

The Art of  
**RECEIVING**  
and  
**GIVING**

THE WHEEL OF CONSENT

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## CHAPTER 1

# Two Offers

*What do you want to do to me?  
What do you want me to do to you?*  
—Harry Faddis

I have the good fortune to have misspent my youth. Growing up in the hippie years offered some splendid adventures and burst any illusions I might have had about what was normal. I questioned everything, explored, and sat in many hot springs with other adventurers. For this, I am thankful.

Some years later, I learned chiropractic, which naturally got my hands on many, many people (even more people than my hippie years). My hands learned to take in a tremendous amount of information: which joints were moving, where they were stuck, muscle tone. Scientists and healers were starting to talk about the mind-body connection—that we could understand ourselves by becoming aware of our bodies, how we move and breathe, or as the case may be, how we don't move or breathe. I remember one time in a workshop being invited to lie backwards over a cushion so that my rib cage opened up in front. When I did so, I became aware of my heartache, both physical and emotional, and burst into tears. No narrative of what or why; just moving my body into a new position brought it up.

During those years, I learned co-counseling, which is pairing up with someone and taking turns listening to each other. I learned how to receive helpful attention from others and how to give it. For this I am thankful too. I learned that when it was my turn, it really was my turn, and when it

was their turn, it really was their turn. I learned some fundamentals about human nature and where we so often get stuck, and I learned how to make good use of my turn.

In my midforties, I attended a women's workshop on sexuality. I remember this feeling at the end of the workshop: as if I had started out with a number of ideas, like sex, love, attraction, and arousal, all in some kind of relation to each other. During the workshop, all those words had been thrown into the air to resettle into some new configuration, and I had no idea what that would be. All I knew was that it would be different. And it was.

One thing that became clear was that my sexuality belonged to me. The realization was so sharp that it made me wonder what I had been thinking all those years before. As a woman of my generation, I had learned that my sexuality was always in response to someone else's—someone else's desire, someone else's idea of what was sexy. But now it belonged to me. I learned that we are each the source of our own eroticism, and we can bring it out to play if, when, how, and with whom we choose.

I got together with a few others who had attended, and we met regularly for some years. Eros became something of a spiritual path for me. *What is the nature of this force within me? What does it mean to have a body capable of this much pleasure?* And perhaps ironically, *Why is it that the more I attend to my body experience, the more spiritual it feels?* For that matter, what is “spiritual” anyway? Heck, what is “sex” anyway? We experimented with movement, play, touch, and massage, and we had much laughter and many tears. For this journey I am also thankful.

After some years of exploring, I became interested in offering some of this new insight to others. I left my chiropractic practice in a small town, moved to the city, and opened up a new practice. My brochure said something like “I guide you in experiences that help you learn about who you are sexually and heal the confusions and struggles you have with it. I keep you safe, support your exploring, and open new doors of possibility for you.”

A little vague, yes, because essentially I didn't know what I was doing. I was good at listening, I was good at boundaries, I was good at supporting people in emotional states, and I was good with bodies in various states of undress and arousal. What I didn't know yet was what it would look

like. What would we actually do in a session? And how would I have known? Nobody else I knew, other than a couple of those friends from my exploring days, had ever heard of such a thing. There were a few pioneers, and I am thankful for them, but mostly we were making it up as we went along. Eventually we did figure out what to do in our sessions, which I now frame as coaching, broadly defined. I began offering workshops too and these days train other practitioners in the Wheel of Consent.

At one of many workshops I attended during my exploring years, we learned the Three Minute Game, which was developed by Harry Faddis. It was a game of interaction based on two questions. We took turns asking those questions and then did whatever they led to that we had agreed on. I came to see each question as a kind of offer. A couple years later as I was starting to see clients, I dusted the game off and put it to work. I figured it would give me a sense of the client's level of comfort and skill with touch. It did show me that—and much more. The Three Minute Game became the foundation of my practice and led to the model of the Wheel of Consent and this book.

## THE FIRST OFFER

The first offer of the Three Minute Game is this: “How do you want me to touch you?”

(The original game included “...for three minutes,” and that's useful for a number of reasons, but for now, to simplify, I'm going to leave it off. We'll come back to it.)

