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LOVEMAKING CYCLES

Reveling in a sexy atmosphere, the mounting excitement of the penis growing erect and the vagina lubricating in anticipation of intercourse, becoming playfully vulnerable and surrendering to orgasms stir up in each of us the passion and mystery of sexuality. God has designed a marvelously complex and intimate process to be set in motion when a couple make love.

A *process* can be defined as “a continuous series of changes over time.” This chapter will develop two models of lovemaking cycles or processes with their evolving changes. The first, with Masters and Johnson, looks at the physical and bodily changes; while the second model, with Christopher McCluskey and his Lovemaking Cycle, considers the increasing emotional and relational intimacy during lovemaking.

Sex researchers Masters and Johnson developed from their research four separate phases of physical buildup and changes during sex: excitement, plateau, orgasm, and resolution. Understanding these phases can help couples enhance their arousal as they maximize each stage of the physical process.

THE FOUR-PHASE PHYSICAL PROCESS

1. THE EXCITEMENT PHASE

The husband’s sexual excitement is a blend of physical friction in the erogenous zones and the mental arousal through sensual stimulation. Male arousal can be observed by the penis becoming erect. Remember that erections and vaginal lubrication can be reflexive and are not always indications of complete arousal. Erections are almost taken for granted until there are difficulties, but all men will struggle with getting or maintaining an erection at some point. Fatigue, alcohol, medications, and performance anxiety are common causes. The key is not to panic because that just compounds the problem. Create plenty of erotic stimulation and realize it is temporary.

Often during the excitement and plateau phases, the erection becomes partial/softer or completely subsides because the husband focuses on pleasuring his mate and has less direct penile stimulation. He also may get distracted and less focused and lose the erection. That is normal. As he enjoys the loveplay and erotic stimulation, the erection will return.

Female arousal in the excitement phase is demonstrated by vaginal lubrication, which is like beads of saliva that sweat through the outer walls of the vagina. This occurs within the first minute or two of arousal but can vary, especially with aging or distraction and an inability to focus on pleasure. The vaginal secretions have an odor much like saliva. Some foods (e.g., asparagus) will affect the odor of the secretions. The mind is a wonderful tool as it can pair the odors of making love (semen, vaginal secretions, perspiration) with sexual excitement and pleasure as they become exciting stimuli.

The nipples of the female become erect in the central papilla area during sexual excitement. The nipples, male and female, are a fun part of sexual loveplay. Within the vagina, the outer third becomes more engorged with blood (tumescence) during the excitement phase and is called the orgasmic platform. It is the most sensitive vaginal tissue, and stimulating the orgasmic platform feels great for both partners.

During arousal, the outer lips flatten and the inner lips of the vulva enlarge, creating a chute for the penis to travel down to the vagina. The clitoris enlarges to two or three times its relaxed size. This occurs under the skin at the clitoral hood and is not readily observable. It can be felt by rolling a finger over this area right above the clitoral hood, feeling much like a firm cord

under the skin. Women vary immensely as to how they enjoy the clitoral stimulation, and this can change over the various phases. Keep talking. The wife may need to demonstrate how she prefers the clitoris to be stimulated.

2. THE PLATEAU PHASE

This phase should be the longest and perhaps the most enjoyable one of the sexual cycle. The initial arousal is there, and the loveplay can build on this tension as it progresses from general stimulation to specific locations. The penis becomes fuller and the head a deeper color as it is further engorged. The orgasmic platform in the outer third of the vagina also becomes larger, giving firmer friction on the penis during intercourse. The inner two-thirds of the vagina expands, creating a receptacle for the semen, and the uterus elevates, giving greater comfort with thrusting because the cervix is pulled away.

In the male, preparation for ejaculation is taking place as the prostate and seminal vesicles contract. Some seepage from the penis occurs; it does contain sperm, so be cautious to have birth control in place. In an ejaculation there are 250 to 500 million sperm, and it takes only one to create a baby. The seminal fluid is building in the urethra and area near the prostate, preparing for orgasm.

Both males and females experience increased heart rates; the blood pressure rises, and the breathing intensifies. With some, there is a sex flush on the upper torso, neck, and face. Muscles involuntarily contract, and sexual excitement continues to build gradually during this plateau phase. The loveplay will increase in intensity with active intercourse and more vigorous direct stimulation of the erogenous zones.

