

# Debunking Lesbian Bed Death

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Do you get a little tired of being the brunt of the “Lesbian U-Haul” joke? You all know the one, so I don’t even have to repeat it. Then we have Lesbian Bed Death mythology---another real lesbian esteem booster---really makes a girl want to get into a relationship just for the experience!

There was a notion that lesbians in long term relationships eventually stop having sex and would rather read in bed surrounded by pets and books, then cuddle up and go to sleep. This less than fulfilling prophecy came from research of the early ‘80s—over 25 years ago! An entire generation of lesbians

came out at that time resigned that that they were destined to have a life without sex in their relationship. Why is that myth still around?

There are a couple of stories about who invented this phrase and why. JoAnn Loulan, an adorable social worker and author from San Francisco, used the phrase in her early ‘80s workshops as a bit of a joke to get lesbians to talk about sex and get comfortable with common relational experiences. Sadly, the “funny” expression “Lesbian Bed Death” is a sticky group of words that stuck! I saw JoAnn at a Queer Therapists convention in San Francisco several years ago where she said she regretted ever uttering those words. I personally have forgiven her because she also wrote the classic book called *Lesbian Sex* which is still cutting edge in exploring lesbian sexuality. LBD is never mentioned!

In 1983 two researchers wrote a book called *American Couples*. In their study, Pepper Schwartz and Phillip Blumstein pathologized lesbian sexuality, saying we had less sex than other couples, implying that diminished sexual activity is related to and natural or typical to being a lesbian. As a therapist, it is alarming to see how we willingly adopted this myth as truth these last 25 years.

After carefully reading this research, I found it does not prove a thing about lesbian sexuality. One of the questions on the survey asks, “How many times during this past year have you and your partner had sexual relations?” I don’t know about you, but that sounds like a “penis involved” question to me! What is meant by “sexual relations,” anyway? Good old Masters and Johnson did research that showed average heterosexual sex was performance based, focusing on orgasms. Within the first 30 seconds, after brief caressing, genital contact was made by the male partner. A big eight minutes later---all

done! Lesbian couples were shown to take their time with whole body contact and caressing lasting way more than eight minutes—the average time being about 30 minutes. But somehow all that

sweet women-loving wasn’t

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considered sexual relations by the researchers of those times because there was no “penetration.”

There is also a rumor going around that the phrase “Lesbian Bed Death” was really started by a right-wing

gay group so that straight people would believe we have something in common with them. The point being, all long-term relationships, gay or straight, experience changes in sexual passion. On the up side, lesbians, in recent studies, reported having more enjoyable sex than heterosexual women! And on that note--how do we keep it that way?

## C-P-R for S-E-X

1. Make sex dates --- don’t just wait for “it” to happen — because it won’t. Set aside a Sunday afternoon or Friday night; turn off the TV, cell phones, and computers. Get busy with each other!

2. Have fun with fantasies --- it is not true that having a fantasy means you are not into your partner. Practice having fantasies on your own. If it isn’t your “thing” to think about sex spontaneously, take some time to let your mind wander. Bring fantasies to your lover. Talk about your secret desires...let the shy one of you take the lead! Start a story line and let her finish.

3. Toys --- Maybe you love steak and potatoes but if you have it every day, three times a day, it can get to be monotonous. Time to try something new on the menu, perhaps? Shop together at Miko or in Provincetown. The sales staff can recommend and demonstrate some of those things that look complicated. Or make it a surprise---make it fun, keep it safe. Some of the new colors are outrageous!

4. Porn – I know this isn’t very PC but there are some good lesbian made movies that might be fun to watch, to get turned on, to learn something new.



5. Talk -- Take a risk and tell your lover what your wants and needs are, and listen to hers. Communicate and be kind to each other with words and actions.

6. Breathe -- life back into your relationship. Time passed, you both got busy with work,

kids, obligations. Also, the chemistry of your early relationship changes pretty early on so look for ways to keep it hot but don’t expect it to be like the first time-- make it better! Our fluctuating monthly hormone levels have a direct impact on sexual desire. As we get older our hormones diminish. Either way, we have to be conscious that our sexual desire comes more from the mind and into our body and that hormones don’t have to dictate our desire to make love.

7. Atmosphere --- flowers, candles, hot tub, words of love, slow dancing to your song, reading poetry to each other, snacks on a tray next to the bed, and compliments to your lover. PLEASE get out of that sweat suit and those wool socks. And off with the flannel sheets, for goodness sake. This is sex with your lover --- not a sleepover at L.L. Bean!

There is a lot left to say regarding lesbian sexuality---aging, illness, body image, abuse issues, hormones, internalized homophobia, socialization, and menopause. The good news is — we are immunized against lesbian bed death just by believing it is just an old homophobic myth we don’t have to buy into.

Just for a laugh, there is a new trend going around New York City --- it’s called “Hetero Bed Death.” The theory is that straight people have used up all the gay clichés and are moving into the lesbian venue. Is this a compliment? ▼