



Pure Romance Between the Sheets: Find Your Best Sexual Self and Enhance Your Intimate Relationship

By Patty Brisben

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Tired of feeling like your sex life has become boring? Frustrated that your sex drive isn't what it used to be? Do you really understand what your body needs to be sexually satisfied?

If you are like most women, figuring out exactly how to spice up your sex life can feel intimidating. Patty Brisben is here to help you learn the secrets behind your body's sexuality and revitalize your intimate relationship with your partner. As the founder of Pure Romance™, the nation's leading in-home party company specializing in romance and relationship enhancement products, Patty has been keeping women's sexual secrets for years. And now she wants to help you. She knows that it can be hard to get accurate, honest, compassionate answers to your most private of questions, but she also knows that if you give up on your sexuality, you're turning your back on an essential part of life.

The first step toward living your best sexual life is learning how to truly tune in to your body's sexual health, its needs, and all the factors that may be inhibiting you from feeling pleasure and sensation. Like no sex educator before, Patty finally offers information that will teach you how to overcome your insecurities, understand your libido, and learn the ins and outs of orgasm.

Once you reconnect with your sexual self, then you can let your partner in on the fun. With Patty's step-by-step guidelines, you can transform your intimate relationship, infusing it with novelty, passion, and pleasure. You will find tips that have helped thousands of women find the right lubricant, introduce a bedroom accessory to their relationship, and expand their notions of orgasm, intercourse, and massage. Using Patty's time-tested techniques, you and your partner will reconnect and reignite your relationship -- forever!

Throughout *Pure Romance Between the Sheets*, Patty answers questions from real women, covering the full range of common sexual concerns, from the connection between birth control and sex drive to how common medications can impact arousal, and why lubricants and other enhancement products can literally

resuscitate sexual desire and pleasure.

Pure Romance Between the Sheets will give you the knowledge and confidence to live the fuller, healthier, and more sexually satisfying life that you deserve.

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Editorial Review

About the Author

Patty Brisben is the CEO and founder of Pure Romance™, the nation's fastest-growing inhome direct sales company specializing in relationship enhancement products, intimacy education, and sexual health awareness. With over twenty-five years of experience working with women, she now leads tens of thousands of consultants who are touching the lives of women and couples nationwide. A mother of four, she divides her time between Cincinnati, Ohio, and Naples, Florida.

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Pure Romance Between the Sheets

CHAPTER ONE



Under the Covers

Getting into Your Comfort Zone about Sex

FOR YEARS NOW, I have been keeping women's sexual secrets. They trust me with their questions, their fears, and their stories—and I take this trust to heart. I understand that talking about sex can make some women feel uncomfortable, but it doesn't have to. In fact, if we take the subject from behind closed doors and treat it with the respect and the care it deserves, we will do ourselves a big favor. We will also get much closer to one of my goals: to make sex—and talking about sex—a natural part of the web of life—something completely normal, special, and fun!

Why do most women trust me when it comes to anything sexual? For two reasons: First, for more than two decades, I've been on the front lines, working with women (initially as a sales consultant and later as the founder of Pure Romance) to provide advice on safe sexual practices and how to become more intimate with their partners. Second, in my newer role as a national speaker, I make a point of speaking about sex as if I were talking about any other subject—the weather, the perfect pair of high heels, or my dream vacation. I believe that by making sex an approachable, natural subject worthy of a conversation, I can show women how much they can gain from becoming more comfortable around the topic. I want them—and you—to know that the more you learn about your own body and how you respond to stimulation; the more you understand how lubricants can relieve dryness and enhance pleasure; the more you see how introducing a simple bedroom accessory can lead you to experience deeper sensation, more pleasure, or your first orgasm; and the more you gain insight into how to reconnect with your partner so you can enjoy one another again—the more you will feel grounded, satisfied, and fulfilled in your life.

It's our right as women to own our sexuality—and it's also our responsibility. Our sexuality has the power to be an intense source of pleasure throughout our lives. How can I be so sure of this? Because after twenty-five years of sharing sexual information with women, I have seen thousands transformed by this knowledge. I've watched hundreds of women leave a Pure Romance party, saying, "I didn't know it was going to be like this"

or “I didn’t know I was missing so much” or “I didn’t know sex could be so easy and so fun!” Surprise, elation, and determination ring in their voices. And that’s what keeps me going. That, and wanting to reach more and more women.

