How Marriages Are Negatively Affected By Gender Differences in Sexual Need and Desire

A Summary Paper

Presented to

The faculty of the Adler Graduate School

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for

The Degree of Master of Arts in
Adlerian Counseling and Psychotherapy

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March 2012
Abstract
This paper reviews literature that discusses and supports how marriages are negatively affected by the different sexual needs and desires of each partner. It discusses research that confirms that there is a difference between husbands and wives. It explores what these differences are and how both the husband and the wife display them in the marriage relationship. Destructive elements such as pornography and extramarital affairs are explored and the damage that these activities can cause. The literature discusses husbands and wives attitudes about sex and intimacy and looks at how these attitudes can determine the level and quality of the connection that partners experience. It examines how unmet expectations can lead to a strain and disconnect that is not easily repaired. Lastly, shortcomings with the current research are identified and what future research should take into account when examining marital discord and sexual dissatisfaction and why the differences in gender should be considered.
This review attempts to prove that if gender differences in sexual need and desire are not addressed and dealt with appropriately between a husband and a wife then the relationship will suffer and divorce can be the inevitable result.
DEDICATION

This paper is dedicated to my husband Robert, who has been my partner and friend for over eighteen years. Without him, this thesis would not have been possible. His input, encouragement and support were invaluable and without it, I do not think that I would have completed this paper or graduate school. Thank you for everything, Sweetheart. I love you!
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

As I complete this amazing journey of graduate school, I would be remiss to not acknowledge the wonderful people that helped me get to this point.

First of all, I have to thank my wonderful Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ! Without Him guiding and directing my path and blessing me at every turn, I not only would not have made it through graduate school, but I would not have made it through my life. Thank you, Father, for your Love, Mercy, Grace, and most of all, Your Salvation.

I also want to thank my wonderful husband, Robert. He was instrumental in my getting into graduate school as well as finishing school. His many nights of taking care of our kids and our home were extremely helpful to me. He allowed me to focus on my dream of completing graduate school without worrying about day to day things. He encouraged me at times when I was discouraged and felt that I could not do what was necessary to succeed. Mostly, he simply loved me and believed in me, when I did not love myself and felt that I could not make it. I cannot thank him enough. The most that I can do is to become the best therapist and helper that I can.

Lastly, I want to thank all of the incredible teachers, professors and staff that I have met at Adler. They are a wonderful, smart, encouraging group of individuals that I will never forget. Without any of them, this achievement would not have been possible. The intelligence and experience that they bring to the school and the students is priceless. They make me proud to say that I am an Adlerian and I cannot wait to utilize all of the tools and techniques that they shared with me. Adler would be very proud.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. Introduction  
   A. The Goal of This Thesis and Research..........................6-7  
   B. Research Problem Description.................................7-9  

2. Details of Research  
   A. Overview of the Research......................................9-12  
   B. The False Picture of Marriage..................................12-14  
   C. Differences Between Men and Women............................14-15  
   D. Male and Female Contrasts Regarding Need and Desire..............15-17  
   E. Is the Difference Strictly Gender Related?.........................17-19  
   F. What Damage These Differences Can Cause.........................19-21  
   G. What Can Be Done to Minimize Gender Differences...................21  

3. Conclusions and Evaluations of Current Research.....................22-23  

4. Future Research..........................................................23-26  

5. References....................................................................27-29
How Marriages Are Negatively Affected by Gender Differences in Sexual Need and Desire

The Goal of This Thesis and Research

The idea for this thesis really came out of personal experience. After being married for 16 years, I had come to realize that marriages have many challenges, several of which have to do with the differences between the sexes. I have had challenges in my relationship in regards to differences in sexual need and desire and I began to hear familiar stories from friends and acquaintances who were dealing with the same issues in their marriages. These couples were struggling with their sexual needs and desires and were growing frustrated trying to find ways to solve their problems. Some of these individuals had become angry and bitter and started to engage in pornography or become involved an extramarital affair. Others just stopped having sex altogether and had no physical or emotional contact at all. Still others, totally frustrated and discouraged, opted for the ultimate disconnection, divorce.

