

Becoming Orgasmic

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A SEXUAL AND PERSONAL GROWTH PROGRAM FOR WOMEN

Revised and Expanded Edition

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Drawings by David Palladini

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Contents

<i>Acknowledgments</i>	ix
<i>Introduction</i>	x
<i>1 Getting Involved</i>	1
Who can benefit from this book?	
Fears and hopes you might have.	
You are not alone.	
If you have a partner, how to decide what to do during your sexual growth.	
Ways to feel encouraged as you progress through the chapters.	
<i>2 Getting to Know Yourself</i>	17
The influence of early experiences on your attitudes toward sex.	
Your personal sex history and putting it in perspective.	
Abusive incidents that may have taken place.	
Dealing with concerns about your body.	
Where you get standards for appreciating yourself physically.	
Visual exploration of your genitals.	
Coming to terms with negative feelings and fostering positive feelings about your genitals.	
Myths and misconceptions about women's sexuality.	
<i>3 Exploration Through Touch</i>	41
Exploring the textures of your entire body.	
Dealing with uncomfortable feelings.	
Relaxation exercises.	

	The G-spot and you.	
	Strengthening your vaginal muscles.	
4	<i>Touching for Pleasure: Discovery</i>	55
	Claiming your body as your own.	
	A new way to look at masturbation.	
	What does giving yourself pleasure mean to you?	
	Exploring your body for feelings of pleasure.	
	Some ideas to try.	
	Cognitive therapy techniques.	
	Putting pressure on yourself, and the tendency to become a spectator.	
5	<i>Touching for Pleasure: Focusing</i>	65
	Continuing exploration through touch.	
	Difficulties you might experience.	
	Ways to focus and increase your arousal and pleasure, including body work and sensate focus.	
	Exploring erotic literature and fantasy, and concerns you may have about them.	
6	<i>Going Further</i>	84
	Problems you may be having.	
	Issues that influence change.	
	The importance of appreciating and valuing who you are.	
	Dealing with conflicted feelings about changing.	
	Women's physical responses during the sexual response cycle.	
	Influences on sexual response, including aging and contraception.	
	Fears about orgasm.	
	Role-play orgasm.	
	Ways to increase arousal and trigger orgasm.	
7	<i>Using a Vibrator: A Little Technology</i>	109
	Taking a new look at vibrators.	
	Different types of vibrators and how to find the right one for you.	
	Exploring your body.	
	Concerns about excessive use of or attachment to the vibrator.	

8	<i>Being Female, Being Sexual: Special Issues of the Body</i>	118
	The menstrual cycle as it begins and ends your reproductive years.	
	Problems with menstruation, including premenstrual syndrome and amenorrhea.	
	Sexual health and response throughout the life cycle.	
	Your body during and after pregnancy.	
	Ways to maintain gynecological health.	
	Breast exams and doctor visits—some suggestions.	
9	<i>Sharing Self-Discoveries with Your Partner</i>	145
	Expectations and apprehensions about sharing your changes with your partner.	
	Ways of sharing self-pleasuring with your partner.	
	Sexual desire problems—approaches to helping.	
	Concerns from the woman's point of view.	
	Concerns from the man's point of view.	
	Learning new aspects of initiating and refusing sex.	
10	<i>Pleasuring Each Other</i>	167
	The importance of trust and communication in pleasuring each other.	
	Ways to avoid putting pressure on yourself and your partner.	
	Using verbal and nonverbal communication during sexual interactions.	
	How to encourage and support each other.	
	Positions for pleasuring.	
	Enjoying nonintercourse forms of lovemaking.	
	Becoming less inhibited in front of your partner.	
	Dealing with negative feelings about male genitals.	
	Vibrators as part of lovemaking.	
	Using fantasies with a partner.	
11	<i>Intercourse: Another Form of Mutual Pleasure</i>	187
	Feelings about intercourse and other forms of sexual affection.	
	Seeing intercourse as part of, rather than the pinnacle of, sexual expression.	
	Appreciation as a key to encouraging change.	

Genital-size concerns.	
Advantages and disadvantages of different positions for intercourse.	
Coital orgasm—is it worth it?	
New approaches to try if coital orgasm is important.	
 <i>12 Sex in the Modern World: Real-Life Relationship Issues</i>	 208
Cultural pressures on women to be more than they are.	
Cultural pressures on men to change.	
How much have social expectations about sex and relationships changed?	
Recovering from rape or incest.	
Choosing a partner in an AIDS age.	
Personal values, religion, and sexual relationships.	
Update on sexual frequencies and changes in stable relationships.	
 <i>13 Enhancement</i>	 228
Guidelines for enhancing your sexuality.	
Techniques for oral-genital and anal lovemaking.	
Aphrodisiacs.	
Ways to delay ejaculation.	
 <i>14 What Next?</i>	 240
Alternatives to consider if you are still dissatisfied.	
Locating and choosing the best therapist for you.	
 <i>Note to Professionals</i>	 247
<i>A Selected Annotated Bibliography</i>	251
<i>Index</i>	259

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Finally, we would like to thank the many women with whom we have worked using this program. While the program has benefited them, they have also taught us a great deal.

