

Awaken Your Sensual Experience

Through Contrast



Marcia Kodama

Alex Streubel

Jean-Sebastien Charron

Gracy Obuchowicz

Maria Bailey

Our Journey Towards Sensuality

We started our journey together when we all met in the first session. There was attraction, curiosity, energy... dynamics we wanted to explore and go into deeper, and also other energies: conflict, fear, doubt, longing....that we weren't expecting in the beginning.

Our first questions was -- What is sensuality? For you? For me? For us? And how does it show up in relationships other than intimate ones? In workplaces? With friends?

We went out to explore and interview people about sensuality in different environments and heard a wide range of stories. At the same time, there was a very thought-provoking phenomenon happening in our group! Fueled by sensuality, attraction, repulsion, preferences, and expectations, we were living our sensual story together.

In this work we share our awakening of sensual experience through contrast by offering our personal experience, intimate reflections, burning questions and a few powerful practices that have guided our explorations...as you will see below.

Our experience was quite a ride. We had the chance to lean into our edges and get more intimate with others and with ourselves. We used the quadrants as a framework to guide the experience. With each quadrant we observed that a polarity showed up in our sensual explorations, as we perceived them in the world and in our POD. We learned that these polarities show up consciously or as shadow and being aware of them are a powerful way to keep us more awake and true, to ourselves and in relationship.

So here is our story! Please remember that it's based on our experience in the POD and also in the experience of the people we interviewed. We cannot generalize our conclusions and still have more questions than answers, but we think this is a good beginning for the exploration of the sensual experience and how we can consciously awaken these energies in our own lives.

Our journey has 4 chapters. Each is rooted in the polarities we discovered in our collective exploration of the sensual experience. We found that these polarities energized our experience of sensual experience at one end (creating difference and conflict) and calmed them at the other (creating sameness and safety).

Enjoy!

Content

Chapter 1: UL - Desire vs. Longing

Chapter 2: UR - Open vs. Closed/Collapsed Bodily Posture

Chapter 3: LL - Group Culture: Safety vs. Risk Taking

Chapter 4: LR - Small Groups vs. Large Groups

Chapter 1: UL - Desire vs. Longing

How do the dynamics of our individual sensual energies influence our experience within a group? How can we navigate the dynamic polarities of this awakened, sensual energy--at one end experiencing desire (a sense of already having what you want with feelings of inclusion or connectedness with the need) and at the other a sense of longing (an experience of exclusion or lack from the need with feelings of nostalgia and an urge for connection) --so that we can be creative and awake participants in a group experience?

Our sensual energy is a powerful fuel that can deeply influence group dynamics. Often this energy is held as shadow energy that we try to ignore or repress because it isn't "appropriate." This can turn into shadow actions (personal dramas such as power struggles or romantic affairs) and block actual creative collaboration.

However, perhaps we can tap into this sensual energy as a way to fuel our creativity within a group. This sensual energy of desire/longing is extremely vital energy. It grounds us in our senses, gives us deeper access to present-moment awareness and connects us deeper with other members of the group. It makes us want to be fully present to each other and helps us to put this present-moment energy into our projects, thus increasing the quality of our work.

From the first time we formed as a group, I became aware of my own feelings of desire for the other members of my POD. I found them all very attractive as people on every level. **Instead of trying to hide from these feelings, I allowed them to be present and even enjoyed my desire for them.** I looked forward to our POD calls and felt like I had a collective "crush" on the other members. The deep inclusion of this crush gave me energy to participate more fully.

After we experienced conflict in one of our POD calls, it felt like the spell of the crush was broken. To me, it was like a fall from Eden and I felt more longing for what we had before rather than desire to continue working together. Although I was physically present for most of our calls, I felt less emotionally present and less attracted to our work. **My longing for what I wished it to be – instead of being present with what it**

was in that moment – made me feel separate from the group rather than a part of things. I felt this tangibly in my experience of sensuality and in my work attitude.

