

COUC870 Literature Review Assignment

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Chapter Two: Literature Review

Overview

The literature reviewed for this study has a focus on heterosexual mixed sex couple's sexual relationships broadly with the intent to bring the conversation around to a focus on: "What are the experiences of Christian heterosexual married couples who would describe their sexual intimacy as mutually satisfying?" Throughout the literature review mutually satisfying sexual intimacy (MSSI) will be a primary focus. The purpose is to help bring to light previous research on the topic to serve as a foundation for the current study and to expose and address a perceived gap in the literature that may hold some foundational concepts to help couples, clinicians, students, teachers, etc. to gain valuable insights that may promote better MSSI for those exposed to the final research data of the current study.

This review sets out with the understanding that sexual intimacy is a factor that is well known to hold high importance in relationships and is often a contributing factor to sexual satisfaction, as well as relationship satisfaction. This review will consider aspects of life (e.g., health, wealth, religiosity, interpersonal and intrapersonal dynamics) that may affect sexual intimacy and what effects it may have on couples achieving the experience of MSSI. One hope is to find research that discusses the positive experiences that promote MSSI, where a cursory review almost exclusively discusses aspects of life that often distract from MSSI.

Theoretical Framework

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This work will be a Qualitative research design that will utilize Husserl's Transcendental Phenomenology. Qualitative Research is very useful to consider the why behind actions and what meanings actions have for the individuals or various populations participating in an action (Denny & Weckesser, 2019). This work 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 the researchers 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). Using the stance of not knowing to be able to glean information from clients in counseling sessions has proven useful. A similar stance will be used to glean information from research participants, to hear their wisdom, and then use this valuable resource to assist in the dissemination of the data.

Transcendental Phenomenology was chosen to navigate the research process of gathering literature regarding heterosexual mixed sex couple's sexual relationships broadly to identify the breadth of data available to see strengths in the previous research, as well as confirm that the current study is indeed a gap that needs to be considered. Later, research participants will be interviewed regarding their experience of having MSSSI with their spouse, and both the data gained in the literature review, and the participants stories need to be unbiasedly presented for consumption in a manner that communicates the literature review data, and the participants lived experiences as neutrally as possible. 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).

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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). To gain a better perspective when learning from others, their information needs to be seen in the world where it occurred. A related concept is the idea of noesis and noema. Noesis is the item or thing that actually is (e.g., the physical tree) and noema is the perception of an object (thoughts about or the aura of the tree) (Husserl, 1931).

Husserl 1931 states that the idea of separating between the concrete (noesis) and the more fluid (noema) is important because, “the grasp and mastery of it is of the greatest consequence for phenomenology” (96). Husserl (1970), talking about experiences around us, 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). These ideas help to show that the Transcendental Phenomenological framework prompts the researcher to see past their own lived dynamics while choosing to take in another’s lived experience to promote the gaining of new knowledge, insights, and potential enlightenment.

With a Transcendental Phenomenological conceptual framework, the information is shared in a manner that makes every effort to clearly communicate the experience of the participants. Connely (2010) describes this idea by directing researchers to communicate the participants reality in a manner that could only be better understood had the researcher

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experienced the event themselves. Van Manen (2016) says, “Human life needs knowledge, reflection, and thought to make itself knowable to itself, including its complex and ultimately mysterious nature. It is a naive rationalism that believes that the phenomena of life can be made intellectually crystal clear or theoretically perfectly transparent” (pg. 17). The researcher must hear the participant and then reflect intently on the information gained to discover and communicate the truths held within. Transcendental Phenomenology is a guiding process to promote the best possible deliverance of the data as intended by the participants, knowing that arriving at a “crystal clear” understanding of MSSSI may be an idealistic concept.

Two categories of phenomenological research are descriptive and interpretive. With the descriptive approach, the researcher proceeds as if they can be fully cognizant of their biases and bracket those biases to the side to remain neutral as they consider the data. On the other hand, the interpretive approach does not consider it to be reasonable that a researcher can simply put biases aside. The interpretive approach says the researcher can only be aware of these preconceived notions and try to limit their influence while also making the biases known as a part of the research report (Connely, 2010). Bracketing is looking at a situation or set of emotions while intentionally setting personal values and experiences aside to gain the perspective of the source of the information while being as neutral as possible (Moustakas, 1994, pg. 60).

Part of the Qualitative Researcher mindset is a desire to ensure the participants’ perspectives are what gets communicated through the final work which requires putting their own perspectives and insights to the side (Grossoehme, 2014). To ensure the participants perspective is what appears in the final document, the participant (who is also considered a coresearcher) should be allowed the opportunity to review the primary researcher’s final

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interview analysis so the coresearcher has the opportunity to make corrections or clarification to better communicate the intended message (Moustakas, 1994, pg. 110). 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.

Moustakas (1994) has a modified version of the Van Kaam method of analysis of Phenomenological data (Appendix A). This modification has seven steps: 1) Listing and Preliminary Grouping; 2) Reduction and Elimination; 3) Clustering and Thematizing the Invariant Constituents (unchanging parts of the conversation); 4) Final Identification of the Invariant Constituents and Themes by Application; 5) Individual Textural Description of the experience; 6) Individual Structural Description of the experience; 7) Textural-Structural Description of the meanings and essences of the experience, incorporating the invariant constituents and themes.

Once these steps have been completed for each individual participant, the final step brings it all together. Moustakas (1994) says, “From the Individual Textural-Structural Descriptions, develop a Composite Description of the meanings and essences of the experience, representing the group as a whole” (pg. 121). Ravitch and Carl (2021) recommend using these four tools: composing researcher memos, keeping a researcher journal, engaging in dialogic engagement, and conducting researcher interviews (pg. 107). These steps and tools will help to organize and make determinations of what remains or is set aside to move toward producing the final research document.

Related Literature

This study will look at what the current literature has to say about heterosexual mutually satisfying sexual intimacy (MSSI) and a focus on heterosexual mixed sex couple's sexual relationships broadly in preparations for the future steps of the dissertation process to consider and develop a better understanding of what experiences are considered by the participants to promote MSSI through a Transcendental Phenomenological study with Christian married couples. The premise for this study came from a reading of the book by Gregoire et al. (2021) *The great sex rescue: The lies you've been taught and how to recover what God intended*. This book considered the struggles that often are associated with sexual intimacy in marriages (more specifically Christian marriages) and some dilemmas that have arisen due to certain interpretations of teachings such as purity culture. The aim of the current study is to shed light on the positive experiences in the Christian married couple's relationships they see as the path towards their experiencing MSSI.

Religious Negative Implications

Kleinplatz et al. (2009) did research on how to have great sex and stated there is a shortage of data to support positive sexual experiences "let alone very special, wonderful sexual experiences." The current study has the desire of bringing to the fore new research on what moves couples towards MSSI rather than focusing on what hinders or moves them away from MSSI. Gregoire et al. (2021) began their chapter 2 by discussing what God said in Genesis 4:1 "Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain, and said, "I have acquired a man from the LORD."” Gregorie et al. (2021) made the distinction that rather than they had sex together or the woman allowed the man to have her, the implication by the wording seems to

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imply an intimate knowledge of one another that ultimately had a coming together of the couple to a conceive a child. The work by Gregorie et al. (2021) goes on to challenge some of the teaching of various works Christian writers have produced that often make it sound as though the man has a need that must be fulfilled by the wife implying, she has a duty. Gregorie et al. (2021) had the focus of helping couples to see the strength in knowing one another and this leading to passionate sex that is fulfilling to both husband and wife it what can be described as MSSI.

Gregorie et al. (2021) went on to discuss some of the negative ideas taught is various Christian publication with one of those teachings typically being referred to as purity culture. Purity culture was a popular teaching that encouraged young people to wait until marriage to enjoy sex. This is indeed a good and God honoring idea that has helped many to overcome the temptation of sexual sin where for some purity culture has had the unintended consequence of communicating that those who did have sex before marriage or experienced sexual assault had lost their purity and therefore, they were dirty rags to be tossed aside (Blyth, 2021). Another unintended consequence is that some young people (often ladies) took the purity culture teaching to mean sex was dirty. While this may have been a great motivator to avoid succumbing to sexual temptation before marriage, many have found this idea difficult to turn off when they were married and now on the side of sex being a beautiful blessing provided by God.

There have been some very unfortunate results for some who were taught purity culture concepts. Sawatsky et al. (2024) found that those exposed to purity culture teachings consistently had a much greater occurrence of sexual pain during intercourse. Sawatsky et al. (2024) looked at those who still believed in purity culture ideas and found that gatekeeping (belief that the female is responsible for stopping sexual advances), perpetual lust (men cannot help but to lust

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before and after marriage), and soul ties (bound perpetually to someone you have had sex with) were associated with lower marital satisfaction. Soul ties, obligation sex, and sexual methadone (like methadone for a drug addict to avoid illicit drug use, a woman acts as the antidote to male lust, porn use, and potential fornication) were associated with high rates of primary sexual pain. 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 (Sawatsky et al., 2024).

In a survey done by Gregoire et al. (2023) the following outcome 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). These ideas all point to a concern regarding long-term effects on an individual who has been taught it is not only their responsibility to keep themselves pure but are also responsible to control the male who has been indicated to be a manic with uncontrollable sexual urges. The current research hopes to bring to light positively reinforced experiences of Christian married couples who report having MSSSI that can be a small step towards helping others to move towards also experiencing MSSSI and maybe alleviate some burdens of ladies who have been told they have the responsibility of being the gatekeeper.

Another key principle that has been missed through having such a focus on abstinence is to help young people to understand the idea of consent. 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

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the church must do a better job of making clear what consent means. The church, Gregorie says, has been so intent to teach abstinence they skipped right past consent.

Gregoire et al., (2023) did a survey that said 44% of those who 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! Better and more concise information is needed to help correct the examples that have been given. This information points a spotlight on the immense need for research to improve healthy dynamics that bring about MSSSI in Christian marriages. The hope is that Christian couples will learn steps to move their marriage to regularly experiencing MSSSI and then those couples will spread what they learn into the teachings on sexual intimacy in churches in a manner that is God honoring and promotes the mutual satisfaction of both the male and female alike.

The overarching plea in the Gregorie works is to bring light to the need for equality of experiencing sexual satisfaction for both males and female, when it seems most sexual works (secular or religious) focus on the male's satisfaction. 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). Gregoire's believes that women would be more apt to desire sexual pleasure if we would change the dynamics of how we discuss the topic. Gregorie et al. (2021) did a Twitter and Facebook survey with 1,500 respondents and asked which teaching they had heard more in churches or Christian books: Do not deprive your husband or Women's sexual pleasure matters? 95% confirmed a focus on men's sexual satisfaction had been their experience (pg. 39). A change in the conversation is needed with the present study desiring to be a small step in a

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female sex positive direction that adds to the limited data to help point Christian married couples towards MSSJ.

