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# The Meaning of Touch in Sexual Therapy

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**Abstract:** In the sexual counseling literature there is a topic, which finds so far little attention: physical touch. The subject of touch is not touched! In the sex-positive discourse on sexuality and especially in sexual counseling, it could get much more space. The clinical observation of the author over twenty years of practice has shown that most people do not have sufficient touch competence. In different sex therapy approaches even though the topic of touch has been considered, what is missing are practical, exercise-oriented interventions for the sexual counseling practice in individual, couple, or group settings. These would provide a qualitative holistic touch competence for the participants. The focus of this research is to highlight the importance of *mindful sensual touch* in sexual intimacy and how people with limited touch experience and competence can best acquire it. Mindful sensual touch - also known as 'Tantric Massage' is a form of touch that has been developed and taught by the German teacher Andro Andreas Rothe in his Berlin Institut Diamond-Lotus. In this article, this special version of Tantric Massage has been focused on. Rothe defines this particular form of touch as a sexual healing and therapeutic massage. People who have deepened their mindful sensual touch experience and competence through personal self-experience (individual setting) and/or attending courses in holistic sensual awareness (group setting) have been interviewed. Through qualitative interviews, it has been possible to explore how this experience positively impacts various components of sexuality and sexual well-being as defined by the WHO, such as feeling more confident in one's sexuality, increasing the ability to experience orgasm for women who could not previously, a prolonged erection for men suffering under premature ejaculation, softening traumatic experiences or becoming more flexible in relation to sexual roles active/passive, male/female nevertheless reinforcing their sexual identity. Unfortunately, this form of massage has been increasingly boycotted especially since a recent law in Germany describes it as sex work disregarding the undeniable empiric data on its healing impact. Nevertheless, not a few sex-therapists do recommend to their clients this kind of experience to improve their sexuality. The aim of this work is to point out the positive benefits of a founded and professional use of this kind of touch experience to contribute to a solution of different sexological issues.

**Keywords:** Touch, Mindfulness, Tantra Massage, Sexual Therapy, Self-Experience

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## 1. Introduction

The topic of touch in general and specifically in a sexual context receives little attention in the scientific literature [1-4]. If the topic is taken up, it is usually about aspects such as assault, abuse, and prostitution. In these cases, the topic of touch is mostly embedded in a negative context. Although recently the positive aspects of touch from a general point of view have been researched more frequently, a direct approach to this topic that deals specifically with touch in sexuality is still missing.

More attention is paid to it in clinical sexual counseling. Two aspects are usually of interest to the sex therapist,

namely: 1. Does physical contact between the partners still take place, or has physical closeness completely ceased at all? 2. If the partners still have physical contact, is it non-sexualized contact (cuddling) or intimate contact (sex)? As far as known at the time of this research, there is usually no further evaluation of the type and quality of touch between the partners - if touch takes place - nor is the quality of touch itself worked on intensively and specifically in practice. This research is focused on this particular aspect: experiencing and learning from model intimate mindful sensual touch.

Currently, two methods in sexual counseling use body-oriented interventions concerning touch: The Sensate Focus and the Approach Sexocorporel. In Sensate Focus, partners are instructed to take turns touching each other within a gradually

expanding framework set by the therapist [5]. How exactly the partners touch each other can be questioned in the analysis of the homework in practice, but the quality of the touch itself is neither observed by the therapist nor practically trained in practice. According to the Sexocorporel Approach a so-called ›restricted arousal mode‹ mostly characterized by mechanical touches is one of the main causes for sexual functional disorders [6]. The improvement of touch competence plays thus a central role. In this approach, clients are invited to try out different qualities of touch at home in the autoerotic experience to ›extend‹ their mode of arousal. As a couple intervention (which is less common, as Sexocorporel is mainly an individual therapy), the couple is merely invited to try different qualities of touch. In this case, however, the focus is on the own body and its resources, i.e. the way we breathe and move, the rhythm of our movements, and the tension in our body while touching the partner [6].