## HEARING THE OFFER

Ask a hundred people that question, which I have done, and here is what you will find: very few will know right away. Many will have no idea. Most will fidget a bit and get awkward. Some will say, “I don't know. No one has ever asked me that!” or “I don't know, I'm usually the giver” or “Wow, am I supposed to know that? Does anyone know that?” Some of them will have an extremely hard time, feeling ashamed, confused, or lost. A great many people, instead of telling you what they want, will tell

you what they wouldn't mind terribly much: "Well, you could rub my shoulders, I guess." Some will ask what you would like: "Hmm, would you like to stroke my arm?"

I learned a lot by simply asking, including how tender and vulnerable it is to ask for what we want, how much fear and doubt we have about receiving it, and mainly how out of practice we are. The thing about working with clients is that whatever you see in your clients, you'll eventually (if you are honest) see in yourself. Once I saw this dynamic, I began to see where I was doing the same thing, where in my life I wasn't asking for what I wanted, where I was afraid or embarrassed or tenderhearted or didn't know.

Eventually, sometimes with much coaching, most clients were able to make a request. "Will you scratch my back?" or "Will you stroke my arms?" Then once the touch was happening, there was more to notice. Many people didn't know if it was okay to change their minds or make a refinement and ended up going along with something they didn't really want. This one turned out to be nearly universal.

At a workshop I was leading, Amy asked for her shoulders to be rubbed. Brent stood behind her and did so, both apparently comfortable and happy. After the three minutes were up, we talked. Amy said, "The first minute was wonderful. Then I spent the next two minutes wondering if it was okay to ask him to go lighter."

Not only do we go along with something, we often try to make ourselves like it more. Some years back, a colleague asked me, "I have a new girlfriend, and she likes to go down on me. It's okay but just doesn't do it for me. How can I become a better receiver?" Now, "a better receiver" can mean a lot of things, which is part of the problem, but he was thinking that because he was being done-to, his job was to like it. Essentially he was asking, *How do I get better at liking something I don't actually like?*

As I kept asking people this question, "How do you want me to touch you?" I was struck again and again by how strong our tendency is to go along with what we think we are supposed to want or like. Why on earth would we do that when it's our turn to have what we want?

One reason is that asking for what we want and receiving it are inherently vulnerable. It's just not that easy. Another reason is that we

are confused about who it's really for. We act as if it's really for the benefit of the other person, the one who is "giving." They ask what we want, and we answer by saying what we don't mind too much. Then we go along with what we don't want and try to change ourselves. I have some ideas about why that is the case, which we'll explore in this book.

Another reason is that sometimes we don't know what it feels like to have something really be for us. It turned out that the key was finding exactly what we want.

In one session in my studio, as per his request, I was stroking Ken's hand.

Ken: Well, I know you said it's for me, but I'm not sure what that means. I guess I'm just used to whatever happens.

Me: Hmm...yeah, so for right now, we're going to stop this, and you get to notice what it is that actually sounds good to you.

Ken: I have no idea. Would you do some different things and let me say if I like them?

Me: Sure! (pressing into his palms) How's this?

Ken: It's okay.

Me: Would you like more of it or something else?

Ken: Something else, please.

Me: (squeezing his fingers) How about this?

Ken: It's okay.

Me: I'm curious here, Ken. If I just kept going, what would you do?

Ken: Nothing. It's all okay with me.

Me: So let's find something that is not okay but is fabulous.

(We try a few more things.)

Me: And this?

Ken: Oohhh, yeah! That is really good.

(We do that a while, and he visibly sinks into it.)

Me: Okay, now, is this for me, or is this for you?

Ken: Oohhhh. I get it. This is for me, isn't it?

Me: Yes, it is.

He looked like he was holding back tears, and we sat quietly.

Yes, it can be hard to notice what we want and to ask for it. If these are not bad enough, there is what happens when we do finally, miraculously,

receive the touch we want. We feel comfort and pleasure, and then that brings up more feelings of guilt, shame, and doubt. Sometimes the feelings are a little tug at our heart, and sometimes they are powerful. One person said, “There’s something deep and primitive going on inside me, enjoying his touch, maybe needing—fear of needing? It’s like an old warrior not wanting to admit they have needs, even deep needs like touch.”