Unhealthy sexual ideas and practices (whether taught or learned through the lack of teaching) can manifest in many ways with some being terrifying to consider. 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 used scriptural principles against her in such an unreconcilable way that it brought to the surface a battle with bi-polar issues for Allison. In essence, this was another unintended consequence of purity culture ideas her parents and church had aspired to teach and enforce in the name of helping. 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 (2021) said, "Brené Brown popularized a now oft-used definition distinguishing shame and guilt in which guilt is an awareness that we did something bad and shame is a belief that we are bad" (pg. 36). Guilt and shame will likely be a key to the components of what distinguishes those who are able to enjoy sexual intimacy with their spouses even if having sinned or been the victim of something horrific like rape—**guilt** (to be clear this is not indicating a victim has done something wrong but is saying it is a terrible event that has happened to them and is not what or who they are), and those who have internalized the purity culture message and

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are therefore unable to find joy in the act of sexual intimacy due to having sex before marriage by choice (sin) or by force (purity stolen)—**shame**. All could benefit from the corrective properties of guilt while shame unamended will simply kill a person's soul and prevent a person from moving towards MSSSI with their spouse.

Allison (2021) quotes her therapist friend Lara as saying, "We have to do the work of determining how we want our relationship to God and spirituality to look as well as our relationship to sex and sexuality" (pg. 198). Doing the work (being intentional) is a key component of seeking to move forward in life when a person has been exposed to negative and burdensome ideas about life and sex. One hope of the present research is to bring about hope by giving those who have been abused or restrained in their ability to enjoy MSSSI, through skewed or dogmatic understandings of teachings, the insights needed to see where it is they desire to go on their journey towards their preferred future and experiencing MSSSI with their spouse.

Some of the teachings were not only taught verbally but found their way into devotional Bibles intended to help young people to grow and mature into the people God desires them to be. Blyth (2021) talks about the many ideas that are often embedded throughout the many devotional notes 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

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(2021) said, “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 behaviour (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.

Blyth sees society and the church telling women who do have a strong sex drive that they are abnormalities and have no need of encouragement in these teaching/devotional Bibles. Whether a lower sexual desire is a culturally taught dynamic or a physiological dynamic present in some if not most women, it is a general truth that men are more sexually driven. However, women and men alike (assuming no medical issues) can typically be enlightened to their own sexual proclivities and grow with their spouse to build upon their intimate knowledge of themselves and their spouse in a manner that will promote moving further on the path to experiencing MSSl.

Though Blyth does appear to have issues with some general teachings of the Bible (male leadership, homosexuality, adultery, fornication, etc.), her work 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

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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 un-ordained sexual gratification (Blyth, 2021, Allison, 2021, pg. 34). 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 MSSSI between these ladies and their future husbands.

Thus far there has been a spotlight on protestant Christians but here is a similar slant towards the Catholic church regarding their influence on MSSSI. (2022) looked at 630 Filipino individuals (60% women and 40% men) in heterosexual relationships (67% unmarried and 32% married for at least one month to fifty years). The study only included those who were Roman Catholics. The heavy influence of the Catholic faith on the Filipino culture may be a contributing factor to sexual shame and guilt. Cruz (2022) considered the mediating effect of sexual guilt and found it does affect unmarried women (expected) and married men (not expected).

To be sexually active outside of marriage violates their Catholic standards and is thus thought to affect sexual and relationship satisfaction. Cruz (2022) speculated that the feelings of being close to their boyfriend may be a driving force to have sex even though it violates their Catholic faith practices. In contrast, married women had the highest levels of relationship satisfaction. In essence the Filipino wife is looked down on for her enjoyment of sex. Sex is considered part of a women's duty to her husband that falls under the same umbrella as household duties and being a mother. For men, sexual urges are innate and natural, and much like many other cultures around the world do not see the unmarried males' sexual escapades to be as damning as it is for women.

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The married men on the other hand were found to experience sexual guilt over their extramarital affairs. Due to the strict rule of the Catholic church, sex in marriage is pretty much considered to be limited to penile-vaginal intercourse with many men considering fellatio and cunnilingus to be proper but only with prostitutes and not with their wives. Cruz (2022) stated that the Filipino women need to be taught and encouraged to consider “the importance of their sexual health, rights, and pleasure and put forth their relationship and sexual satisfaction” (pg. 634-635). The thoughts just considered are another indication that continued research must be conducted that looks at ways that improve women’s enjoyment of sexual intimacy which is likely to be recognized as a key to moving a couple towards MSSSI.

Religious Positive Implications

A little different perspective is one that views religiosity as being a positive force in the realm of sexual satisfaction. 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 to scale if sexual satisfaction led to high levels of religiosity or if high levels of religiosity led 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.

The information from Dew et al. (2020) helps clarify that religiosity is not an evil that is causing poor sexual satisfaction or even unhealthy guilt or shame. However, some teachings by individuals within religious groups are teaching concepts that are well intended but not thought

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through to the potential logical conclusions or effects the teachings may have had, or are having, on those who are adherents of the teaching. Information that promotes MSSSI among Christian married couples is needed. Help building a bridge of hope for those who feel there is a great chasm between them and being able to experience MSSSI with their spouse is a desired effect of the current study.

Though the current author's intention is to be neutral, as a Christian, understanding religiosity as being a unique advantage to increased sexual satisfaction is an unavoidable bias. Specific research that has sought to provide clarity regarding these dynamics is much needed. The current study will certainly consider research questions to glean the perspectives of the future participants to broach the subject of their perceived reality regarding the effects religiosity dynamics have on their experiencing MSSSI. Hernandez-Kane and Mahoney (2018) did look at the Spiritual implications of sanctification on sex between spouses. They found that higher levels of perceived sanctification of sexual intimacy led to higher frequency of engagement in having sex together and experiencing both marital and sexual satisfaction. Seeing MSSSI as being sanctified or God ordained helps to make clearer the differing attitudes regarding sexual intimacy that occurs with those who view sex as dirty and those who view sexual intimacy as blessed by God. The conversation will now turn from a specific focus on religious effects to a consideration of the role communication has on MSSSI.

Communication

Communication can have many facets with a couple of dynamics being an inward focus and an outward focus. Allsop et al., (2021) discussed Carroll et al., (2006) and their Developmental Model of Marital Competence (DMMC). Counselors who are meeting with

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couples should bring out three key areas of the DMMC; communication skills, interpersonal virtues, and intrapersonal identities and help the clients to see how these can affect sexual satisfaction. Allsop et al., (2021) directly applied the idea of sexual satisfaction with the DMMC which was not thought to have been done previously. This work by Allsop et al, (2021) indicates there has only been a couple of works that considered the effect of conflict resolution on sexual satisfaction.

Allsop et al.(2021), 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 and found using the DMMC is supported. They found that avoidant attachment individuals (male and female) had lower levels of sexual satisfaction where secure attachment was associated with higher levels of sexual satisfaction. As one may expect, conflict resolution quality was found to improve sexual satisfaction for both males and females.

Allsop et al. (2021) encouraged teaching conflict resolution skills along with sexual communication and forgiveness to help a couple to move towards sexual satisfaction or what in the current study is being call MSSSI. They also found that partner effects where not found to significantly affect sexual satisfaction leading Allsop et al. (2021) to infer that and individual's perspective holds a higher impact on the outcome of their sexual satisfaction. Use of the DMMC is encouraged to help achieve mutually satisfy sex because it considers sexual relationships from a multifaceted approach. These ideas are right in line with the goals of the present study to see the attributes that contribute to MSSSI and then to make the information available to improve upon the current research data that is available.

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Communication is often thought of from the aspect of being an outward act where it is also an inward act with both dynamics being important and having the potential to significantly affect MSSSI. Carroll et al., (2006) have an excellent chart (Appendix B) that deals with what they refer to as interpersonal competence versus intrapersonal competencies. Carroll et al., (2006) saw these as being the distinction between communication skills (interpersonal) and motivation (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 both self-worth and valuing others are of paramount importance when seeking to take on a well-balanced perspective of the complete relational dynamics. The current study will consider questions to ask participants to parse out their perception of the effects of intrapersonal and interpersonal dynamics.

Work in a home has often been shared between a husband and wife with certain aspects of the work around a home being thought of as the male's domain or the female's domain. However, sometimes there is an actual or a perceived discrepancy in the amount of work one spouse is expected to perform. This may be an area of communication that is avoided and contributes to the lack of MSSSI in a home. Barrett and Raphael (2018) research looked at

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heterosexual couples ages 55+ who had been married at least 27 years and considered the effects of housework on sex frequency and satisfaction.

What Carroll et al., (2006) found is women who had an unbalanced workload in the home experienced lower sexual satisfaction. More specifically the felt perception of having an unfair balance caused the negative sexual satisfaction, however, their findings indicated it affects the quality and satisfaction derived while not changing the frequency that sexual intimacy took place. These outcomes could help counselors by having the knowledge that addressing communication around the perceived inequality of the work in the home could be a key tool to helping couples to have more MSSI.

It is significantly important for married couples to have intentionality in the regularity of their communication generally and regarding sexual intimacy. Both the men and women in the Blumenstock et al. (2022) study were found to experience very high sexual and emotional satisfaction when their sexual communication was frequent (pg. 959). Another area that often gets attention in the conversation of sexual satisfaction is sexual function of individuals (which is important), but communication has been demonstrated once again to be a critical component in the pursuit of MSSI. Impett et al., (2014) quotes Kleinplatz regarding her research on optimal sexuality as saying, "...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) (Kleinplatz et al., 2009). Even when sexual dysfunction was at play, couples who communicated were often able to find ways to achieve MSSI even if intercourse was not a possibility.

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Often individuals live with avoidance of discussing aspects generally, but certainly are avoidant of discussing dynamics perceived to be negative. Cazzell et al., (2022) did research to test the effects of positive exchanges between mixed-sex couples on the negative exchanges that occur in relationships. Their work expected to find a plateauing of the benefit of the positive as a counteracting force of the negative. What they found was the more positive encounters that take place in a relationship, the negative is mitigated to a much lower level as compared to the absence of the previous positive encounters. This effected both male and female but with a higher level of marital satisfaction derived from the positive encounter for the female. Cazzell et al., (2022) failed to show a gender difference with negative exchanges. Communication that is aimed at addressing negative issues to bring about a positive outcome may have the effect of moving a couple towards MSSSI.

Communication can be both verbal and/or action based. Curtis et al. (2012) looked at cues among heterosexual married couples that were intended to lend to intercourse or sexual closeness. Their work found that both men and women play the game of being flirtatious, but men are more likely to make suggestive innuendos such as arriving naked unexpectedly or to begin removing their partner's clothing. These actions led to successfully achieving the goal each time used during the study. Another successful flirtation was a suggestive comment such as describing verbally what they hoped to be doing with their partner sexually. Based on this study it seems likely that communication that uses suggestive actions and/or verbal flirtation will increase the probability of MSSSI.

