
Dailey's Circles of Sexuality - Interview Questions

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The following interview questions are organized according to Dr. Dennis Dailey's (1981) Circles of Sexuality — a strengths-based, holistic model that conceptualizes human sexuality across five overlapping domains: Sensuality, Intimacy, Sexual Identity, Sexual Health and Reproduction, and Sexualization. Each circle captures a distinct but interconnected dimension of sexual experience. Questions should be delivered in a trauma-informed, clinically neutral manner and adapted to the individual's context and the referral question.

Circle 1: Sensuality

Awareness, acceptance, and enjoyment of one's own body and the bodies of others; physiological and psychological pleasure through the senses; includes body image, the human sexual response cycle, skin hunger, and fantasy.

Body Image & Physical Comfort

- How would you describe your relationship with your own body — do you feel comfortable and accepting of it, or do you experience discomfort or shame?
- Have your feelings about your body changed over time? If so, what contributed to those changes?
- Do you believe your body image affects your sexual experiences or your willingness to engage in sexual activity?
- Have you ever avoided sexual situations because of how you felt about your body?

Touch & Skin Hunger

- How important is physical touch — such as hugging, cuddling, or non-sexual physical closeness — to your overall sense of wellbeing?
- Do you feel you receive enough physical affection and touch in your life? If not, how does that affect you?
- How do you distinguish between your need for nonsexual touch and your sexual desire?
- Have you ever sought out sexual contact primarily to fulfill a need for physical closeness or touch rather than sexual desire?

Sensory Pleasure & Sexual Response

- What types of sensory experiences — touch, sound, smell, visual stimuli — do you find pleasurable or arousing?
- How would you describe your body's typical sexual response — arousal, pleasure, and orgasm?
- Have you ever experienced difficulties with sexual arousal or physical response? If so, how have you addressed that?
- Have you noticed changes in your level of physical sexual responsiveness over time?

Fantasy

- Do you engage in sexual fantasy? If so, how frequently?
- What is the general nature of your sexual fantasies?
- Have your fantasies changed in content or intensity over time? If so, in what direction?

- Do your fantasies align with your real-life sexual values and behavior, or do they differ significantly?
- Have you ever acted on a sexual fantasy? If so, describe the circumstances.
- Have you ever had fantasies involving non-consenting individuals, minors, or scenarios involving harm?

Circle 2: Intimacy

The ability and need to experience emotional closeness with another person and have it returned. Components include caring, sharing, loving/liking, risk-taking, vulnerability, self-disclosure, trust, and reciprocity.

Emotional Closeness & Connection

- How would you describe your capacity for emotional intimacy in relationships?
- How comfortable are you allowing others to know you deeply — your fears, needs, and vulnerabilities?
- Have you ever struggled to form emotionally close relationships? If so, what do you believe contributed to that?
- Do you feel that emotional intimacy and sexual intimacy are connected for you, or do you tend to keep them separate?

Trust & Vulnerability

- How easy or difficult is it for you to trust a romantic or sexual partner?
- Have you ever been betrayed or hurt in a close relationship in ways that affected your ability to trust others?
- How do you respond when a partner expresses vulnerability or emotional need toward you?
- Are you able to express your own emotional needs in a relationship? If not, what gets in the way?

Caring, Sharing & Reciprocity

- How do you typically express care and affection toward a romantic or sexual partner?
- Do you feel that your intimate relationships are generally balanced and reciprocal, or have they tended to be one-sided?
- Have you ever been in a relationship where emotional closeness felt unsafe or was used against you?
- How do you handle conflict or emotional distance in a close relationship?

Risk-Taking & Self-Disclosure

- How willing are you to take emotional risks — such as being the first to say "I love you" or sharing something deeply personal?
- Have you ever withheld emotional intimacy as a way to protect yourself or to maintain control in a relationship?
- Have there been times when emotional closeness or love has felt threatening or overwhelming to you?
- Do you believe that past experiences — such as trauma, neglect, or loss — have affected how you experience intimacy today?

Circle 3: Sexual Identity

The development of a sense of who one is sexually, including biological sex, gender identity, gender role, gender expression, and sexual orientation.

Biological Sex & Gender Identity

- How do you describe your gender identity — do you identify as male, female, nonbinary, or in another way?
- Has your sense of your gender identity been consistent throughout your life, or has it evolved over time?
- Have you ever experienced distress related to the relationship between your biological sex and your gender identity?
- Have you sought out or received any gender-affirming care or interventions? If so, describe your experience.

Gender Role & Expression

- How would you describe the way you express your gender — in the way you dress, speak, or carry yourself?
- Do you feel pressure — from family, culture, or society — to conform to particular gender roles or expectations? How has that affected you?
- Have your gender role expectations ever caused conflict in your romantic or sexual relationships?

Sexual Orientation

- How do you describe your sexual orientation?
- At what age did you first become aware of your sexual attraction, and toward whom?
- Have your experiences of sexual attraction been consistent over time, or have they shifted?
- Has your sexual orientation ever been a source of confusion, shame, or conflict — internally or with others?
- How open are you about your sexual orientation, and with whom?

