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QUALITY COUPLE SEX: GROWTH & SATISFACTION WITH "GOOD-ENOUGH SEX"

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HEALTH CONTINUUM

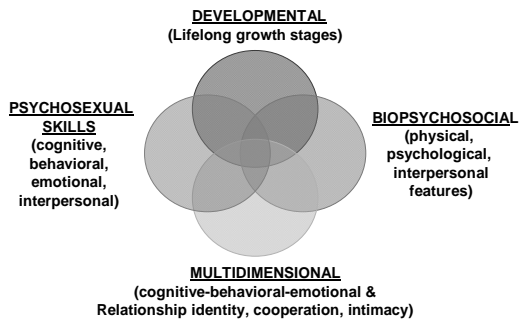
ILLNESS
 pain,
 distress
 dysfunction

RELIEF
 No pain,
 absence of distress,
 function

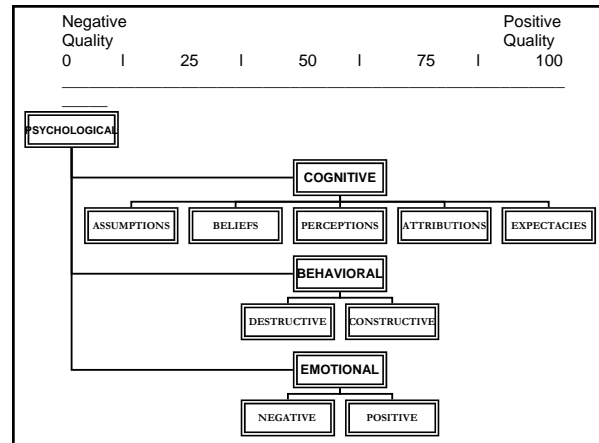
HEALTH
 pleasure,
 satisfaction,
 intimacy

Michael E. Metz, Ph.D.

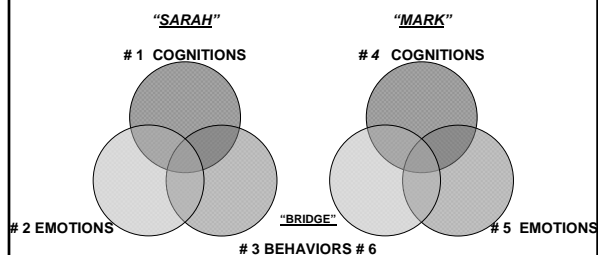
Features of the Integrative Approach



(From: Metz, M.E. (submitted, 2008). Healing Sexually Fractured Couples from Problems with Men's Sexual Health)



Cognitive-Behavioral-Emotional (C-B-E) Dimensions of Two Individuals



The Crucial Variable for Sex Satisfaction: Reasonable, Age-Appropriate Expectations

- The indispensable variable in sexual satisfaction (emotional dimension) is the "meaning" (cognitive dimension) of the sexual interaction (behavior) for the individual and the couple.
- Couples "blend" sexual meanings as a "intimate team."
- Realistic, accurate, age-appropriate expectations are crucial
 - because this "meaning" essentially distinguishes satisfied vs. dissatisfied / dysfunctional couples.
- Acceptance of sexual variability: "not perfect".

Types of Cognitions in Relationships

(adapted from : Epstein, N.B., & Baucom, D.H. (2002). Enhanced cognitive-behavioral therapy for couples: A contextual approach. Washington DC: APA)

1. **Assumptions** – what each **believes** people and relationships **actually are like**; the set of characteristics typical of a partner.

Personae – set of characteristics typical of someone in the role of “husband” or “wife”, or similar roles in intimate nonmarital relationships. For example, what is typical of “husband” may include providing financially, caring, fairly nonexpressive concerning emotions, dominant in family decision making.

Scripts – about how two members of a relationship interact with one another. This includes assumptions about sequences of events that occur between partners, such as sexual initiation.

2. **Standards (or Beliefs)** -- what each **believes** people and relationships **should be like**; the characteristics that a partner *should* have.