Then we had a powerful call where we each had space to share openly about our desire and our longing for each other by openly naming the dynamics of desire and longing in the group. I named my sexual attraction and shared about my feelings of longing during the conflict. **Being able to fully share the spectrum of my own personal feelings without shame was extremely vulnerable and also very healing. I became engaged in the group process again and felt an even greater connection to our group.**

I realized that these sensual dynamics would probably always play out in future group work. I plan to keep a much greater awareness of my own desire and longing and use it as a way to connect. Also I realize that as I offer the group greater transparency and vulnerability about my feelings, it will help me not pull away out of discomfort. Pulling away doesn't resolve tensions but rather blocks the flow of creative, sensual energy in a group. Hiding my true sensual energies means that I am not able to help a group process move forward.

I remain fascinated by the creative opportunities that can arise out of sharing openly about our own sensual experience of desire/longing as a way to uncover and utilize shadow dynamics that influence our experience within a group.

Practice:

- Ask each member of a group to journal for 10 minutes on their experience of desire (inclusion) within a group and for another 10 minutes on their experience of longing (exclusion)
- Allow a moment of silent integration of this arising sensual energy for each individual
- Inquire what would help each group member to feel safe enough to share their experience of desire and longing more openly. If possible, have each group member share out loud their prerequisites of safety.
- If safety is established, ask each member share from the "I" perspective about their experience of desire and longing with the other members of the group.
- After each share, allow a moment of silent integration. At the end, have each member share their current experience of sensual energy in the group. Ask how the group would now like to move forward creatively?

Chapter 2: UR - Open vs. Closed-down/collapsed Body Posture

*How does our body posture affect our ability to connect with or hold desire/sensuality?
How does connecting with desire/sensuality in our bodies affect our posture?*

In the context of the UR quadrant, we understand sensuality or the flow of sensual energy as being related to resourceful high-energy states such as connectedness, excitement and in particular related desire. This stands in opposition to resourceful low energy states (relaxation, peacefulness, etc.), unresourceful high-energy states (anger, anxiousness, fearfulness, etc.) and unresourceful low-energy states (depression, sadness, defeatedness, etc.).

Our body posture impacts our ability to hold and allow the flow of sensual energy. And the opposite tends also to be true: connecting with sensuality affects our body posture. An open, relaxed body is more conducive to supporting sensuality and vice versa. On the other hand, a closed, tight up body tends to limit the ability to connect with sensual energy.

Desire is something we notice when it arises. It is not a decision we make and in that sense we don't have control over desire. This lack of control makes us vulnerable since we are 'at the mercy' of desire. **In other words, we have to be willing to be vulnerable to be in touch with our desires.** Thus, it appears that an open body that allows for vulnerability and therefore for desire to arise is correlated to allowing the flow sensual energy.

During our POD project I noticed how opening up my chest was critical to my ability to stay connected to my desire to continue exploring our project topic as well as to the desire of getting closer and more intimate with my teammates. **It was mostly my open chest that allowed me to hold and stay present to the aliveness and sensual energy that would arise from feeling my desire.** I also noticed that as I opened my chest and connected to desire and sensuality, it would become easier to maintain my chest open. In other words, there was a positive feedback effect between opening my chest and connecting with sensuality. Opening and relaxing my solar plexus, hara and root chakra would further support my connection with sensuality.

As we moved into the final stage of our POD project, I noticed how keeping an open body and allowing sensual energy to flow affected how I participated and influenced the group. My contributions were more spontaneous, clearer and carried more weight when my body was open. I would spend much less time second guessing myself or holding

back out of the fear of saying something irrelevant. In fact, my experience was that my contributions were valued more and often significantly influenced the direction of our work together. At the same time, I stayed much more open to the contributions of my team and appreciated them more. **In these situations, I felt that I was participating in an effortless creative space like I had never experienced before. It felt like a preview of the future of work!**

I also noticed that when the intensity of a situation - arising from conflict, fear, overwhelm - exceeded what I could hold and I didn't feel safe any more, my body would close down and in particular my chest would collapse. I would disengage and lose interest in the project.

