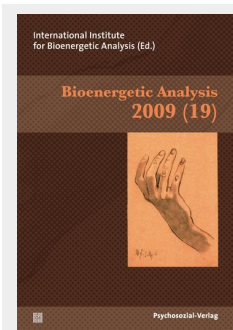


Bennett Shapiro

Rekindling Pleasure: Seven Exercises for Opening your Heart, Reaching Out and Touching Gently



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Rekindling Pleasure: Seven Exercises for Opening your Heart, Reaching Out and Touching Gently

Bennett Shapiro

Summary

The purpose of this article is to help you open your heart, reach out, touch gently and by doing so gain more pleasure in your life.

Section I, *Introduction*, outlines the normal biological pattern of opening your heart, reaching out and touching gently. It introduces a developmental model explaining how internal conflicts are formed that could inhibit the pattern in yourself as an adult and thus reduce your pleasure.

Section II, *Seven Energetic Exercises*, explores internal conflicts through a sequence of exercises that aims to reduce muscular, energetic and emotional inhibitions and increase pleasurable sensations. The exercises are useful both in a therapeutic setting and as self-help.

Section III, *Rekindling Pleasure in an Ongoing Relationship*, demonstrates the importance of seeing your partner as a source of pleasure, and adapts six exercises from Section II for self-help use to address problems that arise in your relationship.

Keywords: heart, reaching, touching, pleasure, energetic, exercises

Section I: Introduction

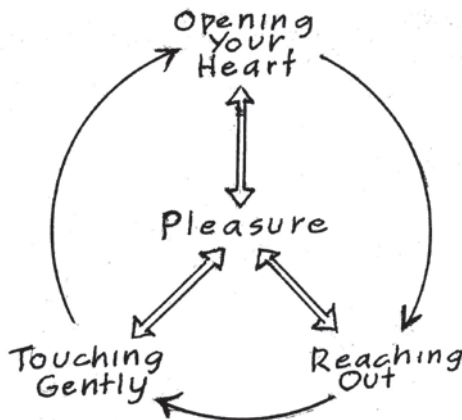
Recently, my heart opened for a period longer than several days, for reasons still unclear to me. I was struck by the difference in my life. I vowed to create some exercises to help my heart to open when it was closed. I also wanted to deepen my relationship with my wife Millie. The new exercises, outlined in sections II and III, have helped me considerably. My clients also found them useful. Their appreciation for the exercises helped to fuel my motivation to write this paper.

The normal biological pattern for opening your heart, reaching out and touching

This paper was stimulated by the concept of the *normal biological pattern*. I use this term in line with Alexander Lowen:

“Since parents are the source of food, contact and sensory stimulation that children need ... the *normal biological pattern* ... [is for] babies and children [to] look to their parents as a source of pleasure and reach out to them with love ...” (Lowen, 1975)

Additionally, it is my observation that in any deep emotional connection (including with pets), the more you *open your heart* to the other person, the more you will want to *reach out* to them and the more you will want



to *touch* them *gently*. There is also a circularity to these actions; that is, touching gently can lead in turn to opening your heart more deeply and so on around the circle at a deeper level (the single-ended arrows in Fig. 1).

Each of these actions – opening your heart, reaching out and touching – is both cause and effect of *pleasure*. If somebody is a cause for pleasure for you, you will want to touch them and, in turn, touching them will give you even more pleasure. Likewise opening your heart to someone will give you pleasure, and if someone gives you pleasure, you will open your heart more to them (the double-ended arrows in Fig. 1).

This normal biological pattern can become inhibited in us as adults for different reasons. One cause of inhibitions to this pattern is internal conflicts, and it is such conflicts that I wish to explore here. As a background to understanding these conflicts, I will introduce a developmental model that is based upon and extends Alexander Lowen's schema of concentric layers protecting the core/heart of the person (Lowen, 1975).

I have found it useful for my clients' ease of understanding to personify Lowen's protective layers, and in this paper I use the term *Defenders* to describe those layers. The concepts of *Natural Child* and *Adult*, which I have added to Lowen's schema, are derived from Eric Berne's *Transactional Analysis* (Berne, 1964). For ease of client understanding, I have grouped these terms – Natural Child, Defenders, Adult – under the general category of “sub-selves.”

The term *Natural Child* is a personification of our life force, the core of our being. We are born as the Natural Child; it is our birthright. It is the source of our heartfelt/aggressive instincts, impulses and feelings, which flow outward from our center, seeking satisfaction, fulfillment and pleasure in the outside world. Our Natural Child lives only for the present, not the past or future; it is all “here and now.” (Exercises 1, 2, 3, 4 and 7 feature the Natural Child.)

The term *Defenders* personifies a sequence of protective layers (sub-selves) that begins to form developmentally in infancy and childhood, when our Natural Child experiences shocks and injuries for which it is biologically unprepared. As adults, our Defenders usually suppress the Natural Child's instincts, impulses and feelings, because the Defenders fear that the environment will find these expressions unacceptable, as they were unacceptable to our parents/early environment. This decreases our desire to open up our hearts, reach out and touch. Also, when the energy of this

suppressed energy gets trapped, it festers inside us and leads to negative, devilish feelings. Thus the Defenders have both protective and destructive aspects. (Exercises 2, 3 and 4 feature the Defenders.)