This phenomenon really saddened and confused me and I realized that many couples were really struggling with the issues of differing and unmet intimacy needs. At first, I just thought like so many of us do, that women were not as interested in sex as men were. This is what most people think; men are sex fiends and women are prudes. However, I began to wonder if this difference was not based on lack of interest, but on gender or biological differences between men and women. The more I researched, the more my theory seemed to prove correct. Hence, where this theory came from and why I am pursuing this area of investigation. I believe that our differences in sexual need and desire are based on gender and are what cause the conflicts in our marriages and relationships.

It is not necessarily the person, but the fact that we are biologically and socially programmed to have a difference in our intimacy needs as men and women. I believe this is the
primary reason couples struggle. It is the fact that they do not understand these differences and in turn, fall into stereotypical thought patterns, which in turn cause dissention and separation amongst a couple. This thesis hopes to prove that these gender differences are the main cause of sexual and physical discord that can lead to the demise of a relationship. In recognizing this, there can be hope and healing for couples that are struggling to understand these differences and restore their relationship and their marriage.

**Research Problem Description**

Few theorists would deny that a satisfactory sexual relationship is an initially important component of a satisfactory marriage (Ard, 1977). The question is what happens in marriage that changes this very important component? There are many things that can negatively affect the intimacy and desire in a relationship. Things such as finances, children and in-laws are common factors, but how do gender differences affect a marriage and with these gender differences, how do they influence sexual need and desire? Both theory and research suggest gender differences in sexual desire and sexual activity and the effects of these factors on relationship satisfaction may be different for men and women both in terms of size or amount of the sexual desire and activity on the relationship, and the effects of a particular type of sexual behavior (Buss, 2000).

Marriages today are dissolving at an astounding rate of around 50%. The reasons for this phenomenon vary, but these reasons tend to follow a familiar theme. Reasons for divorce can occur from things such as personality conflicts, cultural conflicts, religious conflicts, financial conflicts, sexual conflicts, or just plain ‘irreconcilable’ differences, which could include all of the above. With all of these sources of contention, ones gender impacts them all. So, in looking at one of the main sources of marital discord, sex and desire, how does the issue of gender impact these two very important elements? According to one study, experiencing unequal sexual desire
is potentially a source of conflict for couples (Elliott & Umberson, 2008). Research has found that most marital discord that pertains to sexual need and desire has to do with age, children, fatigue and familiarity. Some other variables are a newborn baby and being married for long periods of time, twenty years or more. It would appear from the research, that most would agree that becoming a parent for the first time is a significant factor for many changes in a couple’s relationship. It would also seem that being married for a long period of time encourages monotony and could contribute to the decline in desire and sexual activity, thus creating a conflict in the relationship.

In these cases of long-term marriages, research has found that sex and desire declined due to familiarity and boredom, mainly from the female partner. For example, in a 1977 longitudinal study by Ard, it was shown that in marriages of 20 years or more, each partner’s expectations for marriage differed. In the beginning, both partners held positive anticipations about sex from the outset of their marriage. However, as the marriage progressed, although both partners still were able to achieve orgasm during sex, men still wanted sex more often than their wives did. This discrepancy between the partners caused conflict within the marriage. In another study of young parents of small children, sexual frequency declined soon after the birth and in the first year of the child’s life (Ahlborg, Rudeblad, Linner & Linton, 2008).

It should be noted, that sexual desire did resume after the child reached four years of age, but sexual contentment remained lower then couples with additional children or with older children (Ahlborg, Rudeblad, Linner & Linton, 2008, p. 304). For those in long-term marriages, sex resumed with the couple learned to communicate their needs and wants. Research also found that the quantity of sex did not matter as much as the quality of sex. Men wanted sex more frequently than their wives, and also had to alter or adjust their sexual desire. According to one
A 2001 study that reviewed gender differences in sexual desire, researchers concluded that men evidence higher levels of sexual desire at all phases of a relationship (Baumeister, Catanese, & Vohs, 2001).

The purpose of this review is to examine what researchers have discovered in terms of gender differences in marriage and if these differences affect marriage and how. This review will also point out the shortcomings of past and current research and what other factors may play a part in the gender conflicts in marriage relationships.

Details of Research

Overview of the Research

What was most common in the research was the fact that men wanted more sex than women, or husbands wanted sex more often than their wives. A review of gender differences in sexual desire conclude that men evidence higher levels of sexual desire at all phases of a relationship (Baumeister, Catanese, & Vohs, 2001, p. 272). This trait was consistent in all of the research.