Introduction

If the tone of this book is confident, it is because the program it describes has demonstrated its effectiveness with many different women over the past seventeen years. Many of the procedures described in this book were first developed by Joseph LoPiccolo at the University of Oregon in 1969. Of course, no therapy procedure is ever generated out of thin air. Several other therapists had previously done work that contributed much to this program. In particular, therapy procedures developed by such early behavioral and cognitive therapists as Arnold Lazarus, Joseph Wolpe, and Albert Ellis formed a general theoretical background for this program. The knowledge of human sexuality contributed by such sex researchers as Albert Kinsey, Donald Hastings, William Masters, and Virginia Johnson was also a crucial element in creating this program.

In the years since 1969, we have developed and refined this program in a number of settings and with a number of students and colleagues. At the University of Oregon, W. Charles Lobitz, then a graduate student and now a respected colleague, greatly aided the development of the program. In 1974, Joseph LoPiccolo moved to the Department of Psychiatry at the State University of New York, Stony Brook. At Stony Brook, Julia R. Heiman, who was already engaged in research on female sexuality, joined the program and added her unique skills and abilities. The chairman of the psychiatry department, Dr. Stanley F. Yolles, was very supportive of our development of a sex therapy center in the department and encouraged our work in the area in a number of ways. As all things must end, we both eventually moved on—Julia Heiman to the University of Washington in Seattle and Joseph LoPiccolo to become chairman of the department of psychology at the University of Missouri. Over the years, then, we have had the opportunity to work with hundreds of women in different parts of the country, using this program.

By 1975 it was clear that the program worked. Individual or couple sex therapy, however, was reaching only a small percentage

of the women who could potentially benefit from a program such as ours. It became apparent that an easily understood self-help version of this program would be useful for those women who could benefit from such help without the need for formal therapy. Sharing personal reactions gained from women who had participated in the therapy program over the past several years seemed to be of particular importance. Ideas began to take form, and the result was the first edition of this book, written by Julia R. Heiman, Leslie LoPiccolo, and Joseph LoPiccolo in 1976. Around the same time, we also created a film (also titled *Becoming Orgasmic*) showing a couple progressing through the program. At Stony Brook, Patricia J. Morokoff, a graduate student in psychology, collaborated with us on a research project on the self-help use of this program. In this study, one group of women basically treated themselves, using this book. Another group of women used the book but also received fifteen weekly psychotherapy sessions with one of our staff. To our surprise (and delight), the self-treatment group was just as successful in reaching orgasm as the psychotherapy group. In both groups about 90 percent of the women were able to learn to have orgasm in masturbation. Around 80 percent of the women learned to have orgasm with their male partners, and about 35 percent of the women learned to have orgasm during intercourse. In addition, over 95 percent became more satisfied overall with their sexual relationships. These figures are quite impressive compared to other treatment studies, and to studies of the sexuality of healthy, well-adjusted women. Put most simply, the program described in this book works.

In the years since the original edition of this book was published, we have learned much more about female sexuality and its problems. Some of this knowledge has come through academic research, both our own and that done by others. Additional knowledge has come from our experience in working with women. This new edition incorporates our new knowledge and also extends the focus of this book. Some of the major changes we have made in this edition include:

- A broader focus than just reaching orgasm
- A new section on problems of lack of sexual desire and suggestions for dealing with this problem
- New sections on aging, menopause, pregnancy, contraception, hormones, and other physical issues in female sexuality
- A new section on the aftermath of rape or incest and suggestions for overcoming any traumatic effects suffered as a result

-
- Three new techniques for reaching orgasm during intercourse
 - A review of new ideas about female sexuality, such as the “G-spot” controversy
 - More focus on relationships and emotional conflict and how these issues influence sexuality

1

Getting Involved

Where are you at this particular time in your life? You may be single, married, separated, divorced, or widowed. You may have several children or none at all. You may or may not be involved in a sexual relationship with someone. You may be under thirty, over sixty, or somewhere in between. There may be many difficulties in your life right now, or things may be pretty satisfying.

All of us, wherever we are in our lives, have emotional needs for closeness, intimacy, affection, and sexual gratification. While for most of us our emotional needs are more important than sexual gratification, even the strongest of emotional relationships can be disrupted by sexual problems. For many women, inability to become fully aroused and inability to experience orgasm are major sources of personal frustration and relationship distress. This book is designed to help you address these problems.

