

BATTERING INTERVENTION SERVICES COALITION OF MICHIGAN
AND ALLIES IN CHANGE (PORTLAND, OREGON) PRESENT

ADDRESSING SEXUALIZED VIOLENCE & RESPECTFUL SEXUALITY WITH THOSE WHO CHOOSE TO ABUSE

★

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EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH METHODOLOGY
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*“Since all models are wrong
the scientist must be alert to
what is importantly wrong. It is
inappropriate to be concerned about
mice when there are tigers abroad.”*

George Box
Statistician, 1976

DISCUSSION OUTLINE

Topics Covered In This Webinar

1. Permutations of Sexuality & Toxic Relationship Components
2. Humanizing Sexual Behavior
3. Discussing Sexual Behavior in Battering Intervention
 - Pyramid of Harm / What Counts as Violence & Abuse
 - Sexual Harms Beyond Rape
 - Sexual Respect & Health

PART ONE

SEXUAL IDENTITY

Much More than a Binary Notion

While there has been growing acceptance and affirmation of Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual sexual orientations, sexual identity is still often categorized as gay or straight.

This limits the ability to acknowledge human rights and agency, as well as the common dismissal of bisexual identities and complete lack of understanding of other sexual orientations.

Much of the confusion and dehumanization of sexuality and sexual behavior comes from historical notions of propriety and religious connections, but also from failure to recognize nuances within layers of sexuality

Layers of Sexual Identity: Why does it matter for Battering Intervention?

SEVERAL TOXIC COMBINATIONS OF SEXUALITY CAN LEAD TO A GROWTH OF TOXIC, HURTFUL, AND ULTIMATELY ABUSIVE AND/OR VIOLENT BEHAVIOR IN RELATIONSHIPS – KNOWING THESE DYNAMICS CAN LEAD TO MORE DYNAMIC AND HUMANISTIC INTERVENTIONS IN BEHAVIOR THAT IS OFTEN OVERLOOKED, DISMISSED, OR ASSUMED TO BE IRRELEVANT

LAYERS OF SEXUAL IDENTITY

SEXUAL ORIENTATION

Physical sexual attraction is relatively stable throughout the lifetime, although individuals may fail to acknowledge their attractions to themselves or others.

SEXUAL FREQUENCY

Desired frequency is the source of many relationship issues where there are disconnects – and some can be caused by violence and abuse. Changes may occur for a variety of reasons (circumstance, health, availability).

ROMANTIC / EMOTIONAL ATTRACTION

Interest in other humans to include emotional or mental bonds. These connections often add depth to relationships, and may provide increased empathy or alignment. Changes may occur over time, or may be stable.

SEXUAL ORIENTATION

Five Categories / Types



Heterosexual



Homosexual



Bisexual



Transamory



Paraphilia

SEXUAL FREQUENCY

Six Categories / Types



Asexual



Greysexual



Allosexual



Hypersexual



Demi /
Sapiosexual



Pan /
Omnisexual

ROMANTIC / EMOTIONAL

Six Categories of Attraction



Hetero-
romantic



Homo-
romantic



Biromantic



Queerromantic



Aromantic



Greyromantic

HETEROSEXUALITY PERMUTATIONS

These three layers of sexuality combine to form 36 possible types of sexuality per orientation (for a total of 180 combinations). Here is a demonstration of the types of heterosexuality that may be possible from this analysis.

HETEROSEXUALITY

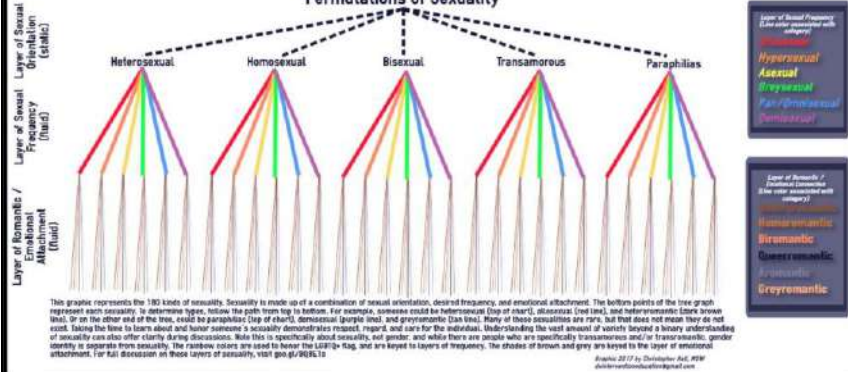
LAYER OF DESIRED FREQUENCY
(may change over lifetime several times)



LAYER OF DESIRED ROMANTIC / EMOTIONAL CONNECTION
(may change over lifetime several times)



Permutations of Sexuality



SOME TOXIC COMBINATIONS FOR BIP DISCUSSIONS

MATCHED ORIENTATION & ROMANTIC/EMOTIONAL
Many men in BIP classes are there due to toxic components of being heterosexual but homoromantic – they may only want contact with a woman for sex, but invest all their mental and emotional connections in other men.

