

Relationship Matters - Podcast Number 12

[Start of recorded material]

Host: From Champlain College in Burlington, Vermont, *this* is Relationship Matters!

Hello and welcome to Relationship Matters, the podcast of the Journal of Social and Personal Relationships. I'm your host, Dr Bjarne Holmes. Today's podcast is on a *really* cool topic, we're going to talk about the topic of sexual healing, from the beautiful resort town of Herzliya, Israel, we have with us today Dr Tsachi Ein-Dor, welcome Dr Ein-Dor.

Respondent: Hello, hello.

Host: Now, we first met at a conference back in 2010, held on your beautiful campus and I have to admit that when I was walking around on your campus, at times I was thinking to myself, 'how does anyone get any work done around here, living in this beautiful town!?', so I have to ask you, is it hard to work there?

Respondent: Yeah, it's hard and it's one of the reasons why I'm interested in the topic of sex, because we have all this sun and all these beautiful women.

Host: I have to admit, I found myself sitting, you know, on a beach, working on a paper and it was really hard to work on that paper! Dr Eindor is an instructor in the Psychology Department at the Inter Disciplinary Centre (IDC) in Herzliya. Could you explain to me for a second what the IDC is?

Respondent: IDC is just an Inter Disciplinary Centre that holds several schools, for example, the School of Economy, on Government and Psychology and then tries to bring research from those different domains into one field of study ... to enrich every domain by different knowledge, so that's the basic essence of the centre.

Host: And, as always, I've got my studio technician, Matt Grasso, with me here in the studio in Vermont – Matt, are you ready to learn about sexual healing?

Matt: I am ready and I didn't know that there were doctors in Israel who work at sexy beaches either! I had no idea!

Respondent: [Laughs]

Host: So the article we're going to talk about today is titled 'Sexual healing; daily diary evidence that sex relieves stress and men and women in satisfying relationships' and it's free to download from the website of the Journal of Social and Personal Relationships, courtesy of Sage Publications and it can be found in the February 2012 issue of the

journal, that's volume 29, issue 1. The paper is co-authored by Gilad Hirschberger, also of IDC in Herzliya, Israel.

Host: So can we get you started by telling us a little bit about why you're interested in this work in the first place, besides the sexy beaches?

Respondent: Yeah, besides being a man, which is promoting the interest of sex, as you probably know, I think sex, as a researcher, is an interesting enigma because sex should not exist if you think about the evolutionary perspective because if the function of sex is to promote the genes to the next generation, to pass them on, then it's not the most effective or efficient way to do so because you need to find a spouse and she (in this case) needs to like you back and you need to maintain her and to sometimes fight over her and then when you engage in sexual intercourse you find that you get an offspring with only 50% of your genes and hence it's not the most effective way to do that and some animals actually have an asexual reproduction, in which they can replicate themselves, as some species of lizard, and hence they do not need to find a mate, they do not need to communicate with him or her and they pass 100% of the genes.

So the general interest in the phenomena of sex came from this enigma of why sex actually exists. And if you are interested in this topic you need to read Matt Ridley's book, the Red Queen, but this is only the general reason why I was interested in the topic of sex. And the specific topic that I and Gillard were interested in was the link between sex and stress because we as people feel stressed all the time, we have daily hassles and we know that it's a fact, the way we behave inside relationships and the way we engage our spouse and that was the general interest in it.

Host: So I think I get where this is going just a little bit – what you're basically proposing perhaps in one sense is that 'hey, it doesn't make any sense from an evolutionary model because basically if we could figure out how to just clone ourselves or have sex with ourselves or something, fine, but that there must be other functions for it and it sounds to me that what better function, certainly anecdotally, to relieve stress than sex.

Respondent: Yeah, that could be one of the functions that sex might produce exactly.

Host: So what did you find?

Respondent: What we did first, we had actually two questions; one question is whether sex can actually reduce stresses that you feel. You might imagine a day in which you go to your work and you had a hectic traffic jam and your boss just yelled at you and you came back and you got a ticket and then you got home ... and the question is, what are you going to do with this awful day that you had and what is the role sex? – it actually reduces the stress that you felt. To know this question or to know some of the answers to the question we have participants, 75 Israeli women, we gave them a diary, which means that we asked them

to fill out a daily diary, with questions about the daily hassles that they had each day and then whether or not they had sex that day and then we were able to predict whether in a specific day if you have a lot of stress, would this predict that you're actually going to engage more often in sexual intercourse ... and also, if you had sex, would that relieve the stress on the next day?

Host: Ooh, I'm really, really, really curious, what happened?

Respondent: And what we have found is the general answer is if you had sex, yes, your stress was reduced but it was not true for all people, it was only true for people in satisfying relationships.

