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Great Sex!

This chapter is close to the end of this book for a reason. Most of the dynamics we've discussed up to this point weigh heavily on sexual attraction and sexual satisfaction in a long-term relationship. In the very beginning of a relationship, or in a superficial relationship, sexual attraction may only require a great body, a smile, and a wink. But sexual attraction and sexual satisfaction are much more complex after a few years and especially after decades of being together. We age and our responsibilities accumulate over time. After a while, it takes more than good looks and firm body parts to create great sex.

The most important sex organ is the brain.

Perhaps it's a cliché, but it's still a truth worth stating. The most important sex organ is the brain. In this chapter, we'll discuss how to use your smarts to make sex more satisfying. But before we start I'd like to ask you an important question:

Are You a Prostitute?

If you aren't too offended to entertain this outlandish question, what criteria would you use? Is it that you don't take money for sex? Throughout history, prostitution has often involved bartering. Sometimes the payment is a goat or a chicken. Money isn't the only compensation. How about traded services? Would it still be prostitution if the compensation was a day's manual labor on the woman's residence? I think most people say "yes." So payment doesn't have to be in physical goods. How about when sex is exchanged for financial security and social status? Would it be prostitution if a person trades sex to acquire these things or to avoid losing them? Or does it make a critical difference if the two people are married so that it appears on the surface that it's all for love?

Some women feel caught in a trap. They feel that they're expected to supply sex as one of their wifely duties. Some men feel an entitlement to sex in exchange for all their hard work to support the family. This exchange mentality is not really that much different from providing sex for goats or chickens. It's just more subtle. If you want to have really great sex, you need to courageously examine your true underlying motivation for having sex with your partner. If you're a man, it will probably be one or more of the following motives.

- 1. You want the lusty pleasure of sexual satisfaction.**
- 2. You want the feeling of importance and power by turning a woman on.**
- 3. You want to have some sensual fun and play with your mate.**
- 4. You want to celebrate your love by sharing sensual joy together.**

A woman's motivation can be more complex. These motives might be involved.

- 1. You want the lusty pleasure of sexual satisfaction.**
- 2. You want the feeling of importance by proving you're sexually desirable.**
- 3. You want to be a good wife by providing sex to your husband.**
- 4. You want to reward your husband for what he does by providing him sex.**
- 5. You fear your partner's angry disapproval or worse if you don't supply sex.**
- 6. You want to have sensual fun and play with your mate.**
- 7. You want to celebrate your love by sharing sensual joy together.**

Of course, the politically correct motive is the one of celebrating love. But is it so terrible or abnormal to want lusty pleasure if you can both enjoy the sexual fun? Does sex always have to carry a heavy romantic burden? Isn't it more honest to admit that our sexual experiences are usually a blend of motives, some of which involve our own satisfaction? Let's hope so. A relationship needs to involve both of you, not just your partner. Good sex is like that too. If you're not in it for your own experience as well as your partner's, then half of the relationship will be missing during sex. The following couple illustrates how some motives can distort a sexual relationship.

Gina and Ike came to counseling six months after Gina had terminated an emotional affair. It had lasted for more than a year although Gina vigorously denied that any sex had occurred. It was obvious by her secrecy that the affair had involved strong passions. For the following six months, Ike had hounded her for excessive accountability. They had fought mostly because of his prying and raging about all of the affair's details.

Both Ike and Gina were physically attractive, especially Gina with her slim figure and her long red hair. They were both around forty, had an eight-year-old son together, and had successful careers. Ike was a physician and Gina was a radiological assistant. On the surface they appeared successful, but beneath the surface they were less solid. Ike was the son of a small-town physician for whom the whole community had respect. In all this pseudo-greatness, the father rarely devoted time and attention to Ike. Ike grew up under the staggering family expectations that he would someday become prominent in the eyes of society. Covertly, he carried the old fear that he would never measure up. He used to feel that he wasn't measuring up in childhood, at least not enough to get his father's attention. His mother was amiable but less important in the family due to the father's prominence. It was a male-dominated world. His father's respect and affection was the unattainable prize. As an adult, Ike focused on showing the whole world that he was finally "enough" and deserved its attention. His large house, collection of motorcycles, dramatic hobbies, and trophy wife all attested to his worthiness. He also had an irritable temper which he sometimes flared at Gina.

