

# **MAKING LOVE TO THE BELOVED: SEXUALITY WITH & WITHOUT ATTACHMENTS**

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(Adapted from *If the Buddha Married*, by Charlotte Kasl & *Relationship Cure*, by John Gottman)

Attachment is a good thing. Our past attachment experiences (especially attachment experiences from childhood) influence the kinds of relationships we form. No matter what we may want, we are naturally pulled toward recreating relationships in a way that is already familiar.

Healthy attachment experiences teach us to feel loved, nurtured, and secure; relationships that are grounded in healthy attachment allow us to maintain a balance between intimate connection & personal autonomy. When we are lucky enough to find meaningful attachment experiences, it is easy to become attached to the belief that we couldn't survive without that particular relationship. An absence of attachment experiences or dysfunctional or traumatic experiences with attachment creates feelings of loneliness, alienation, and insecurity; relationships that are grounded in any kind of distress about attachment are vulnerable to the influences of desperation, manipulation, or distrust. When we lack meaningful attachment experiences, we are prone to fantasy – or idealization – about relationships.

Ideally, we all should have opportunities for healthy and secure attachment experiences, beginning during childhood and continuing throughout our adult life. Psychological research has long ago demonstrated that attachment is just as essential to our physical and emotional well-being as is food, clothing, and shelter. In the absence of ideal experiences with attachment, it is easy to turn to material objects as substitutes to fill the void and/or to distract us from our perceived emotional deficits.

Too often we are vulnerable to attaching ourselves to objects that have the appearance of permanence rather than facing our true feelings about what we have lost or can't hang onto. Herein lies the root of the problem of objectifying ourselves and our bodies: we become attached to our [real or idealized] bodies as objects of desire that we believe we can control. When we immerse ourselves in this kind of physical and sexual attachment, we distract ourselves from the reality that our bodies – like everything in the world – are inherently impermanent.

When we organize our lives around our “attachments,” we feel considerable pain and suffering as we come face to face with the larger reality that nothing can stop the progression of change. Rather than accepting impermanence and learning to adapt and change, we invest increasing amounts of energy into maintaining our attachments to things as they are, or as we want them to be. Therefore, we have a culture that emulates youth, that urges us to consume image-oriented products, and that intimidates us into feeling that we are rarely good enough.

There is much wisdom to be gained by embracing the understanding that nothing lasts forever and that it is the effort to hold onto our attachments that is the root of much suffering.

So, how does this discussion relate to sex? We can become vulnerable to becoming attached to our bodies and our sexual behaviors as objects. We objectify bodies, ourselves, and others. We objectify certain body types and body parts; we objectify certain gender traits and sexual acts. Attachment to objects of desire creates the circumstances by which our bodies, our body parts, and our sexual behaviors can then be transformed into commodities. As objects, our bodies and body parts can be placed on a hierarchy, judged, and freely exchanged on the open market of sex.

We face the inevitability of pain, suffering, and disappointment when we build our relationships on a lifestyle of “attached” sexuality. In contrast, forming relationships with a deeper acceptance and understanding of impermanence allows the opportunity to develop a sexuality that is more resilient. We call this “unattached” sexuality. Following is a list of characteristics that helps to describe and differentiate “attached” vs. “unattached” sexuality.

This list – and this handout – is intended to stimulate your curiosity. We invite you to explore your sexuality from a different perspective. Take a deep breath, clear yourself of your cultural trainings about sexuality, and consider these comments with an open mind and an open heart.

