



## **The Art and Science of Lovemaking**



# **Lesson 3**

## **Creating Love Maps of Your Partner's Sexuality**

# THE GOTTMAN INSTITUTE Gott Sex?

## Lesson 3:

### Creating Love Maps of Your Partner's Sexuality

As the old song goes, "To know, know, know her is to love, love, love her." We couldn't agree more. We have seen so many couples who are trying to improve their sex lives, and yet they really don't know that much about one another sexually! They haven't had the conversations they need to have. In some cases they claim to have talked about it, but one of them has forgotten what the partner said. In therapy we give them a pen and a yellow pad, and say, "take notes this time and study it. It's going to be on the test!"

There's another song relevant here: "Getting to know you, getting to know all about you..." So this is really an old idea, but with new questions.

### Talking About Sex

In fact this idea is at the heart of the **Gott Sex Series**. There is no

more stable and oft-replicated result in the sex field than this: being able to talk comfortably about sex is strongly related to satisfaction. Not just with sex, but with the whole relationship. And the results are not weak, they are dramatic. *Quantity* as well as the *quality* of the talking about sex, are strongly correlated with a couples' happiness.

As we said before, only 9% of couples who can't comfortably talk with one another about sex say they are satisfied sexually, as well as satisfied in general with their relationships. On the other hand, over 50% of couples who do talk with one another openly about sex are satisfied sexually, and are satisfied in general with their relationships. That's a difference of forty-one percent! Amazing.

Research on sexuality strongly points to the importance of being able to talk intimately with one's partner to enhance the quality of sex in your relationship. Yet having these conversations is very difficult for American couples from an African, Anglo-Saxon, or East European cultural background.



For decades now we have been making videotapes of couples talking about their sex life in our Love Lab. Most couples from cultural backgrounds such as those aforementioned have a great deal of trouble being **clear and specific** about what they want and don't want in the bedroom. Most of the time it's impossible to tell what they are even talking about. For example, here's an excerpt of one of these conversations:

*He:* So we're going to talk about this?

*She:* I guess so. So do you think it's gotten better?

*He:* Well, sure, it's gotten better, but still a long way to go.

*She:* You don't like it?

*He:* Sure I like it, but there's a lot we can still do.

*She:* Well at least we're not like Paul and Diane.

*He:* I never said we were. I don't know how he puts up with her.

*She:* He's no picnic either, I can tell you that.

*He:* I know that, I don't know how they put up with each other.

*She:* So we're okay?

*He:* Sure we're okay. But we could be better, right?

*She:* I have been trying.

*He:* I know you have, and I appreciate that.

*She:* Good.

They might have been talking about almost anything! It's hard to tell that sex is even the topic because they're so uncomfortable being so personal with one another. There is an enormous fear of rejection, which comes from a lack of trust and openness with each other. If you think this is because these couples are under direct observation in a laboratory setting, you would be mistaken. Even when they're at home by themselves using small audio recorders they've had a week to get used to, there is still massive ambiguity.

Interestingly, this isn't true of many heterosexual couples who are Latino and haven't been made to feel guilty by strict religion. In some ways, these cultures support direct and frank non-defensive conversations with one's partner about sex, romance, and passion. (This is not to say that all Latino couples are comfortable talking about sex. Many are not.)

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We discovered these facts about Latino cultures in America during a national survey we designed for Readers Digest. We also found that the same was true of gay and lesbian committed couples, in a 12-year study we did with Robert Levenson in the San Francisco Bay area. Generally, Latino and same-sex couples didn’t make assumptions about eroticism. They considered it their responsibility as lovers to know what their partner did and didn’t find erotic.

To facilitate the process of conversation about sex, romance, and passion for couples who may feel uncomfortable with these intimate topics, it is important to ask our partners basic questions about sexual preferences, and then to *remember the answers*.

### **The Exercise**

This *Love Map* exercise can help you know your partner’s ideas and preferences in the area of sensuality and sexuality. If you know your partner’s preferences, you will be able to create more excitement and pleasure for your partner - and by resonating with your partner’s excitement, you will deepen your own pleasure. In turn, this can make your erotic relationship much more personal and put more lovemaking into your sex life.