This book offers something for every one of you. If you are seeking information about how to become aroused, what to do if you frequently feel dry or irritated, or how to subtly introduce a lubricant or bedroom toy—you will find both the know-how and the insight in these pages. And whatever situation you’re in right now—newly married or newly divorced, recently widowed or still single, just given birth or facing an illness or surgery—you will discover the secret to your comfort zone so that you can become the confident, caring lover you always knew you could be.

I am making only one request: that you consider the significance and the importance of your sexuality in terms of who *you* are. Don’t compare yourself to your friends, your sisters, your mother, or your daughter. Simply get to know your body, your mind, your sexuality. My challenge to you is this: Would you rather embrace this powerful dimension of what makes you a woman and let it lead you to a wonderful, full life or let it stay hidden and untapped, weighing you down in body and spirit?

In the pages that follow, I want you to open yourself to the possibility of embarking on this fun, fantastic adventure, one in which you will get to know yourself better—physically, emotionally, and sexually. Yes, you will learn some great tips and techniques that can resuscitate a relationship that’s lost its spark and drive you and your partner wild, but more than that, you will come away with greater insight and confidence in your sexuality and the central place it should have in your life.

How Do You Think About Sex?

For many women, even bringing up the subject of sex makes them shut down. Most of the time this is related to their background and how they first learned—or didn’t learn—about sex. Women who were raised in an environment where sex was taboo or treated as shameful often have a hard time letting go of those negative feelings. This may sound obvious, but I can’t tell you how many women treat their sexuality as a negative thing, hiding from it themselves or keeping it hidden from others. They are blocked from truly embracing their sexuality because they judge it as something bad, dirty, or morally wrong. As Pam, a forty-two-year-old mother of two, said to me, “My parents never mentioned the word ‘sex,’ and I was just too afraid to ask any questions. I just assumed sex was a topic you weren’t supposed to talk about.”

When I visited Indiana University on my first college tour, I had a remarkable experience with a woman who wasn’t aware that she actually had negative associations with sex. Dr. Michael Reece, a professor and director of the Center for Sexual Health Promotion at Indiana University, and part of our research team at Pure Romance, had assembled over four hundred students for my presentation. Before the seminar, the students had been asked to complete a rather explicit survey about their sexual interests and behaviors. They were asked such questions as: “Have you ever gone into an adult bookstore? If so, did you purchase any adult toys? Have you used one with yourself? Have you ever shopped online? Have you ever had an orgasm?”

Before introducing me to the assembled students, Dr. Reece delivered some of the results from the survey: “Seventy-eight percent of you said you shopped online or had been to an adult store; 32 percent bought a bedroom toy, etc.” Then Dr. Reece asked whether the audience was interested in learning more about sex and toys. Everyone gave a resounding “Yes!” (I’m sure they also knew the founder of Pure Romance was

about to take the stage!) Next, he said, “I have one final question. Do you think learning about sex and thinking about buying bedroom toys contributes to society?”

One woman raised her hand immediately and said, “I don’t think there is any reason for sex toys of any kind. They simply demoralize women and there is no need for such products.”

A bit of silence followed and then I walked to the podium. I began as I often do by asking how many of them ever took medicine when they get a cold or the flu. Most hands shot up. I then asked if they were aware that over-the-counter antihistamines not only closed and dried up their nasal passages but also the lubrication that is natural to their other orifices (i.e., the sex organs!). Most people just shook their heads. Next, I asked how many of them often felt stressed before an exam, returning home after a semester away, or even managing the balance between a job and school. Most hands again shot up. “Did you know that any kind of stress can also make your body dry and make it difficult for you to respond sexually? And that by introducing a lubricant, you can immediately and profoundly change the experience of sex?” Heads began nodding in understanding. Finally I asked, “And how many of you would like to know more about finding your partner’s hot spot of pleasure? Would you like to know more about what turns you on and gets you aroused? Did you know that by introducing certain bedroom accessories you can find out this information quickly and easily? Have you ever wondered why there are hundreds of varieties of shampoo and conditioners? Because we are all different—with different likes and dislikes, different needs and desires. The same rule applies to lubricants and bedroom accessories.”