As previously discussed, the lack of adequate communication regarding an issue such as a sexual dysfunction can lead to complication of achieving MSSSI. Ferrira et al., (2020) research

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regarding the effects of sexual problems on the sexual satisfaction of married couples found that when men would self-soothe through self-compassion their efforts helped them individually. However, their partner still had lower sexual satisfaction due to the female's awareness of the man's sexual problem, being a concern of his, even though he had been able to self-soothe (pg. 183). They found that what affected men's sexual satisfaction was women's sexual functioning, where women's satisfaction was less concerned with function but was more so affected by a man's sexual distress (pg. 183). Communication regarding the concerns and desires of the encounter could serve to help overcome the intrapersonal disparagement of the possibility of attaining MSSSI.

Often older couples are overlooked due to a perception that older people are not having sex when they are having sex and when communication is open and honest they are even having what could be described as MSSSI. Gillespie (2017) considered the connections between frequency of sexual encounters and sexual satisfaction among older couples. Gillespie (2017) found that older couples are more prone to use open sexual communication and to create an atmosphere that is conducive for sexual experiences.

Those couples who had higher sexual desires, found a synchronized timing of coming together for sexual encounters, and had variety in sexual experiences, were significantly linked to higher frequency of sexual encounters and high sexual satisfaction, as well as the use of sexual self-help books and materials. Gillespie (2017) found through their research that many older adults remain sexually active which is contrary to many commonly held ideas regarding older couples and their sexual activity, finding that many are remaining engaged in active and emotionally satisfying sex. This work points clinicians towards helping older couples to continue

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to be intentional regrading communication, emotional alignment, and variety in sexual novelty to help this population to benefit from sexual satisfaction.

An interesting thought here is an idea that nonreligious benefitted at a higher level from sexual and nonsexual communication. Lazar (2016) considered the responses of 342 Jewish married women to think about how spirituality and religiosity moderated the sexual and nonsexual communications and how these interacted with marital and sexual satisfaction. Lazar (2016) stated that, “strong associations between all of these variables were found” (pg. 366). This work found evidence that the non-religious had higher effects of sexual and nonsexual communication on their marital satisfaction. Sexual communication was found to have a strong effect on sexual satisfaction which Lazar (2016) took as an indication that sexual satisfaction may be more easily interpreted and understood than marital communication because the outcomes of marital communication was found to be less distinct.

Lazar (2016) did not find that religiosity mediated sexual satisfaction speculating that this is the case because both religious and non-religious people typically enjoy sex. According to the current researcher, a flaw with quantitative research is statements like this one made by Lazar (2016), “After controlling for sexual communication, non-sexual communication has no special contribution to sexual satisfaction” which is what their interpretation of their data indicated. However, no reasonable person would believe that nonsexual communication “has no special contribution to sexual satisfaction” to be factual. Anyone who has ever been in a marriage knows that nonsexual communication (e.g., conversations around household chores, finances, hobbies etc.) absolutely affects sexual satisfaction, maybe more so than sexual communication.

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When reading the work by Leavitt and Willoughby (2015) it appeared there is a fine line between having positive effects of sexual initiation and the negative effects of the perception of sexual coercion. Men were found to be more likely to be the actors of sexual coercion and women the partner being coerced viewed this negatively. When the table was turned and the woman was the coercers, the men did not perceive the interaction negatively. Couples who had more frequent initiation were found to have higher levels of relational satisfaction often regardless of if intercourse resulted from the initiation.

There appeared to be a correlation between making efforts to be sexually intimate and sexual desire leading Leavitt and Willoughby (2015) to believe the attempt at intimacy (regardless of sex occurring) was signaling the desire aspect of the couples in their study. Leavitt and Willoughby (2015) also found evidence to support the idea that when each partner initiates sexual intimacy, their relationship satisfaction and positive communication were improved and conflict was lessened. These communication ideas are in line with the desire of the current study and are dynamics indicated to promote MSSI.

A level of discretion regarding how quickly a couple should begin talking about sexual communication is found to be prudent. Mallory (2022) says that sexual satisfaction is enhanced by sexual communication which 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 when the sweet spot is to begin sexual communication effort would be, however, their idea to have open sexual communication opens the door to explore fantasies and various aspects about their sexual partnership to improve the

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experience for both male and female alike. Being engaged in a relationship and able to have comfort with sexual communication that explores partner sexual proclivities has the potential effect of promoting MSSSI.

Communication can take on different personalities with sexually assertive communication being one of those. Sayyadi et al. (2018) considered the role of sexual assertiveness and its effects on how one feels about their spouse. They interviewed 60 women who came into Imam Reza Medical Center in Mashhad, Iran. Sayyadi et al. (2018) stated, “sexual assertiveness is considered as a person's ability to have intercourse to meet his/her sexual needs and promote sexual relationships with their spouse” (pg. 1314). This may be better explained as the value of sexual communication. Sayyadi et al. (2018) find there is evidence to support the idea that sexual assertiveness does indeed build positive feeling towards their spouse, develops positive sexual effects and emotional stability in the relationship. Their work adds to the literature in support of helping couples to improve upon their sexual communication skills to be able to move towards MSSSI. This segment of the review has been focused on communication with the attention now turning towards what effects personality has on MSSSI.

Personality

Just as communication has been demonstrated to have great importance in the conversation regarding MSSSI, there is evidence to support the consideration of personality traits and their effects on a couple experiencing MSSSI. Aloho and Kuruku (2018) looked at the effects of personality traits on sexual satisfaction with married couples and found that personality traits are key determinant as to relationship dynamics and therefore also have direct effects on sexual satisfaction as well. Additionally, they found no variations concerning gender effects with the

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various personality types studied. Aloho and Kuruku (2018) found support for personality types as a predictor of marital and sexual satisfaction and therefore need to be considered as an important factor when a couple is considering marriage and the possibility of successfully achieving MSSI..

Aloho and Kuruku (2018) stated, “The Big - five inventory: it is a useful framework developed by Digman, 1990 to measure human personality, organizing personality into five broad dimensions. Extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism and openness to experience.” This work by Kuruku (2018) gathered data from 199 participants but only supplied the broad sweeping findings regarding their hypotheses was or was not supported without the results of the personality test data and their grouping by couple results. Including the personality inventory results, seemingly, would have been far more useful than the generalized outcomes shared. Regardless, their work helps to promote the inclusion of the consideration of personality types when working with married couples or couples generally.

An interesting thought is to consider how the personality types of a leader in a home could affect MSSI and frequency of sexual experiences. Hindin and Muntifering (2011) considered the autonomy of women in Sub-Saharan Africa to see what, if any effect this had on frequency of sex. They found that when women were the primary decision maker in the home, it had been a longer period since last intercourse (as much as a 100-fold difference). Hindin and Muntifering (2011) did not dive into the specific nuance to try to understand this dynamic better. However, they did suggest that future research consider whether the female being the decision maker affected her marital, sexual, emotional satisfaction and if it lessened the amount of pain or increased enjoyment with intercourse. Some may think it may have been a stretch to include this

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work in the personality section, however, when a female takes the leadership role in the home in a culture where that is not the norm, by implication, suggest she may have a more dominant personality type.

Whether a home has a dominant personality of male versus female or a combination of the personalities in one or both partners is likely to have a direct effect on a couple's potential to experience MSSSI. Li et al., (2025) looked at attributes of brain function in heterosexual married couples in consideration of relationship and sexual outcomes. They found that when higher male attributes are found in a male, they tend to have higher marital satisfaction where these attributes were found to cause a negative response in women. Variations of masculine traits were found to be far more harmonious. When higher female attributes were present, this led to positive results for both males and female. Li et al., (2025) went on to say that a couple may benefit from more "diversification" between personality types with the reasoning that they will potentially be more well-rounded, able to better divide the task associated with a marriage and get more accomplished with such a plan. An interview question that may arise out of Hindin and Muntiferling (2011) & the work of Li et al., (2025) is: What effect does a stronger male or stronger female personality type have on a couple who reports they do experience MSSSI?

Where a person finds themselves individually in life can affect their MSSSI which may be linked directly to indicators of personality type. McCann and Biaggio (1989) found that higher levels of purpose, higher levels of inner directedness, and "time competence aspects of self-actualization", in the lives of their participants typically had indications on areas of their sex life as well (pg. 65). High levels of selfism and egocentrism were found to be associated with higher

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levels of dissatisfaction with frequency, amount of personal pleasure, and the overall level of pleasure gained from their sexual activities (pg. 65).

Another intriguing finding of McCann and Biaggio (1989) was that the women were often found to have higher levels of sexual pleasure when their partners had higher levels of egocentrism while being lower when their male partner was self-actualized (pg. 69). This result seems counterintuitive in one sense while also seeming potentially contradictory due to the likelihood that a person who is self-actualized may be more apt to be perceived as being egocentric. It will be fascinating to see if this dynamic is seen in the current study while looking at experiences leading to MSSSI.

The effects of certain personalities that have typically been thought of as positive (e.g., low shame) can also enhance other issues as being negative when shame has been removed from the individual. Phillip et al., (2019), “[W]hen people have low levels of shame, and frequently engage in judging themselves, over-identifying with their thoughts and feelings, and seeing themselves as alone with their problems, they tend to have greater hypersexual behavior compared to those who did not judge themselves, over-identify, or perceive that they were alone.” This idea can help clinicians to think about helping clients to consider their values system and what constitutes a right or wrong and hopefully help an individual to regulate themselves more effectively. The lack of regulating of self could reasonably be thought to contribute to a lack of MSSSI in a married couple and especially in a Christian married couple who have a clearly delineated worldview by which they have professed a desire to live within.

Life being lived where there is no standards or principles to guide actions, an individual is left to there on whelms of right or wrong. Whitman et al. (2007) looked at 2,291 married

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individuals and found that higher levels of neuroticism and lower religiosity were increased indicators of sexual infidelity, specifically a heightened level of cheating during pregnancy by the males was present. Marriages are often entered into with an assumed expectation of fidelity which becomes difficult to sustain when the participants are found to be self-focused and do not have a standard to guide them as Christian married couples do have. The present study would not expect to find the dynamic of neuroticism when interviewing Christian married couples who report experiencing MSSSI. The consideration of personality's effects on MSSSI has been shown as a real factor to consider in this review with body image effects on MSSSI being the next area of focus.

Body Image

Some mention earlier of a few perceptions of negative teachings regarding body image were mentioned. Here a broader look at body image will be considered. Ashkinazi et al. (2024) considered what effects body image, as viewed by self and their spouse, would have on marital quality as seen through sexual frequency and satisfaction. Positive self-perception and spousal approval of body image indicated higher levels of sexual frequency and sexual satisfaction and thus indicated a higher marital quality. Negative spousal feedback led to less sexual satisfaction and frequency of sexual encounters which pointed towards a lower marital satisfaction. This work strengthens the need to support couples in healthy living and developing a positive body image which was found to promote a stronger marital quality that also enjoys the frequency and quality of sexual encounters together. These ideas point towards the improved potential for experiencing MSSSI when an individual and their spouse have a positive outlook on body-image.

