



# Finding Healthy & Satisfying Sexuality through self-acceptance

Lisa Firestone, Ph.D.



# 3

## Parts to the Webinar

PART 1:  
What is healthy  
sexuality?

PART 2:  
What gets  
in the way?

PART 3:  
What we can  
do about it



# PART1

What is healthy sexuality?

# What is Healthy Sexuality?

Healthy sex requires that these conditions be met:

- Consent
- Equality
- Respect
- Trust
- Safety



//

*Healthy sexuality is a natural extension of affection, tenderness, and friendship between two people. When both partners are fully present, in close emotional contact with each other, and enjoying giving and receiving affection and sexual pleasure, their lovemaking contributes a great deal to their emotional well-being and overall satisfaction in life.*

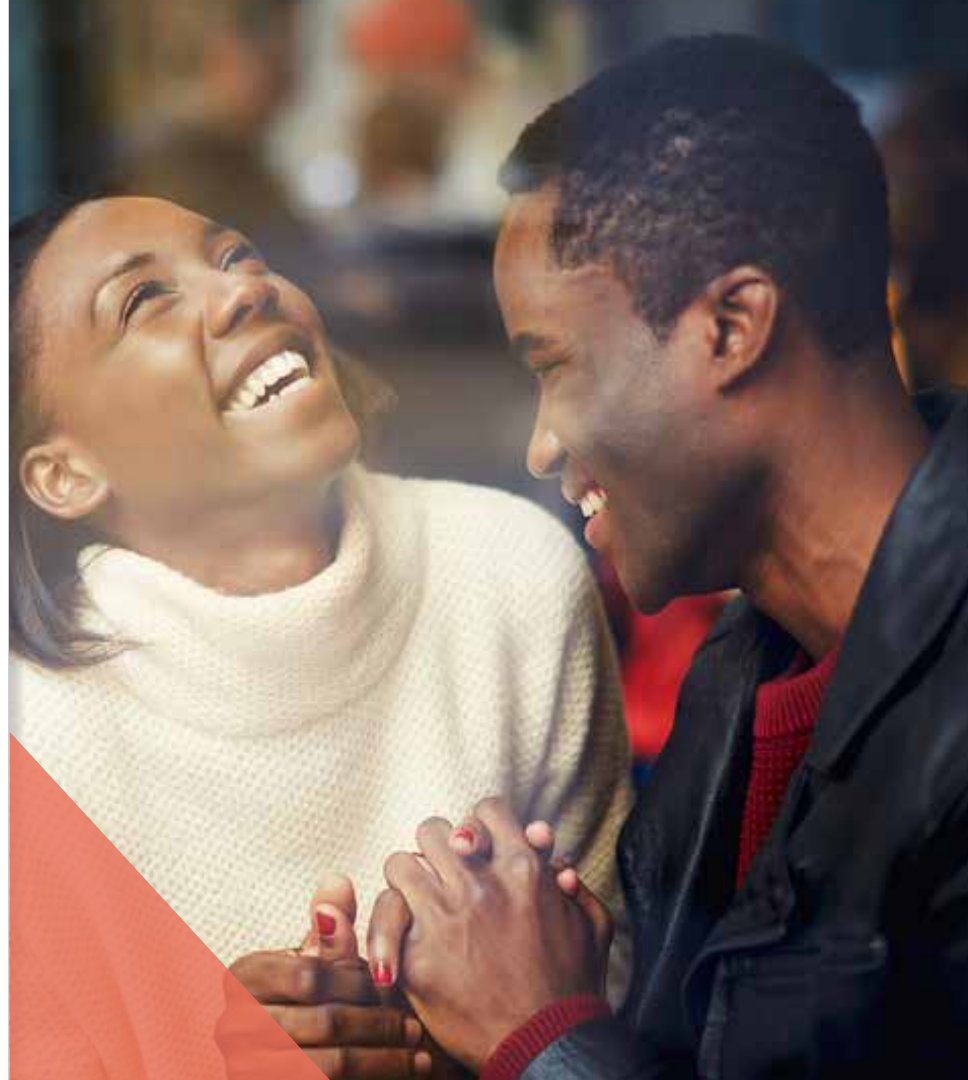
- Sex and Love in Intimate Relationships



# Sexual Health

*Sexual health is a state of physical, mental and social well-being in relation to sexuality. It requires a positive and respectful approach to sexuality and sexual relationships, as well as the possibility of having pleasurable and safe sexual experiences, free of coercion, discrimination and violence.*

- World Health Organization





# Healthy Attitudes about Sexuality:

- Appreciate one's own body
- Affirm that human development includes sexual development
- Interact with both genders in respectful, appropriate ways
- Affirm one's own sexual orientation and respect the sexual orientation of others
- Express love and intimacy in appropriate ways
- Develop and maintain meaningful relationships
- Avoid exploitative or manipulative relationships

