



## Female Sexual Desire-A Motivating, Empowering Approach

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There are a number of old myths about female sexual desire-women don't value sex, women are less sexual than men, predictable orgasm is the key to desire, and since men have more testosterone they have more desire. In addition, there are new myths about female desire-the key to female desire is erotic fantasies and playing sexual games, achieving G spot orgasms will build desire, scientists will find a medication to ensure reliable desire, the solution is finding a new partner each year. Myths die hard. They make for dramatic bar talk and media hype-creating a lot of heat, but little light or understanding.

What is scientifically true and what relevant guidelines promote female sexual desire? The new mantra in couple sex therapy is desire, pleasure, eroticism, satisfaction. Desire is the most important dimension.

The crucial concept is that female sexual desire is first class, different than but not inferior to, male sexual desire. Female desire is more variable, flexible, and individualistic. A little known reality is that when couples become non-sexual (having sex less than 10 times a year) it is almost always the man's decision-made unilaterally and conveyed non-verbally.

Most women begin a new relationship as a "romantic love/ passionate sex/idealization" couple. This is an important, but fragile, relationship phase- lasting between 6 months and 2 years. The challenge for the married or partnered woman is to develop a couple sexual style which promotes strong, resilient sexual desire. Unfortunately, this transition is not successful for as many as 1 in 3 women.

The challenge is to balance her "sexual voice" (autonomy) with being an intimate sexual team. The second challenge is to integrate intimacy and eroticism into their relationship.

The healthy role of sexuality in the woman's and couple's life is a 15-20% factor. Sexuality energizes your bond and reinforces feelings of desire and desirability. Paradoxically, dysfunctional, conflictual, or avoidant sexuality has an inordinately powerful role, draining intimacy and threatening relational stability.

The major inhibitors for female sexual desire are power struggles (especially frequency of intercourse) and predictable, routine sex. In addition, coercion, anger, blaming, performance pressure, and placating the partner sexually subvert female desire. What promotes healthy female and couple sexual desire are positive anticipation and a sense of deserving sexual pleasure. In addition, freedom, choice, pleasure, and unpredictability enhance desire. Healthy female and couple sexuality is facilitated by combining intimacy, non-demand pleasuring, and erotic scenarios and techniques. A core concept is the woman views the man as her intimate and erotic ally, not her critic or someone who pushes her to sexually prove herself.

A key concept is mutual, synchronous sexual experiences are most highly valued (i.e. both partners experience desire, pleasure, eroticism, and satisfaction). However, when both people recognize the inherent complexity of couple sexuality rather than demand perfect sex performance sexual desire will thrive. The woman (and couple) who embrace multiple roles and meanings of sexuality can enjoy both synchronous and asynchronous sexual experiences, and value sensual, playful, and erotic scenarios in addition to intercourse will have strong, resilient desire.

An empowering concept involves "responsive female sexual desire". Rather than using the male model of spontaneous erections, sexual fantasies, and desire for orgasm, the woman realizes that often she begins an encounter at neutral and as she is responsive to touching and being touched and open to her and his emotional needs; she experiences desire. Her desire is responsive to intimacy and pleasure. As importantly she has choices, including choosing a synchronous intercourse experience (an optimal outcome). In addition, she has the freedom to enjoy a sensual encounter, a synchronous or asynchronous erotic encounter, or hold him while he stimulates himself to orgasm. Freedom, choice, and unpredictability facilitate sexual desire.

"Sexually one size never fits all". A motivating, empowering approach involves the woman valuing her unique sexual voice and their couple sexual style of desire, pleasure, eroticism, and satisfaction.

Resource: Barry and Emily McCarthy (2014). *Rekindling Desire* (second edition). New York: Routledge