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It may be that a couple can have MSSSI whether the partners have been blessed to have bodies that meets the current cultural ideals of beauty, however, it is important for spouses to find their mate to be attractive. Impett et al., (2014) says that sexual desire is an important characteristic of the level of enjoyment that spouses will receive. This may be for a variety of reasons from physical attraction to thoughtfulness by a spouse (pg. 280). There are various attributes that contribute to MSSSI with the evidence pointing toward attraction to partner body-image and self-perception being important.

Having a spouse that demonstrates attraction to their counterpart is important and occasionally has what may be seen as a delayed reaction. Mark et al., (2019) demonstrated 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. Mark et al., (2019) thought this may be impart due to a large number of women tend to indicate a higher level of sexual desire when they feel attractive. The idea shared is when the man demonstrates a higher level of desire, the female's felt attractiveness is enhanced and thus increases her sexual desire. The current study hopes to see if this idea holds true for the Christian married couples reporting MSSSI or if there are some differing nuances present. The perception is there will be very similar and different aspects of relational nuances that will promote and/or detract from the male or female individually and possibly the couple's combined sexual desires for one another in achieving MSSSI.

Emotional and Relationship Satisfaction

As discussed, body-image can affect MSSSI and has been found to be an important factor in this discussion. Now the attention is directed to emotional and relationship satisfaction.

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Blumenstock et al, (2020) found that the women in their study who reported high levels of sexual satisfaction were 10 times more apt to be highly emotionally satisfied and the men who reported high levels of sexual satisfaction were 25 times more apt to be emotionally satisfied (pg. 961). , There are many factors that contribute to MSSSI, however, MSSSI may be a contributor to achieving emotional satisfaction for both men and women in a relationship.

Just as sexual satisfaction was found to support emotional satisfaction, sexual satisfaction has also been noticed to promote relationship satisfaction. Fallis et al., (2016) did a study where they tested a group of 113 heterosexual couples and then retested two years later regarding the association between relationship satisfaction and sexual satisfaction. They found that the longitudinal effects of sexual satisfaction on relationship satisfaction were greater for men than it was for women while positive for each. Interestingly, their study showed no significant partner effects (as did Allsop et al.(2021) mentioned earlier) which points to individual perspectives having a direct effect on the couple's outcomes.

Fallis et al., (2016) found sexual satisfaction to be a predictor of relationship satisfaction but the inverse was not found to be reality. A takeaway would be for clinicians to consider the idea of looking at couples' sexual health as a potential door to relationship satisfaction. The focus of the present study is to better understand experiences of Christian married couples who report having MSSSI. Knowing that achieving MSSSI may also promote emotional satisfaction and relationship satisfaction could be the needed encouragement for future couples to be more intentional about seeking MSSSI in their marriage.

Men are often thought to be colder and less concerned with the depth of a relationship, much less relationship satisfaction. This may have validity as a statement of the male's personal

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presentation regarding intimacy; however, it is enlightening to think about the role the female's intimacy can have on their male partner as compared to the effect of the male's intimacy on the female. Finzi-Dottan (2023) had an interesting finding that indicated the male's fear of intimacy had little to no effect on the female's relationship satisfaction, where the female's fear of intimacy did indeed affect the male's relationship satisfaction. When wives had a better sense of self, this attribute led to lower fear of intimacy and increased the male's sense of relational satisfaction.

The study by Finzi-Dottan (2023) supports Bowen's Family Systems idea that individuals who are self-actualized are better equipped to be successful in relationships with this being evidenced through the forming of intimate relations by those who better understand and have a sense of self. The finding by Finzi-Dottan (2023) is in opposition to the findings of McCann and Biaggio (1989) (mentioned previously) which may possibly be associated with McCann and Biaggio (1989) being dated. The outcome of being self-actualized by Finzi-Dottan (2023) is the more intuitive result that is anticipated in the data to be gathered for the current study from the future participants who report experiencing MSSSI.

The concept of being securely attached leading to relationship satisfaction and towards MSSSI is further supported. 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). 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). Great sex, being drawn together, and experiencing a quality relationship are strong factors that clinicians should consider prompting couples to think

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about what it means to be securely attached and how this would help promote experiencing MSSSI with their partner.

There are many factors that may affect relationship satisfaction with premarital sexual experiences and cohabitation in a nonmarital relationships being potential factors of significance. Legkauskas & Stankevičienė (2009) goes on to speculate that those who participate in sex outside of marriage may have other characteristics that promotes not having relationship satisfaction when married (e.g., poor impulse control, inability to resist peer pressure, rebellious against tradition, sensation seeking etc.), or it may be that participating in premarital sex may skew the perception of sex and cause contention between a couple (pg. 24).

Legkauskas & Stankevičienė (2009) found a positive correlation between the age of first sexual experience and the level of marital satisfaction in women (i.e., the later a female began having sexual intercourse the more satisfied she is in her marital relationship), but this was not found in men. An unexpected outcome (according to the current researcher) is the findings that having had premarital sex partners did not indicate a significant impact on marriage satisfaction. Their work also found that men who had cohabitated with a partner prior to marriage had significantly lower levels of marital satisfaction, where this was not found to be the case with women. It will indeed be intriguing to hear from the future participants of the current study to see if they indicate an effect from having had sexual partners prior to marriage and if cohabitation with their current spouse or another partner prior to marriage is believed to have affected their ability to experience MSSSI with their spouse.

Where the current study has the aim of finding attributes that promote MSSSI, Kristen et al., (2020) chose to do their research from the opposite perspective. They looked at some of the

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problems that may hinder sexual intimacy. Kristen et al., (2020) found many things of interest with one being the women in their study were apt to take responsibility for not engaging in sexual intimacy where men are more likely to give credit to their mate. Another interesting outcome of Kristen et al., (2020) is that men are generally more likely to seek “physical closeness” to enhance relationship satisfaction.

The higher the general relationship satisfaction of both the male and female, the more agreeable the couple tended to be with a mutual alignment to not engage in sexual intimacy on certain occasions (Kristen et al., 2020). Their speculation was that closeness may have already been achieved and therefore the sexual encounter was not necessary to accomplish relational intimacy. This is an engaging concept to consider that a couple who has higher relationship satisfaction may agree to not have sexual intimacy because of having fed one another through other aspects of their relationship (Kristen et al., 2020). It will be a delight to see if the future participants for the present study will point to similar attributes being present in their overall relationship satisfaction regardless of actual engagement in the act of sexual intimacy or intercourse. The Kristen et al., (2020) article has helped me to think of additional questions that had not previously been in my thoughts: Have there been occasions when you and/or your spouse have had a desire for MSSSI and were able to mutual agree not to engage or to postpone the engagement? If so, what allowed you to be able to make that decision together? If not, what do you believe hindered you from being able to make this decision together?

Sometimes it may be the case that MSSSI and relationship satisfaction are hindered due to factors such as issues revolving around forgiveness. Miller and Worthington, (2010) in their study with 311 community-based newlywed couples found that men were more apt to portray

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empathy and be more forgiving for a perceived wrong against them by their spouse that had not been fully resolved. This idea was indicated to be an accurate perception by females that men are more forgiving while men did not reciprocate this as reality for the women.

These perceptions were different by gender, the level of the offense, and the level of satisfaction with the marriage generally. Miller and Worthington, (2010) put forward the thought that couples need help learning to forgive as it has a direct association with a higher potential for mental health issues when issues are not addressed. Though Miller and Worthington, (2010) did not directly address MSSSI, the implications in their work can reasonably be applied to the present discussion by inferring that non-forgiveness or a lack of empathy could hinder MSSSI from a marriage.

For a variety of reasons not discussed here, some individuals become opposed to touch which has been demonstrated to be a hinderance to relationship satisfaction. Wagner et al., (2020) looked at touch and its relationship with marital satisfaction. Their work found that touch is a critical part of marital satisfaction. A powerful finding was those who are hesitant or even touch avoidant can mitigate this by regular affectionate touch (e.g., for men cuddling, kissing). Infrequent touch brought about higher levels of dissatisfaction. Wives with avoidant touch had a negative effect on the husbands while women did not experience the inverse. These attributes neglected can hinder marital satisfaction, while when the lack of desire for touch is mitigated and improved, the propensity to move a couple closer to achieving MSSSI seems to be a reasonable anticipation. This idea of touch as an aspect of relationship satisfaction leads right into the next area of focus where the effects of intimacy on MSSSI are considered.

Intimacy

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Often older age groups are overlooked where here we see attention drawn to them and finding that intimacy is an important factor in their sexual satisfaction. Bagheri et al. (2025) looked at 418 sexually active married women in Taran, Iran between the ages of 60-80 regarding sexual satisfaction. With the populational increase in older adults, Bagheri et al. (2025) saw the need to address the sexual satisfaction of this age group. Their work found that intimacy was a mediating factor that pointed towards sexual satisfaction among their participants. Bagheri et al. (2025) saw their findings pointing mental health clinicians to help their clients with sexual satisfaction through helping them with intimacy. In essence this is saying there is more to sex than a physical engagement with a spouse but a need for connection that is personal and creates an interpersonal desire between a couple known as intimacy that has the probability of leading to MSSSI.

Intimacy is often associated with sex or intercourse where it is a broader topic that covers the closeness of heart, mind, body, and soul between individuals. Bahrami et al. (2023) looked at what effected life satisfaction from the realm of sexuality and found that marital intimacy (different than sexual intimacy) and high sexual functioning where characteristics that promoted life satisfaction among married women in the city of Qazvin City, Iran. An often-overlooked aspect of sexual intimacy being desired and leading to MSSSI is the aspect referred to as marital intimacy. This indicates there is a connection between two individuals that has aligned them in a heart, mind, body, and soul connection that then supports the coming together to experience MSSSI.

Similar to Bahrami et al. (2023), Witherow et al. (2016) did work that indicated marital intimacy is a crucial component in how frequently a couple will engage in sexual activities while

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they did not find evidence to support the inverse (i.e., sexual intimacy leading to marital intimacy). [However, much of their findings seem to be skewed by allowing multiple participants who met the criterion or were at the threshold to meet the criterion for sexual dysfunction.] These two sources help to bring to the fore that marital intimacy has a direct effect on sexual intimacy, where it seems some believe sexual intimacy leads to marital satisfaction which was not supported. Marital intimacy is an aspect of the present study that will be an area of questioning to see if the future participants in the current study see a delineation between the ideas of marital and sexual intimacy or if they consider them to be one in the same. Now the attention will move from intimacy to frequency of sex which is often considered to be a byproduct of the former.

Frequency of Sex

Altgelt and Meltzer (2021) looked at the association of sex frequency as an indicator of marital success. In their work they specifically looked at the premarital events a couple experienced and the association they had on frequency of sexual intimacy and sexual satisfaction (pg. 146). They speculated that couples who lived together prior to marriage, had longer courtships, or who had children pre-marriage would have less frequency of sex and less sexual satisfaction in marriage when compared to couples who went into marriage without these factors that have been traditionally considered to be less desirable (pg. 147). The research conducted by Altgelt and Meltzer (2021) found that people who had longer courtships had less frequent sex at the beginning of marriage as compared to newlyweds who had shorter courtships. However, as time went on (this study covered a four-year span) the level of the shorter courtship group fell off and the longer courtship group stayed consistent.