Below are topics for over 100 interesting conversations you could have with your partner. Approach these conversations in a spirit of fun and friendship, without defensiveness. It’s like learning how to give your partner a good back massage. At first you may begin giving a massage the way *you’d* like to receive one. But with some talking and listening, eventually you learn how to give a back rub the way your partner likes to receive one. It’s the same with sex. Really get to know one another; as we like to joke, it could be important!

**Directions:** Ask your partner these questions when you both have time to talk without distractions. Then take notes on your partner’s answers to help you remember what they say. There are so many potentially helpful questions here that it may take several conversations to include them all. If you like, start with the ones you feel the most comfortable asking and go from there. Be careful, though, to not push your partner to answer anything that makes him or her ill at ease. It’s fine to just stick to the questions with which you’re both comfortable.

### **Sexuality Questions to Ask a Woman**

#### **About Masturbation:**

- In research many women say they physically enjoy masturbation but not psychologically. How do you feel?
- In research many women say they like masturbation only if they

didn't come during intercourse. They like being held while they masturbate. Do you agree with that?

- Many women say they physically enjoy masturbation but feel there is something wrong with doing it. How do you feel?
- Many women say that they cannot come through masturbation. What about you?
- When some women masturbate, they fantasize about situations they find erotic. Does that describe you? If so, do you feel comfortable talking to me about these fantasies?
- Some women prefer being manually or orally stimulated instead of masturbating, but some women feel differently. How do you feel?
- Many women say they can come with masturbation in about 10 minutes. Is that true for you?
- Many women say they masturbate entirely by clitoral stimulation, but other women say that to come they need to stimulate other erotic zones as well. What is true for you?
- Some women masturbate to control their own horniness. They feel that they can't talk to their partner about it. What do you feel?
- Many women have been brought up to not masturbate. What have you been taught about it?
- Some women feel that masturbation is a kind of learning experience. What do you feel?
- Many women feel okay about their partner masturbating, either alone, or with them. How do you feel about my masturbating?
- In your view, what is the role of masturbation in our sex life? Mine and yours?
- Do you think masturbating helps you have better sex with me?
- Do you think masturbating helps me have better sex with you?
- How do you prefer to masturbate? Clitoral stimulation while lying on your back? Clitoral stimulation while lying on your stomach? Pressing against a soft object? Pressing your thighs together? Water massage? Vaginal entry? A combination? Do you use a jelly or lubricant? Do you move your hand in circles?

### **About Orgasm:**

- Is it important to you to have an orgasm when we have sex?
- Do you feel entitled to have an orgasm? If so, or if not, please tell me about that.

“ *there*  
*are*  
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*questions*  
*here*  
*that*  
*it may*  
*take*  
*several*  
*conversations*  
*to include*  
*them*  
*all* ”

- How does it feel to have an orgasm during your period?
- What is it like when you have an orgasm? What are the physical sensations? What do you feel?
- Are there times when you feel you do not need to have an orgasm? Can you talk to me about that?
- When you have not had an orgasm, do you feel you can tell me and talk to me about what you need?
- Do you feel pressure from me or pressured socially that you have to have an orgasm?
- Do you feel judged if you don't come?
- Some women say that they don't have orgasms. Is that true of you? If so, how do you feel about that? What do you need from me?
- Is there any relationship between how feminine you feel and whether or not you have an orgasm?
- Is there a sense of “performance” about having an orgasm?
- Are there times when you feel cheated that I have an orgasm and you don't?
- Are you worried that you take a long time (or a short time) to have an orgasm, or worried about just being different from me?
- What about faking an orgasm? Do you ever do that? Maybe to spare my feelings?
- Many women talk about “stages” of orgasm. What is the arousal stage like for you? What do you find erotic and arousing?
- What is the feeling of getting wet or damp like for you? Do you feel wanted? Do you feel alive? Is there urgency? Is there a sense of calm? Do you feel desired? Loved? Tell me what this phase is like for you.
- Is a long arousal stage a good thing for you, or not?
- How does your arousal shift when you're on the verge of coming?
- What can I do to improve the arousal and the experience of orgasm for you?
- After your first climax, what do you need from me?
- Do you usually need to come again, after your first orgasm? What can I do that would feel good?
- What, for you, is the difference between making love and having sex?
- Are there times when you would just like a quick sexual experience that is just erotic and nothing else, or not? Either way, please tell me about that.

