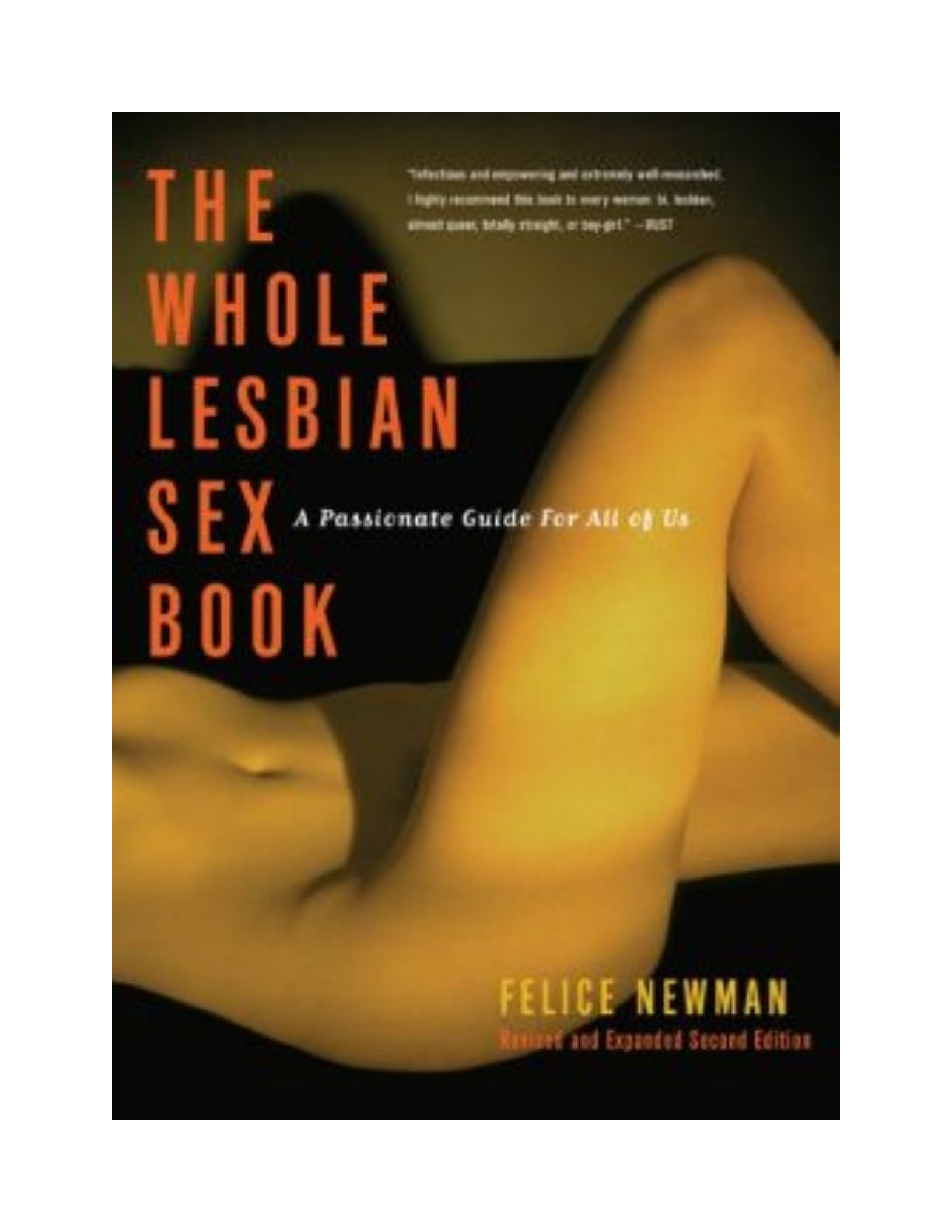


THE WHOLE LESBIAN SEX BOOK

A Passionate Guide For All of Us

"Infectious and empowering and extremely well researched.
I highly recommend this book to every woman. M. Jordan,
straight queer, biably straight, or biy-ge!" — RUST

FELICE NEWMAN
Revised and Expanded Second Edition



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Praise for *The Whole Lesbian Sex Book*

“Newman’s sex guide for lesbians is superb. Why can’t more heterosexual sex manuals be this good?”

—*Library Journal*

“Intelligent, sexy, humorous and emotionally savvy. The lesbian sex information you’ve always wanted but could never find.”

—Staci Haines, author of *The Survivor’s Guide to Sex*

“A classic.”

—Patrick Califia, *The Advocate*

“The most complete, all-questions-answered, savvy guide to lesbian sex. Keep it next to the bed.”

—*Good Vibrations*

“Urban and diverse in topic, this new guide is a cool drink of water in a drought of good sex info for dykes. This book gives tips, toys and tidings you’ll wonder how you lived without.”

—*Toys in Babeland*

“The most awesome aspect of this instant sex guide classic is the inclusion of every possible woman in every possible situation. From the pierced blood-playing hard core dyke to the longtime monogamous lesbian lovers who want to bring hot sex back into their lives to the average fabulous American gal just looking for a few ideas to satisfy herself, Felice Newman speaks to us all.

Getting off is good, and this book will help you get off better.”

—*Bust*

“Kinky people may consider themselves past needing sex manuals, but anyone involved in a sexual relationship with a woman, be they male or female, would be well advised to study this book carefully.”

—*Skin Two*

“Desire, fantasy, every twist and turn of the erotic imagination—it’s all here...”

—*Planet Out*

“Up-to-date, inclusive, and hot.”

—Sexuality.org

The most thorough and up-to-date lesbian sex guide around. Don’t buy Newman’s book expecting a clone of the genteel *Joy of Lesbian Sex*. The author describes everything in delicious and explicit detail...”

—*LesbiaNation*

“Felice Newman has her latex-covered finger on the clit of Lesbian Nation.”

—*San Francisco Bay Guardian*

The Whole Lesbian Sex Book

A Passionate Guide for All of Us

Second Edition

Felice Newman



To Constance

Acknowledgments

Many thanks to my panel of more than 450 experts (nearly half new to this edition) —the respondents to my questionnaires without whom this book would not have been possible. Writing from the United States, Canada, Panama, United Kingdom, Sweden, Finland, France, Germany, South Africa, Australia, and New Zealand, they generously shared their experiences, insights, and desires.

I was fortunate to receive the help of many individuals and organizations who answered questions, provided review copies of books and videos, publicized my research, shared the results of their own research, read drafts of chapters, and offered their guidance: Paula Love, Patrick Califia, Jeanne Marrasso of LesbianSTD.com, Heather Shaw and Christophe Pettus of Blowfish, Kayla Strassfeld of Good Vibrations, Cory Silverberg of *Come as You Are*, Janet Hardy of Greenery Press, Betsy Kalin, John Jameson of *The Advocate*, and Janet Lever. Many thanks to Karen Quigg and Scott Idleman for design, to Fish for illustrations, and to Mark Rhynsburger for editing.

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I am thankful to my coworkers at Cleis Press, Chris Fox and Diane Levinson, whose hard work freed me to write this book. I have worked with Cleis Press copublisher Frédérique Delacoste for 25 years. Her high standards for publishing queer books for intelligent readers have made Cleis Press what it is today—I am grateful to have her as my editor.

Finally, my deepest gratitude to my wife, Constance Clare-Newman, to whom this book is dedicated.

Preface to the Second Edition

SINCE PUBLICATION OF *THE WHOLE LESBIAN SEX BOOK*, I have heard from many, many women. I've received emails from sapphic novices ("I was able to feel confident when I was making love to my very first girlfriend...") and seasoned leatherdykes ("Hey, I may have been 'out' and in the BDSM scene, too, for ten years now, but I still use your book as a valuable reference and as a sorta dyke bible"). I've heard lovely stories of sexual awakening ("My partner came out last year, beautifully and skillfully at the age of 61!") and sexual adventuring ("I once told my girlfriend I wanted to try a threesome, so she talked about it to a really good friend of ours, and one day...").

All of the women I heard from were grateful to have a sex guide written just for us—and packed with information and suggestions, and, as one woman wrote, "inspiration, affirmation, and illumination."

And they weren't shy with requests for more, either—more research, more information, more topics covered, and more support and encouragement in their sexual aspirations for themselves and their partners.

Many of them participated in my new research. In January 2004, I posted notices on Internet bulletin boards and email discussion lists inviting lesbian, bisexual, and queer women to participate in a new survey on sex and partnership. Nearly two thousand women requested my explicit, lengthy questionnaire.

Research on lesbians and sexual partnership usually focuses on how often we have sex, what activities we engage in, and how personal "issues" like childhood trauma, sexual assault, and homophobia play out in our adult relationships.

This edition of *The Whole Lesbian Sex Book* offers a new way to look at our sexual partnerships. We know we have sex and that we hold dear a longer list of sexual proclivities than could ever fit on a survey form—this book offers proof of that. And we know that harm done to us—including the all-pervasive homophobia so many of us live with now—challenges our sense of ourselves as vital sexual beings.

Really, we don't need a research grant to figure that out. What we want to know is this:

How can we, as lesbian, bisexual, and queer women, create sexual relationships that really excite us and enliven us, and maintain sexual energy and heat over the long haul?

This updated second edition answers that question with guidance and practical suggestions based on the experiences of the more than 200 women who completed my questionnaire. Their commitment to sexually fulfilling relationships is truly inspiring.

The most important thing is this: You *can* have great partnered sex. Whether you have one partner or several, you can have ongoing, intimate sexual connections that expand and deepen over time.

What's new in this edition? Along with the new chapter on sex and partnership, there is much that's new. You'll find specific information on facing and healing triggers from sexual trauma, and achieving sexual pleasure even during depression (and what to do about the sexual side effects of SSRIs). Perimenopause and menopause, Tantra and orgasm, herbal supplements to support libido, sexual partnering during gender transition (with quotes from partners of both FTMs and MTFs), and sexual health (including gynecological care for butches)—it's all here. Plus new sex toys, Internet pay porn for us, all new illustrations, and a completely updated bibliography, videography, and resource section.

You *can have* great partnered sex. Whether you have one partner or several, you can have ongoing, intimate sexual connections that expand and deepen over time.

I would love to hear from you. Please send me your feedback on this book and your ideas for future editions. If you'd like to be included in research on the next edition of this book, please let me know. You can write to me: WholeLesbian@felicenewman.com.

Here's to great sex—for all of us—and a life filled with deeply satisfying erotic pleasure.

Felice Newman
San Francisco
October 2004

Introduction

I HAVE ALWAYS LOVED WOMEN. I've known I was a lesbian for as far back as I can remember. As a little girl, I had dreamy crushes on older girls. My mission was to insinuate myself into the lap of the nearest teenaged girl—and never leave.

I emerged as a tomboy, challenging boys to their own games and resisting the efforts of family members to squeeze me into a female gender that pinched and suffocated and just didn't fit. In high school, I ran with a pack of boys and gazed longingly at the smart girls in my class. To evoke their gaze in return was my highest aspiration.

From my earliest memories, desire for women has fueled my life. I savored small attentions and imagined complicities, “accidental” touches that led to burning kisses, and finally, sex. Sex with women drives my passions like nothing else. I have had sex with many women, and I have been blessed with lovers who offered up their desire with raw courage and lust.

What Makes Me an Expert?

I'm not a social scientist, therapist, or health-care worker. I'm a lesbian who has spent many years learning about sex. As publisher of Cleis Press, I've developed and edited books by many of our favorite “sexperts”—from Susie Bright to Annie Sprinkle. I've trained and served as a hotline volunteer with San Francisco Sex Information. Their 55-hour seminar in human sexuality is the most comprehensive course of its kind. I've spoken on the subject of lesbian sex to all sorts of groups—from teachers earning continuing education credits in Pennsylvania and students at a Christian college in suburban Minnesota to undergrads at the University of California at Berkeley.

But what makes me a lesbian sex expert is that I have devoted myself to erotic exploration. I treat my sex life as an adventure story that builds heat with each episode. I'm curious. Whom will I meet today? What will happen next? I seek abundance. Ample pleasure. Innumerable orgasms. Voluptuous moments

bursting with erotic energy. I believe we *all* deserve as much erotic pleasure as life can offer—which is more pleasure really than you or I can conceive of.

I also believe we can teach each other how to have sex. After all, no one else will teach us.

No one ever told us how to be lesbians and bisexual women. No one offered a version of the birds-and-the-bees that spoke to us (“Here is the clitoris. It engorges with blood when aroused and will become erect when caressed...”). No one told us how to ask another girl on a date. Or how to give and receive sexual attention.

I, for one, could have used some guidance. There were years when I wasn’t happy with my sex life at all, but I didn’t know how to change my circumstances—or even what I might like. Because I hadn’t fully explored my own sexual responses, I didn’t know what kind of stimulation worked best for me. Instead, I worried that I was missing some vital ingredient, some secret understanding that others possessed.

Years passed. Like many other women, I had bought into the romantic myths about sex. I believed it was my partner’s job to “give” me orgasms and to figure out how best to accomplish that. I expected her to read my mind. At the same time, I believed that if I wasn’t happy, it was my “fault.”

My orgasms felt like appetizers—they left me hungry and restless. Sometimes it seemed to take forever to reach orgasm. I felt demanding and self-centered. I was impossible to please. On some deep level, I didn’t think I deserved sexual pleasure.

Like so many women, I wasn’t particularly skillful in talking about sex. Although I’m sure we had conversations about sex, I never told my partner of my fears of my own inadequacy. The thought of touching myself or using a dildo or vibrator during partner sex was out of the question. My relationships defined my sexuality. If my lover didn’t appreciate sex toys, then the toys stayed hidden in a drawer. Nor was I particularly imaginative in my fantasies—I had pretty fixed ideas about what was and was not OK for a feminist such as myself to get off on.

I felt stuck.

How *On Our Backs* Changed My Life

Really, it was my job at Cleis Press that cracked the ice cap. First, in the late 1980s, Frédérique Delacoste produced *Sex Work: Writings by Women in the Sex Industry*, a book that blew the scalps off feminists on two continents. *Sex Work* made me nervous. If sex workers could stand up to centuries of social stigma to define their own sexualities—some even going so far as to say their work empowered their sex lives—then what the hell was *my* excuse?

Then Susie Bright, editor of *On Our Backs*, tore through what remained of my self-denial. *On Our Backs* appeared on the scene in the mid-eighties. Aimed at the “sexually adventurous lesbian,” it was the first lesbian magazine to feature explicit depictions of lesbian sex.

Everyone was talking about *On Our Backs* in those years. Many were shocked by the politically incorrect implications of lesbians posing for the sexual gaze. Others distanced themselves from the material by critiquing the writing style or production values. Many feminist bookstores refused to carry *On Our Backs* or kept it hidden behind the sales counter.

I stared at the images in those early magazines and read the stories over and over. I wished I felt so comfortable, so powerful, so confident in my erotic life. I suspected, however, that as with all pornography, this was pure hyperbole. No lesbian I knew lived like that, though secretly I wished they did.

But while working with Susie Bright on her collection of columns, *Susie Sexpert's Lesbian Sex World*, I realized that what had seemed incredible to me was no big deal to her. In Susie's world, lesbians engaged in vaginal fisting (which I didn't think was anatomically possible!), had anal sex, visited lesbian strip shows, partied at sex clubs, and generally sparkled with erotic energy.

My imagination lit like a tinderbox on a hot afternoon. My complacency and resignation went up in flames, replaced by a broiling dissatisfaction.

I saw the parade passing me by—and I was angry! Enough so to take a hard look at my life and begin to make some changes. I felt awkward and self-conscious. It was like coming out all over again. Thankfully, I found supportive friends and lovers who shared with me their devotion to sexual exploration and personal growth. They prodded me to take risks and applauded my courage. With them, I could delve beyond gossip and nervous tittering to get to the nitty-

gritty details of sex. How do you do that? What was that like? How can I do that, too? With their help, I found a language to encompass my own experiences.

I've never looked back. I now can converse easily about sex. I can and do ask for what I need from my partners. I have an active fantasy life—some of my fantasies I act out and some I prefer to remain fantasies. I know what kind of stimulation will best arouse me. I take responsibility for my sex life.

The Whole Lesbian Sex Book

I wrote *The Whole Lesbian Sex Book* so that you would have ample information and encouragement for creating the sex life of your dreams.

Aren't there already lots of books about sex? Yes, and more are published every day. You've probably read horrific treatments of lesbian sex in mainstream sex guides. More recent guides intended for a general audience, however, do a much better job of representing lesbian sex. Still, we deserve a book of our own.

Often, lesbian sex guides are a bit fuzzy on the actual details of sex. *Sapphisty*, arguably the best of the lesbian how-to books, first appeared in 1979—it's simply dated. Other guides focus on couples, or therapy issues, or brighten your coffee table while telling you very little you didn't already know.

The Whole Lesbian Sex Book is a comprehensive, nonjudgmental guide to lesbian sex—this book won't tell you who you should be or what you should think. You'll find detailed how-to information on sexual techniques, understanding your own sexual responses, how to have G-spot orgasms, multiple orgasms, and extended orgasms—and much, much more.

During 1999, I developed a series of questionnaires about lesbian sexuality. The questions were very specific, extremely personal, and designed to elicit qualitative rather than quantitative responses. Many of the responses I received were quite explicit. In addition to a lengthy general questionnaire, I devised questionnaires aimed at lesbians and bisexual women who had survived cancer, as well as those who had viral STDs, such as herpes, HPV, hepatitis, and HIV. Posted on the Cleis Press website, the questionnaires were publicized on Internet mailing lists and in lesbian and gay publications internationally. I received more than 300 responses from 250 respondents (some filled out more than one questionnaire) —from the United States, Canada, United Kingdom, Sweden, Finland, France, Germany, Australia, and New Zealand.

Some women wrote pages on one question. Others reported that they had spent several hours on their replies. Some women wrote back with critiques of the questionnaire; in some cases their insights spurred me on to revise my questions. The candor and energy these women put into this project was

remarkable. Their responses alone could fill volumes. You'll find them quoted anonymously throughout the book.

Here's to lesbian sex! May all your desires come true.

Felice Newman
San Francisco

chapter two

Desire and Fantasy

Fantasies, like dreams or myths, are ways we talk to ourselves about our most profound *truths*.

—DOSSIE EASTON¹

WHAT DO LESBIAN, BISEXUAL, AND QUEER WOMEN DESIRE from our women lovers? Well, just about everything you can imagine—and more. We want the fullness of a woman’s sex in our hands and our mouths and between our legs. We want to smell her arousal and drink our own juices from her fingers. We want to feel her breasts and taste her nipples.

We desire bountiful, luscious, mind-altering moments of pleasure. We nurture dreams we would never make real and dreams we would leap at the chance to fulfill—the hungry gaze of a stranger, the astonishment of a lover revealed in orgasm, bodies like and unlike our own, discovery, transformation, exposure, secrecy, need yielding to force, and need yielding to need. And then—with an unexpected touch, a glance of skin in a spill of light, humidity flavored by sex—we drown in memory.

What do *you* desire sexually? Do you want the same things today that you wanted ten years ago? One year ago? Last week? What turned you on at 12 may have seemed quite silly at 16, and what you liked at 16 may evoke little but nostalgia now. So why would you think that what heats you up now will suffice for the rest of your active sex life?

The inner voice of Eros is arbitrary, bizarre, impeccably honest, bountiful, and so powerful as to be cruel. It takes courage to hear its demands and follow them.

What desires do you allow yourself? Is it OK to fantasize about sex with a man? Sex *as* a man? Sex in the gender that lives most deeply within you? Is it OK for a survivor of violence to masturbate to rape fantasies? For an incest survivor to fantasize sex with siblings? Are you betraying your partner if you fantasize about other people? Her best friend, for instance?

Desire is a slippery beast. What actually stirs you to passion may bear little resemblance to what you *say* you want. Or what you think you *should* want. You may have no idea why a particular scenario makes your heart race. You need not understand or even approve of your desires. You can keep up with the latest theories in the popular press, but you'll probably never really know why you desire women, or men, or both.

Your desires are uniquely yours. You have your own constellation of fantasies, needs, and turn-ons, plus your own history of sexual attractions and experiences. Your desires reveal who you are, where you came from, what's important to you, what you yearn for, and what you fear. No good will come from attempting to mold your desire into something that looks like everyone else's. Indeed, that's the surest route to ending up with no desire at all. The key to developing a sexuality that will challenge and delight you is to bless every crazy twist and turn of your erotic imagination.

I am a huge exhibitionist. I wear transparent, lacy, laced-up things with bits of flesh exposed. Slits in my gowns that go up to **here**. I get a lot of attention....

What's Your Fetish?

Are you turned on by six-inch stilettos? What about engineer's boots polished to gleaming obsidian? Does an exquisite Victorian corset make your blood pound? Perhaps you work up a sweat over leather, lace, latex, rubber, or fur?

A fetish is an erotic attachment to an ordinarily nonsexual activity, inanimate object, or body part. What qualifies as a fetish is a matter of opinion. According

to Freud, a fetish “bears some relation to the normal sexual object but is entirely unsuited to serve the normal sexual aim”—heterosexual procreative sex was what Freud had in mind.² By that definition, you could argue that *all* lesbian, bisexual, and queer women are fetishists, since we share an interest in erotic practices outside Freud’s “normal sexual aim.”

What may have seemed fetishistic to Sigmund Freud may be a staple of your erotic fare, and what seems exotic to you may be someone else’s sexual routine. Many people think of unusual sexual activities as “kinky” or fetishistic simply because they’re unfamiliar. (Conversely, Patrick Califia quips that much truly fetishistic behavior passes as normal because it has become so widespread no one notices it anymore. The heterosexual American male attachment to big breasts comes to mind.³)

Originally, a fetish was an object believed to have magical powers—for example, a small carved figure of an animal thought to heal or protect its owner. A fetish object was “regarded with awe...as the embodiment of a potent spirit.”⁴ Thus, a strap-on dildo can be viewed as a fetish, in the classic sense of an object invested with erotic desire and power. Many butches and female-to-male transsexuals (FTMs) would disagree with that label, however. It’s not the dildo sitting on the shelf that exudes masculine erotic power; it’s who’s driving it that counts. For them, wearing a strap-on dildo represents an expression of their deeply held gender identity.

Fetishes can develop ritualistically around necessities like safer-sex practices. Snap on a latex glove in certain lesbian circles and watch the heads turn. Clothing reserved for erotic use is seen as fetishistic. Often fetish gear is too revealing to wear on the street—for instance, a body suit with a cut-out crotch. But not always—sometimes context creates the eroticism. A man who walks into a sex club attired in a business suit will seem out of place, and he may be asked to leave. A dyke in a suit and tie can breeze past the “Fetish Gear Required” sign, knowing she’ll be viewed as delightfully kinky. That same cross-dressing dyke may pass so well on the street that no one blinks an eye. Likewise, patent leather mary janes with little lacy anklets under a Catholic-schoolgirl plaid skirt won’t raise an eyebrow—until worn by an adult woman whose tight blouse reveals abundant cleavage.

Fetishes involving costume are perhaps the most widely known and practiced.

Leather chaps, revealing lingerie, severe corsets, latex dresses, rubber hoods, and chain-mail chest harnesses are popular items of fetish gear. Many women have uniform fetishes and go to considerable effort to acquire authentic dress of soldiers, sailors, and cops—right down to the billy club. Uniform fetishists may or may not be exhibitionists.

Many women enjoy erotic practices such as spanking, bondage, and water sports (also called piss play or golden showers). A hot stream of urine splashing from one woman's body onto another's is an intense turn-on to many women. (To play safe, keep urine away from broken skin and the eyes and mouth.)

Body modification, such as tattoos, piercings, cuttings, branding, and scarification, holds deep significance for many. Some eroticize the experience of getting (or giving) a body modification; others are more interested in the result. You can think of genital shaving as a temporary body modification. The ritual of shaving one's own genital area can heighten the anticipation of a hot date. Shaving a partner's genitals can make for an exciting encounter. See "Genital Shaving" in chapter 10, Clitoral Play.

Once, we had sex in an airplane. We pulled the blanket up and she put her fingers in my cunt. I was coming quietly, high above New Orleans.

Whether you call your erotic interest a fetish or simply a turn-on is up to you. The point is that you feel free to develop your interests. Lesbian, bisexual, and queer women engage in many different fetish practices, more than could possibly be listed here. You can find organizations, books, magazines, websites, and online discussion groups devoted to a particular fetish. (See chapter 20, Resources.)

Run Wild

What if you just don't know what you *want*? Many women come to sex with a frustrating sense of vagueness. Sure, your clit leaps to meet your partner's desire—but on your own, you don't know what you want. Even if you have a pretty good idea of what heats you up, embarrassment may keep you from fulfilling those desires. Worse yet, that cold stone of shame caught in your gut says you're wrong no matter *what* you want. Or, you may despair over ever finding a partner whose desires will match yours. You haven't met a likely candidate yet—so why

bother? Like unpicked fruit, your fantasies might just as well wither and die on the vine.

The good news is that there *is* support for your desires—though finding it will take some creativity (and courage) on your part. (This book lists hundreds of helpful resources, for instance.)

Allow your imagination to run wild. Suspend judgment. Desires are not social contracts. You don't have to act out your fantasies—unless you want to. Who cares whether your fantasies would rate high marks for cinematography or plausibility? The goal here is to find out what makes your juices run. Forget the political ramifications of your desires.

