

Qualitative Research Proposal Paper Assignment

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### **Abstract**

This proposal is grounded in Husserl's transcendental phenomenological method that seeks to study: **“What are the experiences of Christian married couples who would describe their sexual intimacy as mutually satisfying?”** What an exciting topic that has the potential to bring to light some ideas about a married couple's sexual intimacy relationship that is obvious to some while seeming to be totally obscure from others. My desire is that this proposal will be seen as a true need in the field and that I am encouraged to move forward with seeking participants to interview. I am enthusiastic to move forward in order to gather the data needed to move towards some interpretations that have the likelihood of helping couples who love one another but have been missing keys to unlocking mutually enjoyed sexual intimacy. My anticipation is this research will move forward and produce extremely valuable information that, when disseminated, will be uplifting to many in their relationships and the improvements continue throughout the remainder of their lives together. Throughout this proposal, the reader will see that I intend to follow methodological integrity and to honor the intentions of my participants. Triangulation and other crucial efforts will be made to ensure that the trustworthiness of this proposed work will indeed be found to exist upon the conclusion of the diligent process.

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### **Introduction**

The book *The Great Sex Rescue* (Gregoire et al., 2021) puts forward several thoughts regarding sexual intimacy and how it is affected by so many variables. These range from childhood teachings by parents, society, the local church (by implication, the purity culture that came from some people's interpretations of church teachings), to adulthood teachings of the church, with some being taught explicitly and others being taught implicitly. The Great Sex Rescue spurs on the thoughts of who is satisfied with their sexual encounters and why? Especially, who in the church is enjoying mutually satisfied sexual intimacy? Gregoire et al., (2021) shared "If men understood women's need for intimacy and women's need to experience pleasure, and if churches started talking about mutuality, we would awaken women's libidos and sexual response" (pg. 155).

The purpose of this proposed research project is to look at and better understand the dynamics that are present with Christian adult married couples who have mutually shared experiences of enjoyment with their sexual intimacy together. A primary desire of this proposed research is to gain a clear dialogue with the couples being interviewed that will enlighten everyone reading the outcomes and interpretations regarding the lived experiences of mutually enjoyed sexual intimacy of the participants and open avenues of thought that could lead to improved sexual intimacy for other married couples across the world.

This proposal has the intention of seeking out Christian married couples who report having a mutually satisfying sexual intimacy expressions of their love and desires for one

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another and to better understand the dynamics that may be present in their relationship that affects this outcome in both positive and negative ways. In this introduction, some thoughts that distract from or enhance pleasurable outcomes are explored as an introduction that will be expounded in the proposed research efforts. The dynamics that have been purported as causing harm to satisfying sexual encounters among the Christian population will be briefly considered. Through the introduction stage the dynamics that constitutes satisfying sexual intimacy will also be considered.

This introduction will be followed by the purpose of study to help make clear what is being proposed. This will lead into the conceptual framework where the consideration of some current research will be mentioned and reviewed regarding their influence on the current research topic. Further, a discussion of how the researcher's epistemological views, personal expectations, and general worldview will shade the efforts being proposed. This section seeks to make clear the weight the conceptual framework has on this research project. This will be just ahead of the research questions being clearly delineated and then the research methods that are to be used. The section that will finish this proposal out will include a discussion regarding trustworthiness, a conclusion of thoughts and sharing the references that were considered throughout this proposal. Let us look at what potential roles certain teachings from within the Christian Church tradition have had on couples being able to experience a mutually satisfied sexual intimacy expression of their love for one another.

### **Distractions (e.g. Purity Culture)**

For the past couple of decades, the Christian Church has had a stance on sex before marriage that can be summed up in the word abstinence. This teaching morphed into a general

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teaching idea that became known as the “purity culture” and was taught by many churches and families to help keep their teens free from sexual escapades. Purity culture sounded good and taught great principles, however, there were some unintended things learned by the students who were being instructed. In this section we will look at some thoughts shared by various authors on this topic. Some of the revelations, though shocking, will help point to the need for the research being proposed in the writing.

In her book *Church Too: How purity culture upholds abuse and how to find healing*, Allison (2021) shared her story of having been groomed by an older church member to be his woman (she was 16 and he was in his 30’s). Thankfully her parents realized what was happening and cut it off. However, disgustingly, her parents berated her for her sinfulness, made her apologize to the perpetrator, and this evil use of scriptural principles seemingly unlocked an ongoing battle with bi-polar issues for Allison. In essence, this was a result of the purity culture that her parents and church had aspired to teach and enforce. This is what Allison shares as her perspective that has been reduced to her “elevator pitch”. She says, “Purity culture is the spiritual corollary of rape culture created in Christian environments by theologies that teach complete sexual abstinence until legal, monogamous marriage between a cisgender, heterosexual man and a cisgender, heterosexual woman for life—or else” (pg. 31). Allison had been taught that a woman’s responsibility is to be kind and respectful of the men because they are the leaders and need to be supported. While true in many regards, most anything taught as an absolute without a clear understanding of the heart and mind of God behind the teaching can be dangerous.

Blyth (2021) in her book *Rape culture, purity culture, and coercive control in teen girl Bibles* talks about the many ideas that are often embedded throughout the many devotional notes

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that accompany some of the Bibles that are marketed to teen girls. Blyth points out that, in her estimation, many of the comments made have the potential to be setting young Christian girls up for failure with relationships and self-image. Blyth describes some of the images as, “The girls always look happy and healthy, with shiny hair and perfect skin and teeth; they are also always attractive, able-bodied, and slim, reinforcing Western beauty ideals of “perfect” femininity” (pg. 6). Blyth further indicates her understanding that the information in these teen girl Bibles is worded in such a manner as to harm young ladies throughout their lives. Blyth says, “These discourses help to perpetuate the myths that a rape victim is “damaged goods” as the result of losing her chastity or “purity,” and that she was likely to blame for her assault because she “tempted” her attacker with her immodest appearance or behavior (her “lack” of purity, as it were)” (pg. 12).

