Human Sexuality

TI 022 - Thematic

By

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INTRODUCTION

While there are many ways of gathering and disseminating information about sexuality, several factors argue for the use of a small structured group approach. Of primary importance is the belief that sexual facts do not exist without accompanying attitudes or emotions which may alter the ways those facts are perceived. In addition, since human sexuality is such a highly emotional subject, any approach to examining it should deal with the realities of human relationships, life style, self-image and value structure. A small group approach can offer experiences which foster insight into oneself and the effect one has on others, aid personal unfreezing, provide a more feeling-level orientation, and, thus, increase the feeling of freedom to share material of a sensitive nature.

In approaching the exercises that follow, the leader should encourage and exemplify critical self-examination and an awareness of fluctuating values. They should make it clear that responses from individuals are expected to be varied and that all are acceptable, since "what is" and "what ought to be" are debatable.

The exercises are designed for use in a group of 10 to 12 persons, half males and half females. The group meets weekly for an hour and a half for each of eight sessions. A room suitable for maximum interpersonal interaction and large enough for sub-groups is suggested.

GENERAL OBJECTIVES:

1. to develop awareness of sexual attitudes and behavior in ourselves and in our culture;
2. to honestly and openly discuss sexual issues;
3. to understand factors that inhibit healthy sexual experiences;
4. to increase factual knowledge of normal sexual functions;
5. to positively affirm one's sexuality.

SESSION I

Introduction and Community Building (30 minutes)

This activity provides an introduction to the topic and general clarification of expectations. Through use of the "log" participants can interrelate ideas and experiences which are significant and relevant to the group's objectives. The log also gives the leader an opportunity to note the participants reactions and progress. For both the participant and the leader it can provide indications of growth and change.
A. Explain purposes and format for the sessions that will follow, emphasizing that sexuality encompasses the total personality and is not limited to genitality. Explain the importance of group members' attendance at all sessions, if possible, because of the shared experiential concept of group process.

B. Present background reading material. (Katchadourian and Lunde, 1972.)

C. Explain the use of the "log". Note: The "log" should be a series of entries (to be turned in bi-weekly) describing the participant's intellectual response to what they have seen, heard and read. Also to be included are what they do and feel, pertinent to the topic of sexuality. There is no required writing style, and entries may vary from one time to the next. They may be subjective, poetic, intellectually critical or scientific.

D. Answer questions.

Getting Acquainted (Remainder of Session)

The purpose of the remainder of this session is to establish group cohesiveness through the sharing of personal data with others, to allow each person to experience taking responsibility for sharing with the group, and to begin the practice of self-disclosure at a relatively safe level. Each participant will need a pencil and paper.

A. Instruct the participants to write a very brief response to the following questions: (1) Besides yourself, who is the most important person in your life right now? (2) Where and from whom did you get your first sex education? (3) Describe a gift someone gave you. (4) What do you hope to gain from being in this group?

B. Instruct the participants to break into sub-groups of four or five (depending on numbers). Ask each to share his/her name and responses to the four questions with the sub-group members, who, in turn, respond to each question.

C. Instruct the sub-groups to form one large group. Each individual is to select someone from their sub-group and introduce that individual by telling their name and something learned about the person while in the sub-group. Continue this process until all have been introduced.

SESSION II

1. Sharing a first sexual experience

A. Give each participant a straight pin, a pencil and a three-by-five index card. Instruct the individuals to think about a first sexual experience that was significant for them such as a first "wet dream" or "playing doctor". Ask them to write briefly about the experience on the card and then to pin it on their chests.
Participants should then quietly mill about the room and read what the others have written, responding non-verbally.

B. Instruct the participants to gather into groups of five or six. Talk about what each person wrote on their card, how they feel about it now, reactions to what other people wrote. (Time: 45 min.)

2. Body Image

A. Each group member is given an opportunity to share feelings about their body. Going around the circle, ask one person at a time to stand and share:

1. How I feel about various parts of my body—hair, chest, face, etc.—both negative and positive feelings.

2. If the feelings are negative, the leader asks where the negative feelings came from? (Who says so? Where did you learn that small breasts were bad?)