My legs become swan's wings, and I see the wings lifting up out of the water.

Make Your Dreams Come True

The paradox, of course, is that to build sexual self-esteem, it helps to act as if you already have it. So, here are some suggestions to start you out:

What Do You Want?

- Listen your cunt. Desire is in your body. What makes your clit throb?
- Look to your fantasy life. What images pop into your mind during those unguarded moments on waking—or just before orgasm? Your own erotic imagination is a ripe resource for discovering your desires.
- Brainstorm. Grab pencil and paper and make three lists: (1) every sexual activity you've experienced; (2) every sexual activity you've heard about and think you might like to try; (3) every sexual scenario you've ever fantasized. Add to your lists as you come up with new ideas. Don't worry about whether you'll actually do these things—just write them down. (I tried this exercise with a group of women; it's amazing how other people's turn-ons can give you ideas.) See "Erotic Play," later in this chapter.
- Keep a journal of your own erotic journey. You'll be glad to have a record of your own sexual evolution. Who knows? You may end up in an

erotica anthology someday.

- Read erotica. Collections of erotic short stories, such as the annual *Best Lesbian Erotica* series, are great resources for mining the erotic imaginations of 20 or more creative, articulate authors each year.
- Read sex guides. You'll find informative, detailed descriptions of things others do or like or desire.
- Watch an explicit DVD or video. You may find porn to be a source of erotic inspiration. See "Lesbian Porn," below.

Do Yourself a Favor

- Don't feel as if you'll ever have the sex life of your dreams? Then grant yourself one erotic pleasure every day—even a small one. Buy a current or back issue of *On Our Backs*. Check out www.Cyber-dyke.net and other queer porn sites (that's *real* lesbian and queer porn—not the fake mainstream variety.) Try out your new pocket rocket vibrator at lunch time. Imagine sex with that new receptionist at the gyne's office: "First, I'll get her into the exam room, then I'll put her in the stirrups...."
- "Forbid yourself nothing" is the rallying cry at Stormy Leather, a San Francisco fetish boutique. The creators of all those scrumptious fashion designs in latex and leather would certainly know. New clothes, a new sex toy, a fresh haircut, that tattoo or piercing you've always dreamed of.... Indulge yourself.
- Fantasize about things that delight you, things that frighten you, and things that powerfully turn you on. You can even fantasize about things that you find revolting. It's fine to fantasize about people other than your lover or to fantasize outside your gender preference. You can fantasize about things you may not want to do. You can have "nonconsensual" sex in your fantasies.
- Declare a day of pleasure without guilt. For one day, imagine the unimaginable.

Find Support

- Find friends who will encourage you in your self-explorations.
- Ask for support. Be specific: "I want to be more vocal about my desires

ASK FOR SUPPORT. BE SPECIFIC. “I want to be more vocal about my desires. How did you get over your shyness?”

- Sign on to a sexuality-related Internet discussion group. (See the resources chapter.) Ask the list members how they came to revel in their most compelling desires. (They’ll be glad someone sparked such a fascinating conversation.)
- Ask an expert. Websites like PlanetOut and ClassicDykes host “expert” opinion boards. (ClassicDykes is for lesbians and bisexual women in midlife and beyond, including women questioning their sexual orientation or coming out in later life.) Not only can you post a question, you can see what other women like you are curious about. You can also find lesbian sex advice columns in magazines like *On Our Backs*, *Curve*, and *Girlfriends*.
- You may be surprised to learn that many well-known sex-positive authors and artists started out just like you. They may have struggled just as painfully for self-acceptance. They may have been isolated, or shy, or criticized for their sexual choices. That’s why they’ve dedicated themselves to making the road easier for you. Check out the bibliography in chapter 19 for work by Tristan Taormino, Annie Sprinkle, Staci Haines, Loren Cameron, Patrick Califia, Kate Bornstein, Carol Queen, Susie Bright, and more.
- Ask your friends to tell you their hottest fantasies. Tell them yours.

Nurture Your Libido

Libido is sexual energy in its purest state—that feeling of *wanting*, regardless of *what* or *who* you want. Libido isn’t about how you look, the size of your toy chest, or who wants (or doesn’t want) to have sex with you. Your libido is your erotic life force, an intrinsic part of who you are. While you may identify many sources of your fantasies, *you* are the source of your desires.

Think of libido as something you practice—like playing the cello, meditating, yoga, or even shooting hoops. Not only do you gain sexual skills with practice, but you find that your capacity for sexual energy (and even sensation) expands. There are many ways to “exercise” your libido: masturbating, fantasizing, sensory awareness practices, giving a lap dance, going to a drag king show, keeping a sex journal, having sex with a partner, watching others having sex,

viewing porn, reading erotica, talking about sex, planning for sex, and reading sex guides like this one.

Falling in love, of course, is the universal libido enhancer. Coming out can gear up your sex drive (and you can come out over and over, as you discover new ways to channel your erotic energy). Improved body image, self-esteem, and general health will make room for renewed sexual energy. Anything that expands what you allow yourself sexually will pump up your sexual energy.

Libido evolves over the course of a lifetime, ebbing and flowing in a rhythm that's natural for you. Many women notice they feel particularly sexual just before or during their menstrual period.

Many female-to-male transsexuals (FTMs) report intensified libido once they begin testosterone injections. Similarly, some male-to-female transsexuals (MTFs) notice a reduction in sex drive with estrogen and anti-androgen therapy.

Pay Porn for Us

Pay porn is ubiquitous in the world of Internet porn. Until recently, “lesbian” pay porn meant girl-girl action on sites marketed to a heterosexual audience.

Pay porn sites operate on a membership basis. Usually, members are offered several membership plans, with options for one-time-only and recurring billing.

CyberDyke (“The Erotic Network for Lesbians Only”) hosts a network of sites featuring explicit photos and videos. DarkPlay is the best known of the bunch; others include: Playbutch, Shaved Dyke, Big Beautiful Heaven, Leaky Girls, Posteriority (“for backdoor girls”). Membership in the network provides access to all.

Heather Corinna, of Scarlet Letters, stars in her own pay site at www.Femmerotic.com. Both model and photographer, Corinna posts hundreds of beautiful erotic photographs, many by guest artists and guest models. The quality is a cut above many other pay sites offering erotic photography for lesbians and bisexual women.

Pregnancy is well known to affect libido. For some but certainly not all women, desire diminishes during pregnancy. Rachel Pepper writes, “If you are one of those lucky women who feel more sexual during pregnancy or manage to maintain your normal sexual prowess, more power to you! However, for the vast majority...sexual desire tends to dip.”⁵ Physiological changes, exhaustion, and worry, that universal defeater of desire, can put the brakes on your sex life:

In my first trimester, I was so afraid of having an orgasm and dislodging the fetus that I would not let my partner sex me up.

After birth, estrogen levels drop, and prolactin levels rise (if the mother is breastfeeding), and sexual desire may take a dive. “The impact of hormonal changes on a biological mother’s libido can’t be underestimated,” sex educators Cathy Winks and Anne Semans write.⁶

Hormonal changes during perimenopause and menopause affect libido—and not necessarily in the way you might predict:

*For me at 44, and eight months after a hysterectomy (kept my ovaries), I’ve never been hornier or felt more erotic. I have always had a good sex drive, but WOW! This is one incredible chapter in my life. I’m still in shock.*⁷

While hormones powerfully affect libido, they’re not solely responsible for *all* the dips and peaks in your sex drive. A study of 40-to-60-year-old women found that mood and energy, rather than hormone levels, were the “best predictors of sexual well-being.”⁸ After all, many postmenopausal women have hot sex lives, and many premenopausal women notice no connections between their menstrual cycles and their desire for sex. (For more on this, see “Perimenopause and Menopause,” in chapter 3, Anatomy and Sexual Response.)

So to nurture your libido, nurture yourself. Top of the list: reduce stress. Overwork and stress affect libido more than we realize.

I think I have the tendency to overextend myself and am a bit of a workaholic. Over the last year or so, I have lost most of my desire for sexual contact, which is probably due to stress and fatigue.

I lose all desire and get very irritable if my girlfriend even tries to have

sex with me. I just really need to relax before I'm able to even consider sex.

On the other hand, you might be able to channel that tension and irritability into an eruption of over-the-top fucking—which, by the way, is a great way to relieve stress.

Other ways to nurture your libido by relieving stress include meditation (even ten minutes a day), aromatherapy (try a relaxing blend of bath oils), exercise, healthy eating, and adequate rest. Most important, *slow down*. Breathe. If your life is so busy you don't have time to plug in your vibrator (much less use it), you are seriously overbooked.

During sexual arousal, your brain sends neural messages via sympathetic and parasympathetic nerve pathways. Stress can interfere with the functioning of these pathways, which then impedes nerve stimulation (sensation), engorgement, clitoral erection—in short, the signals that let you know you're turned on. No wonder you've lost the urge! (More on sexual arousal in the next chapter; see chapter 4, *Orgasm*, for information on conscious breathing.)

Erotic Play

Lesbian, bisexual, and queer women enjoy many different erotic activities and turn-ons. Not all of us share all of these turn-ons—in fact, we may not even have heard of some of them. (See the index at the back of this book to find a discussion of terms you may be unfamiliar with.)

anal penetration
blindfolds
blood play
bondage
breast whipping
breath control
caning
caressing
clit pumping

cocksucking (detachable or not)
consensual humiliation
cracking a whip
cross-dressing
cuddling
cunnilingus
cybersex
dancing
digital cameras
dildos
dominance/submission
double penetration
dressing slutty
dripping hot wax
enemas
exhibitionism
fantasizing
finger-fucking
fisting
flirting
flogging
frottage
fucking
gazing into a lover's eyes
genderplay
getting a tattoo
golden showers
group sex
hair pulling
holding hands
hugging
ice cubes on her belly
kissing
kneeling
knife play
lacing up her corset

lap dancing
leather, rubber, or latex
licking her feet
making videos
massage with sensual oils
Master/slave role play
masturbating with a vibrator
negotiating sex
nibbling ears and neck
nipple clamps or clothespins
orgasm
outdoor sex
over-the-knee spanking
packing a dildo in your 501s
paying for sex
phone sex
playing with sex toys
polishing boots
putting on a condom
putting on makeup
rape scenes
reading erotica
reapplying your lipstick
rimming
role play
seduction
sensory deprivation
sex in secret
shaving
snapping on a glove
strap-on sex
stripping
sucking her labia
sucking her nipples
talking dirty
tickling with feathers
tribadism

triple penetration
using Saran wrap
voyeurism
watching porn
wearing a butt plug
wrestling
writing in a journal about sex

Sex + Intimacy

“Healthy eroticism does not avoid problems; it works with and transforms them,” writes Jack Morin, in *The Erotic Mind: Unlocking the Inner Sources of Sexual Passion and Fulfillment*. Morin articulates an equation we all can understand: *attraction + obstacles = excitement*.⁹ The forbidden object of desire—whether a person, a fantasy, or a taboo activity—gets us hot like nothing else.

What happens when you take away the obstacle? Sometimes excitement withers, as in the case of longtime lovers whose desire has waned. No longer risking new levels of intimacy, no longer challenged by the process of discovering themselves sexually, they utter the sad lament “The thrill is gone!” Sometimes familiarity breeds not contempt, but boredom.

It’s rare that a couple’s desire for one another will remain constant through the years. We’ve all experienced the intense sexual high of falling in love and then the inevitable cooling off. Of course, “cooling off” doesn’t mean giving up sex. But maintaining a charged sex life with a long-term partner requires attention.

The most common sexual complaint among long-term partners is “desire discrepancy.” One partner wants *more* sex than the other, or one partner wants *different* sex than the other. This can be very threatening. It’s tempting to simply ignore the problem—but that won’t help. Faced with desire discrepancy, many people opt for a new partner—or give up on sex. As Morin writes in *The Erotic Mind*, reconciling desire discrepancy can be more subtle than that. For instance, you could keep the lover but change the sex. Morin encourages a process of self-exploration and discovery to help you find out what really makes your libido cook.

See chapter 8, Sex and Partnership, for more on sex and intimacy.

Fantasy

Fantasies are great ways to find out what you want sexually. You can try on new sexual activities, styles, and genders in your fantasies. You don't have to be too literal in interpreting your fantasy. That six-woman gang bang you revisit each night before sleep isn't proof of a death wish or a deep need to be defiled. It may just be that you want to give up control, have group sex, or be overwhelmed by your partner's desire for you.

Here are some fantasy classics:

- *Anonymous sex.* "I'm in a crowded bar. We make eye contact and go off to a dark corner. I lift her skirt...." Hotel cocktail lounges are often the settings for fantasies involving sex with strangers (all those bedrooms just an elevator ride away). The rough-trade version of this fantasy can be set in the subway, an alley, or the backroom of a gay bar. Money exchange provides an extra twist.
- *Romance.* We fantasize about falling in love, with soulful gazes and heart-shattering desire. "It's summer and the mangos are ripe. We're lying in bed with the fan on, feeding each other and licking off the stickiness...."
- *Cross-orientation.* Many people change sexual orientation in their fantasies. Lesbians can and do get off to fantasies of sex with men. In our fantasies, we can be straight girls or dykes, dominant or submissive; we can be femmes having sex with men or butch dykes having group sex with bodybuilders at a gay sex club.
- *Gender shifts.* "I pull out my dick (in the fantasy it's real) and start beating off. She reaches down and takes the head of my dick in her mouth and starts sucking really slowly, finally taking it all the way down her throat." In your dreams you can change gender a dozen times in one night.
- *Dominance.* Many of us fantasize having a partner on her (or his) knees, begging for mercy, for attention, for release, for a spanking, or for an orgasm.
- *Submission.* "I need someone to take control," wrote one woman, echoing a common theme. "In my 37 years I have not had that kind of sex, but have always dreamed of it."

- *Discipline*. “I am bent over the teacher’s desk with no panties on, getting spanked for some infraction in front of the entire class—boys and girls. Sometimes the teacher designates a boy to fuck me after the spanking.”
- *Age play*. Hot scenes can come from role-playing in which adult partners adopt age-based (and gender-based) power roles. Daddy/girl, Daddy/boy, Mommy/girl, Mommy/boy roles are popular forms of age play.
- *Exhibitionism*. Up on the roof, under the boardwalk, or in the backseat of a taxi, public sex can be a big turn-on. Wearing revealing clothing and arranging to be “caught” masturbating are also common themes.
- *Famous partners*. Angelina Jolie, Pink, Hilary Swank, Gina Gershon, Kate Moennig (Shane in *The L Word*), and, as one lesbian wrote, “A Tilly sandwich—Jennifer Tilly and her sister Meg Tilly.”
- *Threesomes*. “I’m going down on a woman and a man is fucking me from behind.”
- *Initiation rites*. “Taking” a virgin, teaching a novice new tricks, bringing out a straight woman. “Sometimes I fantasize that I’m a virgin....”
- *Molestation*. “I want to be a little girl selling Girl Scout cookies. I ring a bell and a very handsome man answers the door with only a towel wrapped around his waist....”
- *Role play*. “In my favorite fantasy, I’m the ship’s wench on a coed pirate vessel. I’m tied, spread-eagled, to a giant roulette wheel in a dark room deep in the hull of the ship.”
- *Rape*. “I’m forcing another femme to have sex—tying her up and ass-fucking her.” The debate about rape fantasies usually focuses on the woman as victim. But what about women who fantasize being the rapist?
- *Edge play*. Water sports, blood play, scarification, severe sadomasochism (S/M).
- *Taboo sex*. Vampire play, bestiality (sex with animals), necrophilia (sex with a dead body).

Lesbian Porn

In the world of mainstream porn, the word *lesbian* usually refers to girl-girl action scenes where two (seemingly heterosexual) women get it on. Girl-girl porn places the male viewer inside the popular fantasy of two women putting on a show just for him. (Ironically, many women who have acted in these films

have been bisexual in real life—giving us bisexual women pretending to be straight women having “lesbian” sex.)

Lesbian porn came along in the 1980s—videos shot by real lesbian and bisexual and queer women for *us*. Fatale Video appeared on the scene with a list that included *Clips*, *Hungry Hearts*, and *Suburban Dykes*, which featured porn star Nina Hartley.

Now you can have your pick of explicit videos/DVDs featuring lesbian, bisexual, queer, transsexual sex. You can view lesbian romance; how-to tips on anal sex, play piercing, erotic massage, and female ejaculation; hard-core all-sex no-plot tie-me-up, strap-me-down action; BDSM scenes; and videos featuring Daddy/girl, butch/femme, butch-on-butch, femme-on-femme, and transmen packing some serious heat. You get a wide range of body types, sexual cultures, and styles. You also get a wide range of production values from amateur videos with a homemade feel to the slickest productions. As Violet Blue writes in *The Ultimate Guide to Adult Videos*, “You’re guaranteed an authentic female orgasm in every video, and furthermore these women have styles and methods of getting off that can’t be matched by the adult industry with its formulas and scripts. Not to mention that most of the real lesbian films feature real-life lovers.”¹⁰

Do you like to watch men getting off? Is viewing an intense blow job your guilty pleasure? You’re not alone. One woman wrote: “I have no doubt that I am a lesbian and have no desire to have sex with a man, but the thought of two guys doing it really makes my clit throb.”¹¹ Why? Well, to some of us, cocks are hot. Just because we like to look at them doesn’t mean we need to marry one. (Although we might fantasize *having* one.) And, actually, some of us *like* having sex with men—straight men, bi men, gay men, *and* transmen. Gay male porn isn’t hard to find (pardon the pun). It’s a huge industry, thoroughly organized into subgenres: big meat, college boys, rough trade.

Mainstream porn offers a wide selection of feature films, with story, characters, experienced actors and directors, high production values, and bigger budgets than most lesbian films. (No surprise there.) Look for women directors like Veronica Hart and Candida Royalle; beginners’ picks, like the “soft” porn of director Andrew Blake; educational guides by Tristan Taormino, Nina Hartley, Annie Sprinkle, Staci Haines, and Carol Queen; and the fully realized, plot-driven films of Paul Thomas, whom Violet Blue calls the Scorsese of adult films. As Blue says, Paul Thomas makes *movies*. For more on watching porn

with your partner, how to find authentic performances, and the story lines of hundreds of videos and DVDs, check out Violet's Blue's *The Ultimate Guide to Adult Videos*.

See the videography in chapter 19 for popular lesbian and queer porn videos and DVDs to get you (ahem) going.

Suggested Web Links

CYBERDYKE: THE EROTIC NETWORK FOR LESBIANS ONLY

www.cyber-dyke.net

DARKPLAY

www.darkplay.net

HEATHER CORINNA

www.femmerotic.com

SOURCE OF QUOTE

Patrick Califia, *Public Sex: The Culture of Radical Sex*, second edition (Cleis Press, 2000),105.

chapter three

Anatomy and Sexual Response

My pussy is a very lovely, shorn, shapely, and soft thing.

LET'S BEGIN WITH A TOUR OF YOUR SEXUAL ANATOMY. Regardless of how you relate to your body—whether you're comfortable being female, love your genitals, hate your genitals, or feel your body is the perfect expression of who you are—your sex life will be enhanced by understanding what's going on down there.

Anatomy

The official term for the female genitalia is *vulva*. Some of us prefer *pussy*, *cunt*, and other names. Our genitals include the clitoris, labia, and vagina. The fleshy area over the pubic bone is called the mons. Our perineum, anus, and breasts can also be quite sensitive to sexual stimulation.

Truth is, there are women who don't know where or what their clit is—and there are even lesbians who have never held open their labia and looked at themselves. Why? Well, for starters, we're not exactly encouraged to look at our genitals. If only we were presented mirrors, speculums, and Annie Sprinkle DVDs with those first packages of sanitary pads or tampons.... (As far as I'm concerned, sex ed would best be team-taught by Betty Dodson and Annie Sprinkle, and not your boring, uptight 5th grade science teacher. *A New View of a Woman's Body* and *The Clitoral Truth* should be required reading. For both girls and boys. “*Can you spell c-l-i-t-o-r-i-s? No diploma for you, Johnny!*”)

Add to the lack of basic information about our bodies the complicated relationship many lesbian, bisexual, and queer women have to gender. Some of us experienced considerable pressure to look and act “feminine”—when we didn't feel feminine inside. We may be questioning whether we consider ourselves to be women at all—female anatomy notwithstanding. Others of us

found that our natural femininity made our sexual choice suspect—and, because we looked, dressed, walked, and talked like “normal” women, we felt invisible as lesbians. As a preteen, you may have felt you failed at being the little girl your parents had so wanted. That made it hard to relate to the anatomy diagrams in the package insert that came with your first box of tampons.

Finally, one out of three girls is sexually abused before reaching adulthood. Sex was the site of our pain. No wonder so many of us are shut down, having only a vague notion of what’s going on between our legs.

So, let’s take a guided tour of our genitals.

Clitoris

The glans of the clitoris is the most sensitive spot in your genital area. If you draw your finger up from your vaginal opening in one long stroke, you’ll find your clit at the top of the vulva. (If you like, visualize a clock, with your vaginal opening at six o’clock and your clit at midnight.)

When you refer to your “clit” you probably mean the part of the clitoris on the outside of your body. How big is a clitoris? Clits come in a wide variety of sizes, shapes, colors, and sensitivities. Clits can be so tiny you can hardly find them or as big as the first joint of your thumb. Female-to-male transsexuals taking testosterone can develop clits as large as 3 inches long.

The exterior body of the clitoris is made up of the glans (or head), the hood, and the shaft. The glans is the most sensitive part of the clit, analogous to the head of a penis—only far richer in nerve endings (6,000 to 8,000)¹ and thus more sensitive. Your clitoral hood drapes your glans and keeps it moist and sensitive—still, touching your nonaroused or unlubricated clitoral glans can be irritating or even painful. If you gently hold your clit between your thumb and forefinger, you can feel the shaft.

Hardly the little “nub” described in outdated sex guides and anatomy texts, the clitoris is a complex structure of erectile tissue, much of which surrounds the urethra—no surprise to women who experience ejaculation with orgasm.

The Federation of Feminist Women’s Health Centers identifies 18 distinct parts of the “complete” clitoris, most of which you can’t see, all of which

function as a whole to produce sexual pleasure and orgasm.² Such an extensive description of the clitoris helps explain why a person's sexuality can be decimated by female circumcision or by surgeries imposed on intersexed infants.

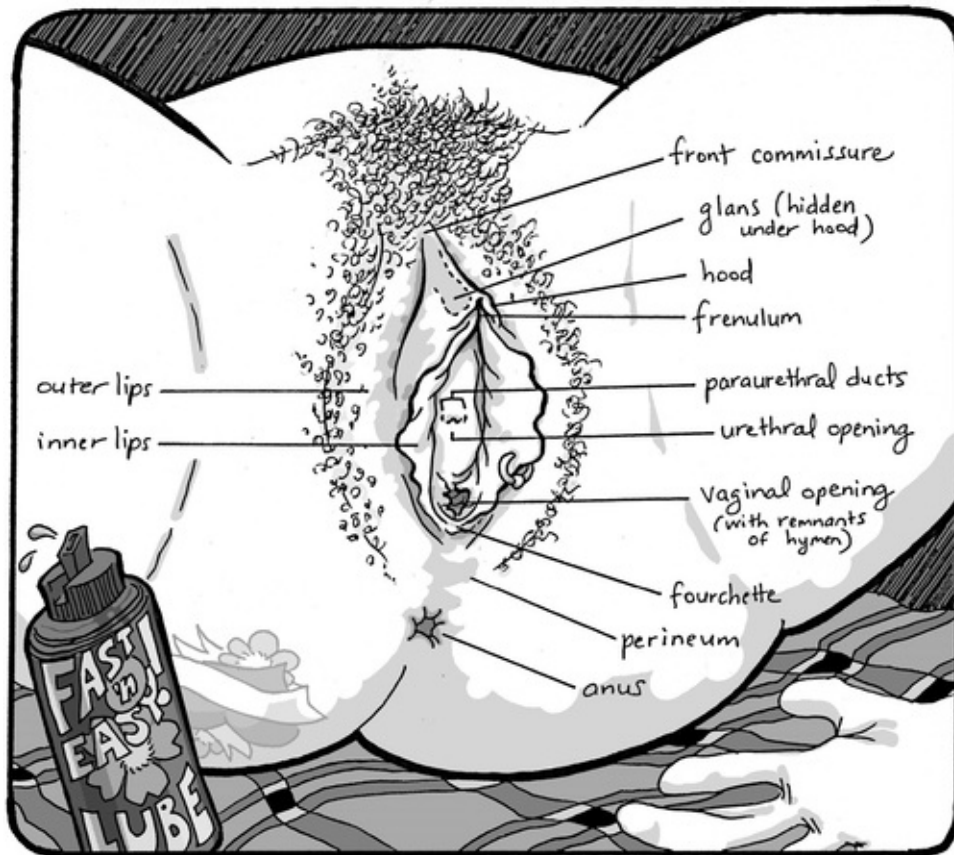


Illustration 1. Female Anatomy (External)

How did the women of the FFWHC figure this out? In the 1970s, while researching a book on reproductive health for women, they came across the conventional descriptions of women's sexuality, which didn't make sense when viewed alongside their own experiences. In true '70s feminist style, they formed a consciousness-raising group and got to work. They looked at each other's genitals, took pictures, made films of themselves masturbating, and studied human anatomy. The result was the book *A New View of a Woman's Body*.³

Another researcher, working almost 25 years later, used a different strategy. Dr. Helen E. O'Connell, of the Royal Melbourne Hospital in Australia, dissected human cadavers. "The pyramid-shaped mass of erectile tissue" she saw, "far

larger than previously described,” bore no resemblance to the anatomy she learned in med school.⁴ “There were glaringly obvious defects in some books—like the book that I learnt anatomy from when I was training for my surgical exams just had no description [of the clitoris] at all.”⁵

Two of O’Connell’s ten specimens were from premenopausal women who exhibited “more extensive erectile tissue” than the typical elderly cadavers found in research settings.⁶ “Welucked out,” she said, “one of our cadavers was 36 years old. She looked like an Amazon.”⁷

Even *Gray’s Anatomy* failed to identify or describe the nerves and blood vessels that go to the clitoris—which are among the FFWHC’s 18 parts of the clitoris related to sexual pleasure. “For a surgeon,” said O’Connell, “that’s unacceptable.” She concluded that current anatomical descriptions of female human urethral and genital anatomy are inaccurate.