Blyth indicates that throughout these Bibles, the devotions teach that purity is the most valuable thing a female has. However, they fail to cover how these girls are not dirty rags to be tossed aside when they suffer a horrific event such as rape or how they still have value even if they succumb to the temptation of having sex outside of marriage. Blyth also shares that these Bibles often relentlessly talk about guys being sexually driven while teaching by implication and sometimes explicitly that females are not and should not be sexually driven. Whether this is a culturally taught dynamic or a physiological dynamic present in some if not most women, it may be a general truth that men are more sexually driven, however, the women who do have a strong sex drive are apparently seen as abnormalities and have no need of encouragement in these teaching/devotional Bibles.

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Though Blyth does appear to have issues with some general teachings of the Bible (e.g., male leadership, homosexuality, adultery, fornication, etc.), her work in this book has helped to bring to light some teachings, that were likely well intended (though Blyth indicates they are often taught for control), that have been taken to heart by many young ladies who then perceive they have the duty to be the guardian of the sexual purity gate to prevent themselves and the men in their lives from delving into the realm of sexual gratification (Blyth, 2021, Allison, 2021, pg. 34, Kristen et al., 2020). An implication of Blyth's work is that this lockdown of sexual exploration and gratification develops a mental block of sorts that is perpetuated into the marriage bed and is likely to wreak havoc on the abilities of having mutually satisfied sexual intimacy between these ladies' and their future husbands. Impett et al., (2014) found that women who struggled with a "desire discrepancy" were shown as having sex less frequently and were less satisfied with their sexual encounters (pg. 283). Some abstinence teachings, whether implicit or explicit, make it very difficult, especially for women, to suddenly flip a switch to go from sex is bad and dirty (sinful) to having a longing for sexual pleasure with her husband who is likely anxiously awaiting the moment when the two come together to enjoy the blessing of an experience together that no other should be allowed to enjoy.

Gregoire et al., (2023) shared a story of Vera who had been taken home from school by her boyfriend (Colton) because she had a migraine. Colton raped Vera. This led her to seek advice from her youth leader at church who said, "it takes two to tango". Vera was crushed because she did not want to tango! Gregorie says the church must do a better job of making clear what consent means. The church, Gregorie says, has been so intent to teach abstinence that they skipped right past consent. Gregoire et al., (2023) did a survey that said 44% of those who

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responded could not give a clear answer of what date rape is and only 11.8% said they could clearly identify date rape (pg. 156). This is a clear indication of a real problem!

The teachings of the church are often leading young ladies to believe they have the mandate to control how far is too far and when they must take the reins to stop the progression of a make-out session. In essence, the church is teaching that men get so horny and excited that they simply will not be able to think about needing to stop. In another survey done by Gregoire et al (2023) the following conclusion was indicated, “Not only is being a sexual gatekeeper in high school associated with poor self-esteem in high school, but it also inhibits women’s later sexual function and marital happiness” (pg. 166). This information points a spotlight on the immense need for the research being proposed in the paper. Many couples are suffering from teachings that put undue burdens on young ladies who are now adults and living as wives and mothers. A major hope of this proposed work is being able to share some of the various ideas and practices that couples who report having mutually satisfied sexual intimacy may share, through our data gathering process, that may be a tool to help other couples to move in the direction of also experiencing mutually satisfied sexual intimacy. If this work helps just one couple, then it would have been extremely successful!

### **Enhancements (e.g., Communication, Attachment, Desire)**

How does communication regarding sexuality affect the sexual satisfaction in a marriage? Mallory (2022) says that sexual satisfaction is enhanced by sexual communication. This then has a positive effect on the overall relationship. Mallory’s research also indicated that there is a fine balance between speaking about sex too early in a relationship and giving the relationship enough time to be comfortable with the topic. Their efforts did not offer a specific time frame of

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when the sweet spot to begin a sexual communication effort would be, however, having sexual communication opens the door to explore fantasies and various aspects about the sexual partnership to improve the experience for both the male and female alike.

Impett et al., (2014) stated that securely attached people typically enjoy the blessings of having quality relationships and the enjoyment of great sex with their partners (pg. 278). There are many factors that exist in peoples' lives that can shape their relationship dynamics and the quality of the mutual satisfaction of a married couple's sexual intimacy. Having grown up in a family that promoted secure attachment is one of the many keys that lends itself to being more naturally inclined to enjoy sex with their spouse. Another area that Impett et al., (2014) says typically raises the level of enjoyment that spouses will receive is sexual desire. Sexual desire is an important characteristic that is often overlooked or taken for granted. This may be for a variety of reasons from physical attraction to thoughtfulness by a spouse (pg. 280). Some people are blessed with a great shape to their body that is naturally sought after where some people must depend on pleasant personalities. Whichever of these areas a person finds themselves in can be affected by the character and level of selfcare demonstrated by an individual. Impett et al., (2014) understands that couples who are in sink and desire one another are less likely to find themselves considering separation. Desire is a force that draws people in towards one another (pg. 281).

Impett et al., (2014) work indicated that engaging in activities together that have an element of excitement are likely to help to increase the potential for increased satisfaction and keeping a couple from the traditional waning that often occurs in their passion towards one another (pg. 283). Impett et al., (2014) quotes Kleinplatz regarding her research on optimal

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sexuality as saying, (2006; Kleinplatz et al., 2009) "...that great sex has little to do with physical function but instead involves the critical factors of being present, connection, deep sexual and erotic intimacy, extraordinary communication, interpersonal risk taking and exploration, authenticity, vulnerability, and transcendence" (pg. 286). The information just covered helps to direct those who are desiring to have great sexual experiences to become aware that great sex starts outside of the bedroom in everyday life through grabbing opportunities to experience excitement (nonsexual) when the opportunities arise, but more distinctly being open and present with your spouse.

