

Come as You Are
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Chapter 1 - Anatomy: No Two Are Alike

- Everyone is made up of the same parts, organized in different ways. No two are alike.
- No one should be experiencing pain, if so talk to a healthcare provider, otherwise everyone is perfect just as they are.
- Genitals in soft porn may have been digitally altered to appear “tucked in”, vulvas don’t look that way.
- Find a mirror or phone and actually look at your clitoris. Knowing where your clitoris is, is power.

Chapter 2 - Dual Control Model: Sexual Personality

- The brain has a sexual “accelerator” that responds to “sexually relevant” stimulation - anything you see, hear, smell, touch, taste, or imagine that your brain has learned to associate with sexual arousal.
- Your brain also has sexual “brakes” that respond to “potential threats” - anything you see, hear, smell, touch, taste, or imagine that your brain interprets as a good reason not to be turned on right now. This can be anything.
- There is actually no “innate” sexually relevant stimulus or threat; our accelerators and brakes learn when to respond through experience. And that learning process is different for males and females.
- People vary in how sensitive their brakes and accelerators are. Take the quiz on page 54 to find out how sensitive you are... everyone is different.

SIS (Inhibitors) 11/20 Sexual brakes based on context. Risky or novel situations may turn on brakes. Stress: anxiety, overwhelm, exhaustion can escalate brakes and reduce interest in and response to sexual signals. 60% of women fall in this range.

SES (Exciters) 11/24 Sensitivity to stimuli depends on context. In high romance or eroticism, tune in readily to sexual stimuli; in low romance it may be challenging to get your attention. Recognize role context plays in arousal and pleasure and take steps to ramp up sexiness of your life contexts. 70% of women fall in this range.

Chapter 3 - Context: “One Ring” in the Emotional Brain

- The brain’s perception of sensation is context dependent. Like tickling (fun or irritating). Same sensation, different context...therefore different perception.
- When stressed, the brain interprets just about everything as a threat. If turned on, everything could be appealing. Because: context.
- Expecting (anticipating); Eagerness (wanting), and Enjoying (Liking) are separate functions of the brain. You can want without liking (craving), anticipate without wanting (dread), or any combination.
- For most people, the best context for sex is low stress + highly affectionate + explicitly erotic.

Sexual cues Assessment

Contexts - Positive

"I" want - He is eager too.
Doesn't automatically end in intercourse
Full Prelude/Day/Evening of connection

Contexts - Negative

Filling Need / Not Desire Oriented
I am easily distracted (including the need to later clean the sheets)
Lack of originality (no surprise or wonder)
Predictability

Chapter 4 - Emotional Context: Sex in a monkey brain

- Stress reduces sexual INTEREST in 80-90% of people and reduces sexual PLEASURE in everyone - even the 10-20% for whom stress increases interest. The way to deal with stress is to allow your body to "complete the stress response cycle.
- Trauma survivors' brains sometimes learn to treat sexually relevant stimuli as threats, so whenever the accelerator is activated, the brake is hit, too. Practice mindfulness to decouple them.
- In the right context, sex can attach us emotionally to new partners or reinforce emotional bonds in unstable relationships. AKA... sex and love are closely linked in our brains - but only in the right context.
- Sex that brings you closer to your partner, "advances the plot" as opposed to gratuitous sex, for no other reason than you can. To have better sex, give yourself a compelling reason to have sex, something important to move toward.

Attachment style tends to come from how we were parented.

Secure attachment: comfort sharing thoughts and feelings...rarely worry about partner ever leaving... comfortable being close... turn to romantic partner in times of need.

Anxious attachment will lead to clinging for fear of losing... separation distress...worry that partner will not want to stay with you...worry partner doesn't love them... they won't care about me as much as i care about them.

Avoidant attachment: prefer not to show feelings, difficult to depend on partner, don't open up... don't want close attachments.

Anxious attachment seek "solace sex"...sex is an attachment behavior...intense but not necessarily pleasurable. worry about sex and equate it with the quality of the relationship.
Insecure attachment (anxious or avoidant) interferes with sex. (See page 141-144)

Stress: Tend and Befriend can create stress. Especially for women who become the “relationship managers”. Women will reign in their own stress response to create space for the man to FEEL. The stress in the relationship will impact her more...she will hold her stress so the man can let go of his...she will become stuck, while he moves through his stress.

