

*Some Questions for Personal Reflection*

- What were some of the “messages” about life, especially about relationships, that you received along your journey of growing up? What were some of the positive ones, some of the negative ones? How have these affected your way of relating to others over the years?
- What were some of the “messages” you received about sexuality as you grew up?
- Become aware of any anxieties or fears you may be carrying that might make it difficult to really listen well to your psychosexual story and to your experiences of growth and healing.
- What would you like to reinterpret or reimagine regarding your attitudes toward sexuality?
- Reflect on the experiences in your life that may have produced “blocks” or obstacles to your psychosexual growth and integration. To what extent have you worked through these obstacles and been able to move beyond them?
- What are some of the positive resources (within yourself, in others, or in the situations around you) that have helped you in your process of psychosexual integration?
- Have you experienced any situations that involved a boundary violation? Try to identify what the vulnerabilities (yours and the other person’s) were in the situation, and what you could have done differently.

### Obstacles to Intimacy:

- Confusion as to what genuine, mature intimacy is. Lack of models of what intimacy is and is about.
- Poorly developed communication skills. Cultural differences creating obstacles to communication.
- Confusion in personal identity (including confusion around sexual orientation issues). A stable core identity is a prerequisite for truly intimate relationships with self, God, and others.
- Negative self-image, excessive tendency toward self-deprecation.
- History of interpersonal trauma (particularly sexual, physical, emotional abuse, as well as serious neglect or abandonment) that has not been worked through. History of difficult interpersonal relationships, especially in the family of origin, and especially when these have involved marked emotional and behavioral unpredictability (as is often the case when there is an alcoholic family member). This kind of history can lead to fear of relating with others later in life, lest one be hurt again.
- Fears:
  - of dependency
  - of losing one's identity if one gets close to others
  - of appearing weak if one needs to be close to others
  - of rejection, abandonment
  - of wanting a good relationship and of not getting it and being disappointed
  - of feeling embarrassed, awkward as one tries to reach out and connect
  - of taking risk
  - of homosexuality (of one's attempts to connect being read as sexual advances).
- Difficult personality dynamics/personality pathology.
- Other significant psychopathology (depression, anxiety disorders, etc., severe enough to interfere with one's attempts to connect).
- Not taking personal responsibility for relationships—expecting others to do all the work.
- Needing to maintain the illusion of being in control of relationships at all times.
- Being dishonest (with God, others, self).
- Being excessively self-centered.
- Addictions (to alcohol, drugs, food, money, work, sex, etc.)
- Excessive stress, tiredness, poor health.
- Lack of discretion.
- Excessively frequent relocations/reassignments (interfere with establishing enduring connections that can foster intimacy over time).
- Generational/cultural differences (especially in communities).

How to grow in intimacy/relationality → address obstacles

Given the importance of healthy intimacy in our lives, what can we do to enhance our capacity for intimacy? We can begin by noticing whether we need to address any of the obstacles mentioned above. In addition, we can open ourselves to the six attitudes or stances

## Elements of Your Psychosexual Story (Saffiotti)

- The story of your growing and developing, of your journey toward friendship and human communion...
- The story of your physical emotional and spiritual awakenings, of your desires, your dreams...
- The story of your enthusiasms, of soaring feelings, and broken hearts...
- The story of your desires, dependencies/attachments, your embarrassment and shame, your reciprocity. The story of your *becoming deeply relational, capable of loving and of suffering in relationship.*

As you review your psychosexual story, it is important to:

- *approach your story with respect and reverence* whatever it may be;
- *listen to your story with trust and do not judge it:* it has very important messages to communicate to you;
- *Identify and clearly name the messages about sexuality and relationality you received over the years;*
- *re-integrate, re-image your story with hope.*