3. The group is instructed to give positive feedback to each individual, like: "I never noticed your hips; you have such a warm face."
An alternative to "1" would be to have participants share a feeling about the part of body that they like the least.

Objectives

Activity 1: To identify and share common personal feelings and concerns about the human body. To increase awareness of how society influences attitudes about our bodies. To encourage affirmative responses to others.

Activity 2: To encourage the sharing of personal feelings and concerns about the human body. To increase awareness of how society influences attitudes about our bodies. To encourage affirmative responses to others.

SESSION III

I: The "Dirty Words" Game

A. Introduction: Sexuality as a subject has spawned many language forms. Often in our culture we find it embarrassing or uncomfortable to use various kinds of words to describe parts of the body or various kinds of sexual activity. Often we describe our sexual appendages as "things" or "it." As children we may have called our penis or vagina by a variety of "family" terms. We are not always familiar or comfortable with scientific terms like coitus, for example. Often our language is vague with imprecise terms like "doing it" or "making out." In addition, our culture is filled with vernacular or so called "dirty words" such as fuck, cock, pussy, which are often (but not always) used demeaningly.
B. Form two groups of 5 to 6 persons. You may wish to give them team names.

C. Each group is told that they are to respond to several terms by coming up with as many synonyms for that word as possible. One person in each group is to be selected as the recorder to write down all of the words as they are spoken. Any term that is synonymous with the key word is appropriate. The team with the most words when time is called is the "winner". The first word is "intercourse".

D. After several minutes, the leader calls time and each group's recorder counts the team's words. The team with the most words reads off its list of synonyms for "intercourse". The losing group is asked to share the words on its list not said by the winning group.

E. Give the next word: "vagina" and repeat step D. Other key words may be "penis", "homosexual", "masturbation", and so on.
(An alternative to C: Place a large piece of blank paper on the wall and as each individual comes up with a synonym, they stand up, state the word loudly enough for everyone to hear, and write it on the paper with a magic marker. The results are usually a hilarious race to list the most terms.

F. The entire group processes the exercise by answering: 1) What were your feelings during this exercise? 2) Was it difficult to say certain words? 3) How did you feel about the presence of the opposite sex? 4) Did you notice any particular patterns in the way you felt about some words?

G. The leader may wish to point out some factors that make a "dirty word" dirty.

SESSION IV
Sharing of Childhood Memories

A Have available newsprint on which to write cues for discussion. Instruct participants to form trios, with both genders in each. If possible, they are not to group with close friends or partners from earlier discussion groups. Have each trio find a private space and face each other.

B. The following comments will serve to introduce the exercise: "In learning about human sexuality, the biological aspects of sex and reproduction are certainly important. But equally significant are the affective aspects -- our private attitudes, feelings, and taboos about sexuality. These are learned mostly from our families, from the street, and from our peers as we are growing up. Today we are going to share some of these experiences and memories. You may have difficulty recalling experiences in a particular area; you may have blocked out experiences and feelings, perhaps because you learned that they were bad or dirty. You may also find that someone else's sharing triggers a
flood of memories you had forgotten. You may discover there are some experiences you prefer not to share with the group. Share only those you want to share. You may want to let your group know that you are reticent about speaking, even though you have decided to share. You may want to note those actions or statements which make you feel ill at ease in your group.” (Ask the following questions.)

C. In this section, it is wise to move quickly through the first three topics and increase the time allotment as the exercise develops. The participants should be advised to take a few minutes for reflection before sharing.

1. What feeling do you recall about being a boy or a girl and how did you feel toward children of the opposite sex? (envy, disdain) Did your parents expect different things of you than they did of your brothers and sisters? If so, how did you feel about that? (Five minute pause)

2. What were your family patterns in regard to: talk about sex; nudity; physical expressions of affections? (Seven minute pause)

3. What childhood memories do you have of sex play? If your parents were aware of it, what did they say or do? What were your feelings about sex play?