A very common theme was the fact that partners reported a decline in their sex lives due to things like fatigue, children and over-familiarity. Another consistent theme was the fact that marital sex did not appear to be very important to many people in actuality, despite the highly sex-oriented media and social environment (Charny & Asineli-Tal, 2004). The frequency of sexual activity between the majority of married couples (in the Charny & Asineli-Tal study, it was 69%), showed a lower level of sexual frequency all in the early years of marriage compared to 23% who reported maintaining a more normal sexual frequency. In addition to these findings, high first year rates were shown to not be maintained by most persons, particularly in the face of increased work and parenthood pressures (Charny & Asineli-Tal, p. 199).
These same factors of work and parenting issues affecting sexual frequency correlates with previously mentioned research. The theme of all of the research seems to be that the majority of married couples and partners view sex as very important for a happy marriage, but that the majority report sexual frequency and desire waning and seemingly being unimportant, especially in longer term relationships.

One interesting discovery showed how husbands and wives adjusted to their partner’s sexual desire. According to a survey of married couples done in 2008 by authors Elliott and Umberson, respondents described how they consciously work to alter or adjust their own sexual feelings, attitudes, and behavior. This is called ‘emotion work’ (Hochschild, 1983 as cited in Elliott & Umberson, 2008). Emotion work involves a spouse adjusting their sexual need to meet their mate’s sexual need. Hochschild used the term ‘emotion work’ to refer to emotion management done in a private context, as opposed to that done for a wage (Hochschild, 1983, as cited in Elliott & Umberson, 2008). Partners adjusted their levels of desire for sex by aligning their frequency or desire for a type of sex with their mate’s. What was interesting about making these emotional adjustments was how the partners went about doing this. If their mate only wanted sex twice a week and they wanted it four times a week, the partner engaging in emotive work would work to decrease their own sexual desire by consciously ‘deciding’ to want sex less often, or engaging in other activities that could occupy his or her time. Other activities such as cuddling with their partner, or just lying with them and falling asleep were other techniques used to help the desiring partner adjust his or her sexual need and desire to meet that of their less desiring mate.

According to one survey conducted by Call, Sprecher and Schwartz, husbands consistently wanted more physical intimacy than their wives (Call, Sprecher, & Schwartz, 1995).
This, again, is consistent with all other research. It was evident in this study that the husbands viewed their sexual need as more intense, immediate and stronger than their wives. They desired more frequency and variety. Thus, husbands began to make adjustments to their physical need by changing the way they viewed the relationship as a whole, in both physical and emotional aspects. To again reference the Elliott and Umberson study, in large part because respondents view sex as crucial to a “good” marriage, but believe that women are less sexual than men, they undertake emotion work around their sexual relationship in an effort to reduce marital conflict, enhance intimacy, and facilitate a spouse’s well-being. This ‘emotion work’ is referred to as “performing desire” (Elliott & Umberson, p. 393). For a husband with a higher sex drive than his wife, he would simply begin to look at the quality of sex instead of the quantity, as he may have done in the past. This technique, or way of moving through a relationship, was effective for both husbands and wives. In this same study by Elliott and Umberson, twenty-three out of 62 respondents spontaneously described how they consciously work to alter their own sexual feelings, attitudes, and behaviors (Elliott & Umberson, 2008).

It was found that men and women are similarly likely to make a concerted effort to change their sexual feelings or behaviors, but there was a gendered pattern in the strategy of changing one’s sexual self. The wives were more likely to say that they make a conscious effort to be more sexual, to want sex more often, whereas more of the husbands say that they make a conscious effort to reduce their sexual desires and focus on the quality of sex, rather than sexual frequency (Elliott & Umberson, 2008. p. 404). So, according to the authors, this phenomenon seemed to occur because both men and women feel that sex is very important to a healthy marriage, but find it difficult to always meet the need of their partner the way that they would
like. So, because of this, ‘emotion work’ is necessary to maintain a happy and workable relationship.

