

Episode 003 Transcript

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Creating More Pleasure in your Relationship

Meredith: Hey there and welcome to episode three of the Simply Great Relationships podcast. We're so glad you could join us today. I'm Meredith Silversmith, and this is Marina Voron, and we are excited to bring you this episode on creating more pleasure in your relationship. I know this is one of your favorite topics.

Marina: Favorite topic.

Meredith: Make sure you stay with us until the very end because we've got a great bonus for you. We're going to tell you how to get it.

Marina: So today we're talking about my very, very favorite topic when it comes to couples. Nothing makes me happier than pleasure enhancement, sexual enhancement, making people's intimacy really great, really awesome. Internalizing a whole lot of reward from it and I guess let's start from just the fact that I guess a lot of times when we're taught about sex, we're taught about sex for reproduction. We're taught about sex for, you know, in the beginning of the relationship, that's what "connects you" and it's hot and heavy and I think there's kind of this social narrative that once you're in a committed relationship or you're married or you have kids, sex kind of falls by the wayside and it's never about pleasure, right? We don't talk; we don't give sex and pleasure a whole lot of spotlight other than in the very beginning of the relationship.

Meredith: Yeah, absolutely. Yeah, I think I hear, and I even hear from a lot of couples where it becomes an issue is like we're drawn together through lust, right? Like, what attracts you to someone initially? "Oh, they're attractive", "I feel drawn to them", "We had good chemistry", that's what you hear but as life happens, as you move through the process of being in a committed relationship, "Okay, now we're engaged", "Now we're married", "Now we're living together", "Now we're having children", all of these things come in and there's this messaging that now your relationship is about that, now your relationship is about having a solid foundation and communicating well, which yes, 100%. You know, keeping your house in good condition and taking care of our children. It just becomes about so much else that sex and intimacy definitely can get pushed aside.



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Marina: Yeah and they don't... no longer become the goal they... you know, I think that's when couples really start feeling a disconnect. So, why is pleasure important to every stage of a relationship? Well, I have got to say so when I was doing sex therapy training, I heard something that was really powerful. So they did all this research on animals, people, and they did this huge, huge study because the narrative is in the animal kingdom. Sex is for reproduction. Well, they actually, what they found is no, animals have sex to bond, not just to procreate, and I thought that was such a powerful message, and we as humans have sex to bond and to experience pleasure and to create a positive environment in our relationship not just for procreation, right? And I think that is what makes sex really important all the time, and pleasure really important all the time because we need to do the things that make us feel bonded all the time not just in the beginning of the relationship.

Meredith: Yeah, absolutely and I think last time we talked about rituals of connection, right? Episode two, we talked about rituals and one of the things about rituals of connection which sort of applies to sex and intimacy as well is that it's something you do with your partner, right? Something special that is only between you two assuming that's the relationship that you're doing, right?

Marina: Assuming that's the arrangement you have.

Meredith: Yes, but that's another story for another day. But assuming that that's the relationship that you have, it's something just for you. It's a ritual; it's something that you do together, you don't do with anyone else, something special, something really powerful, so that's significant as well.

Marina: Yeah and I always ask my couples because I see a lot of couples come in specifically because of intimacy and sexual issues. What is the message that you're sending to your partner and what's the message that's being sent to the relationship overall or is being internalized in a relationship overall when the intimacy breaks down and when it's no longer a priority and when it's no longer something that happens on a regular basis? Is that the message you want to send? Being wanted, being lusted after, being desired, feeling attractive, these are all really integral components also of feeling loved.

Meredith: Yeah, yeah.

Marina: And a lot of times we internalize love and want and care from our partner when we're also feeling wanted by them in an intimate way. So when that part of your relationship dwindles, again what message does that send to the relationship? What message does that send to your partner? And what message do they internalize about how you feel about them?

Meredith: Yeah, and it could really go. To be really direct, the message could be "He doesn't love me" or "She doesn't love me" or "She doesn't find me attractive" or "He doesn't want to have an intimate relationship with me," "He's turned off by me." It could really go to that.