### **Sexual Satisfaction—A well rounded perspective**

While considering the proposal thoughts for this paper the work of Carroll et al., (2006) became a clearly important component to the idea of what is behind mutually satisfying sexual intimacy in married couples. Their work takes a well-balanced approach where others have only considered a part of the larger equation. In Allsop et al., (2021) discussion of Carroll et al., (2006) Developmental Model of Marital Competence (DMMC) there is a suggestion that counselors who are meeting with couples should bring out three key areas; communication skills, interpersonal virtues, and intrapersonal identities and help the clients to see how these can affect sexual satisfaction. Allsop et al., (2021) share that the DMMC has not been directly applied to the idea of sexual satisfaction which is a primary focus of their referenced work. This research by Allsop et al, (2021) indicates there has only been a couple of other works that considered the effect of conflict resolution on sexual satisfaction with opposing results. Allsop et al, (2021) show that with the vast consensus found in many research works agree that "general communication and "sexual communication" brings about positive gains. With that knowledge, it

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would be reasonable to consider that good conflict resolution, that is other centered, would benefit sexual satisfaction as well.

In their work, Allsop et al., considered; Conflict Resolution Quality, Forgiveness, Anxious and Avoidant Attachment, Sexual Frequency, Orgasm Frequency, Sexual Satisfaction, and Relationship Satisfaction to delineate the appropriateness of utilizing the DMMC regarding a couple's sexual satisfaction. Carroll et al., (2006) have an excellent chart (attached as an appendix) that deals with both interpersonal competence and intrapersonal competencies. The authors see these as being the distinction between communication skills (interpersonal) and motivation or intent (intrapersonal). The interpersonal category is effective negotiation, and the intrapersonal categories are other centeredness (valuing others and displays characteristics like kindness, commitment, fairness, sacrifice, forgiveness), and personal security (self-worth/ love and being able to regulate characteristics like depression, anxiety, anger). The interpersonal is what most of the marriage research has considered (i.e. conflict resolution, problem solving, and communication skills). Carroll et al., (2006) are helping their readers to consider the whole of the relational dynamics rather than simply focusing on one aspect, that indeed is important, however, the encouragement to consider the self-worth and valuing of others is also of paramount importance when seeking to take on a well-balanced perspective of the complete relational dynamics. Overall, the whole of a person's attributes that make up a relationship that is good or bad, generally and directly affects the outcome of great longing for or disdain for a spouse with regards to sexual desires and satisfaction. The dynamics shared thus far will now help as consideration is given to the purpose of the proposed study.

### **Purpose of the Study**

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A hope of the introduction is to make clear the problems that can be present through well intentioned teachings like the purity culture principles and that the information presented has awakened a desire to learn more on the topic being proposed. There is little doubt that the purity culture promoters are desiring to help young people to seek to live a fulfilling life in Christ and believe they are doing God's work. On many levels they are doing God's work but may have failed to consider some of the unintended consequences of their efforts.

A further hope is the information shared in the introduction with respects to enhancements in sexual satisfaction will help to spur interest in learning what we will glean from the interviews that take place once this proposal is approved. Sexual satisfaction is an area that most all people can enjoy whether they have been enlightened to the pleasure that could be awaiting them or not. Those who see the world from a Biblical Worldview should see sex as beautiful blessing handed to God's people to bless the union of marriage by both potentially producing offspring, but also to enjoy the erotic pleasure of having each other in a sensual manner that is reserved for the marriage bed alone (Hebrews 13:4 (NET)—"Marriage must be honored among all and the marriage bed kept undefiled, for God will judge sexually immoral people and adulterers."); 1 Corinthians 7:2 (NET)—" each man should have relations with his own wife and each woman with her own husband. A husband should give to his wife her sexual rights, and likewise a wife to her husband."; Song of Solomon 4:11 (NET)—"Your lips drip sweetness like the honeycomb, my bride, honey and milk are under your tongue. The fragrance of your garments is like the fragrance of Lebanon.").

Where other works have considered technical data that underlies relational and sexual satisfaction, this work intends to ask the married Christian couples what dynamics they see and

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experience that they believe effects their mutually enjoyed sexual intimacy. The various aspects that these ladies see present in their men that excites them and gets them stirred up in such a manner as to desire their husbands sexually will hopefully be shared in the interviews. When the men who are interviewed stop and think about what really drives them to want their wife and not just any lady, it is hoped that they can identify some facts about her and their relational dynamics that will help make clearer the pursuit of the same woman year after year. The big picture hope of this work is to open the door to others who would not currently report experiencing mutually satisfying sexual intimacy, the real-life experiences, skills, environmental effects, Spiritual factors, familial setup, etc. of those Christian married couples who do report enjoying mutually satisfying sexual intimacy with one another. As this work moves forward, next will be the consideration of the conceptual framework that is planned to be utilized in the research project.

### **Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework is indeed a key component of this proposal to help establish the background aspects that come together to create the whole of this work. Various ideas from environmental, cultural, spiritual, dialogical encounters, research work, and other aspects make up my desire to take on this very important work regarding mutually satisfied sexual intimacy among Christian married couples with their spouse. A large portion of the current research does not specify being a “Christian couple”. I hope to fill this gap to see if there may be some variations or nuances found through the Christian faith that would either promote or harm the ability of married couples to report having mutually satisfying sexual intimacy together.