As you begin to look through this book you will probably have mixed feelings. Perhaps you are wondering if this book really is for you. You may be worried about whether or not you will get everything you want from it. On the other hand, you may feel unsure about exactly what you do want for yourself sexually or whether you are putting too much emphasis on sex as a problem. You may feel enthusiastic—or very hesitant—about beginning. Perhaps you are tempted to find a magic formula for changing. One thing we are fairly certain of is that you probably feel you want something different for yourself. You want to grow and explore your potentials, and you see the enhancement of your sexuality as part of this exploration.

That's why we refer to this book as a sexual and personal growth program. Specifically, this program is designed to help women who have not yet experienced or who have difficulty experiencing orgasm. We have developed the contents of the book from successfully treating, in sex therapy, numerous women with a variety of problems, fears, and potentials.

Orgasm is certainly a satisfying aspect of sexual growth. And



yet, as you proceed through the following chapters, you will find that orgasms are not an isolated part of your sexuality. Orgasmic response depends on many things. Of course, it depends on sexual arousal, but feeling sexual can be influenced by your ability to feel comfortable with yourself, with your ideas about sex, and with your ideas about men and women. Thus, growing sexually has a lot to do with general personal growth. This book offers you a framework for learning more about your sexual feelings, changing those that *you* choose to change, and deciding how you want your sexuality to continue to develop and fit into the rest of your life.

Perhaps you've already read books and magazine articles on sexuality, and you've tried to make changes. You may have even attempted to put into practice certain ideas of your own that you thought would help.

It's important to remind yourself that as recently as twenty-five years ago, orgasms were not considered to be very important to women's sexual enjoyment, though they were considered to be directly linked to more general personality qualities. Thus, a nonorgasmic woman was likely to be labeled "frigid," implying a pervasive problem—something quite deeply wrong and automatically requiring extensive therapy. Then, beginning around the 1960s, these views were challenged and a new standard appeared, this time fostering a supersexual image: Orgasm is a *must*. As a result, in order to feel sexually adequate, many women began to feel pressured to be instantly, regularly, or even multiply orgasmic.

Women we've seen in sex therapy often come to us feeling like failures because the sexual techniques they'd tried didn't work for them. Perhaps you've felt at times that if you could just do things the *right* way, you'd be orgasmic. It's natural to feel this way at times, to put pressure on yourself—to try harder. However, doing this makes orgasm practically impossible. Rather than looking forward to and enjoying sex, you may find yourself wanting to avoid it or getting it over with as soon as possible. There may have been times when you've faked an orgasm in order to protect your self-image and your partner's opinion of you.

We hope that reading this book will help you take the pressure off yourself. We have tried to make this experience more than just a conglomeration of techniques. Sexual growth is not a series of steps or techniques toward a goal. It is a process that involves all of you. It involves your attitudes, thoughts, and feelings as well as your body. Learning to become orgasmic or more readily orgasmic is only

a part of the process of lifelong sexual development. However, it is likely that you have some specific concerns about changes you want to make. We'd like to share with you a few of the questions that women more frequently have.

Will I ever have an orgasm? If you've never experienced orgasm, it's natural for you to worry that you may never have one. One woman in therapy said, "I used to go to parties and look at the other women. I would be sure that I was the only one there who couldn't have an orgasm." Actually, the fact that you may not have had an orgasm yet is not unusual. Currently, about 15 to 20 percent of the cases seen in sex therapy involve women who have never experienced orgasm. An even greater percentage of cases involve women who are orgasmic but who experience difficulty reaching orgasm some of the time or are unable to have orgasms with their sexual partners.

Many factors may be influencing why you haven't yet experienced (or rarely experience) orgasm. For instance, your family's religious and moral values may have strongly shaped your own attitudes about sex. Your positive or negative feelings about yourself as a person and as a sexual being may be conflicting with your attempts to feel more sexually satisfied. Your feelings about your present or past relationships with men, both on emotional and sexual levels, are likely to be important. How comfortable you are with your body and how familiar you are with sexual responsiveness and techniques may also influence whether or not, and how often, you are orgasmic. And there are also other possibilities, many of which we will discuss in the following chapters. It is possible to deal with those attitudes and feelings that are making it hard for you to experience orgasm. You can learn things about yourself and your sexuality that will make orgasm possible.

What will it mean to be orgasmic? Change usually involves some uncertainty, and you may be concerned about the changes that becoming orgasmic may make in your life.

Many women have concerns of this sort, which often reflect mixed feelings about being a sexual woman. Movies and books typically present female sexuality in ways that have an unappealing edge: the message that the sexy woman is at best not worthy of respect and at worst evil and dangerous.