Gina was raised in an enmeshed family with over-involved and authoritarian parents. Her mother was emotionally volatile and would both ridicule and rage at Gina. Her parents were on her like a vice grip. When adolescence came around, she tried to make her break. She fell in with the wrong crowd, used drugs, and most importantly discovered that she had a hot commodity to trade for attention. Gina was the most attractive girl in school. So, she made the classic trade-off: sex in exchange for attention and love. Unfortunately, many of the boys she dealt with couldn't love her, so they used her. By adulthood, she carried deep shame for how she had allowed herself to be used out of desperation. Gina was afraid of conflict. She carried deeply buried anger but didn't dare to let it out unless she was

cornered. When she did display it, she would get hysterical and replicate her mother's raging imprint. Later, she would feel repulsed at her own ugly, dissociated anger and would try to stuff it some more.

Gina and Ike were very sexual at the start of their relationship. Gina was turned on by Ike's assertive potency as well as all the attention he lavished on her. Ike was attracted to Gina's stunning beauty and her sweet personality. Early on, their love-making was frequent and passionate. Then things began to change. Ike established his own clinic and shifted his attention more toward his business and colleagues. He kept his action-oriented hobbies and shared much less time with Gina, who was expected to do most of the child care. Their sex became stale and routine, almost mechanical. They didn't really talk or play before having sex. When the frequency of their sex fell off, Ike complained to Gina that she was becoming frigid. This criticism only provoked fights and made them both tense about sex. Gina redoubled her efforts to be a good wife and win back Ike's attention. She struggled to be enough in his eyes and gave him sex when she could see his frustration begin to build. Gina didn't understand what was happening. She felt numb and devoid of life. She told her friends that she didn't know who she was anymore. What she couldn't articulate was that she was trying to swap sex for love just as she had during adolescence. She was back in her old desperate trap.

Certain aspects of Gina's story are probably experienced by millions of women who have either lost their sexuality or never developed it in the first place. Gina's sexuality was poorly developed and very tenuous. All of her adolescent sexual activity had really been pre-sexual in the sense that she had traded sex for affection. Sex had merely been a tool in her failed attempt to complete her own identity. It hadn't been a true adult sexuality. It was only during the start of her marriage that Gina began to explore a more mature form of sex. Unfortunately, she was ill-equipped to protect herself from the relationship pressures that pushed her back into her old trap. Many men will reinforce this trap when they hound and criticize their wife for sex as if it's a commodity. It isn't a commodity. In most marriages, it becomes a complex and delicate emotional experience.

Intense sexual enjoyment is relatively easy to attain during the initial *in-love* infatuation period of a relationship. Nature takes care of that. A combination of anticipation, novelty, and neurohormones create a condition that we call "falling in love." In this state, inhibitions are suppressed and we can enjoy some of the most incredible highs of our life. Sex is usually phenomenal during this period. However, the state of being *in-love* rarely lasts longer than two to three years. Boundary pressures erode our fantasies. Novelty becomes the casualty of routines. Sex can become stale. Most people don't realize that reviving great sex isn't as simple as reviving the initial *in-love* state. That's because **it can't be done!** At least not with the same partner. It's hard to believe I actually said that, isn't it? But it's true. I'll say it again a different way. **You're never going to feel "in-love" again in the same relationship as**

you initially had! And your sex will have to be different, too. But don't despair. There's hope for both phenomenal love and great sex if you're willing to learn.

**You're never going to feel “*in-love*” again
in the same relationship as you initially had.**

If you want great sex in your long-term relationship, you need to learn how to protect and promote it. Great sex requires a number of psychological and emotional elements. Each one can be a challenge in its own right.

Sentimental Affection

Most of this book has explained the dynamics of sentimental affection in a long-term relationship. I'm talking about the type of relationship where you're together for thirty, forty or fifty years. Sentimental love of this type requires more skill than the infatuation of being *in-love*. It's different but it can be powerful. When you build a strong sentimental love, you can be jumping each other's bones long into old age – with passion! You can have all this, but you will have to work for it. It should be apparent that developing a great sex life depends on your creating a great sentimental bond with your partner. In that sense, this whole book has been discussing the preconditions for having great sex. If your relationship is out of balance, if there's a deficit of nurturance, or if someone isn't servicing one's own autonomy, then your sex life will probably be lousy. If you and your partner have the skills to create a loving foundation, then it's possible to have really great sex.

One qualification is worth mentioning. Even if your relationship is endowed with sentimental love, both of you will experience various moods at different times. There may be days when you or your partner can't feel affectionate because of stress or other emotions. It's not just about overall affection in the relationship. Great sex involves waiting for moments of opportunity when both of you can feel your affection at the same time.