3. **Selective Attention (perceptions)** – **what each notices** about the partner, the relationship, and the environment; what an Individual notices, depending on factors such as the individual’s emotional state, level of fatigue, prior experiences in similar situations. This “filtering” feature has been termed “selective abstraction” (Beck et al., 1979), “negative tracking” (Jacobson & Margolin, 1979), or “sentiment override” (Weiss, 1980) to describe the selective attention or bias that is commonly unaware to the partners

4. **Attributions** – causal and responsibility **explanations** for relationship events; one’s ***causal explanations*** for relationship events, which serve to increase an individual’s sense of understanding and control over complex relationship events.

Attributions can be (1) **global/specific**, (2) **stable/unstable**, or (3) **internal/external** (e.g., locus of control). Distressed partners tend to assign responsibility for marital problems to factors internal to their relationships by most often blaming their partners (even though the stress may come from features distinct from the marriage such as one individual being depressed, or one troubled by outside career difficulties). Distress tends to be higher when individuals attribute their relationship problems to negative characteristics of their partners such as negative or malicious intent, lack of love, blameworthiness, and selfish motivation.

5. **Expectancies** -- **predictions** of what will occur in the relationship in the future; **outcomes or efficacy**. Two major expectancies: (1) **outcome expectancies** – predictions that particular actions will result in particular outcomes in certain situations. These predictions take on an “if – then” form such as how one’s partner will react to one’s actions (“If I disagree I’ll be criticized”), how one will react to the partner’s actions (“If she criticizes me, I’m sure that I’ll lose my temper and yell”), or the outcome of joint actions (“arguments in front of the children will alienate them”); and (2) **efficacy expectancies** – the person estimates the probabilities that he or she will be able to carry out those actions that would produce those outcomes.

Perspective on “Great” Sex

Michael E. Metz, Ph.D.

- **The idyllic pursuit of “great” sex is the source of extensive personal dissatisfaction (even agony) and relationship distress.**
 - amplifies fears of inadequacy (e.g., penile & breast augmentations).
 - predisposes to life-long disappointment.
- There is a **poignant irony** when the pursuit of “great sex” becomes the cause of **dissatisfying, dysfunctional sex.**

Perspective

- The “Good-Enough Sex” (GES) model intends to **reposition, balance** the cognitive focus away from:
 - the common cultural and interpersonal **expectation** that sex should always be “great” & perfect; and
 - the **belief** that when it is not, it is:
 - “inadequate”
 - a symptom of “falling out of love”, or
 - a flawed relationship.

Basis > the “Good-Enough Sex” Model

- **The Good-Enough Sex model for couple sexual satisfaction is built on a continuum model (“more” or “less”) :**
 1. an **heuristic model** (“replicable approach to direct one’s attention”) from **enduring features of 40 years of biopsychosocial sex research and therapy;**
 2. **inferences drawn from multiple empirical studies of couple sexual function and satisfaction** (biopsychosocial literature: psychology, sociology, social psychology, marital & family, clinical, biomedical research...).
 3. current **clinical observations and outcome experience** of a number of “seasoned” marital & sex therapists.

Good-Enough Sex Model: Assumptions

1. **Sexual Health is complex & complicated:**
 - developmental & lifelong
 - multidimensional
 - multi-causal
 - multiple effects on the person, partner, their relationship
 - all dimensions are interactive, correlation variables, not “A → B” or direct cause-effect.
2. Any approach to sexual health should recognize that **sex is inherently relational** affecting the emotional life of the couple.
 - The relevance of an erect penis or sex desire is its role in individual self-esteem & relationship satisfaction.

Good-Enough Sex Model: Assumptions

3. Comprehensive understanding of sexuality **integrates** medical, pharmacological, psychological, relationship, and social aspects.
4. Real-life problems **rarely have a simple cause and a simple cure** in spite of people’s longing for “quick fixes.”
5. **Clinical practice & theory / research interact** and are enriched when embedded in a detailed, comprehensive view of sexual health – not simply function or absence of illness.