DISCONNECTED FREQUENCY ISSUES

Quality of communication and the ability to discuss sexual connections in an intimate relationship may mitigate certain toxic elements, but disrespectful communication contributes to building disconnect and entitlement. If abusive or violent behavior has contributed to a victim/survivor going into a greysexual or asexual state, but the abusive partner pressures for sex, this could immediately become sexually harmful, abusive, or violent. Open relationships that are not fully consensual are also toxic. An individual who is demi/sapiosexual may not hold the same mental connection, reducing sexual drive.

LGBTQ+ TOXIC ELEMENTS

Complications can exist for transromantic individuals who are not supportive of a partner's transition. Heterosexuals may pressure bisexual partners in various ways tied either to making attempts at threesome or stifling/dismissing attraction components.

HUMANIZING SEXUAL BEHAVIOR

DISCUSSING DESIRE & SEXUAL INTERESTS

Does your partner know what you like, sexually? What does your partner like sexually? What are you sexually interested in?

CONFLICT RESOLUTION

Managing different sexual agendas, boundaries in sexual behavior, dealing with "make-up sex"

PORNOGRAPHY & SEX WORK

Where and how does pornography fit into a relationship? Responding to sex worker partnerships



DESIRE & SEXUAL INTERESTS

How do you communicate?

DIRECT

Engaging in conversations about sex, revealing your interests and desires to your partner, asking for what you want.

INDIRECT

Avoiding conversations, engaging through action or suggestion. Relying on assumptions, cues, and history.

CONSENT

What does it mean to give full consent? Is it possible to know? What factors influence consent? How do you give consent?

CONSENT IS COMPLICATED BY PRIVILEGE



POWER & HISTORY

Who has the greatest ability to make decisions for self and others? What is the history of decision making within a relationship? What traditions are foundations for these decisions?



PRIVILEGE

Someone with historical advantage can afford to not think about experiences of those without those advantages. Their "norm" dictates reality for others. They must CHOOSE to listen and care.

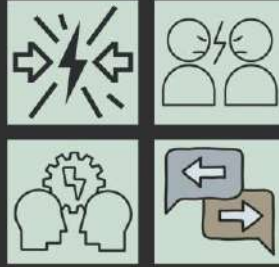


DO YOU KNOW?

How does your partner disagree with you? How do you notice when your partner acquiesces to you, and why? In what ways do you miss cues or fail to listen to your partner?

CONFLICT RESOLUTION

BIPs usually discuss conflict resolution in some fashion, as hurtful behavior is connected directly to entitled and/or dominating conflict that causes pain, fear, or disconnect in relationships. Discussing these dynamics over sexual incompatibilities or disconnects can and should be a part of this process within intervention.



MANAGING DIFFERENT SEXUAL AGENDAS

- Frequency issues, non-monogamy, flirting

BOUNDARIES IN SEXUAL BEHAVIOR

- How to notice boundaries in others, how to reflect on your own boundaries

DEALING WITH MAKE-UP SEX

- A common topic within BIP classes, often categorized by participants as the best kind of sex they have with their partners

MANAGING DIFFERENT SEXUAL AGENDAS

Complicated situations to navigate in the best of circumstances

FREQUENCY ISSUES

Changes are, since desired sexual frequency fluctuates throughout life. All human beings experience disconnects over frequency in intimate relationships.

If the frequency issue is due to medical needs, pain, low drive, and responsiveness matter. If the frequency issue is being complicated by patterns of harm, then this is unlikely to be resolved without greater repairs and atonement.

If the issue is due to incompatibility, then it may be necessary to either end the relationship, or to make open and transparent agreements about sexual activity outside of the relationship.

Sexual therapists may be useful in this area, but must be well trained on IPV issues and may miss the dynamics that are impacting reduced desire.