One of our Natural Child's instincts is the striving for pleasure. But when our Defenders are in survival mode, our focus is only to be relieved of stress, pain, anxiety, depression, etc. Then we have little time for pleasure, and we grow numb to its loss. However, if we are not in a state of pleasure, we are in a state of pain, whether we perceive it or not. If we are living in pain, we have contracted in fear, which closes our hearts, pulls in our arms and reduces loving touching.

The term *Adult* is the personification of our Observing Ego; it is the last sub-self to form in the development of our personality. Our Adult's responsibilities are to lead all the other sub-selves, to be in touch with the reality of the inner world (the sub-selves) and the outer world/environment, and to mediate between the two worlds. Unfortunately, in many of us, our Adult is weak and/or not present enough. In this case, the Adult can easily be usurped by the Natural Child, whereby inappropriate impulses are expressed out to the world. Or the Adult can be overwhelmed or usurped by the Defenders, whereby the Natural Child's impulses, even if appropriate, are further suppressed, leading to even more festering energy and more negative devilish feeling. Therefore one of the chief tasks in our therapy is to strengthen our Adult so that it can more truly lead our sub-selves instead of being overwhelmed or usurped by them. (Exercises 5, 6 and 7 feature the Adult.)

Since our internal conflicts are often projected onto our relationships, it is important to explore first some of our internal conflicts through the exercises in Section II. Then in Section III we'll deal with the problems that emerge when two people, each with their own internal conflicts, interrelate.

Section II: Seven Energetic Exercises

Exercise 1, "Your Natural Child – Opening Up, Reaching out and Touching," helps you experience the aliveness, openness and uninhibited expression of your Natural Child. Step 9 helps you focus on pleasurable sensations in your body.

Exercises 2–7 assist in recovering different qualities of your Natural

Child. These qualities can then be utilized or expressed appropriately by your Adult. Exercises 2–7 explore and begin to resolve muscular/energetic/sub-self conflicts that can inhibit your normal biological pattern of opening your heart, reaching out and touching gently. Resolution of these conflicts can allow you to experience more pleasure in your relationships.

Each exercise includes goals, illustrations, step-by-step directions and self-assessing questions. Only 10–15 minutes per exercise are required. However, associated therapeutic issues may arise and can be explored in the same session. The exercises are to be done in order, 1 through 7. If you wish to change the order, read the introductory comments in the earlier exercises so that you know what you are skipping. Exercises 2 and 3 should be experienced in the same session.

A word of caution: most of the exercises are emotionally and/or energetically demanding; therefore, they should only be attempted with the aid of a trained Bioenergetic therapist. After experiencing an exercise you can repeat it on your own for self-help.

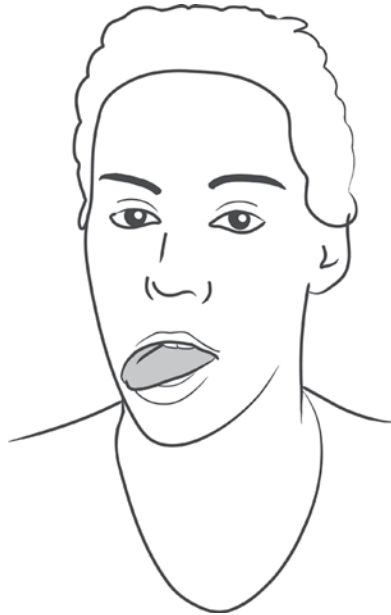
Exercise 1: Your Natural Child – Opening Up, Reaching Out and Touching (STANDING)

Alexander Lowen defines pleasure as “The perception of an expansive movement in the organism – opening up, reaching out, making contact.” (Lowen, 1975) This exercise demonstrates the strength of the striving for pleasure in your Natural Child as it reaches with all its heartfelt intensity out to life – to touch and be touched. The key is to let your tongue hang out limply from the corner of your mouth; this stops the ability to form words and makes thinking more difficult. Hence it is ideal for bringing up the preverbal Natural Child. Note: Figure 2 resembles a physical position outlined in my 2008 Bioenergetics Analysis article. However, this new exercise involves the important additional action of Touching, awareness of the role of the Defenders as inhibiting agents, and the strong specific emphasis on perceiving pleasure.

The goal of the exercise is to give you easy access to the core vitality, spontaneity and emotional freedom of your Natural Child. The exercise can evoke a lot of fun and feelings of great aliveness and bodily warmth when the core energy reaches the periphery of your body.

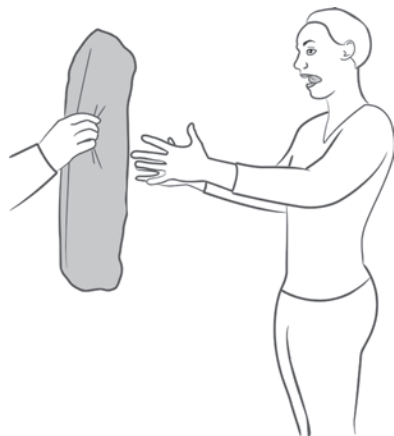
Equipment: A wall or closed door to lean against and a pillow.

1. ‘Ground’ so that your feet feel firmly on the floor; your legs may start vibrating; then lean against the wall, heels about 8 inches out from the wall.
2. Imagine you are a little toddler in a playground with children your age; you see a little friend slowly coming toward you with a big smile on his/her face, tongue hanging out the corner of his/her mouth, and reaching out to you. Simultaneously: Let your tongue hang out the corner of your mouth (as in Fig. 2), open your eyes with excitement, smile and make an “Eh–eh–eh” sound (or whatever sound comes naturally).