- World Health Organization

# Different Aspects to Sexuality



## Gender Identity

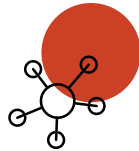
How you identify yourself



Woman

Genderqueer

Man



## Biological Sex

Objectively measurable organs, hormones, and chromosomes with which you were born



Female

Intersex

Male



## Gender Expression

How you demonstrate your gender in how you behave, dress, and interact



Feminine

Androgynous

Masculine



## Sexual Orientation

Who you are attracted to physically and emotionally



Heterosexual

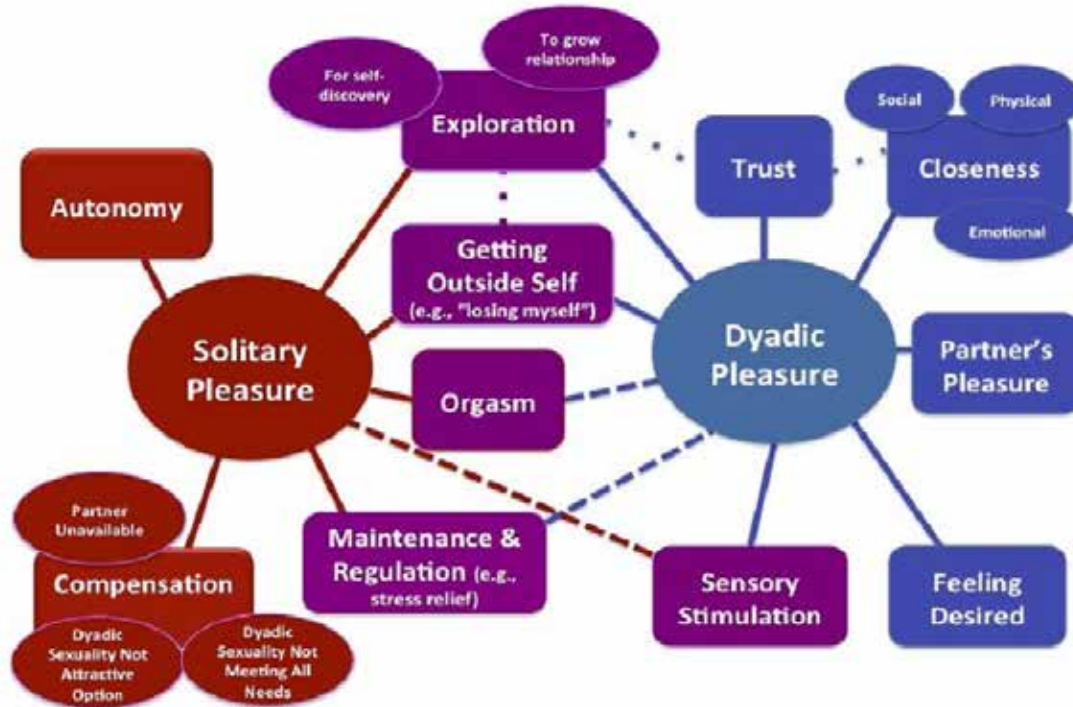
Bisexual

Homosexual





# Dyadic and Solitary Sexuality:



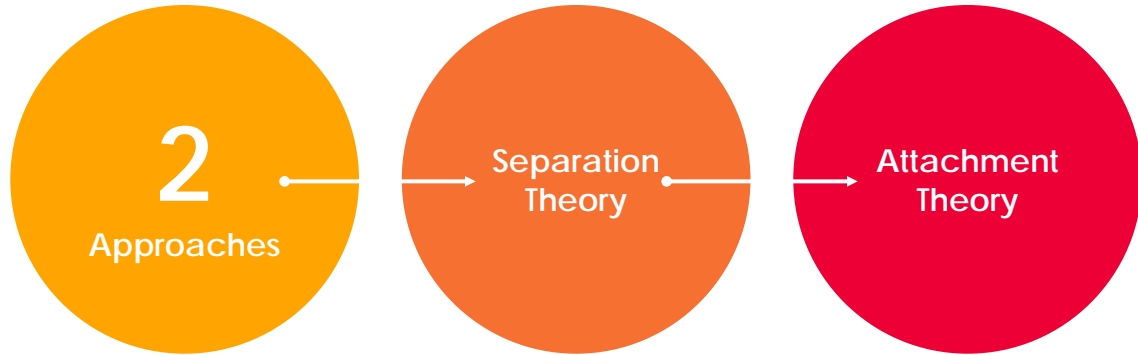
# PART 2

What gets in the way?



