must have a certain level of mental, emotional and physical trust in each other.

Sex means vulnerability: it is an act that can be carried out only if reciprocal trust exists". (Graw, 2003, p.275). Consequently, a quality sexual life supposes creating a relational pattern that should reflect and satisfy the needs of each partner. One has to ask "why there is no intimacy in some couples" or "why a fear of intimacy appears, stronger than the fear of sexuality" (Sternberg 1994). A lot of couples that try to reach a higher level of intimacy end up by growing apart instead of growing together. Intimacy produces anxiety, thus leading to the partners growing apart.

Each couple tries to impose a series of behaviours that sometimes tend to distance or bring them together, succeeding in maintaining, by means of continuous arrangements, an ideal distance, in one direction or another, between the members of the couple, assuring an optimal state of intimacy and thus avoiding anxiety. Why can intimacy generate anxiety? Because intimacy implies the capacity of full trust in the other one, abandoning one's own measures of defence, "showing one's true face", without the fear that the other one would take advantage of these "moments" or "weaknesses" (Sternberg 1994).

Creating and maintaining intimacy in couple relationships supposes the existence of individual psychic characteristics, and their development leads inherently to a lower fear of intimacy, as well as to shortage in the functioning of psychic and behavioural mechanisms of avoiding intimacy.

A low capacity for intimacy supposes not only an insufficient development of specific abilities contributing to the development of intimacy in couple relationships, but also the interference of mechanisms of avoiding intimacy, related to an existing fear of intimacy. In most cases these two aspects are closely related, which means that the fear of intimacy leads to an insufficient development of some characteristics necessary to the development of intimacy, and the insufficient development of those characteristics can represent the basis for fear of intimacy.

Fear of intimacy, mostly unconscious, puts into action psychic and behavioural mechanisms of avoiding intimacy in couple relationships.

Consequently, fear of intimacy and the capacity of intimacy can be considered as functioning in opposition to one another: a low capacity of intimacy supposes a strong fear of intimacy and vice versa, a high capacity of intimacy is correlated to the absence of the fear of intimacy. “In the heart of any fear of intimacy there is fear of loss” (Welwood, 2006, p.118) fear of losing somebody (fear of being abandoned) or oneself (fear of invasion).

“Those of us that couldn’t relate profoundly to their beloved parents or that couldn’t separate themselves completely from them, remain with deep wounds in these areas. People with fear of being abandoned often feel ashamed and powerless when they want to contact others. Because they don’t think they can express their need of contact, so as to trigger a positive reaction, they express it in indirect, distorted, or compulsive ways.

More than that, they are afraid to admit their complementary set of needs – the need of independence, of their own space. The same situation is also confirmed for the ones who are afraid not to lose their individuality in a relationship. Due to their childhood experience with invasive or suffocating parents, they are ambivalent in respect of their impulse to be separate individuals and they lack faith in their autonomy.”(John Welwood, 2006, p.118). Psychosexual behaviour which appears during puberty metamorphoses the have been studied by de H. Ellis, St. Hall, Maranon, S. Freud, Marro etc., who noticed specific psychosexual differences according to sex.

Thus, the young woman is first of all seducing. The feminine sexual desire for partners of the opposite sex manifests itself through a provocative defence. The erotic defence instinct is related to physical integrity, especially when it comes to the first sexual experience, implying the loss of one’s virginity. For girls, sexuality is doubled by a maternal feeling.

The grown up woman expresses herself through “erotic closeness”: total physical participation together with a moral participation in the sexual act. “An indissoluble combination of eroticism and celebrity, fixing the woman’s destiny.” (A. Hesnard, 1933) has been observed.

By consenting to the consumption of an erotic-sexual act, a woman gives up most of her intimate personality. That is why any woman needs a compensation of this submissive defeat attitude, a compensation or consolation of “her psychosexual wound”. This compensation comes through tenderness, from the partner, which is formal and temporary, and not from a long-lasting and a

profound feeling that women desire and expect (Hesnard, 1933).

More than men, women depend on the good will of partners. They possess a polygamy tendency to seduce men, by giving a special value to every “conquest”. “The need of affective stability, based on tender closeness” is shown (Hesnard 1933), dispelling restlessness, removing uncertainty, mistrust and routine among the partners of the couple. Affective and sexual complementariness between a man and a woman is realised and enriched inside the couple, starting from a long term erotic bond. Reciprocal sexual satisfaction is an important aspect and one of the essential ties in the life of a couple, even if there also are other indispensable elements for ensuring the endurance of a harmonic marriage. Sexual motivation is determined by the interaction of internal, organic, innate, genetic, neuro-hormonal conditions with external, acquired conditions depending on the socio-cultural socialisation environment of the person. So, the so-called “sexual need” of men, appears, due to a directional component, more as a desire than a simple sexual need.