Keep leaning against the wall for balance, lightly pressing your shoulders and buttocks against the wall so that your back arches slightly. Note: it will help to support your expression if your therapist faces you and lets her tongue hang out like yours.

3. Your therapist now holds up a pillow vertically, just out of your reach; the pillow represents your little friend, to whom you are reaching and whom you wish to touch (Fig. 3).



4. Slightly bending your elbows and rigidifying your arms, wrists, hands and fingers so that they shake with tension,
 - *On inhalation:* reach out to your little friend with charged (not limp) arms and hands, as in Fig. 3. Smile with your tongue out and your eyes open with excitement.
 - *On exhalation:* Close your eyes and slightly retract your arms. Note: if you increase the rate of your retracting and reaching, your arms may begin to move involuntarily forward and backward.
5. Press the balls of your feet against the floor to increase your excitation and send more vibratory movement up your body. As you keep reaching, your body may wish involuntarily to bounce up and down with all the excitement – just let it happen!
6. At this point, your therapist should move the pillow within your reach; let your hands grasp the pillow and involuntarily do what they want with it.
7. When you've had enough reaching out, bend over and sense the feelings in your legs and your feet as they meet the floor. You may wish to do some good-humored laughing about your experience as you are hanging down and 'grounding.'
8. On standing, hold a pillow to your chest if you are feeling vulnerable. Were you able to experience involuntary movement? Did you enjoy the feelings of excitement? Do you feel considerably warmer, freer, more alive, yet more relaxed? Or did you feel guarded/restricted in

letting go freely and involuntarily to the excitement? What were your emotional feelings and physical sensations when you could finally touch your little friend? Also, did you feel embarrassed letting your tongue hang out? If so, it could have been your Defenders saying, “Don’t look like a fool.” If you wish, you can now share all the above feelings with your therapist, or do so after Step 9.

9. To perceive pleasurable sensations in your body, there are two requirements: an openness in your body to allow a downward flow of energy, and the capacity of your Adult to perceive the flow.

Bioenergetically, pleasurable sensations include warmth, tingling, streaming; perceiving energy flowing through a part of the body not previously a source of pleasure; letting down, relaxing; feelings of aliveness; wanting to be involved in life; a deeper connection to your body.

- If you are feeling vulnerable, hold a pillow to your chest, arms crossed over the pillow, hands curling around the pillow edges. Close your eyes to focus on sensations in your body.
- To keep your energy flowing, slowly bend and straighten your knees in rhythm with your breathing. (Rhythm is an important part of pleasure.)
- On *inhalation*, think, “I can feel my body.” On *exhalation*, think, “... and I can feel its pleasure.” Or shorten the words to: “I can feel ... and I can flow,” or just: “Feel ... flow.”
- You may need to moderate the intensity of the energetic charge/discharge in order not to lose perception of the pleasurable sensations. An internal or external sigh of pleasure is helpful.

Exercise 2: Charging your Hands/Arms by Struggling for Control (STANDING)

Our Natural Child’s movements out to the world are innocent, joyful and spontaneous (as experienced in Exercise 1). However, our Defenders, fearful that our Natural Child will be injured, are determined to protect our Natural

Child by controlling and damping its impulses, instincts and feelings. And so there is an enormous struggle within us: the Natural Child's feeling, "I want OUT!" against the Defenders' feeling, "You stay IN!" One of your hands will represent the Natural Child, and the other hand will represent the Defenders. The fingertips of your two hands will press against each other in a struggle for supremacy, as in Figure 4. Note: Figures 4 and 5 resemble a physical position in my 2008 article whose sole purpose was to charge the arms, wrists and hands. However, in my new exercise, the two hands also represent the struggle between the Natural Child and the Defenders; there is a verbalization to that effect.

The goals of this exercise are to energize (and therefore honour) the Defenders' attempts to protect the Natural Child and also to charge our fingers, hands, wrists and arms so that we can more fully feel them.

1. 'Ground' yourself so that your feet are firmly on the floor; your legs may start vibrating.
2. Hold your hands in front of your chest, and strongly press the *fingertips* (not the hands) together, as in Fig. 4.



Turn your fingertips in towards your chest, as in Fig. 5, and keep pressing the fingertips strongly against each other.



(The charging of your shoulders/hands/arms is necessary because reaching out is sabotaged if your hands are limp/flaccid.)

3. Imagine one hand represents your Natural Child trying to move out into the world, and the other hand represents your Defenders trying to stop your Natural Child's movement:
 - *On inhalation*, imagine yourself as the Natural Child. Think, "I want OUT!" and push strongly with that hand against the Defenders' hand, which resists it.
 - *On exhalation*, as the Defenders. Think, "No way: you stay IN!" and push strongly against the Natural Child's hand, which resists it.

Note: Throughout, keep your eyes glaring as you look at your fingertips pushing, and keep your lower jaw forward with determination. There should be a slight back-and-forth bending at the wrists as the hand that is being verbalized seems to be overwhelming the other hand. Keep pressing the fingertips until your arms quiver. When your shoulders, arms, wrists, fingers and thumbs are all tired, bend over and 'ground' your feet and legs.

4. On standing again, close your eyes and let your arms and hands hang down alongside your body. Focus your feelings on your arms, hands, wrists and fingers. Do they feel warmer, larger, suffused with

- blood and energy? If not, you may need to repeat the above steps 3 and 4.
5. You may feel some twitching in your fingers, wrists, arms and shoulders. Gradually rotate your hands faster and faster, and at some point make a decision to let them move involuntarily. Making a continuous sound and keeping breathing will help you 'let go' to the involuntary movement. If you could allow this to happen, do your fingers, wrist and arms feel looser, freer, tingly? Did you feel the energy invested in the struggle between Natural Child and Defenders?
 6. To perceive pleasurable sensations in your body, see Step 9, Exercise 1.