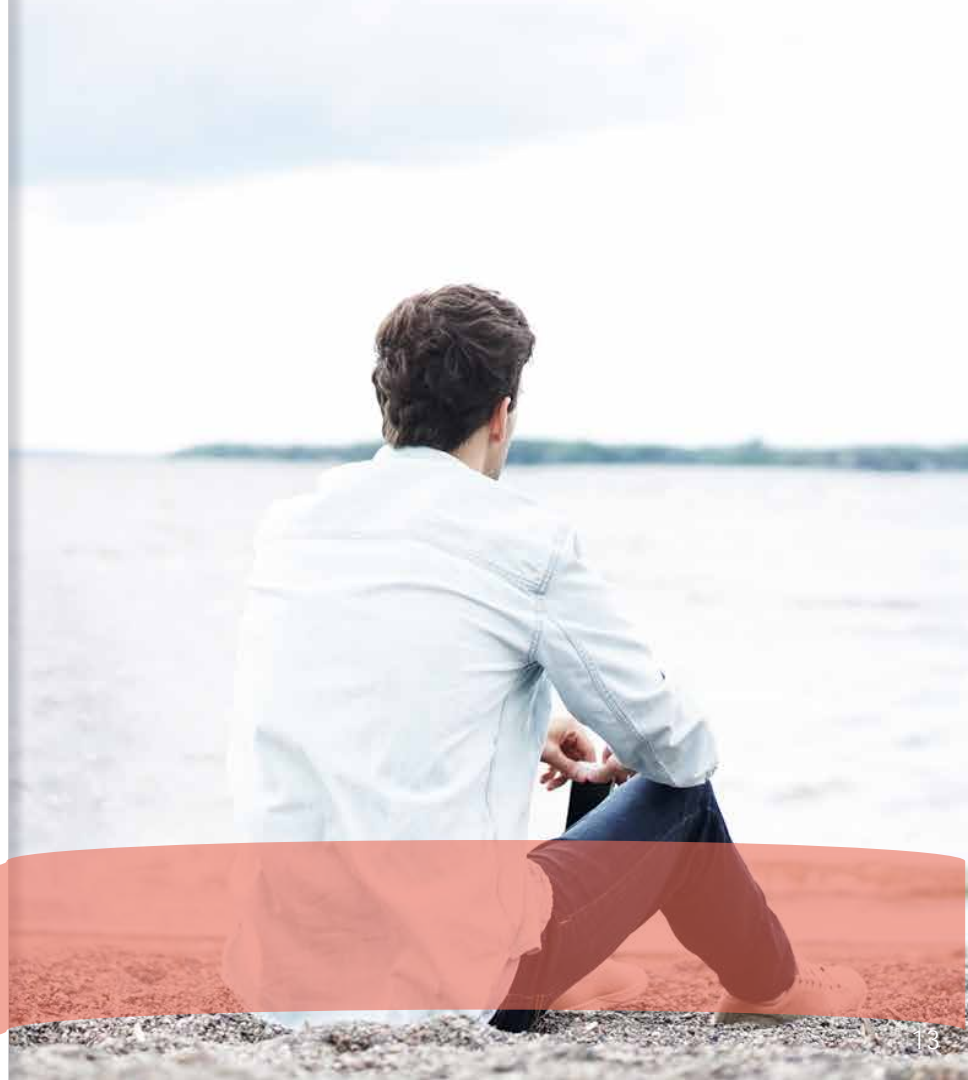


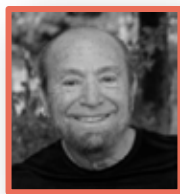
# What gets in the way of our sexuality?



# Separation Theory

- Fantasy Bond
- Critical Inner Voice





# Separation Theory

Robert W. Firestone, Ph.D.

Integrates psychoanalytic and existential systems of thought

Core Conflict:



Two kinds of emotional pain:

UNDEFENDED



DEFENDED



INTERPERSONAL

EXISTENTIAL



FANTASY BOND




CRITICAL INNER VOICE





# Interpersonal Factors that Affect Children's Emerging Sexuality

1. Negative parental attitudes and behaviors (toward themselves and the child)
2. Parental rejection, indifference, and hostility
3. Harsh attitudes toward a child's body and developing sexuality
4. Children's imitation of parents' distorted views of sexuality and the human body
5. Children's identification with and imitation of the same sex parent (negative aspects)
6. Competition and oedipal issues



# Interpersonal Factors that Affect Children's Emerging Sexuality

7. Parents' exploitive use of the child to fulfill their emotional and/or sexual needs
  - Emotional hunger – trying to take love from a child rather than give him or her love.
  - Emotional incest – (sexualized relationship with child)
  - Child sexual abuse and incest
8. Overreactions to natural feelings of attraction that occur within the family
9. Children learning, both explicitly and implicitly through role-modeling, sexist views and negative stereotypes of the opposite sex

# Trauma

The degree to which individuals' sexuality is affected by trauma is influenced by:

- Identity of abuser
- Positive experiences with touch, trust, empathy, and being soothed





# Definition of the Fantasy Bond

A 'fantasy bond' describes an illusion of connection between a couple that is substituted for feelings of real love and intimacy. Forming a fantasy bond is an often unconscious act of self-parenting and self-protection, in which two people become pseudo-independent, replacing the real relating involved in being in love with the form of being a "couple." The degree of reliance on a fantasy bond is proportional to the degree of frustration and pain experienced in a person's developmental years.