## “Attached” Sexuality

1. Equates you or the other person as an object to use or be used
2. Equates sex with self-worth and acceptance and achieve a sense of belongingness: we seek pleasures to feel good about ourselves or ease loneliness
  - a. Motivation may be based on needing a specific partner due to his appearance or status or needing yourself to have certain “goods”
3. Equates sex with performance (achievement, evaluation) and an orgasm (obtaining a high, tension release, intense physical sensation). Focus is on an end-result, momentary high, ending boredom, sometimes separate from our partner, separate from pleasuring one another, and separate from relationship
  - a. Mind may be filled with thoughts: “Am I doing it right, does he love me, will I get what I want?”  
This worry- filled sex may cause separation and shutdown
  - b. Focusing on the future end-result may cause person not to be present
  - c. We may not know how or be afraid to feel deeply connected or experience intimacy; thus, we use our sexual skills to seek a “high”
4. We may sexually objectify ourselves to feel a sense of power or control or go along with our partner to please them & create fantasy relationships when we are angry at or afraid of our partner
5. Pornography allows the person to have complete control and create any relationship he wants with a specific body type or behavior; he can do things to that person (object), use him, and have no regard for his needs or feelings
  - a. May cause difficulty engaging with an imperfect flesh-and-blood partner. The notion of your partner as a whole person may be a turnoff
  - b. May be a result of an awkward development of feeling terrified of “the other”—too scared to ask anyone out—no control, fear of rejection—pornography becomes a way to repeat situation with control. Make friends with that awkward adolescent to help him grow up into the adult, the lover, the friend
6. Substances may be used to enhance a feeling of connection by inhibiting fears, increasing fantasies, avoiding conflicts, and diminishing boundaries
7. Consider committing for a period of time to give up something you use as an escape from intimacy, in the spirit of exploration, to find out what arises when you let go of your escape hatches
8. Because our culture may be caught up in acquiring, owning, possessing, controlling, and getting what we want, we therefore may be motivated to need variety, challenges, and conquests.

## “Unattached” Sexuality

“Giving and receiving merge into a single dance without expectations and images” (Charlotte Kasl)

1. Bring yourself more fully into your sexual relationship
2. Be willing to know yourself deeply and feel what is happening to you throughout the day, when thinking about sex & what you experience during sex and afterwards
3. Celebrate sexual diversity for self and others. Be aware of how you are “boxed in” sexually
4. Tune in to your motivations for being sexual
5. You can only have sex with a person for the first time once. The trick is to discover each for the first time repeatedly by allowing communication, personal erotic development, a sense of exploration and discovery, experimentation, and awareness
  - a. Recognize that you and your partner’s preferences and needs will change over time
6. Develop a mutual connection and celebration of each other
7. Be comfortable with and accepting toward yourself and others
8. Make space for fun and play. Risk more.
9. When you are sexual, go very slow. Take more time (at least 30-45 minutes) to pleasure, explore, caress, touch, and become deeply acquainted with each other’s bodies, needs, and experiences. Focus not only on genitalia but the whole body.
  - a. Surrendering to powerful erotic pleasures may collide with images of being a “nice boy,” feeling too exposed or vulnerable, or feeling the need to “do something” rather than just “being”
10. Explore touching, massaging, and pleasuring each other without focusing on orgasm or becoming sexual.
11. When you are sexual, allow the energy to build, expand, and move upward into your heart. Become more familiar with feelings of joy and intense pleasure. Notice your experiences.
12. Take turns giving and receiving. When one is receiving, say exactly what you want and like and what you do not want or like. Trade roles.
13. Consider sex to be spiritual, cognitive, psychological, social, emotional, as well as physical
14. Heal past shame for being sexual
15. Develop communication skills (i.e., listening, sharing, understanding, resolving conflicts).
16. Become settled in your body and develop solid knowledge of how your and your partner’s bodies work and their limitations and potentials. Become emotionally integrated with your bodies.
17. Develop appropriate (not too flexible or rigid) boundaries, rules, and guidelines for relationship
18. Develop rituals of connections. For example, turn toward each other at least 20 minutes at the end of every day for stress-reducing conversations (not to fix but to express and be understood)
19. Explore the ways in which you take care of yourself in the whole of your life. Be committed to your health (e.g., eating, exercising, meeting new people, exploring and acting on your interests, living your goals and ethics, stretching your capabilities, & being of service).