### **Culture and Environmental Factors of the Researcher**

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Some tacit realities are perceptions that I may have of reality that are cultural phenomenons that have geographical roots while other assumptions are framed within my Christian Worldview paradigm. I strive for neutrality in all aspects of my research work but know there are limitations even with the best of intentions. I have grown up in an area of the United States that had been openly racist up until the desegregation movement of the 1960's (e.g., white water fountain and black water fountain; whites in the front door and blacks in the back door if aloud at all) and has slowly been rebuilding this divide ever since this tragedy of human fallacy was challenged and repudiated by the majority in our state. Thankfully this has improved exponentially but still has room to improve across the spectrum.

A further tacit issue that has been mistakenly understood from a Biblical teaching regarding the man being the head of the home (1 Timothy 3:5 & Ephesians 5:23) is the fallacy that men are the rulers (authoritarians) of their homes rather than them being the one who is ultimately responsible for the home and his family's well-being (protector). Though this is an old concept that has largely been abandoned, it has led some in my religious and geographical area to have some concerning ideas about how a home should function which could have a direct impact on the proposed study at hand. This impact is primarily concerning because many quote the Bible as saying that a woman is to give her husband his sexual right and her body belongs to him, but somehow overlook the part that says the man is to give the woman her sexual rights and his body belongs to her that is found in the same passage (1 Corinthians 7:3-4 NET).

Yet another tacit situation is the assumption that people know to be nice. The ole saying 'it is easier to catch flies with honey than with vinegar' is only apparent to those to whom it is apparent. I have come to understand that 'normal' is a very subjective word. I have a screen shot

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on my phone from a middle school teacher training conference that says, “children who are loved, come to school to learn, while children who are neglected at home come to school to be loved.” This illustrates the varying normality of children in school and can likely be implied across many, if not most, areas of human existence. I am interested to see if when I ask for participants who have a mutually enjoyable sexual intimacy with their spouse if I get couples who indeed are both in the ‘sex with my spouse is amazing and I cannot think of a way it could ever get any better’, or if I will get one spouse who believes their sex is amazing with the other almost in tears to think about it while desiring to save face for the sake of their spouse’s dignity. We now turn our focus to the literature that has been written along similar veins of thought.

### **Current Literature to Lay the Foundation for this Proposal**

There are various works that have undertaken the task of trying to better understand human sexuality and more specifically how sexual satisfaction is experienced in long-term committed marriages. Laura & Kristen (2020) share that the studies they have reviewed indicate various outcomes with some indicating that love and desire are different realities that are activated by different areas of the brain, with other studies indicating they are of the same brain function, and some indicating a middle ground and say it depends on the circumstances. Ultimately their work found that desire and love are factors of significance for both men and women with relationship satisfaction being a predictor for women but not so much for the men.

Works like Laura & Kristen’s help to bring to light some of the general differences between men and women that are thought to be obvious to some while completely overlooked by others. Similarly, the research being proposed in this writing hopes to bring to the fore various ideas regarding having mutually satisfying sexual intimacy that are also apparent to some while

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seemingly undiscoverable by others. This may be due to various aspects present for individuals that range from genetics to cultural influences. My desire is the couples being interviewed, who have mutually satisfying sexual intimacy with their spouse, will bring to life some dynamics of their mutually satisfying sexual intimacy that has the potential to help other couples to awaken this gift from God (Proverbs 5:19 (NET)—“may you rejoice in your young wife—a loving doe, a graceful deer; may her breasts satisfy you at all times, may you be captivated by her love always.”) that often gets degraded by life and all that goes with being individuals in a busy world of distractions (e.g. “stress and fatigue, sexual confidence, health issues, alcohol use, exhaustion, busy schedules” Kristen et al., 2020).

Kristen et al., (2020) chose to do their research from the opposite perspective. Where I aim to find the things that promote a mutually satisfying sexual intimacy, they looked at some of the problems that may hinder it. They found many things of interest with one being that women are apt to take personal responsibility for not engaging in sexual intimacy where men are more likely to give credit to their mate for the missed opportunity. As a man myself, I would tend to say this is generally a statement of fact rather than a shifting of the blame. However, I understand that my perspective is a general truth while not being an absolute.

Another interesting outcome by Kristen et al., (2020) who shared the finding that men are generally more likely to seek “physical closeness” to enhance relationship satisfaction. They found that the higher the overall relationship satisfaction of both the male and the female, the more agreeable the couple tended to be with a mutual alignment to not engage in sexual intimacy. The speculation was that closeness may have already been achieved and therefore the sexual encounter was not necessary to accomplish closeness. This is so interesting to consider

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that a couple who has higher relationship satisfaction would agree to not have sexual intimacy because they have fed one another through other aspects of their relationship.

It will be interesting to see if my research participants point to similar attributes being present regarding overall relationship satisfaction regardless of actual engagement in the act of sexual intimacy. This article has helped me to think of additional questions that had not previously been in my thoughts. I would anticipate that a relationship with higher levels of general satisfaction would lead to higher levels of sexual intimacy, while also being agreeable to skip an opportunity to be sexually intimate due to some pressing life issues with anticipation for their next opportunity to come together.

Another article of interest discussed sexual desire the day after having a high level of sexual desire. This opened a whole thought process for me of what role does desire play in a mutually satisfied sexual intimacy with a person's spouse. Mark et al., (2019) found that the female participants in their study were more apt to have higher levels of next day sexual desire when their male partner demonstrated a higher level of sexual desire on the previous day. They theorize that this, impart, is because a large number of women tend to indicate a higher level of sexual desire when they feel attractive. Their thought is that the man showing a higher level of desire towards the female enhances her felt attractiveness and thus increases her sexual desire. The work being proposed hopes to see if this idea holds true for the Christian married couples or if there are some differing nuances present. The perception is that there will be very similar and different aspects of relational nuances that will promote or detract from either the male or female's individual and possibly combined sexual desires for one another.