Marina: Yeah and I don't know. Tell me if you see this in your work but I see that it triggers so many personal insecurities for people, for males and females regardless of what kind of relationship it is, heterosexual relationships, homosexual relationships. It triggers so much insecurities, and insecurity is such a negative feeling to have in a relationship because a relationship is supposed to be such a safe and supportive structure where your insecurities are maybe acknowledged, but it's not where they live.



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Meredith: Right, right. It's supposed to be the most secure place for you. Your safe haven, your safe space. So to have feelings of insecurity be pushed or triggered in that moment is really, really hard.

Marina: Yeah especially around naked time.

Meredith: Yeah, yeah.

Marina: You know, just putting it out there very bluntly it can bring up so much body insecurity, so much feelings of being unwanted, uncared for. So there's a lot of negative that can be internalized in a relationship when intimacy and sex dwindle.

Meredith: Yeah, absolutely. There are definitely quite a few impasses to sharing intimacy with your partner, and I know you love to talk about this. This is really; it is Marina's favorite. She's not joking. It's really her key but can you share some of those impasses?

Marina: Yeah, there are a lot, and they're very individual, but some of the most common ones I see are, first of all, a real impasse to pleasure and intimacy in a relationship is when one or both individuals don't know what brings pleasure to them individually. It's almost like you need to know what gives you pleasure and what feels good to you to be able to derive pleasure from your partner and you need a certain type of security, open-mindedness, exploration to be able to get to a place where you know what gives you pleasure so that sex isn't just mechanical. So that you can say "This is what feels really good," "This is what feels really sexy," "This is what feels really intimate," and the reality is a lot of people have... and I don't like to gender stuff, but I do notice this a lot with women, some older women that I work with. Maybe women who are a little bit more religiously devout. I mean, they don't feel comfortable exploring their bodies. They don't feel comfortable masturbating. They feel like sex is something you do to please your husband, and I asked them, "How much does that get you off? How pleasure-filled is that?" and they have this impasse in exploring what feels good to them, and I think that's an impasse, you know, there's sex and then there's pleasure.

Meredith: Yeah.

Marina; And what we want is pleasure. We want that really feel good, a tuned, connected experience not just mechanical penetration.

Meredith: Yeah, check a box "We had sex."

Marina: Yeah, so I'd say that's an impasse that I see quite frequently, and there's a real vulnerability. When there's a real vulnerability around self-exploration and around pleasure just like a lack of physical knowledge, it's a huge one and we see some very, very smart people, very successful people, very accomplished people, but their sexual IQ is just bottoming out. I just think knowledge is power when it comes to sex and people just don't know and having that knowledge... not having that knowledge is a huge impasse and having that knowledge and internalizing that knowledge is a huge input as to internalize more pleasure and I feel like having somebody acceptance issues, I know this is things we see like post-pregnancy, post-medical conditions, post-surgery. That can really, really impact people in terms of how they feel about themselves sexually and it makes it really hard. Sex is all about presence. Being in your body in that moment and if you're experiencing some sort of tension with your body, some sort of like "This doesn't feel like the body I want where I can accept in this moment." That can be a huge impasse.



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Meredith: Yeah, makes sense. And I think something else we've seen- I'm sure you see this too, is especially in our area, I mean we know it's been disproportionately diagnosed but people post-breast cancer treatment. I find that's a really big one, right? People have had a mastectomy, reconstructive surgery like that's a big, big shift in the sexual relationship so just really being comfortable with your body, like that comes in a lot. That really plays in.

Marina: Yeah and when you go through a body transition like that, what's really unfortunate is going back to what I was mentioning in the beginning like your doctor's going to talk to you about medication you should take and what things you should eat and how you should take care of yourself but a lot of doctors don't have that conversation of like, this is how you re-adjust to your intimate life now and a lot of women don't feel comfortable asking and even a lot of men like with diabetes, post-heart attack, certain medications. There just isn't as much openness in the medical community as there needs to be because a lot of medication, a lot of surgeries, a lot of really common medical conditions have sexual side effects and they'll talk about every side effect and then kind of just brush over the sexual side effect and they'll talk to you about everything else but not that and that's a huge impasse for people and when it's not talked about and there isn't the knowledge around it, it because a huge impasse to pleasure and intimacy in a relationship.