Exercise 3: Releasing Anger in your Hands/Arms through Involuntary Movement (SITTING)

We saw in Exercise 2: Struggling for Control that our Natural Child's spontaneous impulses to reach out to the world were thwarted and consequently have been inhibited by the Defenders. Generally, the movements that are more inhibited are those for reaching out assertively to possess, to embrace lovingly, and to touch gently. The inhibitions lead either to a muscular rigidity or its opposite, muscular flaccidity, in our shoulders, arms, wrists and hands. Emotionally, we feel frustrated/angry, or passive/victimized/hopeless. Bioenergetically, we first have to release the inhibitions in our aggressive movements; only then can we express the tender caring and loving movements. My experience is that surrendering to involuntary movements is the most reliable, easiest and quickest method of releasing muscular tensions and their associated emotional feelings.

The goal of Part A of this exercise is to surrender to your Natural Child's anger/rage at being restricted in its assertive reaching. The goal of Part B is to surrender to the assertive reaching itself. (The caring tender movements will be explored in Exercise 6.)

Equipment: a chair without arms.

Prerequisite: Do Exercise 2: 'Struggling for Control' *immediately* before doing this exercise.

PART A

1. 'Ground' so that your feet feel firmly on the floor; your legs may vibrate.
2. Sit in the chair, feet parallel and hip width apart, heels directly below your knees. Imagine you are angry at not being able to reach out to possess what you desire.
3. Make claws with your hands and hold them six inches in front of your face, shoulder-width apart. Rigidify your fingers as if you were enraged and were going to tear at someone with your fingernails. Let your lower jaw come forward with defiance and your eyes glare with rage.
4. Alternately claw with one hand and then immediately with the other hand.
 - *On inhalation*, simultaneously: draw one elbow back so that your hand is alongside your head; raise the corresponding knee (for example, left elbow, left knee) so that your foot rises about 6 inches off the floor (see Fig. 6); and tighten your arm and leg so that the charge will build up.



- *On exhalation*, simultaneously: extend your arm forward but keep it still slightly bent, so as not to lock your elbow. Make a

tearing motion downward with your clawed hand. Stomp the corresponding foot on the floor; see Fig. 7.



Tighten your arm and leg so that the charge builds up.

Now immediately do the above movements and breathing pattern with the other hand and foot.

5. Repeat Step 4 several times to coordinate the hand/foot alternation and the breathing pattern. If possible, imagine there is some resistance both in retracting and extending your arm and with the clawing downward – this will help charge your arms and fingers. Do likewise with your feet. Your therapist should steady the back of your chair in preparation for Step 6.
6. Slowly pick up speed as you repeat Step 5, until you feel so highly-charged that you could get carried away by the intensity of the feelings. Then make a *conscious decision* to ‘let go’ and surrender to involuntary hand-clawing and foot stomping (similar to a temper tantrum). Be sure to keep your claws, even when you are letting go of your arms. Making a continuous sound and keeping your breathing going will help you to ‘let go’ to involuntary movement.
7. Afterwards, your therapist might offer you a chest pillow for any feelings of vulnerability.
8. Stand up and ‘ground’ into your feet and legs.
9. On standing, close your eyes and feel your shoulders, arms and hands. Do they feel freer, looser, warmer, more relaxed, heavier, more con-

nected to your body? Do your legs feel likewise? Emotionally, do you feel more relieved, more spontaneous? Did you feel embarrassed by your anger? (If so, it could be your Defenders saying, “Shame on you for having such a tantrum!”)

10. To focus on perceiving pleasurable sensations, see Step 9, Exercise 1.

PART B

One of our earliest movements is to reach out aggressively for food and bring it to our mouth. However, the message from our Defenders is, “Don’t be greedy!” Now that some rage has been expressed in Part A, you can experience the ravenous instinct in its purer form by imagining you are a hungry wild animal bringing food to your mouth with your claws. Or you can stay with the image of being a one-year-old in your high-chair.

1. Turn your claws, palms facing each other (your therapist should steady your chair back):
 - *On inhalation*, simultaneously: Pull your elbow back; open your mouth as wide as possible and show your teeth; open your eyes and raise the corresponding foot.
 - *On exhalation*, simultaneously: Make a sweeping motion with your arm, a bit out to the side as well as forward, so that the claw gathers in the food and brings it to your open mouth in one sweeping motion; stomp the corresponding foot as your claw reaches your mouth.

Now do the above movements and breathing pattern with the other clawed hand and foot.

2. As in part A, alternate the sweeping motions, going faster and faster until you make a *conscious decision* to let your arms go out of control, but still keeping your claws.
3. Stand up, hang down and ground yourself. What are your emotional/physical feelings? Do you feel more awake, warmer, stronger? Did you feel embarrassed about your uninhibited reaching and taking? Did you feel, “It’s all mine”? How were your feelings different from doing Part A?
4. To focus on perceiving pleasurable sensations, see Step 9, Exercise 1.