Desire is a complex entity, into which biological and psychological, emotional and relational elements come together. Desire is not an impulse, a blind urgent rush, being oriented to a specific object that triggers, by its simulative power, a certain psychosexual motivation, of certain intensity, with every subject.

2. OBJECTIVES AND HYPOTHESES

2.1. Objectives

In the context of addressing issues related to young adulthood, a problem that particularly stands out and acquires a central role is the perspective of women involved in relationships. As stated by literary works, women can be found in couple relationships, either formalized or unofficial.

The main objective of this research is to check whether there are significant differences among unmarried women, but in a relationship compared to married women, in terms of the following variables: self-esteem, fear of intimacy and sexual motivation.

The research has the following objectives:

1. Identification of a difference between the fear of intimacy of married women and the fear of intimacy of unmarried women;
2. Identification of a link between low self-esteem and fear of intimacy of women who are in a couple relationships;
3. Identification of differences in sexual motivation of unmarried women and married women;
- 4.

Identification of a link between the fear of intimacy and sexual motivation of women who are in relationship.

2.2. Hypotheses

The main hypotheses regarding the objectives of the research results are:

1. Differences between married women and unmarried women regarding the fear of intimacy.
2. Is there a correlation between low self-esteem and fear of intimacy in women who are in a couple relationships?
3. There is a difference between married women and unmarried women regarding sexual motivation.
4. Is there a correlation between the fear of intimacy and sexual motivation in women who are in relationships?

3. METHOD

This research type is comparative quantitative / differential and co-related. The research method used is the inquiry, and the instrument the questionnaire.

3.1. Participants/subjects

The total range is of 60 women, divided into two equal lots. The first lot of 30 married women, and the second lot of 30 women in a couple relationship, but unmarried. The requirements for subjects participating in this study were: age between 18-40 years is the relationship, for at least 2 years, and the first batch of women do not have children and get but are in a relationship for at least 1 year 6 months before marriage. Subjects come from urban areas. Women are explained how to fill in questionnaires, namely that the data they provide are anonymous and the results are confidential, being used only for the purpose of scientific research.

3.2. Instruments used

In the research each subject received 3 questionnaires: *The Rosenberg Scale (1965)*, indicating the level of self-esteem. The Rosenberg self-esteem scale is considered a reliable and valid quantitative tool for self-esteem assessment. A 10-item scale that measures global self-worth by measuring both positive and negative feelings about the self.

The scale is believed to be uni-dimensional. All items are answered using a 4-point Likert scale format ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. Five of the items have positively worded statements and five have negatively worded ones. The final score is obtained by summing the ratings assigned to all the items after reverse scoring the positively worded

items. Scores range from 10 to 40, with higher scores indicating higher self-esteem.

Fear of Intimacy Scale (FIS) (Descutner and Thelen, 1991). In the current study the FIS was used to measure an individual's fear of intimacy in romantic relationships. This 35-item self-report questionnaire is rated on a scale from 1 (*not at all characteristic of me*) to 5 (*extremely characteristic of me*). Items were based on the definition that fear of intimacy is the "inhibited capacity of an individual, because of anxiety, to exchange thoughts and feelings of personal significance with another individual who is highly valued" (Descutner & Thelen, 1991 p. 219). A total score is produced from the sum of all the items with a higher score reflecting a higher fear of intimacy. Participants are asked to imagine that they were in a close dating relationship when answering the items; but for the current study phrases were slightly modified so that participants who had a partner were asked to answer all items in regard to an existing partner. An example of an item is "I would feel comfortable expressing my true feelings to my partner". The FIS was found to have good construct validity, excellent internal consistency (alpha of .93) and stability was demonstrated with a one-month test-retest correlation of .89 (Descutner & Thelen, 1991). In the current study the Cronbach's alpha was .89.

Sexual Motivation Questionnaire (Neston and Buss 2005). In 2005 Neston and Buss Sexual developed the Motivation Questionnaire, to assess the reasons for which a person engages in sexual activity. This questionnaire consists of 237 items and includes four factors as follows: physical, emotional, goal achievement and insecurity. Physical factors include: reduce stress, reduce pleasure, physical desirability, searching experiences. Emotional factors include: love, involvement and expression. Factors of goal achievement include: resources, social status, revenge and utility reasons. Insecurity factors include: low self-esteem or the need for increased self-esteem, assignment, pressure, "treasure" the partner. Evaluation items of the subjects is on a Likert scale of 1 to 5, where 1 means none of experiences and 5 means a lot of experiences, depending on how much characterizes every statement.