Enjoying Your Own Sexual Pleasure

At the start of this chapter, Gina's and Ike's story illustrated how a woman can be motivated by fear to engage in sex. Fear that a husband will otherwise be angry. Fear that she's "not enough" and won't be a good wife unless she provides sex. For some women, the sexual act doesn't always indicate true sexual desire. The male physiology is less capable of misrepresentation. Great sex involves both partners' expressing the pleasure-seeking parts of their personalities. Neuroscientists have referred to this part of personality as the approach system. For great sex you need to desire connection with your partner, rather than the avoidance of negative consequences. You really need to want fun and pleasure.

The capacity for hedonic enjoyment typically starts developing in childhood. We've already discussed how painful childhood experiences can create core shame and inhibit someone's capacity for pleasure. If a partner is inhibited in this way, he or she may hide in a perpetual telic state in order to avoid vulnerability. There's no hope for really good sex unless one resolves the shame that exists at his or her core. Therapy is a good option for this problem.

Sexual inhibition can be modeled by parents who are themselves inhibited about sex. Subtle messages of anxiety are picked up by a child. The avoidance of specific words for body parts may result in nervous references to "down there" or other euphemisms. References to sex as "dirty" or "filthy" can be planted into a child's subconscious mind only to inhibit their sexual development later on. That development typically accelerates in adolescence. Most adolescent boys will readily explore their sexual sensuality with masturbation and fantasy. Adolescent girls develop their sexual sensuality at a slower pace. They may learn to fantasize, masturbate, and orgasm in late adolescence or even early adulthood. About half will learn to give themselves an orgasm before they ever share it with a man. If they have this history of early sexual self-stimulation, it's very good news to any subsequent marriage counselor. If the woman was able to enjoy fantasy and masturbation before marriage, it indicates that she came into her marriage with a good relationship with her body. It also suggests that her sexual feelings probably aren't inhibited by core shame. People don't realize how important this is. Great sex requires that you have a good sensual relationship with your own body.

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If you haven't developed a good sensual relationship with your body, it's still not too late. But first you need to be honest with yourself about any sexual inhibitions. If you associate your own sexual pleasure to be dirty or not allowed, you may be dealing with core shame issues from your early history. If you have experienced a sexual trauma such as sexual abuse or incest, you're probably not going to have really good sex until you root out the shame with therapy. It can be done. EMDR therapy can be especially effective at resolving this type of core shame.

If you aren't repulsed by sexual exploration but just haven't done it yet, now's your time! There are a number of books that can provide exercises and fantasies for your self-exploration. You can start by exploring your general sensuality and what feels good to parts of your body other than your genitals or breasts. When you're comfortable, you can then shift to your sexual regions. Vibrators come in various shapes and sizes, and I highly recommend that you try them. If it seems a bit much at first, try the very small ones that may be less intimidating. You'll want to explore touching and focusing on various parts of your body while you simultaneously bring up fantasy images. You can accomplish two things when you practice stimulating your own body in this way. First, you can desensitize yourself to be less inhibited about sex. The second thing you can do is to train your attention. Focusing attention is an important sexual skill that influences sexual reflexes. Most women focus their attention on certain nerves and muscles to help bring about their orgasm. This skill is something that you can develop if you're willing to practice.

The bottom line is that you need to be comfortable with your own sexual pleasure if you're going to share it with someone else. If your relationship with that part of your self isn't intact, then you won't be there during sex. Your body will be there, but your mind will be somewhere else.

Enjoying Your Partner's Enjoyment

This sounds strange. "Enjoying your partner's enjoyment." What kind of process is that? Actually, it's a form of empathy, and you have some specific neurological machinery to take care of the job. We previously discussed how mirror neurons can create a model of someone else's mind in our own brain. This system is critically important if you want to have great sex. That's because great sex involves connecting more than your bodies. It involves connecting both of your minds.

Great sex involves connecting both of your minds.

During foreplay and up through early intercourse, your partner's mind can be an incredible source of excitement. Their excitement and pleasure will be telegraphed in numerous ways. Heavy breathing, ecstatic facial expressions, body movements, and other nonverbal cues can combine with your partner's verbal exclamations to give you a very clear picture of what she's experiencing. To the degree that your head can get into her head, your mutual pleasure and excitement will be magnified. When you care about what your partner is feeling, you have an additional exciting dimension to experience.