At the end of my presentation, while I was lingering at the front of the enormous room, I looked up and saw the woman who had first raised her hand barreling down the aisle. I admit, I was actually a bit scared. Dr. Reece moved closer to me as if to protect me. But when she was close enough for me to see her face, I knew what had happened. She grabbed my hand and said, “Thank you so much! You have changed my mind. I didn’t know I was so uncomfortable about sex—I thought I had it all together. Before, I thought lubricants and sex toys were for ‘other’ kinds of women. But the way you describe them, I see now how incredibly helpful—and enjoyable—they can be. I didn’t realize I had so much to learn. I feel like my world has opened up.”

Dr. Reece turned to me and said, “I can offer a ton of information, but I can’t change a person’s point of view like you just did.”

In one two-hour presentation, this woman had accomplished a major shift in her thinking. Instead of judging the subject matter of the talk (and probably the speaker as well!) and rejecting the possibility that she might actually enjoy herself, she succeeded in opening her mind to learning about herself and what she wanted. In place of negative thoughts and a closed mind, she now had a desire to explore. And that’s what I want to instill in you.

Not every one of you will want to run out and get a vibrator (though by the end of this book, you might just be persuaded!) or learn how to resuscitate your relationship in twenty-four hours, but if you simply open your mind and your heart to the possibility that you don’t already know everything about your sexuality, then you will be giving yourself a remarkable gift: the gift of learning something new about yourself that can lead to a richer, fuller, more meaningful life.

Eyes Wide Open

Although I adjust my presentations according to who is in my audience—whether that be college-age women (and men), women in their thirties, forties, and fifties who are juggling marriage, careers, and kids, or

whether I am talking to a vulnerable yet proud group of cancer survivors, my goal is always the same: to help them become aware that there is a lot that they can do to make their sexual experience both more fulfilling and more pleasurable. And that the more they know about what can change and what they can add to their experience, the more in control and empowered they will feel.

That is what learning about sex can do for you, too. It can open all the doors of your life. And this is as true for young, college-age women as it is for more mature women. Like Mariam, a thirty-something mother of a pair of twins, who approached me after a Pure Romance party. I had watched her throughout the evening, and although she had smiled and laughed with the rest of the group, she also hung back, appearing reluctant to jump into the party spirit. Near the end of the evening, I wasn't surprised to find her standing by my side.

"Patty," Mariam said quietly, "I've been married almost ten years and my relationship with my husband has gotten really bad. He thinks I'm frigid." And she began to cry.

I quickly consoled her, saying, "First off, I doubt that's the case if you're here tonight. Why don't you tell me what's been going on?"

It turns out that after her two sons were born, Mariam had started to feel more and more uncomfortable about sex. It was almost as if she felt bad when she was being sexual, that it would somehow make her a bad mother. At first, her husband was sympathetic and gave her lots of room, thinking it was just a "phase." But almost six years later, he had lost his patience and his feelings of sympathy had turned to anger and frustration.

"He knows I came here tonight, but I think he's given up hope. I'm afraid he's going to leave me."

Mariam's situation is much more common than you might think. Here was a woman in her physical prime, with some understanding of how things had veered off track in her sexual relationship, but she didn't know how to set things right. I could tell that she and her husband had not fallen out of love, but rather that she had lost touch with herself. I asked Mariam if she thought of herself as a sexual person and her response was "sort of." I understood that to mean, "I don't know what it is to be a sexual person." I then asked her a few more questions about her background and discovered, not surprisingly, that she had been raised in a fairly conservative household. "We never talked about sex. And my parents didn't seem close—they were never affectionate with each other," Mariam explained.

When I asked her how sexuality fit into her life, she said quietly, "I just don't think about it very much."

"Would you like to be more sexual?" I knew I was going out on a limb, but I felt it was very important for Mariam to recognize that though she came from a family that had a negative, judgmental view of sexuality and may not have been loving in a physical way, she had a choice—a choice to have a different relationship with her husband.

"Yes, I would," she said, smiling a bit nervously.

When I saw that smile—and I get a lot of smiles—I knew that she had begun her own journey of truly owning her sexuality. Sometimes all we need is a gentle push to open up and share our story or our feelings or experiences. But that first step is essential. I admired the courage it took Mariam to say "Yes" and I admired the confidence she was beginning to build. Before we went our separate ways, I offered Mariam some suggestions for how to learn more about herself sexually (you'll learn more about this later in the chapter), and then I drove home my main point: You've got to give yourself permission to be sexual.

Nothing could be healthier for your family than your children knowing that their parents are truly and joyously connected—in every way.

