

Women's Sexual Interest/Desire Disorder : Implications of New Definition

*Rosemary Basson MD FRCP(UK)
Vancouver General Hospital
University of British Columbia
Vancouver, Canada*

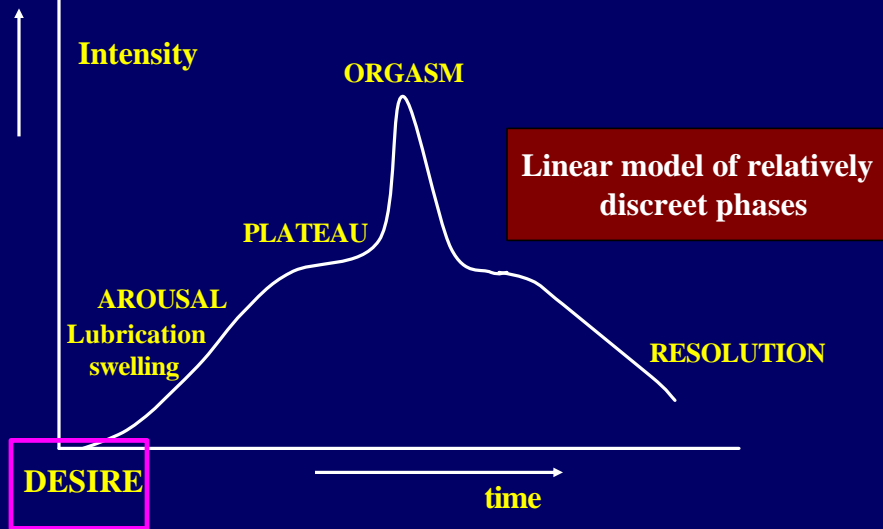
1

New Model of Sex Response : New Definitions of Dysfunction

- **Why move from the model “desire - arousal (erection/lubrication) - orgasm - resolution?**
- **What is the new model and the new definition of low desire/interest ?**
- **What are two major changes ?**
- **Where are sex hormones involved ?**
- **How do we assess and manage desire/ arousal problems ?**

2

Why propose any new model of response or revise definitions of dysfunction ?



3

Need for New Model

- **Women in established relationships only rarely begin sex with their partners for reasons of desire.....(initially)**
- **“Desire” has a broad normative range across sexually content women**

4

Need for New Model

- Women in established relationships only rarely begin sex with their partners for reasons of desire..(initially)
- “Desire” has a broad normative range across sexually content women
- **Women do not focus on genital congestion when they assess their sexual arousal**

5

**Psychophysiological studies :-
Women watch an erotic
(made for women), video**

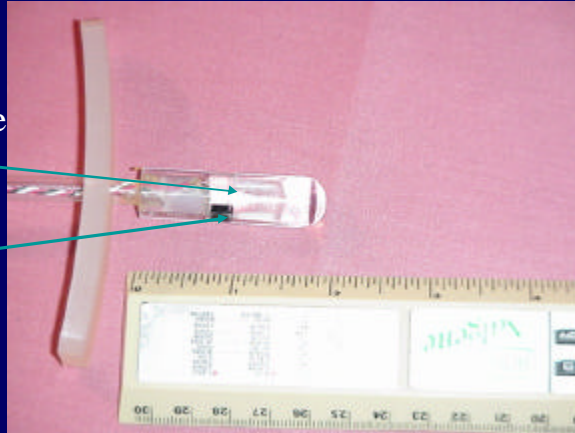


6

Vaginal photoplethysmograph

Light-emitting diode

Phototransistor



Objective increase in congestion is measured along with subjective sexual arousal