There's an interesting symmetry involving the sexual limitations of some men and women. More women than men have difficulty tuning into their own bodies. These women are more likely to be focused on pleasing their partner while ignoring their own body sensations. Conversely, more men than women have difficulty tuning into their partner's minds. These men will focus on their own sensual pleasure while ignoring the mind of their partner. Great sex requires a type of dual attention. It requires that you can enjoy your own physical sensations while you also get turned on by your partner's experience. That's what it means to be "close." You're in the picture and they are, too.

There's a natural change in sexual attention when a woman approaches orgasm. During foreplay and early intercourse, her dual attention to body and mind will work to enhance sex. However, a woman's orgasm usually requires more of her attention to help bring it about. For this reason, she will momentarily divert all of her attention to her body in the final moments before orgasm. The mental connection with her partner is re-established afterwards.

The dual attention required for great sex has a subtle but important implication. It's obvious that you need to think of your partner's sensual needs and not just your own. But what's less obvious is that you need to expose your own enjoyment if you're going to maximally excite your partner. If your own pleasure isn't in the picture, then you're actually depriving your partner of half the possible pleasure. They won't be able to empathize with your own enjoyment. Great sex requires that both of you risk sharing the hedonic parts of your selves while also caring about each other's feelings. It's mindful sex.

Respecting Your Partner's Autonomy

In Chapter 6, the point was made that enmeshment will kill sexual attraction. With certain qualifications, the opposite is also true. Autonomy enhances sexual attraction. It's like a natural aphrodisiac. If you respect your partner for being her own person with her own thoughts, you're probably going to find her a turn on. The one qualifier is that other elements for great sex also need to be present. You're not going to feel attracted if there's no shared affection or your partner doesn't care about your feelings. But, if all the other elements of great sex are present and you see your partner as awesomely adult, then watch out! Your passion will run hot. If you perceive your partner to have a childlike dependence, then you're going to be turned off. Healthy partners don't feel sexually attracted to children, even if they are forty years old. If this is your predicament, you might love your partner deeply. However, it will be a love without respect. That deficit will make all the difference. I see many women who care deeply for their pot-smoking husband. But the husband's childlike dependence has usually obliterated the wife's sexual attraction. It's a real bummer!

**The emotional foreplay for great sex
starts months and years ahead of time.**

Respect for autonomy can't be established at the last minute before sex. Like affection, it either develops or disintegrates over the history of a relationship. It's how you implicitly see your partner's real personality and there's no sexual technique that can change that. Because respect and affection are so intrinsic to sexual attraction, one could say that the emotional foreplay for great sex starts months and years ahead of time.

Shared Decision Making

I'd like to pose a question. Why do you think so many people fall into a sexual routine? Why do they repeat the same sexual repertoire over and over again as if they're robots? Is it because they don't

know anything else, or is it something more subtle? I'd like to suggest that it's probably because making choices about sexual desire exposes them to "The Great No-No" of shame. If one of them were to ask for a new sexual favor and the other were to show disgust, the shame would cut to the core like a hot knife through butter. Shame hurts and exposing our sexual desires makes us especially vulnerable to this kind of pain. That's why many couples fall into a routine. They think that as long as they don't rock the boat and try anything new, then they'll be safe. Except that they're not really safe. They're only safe from acute shame. They're not safe from the insidious decay of a once vibrant sexual relationship because their sex has become impersonal and monotonous.

Great sex involves both partners asking for what they want. This parallels our earlier discussion about how you can maintain passion in your relationship. If you frequently express hedonic desire, you will reinforce your identity and keep it strong. The same principle holds true with sex but on a different time scale. If you ask for what you want during sex, you can keep yourself present so that you don't depersonalize. Remaining passive can be deadly to good sex. Here are a few examples of how some partners might make requests during sex.

"Would you touch me some more there for awhile? That feels real good."

"How about doing it doggy style on the couch like we did before? Would you like that?"

"My nipples are telling me that they've been feeling a bit neglected lately. They're saying they would like a little attention. Do you think you could come to their rescue?"

"Would you be willing to wear that sexy shirt and tie that I like so much. We could pretend that we're in my office and you're the detective that I'm seducing."

"Would you just rub me there for awhile? It teases the cat."

"Would you slow it down just a little bit? This is so sweet I'd like it to last for awhile. I don't want to pop right away."

"How would you feel about using the corner of the bed? You know, the position where I etc., etc."

“Would you kiss me some more like that? I like that little thing you do with your tongue.”