Increase time for sharing on these subjects, allowing a few minutes for reflection before reading each one:

4. When did you first become aware of your parents sexuality? What feelings did you have?

5. What memories do you have of: approaching adolescence; menstruation; wet dreams; awareness of sexual feelings; body development (or lack of it)? What were your feelings at the time?

6. What are your memories of the first time you were kissed or touched by a member of the opposite sex? What do you recall about your first real love? Your first serious sexual involvement?

7. What was your most pleasurable or memorable sexual experience? This experience may be alone, relating to your sense of yourself as a man or a woman; or it may be with another (not necessarily a genital experience).

8. In what way is your “personal history” related or unrelated to your present feelings about your own sexuality?

OBJECTIVES

To identify and express to others some personal experiences and feelings related to sexuality. To increase awareness of how personal attitudes about sexuality develop. To discover the universality of most sexual feelings and experiences. To practice the skill of self-disclosure within a small group. To identify how one’s present attitudes and feelings toward sex are related or unrelated to prior experience.

This exercise is also described in Morrison and Price, Values in Sexuality, 1974.

SESSION V

Activity: True-False Sexuality Quiz
A. Distribute true-false sexuality quiz. Ask students to form dyads and decide, as teams, which answers are correct.

B. Ask the group to form a circle with "teams" sitting together.

C. Go through the list of statements by having each team state its response. Ask for general group agreement or disagreement on response. If response is incorrect, the leader shares the correct response. (Most answers are part of a sexual mythology; complete answers can be found in Sexual Myths and Fallacies McCary (1971). Many statements will initiate more elaborate discussion. This is to be encouraged. (time: 90 min.)

OBJECTIVES:
To increase factual sexual information on normal sexual functioning. To dispel many of the myths surrounding sexuality. To help group members be aware of their own levels of sexual knowledge. To enable the leader to share more completely factual sexual information.

TRUE/FALSE

1. Nocturnal emissions ("wet dreams") are indications of sexual disorders.
2. Women do not experience nocturnal orgasms.
3. Women may have gonorrhea without any obvious symptoms.
4. Women ejaculate as men do.
5. Simultaneous orgasms are more satisfactory than those experienced separately and are, moreover necessary for sexual compatibility in marriage.
6. Women are capable of multiple orgasms.
7. There is a difference between vaginal and clitoral orgasms.
8. It is dangerous to have sexual intercourse during menstruation.
9. Active sex play during childhood or adolescence indicates normal growth and curiosity.
10. Menstruation begins earlier in girls living in the tropics than in girls living in cooler climates.
11. Lower animals menstruate just as humans do.
12. The older man has some advantages over a younger one insofar as sexual activity is concerned.
13. Humans can get "hung up" (i.e., experience penis captivus) during sexual intercourse.
14. Each individual is allotted just so many sexual experiences, and when they are used up, sexual activity is finished for that person.
15. The sixth week of pregnancy (four weeks after a missed period) is the earliest point at which a physical can determine with any reliability that a woman is pregnant.
16. Older men should not expect to remain sexually active; but if they are still potent, they should limit such activity to marital coitus.
17. Blacks have greater sex drives than Whites; the penis of the Black male is larger than that of the White male.
18. Sexual dysfunction is much more frequently a matter of psychological factors than physiological disturbance.
19. Alcohol is a sexual stimulant.
20. Certain substances are valuable as aphrodisiacs.
21. Recent studies of homosexuality have not solved the question of its cause.
22. Once a man or woman is sterilized, sex drive diminishes.
23. Castration completely destroys the sex drive.
24. Menopause or hysterectomy does not terminate a woman's sex life.
25. Sex desire and ability decrease markedly after the age of 40 to 50.
26. The psychological need for sexual expression is of less importance in the later years of life than during the earlier years.
27. There is no absolutely "safe" period for sexual intercourse insofar as conception is concerned.
28. Simultaneous climaxes are necessary if conception is to take place.
29. Nothing can be done to increase the possibility of predetermining the sex of the conceived child.
30. Most adults have, at some point violated the law regarding sex.
31. A fetus sleeps during the day and is awake at night. (And kicks)
32. "Virgin births" (parthenogenesis) do not occur in humans or animals.
33. Taking the pill will not delay a woman's menopause.
34. The birth control pill will eventually cause a wide variety of ills in any woman who uses it for any length of time.
35. Homosexual offenders are a menace to society.
36. Homosexuals are no more creative than are heterosexuals.
37. Masturbation is known to cause many physical and psychological problems.
38. A transvestite and transsexual are the same and both are homosexuals.