Also, our parents, who serve as models in so many areas, often hide their own sexuality from us. (Do you remember being surprised

when you realized that your parents had intercourse?) Unfortunately, then, women often grow up with very few models for female sexuality whom they respect and want to be like.

So it's not surprising that you may feel some conflict about wanting to change sexually. Most women share some of these feelings. Right now, it is important for you to trust yourself enough to begin to explore who you are and where you might want to change. Becoming orgasmic will *not* make you into a different person in terms of your basic sexual values and moral beliefs. What becoming orgasmic *will* do is facilitate a more rewarding expression of your basic sexual and emotional feelings and needs.

Will becoming orgasmic improve my relationships with men (or with my partner or husband)? If your relationship is a good one, you will probably find that becoming orgasmic will give you a more complete sense of pleasure and satisfaction from sex. However, becoming more sexually responsive or orgasmic will probably not improve other serious conflicts in the relationship. Sometimes it's difficult to gauge the degree to which problems in the sexual area affect a couple's other problems. One way to begin sorting this out is to ask yourself: If sex were no problem, would there still be other serious conflicts in our relationship?

Also, try thinking about your reasons for wanting to become orgasmic. Do you want to learn to enjoy your body and its responses for *yourself* or for the pleasure it can give your partner? You stand a much better chance of reaching your personal goals if you are attempting to grow because of your care for *yourself* first and your care for someone else later. Learning to understand and have some influence over your body enables you to begin to enjoy sex for the sensory and emotional experiences it can provide you. This involves taking responsibility for your own sexuality, something we will talk about in more depth later on.

GUIDELINES FOR USING THIS BOOK

This book was designed so that you can use it in the way that is best for you. The first part of the book (chapters 2–8) deals with exercises and learning experiences you can do on your own. The second part (chapters 9–13) deals with how to improve your sexual relationship with your partner. Each chapter builds on the information and exer-

cises in the preceding chapters. For this reason it's best that you begin with chapter 1 and progress through the chapters, trying the exercises in the order they are suggested. Some of the exercises are optional, and at certain points you will be able to skip ahead or go back to previous exercises so that you can progress in the way that is most meaningful to you. If you are already orgasmic, we still suggest you read through *all* the chapters and try the exercises. Changing old patterns, examining your attitudes and feelings, and having some new learning experiences are equally important for you. The material in the chapters will help you do this.

We've included lots of information about sex, particularly about female sexuality, as well as comments that women have made, and common thoughts, fears, or experiences. Often we give you some questions to think about—questions that have been helpful to others. These are questions that we found are important to ask the women we have seen and are now seeing in sex therapy. We hope that they will help you get as much as possible out of each chapter. Doing the various exercises is important, but your personal reactions to the experiences are especially meaningful for your growth. Sexuality involves your thoughts and feelings as well as your body, and change comes from exploring new ways to think and feel as well as new things to do with your body.

Each exercise requires that you have some time to yourself—time when you can be assured of privacy and are free of any responsibilities (at least temporarily). A good idea is to set aside an hour or so for each exercise when you can be sure you will be undisturbed by business, children, friends, the phone, or your partner. If you have children, you might want to take advantage of times when they are in school or in bed. Exchanging baby-sitting with a friend or neighbor on a regular basis has worked for some women. If you have a partner or spouse, ask his help in making these individual sessions possible.

Take your time, and read each section through before doing the exercises described. Become familiar enough with what you will be doing so you don't have to keep referring to the book as you do a particular activity. Try to think about the questions at the end of the suggested activities while your reactions are fresh in your mind.

We suggest the amount of time you should spend on each exercise and also the number of times to try each during the week. You may find you need more or less time than we suggest. That's fine. What's important is to find a comfortable rate of progress. At the beginning, plan on around four to nine weeks for chapters 2–8 and three to six weeks for chapters 9–13. Try to have at least three individ-

ual sessions a week when you try the exercises in the book and practice what you've learned. You may find that unforeseen circumstances interfere at times. That happens. Try as much as you can to keep up some sort of schedule for this program. This is important because of the nature of what you'll be learning and exploring. Each new experience builds on previous ones and makes learning easier. Also, at times you may be tempted to give in to the part of you that resists further change. You will find that having a schedule for progress gives you a little push to help overcome these natural fears about changing.

You are not every woman. You are yourself. You will have your own unique process of sexual growth. Some of the exercises we describe may benefit you a great deal, some may not, and others may initially sound simplistic and even silly. Laugh about them, but try them, too—we've seen women make unexpected discoveries.