OK. Now we can all go and take a cold shower. Up to this point in the discussion, we’ve focused on how to ask for what you want during sex. That’s only half of the picture. The other half involves inviting your partner to do the same. The best type of invitation is the open variety where your partner isn’t confined by any suggestion. It’s along the lines of: “What would you really like for me to do for you right now? What little secret pleasure could I help give you?” It’s **not** along the lines of: “Wouldn’t you really like to etc., etc.?” There really isn’t much technique to extending an open invitation. It just involves your curiosity about what your partner wants and inviting him or her to come out of hiding. Great sex involves the most delicate of negotiations in which you both are actively involved. It’s the process of expressing desire this way that ensures that your hedonic self doesn’t leave the bedroom. You don’t want that part of yourself to be replaced by a robot or a commodity-bartering prostitute.

There’s a paradox about negotiating hedonic desires with your mate. While open negotiation can stoke passion during sex, it also leaves you more exposed to some potential pain. The negotiation process is delicate and fragile feelings are exposed. It’s as if your nerves are laid bare. A clumsy rejection can really hurt. That’s why good tact is essential. It protects both of you from the emotional bruising that might otherwise occur. In the next section, we’ll discuss some useful guidelines for how you can better protect each other.

Protecting Feelings with Good Tact

There are two ways to protect your partner’s feelings during sex. The first is to protect your partner from shame, and the second is to protect him or her from entrapment. The more that your partner trusts in your protection, the easier he or she can share passion. A smart partner always prioritizes this kind of emotional safety over any immediate gratification. Better and more frequent sex is the probable result.

I’m suggesting these three simple guidelines to protect your partner against shame.

- 1. Never criticize your partner when approaching or engaging in sex.** This is a no-brainer. Your partner's hedonic system will be wide open. Any criticism is devastating when one is in this vulnerable state. Don't do it.
- 2. Talk to your partner. Ask about what he or she wants and feels.** Impersonal sex is very shame inducing. If your partner thinks that you only care about your physical pleasure, then she will feel used. Talking to your partner reassures her that you want her mind as well. That's where your partner really lives. An especially powerful technique is to use your partner's name during sex. Endearing terms such as "baby" and "darling" aren't as reassuring. Your partner may wonder if she is lumped together with all the other babies and darlings in your history. There's no other endearing term that sounds as sweet to your partner as her name. It reassures your partner that she is held in your mind and that you're excited about that. What a turn on!
- 3. When declining a sexual request from your partner, always offer him an alternative that shows that you want him or her.** This is a crucially important guideline to protect your partner from shameful rejection. It might look something like this:

"Hey, do you want to fool around? I'm not doing anything right now."

"Actually, I don't know if my head is in the best place for it. I'm kind of tired and I wouldn't want to let you down. But I've been wanting more connection with you lately. I was fantasizing about you earlier today. Tomorrow morning would be much better for me. Perhaps after breakfast? Could we plan for it then?"

Notice that the second partner's response is a tactful maneuver that diverts the first partner's attention to anticipating another form of connection. That's the psychology of it. You shouldn't just leave a partner's rejected request twisting slowly in the wind.