NON-MONOGAMY

Is the enjoyment of non-monogamy mutual and ethical (involving agreements, an open consent, ongoing discussion, sexual safety, and check-ins as needed)? Is the non-monogamy one-sided and consists of cheating? If so:

- Does the cheating partner engage in this non-monogamy for excitement?
- Does the cheating partner violate social boundaries causing complications?
- Has the cheating partner introduced other harms due to cheating (financial, health, emotional/mental, spiritual/religious)?
- Polyamory is a specific ethical non-monogamy that may or may not involve sexual activity, but is held to the same standards and complications as mentioned above.

FLIRTING

Flirting as a relationship dynamic is sometimes tied to an individual's personality style and extroversion or introversion. Depending on the relationship history, this may mean within IPV the flirting behavior is general, but in the context of harm it may be targeted as a grooming pattern.

Personality-based flirting is more broad-ranged and may not be tied to any sexual or romantic interest, but rather is an engagement style.

Grooming-based flirting is about acquiring new relationships, and is specifically geared toward individuals the flirting partner has sexual or emotional/romantic interest in.

If in previous relationships, an individual has experienced harm due to grooming-based flirting, they will have difficulty with personality-based flirting outside of the relationship.

BOUNDARIES IN SEXUAL BEHAVIOR

How to notice boundaries in others, how to reflect on your own



A Working Definition

"A boundary is a limit or edge that defines your unique perceptions of what is acceptable and unacceptable during interactions with the world."



Ways to Discuss

Four questions:

- What are examples of sexual boundaries someone may have?
- How could you notice a sexual boundary in another person?
- How could you ask questions about someone's boundaries?
- What sexual boundaries exist in society and social gathering places?



DEALING WITH MAKE-UP SEX

Consider the previous discussion points:

- Is the communication about make-up sex direct or indirect?
- Where does consent fit? Power and history of make-up sex in the relationship? How do you know when your partner is okay or not okay with make-up sex, or sexual activity overall?
- Are there sexual frequency issues tied to make-up sex? Is there a toxic desire built into fighting as foreplay (either victim or perpetrator)? How does that dynamic contribute to harm?
- What are the sexual boundaries within make-up sex?

Individuals need to be able to answer all these questions to navigate make-up sex with respect and health, or it instead may be a part of an abusive, violent, and overall hurtful/toxic relationship pattern.



PORNOGRAPHY & SEX WORK

"The Relationships in America data reveal that 43 percent of men and 9 percent of women report watching pornography in the past week. On the flip side, far more women than men have not used pornography recently: 34 percent of men and 72 percent of women report not viewing pornography in at least a year, if at all."

This means that a significant portion of Americans use pornography, and simply decrying it as objectification does not address the fact that it is, and will continue to be, accessed and used regularly by some individuals and couples.

With the onset of rapid and accessible online pornography, sex work also exists on several levels that go beyond prostitution. How can facilitators be true to the humanity of sexuality, use of sexual media both within and outside a relationship, and guide BIP participants toward respect and health without becoming alienating?

<https://relationshipsamerica.com/relationships-and-sex/how-much-pornography-are-americans-consuming>



WHERE AND HOW DOES PORNOGRAPHY FIT INTO AN INTIMATE RELATIONSHIP?



TOGETHER

Intimate partnerships may use pornography to stimulate sexual desire, interaction, education, entertainment, or connection. This may be related to issues of consent, or potentially authentic dialog between partners. Negotiation, compromise, and meeting a partner's desires may also factor into the relationship.



SEPARATE

Frequency issues may be mitigated and involve mutually agreed upon use of pornographic material for masturbation. It may also be hidden, forbidden, and an issue of inauthentic sexual communication.



HISTORY

Each partner may have patterns behind their use of pornography, and cultural contexts that inform their opinions and/or use that may contradict. How is this history discussed within relationships?

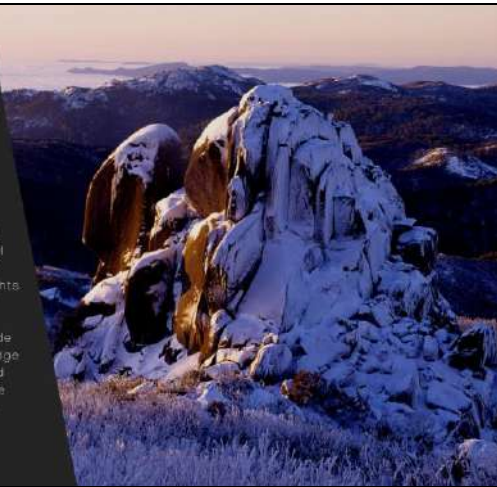
How does BIP ask these questions in humanizing ways?