Another theme was the impact that aging has on a couple’s sex life. It was reported consistently that the older the partners were in a marriage, the more the sex life declined. This was also true if a couple had been together for a long period of time. The impact that over-familiarity had on a couple’s sexual need and desire was great. This was truer for women than for men. Researchers have speculated that the decline in frequency of marital sex is a result of habituation (Call, 2004, p. 364.) and that, with increasing marital duration, married men and women find sex less rewarding (Liu, 2000, p. 363). However, in other research it was found that the duration of a marriage had very little impact on sexual desire and frequency. Although husbands continued to prefer intercourse more frequently than wives, both partners still desired sex and physical intimacy.

The Ard study reports that about 70% of the wives remain orgasmic. The study also claims that 36% of husbands were occasionally impotent (Ard, 1977). It should be noted, however, that both men and women had held positive anticipation about sex from the outset of the marriage, and as the relationship progressed, their early ideas and expectations had changed. Partners went from expecting sexual desire and frequency to remain as high as it was in the first few years of the marriage, to realizing that it would decline due to real life demands and relationship changes, such as work, children, over familiarity and fatigue. These findings would lead us to examine what the initial picture of marriage looks like to most partners.

The False Picture of Marriage

When one thinks of a newlywed couple, many images come to mind. We think of the young couple, excited to start their life together. They want to be together whenever they can,
they seldom argue or bicker, and they have sex whenever possible, everyday, sometimes more than once a day. All the couple thinks about is the future and how great everything is and how in love they are. They probably never image a time when their desire for each other will wane. That honeymoon period, as it is called, is temporary and lasts briefly. According to one 1983 research article written by Cathy Greenblat of Rutgers University, even couples in their first year of marriage show signs of decline in sexual activity.

According to a 2004 study of “sexless” or ‘sex avoidant’ young couples, it was found that following an initially high sexual frequency at the beginning of marriage, there is a progressive and surprisingly early and intense decline in the frequency of intercourse (Charny & Asineli-Tal, 2004, p. 199).

This decline is with newlyweds in their first year of marriage. It appears that sexual activity between partners can change very quickly in a new marriage. There seems to be many reasons for this. Some of these reasons are, as was stated earlier, familiarity with one’s partner, job demands and careers, fatigue and boredom. The simple fact that the couple is now married can sometimes spell disaster to the sexual desire and passion that once dictated the relationship. It has been said by many women, that once they have their husbands, there is no longer a need for frequent sex. Many of them believe that they can now ‘relax’ and just be comfortable in the relationship. This, of course, does not sit well with the men who are thinking that now they are going to get sex on demand, anytime and anywhere they want it. It seems that neither spouse really understands the reality of married life nor how it will change them as individuals and as a couple. In most of the research it was expressed by husbands that they expected sex to be this frequent, exciting phenomenon that would never fade away.
For wives, it seemed that there really was no expectation about sex. If anything, they seemed to expect the husbands to understand when they lost interest in sex. Several elements were always in the way for the women, from work, to household chores, to children to fatigue. The discrepancy in how each gender viewed their physical relationship was clearly evident in all research. Men wanted more sex, more often and with more variety, and women did not desire sex as often or as varied. Both sexes agree to the importance of sex in a marriage, but cannot seem to agree on how often to have sex or what type of sex they both desire. This discordance continues to create tension in marriages.

**Differences Between Men and Women**

The next area of examination is differences between men and women. What was found in the research was that men and women do have differences when it comes to how they view physical intimacy and desire in a relationship. It was consistent in all of the research that there is a difference in how often men and women desire sex. First of all, it is a fact that cultural norms and beliefs about gender guide an individual’s understandings and performances of gender (West & Zimmerman, 1987). These cultural norms and beliefs also influence how men and women view sex and desire as well as how they view the roles of husbands and wives in a marriage. The observation that gender is what one does, rather than what one is, emphasizes the dynamism of gender. Yet, gender involves more than just how people see themselves and how they act; it also shapes how people experience themselves (Bordo, 1993; Connell, 1995), and how they experience intimate relationships. For example, how a man views a husband’s role in a marriage can dictate how he treats his wife and what he expects from her in the relationship, both physical and emotional. The Adlerian view of the sexes would be to see this not as a difference between
men and women, or the opposite of sex, but the ‘other sex’; describing equality and a twosomeness. Relationships are viewed as a cooperation, not a conflict or competition.