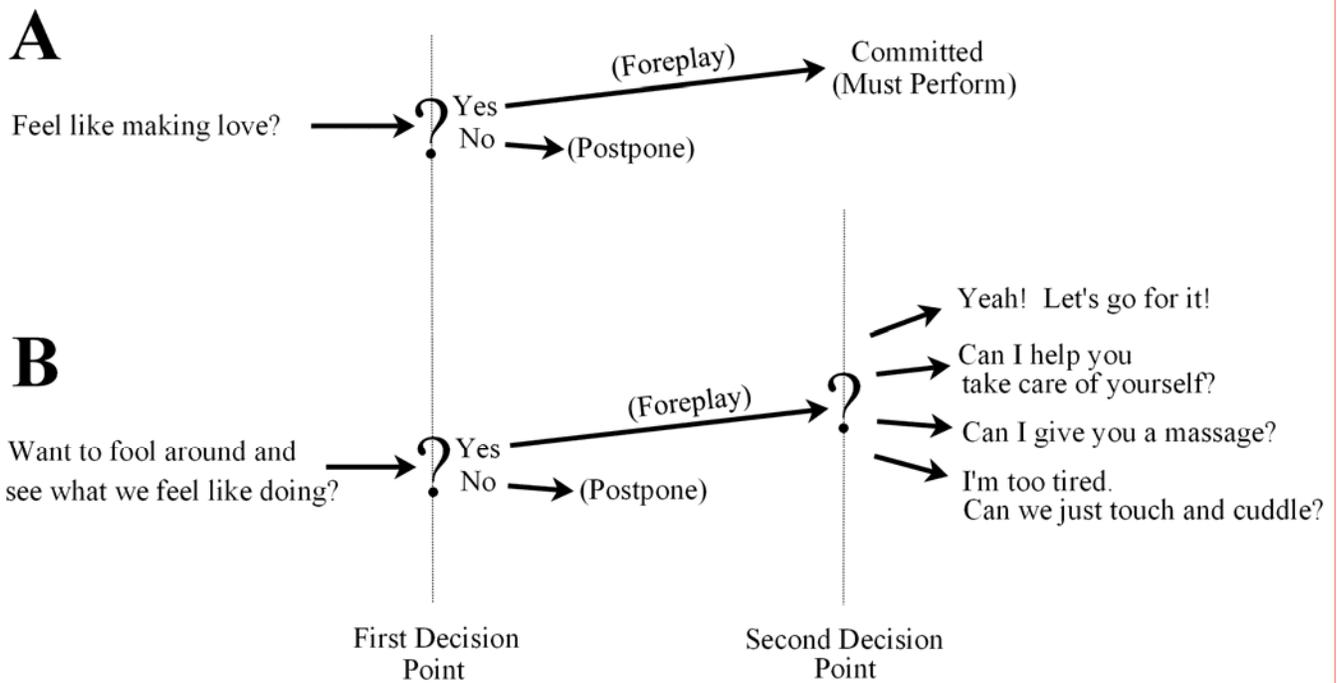
The second way you need to protect your partner's sexual feelings is to frame the situation so that he never feels trapped. You might be wondering, "Trapped by what?" The answer is subtle, yet profound. Partners often fear being trapped by obligation. And they may feel this way for good reason. If you invite him for sex and he commits himself at one point in time, he may be uncertain about how he'll feel later after foreplay. It can be uncomfortable to be in a situation where he's made a commitment

for intercourse, but then later he doesn't feel like following through. Even though he's not turned on, he feels trapped because he doesn't want to let you down. But then he's made a commitment that he must fulfill. It's become a responsibility. Yuk! This type of dilemma becomes more frequent as couples age, hormones decline, and life gets filled with stress. Sexual feelings become less predictable. The following guidelines are great for protecting your partner against this kind of entrapment.

4. **Make an agreement with your partner that neither of you will invite each other specifically for intercourse. All invitations will be only to explore what you each feel and want.** This guideline has the paradoxical effect of promoting better and more frequent sex. There's an agreement to avoid committing to intercourse until the very last second. This agreement eliminates the entrapment fear.

5. **Practice pleasurable alternatives to intercourse for those occasions when either one of you can't get turned on.** The keyword here is practice. It may require some training to reduce your inhibitions and enable you both to enjoy alternatives to intercourse. The more alternative choices you have, the more free you will feel to explore. You will know that if you can't get turned on, you won't frustrate your partner to death by total rejection. You'll find other ways to give your partner satisfaction besides intercourse. Nobody gets hurt.

The following illustration shows different approaches to intercourse. The second approach strategy (B) is much more tactful because it protects against entrapment.



Different strategies for approaching intercourse

The conventional invitation for intercourse is shown in Option A. One partner typically asks for an up front commitment from his or her partner. There's no later decision point because the other partner has totally committed. It's no wonder that many partners are afraid to go down that road because they'll eventually be trapped later if they can't get turned on.

Option B is a strategy to first explore feelings and options. The point of final commitment is immediately before intercourse when both partners have more information about how they feel. If someone isn't up for intercourse, then it's understood that there are other viable options. Remember the third guideline in this section: when declining a sexual request from your partner, always offer an alternative that shows that you want him or her. That guideline applies here. It's wise to offer your partner an alternative pleasure if you decline intercourse at the last minute. Doing so protects your partner from shame.

If you're the one who's offered a last-minute alternative to intercourse, you'd best be smart about the situation. If you protest and complain, you will train your partner to fear entrapment. It will hinder your future sex life. If you show respect for your partner's delicate feelings, your future sex will be

protected. This is what some therapists call “temporal integration.” It’s the ability to consider future consequences and make decisions for long-term benefits. Your partner’s sense of safety needs to be your top priority. Many partners fail here because they focus only on their immediate gratification. Learn to think smarter than that if you want to have great sex.