# The Fantasy Bond

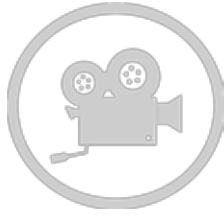
- Merged identity
- Lose spark and attraction



# Couple Interactions Chart

Interactions in an Ideal Relationship	Interactions in a Relationship Characterized by a Fantasy Bond
Nondefensiveness and openness	Angry reactions to feedback Closed to new experiences
Honesty and integrity	Deception and duplicity
Respect for the other's boundaries, priorities and goals, separate from self	Overstepping boundaries Other seen only in relation to self
Physical affection and personal sexuality	Lack of affection; inadequate or impersonal, routine sexuality
Understanding--lack of distortion of the other	Misunderstanding--distortion of the other
Noncontrolling, nonmanipulative, and nonthreatening	Manipulations of dominance and submission





# The Fantasy Bond and Intimacy



# eCourse

## Become Your True Self





# The Critical Inner Voice

- Well-integrated pattern of destructive thoughts toward ourselves and others
- At the root of much of our maladaptive behavior
- Fosters inwardness, distrust, self-criticism, self-denial, addictions and a retreat from goal-directed activities
- Affects every aspect of our lives: our self-esteem and confidence, and most importantly, our personal and intimate relationships.

# EXAMPLES of VOICES BEFORE SEX

- You're going to be so awkward.
- What if she's disappointed?
- Do you really think he is attracted to you?
- You look terrible. She won't be interested.
- Why even bother? You know how this will end up.  
Watch out, he is only using you.
- He won't like you anymore if you have sex with him.



- It's weird to want to have sex.
- Sex is too much trouble.
- You won't be able to satisfy her.
- He's not attracted to you anymore.
- You shouldn't want anything.
- You're not who he really wants to be with.
- How do you know you can trust this person?
- You're going to make a fool of yourself.

# EXAMPLES of VOICES DURING SEX

- You look terrible naked. You look fat/old/ugly.
- You're not doing this right.
- She probably doesn't feel good.
- You're not excited enough.
- You're moving too much.
- You're not going to be able to have an orgasm.



- You're going to finish too quickly.
- He probably thinks you're a slut.
- You don't know how to make her feel good.
- He doesn't seem to be very excited
- You'll finish too quickly.
- You won't be able to finish
- You want to do that? You are really twisted!
- He/she wants to do that? What kind of a pervert are you with?

# EXAMPLES of VOICES AFTER SEX

- He probably didn't enjoy it that much.
- She may have faked an orgasm.
- So what if you felt good? You won't feel good next time.
- She may not like you anymore.
- You were too enthusiastic. You probably scared him off.
- You probably looked weird.

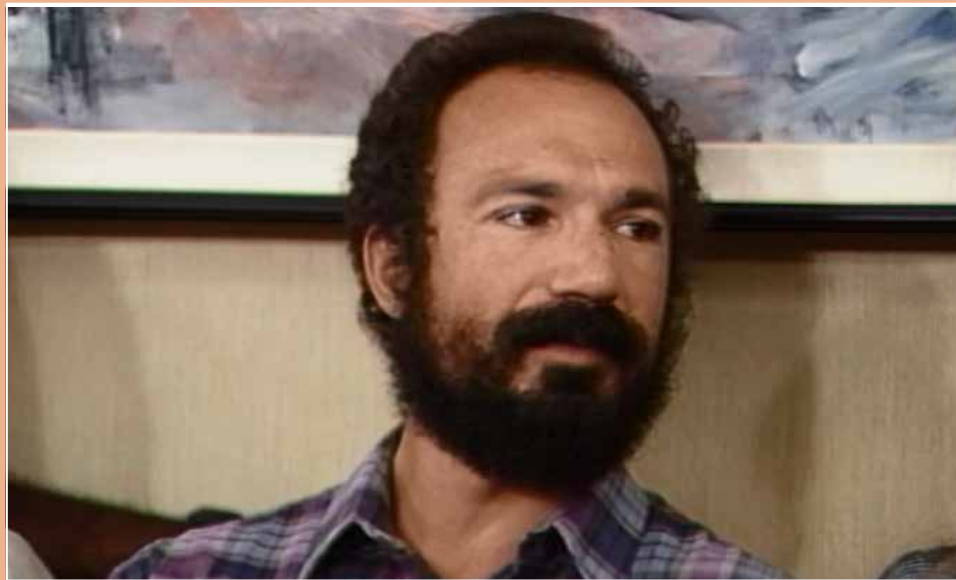


- You didn't feel enough
- He didn't seem to like being with you that much
- You were too excited.
- You liked that? You are a pervert!

