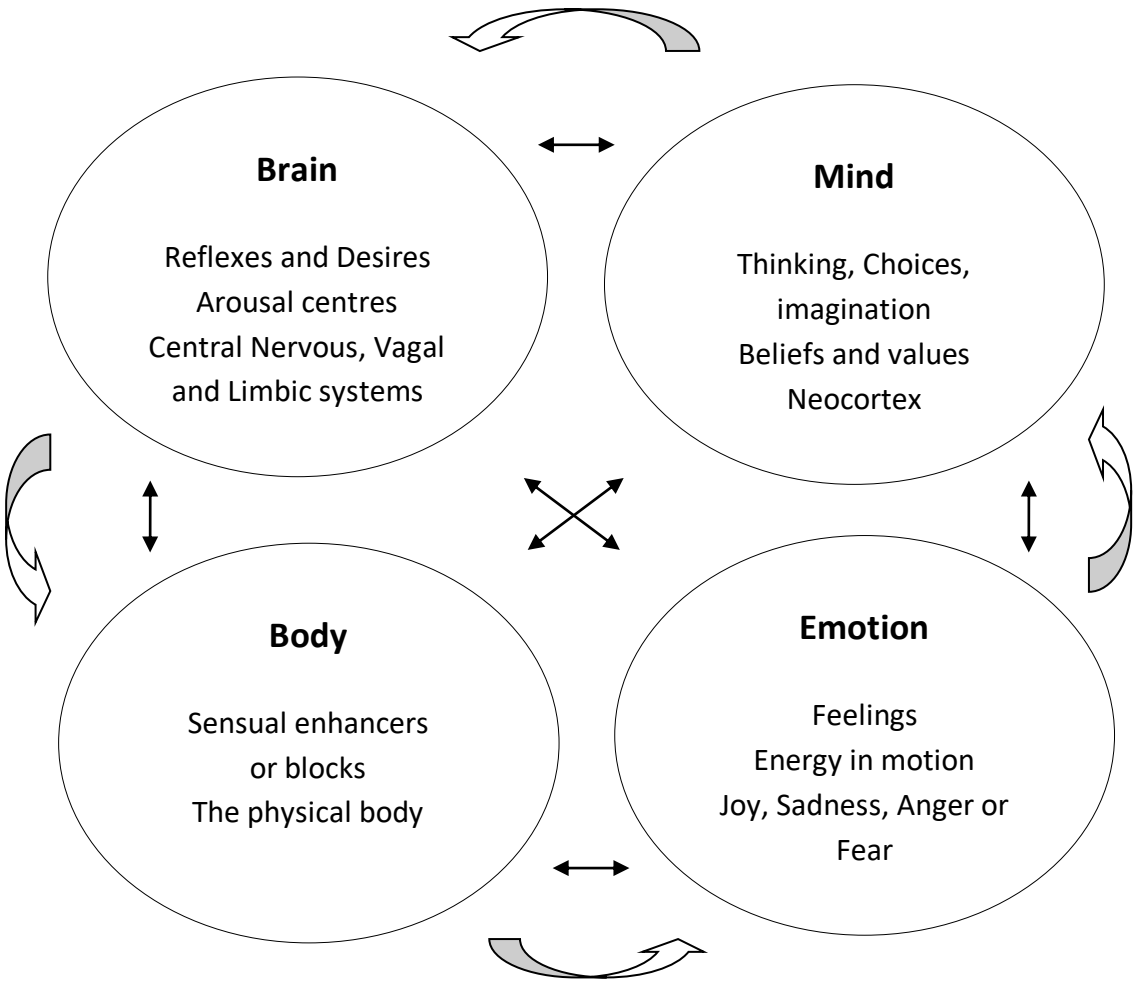
The Homeodynamic Model

As a concept to help us understand some of the different elements that are at play in any human sexual moment, the Homeodynamic model expands on the body-mind paradigm and uses the four distinctions of Mind - Body - Brain – Emotion. We are familiar with the idea of the head or the mind being the part of us that is rational, our thinking part, and the body being the more irrational or emotive part of us. With regards to our sexuality, it can be helpful to distinguish what goes on in the **Brain**, the back brain, which triggers our reactions, reflexes and urges, from the **Mind**, the front of our brain, our rational thinking ability. We could think of this as the back part of the skull and the forehead. Also to consider the differences between our **Body**, our physical sensations and sexual responses, and the feelings and **Emotion** we may experience.

The Homeodynamic Model for Sexuality



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In reality, human experience is a continuous relationship between all of these different aspects: our instincts, our physiology, feelings and thoughts are affecting and being affected by each other, and they are all operating in unison in a continual feedback loop. We cannot separate them out or place them in any hierarchy, as all are equally important.