Resolving these situations wasn't a matter of simply remembering to open my chest again. It required a joint group effort to recreate the conditions of safety and openness needed for the flow of sensual energy. **However, this doesn't invalidate the fact that taking care and being responsible for my body posture went a long way towards supporting my individual and my group's ability for creating a powerful space for group collaboration where the flow of sensual energy was a critical ingredient.**

Practice:

- Take a moment to observe your experience in this moment in the four quadrants. Notice your thoughts, emotions and sensations. Notice your body posture and your energy level. Notice your relationship to your surroundings and to people.
- Now, open your body. You can do so standing, sitting or lying on your back. In particular, open your whole front: neck straight, chin up, shoulders, chest, arms and legs open. Also open your body 'from the inside' by relaxing it. One way to do this is by bringing the quality and felt sense of a subtle smile (a Buddha smile) to your heart, solar plexus, hara and root chakra.
- Take again another moment to observe your experience in the four quadrants. Notice if there are any changes.
- As a final step, close your body by closing the front of your body: pull your chin to your chest, pull your shoulders forward, cross your arms and legs.
- Again, take a moment to observe your experience in all four quadrants. What changes do you notice, if any?

Chapter 3: LL - Safety vs. Risk-Taking

How does the polarity of safety and risk-taking affect a group's experience of sensuality? How can we use the contrast of risk and safety to create a culture where sensuality can be experienced and utilized?

Sensuality has a sweet spot, and it lives somewhere between safety and risk-taking. With too much safety we become too familiar and thus sleepy in our experience; with too much risk, fear goes through the roof and our body fills up with adrenaline and cortisol giving us the experience of being in a constant stage of threat and resistant or afraid to relate with any kind of intimacy.

Somewhere in between, when we feel safe enough, our nervous system relaxes, our emotional defenses soften and oxytocin washes away our fears with feelings of empathy and openness to others. **When this balance happens it's easier to stretch our edges of safety. At this time, if we risk just the right amount, excitement happens.** We all know that feeling when we're nervous but a whole lot more excited about something that is just a little out of our control. That's the sensual experience we were after. So we went out to find that sweet spot between safety and risk taking.

But what came first the chicken or the egg? Risk or safety?

What I discovered in our group is that safety and risk-taking come hand in hand. When we feel safe and connect with others, we build rapport and rapport cultivates trust. The more we trusted that we had each other's back, by sharing appreciations and not being judgmental, the safer we felt and the bigger risks we took revealing intimacies and shadow.

Finding the sweet spot wasn't easy, though. We not only had different definitions and needs for safety. For example, I needed more contact and faster intimacy while others in the group needed less. We also had differences in how we asked or demanded what we wanted, and we had a difference in range - capacity and skill to experience, express and relate at various levels of sensual experience when intensity amplified. I handled the difference with frustration and sometimes even with aggression while others responded sometimes with fear or by disconnecting. What is most true though is that we were all trying very hard to learn new ways to come together and manage our anxiety.

How did we navigate this?

Like the wolf pack that tends to the whole by placing those with most needs in front to set the pace for the rest of the group that follows, the participant with the smallest range in capacity determined the capacity for the whole group. **This meant that safety came first and in this way we learned to tend to and maintain a balance between safety and risk-taking.** The way we navigated this was to invite the participants in our group who wanted to take risks and go fast to bring their attention to the needs of others to build rapport and grow trust in the group. This in turn created the necessary safety the rest of the group needed to join in with speed and more risk-taking.

There's something about the shadow aspect of this polarity that I would like to mention. As an individual it is important to know what we want but more importantly it's to know what we can handle right now. **To be honest with ourselves and our group, to set clear boundaries, and cultivate rapport and clear communication is essential for building the kind of relationship that is strong enough to contain the contrast of risk-taking and conflict so that we can enjoy the fruits of sensuality as an experience.**

This is how we experienced sensuality, worked as a group and developed our group culture with the polarity of safety and risk-taking: We showed excitement for coming together, we pushed each other around and tested our boundaries, we built rapport and created the necessary safety and trust to grow beyond our comfort zone. Then we enjoyed and fell in-love with each other once again, including all our differences. It would seem counter-intuitive but in the end we felt more intimacy after taking the risk to speak our differences, going through conflict and coming out stronger on the other side. This journey as we found out, from beginning to end, was our sweet spot.