What About

OBJECTIFICATION?

As a concept, objectification is about reducing a human being to an inert object for someone to act upon with no consequence. This happens in several contexts including and beyond pornography. Video game violence? Cultural appropriation? Workers rights and class-based values of careers?

This a separate topic of discussion that may include ways individuals are seen as inert in their knowledge and ability to form opinions. Discussing healthy and respectful interactions around pornography use are much more pressing and humanistic than teaching moral values and how to navigate the separation between fantasy and fiction.



RESPONDING TO SEX WORKER PARTNERSHIPS

When BIP participants discuss their partner's history as a sex worker

This can be a complicated topic, as it often depicts women as deserving certain negative treatment due to their work, and enforces a "savior complex" that will permeate a participant's hurtful behavior. If facilitators take an objectification approach, they will alienate such participants immediately.

Hard questions facilitators need to ask themselves – do you believe that sex workers deserve negative treatment, are inert in their ability to make decisions? Do sex workers need to be rescued from their positions, life choices, or situations in which they may have been victimized for many years?

Like with pornography – the nuances of the relationship MATTER.

How did they meet? How did they discuss sex work? Was one of the partners procuring the other's services? What dynamics were developed through these interactions and communications? Why did they choose each other? How did their relationship develop? How was sex work supported or decried?

DISCUSSING SEXUAL BEHAVIOR IN BATTERING INTERVENTION

PYRAMID OF HARM

An organic understanding of hurtful behavior is critical to differentiating between violence, abuse, and other harms

SEXUAL HARMS BEYOND RAPE

Using context, intent, and impact to explore sexual behavior expands the ability to name and discuss various sexual harms that are normally minimized, invisible, or dismissed

SEXUAL RESPECT & HEALTH

Respect & health should not simply be opposites of harm, but rather an in depth exploration of creating connections, humanizing oneself and others, and meeting your partner's needs

PART THREE

EMERGE CONCEPT OF THE PYRAMID OF HARM

While Emerge was involved in the development of the Duluth Domestic Abuse Intervention Program (Duluth Model), they chose to remain focused on a more psychoeducational format that does not use the Power and Control Wheel, instead using an organic approach to understanding harmful behavior.

Violence

Abuse

Control

Alienating / Irritating Behavior

ANY BEHAVIOR CAN FIT INTO THE PYRAMID WHEN IT CAUSES HARM TO SELF OR OTHERS

FOUNDATIONS: PYRAMID OF HARM

The foundations of the pyramid are a part of human behavior as a whole - everyone has chosen variations of these specific harmful behaviors in their relationships

ALIENATING AND IRRITATING BEHAVIOR pushes others away. It can be conscious or unconscious, and while associated with greater levels of harm, by itself the harm may be minor to a relationship. Often these kinds of behavior are sources of conflict within relationships and part of individual personality dynamics that may clash. When built up over time, it can lead to the end of a relationship altogether.

CONTROLLING BEHAVIOR works to make someone do something or to keep someone from doing something. It tends to go back and forth within a non-abusive egalitarian, respectful relationship. Sometimes it is unconscious, but often it is a conscious decision to push for a certain outcome. It is not inherently abusive or violent, but over time if one person in a relationship builds a pattern of coercive control, such behavior easily becomes abusive or violent.

ESCALATIONS: PYRAMID OF HARM

Once pain and fear are introduced as an impact, hurtful behavior escalates to destructive levels. Note - these two layers are only important for perpetrators to understand as victims/survivors experience them as the same harm

ABUSIVE BEHAVIOR causes pain and/or fear in another person. The pain could be physical, emotional, mental, or spiritual. The person causing the harm does so in an attempt to control but does not intend to cause pain or fear by doing so. This creates a schism in a relationship, as the abuser will often defend behavior as being unintentional, or that the person on the receiving end is misinterpreting a motive. Regardless, if the individual does not work to make repairs, the hurtful behavior in the relationship may persist.

VIOLENT BEHAVIOR also causes pain and/or fear, and like abuse can be physical, emotional, mental, or spiritual fear. The difference between what counts as abuse and what counts as violence is all about **INTENTION**. Violent behavior involves the person having a desire to cause pain and/or fear as an end result of that behavior.