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The finding that Altgelt and Meltzer (2021) had that is contrary to the modern perception is that couples who cohabitated prior to marriage reported lower frequency of sex both at the start and throughout the course of the study period of four years (though sex did continue to occur at a similar rate throughout) and the cohabitating group consistently reported lower levels of sexual satisfaction. Another counterintuitive finding was that couples who had children before marriage reported higher levels of sex at marriage onset and four year later reported an increase in sex (pg. 156). Altgelt and Meltzer (2021) discovered there are precipitating affects from actions prior to marriage that have implications on aspects of the marital relationship. It is difficult to predict which pre-marriage actions will have a negative or positive correlation on a marriage generally and their effects on sex frequency and MSSSI.

There are a variety of life circumstances that are known to affect the frequency of sexual intercourse with one of those being pregnancy or attempting to become pregnant. Bond et al. (2022) surveyed 3,015 married couples with 92% married, 43% trying to get pregnant for one month or less, and 35% trying to get pregnant for 2-5 months. 1,927 of the couples surveyed reported the same frequency of sexual intercourse as their partners, 715 females reported higher frequency than their partners and 373 males reported a higher frequency than their partners. Some of the females had been using a tracker app to help with ovulation tracking and had been imputing intercourse times as part of that app.

Bond et al. (2022) found that even when the couple agreed on the number of intercourse times, it often was found to be contrary to the ovulation app. This led the researchers to think there is no real way to know who is correct. It is a fascinating thought to consider the many possible reasons why a couple accounting of frequency of sex would be skewed. It was overly

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intriguing to read that the ladies often gave higher accounting than did the men. Regardless of the reasons, the present study will inquire with the future participants to see if they report similar accounting of sex frequency and if the frequency was affected when/if they ever attempted to become pregnant or had active pregnancies and what effect this had on MSSSI.

There are also many factors that can work to improve the excitement of sexual intercourse while others seem to take all the fun out of it. Brown (2022) looked at couples who were trying to get pregnant and had been unsuccessful in getting pregnant with casual random sexual encounters and therefore had turned to timed intercourse to try to hit ideal ovulation moments to increase their probabilities of successfully conceiving. The participants discussed how timing sex became a type of work, sucked most of the fun out of having intercourse with their spouse, and even made having sex a chore. Brown's (2022) work helped shed light on the idea that stressful or time forced sexual encounters may work functionally to produce a child but has the likelihood of taking the excitement and spontaneity away from the sexual encounter. Even when a high frequency of sexual intercourse is occurring, the pressure of necessity is likely to decrease the probability of experiencing MSSSI.

Sexual frequency is may often be determined by the simple act of initiating sex with one's partner and may be forgone for a variety of reasons, all of which have the propensity to avert experiencing MSSSI. Byers and Heinlein (1989) looked at men and women regarding sexual satisfaction as affected by initiation, responses to initiations, and times when consideration to initiate was thought about but not presented to their partner. There were 77 participants from University in New Brunswick in Canada with 22 men and 55 women.

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During this study they reenforced the idea that men were more apt to initiate (twice as many men had initiated in the previous week) yet made the assertion that, “when initiations were controlled, men and women did not differ in their responses to initiations” (pg. 210) [Another example of why the current author does not prefer quantitative research techniques. Ask yourself, is there any version of reality where a person believes that “men and women did not differ in their response to initiation”?]. Byers and Heinlein (1989) also speculated that women initiating less often than men was likely driven by societal norms (a speculation supported by Gregorie et al, 2023). Participants reported having sex an average of 10.9 times in the month prior to the study participation.

The initiation of sex was more frequent when couple had been together for a shorter amount of time, were younger, living together, presented that they were satisfied with their relationship, and were sexually satisfied. When there was a disagreement about having sex, 60.5% mutually agreed to drop it, 15.8% agreed to come back together at another time, 5.3% agreed to disagree (current author—which sounds like they did not have sex), and 18.4% simply agreeing to have sex (pg. 224). Byers and Heinlein (1989) indicate they would not suggest generalization of these findings across all populations because their participants tended to be younger and satisfied with their relationships.

They further stated that the level of sexual satisfaction has potential to mitigate the number of positive or negative reactions to the initiation of sex. Often an acceptance of initiation was done so nonverbally where a rejection was verbalized. An implication of the work by Byers and Heinlein (1989) would be for older couples to remember their youth or early days of their relationship to help move towards or to continue in experiencing MSSSI. In the vane of

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remembering young love, Impett et al., (2014) indicated that engaging in activities together that have an element of excitement are likely to help to heighten the potential for increased satisfaction and keeping a couple from the traditional waning that often occurs in their passion towards one another over time (pg. 283).

When looking at sexual activities in older adult from the biopsychosocial perspective, DeLamater and Koepse (2015) found there are many factors that affect the frequency of sexual activities (e.g., erectile dysfunction, loss of partner due to death, perception of sex as only being for procreation, etc.). However, many older individuals have found they can either continue to enjoy intercourse or change up what it means to be having sex to experience the satisfaction of being sexual with their partner. The older population, says DeLamater and Koepse (2015), may consider swapping to other sexually motivated action (e.g., cuddling, kissing, etc.) and forgo intercourse altogether while remaining sexually satisfied. As mentioned previously in the intimacy section, intimacy appears to be a key to achieving relational and sexual satisfaction.

When thinking about frequency of sex, it would be an interesting thought to consider if there are certain times of the day when sexual advances are more likely to be accepted by one's spouse. Jocz et al. (2018) looked at the "chronotype" (preferred time of day to sleep or are more alert) regarding males and females preferred times to have sex. They found that regardless of the preferences for nighttime or daytime sex, the women were the determining factor for when sex typically takes place. Interestingly, a person having sex at their preferred time does influence their relationship and sexual satisfaction.

With men their preference for when to have sex was directly associated with their chronotype where the women in their study, regardless of chronotype preference, typically

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wanted to have sex at night. Sexual satisfaction was higher for both couples when they adhered to the woman's time to have sex, and the woman had higher levels of relationship satisfaction. It is doubtful that most people have ever considered what time of day is best for their spouse to be sexually intimate and is an idea that may be an additional piece of information leading a couple to enjoying MSSSI. The attention will be shifting from looking at sexual frequency to now looking at sexual variety and its effects on MSSSI.

Sexual Variety

There are a variety of sexual activities that are often taking place in relationships that some people may consider as being taboo and extreme while others count the very same acts as being "low in adventure". When Blumenstock et al. (2022) looked at the effects of various sexual acts (i.e., penile/vaginal intercourse, giving or receiving oral) found that high frequency was indicative of higher levels of being very emotionally satisfied for both men and women (pg. 959 & 963). An interesting finding by Blumenstock et al. (2022) was that women who participated in penile/anal intercourse in the past year were associated with being very sexually satisfied but did not indicate emotion satisfaction where men participating in penile/anal intercourse had no rise regarding sexual or emotional satisfaction (pg. 959). An encouraging finding is that high frequency of penile/vaginal intercourse and oral sex indicated higher emotional satisfaction. The oddity was that penile/anal intercourse did not improve either sexual or emotional satisfaction for the males (who are likely the ones pressuring the female into the act), yet the female participants indicated higher sexual satisfaction while not experiencing emotional satisfaction.

Some variety can be a positive force to move a couple toward MSSSI where too much variety, especially straying outside of the marital dyad, may be problematic. DeVisser et al.

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(2003) looked at sex habits among heterosexuals. They found that men were far more apt to report having more than one sexual partner in the past year. They speculated this could be accurate or may be the result of societal norms causing men to inflate and women to understate the facts (a contrary finding to Bond et al. (2022) who had women reporting over twice as many encounters as did their male partners).

DeVisser et al. (2003) stated their respondents had nearly all had vaginal intercourse during their last sexual encounter. It was almost equally reported by both men and women that vaginal intercourse, the female masturbating the male, anal sex of the female, and oral stimulation of the male by the female were commonplace, where it was not reported by the females that they received male masturbation or oral stimulation of their vaginas. DeVisser et al. (2003) shared that most respondents indicated intercourse with one person over the past year whether they were married or single. Most of the intercourse reported in this study was taking place among married couples or those in “de facto relationships” (pg. 153).

A very small number of married men and women reported more than one sexual partner over the past year. Of the 8,549 men and 8,274 women who participated in the computer assisted phone interviews, only 214 men and 66 women indicated they were married and had multiple sex partners. The level of fidelity was much higher than was anticipated by the current author which is encouraging from the Christian perspective which being an active Christian is an inclusion criterion of the current study’s future participants. An area that causes one to wonder is why the men in the study by DeVisser et al. (2003) were receiving hand and oral stimulation to their genitals and women are not receiving these stimulating actions. It will be notable to see if the

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future participants of the current study report similar activities or avoided the topic, potentially, as a result of the focus on Christian married couples' and their experiences regarding MSSSI.

Slosarz, W. J. (2000) surveyed 200 married people between the ages of 25-40 and looked at sexual encounters to see what was considered as having brought the highest levels of pleasure. The most frequently reported was penil-vaginal intercourse followed by male mouth on breast, male hand on vagina, hand on breast, intercourse with both achieving orgasm. Intercourse with mutual orgasm was noted to be considered the most pleasurable where hand and oral stimulation were ranked much lower while still inducing pleasure. Slosarz, W. J. (2000) describe these encounters as being "low in adventure" which is implied to be an affect of the large Catholic influence. The men were far more apt to report sexual pleasure as compared with the women in the study. An expectation of the current study would be to bring out aspects of sexual activities that are often unequally enjoyed and through the future participants interviews regarding MSSSI will gain insights to help level the mutual enjoyment of experiences by future recipients of the current study's data.

Relationship Status and Life Event Effects

Relationship status can affect different people in different ways with there being a possible difference in how males and females may react. Blumenstock et al, (2020) found that the women in their study who were cohabitating or married were more than twice as likely to indicate having emotional satisfaction than the women who were dating. The men in their study where twice as likely to report being emotionally satisfied when in a dating relationship (pg. 962). There is no way to know what worldview the participants of this study are seeing life through, where the current study is looking at Christian married couples. An expectation is this

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type of information that will be gathered through performing of the current study will produce different outcome data than the results found in the Blumenstock et al, (2020) and future participants (men and women alike) will report greater emotional satisfaction in their marriage. This is an expectation because the interviews will be of those reporting MSSSI which often points to marital and emotional satisfaction.

There are a variety of life events that influence sexual patterns with pregnancy being one such life event. Dwarica et al. (2019) looked at 52 couples and their sexual patterns during pregnancy. They found that the women indicated a lower level of communication regarding sex, higher levels of vaginismus, and a lower frequency of intercourse. The idea that these couples reported lower frequency was interesting because 65% of the couples reported having intercourse more than weekly. Dwarica et al. (2019) assessed for sexual satisfaction and found that it remained within the range of being sexually satisfied. Whether a couple is in or out of a time of pregnancy, communication is critically important and may help mitigate some of the issues mentioned such as vaginismus and lower frequency of intercourse.