- Can I tell when you're having an orgasm? Are you at all embarrassed by what you're like when you're coming?
- Do you have contractions or pulsing sensations when you're coming?
- After orgasm do you feel satisfied or fulfilled? What do you need from me? Do you need to feel tender and close? Are you sleepy? Do you feel energized and wide awake?
- Do you usually have multiple orgasms?
- Are you very sensitive after orgasm and want to avoid stimulation?

**About Sex:**

- Many women say they like the closeness of penetration, but some women say they don't have orgasms through penetration, so they have mixed feelings about it. What do you feel about penetration?
- Many women say they hate the fact that their partner expects that ALL sexual contact will lead to orgasm. Do you feel that way?
- Some women dislike the expectation that sex will always lead to some kind of penetration. Do you ever feel that way?
- Many women say they aren't asked by their partner what they would like sexually, when sexual contact of any kind begins. Do you feel that way?
- Some women say they can't really tell their partner what they want sexually, when sexual contact of any kind begins. Do you feel that way?
- Many women say they cannot be truthful with their partner about what they want sexually because they are afraid it would hurt his ego. Do you feel that way?
- Many women say they can't ask for what they want in terms of non-sexual affection from their partner (cuddling, being held or touched affectionately). Do you feel that way?
- Do you feel pressure to have an orgasm during intercourse with me? If so, what can I do to make that better?
- Do you feel pressure to have an orgasm at the same time as me? If so, what can I do to make that better?

**About Libido:**

- Many women say they have lower sex drive than their partner. Is that true for you? If so, is that a problem?
- Do you think I can tell when you're in the mood for sex? Am I not reading some of your signals?

“ *be  
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or her  
ill  
at ease* ”

- Many women say they have higher sex drive than their partner. Is that true for you? If so, is that a problem?
- How do you handle differences in desire between us?
- What would be a good way for us to handle my wanting sex and you not wanting it at the moment?
- Do you ever feel pressured by me to have sex when you don't want to? If so, how should we handle that?
- Do you need me to ask you whether you're in the mood for sex?
- Do you ever want to have sex with me (of any kind) and feel I turn you down or reject you?

**About Initiating:**

- What would be a good way for us to initiate sex? Can we create a ritual?
- When I initiate sex, what do you usually feel?
- When you initiate sex, what do you usually feel?
- What should we do if I am more amorous than you?
- What should we do if you are more amorous than me?

**About How I Feel About My Body:**

- What do you like about your body? What about it makes you feel good?
- What do you least like about your body?
- Tell me honestly, are there things I do that help you like your body? What could I do to make you feel better about your body?
- Tell me honestly, are there things I do that make you not like your body? What could I do differently?
- Tell me how you feel about my body. What specifically about it do you appreciate?
- What do you least like about my body? Are there things I can do to be more attractive to you physically?

**About Slow Hands And Mouth:**

- There's a song, "I want a lover with slow hands." Does that make sense to you? How do you feel about it? Am I ever too fast?
- I want to talk to you about kissing, touching, caressing, love talk. What about this thing people call "foreplay" do you like the best?
- What parts of foreplay, kissing, touching, caressing, love talk, and so on, don't work for you? How can I make that better for you?
- Some women say there are erotic parts of their body almost entirely neglected by their partner. Is that true for you?



- Many women say they could do without the expectation that all warm touch will lead to sexual encounters. They want more variety and openness. Is that true of us?