Research has found that a man, if actively thrusting, will often climax in less than two minutes while a woman will take longer to reach an orgasm. The wise couple intersperse intercourse and vary rhythms of thrusting throughout the plateau phase as the husband starts and stops and keeps his arousal on a plateau without peaking too soon. Both husband and wife can learn to approach an orgasm and then back off as they maintain the plateau phase for extended periods of pleasurable and sensuous lovemaking.

3. THE ORGASM PHASE

This phase focuses on producing an orgasm in one or both partners. The plateau phase has increased excitement, and now both partners are ready to climb that last peak with focused stimulation.

In allowing the reflexive action of an orgasm to occur, you must focus on your body and the tension that is building. Allow your mind to give in to the increasing arousal and revel in the approaching climax. At orgasm, you become self-focused and trust your partner with grimaces and squeals and muscle contractions. You are oblivious to how you look as your mind is selfishly centered on your growing excitement.

Physically, both the male and female experience muscle contractions, eight-tenths of a second in duration, as the central part of the orgasmic response. For the female, the contractions center in the vaginal area in the orgasmic platform with the PC (pubococcygeal) muscle and the rectal sphincter (circular muscle at the opening of the rectum). The uterus also contracts, much as in labor pains. The female experiences a series of spasms, four to twelve in duration depending on the intensity of the orgasm. The male experiences spasms during his ejaculation, which also vary in intensity depending on level of arousal and abandonment to the experience. His contractions occur around the prostate gland and along the seminal duct system and penis as the semen is propelled outward through the urethra.

With orgasm also come involuntary contractions of the muscles of the arms, legs, pelvis, and back. Breathing, blood pressure, and heart rate will increase. Sometimes deliberately stimulating these physiological aspects of an orgasm with tensing muscles and breathing heavily can trigger the climax.

There are interesting distinctions between male and female orgasmic capabilities. Males have a refractory period, or recuperative time, between orgasms. At age nineteen, this rest period may be a few minutes; with aging, it increases to a few hours or days. The second orgasm following close to the first may take more stimulation and may be less intense.

Females, on the other hand, do not have a refractory period. They are capable of having repeated orgasms, and rather than diminish—succeeding orgasms may be more intense. Women may experience separate orgasms minutes apart, or during an intense lovemaking session with increasing arousal, they may experience them in rapid succession. This rapid succession may also be explained as a more intense orgasm, which can have ten to twelve spasms. Some women also experience a gushing of secretions and a greater wetness.

In the orgasm phase, a common concern is whether the wife should be able to climax during lovemaking by penile thrusting alone. Almost two-thirds of women can't achieve an orgasm without direct stimulation of the clitoris. Most wives will need manual or oral stimulation of the clitoris to create arousal up to the point of climaxing. Climaxing through intercourse could be likened to the husband having an orgasm by stroking his testicles but not his penis.

Remember that an orgasm is a reflexive response; it is not an intentional act of the will. You cannot consciously will yourself to have an orgasm. Orgasms are a product of sufficient buildup of physical, mental, and emotional stimulation as the mind focuses on that increasing sexual tension. For most women, the stimulation needs to be in the clitoral area where there is a concentration of nerve endings.

This is where the husband has to allow the wife to coach him as to what touches stimulate her best and what rhythm she desires. He controls his orgasm and rhythm by being the one thrusting his penis in her vagina—fast, slow, intensely, gently—however he desires. She is dependent on his hand, mouth, or penis to create the friction and buildup with the right touch, tempo, and building intensity.

Some women enjoy their orgasms with the penis in the vagina and experience greater intensity, while some prefer not to have the penis in the vagina as they focus on their own sensations. Some couples like orgasms close together, and others prefer allowing a woman to climax several times before the man. Create the patterns and rhythms that fit you as an individual and as a couple.

4. THE RESOLUTION PHASE

After an orgasm, both men and women experience a release of tension as the body returns to its original state before sexual arousal. This is physically the final enjoyment of an orgasm as the muscles relax, blood vessels and tissue release the engorged blood, and the congestion abruptly eases. Sometimes with men and women, the genitals become very sensitive after an orgasm.

There is a feeling of tension release with an orgasm as the blood congestion leaves the genital, pelvic area with a pleasant, perhaps tingling, sensation. In the woman, unlike the man, there is the potential to return quite quickly to an aroused state and experience multiple orgasms. The wife may learn to experience several orgasms as she then returns to the plateau phase with her husband. It can be fulfilling for both of them.