The phrase 'homeostasis' is used in science to describe how organisms rebalance in reaction to stimuli and responses, to come back to stillness. To understand human sexuality more deeply, we've adopted the phrase 'homeodynamic', coined by Rose in 1999, to indicate the constant feedback loop of responses and interactions that happen in human beings.

This new integrative model for sexuality incorporates research from neuroscience, complementary and alternative health therapies and cognitive behavioural therapy, along with psychotherapy and traditional eastern and western approaches to psychosexual therapy. It considers our sexuality with regards to these four different aspects, and also how they impact and are impacted by each other.

- The **Mind** can be thought of as the front brain and is home to our sexual values and beliefs. Humans have evolved with frontal lobes which allow us to reflect on our reactions; to think, weigh up options and make choices about our behaviour. We have imagination, the ability to anticipate and dream about the future.

  Our beliefs and social cultures deeply inform our sexuality. Having an opportunity to question and re-evaluate our explicit and implicit belief systems allows us to identify issues for concern and to make more conscious choices. We can review what we believe, where we learnt these ideas and whether they still serve us. By analysing our unique history and our current social and cultural opinions about sexuality, we can contextualise our thinking. We can become clearer about what we really value about our sexuality and sexual relationships, about what suits us now as adults. We can gain some tools to change any outmoded ideas and sharpen our current belief system.

- Our **Body** has a sexual anatomy and physiology that is little understood. By separating our reproductive and sexual functioning, we can learn more about sensuality and more fully understand and enjoy our physical sexual potential. For example, that ejaculation and orgasm are distinguishable from each other and that all genders are capable of multiple orgasms. Sexual arousal on a physical level is sensual arousal, stimulation of the senses. Some sights, sounds, tastes, smells, touch and ways of being touched turn us on and others turn us off.

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We can find out more about ourselves sexually by exploring sensuality in depth, and including all the various body systems, not only our genitals, that are involved in sexual arousal. This is particularly useful where there are obstacles to sexual arousal like erectile difficulties, lack of clitoral arousal or lack of vaginal lubrication. We can develop a more intimate connection to our own body and thus discover and become more conscious about what arouses pleasure and what does not; a subjective experience of feeling sexual rather than what we look like to others.

- The back **Brain** triggers our reflexive, survival abilities, like the adrenaline rush of fight and flight or our desires and urges, for sex and food. It is home to our limbic system: the name given to a cluster of organs in the brain which are activated when we react to any stimulus to our system. It includes our vagus nerve and memory centres, which are used to process reactions by using our knowledge; our history, to evaluate responses in any given moment.

  Understanding the neurochemistry of sexual arousal allows for a wider view of our imperatives for being sexual and also, helps us understand the impact of sexual trauma. We can see passion and desire as impulsive reactions from our back brain, as distinct from the thinking abilities of our frontal lobes, our mind. We can explore issues concerning sexual desire to help clarify our own sexual identity: who we are attracted to, what behaviours we wish to express with them, and also when, how and why. We can discover more about our 'reactivity' and the triggers which turn arousal on, or turn it off, and how this links with our personal history. Such explorations are useful to address sexual difficulties which impact both arousal and desire, like rapid or delayed ejaculation, orgasm difficulties, unconscious tightening of vaginal or anal muscles or where there is pain during intercourse.

- The **Emotions** and feelings are our experience of the energy that gets set in motion through the body by any triggers that have stimulated any of the other quadrants. A feeling can be an emotion like love, grief, fear or anger or it can be expressed as physical sensations like feeling hot or cold, tightness in the stomach or a headache. A feeling might be a hunch, a guess or maybe a thought. Sometimes it is a combination of all of these.

  We can explore the myriad feelings and emotions which surround human sexuality and their impact on our experience of sexuality. A focus on social issues provides a wider context for some of the sexual issues people contend with. This includes sexual shame, compulsivity, and the impact of sexual violence. Many people have concerns about

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seeking sexual relationships or sustaining current relationships. Relationship issues are discussed, such as communication skills, managing difference and conflict. Sexual health is explored in terms of physical, emotional, mental and spiritual well-being.

The **Homeodynamic model** is a way of understanding what may be happening within an individual person, while taking into account that humans do not exist in isolation, we are also social beings. We experience ourselves and behave in ways that are influenced by our society and culture. We are constantly in a relationship, not only with ourselves (and all our internal body systems) but also with our external environment and other people including our families, friends and lovers. We need to consider all these factors and how they interact in relationship to our sexuality.

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