Meredith: Absolutely. So I think what's really helpful and what can be helpful, as Marina said, have the whole of this knowledge and understanding of sex and pleasure but also of yourself and what you like and what enjoy. Talking about it with you partner is a really vulnerable conversation so this is where the communication tools that we talked about in episode one can be super helpful.

Marina: 100%.

Meredith: Because if there's ever a time where you need your partner to be open and to feel supported and validated and accepted, it's during this type of conversation.

Marina: 100%. That's where creating safety around vulnerability becomes the number one call and just touching on another thing we talked about actually in episode two, so let's look at two scenarios. What it looks like when intimacy and sex is a ritual of connection versus when it's not. This, I think is a really huge impasse to really good intimacy is when intimacy is not a ritual of connection, intimacy becomes a really high stakes occurrence. What happens is, "We don't really have a date night. We don't really schedule sex. We don't really schedule pleasure. It's not a routine in our... we don't prioritize it. It's not a routine in our lives. My husband's birthday's coming up, so I feel like it's my "wife obligation" to have sex with him and we haven't had sex in six months." Do you think that that sexual interaction is going to be really free and open-minded and loose and comfortable?

Meredith: Probably, not.

Marina: Yeah, it's because it is...

Meredith: Anxiety-provoking and nerve-wracking and stressful and anticipating it with dread rather than looking forward to it.



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Marina: Exactly! Because it's not a ritual of connection. It's not something that happens all the time. It's not something where there's kind of freedom around it as opposed to... let's look at intimacy and a sex life that is a ritual of connection, right? What happens in that kind of situation is you know that every Friday is date night and even if it doesn't lead to penetrative sex, it leads to some sort of physical intimacy that's pleasure-filled and exploration and open-mindedness. That couple is much more likely to be able to bring up like, "Hey, I listen to this awesome podcast and they talked about this toy and I would really like to try that. What do you think?" or "I would like to share this kind of intimacy with you but maybe I don't really feel like doing that tonight." Is that as high stakes as if you're doing it once every six months and then you're "rejecting." Right? It's going to be internalized in an extremely different way. So when sex becomes a ritual of connection, it really takes that impasse to having good, open-minded, you know, "not perfect sex" but they're really loose, fun, free kind of intimacy. It makes it much more viable.

Meredith: Yeah, it's more integrated into your relationship rather than something that you feel like you have to do. It's something that you want to do.

Marina: Yeah or like it's a one off where it has to be perfect or it's a failure.

Meredith: That's a lot. Yeah, that's a tough one. We hear that a lot actually and there's this such tremendous amount of pressure that comes with that.

Marina: Yeah.

Meredith: Pressure is not helpful. Pressure is not good for the sex life.

Marina: Yeah, pressure is not good for the sex life but again, if your sex life is not ritualized, there's so much room for pressure. So much room for pressure because it's a one-off occurrence and it's so high stakes and it has to go perfect or else...

Meredith: Yeah.

Marina: And sex is not perfect. That's the thing. Really good sex, I'm not sure who said this but somebody said, "Really good sex is really sloppy." And what I take that to me, it's like really good sex is uninhibited and open-minded and there isn't all these ideas and notions based on it that it has to look like a curated romance scene in a movie. There's room for imperfect curation and to express to be a real human.

Meredith: Yeah, yeah. Definitely. And I know you have some really helpful tips for enhancing the pleasure in a relationship, so I'm excited to hear these so I hope you guys are too.

Marina: Okay, the first thing that I really wanted to acknowledge going into this is that talking about pleasure and talking about intimacy and talking about sex is vulnerable and hard. So again, going back to the first podcast, really utilizing those communication tools is so, so, so key. So all of these tips that I'm gonna talk about living the context of you already utilizing those relationship communication tools.