Another potential life event that many couples, unfortunately, face is infidelity. One cannot help but wonder how they may react in such a life event. Whisman and Sanchez (2024) looked at 236 married couples with 12% of men and 9% of women indicating extramarital affairs (this was a bit confusing because later in the article it stated that only couples who remained together after infidelity were included in the study). Couples were an average of 30 years old and married an average of five years. When husbands cheated, the wife knew 62% of the time and when women cheated the men knew about it 57% of the time. Of the spouses who reported no cheating, 9% of the men and 7% of the women were suspected of cheating.

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Whisman and Sanchez (2024) found that husbands and wives were “less satisfied” if their spouse had reported or was believed to have engaged in extramarital sex. They further concluded that those who have had an affair but are keeping it a secret experience lower relationship satisfaction, fear their spouse finding out, and are also conflicted about whether to tell their spouse or continue to keep it from them. Whisman and Sanchez (2024) found that hearing directly from their spouse directly of the partner’s infidelity was better received than hearing from a third party about the infidelity. Such a strain on a relationship has the potential to cause separation or hurt that is so deep that MSSSI would be difficult to achieve and could take considerable time to get back to MSSSI, assuming the marriage can even be salvaged from the wreck of an extramarital affair.

With so many life events that an individual may experience in life and how the individual experience will affect their marriage, it is intriguing to think about how the brain may sway the encounter. Vowels & Mark (2020) shared that the studies they reviewed indicated various outcomes with some indicating that love and desire are different realities that are induced by different areas of the brain, other studies indicating they are of the same brain function, and others indicating a middle ground and stating it depends on the circumstances.

Ultimately Vowels & Mark (2020) found that desire and love are factors of significance for both men and women with relationship satisfaction being a predictor for women. It may be helpful for couples to know that the area of the brain that is activated may ultimately have a direct effect of achieving MSSSI. Whether a brain effect or other factors, a woman can have difficulty with sexual activities if her desire is troubled. Impett et al., (2014) found that women who struggled with a “desire discrepancy” were shown as having sex less frequently and were

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less satisfied with their sexual encounters (pg. 283). The consideration of relationship status and life events will now turn towards the motivations for sex that are experienced by couples.

Motivations for Sex

Life can bring about a plethora of circumstances and situations that lead a person to emotional highs and at other times to emotional lows. It may be that sex with a partner could have an added benefit of affecting emotional issues in a positive manner. Chai & Umberson (2023) researched the effects of stress and depressive attributes and their correlation with intrinsic and extrinsic sexual motivations. They state that intrinsic motivations are ideas of an individual such as “sex is for enjoyment and pleasure and for emotional closeness” (pg. 264). Extrinsic is participating in sexual encounters “to please one’s spouse, because they felt pressured by spouse, and for the sake of the relationship” (pg. 264).

Chai & Umberson (2023) found that intrinsic sexual motivation reduced depressive ideation and conversely extrinsic sexual motivation increased depressive ideation (worsened for men when stress is also present while little difference was noted for women when stress is also present. It is thought that once women reach a certain “saturation” of negative issues their responses appear to flatline) (pg. 269-270). This finding could be a motivating factor for future research to help couples to choose to develop their personal sexual confidence to gain the potential, and likely, benefit of utilizing sexual adventures with their partner to help reduce mental health struggles like depressive ideation.

Many people have had multiple premarital sexual partners where other have had no premarital sexual partners. The potential variance may need to be rectified when finding the person one intends to marry. Garcia and Markey (2007) looked at the effect of previous sexual

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partners to consider if this had an influence on cohabitating couples or those who a person would marry. Their work indicated limited effects on the cohabitating couple but did in fact influence who a person would marry. They found that people tend to marry people with similar sexual histories as themselves.

It was unclear if this was an asked and answered factor with the couples or if the similarity in the number of previous sexual partners was a natural coming together of people with similar mindsets that were able to connect without directly enquiring. Regardless of how couples determined this, the alignment of similarity in past partners who they had intercourse with was found to lead to greater love, relationship satisfaction, and greater commitment to each other when compared to couples whose number of previous partners of intercourse was not similar (Garcia & Markey, 2007). It would be interesting to consider the ideas behind this phenomenon and ask if these alignments occur through conversation about sexual encounters specifically or if it may be the result of the alignment of worldviews. This alignment is likely a positive step on the journey to being able to have MSSSI with their spouse.

There are motivations to participate in or avoid MSSSI that are often overlooked while becoming obvious once considered. Smith et al. (2010) spoke with 447 women who had their tubes tied and found they had desire for sex at higher rates, reached orgasm more quickly, enjoyed sex more, enjoyed naturally occurring vaginal wetness during intercourse, and reported higher levels of relationship satisfaction, as compared with women who had not had their tubes tied. Smith et al. (2010) thought increased pleasure and satisfaction may be in part due to lower stress over the potential for pregnancy and potentially a result of having been on birth control which has the potential to lower libido hormonally. The ironic understanding that a woman who

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is taking birth control to be able to better enjoy sexual intimacy may have depressed sexual desires because of the birth control is helpful knowledge. It was also enlightening to consider that the women in the study who had undergone having their tubes tied had the perceived effect of increasing their uninhibited sexual interest, participation in sexual intimacy, and were found to be experiencing higher relationship satisfaction. These have the real potential to increase MSSSI with their partner and should be considered further and likely will be in the present study's future interviews. This area of the review has looked at aspects of life that affect motivations for sex, but will now look at generational and cultural dynamics that have the propensity to affect a couples ability to enjoy MSSSI.

Generational and Cultural Dynamics

Hirsch and Nathanson (2001) looked at a group of 26 Mexican women with half of the respondents being in Atlanta, GA and the other half (sisters or sisters-in-law) (age 40 and under) residing in Mexico to consider attitudes about sex with their husbands. This work found that older women were apt to have seen their sexual encounters as a service or obligation to be performed using phraseology such as “when he uses me” to discuss intercourse.

The younger ladies desired enjoyment, fulfillment, and attempting to feels sensual for themselves and their husbands (e.g., wearing lingerie), and used terms like “making love”, “being together”, and “having relations” (pgs. 416-417). A thought was shared by one of the older respondents that stated that women used to go into marriage not knowing about sex but focused on cooking and taking care of the children. The more modern females have the perceived advantage of having seen sexual activities in some form or hearing about sexual experiences via TV and Movies allowing them to go into marriage with a much higher

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understanding of sex and the potential for the enjoyment and pleasure they as females can experience.

The ladies in Atlanta also had neighbors who were more informed, aid from the government or the ability to earn their own income, and access to contraceptive tools that empowered them to have a self-identity. The ladies in Mexico, though advanced from previous generations, were typically held to traditional ideas about sex and the women's role in marriage. Rather than using modern contraceptives, the women (especially in Mexico) were taught coitus interruptus (pulling out before ejaculation) or avoiding sex when being fertile as the means of birth control.

One of the interviewees stated that the point when pulling out is necessary to avoid pregnancy is the best part for both male and female and to interrupt at that point is difficult to do in the moment. One lady said I now have seven children and if we keep using this method, I will have twelve. Hirsch and Nathanson (2001) also shared how important and influential the Catholic church is in Mexico and how Sunday is the only day both spouses are not working from sunup to sundown and may be able to enjoy a meal out, shopping, and attending church services where the Atlanta participants typically have many other opportunities for entertainment. This work shows the perspectives of the Mexican culture as influenced by two drastically different locations. It helps to consider how environment affects the potential for MSSSI to occur in a marriage.

Legkauskas & Stankevičienė (2009) did research with the Lithuanian population where there had been heavy influence from Russian communism which had a very conservative view of what was appropriate when it comes to sexuality. Legkauskas & Stankevičienė (2009) quoted

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Zalytis (1985) (a Soviet-era writer) as stating that men were not able to resist the temptations of a women so females would have to be the resistance and saw it as the women's fault when sex occurred outside of marriage (pg. 22). Writers of Zalytis's type believed sex outside of marriage was increasing and blamed it on waning morals, more readily available contraceptives, and the media's influence (pg. 22). Ironically the Russian influenced stance sounds much like the purity culture concerns mentioned much earlier in this review. Once again, when a woman must serve as the gate keeper, it would be very difficult to find pleasure in the resulting sexual act.

Lesch and Adams (2016) looked at sexual habits among colored low-income farm workers in South Africa. This population has typically been observed for negative attributes that lead to the spread of HIV and other STDs. Lesch and Adams (2016) decided to look at the positive aspects of the sexual experiences of this population. Their work helped to see the heavy influence of the Christian faith on what is constituted as right and good. Unfortunately, inappropriate actions of males, like sexual intercourse with those who are not their spouse, are often overlooked. One participant said her husband had sex with other women early in their marriage and she took him in the bushes and beat him. He later said he does not do that anymore because she would hurt the other women.

There were many respectable ideas shared by Lesch and Adams (2016) such as being a couple being hindered from having sex together as often as they wished due to their living in one room with their children or other family members. The couple would either have to wait until everyone was asleep or find another place where they could be sexually intimate. They shared some interesting phrases that referenced having sex like "are we going to Cape Town tonight" (Cape Town was a nice city and they were rarely able to go there). An unfortunate idea that

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seemed to be present from the Christian perspective was the idea that the woman is somehow responsible to satisfy her husband in a type of gatekeeping role to keep him from wondering to other females (another instance that is similar to the purity culture mentioned previously).

Though it is true the Bible refers to the man and woman giving sexual rights to one another, it should not be inferred that the man is without his own moral duty to remain faithful to his spouse (current author). Lesch and Adams (2016) had one participant who referred to a room in the backyard where they would go to be sexually intimate. He stated that often he would give her the look, and she would come with him to the room while on other occasions she would give him the look. What a great picture of a husband and wife desiring one another and having a special way to communicate that desire to one another. Though less convenient, they made MSSI a priority and moved to make it a reality.

Pierce et al. (2013) were able to gather an incredible amount of public data in Denmark due to the way that nation tracks income and medical information. They looked to see if erectile dysfunction (ED) medication was being taken at higher levels by men whose wife out earned them financially. Their work indeed noted a 10% increase in the number of men taking ED medication when their wives even slightly out earned them financially. Pierce et al. (2013) also noted increased stress and insomnia among wives who earned nearly equal or greater incomes as their male spouses. An interesting thought is regarding Denmark's progressive mindset towards the roles of women in society and asking: If this dynamic of ED medication is present there where traditional norms have been challenged and often ignored, what affect would be seen if the same data could be gather in a more traditionally minded nation?