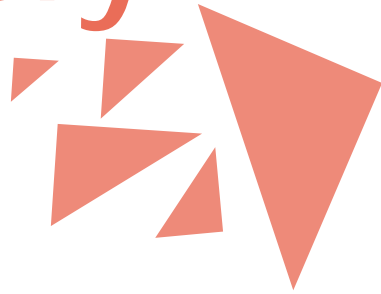




# Critical Inner Voices During Sex

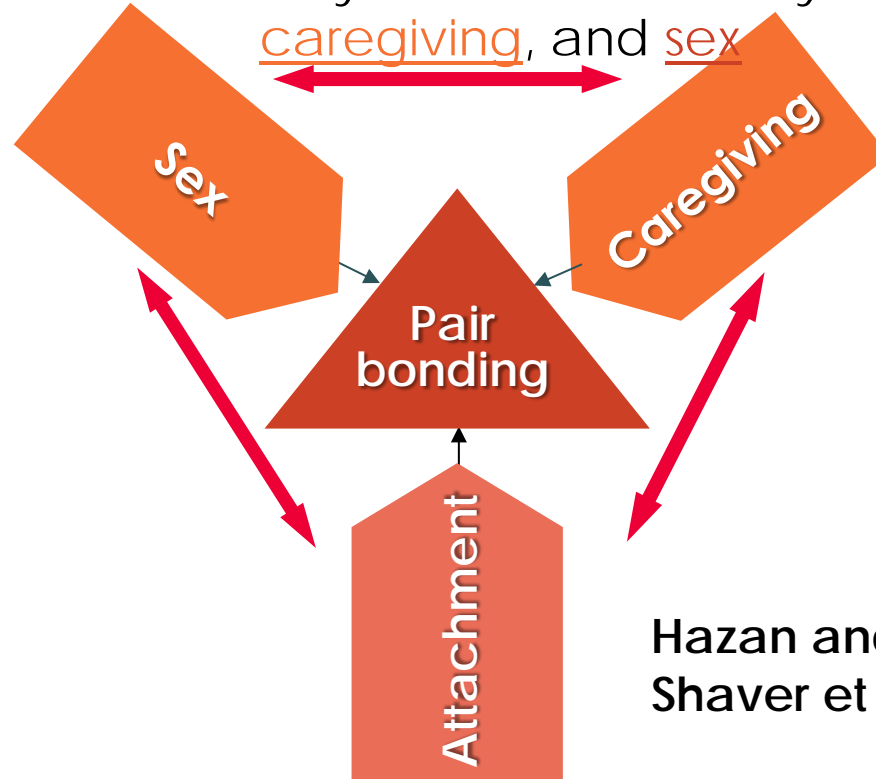


# Attachment Theory



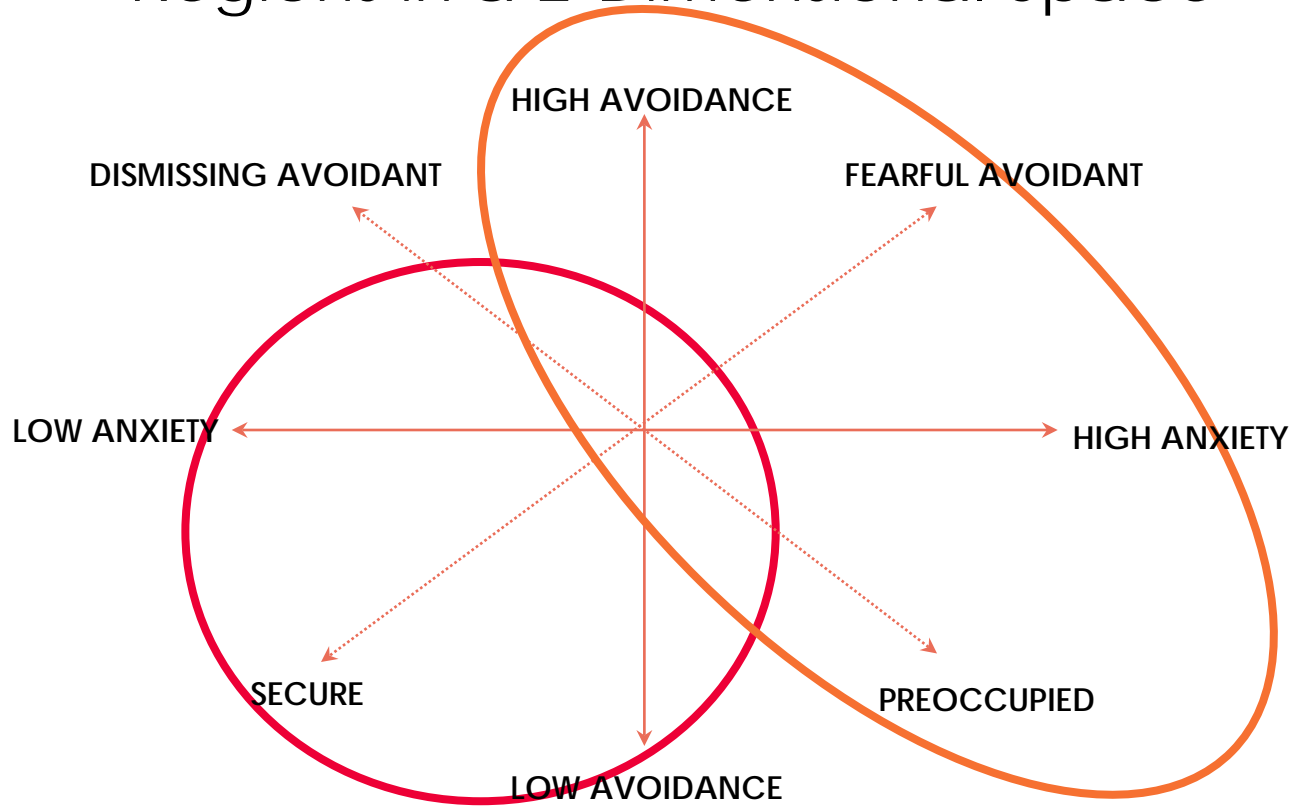
# Couple Relationships

Romantic love (couple pair-bonding) can be conceptualized as the integration of 3 behavioral systems discussed by Bowlby: attachment, caregiving, and sex



Hazan and Shaver (1987);  
Shaver et al. (1988)

# Adult Attachment Styles: Regions in a 2-Dimensional Space



From: "Secure and Insecure Love: An Attachment Perspective" Phillip R. Shaver, Ph.D.  
Adapted from Ainsworth et al. (1978), Bartholomew & Horowitz (1991), Fraley & Shaver (2000)

# A daily diary study of sexual fantasies...


- Young Israeli couples kept daily diaries concerning sexual fantasies and described aspects of their relationship functioning for 21 days.
- **Avoidant attachment:** was related to sexual fantasies that emphasized non-intimacy, control of sexual interactions, and negative views of fantasy sexual partners.
- **Anxious attachment:** related to sexual fantasies that emphasized desires for closeness, perception of the self as weak and dependent, and perception of fantasy sexual partners as cruel and abusive.



# Is your attachment style affecting your relationship?

**Secure Attachment:** Securely-attached adults tend to be more satisfied in their relationships.

**Anxious-Preoccupied Attachment:** People with an anxious attachment tend to be desperate to form a fantasy bond. Instead of feeling real love or trust, they often feel emotional hunger.