As I kept on making the offer and hearing these kinds of responses, I came to see that the crux of this kind of receiving was to distinguish between what we want and what we don’t mind. In order to do that, we have to learn that there is in fact something we want and that it matters. As we learn to notice what we want, to trust it, value it and communicate it, the experience of receiving opens up into a rich, deep, gorgeous landscape. Not because we get better at going along but because we get better at requesting exactly what we want. This taught me that receiving is inherently wonderful. If it’s not wonderful, it’s not because you’re not a “good receiver.” It’s because it’s not the thing you want.

As we learn to make that distinction, receiving the touch we want brings us joy, pleasure, and gratitude. We come back to this theme throughout the practice and the book.

#### MAKING THE OFFER

What about the other side, the person who is making the offer: “How do you want me to touch you?”

The most common thing that happened when people made this offer was that they forgot they could set limits or say no. They sometimes assumed that they had to do whatever their partner asked of them. As someone said, “I’m not really comfortable with that, but I didn’t know how to say no” or they forgot they could change their mind. “I thought this would be okay but it wasn’t, but I kept going because I didn’t know what else to do.”

During a workshop, Kay was visibly tense when her partner asked her for something. She appeared to be weighing it in her mind. When I reminded her that there was a limit to what she was willing to do and that that is a good thing, she was relieved. She said, “Oh my gosh, you

mean I don’t have to do that? It never occurred to me that it didn’t have to happen.” When she thought about what she *was* willing to do, she relaxed and became delighted to do it.

I began to see that when we are worried about having to give too much, we become afraid to give anything at all. When we take full responsibility for our limits, we become relaxed and generous within those limits. It is backward from what we might think. The way to joy and generosity is not to push ourselves, but to own our limits.

I learned to take more notice of how the giver was setting it up. Did they find out what the receiver wanted, or did they get started anyway?

At a workshop:

Dane: How would you like me to touch your hands? (Picks up his partner’s hand to begin)

Me: Oops, I didn’t hear him ask for what he wanted. Did you?

Dane: Oops, no, I guess I didn’t.

Me: Then how do you know what he wants?

Dane: Oh, wow, I didn’t even realize I did that. Do overs!

Dane: (to Mick) How would you like me to touch your hands?

Mick: I’d like you to massage them.

Dane: (picks one up and starts)

Me: Do you know what kind of massage, soft or firm or whatever?

Dane: Again? I did that again? (to Mick) Soft or firm or whatever?

Mick: Whatever is fine.

Dane: See? He doesn’t care! (laughter)

Me: Then you get to hone your art of finding out. Don’t let him off the hook. (more laughter)

Dane: Okay, how exactly? Our teacher is strict.

Mick: Hmm. I don’t know. Actually, you know I don’t actually want massage. I think I’d rather have you sort of stroke it softly.

Dane: Front of your hand or back?

Mick: Wow, this is hard. (laughter again) Back.

Dane (to me): Do I start now?

Me: Do you have the information you need? And he asked you? And did you say yes?

Dane (to Mick): Yes. (to me) Yes.

Me: Okay then!

Sometimes the givers, in their enthusiasm, expanded on what was asked for, “giving” more. They thought—well, I’m not sure what they thought. Either that the receiver didn’t actually know what they wanted or that they, the giver, knew better, or that if they gave more, they would impress the receiver. Or sometimes the giver just didn’t notice they were doing more.

Then there is this one: doing to get a response we want to see. This is so easy to do! I’ve done this, and I imagine you have too. We want to see the person relax, or moan and sigh, or be impressed with our skill, or have a mind-blowing breakthrough. This trap is especially common with sexual touch. I’ve found that mostly we don’t know we’re doing this until we don’t get the response we want; then we say “It didn’t work.” We blame ourselves for not having the right technique or blame the receiver for not being liberated enough or not being able to surrender. There are many problems with this, and we’ll be looking at them.

This role, doing for the benefit of the receiver, taught me that we don’t own their experience—they do. What we do is contribute to their experience in some way that is useful and meaningful to them, and that makes it meaningful to us. When we can do that, it becomes satisfying to us, no matter their response.