METHODS OF ANALYZING HARM

To differentiate between the layers of harm, there are three critical components to thoroughly analyze, allowing for a nuanced understanding of how patterns relate. This offers thinking on how potential repairs can be made depending on the combination of factors.



CONTEXT

Perspectives structuring events

What situation was occurring at the time of the behavior? How did others understand situations? Was there an agreed perspective? How was this agreement reached? What is the history/pattern of behavior that informs the context?



IMPACT

Changes made to other's lives

How was the other person impacted by the behavior? What was the end result of the situation? Impacts are about others, not about the individual who caused harm, so where is the focus of the story/situation?



INTENT

Planning and intentional purpose

What did the individual want to happen as a result of the behavior? What were overall and specific motives? This component only matters in the mind of the individual causing harm and is often impossible for the other person to understand.



Sexual Harms Beyond Rape

Using the Pyramid of Harm and the analysis of context, impact, and intent we can establish conversations about what might count as irritating/alienating sexual harms, controlling sexual harms, abusive sexual harms, and violent sexual harms.

IRRITATING AND/OR ALIENATING SEXUAL BEHAVIOR

Everyday harms that evolve over time

Considering that hurtful behavior is layered, it is a trap for people to think only of the tip of the iceberg of harm. Harm builds over time, and things at the top tend to have echoes of the past that started and built gradually.

- Differences in desired frequency
- Flirting behavior
- Acting insecure about the relationship
- Selfish sexual behavior
- Sexual insensitivity to other's desires, boundaries, physical space
- Pressuring for sexual behavior
- Not engaging in loving touch / engaging too much
- Using pornography in ways partner does not like
- Causing sexual discomfort (physical, emotional, mental, spiritual)
- Talking about / comparing past sexual experiences
- Public displays of affection
- Hygiene issues causing disgust in partner
- Making assumptions about partner's desires or interests
- Not discussing sexual behavior within an intimate relationship
- Dismissive, disrespectful, hurtful comments about partner's body

CONTROLLING SEXUAL BEHAVIOR

Making people do things or keeping people from doing things

Many irritating / alienating behavior become controlling once the individual is aware that the behavior causes that harm in their partner. At that point, continuing to do the behavior is an attempt to make their partner accept behavior they do not like. This is an inherent part of negotiating space and identity in a relationship, and happens for all people. It is not inherently abusive or violent to refuse to stop a certain behavior, although the consequence could be ongoing problems or discontent.

- Confiding emotional/mental energy in someone other than an intimate partner, particularly if it is a part of developing an emotional affair (grooming-based flirting behavior)
- Jealousy, while a natural/neutral emotion, can turn into controlling behavior, particularly if it shifts into accusations or assumptions or becomes petulant
- Patterns of pressuring behavior or violating sexual boundaries until your partner will acquiesce
- Pushing partner to provide past details of sexual behavior
- Compelling partner to engage in sexual fantasies they are not interested in, which may develop from repeated pressure
- Trading sexual favors for common responsibilities or tasks
- Refusing to discuss sexual desires or content when a partner wants to do so
- Making assumptions about or pushing family planning decisions, or avoiding family planning discussions
- Resisting commitment to a relationship if a partner wants that, but not being open and transparent about disinterest
- Enforcing religious beliefs about sexual behavior when partner disagrees or manipulating religious texts to pressure
- Failing to notice, appreciate, ask about, or acknowledge partner's sexual boundaries

ABUSIVE SEXUAL BEHAVIOR

Unintentionally causing sexual pain and/or fear

Controlling behavior easily becomes abusive, particularly if there is an imbalance in control within the relationship. Alienating, irritating, and controlling behavior are evolutions of harm, but abusive behavior evolves into causing fear and/or pain.

Nuances between "harm" and "pain/fear" are great, and why it is necessary to consider CONTEXT, IMPACT, and INTENT. Impact is most important to consider with abuse, as intent could be explored to determine if a behavior might be an intentional violation. Many of the examples here are borderline violent, and a desire to cause pain/fear or knowing that behavior will cause pain/fear but choosing to do it anyway will instead make that some behavior violent.