# Is your attachment style affecting your relationship?

**Dismissive-Avoidant Attachment:** People with a dismissive-avoidant attachment have the tendency to emotionally distance themselves from their partner. They're often the other half of a Fantasy Bond.

**Fearful-Avoidant Attachment:** People with a fearful-avoidant attachment live in an ambivalent state, in which they are afraid of being both too close to or too distant from others.





# Attachment and Differentiation of Self

- Attachment avoidance and attachment anxiety associated with FSD
- Lower levels of differentiation of self: strongest predictors of sexual difficulties
- Higher levels of psychological distress associated with sexual difficulties
- Positive mood, positive partner behavior and positive relational feelings predicted more sexual activity and intimacy

# Biopsychosocial Model:

## Neuroendocrine

- Hormonal changes
- Neurotransmitters

## Interpersonal

- Life stressors
- Quality of current and past relationships

## Psychological/Psychiatri

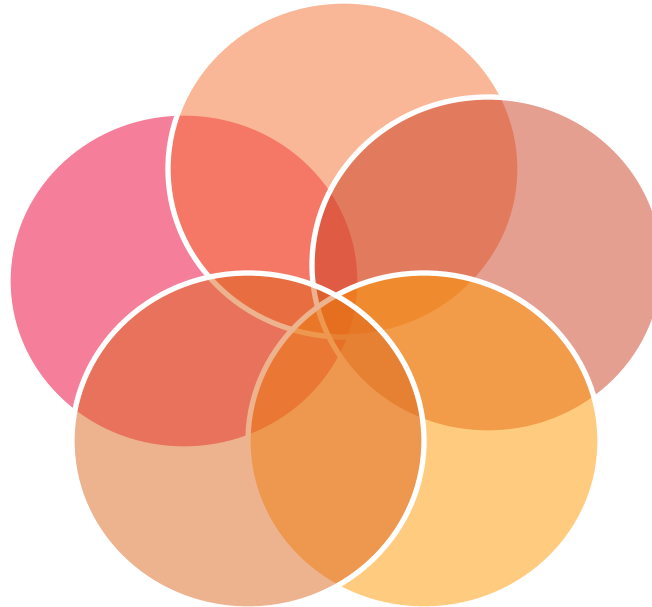
- C
  - Anxiety
  - Depression
- Cognitive disorders
- Trauma

## Social/Cultural/Religion

- Upbringing
  - Myths
- Cultural/religious norms and expectations

## Medical

- Physical health
- Medical conditions
- Medications





# PART 3

What we can do about it

# Understanding Your Attitudes Toward Sex



- *How'd you learn about sex?*
- *What were the messages you received?*
- *How did that affect you when you became sexually active?*
- *What are your attitudes now?*



# Dan Savage

GOOD.