In the Neo-Tantric Bodywork, on the other hand, special attention is given to touch and especially to holistic sensual awareness in a state of mindfulness. The author of this article has been observing over twenty years of experience in leading courses in mindful sensual touch that the qualitative touch experience and competence of the participants are in the beginning mostly suboptimal. The direct observation of how two people touch each other is of great importance for a deeper understanding of dysfunctional couple dynamics or the emergence of sexual problems. Equally important, to improve the transfer of knowledge, is the direct three-dimensional demonstration in the presence of how to touch in an intimate sensitive way, as well as repeated practice under the guidance and individual suggestions from the person leading.

How mindful sensual touch works and positively influence a person's sexual life, what the individual elements of this healing massage are, and what central role the sense of touch plays in human life is the content of this work. Qualitative research records the process of change in the sexuality of individual people based on personal experience reports.

## 2. Motivation and Relevance for Sex Therapy

People who have reached the end of their rope in the search for solutions to their sexual problems usually come to sex therapy. These mostly suffer from sexual functional disorders, such as difficulty to reach orgasm or premature ejaculation. In most cases, sexual intimacy no longer takes place, or only in a limited way, which is neither satisfying nor fulfilling for both partners. People whose sexual functionality is restricted often develop avoidance behavior, which over time also excludes any form of physical closeness. The sexual symptom, which can be interpreted differently depending on the therapeutic approach and treated accordingly, rarely has only one cause as a rule: in addition to intrapsychic factors that have to do with the psychosexual development of the person and with unresolved conflicts from childhood [7-10], are interspsychic problems, i.e.

unresolved conflicts at the current relationship level, which are acted out at the level of sexuality [5, 11-14]. If such factors are present and predominant, the optimal therapeutic choice will be a depth psychological oriented sex therapy and/or a systemic oriented sex therapy.

On the other hand, the Sexocorporel Approach suggests other possible factors related to disorders in sexual function. In this approach, the body function is focused on. Desjardins [6], identifies a correlation between a restricted use of the body resources (touch, movement, breath, rhythm, and tonus) in the course of the individual psychosexual development, which results in a so-called ›pressure‹ or ›mechanical‹ mode of arousal [6, 12]. In particular, the following aspects play an essential role in developing a good sexual function: 1. The development of a ›wide‹ arousal mode in which the arousal potential can be fully expressed; 2. The anchoring and deepening of the feeling of being a sexual being, as well as the associated pride in one's genitality and the satisfaction of being able to be sexually active; 3. The flexible transition in lovemaking from one role to another, from the active to the passive role; i.e. the avoidance of polarization of roles within a couple constellation; 4. The ability to feel pleasure and to express feelings in non-verbal communication; 5. The deepening of experiences of intimacy and closeness in the sexual encounter with the partner; 6. Increased erotic competence; 7. The improved erotic communication about wishes, limits, and needs in sexuality.

Sex Therapy according to this approach highlights the training of the individual physical potential based on the Embodiment Theory. Exploring and developing the above-mentioned components can bring relief and contribute to a solution to the sexual problem. The inclusion of the physical level with targeted interventions to explore and extend a restricted arousal mode by also changing the way of touching oneself - is a central component of the Sexocorporel Approach.

This work focuses precisely on the question, of to which extent the practice of a special form of touch - specifically the Tantra Massage according to Andro-Andreas Rothe, a particular form of mindful sensual art of touch - can positively influence the development of the arousal mode from a pressure and mechanical mode to a more flexible one, which fully uses the body resources (different touch, movement, breath, rhythm, and tonus). Should this be the case, it would make sense to promote learning and experiencing such a form of touch in the treatment of sexual dysfunctions. A lack of touch competence often becomes visible when there are problems in intimacy. In these cases, the partners usually practice only goal-oriented (i.e. orgasmus-oriented) touching or sexually neutral touching such as cuddling while watching a movie together.

The idea of bringing people together through ritualized touch sessions and thereby reactivating their sexual life and healing or at least alleviating sexual dysfunctions is not new. Master and Johnson had already created the intervention ›Sensate Focus‹ in the seventies [5], which for example has been further developed in Germany in recent

decades and is known as the ›Hamburger Model‹ [13, 14].