Exercise 4: Closing Yourself or Opening Yourself

(STANDING)

In this exercise, you alternate between feeling safe in closing yourself from the world, thus saying “No” to it, and then taking the risk to open yourself to the world, so as to connect with others and have excitement, fun and pleasure – in effect saying “Yes” to the world. In the closed position, the Natural Child (your thumbs) is enclosed and protected within your curled fist, and your arms and fists protect your heart. In the open position your heart, sensitive palms and forearms are exposed, and your Natural Child (thumbs) is free to move as it wishes; moreover, your palms are open to receive whatever the world has to offer.

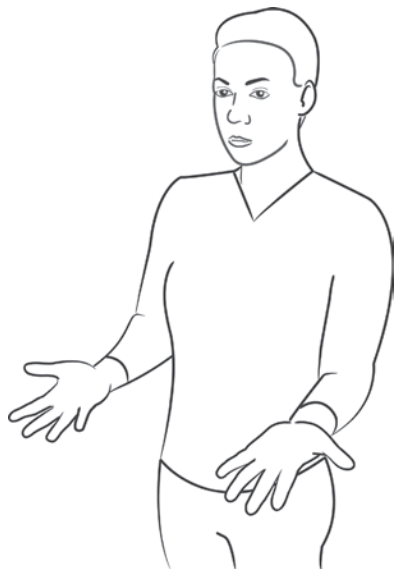
The goals of this exercise are to strengthen our Adult, honour our Defenders and encourage our Natural Child to emerge. The goals are accomplished by alternating between the polarities of safety (“No”) and risk (“Yes”), augmented by the curling and uncurling of your arms and hands, in rhythm with your breathing. Note: For detailed information about polarities, charging of arms and hands through curling and strengthening the Adult, see Shapiro, 2008.

1. Ground yourself so that your feet feel firmly on the floor; your legs may vibrate.
2. Bend your thumbs and curl your fingers loosely around them. Imagine that your enclosed thumbs represent your Natural Child protected by your Adult.
 - On *exhalation*, keep your elbows at your sides, bring your curled hands with enclosed thumbs up to your chest, and rest them on either side of your sternum (see Fig. 8).



Close your eyes and think, “*I can close myself.*” As if your Natural Child was resisting the movement to close yourself to the world, tighten your arms as they move upward.

- On *inhalation*, swing your forearms down so that they are parallel to the floor, with your hands open, palms facing upward and thumbs extending outward. See Fig. 9.



Open your eyes and think, “... or I can open myself.” As if your Defenders were resisting the movement to open yourself, tighten your arms as they move downward.

Your arms should almost quiver with tension/charge as they move upward or downward against the resistance.

3. After you have learned to coordinate all the above activities with your breathing, you can shorten your thoughts to just “Close” as you raise your forearms and just “Open” as you lower them.
4. If you wish more excitement: on exhalation, bring your jaw forward to protect your Natural Child; on inhalation, open your eyes wider and reach with your lips; also you can say the words “Close” and “Open” out loud instead of just thinking them.
5. After 15 or 20 breathing cycles, you might begin to feel your arms and upper body quivering as the alternating between safety and risk builds up the energetic charge/discharge.
6. After you’ve had enough closing and opening, hang down and ‘ground’ yourself.
7. If on rising you wish to feel pleasurable sensations in your body, see Step 9, Exercise 1.
8. Share with your therapist your experiences. In particular, what were

your emotions and bodily feelings about your Adult protecting the vulnerability of your Natural Child, and your Natural Child's feelings about being protected? Your feelings about your Adult alternating between escorting your Child out into the world and then bringing it back to safety? Did alternating between closing in and going out make it easier to do both? Did you feel uncomfortably vulnerable with your sensitive palms and forearms exposed? Was it easier closing up from the world than opening out to the world? Does your answer surprise you? Were you previously aware that you had a clear and conscious choice to be closed or open to the world?

Exercise 5: Touching for Reassurance (STANDING)

To be touched gently, reassuring and lovingly is our birthright. It was a necessity for our survival as infants and small children. Unfortunately, in our culture very few of us receive enough nurturing touching in our early childhood development. (See Montagu, 1977.) Accordingly, many of us are starved for such touching, and some of us have long ago denied our basic need for it. But for all of us, touching and being touched is an ongoing need for our fulfillment as human beings. (The need for our pets is just one example.) The connection between touching and a loving heart is embedded in our language; for example, we say "I felt really touched when you said such-and-such to me;" and if it was an even more moving experience, we say, "You touched my heart." Sadly for some of us, it is only when we are in distress that we become acutely aware how deep our need is to be touched and held lovingly by others. If deprived by the touching of others, one outlet some of us turn to is wringing our own hands as a way to soothe our distress.

The goal of this exercise is to experience the power of being touched gently. The exercise is simple but can be strong. It's best that the client knows they will be touched, because if they had been abused in the dark as a child, being touched when they weren't expecting it could trigger a traumatic response.

1. 'Ground' yourself so that you feel your feet firmly on the floor; your legs may start vibrating. Have your therapist stand about four feet away, facing you.

2. Hold your elbows at your sides, forearms and hands parallel to the ground; turn your palms upward – the position of supplication. (See Fig. 10.)



Close your eyes and keep them closed throughout the exercise.

3. Say out loud, quietly and softly, the word “Please.” (If this is difficult for you to say out loud, just *think* it.) Try not to associate your pleading with any particular need that you may have; the word ‘please’ can be enough to give you the feeling of pleading, and the deeper your feeling of pleading, the more powerful can be your experience.
4. If your arms start moving forward involuntarily with each succeeding plea, just let it happen.
5. At some point, when your therapist senses you are feeling your pleading, she should gently put the palm of one of her hands into the palm of one of your hands. (See Fig. 11.)