That lack of respect for women’s anatomy can have serious consequences for women undergoing radical hysterectomy and other surgeries. Men who undergo surgery for prostate cancer benefit from the “tons of studies about how to prevent impotence after radical prostatectomy,” as one expert in gynecological anatomy said. “Given this beautifully detailed knowledge of the interrelationship between the female urethra and sexual organs,” the researcher continued, “it should be possible to develop similar nerve-sparing operations for women.”⁸

O’Connell found that the crura (or legs) of the clitoris “flare backwards into the body,” extending into the vaginal wall on either side of the urethra. (Think of a wishbone, with the clitoral glans in the middle and the crura as the legs.) Called the “vestibular bulbs” in traditional anatomy texts because they sit on either side of the vaginal opening, the “clitoral bulbs” (so named by O’Connell) are analogous to the bulb of erectile tissue at the root of a penis, though, O’Connell says, “the bulbs are more prominent in females.” The clitoris, she concludes, is far larger than the tiny structure depicted in conventional anatomy texts.

But why does any of this matter to you? If you think of your clitoris as an extensive sexual organ—one that protrudes at the top of your vulva, reaches down to flank the vaginal opening, extends into the vagina, and cradles the urethra—your concept of touching your clit just might take on new dimensions!

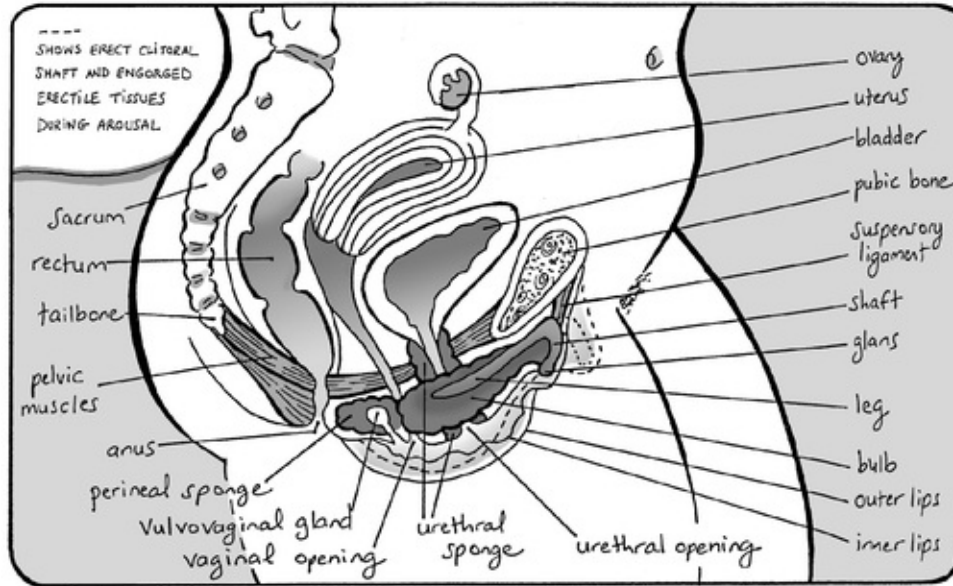


Illustration 2. Female Anatomy (Internal)

Labia

The *labia majora* are the large outer lips of your vulva. These are what some women call their pussy lips. They're usually covered with hair, and the skin is the same texture and color as the rest of you. Among women who shave their genitals, this is the area that's most commonly shorn. The *labia minora* are next as we move inward. These are asymmetrical, delicate folds of tissue with the same texture as mucous membrane. Generally hairless, they become quite slippery during sex. Some women's inner labia are long, extending outside the labia majora; others are smaller and tucked away inside the labia majora.

Vagina

The opening of the vagina sits below the clitoris and urethral opening, and above the perineum and anus. The vagina is made up of very elastic tissue that opens up and expands during arousal (and childbirth, of course). When not aroused, the walls of the vagina touch—we do *not* have a big “hole” in there.

The outer third of the vagina contains the most nerve endings, and most

women find it to be more sensitive than the deeper areas of the vagina. The opening and G-spot are the most responsive to the subtleties of movement and touch; the deeper areas are more responsive to the pressure of thrusting. The vagina ends in the cervix, the knoblike opening to the uterus through which menstrual blood passes. Some women love to have their cervix pounded; others hate it. Be careful not to bruise or abrade your cervix.

I love my cunt, for sure—the way its lips pucker, the way it hungers to get some. My cunt and I are partners in crime! Arrest us for being too hot!

The vagina isn't a passive receptacle. The opening of the vagina is quite muscular. Surrounded by the pelvic muscles, the vagina will contract with pleasure, gripping a finger, dildo, or hand.

G-Spot

The G-spot is named for Ernst Grafenberg, an ob-gyn—but let's think of it as the girl spot. Since Grafenberg, Beverly Whipple, Deborah Sundahl, Carol Downer, and many others have discovered so much more about the G-spot and its role in pleasure and orgasm.

The G-spot isn't a magic button, but rather an area of tissue that feels a bit rougher in texture than the rest of the vagina walls. You can find your G-spot by inserting a finger into your vagina and making a "come hither" motion toward the front wall of the vagina. The G-spot is actually the urethral sponge, or *corpus spongiosum*, an area of tissue surrounding the urethra, which runs along the front wall of your vagina carrying urine from the bladder to the urethral opening. (The urethral opening is located below your clit, just above your vagina.) You can also think of the G-spot as your female prostate; like a man's, it plays a role in ejaculation.

Some women ejaculate with G-spot stimulation; some ejaculate with clitoral stimulation. Some like G-spot stimulation, but don't ejaculate. And others find G-spot stimulation too intense to be pleasurable. (More on the G-spot and ejaculation in chapter 4, Orgasm.)

Perineum

Between your vagina and anus sits a small area of connective tissue, the perineum. A lot of women like pressure here during penetration, and licking or nibbling during cunnilingus. This tissue is also somewhat elastic—it stretches during childbirth to allow passage of a baby’s head. During her pregnancy, Susie Bright discovered that “perineal massage” recommended by her childbirth preparation teacher was much like fist-fucking. “I could see why immediately,” she wrote. “A hand going inside my pussy is a little like a baby’s head trying to move outside into the world. How exciting! For the first time I felt a surge of confidence about my chances for a successful labor.” [9](#)

Anus

The anus is a very sensitive area, ripe for erotic play. In Victorian porn, it’s called the “little rosebud.” Made of delicate tissue, rich in nerve endings and blood vessels, the anus is quite responsive to sexual arousal.

The anus is guarded by two muscles—the external sphincter, which consists of voluntary muscles (you can flex them), and the internal sphincter, which consists of involuntary muscles (they seem to open and close according to their own will—like blinking—though with practice you can learn to relax these, too).

The anus is short, just an inch or two long, leading into the rectum, which is about 4 to 6 inches long, and ending in the rectosigmoidal junction, the opening to the sigmoid colon. From there, the colon leads to the intestines. The rectum offers no equivalent of the cervix; there’s no stopping point. Things really can get lost in there, so precautions are a must when inserting an object into your anus. Dildos and butt plugs must have a flanged base (bigger at the base than the top), and insertive toys, like anal beads, must be securely fastened to their strings.

The tissue of the anus engorges with arousal and is quite expansive; you can fit a finger, a dildo or penis, a butt plug, or even a whole hand inside your butt. The lining of the anus and rectum is very, very delicate, and will tear easily—another reason to be extremely careful in choosing insertive anal toys and to always use lube.

In biological males, the prostate gland, located on the front wall of the rectum a few inches from the anal opening, responds to stimulation similarly to the G-

spot. You can insert a finger into the rectum and use that come-hither motion to find a partner's prostate. Male-to-female transsexuals, both pre-op and post-op, can enjoy prostate stimulation.

PC Muscles

Finally, the pubococcygeus (PC) muscles are the set of muscles that run through your pelvic area in a figure eight. These are the muscles you exercise when you stop the flow of urine midstream—or grip your lover's finger. Developing these muscles will heighten your experience of orgasm; prevent incontinence when laughing or sneezing, or in old age; and generally help you become more aware of sensations in all areas of your genitals. Kegel exercises (named for the gynecologist who popularized them) involve squeezing your muscles as if you were shutting off the flow of urine. Inhale as you contract your PC muscles; hold the contraction for several seconds; and then exhale as you relax. Do this ten times. Then push out ten times. Repeat. Do this daily—on the bus, in traffic, and while watching your TiVo.

Breasts

Many of us enjoy breast play—so much so that it gets its own chapter in this book. Unless you have health concerns or plan to breastfeed, you may not have sought out information on the anatomy of your breasts.

Our breasts are composed mostly of breast tissue and fat. Although the size of your breasts is genetically determined, your breast size will change as you gain or lose weight. One breast may be larger than the other. The size or shape of your breasts has no bearing on their responsiveness to sexual stimulation.

The areola surrounds the nipple; it's darker than the rest of the breast. The areola darkens and swells in response to sexual stimulation. The nipple becomes erect when stimulated; some women's nipples invert when aroused. (Dr. Susan Love calls these “shy” nipples.)¹⁰

Breast sensitivity varies from woman to woman, as well as at different points in a woman's menstrual cycle and over the course of her lifetime. PMS (premenstrual syndrome) and pregnancy can intensify breast sensitivity, and

menopause can lessen breast sensitivity. Women who have cystic breasts may find breast play very uncomfortable.

Sexual Response

How do you know when you're turned on? Does your clit throb? Can you feel a pulsing at the mouth of your vagina or at the opening of your anus? Do you feel nervous or fluttery? Do you notice small contractions of the sphincter muscles? Do you feel yourself getting wet? Do your nipples get erect? Are you aware of your nipples brushing against the fabric of your clothing? Can you smell your own juices?

You may be familiar with the Masters and Johnson model of sexual response. In the 1960s, William Masters and Virginia Johnson identified four stages of sexual response: *arousal*, *plateau*, *orgasm*, and *resolution*.¹¹ Theirs became the standard model of describing what happens when we're sexual. Helen Singer Kaplan added a fifth stage, *desire*; she posited that before there is arousal, there's desire.¹² In the 1980s, Joann Loulan joined the chorus, adding a sixth stage: *willingness*. Loulan suggested that even if there wasn't desire, there could be a willingness to feel desire.¹³ Don't worry if your sexual response fails to follow any of these models. Human sexuality varies greatly from person to person, and even from day to day.

So why would it be useful to have a model of sexual response? Well, knowing generally how human sexual response works can help you understand your own experience. You can learn to notice your own sexual rhythms. Then you can decide what aspects of your sexual response you might like to develop more. Models such as these can give you a language to help you describe your experience, one that others may understand. However, if theories bore you—or, worse, make you feel inadequate—just skip them. You don't have to be a sexologist to have a fabulous sex life.

Understanding your own sexual response, however, *will* help you create the sex life you want. Try masturbating in front of a full-length mirror, or with a hand mirror between your legs. As you stimulate yourself, you'll get to see your particular sexual responses in action. You can become acquainted with the visual

cues of your sexual arousal. (You can even insert a speculum—available from www.The-Clitoris.com, women’s health centers, and some sex toy stores, such as Toys in Babeland (see chapter 20, Resources)—and grab a flashlight to see what you look like on the inside when you’re turned on.)

During *arousal*, your heart rate and blood pressure increase. You may feel warm. A sexual flush may appear over your face and chest. The breasts enlarge. Your nipples become erect; later in arousal, your areolas swell and your nipples may seem to retract. The clitoris engorges with blood and becomes erect, growing bigger. The inner labia swell and darken in color. You get wet. Your vaginal walls lubricate and the whole vagina expands. The uterus engorges and lifts, expanding up to twice its normal (not pregnant) size. Your vagina opens. Your sphincter muscles may relax or contract.

A friend told me that women once wore lipstick to symbolize the sexual engorgement of their labia during arousal—a reasonable explanation of why women who wore bright red lipstick were said to be “loose.” Whether or not the story is true, my friend (happily) now can’t look at a woman’s freshly painted lips without thinking of the engorgement—and resulting darkening and deepening of color—during arousal.

The *plateau* stage is the state of peak excitement right before orgasm. The vagina opens up and balloons out. The clitoral glans is tucked inside its hood. The areolas continue to swell. You may notice that you can take more nipple stimulation. Muscle tension increases all throughout the body, as the heart rate continues to climb. You find yourself breathing faster and deeper. The sex flush becomes more pronounced. The labia minor may turn a deep red or wine color. The vagina opens into what’s called the orgasmic platform. The outer one-third of the vagina further congests with blood.

Orgasm is a series of involuntary muscle contractions in the vagina, uterus, and anus, releasing the blood that’s been stored in the erectile tissues of the genitals. Most sources report that the contractions occur at a rate of slightly more than one per second; generally an orgasm will involve anywhere from just a few contractions to 10 or 15 of them. Of course, the intensity and duration of the orgasm will vary greatly. During orgasm the heart rate peaks. Breathing is faster. (More on orgasm in the next chapter.)

Resolution is the stage in which the body returns to its nonaroused state. You experience a release of tension. The heart rate and breathing return to normal.

Sex flush disappears, nipple erection fades, the glans of the clit once again protrudes from its hood. The labia return to their nonaroused color and size.

Do women get “blue balls”—that painful state of unresolved arousal that men talk about? Yes—if after reaching a very high degree of arousal you don’t come, it takes a longer time for the vascular congestion to ease, which can be uncomfortable—or exciting!

Sexual Response over a Lifetime

Just as your experience of arousal and orgasm does not necessarily follow Masters and Johnson’s four-stage model, your experience of sexuality over the course of your lifetime will not necessarily follow the linear model we’ve been given.

And what linear model is that? As children we are supposed to be asexual. Then we hit puberty and get interested in boys. (If we get interested in girls, we must be confused.) Our sexuality matures: we like dick—but not *too* much and only when we feel an emotional connection to it. Then we hit menopause and the sexual portion of our lives ends with the cessation of reproductive functioning. Gender development is supposed to follow an equally linear path.

Of course, this model bears little resemblance to anyone’s real experience. (In fact, if you’re reading this book, you’ve already strayed far from the path.) *Real* sexual response develops individually (and messily!) over a lifetime—it doesn’t ratchet through one neat stage after another.

I had a rough time trying to figure out who I was during my adolescence.... I’m just glad that an eating disorder, shagging some guys, and some experimentation with drugs helped me figure it all out. As I am only 25, I still have a few major life changes to go.... But the main one was the realization that I am not heterosexual. My sex life increased a zillion percent after that.

You’ll likely go through many subtle and not so subtle evolutions in sexual response and desire throughout your life. If you’ve come out as lesbian, bisexual, transgendered, queer, or kinky—or all of the above—you’ve already experienced the process of developing your sexuality and gender expression from the inside, rather than from others’ expectations.

I am very proud of the fact that since I stopped fucking men, I went from a girl who spreads her legs and waits for it to someone very active and very top!

Many women say sex gets better and better as they come to know and accept themselves. The more you explore your sexuality—without judgment—the richer your sense of yourself as a sexual being.

MTF Prostate = G-Spot

My partner and I recently started reading *The Whole Lesbian Sex Book* together and find it interesting and useful so far. One sentence caught my attention and got me to make a connection I hadn't thought of so I decided to pass it along.

As almost an aside you wrote that male-to-female transsexuals (pre-and post-op) can enjoy prostate stimulation.¹⁴ Having always thought of myself as female, the fact that the prostate is not removed during gender reassignment surgery always seemed somehow unfair (like some vestigial male anatomy left there to taunt me). But as I looked again at the little sentence in the book, I realized there was something wrong.

After surgery I read a lot about anatomy. I remembered reading that, while I still do have a prostate, the vagina is now *between* the prostate and the rectal wall. This is important because if my doctor ever does a prostate exam, she won't find anything using the usual procedure. She will actually need to find my prostate by feeling through the vaginal wall.

Suddenly, it all came together—since my gender reassignment surgery, the prostate is in about the same position and should function very much like a G-spot. *Cool.*

I've mentioned this to my partner, and I am looking forward to her helping me test my theory.

I love being who I am now as a sexual being—everything, all my 42 years—adds up to the moment. Tough-assed femme to the core who needs the tender as much as she needs the slam and fury. I own all aspects of me now in ways I never dreamed possible. And I feel like I’m gonna rock it that much more every year that I’m on the planet. I like to take long steps in tall heels. That’s my sexuality.

Gender Transition

How does the process of gender transition inform sexual response?

Trans-Health (“the online magazine of health and fitness for transsexual and transgendered people”) surveyed its readers on the subject of trans sexuality in 2001.¹⁵ Only about 30 readers responded to the survey questions; yet even among this small group, there is a range of sexual interests and concerns. A few identified their gender as “other”; the rest were evenly split between male-to-female (MTF) and female-to-male (FTM) transsexuals. Half “expressed some degree of sexual fluidity; their interests had changed since transition, occasionally several times.” Nearly all the MTFs said they wanted to experience vaginal penetration. Nearly all the FTMs expressed a desire to “put their cocks in other boys’ bottoms.”

Many had transgendered partners. Some reported no sexual problems; some, problems related to coming out as trans; and others, problems related to their sexual physiology. Interestingly, many said that being able to view sexuality from more than one gender perspective benefited them.

Gender transition is a time of self-discovery. Some people liken it to a kind of adolescence for grown-ups. Ask a 30-year-old man appreciating his chest for the first time, or a 40-year-old woman caressing her own round hips and soft skin.

More on gender transition in chapter 14, Gender (Not Destiny).

Depression

Certain medications for depression flattened out my sex drive so that my lover had to do with no sex for months at a time while I wore my gray

flannel bunny nightgown around the house and then slept in it. A far cry from my collection of very sexy lacy lingerie.

Nothing kills an otherwise healthy sex life like depression. Depression can severely diminish libido. It's hard to muster much interest in sex when you're barely getting through the day. Even more frustrating is that some medications available to treat depression often reduce sexual desire and functioning. Not all women experience sexual side effects while on antidepressants. Some notice no change whatsoever. For many, just not being depressed kick-starts their libido enough to overcome the effects of antidepressants. But for the huge number of women who do experience sexual side effects, they're a real problem. It's disheartening to finally come alive again—only to feel robbed of one's capacity for erotic pleasure. You certainly cannot fault yourself for grieving over the loss of sexual pleasure.

It's difficult to create a mood of openness and curiosity when you've just been through a major depression—but that is what's called for. If ever there was a time for self-exploration, this is it.

Antidepressants can affect your sexual response in a number of ways. You might not be able to reach orgasm. You get really turned on, but can't quite get over the edge, no matter how many vibrators you wear out. You might have disappointing orgasms—barely a ripple compared to what you used to enjoy. Your sensation may be muted. One woman described it as being touched though velvet. Finally, you may have no interest in sex whatsoever, even though your depression has lifted.

Quite often, anorgasmia (inability to reach orgasm) passes after a few weeks on an antidepressant. A temporary bout of anorgasmia may have an odd benefit. If you were previously goal-oriented in your approach toward orgasm (*wham bam come*), you probably have never experienced a sexual plateau stretching on indefinitely:

I've never been as turned on in my life as when I first went on Zoloft. Even though not being able to come was freaking me out, I was stunned by how wet and open I could get. I could practically fit my whole hand inside me.

Of course, after a month or more of arousal-without-orgasm, you may not be so impressed.

An antidepressant can interfere with your ability to feel sensation. You might touch yourself in your usual way and feel nothing. All systems are going—you engorge, you get wet, your muscles contract—but you don't feel it. You can have an orgasm so muted and distant that it feels like it's happening to someone else. This is not your imagination. Some neurotransmitters, like dopamine, facilitate sexual function while others, like serotonin, reduce it.

Here's where an experimental attitude helps. If you can detach from your frustration and disappointment (I know, I know), you may be able to locate your pleasure as you experiment with touch and sensation. A completely different touch may produce some sensation. If you previously used a vibrator, try your own fingers. If you are used to light, indirect clitoral stimulation, go for something more direct. Never tried a vibrator? Time to go shopping.

If you can't come—but you do find touch pleasurable—try focusing on sensation rather than orgasm. If sex doesn't end with orgasm, how might it end? Rather than stop in failure (after exhausting every possible means to reaching orgasm), decide in advance that you're going to engage in a session of touch and sensual awareness for, say, 20 minutes. When the need to come builds toward frustration, stop. Back off, relax all the muscles that have contracted in orgasmic tension, take a few deep breaths, and start again. Approach pleasure in a different way: notice what produces a yummy sensation rather than what you think will get you off.

Antidepressants or Orgasm Suppressants?

Most notorious for negative sexual side effects are the SSRIs (selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors), the class of drugs most frequently prescribed for depression. While medications like Effexor, Paxil, Prozac, Zoloft, and others have helped many overcome debilitating depression (and no doubt saved lives), they have also been known to cause sexual problems for many who take them.

Psychiatrists and other physicians have come up with a few tricks, such as combining two different antidepressants—for instance, coupling an SSRI with another type of antidepressant, such as Wellbutrin, that doesn't seem to adversely affect sexual functioning. Tianeptine, a French drug, seems to be as effective as other drugs in treating depression, but without the sexual side effects. It hasn't been approved by the FDA for use in the U.S. yet.¹⁶

Physicians can also closely monitor patients to find the precise dosage that ameliorates the symptoms of depression while minimizing adverse side effects. Landing on a treatment that works for you can take months of persistent effort—no small task for someone suffering from depression.

Health-care practitioners have come up with other creative solutions as well. Some recommend testosterone for women used in conjunction with an SSRI. Small doses of testosterone can add a bit of zip to the libido, they say. Likewise, some women who take an SSRI report an increase in libido when it is combined with Dehydroepiandrosterone (DHEA), an adrenal hormone used by bodybuilders. (DHEA use has also been linked to acne and mood swings.) There hasn't been sufficient research on DHEA or testosterone to know whether long-term use by women will lead to other health problems.

You can try Viagra and other recent drugs developed for men. Researchers have begun studying the potential of Viagra to help women who report negative sexual side effects from SSRIs (or “iatrogenic serotonergic antidepressant medication-induced sexual dysfunction,”¹⁷ to those in the know). Viagra will not give you back your sense of yourself as a sexually whole person. But it may help you achieve physiological arousal and orgasm. (See “Does Viagra Work for Women?” in chapter 4, Orgasm.)

Some women who suffer from depression have found it helpful to combine lower dosages of an SSRI with Saint-John's-wort or other herbal and nutritional remedies such as yohimbine and ginkgo. Others have abandoned SSRIs altogether, favoring herbal alternatives. (See “Herbal Supplements,” below.)

You might be helped by combining standard treatments (like medication and psychotherapy) with alternative strategies, such as light treatment¹⁸ and acupuncture.¹⁹ In one study of acupuncture as treatment for major depression, more than half of the women in the study achieved full remission.²⁰

Others may find nutritional counseling (for instance, aspartame has been linked to depression in those predisposed to it²¹), exercise, meditation, and spiritual work as helpful as transitional medical treatments:

In the past, I often found myself in the vicious cycle of getting depressed (for whatever reason, girlfriend-related or not), then losing my sex drive, then being depressed because I have no sex drive. I talked to a few

doctors about it, and they told me to regulate the foods I ate, and wanted to put me on medication, but I decided to meditate my way to a better outlook (which also reflected on my sex drive), and it's worked surprisingly well.

Of course, decisions regarding management of depression should be made with the help of a health-care practitioner who is knowledgeable about the available treatments and respectful of the needs of lesbians, bisexuals, and transsexuals. For many of us, that is easier said than done.

Finding Help

Most physicians spend less time learning about human sexuality—roughly 12 hours of classroom instruction—than you spent learning to drive a car. Homophobia may creep into the doctor/patient relationship in a variety of ways. Your physician may downplay your concerns about your sex life. She may feel uncomfortable talking to you about sex between women (or any sex at all). Your physician may view lesbians as not sexually “active”—since they presume we’re not having sex with men. More subtly, it might be assumed that if you’re not partnered, you aren’t interested in having sex.

Herbal Supplements

Herbalists can rattle off a long list of remedies for low libido and other sexual problems: Siberian ginseng, motherwort, ginkgo biloba, fenugreek, black cohosh, wild lettuce, and wild oats (as in “sow your wild oats”).