However, this intervention primarily involves verbal suggestions to touch different parts of the body thus building up new patterns of intimacy for the couple. The encounters take place in a specific setting at home, where a gradual increase in the intimacy of the touch is envisaged. Similarly, though not in the setting, touch suggestions are taught in the Sexocorporel Approach [6]. In both cases, however, the touching skills are not taught in adequate practice spaces under guidance. If somebody does not know how to touch, is doing this in an unpleasant way for the other person, or does not know, how to want to be touched will mostly have no idea how to do it differently, unless somebody will demonstrate different touching options and teach how to do.

In Neo-Tantric Bodywork - a self-experience-space until now hardly officially recognized in the field of sexual therapy - the subject of touch plays an essential role. In this approach, touch is experienced intensively and touch competence is trained. Inner-psycho skills such as presence, expectation-free intention, mindfulness, emotional communication, and other skills such as deceleration in touch, various holistic touch qualities, as well as clarity in touch are taught, demonstrated, and learned by the participants through repeated practice. The leader demonstrates all touch details - including intimate genital touch - in demo sessions. During the subsequent self-experience, it is possible to observe how the partners touch each other and immediate individual impulses and suggestions can be given.

The main purpose of this work is to research and scientifically substantiate the importance of mindful sensual touch in the context of sexual counseling and sexual education for adults.

### **2.1. The Tantric Massage - Mindful Sensual Touch**

The Tantra Massage is a method of touch which - in the form considered for this research - has been developed, practiced, and taught by Andro-Andreas Rothe in his Diamond-Lotus Institute in Berlin, Germany over the last forty years. Rothe is one of the first and best-known Tantra teachers in Germany [21]. During his long stays in Arabic North Africa, the Middle East, and India, Rothe became acquainted with Byzantine and Asian forms of massage, from which he developed this particular form of massage, by him defined as ›therapeutic healing massage‹. He completed his further training at the Dalai Lama's Medical Centre and studied yoga in Poona. He is an ordained Zen monk and master of the Bogenzen [15].

Rothe's Tantra Massage is a radical, innovative treatment method that is still barely understood to its full potential. In its current version, it combines the basics and methods of various well-founded massage techniques as well as elements from bioenergetics, yoga, meditation, and sex therapy in an integrative way. The body is considered to be the soul's ›home‹ and is viewed holistically, accepted, and treated with appropriate care. Through whole-body sensual touch, which is carried out in a state of mindfulness, i.e. non-judgmental perception and expectation-free intention self-

healing processes are set in motion that *get under the skin* and ›touch‹ the whole person.

#### **2.1.1. Rothe's Tantra Massage**

There are fundamental differences between a well-founded Tantra Massage, which requires longer training, intensive self-experience, and confrontation with one's sexuality, and similar-sounding offers because the term Tantra Massage is not protected and can therefore be used arbitrarily. The following aspects characterize a Tantric Massage as a healing treatment: 1. *The clear setting and the ritualized process*: The clear setting, in which there is a separation between the giver and the receiver and the definition of possible boundaries, enables a safe framework for self-experience. 2. *The meditative attitude*: The practice of meditation is necessary to be able to give touches in a state of mindfulness, which is carried out with a benevolent intention but is open-ended and expectation-free. This expectation-free intention opens up a space for what wants to emerge without having a fixed goal. 3. *The encounter in the here and now and the courage for desire and closeness*: Aiming for the state of greatest possible authenticity, where a real encounter and not a simple service comes about. The caring and full acceptance of what is - at this time in this place - can create a real encounter between the giver and the receiver. 4. *The focus on self-awareness and self-experience*: the experiential scope of this massage goes beyond relaxation and well-being. A space is opened and held in which deep self-awareness is made possible. 5. *Appreciation of the whole person with all feelings and sensations*: The attitude of Tantra Massage is that of mindfulness. The human being is seen in his complexity as a sexual and spiritual being. This basic attitude enables the participants to step out of everyday life and to celebrate their bodies in a ›festive‹ setting, in this way experiencing their own sensuality and sexual potential in dignity and beauty. This conveys a sense of being accepted. This feeling is a central prerequisite for the healing effect of this experience [21]. 6. *The whole-body intimate and sensual touches*: A massage becomes tantric through its wholeness. It touches the whole person, it does not leave out any part of the body. In particular, it integrates sexuality and awakens its energy as a life force. Every consequence of this, be it breath, voice, or movement, be it arousal, fear, and tears up to a lustful mystical experience or just a simple orgasm - everything is welcome, not judged, and fully accepted (ibid.). 7. *The profound knowledge of energy pathways and anatomy*: Rothe's Tantric Massage is based on the Far Eastern knowledge of energy centers and pathways in the body [15]. All these components enable the receiving person to have a holistic experience. This often sets in motion a profound process of change that can positively influence one's own sexual experience and, beyond that, life in general.