6. Immediately after seeing your bodily response (or even the lack of it), your therapist should place the palm of her other hand on the back (bottom side) of the hand of yours that she is touching – thus enclosing your hand between her two hands.
7. Feel the emotional impact your therapist's touch has upon you; note any changes in your breathing and your shoulders. Now (with your eyes still closed) compare the feeling of difference between the hand your therapist is holding and your other hand, which is not held.
8. To perceive pleasurable sensations in your body, see Step 9, Exercise 1.
9. Share with your therapist your emotional reactions about this whole exercise. If you felt this was an important experience, can you see yourself taking the risk to move out more often into the world to touch and be touched? Which person(s) or even pets might find it meaningful to be touched more by you? If you are in an ongoing relationship, do you touch your partner often? Are your touches heartfelt? Do you feel you are being touched enough lovingly?

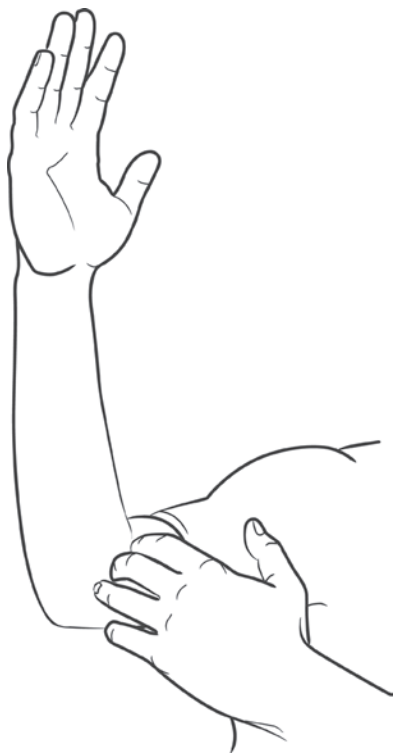
Exercise 6: Sensitizing your Hands/Arms for Pleasure (SITTING)

Our capacity to feel pleasure is vitally important. As Lowen says, “The primary orientation of life is toward pleasure and away from pain ... Pleasure promotes the life and well-being of the organism.” (Lowen, 1975)

The goal of this exercise is to perceive pleasure by focusing on the sensation of a gentle caress through the stroking of one hand and forearm by the fingertips of the other hand.

Equipment: a chair (with arms preferred) or a table on which to rest your elbow, if possible.

1. Sit in the chair and rest your right elbow on the chair arm, on the table, on the side of your belly or on your thigh by leaning forward. It is important to be as comfortable as possible, and not to be distracted by contact with clothing, outside noise, etc. – except perhaps some gentle music. If you are wearing long sleeves, roll up your right sleeve above your elbow, so that your forearm is exposed.
2. Raise your right forearm vertically, with fingers comfortably extended, palm facing to left. Start with the fingertips of your left hand at your right elbow (Fig. 12) and close your eyes.



- *On inhalation*, in one continuous languid motion, slowly stroke the fingertips of your left hand *up* your right forearm, wrist and

palm, finally resting on the fingertips of your right hand (Fig. 13).



Focus on perceiving your right arm and hand. Think: “*I can feel.*”

- On exhalation, in one continuous languid motion, slowly stroke the fingertips of your left hand *down* the fingers, palm, wrist and forearm of your right arm. Focus on perceiving pleasure in your body – it will help if you visualize pleasure as a downward flow in your body, echoed by the downward stroking motion of your fingertips. Think: “... *and I can flow.*”
- 3. Repeat Step 3 as often as you like, but at least long enough to find an easy rhythm between your breathing pattern and your stroking. (Rhythm is an important part of pleasure.)
- 4. When you’ve had enough, stand up, hang down and ‘ground.’ Stand again, with your arms hanging down by your sides. Do you feel any more relaxed in your body, more ‘down’ into your legs and

feet? Any difference between the two arms? Between the two hands?

5. To perceive pleasurable sensations in your body, see Step 9, Exercise 1.

Exercise 7: Opening Your Heart with ‘Thank You’ (SITTING)

It’s an old Bioenergetic dictum that “once your heart is open, everything is open.” A good example of this is being in love – your muscular and energetic holdings diminish, you harbor little negativity toward others and are radiant to behold.

This exercise focuses on opening your throat and heart; the salutary effects may last for several hours or even a whole day. The exercise also illustrates that our Adult and Natural Child can communicate with each other; but whereas our Adult’s language uses words (“Thank you”), the Natural Child’s language uses excitation and involuntary expression. Note: Figures 14 and 15 resemble two physical positions in my 2008 article, which, however, were for a different purpose (examples of “Accelerators”) and did not accompany a detailed exercise for opening your heart, as this exercise does.

The goal of the exercise is to experience pleasure by being more physically and emotionally open, both in your throat and heart.

Equipment: A straight-backed chair without arms and 2 pillows, one firm and one soft.

1. Sit in chair, feet parallel, hip width apart, your feet directly below your knees. If desired, put a firm pillow between your back and the chair back, and hold a soft pillow to your chest, arms crossed over the pillow and hands curled loosely around the pillow edges.
2. The therapist should position herself behind your chair, with one hand supporting the back of your head and the other hand on your forehead supporting your ego.
3. Imagine thanking your Natural Child for its optimism, excitement, spontaneity and open-heartedness – as evidenced in Exercise 1.
 - *On inhalation* (Fig. 14), simultaneously: open your eyes, throat and mouth and lean back against the chair; to open your chest

both lengthwise and laterally, let your head go back gently, extend your arms downward and backward, about 18 inches out to each side, palms up and fingers extended; arch your back gently by pressing your buttocks and shoulders against the chair back, this will help open your throat and chest even more.



