



Day in the Life of a Sex Therapist by Jennifer Wiessner, LCSW, CST MARCH 2015

As a wife, mom and sex therapist in Maine; a typical day is far from “typical.” As both a couples therapist and certified sex therapist, I like to think of myself as a Sherpa or guide to the couples, groups and individuals I serve. It is my goal to create a safe, permission-giving space for people to share their sexual selves and to gain understanding of their issue and how it may be affecting them. I help clients see in themselves the answers that already exist.

The history of sex therapy has many roots. In ancient China, India, Greece and Rome, sex therapy took the form of spells, aphrodisiacs, tantric yoga, the Kama Sutra, and other manifestations; flash forward to the studies of human sexuality by Kinsey, Kaplan and Masters and Johnson and beyond. Today’s sex therapy is similar to “talk therapy” with a licensed therapist in that the distressing issues are brought to the therapist, and the client and therapist work together to reduce distress, learn coping mechanisms, and improve outlook on the problem. A sex therapist is skilled in hearing intimate details from clients who often do not have safe places to share them.

As of January 2015, Maine has only three AASECT-certified sex therapists (I was the first certified female in the state). I am certified through the American Association of Sex Educators, Counselors and Therapists (www.aasect.org) as a sex therapist. I was a licensed clinical social worker working with adolescents and adults for 10 years before pursuing AASECT certification. To achieve certification as a sex therapist through AASECT, there is a long and rigorous process including a SAR (Sexual Attitude Reassessment), a must for any therapist. As a sex therapist, I provide couples therapy and sex therapy to individuals and couples of any configuration to improve their sex lives, communicate better, heal from past trauma, heal from infidelity, and understand discrepancy in desire. I work with individuals and couples to reinvent their sex lives after cancer, illness, discover their own passion, and consult with physicians on a client’s behalf to connect the emotional and physical aspects. I enjoy assisting transgender individuals to become their true selves as well as working with kinky people who want to accept themselves in what often feels like a sex-negative culture. To do this, I use sex therapy informed talk therapy, experiential exercises to tap into the neurobiological aspects of learning, mindfulness, cognitive behavioral work, and much more!

My clients know that my office is a safe haven to share intimate information so they can begin to process without the shroud of fear and shame. What I expect from clients is that they bring their whole selves as much as they are able; the shadow side and the one shown to the world. I often tell my clients that what we do in my office lays the foundational blocks for the magic they create in their relationships. My clients can expect empathy, skillfully placed insight, confidentiality, and

positive regard from me. On a lighter note, unique to me, my clients would probably say that my sense of lightheartedness and, at times, humor are key elements to setting them at ease. Sex doesn't have to be so serious all the time. It's common to hear occasional bouts of laughter coming from my office!

So do I talk about sex all day? More than just sex, I discuss intimacy, safety, healthy relationships, and pain navigation. I find that almost everyone can relate to words like safety, healthy relationships, and intimacy if they can't relate to my talking about sex. I feel it is my obligation as a sex therapist to demystify this discipline and provide as many people as possible with sound, rational information about what sex therapists do and how many people benefit from what they learn and how the impact can be far-reaching..

Deconstructing a client's negative messages about sexuality that have been long embedded from early attachment figures, culture, religion, and politics can be daunting. It may be why I find assisting clients to develop beliefs and values that are their own and congruent with who they are so rewarding. Challenging one's history for some is intimidating, as old beliefs can feel like they penetrate our cells and leave a residue, making change seem impossible. This brings us back to the therapeutic alliance and how important it is for a client to feel no judgment and safe to challenge that which was fed to and embedded in them. (continued on page 8)

After years of seeing so many people share their early childhood experience of negative parental messages or lack of messages and then becoming a mother myself, I realized I wanted to do something about this legacy of negative sexual messages people carry. I considered that if I want the adults I see to have fewer negative messages about sex I would have to intervene at a different level. "Raising Sexually Healthy Children" workshops were born from that realization. My passion is educating and empowering parents of children to provide healthy, developmentally appropriate sex education in a way that doesn't feel threatening and can embody the parents' values. I provide them with a fun, uncomplicated workshop and individual consultations that enable them to understand what is age appropriate, what is healthy, and how they can open up dialogue with their kids, as well as assess their own values about sex as parents.

I believe I provide, for some, an experience that significantly impacts not only their understanding and, at times, healing of their sexual self, but the unexpected ripple effects that come from opening to the sexual self. My mission as social worker and sex therapist is to help people embrace their sexuality, heal from negative sexual impact, and live as functional healthy sexual beings, however that may look for them.