

## **Adding a Little Love and Spice to Your Relationship: *Combining Closeness with Arousal to Enhance Connection***

**Douglas Tilley, LCSW**

These exercises are about love, closeness and arousal. If you are just having sex without love and closeness then your sex life will likely burn out early.



Closeness and sensuality provide an important dimension of energy and vitality to relationships. But honestly most people don't feel adept at love making. Many partners are awkward and fearful. Many partners give up. We could all use a refresher course. Hopefully the exercises below will enliven your intimate relationship.

You will be combining feelings of closeness and arousal. You will heighten your feeling of closeness and arousal through anticipation, visualization focusing and breathing. You will be focused on touch sensation, on being attended to, and being supported by your partner through this process. You will invite and allow intimate and sensual feelings to come in and allow them to build. It is important that you feel safe and connected through this process.

*This is very important: It is not unusual for a partner doing these exercises to feel an increased sense of vulnerability and for some partners this can lead to a surfacing of negative feelings. Sometimes partners experience negative feelings about themselves or the relationship with their partner or even about past relationships. If this is the case then stop the exercise. You will need to process these feelings – to feel them, to name them, and maybe to express them to your partner so they can be heard and understood. Hopefully after talking through these feelings, you will feel safe enough to continue. Some couples are able to work through these moments and feel more connected as a result. If you are too upset to continue then you should stop the exercise and talk to your couples therapist to have them help you process your feelings before continuing.*

This experience is designed to be split into 3 separate sessions. Each session may take an hour to an hour and a half.

Session 1: Exercise 1 - Read aloud together all the exercises

Session 2: Exercise 2 - Parts 1, II, III – Focus on Me Fantasies

Session 3: Exercise 3 - From Me to We, Your Pleasure is My Pleasure

Enjoy the journey! And make it fun!

## **Exercise 1: Read Aloud All the Exercises to Each Other.**

Lie on your bed together. Read aloud all the exercises to each other before doing any of the exercises. Reading aloud together is really important since this is a together experience. Notice what feelings you have in your body as you read the exercises. Talk them over and make sure you are comfortable before starting. After talking, if you do not feel right, then don't go forward. Perhaps it is time to talk to your therapist.

In the following exercises the terms fantasy and fantasies are used to mean images, musings, day dreams, reveries or snippets of imaginations. It is not necessary to develop a plot fantasy with a beginning, middle, and end.

## **Exercise 2, Part I: “Focus on Me Fantasies”**

Together you will spend 10 minutes immersed in the Focus on Me Fantasies. During the first 5 minutes, you will lie on the bed next to each other, with your clothes on, with your eyes closed and not touching each other. As you lie in bed, allow your mind to create and follow images of being attended to, loved, and physically pleased by your partner. Notice how you feel in your body. Notice any sensation or arousal. For the second 5 minutes you may touch hands or hold hands while staying focused on the images. Human touch is very powerful. When holding hands, notice how it feels to be touched and any changes in your comfort, pleasure or arousal.

In this “Focus on Me Fantasies” you give yourself permission to receive all the attention, all the caring, all the love, and all the pleasure. You are not focused on your partner's needs, just your own.

In your fantasies be as detailed as possible about how your partner can....

Set the stage to make you feel comfortable and safe.

Know the secrets to your feeling loved, feeling safe, and knowing what really increases your arousal.

Know how to kiss you and caress you. About what kind of sensual touches and genital stimulation you enjoy.

Build your pleasure and make you feel really, really good and cared for.

As you create these visualizations, notice where in your body you are experiencing feelings and sensations. Allow your arousal to build. Focusing on sensations in the body will enhance them and make them build. Also taking long, slow breaths will enhance and heighten feelings and sensations of comfort and arousal.

Notice if touching and holding hands during this part of the exercise helps you to heighten your focus on bodily sensations or if it distracts you from focusing inward. Make adjustments in how and how much you are touching so that you may deepen your immersion in your own inner bodily experience.

These fantasies are your time to feel and visualize yourself allowing your partner to attend to you – for you to receive caring, love, and pleasure. Stay with these visualizations as long as you want.

