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Clinical review editorial: highlighting sexual potential with sexual locations

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We are all in for a treat with this issue of *Sexual and Relationship Therapy*! So many wonderful articles exploring various concepts in the field. Collectively the articles can be summarized into an examination of—or the relationship with—or causes of setbacks in—sexual potential. Each person holds unlimited sexual potential with themselves and their relationships, only defined by their own comfort and uniqueness.

Examination of potential

Fantasy is a part of sexual rights, but Rainville (2019) was interested in how fantasies involving strangers and/or former partners impacted a person's regard for their current partner. In their study, they were able to discover that in already low sexual satisfaction relationships, having any fantasies will help to improve or bolster partner regard, whereas in those relationships with high sexual satisfaction fantasies ended up eroding regard for the partner. Taking this interesting outcome, the authors bring forward suggestions on how to use fantasies with low-satisfaction couples to increase regard for a partner, and also suggest clinical avenues of re-examining the characteristics and attributes a person found attractive to their partner at the beginning of their relationship as a way to increase relationship and sexual satisfaction.

In Traeen et al.'s study (2019), they examined the activities and believed nudges to engage in extradyadic affairs in European older adults. Specifically, they found that for women, the main push toward having an affair was related to lower intimacy in the primary relationship, whereas for men, the likelihood of engaging in an extradyadic affair increased when sexual congruence (liking or disliking same activities, behaviors, etc.) between partners was low, when they were unhappy in general in the relationship, or when their partner had sexual difficulties. This was mainly a helpful article for knowledge related to extradyadic trends and activities, but also the reasoning behind consideration of said activities.

Setbacks of potential

Grunt-Mejer and Łyś (2019) were able to utilize an experimental mixed-method design to uncover additional evidence of the bias and stigma that many clinicians

hold for non-monogamous relationships and how that plays a significant role in clinician decision making and treatment application. They were able to find that most clinicians (both experienced and those in training) hold monocentrist (belief that monogamy is the 'default' setting for relationships) opinions of 'normalcy'—therefore, nonmonogamy is pathological in nature in some way. They share a call to the field to deconstruct ideas of monocentrism through ongoing trainings and supervision experiences.

The qualitative research by Martin and Coolhart (2019) sheds light on trans masculine people and the mental, physical, and relational pain that occurs in the suffering of body dysphoria. The authors recommend that all therapists should become more knowledgeable about the expression of gender in sexual activities, while privileging the humanistic nature of a person's identity and comfort level. By affirming gender identity and normalizing sexual practices that align with the client's comfort (for example, sex with lights off or use of toys and prosthetics) the therapist can help to dissipate body dysphoria concerns and increase sexual satisfaction.

Mosallanezhad et al. (2020) article examines the impact of body mass index on sexual functioning and quality of life for women in Iran. Their study indicated that as body mass index increases, sexual satisfaction, arousal, and desire decreases significantly, as well as seeing decreases in reported quality of life and marital satisfaction scores. It is unknown if this is due to a sociological cultural factor related to body image/size.

Sex and perfectionism – a terrible mix! Palha-Fernandes et al. (2019) discovered that with increasing rates of perfectionism, sexual satisfaction rates decrease significantly. In addition, age and frequency of intercourse also had significant relationships (as age increases, sexual satisfaction decreases; as frequency decreases, so too does sexual satisfaction). However, the focus of this article was on the impact of perfectionism and how that has become a maladaptive detractor from a person's sexual potential.

Female urinary incontinence is a prolific issue affecting approximately 30% of women aged 30-60 (Abdel Rahman et al., 2019). There are three types of urinary incontinence—urgent, stress, and mixed types. The Abdel Rahman et al. (2019) study indicated that those with urinary incontinence had a significant negative impact on the sex life of couples, with significant increasing rates of orgasmic difficulties and decreasing sexual satisfaction in heterosexual couples, and functional difficulties in terms of lubrication for women with stress induced urinary incontinence. This article helps us to understand that as we see couples where the female partner suffers from urinary incontinence it is important to gather additional information about functioning and satisfaction in the relationship.

Relationship with potential

The combination of psychosexual therapy and person-centred approaches to treatment are the focus of the Irwin and Pullen (2019) work, which reinvigorates the work of Carl Rogers and other humanistic approaches to treatment. I really enjoyed reading this article for the review, as they brought out a lot of interesting questions related to practice, theory, and client/clinician humanism. This article is a helpful read for anyone who works in the field of sexology, it will help you to increase your skills in connecting and being present with others.

Aloni et al's. (2019) article brings us back to the ways in which couples communicate, and how that specifically impacts our internal psychological process and therefore also ripples back outward into sexual difficulties in our relationships. This article is very helpful to provide theoretical and academic knowledge of the concepts outlined, and then clearly providing steps and resources through which to apply the concepts in clinical work. With a multitude of appendices, it is very helpful!

Sexual potential as a core component of sexual location

The articles in this issue made me revisit a concept I had considered many years ago – the idea of a ‘sexual location.’ Often, we socially locate ourselves (provide context to the intersection of our various identities), but how often do we sexually locate ourselves in our interactions with others? Sexual location can be defined as a way to provide context of the interrelated nature of our sexuality – specifically paying attention to the attractions, desires, identities, health, abilities, pleasures and sensitivities, and values of ourselves in relation to sex and sexual expression. Directly related to, and influenced by sexual health and pleasure developments, the concept of ‘sexual location’ can be theorized as an intersectional examination of various concepts.

For years, the field of sexology, public health, mental health, and medicine have called for increased attention to sexual health overall (Giarni, 2002; World Health Organization, 1975) – with recent attention being pointed toward overall sex positivity as a central construct (Gruskin et al., 2019; Nagoski, 2015). The articles in this issue bring up the interrelated concepts of sexual health, rights, pleasure, and potential – and can be combined to give a larger overview of how these concepts are related in the overall schemas of a person's sexual location (term similar to ‘social location’ but is about a person's sexual identities and locations on various spectrums). Sexual potential is related directly to the ability to obtain sexual health, which in turn allows for the advancement of sexual pleasure through the realization of sexual rights (Ellison & Papps, 2020; Gruskin et al., 2019). I know – if I had read that sentence just now, I would be thinking to myself, ‘*what did he just say?*’ Here's a graphic to illustrate what I'm trying to say – (Figure 1)

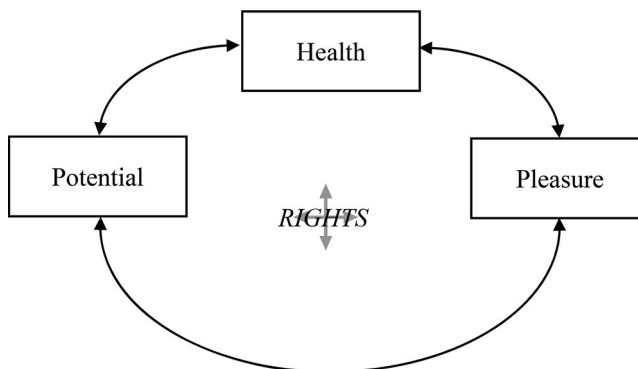


Figure 1. The smiley face of the interrelationship between sexual health, pleasure, rights, and potential.

Virtually all of the articles in this issue fit onto this model in some way – but in reviewing them, I believe that they fit most strongly to enhance the argument of the inclusion of sexual potential as a component helping to sexually locate a person in the previous ‘trifecta’ of rights, health, and pleasure. I hope you all enjoy reading these articles as much as I did!

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