**About Feelings And Intimacy:**

- Many women say that their sexual experience is dependent on feelings. Is that true for you? What do you need from me in the area of feelings?
- There is an old saying that some partners want sex to feel close, but others only want sex when they already feel close. Does that fit us in any way? Do you think that's true? Is that a problem? If so, how can we make that better?
- Some women do not want sex during their period, is that true for you?
- Many women say that they have told their partner what they find exciting and erotic, but he or she seems not to remember. Is that true of us? If so, can you give me a refresher course?
- What makes sex more romantic and passionate for you?
- How can our sex life be more like making love?
- What were some of the best, most romantic times for you between us? What can we do to have more romance?
- Do you feel that I court you? Or did that stop between us? What can I do to make that better for you?



**About Clitoral Stimulation By Hand:**

- What are your feelings about my stimulating your clitoris by hand? Does that work for you? How could it be better?
- Are there some ways of caressing you that work better?
- How do you feel about my satisfying you by caressing your clitoris?
- Is manual vaginal penetration important to you as well as clitoral stimulation?
- Do you feel embarrassed to ask for clitoral stimulation from me? If so, what can I do to make that better?
- Would it help if I asked you, "What do you want and need?"

**About Oral Sex:**

- Many women have said they enjoy cunnilingus, but that it is rarely long enough. Is that true for you?

- Some women say that some partners use cunnilingus as a quick step to their own orgasm, after a short bout of licking. Is that true of us?
- Many women have said they enjoy cunnilingus, but that they don't enjoy 69 because it does not permit them to focus on their own pleasure. Is that true for you?
- Some women don't like cunnilingus. They have negative feelings about it. Is that true for you?
- Some women don't like cunnilingus because they worry that they smell bad or are somehow dirty. Is any of that true for you?
- Some women do not like cunnilingus during their period. Is that true for you?
- Many women have said they enjoy performing oral sex, but there are a few things that are negative about it. Is that true for you?
- Do you like oral sex with me but have some negative feelings about it?
- Some women do not like oral sex at all. They have negative feelings about it. Is that true for you?

**Fantasies:**

- What sexual fantasies do you enjoy? Can you share them with me?
- Can we do more in the area of fantasies to make sex more erotic?

**Sex With Others:**

- Do you ever think of or want to have sex with other people?
- What would be your concerns about an open relationship?

**Anal Sex:**

- Tell me your feelings about stimulation of your anus.
- Tell me how you feel about anal penetration.
- What are your feelings about anal sex in general, giving and receiving it?

**Sexuality Questions To Ask A Man**

**About Masturbation:**

- Many men say they physically enjoy masturbation but not psychologically. How do you feel?
- Many men say they like masturbation if they have not come during intercourse. They like being held while they masturbate. Do you agree with that?

- Many men say they physically enjoy masturbation but they feel there is something wrong with it. How do you feel?
- Many men say that they cannot come through masturbation. What about you?
- When some men masturbate, they fantasize about situations that they find erotic. Does that describe you? If so, do you feel comfortable talking to me about what fantasies you find erotic when you masturbate?
- Some men prefer being manually or orally stimulated by their partner over masturbation alone, but some men feel differently. How do you feel?
- Many men say they can come with masturbation in about 10 minutes or less. Is that true for you?
- Many men say they masturbate entirely by penile stimulation, but other men say that to come they need to stimulate other erotic zones as well. What is true for you?
- Some men masturbate to control their own horniness. They feel they can't talk to their partner about it. What do you feel?
- Some men have been brought up to not masturbate. What have you been taught about it?
- Some men feel masturbation is a kind of learning experience. What do you feel?
- Many men feel okay about their partner masturbating, either alone, or with them. How do you feel about my masturbating?
- In your view, what is the role of masturbation in our sex life? Mine and yours?
- Do you think masturbating helps you have better sex with me?
- Do you think masturbating helps me have better sex with you?
- How do you prefer to masturbate? Can you show me?

