

The Mysterious Nature of Desire

As a Registered Sex Therapist, I often hear about people's struggles with low sexual desire.

Many couples describe how much they appreciate their partner's positive qualities, such as being reliable, faithful and a stable parent, but they report having difficulties feeling sexual with their mate. Although the research is quite varied, I would say about 2 in 5 couples can be affected by low sexual desire. One of the most common situations is desire discrepancy, which occurs when one partner desires more sexual activity than the other on a regular basis.

Of course, today's busy lifestyles can certainly cause fatigue and exhaustion which lowers desire. But, there is another aspect to this problem. Desire is strange. It is very nebulous. It weaves and winds, and it can change on a moment's notice. Desire can drive you wild and lead you to do things that you never thought you would do.

Have you ever had the experience of going back to visit an ex-partner only to realize that you do not feel the same way about him/her, and may even wonder what attracted you to this person in the first place? This experience can help us to understand the nature of desire. It depends on a variety of factors that can change from moment to moment, and it can be helpful to be aware of them.

We usually want something when we cannot have it. We may want it even more when it is scarce or rare. The object of desire can change over time, and different life stages usher in different experiences of what is desirable. Esther Perel, author of *Mating in Captivity*, emphasizes the importance of imagination in desire. She feels it is important to ask yourself what you might want out of your erotic life. Do you want to break the rules, be naughty, be someone else for awhile, be in control, be dominated, be spontaneous, be playful, or something else entirely? It is essential to know what it is that "does it" for you.

It seems that it is helpful to be somewhat selfish about what we desire, since being self-focused can help to ensure satisfaction. A study in *The Canadian Journal of Human Sexuality* (Leveque and Pedersen, 2012) cited the importance of being self-focused in order to be sexually satisfied. Perhaps, this is because you have to know yourself, know what you like, what you want and do not want, and be able to communicate it to your partner. Desire requires self-knowledge because you need to know what turns you on, as well as be able to ask for it.

Absence and longing also seem to create desire, perhaps because it makes the person more elusive and special. Other factors that seem to relate to desire in my experience include when you can laugh with the other person, when you are surprised by him/her, and when you have the opportunity to see the person in his/her element. Perel has researched some of these ideas, and she refers to the quality of *radiance* as being connected to desire. When we see the object of our desire shining with his/her best qualities, or sought after by others, we can find ourselves increasingly drawn to him/her.

There are many factors that can affect desire, and it is essential to work as an intimate team to keep desire alive in your relationship. Incorporating adventure and discovery into your relationship, as well as unique and fun experiences, can help to fuel desire. Taking a few calculated risks together can help you to see new sides of your partner that remind you that you do not know everything there is to know about him/her. This can bring a rush of excitement and vitality to your relationship, and remind you of why you fell in love with this person in the first place.