Many herbal and other plant-derived supplements (called *phytochemicals*) are marketed as sexual enhancers. Some have been studied in controlled research settings, others not. Often studies focus on erectile function in men; we have to extrapolate. Will an herbal remedy purported to help men get erect help women get erect? Get engorged? Get off? The lack of research or understanding of how these remedies work—or whether they work—doesn’t discount the fact that some women find them helpful. But it does make it harder to

know what to try.

Three herbals often associated with sexual functioning in women are ginseng, yohimbine, and ginkgo biloba. Ginkgo biloba has long been known to support circulatory function; that may explain its helpfulness in promoting physiological arousal. In one recent study, ginkgo biloba extract was found to “alleviate symptoms of antidepressant-induced sexual dysfunction related to all phases of the sexual response cycle”—in both men and women.²² Recent research suggests that yohimbine may help with antidepressant-induced anorgasmia. Ginseng is reported to enhance sexual drive.²³ And motherwort is said to help with lubrication.

Commercial supplements often make vague promises of “enhanced libido” or “enhanced performance.” Sometimes it’s unclear what aspect of sexual functioning they are trying to ameliorate.²⁴ Does this product promote orgasm? Sensation? Lubrication? Overall sexual energy?

Don’t underestimate herbal and other plant-derived remedies. Humans have a long history of making use of phytochemicals to ameliorate all sorts of troubles and to support healthy functions of the body. That they are powerful also brings with it a caution. Some of these have strong side effects or may produce adverse reactions when taken in combination with antidepressants and other medication. Some may include Saint-Johns-wort; if you are already taking an antidepressant, watch it. Others may promote estrogen production or contain phytoestrogens; if you have breast cancer and have been told to avoid isoflavones, stay away from these. Consult a healer knowledgeable in herbal remedies, such as an acupuncturist.

Susun S. Weed has an encyclopedic knowledge of herbal remedies for women. Her website (www.susunweed.com) features articles on women’s health and information on the Wise Woman Center, located in upstate New York, where she offers workshops.

Generally, these are supplements one takes daily for a period of time. They don’t work like Viagra—you don’t take ginseng and get wet half an hour later.

Of course, many health-care practitioners do quite well with lesbian, bisexual, and transsexual patients—especially since so many of us fill the ranks of the health-care industry. Now that sexual side effects of antidepressants have gained such notoriety, many health-care practitioners have become quite comfortable discussing libido and medication. Whether you're seeking the help of a psychiatrist, physician, or therapist, the best strategy for reclaiming your libido is to find someone who will work with you. Here are some questions to ask yourself when choosing a health-care professional:

- Do you get a gut sense that this practitioner will treat you respectfully—regardless of your gender identity or sexual choices?
- Do you feel comfortable talking to this practitioner? Does he listen to you?
- Does this practitioner have other lesbian, bisexual, or transsexual patients or clients? Who's recommending this individual?
- Is the practitioner qualified to answer your questions regarding the best course of treatment for your depression?
- How many hours of formal training in human sexuality has this practitioner received?
- Does the practitioner support you in prioritizing sexual satisfaction in your sex life?

Resources such as Kink Aware Professionals (www.bannon.com/kap) provide referrals to health-care professionals who are sensitive to the needs of lesbians, gays, transsexuals, sex workers, and S/M and fetish devotees. The Gay and Lesbian Medical Association (www.glma.org) offers referrals to queer-friendly physicians in the U.S. Local announcements lists, like San Francisco Bay Area's BA-Sappho, are also sources of referrals. The resources section of this book lists many helpful contacts for those seeking support and care. Your local women's, transgender, or queer community center may also provide referrals to health-care professionals.

Illness and Disability

Any disability, medical condition, or medical treatment that affects blood pressure, blood flow, muscles, or nerves can affect one's ability to orgasm.

These may include diabetes, multiple sclerosis, spinal injuries, and high blood pressure. Nerve damage can affect the sensitivity of the clitoris, making it either numb or too painful to touch. Some women suffer from oversensitivity. For seemingly no reason, their clit or nipples are too sensitive to be touched at all. Conditions like attention deficit disorder (ADD) that interfere with one's ability to concentrate can make orgasm difficult.

Surviving cancer and the treatments for it can affect sexuality. Many women who undergo chemotherapy experience a chemically induced premature menopause, with all the associated symptoms, like loss of vaginal lubrication and elasticity.

Hidden disabilities like fibromyalgia, chronic fatigue, and crohn's disease can have a particularly frustrating impact on sexuality. Feeling fine one day but experiencing genital touching as painful the next can make it very difficult to sustain interest in a sex life.

Often the first sign of arousal many of us notice is lubrication. So, if we don't lubricate, we may not "feel" aroused. Lubrication, of course, is affected by our menstrual cycle, aging (with the loss of estrogen in menopause, many women lubricate less), and medications—even antihistamines can dry you up.

If you aren't lubricating, you may think you're not turned on. What to do? Well, for starters, invest in your sexual pleasure by purchasing some lube. (More on lube in chapter 17, Sex Toys and Accoutrements.) Second, start noticing your other signs of arousal. Do your nipples harden and become more sensitive? Do you feel a fluttering in your belly? Can you feel your PC muscles contract?

Finally, ask yourself how *you* feel about your capacity for pleasure. Want to come faster? Want to take longer? Want to have deeper, more satisfying orgasms? Want to come even one time in a night? What's important is that *you* develop your sexuality in directions that bring you the most pleasure—regardless of what others may think or what you've been told is possible for you.

Perimenopause and Menopause

I'm finally admitting that my sexuality (or at least how I express it) is changing as I get older. That my desires are getting more interesting as my physical sensations are changing. I've become more diffuse. I find

more aspects of women—and myself—erotic. It's less about this act or that act, more about nerves and skin...it's just more.

How do our sexualities evolve as we get older? What is the relationship between fluctuating hormone levels in midlife and sexual energy? How do hormonal changes affect blood flow and genital engorgement? Nipple sensitivity? Clitoral sensitivity? Overall skin sensitivity?

Some women experience reduced sensitivity to stimulation and difficulty reaching orgasm:

Yes, the older I get, the harder it is for me to have orgasms. I also don't think they are as strong or satisfying as they used to be.

Others report just the opposite—intensified sensitivity and stronger orgasms:

My breasts are very sensitive, more so now that I'm going through menopause. I like fingers, but gently, and it can't go on for too long or it starts to irritate me.

How much of libido is hormonal, anyway? Many women *do* experience a drop in libido during menopause—though many do not. One study followed 326 women aged 35 to 47 for four years. Less than a third reported decreased libido.²⁵

Hormones aren't alone in influencing sexual energy during perimenopause and menopause. The editors of Power Surge (www.Power-Surge.com) report: “A drop in libido at this time in a woman's life may be due in part to physical changes that can occur at menopause, including hormone changes, changes in vaginal tissue and lubrication, fatigue, sleep disturbances, hot flashes, night sweats, and increasing general health concerns. Mental and emotional contributors include stress, changes in body image, relationship issues, and changes in sexual expectations.”²⁶

When the challenges to libido are so complex—and interconnected with such complexity—what can you do? There are some factors you can suss out: You can have your thyroid tested (unrelated to menopause, but an easy problem to rule out). You can get a blood workup and check your hormone levels. You may discover a hormonal deficiency.

But it's unlikely you'll be able to trace your lowered libido, difficulty reaching orgasm, or other sexual concern to a single cause. Instead, focus your

attention on ways to sustain and support your sexual well-being. And there are many:

- Masturbate—often, daily if possible. Frequent sexual stimulation will help keep your libido going. Susun S. Weed writes, “My Rx for low libido is 7 orgasms a week, whether you feel like it or not. You can do one a day or all in one day. Continue for at least 3 months.”²⁷
- Keep a sexuality journal. Track your erotic highs and lows. How often do you masturbate? Have you noticed changes in sensation? Orgasm? In your fantasies?
- Talk to your partner. One woman wrote, “I had a hot flash during sex about a week ago and I was embarrassed (not sure why), but I still had a wonderful time. I think being with a woman who’s close to me in age helps. Just talking about it helps.”
- Make sure you are well aroused before vaginal penetration. You may notice that you are slower to lubricate or that your vaginal walls are more sensitive.
- Use lube. Magazine articles aimed at women in midlife often recommend commercial products for “vaginal dryness.” Some of these may contain ingredients that “lower the pH of the vagina, which helps prevent overgrowth of bacteria in vagina,”²⁸ but your favorite lube will do just as well.
- You can address vaginal dryness with herbal remedies. Carol Leonard, of the Feminist Women’s Health Center, recommends Vitamin E, motherwort, and natural progesterone cream made from wild yam roots. She, too, recommends lube (she offers recipes for “natural” homemade concoctions) along with drinking two quarts of water a day. She also cautions against the use of estrogen creams, which have “potentially serious risks.”²⁹
- Exercise. Move your body, get your heart beating and your blood flowing. Along with general health benefits, the improved blood flow to the pelvic area will nourish genital tissue.³⁰ Declining vascular flow to genital tissue, which is not uncommon in perimenopause, can impair your ability to experience sexual arousal.
- Don’t forget your Kegels. Your PC muscles need exercise, too.
- Take good care of yourself. Sexual energy is related to overall well-being.

Make sure you eat well, get enough sleep (not always easy during menopause), and attend to health concerns.

- Consider that lowered libido, reduced sexual response, and inability to orgasm may be due to medication—particularly antidepressants. (See “Sex and Depression,” above.)

Just for a few days, stop thinking hormones and menopause and estrogen replacement, and instead think about how to get your sexuality back, in the sense of losing the tension, the anxiety, and feeling yourself open, really open so that people who walk by you stop and think, “Ah, she’s open!”

NANCY FRIDAY

- Many women look to herbal supplements to enhance energy and that feeling of well-being. Herbs like ginseng and ginkgo biloba can give your libido a boost. (See “Herbal Supplements,” above.) *The Wisdom of Menopause: Creating Physical and Emotional Health and Healing During the Change*, by Christiane Northrup, is a wonderful source of information on dong quai, chasteberry, and black cohosh. Also check out *New Menopausal Years the Wise Woman Way: Alternative Approaches for Women 30-90*, by Susun S. Weed.
- Low testosterone levels may be the cause of your lost libido. One study found that women with low testosterone levels were four times as likely to report low sex drive.³¹ Testosterone deficiency may also be responsible for decreased sensitivity in nipples and clitoris and diminished orgasm—or difficulty reaching orgasm at all.³² Testosterone may produce the sexual urge you’re looking for. This is very low dose testosterone; it should not produce male secondary sexual characteristics. Some gynecologists prescribe Estratest (a combination of estrogen and testosterone). Others prescribe low-dose testosterone in the form of a topical gel or cream or as a sublingual tablet. Dr. Susan Rako, author of *The Hormone of Desire*, recommends 2 percent testosterone in petroleum jelly (prepared by a compounding pharmacist) applied directly to genital

tissue “to jump-start” the libido. This is followed by low-dose orally prescribed testosterone.³³ If you think you may have a testosterone deficiency, work with a health-care provider to determine if testosterone will be helpful for you, and in what dose and form.

- DHEA is an androgen and a precursor for testosterone; in some women, DHEA raises testosterone levels sufficiently to improve libido. Some health-care providers recommend DHEA for libido loss; others don't. Some researchers say that DHEA strengthens the immune system, fights fatigue, and lifts depression. It is said to increase feelings of well-being and enhance libido.
- Once widely prescribed for symptoms of menopause and to reduce the risks of heart disease and osteoporosis, estrogen and estrogen-plus-progesterone have been discredited by the Women's Health Initiative (WHI) study, which found both to be ineffective and potentially dangerous.³⁴ Still, many women weigh the risks and decide that taking estrogen is the best course of action for them.

You *can* replenish libido. In spite of physiological changes and health concerns, regardless of whether you take hormones or botanical supplements, you can maintain your erotic life force. Sexual energy needn't be something that just happens to you—up in good times, down in bad. You can actively regenerate sexual energy, in much the same way you renew your energy overall. When you begin to think of your libido as self-generating, you have tremendous power over the course of your sexuality throughout your life.

And just how do you do that? The book you're holding is a good start. You'll find plenty of suggestions and sources of additional information throughout the following chapters.

Suggested Web Link

THE CLITORIS.COM

www.the-clitoris.com

SOURCE OF QUOTE

Nancy Friday, interviewed on www.Power-Surge.com

chapter four

Orgasm

Orgasm is leaving my body and coming back anew.

SO, ORGASMS! You can have orgasm-directed sex by yourself or with a partner. If it's all about getting off, that's fine. You can also have sex without orgasm, and that's fine, too. Most of us want that release of coming.

Many women are completely happy with our orgasmic capacity. Others want to come harder, quicker, longer, more easily, more often, more transcendently, or more meaningfully. You may wonder if you're doing it "right"—and you may have had lovers who pressured you to respond differently than was natural for you.

You *can* enhance your capacity for orgasm—and you'll find plenty of tips and techniques throughout this book to help you do just that. In fact, here's the first one: *You're fine just the way you are.* Even if you've never had an orgasm, you're not defective in any way. Your experience of sexual pleasure is uniquely yours and no less valid than anyone else's. Sex is not a competitive sport.

I would love to be able to have an orgasm more easily than I do. But when I have them they are incredibly intense.

Do you start coming as the first drop of moisture hits your panties? Perhaps you come ten seconds after the vibrator touches your clit, and you don't feel complete until you've come nonstop for an hour. Good for you.

I orgasm and cum very easily. Just the brush of a woman's wet tongue on my clitoris causes me to orgasm.

I can come every few minutes for several hours.

Does the term *Pillow Princess* ring a bell? Or *Do-Me Queen*? So what if you don't consider one or two (or three or four or five) orgasms sufficient? Even if every dyke you've ever loved has had to seek medical intervention for repetitive

stress injury, there's nothing wrong with you. How much pleasure is too much? It's *your* call. (You can enjoy yourself indefinitely without stressing your partner—see below.)

This Is Taking Too Long

Perhaps your partners have complained that you're a "hard come," taking too long to reach orgasm. Too long for whom? If it takes 30 minutes of perfect clit stimulation, with just the right touch in just the right spot, for you to reach orgasm, you're fine. Enjoy the attention.

If you'd like to come more quickly or reliably, however, here are six specific techniques you might try:

- Experiment with different positions or activities. Switch from oral sex to penetration or clitoral stimulation. Get on top. Find out what works for you.
- Make sure you're really turned on before you even *think* of attempting to come. Human sexual response isn't linear. Back off, do something else, and then come back to your arousal.
- Buy a vibrator. Many women find the strong, consistent stimulation of a vibrator to be the surefire aid to achieving orgasm.
- Touch yourself. Play with your clit while your girl's going down on you, while she's penetrating you, even while she's touching you.
- Breathe into your pelvis, move your pelvis, don't clench—let go.
- Fantasize. What are the images or scenarios that make you sizzle? It's OK to fantasize during partner sex. You can invite your partner into your fantasy, too—tell her a story as she reaches for your clit.

If you come only by your own hand or vibrator, you're no less a sexual partner. You can incorporate masturbation into partner sex in a way that will be incredibly hot for both you and your partner. You'll find suggestions throughout the book for what to do when your lover's tongue or hands—or even her strap-on—get tired. (These will also help out with your partner's fatigue and that pesky repetitive stress problem.)

I need my vibrator; it's very difficult for me to come by any other method. I can have an orgasm from oral sex, but it's hard for my

girlfriend to keep up the constant, unchanging stimulation that I need. I need repetitive movements, and it takes a while.

If you don't happen to have an earth-shattering orgasm every time your girlfriend makes love to you, it doesn't mean that she's a bad lover or that you've fallen out of love. It may be that you're just not getting the right stimulation to send you over the edge. You may be too stressed. You may not know your partner well enough, trust her enough, trust *yourself* enough, or feel safe enough to give it up in that moment. Just how vulnerable you care to be varies from day to day.

I don't always have the most intense orgasms that I know I can have. It depends on my psychological readiness to be thoroughly opened.

Orgasm is about pleasure. It's not about your girlfriend's reputation or bedpost notches—that's *her* problem. That she may be gratified by your coming is great—but it's not the point for you.

However you come, how easily, how hard, how often, you have a sexuality that's yours and yours alone. You're not broken, gluttonous, selfish, oversexed, defective, or perverted (unless thinking of yourself in these terms turns you on). You needn't compare yourself to some mythic example of sapphic perfection.

If You Can't Have an Orgasm

If you've never had an orgasm, or aren't sure if you've had an orgasm, you may be preorgasmic, a term that presumes that you *can* become orgasmic. (See chapter 6, Masturbation, for suggestions on learning to orgasm.) There are many reasons why you may never have had an orgasm or may find it very difficult to reach orgasm. Chief among them are lack of information about your body and sexual response, dissociation, and trauma from sexual abuse.

You may be *anorgasmic* (not having orgasms) for physiological reasons. These include a range of health conditions—and the medications used to treat them. Depression and antidepressants are notorious for wreaking havoc on one's ability to come. Even the hormonal changes of pregnancy and menopause can affect orgasm. (See chapter 3, Anatomy and Sexual Response.)

You may wonder if you'll ever get your sexual response back.

Most likely you *will* regain your capacity for pleasure and orgasm. In the meantime, take the advice given to the woman who has never had an orgasm. Go back to the beginning. Grab your lube, your favorite vibrator, unplug the phone, prop your beautiful self up on some pillows, and pretend you are masturbating for your very first time.

Does Viagra Work for Women?

In short, yes—for *some* women and *one* specific sexual function: physiological arousal. Drugs like Viagra, Levitra, and Cialis will not make you think sexy thoughts. You can take Viagra before the Big Date, but it won't restore the ongoing flow of erotic energy in your life.

Many women have tried Viagra and other drugs with much success. While Viagra (sildenafil) was developed to help men overcome erectile dysfunction, it's increasingly being taken by women.

Viagra works by increasing vasoactivity—that's blood flow. Blood flow leads to engorged tissues, which leads to clitoral erection, and voilà: physical arousal.

I was so hot. I didn't realize I was that turned on, and then suddenly, my cunt was so open my partner fit her whole hand inside me right away. Then she put a huge butt plug up my ass. And this was without much in the way of a warm-up.

I hadn't had a real orgasm in months (I'm on Effexor), but I found myself coming and coming and I couldn't stop.

This is pure physiology in action.

Should you try Viagra? Naturally there is a raging debate on this one, with medical researchers, sex educators, women's health activists, and pharmaceutical companies all taking positions on whether or not female sexuality can (or should) be aided by the little blue pill.

Viagra will not revolutionize your orgasms. It may offer you pleasure—and that, in itself, is worth a lot, especially to a woman who may not have been experiencing much between the sheets lately.

Make sure to consult with a health-care provider—one who's actually seen

you (not just processed your Internet order)—to find out if such medications are safe for you.

How Do You Come?

I continue to have better orgasms as I get older. In my 20s, I rarely had a vaginal orgasm, and my clitoral orgasms were fine, but not as yummy as now.

How do you reach orgasm? Women come from all sorts of stimulation. Most women require clitoral stimulation to reach orgasm—from vibrators, fingers, tongues, or surfaces to rub up against.

Many women find nothing sends them into orbit quite like a tongue and lips licking, sucking, and nibbling on their clit. For others, oral sex is just not intense enough to bring them to orgasm.

The tried-and-true tongue-to-clit method is still the only thing besides my Hitachi Magic Wand that never fails to bring me to orgasm.

Many women come from penetration—either vaginal or anal—without any clitoral stimulation at all.

The first time I came with a partner, it was a vaginal orgasm—my girlfriend was finger-fucking me. That's still how I come best, and I can have many, many orgasms in a row that way.

Others find their orgasms are intensified when clitoral stimulation is combined with penetration, either vaginal or anal.

I don't come without clitoral stimulation. But when vaginal penetration is added, it's like a deeper experience; it reaches into my insides and clenches me with intense pleasure.

Different kinds of stimulation produce difference experiences of orgasm. Some women make clear distinctions between the orgasms they experience from clitoral stimulation versus penetration.

Vaginal orgasms feel as if they happen deeper in my body; they feel more like contractions. A clitoral orgasm is sharper, more like an intense tingling that spreads over my body. I'm multiorgasmic, and I need one of

each to feel really satisfied.

Some women reach orgasm with sufficient attention to their nipples. Others come from fantasy and mental stimulation. Tantra practitioners move erotic energy through their bodies, experiencing energy or whole-body orgasms.

I have very intense concentration and my mind becomes my orgasm. I can ride it for a fairly long time.

Some women come from pain and other intense sensations of S/M play—and some tops are known to come simply from administering to their bottoms.

My favorite way to come is from caning someone. We don't need any other contact but the cane with her ass, to make me come—if I can hurt her enough. I come from doing, rather than from being done.

I can come from pain. From clitoral stimulation. From hard fucking or fisting. I can come just from having my nipples pinched hard. I can come from sufficient mental stimulation with no body contact.

Getting Her Off

I love orchestrating someone else's orgasm.

Rarely do sex guides give sufficient attention to the pleasures of facilitating another's orgasm. Discussions of orgasm are typically about getting them, not giving them. Yet getting a partner off is central to lesbian sex. It's thrilling to feel a woman come in your mouth, to find yourself gripped between her powerful thighs, or to feel her vaginal contractions clamp down on your hand.

It is CRUCIAL that my mate has an orgasm—my jaw can lock up and I won't stop until I feel her body pop and her moans quicken and muffle and she tries to run away from me.

Taking turns pleasuring one another is a wonderful way to enjoy sex. But not all women have reciprocity as their goal. What if your partner doesn't want to have an orgasm? Does that mean she identifies as a "stone butch"? Maybe. Maybe not. Why not ask her? You can't predict gender identity by whether or not someone is orgasm-focused. See chapter 14, Gender (Not Destiny). It also

doesn't necessarily mean she's shut down, self-hating, or unable to have orgasms.

Ask your partner how she feels about orgasm and what kinds of sexual attention she likes for herself. She may share with you profound feelings about her gender and sexuality. She may feel completely gratified by your sexual encounter. After your strap-on stud has finished riding you through more orgasms than you can count, she may simply be spent.

Truly, all I care about is pleasing my femme. Sometimes I don't have any orgasms at all, and neither one of us feels that the session is missing anything. Now, if my girlfriend didn't have an orgasm, I imagine that we would feel differently. We have different sexual roles.

Your partner's experience of your orgasm isn't vicarious. Think of your partner's lips, hand, or pelvis as a conduit for sexual energy. As your body is humming with orgasm, your partner is riding that wave with you. She may indeed feel your orgasm from her heart to the bottom of her toes.

Multiple Orgasms

Women can and do have multiple orgasms. Which doesn't mean you *should* have multiple orgasms or even that multiple orgasms are more satisfying than ordinary single orgasms.

I'm not multiorgasmic and that's OK with me because the ones I already have nearly break the bank.

But many women do find that one orgasm leads to another, with very little time elapsing in between.

After she fucks me really hard, if my partner goes back to my clitoris and plays roughly with it, I will usually orgasm again, and again, and again....

Rather than relaxing into afterglow, these women go right back to the plateau stage and come over and over. Some women experience this as a series of smaller orgasms; others experience orgasms that increase in intensity and duration, leading up to a really big bang.

Sometimes I have smaller orgasms before the big one. After the big one, I get ticklish and it's hard to be touched. But if my partner works past that point I have powerful orgasms over and over.

How do you achieve multiple orgasms? In *The Good Vibrations Guide to Sex*, Cathy Winks and Anne Semans offer three rules for achieving multiple orgasms: “back off, breathe, and move.” After you come, and your clit is too sensitive to touch, back off without entirely ceasing stimulation. Winks and Semans suggest switching to a lighter or less direct touch. Then, breathe. Breathing oxygenates your body and keeps the energy flowing. And move—move your pelvis, your legs, your feet. “Let the energy build back up in your genitals. Within a few minutes, excruciating overstimulation may well give way to excruciating pleasure....”¹

The only way I reach multiple orgasms is if my partner just doesn't stop when I tell her to. Then they're in rapid-fire succession.

Tantra and Extended Orgasms

You may experience extended orgasms, one long delicious coming that seems to last and last. Or you may ride the edge of the plateau almost indefinitely, without actually coming.

What if we viewed orgasm not as a peak (sharp rise, sharp drop) but as a wave or flow of sensation and energy? Margo Anand, author of the classic *The Art of Sexual Ecstasy: The Path of Sacred Sexuality for Western Lovers*, suggests that instead of thinking of orgasm as an *explosion*—sending energy outward—we think of it as an *implosion* and redirect the energy upward and through the chakras, or energy centers, of the body.²

Mikaya Heart distinguishes between multiple and extended orgasms. In her book *When the Earth Moves: Women and Orgasm*, she defines extended orgasm as a state of “continual sensation” that can last up to six hours, while multiple orgasms are discrete “ongoing individual orgasms with a break between each one, and then more stimulation to bring on the next one.”³

You may experience energy orgasms or whole-body orgasms. “Many women think that if an orgasm doesn't feel like a clitoral orgasm, then it must not be an

orgasm,” writes Annie Sprinkle. “They are limiting themselves.” ⁴

Sometimes when I’m being fucked, I feel my head separate from my torso—and not in any sort of get-thee-to-therapy dissociative way, but rather in an ecstatic rush of sheer exquisite sensation.