“Good-Enough Couple Sex”

- promotes **realistic expectations:**
 - ▶ **Relationship intimacy** as the ultimate focus (“intimate team”).
 - ▶ **Pleasure, and mutual emotional acceptance,** are as important as performance / function.
 - ▶ **flexibility & accepting variability** are crucial.
 - ▶ **sex “fits” into real life,** and real life fits into sex.
 - ▶ **sexuality is personalized:** Sex can be spiritual, “special.” Sex is at times experienced as mature **playfulness.**

Dimensions of the “Good-Enough Sex” Model For Couple Satisfaction

Michael E. Metz, Ph.D. & Barry W. McCarthy (2003, 2004, 2007, 2008)

1. **Sex is valued as intrinsically good**, an invaluable part of an individual’s and couple’s self-esteem, pleasure, intimacy, comfort, and confidence.
2. **Sexuality is inherently relational**. Relationship and sexual satisfaction are the ultimate developmental focus and are essentially intertwined. The couple blends the 12 facets of intimacy; views the partner as “Sexual Friend”; their relationship as “Intimate Team.”
3. The partners ground their **sexual expectations** on realistic, age-appropriate expectations. Accurate and reasonable knowledge about sexual physiology, psychology, and relationship health are crucial for sexual satisfaction
4. **Good physical and psychological health**, ensured with healthy behavioral habits, are vital for sexual health. Individuals value their and their partner’s sexual body.
5. **Relaxation** is the foundation for sexual pleasure and physiological sex function.
6. **Sensual touch & emotional pleasure** are valued as well as sexual performance.
7. Valuing **variable, flexible** sexual experiences and abandoning the “need” for perfect performance inoculates the couple against sexual dysfunction by overcoming performance pressure, anxiety, and fears of failure and rejection.
8. Five **basic purposes for sex are integrated** into the couple’s sexual relationship -- blending pleasure, tension release, self-esteem, intimacy, and/or procreation.
9. Partners integrate and flexibly use the three basic **sexual arousal styles** to cope with “sexual over-familiarity” by balancing and blending multiple styles of sexual arousal --> sensual “self-entrancement”, “partner interaction”, and “role enactment”.
10. **Gender differences** are respectfully valued and similarities mutually accepted. Each is attentive to integrating their psychological and physical sexual feelings. The man learns to self-regulate his sexual drive and arousal while the woman self-regulates her emotional drive and sexual arousal. They consciously accept and respect the body’s “biological sexual nature,” he learns to personalize his biologically natural tendency toward “sexual objectification,” and each differentiates and integrates emotional and sexual feelings (issues of “emotional sexualization” and “sexual emotionalization”) to enhance relationship intimacy.
11. Sex is integrated into **real life** and real life is integrated into sex. Sexuality is developing, growing and evolving throughout life. The healthy couple integrates the events of daily life to create their realistic, distinctively personalized, and enriched sexual style. Sexual health and satisfaction are directly influenced by the quality of relationship conflict resolution. Conflict presents the ordinary, day-to-day opportunity to cooperatively address it and thereby deepen emotional and sexual intimacy. They each become leaders in cooperation for intimacy – in and out of the bedroom.
12. Sexuality is **personalized --> occasionally playful, special, spiritual**. Mature playfulness is characterized by acceptance, emotional trust, and pleasure.

“Good-Enough Couple Sex” is Great Sex.

Michael E. Metz, Ph.D. & Barry W. McCarthy, Ph.D.

Many - when they first hear us propose putting into practice Good-Enough Couple Sex - think we're encouraging acceptance of mediocre or second-rate, bland, take-what-you-can-get, boring sex. To the contrary, the Good-Enough Couple Sex model summarizes the developmental principles for satisfying sex without hype. It serves as a blueprint for a genuine, pleasurable, realistic, playful, intimate, erotic, flexible, satisfying sexual life.

HOW IS "GOOD-ENOUGH SEX" GREAT SEX ?