### **About Orgasm:**

- Is it important to you to have an orgasm whenever we become erotic with one another?
- Do you feel entitled to have an orgasm? If so, or if not, please tell me about that.
- What is it like when you have an orgasm? What are the physical sensations? What do you feel?
- Are there times you feel that you do not need to have an orgasm? Can you tell me when that might be?

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- When you have not had an orgasm, do you feel you can tell me and talk to me about what you need?
- Do you feel pressure from me or pressured socially that you have to have an orgasm?
- Is there a sense of “performance” about having an orgasm?
- Do you need for me to have an orgasm when we have intercourse? If so, please talk to me about it.
- Are there times when you feel cheated that I have an orgasm and you don't?
- Do you think men take less time to have an orgasm than women? Is that true for you?
- What do you find most erotic and arousing?
- What is the feeling of being erect like for you? Do you feel wanted? Do you feel alive? Is there urgency? Is there a sense of calm? Do you feel desired? Loved? Tell me what this is like for you.
- Is a long arousal stage a good thing for you?
- How does your arousal shift when you're on the verge of coming?
- What can I do to improve the arousal and the experience of orgasm for you?
- After your orgasm what can I do that would feel good?
- What, for you, is the difference between making love and having sex?
- Are there times when you would just like a quick sexual experience that is just erotic and nothing else, or not?
- After orgasm do you feel satisfied or fulfilled? What do you need from me? Do you need to feel tender and close? Are you sleepy? Do you feel energized and wide awake?
- Are you very sensitive after orgasm and want to avoid stimulation?

#### **About Sex:**

- Many men say they want and expect that ALL sexual contact will lead to intercourse and their orgasm. Do you feel that way?
- Some men dislike the expectation that sex will always lead to penetration. Do you ever feel that way?
- Many men say they aren't asked by their partner what they would like sexually when sexual contact of any kind begins. Do you feel that way?
- Some men say they can't really tell their partner what they would like sexually when sexual contact of any kind begins. Do you feel that way?

- Many men say they cannot be truthful with their partner about what they would like sexually because they are afraid it would be hurtful or repulsive. Do you feel that way?
- Many men say they can't ask for what they want in terms of non-sexual affection from their partner (cuddling, being held or touched affectionately). Do you feel that way?
- Do you feel pressure to have sex with me? What can I do to make that better?
- Do you feel pressure to have an orgasm at the same time as me during sex? What can I do to make that better?

**About Libido:**

- Some men say they have higher sex drive than their partner. Is that true for you? If so, is that a problem?
- Do you think I can tell when you're in the mood for sex? Am I not reading some of your signals?
- Some men say they have lower sex drive than their partner. Is that true for you? If so, is that a problem?
- How do you handle differences in desire between us?
- What would be a good way for us to handle your wanting sex and my not wanting it at the moment?
- Do you ever feel pressured by me to have sex when you don't want to? If so, how should we handle that?
- Do you need me to initiate sex more often? If so, how should I do that?
- Do you need me to ask you whether you're in the mood for sex?
- Do you ever want to have sex with me (of any kind) and feel I turn you down or reject you?

**About Initiating:**

- What would be a good way for us to initiate sex? Can we create a ritual?
- When I initiate sex, what do you usually feel?
- When you initiate sex, what do you usually feel?
- What should we do if I am more amorous than you?
- What should we do if you are more amorous than me?

**About How I Feel About My Body:**

- What do you like about your body? What about it makes you feel good?
- What do you least like about your body?
- Tell me honestly, are there things I do that help you like your

body? What could I do to make you feel better about your body?

- Tell me honestly, are there things I do that make you not like your body? What could I do differently?
- Tell me how you feel about my body. What specifically about it do you appreciate?
- What do you least like about my body? Are there things I can do to be more attractive to you physically?

#### **About Slow Hands And Mouth:**

- There's an old song, "I need a lover with slow hands." Does that make sense to you? How do you feel about it?
- I want to talk to you about kissing, touching, caressing, and love talk. What about this thing that people call "foreplay" do you like the best?