→ GIVING .

→ GAME

# Psychological, Relational, and Sexual History Format

Barry W. McCarthy, Ph.D.

1. Conducted individually, not together.
2. Start by saying, "I want to understand your psychological, relational, and sexual history both before this marriage and during the marriage..."
3. Guidelines: Structure chronologically, move from less anxious to more anxiety-provoking questions, be non-judgmental about secrets and non-socially desirable behavior, ask open-ended questions, probe for trauma and dysfunctional attitudes, behavior, and emotional reactions.
4. Initial open-ended question—"What did you value about your growing up and what caused you problems and regret?"
5. Social and sexual experiences as a child
6. Puberty and adolescence
7. Adult development
8. Present relationship
9. Wrap-up questions

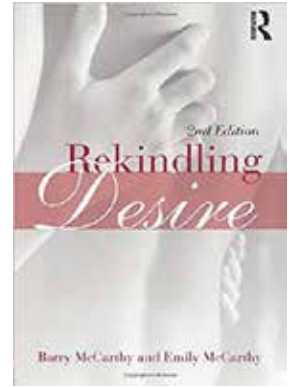




# Exercise Core Strategies

*Strategies to facilitate sexual desire include:*

1. Nurturing anticipation
2. Owning your sexuality
3. Feeling you deserve sexual pleasure
4. Enjoying arousing, orgasmic sex
5. Valuing intimate sexuality



# Importance of Communication



## **Comfort with communication:**

Comfort with sexual communication is directly linked to sexual satisfaction.

**University of Ohio**



## **Ability to listen:**

People who can better communicate and understand another person's emotions are more likely to have a satisfying sex life.

**John's Hopkins University**

# Healthy Communication

What's going on in you when you talk to your partner? What do you feel?

- Verbal signals
- Body language
- Tone
- Timing
- Volume
- Intensity



# Healthy Communication

*From Parenting from the Inside Out - Dr. Daniel Siegel*

- Awareness
- Attunement
- Empathy
- Expression (make internal external)
- Joining (verbal and nonverbal)
- Clarification
- Sovereignty



# Countering the Critical Inner Voice in Sexuality



# The Therapeutic Process in Voice Therapy with Couples

## Step 1

Each Partner identifies the content of his or her negative thought process and releases the associated affect.

## Step 2

Partners collaborate with the therapist to plan changes in these behaviors. The couple is encouraged to not engage in aversive behaviors dictated by the voice and to increase the positive behaviors that the voice discourages.

## Step 3

Each partner answers back to the voice attacks, which is often a cathartic experience. Afterwards, it is important for each individual to make a rational statement about how he/she really is, how the other person really is, and what is true about the relationship.





# The Therapeutic Process in Voice Therapy with Couples

## Step 4

Each partner develops insight about how the voice attacks are influencing his or her behaviors in the relationship.

## Step 5

Each partner discusses insights and reactions to verbalizing the voice and attempts to understand the relationship between voice attacks and early life experience.

## Step 6

In dealing with sexual problems, couples learn to give away their “voices” and maintain personal communication in the intervals between formal sessions. They are encouraged to maintain physical contact while “giving away” their self-critical thoughts and hostile attitudes toward each other. This technique often leads to the arousal of deep feelings from the past that can be worked through in later sessions.







# Challenging Your Critical Inner Voice



# Exercise 5.1:

## *Firestone Voice Scale for Sex*

*Circle the frequency with which you experience the following critical inner voices:*

0 = Never      1 = Rarely      2 = Once in a While

3 = Frequently      4 = Most of the Time

0 1 2 3 4

Sex has always been a problem. Why bother with it?  
There are more important things in life.

0 1 2 3 4

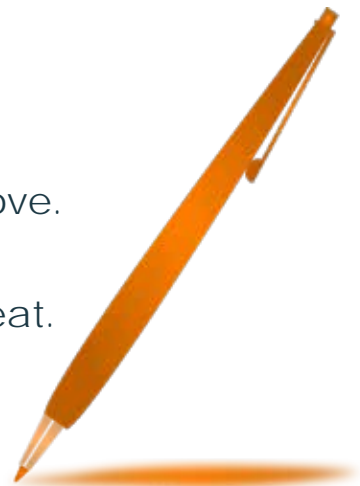
He(she) always has an excuse for not wanting to make love.

0 1 2 3 4

You'd better keep an eye on him(her) He(she) might cheat.

0 1 2 3 4

The next time he'll(she'll) find out what you're really like.