SESSION VI

Sex Roles: The Ideal Man - The Ideal Woman

A. Divide participants into all male and all female groups. Give each group a meeting place, a magic marker and poster paper.
   1. Each group brainstorms and lists the attributes of the ideal man (for women) or the ideal woman (for men). (15 min.)
   2. Each group is asked to assume what the groups of the opposite sex might list. Women are asked to list what men think is the ideal woman; men are asked to list what they think women might have listed as the ideal man. (15 min.)
   3. Each group is asked to list the desired attributes of their own sex; for men, the ideal man; for women, the ideal female. (15 min.)

B. Have everyone get back together in the main room. Each group's lists are posted on the wall with a spokesperson explaining the terms. Each group must share their list of attributes. (45 min.)
C. Option 1. Have participants break up into two groups (mixed gender). One group sits in a small circle and the other in a larger circle around the first group. Group 1 has a general reaction session sharing feelings, attitudes, beliefs, etc., for about 20 minutes. Group 2 must observe and remain silent. After time is up, the groups switch positions. After another 20 minutes, critique entire discussion.

Option 2. Have women and men break into separate groups and role play a dorm or floor meeting where they assume the roles of the opposite sex. The men (playing women) may wish to discuss the social situation (from a woman's point of view) and vice versa.

OBJECTIVES
To learn what roles members of the opposite sex ascribe to one another. To dispel some of the culturally pre-conceived notions about how males and females feel about one another. To share personal feelings about one's sex role in a mixed group. To help participants become more empathic and less prone to make generalizations about the opposite sex.

SESSION VI

Reactions to Films
A. Divide the group into two sub-groups prior to viewing the films. Suggested films: "Orange", "A Quickie", or "Unfolding".

B. Immediately after viewing the films, give each individual paper and writing materials. Instruct them to complete the following sentence for each film: "This film makes me feel like sex is ...." Participants should consider the feelings generated by the films. An example of such a response might be: "This film made me feel that sex is like a roller coaster ride, fast and furious."

C. When everyone has completed their sentences for each film, ask them to fold their papers and put them in the center of the circle. Then each is asked to draw out as many pieces of paper as there were films.

D. Each person reads the first sentence on the paper drawn and attempts to share what the writer was trying to express. Writers then identify themselves and share what they were trying to express and what aspects of the film prompted the response.

E. Follow the same procedure for all of the sentence completions. (90 min.)

OBJECTIVES
To increase individual awareness of sexual attitudes. To share individual interpretations of abstract concepts and explore feeling content of these interpretations. To express feelings about symbolic representations of sexual themes. To discover the varieties of attitudes toward sexual themes in a given group.
SESSION VIII

Sharing of Final Log Entry

Participants are asked to bring their final log entry (see Session I) and share its contents with the entire group. This log entry should provide an overview and final reaction to the series of group sessions. (90 min.)

OBJECTIVES:

To give the participants an opportunity to share their growth and learning with other group members. To enable each group member to give valuable feedback to the leader about their experience. To enable group members to express how in-group learning have affected their outside experiences. To discover to what extent the goals of the program have been met.

REFERENCES


"Orange" Multi Media Center
"A Quickie" 540 Powell St.
"Unfolding" San Francisco, CA 94018