Some suggestions may sound easy—for example, taking a personal sexual history. Yet you may find that you postpone trying it or, when you do try it, that you feel somewhat irritable and want to stop. On those exercises with which you may find it too uncomfortable to proceed, we will be giving you specific ideas about what you can do. Two general guidelines that you will find helpful when confronted with an impasse are: First, accept your response, do not judge it. Your negative response is an honest one and is there for a reason; to blame yourself is a waste of energy and self-defeating. Second, get acquainted with, rather than avoid, the negative feelings that are behind your negative reaction. You may need to name the feeling (is it anger? fear? shame?) first and then examine it (where in your experience does it come from? what memories or fantasies are tied to it?).

The shift we want to encourage within you is away from the critic who chants, "What's wrong with you, how have you failed this time?" and toward the curious explorer who asks, "That's interesting, what's going on here?"

We've mentioned that anticipating change can be frightening because it means interrupting comfortable, predictable (although often unsatisfying) patterns and risking potential disappointment as well as potential satisfaction. Change is also irregular. If you have ever tried to change other areas of your life—by dieting, learning how to dance, learning how to talk in front of a group of people, teaching yourself to be better at ice-skating, swimming, or tennis—you have probably found that improvement occurs with stops and starts. To prevent giving up during the difficult moments, it is important not to expect huge changes all at once. Growth, whether physical or emo-

tional, is a series of small and uneven steps, so it's important to enjoy each small change, experience it fully, and resist the temptation to devalue the change and yourself by worrying about how much further you have to go. It's very important to acknowledge whatever gains you make and to take credit for them.

Relax. Give yourself time. The exercises, questions, and learning experiences we've included in this book are not tests of your ability that you can either pass or fail. Rather, they give you a chance to learn about yourself in ways that can not only enrich the sensual-sexual aspect of your life but other areas of your life as well.

Before you go on and actually begin the program, we'd like to recommend strongly that you have a gynecological exam if you haven't had one in the last year. This type of exam (also called a *pelvic*) should reveal certain physical problems that, if they are present, may be interfering with your enjoyment of sex. It is currently recommended by most doctors that women have such a checkup every one to two years. This is important for your general health as well. At this time, a Pap smear (a test for early detection of cervical cancer) is routinely done. A breast examination is also given, though we (and most physicians) recommend that you do this yourself each month after your period. Chapter 9 provides several self-help guidelines that explain how to do a breast exam if you do not already know.

IF YOU HAVE A SEXUAL PARTNER . . .

Because a sexual relationship involves two people, the sexual responsiveness of your partner can influence your own responsiveness. (Given the focus of our clinical experience and research, we will discuss only the issues pertaining to heterosexual couples.)

If your partner has difficulties getting or maintaining an erection, or ejaculates before you have sufficient time to get aroused, this can directly influence whether or not you are orgasmic. If these problems are a common part of your sexual experiences together, you should consider getting some additional sex therapy in order to work on them (see chapter 14). However, you can progress through the first part of this book (chapters 1–8) on your own.

If male functioning is not a problem, you are probably wondering about how to integrate the learning experiences you will be having on your own into your sexual relationship with your partner. There are several ways in which others have done this that we'd like to offer you.

Both of you should think and talk about these alternatives and make a decision about which ones you feel would work for you.

First, a general way in which some couples have shared this growth experience is that the male partner read through and tried some of the exercises on his own. For example, exercises on body exploration, thinking about feelings and attitudes, and self-pleasuring could be done by him, too. Often men are surprised to find that they have something to gain from such exploration.

In our sex therapy work with couples in the last few years, we have routinely asked the male partners to participate in the program in this way. While this active participation by the partner does seem to be helpful in many cases, it is not crucial. If your partner is not interested in participating actively, don't insist on it. A good discussion with him about the issues involved in your sexual growth, and his support of this growth, are the most important aspects of his participation. Going through a process similar to what his partner is going through often enables a man to be more understanding and supportive of her. Some men, however, have trouble being sympathetic, since to them it doesn't seem difficult to have orgasms. Whether or not your partner makes an effort to understand your attempts to change, we would like to caution him not to interfere, not to be critical, and not to try to direct or advise you himself. Some reassurance from him will make changes easier, but his help is not essential for you to make some progress on your own. Later, when you try these sexual activities together, his cooperation will be vital.

In terms of your sexual activities together, one possibility is for you to continue having sex with your partner as you've done in the past, while you individually progress through the growth program. This usually works best for couples whose sex life is enjoyable for both of them and who have no major sexual problems except for the woman's difficulty in experiencing orgasm. For some couples, though, feelings of frustration and pressure to have orgasm have disrupted or replaced feelings of pleasure in sex. When this happens, one or both partners may find sex unpleasant and try to avoid it or get it over with as soon as possible. These feelings are understandable. However, continuing unpleasant sexual activity while you are involved in learning to become orgasmic can interfere with your progress. This makes sense if you think about any new way of feeling or behaving. At these times, in order to feel motivated and encouraged to keep changing, you need a chance to have many good, positive experiences, with no constant reminders of unpleasant old habits.