Like the other side, once I saw where my clients were getting lost, I noticed it more in myself. Where was I giving to get something back: appreciation, praise, feeling good about myself? Where was I giving what I thought they wanted, or thought they should want, without finding out what they actually wanted? Where was I giving more than I honestly felt I wanted to? I still ask myself those questions.

That’s both sides of the first offer. Let’s look at the second offer.

## THE SECOND OFFER

The second offer is this: “How do you want to touch me?” This is where it really got interesting.

## HEARING THE OFFER

I’ve always been a tactile person. Making mud pies as a kid, feeling the velvety leaves of plants or the warmth of a horse’s neck. When my play buddy at the original workshop asked me this question, “How do you want to touch me?” I knew right away what it meant. It meant I could use my hands to feel them. *Hell yeah!* I could feel the shape of their arm, the contours of their hand. I could explore the dips and hollows of their clavicle. I could get a good grip on the muscles of their thigh. They graciously gave me this gift, and I drank it in.

When I used this question with clients (and a few willing friends), I found that it was rarely so clear. Maybe two or three understood right away that it was for their own enjoyment, and they would say “Oh! I’d like to play with your hair!” or “May I explore your neck?”

Almost everyone else became confused. They most often responded by saying what they were willing to do *for me*. They would say, “Would you like a shoulder rub?” or “I’m fine with anything you want” (a generous offer but doesn’t answer the question). It was as if the act of touching and the idea that they were giving were welded in their minds, and I came to see that for most people, they are.

I thought, *They just need a reminder to do what feels good to their hands. They just need a little permission.* It rarely worked that way. It turned out to be much more difficult for people. I tried everything I could think of to change the focus from touching for the other person to touching for themselves. I tried to get them to let their hands do what felt good to their hands. I coached them, reminding them to feel the shape and the texture. I reminded them that this was a gift they were receiving, not one they were giving.

I tried as many different ways to say it, coach it, and set it up as I could think of in order to get people to stop giving. I learned to use the word “feel” instead of “touch.” To feel is to touch for the purpose of taking in information or pleasure. You feel the baby’s bath water to make sure it’s not too hot; you feel your partner’s skin because it’s pleasant to you.

I learned to have people say “May I...” (feel your back, explore your hand, etc.). I noticed that “May I...” made it clearer that they were asking for a favor. It turned out to be a tender question and often an emotional one. Often just

asking the question would bring up confusion, fear, or shame. I tried telling people they could be selfish. For some, that helped, but for others the word “selfish” was so offensive as to stop them completely.

For a few, the offer itself made no sense. At a workshop, Carrie had given her partner the shoulder rub he’d asked for, completely comfortable and generous. Then he asked, as per the instructions, “How would you like to touch me?” She looked to me for direction, and I went over to them.

Carrie: Huh? What are you talking about? I don’t understand the question.

Me: He is inviting you to touch him in some way that you want.

Carrie: Okay, uh, why would I want to do that?

Me: I don’t know. Maybe you don’t, or maybe you are curious about the fuzzy sweater he’s wearing, what it might feel like in your hands, or maybe you’d like to feel that soft spot in front of his ear (me trying to coach her).

Carrie (to him): Is that what you want?

Me: The previous question was about what he wanted. This question is about what *you* want.

Carrie: This is crazy. I have never done this before.

Sometimes people would say, “But giving you pleasure IS what gives me pleasure.” This got me pondering two routes to pleasure, direct and indirect, which we’ll come back to in Lesson 2.

Asking the question set the stage, and then there was the experience of it. I knew that *feeling* a person felt different than *giving* to them, and it was evident from the start that this was true for others. There was a definite aha moment when the difference clicked and the change was visible. For some people, all it took was to fiddle around a little. “Oh, yeah, this does feel good to me.” For many, the experience of it was seriously elusive. Even with all the coaching, they couldn’t find it. What was going on?