Practice: Take a moment to feel into yourself and ask:

- How safe do I feel right now? Is there something I'm vigilant about? Can I locate a current of sensuality in my experience?
- What adjustments can I make (for myself and/or my group) that might increase trust and safety and in my/our experience? (Consider appreciations, a vulnerable reveal or the use of space). Do I notice any change in my openness to sensuality?
- In what way can I lean into risk-taking that is within my range of capacity or the group right now given my/our level of safety and trust? (Consider revealing a withhold, asking a difficult question or adjusting closeness in the physical space). Does this risk amplify or contract my experience of sensual energy?
- Check again for the level of safety and adjust with yourself and/or the group as many times as you need.

Chapter 4: LR - Group Intimacy in Small vs. Large Groups

How does the size of our groups impact our experience of sensuality? Can we affect the group connection through breaking into dyads or forming large groups as a way to cultivate deeper intimacy?

The size of the group is an important variable when exploring sensuality and for the flow of communication, intimacy and creativity among members of a group. **Intimacy can produce intensity and this intensity can be affected--either increased or decreased--by the size of the group.**

Exploring sensuality in small groups (dyads/triads) appears to help create more comfort and sameness. This intimate experience of connection helps to build trust and safety between the individuals. Interaction in a dyad typically yields more intimacy because neither member shares the other's attention with anyone else and the sensual energy can flow in a more focused way.

Sharing intimacy in a larger group is more stimulating, has more variables in how it can flow between members and contains greater opportunities to take risks.

Once this intimate flow of sensual energy is established in a small group or dyad, individuals can usually contribute their flow of sensual energy with more ease later in a larger group setting.

In our group, the challenge was to amplify our experience of connection, love and desire by creating ways for sensual energy to flow more freely in our group. **Our basic principle was that just as respect cannot be forced but has to come from establishing trust, our sensuality cannot be earned but rather has to be given freely when there is the appropriate setting for it to flow.**

My personal experience was that while I was interacting in a dyad (with one other person) it was easier to connect to my emotions rather than when I had to interact with the whole POD. Another thing that impacted my experience and that caused me to close down my feelings of sensuality and affected my behavior toward the group was keeping track of time or having a time container for our practices. **Overall, connecting with my deep emotions with ample time was easier in small groups or dyads, as I felt more secure. When I felt secure, my sensual energy and emotions led me to positive action and to powerfully engage with the group while still remaining resourced and connected with myself.**

In the bigger group, success was less about my own experience and more about what we felt collectively, what we explored together and what we discovered about our sensual energy that helped us build our relationship. A sense of mystery guided our process into deeper connection and relationship with each other and as a whole. The more I was stimulated in my sensuality, the more I felt connected with the other members of our group.

Our commitment as a group grew as we cultivated our one-on-one relationships and in turn our empathy for each other that generated a shared sense of intimacy and trust. **In the end, intimacy was the perfect gesture that expressed our common understanding and allowed the flow of sensual energy to stream more freely for me and from there, to allow it to flow through my own active participation in our larger group.**

Practices:

- Divide the group into dyads/triads. Ask them two questions to evoke intimacy. Time one of them and leave the other open.
- Bring the group together as whole. Ask them the same questions so they can address their answers to the entire group. Time one of them and leave the other time open.
- Lead a discussion that addresses: The flow of sensual energy while in dyads/triads vs. in the larger group? How does experiencing these sensual energies drive action? How does a time container affect group intimacy and sensual energy?

Conclusion

In exploring sensual energy we found that it was most awakened through contrast of certain polarities. Following our desire and/or longing we leaned into our edges, we discovered that our body posture impacts our sensual experience and we learned how to grow our edges by maintaining a balance between safety and risk-taking. We used the quadrants as a framework to guide curiosity and explored how group size and time containers influence how close or open we are to our sensual energy in relationship to others and our own internal experience. May this work be helpful for you in your enjoyment and delight of awakening your sensual experience in all your relations.