Identity Integration & Acceptance

- How comfortable and accepting do you feel about your sexual identity overall?
- Have you experienced discrimination, rejection, or harm related to your gender identity or sexual orientation?
- How has your family, culture, or religion responded to your sexual identity, and how has that shaped your self-concept?
- Do you feel your sexual identity is well-integrated into how you see yourself, or is it a source of ongoing conflict?

Circle 4: Sexual Health & Reproduction

Attitudes and behaviors related to producing children; care and maintenance of the sex and reproductive organs; health consequences of sexual behavior; includes anatomy and physiology, contraception, STIs, sexual dysfunction, and menopause.

Knowledge & Education

- How would you describe your level of knowledge about your own sexual and reproductive anatomy?

- Where did you receive most of your information about sex and reproductive health — school, family, peers, internet?
- Do you feel you had adequate, accurate sex education growing up? If not, how did gaps in that education affect you?

Sexual Health Practices

- How do you currently approach sexual health care — for example, regular checkups, STI testing, or conversations with a provider?
- Have you ever been diagnosed with or treated for a sexually transmitted infection? If so, how did that affect your sexual behavior or relationships?
- How do you approach contraception or pregnancy prevention in your sexual activity?
- Have you ever experienced an unintended pregnancy or been involved in one? If so, how was it resolved, and what was the emotional impact?

Sexual Functioning & Dysfunction

- Have you ever experienced difficulties with sexual functioning — such as pain during sex, difficulty with arousal or orgasm, or changes in sexual drive?
- Have physical health conditions, medications, or substances ever affected your sexual functioning?
- Have you sought professional help for sexual health concerns? If so, describe that experience.

Reproductive History & Goals

- Do you have children? If so, describe your experience of becoming a parent.
- What are your current feelings or goals regarding having children or future reproduction?
- Have you experienced significant reproductive health events — such as miscarriage, infertility, or menopause — and if so, how have those affected you emotionally and sexually?

Circle 5: Sexualization

The use of sexuality to influence, control, or manipulate others. Components range from flirting and seduction to withholding sex, media and advertising messages, sexual harassment, incest, and rape/sexual assault. This circle includes both normalized and harmful expressions of sexual power.

Awareness of Sexualization

- How would you describe your understanding of the difference between healthy sexual expression and the use of sexuality to control or manipulate others?
- Have you ever used sexuality — such as flirting, seduction, or withholding sex — as a way to get something you wanted or to gain power in a relationship?
- Have you ever been on the receiving end of someone using sexuality to manipulate or control you? If so, describe how that affected you.

Media, Advertising & Socialization

- How do you feel that media, advertising, or pornography has shaped your understanding of sex, gender roles, and what is considered attractive or desirable?
- Have media or cultural messages about sexuality ever caused you to feel inadequate, objectified, or confused about your own identity or desires?
- Do you believe that media portrayals of sex have influenced the expectations you bring to your own sexual relationships?

Flirting, Seduction & Boundary Violations

- How do you typically initiate romantic or sexual interest with someone? How do you assess whether your advances are welcome?
- Have you ever continued to pursue someone sexually or romantically after they indicated discomfort or disinterest?
- Have you ever engaged in behavior that others experienced as sexual harassment, even if that was not your intention?
- Has anyone ever accused you of inappropriate sexual behavior in a workplace, school, or social setting?

Coercion, Abuse & Offending Behavior

- Have you ever engaged in sexual behavior with someone who was unable to or did not give informed, sober consent?
- Have you ever used emotional pressure, threats, substances, or authority to obtain sexual contact from another person?
- Have you ever engaged in sexual contact with a minor?
- Have you ever been accused of, charged with, or convicted of a sexual offense? If so, describe the circumstances and your understanding of what occurred.
- How do you currently understand the impact your behavior had on others?
- Have you received treatment specifically focused on offense-related sexual behavior? If so, describe your experience and the progress you believe you have made.

Victimization History

- Have you ever been the victim of sexual harassment, coercion, or assault?
- Were you ever exposed to sexual content, behavior, or contact as a child or adolescent that was inappropriate or unwanted?
- How have those experiences affected your sexuality, your relationships, and your sense of self?
- Have you received counseling or support related to sexual victimization? If so, how has that affected your healing?

Clinical Notes

These questions are grounded in Dailey's (1981, updated 2017) Circles of Sexuality model — a strengths-based, holistic framework that situates sexuality across five overlapping domains. Because the circles are interconnected rather than discrete, responses in one area will often illuminate dynamics in others. All questions should be adapted to the individual's referral question, cultural background, and clinical presentation, and delivered using a trauma-informed approach. In forensic and offense-specific evaluations, the Sexualization circle carries particular weight in risk assessment and treatment planning.

Reference: Dailey, D.M. (1981). Sexual expression and aging. In F. Berghorn & D. Schafer (Eds.), The dynamics of aging. Westview Press. Updated 2017.