The Rothe's Tantra Massage is a full-body massage with intensive sensation and as such a sexual therapeutic healing treatment. It is an officially registered trademark in the category of ›therapeutic treatment‹ (class 44). On 7 October 2004, the Tantra-Massageverband e.V. (TMV) was founded

under Rothe's leadership. With its quality and training standards, the Tantra Massage Association pursues the goal of creating a common distinguishing criterion for certified masseurs. The members of the TMV commit themselves to act with integrity, to the transparency of their offer, as well as to adhere to the quality guidelines set by the association. In the meantime, the Tantra Massage Association has developed guidelines for the recognized professional training to become a Tantra Masseur TMV [15]. In addition, there are also comparable training offers outside the association.

### **2.1.2. Difference Between a Tantra Massage and an Erotic Massage**

Although many steps have been taken in recent years, Tantra Massage remains a little-known option for the general public in the landscape of body-oriented sexual therapy approaches for promoting sexual well-being and solving sexual problems; this is also because it is often misunderstood and therefore its therapeutic potential is not perceived. The still insufficiently clear separation between the sexual service of an erotic massage and the offer of professionally trained people who have a neo-tantric background and a well-founded Tantric Massage training and are also skilled in sexual counseling contributes to reinforcing the prejudices and doubts about this form of touch and its healing potential. This therapeutic possibility is therefore still located in a specific subculture and is not officially recognized by the mainstream therapeutic approaches, even though this healing massage is being increasingly often recommended by individual therapists and is also able to exert a clear attraction on many people.

### **2.2. In the Beginning Was Touch**

As Ute Wagener [4] postulates in her doctoral thesis, there are probably many more possibilities in touch than we have discovered so far. It would be possible to expand our perception if we were to learn touch; thereby perhaps new insights would also be possible. "In the beginning was the Word" is asserted in the Gospel (The Gospel, John 1.1), but Wagener wondered in the course of her research on touch whether it was not rather touching that was in the beginning: "Touch is the first sense we develop in the womb, and it is often still active even when eyesight and hearing diminish in old age" [4]. Language loses its expressiveness in particularly strong emotional situations, we then lack words, and what we have left as a medium of communication is touch, e.g. a comforting, supportive touch, especially where words would no longer help.

Humans can survive without seeing or hearing, but not without the sense of touch, claims Martin Grunwald, haptics researcher and founder of the Haptics Research Laboratory at the University of Leipzig in his 2017 book 'Homo Hapticus' [16]. Without the sense of touch and its various functions, humans are not viable and cannot survive, for example in the disease 'cutaneous analgia', in which there is no cutaneous pain sensation [2]. "Without this sensory system", Grunwald continues, "we would not even know that we exist" [16]. One

of the main functions of the sense of touch is that we can be aware of our physical existence in every moment (ibid.). "We do not think ourselves, we feel ourselves" (ibid.). In every moment, in every everyday situation, we are certain of our bodily existence. It is through the sense of touch that our mind is held together. All information coming from the other senses is dispensable for this certainty (ibid.). Every touch is life-sustaining and is processed biologically and psychologically without us necessarily being aware of it. "Every area of every person's life is shaped daily by the silent workings of the touch system" (ibid.).

Only a few weeks after fertilization of the egg, the ability to perceive touch stimuli on the body surface is already developed [16]. The seven-week-old embryo reacts to the touch of the lips by retracting its head and twitching its whole body. At this point, the human embryo is about 16 millimeters tall and no other sense is active (ibid.). Long before the formation of the internal organs is complete, by the ninth week of pregnancy, the developing sense of touch is able to detect and respond to stimuli. This observation also shows how the sensory and motor systems are interconnected [16].