**Male and Female Contrasts Regarding Need and Desire**

As it was stated earlier, it has been proven that men desire sex more than women. It has also been theorized that men desire different types of sexual activities than women. For example, the 1994 Laumann study of heterosexual couples revealed that men reported a significantly longer ideal duration of intercourse than their partners did, although the ideal length of foreplay did not differ for either men or women. Other research suggests that women are less interested in receiving and giving oral sex than men (Laumann, Gagnon, Michael, & Michaels, 1994, p. 32) and that women desire more tenderness (e.g., kissing) than men (Schmidt, Matthiesen, & Meyerhof, 2004, p. 32). Also, there may be gender differences in sexual behaviors. For example, men report having sex more frequently than women (Colson et. al., 2006, p. 32) and the frequency of masturbation, sexual fantasies, and anal intercourse is typically higher in men than in women (Leitenberg, Detzer, & Srebnik, 1993; Leitenberg & Henning, 1995; Wilson, 1987, p. 32). A common theme that was heard throughout all of the research was that men are more sexually driven than women and that women have an innately lower libido than men. One participant stated, “for men I think it is just…well, it’s physical. It’s like they build up that sperm and they need a release” (Elliott & Umberson, 2008, p. 397).

Looking at all of these findings it is safe to suggest that for men, there may be a stronger association between sexual satisfaction and relationship satisfaction compared to women. Men seem more likely to be dissatisfied with their relationship if they perceive a large discrepancy between their sexual desire and sexual activity. There is also a way that men and women see themselves in terms of femininity and masculinity. This is called ‘gender identity’ and this can
also impact sexual behavior for men and women, as individuals and in relationships and marriage. It is believed that one’s gender is rooted in the social and not the biological. The degree to which each partner sees him or herself as either male or female, will dictate how each partner view themselves as a husband or a wife and what their roles are in the marriage. This could be labeled as classical gender training. In addition, society holds each gender to a different standard. Women, for example, continue to experience a sexual double standard that is rooted in cultural understandings about gender and sexuality. Femininity is usually seen in terms of being sexually desirable rather than sexually desiring, whereas the idea of masculinity connotes sexual aggression and prowess. These conflicting messages about sex and sexuality may cause both genders to develop a skewed sense of sexual identity. It may make one feel that they have “to sacrifice their sexual autonomy in exchange for social desirability”, and become disconnected from their own desire (Crawford & Popp, 2003).

Adlerians may view this as a type of overcompensation or doing more to be accepted. This could evolve into a negative form of feminism. This occurs when women try to move through life searching for their gender identity in this male dominated world. This behavior manifests itself in work, social relationships and work. These three areas are what Adlerians call the three ‘life tasks’. These are the main areas that every person has to manage and navigate in life and many struggle to find balance in these areas. So it seems that men and women have their own preconceived ideas about what makes one feminine and what makes one masculine. These ideas transfer into the bedroom and impact our sexual activities. Often women feel that it is ‘normal’ or natural for them to not want to have sex as often as their husbands. Men also seem to acquire this belief once that initial sexual peak is reached, and eventually get a taste of ‘real’ married life. This real life involves a marriage that deals with real issues, such as work, stress,
and conflict and not the perfect marriage that one sees on television. It should be noted that this theory of men wanting sex more than women may not apply to the modern day woman, especially for women in the late teens and twenties. The modern attitude can be viewed as a feminist attitude where women seem to want sex as much as men and many times, the female is the aggressor.

Is the Difference Strictly Gender Related?

Now, the question becomes, is this sexual difference solely due to gender, or could it be something more? Research has shown that for many married couples, sexual need and desire is influenced by environmental factors such as fatigue, children and familiarity. Another common element seen throughout the research was that women’s sexual desire was greatly influenced by the fact that they were tired from work and children and household duties, while the men’s sex drive remained the same. This appeared to be due to the fact that research showed the women still took on the majority of the household labor as well as work a full time job outside of the home. Previous research suggests that the gender gap in household labor persists because of cultural expectations about gender and marriage. That is, wives perform the bulk of domestic labor, regardless of their employment status, because it fits with their (and their partner’s) gendered construction of self (Tweiggs, McQuillan, & Ferree, 1999). An unequal division of household labor may also affect the amount of time and energy wives have for, and are willing to give to, sex with their partner (Elliott & Umberson, p.402).