Parallel masturbation can be a helpful alternative to intercourse. It’s a skill that I’ve trained many couples to use because it reverses entrapment anxiety. In many cases, I’ve seen this kind of training overcome impotence because it removes a lot of anxiety. The training has some similarities to sensate focusing in sex therapy where couples practice sensual touch without having intercourse. In masturbation training, one partner caresses and erotically touches his or her partner while the other partner masturbates to climax. The two partners alternate their roles over time. An important agreement is that intercourse is ruled out for the six weeks while practice takes place. This agreement reduces so much anxiety that paradoxical effects sometimes occur. I’ve always been amused when a previously impotent couple comes back and sheepishly admits to having broken the rule. With one such couple, I felt exceptionally good rapport and decided to use some therapeutic play. With a very stern look on my face, I shook my finger at them and exclaimed: “You naughty, naughty children!” Everyone broke into hilarious laughter and their guilt dissipated immediately.

After six weeks of practicing parallel masturbation, couples typically feel more relaxed when approaching sex. That’s because they’ve trained their lower brain to feel safe. They’ve practiced erotic touch without being trapped into intercourse. This is a conditioning process, rather than intellectual learning. It takes repetitive experience to learn this technique.

There’s often a big difference between intellectual understanding and emotional safety. The latter usually requires repetitive training. I like to use a personal story to illustrate this point. When I was a young man, I decided that I would try rock climbing. The experienced guides rigged a safety line from my waist up through a carabiner attached to a tree at the top of the cliff. Then the line fed down through another carabiner that was attached to a tree at the bottom of the cliff. Two men also managed the line around their waists at the bottom of the cliff. As I climbed, any slack in the rope would be taken in by the two men. There was no way I could fall more than a couple of feet. This was my intellectual assessment as I approached the cliff. My skills were not good, and my physique was poor for climbing. About fifty feet up, I knew that there was a ledge I could never get past. With my strength giving out, hanging from my finger tips, I couldn’t feel the rope tethered behind me. I knew it was there and my intellect told me that I should be safe. However, every neuron in my lower brain screamed that **I was going to die!** I felt it in my gut. So much for intellect when dealing with conditioned emotions. A person could have a Ph.D.

in zoology, but if he has negative emotional conditioning in his history, he might still be terrified by an eight-inch snake or a tiny spider.

If you've been conditioned to fear sexual entrapment, then strongly consider parallel masturbation training. You could train your lower brain to feel that you really do have a safety line behind you. You and your partner could train each other into a higher level of trust. Imagine trusting that each of you will take full responsibility for your immediate sexual gratification if your partner can't get turned on. No entrapment. It's nice. Couples who broaden their final repertoire to include parallel masturbation will usually find that they have more frequent intercourse. This is the natural consequence because they feel safer and more relaxed. Both partners are unafraid to explore foreplay because they know they won't be trapped.

Creativity

Creativity is a talent that can't be taught. There's no way that I can tell you "the seven steps" to being more sexually creative. That would be a paradox because once you're following a method, then you're no longer in a creative state of mind. Creativity needs to come from you, not from someone else. What I can suggest is that you think about two dimensions toward which you can direct your creativity. After that, it's up to you.

Novelty and surprise are two dimensions that really spice up sex. Both of these dimensions are neurologically related and can contribute to positive arousal. Each of us has novelty detectors in the hippocampus part of our brain. When these detectors are stimulated, then we become curious and aroused. Most of the time, this arousal feels pleasurable unless we perceive that we're in a dangerous situation. This positive arousal can make sex a lot more fun. Of course it also depends on good taste so that you and your partner don't weird out. Dropping a worm on your partner's stomach would certainly be surprising and novel, but it probably wouldn't have a positive effect. Poor taste trumps other factors. However, novelty and surprise combined with good taste can make sex exciting.

Creative novelty goes far beyond finding new sex positions. Have you ever noticed that sex is a bit more exciting in a motel room and a different feeling bed? Suggesting different locations in the house can have a similar effect. How about that huge lounge chair in the corner? Could that be put to good use? *Hmmmmmm*. Different clothing can be a turn on too, especially if it's combined with fantasy.

The use of fantasy is one of the most effective ways to stimulate novelty, particularly if it dovetails into your partner's previous fantasies. Does she have a fantasy of meeting a young lover on a deserted beach? Perhaps it's an office seduction scene that he mentioned a while back. Play acting isn't dishonest. It's a natural way to have fun that we start at a very young age. In adulthood, we can use those skills and add the sex component to produce an endless variety of novel pleasures.

Several authors have written about how a frame of meaning can create novelty in sex. I agree, but I want to add the qualifier that not everyone can do it. People with low level of consciousness are usually too concrete to create much meaning. These people may only think about sex organs and body parts. Their limitation will doom them to eventual boredom and possibly the desperate search for novelty in porn, telephone sex or unfaithful promiscuity. If you have a higher level of consciousness, then you can use it to empathically feel your partner's joy, to appreciate the value of their hard-earned trust, to appreciate the emotional freedom that you've both created and to feel the uniqueness of the present moment in your two transient lives. If you can both feel and express things like this during sex, then there are an infinite number of ways that novelty can be generated.