Your therapist should allow your head to go back as far as it wishes on inhalation but support some of the weight, so that you don't feel stressed in the neck.

- *On exhalation* (Fig. 15), simultaneously: imagine that your Natural Child is looking at you, and *in gratitude for its openness, energy, excitement and spontaneity*, say out loud to the child, “Thank you!” – then close your eyes and mouth; reverse the arch in your back; let your head come forward gently, chin almost to chest, while your arms cross over the pillow and hands curl tightly around the pillow edges; if possible, make a sighing sound as you come forward.



As you squeeze the pillow, let your tongue come out limply at the corner of your mouth and make a gleeful, gloating little laugh: “Eh-eh-eh” as your Natural Child delights in being appreciated by your Adult. Or you may feel more like crying – just do whatever comes naturally.

Repeat all of Step 3 at least two or three times.

4. Option: To increase your energetic charge and strengthen your child's delight, extend your exhalation, which will deepen your inhalation (this might have already happened naturally).
5. After expressing enough gratitude, stand, hang down and ‘ground.’
6. To focus on perceiving pleasurable sensations in your body, see Step 9, Exercise 1.
7. On standing again, do you feel more openness in your throat/chest/heart area? More alive, energetic, positive toward life in general? More

present, less vague, less spacey? More capable of opening to life? Look around the room and perhaps out a window at the outside world. Do you feel more expansive? Finally, as you move through your day, note whether you have different feelings towards people or situations you encounter; also note whether people respond to you differently than usual. Does your increased expansiveness feel pleasurable?

Exercise Variations

- a) For deepening your feelings of gratitude toward your Natural Child, keep your arms open while exhaling; doing this several times, with very short inhalations, will probably lead to crying.
- b) Instead of thanking your Natural Child, you can thank God, the Universe, a person or a pet.

Assessment

- Which exercises in Section II were the easiest? Which gave you the most difficulty/anxiety? Summarize your emotional/physical reactions from having experienced the exercises.
- Where do you experience difficulty – Opening your heart? Reaching out? Touching others?
- Discuss with your therapist where you have the most difficulty in the three key areas noted above. Can you see yourself doing some therapeutic work in these areas? Can you and your therapist design a self-help program for you to follow?

Section III: Rekindling Pleasure In Your Ongoing Relationship

Al Lowen once said to me, “What gives you pleasure, you love, and what you love is beautiful.” This statement certainly applies to the beginning of an ongoing couples relationship, where there can be the intense pleasure of falling in love and relating sexually. Sadly, for many couples, after the ‘honeymoon’ period is over, the negative of this statement would seem more

applicable: Whatever doesn't give you pleasure, you don't love, and what you don't love isn't beautiful. For if we find less pleasure in our partner, we will touch, reach out and open our hearts to them less. (As sexuality can be such a complex issue in an ongoing relationship, it cannot be thoughtfully presented in this short article. It will therefore have to be reserved for a future paper. However, to experience my basic exercises for reclaiming sexuality, see Shapiro, 1993.

Having created and experienced the exercises, one day I had the following realization: If I could see my wife simply *as a source of pleasure* (emotionally, physically, intellectually) then I could let go of a lot of emotional baggage that I had accumulated over 35 years of marriage. This realization made it much easier for me to approach my wife in a fresh way and open up more to her. A change in attitude has made a significant difference in our relationship.

When I shared my insight with those of my clients who were in ongoing relationships, they also found this attitude important for them. As one of them said, "I feel relief – this gives me hope."

Therefore, I believe the most important step you can take to improve an ongoing relationship is simply to *view your partner as a source of pleasure for yourself*.

Viewing Your Partner as a Source of Pleasure

To help make a shift in how you view your partner, close your eyes and imagine seeing your partner across the room standing or sitting in a chair smiling at you:

- Can you, at least temporarily, let go of the emotional baggage you have accumulated toward your partner, e.g. feelings of hurt, rejection, disappointment, betrayal, mistrust, resentments and fear of experiencing more of the same in the future?
- Can you now view your partner simply as a potential source of pleasure – emotionally, physically, intellectually, spiritually? (In the beginning of your relationship you probably viewed them as this way, or you wouldn't have fallen in love).
- Can you fantasize what you would feel toward them if they were indeed a source of pleasure? Would your heart open more often to them? Would you want to reach out more frequently to them, want to touch them more gently and lovingly?

Ongoing Relationship Problems and Suggested Exercises

Whether or not you can view your partner as a source of pleasure, problems frequently occur in ongoing relationships that, if unaddressed, result not in pleasure but in pain. Listed below are some of these problems (as they would be stated by clients), some comments of my own, and some exercises that may help to resolve the problems. Since the exercises are an adaptation of those in Section II, you will need to experience the original exercises before attempting these adaptations. Remember: If you wish to experience pleasurable sensations at the ends of these adapted exercises, you need to follow the instructions in Step 9, Exercise 1.

PROBLEM A: “I FEEL DEPRESSED IN MY RELATIONSHIP; IT’S NOT GETTING ANY BETTER, AT BEST, IT’S BORING; AT WORST IT’S PAINFUL, NOT PLEASUREABLE.”

This exercise is the easiest, quickest and most fun way to reawaken good feelings for your partner.