Spend time allowing the body to enjoy each of the four phases as you cycle through excitement, plateau, orgasm, and resolution. In becoming an expert lover, the right-hand graph is more pleasurable, especially for the wife, than the left-hand graph and more characteristic of a fun lovemaking session.



Figure 2.5 The four phases of arousal and satisfaction: frustrated (left) and fulfilled

THE LOVEMAKING CYCLE

While Masters and Johnson focus on four phases of physical arousal, Christian sex therapist Christopher McCluskey has created a more relational and emotional Lovemaking Cycle. He insists that there is a great deal of difference between having sex and making love. True lovemaking (the Cycle) creates a growing intimacy and an increasing sexual passion based on two hearts who are becoming spiritually and emotionally one.

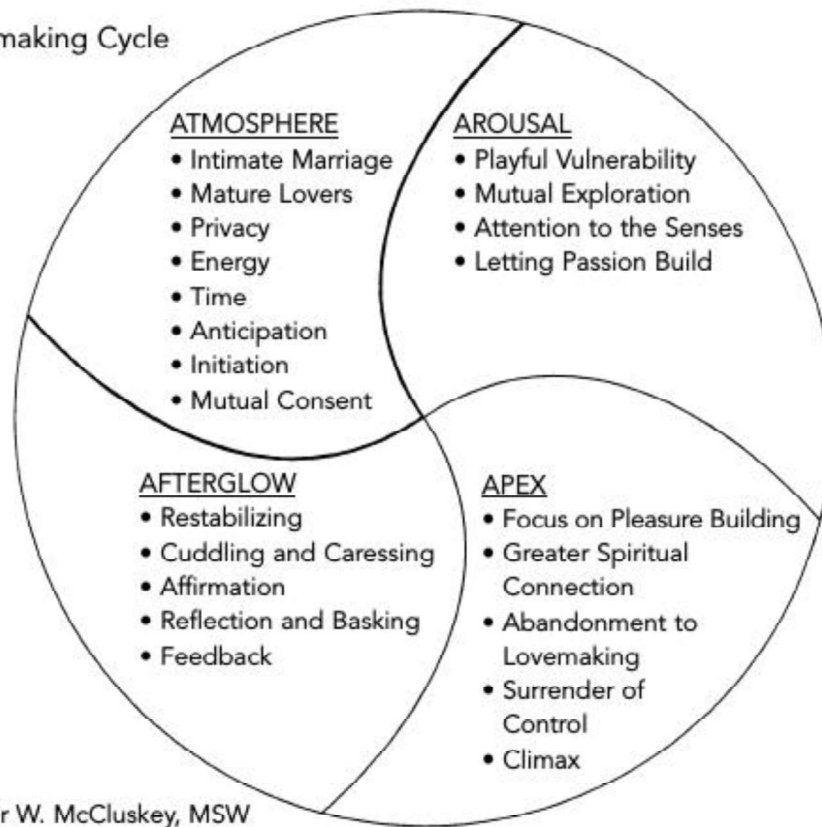
In McCluskey's model, each part of the cycle feeds into the next, creating an ever-deepening experience of vulnerability and intimacy with your mate and lover. He emphasizes that if one part is neglected, lovemaking will “clunk” every time it hits that weak spot and throw off the whole cycle—much like a wheel that is flat in one area and no longer round. Lovemaking will in time break down because each of the four parts represents a deep emotional and relational need that is critical for maintaining passionate lovemaking.

This model identifies many important factors that can facilitate progressively deeper levels of intimacy in lovemaking. Each will be briefly examined and explained with an emphasis on the four key areas that are truly interactive and must flow from the heart: atmosphere, arousal, apex, and afterglow. (A brief disclaimer is in order. Though this is McCluskey's model, much of the following illustrative and descriptive matter is my own and may not reflect his style or values.)

ATMOSPHERE

Mood-setting is not simply lighting a candle or creating a little ambience. *The concept of atmosphere is much deeper.* It is lovingly building an intimate relationship with your covenant companion so that energy is reserved and time is devoted for sexuality. Time, energy, and anticipation are powerful aphrodisiacs. Desire is never just hormonal, especially for the wife. Sex begins with loving attention in the kitchen and flows into passion in the bedroom. Lovers anticipate each other, and sexual passion permeates the relationship regardless of place or circumstances.