7

Studies over the past 25 years

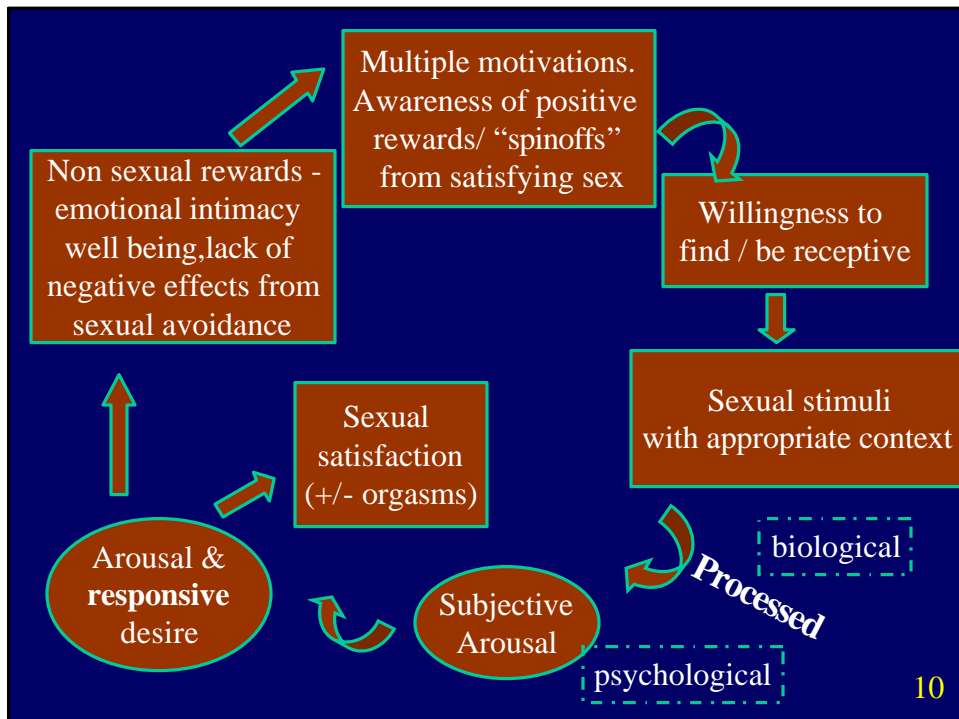
- **Psychophysiological studies repeatedly confirm women may genitally congest in a healthy manner** but experience no subjective sexual arousal
- For women with chronic low arousal measured increase in vasocongestion matches that of sexually healthy women

8

Need for New Model

- Women in established relationships only rarely begin sex with their partners for reasons of desire..(initially)
- Women do not focus on genital congestion when they assess their sexual arousal
- **Phases are not discreet, dysfunctions co-exist**

