

## **Sex, What's That? I'm Married!**

It's not a joke; most married men I know claim to have less sex than they did when they were single. This seems to be confirmed by the Durex Survey (2001), since couples living together claim to have sex 146 times per year, while married couples make love only 98 times per year. Yet going from roughly three times a week to two hardly seems to justify the statement. But why is it that simply being married reduces the number of times we choose to enjoy each other's bodies?

After working with couples for over the past nearly 20 years, and going through my own set of divorces, I have come to the conclusion that marital dissatisfaction and a lack of sexual intimacy go hand in hand. Men feel it as a lack of sex; women feel it as a lack of emotional connectivity. But both feel it as something lacking in the relationship. Men tend to blame their wives for being disinterested or lacking in sexual drive, and women tend to blame their husbands for not having a good emotional I.Q. Yet both are unhappy. Hmm. The thing that seems to be consistent is that they each blame each other.

Blame is an old survival mechanism left over from our years as cavemen. We needed to know who was to blame for things in order to survive our harsh environment. This is not something we need to hang on to in our modern society. The assignment of blame acts as a tool to focus our actions and provides us with clear understanding of what to do next. But it also distances us from those we love. Our old brain, our mammalian primitive brain stem tells us that the one we blame is threatening our survival. This does not make us want to make love to them. It makes us want to protect ourselves, in other words, distance ourselves from that person.

Blaming each other and feeling like a victim of the other's behavior, in my experience tends to lead to divorce. Yet somehow, this is the behavior of choice. What might happen if both partners actually took ownership of the situation and decided that they are both responsible for the lack of sexual and emotional intimacy?

If we can understand that our old brain is in gear when we are in a blaming stance, then maybe we could make a different choice. When we can recognize that we are blaming our partner for something, be it lack of sex or lack of emotional connection, it would behoove us to take ownership of our own part in the problem. We may not be sure what it is; but rest assured you have as much a part in the problem as your mate.

The alternative is to begin to explore what is in the way of the thing that you want. Let your partner know that you want things to be different and that you recognize that you have not made it easy for the two of you to have what you want. Simply admitting that you recognize that you have a part in the problem will take your partner out of defensive mode and improve your communication.

This is hard for people who habitually take the victim stance. When we think that we are always the one being abused it's difficult to recognize our part in a problem. In fact, those of us stuck in believing that we can do nothing to change our circumstance are creating the problem as Eldridge Cleaver said, "If you are not part of the solution, you are part of the problem." So if you think you are the Victim, think again. If you are not actively working at solving the problems you have, you are as responsible as the person you are blaming for the problem!

Owning your part, even if you don't fully understand it, opens you up to being curious about what you can do differently. Letting your partner know that you want to know what you can do differently, immediately takes down barriers between you. Suddenly you are not each other's enemy, but instead, team mates trying to work out a plan that will work for you both.

Whether it is more sex you want, or more emotional intimacy, you both are responsible for making it safe for each other. If you have been accusatory and blaming your partner for the problems your partner will not feel safe to explore the problems. They will feel defensive and ashamed, fearful of the topic, and generally untrusting of your motives. Moving out of a blaming position by communicating that you have as much to do with the problem as your partner, you allow safety to evolve.

No one wants to make love when they don't feel safe. No one wants to open up emotionally to someone they don't trust. If you are not having sex or emotional connection in your relationship, you have to own your part in not making it safe for those things to occur.

Now on my third marriage, I have finally learned to own my part in my relationships. I don't have to blame him when things go wrong. I know that there is something I can do to improve things, even if it only means saying "I'm sorry. I know things are not right between us. What can I do?"