Try to evaluate how the continuation of sexual activity with your

partner will affect your ability to make progress sexually through this growth program. Ask yourself about the quality of your sexual experiences together. Are they mostly positive and enjoyable, or are they negative and unpleasant for you? Will you feel pressured to have an orgasm or to give your partner an orgasm during lovemaking sessions? Are you tempted to continue sex with your partner because you're worried about how he would feel about not having sex (including intercourse) for a while?

Both of you need to consider your feelings about this latter possibility. Discontinuing old sexual patterns that have been harmful or unpleasant is the second alternative that has worked for some couples. In most sex therapy clinics, couples are usually asked to refrain from intercourse for a while so that new sexual attitudes and experiences can be explored. "Banning" such sexual activities as intercourse does not have to mean you can't be physical with your partner. Rather, through a series of sensual massage experiences, you can begin to rediscover the enjoyment of sexual expression or feelings without pressure to have intercourse. We shall describe the kinds of sensual activities that you can do a little later in this chapter. For now, we would just like you to consider this as a possibility.

Leaving intercourse out of sex can be a new experience. For many couples, making love has always meant intercourse and, at least for the male, orgasm. Not expecting or demanding this allows you to explore a fuller range of sensual pleasures that can be neglected in the "rush" to go on to intercourse and orgasm. This pattern can be destructive to your sexual enjoyment because you become focused on where you are going rather than on the pleasure of each moment. It's not surprising that couples who have been in a sexual relationship more than a few years often complain that sex between them was better earlier in their relationship. The fact that some of the novelty may have worn off is usually only part of the difference. There is also a tendency for couples to stop doing some of the enjoyable sexual things they used to do together. In the beginning of their relationship, many couples spend more time on sexual play than on intercourse. Once married, when "real" sex is okay, making love can easily become a pattern of hurried foreplay, quick intercourse, and ejaculation. The pleasures of touching, kissing, caressing, and fondling each other somehow get forgotten. Restricting or refraining from intercourse is one way to allow yourselves time to rediscover each other through the sensual experiences.

Yet the idea of not having intercourse, or of not having your male partner have an orgasm in your sexual activities together, may seem

impossible right now. The difficulties most couples encounter are in trying to deal with the man's feelings of sexual frustration and the woman's feelings of guilt. Over time, many women who are seldom or never orgasmic find that they do enjoy feeling close and participating in their partner's pleasure during intercourse. By not having intercourse, especially for several weeks, you may feel bad about not responding in this way. Think about your own feelings, and talk with your partner to find out his feelings and attitudes. During your sensual experiences together, we stress the importance of not trying to get sexually aroused. At times, however, your partner may become aroused, want to go on to intercourse, and find it frustrating not to be able to do so.

There are several things you can do if this situation occurs. Some men are able to adjust to the idea of no intercourse. They know that it's temporary, and they understand that in the long run it will be the most beneficial way for their partner to make her own sexual progress and for their sexual life together to improve. Other men find that they feel less frustrated if they have a physical outlet, such as masturbation. Since couples often have conflicting feelings about masturbation, we'd like to spend a few minutes talking about it. Although much of the discussion applies to both partners, for now we are concentrating on the male, since in later chapters we will discuss further issues related to women.

Almost all males and a majority of females masturbate at some time during their lives. Typically, males masturbate more frequently during their teens and prior to marriage, but a fairly large percentage of men continue to masturbate after marriage. Although we are all familiar with the tales of the ill effects of masturbation, we now know that masturbation is a normal and healthy pattern of sexual expression. In fact, research has shown masturbation to be beneficial to adequate sexual functioning, especially among women (more on this later). Unfortunately, most men and women grow up feeling very guilty and ashamed that they masturbate. It was something that was hidden from parents and usually from friends, too, for fear that it would be punished or ridiculed by others. If you, and here we are speaking to the male partner, still have some negative feelings about masturbation, it is not surprising. Or if you have been masturbating and don't feel bad about it but find it difficult to mention to your partner, that's not unusual either. Sharing your thoughts about masturbation may be easier after you finish this chapter, since we will give you a framework of ideas to think over. For now, what we are most interested in having you consider are the *benefits* of masturba-

tion for you while your partner is progressing through her own sexual learning experiences.

1. The freedom to masturbate when you feel the desire to do so will allow you to enjoy your pleasuring sessions with your partner without feeling physically frustrated and emotionally resentful.

