

# **Systemic Assessment of Sexual Issues in Individual and Couples Counseling**

## **SexTherapy-Online**

**Rhiannon Beauregard, MA, LMFT-S, CST**  
**Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist**  
**Certified Sex Therapist**

# About the Therapist



- Rhianon Beauregard, MA, LMFT-S, CST is a Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist and Certified Sex Therapist
- Licensed in five states: Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New York, and Texas
- Specializing in Sex Therapy with individuals and relationships
- Based in Austin, TX

## Some Details

- This presentation and many other resources are available online at my website:  
[www.SexTherapy-Online.com](http://www.SexTherapy-Online.com)
- I don't mind if you stay “wired” with this presentation- feel free to post, tweet, comment, blog, whatever. Live tweeting is a great way to share info and stay engaged:
  - Twitter Handle: SexTherapyOnline
  - LinkedIn: Rhiannon Beauregard
  - Google+: SexTherapy-Online

#TAMFT2016

# What We Are Going To Cover

- We are going to talk about the Systemic Assessment of Sexual Issues in Individual and Couples Counseling. This includes other types of relationships as well.
- We are not going to talk about specialized treatment, for sexual issues, but will cover how you have the ability within yourselves as clinicians to TREAT sexual issues.

# Learning Objectives

- Participants will demonstrate how to systemically assess sexual issues in individuals and couples.
- Participants will be able to identify their role as a marriage and family therapist in the assessment of sexual issues.
- Participants will be able to identify when to refer their clients to a specialist when presenting with a sexual issue.

# What I Want You To Take Home

- All sexual issues are MULTI-CAUSAL.
- You are likely VERY qualified to treat most of the issues that can cause a sexual issue.
- You can figure out what those multiple causes are by doing a comprehensive systemic assessment of the individual/couple/relationship/family/etc.
- You are not alone and do not have to treat complicated sexual issues all by yourself.

# What I Want You To Take Home

Assessment of sexual issues is ongoing and needs to occur in EVERY SINGLE SESSION YOU HAVE. Sex isn't this one time thing you ask about then never mention again. It is intertwined into everything we do. Always ask about it, otherwise it conveys a message that it isn't an essential part of the clients relationship.

# How We Are Going to Cover It

- Presenter Introduction ✓
- Objectives ✓
- Small Group Activity 1 (10 minutes)
- Large Group Activity 1: Common Issues and Causal Factors
- Systemic Assessment
- BREAK (15 minutes)
- Small Group Activity 2: Case Study (20 minutes)
- Large Group Activity 2: Case Study Presentation
- PLISSIT Model and Competency
- Action Items
- Conclusion and Q&A



# **SMALL GROUP ACTIVITY 1:**

## **Form Small Groups of 4-8 People**

- Please share with your small group the following:
  - Your name
  - Where you are from and where you practice
  - What type of setting are you in (school, community, private practice, etc.)
  - Why you signed up to attend the workshop
- You'll have 10-15 minutes to do this



# **Large Group Activity: Common Sexual Concerns That Your Clients Have Presented With**



# **Large Group Activity: Causal Factors**

# Systemic Assessment

- As an MFT, you are likely already doing a comprehensive systemic assessment of your clients.
- Systemically assessing your clients for *sexual issues* will ASCENTUATE your current assessment processes.
- Systemically assessing your clients will give you a LOT of information to develop a plan for treatment.
- NOT systemically assessing for sexual issues will probably not give you all the information you need to treat effectively.