GARDEN METAPHOR:

Love is the rain and stress is the sun. Too much of either is not good...but the right balance and the garden thrives.

Allow time and space for the body to move through cycles of stress and reconnect with partner...this is essential to maximum pleasure.

Stress equals WEEDS in the garden metaphor. Must take time to tend the garden.

In NOT having sex for awhile, it changes the CONTEXT. Relieves the stress.

Exercise p 151

My top 3 stressors:

Guilt saying No...again / Stress he will want to have sex

Pressure to relieve his NEEDS vs. sharing desire together

Thinking there was something wrong with my libido was a huge stressor (cross that off list!)

Stress relievers: self care, journaling/writing, pilates, deep breathing, researching

Chapter 5: Cultural Context: A Sex Positive Life in a Sex Negative World

- We all grew up hearing contradictory messages about sex...which has led to ambivalence. The more aware of the conflicting messages the more choices to believe them or not.
- People resist letting go of self-criticism...because it can feel like “giving up hope” about becoming BETTER...but that is the opposite of how it works. Instead...when we really stop beating ourselves up...we begin to heal...and become even better than we have ever been before.
- Health is NOT based on weight. When we enjoy living in our body TODAY, we treat ourselves with kindness and compassion and sex will get better.
- Sexual disgust hits the brakes. This response is learned, not innate, and can be unlearned. Begin to notice “yuck” responses and then question if this improves sex life or hurts it... consider letting go of this interference (see chapter 9 for strategies)

GARDEN METAPHOR

Everyone is born with a little plot of rich fertile soil unique to itself. The brain and body are the soil of the garden and individual differences in SIS and SES are important characteristics of the inner garden, that has the same parts as everyone else, but organized in its own unique way. Family and culture plant the seeds and tend the garden, and they teach you how to tend it. The plant the seeds of language, attitudes, knowledge, habits about love and safety, body and sex.

Gradually we move to adolescence and we take on the responsibility of tending our OWN garden. We may look and see that family and society have planted “crap”...these invasive

weeds of sex-negative culture and body shaming and sex stigma have even come in from under the root system and across fences.

To have a healthy garden, we will have to go row by row and figure out what to keep and what to dig up and replace with something healthier.

Robin Milhausen, "We're raising women to be sexually dysfunctional, with all the 'no' messages we're giving them about diseases and shame and fear. And then as soon as they are eighteen, they're supposed to be sexual rock stars, multiorgasmic and totally uninhibited. None of the things we do in society prepare women for that."

Three core cultural messages: the moral message (you are evil), the medical message (you are diseased), and the media message (you are inadequate). If we see them, we can weed them out.

Women have been given cultural permission to criticize their own bodies...then punished if they praise themselves...if we say we like ourselves the way we are. This messes with sex - our pleasure, our desire, our sexual satisfaction.

"Criticizing = Stress = Reduced Sexual Pleasure"

Chapter 6: Arousal: Lubrication is NOT causation

- There's a 50% overlap between blood flow to a male's genitals and how turned on he feels. There's a **10%** overlap for women on how turned on she feels.
- The reason for the difference is that sexual relevant (expecting) is not the same thing as sexually appealing (enjoying). In men there is a lot of overlap between the two most of the time, and for women the overlap is context dependent.
- The difference is NOT because women are broken...they are women.
- The best way to tell if a woman is aroused is not in her genitals it is in her WORDS.

Non concordance is normal.

"The sexiest thing a man can do is take away as many brakes as possible".

GARDEN ANALOGY

For the female gardener, it takes more than ripeness to feel like having fruit (vs a male gardener, when the fruit feels ripe he is usually in the mood for fruit). For women it has more to do with the context in which she enjoys having fruit.

Chapter 7: Desire: Actually, it's NOT a drive

- About 15% of women have a spontaneous desire style - they want sex out of the blue.
- 30% experience responsive desire - they want sex when something erotic is happening.
- 55% or so ... experience some combination of the two depending on context.
- *Sex is NOT a drive, like hunger.* It's an "**incentive motivation system**" like curiosity...so stay curious. Curiosity and sex are fuel for desire. But like sex, curiosity is deprioritized with stress!