Annie Sprinkle delineates seven different kinds of orgasms—among them, whole-body orgasms, energy orgasms, and “megagasms”—“the tsunami of all orgasms...an intense full body experience, a deeply emotional experience, and for some a deeply spiritual experience.”⁵

Want to expand your experience of orgasm? Expand your attention. You may think that more attention to your pussy is the answer to improving your orgasmic capacity—and it well might be. But for an experience of orgasm that enlarges your entire understanding of sex, expand your awareness to include your whole body: cunt, torso, face, limbs, ass, muscles, organs, juices, and breath.

Especially breath. Tantra teachers and orgasm coaches all agree: Through conscious breathing practices, you can become aware of energy as it moves through your body. You can also become more aware of your sensations.

Breathing deeply, allowing the breath in and out without pushing it, helps create a fuller sensation through my whole body.

Sensory awareness not only increases pleasure, but it helps you to know what’s going on with you. Are you breathing? Rapidly? Shallowly? *At all?*

Do you contract your muscles as you approach orgasm? Try another strategy:

I prolong orgasm by relaxing and softening my muscles, which gives my orgasms a more sensuous quality. I get a suffusion of pleasure opening and expanding down my legs.

If you prefer the “big bang” to the continual wave, you might actually find extended or energy orgasms frustrating. But if you want to experience a long, unfolding ride, you may want to learn more about Tantric practices.

Body Electric is a great place to start. Celebrating the Body Electric for Women, a weekend-long workshop offered in several U.S. cities, includes instruction in breath, movement, and touch techniques. The Women’s Sexuality Center in Southern California offers the Lesbian Tantra Weekend along with other courses. Well-known Tantra teachers like Jwala, Annie Sprinkle, and

Barbara Carrellas also offer workshops in various locations.

Even if you don't live anywhere near a Tantra workshop (or the ones in your area are hopelessly heterosexual), you can learn some basic practices that you can apply to the sexual realm. Conscious breathing and sensory awareness are two practices taught by nearly every somatic discourse. Yoga instructors, Alexander Technique teachers, bodyworkers, and somatic healers all talk about breathing and sensation.

You can read about many aspects of conscious sex on www.Tantra.com—and search their directory for teachers and workshops near you. Books like *The MultiOrgasmic Couple* (written for heterosexuals) and *The Tao of Natural Breathing* (exceptional on breathing; *not* a good source of information on women's sexuality) do an excellent job of presenting the Taoist principles underlying even the most Westernized applications of Tantra.

Ejaculation

I like to ejaculate. I mean, I can really flood the bed.

Female ejaculate is produced in the paraurethral glands. Ejaculate isn't urine, though it may contain small traces of urine. The clear fluid may contain vaginal lubrication, cervical mucus, and fluid from the uterus, and has a similar chemical composition to male ejaculate (minus the sperm).

How much fluid is ejaculated varies from woman to woman. Some women spurt streams of ejaculate into the air. Others leave a pie-sized puddle on the sheets. The amount of lubrication we produce is quite individual and is affected by menstrual cycle, age, health conditions, and even medications like antihistamines.

A lot of women feel self-conscious about what they perceive to be peeing during sex, mistaking ejaculate for urine. You can reassure yourself by urinating before sex.

For some women, ejaculation precedes orgasm. They experience a gush of wetness right before orgasm. For others, ejaculation and orgasm are separate phenomena. Ejaculation may be experienced as a feeling of release with a nice big spray of come—but not the same level of intensity as other orgasms. This

may or may not feel satisfying.

Some women like having sex with women who gush or ejaculate; others find it a big mess. Place a waterproof pad (you'll find them in the incontinence aisle of your local pharmacy) under a towel to protect your bed.

Much has been written lately about "G-spot orgasms"—orgasms resulting from G-spot stimulation and accompanied by ejaculation. Some women ejaculate with G-spot stimulation. Some ejaculate without any penetration at all. Others simply don't ejaculate.

How can you learn to ejaculate? You can explore your urethral sponge or G-spot with a firm, curved dildo or your fingers (particularly if you have long arms or a short torso or are particularly flexible). Make sure you're well aroused. (One review of the scientific literature regarding female ejaculation, published in the *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, cited "full tumescence" of the vagina as a requirement for ejaculation.)⁶ Insert your fingers or dildo, aiming for the front (anterior) wall of the vagina. Stroke this area with a "come hither" motion. If you use your fingers, you'll feel the difference in texture between this area, which is rough, and the rest of the vaginal walls, which are smooth. Some women like to stimulate the opening of the vagina just below the urethra. You can also press down on your pelvis with your free hand, applying pressure just above the pubic bone. Stimulate your G-spot until you feel intensely turned on and like you're about to pee. As you approach orgasm, push out, as if urinating. The stream you produce is ejaculate.

Check out the bibliography in chapter 19 for books, DVDs, and videos on G-spot stimulation and ejaculation.

Please include something on the topic of female ejaculation. I had a horrible experience last year in a damn Ivy League graduate school (social work) class with a professor who, in a course on human behavior in the social environment, made a big deal about how teenage boys masturbate more and are more sexually aware than girls because they have visible results. I contacted her outside the class to cite some textual evidence on female ejaculation (rather than anecdotal evidence), and she basically dismissed it all with the valid point that there simply hasn't been enough research published on the matter. Why am I interested in this? Well, my lover is a kick-ass ejaculator. Not all the time, but on demand. If I ask her to squirt for me, it usually happens. It's quick, and

quiet, and quite arousing. Just at the point of orgasm, she gets very wet, but not normal wet...more like water, and my hand gets kinda pruneish, like when I've been in the bath too long, and then it's a sudden O, after which there's a big ole wet spot on the sheets. Love it. How she knew she could is beyond me.... We were talking once and she said very casually that she thought she could ejaculate, but that she'd been afraid of it, and always managed to hold back during orgasm. The next time we made love, I asked her if she would let it all out for me, and she did. Amazing.

Suggested Web Links

ANNIESPRINKLE.ORG(ASM)

www.anniesprinkle.org

BODY ELECTRIC

www.bodyelectric.org

chapter five

The Road to Heaven Leads to You

I love my body! At least, I try to. It's my goal to say I love my body and really mean it.

HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT YOUR BODY? Many of us love our bodies. We love our strength and passion, and we love the pleasure we take in our flesh. We love our broad backs and strong thighs, love the way our bodies carry us through life. We love our full, rich lips, sharp teeth, and piercing eyes. We love our boyish smiles and lean bodies, love our well-defined muscles that ripple as we move. We love the dark berries of our nipples, the ripe plum swelling of our cunts. We love our graceful hands, the delicate slope from neck to shoulder and from waist to hip. We love our voluptuously long legs. We love our eagerness, our openness, the desire that gushes from our vulvas. We love our roundness: round face, round breasts, round belly, round butt, round thighs, the generosity of flesh we offer up to our lovers.

I honestly like my body. Please publish that in your book. Some of us just really like our bodies.

It's marvelous how much delight we take in our bodies. When you consider the ridiculously narrow cultural standards most people hold for female beauty, it's truly remarkable that so many of us wholeheartedly love our bodies. Do you ever get the feeling that if you give yourself a compliment, someone will correct you? ("Dream on, girlfriend—those cellulite bags are *not* becoming.") You might even think it impolite or conceited to say you find yourself gorgeous. It may seem safer to downplay the whole thing.

No matter what your size, shape, age, health concerns, abilities or disabilities, HIV or STD status, you deserve to love yourself fully and unconditionally—and that includes your body.

A Love/Hate Relationship

So many of us women come to adulthood with less than perfect feelings about our bodies. Even if our families were supportive of how we looked and felt, our commodity-oriented, gender-obsessed, homophobic, *and* lesbophobic culture probably was not!

Many of us continue to feed a love/hate relationship with our bodies. We accept and reject parts of ourselves, managing only a cafeteria-style kind of acceptance.

Some days I can't keep the internalized stuff in check. I hate it...my body. Belly's fat. Butt ain't big and bubbly enuff for a black girl. More breasts. Less breasts. Skin too dark. Skin too light. On these days I just can't win! I don't have many days like this—thank Gawd!

Finding out that others love exactly the characteristics of your body you'd like to hide can be quite an awakening. That belly? That butt? You may have gotten the message that it all adds up to something less than zero—but odds are there are some women out there who'd be tickled to look just like you (and to take you to bed).

Many of us come to love ourselves in spite of severe barriers—such as childhood sexual abuse, eating disorders, addiction, depression, disability, chronic or life-threatening illnesses, or harassment for our gender presentation or sexual choices. Add racism and classism, and the mix gets very thick. For us, developing a positive self-image is a lifelong process, with a fully conscious relationship with our bodies as our reward. Our self-love is hard won and thus all the more precious.

Formerly ignored, stuffed and numbed with food, I love my body. What aspects of my body make me happy? That everything I have pretty much keeps me alive and kicking to enjoy another day.

Body size, of course, is the most common stumbling block women mention when they talk about body image. Too fat. Too thin. We've been trained to measure our self-worth according to the numbers on the scale.

My mother used to tell me that no one would ever find me beautiful unless I lost weight, and it wasn't until I met the love of my life that I finally stopped believing it.

Skinny femme girl that I am, there are times I've wished for a more womanly figure. But I love that my small breasts disappear in the palms of my lover's hands—and the ease with which I am lifted into her arms. I love catching butch girls staring at my braless chest, my nipples peeking out through a thin shirt.

Weight issues get complicated by gender and sexual orientation. It's disconcerting to be told that because you are delicate and petite you can't possibly be a dyke (after all, *you could get a man*)—or that because you're big and broad-shouldered you could *only* be a dyke (because no man would have you). Thankfully, many of us manage to turn this around.

I like my broad shoulders, big hands, tight ass. I enjoy being strong. I love being able to pick up my lover, wrap her around my waist, and fuck her even longer than she thought she wanted.

I am big-boned, with quarterback shoulders, muscular biceps, and calves an NFL pro kicker would die for.

I'm a fat dyke. That used to be an issue for me but it isn't anymore. My hills and valleys and breasts make an excellent playground for those who are adventurous enough to explore them.

During the process of gender transition, body image takes on a whole new layer of meaning. What does it mean to identify as masculine when you have 40DD breasts? To be female but not feminine? To wear your clit as a cock? Or conversely, to be 45 years old and have the brand-new budding breasts of a 14-year-old girl? To identify as female and have a penis?

For years, sex was unsatisfying for me because I was completely out of touch with my body. Now that I'm in the early stages of transitioning from female to male, I can handle physical pleasure and accept that this flesh-cart is part of me.

My breasts are small but perky, and I love my tattoos and my nipple piercing. I have a beautiful tattoo of ivy on my breast covering scars from a lumpectomy I had when I was 19. It made me feel so much better about my breasts when I had that done!

Take a Good Look

Get naked and position yourself in front of a full-length mirror. Lights up! Take an uncritical look at yourself. Drop your judgments, save your critical skills for a film review, and forget all the things you've heard about what you are "supposed" to look like. Just look at yourself. Pay attention. What do you see?

I have a nice hourglass shape (maybe a two-hour glass!) and my breasts are full, which I like. I like how I look without clothes because I pretty much like how anyone looks without clothes—we're all so unique and interesting and vulnerable and human without clothes.

Appreciate Yourself

I love that I'm so sensitive! Everything feels so damn good!

Masturbation is a great way to appreciate yourself. If you want to challenge yourself, masturbate in front of the mirror. You can stand, sit in a chair or on the floor, or lie on your side. Try to maintain eye contact with your image in the mirror—at least until you get too turned on to focus at all. (More on masturbation tips and techniques in chapter 6, Masturbation.)

Take It In

Next time someone pays you a compliment, take it in. All the way in. Don't toss it off, don't disagree, don't make excuses. Say, "Thank you." Period. Let yourself be appreciated. Of course, no one can talk you into believing you are beautiful—and you'll get nowhere if your self-esteem hinges on others' approval. Yet it's nice to know somebody likes how you look. Being showered with compliments never hurts.

I feel a lot better about my body than I used to. Part of it is that I got in shape, part of it is my lover's appreciation of my body. She plays it like a goddamn violin.

Join the Crowd

How often do you have the opportunity to appreciate other women's bodies? Next time you are in an environment where women are naked—whether it's the locker room or your favorite swimming hole—take a good look. Appreciate the variety of shapes and sizes. No judgments, no evaluations, and no comparisons.

One reason we're so critical of ourselves is that we are isolated. We don't get to see enough naked bodies to view ourselves as unique (but really not-so-unique) members of humanity. That's one of the amazing contributions of the women's music festivals—being naked with thousands of naked women who span every possible description, and some that you've never even thought of. The locker room is reason enough for a trip to the gym. If you hit the right gym at the right time of day (try a downtown YWCA at lunchtime), you'll find a diverse group of women whose bodies take all shapes.

When I'm feeling less than wonderful about my body, I take a trip to my local women's bathhouse, which offers a hot tub, sauna, steam room, outdoor deck, and massage. (It's not a women's bathhouse in the sexual sense of the term, though I'm sure that would be very popular in my town.)

You might think it counterintuitive to be naked in public on a bad body image day—"What? You want me to show off *this* body?!"—but it really helps. The first 20 minutes are excruciating—and not because of the temperature of the hot tub. After a while, all those judgments peel away like so much dead skin. Your bones get the message, even if your head is skeptical. You may surprise yourself and feel infinitely better by the time you leave. Many cities have women's baths or public baths with women-only days.

Finally, my favorite place to stare at naked bodies is actually the one place where such behavior is socially appropriate—and even encouraged. Sex parties and sex clubs provide great lessons in humanity. All those naked people! Such abundant flesh! The smells of women's arousal mingling with sweat. The sounds of bodies slapping together, women laughing and coming. (And at S/M play parties, the sounds of floggers thudding against backs, paddles smacking buttocks, and big, hearty screams.) At a sex party, you'll see women you find less attractive than yourself being treated like sex goddesses. And you'll see women you find too stunning to approach getting no more (or less) attention than you. The resources section at the back of this book lists local contact

information for group sex events.

My ass! Definitely I like my ass! I got a nice big old round booty that looks good either in clothes or out.

Get Into Your Body

The more active I am, the more positive feelings I have for my body. It's nice to feel powerful—to feel how my body can move me around and give me joy, through lovers, self-love, running, kung-fu punching, and dancing.

Move your body. Breathe. Feel your heart pumping. Let your skin heat up. Get into your body. Can you feel your bones? Muscles and tissue? You can learn how to feel yourself from the inside. You can do this whether you're athletic or not. Even if the closest you've ever come to meditation is a 20-minute nap, you can become conscious of yourself as a sensate being. You don't have to be able to get up out of your chair to have a positive relationship with your body.

Perhaps the most obvious (and readily available) form of bodywork is massage. Following a masseuse's hands as she works your body can help you become aware of every bit of you—from the backs of your knees to the wings of your shoulder blades. If you don't feel comfortable being touched by a stranger or can't afford a professional massage, you can trade with a good friend. This has the added advantage of giving you an opportunity to explore another person's body while enhancing your friendship.

Former shy girl Carol Queen recommends solo dancing. Get out of your clothes, pop in your favorite CD, and *move*. In *Exhibitionism for the Shy*, Queen writes, "Feel your body move; disconnect your head from all the worries about how you look, and concentrate on letting the music sink into your limbs.... Dancing can lead you into your body perhaps further than you've ever been before." [1](#)

Been dancing alone for too long? Hit the clubs. Go dancing. Not only will you get to move your body and shake that booty—you'll get out of the house. If you don't like to move to a club beat, find a swing, two-step, or country western group.

Go to the gym. Not to “improve” your body—though you may enjoy Pilates or power lifting—but to experience yourself inhabiting your body and to see other people doing it, too. You can take classes in yoga or kickboxing—it doesn’t matter, as long as you find an activity that works for you.

Don’t like the gym? Go to the park. Walk. Get a skateboard. Ride your bike. Roll your chair along a different path. Take a new route to work, and walk there. The point is to engage in activity that will bring you into a relationship with your physical self. Sure, you’ll find buff specimens in the park, but you’ll also see people who look just like you.

If the parks and gyms in your town are too straight for comfort, start an all-dyke workout group. You can meet once or twice a week for long, brisk walks; hit the gym on the buddy system; sign up for a martial arts class; or go swimming on your lunch hour.

Your body need not be a box you are locked into all by yourself.

Somatic Healing

I’ve had a long, hard struggle overcoming an abusive relationship that included sexual assault. Because of this, I haven’t learned a lot about my sexuality that many people learn when they are younger, so I’ve had the nice experience of being an actual grown-up when I figured out what I was doing. Of course there have been negative consequences: I sometimes still have flashbacks during sex, even with my long-term partner.

Somatic healers teach the concept that the body and mind are part of one intelligent biological system. Your emotions do not exist separate from your body. So if you “feel” less than gorgeous, the solution may lie in deepening your relationship with your body rather than trying to escape it.

My body is femme, fat, cushy, strong, pale, soft—I love it. It’s just right.

Do you “check out” during sex? Do you think you’d have an easier time reaching orgasm if you could stop your mind from wandering? Or are you fine for a good fuck—as long as your partner doesn’t get too emotionally close?

Emotions are part of your cellular history, your body’s “memory” of where it

has been. The feelings associated with a traumatic experience don't go away, even if we ignore them. Trauma remains in the body until the emotions surrounding it are resolved and integrated into your experience. Your body will continue to respond automatically to situations you perceive—from your body's perspective—to be threatening. One survival strategy is simply to shut down.

I have large breasts and they have little feeling. Little feeling in breast and vagina.... Thank goddess my clitoris is in working order. Otherwise I'd be a Barbie.

Regardless of what has caused your body to respond like a town under siege, the trauma remains. Whether you have survived childhood sexual abuse, emotional neglect, physical abuse, a battering adult relationship, rape, sexual harassment, queer bashing, a life-threatening accident or illness, or even time spent in a war zone, healing trauma is a slow, painful process. And it's the only way to get your *self* back.

Staci Haines, author of *The Survivor's Guide to Sex: How to Have an Empowered Sex Life After Child Sexual Abuse*, stresses somatic healing as the key to sexual healing:

Your body was a dangerous place.... Leaving your body then, or dissociating, was an intelligent move. The memories or experiences of the trauma are often still present or "held" in your body today. Many survivors stay out of their bodies and senses long after the danger has passed to avoid revisiting those stored experiences.

Yet, your body is also you. It is the place in which you live and are alive. You connect and are in relationship with others from your body. You act in the world from your body. Your body is where the healing from trauma and abuse happens. Your body is also where you experience sensual and sexual pleasure. To experience all of these pleasures, however, you must be in your body, or "embodied." [2](#)

Happily, you have many kinds of healing practices to choose from—everything from meditation and Tantra to therapeutic bodywork practices, like Rosen Method bodywork, somatic coaching, sex coaching, sexological bodywork, and others.

What's it like to come back into your body? It's like awakening to a sense—such as touch—you've read about, heard about, thought you understood, but

have never truly experienced.

You Are What You Eat

“Not treating your body as a temple can kill even the most Herculean libido,” Heather Corinna writes on Scarlet Letters, her erotic website. “Healthy sexual functioning requires a good respiratory system and a healthy flow of oxygen, adequate hormone levels and properly functioning sexual glands, and most of all, energy. The best diet for your sexual health is the best diet for your health, period.” [3](#)

Your body requires nutrition, adequate rest, plenty of fluids, and movement just to sustain life, much less thrive. You can improve your relationship with your body by learning to take good care of yourself. In fact, tending to your physical care is a great prelude to sex.

Get a Pelvic Exam

Add to this good health care. Many lesbian, bisexual, and queer women fail to get regular gynecological exams, and even when we do get checkups, we’re often not candid about our sexual practices.

Why don’t we get better health care? In the United States, lack of access to health insurance is a big factor in preventing women from getting adequate health care. Many lesbian and bisexual women as well as transgendered people feel very uncomfortable talking to health-care practitioners about sex. (Many of us feel uncomfortable talking to our *lovers* about sex.) It doesn’t help that few of us have access to health-care professionals who have any idea what we *do* sexually. Some lesbians feel uneasy about the mechanics of Pap smears; others think that because they don’t have sex with men, such care is unnecessary—not true.

Regular gynecological exams will help you stay on top of the state of your sexual health. Some sexually transmitted conditions don’t produce noticeable symptoms until you’ve got a serious problem. For example, human papillomavirus (HPV), among the most widespread sexually transmitted

conditions, has been linked to cervical cancer. A recent study conducted in Seattle found HPV present among lesbians—even those who had never had sex with men.⁴ A Pap smear can alert you to the presence of abnormal cells caused by HPV, long before cancer develops. However, you will need a complete gynecological exam, including blood work, to determine if you've been exposed to HIV or other STDs.

Risk-Free _____

Frottage (with clothes)
Nipple and breast stimulation (not lactating)
Sharing sex toys (with a condom)
Genital touching with glove
Oral sex with barrier
Masturbation (touching only yourself)
Voyeurism and exhibitionism
Cybersex and phone sex
Watching porn
Reading erotica
Talking dirty
Fantasy

Safer Sex, Please

We hear a lot about safer sex—but what is it, really? Safer sex is the practice of assessing risks and taking precautions that you hope will prevent you from acquiring or transmitting STDs.

How do you know if you're at risk? Well, the greater the number of people with whom you have had unprotected sex, the greater the risk you've been exposed to a sexually transmitted disease. Your risk for acquiring an STD increases if you already have an STD, if you've used intravenous drugs, or if any

of your partners have used intravenous drugs. Finally, some sexual activities are riskier than others. (See “Safer-Sex Guidelines for Lesbian and Bisexual Women,” below.)

You may believe that because you’re in a committed monogamous relationship you’re exempt from safer-sex concerns. If that were true, there would be far fewer of us with herpes and HPV. Unfortunately, monogamy is *not* a foolproof safer-sex strategy. Some STDs can lie dormant for months or even years after exposure, which may be longer than your previous relationship. You could easily transmit an STD you didn’t know you had. And, of course, a commitment to monogamy is no guarantee. Many women have sex outside of their relationships without telling their partners.



Illustration 3. Making a Dental Dam

Here is a recommended safer-sex strategy for *monogamous* couples (two partners having sex exclusively with each other): For six months, use latex barriers every time you have sex. (See the safer-sex techniques, below.) After six months, both of you can get thorough gynecological exams, including a Pap smear and blood tests for STDs. If all tests are negative, you may decide to forgo latex barriers. However, if one of you has a viral STD, such as herpes, HPV,

hepatitis C, or HIV, safer-sex practices are recommended to prevent transmission of the STD. If one of you has a bacterial STD, such as chlamydia, use latex barriers until you've completed treatment.

Some women in *nonmonogamous* relationships choose to *fluid-bond* with their primary sexual partner. They share bodily fluids with only that partner, while using latex barriers with everyone else. Should one partner “slip” and engage in unsafe sex with an outside partner, the commitment is to tell the other right away. The partners can then assess the risk and make safer-sex decisions. Again, this presumes a high degree of trust.

Safer-Sex Guidelines for Lesbian and Bisexual Women

These guidelines are intended to help you make choices about sex with women:

- *Oral sex:* Use dental dams, Lollyes, or plastic wrap for cunnilingus and rimming. Put a drop of water-based lube on the genital side of the dam. You can also cut up a latex glove or unlubed condom to make a barrier for oral sex (see illustration).
- *Finger-fucking and fisting:* Use gloves for hand-to-vagina or hand-to-anus penetration.
- Change gloves when moving from anal to vaginal penetration and when you change partners. Remove the glove before you touch yourself.
- *Masturbation:* Don't touch your vulva, anus, or favorite sex toy with the same hand you've just used to touch your partner's vulva or anus—change hands or wash up first.
- *Dress your toys:* Use condoms on dildos, butt plugs, and vibrators.
- *Sharing toys:* If you share toys, be sure to use condoms and clean thoroughly between uses with an antibacterial soap.
- *Use water-based lube:* Never use oil-based lubricants with latex products. (Oil will break down latex.) Do not use oil-based lube for vaginal penetration.
- *Avoid products with nonoxynol-9:* While “noxious-9” has been

shown to kill HIV in some laboratory tests, it can be irritating to vaginal and rectal tissue. Certain women experience vaginal infections after using nonoxynol-9. The product can actually increase the risk of HIV transmission by irritating the delicate rectal tissue, providing a direct route to the bloodstream.⁵

- *Yeast infections:* If your lube is giving you yeast or other infections, switch to a lube that doesn't list glycerin as an ingredient.
- *Bacterial vaginosis:* If your partner has a vaginal infection, see a gynecologist—and refrain from unprotected sex with your partner.
- *Urinary tract infections:* Urinating after penetrative sex can help prevent a urinary tract infection. Remember to drink plenty of water as well.
- *Do not share needles,* whether for IV drug use, play piercing, permanent piercing, or tattooing.
- *Blood play:* Wear gloves during any activity that may bring you in contact with a partner's blood, such as piercing, cutting, or shaving. Be careful not to stick yourself. Dispose of sharps properly.
- *Dispose of gloves and condoms carefully:* Turn gloves and condoms inside out as you pull them off to prevent exposure to bodily fluids.
- *Clean your sex toys* with an antibacterial soap after every use.
- *Wash your hands* frequently with an antibacterial soap.
- *If you have sex with men,* use condoms for fellatio (or avoid ejaculation in the mouth). Use condoms for vaginal or anal penetration.