- "Make-up" sex where someone does not feel safe to refuse
- Progression of emotional affairs
- Following partner as a progression of jealousy (potential or actual stalking behavior, where intent is nebulous)
- Sexual humiliation as a part of engaging in sexual desires a partner does not share, or violating an unknown sexual boundary
- Using pornography when a partner is explicitly against its use
- Negatively comparing partner to prior sexual partners
- Dismissing or demeaning partner's past history of sexual harms, the partner's experience of trauma as a result, or failure to support partner against previous perpetrators
- Any BDSM behavior without full consent and comfort
- Cheating on partner physically while under the influence

VIOLENT SEXUAL BEHAVIOR

Intentionally causing sexual pain and/or fear

Since violence and abuse are identical to victims/survivors, the nuance between the two is better considered as a method of assisting perpetrators in understanding how to make repairs. For abuse, the repairs are often to validate and not to explain motive or intent, or to only do so after validating the pain and fear and working to understand it. As violence is intentional, addressing pain and fear is important, but also working to understand and dismantle the entitlement behind the motive as well as the disconnect from the relationship to allow such behavior to build to that point. The following examples (mostly) speak to non-physically violent sexual behavior.

- Sexual/emotional affairs (including finding a new partner before ending a relationship)
- Sharing sexual secrets to intentionally shame, embarrass partner, or damage future relationships
- Posting explicit photographs or videos of partner online without consent
- Spending money on an illicit affair, where such monetary expense causes financial pain to a partner or family
- Physically forcing partner to engage in sexual behavior the partner is not okay with
- Giving partner an STD/STI due to sexual affairs or IDU behavior (this is physical violence)
- Lying about contact with ex-partners when knowing a partner is upset by this contact
- Threatening religious consequences for not engaging in sexual behavior
- Enforcing strict gender roles a partner does not agree with
- Reproductive coercion (several kinds, may vary in context and not be violent if it does not cause pain/fear)

THE PROBLEM WITH DEFINING HEALTH AND RESPECT

Creating working definitions is instrumental to having conversations where all participants are working together and thinking of the same things. Unfortunately, concepts of 'health' and 'respect' are mostly nebulous terms. Having a discussion on defining these terms can be enlightening as to where participants are thinking about their lives and relationships. Before discussing sexual health and respect, here are examples of how perpetrators of IPV have discussed and defined health and respect that are problematic:

Inadequate Definitions of "Health"

- 'Health' definitions that emphasize physical aspects
- Definitions that are opposites to 'health' such as being sick/ill
- Examples of being healthy without a direct definition
- Examples of not doing certain unhealthy behavior offered as a definition

Inadequate Definitions of "Respect"

- Equating 'respect' to fear ('I respected my father, if I didn't I'd get a spanking')
- Equating 'respect' to authority/hierarchy ('You have to listen to the boss')
- Equating 'respect' to the 'Golden Rule' and not considering if you don't care what happens to you then that can excuse doing hurtful things to others
- Legal orientation to 'respect' by referencing 'contempt of court'

WORKING DEFINITIONS OF HEALTH AND RESPECT

The following are the working definitions that I have used in my direct service IPV intervention groups – whatever conclusion / definition you come to within the group might mirror this definition or be slightly different, but in general having a place to build discussion – particularly for sexual health and respect – is important for a functional group discussion.

HEALTH IS A STATE OF BEING THAT LACKS ANY SUBSTANTIAL THREAT OR FEAR OF HARM

- Physical health would involve the ability to function physically to full capacity
- Emotional health would involve the freedom to feel emotions and not experience consequences for expressing them
- Mental health would involve the ability to reason, make decisions for self and others, and navigate mental tasks without impairment
- Spiritual health would involve the ability to navigate personal value and meaning without harming self or others through them

RESPECT IS THE CHOICE AND ABILITY TO LISTEN TO OTHER'S THOUGHTS, OPINIONS, AND EMOTIONS – AND CARE ABOUT THEM EVEN IF YOU DO NOT AGREE

- Self-respect is similar – the choice and ability to listen to your own thoughts, opinions, and emotions – and care about them enough to make sure they increase your own well-being

DEFINING SEXUAL HEALTH AND RESPECT

After having working definitions of health and respect, and being able to reference the layers of harm, it is then more possible to discuss specific connections to sexual behavior in a relationship.