2. Your willingness to find some sexual pleasure and release by masturbating will tend to take pressure off your partner. She will not have to feel guilty about not having intercourse, since you are trying to cooperate in improving her chances of making changes. If you want to help her change, it is only going to be possible if you take a share in reducing any pressures she feels. Worries about pleasing you will keep your partner from focusing on and really enjoying her own pleasurable feelings. Being able to do this is crucial for a woman who is learning to become orgasmic.

3. Not having to focus on arousal and orgasm takes pressure off you also. Rather than trying to “give” your partner an orgasm and have one yourself, you are free simply to enjoy what you’re feeling. We suspect that you will discover some new information about your sexuality, too. We have seen many men surprise themselves in learning that a sensual experience without intercourse or orgasm can be very satisfying and enjoyable.

Sometimes one partner interprets the other’s masturbation as a rejection or as an indication that their sexual relationship is a failure. If you, the woman, feel this way, it will make it hard for you to help your partner deal with his sexual needs and feelings. You may give a mixed message to your partner: He should not have to feel frustrated by not having intercourse, but at the same time, you are leaving him no alternative ways to achieve physical pleasure. In trying to work out this conflict, it will be important for you to talk over your own feelings with your partner. In turn, he could make an effort to reassure you that masturbating is a positive expression of his sexuality rather than a negative reflection on your relationship. How do you both feel about this? You both may have to rethink some of your own attitudes about different patterns of sexuality. Whatever you work out, keep in mind that a solution should maximize satisfaction and freedom to learn new patterns for both of you. That will probably involve some compromises and understanding on both sides.

Remember, too, that the male partner does not *have* to masturbate, particularly if he doesn’t want to, in order to decrease physical arousal. Instead, he may be able to adjust temporarily and without

frustration to moments of sexual tension. We have seen this happen with men who are able to accept the situation (since it is temporary) and who simultaneously derive a great deal of pleasure from their *sensual* experiences with their partners.

There is a third option for sexual activity while the woman is progressing through this program, but again, it is one that needs to be discussed fully between the two of you. This third option is for the woman to give sexual gratification to the man, without (temporarily) the requirement that she also be aroused and gratified sexually. This option works best when the man finds solitary masturbation unsatisfying and the woman genuinely enjoys bringing the man to orgasm, provided she is not also pressured to become aroused and orgasmic herself. If this pattern describes your relationship, your couple sessions might involve mutual kissing, caressing, and body massage and the woman then caressing the man's genitals to orgasm. While this pattern can work to reduce pressure for intercourse from the male, it can interfere with the woman's progress unless she finds the experience of providing orgasm for the man to be a pleasurable form of giving. Certainly, if she feels coerced to provide this gratification for him, growth in her ability to enjoy sex for herself will be disrupted.

Here are three alternative patterns you might decide on as you proceed:

1. Continue sexual experiences as before. This option should be chosen only if the sexual experiences are comfortable and pleasurable for *both* partners.
2. Discontinue intercourse temporarily, or any activity that is uncomfortable or unpleasant for either partner.
3. Discontinue intercourse, any unpleasant activities, and the pressure for the woman to be aroused and orgasmic. Under this option, however, the woman continues to give pleasure sexually to the man.

A fourth pattern combines these three. In other words, if what you do together sexually is not unpleasant for either of you but is generally enjoyable, you may choose to continue this during the first part (chapters 2–8) of this growth program. That will involve anywhere from one to nine weeks or so. When you are ready to begin the part of the book that involves both of you, you should then refrain from intercourse and follow the sequence of exercises described in chapters 9–13. You will also be able to include some of the sensual massage experiences.

An important consideration when including intercourse in your sexual experiences together is whether or not to use a contraceptive. This, of course, is a personal decision, one that should take into account your feelings as well as current medical knowledge about the effectiveness and the potential drawbacks and dangers of the different forms of contraception (see *The New Our Bodies Ourselves* in the bibliography).

If you are premenopausal and don't use contraception, there is a possibility that fears of becoming pregnant will interfere with your enjoyment of sex. If you feel this may be true for you, you need to reevaluate your feelings about contraception, unless strong personal or religious beliefs prevent you from considering it. If you do use contraception, it is best to use a method that you feel comfortable with and that best meets your physical needs.

SENSUAL MASSAGE

Both of you are probably missing a lot of the good feelings that touching different parts of your body can provide. The massage exercises we describe are called *sensual* because they encourage you to appreciate more than just sexual or genital feelings. There is no real difference between "sensual" and "sexual," of course, but we would like you to attune yourselves to feelings other than genital ones and mutually pleasurable activities other than sexual ones, such as intercourse or oral-genital sex. We will not elaborate on any particular massage techniques, but we have listed in the bibliography some massage books that couples in sex therapy have used with good results. What we want to outline for you are the general principles of a sensuous massage, with specific hints to help you experience as much satisfaction as possible. Feel free to expand on whatever you learn here.

