

Some Meanings of Sexual Behavior

A. SEX TO MEET NEED FOR AFFECTION:

- Sex as a way of getting acceptance, feeling liked, needed.
- Sex as a way of feeling loved.
- Sex to get a feeling of security, safety.

B. SEX TO EXPRESS HOSTILITY:

- Sex to express feelings of anger.
- Sex to hurt someone, humiliate someone.
- Sex to get revenge

Note: All of these hostile feelings can be direct or displaced--that is, they can be toward the sexual partner or toward someone else altogether.)

C. SEX TO IMPROVE ONE'S SELF-IMAGE:

- Sex to confirm masculinity/femininity.
- Sex to feel strong, powerful, big, potent.
- Sex to lessen fears about an experience of impotence.
- Sex to lessen doubts about sexual orientation.
- Sex to feel oneself to be sexy, gentle, desirable, knowledgeable.
- Sex to feel strong and in control of someone else.
- Sex to feel like a wise teacher about sex.
- Sex to feel powerful by making someone else become aroused.
- Sex to feel special, to share a secret.
- Sex to feel successful at living out one's fantasies.

D. SEX TO AVOID UNPLEASANT FEELINGS OR THOUGHTS:

- Sex to stop feelings or loneliness.
- Sex as an escape form tension and stress.
- Sex to quiet feelings of emptiness and depression.
- Sex to create excitement, risk, danger, to stop feelings of boredom, or distract from other unpleasant feelings.
- Sex to forget oneself by identifying with the sexual partner.
- Sex to avoid intimacy, real interpersonal closeness, talking.
- Sex to avoid the realities of life and the unavoidable sadness of reality and the world in which we live.
- Sex to deny death, mortality, growing old.

E. OTHER NON-SEXUAL MOTIVES FOR SEXUAL BEHAVIOR:

- Sex as a role reversal, passive-into-active, doing unto someone else what was done to oneself, identifying with the aggressor (often when someone has previously been the victim of sexual abuse as a child or even as an adult).
- Sex as a way for someone who lacks social skills to connect with another person.
- Sex as a way to undo, correct earlier bad sexual experience.
- Sex as a way to experiment and learn about sexuality.
- Sex as a way to rebel, be bad, do something forbidden.
- Sex as a way to create a private, secret little world apart.

(Adapted from a handout from The Center for Special Problems, San Francisco, California)