Host: So you're saying if you feel close, if you feel well bonded, if your satisfaction is relatively high, *then* having sex reduces stress or when stress is reduced you have more sex, one or the other?

Respondent: The first phrase was the correct one, for sex to work you need to be inside a satisfying relationship; if you are in dissatisfying relationships, sex just will not relieve the stress.

Host: So do you speculate that that's simply because the sex is not being enjoyed as much as an emotional bond, or why do you think that might be?

Respondent: If we look at the other end, meaning if you are feeling now stressed when you actually engage in sex, what we see is that there is no one process for men and women, what we see is when women feel stressed, they would engage in sex only if they have this satisfying relationship, they need to feel close to their spouse, they need to feel this [8.56] to him for using sex as a way to relieve stress – but actually, men do the exact opposite; men use sex to relieve stress when they are in dissatisfying relationships, in satisfying relationships they might do other things but in dissatisfying relationships, men, what we think is happening is that they do not have other ways to relieve stress; they've just had an awful day, the relationship is not satisfying, what's left to them is having sex; meaning that men look at sex as more of a physical activity and it's something that ... speak about, that men look at sex as more of a physical activity and they can use it to relieve stress also in dissatisfying relationships but women look at it as more of an emotional bond, as you have said, and hence they can use sex only in satisfying relationships. So that creates kind of a conflict between men and women because we just expect something else and the distance of expectations can cause many conflicts in relationships.

Host: So what's your advice for couples?

Respondent: First I think that they should know about it because as humans we have a tendency to think that the other person thinks just the same way – so if I'm a man and I'm feeling dissatisfied with my relationships and I had a

very awful day, then I expect to engage in sexual intercourse to relieve stress and I expect it and hence I can say to my spouse that I want to have sex and she would see it as an act of insanity because, ‘come on, we are not speaking, it’s not satisfying for me this, this relationship’ and hence the expectations are just off but if you would *know* that, you know the expectations of the other side, then you can bridge the difficulties that you have getting to places.

Host: Knowledge is absolute power when it comes to this. I’m just looking at my studio technician, Matt, and I’m smirking a little bit because I can tell what’s going through his mind – I’m about to ask him about what sex is like in Vermont and he’s thinking ‘how much can I say here without getting into trouble with my wife!?’.

Matt: He is totally 100% on the money! Guys think that women think the same thing – so if I’ve had a terribly day and I say to my wife, ‘I’ve had a terrible day’, I assume she knows what that means, which is ‘there’s only one way to take care of a guy whose had a terrible day!’ but women aren’t thinking that way – wow, smart man on the phone!

Host: Wait, wait, wait a minute, are we sure about that, are we sure that women are better at perceiving the needs of men than vice versa? And aren’t there other things, like attachment styles and personality traits that might predict some of this better than gender? – I’m just wondering, Tsachi, what do you think?

Respondent: Yeah, personality should affect it but in the process of having sex there are huge differences between men and women because we just need, even on the physiological level, we need something else but of course the personality would change the expectations as we know and if you mention attachment, attachment is the way I see relationships when it comes to times of need and if you are encountering daily hassles, this is the exact time that you are in need and the way you have this expectation in the personality perspective has been, for example, with an anxious attachment, meaning that you expect people to be close to you, you want proximity and so on, so this should affect the way you actually use sex as a means to reach closeness.

Host: So if you are in dire need of constant reminding of your worth and love and you can use sex that way, so yeah, that makes sense?

Respondent: Yeah, you actually *use* sex as more of a physical tool to use to promote closeness.

Host: Right, which is what your awesome colleague [13.36] is doing research on?

Respondent: Exactly.

Host: I want to thank you so much, this has been a really, really fun conversation. I envy the fact that you can probably find somewhere on the beach ... no, never mind, I'll let your own mind go there! ... but I want to thank you so much for taking the time.

Respondent: Thank you.

Host: You're listening to Relationship Matters, I'm your host Dr Bjarne Holmes. So if you want to read more about sexual healing and its positive effects on relationships, download the paper for free from the website of the journal, the authors are *more* than willing to answer your questions and respond to comments on our Facebook page, just search for the Journal of Social and Personal Relationships – and remember, we're talking about sex because sex heals.

Relationship Matters is a production of the Journal of Social and Personal Relationships in Sage Publications. You can subscribe through iTunes by searching for 'Sage podcasts' or access the series from the web page of the journal, send us an email at jsrprpodcast@gmail.com, follow us on Facebook by searching for 'Journal of Social and Personal Relationships' or follow us on Twitter, jsrprpodcast. The music you've been hearing is by Urban Delights (more at urbandelights.net). Thank you for listening and remember, we're talking Relationship Matters because relationships *matter*.

[End of recorded material]