- What parts of foreplay, kissing, touching, caressing, love talk, and so on, don't work for you? How can I make that better for you?
- Some men say that there are erotic parts of their body that are almost entirely neglected by their partner. Is that true for you? Tell me about it.
- Many men say that they wish that their partner would pay more attention to their penis. Is that true for you?

- Some men do not like the expectation that all sexual encounters will end in intercourse. They want more variety and openness. Is that true of you?

#### **About Feelings And Intimacy:**

- Many men say that their sexual experience is not dependent on their feelings. Is that true for you? What do you need from me in the area of feelings?
- There is an old saying that some men want sex to feel close and some men only want sex when they already feel close. Which one do you think is true of you? What is true of us? Is that a problem? If so, how can we make that better?
- Many men say they have told their partner what they find exciting and erotic, but their partner seems not to remember. Is that true of us? If so, can you give me a refresher course?
- What makes sex more romantic and passionate for you?
- How can our sex life be more like making love?
- How can our sex life be more like lust?

- What were some of the best, most romantic times for you between us? What can we do to have more romance?
- Do you feel that I court you? Or did that stop between us? What can I do to make that better for you?

**About Stimulation By Hand:**

- What are your feelings about stimulating me by hand? Does that work for you? How could it be better?
- Are there some ways of caressing you that work better?
- How do you feel about my satisfying you by caressing your penis?
- Do you feel embarrassed to ask for penile stimulation from me? If so, what can I do to make that better?
- Would it help if I asked you, "What do you want and need?"

**About Oral Sex:**

- Many men have said they enjoy oral sex. Is that true for you?
- Some men say that some people use oral sex as a quick step to sex, expecting penetration after a short bout of licking. Is that true of you?
- Many men have said that they enjoy oral sex, but that they prefer 69 because they then also enjoy their own pleasure. Is that true for you?
- Some men don't like oral sex. They have negative feelings about it. Is that true for you?
- Some men don't like oral sex because they don't like the smell or somehow feel it is dirty. Is any of that true for you?
- Many men have said they enjoy fellatio, but that there are a few things that are negative about it. Is that true for you?
- Do you like fellatio but have negative feelings about your come in my mouth, or my swallowing your come?
- Many men have said that they enjoy fellatio, but they don't enjoy 69. Is that true for you?
- Some men do not like fellatio at all, but some men want more fellatio. What is true for you?

**Fantasies:**

- What sexual fantasies do you enjoy? Can you share them with me?
- Can we do more in the area of fantasies to make sex more erotic?

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### **Sex With Others:**

- Do you ever think of or want to have sex with other people?
- What would be your concerns about an open relationship?

### **Anal Sex:**

- Tell me your feelings about stimulation of your anus. Have you ever tried anal sex?
- Tell me how you feel about anal penetration.
- What are your feelings about anal sex in general, giving and receiving it.?

## **The Penis and Clitoris are Not Complicated**

The heart is a complex organ; its pumping action is very intricate. It wasn't until William Harvey's research in the 16th and 17th centuries that millennia of wrong-headed ideas about the anatomy and physiology of the heart and lungs were reversed. It took Harvey his whole adult life to understand the heart – it's a fascinating organ.

Each kidney is also an amazingly intricate network of a million nephrons that purify the blood. The brain is also incredibly complex, and we are only beginning to understand how it works.

The penis and the clitoris, however, are not complicated. They're wonderful and pleasure giving, and really quite simple. As we noted, go to any large bookstore and you find books on sex. Usually they suggest various ways of rubbing, caressing, sucking, and licking the penis and the clitoris. These are all fine ideas that create stimulation, excitement, engorgement and erection of the genitals, and lubrication of the vagina as couples prepare for sensual play or intercourse. Very cool, but these organs are actually really quite simple. Sex itself is really quite simple.

What you have probably figured out, and what actually makes sex "complicated," is that in addition to our physiology, there are two minds involved. As a result, a good sex life requires talking, touching, knowing one's partner romantically, and establishing and maintaining an emotional connection that makes both people want to be excited, carefree, playful, open, vulnerable and erotic with one another.