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Rigo and Saroglou (2018) seem to have a skewed view of religious groups, namely the Christian and Islamic ideas they purport to be studying. It is possible that their pool of participants was from very conservative sects of each. Rigo and Saroglou (2018) indicate that both Christian and Islamic views are similar when it comes to sexuality, and each scored almost identically on the questions asked during the study. Rigo and Saroglou (2018) have arrived at the understanding that both religious groups find sex to be more utilitarian and frown upon seeking pleasure or engaging in fantasies. According to Rigo and Saroglou (2018) both religious groups are less likely to engage in intercourse or masturbation due to the guilt associated with such actions.

The study by Rigo and Saroglou (2018) even goes as far as stating that the “similarities between the two studies (Islamic and Christian) underline the fact that religion’s suspicion of sexuality is not restricted to Christianity, whose theology is perceived as having amplified sexual guilt, but extends to the second major world religion, Islam” (pg. 193). It is clearly a statement of bias to say, “...whose theology is perceived as having amplified sexual guilt...” (pg. 193). It is not the purpose of this review to criticize authors, however, the Christian faith has verses such as 1 Corinthians 7:3, "A husband should give to his wife her sexual rights, and likewise a wife to her husband" (NET). This seems to be a bit more involved than procreating. Also, you can read in Song of Solomon verses such as 7:7-9, “Your stature is like a palm tree, and your breasts are like clusters of grapes. I want to climb the palm tree and take hold of its fruit stalks. May your breasts be like the clusters of grapes and may the fragrance of your breath be like apricots! May your mouth be like the best wine, flowing smoothly for my beloved, gliding gently over our lips as we sleep together” (NET). These verses indicate that Solomon had some sensually motivated plans

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with his lady that likely achieved MSSSI. There are many more verses that could be used to illustrate the Christian faith is pro pleasure and fantasy when directed at one's spouse and experiencing MSSSI.

Skoblow et al., (2023) looked at older couples and the attributes that effected their sexual activity frequency and enjoyment. They found that the individuals who had a more positive view of aging (what they refer to as perception of aging) were far more likely to be engaged in and enjoying sexual activity. A finding that seems counterintuitive was that the actor's attitude towards aging did not show to have a significant effect on the partner's attitude and outcomes. Skoblow et al., (2023) saw the value of being sexually active and made the suggestion that counselors who work with older people help them to work toward a better perception of aging and break the no sex in old age stereotype.

Smith et al. (2021) looked at the association between cognitive decline and sexual satisfaction and found that a higher level of sexual satisfaction had a significant association with a lower likelihood of cognitive impairment where other areas such as romance and emotional intimacy were not found to indicate a positive or negative effect. With the evidence pointing towards a lower likelihood of dementia with higher levels of sexual satisfaction, it was suggested that clinicians assess older individuals for levels of sexual satisfaction and make referrals to help lead to improvements with their sexual satisfaction. Smith et al. (2021) concluded by telling their readers that their effort has added to the girth of information that points to the importance of relational quality and intimate wellbeing to promote long term sustainability of cognitive abilities.

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Busy schedules and heavy work expectations can be detrimental to sexual satisfaction. Tan (2021) found the married women in Singapore they surveyed were far more likely to have sex during weekends. The age group of 25-29 had a higher frequency of sexual activity than did the 30-34 age group. Women who were not stressed or had average stress and women who were not tired indicated higher levels of sexual intercourse within the previous two weeks of the study (pg.2584). Regardless of the culture, it is likely that these ideas around business and tiredness will translate as they effect MSSI.

Dew et al., (2020) has a take on sexual satisfaction that is well reasoned and strived 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 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. Here the focus will shift from cultural dynamics to the effects often associated with pornography use.

Pornography and Hypersexuality

This section will look at literature concerning pornography use regarding its effects on individuals and couples to see if it encourages or reduces the potential of MSSI. Floyd et al. (2020) looked at 493 participants (220 male, 273 female), with 66% married and 34% in a monogamous dating relationship and had intentionally used pornography in the last 6 months. 79% of the respondents were Caucasians with the remaining 21% being mixed race indicating findings may be different if other ethnic groups were in the majority. This work looked at

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variations of the effects of pornography use and correlations with sexual shame, sexual satisfaction, relationship satisfaction, self-forgiveness, and moral disapproval.

Floyd et al. (2020) did not find support for their hypothesis regarding relationship satisfaction being negatively moderated by the moral disapproval of pornography use (H1). The use of pornography with moral disapproval of pornography did increase sexual shame (H2a). The use of pornography with moral disapproval of pornography did decrease sexual satisfaction (H2b). Sexual shame was found to decrease sexual satisfaction (H3a). Sexual shame was found to decrease couple's satisfaction (H4a). Sexual satisfaction was found to positively affect couple's satisfaction (H4b). There was no evidence to promote the idea of self-forgiveness effecting sexual shame due to pornography use (H5). Support was found to indicate that "a potential sequence may exist in which pornography use, amongst those high in moral disapproval of pornography, is associated with increased sexual shame, which is associated with decreased sexual satisfaction, leading to a subsequent reduction in couple's satisfaction" (H6). When living contrary to a person's worldview, it is anticipated that their will be moral angst and not reconciling the misalignment of actions and values are likely to lead a couple away from MSSSI. The work by Floyd et al. (2020) demonstrates many ways that pornography use coupled with moral disapproval is, at best, a strain on sexual satisfaction and couple's satisfaction.

Perry & Snawder (2017), "[A]s pornography consumption increased, parents who attended religious services more frequently showed declining communication with their children, compared to those who attended religious services less often." It becomes difficult to carry on personal conversations with loved ones when living out of alignment with a personally respected value system. Attending service and having guilt and shame associated with the misaligned

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pornography use will cause ongoing issues in a person's home that are not apt to subside before removal of the conflicting actions causing the angst. When conflict has invaded a person individually, it is bound to broaden its effects from the individual to the marriage which will greatly reduce the probability of enjoying MSSl.

Perry & Whitehead (2019) found that people who view pornography and attend church once a week or more were more likely to divorce, have affairs, have lower marital happiness, and to have the lowest levels of sexual satisfaction when compared to nonchurch attenders. Perry & Whitehead (2019), "...[I]t is likely that men who attend worship services more often (indicating greater attachment to a religious community) or have a higher opinion of the Bible (indicating it serves as a source of moral authority in their lives) but also view pornography fairly regularly are more likely to experience guilt and shame that potentially colors their evaluation of their own sex lives." Throughout this section the theme is repeated in study after study that what individuals get burdened with will affect the potential of a couple to have MSSl.

Regnerus (2016) were considering why four studies showed different levels of pornography consumption among US citizens. They found that longer term frames of time rather than shorter time frames may have caused recall bias. Their suggestion was to use shorter more specific time recalling especially when sensitive topics are being reviewed and the utilization of more specific survey methods. Additionally, it was found that individuals being interviewed in person were found to report lower pornography use than those respondents answering survey questions via a computer where a greater perception of anonymity was present. When doing research regarding sensitive information it was suggested to consider not doing the interview face to face and not letting too much time to lapse before gathering the data from participants to

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help with gaining more accurate information. The current study interview process will need to take these concepts into consideration to optimize the opportunities with participants.

Reid et al. (2016) looked at 52 religious and 105 nonreligious men who had been assessed for hypersexuality as participants in the DSM-5 Field Trial. They looked at the occurrence of hypersexual behaviors and psychological behaviors to see the interaction of religiosity with these issues. Minimal effects were found while there was a lower instance of anxiety and substance use found among the religious population as compared to the non-religious. The religious did report higher levels of depression as compared to the non-religious where the other factors considered were very similar (i.e., shame, life satisfaction, impulsivity, and stress proneness).

Reid et al. (2016) did find that though the religious group had similar hypersexual encounters as the non-religious, the religious group had far less lifetime sexual partners, were more likely to handle the urges individually, and were less likely to use drugs and alcohol. The non-religious reported 10 different partners and the religious 5 different partners over the past year with these being affairs or sex workers. Reid et al. (2016) said they did not find support for the idea that sexual shame is more prevalent among the religious group which seems to be contradicted by the religious group having higher levels of depression. Further, it was reported that the non-religious and religious had similar levels of hypersexuality behaviors [It should have been included what population the DSM-5 Field Trial surveyed because if it was taken from a sexual issues ward of a mental hospital it would be difficult to take it seriously as compared to a random sampling process.] It is apparent that hypersexuality can have detrimental effects on a

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couple having MSSSI, especially if one spouse is stepping out on the marriage multiple time a year.

Roza et al. (2024) looked at treatments for problematic porn use (PPU) with Cognitive Behavioral Therapy being found useful by affecting impulse control, emotional regulation, and behavioral change. Some studies discussed the use of opioid antagonists (e.g., naltrexone) and antidepressants with one mentioning the use of repetitive transcranial magnetic stimulation. None of these were seen by Roza et al. (2024) to be strongly supported curative modalities. There is no doubt that there is hard work to be undertaken by those who find themselves dealing with PPU. This process of recovery and restoration will certainly distract from MSSSI but with diligence may be able, with time, to restore a relationship and once again move towards MSSSI with a spouse who has been neglected or abandoned due to PPU.

Short et al., (2015), had 223 participants ages 18 to 53, indicated, “When asked whether internet pornography interfered in certain life domains, participants reported that internet pornography interfered with their relationship with God the most (16.1 %), their spirituality second (14.3 %), while sleep and religious participation came next (6.3 %) and (4.9 %), respectively. Interference in other life domains was reported <4 % in the remaining areas; this included marriage, other relationships, job/school, finances, health, belief in God, and membership to religious affiliation.” Short et al., (2015), examined the effects of the absence or presence of religiosity (religious and non-religious) on frequency of internet pornography use. Non-religious individuals viewed internet pornography more often (97.82 min/week) than religious individuals (61.60 min/week).

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Short et al., (2015), found that people who do not act or live according to their spiritual values had a higher level of pornography use. It was unclear whether departing from spiritual values leads to porn use or if porn use leads to a departure from spiritual values. This article had a finding that gave the impression that using pornography only affected a small portion of the marriages. Consider the data in their study stated that on average the non-religious was viewing pornography 97 minutes each week and the religious were viewing pornography 61 minutes a week and ask yourself if this is a reasonable conclusion that pornography use only had a small effect on marriages. Further, how is it possible to have such a significant effect on relationship with God, spirituality, and religious participation and not cause significant harm to a marriage. It seems apparent that the use of pornography as described by Short et al., (2015) would make MSSSI to be an unrealistic expectation.

Tan et al. (2022) looked at problematic internet pornography use (PIPU) and found that persons with higher PIPU were also found to have higher incidence of depression, anxiety, and stress. These effects were seen in both sexes, but the levels of distress were stronger in females. Tan et al. (2022) saw this as being an effect of conservative cultural norms. Their work points the counseling field to consider ways to educate individuals regarding the use of porn with a gender specific perspective of the potentiality of negative outcomes being associated with its use. Tan et al. (2022) seems to point the finger at conservative values to explain the cause of depression, stress, and stress. Making the speculation (current author) that conservative is code for religious this finding is contrary to Reid et al. (2016) (discussing hypersexuality vs. pornography use) who did find higher levels of depression among the religious but almost equal levels of stress with the two groups and lower levels of anxiety among the religious group.

