

An Integrated Approach To Treating Low Female Desire

AASECT Conference, May 4, 2001

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Women come to sex therapy, because they think something is inherently wrong with their sexuality. They may even say they have no sex drive at all. Ever since Masters and Johnson laid to rest the matter of female orgasm, women have been trying to fit themselves into the *Procrustian* bed of an essentially male model of sex which is:

Sex=Intercourse

The goal of Sex=orgasm

Great Sex=a technically correct virtuoso performance

Women have learned to fake orgasm and use their mouths in phenomenal ways.

Women have gotten the idea that a great performance of fellatio, pelvic gyrations or quadrasonic sound is required of them because: you must please your man, or you will lose him to someone who can. However, the questions remain: are women able to experience their own pleasure consistently? Can they maintain sexual desire in long-term relationships?

Often, when couples come to treatment with desire problems, women express the feeling that *something is missing* which results in their feeling sexually incomplete even when they are easily orgasmic. I have found that many women lose sexual interest because genitally focused sex in rote patterns purely for physical release become boring without additional paths of emotional and spiritual discovery.

The woman-centered sexual perspective shifts the paradigm enormously. If visiting anthropologists from another planet were to interview a few sexually secure women, they might describe male-female sex quite differently. In fact, alien researchers might not immediately see any connection to procreation in what they were told by these women about the things they enjoy. Pleasure would appear to be the purpose of the interaction and there might not be any emphasis on one particular sexual act, but a long list of pleasurable activities in no particular sequence and with no particular finale.

Our alien researchers might take notes on touching, eye contact, playful or seductive moods, sensual bathing, passionate kissing, and embracing. They might list the clitoris as a primary sexual organ because it gives the women such joy, but they might also recognize the entire body to be an organ of pleasure with the Yoni as the source of sexual heat. If they published their findings, we humans would recognize that their data was biased because it would be obvious that they had interviewed a rare and small percentage of the female population.

Ancient knowledge holds that the female polarity is the powerful, magnetic pull of sexual surrender. In its highest expression it is spiritual sex. When the notion of sex is strictly limited to a masculine template into which women are supposed to fit, there is no counterpoint of active, female energy. If the feminine way is to be represented in contemporary, sexual knowledge in equal measure, female desire must be a clearly represented as an active urge, as powerful as the male's but very different.

The Ancient Women's societies divided women's lives based on the three blood mysteries: First Blood, Childbirth and Wise Blood. These continue to be powerful *psychological transformations* within all women. They are universally transformational

events for all women, everywhere and for all times. There are great sexual lessons in each
2
of these stages.

The integrated approach I have developed has 4 phases:

1. Re-imagining/Psycho-education

I find it very helpful to educate women about their collective history, specifically the history of women's sexuality in the last 3,000 years. I have condensed much of it in my book, Reclaiming Goddess Sexuality, (*Psychology Today* called it easy to read). Women feel inspired by a new view of themselves. They are excited by the possibility that there is a feminine sexual paradigm, derived from cultures that honored the divine feminine and where women were central to society.

In order to heal feminine desire, I believe that women must reclaim the core of their universal feminine selves, The Image of the Goddess represents the feminine polarity of the Life Force. The sense of the Divine Feminine is important to women's unique sexuality because it breaks up the judging, sex-negative image of women that has dominated for the last five thousand years. In patriarchy, female sexual desire was dangerous if one must trace the bloodlines through the male.

The Message

Abundant sexual desire is not something you have lost. It never left you and it is within your power to reawaken. Sexuality is not purely physical, but a function of body-mind-spirit interaction. Low sexual desire is not a mechanical problem achieving orgasms, but a lack of self-acceptance, inhibiting surrender to your natural and powerful erotic energy.

The psycho-educational component of the work illuminates the central tasks of each stage and the *optimal psychological sets and settings* for positive sexual development in each one. I have found that reframing healing in terms of *reawakening* sexual energy, appeals to feminine values. It validates the woman's own inner resources in collaboration with constructed knowledge from experts.

We have plenty of evidence from books such as In a Different Voice and Women's Ways of Knowing that women have a deep desire to integrate received knowledge with subjective insight. Women's wisdom has always been grounded in situational and contextual experience. Both the teachings of wise elders and personal experiences in the quest for self give an authentic voice to the woman's own embodied wisdom as a primary instrument of self understanding.