I had a client for whom touching for his own pleasure was particularly elusive. He was stroking my arm and could not stop trying to give no matter how I described it. I looked over to my shelf, saw a river stone with some interesting textures, and thought, *Ah! Let’s see what he does when there is no one to give to!* I picked it up and put it in his hands, inviting him to feel it. I wanted to help him access the ability to take in sensation and feel it as pleasure. I naively expected him to say, “Oh, now

I get it!” but he didn’t. He had trouble with that too. He couldn’t take in the texture or anything about it; there was certainly no pleasure in it. I realized his challenge was not that he didn’t know how to feel a person. He didn’t know how to feel anything. He knew it was a stone, so he was taking in some basic information, but he was unable to attend to it or enjoy the sensation of it.

This was a big aha for me. I started using this exercise with everyone and found that though a few people were already “switched on” (very few), most people needed some time to take in the sensation (a few minutes to twenty minutes or more), and for some, it was extremely difficult.

It was clear we were onto something. When the sensation became pleasurable, when it clicked, it was often an emotional moment. Tenderness, relief, joy, shame, confusion. Something was going on in there!

Over the years, I’ve heard many responses to this exercise:

“This is weird...”

“I feel sad. I have no idea why.”

“I didn’t know I could feel this much!”

“I know what it is and I know what it is for, but I don’t know what it *feels* like.”

“I don’t feel alone.”

“Once you feel that avocado, you can never go back!”

“I have been using my hands in my work for years. I have a new dimension now.”

This exercise turned out to be a foundation for everything else we’ll be doing. I will be taking you through it in the lessons.

So yes, learning to feel someone for your own pleasure turns out to be challenging for almost everyone. I learned ways to make it more accessible. I learned that how we position our bodies makes a difference as does slowing down. I came to appreciate how tender it is for most people and how foreign. I learned to give it time. It often doesn’t click the first time, and then when it does, it takes coming back to it again and again.

As people rediscover touching for their own pleasure, they often feel like they are recovering something that has been lost and is found again, which is exactly what happens. They recover the ability to touch another

with no agenda, with no trying to get it right, to enjoy the sensation of their hands. It shows us that we are right to want to touch each other, and there is a sense of relief, freedom, and joy.

This experience made me reflect on what I meant by giving and receiving. It was obvious that the person “giving” the touch was not giving a gift—they were receiving one. This made me scratch my head.

#### MAKING THE OFFER

What about the other side, the person who is making the offer: “How do you want to touch me?”

When you make this offer, you are offering to be touched in the way the other person wants, not necessarily the way you want. What you are offering is access to yourself. People’s feelings about hearing this offer, as we said, were consistently challenging, but their feelings about making this offer were all over the map. For some it was easy, natural, and a relief at having nothing to do. For some it was worrisome, disconcerting, even nearly debilitating. This turned out to be a major learning opportunity. Again, the biggest assumption people made was that they had to go along with whatever the other person wanted.

Sometimes you have an experience that makes it all crystal clear. Cal was in his sixties and struggling with his sexuality and confidence. He had had only a few dates and was seriously intimidated by women. Over several sessions, we explored the offers gently and slowly. It became his turn to ask me, “How do you want to touch me?” He looked worried, and I could tell he was trying very hard to trust me. As one does before jumping into a cold river, he leaned forward, then backed off, then leaned forward again, gathering courage. *Okay, ready? I think I can do that. Okay, ready, here we go!* He took a giant leap of faith and blurted out, “Do whatever you want!”

Me: Oh dear! Is that what you thought the question was?

Cal: Uh, that’s not it?

Me: What’s actually true is that though there might be something I would like to do, *you* get to decide if that is okay with you.

Cal (after a pause): I do?

Me: Yes, you do.

Cal: Oh.

It was clear at that moment that it had never occurred to him that he had any choice in the matter. So deep was this belief that he could not hear the question. The instructions were “How do you want to touch me?” He heard that as “Do whatever you want.” Those are very different things.

I thought, *No wonder he is afraid of relationships! If you don’t know that you get any choice about what happens, how can you get close to anyone? You can’t risk being in the same room.* One has only a few options then. You can go along with everything and become a doormat, you can try to control everything, you can stay on the doing side of every interaction, you can stay away from people altogether, or some combination. If you don’t know and trust, bone deep, that you have a choice, you’ll have to do one of those.