Let me share another story about how, no matter how deeply rooted one's negative attitude toward sex may be, there is still the possibility to change. Lynette (her real name) was a fifty-something woman from Wisconsin who for twenty-five years had been active in her church, even serving as the leader of its choir. For a quarter of a century, her entire life had revolved around the church. As she said, "My life has been about serving wherever I can." But after suffering through a brain tumor and also watching a dear friend struggle unsuccessfully against breast cancer, Lynette risked her ties to her church because of how deeply moved she was by her new mission to serve as a Pure Romance consultant. As she described so boldly in a letter to us, she could not help her friend, "But it wasn't too late for me." After being introduced to a Pure Romance consultant, she realized "I was too embarrassed to talk about sex to anyone, even my doctor. I just wasn't comfortable discussing that area of my life.... But I was so impressed by the consultant's compassion toward women, I found myself telling her things that I never discussed with anyone else. She immediately suggested that I try one of the bedroom accessories, and I did and it changed my life. It was as if I finally gave myself permission to think of myself as a sexual person."

Lynette became a Pure Romance consultant because, as she said, "I felt given what both my girlfriend and I went through, then there must be loads of people who are looking for the information that can help them." And when Lynette was asked to leave her church and give up her role as choir leader, she said this: "My dedication to service kicked in again, and I believed that I could do a job that was actually helping people.... My focus is to educate women with information they seek, ... and when people tell me how [I have helped] them strengthen their marriage, that is the greatest reward."

Obviously you don't have to become a Pure Romance consultant to benefit from the information in this book; nor do you have to buy a single product. All you need to do is embrace the power and wisdom the women in these pages have to offer you.

Intimacy Issue #1—"Don't Touch Yourself."

Many of us have heard this refrain from our mothers, fathers, or siblings, or we say it to ourselves. It's time to banish those chastising voices in your head once and for all! Remember Lynette's story? It's never too early—or too late—to give yourself permission to explore your body and understand your sexuality more fully.

Clare is a perfect example of a woman who is so distant from her sexuality that she had never felt lust or sexual desire—never mind turned on enough to experience an orgasm. Working with her Pure Romance consultant, she slowly but surely opened the door of her sexuality and found a passionate, eager woman inside. But this process took a while. As Clare said, "I had never ever touched myself. I was brought up to believe that it was just plain wrong. So when I got married, I had no idea what I liked. I just assumed sex was something I did for my husband. It was my duty as a wife. But when a friend of mine invited me to a Pure Romance party, I went along—really just to be a good friend. At first, when the women started discussing vibrators and other bedroom accessories, I thought they were crazy. I felt so uncomfortable I wanted to run out of the room. But other women at the party were sharing their stories of how much their lives—and their relationships—had changed. So I bought a small vibrator and tried using it that afternoon—when my husband was still at work and the kids were not yet home from school. I know this sounds completely unbelievable, but I had never felt so great. I think my first orgasm was a complete accident! I have never felt so excited in my life, and learning to be more open in this way has literally changed my marriage."

Getting in touch with your sexuality is not as simple as turning on a faucet. It's about making a commitment to explore yourself, your desires, and how you respond to stimulation—in all ways. It can take time, but it's a process that can lead you to enormous pleasure. As you will see in the next chapter, one of the first steps to learning more about yourself is masturbation.

Your Comfort Zone

When women give themselves permission to be sexual, they have the key to finding and defining their comfort zone. So whether you are a woman whose challenge is getting back in touch with yourself after childbirth or you've never fully understood or appreciated the role of sexuality in your life, you can learn to give yourself permission to value and honor this important part of who you are. If you are in your twenties, then you have your whole life ahead of you! Do you know how many women would have killed for this information when they were twenty-five?! As Gwynne, twenty-eight, said, "I am so much more confident knowing what my choices are."

In order to find your comfort zone about sex, you must give yourself permission to learn—about yourself, first of all. And what do I mean exactly by finding your comfort zone? I mean feeling at ease with your sexual needs and desires; being comfortable in your own skin; comfortable talking about your sexuality with your partner or best friend; comfortable asking a new partner to use protection and practice safe sex; and comfortable finding out how to take care of your sexual health.

Some women operate outside their comfort zone because they simply never learned enough about sex and were taught that "good" girls should not be curious about it. Others married young and quickly had children, and they never bothered or found the time to investigate this side of themselves. I want you to come to the realization that curiosity is healthy and necessary—it's not only a goal but also an attitude that will uncover so many wonderful things during the course of your life.

