

## Chapter Five

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### *The Sensual Journey: Seven Exercises for Creative Intimacy*

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**Y**ou are about to engage in a series of experiential exercises focused on enhancing the sexual connection and intimacy between you and your partner. The journey ahead has no particular destination as every couple has a unique experience. In fact, the concept of “beginner’s mind” is particularly apropos as you move through these exercises. In other words, have no expectations and meet the challenges as a beginner might—with curiosity and an open heart and mind.

In the 1970s, pioneering sexologists William Masters and Virginia Johnson, a married couple, developed a groundbreaking technique for heterosexual couples with sexual challenges. Introduced in their book *Human Sexual Inadequacy* “sensate focus” has, since, been the foundation of clinical sex therapy. By focusing on the sensations of physical touch without an expectation for sex or orgasm, Masters and Johnson found couples were free from any anxiety around performance and could engage their true feelings.

In the 1980s, Dagmar O’Connor, a student of Masters and Johnson, expanded on sensate focus in her book *How To*

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*Make Love To The Same Person For The Rest Of Your Life And Still Love It* and developed workshops with exercises for marriage enhancement. In the early 2000s, I, myself, set out to expand upon the work of earlier sexologists with a concentration on enhancing the sexual connection for gay men. I wrote *Sexual Enhancement Therapy for Gay Men in Long Term Relationships* for my PhD dissertation.

The exercises in the following chapter are a modification of my work designed for a self-guided experience in sensate focus for gay male couples. *It is ideally recommended that these exercises be supervised by a licensed and certified sex therapist.* I want to warn you, before you engage in the prescribed activities, that feelings and issues may arise that could necessitate seeking professional help. If you are already working with a therapist, be sure to get his or her input before moving into this work. And, as previously mentioned, if there is any history of abuse or sexual trauma, you *must* have professional attention and guidance prior to and during these sensate focus and sexual exercises.

The experience ahead is a step-by-step exploration of yourself and of your partner's sexual interests and desires with the intended outcome of creatively enhancing your intimate connection. You may, at times, feel the guided exercises are too directive, authoritarian and scripted. I will agree that they are all that, but there is a method to the madness. Have patience with the process and allow it to unfold at a comfortable pace. It takes courage (heart) to do these exercises as you will create considerable vulnerability, with no certainty of the outcomes. However, keep in mind that increased vulnerability results in increased intimacy. Stay in the moment without expectation and be present with your partner. After all, you are riding this wave together; you are a united team in this adventure.

Each exercise begins with a purpose, but no direction for a specific end result. Pay attention to this purpose as you read the instructions. Once you and your partner have read

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through the exercise together and understand the format and intention, put the book away and go to the bedroom. You do not want the experience to feel like you are acting out a recipe from a cookbook. The written instructions are merely a guide to achieving the specified purpose.

Creating the supportive environment as you did with the dialogues in Chapter Three is necessary before starting any of the exercises in this chapter. The necessary supportive elements for sensate focus include:

1. Have enough light to be able to see into each other's eyes and sense facial expressions, but not too much light as to be glaring. You may use candlelight, flowers, incense and other atmospherics to enhance a romantic mood.
2. Have no distractions...none. No TV, no (cell) phone, no computer. Soft background music is fine.
3. Do not eat during these exercises. Do not drink alcohol or use recreational drugs before, during or immediately after the exercises.
4. Keep the room temperature slightly warmer than usual for your comfort while undressed.
5. Acknowledge readiness and confirm who will be going first as explained in each exercise. Affirm your love for one another and express appreciation and gratitude while looking into each other's eyes. Taking one another's hands or engaging in a hug or light touch before getting into bed is also highly reassuring and affirming.
6. Take three or four deep breaths together.
7. Think love.

At the end of each exercise there is a series of "Questions to Ponder" with your partner. The dialogue created by answering these questions is at the heart of enhancing

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your physical and emotional connection. Be sure to use the communication skills you developed in Chapter Three to guide your conversation.