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Marina: If you haven't listened to the first podcast, that's like pre-requisite to applying any of these tips because you don't want to be applying these without using the proper communication tools to apply them because again, you're talking about something extra vulnerable and extra sensitive if sex hasn't been a ritual of connection or if sex is something that has felt kind of high stakes or if sex is something that maybe has kind of used to be great but has kind of slipped to the back burner.

Meredith: Absolutely.

Marina: Right, so please, please, please make sure that you listen to episode one first. So the first one is: explore what feels good to you. Go through that learning curve with yourself and that can go many different ways. If you're a woman, that doesn't mean like buy yourself a whole slew of sex toys and... for some, that might be great. For others, that might really be jumping into the deep end of the pool. Exploring what feels good to you sometimes, psycho-education first is a big part of that exploration. Like learning about the body, learning about the clitoris and other erogenous areas and learning about the penis and other erogenous areas and learning about what feels good and learning about all that kind of stuff just on a practical level. Is it really great for a step to entering at the shallow end of the pool as opposed to like I think a lot of people always say like when I started working with couples that did this and I say like, "Well, just go home and explore what feels good to you." They're like, "Well, I've never masturbated and that might be too much for me." So I've really learned that people need to start very, very easy, emotionally safe and something like education first. That's a really good step to exploring what really feels good to you and then you want to get to the more physical part but, the more physical part again, you don't have to jump to something that feels uncomfortable right away. Even know what feels good when you touch your arm, how much pressure you like, what feels sexy as opposed to what feels not so good. That's a part of pleasure exploration on your own, and people don't... like self-massage is a really big part of it. Again, you don't have to jump into the deep end of the pool right away. Another one is, so this is a couples one. This is the one I really like couples to do and this can go from PG all the way to triple X.

Meredith: Okay.

Marina: Really depends on the couple. So what I really like is you know, we watch so much T.V. these days and I love T.V.

Meredith: I'm a fan.

Marina: And what I think is there are quite a few shows that are really good at portraying pretty realistic, pretty good sex scenes, like sexy scenes, and you know what sex scene resonates with you, right? Like when you're watching a T.V. show or you're watching some porn or you're watching whatever you're watching and you're like, "Ugh, that is hot!", right? You know what resonates with you. So I always encourage couples to share that with each other.

Meredith: Yeah.

Marina: So say you're watching, I know you're a Walking Dead fan. Do they have sex scenes?

Meredith: Not a lot of time for sex in a zombie apocalypse.



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Marina: Oh, okay. Okay. But even I know shows like Sex in the City, girls like a lot...

Meredith: Shameless.

Marina: Shameless

Meredith: Shameless has a lot of sex.

Marina: A lot of the HBO shows, but even I know we've been watching Handmaid's tale. Great sex scene in that one.

Meredith: Yeah, I would agree with you. Yeah.

Marina: You know, if you're watching something and it really resonates with you, share that with your partner but don't just say like, "Hey, this is what I like." I don't know; I watch a lot of T.V. on my phone that's why I'm doing this. Share that with your partner but don't just, "Look at what I like" and that's it. Talk about it, like what person are you connecting within that sex scene. Who are you identifying with? What's making it sexy? What's the turn on? What touch do you specifically? How do you think that feels for the receiver? How do you think that feels for the giver? What is doing that for you? And that, you're going through a big learning curve with yourself and you're also going through a big learning curve with your partner around what turns you on and when your partner's able to reciprocate, they're going through that learning curve, you're going through that learning curve with them also and it just gives you so much insight into each other's turn-ons without having to have that really direct like eye-to-eye kind of intense conversation about like, "Here's a list of my turn-ons".

Meredith: Yeah, I think that's great idea because if you think about it, we are, I mean, we are visual people. We're multisensory humans so if you're using like you said, a T.V. show or a sex scene in a movie, something where you can capture the sights, the sounds it's like capturing a lot in that moment and you can share that with your partner. It's so clear.