Let Me Introduce You to Your Sexual Self

Like many things that make us grow, there is a process involved in truly understanding your sexuality. And you need to be clear on where you've been to know where you want to go. So as you begin to think about who you are, sexually speaking, consider these questions:

1. When was your first sexual experience?
2. Was it positive or negative? Pleasurable or painful?
3. Where or from whom did you learn about sex?
4. Did you experiment with self stimulation?
5. Have you ever experienced sex without your consent?
6. Do you ever experience pain with sex?

7. Do you like sex or do you go “go through the motions”?
8. Have you ever had a completely wonderful experience during sex?
9. Have you ever had an orgasm?
10. If you are in a relationship, do you feel that your partner understands you sexually?

There are no right or wrong answers to these questions. There are simply your answers. By answering these questions, you are focusing your attention on your own sexual experience. And when was the last time you gave it any thought? Most of us spend our days running around, balancing work with taking care of kids or partners, pets, elderly parents, or all of the above. Once the day is done, dinner’s over, and the kitchen cleaned up, the last thing on our minds is sex! Who has the time or the energy?

I always tell women this: If you’re going to participate in sex, you should enjoy it. So this book is not about overthinking your sexuality; it’s about making it simple—and making it better. Use the questions above as a guide to helping you discern where you’ve been in terms of your sexuality and where you are now. Then, slowly but surely, open that door to new ways to think about your sexuality.

The truth of the matter is that if we spend some quiet time just with ourselves and begin to become more aware of our sexuality, we will be more in control of how we approach our sexuality. We can learn to make vital decisions about what we want and what we need. For instance, if your response to the first question was, “I first had sex when I was seventeen,” and you are now in your mid-thirties, do you know that your body has changed dramatically over the intervening fifteen-plus years? If you answered the second question by saying that your first sexual encounter was “pleasurable,” then good for you! For many women, the first sexual experience tends to be not only frightening but also painful. These early experiences can have a profound impact on how we think about sex. As one woman told me, “I first had sex when I was sixteen. My boyfriend kept pressuring me and pressuring me, so I finally gave in. I didn’t really know what I was doing, but looking back, I think having sex so early made it difficult for me to trust men. I always thought about sex as something *they* wanted—it had nothing to do with me. It wasn’t until I married and my husband was gentle and kind and really wanted me to feel pleasure that I began to enjoy sex. Before, I just went through the motions and wanted it to be over.”

Do you know how many women tell me that sex is merely “going through the motions”? Thousands! Which means that thousands of women think of sex as routine, boring, one-sided, and/or painful. The bottom line is this: too many women are not enjoying sex. This in turn means that they are uninvolved or disconnected from their sexual experience. This kind of detachment occurs for many reasons. Some women withdraw from their partners because they are angry or hurt, or both. Some women withdraw because sexual intimacy makes them feel too vulnerable. This type of reaction is usually related to a painful or traumatic situation in the past, which for many women can have a lasting impact that closes them off from sex psychologically, emotionally, and physically.

My point? That by becoming aware of and understanding our early sexual experiences—positive or negative—we give ourselves the opportunity to update our view of ourselves. If your first sexual experience was unpleasant, that shouldn’t mean sex has to remain an unpleasant part of your life. Far from it. By understanding what happened in the past and how you’d like things to be different today and in the future, you can change your experience. If, on the other hand, your early experiences with sex were positive, that’s fantastic! But you can still learn more—and enjoy more—by exploring your sexual self. Do you really want to go through life missing out on such an important part of who you are?

These questions are also asking you to be honest about where you are now in terms of your sexuality. If you are in a relationship, are you happy, satisfied, and well taken care of sexually? If your response was a quick and easy “yes,” then get ready to discover many new ways to enhance your intimacy with your partner. If, however, you hesitated to respond, or if a resounding “no!” echoed in your ears, then you need to acknowledge the truth about your situation and consider what you can change. I remember one evening at the end of a Pure Romance party, when fifty-two-year old Connie finally reached her own breaking point. All evening, she had been the life of the party, entertaining the other women with the stories about how much her husband wants her all the time. But as soon as she came into the confidential Ordering Room, she broke down in front of me and started sobbing. Despite her bravado and big personality, Connie was miserable.

“You don’t know what my life is like,” she cried.

“So tell me,” I encouraged her.

“My husband has no interest in me at all,” she said. “We never have sex.”