# Exercise 5.2:

## What Your Critical Inner Voice Tells You About

### MY CRITICAL INNER VOICE

Before Sex:

---

During Sex:

---

After Sex:

---

### MY REALISTIC THOUGHTS

Before Sex:

---

During Sex:



---

After Sex:

---

# An Imaginary Conversation About Your Sexuality

*What would your mother/father say about your sexuality,  
your partner and your sexual relationship?*

- 
- 
- What my mother/father would say
  - What I would say back to my mother/father


# Creating a Coherent Narrative

- *"When we create a narrative of who we are, we link past and present so we can become the active author of a possible future, too."*

*~ Dr. Dan Siegel*

- *"...the formation of a narrative is critical and is an indicator of good mental and physical health."*

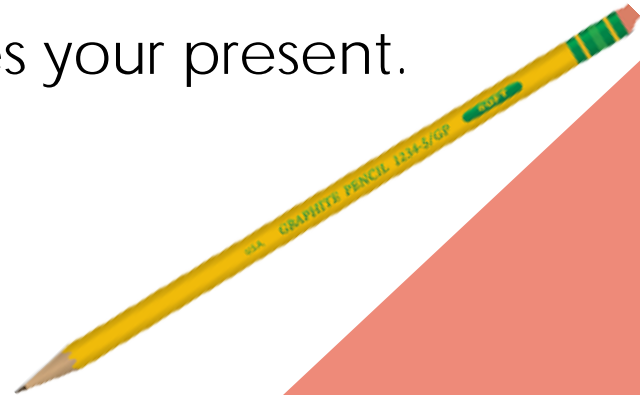
*~ James Pennebaker*



What's your story?

# Tips for Writing a Coherent Narrative

- ▷ Write as an adult.
- ▷ Write rationally.
- ▷ Write autobiographically.
- ▷ Write intuitively.
- ▷ Write with feeling.
- ▷ Write about how the past influences your present.
- ▷ Write with balance.
- ▷ Write with self-compassion.



# eCourse

## Become Your True Self







# Achieving Satisfying Sexuality



## Communicate with Your Partner

Don't expect him or her to be a mind reader concerning what is pleasurable to you. Make it a habit to talk to your partner while you are having sex; verbal communication then does not come as a shock. Some people, though, feel uncomfortable talking at such times; non-verbal communication, such as placing your hand on top of your partner's and moving it where you want it, works well too.



## Don't Be a Spectator

Don't feel like you are putting a sexual performance that you constantly need to evaluate. Concentrate as much as possible on the giving and receiving of sensual pleasures, not on how well you are doing.



# Achieving Satisfying Sexuality



## Don't Set Up Goals of Sexual Performance

If you have a goal, you can fail, and failure can produce disorders. Don't set your heart on having simultaneous orgasms or, if you are a woman, on having five orgasms before your partner has one. Just relax and enjoy yourself.



## Be Choosy About the Situations in Which You Have Sex

Don't have sex when you are in a terrific hurry or are afraid you will be disturbed. Also be choosy about who your partner is. Trusting your partner is essential to good sexual functioning; similarly, a partner who really cares for you will be understanding if things don't go well and will not laugh or be sarcastic.



*Sex is one of the strongest motivating forces in life. It has the potential for creating intense pleasure and fulfillment or for causing considerable pain and suffering. The effect of a natural expression of sexuality on one's sense of well-being and overall enjoyment of life cannot be over-emphasized. The way people feel about themselves as men and women, their feelings about their bodies, and their attitudes toward sex contribute more to a sense of self and feeling of happiness than any other area of experience.*

- Robert Firestone, Ph.D.

# Conclusions

- Adult sexuality is often influenced both by the attachments we form as children and how our parents felt about themselves as sexual people, as well as how they relate to us and our bodies.
- When long-term relationship partners form a Fantasy Bond, the real loving actions between them dissipate, form replaces substance and the sexual relationship suffers.
- Critical inner voices, criticizing ourselves, and our partners often interfere with sexual relating. Criticisms of our bodies and performance, and of our partners bodies and performance have a destructive effect on our sexual relating.
- Helping couples become more secure in themselves, recognize and break Fantasy Bonds, and challenge critical inner voices can help them greatly improve their sexual relationships.

A top-down view of a wooden desk. In the center-left is an open laptop with a silver keyboard. To its right is a white ceramic cup filled with dark coffee. Scattered around the desk are several pieces of crumpled white paper, two wooden pencils, and a small rectangular notepad with horizontal lines. The entire scene is bathed in a warm, orange-toned light.

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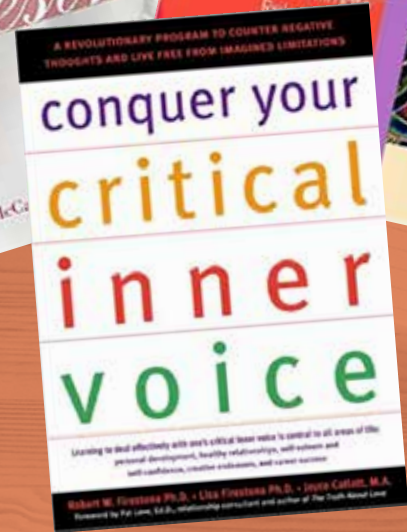


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*Any questions?*

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# Thank you!



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