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The following article is the closest I have come across to having similar ideals as are being proposed in this writing. Dew et al., (2020) has a take on sexual satisfaction that is well reasoned and strives to take in multiple perspectives. They show that indeed couples who are involved in religiosity both publicly and privately are far more prone to enjoying sexual satisfaction. Dew et al., (2020) goes on to make clear that there were no factors in their work to scale if sexual satisfaction led to high levels of religiosity or if high levels of religiosity lead to higher levels of sexual satisfaction. Further, it is unclear if their efforts point specifically to religiosity as causality or simply the convergence of the couples participating in extracurriculars that increase mutual participation. Though my intention is to be neutral, I am unavoidably biased as a Christian myself to personally understand that those couples with higher levels of Biblical religiosity (true Bible teaching similar to what was shared earlier) have a unique advantage towards increased sexual satisfaction, however I am unaware of specific research that has sought to provide clarity regarding these dynamics. I will certainly consider some research questions to glean the perspectives of my participants to broach the subject of their perceived reality regarding these dynamics.

### **Epistemology**

I tend to see things as having causation that can be inferred or discovered through study, observation, thinking, and rational inference. I would likely identify as a post-positivist because I do believe in absolutes that are the same yesterday, today and always. However, I am aware that the postmodern concept of social constructivism is a perceived reality of the real world with some areas attempting to be made fluid that are not (e.g., gender) while other areas are indeed as subjective as which flavor of ice cream is the best? Galbin (2014) said, “In a constructionist

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perspective, individual rationality is not conceived of as an attribute of individual thinking but as a consequence of cultural convention.” Consider a group of people who grew up in an Amish community verse a group who has grown up in XYZ popular beach town in anywhere USA. The Amish would know with distinct certainty that wearing clothes that not only covered the entirety of a person’s body was appropriate, but that these must be of muted colors to prevent drawing attention to oneself. On the other hand, you have the beach front regulars that are wearing thong bikinis that seem to defy gravity and are every neon color known to the human species. Both groups ‘know’ they are perfectly within their prerogatives to see this idea of modesty from their social framework, but who is objectively right, or is there a subjective right that is determined depending on where you are located.

My family has grown up on a lake and have been around water for all my kids’ lives (four kids ranging from age 16 to 23, two girl and two boys and I have been married to the same beautiful woman for 25 years who grew up going to the community pool every day during the summers). My kids have all taught swim lesson, been lifeguards, and are scuba divers. They do not think twice about a person who is in a string bikini or in shorts and a tee shirt. They would probably wonder more about the Amish type clothing choice than the swimwear because of my children’s culture and environmental influences (ironically, we attend church with many people who think shorts above the knees are inappropriate and even sinful).

All this is to say that some dynamics are clearly culturally construed while some things are right or wrong regardless of how you feel or think about it. Hitler managed to convince his men that slaughtering the Jews was the best course of action for their civilization to thrive.

Though socially accepted, it is always wrong to kill humans. Though certain aspects of social

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constructivism exist, we must be thinkers to avoid what the Bible refers to this as being “tossed back and forth by waves and carried about by every wind of teaching...” (Ephesians 4:14 NET). I would argue social constructivism is a part of reality but not an absolute to determine right and wrong in every situation. It will be fascinating to see how my research participants respond and whether their responses are socially constructed or appear to be grounded in something that is more concrete.

I reject outright the fallacy of the ontological assumption that the mind “does not exist and never has or ever will” and is merely a creation of “professionals and lay people” as though humans are living in a type of matrix where nothing is real (Galbin, 2014). I unabashedly affirm that God has given us minds to actively engage and to reason about the world we live in. Without an actual mind, we are simply pawns in a strange game with no absolutes or clearly delineated lines of what is right and what is wrong. This idea of the mind being an illusion could likely lead us to a similar situation as was experienced in the Old Testament where “every man did what was right in his own eyes” (Judges 17:6 NET).

This proposal is desiring to seek information from one set of human minds to help affect other human minds for good, to help them grow and flourish in life. I do claim to the Positivist view when it comes to what is good. Coming from a Christian Worldview, I see what God proclaims as good in His written word to be what is good and definitively reliable through various waves of human whelms. However, past the written word of God, I am very hesitant to take on a true Positivist stance unless it is something more definitive like gravity that is consistent.

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With regards to psychology theories, these principals are true and valid across the board except for when they are not valid or true. As an example, think about Proverbs 22:6 (NET) where it says to “train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old, he will not turn from it.” This is generally true but not an absolute. God has given each person the privilege of being free moral agents who have the prerogative to choose to be good or to not be good. Further, there are individuals who have mental challenges that may cause a norm to be obfuscated.

This thought process leads me to be most aligned with Guba and Lincoln’s (2000) description of post-positivism that is described as using “critical realism, “real” reality but only imperfectly and probabilistically apprehendable, findings are probably true, findings are probably facts and laws, and commensurable.” However, Guba and Lincoln (2000) go on to say regarding objectivity of the researcher, “we are persuaded that objectivity is a chimera: a mythological creature that never existed, save in the imaginations of those who believe that knowing can be separated from the knower.” Their point is well taken that as individual researchers, we are likely fooling ourselves to believe we can step completely outside of our lives and all the experiences we have lived through and studied to remove all biases.