It was clear that Connie had put up a charade to cover her pain and disappointment in her husband and her marriage. I suggested that she buy some products for herself first. Before she could figure out what she could change in her relationship, she needed to take responsibility for herself, and that included reconnecting with her sexual self. (You will find more information on what bedroom accessories are right for you in Chapter 8.)

This is often the first step to finding your sexual comfort zone. We tend to jump too fast to “save” or “fix” our relationship, when what we really need is to get back on track with ourselves. Another story comes to mind. This situation took place at an end-of-the-year Pure Romance party back in the early days when I felt a lot of pressure to sell products. I was a single mom with four growing kids and the financial pressure was on. In the confidential Ordering Room, Gail, a pretty, thirty-something woman, ordered an array of products—pretty much one of everything. From a sales perspective I was thrilled.

As I filled in her information, we began talking and I asked Gail if she was planning an anniversary or some special surprise for her husband. She nodded a bit shyly and then told me her story: a few months back, she was desperate to try and fix her relationship. Her husband had mentioned a fantasy he had about having a threesome. Instead of taking that as a signal that they should begin thinking outside of the box and find new ways to spice up their relationship, Gail took the fantasy literally and felt that by doing something a bit “outrageous,” she and her husband might re-find the sexual spark between them, so she arranged a threesome with her best friend and her husband at a cabin in the woods.

Unfortunately, the only outrageous thing that happened was that her husband and her girlfriend began their own private affair. Now, Gail was trying woo her husband back by wowing him with some bedroom accessories.

“What have I done?” she said.

I looked at her and said, “Do you want to try these products?” When she hesitated and then explained she was doing it “for her husband,” I scooped up all the items on the table and said, “I don’t want you to buy these. They are not going to save your marriage. Why don’t you buy a couple of things for yourself and take the money and spend it on professional help for you and your husband.”

Although a part of me was sad to see a big sale go by, it was more important to me that Gail understood what had happened. She had moved out of her comfort zone and not only didn't help her relationship but undermined herself. So as you consider where you are now in your relationship or within yourself, think about what is right for you—and never undermine or betray yourself.

If you have ever been victimized or traumatized sexually, it's important that you receive the help you need. The American Association of Sexuality Educators, Counselors, and Therapists (AASECT) is a trusted source for finding a therapist or counselor in your area who will help you work through any kind of trauma or abuse. Contact www.aasect.org for more information.

Sex Is an Inside Thing

In my travels, women come up to me asking and sometimes begging for advice on how to turn on their man, how to have simultaneous orgasms, or how to give mind-blowing oral sex. And most of the time, I say, "Okay, but slow down, already!" Sure, great sex and becoming a great lover is about technique. But only partly. It's also about going inside yourself and being fully present. It's about letting yourself become aware of every inch of your body and paying attention to how your body responds to touch, to music, to kissing, to whatever is happening to or around you.

It's hard to tell people how to get inside themselves. When you're having an orgasm, it's about creating a bubble in which you pay attention to what is building and close your eyes so you can appreciate all the feelings. When you're with your partner, it's about feeling his body against your skin, his sweat dripping onto you, and letting yourself get into the sensuality of sex. It's also about giving that same attention to your partner. Are you watching, listening to, and feeling how he responds when you touch him?

Try something right now. Close your eyes and let yourself travel. Imagine yourself on a beach. Can you feel the soft breeze on your face, your arms? Can you feel the sand between your toes? Can you hear the rhythm of the waves as the surf comes in? Can you smell the salty air? If you are able to let your mind travel, and if you are able to imagine the above sensual experiences, then you can certainly bring that same level of attention and heightened awareness to your lovemaking. Having wonderful sex is much more about being fully engaged in what you are doing than it is about any technique you can perform.

This is especially true for women, for whom arousal is much more complex and varied than it is for men (you'll learn more about arousal in the next chapter). Some women conjure up an image of a dream man touching and pleasuring them. Other women create a fantasy map of their bodies, in which they go on a treasure hunt of pleasure, imagining each of their favorite spots being touched or caressed. Some women need something more physical to get them aroused—whether that means touching themselves, using a vibrator, or having their partner touch or stimulate them in a particular way. But regardless of precisely how you get aroused, you need to experience this arousal *inside*—by paying attention with your mind.

Whether or not you're in a relationship, it's important to start with yourself—romance yourself, I like to say. Once you form this bond with yourself, you automatically lay the groundwork for intimacy—first with yourself and then with your partner.