1. You feel more self-assured and proud of yourself as a sexual person because the Good-Enough Sex model is based on positive, realistic expectations.
2. You gain a sense of self and other acceptance because you view sex in realistic terms, seeing sex as a part of unfeigned life and an honest intimate relationship.
3. You accept yourself and your partner as authentic persons, not mythic figures.
4. You understand and view your sex life as a normal part of life, not hype with its pressure to be someone you are not or pressure to sexually perform in ways that don't fit your actual body and your genuine self.
5. You can accept variable sex with its passionate and “wild” times, special and intimacy times, as well as accept the mediocre times without disappointment and panic because together you find flexible ways of making love that fit your life's situation.
6. You feel more confidence about your sexual function and flexible because you understand there are multiple reasons for having sex, and multiple ways of becoming aroused. You can be flexible because you are an intimate team and have options and choices for pleasing yourself and each other.
7. You feel anxiety-free because your solid focus as a couple is mutual pleasure, not the Hollywood movie pressure of perfect performance.
8. You feel comfortable with your partner because you endeavor to cooperate as an “intimate team.” Together you are open to a variety of meanings in your sexual life – fun, pleasure, comfort, tension reduction, playfulness, consolation, spirituality.

What makes Good-Enough Couple Sex great is that it is not “great” in the perfectionistic performance sense but in the sense of emotional acceptance and relationship playfulness, cooperation, intimacy, pleasure and eroticism. It is a case where reality really is better than fantasy.

Variable Sexual Experience Distinguishes Satisfied Couples in “Good-Enough Sex.”

(From: McCarthy, B.W. & Metz, M.E., (2007). *Men’s Sexual Health*. NY: Routledge.)

Valuing variable flexible sexual experiences (the 85% approach) and abandoning the need for perfect performance inoculates the man and couple against sexual dysfunction by overcoming performance pressure, fears of failure, and rejection.

The reality for emotionally and sexually healthy couples is that the quality of sex varies. The male myth portrayed in the romantic love/passionate sex media (including R and X-rated videos) is that each sexual experience involves perfect performance. What nonsense. In truth, both scientific findings and clinical experience show that emotionally satisfied, sexually functional couples have a variable, flexible sexual response (Table 6.2). This means that about 35–45% of encounters are very satisfying for both partners, another 20–25% are better for one (usually the man) than the other, and 15–20% are okay but not remarkable. The most important information is that 5–15% of sexual encounters are unsatisfying or dysfunctional.

The Good-Enough Sex model accepts that among satisfied couples, up to 15% of the time their sexual encounters will not flow to intercourse. Rather than thinking of these as failures, accept them as part of normal variability. Instead of apologizing, you can transition to a backup scenario—either a warm, sensual scenario or an erotic, non-intercourse scenario leading to orgasm for you, her, or both. The Good-Enough Sex approach encourages relationship satisfaction with an acceptance of variability in the quality of sex grounded on positive, realistic expectations. This serves the man and couple well and inoculates them against sexual problems with aging. Accepting Good-Enough Sex is often easier for the woman than for the man, but it promotes sexual satisfaction for both.

The Quality of Good-Enough Sex in Well-Functioning, Satisfied Married Couples

35–45%	Very Satisfying
20–25%	Good (at least 1 partner)
15–20%	Okay (not remarkable)
5–15%	Unsatisfying (dysfunctional)

Note. Adapted from “Frequency of Sexual Dysfunction in Normal Couples,” by E. Frank, C. Anderson, and D. N. Rubinstein, 1978, *New England Journal of Medicine*, 299; and *The Social Organization of Sexuality: Sexual Practices in the United States*, by E. O. Laumann et al., 1994, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.; Table 10.10, p. 374

12 Facets of Intimacy

- **Recreation:** sharing experiences of fun, sports, hobbies, recreation; sharing ways of refilling the wells of energy, leisure.
- **Aesthetic:** sharing experiences of beauty -- music, nature, art, theater, dance, movies; drinking from the common cup of beauty.
- **Intellectual:** involves sharing the world of ideas; a genuine touching of persons based on mutual respect for each others intellectual capacities (reading, discussing, studying, respectful debating, etc.).
- **Commitment:** togetherness derived from dedication to a common cause, value or effort (e.g. working for a political cause).
- **Work:** sharing common tasks or projects, supporting each other in bearing responsibilities (raising a family, house/yard chores, cooking together, etc.).
- **Communication:** being open, honest, trusting, truthful, loving; giving constructive feedback; positive confrontation.
- **Crisis:** standing together in the major and minor tragedies which persist in life; closeness in coping with problems and pain.
- **Sexual:** sensual-emotional satisfaction; the experience of sharing and self-abandon in the physical merging of two persons; sensual-sexual fantasies and desires.
- **Emotional:** depth awareness and sharing of significant meanings and feelings; the touching of the innermost selves of two human beings.
- **Creative:** helping each other to grow, to be co-creators (not "reformers") of each other.
- **Conflict:** standing-up with/to each other; "fighting" in non-des-structive (i.e., constructive) ways; facing and struggling with differences together.
- **Spiritual:** the "we-ness" of sharing ultimate concerns, the meanings of life, philosophies, religious experience.