Self-help adaptation of Exercise 1: ‘Your Natural Child – Opening up and Reaching Out’: Sit in a chair and imagine your partner, instead of a little toddler friend, coming towards you. If you wish, put a pillow in a chair facing you. (An alternate position is to lie in bed with your knees up, feet on the mattress.) Remember to let your tongue hang limply out of the corner of your mouth as you reach out excitedly to your partner. Another form of this exercise is great for improving the ‘waking up blues’ – go into the bathroom and see yourself in the mirror as your little friend.

PROBLEM B: “I LIKE TO THINK MY PARTNER AND I ARE COMPATIBLE, BUT WE STRUGGLE A LOT FOR CONTROL. I DON’T SEEM TO REALIZE WE’VE BEEN STRUGGLING UNTIL IT’S TOO LATE.”

If you can energize your struggling for control, you will not only ‘charge’ your hands and arms, but you will also honor your Defenders who fear losing control. All this will help bring your struggling to consciousness instead of denying it. Then, the next time you begin to struggle, you’ll be

able to recognize it, and you'll have a choice whether to take a different course of action.

Self-help adaptation of Exercise 2: 'Charging your Hands/Arms by Struggling for Control': Imagining one hand is your partner and one hand is yourself, have the fingertips of one hand press against and resist the fingertips of the other hand.

You may also need to express anger; if so, adapt Exercise 3 by imagining your partner facing you.

PROBLEM C: "I AM ALWAYS CARRYING AROUND A LOW-KEY RESENTMENT TOWARDS MY PARTNER. WHAT'S IT ABOUT? HOW DO I GET RID OF IT? FOR SURE THERE'S NO PLEASURE IN IT!"

If your Defenders are living in fear of being hurt by your partner – that alone could make you angry. If your Natural Child has the impulse to open its heart, but the impulse is shut down by the Defenders, that also could make you angry.

Self-help adaptation of Exercise 3: 'Releasing Anger in your Hands/Arms through Involuntary Movement': Imagine your partner is sitting or standing in front of you – the target of your clawing.

PROBLEM D: "I AM DEFENDED AND CLOSED TO MY PARTNER; I DON'T WANT TO OPEN TO THEM. "

If you fear being hurt by your partner, you have to feel you can protect yourself before you can take the risk to open out to them. (You have to be able to say "No" before you can say "Yes.")

Self-help adaptation of Exercise 4: 'Closing yourself or Opening yourself': Imagine your partner standing in front of you. Alternate between thinking "I can close up and protect my Natural Child from you" (as you protect your heart) and "I can risk to open up and have pleasure with you" (as you open your vulnerable chest and, *with palms facing each other, reach to your partner*).

PROBLEM E: “I SCARCELY TOUCH MY PARTNER ANYMORE. I AM RELUCTANT TO DO SO; IT’S AS IF MY HANDS ARE NUMB. HOWEVER, I TOUCH MY DOG AND CAT A LOT AND REALLY ENJOY THAT!”

The following exercise could reawaken feelings of reassurance and/or feelings of relaxation as well as the potential for pleasure with your partner.

Self-help adaptation of Exercise 6: ‘Sensitizing your Hands/Arms for Pleasure’: Instead of stroking only one hand/arm, alternate the stroking – first the left hand stroking the right hand and forearm, and then the right hand stroking the left hand and forearm. Let one hand/arm represent yourself, the other arm/hand represent your partner. In effect, you will be giving your partner pleasure, and then your partner will give you pleasure. It’s important to coordinate the rhythm of stroking with the rhythm of your breathing.

If you wish to do this exercise in bed (it helps getting to sleep) or at the office, it is easier and/or less conspicuous to stroke only down to your wrist; this will avoid having to roll up your sleeve.

If your partner is amenable to participating with you in Exercise 5, *Touching for Reassurance*, both of you may find it deepens your appreciation for each other.

PROBLEM F: “I WAS SO IN LOVE AT THE BEGINNING. I KNOW AT SOME LEVEL I STILL LOVE MY PARTNER, BUT I CAN’T SEEM TO GET BACK TO THAT FEELING, NO MATTER HOW HARD I TRY.”

Opening your heart to your partner is an important way to reawaken your love, and it will also give you the deepest pleasure. Moreover, when your heart is open you will find yourself naturally initiating pleasurable activities together, which will help keep your love flowing. (Of course, there are situations where it may not be advisable to open your heart towards a partner – e.g, if he or she behaves abusively towards you.)

Self-help adaptation of Exercise 7: ‘Opening your Heart with Thank You’: Thank your partner instead of thanking your Natural Child. You can thank your partner for many things – e.g., helping you open your heart to intense love at the beginning of your relationship. If you wish, the chest pillow could represent your partner whom you embrace as you exhale. If

your neck gets tired, don't lean your head back so far. Or do the exercise in bed – but then you really need to press your shoulders and buttocks against the mattress to arch your back.

Assessment

Reflect upon your emotional/physical reactions from having experienced the adaptations of the exercises for couples in Section III.

In your relationship with your partner, where do you experience the most difficulty – opening your heart? Reaching out? Or touching them? Or is it difficult to see them as a source of pleasure, or be able to perceive sensations of pleasure with them?

Can you share your findings about *yourself* with your partner? Can you get feedback from them on how they perceive *your* problems? (Caution: do not use that discussion to analyse your partner's problems!) Can you then take their view of you and your own self-assessment to your therapist for deeper therapeutic work? Can you and your therapist design a self-help program for you to follow?

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