9

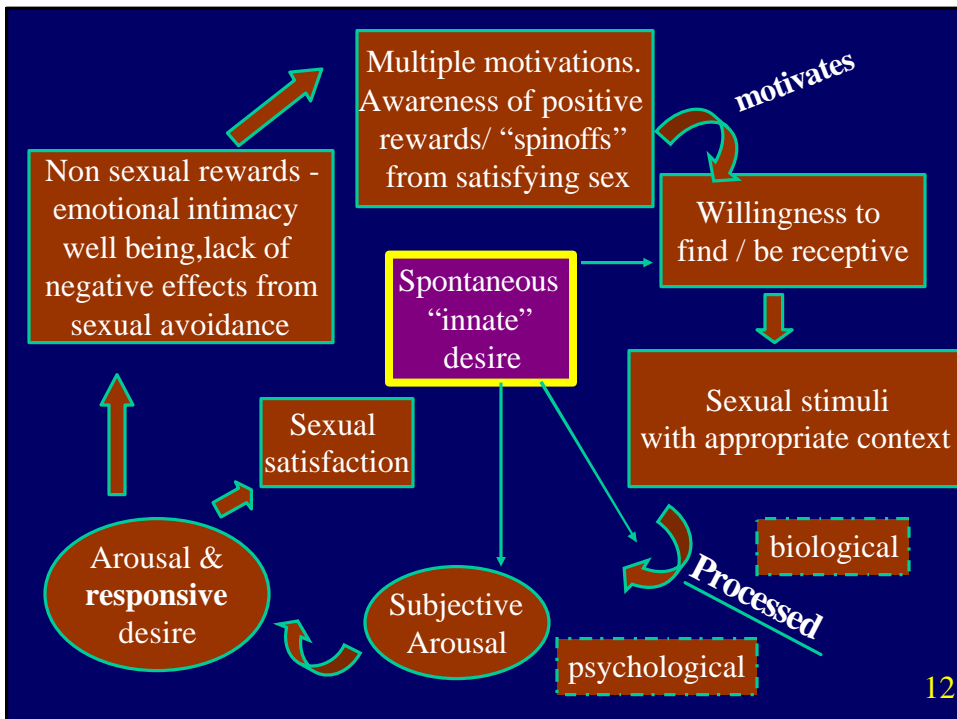


10

Spontaneous/Initial Desire ??

- **Common early on in relationships**
- **May endure for decades in the same relationship**
- **Frequently extremely rare**
- **Is the focus of existing definitions of desire disorder**

11



12

**American Foundation of Urological Disease
International Consensus Committee on
Definitions of Women's Sexual Dysfunctions
2002 - 3**

**Basson R, Leiblum S, Brotto L, Derogatis L, Fourcroy J,
Fugl Meyer K, Graziottin A, Heiman J, Laan E, Meston C,
Schover L, Wejmar Schultz W, van Lankveld J**

J Psychosom Obstet Gynecol 2003;24:221-229

13

**Sexual Interest/Desire
Disorder**

**Absent or diminished feelings of sexual
interest or desire, absent sexual thoughts
or fantasies, and a lack of responsive
desire.**

**The lack of interest is considered to be beyond a
normative lessening with life cycle &
relationship duration.**

14

Two Major Points

- It is the inability to be subjectively aroused and access desire during the experience, that designates disorder
- Lack of initial desire per se, does not designate disorder. (Its sudden loss may accompany loss of subjective arousability and lack of responsive desire)

15

Sex Hormones

- Testosterone via AR &/or ER involved in arousability - response - pleasure, excitement, orgasm
 - and in any initial “spontaneous” desire
 - ? in the active neurovascular genital smooth muscle response of swelling & increased lubrication
 - ? in genital sexual sensitivity

16



Sex Hormones

- Estrogen is involved directly in vulval, vaginal congestive response
- and indirectly via effects on mood, sleep, it is linked to sexual motivation and arousability