## **3. Method, Design, and Limitations of the Study**

The central thesis of the study, to which the following text refers, is that self-experiencing, learning, and practicing mindful sensual touch have a positive effect on various central aspects of human sexual life. The explanations are based on a qualitative, inductive research design in the form of semi-structured interviews. The questions reflect the exploratory nature of this research. The sample consists of five people experienced in the field of sensual mindful touch - two men and three women in the age range of 38-59 years. The inclusion criterion was previous experience in the field of sensual mindful touch. The previous experience referred to so-called individual sessions in which the interviewees were treated by a person who was professionally trained in this field, who offers this form of massage as a healing massage, and/or who leads workshops in which this form of touch is taught.

The basic idea was to explore whether and what changes have taken place in perception, experience, and behavior about different components of human sexuality as described before according to the Sexocorporel Approach. At the same time, open-ended questions of exploratory nature were used to give the interview partners space to explore further hypotheses.

The use of terms turned out to be difficult. Not only each therapist but also each therapeutic direction develops new terms and uses existing ones differently. What exactly is sex, for example? What should an act contain to be called sex? What is the beginning of a sexual act? Is a sexual fantasy or masturbation already a sexual act, or only sexual intercourse (meaning vaginal penetration in heterosexual intimacy) itself? Another difficulty resulted from the fact that the aspects examined were difficult to translate clearly enough in

colloquial language. Sexologists trained in the Sexocorporel Approach, for example, differentiate between sexual arousal (i.e. vasocongestion in the genitals, physiological change in the body) and pleasure (a complex of emotions felt during the physiological arousal of the body) or between pleasure and desire (the lustful anticipation of pleasurable sexual activities), as well as between sources of arousal (the five senses and fantasies) and codes of attraction (emotional and sexual individual preferences of body shapes and personality traits). Inquiring about changes in feelings of gender, sexual archetype, or genital self-image without using these terms and/or without minimal explanation of what they are about proved to be a distinct challenge. The limitations of the study are undoubtedly that the author could not approach the topic in an unbiased way as she teaches sensual mindful touch.

The selection of interviewees also consisted of people who had experienced individual sessions as well as participated in self-awareness groups. The author knew them personally - they were all participants in her groups. This could have unintentionally put pressure on them and pushed the answers in a certain direction. In addition, these were people who were looking for new experiences and some of them were especially searching for Tantra experiences in the first place. This may have contributed to the fact that they were particularly open to corresponding experiences. It is even likely that only people who experienced this as a very positive experience agreed to be interviewed. The range of motivation and motives for this search (Tantra) have been very different, as became clear in the interviews. However, the leitmotif for all of them was the search for new spaces, possibilities, and suggestions for more fulfilling sexuality.

## 4. Results and Discussion

The interviews nevertheless showed that the erotic, sensual, and sexual potential of the interviewees had increased. The following paragraphs present the main results of this research:

*Sexual function and arousal mode:* Expansion of the arousal mode by using the body's resources in a wider way. New, positive sexual experiences, such as vaginal orgasms by women who were not able to reach it before, better control of arousal patterns in men with premature ejaculation, the experience of male orgasms without ejaculation as well as multiple orgasms without ejaculation could be experienced. These new experiences correlate with the hypotheses of the Sexocorporel Approach, according to which an improvement in the sexual function - like the ones described above - can take place by expanding the arousal mode from a mechanical and pressure-based one to a more flexible mode with further variations in the use of the resources of the body - such as different touch modality (from a monotone and mechanical one to one more sensitive, sensual and playful).