## **With any assessment it is important to determine:**

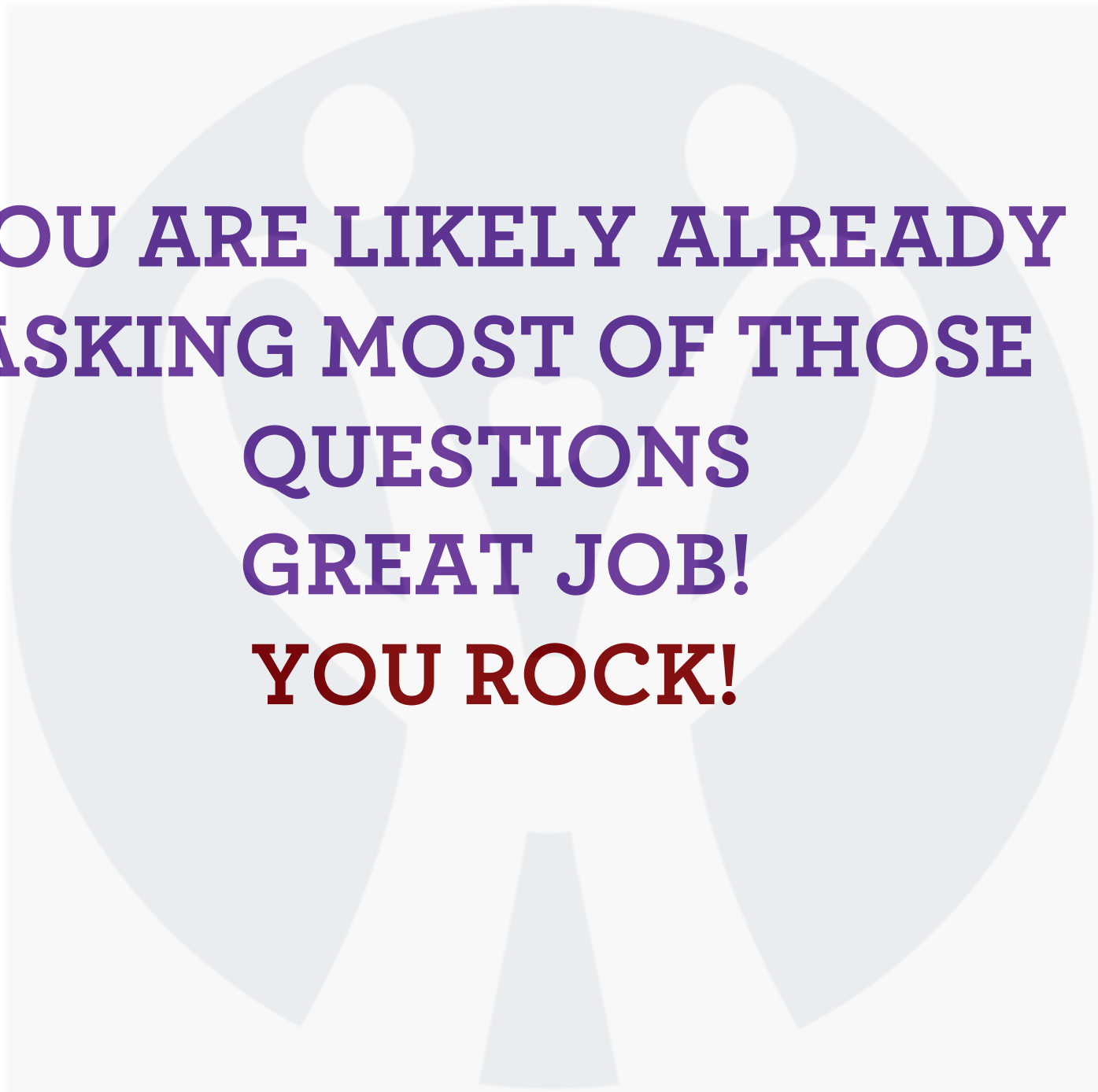
- Current Baseline
- Optimal Sexual Functioning (couple's ideal sex life at the end of treatment)
- Sexual Desire
- Sexual Satisfaction
- Level of Distress Experienced Because of the Sexual Problem
- Problem's impact on intimate relationships

Most of this information can be found in the two books by Hertlein, Weeks, & Sendak

# The Therapist Should Be Sure to Ask About

- Any physical illnesses or chronic medical conditions (including medication)
- The overall couple relationship
- The level of communication
- The level of affection in their relationship
- The level of sensuality in their relationship
- Whether there is anything else that the therapist needs to know

Most of this information can be found in the two books by Hertlein, Weeks, & Sendak



**YOU ARE LIKELY ALREADY  
ASKING MOST OF THOSE  
QUESTIONS  
GREAT JOB!  
YOU ROCK!**

**If you aren't, that's okay.  
Challenge yourself to start to make  
it part of your next assessment. Or  
you can use a pre-established  
assessment measure**

**[https://sextherapy-online.com/  
online-sex-therapy-forms/](https://sextherapy-online.com/online-sex-therapy-forms/)**



# Systemic Assessment of Sexual Issues

- Individual Assessment
  - Physiological
  - Psychological
- Interactional Assessment
- Intergenerational Assessment
- Sociocontextual and Ethnocultural Factors
  - Gender and Gender Roles
  - Religion/Spirituality
  - Economic and Financial
  - Racial and Ethnic Considerations
  - Sexual Orientation
  - Non-normative Practices (Kink, Poly, Swinging)
  - Political Views

# Individual Assessment

## Physiological

- Take medical history
- Analyze/evaluate medications and side effects
- Physical examination focusing on specific sexual and physiological functioning to ensure that nothing else is wrong
- Run specific tests to see if there are other things going on in the health of the client

## Psychological

- Psychological assessment of of cognitions, behaviors, and affect
- Life stressors
- Thoughts about sexuality and self.
- Assess body image concerns and physical attractiveness
- Anxiety and styles of stress management
- Life stage and developmental changes
- Presence of other disorders as well

# Interactional Assessment

- Relationship issues/problems
- Lack of sexual satisfaction
- Often times sexual dissatisfaction is what brings the clients in in the first place
- Sexual timetable
- Difference of desire longstanding turning into arousal concerns
- Observe overall relational dynamics
- Length of relationship, offspring, relevant extended family members
- Couples degree of cohesion, empathy, commitment autonomy
- Communication
- Anxiety in Sexual Relationships
- Patterns in relationship carrying over into sexual relationship
- High conflict
- Sexual Satisfaction
- Sexual functioning- current, previous and optimal
- Conflict resolution patterns
- GENOGRAM, but ask about sexual patterns, low desire, sexual problems, miscarriages, infertility etc.