- **There is no such thing as SEX DRIVE. Can't find it...it is not lack of hormones.** we are not broken....we just need change of context.
- **Sex is NOT A NEED (which our society has used to foster an attitude of men's entitlement...and even the message to boys that they require outlets for sexual frustration release)**
- When sex feels like a drive, it's because of the little monitor in the emotional brain whose job is to reduce discrepancies. The monitor motivates to pursue novelty, pleasure, ambiguity etc.
- To increase sexual desire, increase novelty, pleasure, ambiguity, and intensity (increase your heart rate)

Low desire is a relationship issue. The partner with low desire is the one who wants sex too infrequently for the other partner's satisfaction. It's not that one is too low and one is too high... they are just different...at least in the CURRENT CONTEXT. The problem is not the difference is how the COUPLE MANAGEMENT is created.

Ex: A has spontaneous desire, and B has a responsive style. A feels rejected and undesirable because they do all the initiating, and B starts to feel pushed and resists more. A asks and asks and asks and feels rejected because B says no, no, no...and B will feel defensive, and also guilty and hurt because B feels like there must be something wrong. A may even wonder if there is something wrong with them for wanting sex so much. It can become a mess.

The answer is not desire...it's the context! More sexually relevant stimuli to activate the accelerator and fewer things putting on the brakes.

One Ring of brain if about moving forward or away... approach or avoid. There is only One Ring to rule all your emotional systems, activation of one motivational system can turn up the volume on activation of other motivational systems. What increases intensity of activation?

Strategy 1: Stuff that raises the heart rate. Do what excites you and gets your heart beating faster. You'll experience general arousal and your brain will notice your level of excitement; notice the person you are with, and decide "I think that person is exciting".

Strategy 2: Meaningful Challenges. Ways to "Advance the Plot" that is already at the "happily ever after" phase.

Neither of these strategies will work **if the brakes are on!!!!**

Turning off the offs

1. Make a plan. Specifically: What sex is worth having, and what will you do to create that in your life? Be concrete. specific. detailed.
2. Anticipate barriers. Make contingency plans.
3. Connect to your identity. (Don't just run, be a runner). Don't just have sex, be a deliciously erotic woman who is curious and playful about sex. Attempt to identify as a woman who loves to have sex (not just someone who does it...if we run because we have to we will hate it...same for sex)

“If I were a woman who loved sex, how would I overcome being too busy for sex”

“If I were a woman who loved sex, how would I overcome self-criticism”

TEND THE GARDEN...get rid of the weeds.

SEX THERAPY APPROACH FOR DESIRE REBUILDING

1. No sex... no genital contact or no orgasms for how long? So it feels like a substantial barrier. This will remove every trace of expectation or demand sex. This is a time to remove all things that B finds pushy. Removes dread.... “What if this amazing kiss turns into expectation of sex”... both partners can relax and enjoy shared physical intimacy.

2. Alternate Initiation. Break down the chasing dynamic so that neither feels pressured and neither feels deprived. Since there is no sex... the initiation is physical touch. No demand, no expectation, no pressure to perform. Just touching and pleasure and affectionate awareness of bodies. 20 minutes of uninterrupted, without distraction, time to explore. One partner indicates they are initiating... (get a code) ... negotiate a better time if that is not feeling right. (but stick to the new time together)

stage 1: one person touches the other (excluding underwear parts)...for the “touchers pleasure and then they switch.

stage 2: one person touches the other (excluding underwear parts)...for their own pleasure and their partners pleasure, and then switch

stage 3: one person touches other all over for partners pleasure, then switch

stage 4: simultaneous touching for mutual pleasure.

next: move toward penetration. first without thrusting (vaginal containment)...then thrusting without orgasm... negotiate a variation that works for both partners.

Person doing the touching must practice “self assertion” and the person being touched must practice “self protection”. the toucher must do what feels good and the touchee must stop what is uncomfortable. (traffic light idea...green, yellow, red)

Message for Partner B...who feels chased: You are NOT broken. You might feel stuck. You might be exhausted...and in need of renewal. These are all circumstances...they are not you. “It can be terribly frustrating for one partner to be feeling NOW while the other body is WARY... the more ready...the more wary... it is hard on both partners”... BUT she is there in you waiting to come out and play...she will get there when she feels safe enough”.