It would seem that when there is inequality in the relationship, women begin to feel unloved. This feeling of not feeling loved can lead to the men being told ‘no’ to sex more often by their wives. This then leads to less and less physical intimacy between the couple. For many women, no love, equals no sex. The more unappreciated and overwhelmed a woman felt, the less
she seems to want to engage in sexual activity. This evidence was seen throughout the research. Women are working full-time, coming home and taking care of household duties, which includes taking care of the children, and then are expected to be ready and willing to engage in sex, or intense partnering, with their spouses. There is a name for this kind of experience. It is all the called the ‘third shift’. The third shift involves the family emotion work that follows household work and paid employment (Hochschild, 1997, as cited in Elliott & Umberson, 2008).

For example, many wives interviewed for the Elliott and Umberson survey said they carried the bulk of the responsibilities in the domestic realm along with holding down a full-time job and that this, more than anything, decreased their sexual desire. This ‘third shift’ occurs in more marriages than we realize. It is suggested that among dual income parents, sex is often experienced as a part of the third shift or an additional set of duties for the woman. In addition to household work, childcare, and paid work, employed wives often feel compelled to show affection to their partners by having sex with them (Elliott & Umberson, p.402). It would seem that women, who are employed outside of the home, are unable to relax and settle down in the evening when they come in from work. Whereas, men are able to end their evenings soon, thereby, giving more room for sexual desire to grow and encourage sexual activity. Because of this, many couples have started to engage in a ‘barter’ system of sorts. It is a sort of ‘tit for tat’ kind of exchange, a negotiation system, ‘you do what I want, and I’ll give you what you want’.

Respondents in the aforementioned survey reported that they use housework or sex to get more of what they want from the relationship – a kind of conscious or unconscious exchange system (Elliott & Umberson, p. 401). One participant stated that” having sex is less about sex per se and more about what goes on outside of the bedroom.” She continued, (I tell Anthony) “if I’ve had a really good day, and you have been really helpful, you took out the trash and you mowed
the lawn and everything, those are the things that work for me and kind of get me going” (Elliott & Umberson, p. 401). If we were to look at this from an Adlerian perspective, one could say that each partner is struggling with the life task of sex/love. For the women, they are dealing with the challenge of trying to manage their full work day in addition to trying to manage their physical relationship with their husbands. For the husbands, they are suffering in the area of love and sex due to the fact that their spouses are not feeling supported and respected as far as the sharing of domestic and childrearing duties. Therefore, the husband suffers in this life tasks because he is unable to have his needs and desires fulfilled based on his wife’s feelings of lack of support and equality in the relationship.

What Damage These Differences Can Cause

A lot of damage can be done to a marriage when the sexual desire and need of each partner is not fulfilled. These things can range from anger and resentment, to arguments and fighting, to engaging in pornography and even extramarital affairs. The first thing that seems to happen when sexual desire is not met, is that spouses become anger and distant from one another. This can be especially true if the spouse that wants more sexual activity and connection makes attempts to meet the other spouse’s needs. For some, these unmet needs can lead to resentment, coldness and anger. For others, it can lead to addictions such as pornography which can lead to an extramarital affair. According to a study done by Jill Manning of Brigham Young University, pornography has a negative impact on the individual, the marital relationship and the family as a whole. Since the advent of the internet, the sex industry has profited from an unprecedented proximity to the home environment. Consequently, couples, families, and individuals of all ages are being impacted by pornography in new ways, but pornography affects the marital relationship in a very unique way (Manning, 2006). One of the reasons that
pornography is so destructive to a marriage is because once a partner gets addicted to the on demand sex that internet pornography provides, a spouse is hard pressed to compete with the false perfection and abnormal enthusiasm of a virtual lover. This addiction then begins to create alienation between the couple. The more time and energy that the offending partner spends viewing pornography, the less time will be spent with real physical intimacy with their spouse. And this leads to a question, is pornography another form of adultery or extramarital affair? Some would say yes, others would say no. Either way, no matter what side of the argument you are on, most spouses would agree that they don’t want this intruder taking their place in their spouse’s heart or mind.