# Intergenerational Assessment

- Ask about family of origin and how sex was talked about at home
- Explore if the couple was raised differently in how sex was talked about taught, etc.
- Explore family of origin Genograms
- Explore sexual and relationship Genograms- Past events and experiences in related to sex and relationship
- Are their family patterns of sexual issues?
- Review Past Storm Damage Activity
  - Write down any past, bad, or negative experiences of sexual activity that they remember including self exploration

# Sociocontextual & Ethnocultural Assessment of Sexual Issues

- HOW MIGHT YOU ASSESS FOR THESE FACTORS AND HOW THEY RELATE TO SEXUAL ISSUES?
- Sociocontextual and Ethnocultural Factors
  - Gender and Gender Roles
  - Body Image
  - Religion/Spirituality
  - Economic and Financial
  - Racial and Ethnic Considerations
  - Sexual Orientation
  - Non-normative Practices (Kink, Poly, Swinging)
  - Political Views

# Body Image Assessment Exercise



# How We Are Going to Cover It

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**BREAK**  
**15 minutes**



# **SMALL GROUP ACTIVITY 2:**

## **PART I: ASSESSMENT**

- You have a new client who is coming in. A very high profile client.
- Create a Celebrity, Political Figure, or Fictional Person who you will be seeing.
- Decide if you are going to see them individually, in a couple, or as a family.
- You only know the issue that they are coming in for.
- Systemically Assess the clients to determine the causal factors that are contributing/creating/maintaining the issue.
- You'll have 10 minutes to do this.

# SMALL GROUP ACTIVITY 2:

## PART II: TREATMENT

- Take a look at the causal factors that you have discovered through your systemic “assessment”
- Discuss in the group the causal factors that you, as an MFT, would VERY LIKELY or LIKELY be comfortable TREATING
- Discuss in the group the causal factors that you, as an MFT, would be UNLIKELY or VERY UNLIKELY be comfortable TREATING
- With the causal factors that you are unlikely or very unlikely to be comfortable treating, who would need to be on your “team” to refer to for those issues?
- You have 10 minutes to do this



# **Large Group Activity: A Few Brave Souls to Share Their Groups Case**

# How We Are Going to Cover It

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# PLISSIT Model

## Permission

- Give clients PERMISSION to speak about their sexual issues
- Give clients permission to feel comfortable about the sexual topic
- Therapist is a nonjudgmental, listener
- Normalize and Validate

## Limited Interventions

- Provide limited and specific information on the topic
- Offer a limited amount of resources, information, organizations, support groups, books, self-help programs, podcasts, videos

# PLISSIT Model

## Specific Suggestions

- Give client specific suggestions, interventions, assignments to help with the issue

## Intensive Therapy

- Provide intensive therapy for more complex issues
- Deal with the deeper issues

# A Brief Word About Competency

- You are not expected to the job of a sex therapist. You can't do it all.
- You are expected to assess your clients systemically as an MFT and to refer when you are not competent in an area and it is out of your scope.
- If you want to do sex therapy, become more competent in sex therapy.
- How? KNOWLEDGE + EXPERIENCE = COMPETENCY which leads to CONFIDENCE in working with sexual issues.

# Action Items

- Start Assembling Your Team of Referring Providers. It would be helpful if the following professionals were included in your “team”:
  - Sex Therapist ✓
  - Someone who specializes in working with problematic sexual behavior ✓
  - Urogynecologist/Gynecologist that *specializes* in sexual health
  - Urologist that *specializes* in sexual health
  - Physical therapist that specializes in pelvic health
  - Sexual Product Specialist



# Where to Find Your Team

- You've already found your sex therapist!
- A good place to start is visiting my website for a comprehensive list of associations and societies dedicated to sexual health:  
<https://sextherapy-online.com/resources/professionals-and-associations/>
- Ask your clients or your own practitioners who they refer to or use.
- Just start networking. Chances are they could use a good marriage and family therapist to refer to as well!

# Contact

- [www.SexTherapy-Online.com](http://www.SexTherapy-Online.com)
- Phone: 512.765.4741
- Email: Rhannon@SexTherapy-Online.com
- Fax: 888.288.8495
- Twitter: SexTherapyOnline
- Please feel free to contact for questions and materials, mentoring, case consultation, supervision, and referrals!

**Any Questions?**



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