17

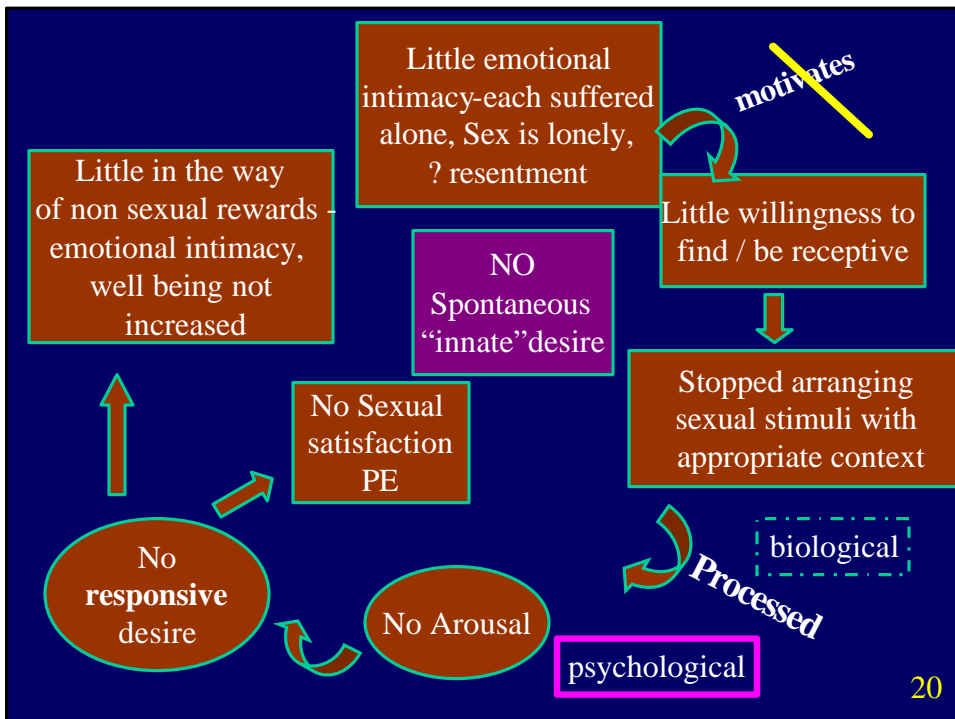


**How Do We Assess Lack
of Subjective Arousal
Lack of Interest /Desire?**

18

Jenny and Michael

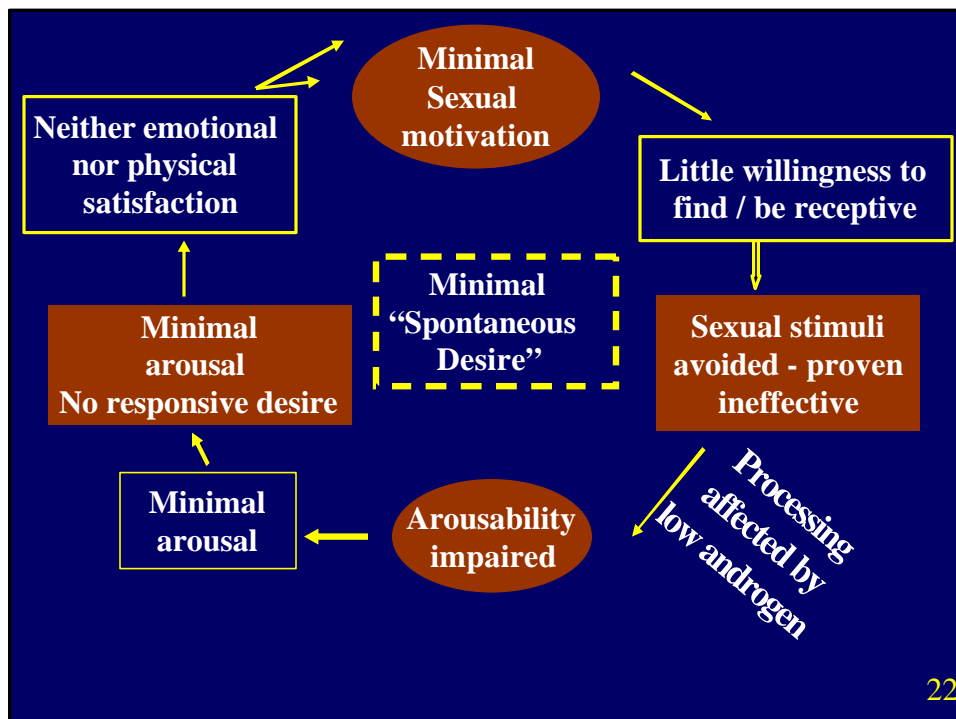
- Sex was fine for first 5 years
- Infertility testing desire and arousal faded
- Alisha is now 5 years old
- No improvement in Jenny's sexual experiences



Anna and Sharon

- Sex was fine for their 10 years together until Anna's BSO & hysterectomy for ovarian mass

21



22

Conclusions

- **Women's sexual desire is largely responsive "triggerable"**
- **The concept of "arousability" is key**
- **Many psychological, interpersonal and contextual factors influence arousability**
- **Biological factors also influence - eg fatigue, depression, medications, androgen loss**