This and other experiences showed me that the one factor underlying whether we can enjoy being touched, in any way at all, is knowing that we have a choice in the matter. It turned out to be a direct correlation. If you know you can say no or stop, you relax. If you don’t know you can say no or stop, you can’t afford to make such an offer. You will be on guard, worried about what’s coming next, because you have to be. I came to see that knowing it in our minds is not enough. We have to know it with our bodies—that is, we have to have a body experience of exercising that choice.

That day brought a big insight for me about how deep this goes, how invisible it is to us when we’re in it, and how confusing and disempowering it is. Again, seeing it so clearly here let me see the same dynamic in myself. Where was I forgetting I had a choice?

This role of offering themselves to be touched for the other person’s enjoyment was surprisingly rich. People noticed they had a choice and learned how to exercise that choice. They learned, perhaps for the first time, that someone could enjoy them. They learned that they were giving a gift even when it felt wonderful to them. Often the learning was that they did in fact have a limit to what they were willing to let someone do to them and that owning their limits leads to joy and freedom.

This dynamic too made me reflect on what I meant by giving and receiving. The person who was being touched was not receiving a gift; they were giving one. More head scratching.

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It's been a long rich journey, one that I am still on. As I learned to take responsibility for my desires and my limits, everything became easier. I became more honest about requesting. I learned to appreciate the gifts I had been given. I still have my comfort limits for what I can ask for without shame, and I still have places I give away more than I want to. Of course I do. And I still have places where I am entitled and unaware of what others are giving up for me.

#### TWO OFFERS, FOUR QUADRANTS

Now we come to the part of the story where I notice that each of the two offers creates two roles and that the four roles are each a combination of who is doing and who it's for. This discovery turned out to be so compelling that I spent the next ten years pondering it, exploring it, and developing it.

I'll come back to this after the next chapter. First we have to understand about receiving and giving—where the head scratching led to.

### THE THREE MINUTE GAME

This is a game for two (or more) people.

Two questions, each one an offer:

- How do you want me to touch you for three minutes?
- How do you want to touch me for three minutes?

Each person takes a turn asking each question and then you do what was agreed upon.

When your partner asks what you want, pause to notice what sounds wonderful. Ask for it as directly as you can.

When you ask your partner what they want and they tell you, pause again and notice, *Is this a gift I can give with a full heart?* Set limits as needed.

(Yes, you can change your mind in the middle, and yes, you can ask for more than three minutes, provided you both take an equal amount of time.)

Set a timer! Repeat for a few decades.

#### VARIATIONS

##### 1) The original game:

This is the original Three Minute Game as developed by Harry Faddis. As you can see, the questions are more open ended.

- What do you want me to do to you for three minutes?
- What do you want to do to me for three minutes?

This is the game I started with and then changed to the “touch” version because it related more to what I was teaching.

##### 2) The May I/Will You Game:

You can dispense with the two offers and start right off with the requests.

- May I...?
- Will you...?

Some people find this version with the two requests less confusing. I like hearing the offers, because hearing that my partner wants to know what I want makes it easier to ask. Either way is fine. The same dynamics are created.

### **3) Talking and Listening:**

- What would you like to say for three minutes while I listen?
- What would you like to hear from me for three minutes?

It's recommended that you not use this time to complain about your partner.

### **4) Children:**

Here's how to play the game with children: Keep the game focused on what the child wants and never what the adult wants. The adult asks the child, "What do you want me to do to you?" and/or "What do you want to do to me?" You are asking them what they want. They never ask you what you want. Later, when they're older, they will naturally begin to ask what you want. That's fine as long as they initiate it, not you. (And if it's a wrestling match—make sure the kid wins. *Never* physically overpower a child.)

### **5) Playing with three people:**

The first question, "How do you want me to touch you?" becomes "How do you want *us* to touch you?" You can ask to have both people touching you or one person touching you and the other witness, sit aside, leave the room, or even cheer—it's up to you!

The second question, "How do you want to touch me?" becomes the two people asking, "How do you want to touch *us*?" Again, you can ask to feel both at the same time, alternate between both people, or ask to feel one while the other witnesses, sits aside, cheers, or leaves the room. Again, you get to decide.