### Research Questions

My primary research question desires to get at the why behind couples who experience mutually satisfying sexual intimacy with their spouse. My question is, **“What are the experiences of Christian married couples who would describe their sexual intimacy as mutually satisfying?”** As has been discussed previously, there are many varying possibilities of what dynamics come together to enhance a couple’s sexual intimacy. I am focusing on the Christian population to see if they indicate anything specific to their faith practices or if their

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satisfaction levels are commensurate with the nonreligious participants in the other works referenced. Another aspect of interest is the curiosity to see if indeed any mention of the purity cultural phenomenon is mentioned by any of my research participants and to then consider if they deem the concept to have been helpful or hurtful to their experiencing sexual intimacy as mutually satisfying with their spouse. I have known several Christian couples who have struggled in the area of sexual intimacy (really intimacy period) and am hopeful that this proposed research can help to open the path for others to likewise develop patterns that lead them to be able to proclaim that they too enjoy mutually satisfying sexual intimacy with their spouse.

### **Research Methods**

#### **Design**

This proposed work will be a qualitative research design that will utilize Husserl's transcendental phenomenology. I as the researcher will be using a transcendental phenomenological methodology and the process known as epoche, which is to suspend all assumptions or previous notions about the phenomenon being researched to gain as much value from the data independent of previously held ideas in an effort to be a blank canvas that is "completely open, receptive, and naive in listening to and hearing research participants describe their experience of the phenomenon being investigated" (Moustakas, 1994, pg. 22). I very much enjoy the stance of not knowing to be able to glean from my clients in counseling sessions the knowledge they have within themselves. I will use a similar stance with my research participants to hear their wisdom and then use this valuable resource to assist me through the dissemination of the data.

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Transcendental phenomenology was chosen because as I interview participants regarding their experience of having mutually enjoyed sexual intimacy with their spouse, I want to let them truly deliver their understanding of what has allowed this to happen and the specific dynamics they would want other Christian married couples to know to build their sexual intimacy towards being mutually satisfying. van Manen (2016) says “Phenomenological research is a search for what it means to be human.... phenomenological research has, as its ultimate aim, the fulfillment of our human nature: to become more fully who we are” (pg. 12). My desire is through the work being proposed that each couple will grow into becoming “more fully who” they are in their physical, spiritual, and unifying encounters of experiencing mutually satisfying sexual intimacy together.

There are aspects of the “social and communal world” that affect all who exist within and around the exposure to its influence. “It is precisely the experience of intersubjectivity and the concept of a world as backdrop to all experience that requires a new kind of phenomenology of collective cultural experience” (Dermot, 2012, pg. 17). A major hinderance to people gaining the valuable information I hope to gain through this proposed research is that so many people are caught in the mindset that sexual intimacy taboo in nature and therefore avoided in conversation. Further, there are egos involved which limits the ability of some to ask why if sex is supposed to be so amazing, why is it meh in my bedroom?

I hope this proposed work will expand the current knowledge base generally, but more specifically I hope it finds its way into the hands of Christians across the world to help unlock any aspects of the readers world that may be holding them back from experiencing amazing mutually satisfying sexual intimacy with their spouse. Husserl (1970) in talking about

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experiences around us (and I believe speaks to this idea of unlocking sexual enjoyment) said “All things of this sort, even though they are momentarily not actualized, are in a constant motion involving modes of being awakened, immediately or mediately, and modes of affecting the ego and possibly passing over into active apperception, intervening as validities in the complex of acts” (pg. 149).

### **Research Relationships**

My relationship to the participants will be present while intending to have as limited impact possible. Ravitch and Carl (2021) discuss in detail how they see the researcher as the “primary instrument in qualitative research” (pg. 107). They go on to say this can be realized by the impact the researcher has on the participants through the type questions they ask, how the questions are phrased or asked, and methods used. Their recommendation is to use these four tools: composing researcher memos, keeping a researcher journal, engaging in dialogic engagement, and conducting researcher interviews (pg. 107). I will need to be very aware of the potential impact that I may have and practice *epoche* in my interaction with my participants as well as during the data review segment of my work.

I plan to interview seven to nine couples individually via teleconferencing. I hope to get their permission to record our sessions to help with having a good transcript of the interview. I prefer to have the video on for the interview to be able to notice body-language and be able to ask follow-up questions if something is noticed during our conversation. However, for confidentiality purposes I plan to turn the camera off when I start recording or to record on an audio only recording device. GROSSOEHME (2014) says that the interviews and their recordings are very important because they are the data. GROSSOEHME (2014) recommends using two forms of

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recording to ensure valuable data is not lost due to failure of a recorder (pg. 119). With these interviews being the data source, I want to do my best to make the participants comfortable and confident in the value of the work we are doing together. My intention is to find participants from outside of my immediate area in hopes that we will not know one another or at least have a minimal exposure to one another. I am aware that talking about sexual intimacy for many people, and especially Christians, can be a taboo subject. I do not want my participants wondering if their personal story will be brought up passively or simply have the potential of embarrassment or concern by the knowledge I will have gained from our time together.

### **Setting and Participant Selection**

The intended participants will be recruited through reaching out the Christian organizations that have platforms to reach couples who are preferably widely located geographically to give a diverse group of Christians married couples who identify as having mutually satisfying sexual intimacy. The hope is to draw in people who are from different communities than mine to hopefully broaden the richness of the data gathered. I will give my email address out for people who are interested in participation can reach out for inclusion. I will make clear in the advertisement what I will be doing and that a limited number of couples will be accepted. A hope is that I will have more responses than needed and be able to narrow down to one couple from a particular location. I am currently aiming for seven couples but am open to depending on the level of data saturation. Ravitch and Carl (2021) say this term “data saturation” can be misunderstood because there is a broad spectrum of themes and information that can be gleaned from research while they also acknowledge there is a clear point where you have an adequate amount of data to answer your proposed questions (pg. 289).