The 5 Basic Purposes for Sex (Biopsychosocial Functions)

In the order of prevalence:

- **Physical pleasure** (bio-psych)
- **Tension / anxiety reduction** (bio-psych)
- **Relationship intimacy** (interpersonal).
- **Self-esteem, confidence** (psych)
- **Reproduction or procreation** (bio).

Arousal Styles: Differences in Focus

1. "**Partner Interaction**" focus on the partner. Person is active, eyes open, looking at the partner, talkative (romantic or "sweet" talk), and energetic. This is the sexual style on TV and in movies -- passionate and impulsive sex.
2. **Sensual "Self-entrancement"** focus on one's own body. Person utilizing this style typically closes one's eyes, goes within, becomes quiet, and looks detached and passive. Routine and stylized touch help this person to become aroused.
3. "**Role Enactment**" focus on role play, fantasy, variety, and experimentation, such as dressing in sexy lingerie, role playing being "tough" or "hard to get," acting out a scene from a movie or fantasy, having sex in new places (e.g., vacation), using "toys" (massage oil, vibrator, dildo) to find excitement and arousal through sexual playfulness.

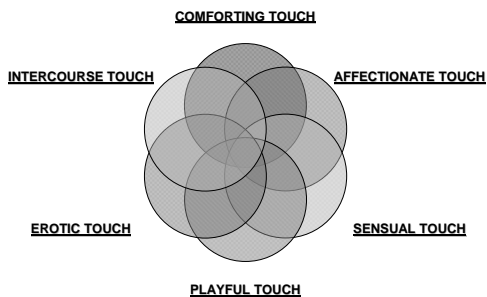
REAL LIFE REGULAR SEX – THE "INTIMACY BLENDER"

Regular sex ensures that the moods and events of life are brought to your bedroom.

Sexual Environment → Example

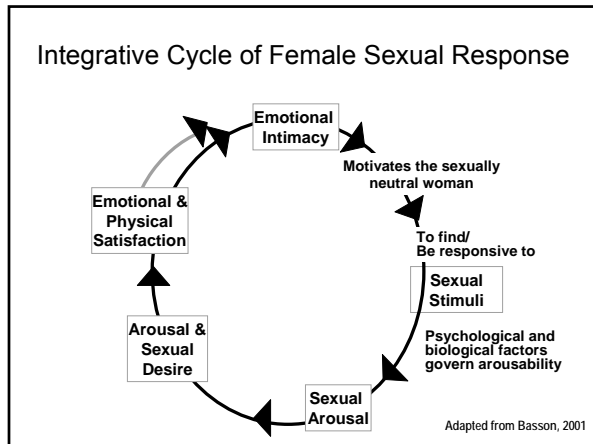
- "**Spirited Sex**" → when you feel full of life and vigorous.
- "**Standard Sex**" → when life is uneventful, sex is a shared pleasure.
- "**Make-up Sex**" → after an argument.
- "**Compassionate Sex**" → after the funeral of your close friend.
- "**Bad Mood Sex**" → during despondent or glum moments.
- "**Angst Sex**" → sex for tension or stress release.
- "**Vacation Sex**" → on a holiday or escape trip.
- "**Role Play Sex**" → when you're "stretching", experimenting
- "**Transcendental Sex**" → sharing sex "under the stars", awareness and appreciation of the ultimate meaning of life, love, the universe.