Asking a new partner about her STD status is not foolproof either. While it's good to know a partner's story, you can hardly take a thorough sexual history on a first date. Even if you ask all the right questions and get all the right answers, you can't assume that a new acquaintance is being truthful—no matter how charming she is. She may have an STD and not know it.

Whether you have one partner or many, if you don't know your partners'

sexual practices, health status, and sexual history—and *their* partners' practices, health status, and history—you'd do well to practice safer sex. Of course, if you don't know your own sexual health status (because you haven't been tested for HIV and other STDs), you need to practice safer sex to avoid transmitting an STD to your partners. And if you know you have an STD, then you need to practice safer sex.

Be Present

Sex is always more gratifying when you are *really there*. Not skin deep, not hiding, not distracted, not anesthetized, and not suffocated under a molasses-thick blanket of shame—but fully available to engage in the moment. Whether you are flying solo, enjoying a sensual tangle with several partners, or gazing soulfully into the eyes of your one true love, it's good to be present for the experience.

Being present is the bottom line for most spiritual practices. Meditation, ritual, and prayer are all intended to bring the consciousness to the moment. What's

I love the feeling of connection I get from making love with my
girlfriend.

this got to do with sex? Well, many people find a powerful connection between sex and spirituality. Tantra, essentially a spiritual tradition, has become the basis for sexual techniques designed to refocus erotic energy from “slam-bam-thank-you-Ma'am” to something a bit more, well, holy.

Others find sex to be a rare oasis of animal nature in our overscheduled, too civilized urban lives. When else do we permit ourselves to loll in bed in the middle of the workday? An afternoon of sex will go a long way toward reminding you that you have a body—and a great capacity for pleasure.

On a more practical level, being present enables you to make meaningful choices about sex. This is what is meant by the term *consent*. Consent comes from *your* experience, *your* feelings. Not what you think you want (or worse, what you think you *should* want) but what you *do* want—in your gut. Or cunt. Or feet. How can you consent to sex if you don't have a clue about what you want—or even what you're feeling?

Being present for sex means not shutting down and not hiding the truth of who you are and what you want (or don't want). Being present means not bingeing, purging, or starving yourself, and not getting drunk or high to have sex.

I used alcohol as social lubricant so that I could get to the sex part. Now, though I'm not in recovery, I prefer to have sex sober, just because it increases the intensity for me.

Being fully available—in body and spirit—means dealing with problems that rob you of your life. There's no shortage of resources to help you become fully available for your life. Therapy, support groups, 12-step programs, and bodywork can help. (See the resources chapter for more information.)

Life Changes

Even in bliss, when your dreams come true, your relationship to your body can be challenged by change. Pregnancy and childbirth, that longed-for breast reduction surgery, or beginning gender transition cause upheaval in your life.

Rachel Pepper reminds us of the importance of love and support to cushion the shock of change:

After spending so many years in the same body, it's disconcerting to watch it change so dramatically, so quickly... As you go through physical changes, your partner can let you know you are still attractive to her. Many pregnant women get shy about their bodies when they start morphing. Of course, some partners know there's nothing more sexy than a pregnant woman. Those breasts! Those hips! That curvaceous belly! That growing life within! Your girlfriend can help boost your self-esteem by lavishing you with praise.⁶

Many significant life changes happen *to* us, not *by* us. Crushing blows—such as the death of a loved one—can rock your world and with it your sense of comfort in your body. The end of a relationship can shake your self-confidence like almost nothing else.

A severe illness or a sudden or chronic disability can sharply challenge your sense of self. Recovery from an eating disorder or addiction can toss you around on a roller-coaster of emotions. Menopause and aging can be both freeing and

challenging to your sense of yourself as an erotic being.

You may feel that you can't be sexual while swimming through so much emotion. You may not want to get involved romantically just now. Perhaps you believe that fully experiencing your sexuality is disrespectful to a lost lover. You may feel very protective of your newly gendered body. You can take a break from erotic play—or a break from partner sex. This may be an opportunity to discover and pleasure yourself. Chapter 6, *Masturbation*, will tell you how.

You deserve a fully satisfying sex life—all the pleasure you desire (in fact, all the pleasure you could ever imagine), on your own terms, without apology or price tags.

chapter six

Masturbation

Masturbation is fundamental to my spiritual and sexual well-being.

DO YOU MASTURBATE? When someone asks you what you like sexually, do you mention the ways in which you pleasure yourself? Think of masturbation as the foundation for your entire sexuality. Masturbation is how you learn what you like and how you like it. How much of yourself do you bring to the task? A lot of us don't admit to ever masturbating. We get so many messages about the second-class status of masturbation—and, for that matter, of being single. Well, not so. Masturbation is a form of sexual expression like any other, no more or less “legitimate” than oral sex or strap-on penetration.

So what are the myths you've heard about masturbation? Are you afraid that if you masturbate you'll become antisocial or vibrator addicted? That you'll hurt your lover's feelings when she finds out what hot sex you're having all by yourself? Do you think that if you stay home on Saturday night to masturbate you're a loser? Or a sex-crazed pervert? Well, let me give you some good reasons to masturbate.

What Will Masturbation Do for You?

You get to have pleasure...lots of it. You can get off, whenever you want. All this pleasure is for *you*—you don't have to worry about anyone else's desires or needs.

Ten Myths About Masturbation

1. *Masturbation isn't real sex. Real sex is what you do with your girlfriend.* We were also told that sex is for making babies.

Puhleeze, let's not buy into this. Pleasure is as good a reason as any to have sex, and pleasuring yourself is as valid an expression of your sexuality as any other.

2. *If you masturbate too much, you'll grow hair on your palms—or your labia will get really big. Or change colors. Or look weird.* Not true! One look at *Femalia*, a collection of color photos of women's genitals, and you'll see that vulvas come in all sizes, shapes, and colors. (And no one has ever gotten hairy palms from self-pleasure.)
3. *People in relationships don't masturbate. Or they masturbate only when the girlfriend's out of town.* The corollary to this is: *Women in healthy relationships don't masturbate; if you have to do for yourself, you must be suffering from Lesbian Bed Death.* The opposite is more likely to be true: if you masturbate—filling your life with erotic richness—you probably won't suffer from lack of libido. And if you share your erotic energy with your girlfriend, maybe she'll get turned on, too.
4. *Save it for your girlfriend. If you masturbate, you're taking something away from your partner.* That's fine if your honey is your erotic twin. But what if your desires don't perfectly match on a 24/7 basis? Masturbation isn't being "unfaithful." The idea that your lover should satisfy all your needs—sexual, emotional, spiritual—not only is unrealistic, it doesn't leave much room for you to be *you*.
5. *If you masturbate you'll get addicted and be unable to have orgasms any other way. You'll become antisocial.* "I was far more antisocial when I was love addicted," writes Betty Dodson.¹
6. *Masturbation is a lonely occupation.* Yes, masturbation can evoke loneliness, sadness, grief—as well as joy, excitement, and the feeling that you might burst with pleasure. Sex is an emotional experience, whether you're sharing that experience with a partner or flying solo.
7. *Masturbation is something you should do in private.* Some of us had "enlightened" parents. Instead of slapping our hands when they caught us masturbating, they told us it was OK—

just don't ever let anyone see us doing it. No wonder we find masturbating for an audience so deliciously naughty.

8. *Women who jerk off too much are sex obsessed.* How much is “too much”? How much pleasure are you willing to allow yourself? A thimbleful? A bathtub? An ocean?
9. *Autoeroticism is kinky. It's “normal” to get off now and then, but dressing up, playing with toys, watching yourself in the mirror, and licking the juices from your fingers—that's kinky.* Give yourself permission to touch yourself, look at yourself, smell yourself, taste yourself. (If it helps to think of yourself as the perviest girl on your block, go for it.)
10. *If you masturbate, you'll become very demanding, expecting lots of orgasms and a life filled with erotic delight.* Yes. Good for you!

Relaxation, reduced stress, and a good night's sleep are all benefits of masturbation. And buzzing off is a much better reward than a candy bar for finishing that term paper or sending off that business proposal. Masturbation allows you to experiment with new sexual activities in a safe setting. You can try new toys, new fantasies, even a new persona without embarrassment. You can experiment with extended orgasms, multiple orgasms, and ejaculation. You can get messy without worrying about offending a partner's aesthetics.

Masturbation is the key to sexual self-knowledge. You'll know what you like. How? Because you've tried it. You'll know what gets you off—not just that one trick you discovered at age 10, or that particular technique you learned from your last girlfriend. You'll discover a number of sexual activities, fantasies, and techniques that work for you.

Masturbating really taught me how to touch myself, and gave me a good idea of how to touch and stroke a lover—I know now, for instance, to slow my stroking of her clit when she's about to come, when she's nearing the loudest part of her orgasm, to prolong the most intense, delightful part.

All that self-knowledge leads to self-confidence and sexual autonomy. You know you can take care of yourself. You know what gets you off; you'll have specific information to convey to partners (“What do you like?” “Oh,

everything, I guess.”).

You can't be intimate with others until you can be intimate with yourself. How well do you tolerate your own company? What kind of solo-sex partner are you? Through masturbation, you can develop an erotic relationship with yourself.

Think of masturbation as a way to practice self-love. Sure, it's easy to say you love yourself, but do you *act* on that love? Masturbation is part of self-care, as much as regular massages, gynecological exams, or trips to the spa. Here's a way to pour energy *into* yourself, even as the world pulls so much energy out of you.

And, while we're talking about self-love, let's not forget that your body is a very big part of your "self." Through masturbation you can learn to love your physical self.

Sex-positivity means accepting, supporting, and celebrating human sexuality in all its splendid variety. Why not begin at home by accepting your sexuality, your body, the things you like, the ways you respond to your own touch and your own imagination? You're never too old, too boring, too fat, too thin, too stressed-out, or too timid to deserve a great sex life.

The Masturbation Workshop Adventure

It's no coincidence that the best sex educators teach masturbation as the basic tool to helping women expand their sexual possibilities. And masturbation is the one tool you're always packing. From *The Ultimate Guide to Anal Sex for Women* to *Exhibitionism for the Shy* and *The Survivor's Guide to Sex*, sex guides are filled with encouragement and advice about masturbation.

Sex toy salespeople are cheerleaders for the power of masturbation. "You would be hard-pressed to find a group of people more enthusiastic about masturbation than the employees of Good Vibrations," write Cathy Winks and Anne Semans in *The Good Vibrations Guide to Sex*. "Every time we talk to a customer about sex toys we're inwardly cheering, 'Go home! Masturbate! You can do it! You'll love it, we promise!'"²

Sex ed pros like Betty Dodson, Annie Sprinkle, Carol Queen, Tristan

Taormino, and others facilitate hands-on workshops designed to help participants become more sexually confident. Some teach particular skills, such as G-spot ejaculation, anal penetration, Tantric sexual practices, or the art of the striptease. All of them endorse masturbation as their core curriculum. Those who've devoted themselves to teaching others know that self-exploration is the key to sexual discovery. If you had the opportunity to attend a masturbation workshop, what would you like to learn? Would you wish to change some aspect of your masturbation practice? Would you want to devote more time and energy to thoroughly pleasuring yourself? Would you want to figure out how to get out of a rut—try a new position, a new toy, or a new style of stimulation?

Tristan Taormino got just that opportunity. Writing for *On Our Backs*, Tristan reported on her solo session with Betty Dodson, the “mother of masturbation.” Intrepid journalist that she is, Tristan arranged a private lesson. “I was so excited about this adventure I nearly peed in my pants,” she reported. “I was going to touch myself for Dr. Betty Dodson!” [3](#)

Like any responsible Ph.D., Betty began the session by taking a client history—in this case, talking to Tristan about her masturbation habits and practices. “I’ve been jerking off since I was 4 years old, so I was pretty comfortable with it, but I still believed that I could benefit from Betty’s expertise. You can never be too rich or too sexually skilled.” Confessing her citizenship in the Prozac nation, Tristan told Betty that she’d had difficulty reaching orgasm lately and would like to try coming on her back, rather than her tried-and-true method of lying on her stomach.

Intimacy—closeness to yourself in times of solitude or closeness to others in moments of sharing and connecting—reflects your inner world as almost nothing else does. And intimacy begins from the inside; it begins with your own self.

STEPHANIE DOWRICK

Betty led Tristan through a genital self-examination in which she praised Tristan’s shaved cunt, coached her as she began to touch herself, and offered up a basket of toys for Tristan’s edification, including a Crystal Wand (the S-shaped

Lucite dildo designed for G-spot stimulation), a Hitachi Magic Wand, and a barbell that resembles the Kegelcisor, designed by Betty herself.

So what happened? Tristan earned an A+ in pelvic thrusting, but got a big “needs improvement” in the breathing department. Betty also pointed out that Tristan’s reliance on extreme direct clitoral pressure was self-limiting; if she could train herself to respond to other forms of stimulation, Tristan would be a more “versatile” lover. Apparently, even the *On Our Backs Adventure Girl* could learn some new tricks!

Tristan summed up the most important lesson of all: “Betty helped me remember something I knew, but sometimes tend to forget, especially when having really good sex with an amazing lover: The one person who holds the key to my pleasure is me.”

You don’t have to wait for an invitation from Dr. Dodson to brush up on your sexual skills. You can sign up for a hands-on sex workshop at the nearest woman-owned sex toy store. Even if you don’t have access to a sexuality workshop, class, or sex coach, you can rent an instructional video or DVD, like Fanny Fatale’s *How to Female Ejaculate*, in which a circle of women masturbate to ejaculation and orgasm, or Betty Dodson’s *Celebrating Orgasm*, which offers a glimpse of Dodson’s famous hands-on coaching techniques. (One sex toy saleswoman calls this genre the “Jack La Lanne of lesbian porn”—because you can follow along with the exercises at home.)

Time Out!

Do you ever feel like your insides have shattered into a million pieces? Or that if you have to endure one more breakup you swear you’ll give up girls forever? Time to take a break, sister.

Lots of people choose periods of celibacy, which is as legitimate a sexual choice as any other. For some, celibacy means not being sexual with others. For others, celibacy may also mean not being sexual with oneself. Both are fine options.

For some, taking a break from partner sex is a spiritual tool, a way to achieve a heightened awareness of one’s own energies and place in the universe. For others, it’s a strategy for coping with difficult life

changes—a breakup, newly won sobriety, the death of a close friend, or the turbulence of recovery from sexual abuse.

But what if it's your partner who has taken time out from sex—though you're still interested in pursuing your desires? This can be very challenging—especially if you've made a commitment to be sexually monogamous with your partner. While you may not have chosen the circumstances, you might be facing a prime opportunity to learn more about your own sexuality: just you and your imagination, a loving dance for one.

When you take a break from exchanging sexual energy with others, all that energy is left for you. A break from partner sex can really move you forward and help you focus—you can finish that last semester of grad school or figure out what you want to do with your life.

Without the distractions of another person, you get to feel all of you. As Staci Haines writes in *The Survivor's Guide to Sex*, “Intimacy with yourself means accompanying yourself through all of your feelings, sensations, thoughts, wackiness, and imperfections.”⁴ Prepare to feel, really feel, who you are from the inside, perhaps for the first time.

Most important, a period of celibacy is a choice. I'm not talking about those times when there's no one out there you'd want to hook up with; I'm talking about taking a break by choice. Nothing like choosing not to have sex to remind you that all sexual expression is about choice.

You're hot, you're wonderful, you deserve every sexual gratification life has to offer. Taking a break from partner sex can help you to enrich your relationship with yourself.

Of course, you can schedule your own masturbation workshop-for-one, anytime you please. You can even set educational goals. Maybe you've never masturbated to porn. Now you can rent a DVD, unzip your jeans, and find out what it's all about.

Your workshop curriculum can focus on breathing, making noise, moving your legs, or not stopping after the first orgasm. Perhaps you've never had an orgasm—or you don't *think* you've ever had one. This is your chance. What would you like to learn?

Teach Yourself Some New Tricks

I'm a traditional girl: I usually just stimulate my clit with my finger. Every once in a while, when I'm feeling particularly naughty, I enjoy penetration during masturbation.

We all have different ways of masturbating. Most women reach orgasm by stimulating the clitoris—either directly or indirectly. Whether you lie on your stomach and rock your pelvis into the palm of your hand or against the edge of your kitchen table, rhythmically squeeze your legs together, thrust a dildo into your vagina or anus, touch your clit with your fingers, or buzz off with your trusty Hitachi Magic Wand, you've probably discovered a way to masturbate that works for you.

I masturbate in bed on my stomach with both hands, using my sheet or some piece of cloth for friction. I've been masturbating that way for most of my life. I like to be leisurely about it—take a long time to fantasize and get turned on, then sleep or rest for a while afterward.

For many women, childhood masturbatory discoveries are today's *modus operandi*. If at 12 you discovered you could orgasm by rapidly caressing your clit in small intense circles, you may still be masturbating that way. That's great—you've no doubt given yourself years of pleasure. But, like any great lover who gets into a rut, you can become predictable and boring.

Some of your masturbation techniques may be necessary for you to reach orgasm, such as a particular quality of stimulation, and some, such as a particular position, may be mere habit. Can you reach orgasm standing up—or do you have to be able to stretch your legs and curl your toes? What about clitoral stimulation? If the vibrator is held just below your clit, rather than nestled beside your left labia, can you still come?

You can train yourself to respond to different kinds of stimulation and different circumstances. The key is to be open to new possibilities and to be

willing to suffer a bit of frustration in the interest of experimentation. OK, so you could play with that dildo for days and *never* have an orgasm. Forget about whether or not you're getting off, and just note the sensations. Can you feel the muscles in your vagina fluttering as you push the dildo inside you? What do you notice in your ass, legs, and feet? Follow the sensations as they course through your body. You may surprise yourself and reach orgasm from stimulation you never thought could take you over the edge.

I lie on my stomach with my knees slightly propping my ass in the air; I use my fist, with my thumb rubbing my clit; I rub faster and faster, sometimes stroking the clit or reaching to my vaginal opening, and use my body weight as pressure.

How-To's of Masturbation

Here are some favorite masturbation techniques:

- Treat yourself to ample time and privacy. Light some candles and put on music that arouses or soothes you.
- Lavish yourself with your most appreciative gaze. Get out the mirror. Spread your labia. With your finger, trace the parts of your genitals: labia, clit, vagina, perineum, anus. Feel the different textures of skin. Note the different colors.
- Caress yourself. Touch your breasts, belly, thighs, feet.
- Suck your fingers—or a nipple, if your breasts are large enough to reach your mouth.
- You can lie on your back or your belly, sit in a chair, kneel or squat over your hand or dildo, or rub up against a piece of furniture.
- Run your fingers lightly over your vulva. Notice which areas have the most heat for you.
- Reach inside your vagina and draw out your lubrication.
- Even if you're quite wet, put some water-based lube on your finger.
- Draw your finger up from your vagina to your clit.
- Stroke and pinch your nipples with the same rhythm you use on your clit.
- Gently hold the shaft of your clit between thumb and forefinger; stroke the shaft and hood with your fingertip.
- If you like intense nipple stimulation, try a pair of nipple clamps—just

remember that the sensation greatly intensifies when you pull them off.

- You can masturbate in the shower or tub with a handheld shower attachment. Remove the showerhead attachment and put your finger over the end of the hose to create a high-pressure stream of water. (Do not spray water directly into the vagina.)
- Tug on your clit or labia piercing.
- Circle your clit with rapid, intense touches.
- Slip two fingers into your vagina and thrust against your G-spot; with the other hand, press down on your pubic bone and mons—so that you’re stimulating your G-spot both inside and out.
- Slip a finger, butt plug, or string of anal beads into your butt. (Do not use the same finger or toy in your vagina, to avoid a bacterial infection.)
- You can hold a vibrator against your clit as you penetrate yourself with your fingers or dildo, or you can thrust a vibrating dildo in and out of your vagina as you touch your clit.
- Rock your pelvis, move your legs.
- Breathe. Breathe. Breathe. Breathe into your chest, belly, and cunt.
- Make noise.

Solo Toys

There are lots of toys you can play with by yourself. Favorite among them are vibrators and dildos, and the dual action “twice as nice” models with rotating shaft *and* clitoral vibe for one-handed simultaneous penetration and clitoral action. You can play with nipple clamps, butt plugs, anal beads, and many items found in the produce aisle of your local grocery store. If you play with vegetables, make sure to wash them first—or use a condom. The same caution applies to dildos, especially if you like both anal and vaginal penetration; just change condoms when you change activities, or have fresh sex toys at the ready. And don’t forget the lube.

I used carrots a couple of times but they’re too cold, and I found out if you microwave them they’re too soft!

Some women manage elaborate solo rope bondage. (Do *not* asphyxiate yourself.) You can loop string through your piercings and link nipples to labia—which will create an interesting tension when you rock your hips. You can attach

clamps or clothespins to the outer labia and inner thighs, tease yourself sensually with ice cubes or hot wax, and even do play piercing. You'll find more about sex toys and supplies in chapter 17, *Sex Toys and Accoutrements*.

Erotica and Fantasy

Of course, your imagination can be the most wonderful sex toy of all. And erotica is a great fantasy stimulator. Whether you begin your masturbation session with some one-handed reading, a favorite video, DVD, or audiotape, a lascivious phone call to a gal pal, or a visit to a sexy website or online chatroom, when you close your eyes to ride that delicious wave of pleasure all sorts of surprising images may pop into your head. While you started out fantasizing about the hot couple in *Hard Love*, suddenly you morph into a straight guy at the library or the sadistic librarian who leads him on. Who knows? You could be an uptown housewife seduced by her butch plumber. Let your clit lead the way. Don't try to have the "right" fantasies—follow the images that get you wet. Exactly what kind of touch are you really craving?

How-To's of Orgasm

Masturbation is a good way to learn how to orgasm—and all the experts from Lonnie Barbach to Betty Dodson will tell you it's much easier to learn how to give yourself an orgasm than to learn to come with a partner.

To summarize the best of the advice:

- *Give yourself permission.* Pleasure is important—as important as food or air. You're no less deserving of sustenance than any other living being.
- *Experiment.* Touch yourself in a variety of ways. Find out what feels good to you. "If you don't orgasm, that's OK—what's important is your discovery of what feels good. You can build on this the next time you masturbate," Cathy Winks and Anne Semans advise.⁵
- *Take your time.* It may take you an hour or longer to reach a level of arousal that can take you over the edge.
- *Breathe.* Breathing will oxygenate your blood and move energy through

your entire body.

- *Make noise.* You can't hold your breath when you're moaning.
- *Move.* Rock your pelvis, move your legs. Notice the energy building as you move.
- *Use a vibrator.* Many women find the intense, reliable sensations of the vibrator necessary for reaching orgasm.
- *Use lube.* Put some water-based lube on the head of the vibrator, on your finger, and on your clit. Spread the lube around so that it coats your entire vulva.
- *Stop and start.* If you get frustrated, back off and let your sexual sensation slowly build up again. "Try not to get too fixated on the orgasm or else 'trying too hard' might kill your arousal," Winks and Semans write.⁶
- *Don't tense up.* Play with the tension in your body. Contract and relax.
- *Practice.* Lonnie Barbach recommends that you set aside an hour a day, every day, for up to six weeks.⁷
- *Do your Kegels.* Annie Sprinkle writes: "Squeeze the pubococcygeus muscles (the muscles you squeeze to stop the flow of urine) on the exhale. These squeezes can actually stimulate the clitoris and G-spot, while pumping up energy throughout your entire body. In other words, inhale while filling your belly like a balloon, exhale and flatten your back while contracting the PC muscles."⁸
- *Feel your feelings.* Sexual feelings can stir up grief, anger, or fear. Backing off from sexual stimulation may make sense in the moment—but the cost is dear.
- *Get help.* There are many ways to approach your sexual healing. You can try somatic healing practices designed to help you heal trauma in your body. You can see a therapist to explore why you have a problem reaching orgasm. You can work with a sex therapist or surrogate. Or arrange a session with an orgasm coach.
- *Read a sex guide.* Aphrodite, the savvy online advice columnist at A Woman's Touch boutique, reveals that *she* learned to masturbate by reading *Our Bodies, Ourselves*.⁹ Even sex goddesses had to learn somewhere. Investigate videos, DVDs, books, and workshops. See the resources section for details.

Masturbating with a Partner

I absolutely love to be a witness to a lover enjoying her own body; it is such a beautiful personal intimacy. I've used masturbating to turn my partner on, too, which is really fun. It is very empowering to be openly appreciated and acknowledged and not shamed for masturbating.

You might find nothing is more tantalizing than your partner parading her arousal in front of you, working herself up to a colossal orgasm as you sit helplessly stewing in your own juices. When you masturbate in front of your partner, you're inviting her to witness you pouring loving energy into yourself. You give her evidence that you value your sexual pleasure. It's a sign of trust to allow someone to witness you in such an unguarded moment.

Masturbating to orgasm in front of my partner brings up a lot of my issues around self-acceptance. I feel self-conscious because the spotlight's entirely on me—I'm being watched. I worry that I look funny when I come.

Not only do you get to revel in your partner's gaze, you won't have to cope with the problem of the well-meaning (but clueless) partner who has no idea how you like your clitoris stroked. If the idea of explaining your preferences leaves you tongue-tied, you can rely on your freshman English teacher's favorite rule: Show, don't tell.

I don't think twice about having a wank in front of my partner. Especially if she's tied up.

