

# Body Mapping

or  
(to borrow a song title from David Bowie)

## Loving the Alien

People have a natural tendency to judge the intentions and feelings of others based on what we know about ourselves. There is nothing necessarily wrong with that. As long as the people involved are fairly similar, it is a great shortcut. It is so much easier than spending a lot of time trying to communicate such difficult concepts. And, aren't all people pretty much the same anyway? Aren't our brains and nervous systems similar? Don't we all experience the same emotions?

The short answer to these questions is: No, we really aren't the same.

If I assume that my wife has the same feelings or intentions that I would have in the same circumstances, I will probably misinterpret her meaning. If she does the same thing, we could very easily get ourselves into a nasty emotional fight.

I think that this type of interaction is probably common in all couples and it is probably responsible for much of the heartache in relationships. But for my wife and me, we aren't simply different people and different sexes. We have an even more fundamental difference. I am an Aspie, and she is a Neurotypical; our basic neurophysiology is different. We not only have different intentions and feelings; even our sensations are different.

In sexual encounters, if I assume that her body is feeling sensations the same way that mine would in the same circumstances, I end up doing things to her that would feel good to me. If she does the same thing, we aren't really making love to each other. We are trying to make love to ourselves using each other's bodies. All we really end up doing is irritating each other.

To truly make love to each other, we must take the time to learn about each other's bodies. We must map each other's bodies as if we were exploring alien land. I suspect that all good lovers have made mental maps of their partner's body whether they are aware of it or not. What we are suggesting is that being more intentional about body mapping may help avoid making the kind of assumptions that lead lovers astray. For example, many Aspies find light touch extremely irritating while deep pressure may be more soothing. Neurotypicals often assume that if a partner is irritated, the best thing is to back off and use **less** pressure. This may be precisely the wrong thing to do. Likewise, an Aspie may assume that irritation means that the best thing to do is use **more** pressure. It is easy to see how these incorrect assumptions could lead to disastrous sexual encounters.

Body mapping can be used as an extension of the sensate focus exercises originally developed by Masters and Johnson. But we suggest that the lovers consider drawing an actual map of each other's bodies. This helps to abandon all

assumptions about what should feel good. Don't assume you know how something will feel to someone else; test it and find out. Then keep good notes and use them to come up with new ideas about what to test. Take a scientific approach to the exploration of your partner's pleasure.

- 1) The map should begin with a basic outline of a male or female (or intermediate) body and include a front and back view. There should be a different map for each of the partners. Don't forget to include any hair.
- 2) How does it feel to be touched in a specific place? The partners add notes on specific body parts. It may help to color code the map. Feel free to use different color schemes if this one doesn't feel right to you.
  - a. Blue feels very bad (or irritating)
  - b. Green feels a little bad (or irritating)
  - c. Yellow feels neutral
  - d. Red feels good (or soothing or arousing)
  - e. Purple feels very good (or soothing or arousing)
- 3) How much pressure? The partners should note how much pressure feels good or bad in each place (eg. light touch, medium touch, deep pressure or not even touching but close enough to feel heat.)
- 4) What rhythm feels best? (eg. slow, fast, or something in between)
- 5) Touching with what? Try touching with different things (eg. hands, other body parts, feathers, a brush, velvet, satin, or whatever) and make notes about what feels good.
- 6) Make different maps to keep track of how touch preferences change during different phases of the sexual response cycle. Many sex therapists see the traditional Masters and Johnson stages I've listed below as too linear and goal focused. Feel free to substitute different stages if it seems more appropriate.
  - a. Unstimulated (non sexual)
  - b. Excitement
  - c. Plateau
  - d. Orgasm
  - e. Resolution
- 7) Keep in mind that the map is never really finished. You can never "learn the map" and then assume you now know your partner's body completely. Many things can cause changes to the map and updates will be necessary. Things may change with different emotional states, at different parts of the menstrual cycle or with age. Surgery, disease, or changes in weight may also alter the maps.
- 8) With growing experience the actual written maps may no longer be necessary. What is really important after all, are the maps you carry in your minds while making love with your partner. But start out with actual, written maps. It will help you double check with your partner that what you think you have discovered is really true. It will also make it easier to show your progress and discoveries to your sex therapist for possible suggestions about what to do next.