INTERACTION CONSULTANTS

Conflict of Libidos?

Libido refers to sexual drive. Over the course of the human life span, libido can increase or decrease depending upon numerous factors. Those factors can be divided into biological, psychological and social.

Of the biological factors, a woman's menstrual cycle is known to alter libido with increases occurring consistent with ovulation and decreases at or about menstruation. Similarly as hormone levels change and alter during pregnancy, some women may experience a decrease in libido, whereas others may actually experience an increase. Menopause again brings a change of hormone levels to which some women respond with lower libido while others with higher libido. From a biological perspective, men tend to have a steadier libido, although some, particularly during middle age, may have a decrease in testosterone leading to a lower libido. Erectile dysfunction may occur and be the result of numerous medical conditions. Certain substances can affect the libido of men and women equally. Medications, use of non-prescription drugs and alcohol use can all negatively affect libido as can illnesses.

Psychological factors affecting libido occur equally for men and women. These include how one view's oneself and body as well as factors such as stress, conflict or fatigue. Anxiety over meeting a partners sexual needs can also affect libido as can other factors affecting the relationship.

Social factors affecting libido include religious beliefs, ideas related to sexuality and aging, as well as other social norms.

In view of so many factors that can affect libido, it is common that a couple's mutual libido can be at different levels. Hence one person may feel particularly aroused or desirous of sexual pleasure or intimacy, whereas the other person may be disinterested and even to the degree of repulsion. Such differences in libido between partners can be a source of serious conflict. The challenge in a relationship is to meet both persons' needs as much as possible without imposing, undermining or causing bad feelings in either person. It is sometimes the case that when one is faced with a decreased libido in their partner, this is taken as a reflection of the relationship. While in some cases this is true, in other cases, this is not true.

In the event couples are faced with a conflict of libidos, they are urged to talk about their differences as a starting point. It may be that one partner is unaware of the needs and differences between them. For some folks a discussion can bring about necessary changes to thus help both persons meet their needs. If a discussion is not sufficient to address the differences and find a resolution, it may be that a meeting with a physician is necessary to determine the nature of the differences and the kind of change or intervention to revolve the conflict. Interventions may be medicinal or hormonal or may require lifestyle or habit changes. Interventions may also include counselling, particularly if the underlying problem is considered to be psychological or owing to the relationship. Further, discussion with a counsellor can provide tips or education to better meet one's own needs or that of the partner's.

A conflict of libido does not have to be a deal breaker for the relationship, nor do people have to suffer in silence or look to would-be solutions that could actually bring more harm than good. Discussion with your partner, medical investigation and/or counselling can lead to greater satisfaction in this area of life.

Gary Direnfeld, MSW, RSW
(905) 628-4847
gary@yoursocialworker.com
http://www.yoursocialworker.com

Gary Direnfeld is a social worker. Courts in Ontario, Canada, consider him an expert on child development, parent-child relations, marital and family therapy, custody and access recommendations, social work and an expert for the purpose of giving a critique on a Section 112 (social work) report. Call him for your next conference and for expert opinion on family matters. Services include counselling, mediation, assessment, assessment critiques and workshops.