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# Aware Negotiation of Sexual Attraction

(ANSA contract)

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If one person is sexually attracted to another and there is some indication that it may be reciprocal and circumstances are such that to acknowledge it and negotiate about it may not be totally out of the question, then here are a set of possible stages for such acknowledgement and negotiation. The point about these stages is that they demand honesty, authenticity, directness and courage in both persons. They exclude dealing with a sexual attraction by compulsive seduction, unaware flirtation, innuendo, ulterior transactions, game playing, a whole series of moves and ploys that do not really acknowledge what is actually going on.

## 1. The First Declaration

One person is sexually attracted to another and maybe the attraction is mutual. Someone has to own it. Traditionally the male has owned it but only indirectly by some ostensibly innocent non-sexual invitation. On the ANSA model, one person owns it quite directly to the other, and to get away from role stereotypes, this person is female as often as male.

The first declaration, if handled well, has an exploration clause. So it goes: "I feel vulnerable about saying this, but I find you sexually attractive. I would like to ask if this is reciprocal, and if so, whether we could meet soon to talk it over and explore what it means to both of us?"

The important point about the exploration clause is that it leaves space for the other person to look at the attraction without commitment or subtle pressure to act on it. If you omit the exploration clause there is a danger that the other person will already feel trapped by unidentified expectations and demands.

## 2. The Straight Response

The one who is asked the above question needs, on the ANSA model, to give a direct, honest response: "Yes, I do find you sexually attractive." "I don't know whether or not I find you sexually attractive." And also, of course, a direct response to the invitation to meet and explore what the attraction might mean.

If the person you approach with the first declaration goes into agitation, distress and general disarray on either aspect of the response, I would advise you discreetly, respectfully, and tactfully to withdraw. This ends the ANSA.

Alternatively, the person approached, whether they say "Yes", "No", or "I don't know", on the sexual attraction, may directly decline the invitation to meet and talk. This also ends the ANSA.

If the invitation to talk is clearly rejected, graceful withdrawal is nobler than compulsive pursuit.

### **3. Clarifying the Attraction**

This is the stage when two people have agreed to meet and explore the meaning of a mutual attraction already explicitly owned to each other.

There are two parts to this stage:- First, a sensitive reciprocal exchange about what each one finds attractive in the other, about the history and perceptions of the attraction, about the thoughts and feelings elicited by it. Second, and developing inevitably out of the previous part, a check for hidden projections. Each person takes it in turn to see whether the other is identified at a subliminal or near unconscious level with someone else from the past with whom a lot of unresolved negative, positive or ambivalent feeling is attached.

If this enquiry shows that either way there is a lot of heavy projected material at work, then it is probably wise to end ANSA, because some sexual attractions constitute the leading edge of unidentified distress. In these cases, to act on the attraction is chaotically to displace and act out the distress to the mutual misery of both persons; the wiser course is to separate and work on the underlying material.

Checking for hidden projections goes as follows:

- A. Do I remind you of anyone?
- (repeat until B comes up with an association).
- A. How do I remind you of X?
- (B identifies the associations and connections).
- A. What's left unsaid to X? What feelings are still unexpressed to X?
- (B expresses these feelings to A as if A were X).
- A. How am I not like X?
- (B consciously withdraws the projection and specifies how A is unlike X).

If the projections, whether negative, positive or ambivalent, are relatively light, the ANSA can proceed. Never proceed without the projections, however light, have been identified.

### **4. Clarifying the Circumstantial Factors**

The discussion continues, and now each person explains fully, without holding anything back, the details of their current life-style: whether married, whether the marriage is closed or open, whether there are children, whether existing relationships are honest or duplicitous, and so on and so on. This discussion moves on to a statement from each as to how free, morally and psychologically, each one feels about taking this attraction any further, given all the relevant circumstantial factors.

Either or both persons may end the ANSA at this point. However, there may be some necessary overlap with the following stage, before a clear decision can be taken.

Circumstantial factors may legitimate one or more options rather than others... What diseases you've had.... How many partners you have had....

## 5. Clarifying the Options

If the circumstantial factors seem to give some scope for continuing the ANSA, then the two persons can move on to consider awarely the full range of possibilities for honouring the sexual attraction between them.

Here is one fairly comprehensive spectrum of possibilities:

1. Enjoy the attraction but do not act on it in any way other than enjoying each other's company on social and recreational occasions: conversations, walks, theatre, etc.
2. Meet as above but also enjoy nurturance clothed. This means non-erotic contact and embraces, warm and loving without nakedness. The sexual attraction is left tacit within the explicit warmth and nurturance.
3. Go to bed and enjoy naked nurturance only, with no explicit genital sexuality and with a clear contract about keeping out of explicit genital sexuality.
4. Go to bed to enjoy naked nurturance and leave it open as to whether genital sexuality develops, without any expectation or demand either that it should or that it should not.
5. Go to bed with the mutual expectation that naked nurturance will develop into explicit genital sexuality.
6. Plunge into bed for the celebration of unmistakably sexual passion. Of course, the two persons may start with the first of these on the list and have an open ended contract as to whether any one or more of the others may develop at a later stage - again as a function of aware negotiation.

## 6. The Caring, Rational Contract

Both persons commit themselves to a contract that they will care for each other by excluding irrational demands and expectations, by awarely negotiating every stage in the relationship and any change in a previously and mutually agreed stage. They also commit themselves to some mutually agreed and effective growth-oriented way of dealing with compulsive hassles and tangles that may arise.

NB: Stereotypic male behaviour in the culture tends toward the manipulation, domination, and subtle oppression of authentic feminine rights and feelings.

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## PostScript by JanPieter Hoogma

To make sure that you get the best out of your sexual attraction check, ask a third Co-Counsellor to be present to counsel the two of you on the ANSA contract. Several Co-Counsellors mentioned in my Sexuality workshops, that despite the ANSA contract they ended up in an unwanted sexual relationship. Apart from the opportunity to work on identifications, frozen needs and other restimulations, they found that the ANSA contract provided a mutually exciting courting opportunity as well (i.e. it fuelled the fire). This might be because they were caught in a sexual whirlwind without really getting down to the nitty-gritty of figuring out the underlying stuff. Having a third person present can help you to avoid this.

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