Another risk of unmet needs and desires is an extramarital affair. It is a pretty common fear that if a spouse is not getting their sexual and emotional needs met that it is possible for them to engage in an extramarital affair. Is it the lack of sexual frequency or simply a loss of interest? Is it selfishness or simply a misplaced sense of primacy; deciding that after oneself, the spouse is not the most important person in the individual’s life as they should be. So, is an affair an issue of misplaced primacy or are there other factors? Are there contributors that increase the chances that the spouse will stray? Research has found that there are factors that may determine infidelity among couples. Married individuals who cheated on their spouses were three times more likely to have used internet pornography as married people who hadn’t committed adultery (Douthat, 2004). The question is why is the partner engaging in pornography and adultery? Could it be a lack of physical intimacy and unmet sexual needs? There is research that would differ from this though. According to a study by Yorio and Palmer, the answer is no. Affairs did not occur due to lack of sexual frequency, but the lack of the spouse feeling desired and emotionally understood. According to this study, ‘forty eight percent of men rated emotional
dissatisfaction as the primary reason they cheated. Only eight percent of men said that sexual
dissatisfaction was the main factor in their infidelity’ (Yorio & Palmer, 2008). It seems that there
are many negative outcomes that can occur due to a disconnect in a relationship, whether this
disconnect is based on a lack of sex and intimacy, or simply feeling emotionally dissatisfied.
Nonetheless, the results can be hurtful and destructive and it is important that anyone in a
marriage relationship be aware of these dynamics and emotions.

What Can Be Done to Minimize Gender Differences

This would lead us to discuss what things can be done to minimize these gender
differences and in turn, strengthen the relationship. As mentioned earlier, sex within a marriage
or long-term relationship tends to wane over time. This decline in sexual activity is usually
initiated by the female, with the male adjusting to the female’s sexual desires. Many factors
contribute to this decline, including fatigue, children, life/work demands, and habituation to sex.
These challenges affect all marriages, but there are some couples that have found a way to
bypass these challenges and maintain their sexual and emotional connection. According to a
1997 article by Dennis, it may not be just quality that matters with physical connection, but
quantity as well. More sex, more often is the secret that some couples swear by for keeping their
marriages healthy and happy. Things such as penciling in time together, engaging in spontaneous
sexual activity, not allowing the kids to dictate all of the couple’s time, realizing that sex will not
always be amazing and not holding grudges (Dennis, 1997, p. 188). These couples also looked at
sex differently than most of us do. Sex could include intercourse or simply kissing and fondling.
Whatever it included, it kept the physical connection strong and consistent. This intense
partnering as well as the previously mentioned ‘emotion work’, are just some of the ways that
help couples keep the physical and emotional connection strong in their relationships.
Conclusions and Evaluations of the Current Research

What the current research shows is, as with previous research, men want sex more than women. Also, as previously found, couples were having less sex, especially after the first year of marriage. Current research found that the reasons for this lack of sex in both young and older couples were similar as in previous research. Factors such as fatigue, children, work and careers, habituation and familiarity were all cited as reasons for couples not being physically or emotionally close. This lack of sex caused many couples to engage in what Hochschild termed ‘emotive work’, where one partner had to adjust their sexual needs and desires, either increasing them or decreasing them in order to match their partner’s need and desire. For men, these adjustments normally included having to lessen their sexual needs and desires, in both frequency and type of sexual activity. For the women, it included having to increase their sexual frequency and desire to meet their husband’s needs. There was also evidence that showed that couples engaged in a type of barter system, exchanging household chores and duties for sex. This barter system was performed mainly by husbands for the wives.

The research also discussed the phenomenon of the ‘third-shift’, which involves wives who work outside of the home in full time work, feeling that their work duties continued at home and into the marital bed. The research also showed that when these intimacy needs are not met, partners can be tempted to engage in damaging behavior such as pornography and extramarital affairs. As far as why men want sex more than women, the research did not really state why this was. It would seem that genetics plays a role, being that each gender is ‘made’ up of differing hormones and levels of desire and sexual need. Or it could be that each gender acts on what they know to be socially and historically expected and acceptable for men and women.
With the research, there were several areas that the previous and current studies fell short on. First, there was a lack of diversity in the samples, both in terms of race and socioeconomic status. Different ethnic and cultural groups may view gender and sexual interactions differently than the European American samples that were used in a majority of the studies. Also, lower middle and lower class couples may view gender and sex differently than that of their college educated, upper-middle class counterparts. Future research should examine diverse married couples to gain a better understanding of how sexual relations and negotiations occur with these groups. There are likely to be some variations within these segments of the population. Research also fell short in examining how religion and religious beliefs affect gender and sex in the marital relationship. This, too, would present some differences in how this topic is addressed and managed.