The 6 Kinds of Touch



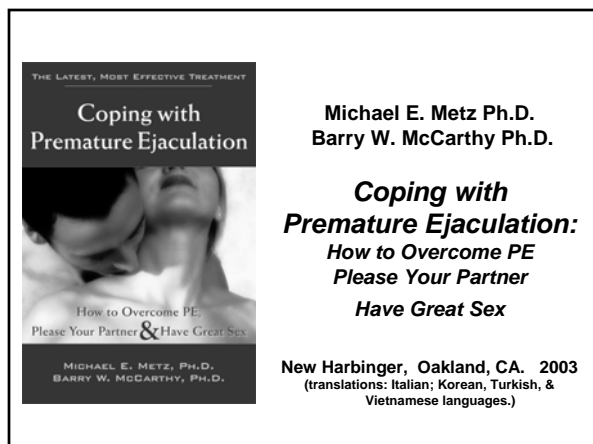
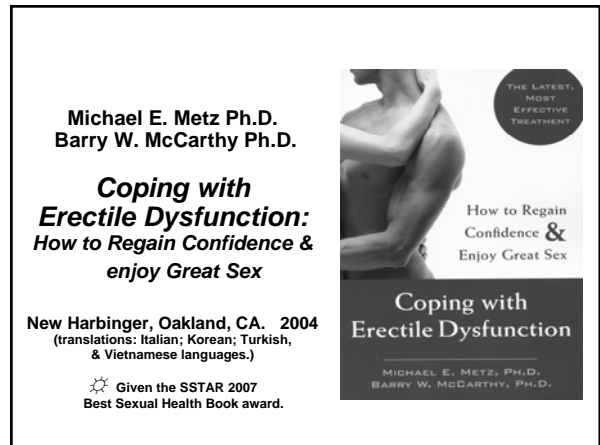
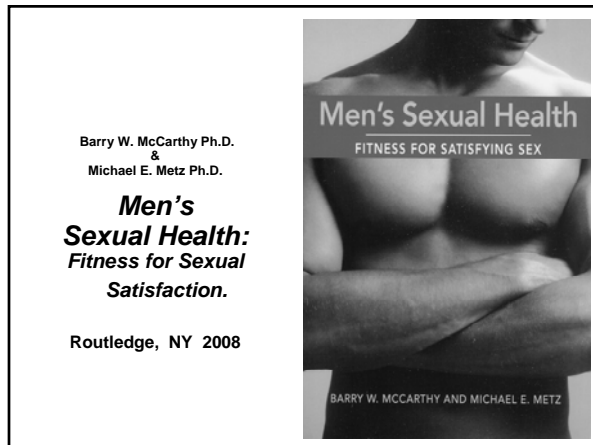
"Good-Enough Sex" is Special Sex

- Perhaps the more reliable indicator of "Good-Enough sex" is the occasional presence of playfulness at sex because:
 - for play to occur, certain other aspects of intimacy must be functioning well:
 - trust
 - mutual acceptance
 - priority on pleasure (more so than performance)
 - freedom to be oneself
 - deep valuing of the overall relationship – a "special feeling".
- Playful experiences "personalize" the bedroom.



Good-Enough Sex Approach: Resources

- ▶ Metz, M. E., & McCarthy, B. W., (2007). "The Good-Enough Sex Model for Couple Sexual Satisfaction." *Sexual and Relationship Therapy*, Vol. 22 (3),351-362.
- ▶ McCarthy, B.W. & Metz, M. E., (2008). "The Good-Enough Sex" Model: A Case Illustration. *Sexual and Relationship Therapy*; 23 (3), 227.
- ▶ Metz, M. E. & B. W. McCarthy, (2008). "Eros & Aqing: Is Good-Enough Sex Right for You?" *Psychotherapy Networker*, July/August 2008; 55-61.
- ▶ McCarthy, B. W. & Metz, M. E., (2008). "The Cognitive-Behavioral 'Good-Enough Sex' Model: A case illustration." *Sexual and Relationship Therapy*; 23 (3), 227.
- ▶ McCarthy, B. W. & Metz, M. E. (2008). Chapter 6, "Good-Enough Sex"; *Men's Sexual Health: Fitness for Satisfying Sex*. NY Routledge/Taylor Francis.



The Good Enough Sex Approach
Book for Couples – release summer 2010

- Title:
"Enduring Desire: Your Guide to Lifelong Intimacy"

Michael E. Metz & Barry W. McCarthy

Routledge Publishing, NY 2010