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Intimacy and the Sense of Self - on Sexuality and Psychosis

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Learning Goal:

The issue of intimacy and sexuality is highly relevant for people struggling with psychosis, especially the longing for intimacy yet the threat of being overwhelmed by it. It will be given examples from therapy on how health care professionals can address the issue.

Abstract Text:

Intimacy and the Sense of Self - on Sexuality and Psychosis

During my work as a psychologist in the field of psychosis and severe mental illness, it has been surprising to experience the lack of focus and awareness on our patient's management of their sexuality and partnership with others. When I have searched for literature on the subject, I mainly find literature focused around risky behaviors, HIV/AIDS and the stigma associated with that, and how medications affects sexual functioning. Even though the latter might be one of the major factors contributing to noncompliance with antipsychotic medication, it still has received surprisingly little attention within standard psychiatric care for psychotic patients.

What we meet in our clinic is people obviously traumatized and sometimes deeply psychotic, with no feeling left of who they are or if they even exist. Many are still longing for partnership and intimacy, yet overwhelmed by the threat it represents.

Borut Skodlar and collaborators did a retrospective qualitative, phenomenological study over some basic categories of manifestations of sexuality in the therapy room (2009), and they stress that there are a lack of literature and research on the subject. Many clinicians, researchers and authors agree upon the fact that the needs of intimacy and sexuality amongst people suffering from psychosis remains unrecognized and unfulfilled and is a much neglected topic amongst them (de Jager & McCann, 2017, De Jager et al., 2017, Træen & Schaller, 2013).

In my practice as a clinical psychologist I have had to trust myself and learn from my patients as I've gone along. In this speech I will describe how sexuality and the longing for intimacy is a very prominent issue for many persons experiencing psychosis, how important it is for their recovery and how I address it in the therapy room.

**ON THE HEALING POWER
OF HUMAN RECONNECTION**