If your relationship is working well sexually, these exercises may not be necessary, but may help bring more sensuality and intimacy into your love life. If your sexual relationship is not working as well as you may like, but there is still a sexual connection, the exercises may well enhance that connection. If you and your partner are disconnected sexually, the exercises may or may not create a sexual reconnection, but more than likely they will increase your level of intimate connection. The key point here is that *every couple is different and unique, and all outcomes are different and unique*. No particular outcome is right or wrong, good or bad. Always remember the focus is on observation and a sense of presence in the moment with your partner. No matter the nature of the experience, these exercises will surely enhance honest communication about sensuality, sex and sexual feelings. Nearly all of the men I have worked with report that the exercises brought them closer and helped them to communicate better—both in and out of the bedroom.

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### Exercise One: Focus on Touch

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The purpose of this exercise is to give and receive non-genital touch without sex and to focus on the sensations of touching and being touched. You need to plan for two thirty- to forty-five-minute sessions so each partner may experience touch as both a giver and as a receiver. You do not have to do the exercises back-to-back, and most couples choose to take a break, or even a “day off,” between giving and receiving. The giver will be in control in this exercise, and a coin toss before you begin will determine who is giver first. Create the supportive environment in your bedroom and affirm readiness, love and appreciation before you begin.

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Start the exercise by getting undressed. If as a couple you have never had sex, have never been undressed in each other's presence or for some other reason do not feel comfortable at this time undressing for your partner, you may leave your undergarments on and repeat the exercise once or twice a week until you feel you can proceed without clothes.

The partner to receive touch first lies down on the bed, face down, turning over on his back half way through the thirty-to forty-five-minute encounter. The giver is now instructed to take his time and touch his partner wherever he likes, while *avoiding* the receiver's nipples, buttocks, perineum (the area between your scrotum and anus) and genitals. The giver may touch, rub, massage, stroke, caress or simply hold an area of his partner's body, utilizing varying degrees of pressure over varying lengths of the body. However, do not think of this as "giving my partner a massage." The object is to experience touch in many different ways, while being creative and loving in the process. The giver may use massage oil, lotions or powders. Talcum powder, baby powder or cornstarch may be lightly sprinkled on an area of your partner's body before stroking. Utilize body lubricants sparingly, and for the sole purpose of reducing any friction from dry, rough or chapped hands.

The giver makes decisions about lighting, candles, incense and other romantic atmospheric with the approval of his partner, but the lights are to remain on throughout the exercise. The temperature in the room should be adjusted by the giver with particular attention to the comfort of the receiver.

The receiver is to focus on the sensations he experiences. The giver, likewise, is to experience the sensations of touching and, at the same time, pay attention to which sensations the receiver likes and dislikes.

The receiver should guide the giver verbally—and nonverbally—by telling his partner what areas of the

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body, what kinds of touch and pressure, and what lotions or powders he finds unpleasant or particularly pleasant. It is best to use sentences starting with the word “I” to communicate your feelings. For example, “I actually like lighter touch on my shoulder” or “I would prefer having my neck rubbed” or “I don’t really enjoy being touched under my arm.” Be careful not to scold or criticize your partner with harsh comments that start with the word “you,” such as, “You know I’m ticklish. Don’t touch me over there!” Be gentle with one another, as this can be a difficult and emotional process.

The receiver may also put his hand over the giver’s hand and gently direct the movement away from displeasure and/or toward more pleasurable areas. Guiding pressure and movement is fine, remembering that the giver is focusing on *his own* desires in terms of where and how he wants to touch his partner. *Asking for, or showing, your partner what feels good or not so good is a necessary part of a loving sexual relationship.*

Although the giver is exploring his own interest while touching and feeling, he needs, first and foremost, to be committed to avoiding areas of discomfort for his partner. As you go through this exercise you will want to relax, breathe deeply and be present in the moment with your partner. It is acceptable to close your eyes during this exercise.

When the giver determines by the clock that the exercise time is complete, you should spend a few minutes lying in bed together. Avoid the urge to discuss the experience at this point, but *acknowledging love* at this moment can be extremely comforting.

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