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Volk et al., (2019) said, "...there has been little work understanding the factors that may attenuate or exacerbate the relationship between pornography users' moral incongruence and developing negative psychological functioning." When there was a perceived addiction to pornography accompanied with moral disapproval, sexual shame did indeed have a mediating effect. Pornography users blaming others was found to affect the path of moral disapproval and perceived addiction, as well as perceived addiction and depression.

Blaming others appears to be intended to alleviate guilt but exacerbates the negatives feelings rather than eliminating the feelings. It is a notable distinction that those who blame other for their disapproved of behaviors experience higher levels of negative feelings. This parallels with the Genesis account of Adam and Eve when Adam ate the forbidden fruit and told God, in essence, this is your fault God because you put the woman here and she caused me to eat it (Genesis 3:12). A valuable lesson to be gleaned is to own the mistakes made and that blaming others for a personal misstep has the potential to have unintended negative consequences. There may be potential questions for the present study to see how future participants respond to being guilty of a wrong and how their method of addressing it affects MSSSI.

"Sexual shame generates a high level of self-consciousness. While perceiving and ruminating on the fear that deficiencies in the sexual self will be exposed, a hiding process is activated to prevent others from knowing the true self" (Volk et al., 2016). Religiosity did point toward the likelihood of felt moral disapproval and moral disapproval pointed towards the perception of a pornography addiction. Volk et al. (2016), encourages the compassionate and whole person (bio-pycho-social-spiritual) care of persons who have experienced the unintended consequences of sexual shame due to pornography use. This is encouraging mental health

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practitioners while the same admonition could be directed at spouses of those in the grips of pornography addition to be compassionate in their interaction which may have restorative benefits that could lead back to MSSSI. The end of 1 Peter 3:15 say "...with meekness and fear" indicating taking the needed message to a person remembering all individuals have faults and to avoid getting on one's high horse of piety.

Wilt et al., (2016) was referring to works by Grubbs, Exline, Pargament, Volk, & Lindberg (2014) and Exline & Rose (2013) when saying, "Specifically, these studies showed that perceived addiction to internet pornography was concurrently related to divine struggle (perceived conflict with a deity), moral struggle (perceived conflict between one's behavior and religious/spiritual values) and interpersonal struggle (conflicts with others regarding religious/spiritual issues) in large samples of adults and college students." Among religious participants there was moral disapproval experienced from the use of pornography while little concern was displayed regarding their compulsions to view pornography or concern regarding acquiring the pornography to view. (Wilt et al., 2016). This work seemed to attempt to separate out "moral disapproval" from "religious/spiritual" as if to indicate one is not a direct correlation to the other. When living in direct conflict with a personal held value or worldview it is difficult to be at peace individually, which is apt to affect a marriage negatively and leading a couple away from the ability to enjoy MSSSI.

Wright and Herbenick (2022) consider the relationship between pornography use and relationship satisfaction and found when pornography use was frequently viewed it led men to experience lower relationship satisfaction while this was not the case for the women. Wright and Herbenick (2022) considered sexual orientation, race, relational length, religious participation,

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moral disapproval of pornography as mediators of higher pornography uses and relationship satisfaction with none having a significant mediating effect.

Pornography consumption by white men (not white women or men and women of color) was found to be related to lower relationship satisfaction (pg. 3844). It was suggested that a religious person who continues to view pornography, even though its use is seen as being morally disapproved, may intensify the connection between pornography use and lower relationship satisfaction (pg. 3840). Men who are using pornography are possibly doing so for enjoyment and pleasure, but it appears this has a selfish aspect about it that distracts from MSSSI with their spouse. It is puzzling to see this effect for white men but not for the other groups included in the data which speaks to a need to further consider the aspects that may lead to such outcomes.

Yucel and Gassanov (2010) did work to consider the effects of one spouse's actions (the actor) on the other (the partner) in heterosexual couples. They considered factors like cohabitation and sex with each other before marriage, infidelity, and porn use regarding how these variants affect the sexual frequency and satisfaction of the couple (pg. 725). Their results indicated that couples were found to be having sex at an average of six times in the previous month, 8 % of wives and 10% of husbands had ever cheated, 12% of husbands and 30% of wives reported their spouse viewed pornography, one in five couples waited until marriage to have sex with each other, over half cohabitated before marriage, and 25% of husbands and 21% of wives had cohabitated with someone other than their spouse (pg. 732).

Yucel and Gassanov (2010) found infidelity to be negatively correlated with sexual satisfaction. Women were negatively affected by their husband's porn use, the inverse was not

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found, while when both partners consumed porn no significant association was found. When one spouse is sexually satisfied the other is typically satisfied as well. A slightly positive correlation was found with those couples who waited until marriage to have sex, while a slightly negative correlation was found with those who cohabitated before marriage. Cohabitation with someone else had a significantly negative correlation on sexual satisfaction for both men and women.

An unexpected finding was that infidelity had no significant actor effect on men or women (pg. 733). Those reporting sexual satisfaction were found to be having sex more often than the dissatisfied participants (pg. 735). It seems unrealistic to report no actor effects on men or women as a result of infidelity and if true, there needs to be research that parses out the possible reasons for no actor affect and ask are they simply selfish, or something more extreme (e.g., narcissistic, psychopathic, etc).

Through this section there have been many ideas shared regarding pornography use and hypersexuality with nearly all information pointing in a negative direction as it regards MSSSI. Overall, couples need to have an open and honest dialogue that helps them to be aware of one another's peculiarities and to be able to assist one's partner in living in alignment with their values system. It seems a reasonable conclusion that pornography use (specifically problematic use) and hypersexuality are killers of a couple experiencing MSSSI. The attention will now briefly turn to mindfulness.

Mindfulness

Mindfulness has been a popular tool in the counseling world for years to help clients to be present in each moment and to not miss experiences happening right in front of them but overlooked due to being distracted. Leavitt et al. (2021) looked at the potential that utilization of

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mindfulness in sexual encounters may have on a married couple's sexual satisfaction. Much like the benefits of mindfulness techniques to help slow life down to experience the intricacies of life, their work indicates utilization of mindfulness techniques in sexual encounters has the probability of increasing sexual orgasm for male and female and especially increasing the consistency of orgasm for the female.

Helping each partner to be nonjudgmental, being present, and using their senses to make the encounter focused and intense has the propensity to enhance the experience for the male (who is typically achieving orgasm with sexual intercourse) and hopefully considerably increase the likelihood of more consistent orgasms for the female (Leavitt et al., 2021). The literature reviewed for this work has shed much light on the present study. This work by Leavitt et al. (2021) on mindfulness is a great value and one of the most pertinent works to speak to the occurrence of MSSSI. When couples learn to bring their focus from all the distractions of the world and bring their gaze (internally and externally) to solely focus on their spouse in moments of sexual intimacy, the opportunity to experience MSSSI with one's spouse has improved exponentially.

Conclusion and Moving Forward

Kleinplatz et al. (2009) offer research based on 64 interviews regarding what constitutes "optimal sexuality" and arrived at eight major components identified to describe attributes leading to great sex: "being present, connection, deep sexual and erotic intimacy, extraordinary communication, interpersonal risk-taking and exploration, authenticity, vulnerability and transcendence." Being "totally immersed in the moment" was considered by the participants to

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be a key to optimal sex. One participant stated, “The room could be on fire, and I probably wouldn’t have noticed.”

Another participant described great sex as being like a blanket that wraps around the two partners engaged together and noticing the experience between them rather than each person individually. A different participant said, "Inside my body I'm the other person's body and we're just kind of all one together at that moment." Kleinplatz et al. (2009) went on to say they found “extraordinary communication” and “heightened empathy” were found to be critical for great sex. Also, great sex was described as an adventure where you come to know yourself and your partner and to achieve greater depths (i.e., “discovery process”). One lady said humor is necessary because to roll yourselves up in an origami ball can look funny. Kleinplatz et al. (2009) found the common themes like techniques, novelty, variety, and physiological functioning are not nearly as important as the mindsets or intentions of the couple engaged together. The work by Kleinplatz et al. (2009) really speaks to the direction the current study is focused by looking at the attributes that bring about MSSSI.

There have been many works discussed in this literature review that have helped to promote the awareness of negatives and to engage in aspects of relationships and individualistic activities that promote the experiences of mutually satisfying sexual intimacy (MSSI). Many of the works about sexual intimacy generally, in marriages, and occasionally considering religiosity have been approached from a quantitative perspective. The current study has the high expectation of adding significantly to the understanding of “What are the experiences of Christian heterosexual married couples who would describe their sexual intimacy as mutually satisfying?” and more specifically add to the breadth of knowledges by performing a

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Transcendental Phenomenological Qualitative study that brings clarifying descriptive dialogue to the table. It is a value to have numerical data to help consider various aspects of sexual intimacy, but it is the belief of the current researcher that having clear reporting of the descriptive ideas of the future participants will provide data to help clinicians, students, teachers, and individuals to gain great value and hopefully unlock cues to propel others to experiencing MSSl.

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Appendices

Appendix A

MODIFICATION OF THE VAN KAAM METHOD OF ANALYSIS OF PHENOMENOLOGICAL DATA (Moustakas, 1994, pg. 120-121)

Using the complete transcription of each research participant:

1. Listing and Preliminary Grouping

List every expression relevant to the experience. (Horizontalization)

2. Reduction and Elimination: To determine the Invariant Constituents:

Test each expression for two requirements:

- a. Does it contain a moment of the experience that is a necessary and sufficient constituent for understanding it?
- b. Is it possible to abstract and label it? If so, it is a horizon of the experience.

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Expressions not meeting the above requirements are eliminated. Overlapping, repetitive, and vague expressions are also eliminated or presented in more exact descriptive terms. The horizons that remain are the invariant constituents of the experience.

3. Clustering and Thematizing the Invariant Constituents:

Cluster the invariant constituents of the experience that are related into a thematic label. The clustered and labeled constituents are the core themes of the experience.

4. Final Identification of the Invariant Constituents and Themes by Application:

Validation

Check the invariant constituents and their accompanying theme against the complete record of the research participant.

(1) Are they expressed explicitly in the complete transcription?

(2) Are they compatible if not explicitly expressed?

(3) If they are not explicit or compatible, they are not relevant to the coresearcher's experience and should be deleted.

5. Using the relevant, validated invariant constituents and themes, construct for each coresearcher an Individual Textural Description of the experience.

Include verbatim examples from the transcribed interview.

6. Construct for each coresearcher an Individual Structural Description of the experience based on the Individual Textural Description and Imaginative Variation.

Literature Review

7. Construct for each research participant a Textural-Structural Description of the meanings and essences of the experience, incorporating the invariant constituents and themes.

From the Individual Textural-Structural Descriptions, develop a Composite Description of the meanings and essences of the experience, representing the group as a whole.

Appendix B **Carroll et al. (2006)**