Message to Partner A... the one who wants sex and keeps asking for it. It can feel like B is withholding and that can feel awful...but your role is to put down your hurts and be the loving person who, it seems at some times, is the source of the hurts. You can worry that you want sex too much and you are pushing... you are not anything but who you are ...someone with a higher level of sexual interest...

You both will find a way to collaborate to a context that works for both of you. Give partner B space and time away from sex and just be there fully present emotionally and physically. Lavish her with affection and that affection is not a preamble for sex. Be warm and generous with your love... you won't run out.

Be kind to each other.

Chapter 8: Orgasm: The Fantastic Bonus

Ex: Orgasms were not Laurie's problem..once she got going, orgasms were reliable. But when stress was present in her life there was a stone wall between her and her pleasure. She and Johnny were learning to break down that wall by changing context...but then Johnny got cocky and pushed his luck. He started asking and pressing and chasing, which made Laurie feel more and more pressured and soon she started resenting the asking, especially since he knew that when she felt pressured her interest evaporated.

A perfectly normal and tempting reaction for Laurie would have been to say, "My life is out of whack, therefore my sexual interest is out of whack. So be it. No sex for me." It's a matter of priorities. And having sex for the other's pleasure, is not self satisfying. It feeds the stress.

Flying toward ecstasy: To have more and better orgasms, turn off all the offs and slow down how you turn on the ons. Let the whole brain get on the orgasm train.

Your pleasure belongs to you...to share or keep as you choose, to explore or not explore as you choose, to embrace or avoid as you choose. You were born with all the pleasure your body can feel. You were born entitled to the pleasure in whatever way your body receives it.

Create the context where you can experience pleasure, and sexual ecstasy will follow, given time, practice, and genuine solutions to turn off the offs.

- Orgasm happens in the brain, not the genitals
- 30% of women are reliably orgasmic from vaginal penetration alone. The remaining 70% are sometimes, rarely, or never orgasmic from penetration alone. The most common way is clitoris stimulation.
- Orgasm is not an evolutionary adaptation, necessary for survival. It is a bonus.
- To have bigger, better orgasms, turn off more offs, and turn on more ons.

Chapter 9: Meta-Emotions: The Ultimate Sex-Positive Context

The best trick: When Laurie chose pleasure - for herself. She notices what it is to be alive and move through her world. Be a source of joy for yourself. You can't be for others, if you don't do for yourself.

What have we learned so far:

- Women, as a group, have more sensitive brakes and less sensitive accelerators than men.
- To a greater degree than men, women's sexual response is sensitive to external circumstances and internal brain state—to context.
- Women are less likely than men to experience concordance between their genital response and their subjective arousal.
- And more women than men experience responsive or context sensitive desire.

- **How you feel about your sexuality, is more important than your sexuality itself.**
- **What to do? Start loving responsive desire. Figure out what contexts give you fantastic relationship AND hot sex.** (*Context-free spontaneous desire is the man-as-default*)

standard, and screw that...Don't use someone else's standard to measure the quality of your own sex life)

Slow down. Stay still. Don't push or pull. Allow sensation to grow.

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Higher desire partners may think: "She should be able to want it as much as I do". This creates negative meta-feelings about their partner's sexual feelings. But Johnny realized it's not about just wanting sex, it's about creating context - really it's about creating a life that makes space for both people's needs. He brought a sense of curiosity to the puzzle of turning off her offs. He brought a sense of wonder to the surprising way Laurie's sexuality can spring and blossom from fallow winter ground. He brought a sense of awe to the ecstatic way her passion overflows the garden walls, under the loving warm rain and sun of the right context."

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- The most important thing you can do to have a great sex life is to welcome your sexuality as it is - right now - even if it is not what you expected or wanted it to be.
- Letting go of the old, bogus cultural standards, requires grieving the process, going through the "little monitors" pit of despair.
- To facilitate the letting go, develop non-judgmental "emotional coaching" meta-emotions. Recognize the feelings are a normal part of life, and when bad things happen, it's normal to feel angry, fearful, or sad.
- When you give yourself permission to be and feel whatever you are and feel, your body can complete the cycle, move through the tunnel, and come out to the light at the end.

Conclusion: You Are the Secret Ingredient