4. RESULTS

The analysis of the first hypothesis was started from the premise that unmarried women, but who are in a relationship, have a higher fear of intimacy than married women. The results have rejected this hypothesis, since there were no significant differences; therefore the fear of intimacy was similar

between married women and unmarried women, but who are in a relationship. The second hypothesis claimed that there is a correlation between low self-esteem and fear of intimacy of married women and unmarried women, but who are in a love relationship. The obtained results supported the hypothesis. Therefore as the self-esteem of women increases both fear of intimacy decreases. The third hypothesis claimed that unmarried women, but are in a couple relationship have a higher level in terms of sexual motivation than married women. Results have disproved this hypothesis, since there were no significant differences; therefore sex motivation was similar between married women and unmarried women, but who are in relationship.

The fourth hypothesis sustained that there is a correlation between the level of intimacy and the fear of sexual motivation of women who are in a couple relationship. The results obtained have disproved this hypothesis, therefore there is no correlation between the fear of intimacy and the females' sexual motivation, and thus any correlations between the fear of intimacy and women's sexual motivation who are in a relationship couple are due to hazard.

5. CONCLUSIONS

By analyzing the four hypotheses the following can be identified: The conclusion of the first approach is that self-esteem is not influenced by the fact that women are married or unmarried, but in a relationship. The conclusion of the second hypothesis is: the more self-esteem women have, the less fear of intimacy they have. The conclusion of the third hypothesis is that sexual motivation is not influenced by the fact that women are married or unmarried. The conclusion of the fourth hypothesis is that there is a link between fear of intimacy and the sexual motivation in women who are in a relationship.

By analysing these hypotheses, one can draw the conclusion that there are a number of advantages given by the choice of being a married woman, but these conclusions may not be applied to an entire population, because all the variables analysed are also influenced by other factors that weren't introduced in this study, even if for the present research, conclusions were covered by findings presented.

REFERENCES

- Carvalhoira , A., Brotto L, Isabel Leal** (2011). Women's Motivations for Sex: Exploring the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual, Fourth Edition, Text Revision Criteria for Hypoactive Sexual Desire and Female Sexual Arousal Disorders. *The Journal of Sexual Medicine* Volume 7, Issue 4pt1, pages 1454–1463, April 2010
- Descutner, C., & Thelen, M.** (1991). Development and validation of a fear-of-intimacy scale. *Psychological Assessment: A Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 3, 218-225
- Enachescu, C.,** (2008), *Tratat de psihosexologie*, Iasi: Polirom.
- Eryilmaz, A., & Atak, H.** (2009). Ready or not ? Markers of starting romantic intimacy at emerging adulthood: Turkish experience. *International Journal of Social Science*, 4 (1), 31-38.
- Fanget, F.,** (2008), *Sensul vieții. Răspunsurile psihologiei pentru a da sens propriei vieți*, Bucharest: Trei.
- Gavreliuc, A.,** (2006), *De la relațiile interpersonale la comunicarea socială*, Iasi: Polirom.
- LAROUSSE,** (2002), *Biblioteca medicală a familiei. Viața sexuală*, Bucharest: Enciclopedia RAO.
- Meston, C. M. & David M. B.** (2009). Why Women Have Sex: Sexual Motivation--from Adventure to Revenge (and Everything in Between). By: Maxwell, Lynne F., *Library Journal*, 03630277, 7/1/2009, Vol. 134, Issue 12
- Mitrofan, I., Mitrofan, N.** (1989). *Cuplul conjugal – Armonie și dizarmonie*. Bucharest: Editura Științifică și Enciclopedică
- Mitrofan, I., Ciupercă, C.,** (1998), *Incursiune în psihosociologia și psihosexologia familiei*, Bucharest: PRESS Mihaela S.R.L.
- Mitrofan, I., Ciupercă, C.** (2002). *Psihologia vieții de cuplu*. Bucharest: SPER
- Salome, J.,** (2006), *Trăind cu cei apropiați – în fiecare zi...viața*, Bucharest: Ascendent
- Stancu, I.,** (2011), *Mecanismele intimității în relația de cuplu*, Bucharest:SPER
- Sternberg R J,** (1986). A triangular theory of love. *Psychological Review*. 93:119-135 <http://books.google.ro/books>