Marina: Yeah!

Meredith: Right? It's super clear and it's super, you know, it really simplifies it.

Marina: It does and the goal of this is not to recreate that scene.

Meredith: Right.

Marina: The goal of that is to just learn and to ask questions and to be lovingly curious and to facilitate conversation more than to be like, "Well, at moment... at like minute 2:37 seconds they did this" you know like you have a timer going. No, that's not at all the goal of this. The goal of this is to learn. It's to find out a little bit more about yours and your partner's turn-ons. The next one, this is actually a really, really big one. When we're talking about turn-ons and when we're talking about the things we like, the kind of touch we like, the kind of intensity we like, the kind of things that turn us on, it's really, really, really important to use positive language.



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Marina: By positive language, I don't mean just saying everything's great. By positive language, what I mean is stating things in the positive. So not saying so, I'm thinking of a specific couple but I've had this with a lot of couples where there's a husband and a wife and they've struggled with intimacy for quite a bit and the wife is super good like PHG level at being like, "No, that doesn't feel good. No, you're not doing that right. No, that's not how I like to be touched". And the husband just internalized so, so, so much rejection from that that he started having erectile issues.

Meredith: That makes sense.

Marina: Because he was like "Ugh, this is horrible. I'm not doing anything right". So saying things in positive language is not saying "I don't like this." It's saying "I do like this, do more of this, this is more sexy, touch me like this, do this to me" as opposed to "No, I don't like that. No, do this to..." you know. It's saying what you do like instead of what you don't.

Meredith: Yeah.

Marina: Just to keep things moving in a positive and forward direction because "No" is a triggering word. "Don't" is a triggering word. "Don't like" is a triggering word. All these words can really be easily internalized as rejection in a vulnerable moment.

Meredith: Yeah, absolutely. That makes a lot of sense and I mean, really, this is a theme in general, in communication. I would say in relationships like we apply it here but talking about what you want rather than talking about what you don't want, right? So rather than saying "I don't want you to sit on the couch while I do laundry," if you don't know that story, go back and listen, say "I would really like it if you could help me," right? What you do want is so much better received than a criticism. Essentially, the don'ts are criticisms, so that's a really, really good point.

Marina: Yeah, exactly. This is a really, again, sensitive, vulnerable; we don't want to criticize. We don't want to make our partners to feel rejected and attacked. We want our partners to feel like we're being vulnerable with them and telling them what we like so we create that kind of atmosphere for them also. The next one is the one I really like. It doesn't just apply to sexuality, it applies across the board but it's giving process-based compliments. So giving that really positive feedback about when your partner does something sexy, something intimate, something that turns you on, giving a process-based complement. So what a process-based complement is, it's not just saying, "Meredith, you look really nice today." Does that mean anything to you?

Meredith: It feels a little like, a little superficial.

Marina: Yeah, so what a process-based complement is complimenting somebody on the process of how they did something and then saying how it impacted you. So what it is is when you touched me that way, it felt really sexy to me and it made me feel really close to you and really connected and really aroused in the moment. It's like really giving a moment a lot of depth and telling your partner how significant their role was in that moment in creating pleasure for you. It's not like "You're good at sex."

Meredith: Yeah. High five.



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Marina: Yeah. Like “Good job!”.

Meredith: Yeah.

Marina: It’s really breaking it down to like “This is what really works for me when you did this. This is what really works for me and what’s really hot for me. Thank you for that. That was awesome”.

Meredith: Yeah.

