

## **Session 2. Understanding Women's Difficulties with Sex** **Dr Vivienne Cass**

### **To understand women's difficulties with sex...**

- Unique approach that is relevant to women's experience
- Can't transpose a model of male sexuality onto women
- Holistic approach needed

### **Models of women's sexuality**

- Psychological model
- Socio-political model
- Medical model
- Interactionist model
- New View Model

### **The New View Model**

- Critical of any approach that ignores impact of psychological, social, environmental, political, economic and ideological factors on women's sexuality

'A new view of women's sexual problems' Ellen Kaschak & Leonore Tiefer, Haworth, 2001

### **Sexual Response Cycle**

- Masters & Johnson:                      Excitement → Plateau → Orgasm → Resolution
- Kaplan:                                      Desire → Excitement → Plateau → Orgasm → Resolution

### **Sexual Disorders/Dysfunctions:**

#### **DSM-IV CLASSIFICATION**

(derived from earlier work by Masters & Johnson, Kaplan)

- Sexual Desire Disorders
- Sexual Arousal Disorders
- Orgasmic Disorders
- Sexual Pain Disorders

### **What about... ?**

- Conservatism
- Guilt about taking leisure time
- Anxiety about body shape
- Inability to let go control of sexual passion
- Fragility of sexual interest/arousal
- Low priority given to sex
- Fear of lack of control with men

### **'New View' classification of women's sexual difficulties**

Suggests an alternative classification system based on:

- I Sexual problems due to socio-cultural, political or economic factors
- II Sexual problems relating to partner and relationship
- III Sexual problems due to psychological factors
- IV Sexual problems due to medical factors

### **Women's sexual difficulties may be related to:**

- Inadequate sex education
- Lack of access to health services
- Household conflicts
- Lack of sexual vocabulary
- Gender roles, differences
- Conflicts between culture and subculture sexual norms
- Fatigue due to family obligations
- Power inequality in relationships

- Discrepancies in desire
- Problems with attachment, rejection

### **Types of orgasm difficulties**

- Those women who never or only occasionally have an orgasm
- Those women who used to be able to orgasm... and now don't
- Those women who can orgasm at some times and not others

### **Summary of causes...**

- Personal style
- Relationship
- Lifestyle
- Sexual practices
- Health

### **Never, occasionally orgasm...**

- Being a busy person
- Being goal-focused
- Needing to stay in control of emotions
- Lacking enough information about sexual arousal
- Unable to communicate sexual needs
- Not enough time to become highly aroused
- Some fantasies can affect arousal
- Feeling guilty about enjoying yourself
- Feeling guilty because of childhood sex
- Past sexual abuse
- Long-time use of some medications
- Physical conditions

### **A woman's brain is her most important sex organ!**

Cass, V. *The Elusive Orgasm: A woman's guide to why she can't and how she can orgasm.*  
Brightfire Press, 2004

### **Vivienne Cass has responded to questions from the audience on:**

- A patient is **unable to orgasm following a termination** 1 year ago. How can we help?

The reasons are likely to be associated with holding onto grief about the termination and/or negative feelings about sexual pleasure which led to the pregnancy. If a woman is controlling these types of emotions, she is unable to let go sexual feelings enough to become highly aroused. These matters are discussed more fully in my book, *The Elusive Orgasm* (Brightfire Press 2004)