*Gender Identity:* The interviewees' statements also suggest that the feeling of being a gendered being, i.e. a human being with its own individually shaped genitality, was reinforced. This genitality appears to be much richer and more complex in the interviewees' statements than a heteronormative

perspective would suggest. Interestingly, something is mentioned that could initially be read as a contradiction, but in fact, it is not. These people often feel that their biological - in this case, male/female - genitality is reinforced. This means, among other things, that their genital image is perceived as clearer, more contoured, stronger, and more potent and this feeling is also confirmed by their partner. However, this does not mean that they live their sexuality more as a sexually archetypal ›man‹ (being intrusive) or ›woman‹ (being receptive), but rather that they can flow much more freely between the poles and allow both masculine/intrusive and feminine/receptive elements to become part of their sexual life. Women can be both receptive and intrusive like men, and both enjoy these different possibilities without being insecure in their sense of belonging to a specific gender. This greater role flexibility contributes to avoiding a strong polarization within the couple's sexual intimacy.

*Body Intelligence:* The essential factors for strengthening the inner feeling of our sexual/genital dimension seem to be the intensive and prolonged touch of the body and the sensual attention dedicated to the genitals. The genital is touched in a variety of ways over a longer period and in an expectation-free, non-judgmental and caring attitude. The development - or rediscovery - of what can be called our *body intelligence* through deceleration, conscious awareness, and heightened sensitivity seems to allow access to new inner spaces that were previously hidden or inaccessible. This body intelligence is the ability that enables us to be centered in ourselves, thus being able to identify and express with greater clarity our desires and needs.

*The skin ego and self-centering:* The first thing we perceive as a living being is likely to be a feeling of intimate bodily contact. The *skin ego* that Anzieu [17] speaks of is formed in childhood in contact with a loving mother (or other caregiver), but continues to be nurtured - throughout life - by mindful sensual touch. At first, it is a world of touch and skin, it is skin sensations that stimulate the perceptual and consciousness system, form the background for a comprehensive sense of existence and enable the creation of a first psychic space. The perception of this first psychic space built the basement of what later will enable us to be centered and in contact with ourselves. Based on the experience of a body surface, a conception of oneself is developed as an I that contains psychic contents such as desires, ideas, needs, and limits. It seems to be precisely these mindful, sensual touches, which are usually performed slowly with little pressure and in a warm environment, that can address optimally our CT fibers. As Jonsson et al. [18] have found - exactly these types of fibers are responsible for transmitting those stimuli to the brain which gives us a pleasant feeling. They activate in fact the *insula posterior*, which - among other functions - is responsible for the emotional aspects of tactile processes. Through this kind of touching experience, we reinforce our skin ego thus remaining centered in ourselves.

*Integrity through integration:* The holistic touches allow a

growing sense of integrity through the integration of rejected parts; an inner merging into ourselves becomes possible. A merging of body parts and partial aspects of our personality takes place, which until then were perceived as separate, rejected, not belonging together, and not as part of a whole. In this sense, traumatizing experiences can be integrated, processed, or even dissolved. As described in the interviews, it is precisely these touches that touch the whole person, without boundaries and without excluding (body) parts, that convey this feeling of wholeness from the outside, while the receiving person is being touched in this way by another person. Experiencing being touched in the whole body - including the parts, which are usually not included - in a mindful non-judgmental, expectation-free way enables a kind of inner fusion of all the rejected parts of our personality. This process can activate a deeper loving and tolerant acceptance of oneself, which is usually referred to as ›self-love‹. It is precisely this process that is set in motion by a holistic touch that does not exclude any part of the body - a process that is intentional but free of expectations, and that has the intention of lovingly accompanying the touched persons on their journey of discovery and development without judgment. There is no goal to reach, the touch does not aim for any kind of sexual reaction although sexual reactions, sensations, and feelings in the touched person are not excluded, and if they do come they are welcome the same way as all other sensations and feelings are.

*Intimacy and bonding:* Feeling connected, and being able to be in contact with the other person, is a central need within a fulfilling love relationship. The results of the interviews showed that learning, experiencing, and practicing mindful sensual touch deepens intimate contact, making it more complex. In the process, the perception of connection and also the ability to stay connected to the partner is strengthened.

