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News in Science - Sex makes women happy, it's official - 06/12/2004

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Sex makes women happy, it's official

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Reuters

Monday, 6 December 2004

Having sex is the high point of most women's days, while commuting is the low point. And most women like being with their kids less than they admit, says a new study.

While the results may not seem startling, the method used to assess mood is a new and more accurate way of figuring out how happy people are, the researchers report in the latest issue of the journal [Science](#).

They propose that their tool could be used to plan social policy.

"Current measures of wellbeing and quality of life need to be significantly improved," said Dr Richard Suzman of the [National Institute on Aging](#), which helped fund the study.

"In the future I predict that this approach will become an essential part of national surveys seeking to assess the quality of life."

For the study, Professor David Schkade of the [University of California, San Diego](#) and team studied more than 900 women.

Usually, people are asked about their feelings in general for questionnaires on mood.

The new method, called the Day Reconstruction Method, involves breaking the day into a sequence of episodes and rating each activity or moment as a kind of snapshot.



But what about chocolate? (Image: *iStockphoto*)

"Think of your day as a continuous series of scenes or episodes in a film. Give each episode a brief name that will help you remember it, for example, commuting to work, or at lunch with B," the women were told.

The women rated each activity for positive and negative associations, with 6 being the strongest and 0 the weakest.

Then the researchers analysed the numbers.

From shopping to sex

"Grocery shopping and cleaning the house were rated lowest among 28 activities," the researchers wrote.

On average, the 900 women gave "intimate relations" a positive score of 5.10, compared to 4.59 for socialising. Housework scored 3.73, which was better at least than working at 3.62 and commuting with a lowly score of 3.45.

As for who the women preferred to be with, friends clearly won out with a positive score of 4.36. Children landed in the middle, after relatives and spouses. The boss scored just 3.52.

"When people are asked how much they enjoy spending time with their kids they think of all the nice things: reading them a story, going to the zoo," said [University of Michigan](#) psychologist Professor Norbert Schwarz, who worked on the study.

"But they don't take the other times into account, the times when they are trying to do something else and find the kids distracting."

This new method creates a more accurate picture than asking people to generally report how much they like various activities, Schwarz said.

"Saying that you generally don't enjoy spending time with your kids is terrible, but admitting that they were a pain last night is quite acceptable," he said.

Let me sleep

Sleep quality had a large effect on the enjoyment of life, the researchers found.

Women who slept poorly, on average, enjoyed their day as little as a typical person enjoys commuting. Women who said they slept well enjoyed their day as much as most people enjoy watching television.

And women who earned more were not necessarily happier, the survey found.

"Measures of wealth or health do not tell the whole story of how society as a whole or particular populations within it are doing," said [Princeton University](#)'s Professor Daniel Kahneman, who led the study.

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