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### **Data Collection**

The primary tool, besides me as the researcher, will be the teleconferencing platform. This will allow me to have access to people in various locations across the United States without the cost of travel that would have formally been necessary to accomplish the research in the manner that I am proposing it. This will also accommodate individuals who have a limited time availability to be able to be reached anywhere they can be private without having to be at a specific location. I hope to have an initial interview with each participant and then to become very familiar with the data through reading and coding. I anticipate a second-round interview to follow-up and can clarify in any areas left vague. I plan to put the data together from our interview sessions and then to send the report to the participants to make sure they agree that I have been truthful to their intended communication or if there are areas where my preconceived notions have fogged my clarity of what they desired to share.

### **Data Analysis**

Data analysis is a vital part of the qualitative research process and needs to be given considerable thought. Lester et al., (2020) point to a thematic approach to data analysis and suggest a seven-step approach they borrowed from Lochmiller and Lester's (2017); preparing and organizing the data, transcribing the data, becoming familiar with the data corpus, memoing the data, coding the data, producing categories and themes from underlying coded passages, and making the analysis process transparent.

#### **Preparing and Organizing the Data**

In this process I will gather all the data that has been produced from videos to notes and go through the process of categorizing them where they can be referenced. Any handwritten

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documents will be converted to electronic files that can be searched. This step is critical, so the data is organized in a manner that promotes easier access where the researcher is not digging through piles of random information. Being orderly at this stage will help all other processes to be more smoothly implemented.

### **Transcribing the Data**

Converting audio or video files to writing is a process that can be very helpful and generally is considered a must in qualitative research work. A common method is producing a verbatim of the interviews. Many researchers find this process to be a burdensome task but Lester et al., (2020) recommend that each researcher do the work themselves rather than subbing it out to a transcriptionist to help them become more intimately familiar with the data sets.

### **Becoming Familiar with the Data Corpus**

This initial effort needs to occur early on to help the researcher to identify areas where they may need to tweak their questions or may find a data gap that needs to be addressed. These early efforts to begin the development of understanding the data will help as the process get further along by allowing concepts to begin to come to life and grow into the ultimate final delineations of the work.

### **Memoing the Data**

Memos are archival works that can help to track the various impressions that have been experienced throughout the various steps of the process. Lester et al., (2020) quotes Clarke (2005, p. 202) as saying memos are, “conversation with ourselves about our data.” After the initial interview and throughout the multiple stages of the research process, there may be thoughts that are worth writing down for further consideration or future clarification of what was

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thought at various junctures. It can be eye opening to look back on the thoughts towards the end to see how far your thoughts have evolved or if the earlier thoughts have held firm throughout the data collection and analysis stages.

### **Coding the Data**

Coding allows the reduction of the vast amount of data to some key words or phrases. This may help initially to begin to see some similarities between the interviews and then progress into seeing themes that might open through the process. There are varying opinions about how many phases of coding should occur, but it can be beneficial to consider multiple rounds of coding. Lester et al., (2020) say the first phase tends to be very general, the second phase begins to draw more concise themes that are related to the research questions, and the third level has “high levels of inference” through the connections of “the study’s conceptual and/or theoretical ideas.”

### **Producing Categories and Themes from Underlying Coded Passages**

This step moves the preliminary work of coding along to help to begin to see categories. Various coded segments are likely to fit nicely into a broader category. As the information comes alive it is then categorized and then develops into themes that are well aligned with the research parameters and goals. I love the way Lester et al., (2020) talk about the codes as being individual puzzle pieces that when carefully considering the parts and how they best fit together to make up the whole. They go on to speak regarding the interrelationships and the contrast that are present in the coding that lend themselves to categories. In much the same manner that categories were developed from the code, now the themes begin to emerge from the categories.

### **Making the Analysis Process Transparent**

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Lester et al., (2020) share two steps to having a transparent analysis process. First, they say that making a map that can help to make a visual representation is a very helpful way to the layout more distinct. Second, make a tabular form of an audit trail that many researchers include in their final work. This is to help clarify the “connection between data sources, codes, categories, and themes.” These steps will hopefully lead to having a work where there is considerable trustworthiness in the final reports of the research efforts being proposed.

### **Trustworthiness**

I am very focused on the proposed work meeting this standard so it can add value to the area of study without reservation. I will need to remember that Phenomenological research is “based on several assumptions: (1) meaning and knowing are social constructions, always incomplete and developing; (2) the investigator is a part of the experience being studied and the investigator’s values play a role in the investigation; (3) bias is inherent in all research and should be articulated at the beginning; (4) participants and investigators share knowledge and are partners; (5) common forms of expression (e.g., words or art) are important; and (6) meanings may not be shared by everyone” (Boss et al. quoted by Grossoehme, 2014, pg. 117). This information is here to remind me of the sway I could have on the outcomes and therefore I must understand the immense need for taking very intentional steps to achieve a work that is trustworthy.

I will primarily be using Ravitch & Carl (2021) for this section and specifically their chapter six which covers validity in qualitative research. Ravitch & Carl (2021) begin their chapter on validity by saying that qualitative research must have rigor and validity which is part of the design efforts throughout this proposal. While many in the qualitative world prefer the

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term trustworthiness, Ravitch & Carl (2021) say the terms trustworthiness and validity are interchangeable and points to validity in qualitative research as referring “to the ways that researchers can affirm that their findings are faithful to participants' experiences...it refers to the quality and rigor of a study” (pg. 166). Here I will take a moment to show my intention to include credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability, descriptive validity, interpretive validity, theoretical validity, generalizability, and evaluative validity from this proposal stage and throughout the research journey regarding Christian married couples who report having mutually enjoyable sexual intimacy together with their spouse.