SEXUAL HEALTH IS THE ABILITY TO FUNCTION SEXUALLY IN A WAY THAT PROVIDES PLEASURE TO YOURSELF AND YOUR PARTNER(S) AND LACKS ANY SUBSTANTIAL THREAT OR HARM

SEXUAL RESPECT IS THE CHOICE AND ABILITY TO LISTEN TO OTHER'S THOUGHTS, OPINIONS, EMOTIONS, AND DESIRES RELATED TO SEXUAL BEHAVIOR

CATEGORIES OF SEXUAL RESPECT

To discuss dynamics of sexual health, it can be useful to further categorize respect into three areas of care:



SEXUAL INCLUSIVENESS
Working to actively engage with a partner about sexual desire, to include different communication and pleasure



SEXUAL TRANSPARENCY
Being open and willing to discuss sexual desires, willing to compromise and listen to partner's desires



SEXUAL SUPPORTIVENESS
Supporting partner's desires and pleasure, to include dynamics beyond physical aspects of sexuality



SEXUAL INCLUSIVENESS

Within an intimate relationship, sexual inclusiveness has to do with listening and inquiring about a partner's desires, adapting your boundaries to mix with your partner's (or discussing them openly), and making decisions together about issues related to sexual expressiveness.

RESPECTFUL AND HEALTHY INCLUSIVE SEXUAL BEHAVIOR INCLUDES:

- Discussing your sexual interests and desires without pressuring your partner
- Making family planning decisions together, such as choices to have or not have children, birth control, attachment to ex-partners, etc.
- Compliments toward partner about affection, physical characteristics, and noticing the difference between what your partner provides as a service to you and what unique traits make your partner special to you
- Making sure you understand your partner's desires before acting on them
- Recognize that sexual frequency differences go through phases, and honoring your partner's boundaries as a part of that process
- Showing affection beyond sexual encounters




SEXUAL TRANSPARENCY

Healthy and respectful sexual behavior requires that partners communicate their boundaries, desires, and history related to their sexual intimacy. Transparency partially requires individuals to know themselves and be able to reflect on their own needs and interests, which can complicate relationships in a number of ways if one partner is not reflective or mindful. Transparency builds intimacy in a relationship, so when it builds and flourishes, so can your relationship, but alternately if transparency is limited or does not exist it is much more challenging to be emotionally / mentally / spiritually intimate with a partner.

RESPECTFUL AND HEALTHY TRANSPARENT SEXUAL BEHAVIOR INCLUDES:

- Learning about the compatibility between you and your partner before making greater commitments
- Discussing sexual history and desired relationship configuration at an appropriate time (preferably before certain sexual behavior occurs)
- If you have a non-monogamous pattern and preference, be transparent about that as early as possible to make sure that is compatible with your partner
- Discuss preferences regarding use of pornography and sex toys/paraphernalia
- If you have children, plan with your partner how to discuss sex with them
- Communicate your sexual boundaries and notice your partner's boundaries
- Filter negative self-talk regarding sexual issues with your partner and either productively and respectfully discuss or find an appropriate outlet to work past it
- Understand and acknowledge that trusting behavior in areas beyond sex impact your sexual relationship with your partner
- When feeling jealousy, either express it respectfully, be reflective about why you experience that jealousy, or identify it as negative self-talk and stop those thoughts



SEXUAL SUPPORTIVENESS

Being supportive of your partner is an important part of relationship health and respect overall, when it comes to sexual intimacy, being supportive (as opposed to entitled) involves several verbal and nonverbal interactions that demonstrate care and create comfort.

RESPECTFUL AND HEALTHY SUPPORTIVE SEXUAL BEHAVIOR INCLUDES:

- Practice non-judgment about your partner's sexual desires, and of your own
- Learning and practicing loving touch that your partner appreciates
- Being okay and supportive of your partner's limit setting regarding sexual frequency
- Negotiation and compromise in meeting sexual desires
- Working to give pleasure to your partner without making it about you
- Supporting any self-pleasuring desires your partner might have, and acknowledging your own
- Being open to the evolution of a relationship's sexual development
- Creating space for your partner's physical comfort both including and beyond sexual behavior
- Engaging in activities that demonstrate small and large affections for your partner
- Negotiating religious practices regarding sexual behavior as partners, making joint decisions
- Understand how your partner most feels love and work to provide that (may not be physical)
- Asking questions about your partner's sexual interests when expressed
- Work to understand any trauma or damage your partner may have experienced due to physical or sexual harms in the past, and support your partner's methods of working through those experiences



CONTACT INFORMATION:

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I'm always interested in discussions, questions, philosophizing, research, and overall work in IPV intervention topics, intersectional oppression theory, and more – please reach out with anything you might want to discuss further!

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