I teach women about the *optimal psychological sets and settings* necessary in the second phase of treatment.

2. Restore and reawaken

MAIDEN STAGE: Permission

Much of what we do now in sex therapy is permission giving and restoring the woman's acceptance of her body. It must be internalized which takes more than just talking about it. Mirror exercises and guided imagery, such as I have offered in my book

help women own a new view of themselves as whole and unique.

3

MAIDEN STAGE: Readiness

One of the basic principles of awakening female desire is to foster the long, slow buildup of sensual feelings and the “banking” of sexual urgency so that the woman does not feel rushed into sex. The simple concept of waiting for the woman to feel a sense of readiness is fundamental.

Men who know how to wait for and tease female desire, delaying intense sexual touching, know a valuable key to feminine readiness. Central is awakening desire before progressing to a more sexual kind of touch. This principle starts with sensual touching and kissing and goes all the way to penetration and beyond.

The Message: YOU are the only source of information about your readiness for intercourse OR any kind of touch. As a woman taking responsibility for your own sexual experience you must not give in to pressure to be rushed, simply because his tempo is ten times more rapid than yours. The pattern of yielding to the male partner’s timing, when it becomes chronic, is perhaps the greatest source of the gradual loss of female sexual desire. It begins in early sexual experiences.

The demise of desire can be so subtle that a woman may not realize she has sabotaged herself until she have practiced this pattern of ignoring her needs chronically. The following scenario is an example.

The husband asks for sex before rising for another busy day. She says to herself, “we don’t have much time and the baby will wake up, so what’s the harm in a quickie? He’ll be much happier and easier to live with.” When she has more time, it is too much bother to try to relax enough to complete her response cycle. Men often collude with their partners in allowing this accommodation to persist. He may say, “are you sure you’re okay with this?” She reads the signals of his yawns, lack of eye contact, and waning interest after his orgasm. She says, “sure honey, I just enjoy the closeness.” With that he gives her a big hug and tells her what a great wife she is.

The Safe setting is required to explore pleasure and build readiness. It means that the woman is safe not only from trauma, and pregnancy but especially from abandonment. Remember that song in the 60’s, “Will You Still Love Me Tomorrow”? It is an old and classic theme with women who feel swept away by their desire but fear the consequences.

MOTHER STAGE: Surrender

The message

In order to respond sexually you must listen to your own body. This means attending to your Body Wisdom. Learning to surrender to the body’s natural rhythms means your must honor all the signals. That is:

- 1) Letting go of thoughts and tuning into the sensations of the body.
- 2) Not over-controlling a sexual encounter to allow only “acceptable” sexual behavior that limits sexual surrender.
- 3) Allowing sensual feelings to develop when your timing is right.

- 4) And knowing when conditions are not right and acting in your best interest.

4

I explain to couples that there are four sexual desire phases for women, (from Theresa Crenshaw's Alchemy of Love and Lust)

1. Receptive--at the highest levels of estrogen when women are most open to penetration but also need lots of cuddling and emotional closeness.
2. Seductive--"on-the-prowl" desire when estrogen is more mixed.
3. Active--when high testosterone levels stimulate an aggressive desire for orgasm (with a partner or solo masturbation).
3. Aversive--when progesterone is at its peak and women should not be pressured to give in to unwanted sexual behavior.

The Seductive Setting in the Mother Stage means that women must take responsibility for insisting on the seductive setting. Motherhood requires the abandonment of self-absorption enjoyed in the Maiden Stage and so many conditions operate against sexual desire in the Mother Stage that women need all the romance they can get.

Yet, in this stage, husbands are less likely to behave in ways that are seductive to their mates. They may insist on contract sex. When I suggest men use techniques that were successful for them in their single days, men are often uncomfortable creating them or they find it too much of a chore to be bothered.

One of the best methods to experience surrender to sensations and create a seductive setting is one you already know: dance. Dancing is a simple way to heal the split between mind and body. The couple can learn sensual techniques such as breathing together, playful interaction, dancing, and many others that lead to a seductive setting.