Novelty doesn't just occur on a sensory level. It's determined more by how your sensory experience fits with your intuitive understanding of the situation. The latter is called context, and it affects your reflexes. If you sense that your partner still resents you after a recent fight, then some of your reflexes probably won't work no matter how much you're stimulated. The contextual frame of meaning that you bring to sex will largely determine its quality. Some people say that sex without love becomes boring. That may only be partially true. It may be more accurate to say that sex without meaning will often lead a partner to desperately seek novelty on a concrete level. Whips, chains, trios, group sex, bondage, sadomasochism, animals, swinging? Really kinky sex can be a sign that someone has a hard time creating one's own frame of meaning.

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to desperately seek novelty on a concrete level.**

Surprise is the other way to spice up sex by stimulating those same novelty detectors in the hippocampus. But there's a caveat. Random surprise isn't a good idea if it makes your partner feel unsafe. The best way to surprise your partner is to do something unexpectedly that you can remember that he or she has wanted. When you surprise your partner like that during sex, he or she will often want

to jump your bones. If you remember that your partner gets turned on by formal wear, imagine his or her excitement when you emerge from the bathroom dressed to the hilt. Perhaps it's not formal wear. Maybe it's an English accent of some actor that your partner finds hot. You could stir things up by suddenly shifting into English speak as if you're in a movie. This kind of sudden play, remembered from your partner's fantasies, can give him or her a surprising turn on.

So what stands in the way of your creativity? You could use novelty, surprise, and remember what's in your partner's mind. But then you would have to face one more obstacle. Can you guess what it is? Let me give you a clue. How would you feel if your partner remarks that you look "silly"? What would it be like if you try something new and then your partner gives you a disgusted look? How would you feel then? Of course! You knew it all along, didn't you? You would have to face "The Great No-No" of your own shame if things don't turn out right. Maybe it's better to do what's totally safe and familiar. At least, that's what your unconscious says.

Confronting a Partner Who Avoids Sex

What happens if there's no sex at all in your relationship? Some readers no doubt think that great sex may be all very fine and good, but they'd settle on any sex at all. If this is your predicament, then listen up. You are absolutely right to expect sex with your partner. After all, that was part of the deal. It wasn't written in a contract or stated in a vow, but it was implicitly understood that you would be sexually relating. If your partner is currently avoiding sex altogether, then you have a broken contract. You need to confront the situation.

You will notice that I said that you're correct to expect sex with your partner. That statement needs a lot of qualification because you can really mess up if you interpret it incorrectly. Confronting your partner for immediate forced sex would be exceptionally obtuse. It doesn't work like that. Most sexual reflexes are involuntary and depend on emotion. The danger is that if you confront your partner to *produce* sex, then her sexual feelings will become injured and contaminated with anxiety. For all you know, that might already be the main reason why her sexual desire is blocked. Whatever the reason is for your partner's sexual avoidance, you don't want to aggravate the situation. Don't focus on her immediate sexual performance.

You need to place your focus on your partner's sexual safety and freedom. If your partner is avoiding sex, then her sexual feelings are blocked. She needs to discover what's blocking them. In fact, your partner has a responsibility to the relationship to find out. You can confront your partner about it, but she doesn't have a responsibility to produce sex without desire. Got it? It's a critical distinction; if you don't understand it then you could cause a lot of damage. You need to confront sexual avoidance by challenging your partner to methodically remove the emotional block. Notice that I used the word "methodically." I'm implying that the process will take time. She may not understand what's really going on. Perhaps core shame plays a part. Your partner might need sex therapy, assertiveness training, marriage counseling with you, or some other resource to help her do the required detective work. Maybe some of the emotional blockage is attributable to your own behavior.

You need to confront sexual avoidance by challenging your partner to methodically remove his or her emotional block.

I have a recommendation if you're going to confront your partner about a sexless relationship. At the beginning of your confrontation, make sure that you *tell your partner that you don't want him or her to incur self injury by trying to force sex*. Reassure your partner that you're more concerned with what's happening to his or her sexual feelings than the concrete sexual act. It's only after you make this clear distinction that you can constructively confront your partner to do the detail work. And that means that your partner has to figure out how to find safety and freedom for his or her own sexual self.