Phone sex turns your awareness to aural stimulation. As you touch yourself, the sounds of your partner touching herself intensify your experience. Cybersex, most of all in the form of chatroom sex, is a great tool for becoming adept at using words to describe your erotic experiences. With the advent of devices like Apple's iSight, you can answer an online personal ad and then have real-time online sex, regardless of where you live.



Illustration 4. Masturbating with a Partner

You may discover the exhibitionist in you; and your partner may discover her inner voyeur. Every time you take a sexual risk, the possibility exists that you may widen and enhance your sexuality.

You can also touch yourself during partner sex. Sometimes it's just easier to take care of your own orgasm and leave your partner free to concentrate on other things—reaming your butt, filling your vagina with her fingers, wielding the G-Spotter, or sucking your nipples. Many women discover that they can come more reliably, more intensely, more easily when they touch themselves during partner sex. And when your partner is relieved of the job of “making” you come, she may be more creative, more assertive, more confident in pleasuring you.

If you come by your own hand (or vibrator), it still “counts.” I discovered this sexual truth while watching a gay porn video at a queer film festival. As the star was being anally penetrated by his well-hung partner, he stimulated his penis. I was struck by the similarity to lesbian sex and the practice of touching one's clitoris while being penetrated by a woman partner. That the star brought himself to orgasm during partner sex was depicted as totally hot. The theater (packed to overflowing with gay men) was so quiet you could have heard a pin drop—or a zipper.

Notice how generously you treat yourself. Do you bring as much creativity to your own arousal as you would to your partners'? If you masturbate once a week, is that OK? Once a day? Three times a day? How much pleasure are you worth?

Suggested Web Links

BETTY DODSON'S HOME PAGE

www.bettydodson.com

VULVA UNIVERSITY MASTURBATION CLASS

www.housechicks.com/vulvauniversity/masturbate/masturbation.html

SOURCE OF QUOTE

Stephanie Dowrick, *Intimacy and Solitude* (W. W. Norton, 1995), 5.

chapter seven

Communication and Finding Sex Partners

Where do I find sex partners? I go after them.

WHERE CAN YOU FIND SEX PARTNERS? Well, just about anywhere. At school, in sessions of academic conferences, at work, at a bar, at a dance club, at the gym, on the subway, at a sex party, in a women's studies class, in your queer youth group, at a 12-step meeting, at church or synagogue, while doing community activism, through introductions from friends, via ex-lovers (and even the occasional ex-husband), and of course on the Internet.

Where did I find her? She responded to an ad I placed. We went out a couple of times, but the timing just wasn't right. Four years later, she was working in my department. Soon we were flirting, teasing, and trading little notes. I felt like a teenager again. Finally, I left her a note that said, "I would really like to kiss you."

Gyms are good places to meet women... Praise the lycra!

More specifically, you can meet sex partners while shopping for sex toys, at a Dyke March planning meeting, in line at the queer film festival, at the women's basketball playoffs, on parent/teacher night at your child's preschool, while marching in your local Pride parade, at the International Ms. Leather competition, at the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival, at Novice Night at your local S/M group, in your neighborhood queer bookstore, through your polyamorous lovers, and in the park while walking your dog.

Geography, Not Destiny

Whether you live in Louisville or London, the basics of meeting potential sex partners are the same. Sure, finding lovers becomes difficult when you can count

the lesbians on your campus on your fingers—and still have a couple left over to vent your frustration. If your town boasts few queer social resources, you'll have to muster all your creativity (and self-confidence) to find sex partners. But even in cities with bustling queer communities—New York, London, Berlin, San Francisco, Los Angeles, Sydney—the well seems to run dry at times.

You can fly to San Francisco for the annual Pride parade, line up on Market Street with the cheering crowd half a million strong, and overhear an adorable pierced-and-tattooed dyke complain that she can't find a lover. Deprivation thinking will keep you, well, deprived. Honestly, if you think negatively enough, you'll discover a dyke shortage in Provincetown at the height of summer.

Want to find a girlfriend, trick, fuck buddy, or summer fling? Indulge yourself in every erotic delight at your disposal—especially your own erotic imagination and capacity for self-pleasure. Shine on yourself.

And in the meantime, here are a few pointers for finding sex partners:

- Know who you are and what you want.
- Take risks. So maybe you're not a party girl—but how many invitations have you turned down lately?
- Get out of your shell. Never been to a club? Dust off those dancing shoes.
- Throw a party.
- Get involved in your community. You'll meet women who care about the same things you do.
- Let your friends know you're looking.
- Go to a sex party—even if you don't have a date. Take a friend.
- Place a personal ad in your local queer press, alternative weekly, or online.
- Learn how to talk about sex. There's more to finding sex partners than moving to a city with favorable demographics or buying a new black leather miniskirt—though you will look irresistible in the East Village. Before you rent the U-Haul or spend next week's paycheck, learn some basic communication skills. You'll be a more confident and competent partner—and you'll learn about yourself in the process.

Talk Talk Talk

I like it when she squeezes my nipples and talks dirty to me while I beat off. Very hot.

Many women enjoy talking about sex. It can be thrilling to be told in scrumptious detail how much a lover wants you—and to tell her exactly what you plan to do once you get your hands on her.

Desire—communicated in no uncertain terms—is a gift we give each other. Think of your tongue as a sex toy (not just for oral sex) and of sex talk as foreplay. Your words can stoke the fires as effectively as kisses and caresses.

Some of us love to talk dirty. We whisper sensual promises into eager ears. We send salacious emails in the middle of the workday. We leave outrageously graphic notes in gym lockers, patent leather purses, billfolds, underwear drawers, and peeking out from the floor mat in the Honda—on the driver’s side, of course. We have long, wet phone conversations. We spend days online cruising chatrooms for eloquent lovers. We make home movies. We tape ourselves having sex, and, as one woman relates, we hit the playback button again and again and again.

My lover and I recorded ourselves making love and we played it back one day, attempting to follow along with the rhythms of that particular “session.” It started with my lover going down on me. I could hear myself in the recording wiggling around, the sheets crinkling underneath me, and the wetness my lover caused between my legs. I could hear her licking me, in the tape and in the moment, as if in stereo. Her moans were echoing through my head, my moans were echoing through my head. As my breath became quicker in the recording, so did it in real time. My lover was so wet that when she rose to kiss me, all of my fingers entered easily, and she rode my hand. I had just barely gotten my fist inside her when she came. I could hear myself beginning to climax in the tape. I was tight, waiting for her to come inside me with her cock. When she did, I felt my entire body shudder, sucking her in. I lost track of what was happening in the tape. All I could do was feel her inside me and listen to our breath. I have never come so hard as I did that night. It was beautiful.

Effective sexual communication is the single most useful erotic skill you can bring to a lover. As Susie Bright says, “No lover is able to look into your eyes

and figure out how you want to get fucked in the ass.”¹ Sexual communication includes being able to articulate your desires, fantasies, history, limits, and concerns—and being able to listen without judgment to those of your partners.

Communication skills carry a big payoff: Your sex life improves dramatically as you gain fluency in the vocabulary of your own desires. When you can tell a partner what you want—in plain language—she’ll be more likely to meet your needs. (One woman wrote, “I would love to be fucked up the ass on the hood of my sports car”—a simple enough request.) Your partner will be inspired by your forthright manner, too. Soon, she’ll be telling you things she’s never said aloud before.

Asking your partner what she likes will also improve your sex life. You’ll find out exactly how she likes to be touched, which will make you a better lover. You needn’t worry about appearing inexperienced if you ask your lover how she likes her clitoris licked. Even if you’ve gone down on a hundred other women, you still don’t know how she likes it. Asking is the mark of a sophisticated lover. It’s a great way to get used to talking about desire, too. If you’re too shy to open up a dialogue about your needs, start with hers. (Just don’t forget to come back to you.)

Talking about sex won’t ruin the mystery or spontaneity of your erotic encounters. The romantic myths that great sex “just happens” and that a skilled lover can intuit your needs are just that—myths.

Once you’re open about your sexual practices and fantasies, you can stop wondering whether you’re “normal.” As soon as you start telling friends and lovers the scenarios that fuel your dreams, you’ll find out that you are hardly unique. Many people share your fantasies. In fact, some of your friends may come up with turn-ons even more kinky than yours.

Folks in the BDSM community (bondage, dominance/submission, sadomasochism) have elevated sex talk to an art form. Among S/M aficionados, it’s a common practice to negotiate before engaging in play, exploring each partner’s desires, needs, limits, and safety concerns to find a common ground from which to proceed. Even experienced players negotiate prior to each new encounter—as do novices, for whom a single item on a checklist of possibilities can produce hours of wonder and anticipation. Intimate partners find that ongoing negotiation helps to keep their sex life fresh.

Negotiating a scene won't make it less exciting. For instance, you can discuss an abduction scene in great detail without ruining the surprise of the capture or the specific content of what will happen when your partner whisks you away. Negotiation between equals is what makes power play emotionally safe—and what distinguishes it from real-world, nonconsensual power dynamics.

Negotiation is best handled in a nonsexual setting rather than in the heat of the moment. Take time to think about what you want from the encounter. You can discuss your hopes and desires, past sexual experiences, likes and dislikes, emotional needs and hot buttons, as well as your limits—the things you don't wish to do. This is a great time to talk about STDs and safer-sex practices, too. More on negotiation in chapter 15, *Play Nice! (...or Else)*.

What traits do sex educators look for in a partner? Expressiveness tops my list. In fact, many women seek out partners who are able to freely articulate their erotic desires. Why? When you talk with a new partner about what you are going to do, you reencounter your own sexuality through her eyes. Sex becomes new for you.

Finally, communication is how you practice consent. Even if you know what you want, you can't give (or withhold) consent without communicating it.

Tongue-Tied?

Sexual communication isn't just for the chatty and the brave. Anyone can learn how to talk about sex—even a Recovering Shy Person like Carol Queen:

When I was (not so very much) younger, the idea of getting up before a crowd and attracting erotic attention would have sent me into a panic. In fact, I couldn't even imagine doing much of that sort of thing one on one. My idea of talking dirty was "I love you" or—really bold—"Oh, yes!"

Since then I've been photographed naked, recorded (video and audio) having sex, and performed explicit sex shows. That I've done these things is not only evidence of my recovery, they're part of it.²

Many of our inhibitions about sex talk are cultural. We're taught what's appropriate to say aloud and what's not. Especially for women, the bold expression of sexuality can carry a hefty price tag. *Slut* and *whore* may be words

you've reclaimed as badges of honor, but in the wrong context they can still silence even the most fearless among us.

You may be afraid that at the core your sexuality just isn't good enough. That by putting your desires into words, you'll expose your basic inadequacy. That people will see how boring you are. Or how perverted. Or how tame. Or simply different.

Whether your goal is a career at the peep shows or to be able to tell your lover exactly how you want your breasts touched, you can learn to feel comfortable talking about sex. After all, you had to be taught to choke over those sexual words. You weren't born that way—think of a 3-year-old, happily reciting her new vocabulary words (“poop!”) and dropping her pants for all the world to see.

Here are some suggestions to get you started:

- *Make a vocabulary list.* What words do you feel comfortable using to talk about sex? Is it *cunnilingus* or *oral sex* or *eating pussy* for you? *Butt-fucking* or *anal intercourse*? What do you call the parts of your body?
- *Know yourself.* Nothing like information to give you confidence. Now's a good time to compose your own Yes/No/Maybe list. Take a second look at the “Erotic Play” list in chapter 2, Desire and Fantasy. Which of these activities do you like to engage in? Which might you like to try, perhaps under very specific circumstances? And which are you sure you're not interested in? Write “yes,” “no,” or “maybe” next to each item. Don't forget to record the date—when you discover your list a year from now, you may be charmed by your innocence.
- *Talk to yourself while masturbating.* Start with grunts and moans and work up to your own erotic monologues. For an added challenge, record yourself masturbating and talking dirty and then play it back.
- *Engage a friend in a conversation about her or his sex life.* You might want to pick someone who's also struggling to break free of sexual inhibitions. Go to a sexy poetry reading or film together. Talk about the experience afterward.
- *Treat yourself to an online chat* or an evening of phone sex.
- *Attend a workshop, play party, or other group event* where people speak openly about sex.
- *Take a class.* Even if “Talking Dirty” isn't among the course offerings at your local sex boutique, you can polish your communication skills in

nearly any workshop or lecture on sexuality. See “Where to Learn More,” below.

Who Are You Looking For?

I am attracted to big bodies. Give me the soft, plush, easy-to-roll-into bodies. Mmmmm.

What are you looking for in a partner? Do you want a sex partner whose sexual interests match specific interests of yours? An experienced bondage top? A fisting bottom? Are looks important to you? Age? Cultural background? How important is gender to you in choosing a partner?

“Oh, I just want someone nice” is a response that indicates you probably haven’t given this much thought. Perhaps you know what you’d like in a partner, but don’t think you really deserve someone that great. You may have been taught that it’s wrong to objectify a potential partner by naming such specific preferences. If you don’t own your preferences, someone else will do it for you. So take a pencil and paper, or call your best friend, and start a list of qualities you’re looking for in a sex partner.

You can also get too specific for your own good. So, you’re looking for a butch Latina dyke, 25-29, at least 5’8”, strong build with voluptuous breasts and big hands, who works in the helping professions, enjoys softball and all-night poker games, Almodóvar films and mystery novels, nonsmoking, kinky S/M top, who loves kids and dogs? Great. That’s a start. But will you consider her if she’s 34? Only 5’5”? Programs computers? Enjoys an occasional cigar? And hates gambling?

Give yourself permission to pursue sex—any kind of sex you can imagine, on terms of your choosing. You don’t have to pretend to romantic interests you don’t feel. Likewise, you needn’t pretend that you want to play when what you really want is to find a lover. Are you looking for a woman who will want only you? A polyamorous lover? A safer-sex buddy? Do you want to find a partner with whom you can break out of a rut? Are there particular sexual activities you want to try?

I’ve gotten better at asking for what I want and finding partners who like the same kind of sex I do. Being polyamorous, I frequently seek in one

relationship the sex I'm not getting in another.

Ask for what you want (not what you think you should want). You don't have to mold your desires to fit a political agenda. You needn't feel guilty that you are turned on by women of a certain body type or that you want to meet someone whose culture resonates with yours. You can always change your mind.

I went through this black-dykes-only phase. Looking back, I think of it as a cocooning phase. I was focused on learning about who I was in the world, coming into an understanding of my blackness, and I didn't want to be concerned with the needs or beliefs of white women. However, I did have a very powerful sexual reaction to one white woman. Eventually, I took this as an opportunity to explore the ways that my desire did not follow my politics. I had to find a way out of this discomfort, which was very much about boxing myself in. But it was also important for me to continue to make my beauty, my desires, and my culture the center of my world. Attraction for me would never equal loss of self or assimilation. Which is what I think I had feared.

Making Your Move

It's time to make your move. Now what? Surely there's more to sexual communication than lewd invitations whispered in a cloud of hormones. What about the thornier issues of partner sex? For instance, how do you ask someone to have sex with you?

Many of us have been taught to wait for someone else to make the first move. Have you ever convinced yourself that if she isn't making a move, she isn't interested? This would be comic if it weren't so tragic—since she's probably thinking the very same thing. You have only one sure way to rise above misperception: Ask her. The trick is to ask in a context-appropriate manner. The statement "I find you extremely attractive, and I'd love to spend some time with you. Would you like to get together?" is acceptable in almost any situation. "I'd really like to touch you. May I?" is best saved for the dance floor or a sex party.

You can state the conditions under which you might like to have sex: "I'd love to play. But I'd like to get to know you a bit better first." You can check out a potential partner's relationship status: "I never date married women. Are you

seeing anyone?”

You can invite a potential partner to engage in a particular activity and state your limits at the same time. “I’d love to play. But I’m not into penetration right now. Would you like to trade massages?”

You can trade interests, experiences, and fantasies—and get your message across quite clearly: “I hear you’re quite a skilled top. I find the thought of submission quite tantalizing, though I’ve only bottomed once. Would you be interested in showing me the ropes?”

“No, Thank You”

Of course, sometimes you get turned down. My own fear of rejection shrank to a manageable size the day I overheard a stunning femme graciously deflect a sexual come-on. The would-be suitor approached the femme and said, “We’ve been eyeing each other all day. I want you to know I find you very attractive.” The femme responded, “Thank you.” *Period.* She did not find it necessary to qualify her response (“Thanks, but I’m not interested in taking this further”), nor did she find it necessary to behave defensively (“No way!”).

I understood in that moment that a genuine expression of desire had value, regardless of the response. I was no less beautiful or worthy a human being because someone said, “No, thank you.” (I also understood that I needn’t fear a rude or unkind response—since that would reflect a lack of grace on the part of the speaker, and say nothing about me.)

Signs of Healthy Boundaries

- Appropriate trust
- Revealing a little of yourself at a time, then checking to see how the other person responds to your sharing
- Moving step by step into intimacy
- Considering compatibility before moving into a relationship
- Deciding whether a potential relationship will be good for you
- Touching only with permission
- Weighing the consequences before acting on sexual impulses

- Weighing the consequences before acting on sexual impulse
- Being sexual when you want to be sexual, concentrating on your own experience
- Maintaining personal values despite what others want
- Noticing when someone else displays inappropriate boundaries
- Saying no to unwanted food, drinks, gifts, touch, sex
- Respecting others—not taking advantage of someone’s generosity
- Respecting self—not giving too much, hoping that someone will like you
- Not allowing someone to take advantage of your generosity
- Trusting your own decisions and accepting the consequences
- Knowing who you are and what you want
- Pursuing your own growth
- Recognizing that friends and partners are not mind readers
- Clearly communicating your wants and needs (recognizing that you may be turned down, but you can ask)
- Talking to yourself with gentleness, humor, love, and respect

“No” is an expression of a preference and is as valid a response to a sexual request as “yes”—though it’s not what you hope to hear. Respect that preference. Being told “no” is not an invitation to argue or persuade. Move on and ask someone else.

What if someone approaches you for sex, and you’re not interested or available? If you like, you can say, “I’m flattered you asked, but no” or “Not right now, but check in with me another time” (if you really think you might be interested later). However, a simple “No, thank you” is enough. You don’t owe an explanation.

Personal Ads in Newspapers and Magazines

The world of personal ads offers a wonderful opportunity to practice asking for what you want. Personal ads are especially helpful if asking for sex face to face makes you feel shy.

Even if you have no intention of placing an ad, writing one is a useful exercise. Why? A good ad lists both the qualities of the person you're seeking and the qualities you have to offer—plus a memorable headline, some vivid description, and a bit of witty repartee. In newspaper and magazine ads, you may be limited to 50 words. Not a small task even for a seasoned copywriter.

*you = f2m who likes to fuck.
me = f who likes to get fucked.
me + you = lots of fucking.
i promise i am totally cute.
so let's listen to some make-out music
and get down to it.*

Check out the ads in your local queer newspaper or arts and culture weekly. The nature and tone of the ads will give you an idea of who's using this particular venue and what they're looking for. In print publications, placing the ad is usually free, while those answering the ads are paying for the service.

Other venues for personal ads include the Internet (see below), organizational and community newsletters, national lesbian and gay magazines, and "straight" magazines with a hip readership.

Sex on the Internet

I found my current partner on the Internet. Risky? Yes. Silly? Perhaps. That aside, this is the healthiest, hottest, most solid relationship I've ever had.

Lately, women have been meeting and mating by way of the Internet in growing numbers. Whether or not you intend a face-to-face encounter, you'll find buzzing conversations, flirtations, and sex.

As a medium for meeting people the Internet has some advantages:

There's something for everyone on the Internet. If you can imagine it, you can probably find it, and if not, you can start it.

You can transcend the limits of geography. Even if you feel isolated in "real" life—the only boi in your campus queer group, or the only queer woman in a wheelchair in the entire county—you can create your own virtual community.

Beauty isn't always skin deep, and while many women exchange photos online, many more get to know one another through conversation—which is something of an equalizer, as you don't need to have the latest “do” to attract attention. Chatrooms are great for those who feel more comfortable in conversation than on the dance floor.

There's safety in anonymity; you can ask questions and try new things without worrying about looking silly.

You can be anyone or anything you like. No one knows you came out two weeks ago. No one knows online whether you're pre-op or post-op. You can grow accustomed to being yourself in the world.

One person's Internet advantage will be another's disadvantage. That written and conversational cues supersede visual and cultural cues isn't a selling point for everyone—not everyone feels comfortable communicating in writing or wants to learn how to use a computer. There's a lot of trite conversation on the Internet. You have to put up with spam, endless spam. And publicly accessible chatrooms can be infiltrated by queer bashers and trollers.

The same freedom of anonymity that allows you to change personas when the mood strikes allows others to manipulate and deceive. You have to be just as cautious in opening your heart on the Internet as you do bellied up to the bar.

Websites by and for lesbian, bisexual, and queer women seem to multiply daily. Many of these are sprawling, multifaceted affairs with chatrooms, message boards, personal ads, uploaded erotica (both written and visual), links to other Internet resources—you name it.

Internet resources include:

- Message boards where users post messages on a variety of topics
- Live chatrooms. Online chat used to require that you understand IRC (Internet relay chat) protocol. You still can cruise the thousands of IRC “channels” that feature explicit conversation on every imaginable topic. But you can also enter chatrooms on many websites, thus eliminating the need to understand IRC technology.
- Personal ads and matchmaker services
- Email discussion lists
- Usenet newsgroups. The original Internet discussion forums, newsgroups are similar to email discussion lists—people post their views on a variety

of topics. However, while only subscribers can post to most email lists, newsgroups are open to anyone who wishes to download the daily posts or post their own messages. So groups like alt.sex.bondage are heavy with spam, attacks on women and queers, and off-topic posts.

See “Where to Meet Girls on the Web” in the resources chapter for a selection of websites and services.

Play Safe

Remember to exercise caution when meeting strangers—whether you make contact online or through a personal ad in your local paper. Talk on the phone before you make a date. Trust your instincts—if your gut says, “No way,” don’t go. You’re under no obligation to follow through on an initial contact, though standards of etiquette still apply. (Call if you have to cancel a date.) Cafés are a great choice of meeting place for first dates with strangers—they’re low-key, inexpensive, and public. Here are a few tips for safe play dates with strangers:

- If possible, play at a sex club or party.
- Bring your own safer-sex supplies.
- Let your friends know where you’ll be.
- Tell your date you’d like to give her phone number to a friend—a safe player will respect your caution.

Sex Parties

As Carol Queen so eloquently puts it, “Nice girls don’t go sniffing like beasts around warehouses full of men with erect cocks and women decked out in lingerie and smelling of hot pussy.” ³ Which is exactly what so many women love about play parties.

Play parties can be shadowy affairs in dungeons equipped with elaborate bondage stations, or sensual afternoon soirees with soft music and seasonal arrangements of fresh fruit. Parties tend to take on an individual flavor, and everyone has her favorites.

Sex parties, workshops, S/M demos, and other overtly sexual gatherings are prime places for meeting a new sex partner—or even a lover. The advantage of these events, of course, is that you can be sure to find someone who shares your particular sexual style—since talking about sex is encouraged, and cruising is often the whole point of the evening. (More on sex parties in chapter 16, *Play Parties and Public Sex*.)

Sex Talk Guidelines

How do you tell your hot new girlfriend her cunnilingus technique leaves a lot to be desired? How do you tell your lover of five years that you're dying to try out a new sexual technique, sex toy, or play partner? Before you enter couples counseling, try these basic pointers:

- *Emphasize the positive.* “I’d really like your tongue on the shaft of my clit. But I need firm, steady strokes to come—and please don’t stop once I start moaning” will yield a more positive result than “I hate when you change what you’re doing just when I’m about to come.”
- *Be specific.* In her eagerness to please, “a little harder” might sound like an invitation to trade in her dildo for a jackhammer. How about 10 percent harder? 20 percent harder?
- *Be polite in turning down offers for sex.* A kindly spoken “no, thank you” is a perfectly adequate response. “What? Are you kidding?!?” will tarnish your karma.
- *Be polite in asking for sex.* Even if you’ve been living in bliss for a decade, your partner isn’t required to put out for you. She’s a human being, not a domestic resource. Say “please.” Make it hot for her.
- *If you need it, ask for it.* Do you need lots of cuddling after sex? Time alone? A protein shake?
- *Practice compromise.* This doesn’t mean that you engage in sex you don’t want—or that your partner should engage in sex she doesn’t want. But sometimes it’s fine to put your wants on the back burner. (Your wants, that is, not your needs.)
- *Ask your partner what she wants.* You can practice active listening by checking to make sure you heard her correctly. “So, are you saying that you really don’t find nipple stimulation a turn-on?” Who knows? Maybe

she just told you that she loves having her nipples sucked—but not until she’s well aroused.

- *Practice nonjudgmental listening.* As they say at the San Francisco Sex Information hotline, watch the “Ick!” response. You may not find her fantasies at all erotic, and you’d do well to turn down requests for sex acts that turn you off. But you don’t have to make her sex “bad” just to say no to it.
- *Talk in a nonsexual setting.* It’s easier to talk about sexual needs in a nonsexual context than in the heat of the moment. Grab a mug of tea and sit down at the kitchen table (unless, of course, that’s where you’re planning to have sex).
- *Pick a time when you and your partner are both relaxed and available.* As she’s running out the door, already late for work, isn’t the time to tell her you want to change your sex life.
- *Don’t compare her to past lovers, put her down, or dump a long list of grievances.*
- *Watch out for unspoken assumptions and expectations: If I can make you come, you’ll never leave me.*

Where to Learn More

Here’s a tip for learning how to talk about sex: Attend a lecture or workshop on any specific sexual technique or form of sexual expression that interests you. While you’re learning *Advanced Oral Sex Techniques* or *How to Make Your Own Sex Toys*, you’ll be getting practice in hearing someone speak explicitly about a sexual practice—and you’ll get practice sharing as well. You’ll gain knowledge and confidence and feel less shy about telling your partners what you like.

