

People who viewed sex as a leisure activity enjoyed more, better sex during the pandemic

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The fear, uncertainty and stress associated with the COVID-19 pandemic took a toll on adults' mental and physical health—and their sex lives, several studies reported. However, new research suggests that individuals who embraced sex as a leisure activity found creative ways to cope with the effects of the pandemic and enjoyed more satisfying and active sex lives compared with people who did not view sex the same way.

Researcher Liza Berdychevsky, a professor of recreation, sport and tourism at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, conducted an online survey of 675 adults in the United States, the United Kingdom and Canada between February and May 2021. Published in the journal *Leisure Studies*, the first paper from the project examined people's views of sex as [leisure](#) before and during the pandemic and the effects those outlooks had on the respondents' quantity and quality of sex.

The sex-as-leisure perspective was defined in the study as engaging in [sexual activity](#) for purposes such as recreation, relaxation, self-gratification or personal development.

"When sexual activity is pleasurable, freely chosen, and intrinsically motivated, it aligns with most definitions of leisure activity," Berdychevsky said. "The sex-as-leisure mindset affects sexual inhibitions, attitudes and practices, and it is congruent with the view of sexual health as key to our overall well-being and quality of life."

Those who strongly viewed sex as a leisure activity had more resilient [sex lives](#), Berdychevsky found. They reported increased sexual desire, as well as greater variety, frequency and quality of sex compared with people who were less inclined to view sex the same way.

"Viewing sex as leisure minimized the negative effects of the pandemic on people's sex lives and was linked with greater ability to reach orgasm, heightened sexual intimacy and more touching and caressing," Berdychevsky said.

"These individuals used the additional time with their partners to devote more time to sexual intimacy, communication and experimentation. Adopting this approach may have been a powerful means for individuals and couples to feel both safe and adventurous in their sex lives during a rather scary time."

The participants ranged in age from 18-76. The sample included almost 66% women, 30% men and 2.8% individuals who identified differently. About 68% of respondents had a regular sexual partner and 12% had a casual partner.

In another paper from that project, published in the journal *Leisure Sciences*, Berdychevsky examined the capacity of the sex-as-leisure approach to serve as a coping strategy and whether it was related to a tendency to use and benefit from other sexual coping mechanisms.

Participants were asked whether they engaged in various attitudinal, behavioral and technology-assisted sex-as-leisure coping mechanisms.

The attitudinal strategies included engaging in sex for comfort, pleasure, stress relief or to be playful. The behavioral coping strategies encompassed trying new positions, toys or activities such as bondage and domination or sexual role-playing. And the technology-assisted coping strategies involved watching pornography, sexting and using geo-social networking apps.

Over half of the respondents found sex-as-leisure to be a useful coping mechanism during the pandemic, with many reporting increased feelings of creativity, playfulness and spontaneity. Sex was a source of pleasure, relaxation and comfort for more than two-thirds of the respondents, as well as a means of stress relief, distraction or passing free time.

More than 20% of respondents indulged in long-suppressed sexual fantasies, tried new positions (41%), explored sex toys and aids (26%) or engaged in bondage and domination (18%) or sexual role-playing (13%).

Not surprisingly, with the pandemic's extended periods of isolation and heightened fears of contagion, the use of technology-mediated coping mechanisms flourished, offering people an outlet for flirting and sexual expression without concerns about safety and social distancing, Berdychevsky found.

Respondents reported that they watched porn alone or with a partner (59% and 17%, respectively), took erotic photos or videos (31%), exchanged erotic notes or emails (25%) or participated in phone or webcam sex (nearly 14%).

Participants reported that they found the behavioral sex-as-leisure coping strategies much more effective than the attitudinal tactics. However, while about 21% of the people surveyed used geo-social networking apps to connect with others, these were rated the least effective of the behavioral coping mechanisms, according to the study.

Initially, Berdychevsky's data analyses showed that participants' tendency to view sex as a leisure activity deteriorated, on average, during the pandemic. While a mixture of variables affected the quality of respondents' sex lives—including age, stress levels and access to a regular sexual partner—when Berdychevsky took a closer look at the data, she found that individuals' perception of sex as a leisure activity predicted whether their sex lives thrived or deteriorated.

"These results demonstrate that a strong tendency to view sex as leisure served as a protective factor against the adverse impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on people's sex lives," she said. "The decline in people's tendency to view sex as a form of leisure activity is a potentially problematic health risk factor because this perspective is positively related to all aspects of sexuality, including [sexual desire](#), intimacy and satisfaction.

"Frequent and rewarding sexual activity has been associated with individuals' greater overall enjoyment of life, quality of life and well-being. It is crucial not to let sexual and relational health become collateral damage of the COVID-19 pandemic. Public health messages educating people to view sex as leisure could help them navigate the impacts and aftermath of the pandemic in their intimate lives and improve their preparedness for future public health crises," she said.

More information: Liza Berdychevsky, Sex as leisure approach during the COVID-19 pandemic and its impacts on the quantity and quality of sex life, *Leisure Studies* (2022). DOI: [10.1080/02614367.2022.2115113](https://doi.org/10.1080/02614367.2022.2115113)

Liza Berdychevsky, Sex as Leisure as a Coping Mechanism with the Impacts of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Sex Life, *Leisure Sciences* (2022). DOI: [10.1080/01490400.2022.2127432](https://doi.org/10.1080/01490400.2022.2127432)

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