The embryo develops its first internal concept of closeness in the womb. Loving touch is fundamental for the development of feelings of bonding between mother and child and for the release of hormones that set growth processes in motion and - as Moberg [19] has shown - for the production of oxytocin, the main component of the *resting and bonding system*. This system correlates with trust, openness, and curiosity. At any age, attentive sensual touch sets a circuit in motion that triggers pleasant feelings and builds trust through the transmission via CT fibers. In turn, this fact contributes to increasing the motivation to repeat intimate sexual encounters. The repeated fulfilling intimate encounters make one feel more open and brave to show oneself as a sexual being with one own personality to the partner. A sex-positive mood spreads into the couple's everyday life. CT fibers react to slow touches with a certain intensity of pressure. They sort out those touches that are important for our emotional and social life. Activating CT fibers correlates with positive feelings of well-being. According to Linden [20], they are probably also mediators of erotic touch. Touch is perceived as erotic with particularly slow stimuli and it is precisely these decelerated touch

stimuli that are a central feature of mindful sensual touch.

*Non-verbal communication:* Non-verbal emotional communication is central to functional relationships. It is precisely when sexuality has become unsatisfactory or even at a standstill that it becomes indispensable to rebuild the emotional bridge between partners. As Field [1] has shown, emotions can be clearly expressed through certain touches. Prosocial emotions such as love, gratitude, and sympathy are most convincingly communicated non-verbally. Touch is an immediate emotional form of communication and is more powerful than verbal contact. Non-verbal emotional communication takes place through touch as well as body language, facial expressions, breath, and sounds. Emotional intensity and expression of emotions such as feelings of pleasure during sex can be intensified through the practice of mindful sensual touch, as was clearly mentioned in the interviews. Emotional communication with the partner during sex improves.

*Orgasm fixation:* As Field [1] has shown in her studies, and as was also noted in the interviews, the positive effects of mindful sensual touch are felt not only by the touched but equally by the toucher: touching and being touched flow into each other. One cannot touch without being touched. A shift of interest in the encounter with the partner seems to be another result of the repeated practice of mindful sensual touch: from the fixation on orgasm and pure satisfaction to more sensuality and the search for deeper fulfillment, for moments of connection, of being held without any pressure. A closer touch relationship develops. This also seems to correlate with the results of a study by Field [1], according to which almost two-thirds of the people asked would rather be held lovingly than have sex. In sexological practice, clients with such an orgasm fixation are not uncommon. A significant development in the couple dynamic is achieved when the partners can go beyond this and live a sexuality that does not run according to a certain pattern and that refrains from an orgasm fixation. Through the practice of mindful sensual touch, such a shift occurs without the partners mentioning it as a goal beforehand.

## 5. Conclusion

The form of contact presented here has not yet gained widespread recognition in the context of sexual therapy; professional providers are thus moving into a grey area. Nevertheless, there are several practical implications for sexual therapy practice: Concerning the expansion of erotic, sensual, and sexual potential through the practice of mindful, sensual touch, it seems sensible to integrate this practice as a possible complement to sex therapy.

Depending on the individual problem, psychological stability, and openness to such an offer, participation in a group or individual self-experience setting could help to solve various sexual problems. In addition, it would make sense to develop low-threshold learning and practice formats for clients who would like to approach the topic of mindful sensual touch more cautiously. As a third option, it would be

conceivable to create a mixed offer in which both low-threshold exercises with guidance take place in the practice or in the group and develop audio files that guide more advanced exercises for implementation at home.

Teaching the basic elements of mindful sensual touch to future sex counselors and therapists would be recommended in this sense. This would mean providing resources for this aspect within clinical sexology academic studies<sup>1</sup>.

Since July 2017 (in Germany), the situation has changed again due to the new prostitution law, because now also professional providers of mindful sensual massages are supposed to register as sex workers. This certainly does not contribute to making the valuable and healing aspects of this practice visible and socially acceptable. The law may also limit the willingness of the sex counselor to recommend this method.

No study related to the topic of this paper could be found in the scientific literature. This work is intended as a scientific contribution to the recognition of the effectiveness of mindful sensual touch on human sexual life and to support its acceptance in the context of sexual therapy and sexual education for adults.

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<sup>1</sup>After completing and presenting the results of this qualitative research the Hochschule Merseburg in Germany has established a learning module on mindful sensual touch within the clinical sexology studies. This module is held by the author of this research.