1. First, set a mood for your massage. You can make the atmosphere as relaxed or romantic as is agreeable to both of you. Make sure the room temperature is comfortable for being nude together and that the light is not too glaring—candles or dimmed lights are especially nice. Put on relaxing music if you like.
2. Choose a time of day when you can have privacy and uninterrupted time together (thirty minutes to one hour, if possible). You

may want to do this just before you go to sleep, but watch out for fatigue—it can make you edgy and decrease your ability to enjoy this experience.

3. Try to spend a little time together before you begin. You may want to talk or have a glass of wine. Or try sharing a shower or bath together first.

4. The main purpose of this experience is to increase your pleasure and awareness of your partner's response to physical—but not necessarily genital—stimulation. You will be taking turns caressing, stroking, and rubbing different areas of each other's bodies. Although you may find yourself becoming aroused, this is not the goal, and you shouldn't *try* for arousal. The first few times you do this, we would like you to massage any areas *except* the genitals and the woman's breasts. Explore the toes, feet, thighs, tummy, arms, face, hair, and buttocks. Do this *slowly*—allow at least ten to fifteen minutes for each of you. Remember, this is supposed to be sensuous, not a rub-down, so try light touches as well as strong kneading touches. Use your palms, fingertips, or fingernails; pieces of material or fur; or your lips or hair.

Do not massage each other simultaneously—it's impossible to experience a massage as intensely as you might if each person takes turns.

5. As you take turns, it's important to *talk to each other* about what feels good and what doesn't. The person being massaged should try to say what he or she is feeling, such as, "Good, harder, easy, use your nails more, go slower, mmm," or, "Yes, that's great," fairly often in order for the person massaging to be able to give the most pleasurable stimulation. The person massaging might say, "How's this?" or "Does it feel better here?" if he or she is unsure about the other's feelings. It's extremely important to communicate your likes and dislikes in a clear way. Communication allows you to give and receive pleasure in personal, more meaningful ways. Everyone has different needs and pleasures, and they change as people change. By letting each other know what feels good, you help make each massage (and later each sexual experience) less routine, more spontaneous, and more intimate.

6. On the third or fourth session together, you can include breast massage, but continue to explore different strokes and touches that each of you likes.

7. Gradually, by the sixth or seventh massage, or whenever you both feel comfortable about it, add each other's genitals into your massaging. (You may want to wait until you are at chapter 9.) Again,

the idea is just to give yourselves pleasure, not arouse each other. When it comes time to include genitals in massage, it is often tempting to zero in on those areas and forget about the rest of the body. This can build anxiety and reduce the total pleasure of the experience. So, when you do begin to explore the touching of genitals, try including them as just another source of pleasure and spend a proportionate amount of your massage time there.

8. While you are being massaged, try to focus on the feelings at the place where you are being touched: Let your attention remain on those feelings. If your thoughts wander, bring them back to your physical feelings, and follow your partner's touch with your mind. This will help you get more pleasure and relaxation out of the massage. Remember, when you are being massaged, you have no responsibilities except to communicate clearly—verbally or nonverbally—what feels good and what would feel better.

9. If you find that these sensual massage sessions are not going well (or if they are and you just want to try something different), try changing the focus of your sessions. Instead of focusing on giving your partner pleasure, try massaging in ways that give *you* the most pleasure. The only restriction is that you do not do anything that is painful or in any way distressing to your partner. The partner who is being pleased is to relax and focus on his or her feelings rather than to guide or direct the massage. Often, people who were anxious or upset while focusing on their partners' pleasure are able to relax and enjoy massaging in this demand-free way.

All of the above suggestions have been useful for other couples. In addition, some couples like to try massaging with different lubricants (oils or lotions, for example) in order to change the friction and texture of the massage. Oils tend to intensify the touches you experience and make your skin feel warmer; lotions tend to make the skin feel cool and are sticky after they dry. Powder is another possibility, and any of the above in some perfumed fragrance can be nice. The genitals are extremely sensitive, so don't use anything except a sterile lubricating gel when massaging them. K-Y and Astroglide are two such lubricants and are available over-the-counter in most drugstores. Explore and find out what's good for *you*.

Keep in mind that if you are in a bad mood, very tired, very distracted, or angry with your partner, it will influence how completely you are able to enjoy sensual massaging. Sometimes you will be able to overcome whatever is bothering you by letting the enjoyment of the moment take over; at other times you may not be able to

let go of what's bothering you. If you find that a sensual massage experience isn't pleasurable or is making you feel bad, stop and try to discuss with your partner what is interfering. This gives you a chance to share feelings and to begin to deal with any difficulties.