## **Exercise 2, Part II: Sharing the “Focus on Me Fantasies”**

Following Part I, each partner takes 10 minutes apiece to share. Lie close on the bed together. Touch or hold hands. Clothes on. Eyes open. The partner who is typically slowest to warm up in intimate situations begins sharing first.

Share your “Focus on Me Fantasies” with your partner. Take it slow. As you are sharing how things felt, you may feel aroused. Take a slow, deep breath and stay with the feelings. Share them with your partner.

### **Example of Sharing Your Focus on Me Fantasies.....**

Partner sharing his/her visualizations: “I imagined you asking if I would like some spice and I said yes. You made me feel safe. You closed the door and locked it, you lowered the shade and turned back the covers. We lay clothed next to each other ... You kissed me ... I took your hand and laid it on my stomach... You lightly touched the skin on my stomach and under my breast. It felt so good to ... I just drank it in ...I took long slow breaths as the feelings increased ... You said to me ... I felt so attended to and taken care of ..... I asked you to remove some of my clothing ... Feelings slowly built as you put lotion on ... I closed my eyes and I stayed focused on me- feeling your touch and as I take deep breaths letting it build and grow inside..... It felt selfish but so good... Right now as I share these fantasies, I feel tingling in my... I feel comforted by you.... etc...

1. After sharing these fantasies, ask your partner to soak in your experience and then ask your partner to embrace you for a long moment.
2. Now, each partner can talk about what each particularly liked about the fantasies and the sharing of the fantasies. When sharing, focus more on what you like rather than what you did not like.
3. If you are the listening partner, share what you learned about the other’s needs, preferences, and what makes your partner feel safe and aroused. Be specific. Then check to make sure you got it right.
4. Now switch roles and let the other partner share his/her fantasies.

### **Connected Intimacy: Your pleasure is my pleasure**

So you ask... How can the “Focus on Me Fantasies” be the beginning of connected arousal and intimate connection? Isn’t focusing on your own arousal just self indulgence? It can be unless you understand that your partner’s pleasure and joy become your pleasure and joy. You are both there for each other supporting the other’s pleasure experience. One of the highest forms of Love is to take pleasure and joy in your partner’s pleasures and joys. Also, seeing your partner gaining pleasure from your attentions can increase your own pleasure and arousal.

Again, many partners do not feel comfortable or entitled to focusing on their own feelings of arousal. It can feel embarrassing and selfish to be aroused in the presence of the other. The supporting partner’s love and support are necessary to create a safe environment for the other. The supporting partner must find a way to be there supporting the other while not getting in the way of the focusing partner. The focusing partner must allow themselves to feel and allow the other partner to support.

Of course there are times when sex is more about one partner’s pleasure than the other. That may be ok sometimes. However, when this is the norm couples lose their juice and burn out.

Hopefully these exercises will enhance your pleasure in your partner's pleasure and lead to a more mutual, lasting, intimate connection.

## **Exercise 2, Part III: Making Real the “Focus on Me Fantasies”**

Following part II, each partner takes a turn for 15 minutes. You will invite and help guide your partner to try out some of the things you imagined.

Start by lying on the bed holding hands with clothes on. Begin by sharing your fantasies just as in Part II but this time guide (physically or with verbal instructions) your partner in how to help you focus on your pleasure and arousal. During this exercise you will not have intercourse. You may orgasm but it is not necessary. Just enjoy yourself.

- a. Find the most comfortable position for you. You can ask your partner to hold you a certain way, you could take his/her hand and guide it as he/she caresses you. You can remove some clothing if it makes you more comfortable. You may use a lubricant to enhance touch sensation if you like. You can guide your partner to touch you in any way you like as long as you are both comfortable. You are entitled to this moment.
- b. If you are slow to arouse, think of your arousal as waves building on the beach. As you focus on images and touches and allow your breaths to become long and slow, your arousal will build. Allow the wave to build and then let it pass. Then, wait till the next wave of arousal begins to build and focus on it. Be patient with yourself and take your time. Doing this will build your arousal higher and higher. Building and subsiding, building and subsiding. Whether or not you orgasm is secondary to allowing your feelings of closeness and arousal to build to high states. Take your time when you need it.
- c. When you are satisfied that you are finished, soak it in for a few minutes and then you may switch roles. You may orgasm during this exercise but please wait to have intercourse till the next exercise.
- d. After each partner has taken a turn, take a few minutes to share what worked best for each of you. This may be the most important part of the exercise.