The Lovemaking Cycle



Intimate marriage and mature lovers. This goes back to the formula for fulfilling and passionate sexual encounters. The foundation of fantastic lovemaking is an intimate, grown-up companionship that includes effective communication.

Privacy. God designed sexual intimacy to be a very special and private interaction between husband and wife. Though making love should not be confined to the bedroom, it will be the primary love nest because of the need for privacy as well as for comfort. Mood lighting or candles, sensuous linens, and the ability to control the temperature are sexual enhancements that can give the bedroom very private, sensual, and erotic qualities. You can also create an intimate privacy in other parts of your home and in that hotel room on your honeymoon. It is just the two of you alone.

Energy. Even if you are newlyweds, you will have to reserve some energy for sex. Can you remember how exhausted you were on your honeymoon night? Think of what rest and a boost of energy would have done. Putting some extra current into your love life will have a marvelous effect.

Time. If five minutes is great, then forty-five will be even more intimate. Time may be the most precious gift you bring to your sex life. It is the bottom line in creating the sexy, connected atmosphere as you get beyond quickies to luxuriating. Five-second hugs, lingering-deep kisses, and two-hour picnics in bed will do wonders.

Anticipation. Great lovers are childlike in their ability to anticipate pleasure with glee. Husbands and especially wives can enjoy their God-given imagination and think about lovemaking more—like a kid who has looked forward to the ice cream store all day. Anticipation also has a deeper quality of mentally preparing your bodies and spirits to being truly naked and vulnerable.

Initiation. Lovemaking has to start somewhere, and a part of ambience is both husband and wife initiating sexual activity. Initiation does not have to lead to intercourse but can be that passionate kiss when arriving home from work. Grow into verbal as well as nonverbal forms of initiating. Verbal can be even more intimate.

Mutual consent. If you want to maintain a great mood for sex, be *assertive* and *empathetic* in your intimate communication. Lovemaking is about giving and not demanding. You aren't trying to service each other. The husband or the wife may not be in the mood and that's okay, but what great fireworks happen when you do mutually engage!

AROUSAL

Sexual maturity helps us grow beyond the arousal of sexual rushes and buzzes. Deep, erotic arousal grows from a three-dimensional (body, soul, spirit) connection and bonding. When you and your mate learn to be aroused in a truly *intimate* way, you will be amazed at the feelings that occur. The physical and emotional interaction and fusion (God-given *eros*) create an unbeatable intimacy high.

Playful vulnerability. Fun and open lovemaking takes place in the child ego state. Each of us has that curious, silly, innocent, playful part of us that loves to romp. "Naked and unashamed" is a very vulnerable yet powerful place to be.

Couples sometimes worry that certain props (like lingerie or body oils) create artificial or sinfully seductive arousal and will detract from their natural lovemaking. I strongly believe that God gave imaginations to create and enjoy various means of enticing and playing with our mates. Props can enhance experiences and sensations. Flickering candlelight with soothing music in the background creates totally different feelings from those created by mirrors employed in an afternoon delight with some jazz on the stereo. Pillows as props are great to lean against as you have intimate conversations or to use in positions of pleasuring and intercourse. They help make the bed the playground it should be. A great rule of thumb about props is that they (1) remain playfully in perspective, (2) not detract from your vulnerability and respect, (3) enhance true three-dimensional (body, soul, and spirit) passion.

Mutual exploration. Many mates have never taken the time to examine each other's genitals and familiarize themselves with the hot spots. Take the time to truly be present with each other in curious, teasing, and exploratory ways. The Song of Solomon delightfully encourages lovers to "browse among the lilies."

Attention to the senses. Every couple can wisely make two lists. The first list is of each of the five senses and how each sense can cue you in to sexual arousal—how you want that sense to be utilized. The second list is what turns you off with each sense and detracts from lovemaking. A sample list:

Sight. Turn-ons: Show up naked. A couple holding hands. Strategically placed mirrors. Seductive dances. Bright satin sheets. Emerald boxers. Soft peach teddies. Turn-offs: Bright lights. A beer gut. The same nightgown. Dirty sheets.

Smell. Turn-ons: Perfumes, candles, incense, scented lotions. Semen. Bubble bath. Turn-offs: Semen. Body odor. Dirty sheets. Dragon breath.

Taste. Turn-ons: Chocolate and strawberries. Minty kisses. A favorite wine. Turn-offs: Certain lubricants. Garlic kisses.

