

IF I COULD DO IT ALL OVER AGAIN

RETHINKING A SEXUAL FLING IS NORMAL—
AND THE REASONS WE DO ARE REVEALING.

by Matt Huston

IT SEEMED LIKE a good idea at the time. When it comes to sexual misadventures, why do we feel so wrong about that which, in the heat of the moment, felt so right?

There are many reasons for second-guessing sex: It ruined a relationship; it wasn't very exciting; it made you feel dirty or unvirtuous. Roughly half of women and a quarter of men who have had casual sex feel regretful about the last time they did it. Then, of course, there are quite a few who pass up a go at sex and later kick themselves for it.

Evolutionary psychologists argue that sexual ruminations stem, in part, from our oldest inclination: to produce the fittest offspring we can. Women have a far heavier burden and fewer opportunities than men—start with the nine-month gestation—so it pays for them to be choosy about mates. Men, on the other hand, can afford to be more freewheeling.

A collection of studies in the *Archives of Sexual Behavior* supports this theory. On average, women most regretted the sex that they had; men were more likely to regret the sex they didn't.

"Why should you worry about something you already did or didn't do?" asks Martie G. Haselton, a psychologist at the University of California, Los Angeles and coauthor of the studies. "Our view is that it could help you avoid making the same mistake twice." Accordingly, a top regret for women was losing one's virginity to the "wrong person." Men largely wished they had been more sexually intrepid.

That's not to say that women are naturally coy and that all men are sex machines. The studies only depict average tendencies, and most of us know exceptions to the rule. A study in the *Journal of Sex Research* finds that regardless of gender, college students who engage in sex with relative strangers may actually be more anxious and depressed.

Maryanne Fisher of Saint Mary's University in Nova Scotia found that more than 70 percent of college students who'd had a one-night stand had also

experienced sexual regret. More than half the time, alcohol played a role. "I'm wondering," she says, "if people are walking in expecting what Hollywood has sold them—that these experiences are going to be the pinnacle of young adulthood."

However, some regrets—including shame-based ones—may simply be outdated. If no one is hurt and safe sex is practiced, Haselton suggests, "You might say, 'This is just my Stone Age mind, responding to what would have had huge consequences.'"



I regret...

MEN		WOMEN	
...not indicating my sexual attraction to someone.	55%	...moving "too fast" or having too much sex.	43%
...not being more sexually adventurous in my youth.	48%	...losing my virginity to the wrong person.	41%