



Regardless of whether they continue, romantic relationships teach romantic competency

"Romantic competency", a term Venus came across in her reading recently, is the skill required to develop healthy romantic relationships, and starts for most of us as teenagers. Working on the hypothesis that relationship skills would improve with exposure to more relationships, allowing individuals to build on their experiences over time, researchers conducted a qualitative, interview-based, longitudinal study involving over 400 American teenagers. For both those whose relationships endured and those whose relationships ended, all experiences resulted in learning important adult relationship skills. These included romantic agency (the ability to regulate emotionally intense experiences including conflict), coherence (the ability to integrate both positive and negative aspects of relationships) and social maturity.

J Adolesc Res 2017;32:155–182. doi: 10.1177/0743558415605166

PCOS sufferers are not at increased risk of sexual problems

Given that polycystic ovarian syndrome (PCOS) is associated with hormonal dysregulation, one might wonder whether women with the syndrome might also suffer sexual problems. A lack of suitable studies means we don't know much about sexual functioning in women with PCOS. However, a recent population-based study of 63 women with confirmed PCOS and 216 healthy controls showed no significant differences between the two groups in any domains of sexual functioning using the Female Sexual Functioning Index. Within the PCOS group, there was no correlation between hormone profiles and sexual functioning except for prolactin levels and orgasm. Nor did high levels of androgens result in improvements in sexual functioning in woman with PCOS – a result which does not surprise Venus, given that testosterone levels generally correlate poorly with sexual functioning in women.

Int J Impotence Res 2017;29:1–6. doi:10.1038/ijir.2016.35

Continued use of COCs post-abortion is low even with pre-abortion contraceptive counselling

Does proactive pre-abortion contraception counselling influence women's choice of method and ultimately reduce the incidence

of repeat abortions? A Chinese study of women seeking a first-trimester abortion prospectively received pre-abortion contraceptive counselling and the choice of method of contraception was based on the counselling and not related to prior methods of birth control. Of 455 women followed up 6 months after a first-trimester abortion, 64% were found to be using an intrauterine device (IUD), 10% the combined oral contraceptive (COC) pill and 52%, condoms. COC use had been initially higher but was then discontinued by many regardless of the pre-abortion counselling, due to fear of and actual experience of side effects (especially weight gain). IUDs were the preferred choice, offering reliable birth control with a lower discontinuation rate than COCs or condoms.

Gynecol Obstet Invest 2017;82:86–95. doi: 10.1159/000445292

FGM incidence has fallen in Ethiopia despite its perceived social benefits

The practice of female genital mutilation (FGM) continues in much of eastern Ethiopia, and while its associated harms are familiar to journal readers, it is sobering to remember that these occur in the context of perceived social benefits. A community-based, cross-sectional study of FGM of women aged 15 years or over with at least one daughter under the age of 12 reports that for those whose daughters were mutilated, social acceptance and better marriage prospects were perceived as the major benefits. FGM amongst the daughters was significantly associated with lower reproductive age, lower educational attainment and the mother's experience of FGM. But while 80% of the women had undergone FGM themselves, just 19% of their daughters had done so, hence so the incidence of FGM had significantly reduced over one generation.

Int J Gynaecol Obstet 2016;135:304–309. doi: 10.1016/j.ijgo.2016.06.017

Pupillary dilation is a measure of sexual attraction with both naked and dressed images

Research is always affected by culture, but none more than sexual research. Dilatation of the pupils in response to naked images is often used in research investigating sexual attraction and response, but not all cultures permit the display of naked images. In an attempt to address this, researchers looked at

whether pupillary responses occurred only to footage of naked men and women, or to footage of dressed images too in a cohort of 325 men and women with varied sexual orientations. It appears pupils dilate in response to both. This means fully non-invasive studies can now be designed using pupil dilation as a proxy for sexual attraction in populations previously out of bounds due to the use of sexually explicit images.

Arch Sex Behav 2017;46:155–165. doi: 10.1007/s10508-016-0801-8

Best contraceptive outcomes depend on listening to patients and respecting their autonomy

Despite enormous effort and billions of dollars of expense, the vast majority of the published biomedical literature is not useful, meaning that it fails to impact favourably on decision-making by consumers or providers. An editorial advocating for patient-centred family planning criticises the spending of billions on campaigns to promote long-acting reversible contraception which ignores whether this is what women wish to use. Ultimately when we provide our patients with what they want and the care that they believe will best meet their needs, they will be satisfied and have the best outcomes. This, says the writer, involves providing free access to all methods of contraception, which in turn permits true autonomy in decision-making.

Am J Obstet Gynecol 2017;216:98–100. doi: 10.1016/j.ajog.2016.11.1030

Maternal bereavement is associated with congenital genital malformations, but not future infertility, in sons

Does maternal bereavement impact on the reproductive functioning of sons? A large Danish cohort study examined the impact of the loss of a close relative during pregnancy or in the 12 months before conception, on the sons who were subsequently born from the same pregnancy. It reports that congenital genital malformations were significantly more frequent among men born after a mother's bereavement during the first trimester of pregnancy, but no significant increase in male infertility or testicular cancer seen later on in life. The authors suggest the lack of association with infertility might be because men with genital malformation tend not to attempt to have children in the first place.

Fertil Steril 2017;107:189–197. doi: 10.1016/j.fertnstert.2016.10.016