Marina: Those process-based compliments like what they are is they’re communicating like a reinforcement of a behavior you want more of. So when you think about it in those terms, it’s like “I really liked that. Let me reinforce it so I can get more of it”. So yeah, that’s a really big one. I’m sure we’re going to talk about this one a lot more down the line because I feel like this is something that works in a lot of areas, not just intimacy. The last tip I have is just about making pleasure and intimacy a ritual of connection. Again, episode two, we talked about a lot of rituals of connection and we talked earlier about how intimacy looks different when it is versus when it isn’t a ritual of connection. And to make intimacy a ritual of connection, it doesn’t need to be sex. It doesn’t need to be penetrative sex. It doesn’t need to be goal-oriented, orgasm-producing behavior. Six-second kiss, great intimate, sexy behavior. Hugging ‘til relaxed, great, intimate, sexy behavior, not sex. Erotic massage, foot massage, anything that’s really like a pleasurable touch is a great ritual of connection that’s focused on intimacy and again, our guide, John Gottman, has one of my favorite quotes which is “Every positive thing you do in your relationship is foreplay,” firm believer. Firm believer in that?

Meredith: Yup! 100%.

Marina: So, creating these intimate rituals of connection doesn’t need to be scheduling sex every Wednesday night. It’s about the little things you can do throughout the week that feels sexy, that creates that sexy mood and atmosphere in your relationship.

Meredith: Yeah, and I would even suggest going back to episode two just to get the download because of the PDF we made for you guys last week. We have Marina’s list of rituals of connection in the physical intimacy areas. You can pull them off there and then it’s really, really easy.

Marina: Yeah, and there’s some very PG ones, super easy ones, ones that take literally seconds. Again, low stakes, high reward. But again, you want to create that; I always tell clients “You need sexy to have sex.” Rituals of connection that are about intimacy. Create that sexy atmosphere in your relationship. That sexy atmosphere is a lot more likely to lead to sex and intimacy than a different atmosphere.

Meredith: Absolutely, absolutely. So really good tips. Really good tips from Marina. So, you know, as always we don’t want you to just listen to this and then go back to life and not use it. We want you to integrate it into your relationship. So Marina was kind enough to put her tips, I have to say the name because I love it, into a sheet, a PDF that we have available for you to download called “Just the tips. Just for a second just to see how it feels”. If you could quote that movie, put it in the comments. You can get it on our website at www.simplygreatrelationships.com/0003. Really, really good sheet. Definitely, download it.



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Marina: Yeah, so let's talk about takeaways. What would you say was the biggest takeaway for you?

Meredith: I would say the importance of making sex and physical intimacy a ritual and how, you know, I'm big into the simple changes, I'm big into the one step changes where something so simple as creating a ritual around it and making it into a consistent part of your relationship can so dramatically improve the quality and the experience of your intimate relationship versus having it be a one off just like you said and I think that's really powerful.

Marina: Yeah, I definitely agree. For me, a big takeaway is that you don't have to jump into the deep end of the pool when you're exploring what feels good to you. That psycho-education, massaging yourself, trying different kind of sensory things, all of those are about pleasure exploration and teach you about what you like and what you don't like but can feel much more safe and much more secure and much easier than going to Babeland and buying a Hitachi and being like "What is this thing" when you've never done that before if that's the stage you're at. I think it's a very powerful message that you're allowed to be at the stage you're at and you don't need to jump into the deep end to "do it right."

Meredith: Yeah, absolutely. That's a really good one.

Marina: So...

Meredith: That's good. So, that's all we have for today. So we really hope you'll take these tips and start using them today, tonight. Download the PDF for sure and we'd also love for you to continue the conversation with us in our Facebook group where we're going to connect you with more tips, tricks, live streams we're going to do in there exclusively for our members. You can find the group at www.facebook.com/groups/simplygreatrelationships or you can click the link on our website www.simplygreatrelationships.com and I know Marina's going to pop in there and answer questions about physical intimacy and ritualizing them and really anything around physical intimacy that you want to know, you can totally throw in there. So, we'll be popping in and chatting with you.

Marina: Yeah and if you need resources or want to share resources around things that have helped you to get more comfortable with yourself, get more comfortable with your partner, learn a lot about sex and physiology and sexually, let's share those together and create a wonderful resource library for everybody.

Meredith: Yeah, absolutely. Alright, well we're glad you joined us for today and be sure to download the PDF and we will chat with you soon. Bye bye!

Marina: Bye!