### **Credibility (pg. 167-168)**

One technique here is triangulation which is using multiple ways of thinking about the aspects of my work to help ensure I am not trapped in tunnel vision and not seeing the broader possibilities of understanding or interpretation (e.g., dialogic engagement). Member checking is another method that could also be a part of triangulation. I plan to take my outcomes back to the participants to ensure that I have been faithful to their intended desire of what they communicated. Using a thick description will help anyone who wants to further work in this area or to check my work to have the necessary components to move forward in their work. Including data that may be understood as negative will help to give a truthful and full spectrum view of the data collected to help understand the interpretive outcomes. All effort will be made to challenge my interpretive stance to offset any overlooked assumptions or biases that may sway my final work.

### **Transferability (pg. 168)**

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Though the primary idea behind qualitative research is to learn from a specific situation and to report on that instance with the clear understanding that at another time or set of circumstances with the same people could potentially have a varying outcome. This being said, qualitative research is not intended to be forced into other settings as absolutes, but to share generalized concepts. When using thick description, other researchers can use my data to help them when thinking about how my findings may be helpful or even enlightening in another area of thought. This concept should allow others to take my work as a starting place without having to repeat the work being proposed.

### **Dependability (pg. 171)**

Chowdhury (2015) uses an illustration of using a tape measure to measure a desk at two different periods of times and the expectation that it should measure the same at each opportunity to be measured. This was specifically in relation to reliability which is a quantitative research term. Chowdhury (2015) says dependability in qualitative research is like the reliability standard in quantitative research. In other words, my research being proposed will be done in such a manner that can be audited or remeasured at another time and should (assuming all factors are the same) produce the same or very similar results. Ravitch & Carl (2021) say that triangulation helps with dependability and that you should see clear evidence of the research questions being answered through the data (pg. 171).

### **Confirmability (pg. 171)**

Guba (1981) Says that we must be aware of the lack of researcher objectivity and suggest three keys to help promote confirmability; triangulation, practicing reflexivity, and a confirmability audit to show that the interpretations are indeed in alignment with the data sets

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produced during the interviews (pg. 87-88). Ravitch & Carl (2021) tell us that confirmability is to qualitative research what objectivity is to quantitative research and since subjectivity is a given, qualitative researchers must mediate their prejudice through structured reflexivity processes. Ravitch & Carl (2021) go on to say that the researcher's positionality and biases need to be made clear and then "problematized, scrutinized, and complicated to improve confirmability (pg. 171).

### **Descriptive Validity (pg. 172)**

According to Ravitch & Carl (2021), this refers to the accuracy of the data sets and the way they have been transcribed. The information gathered needs to be checked for accuracy against the transcripts, field notes, and memos to ensure accuracy with the notes taken at the time of the interviews or along the research path. This is key to the entirety of the research process because all my work will be coming from this vital sets of information. If this phase is not given adequate scrutiny and perseverance, the validity of the outcomes will likely suffer as a result.

### **Interpretive Validity (pg. 172)**

Ravitch & Carl (2021) say this is the alignment of what the researchers says has occurred and that of the participants actual perspectives. They go on to say the way a researcher hears the participant, the way the questions are adapted, and how the whole project is finalized are aspects of the researcher's interpretive work. Ravitch & Carl (2021) introduce the concepts emic (words and concepts of the people studied) and etic (descriptive words introduced by the researcher). Interpretive validity leans in favor of the researcher being emic as much as possible to ensure the outcomes grasp the true intent of the participants.

### **Theoretical Validity (pg. 172)**

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This aspect reminds me to ensure that my work aligns with the empirical data and “explores the relationship between your empirical study, other empirical studies, and other theories that may or may not be empirically based.” It also includes the “ability to explain the phenomena studied, including the study's main concepts and the relationships between them” (Ravitch & Carl, 2021, pg. 172).

### **Generalizability (pg. 172-173)**

This is one area that I struggle to fully align with because I desire the findings to be generally generalizable to other works and interested parties. However, generalizability is not a standard that is accepted by most of the qualitative research world. Ravitch & Carl (2021) go so far as to suggest that the phrase generalizability should not be used because it appears to be claiming something they claim is not a valid part of qualitative research. Ravitch & Carl (2021) quote Maxwell (1992) as using the term generalizability to encourage qualitative researchers to look inwardly at “how individuals from the same community agree and understand their experiences (pg. 173). I will indeed be looking internally to see that my claims (understanding and interpretations) are in alignment with those of my participants.

### **Evaluative Validity (pg. 173)**

Ravitch & Carl (2021) say this comes down to an assessment of the researcher's interpretations of the data to consider if they were as balanced as possible or if they were “evaluative and judgmental”. I will need to remember that “descriptions, interpretations, and theoretical validity” are the roles considered important from the qualitative research perspective. Ravitch & Carl (2021) conclude by reminding their readers to be very intentional and cautious

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about the words used to describe their observations because words are not neutral but hold meanings that could be judgmental unintentionally.

### **Conclusion**

My hope is this proposal will be well received and that I will be granted the opportunity to move forward with the transcendental phenomenological study regarding: What are the experiences of Christian married couples who would describe their sexual intimacy as mutually satisfying? In the vary brief literature review it was demonstrated that there are a variety of factors that bring about dynamics that lead to mutually satisfying sexual intimacy (e.g., relationship satisfaction, communication, quality time, desire, feeling attractive, etc.). I look forward to the interviews, becoming extremely familiar with the data, and eventually arriving at the interpretations to see if the lived experiences of my participants are as helpful and as encouraging as I hope they will be. I also desire that this work will find its way into the hands of the general public to help those who are missing out on mutually satisfying sexual intimacy and can find a valuable nugget that points them to successful encounters and higher levels of enjoyment with their spouse.

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