And remember, these fantasies are not a blueprint for what you or your partner must do. You should never compel the other or feel compelled by the other to do anything sexually that you or your partner experience as uncomfortable or distasteful. The universe is large and most couples can find plenty that they can enjoy together.

As you enact some of your fantasies, some of them may not be as wonderful as you imagined. Sometimes some of what we thought would be great isn't. That's ok. So keep what is working and skip what isn't. No need to force anything.

Again, if negative feelings surface during this exercise, then you may need to pause and talk about them. If you can process them, then that's great. If you cannot process your negative feelings, you can stop and talk to your couples therapist to help you process your feelings.

As the supporting partner, go with your partner's pace and let him/her lead. Don't rush or get ahead of your partner. Slower is quicker. It is your job to take your time and create a safe environment for exploration. Your partner's pleasure is your pleasure.

### **Exercise 3: From Me to We: Your Pleasure is My Pleasure**

Hopefully, by now you have discovered and experienced in your intimate relationship what makes you feel close, cared for, and highly aroused. Also you are learning to take pleasure in your partner's pleasure. In this exercise, you will be using the skills you were learning in Exercise 2 – what makes you, and what makes your partner, feel most attend to, cared for, and stimulated. Combining feelings of closeness and arousal can increase your feelings of being intimately connected. By creating a safe environment and taking turns focusing on your own feelings of arousal and then being there supporting your partner's feelings, you will heighten your feelings of mutually aroused connection.

- a. As in Exercise 2, Lie in bed next to each other holding hands. Wear whatever clothes you want or choose to wear none. Close your eyes and visualize for about 10 minutes how you imagine safe, connected arousing lovemaking culminating in intercourse. Spend some time focusing on images of what your partner has done to make you feel most aroused and images of what you have done to make your partner feel most aroused. Let your body feel the sensation of your fantasies in this moment. Stay with the feelings and take long, slow breaths.
- b. Take turns sharing with your partner the feelings you feel right now in your body and anything you need in order to feel safe and enjoy intercourse. Again, the slower-to-arouse partner should start off as the sharing partner first. Try to share any special needs you have – places to touch or not touch and how to touch to give you maximum pleasure and safety. Share what positions are most comfortable and arousing.
- c. Now take turns guiding each other physically and verbally to increase comfort and arousal. It is ok if you get aroused and then lose the feeling before intercourse and orgasm. This is just an opportunity to slow down and ride another wave of arousal.
  - a. When you think you and your partner have reached a place of comfort and heightened arousal then ask your partner if he/she is ready for intercourse. This is a team sport – only continue if you are both ready and having fun.
  - b. It bears repeating that for many couples a lubricant is a must. Sometimes our naturally-occurring body fluids are not enough. Lubricants can sometime reduce pain and increase sensation and arousal.
  - c. For many women intercourse itself does not result in orgasm because the penis does not stimulate the clitoris very easily. Some couples will bring the women to orgasm first and then initiate intercourse. Having said that, there are many exceptions to this rule. Hopefully, sharing your fantasies and exploring each other's bodies has provided some insights into what may work best for you.
- d. When you have had intercourse, cuddle up next to each other and allow yourself to relax and enjoy some cuddle hormones for a few minutes.
- e. Share with each other what you really liked, what made you feel safe, connected and aroused. You may need to share something that was not good for you and that is ok. Hopefully by now you are able to talk about it and find a way to make it work better in the future.

Couples have a lifetime to grow their intimate relationship. I hope these exercises will begin the journey to enhancing your couple bond through connected arousal.