ASK PATTY:

A Small Question

Hello Patty,

I'm kind of embarrassed to ask you this, but I figure you would be best since we don't know each other. I am a twenty-five-year-old female and I don't know whether or not I've climaxed, reached the big "O", or experienced this so-called out-of-body feeling. Numerous people say I need to start masturbating to figure out what it takes and how it feels. However, I've had partners who have told me that I have climaxed, and I've seen the puddles/ejaculation from myself. But I have never felt that out-of-body, earth-shattering feeling. Do you think I'm looking too much into it, or expecting too much from an orgasm? If anything, can you recommend a toy that will help me masturbate & orgasm? I've never really done it before, but I'm trying to overcome my insecurities about it.

Thank you!

Dear Small Question:

First of all, if you don't think you've had an orgasm, then you probably haven't. But more importantly, it's up to you to decide and define your own sexual experience. Just because a partner tells you that you've climaxed doesn't mean it's true.

Your girlfriends are probably right: masturbation is a private way for you to learn more about yourself. Find a quiet, safe time and place and experiment with a vibrator or bullet. One of the best ways to learn to orgasm is through self-pleasuring, which is not only a completely personal way to get to know yourself, it can also be enormously satisfying. I can't stress to you enough that you define your own sexual experience—orgasm or not.

Truly,

Patty

Change Is Everything

Sex changes. We change. Relationships change. Our bodies change. If we don't accept this fact of life, then we set ourselves up for unrealistic expectations in all areas of our lives. The women I work with who have the most difficulty finding—or refinding—their comfort zone are usually struggling with change: They need to remain open to change and be ready for it one way or another. Amy is one of my favorite product vendors and a woman I consider one of my closest friends. She was widowed about five years ago when her husband died of a brain tumor. During a girlfriends' weekend in Miami, I asked her, "So have you begun dating?"

She shook her head no, and said, "I just can't even wrap my head around it. I don't think enough time has passed."

Deciding when you are ready to resume dating is an entirely personal decision, but I did want to start talking about intimacy issues.

So I said, "You're telling me you haven't had any sex or penetration?"

"No," she said.

"Well, did you know that if you don't use it, you might just lose it?" I asked her gently.

Amy looked shocked. Here was a woman who thought she knew everything there was to know about her

sexuality, and yet she didn't really understand that her sexual plumbing, so to speak, could stop functioning from mere lack of use. Essentially if a woman goes too long without using her sexual muscles (more on this later!) or being sexually active—either with a partner or on her own—then her vaginal walls can literally collapse, causing not only pain but an inability to become aroused or orgasm.

It was clear to me that it would take more time before Amy felt ready to date again. But I sent her a bedroom toy with some heartfelt suggestions on how being intimate with herself could really benefit her body and her mind. She called me a few weeks later, saying, “I not only owe you at least three dinners the next time we get together, I owe you so much more—I feel alive again!”

We know our bodies change day to day month to month, year to year. What we often are not aware of is how these changes impact our sexuality. Amy was still a vibrant woman in her early fifties. Did she want to sacrifice her sexuality for the rest of her days? Not on her life. But she needed some gentle encouragement and some knowledge.

It's up to You

Finding your comfort zone about sex is also about knowing your boundaries and limits. Never let anyone pressure you to do or try something that makes you feel uncomfortable. And don't let a partner make you feel guilty—sex is something to engage in respectfully.

When we stay open to learning about sex, ourselves, and our partners, we allow for wonderful, magical possibilities. At its most basic level, sex is about pleasure and release. It's not about taking notes or memorizing techniques. It's about getting to know yourself, paying attention, and then following your intuition— wherever that may lead!

Sexuality is a *big* part of who we are as human beings. It's written into our DNA, it's a driving force, and it can be a source of enormous pleasure. If this part of you is not nurtured and stimulated, your health suffers—there are mental, emotional, and physical consequences to denying or suppressing your sexuality. So let's throw outdated, harmful myths right out the window! Being a sexually active, aware woman does not mean that you are “bad” or “naughty”—it simply means you are alive.

One of my top consultants loves to say at Pure Romance parties, “I want to save one vagina at a time!” She's not on a mission to make women into sex machines—in fact, quite the opposite. She wants women simply to open up to who they are and to this important, life-sustaining part of themselves. Taking care of your sexuality is the most deeply personal way to take care of yourself—and your relationship—and the bonus is that it can be tons of fun too!

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