3. Reconnect with the partner

MOTHER STAGE: Communion (meaning compassion that goes both ways)

The definition of intimacy is the desire to know and be known by another. The desire to know your partner means that you will work at telling each other about your thoughts, feelings, and desires, and you will continue opening yourself up to new information about your partner. Not only will you tell him your deep emotions and thoughts, without filtering information, but also you will remain silent, and listen to his feelings or views without judgment. Once you understand the blueprint for intimacy, you can build your own version in your relationship, using the essential components (which are the four walls: respect, honesty, connection and communication).

The Message

Communication skills help you speak about your needs while eliminating defensive reactions. You can talk about anything, if you deliver the message in a congruent, non-blaming, and self-responsible way. The goals for all intimate communication can be summed up in three principles:

- 1) expressing your feelings congruently,
- 2) giving information in a non-blaming way, and
- 3) requesting information from your partner. Ask for information, rather than assume your partner's feelings.

A balanced sexual partnership is essential for sustained sexual desire. Long after

5

the early kinds of mutual pleasuring have lost their luster, both men and women are afraid to discuss the problem with their partner. It is difficult to be really specific about changing the kind of touch, tempo, sights, sounds, and any other details.

One more essential skill in the reconnect phase, is learning to maintain and individuated stance through negotiation. Most individuals enter into negotiations with the underlying assumption that the goal is to argue their point, until they can prove to their partners that their way is better or more important. Arguing over whose way is better is a win-lose situation from the start. When they experiment with the attitude that they are both on the same team, each will feel more motivated to work hard at obtaining a true win-win solution. I remind them that to be effective, communication must be non-blaming and respectful. The following equation seems to be an effective way to illustrate the need for a win-win for the health of the relationship

<u>You</u>		<u>Your Partner</u>		<u>Your Relationship</u>
Win	+	Lose	=	Lose
Lose	+	Win	=	Lose
Win	+	Win	=	Win

4. Expand: Sexual Mastery

The ancients held the view that sexuality was both a healing energy and a pathway to raising the consciousness. The ancient ritual of the Great Marriage was enacted several times a year at festivals and was believed to renew the land and demonstrate the healing aspects of sexuality to the community.

Those who were initiated into the truth about this mystery of sexual energy were able to use it for sacred purposes. The temple priestesses were called *Hierodules* or the sacred virgins. Those who served the Great Mother were “women unto themselves” free of marital bonds. (Thus the original meaning of virgin.) These women were practicing sexual healing and initiating men into the sexual pathway towards a more expanded consciousness.

In the crone stage of life, a time comes when we turn from a path of self-healing to our path of power, when we are ready to make our contribution. Sexual Mastery is the conscious development of this path of power. It can rejuvenate sexuality because older women may feel motivated to tap into “intentional desire” which accesses the will to pursue the healing and spiritual aspects of sex. Those who have had such experiences of ecstasy are described as extraordinary light, luminous colors, loss of the sense of a physical body and merging with universal energy.

Sex researcher and therapist Gina Ogden launched a study in cooperation with New Woman Magazine in 1999. More than 1,400 women responded. She found that 91% of women over 40 said that they had experienced sexual ecstasy or spiritual sex. They described experiences such as “feelings of oneness with the universe during orgasm,” having out of body travel while making love, weeping with the joy of sexual bliss, being enveloped with a loving light, and touching souls with the partner. My own spiritual sex experience was a most compelling direct encounter with universal healing energy, and there were moments of boundless, timeless existence in “light/energy.”

Clearly, many women are having such experiences and are willing to talk about them. The descriptions of sexual ecstasy sound quite similar to near death experiences in some ways. There are many pathways of spiritual discovery and we are on a new frontier of research which brings in the so-called paranormal as part of eroticism. It is also an ancient knowledge. In the new Millennium, I hope to see a re-emergence of this life-affirming pathway of spiritual sex.

The Feminine Paradigm

- Pleasure rather than orgasm is central to an erotic encounter
- Sensual touch is the vehicle rather than genital performance
- Orgasm is perceived as multidimensional
- Female sexual power is magnetic attraction

Treatment Modules

1. Re-imaging/Psycho-education: Feminine Life Stages and Sexual Development
2. Restore and Reawaken: Permission, Readiness, Surrender
3. Reconnect with the Partner: Communion--Intimacy Skills
4. Expand: Explore Sexual Mastery--Healing and Spiritual Ecstasy

Books of Interest

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