Hearing. Turn-ons: Favorite songs. Sexy talking. Uninhibited groans and squeals. Turn-offs: Squeals in ear. Silence. Television. Slang.

Touch. Turn-ons: Soaping each other up. Ice cubes over sensitive areas. A fur rug. Satin gloves (fabrics are sensual). Lotions. Sweaty bodies rubbing. Turn-offs: Unshaven beards. Rough hands. Sweaty bodies. Tickling.

Letting passion build. Arousal carries with it the idea of a crescendo and increasing excitement. In a mature way, you are responsible for your own passionate feelings. A healthy self-focus is important in letting passions build. Get into your private feelings and share them with your mate. What a powerful turn-on as you build toward the apex.

APEX

It takes a mature person to understand that the emotional center of the apex is not orgasm, but a surrender to feelings and each other. The term “apex” is purposefully used to de-emphasize chasing orgasms and to emphasize the deeper idea of abandonment and achieving a deeper oneness. Most often there will be that exciting climax, but there will be some times when an orgasm will not occur and yet an apex is achieved. Mature, older couples have often grown into this level of apex and enjoy its beauty.

Focus on pleasure building. Remember that women vary more in what they find pleasurable, and the center of sensory nerves for them is the clitoris and not the vagina. Stay in the moment with a growing focus on accenting what each partner is experiencing.

Greater spiritual connection. Look deeply into each other’s eyes and get lost in each other and the sharing of passion. Lovemaking can make you more totally “naked” than any other mutual experience. Your emotions and your bodies are making heavenly music that is much more profound than the friction.

Abandonment to lovemaking. Only with commitment and trust do you feel safe enough to abandon yourself to another person. Your covenant companionship provides that context. You no longer need to be self-conscious but can be passionate without any inhibitions. You are unconditionally loved and accepted.

Surrender of control. This is the heart of the apex and indeed of becoming orgasmic. Orgasms are such beautiful metaphors of uninhibited worship and giving up control to Christ. You are allowing your bodies and souls to soar with surrender.

Climax. You lose time and your body and feelings overwhelm the rational. What a precious gift to share with that lifetime lover—again and again with ever-increasing meaning and passion.

AFTERGLOW

The lovemaking wheel will begin clunking if lovers neglect this important stage. It may last three to five minutes or an hour, but this time is critical for maintaining sexual passion. The afterglow—regrouping, complimenting, evaluating, and an anticipation of the next occurrence of lovemaking—fuels the fire and greases the wheel.

Restabilizing. After the apex you need to catch your breath and come down physically and emotionally. This is the afterglow that is warmly intimate but less intense. A time of re-creating and affirming the recently shared intimate moment is needed.

Cuddling and caressing. Wives are especially vulnerable after literally opening themselves up to their husbands. Rather than jumping up to clean up, hold each other and bask in the afterglow of intense connecting and shared surrender. Affirm the closeness.

Affirmation. Husbands so want to please their wives and be great lovers. A “Wow, I can’t believe what you just did” goes really far at this point. The wife wants to feel sexy and valued; compliments are important to her too. Not “Great butt,” but “It’s awesome how your body makes me irrational.” Mates soak up praise and compliments.

Reflection and basking. Wives often comment how their husbands will engage in connecting conversation after lovemaking more than any other time. You have become vulnerably close. Reflect and bask in the relationship as well as in the events of the past moments.

Feedback. Feedback can start the wheel rolling for the next lovemaking session. “Let’s do that again” or “Could we make love Thursday morning?” This is indeed an ongoing party, and you are enriching and preparing for the next festivity.

Isn’t lovemaking exciting?! You will be learning new pleasures fifty years from now. Keep tuning in to all four aspects—atmosphere, arousal, apex, and afterglow—so the wheel of your love life doesn’t clunk and you can experience the ever-increasing passion God designed.

(Note: Christopher McCluskey and his wife, Rachel, have written a forthcoming book on the Lovemaking Cycle with Baker /Revell Publishers. He also has an excellent videotape, *Coaching Couples into Passionate Intimacy*, which explains the model and can be ordered through his Web site at www.christian-living.com.)

TIME OUT . . .

1. Discuss your turn-ons and turn-offs in these areas: sight, smell, taste, hearing, touch.
2. What gets in the way of really surrendering to your climaxes? Discuss this together. While making love and the apex approaches, pretend you are on a roller-coaster ride and trust your mate as you truly surrender to this ride and its out-of-control feelings.