**Future Research**

With future research in this area of gender, sex and desire, I think it should be noted that this examination does not fully take into account the next generation of individuals and how sex and intimacy are viewed in the 21st century. It would seem that in today’s modern society roles of men and women are not only reversed in the work place, but they are also changing in marriage, relationships and sexual activity. In this modern age, young women have become much more sexually aggressive, even sometimes surpassing males, in their level of sexual desire. Young people today are exposed to so much more than in years and generations past. In the media today, women are portrayed as equals in every area, especially in the area of physical desire. They are viewed as more sexual, and less emotional, behaving like their male counterparts in regards to seeing sex as just a physical enjoyment with no emotional attachments. Networks such as MTV show women being sexually aggressive toward men, with no attachment
or connection whatsoever. This societal change certainly has an impact on gender roles and how men and women see themselves, and should be taken into account when reviewing this subject in the future.

As mentioned earlier, other demographics should be examined. In the research that was reviewed, study participants were married individuals, ages 25-45, mostly of European descent, college educated, and with middle to high incomes. With future research, studies should be done with lower income individuals, from several different cultures, such as Afro American, Latino American, and Asian American. With other groups, I believe that in regards to men consistently desiring more sex, the results will be similar. However, differences may appear in regards how wives response to their husband’s sexual advances or even feelings of duty and obligation. There could also be differences in how domestic duties are divided among these other groups. It would also be good to look at how religion and religious beliefs impact sexual need and desire amongst couples as well as the attitudes about sex and intimacy. It would be worth it to see what the variations and challenges are among these different groups of individuals. In addition, the biblical definition of marriage should be defined and the Christian view of marriage should be compared to the general view and how, through understanding and serving each other as the bible suggests, couples may achieve a loving and fulfilling relationship that will endure life’s many challenges and hardships.

These areas of further study could be very beneficial for those wanting a better understanding of how marriages are impacted in these areas and how much of the challenges are really based on gender or something more complex, such as societal, emotional, cultural, spiritual or individual.
Lastly, I want to address the Adlerian view of gender and marriage. Instead of looking at males and females as the opposite sex, Adler viewed each gender as the ‘other’ sex. This definition of ‘other’ sex encourages equality and partnership instead of a contrast or competition that traditional definitions evoke. With this equality, a partnership can be achieved both in the sexual relationship as well as the sharing of household duties and chores. If husbands and wives would view themselves as partners or ‘help-meets’ as the bible defines it, a more harmonious relationship can be achieved. In addition to harmony, a feeling of safety can also be achieved. With feelings of safety, then trust can be achieved. With trust, comes vulnerability. With vulnerability, comes increased intimacy, both physical and emotional. Both partners need these feelings of safety and vulnerability, but it is especially true for women. When women feel safe and loved and accepted, they can be more open with their husbands. This openness increases a woman’s sexual desire and drive.

As mentioned earlier in this review, research showed that the more understood and accepted a woman felt, the more physical she was willing to be with her spouse. In viewing the marriage as a place of equality and respect, it can encourage more communication, sharing and transparency between a couple. This ability to be naked and unashamed with each other can make for a more fulfilling and complete marital relationship. This is what Adler was trying to make clear when he talked about the three life tasks of love, work and social. Love and sex is one of the hardest tasks to manage. For husbands and wives to look at each other as partners instead of competitors can be challenging, but if this can be achieved, they will experience a much more peaceful relationship. When we can get a handle on this life task, it can allow for the other life tasks of work and community to be strengthened and focused upon.
Much more can be examined in this area of sex and desire by gender. This thesis is simply one of many studies that will attempt to examine this great mystery and it may never be figured out completely. All one can do is to continue to try and gain an understanding of ourselves and each other, as we move through life, doing the best we can.
References


Newsome, M. (2006). “My husband was a pervert but I didn’t know it”…And other shockers. *Marie Claire, 13*, 126-129.