No matter what the topic, most sex educators put communication at the top of their curriculum—since it’s essential to partner sex. (Even a masturbation workshop will help you explore what you like, and knowing yourself is essential to effective communication.)

Many authors and other “sexperts” in the United States and Canada offer workshops and classes on specific sexual techniques. Both Tristan Taormino and Carol Queen offer anal sex workshops; Karlyn Lotney (aka Fairy Butch) teaches

Dyke Sex: Power Tools, and other dyke sex classes; Annie Sprinkle conducts workshops on Tantra and genital massage; Barbara Carrellas teaches Urban Tantra workshops; and Betty Dodson offers her famed masturbation workshops. While most of these women are based on the East or West Coast, they do travel. The Michigan Womyn's Music Festival and other large national and regional gatherings are also great places to catch a traveling sexpert.

Sex-positive sex toy boutiques often sponsor educational events. Sh! in London, Good Vibrations in San Francisco and Berkeley, Grand Opening! in Boston and West Hollywood, Toys in Babeland in Seattle and New York City, A Woman's Touch in Madison, Early to Bed in Chicago, Good for Her and Come As You Are in Toronto, and many other stores across the United States and Canada offer workshops and demos on everything from flirting to anal sex. Local S/M organizations frequently offer workshops and demonstrations—even if your interest in S/M is on the mild side, you may want to attend a program on negotiating with a new partner. See the resources section for more info.

When I was 20 I had a girlfriend who was a total exhibitionist. She dressed to turn herself on, and turned on everybody she met. I learned my best-ever sexuality lesson: Assume that you—your body, your needs, wants, desires, and fantasies—are the hottest fucking thing on the planet.

Suggested Web Links

IRC HELP

www.irchelp.org

LESBIANS CLICK

Directory of links to online lesbian communities

www.lesbiansclick.com/Online_Communities/index.html

CLASSIC DYKES

www.classicdykes.com

LESBOTRONIC

www.lesbotronic.com

STRAP-ON.ORG

www.strap-on.org

SOURCE OF QUOTE

“Signs of Healthy Boundaries” reprinted from a flyer by Co-Dependents Anonymous.

chapter eight

Sex and Partnership

We've been together for 27 years and still very much enjoy an active sex life. We have a fun game of keeping track of how many different places we can have sex. We have made love in 40 states and 11 countries.

LESBIAN, BISEXUAL, AND QUEER WOMEN have all kinds of sexual partnerships. We have lovers, play partners, longtime sweethearts, regular fuck buddies, domestic partners, Daddies, bois, girls, Mistresses, Masters, slaves, Tops, bottoms, and in some locales, legally recognized wedded spouses.

We have sex with women and men, partners who identify as transgendered, traditionally gendered, and ambiguously gendered—and partners who reject the notion of gender altogether.

We may dream of committed life partners, two dogs and a cat, the house with the garden (and maybe a child or two), and we may attempt this with a number of partners over the course of a lifetime. We enjoy longtime friendships with occasional forays into erotic play and decades-long monogamous relationships.

We live in committed polyamorous relationships, where our network of lovers—and their lovers, ex-lovers, best friends, and roommates—become our extended family. We have sex with exes and exes of exes.

In our S/M play, we may negotiate for hours with a new partner with whom we expect to share a one-time scene. Or we may engage in ongoing negotiations with a regular partner with the intention of building toward a 24/7 relationship. We may negotiate a contract with a slave or Master that spells out in numbered articles and paragraphs the duties and privileges of each of our roles.

Erotic Intimacy

Clearly, sex in the context of a relationship is something many of us value highly

—and while our definition of the word *relationship* varies as widely as our sexual interests, we have in common the desire for ongoing, intimate sexual connection. It's the interplay of two (or more) people bringing their whole selves to sex that compels many of us. You can, of course, enjoy that erotic exchange with a brand-new lover or someone with whom you intend to share one night of sex—and one night only. But it is the element of *time* that creates those possibilities many of us are drawn to explore.

You can expand and deepen your erotic life with the encouragement of a supportive partner. Cheering on your partner's erotic discoveries may give you permission to further your own sexual explorations. She may bring to the relationship sexual experience and interests that will enrich your sex life. You may discover gratification in teaching your partner a thing or two—many of us take delight in showing a partner new sources of pleasure.

We have questions about our sexualities and gender that cannot be answered in a weekend, and ongoing themes that evolve over years of exploration. Our partners are more than steadfast support or critical witnesses. Our partners hold a long view of us. With years behind and years ahead, they can help us keep our sexualities in perspective. They have watched the changes in our sexual practices, desires, and bodies. They can help us remember our stated wishes and help us keep the momentum of our sex lives rolling.

My partner likes my body. She knows I am not happy with being in too feminine a body and accepts my masculinity. I had fears of telling her about this until a year ago, as my ex always told me I was too masculine. She gets upset, though, that I don't like my breasts being touched but has come to understand why. She is the first one to accept me as I am.

Building on shared experience, sex can become more intimate—and more intuitive, playful, and vital—and can bring into being a more deeply intimate relationship.

I didn't realize just how much love can affect fucking, but it really does make a difference.

I think great sex is very contextual. What I enjoy depends on the person I am with, and the relationship I have with them. I guess my ideal would be to be with someone I love completely, and be intimate with them, sexual

with them, regularly—as an expression of our love for one another.

This deepening of erotic intimacy is something that many people long for. They may be disappointed to discover that love and commitment don't guarantee a satisfying sexual connection—or sustain sexual interest over the long haul. (Faced with that disappointment, they may conclude their partner is not “the one” and move on.)

Thankfully, the qualities that make for thriving sexual relationships are ones you can cultivate, both in yourself and in your relationship.

What Kind of Sex Life Do You Want, Anyway?

Before you can say what kind of relationship you want, it helps to think about what kind of sex life you envision for yourself. You may have completed a Yes/No/Maybe exercise—either as a way of discovering your desires (see chapter 2, Desire and Fantasy) or in negotiating with a partner (see chapter 7, Communication, and chapter 15, Play Nice!...). You probably already know which of the activities in the “Erotic Play” list in chapter 2 you'd like to try. Now take it a step further.

Sure, you know you'd like to receive cunnilingus from your partner for hours, nonstop, if it were possible. Or that your best orgasms occur when you've got a chrome dildo in your butt and your partner squeezes your nipples as you hold a vibrator to your clit.

But what kind of erotic *life* would you like?

Your sexual concerns may be so wrapped up in the needs of a particular relationship or partner that you haven't taken the opportunity to simply imagine what you want for yourself. Period. No one else's expectations. No one else's baggage.

Begin with your imagination. Don't worry if your flights of fancy are just that—let your fantasies loose and worry about plausibility later:

The sex life of my dreams would allow me to have sex with who I want, when I want, whether I was in a relationship or not. I'd probably have one steady partner, with the understanding that we are free to have sexual experiences with other people. I'd engage in activities with men

and women, but mostly women. I would feel free and uninhibited. I would be pleased with myself.

While at first glance this may look like an unrealistic ideal (the kind that can have you wallowing in dissatisfaction), this is actually a quite attainable goal. OK, within reasonable limitations. Why *shouldn't* you have sex with whomever you want when you want? Why *not* have as your goal feeling free and uninhibited and being pleased with yourself?

No STDs. No pregnancy. Cum tastes like grape soda (both male and female). Many different people, ages, body types, organ styles. All sexual activities within moral reason. I feel better about my body.

So what if what you want is completely absurd? Behind the impossibilities lie elements of plausibility. OK, so ejaculate may not taste like a fruit drink, but the rest of this woman's ideal sex life is quite within the realm of possibility.

As are these:

If I could order a new sex life I wouldn't change anything about the current one—the only difference would be for me to have a higher sex drive so I could satisfy my woman more.

My partner and I can't keep our hands off each other. We engage in every sexual activity imaginable—fisting, S/M, using strap-ons, etc. I feel wonderful and sexy.

I see myself having a family of friends, some of whom are also lovers. I see myself having a LOT of time to myself as I now understand (after 18 years of monogamy, spread over three relationships) that I need to live alone.

You can heal your sexuality of the traumas of the past, and in so doing, invent a sex life that works for you. (A woman interviewed for *The Survivors Guide to Sex* reports, “I think survivors who have done their healing have some of the best sex lives around. We do all this healing work that most people need to do, survivors or not.”)¹

In my dream life, I'm not depressed. I have a healthy self-image and I

don't have to take daily medication just to stay alive. I've gotten rid of the baggage from my childhood and sexual abuse, and I have multiple partners and exciting, fun sex.

Allow yourself to imagine the ideal sex life for you. Don't worry about whether it's realistic—we are trained to evaluate limitations, we are not encouraged to think freely. We worry we will be seen as greedy, self-centered, or immoral if we insist on sex lives that work for us. Don't judge. Just brainstorm. If you keep a journal, or like to write, set a timer for five minutes (or 10 or 15) and write down everything that comes to mind when you imagine your ideal sex life.

You might surprise yourself—both with the ordinariness of what you want and the fantastic:

I'd get rid of all the time-consuming and energy-consuming things that interfere with sex. More three and four-day weekends! The physical limitations could go, too. I'd like to have the resilience, flexibility, and stamina that I had when I was a young woman, but with the mind I have now. I would definitely stick to my current partner, though. She's a great lover, and I get hot just looking at her.

I joke about how in my next life I'm coming back as a beautiful, well-hung fag in an age without AIDS and STDs and I'm going to fuck myself silly. I'm going to have innumerable sexual encounters. I'm going to have circle jerks and orgies and everything under the sun. It's gonna be quite a party.

Be Specific

When asked what kind of sex life you want, do you answer: “Great sex with a woman I love and who loves me”? That's too vague a statement to build a life around. It's not that there's anything wrong with wanting to be sexually satisfied in the context of a committed relationship—of course not! Many of us want this. But a statement this vague leaves too much room for disappointment and frustration. What do you mean by “great sex”? For that matter, what do you mean by “love”?

And if yours were a truly satisfying sexual life, how would you know it? Don't minimize this question. What would have to be true for you to say, "This is it! I'm totally happy about my sex life." What sexual activities would you engage in? With whom? How frequently? How would you feel about yourself?

You can be rigorous with this. Don't let yourself get away with easy statements and vague yearnings. ("I'll know it when I see it" is not an acceptable answer.) Don't fall into the trap of forever seeking out greener pastures or settling for a sex life you don't really enjoy. Take the time to fill in the blanks. After all, it's *your* life—your shared erotic life.

Here's an example:

- You and I spend waking time in bed, where we are erotically focused on each other, three times per week. We might talk about sex, give each other massages, or have sex.
- At least some of the time, we include cunnilingus in our play, and at least some of the time, we include anal penetration.
- Sometimes we are playful, sometimes romantic, sometimes wild and hot.
- At least once a month, we share some form of erotic entertainment—an evening with a porn DVD, a night at a drag king show, a trip to the toy store, a photo shoot with our new digital camera.
- At least once every three months, we explore something that one of us has never done before (or even that neither of us has done before).
- At least once every six months, we go away together for a long weekend—no cell phone, no laptop.
- We tell each other what we need to get off.
- We tell each other if we feel unsatisfied, jealous, too vulnerable, or freaked out.
- We give each other lots of compliments.²

This list is certainly specific. Is it possible to achieve? For instance, are both of you home often enough to meet up in bed three times per week?

Most important, are the items on the list measurable? Is it possible to say, "Yes, we are meeting our expectations"? Or "Well, we're doing OK in some areas, but not in others"? Or even "I haven't even thought about sex in weeks"? Back to the drawing board....

What would you put on *your* list?

One woman said that she couldn't imagine being with a partner who didn't like oral sex—without receiving cunnilingus on a regular basis, she simply would not feel satisfied. Another said she needed to get fucked, on her back, heels in the air, three times per week, at a minimum. And a third said that she didn't care so much about frequency or what particular sexual activities she and her partner engaged in. What matters to her is that her lover is her equal in adventurousness and curiosity, willing and able to meet her wherever her explorations might go.

Do you want a partner who is romantic? Daring? Who'll try anything once? (Who has tried everything once?) A partner who knows more about sex than you do? Do you want to mentor a novice? Do you feel desired and protected by a partner who never leaves your side—or does such possessiveness repel you?

What about variety? One woman said she couldn't stand the predictability of reciprocal sex in her previous lesbian relationships: *You do me, then I'll do you, we both do each other, back and forth, weekend after weekend.*

Is S/M essential to your sex life? “It doesn't have to be all the time, but I couldn't be in a relationship if I knew there was no possibility of S/M play. I've done that before and I won't do it again.”

Do you need a partner who is a switch? “I need to bottom occasionally. Otherwise I start to feel resentful.” Or, “I'm a top, and I don't want my partner to expect that I'd like to be on the receiving end.”

Are gender roles essential to your sex life? If you want someone who is comfortable with your gender fluidity, say so. If a traditional butch/femme relationship is the bottom line for you, say that.

Is sexual growth vital to your well-being? Is it important to you to learn new things about sex and sexuality over time?

How important *is* sex in your life anyway? If ongoing erotic communication and play—however you define that—is essential to you in a partnership, say so. To yourself. To all the friends who are eager to see you happy. And most certainly to prospective lovers.

Set Your Standards

Think of these as your sexual standards for being in a relationship. Of course, you may have other standards regarding other aspects of your partnerships—for instance, you may want a partner who has integrity, is loyal, loves children and dogs, and dances really, really well. Many of us are well-practiced in ticking off these qualities. We may be less versed in enumerating our sexual wants and needs.

There are things that I will do for a partner because I want to make her happy even though I'm not that turned on by it. My last girlfriend loved to have her toes sucked. I wasn't into that. I was very into seeing her turned on, so it was worth doing. There are things I won't do, no matter how much a girl begs. No drawing blood. No Nazi scenes. No pedophilia scenes. No scat. No urine.

My partner blamed many "dry spells" of very little or no sex on depression, school, and herpes. I always remained patient, and tried to ride out the storms.... Nine years later, she left me. I will never again tolerate lack of sex for any excessive duration for any excuse. No harm will come to either of us if we come to the realization that our sexual needs are not compatible, and part ways immediately.

You might think of your sexual standards as good boundaries; they are that, and more. Your sexual standards describe what qualities you require in both your partner and your relationship.

Sex with her was so great in the beginning because—and I still have no idea how she was able to do this—we could go for hours and hours. She is 23 years my senior and disabled, but her passion is unequalled by any woman I've known or even heard about. She is inventive, all-consuming—right there. It's even better now that we know each other so well. Our connection is stronger and the sex is fantastic. Sex with her is so great because our hearts and energies are as intertwined as our bodies.

What sexual qualities do you look for in a partner? By sexual qualities, I don't mean a 5-inch tongue, fingers as busy as a vibrator, or an exquisite strap-on technique. I'm talking about the qualities of self we bring to our sexual couplings. You may say that you want a partner who knows without being told what you need sexually. You've no doubt heard by now that this is a romantic myth. Sure, it happens, but I wouldn't count on it.

Eros, if it is to survive the ravages of time, familiarity, and routine, requires a special kind of nurturing and a unique set of skills.

JACK MORIN

Putting aside the desire for a mind-reader or a magician, and your own personal likes and dislikes, what makes someone a great sex partner? Here are some qualities that can make a difference, regardless of your sexual proclivities or situation. (This is not a complete list, nor does it address all the *other* aspects of relationship.) Some of these are qualities you can develop in yourself as well as look for in others:

- *Erotic attraction.* Heat. Someone for whom you feel powerful sexual desire.
- *Sexual compatibility.* Your favored sexual activities needn't match up like pieces in a jigsaw puzzle, but it helps to be playing the same game.
- *Willingness to try new things*—that's what makes it possible for you to grow sexually, both individually and together.
- *Openness* to discussion about what you like, don't like, what you need, how you feel, your sexual histories, STDs, safer sex—even if the conversation is awkward or uncomfortable. These are the courageous conversations that make possible new erotic adventures, experiences that can't possibly happen if you never speak up. Good communication deepens sexual relationship.
- *Respect both for herself and for you.* That's limits *and* desires—especially respect for those she does not share. This also includes respecting your physical and emotional health concerns.
- *Sexual honesty.* This is required for your emotional safety. It's also the bottom line for couples who forgo safer sex practices, instead choosing to be monogamous or fluid-bonded.
- *Ability to listen* to not just the words, but the intention. Listening is more than just waiting your turn to speak.
- *Embodiment.* You do not have to be a goddess of sensuality or a practitioner of Tantra to be in touch with bodily sensations. Regardless of

your level of sexual experience, your disabilities and physical limitations, and even a history of dissociation, you can learn how to live *in* your body as a sensate being.

Sex with her is so great because she embodies a wide range of genders and sexual roles—boy, fag, straight girl, butch dyke, high femme, daddy...

How would you describe *your* ideal partner? Here are some examples to get you started:

Someone who really touches my skin and listens to my body. The skin is the biggest sexual organ of them all.

Doesn't get jealous, wants to have sex frequently with cuddles before, during and after, enjoys sex with others with and without my participation, is into a wide range of sexual activities including BDSM, has no hang-ups about safer-sex practices, is open and honest about what she wants in and out of bed, respects the hell out of me.

Hmmm. Butch. Tall. Sweet, kind, strong, intelligent, humorous, loving, open, honest, warm, interested in life, slightly introverted, thoughtful, sexy!!! Oh, and open to being in a poly relationship of course...

My ideal female sex partner would be unselfconscious about her body. She'd be uninhibited, and adventurous. She'd know she was beautiful, and she'd approach sex as a way of expressing the joy of being a physical creature. I can't help but think of the way cats move in their bodies—a mixture of pride and pleasure. My ideal woman would be like that. A free spirit.

What Kind of Partnership Do You Want?

The idea of choosing what kind of relationship you want may be quite foreign. After all, how many models of sexual partnership are we offered?

Many of us fall into relationships very easily. Sometimes we end up in a sexual relationship exactly like the one we told our best friend we wouldn't settle for. How does that happen? Well, there are many reasons for repeating past mistakes. And many sources of help for sorting out our histories and motivations. In the meantime, think about what you want for your future.

What kind of relationship do you want? Do you long for a committed partner who shares your home as well as your bed? Or does the thought of "till death do us part" make you break out in hives? Would you like home, lover, family—but not monogamy? Monogamy, but not cohabitation? Not interested in marriage right now, thank-you-very-much?

Do you want to date without pressure? Is your joy in dating over time, discovering a partner's particular brand of sexuality—without any expectation, implicit or otherwise, that if you care about her you'll want the relationship to go further?

If monogamy is your goal, how do you define it? Is it monogamy if you have sex with only one partner in real time, but have online play partners? Or flirt in chatrooms? Does an occasional romp at a play party count? What about a lap dance at a charity strip show? Or when you're out of town on business? And is this arrangement explicit—something you've discussed with your partner—or something you think she knows-but-doesn't-want-to-know? Does your relationship leave room for you to fantasize freely, even when your partner is not in the starring role—or do you rein in your imagination?

I perform as a drag king and flirting is part of the show. I get offers for sex with women I am REALLY attracted to and wish I could keep my current relationship with my partner and have some sex on the side.

Monogamy vs. nonmonogamy (or polyamory—see "What's Your Style?," below) is an age-old tug-of-war. It's also a construct—that is, something we have created. As with other polarities (children vs. no children, city vs. country), it oversimplifies our real needs and goes nowhere toward creating mutual satisfaction.

Be specific about what these words mean to you. What about monogamy do you require? Is it security and commitment? Do you need exclusivity in order to risk or sustain intimacy? Monogamy is not a remedy for jealousy (for that, turn to open communication and trust built over time), nor is it insurance against loss.

We used to have a theoretical open-relationship. We didn't want the desire to sleep with someone else to ruin our emotional relationship, so we thought we would remove the stigma and make desiring and sleeping with another "OK." We were eventually honest with each other about our jealousy and admitted we would be very hurt if the other slept with someone else so we closed the relationship. We still have an agreement to talk about it and be honest about attraction to or desire for someone else.

Does your erotic life blossom in the shared privacy of two—and only two?

My sexuality is an expression of my love—it's reserved for only one person.

We are monogamous and very content like this. We have been together for three years, we know each other very well, we have fabulous sex and we have great communication and honesty.

If you prefer nonmonogamy or polyamory, what about that is important to you? Is it the idea of sexual freedom—or the practice? Nonmonogamy is not a guarantee of sexual satisfaction; nor does it prevent loss of sexual interest. Do you need to know that you can act on the erotic sparks that fuel your days? Do you need more sex than your partner and want to take care of that need?

Being poly is very satisfying for me. Having the freedom to get my sexual needs met in the variety of ways that I enjoy is wonderful and necessary for someone like me who has such a strong (and varied) sexual drive.

Do you want to have sexual relationships, or is it sexual variety and adventure that you need? Would a birthday visit from a stripper offering more than a show satisfy your itch? A recreational play date?

Both of us to enjoy our freedom of sexual expression, and face it—playing with a woman that you will never have to see again is really fun.

What mutually satisfying possibilities might you imagine together? Would either of you feel differently if extramarital forays were negotiated and staged to involve both of you? While the idea of having sex with someone other than your lover may leave you cold, might you participate as co-conspirator and witness? What about spinning fantastic tales of made-up sexual adventure while you have

sex? Would attending a sex party as voyeurs (and having sex afterward) satisfy your need for outside sexual stimulation?

If you are skeptical and doubtful that nonmonogamy can work, then it won't work. If you believe in the freedom of desires and have the determination to pursue what's in your heart, anything is possible.

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In any case, don't be talked into arrangements that you know are impossible for you. (One woman wrote about what she called "crappy nonmonogamy"—a situation in which "not everyone involved really wanted nonmonogamy" but, out of fear of losing a partner, went along with the arrangement. The same could be said of "crappy" monogamy.) Self-denial doesn't prove love. Be honest with yourself and your partner.

Are you by nature polyamorous? Does being polyamorous mean you prefer to engage in committed relationships with your sexual partners? Is one relationship more "important" than the other—and what does *that* mean? More sexual? More intimate? More shared responsibilities? Would you consider your life perfect with a committed spouse who encourages your ongoing crushes and sexual friendships? A three-way marriage? Partners of both genders—or a variety of genders? If you currently have one lover, do you still call yourself "polyamorous"?

For some women, polyamory is as much a sexual orientation as gender preference. They speak of their desire as a way of being, not a strategy—though they will tell you there certainly are payoffs!

Polyamory is not a way to fix yourself. It's a myth that if you're polyamorous, all that sexual variety will prevent you from ever becoming bored or having sexual conflicts. More likely, it is the intentionality and awareness with which you approach your sex life that is keeping your libido simmering, not the fact that you have more than one lover.

You may have a fuck buddy whom you see now and again when your desires and schedules mesh. You may be in each other's lives for years, share all the

horrid details of your last breakup over pastry at the café “after”—or meet for sex and only sex, that’s it, put on your shoes and go.

What’s Your Style?

Monogamy: Having sexual relations exclusively with one partner

Serial monogamy: Engaging in a series of monogamous relationships, one after the other

Nonmonogamy: Having sexual relations with more than one partner

Fluid-bonding: A safer-sex strategy of using latex barriers and limiting sexual activities with all but a primary sexual partner

Polyamory: Having more than one sexual relationship at a time. Some women use this term to mean sexual relations with more than one partner, preferring this term to nonmonogamy, a word based on a negative.

24/7: Full-time, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, BDSM role-based relationship

Your life may be centered in a spiritual practice within a community of others who are likewise engaged in spiritual development. Perhaps you study Tantra, joining your sexuality and spirituality. You may be part of a circle of women who meet monthly for erotic massage. Perhaps you enjoy workshops and group events—Body Electric, Burning Man, lesbian Tantra classes, seasonal rituals and retreats. You are happiest when you can move in groups of women and men who share your values about the role of spirituality in our sexual lives—and vice

versa. Whatever is going on in your personal life at the moment, these are the relationships you know sustain you.

You Make It Happen

A vital sexual partnership is something you generate. Regardless of whether you have one partner or three, keeping your sex life alive is something you *do*, not something that happens *to* you.

Think of your partner as your collaborator in creating your shared erotic life. You each bring your strengths (and weaknesses), your experiences and histories, needs and wishes to the sexual relationship. This is true whether you are frequent fuck buddies or domestic partners.

In real life, we are busy. We have personal goals—education, jobs, travel. Children, friends, other lovers demand our time and attention. We may have aging parents, health concerns, demanding work, stress about money.

Over the years, a sameness may settle over your sexual activities. With less excitement in your life, you may experience a decline in libido. Inertia sets in. The days between sexual encounters can stretch into weeks and months. Erotic exploration seems more and more unlikely.

Fifteen Ways to Heat Up Your Marriage

The mystery is gone, you say? Well, perhaps the challenge of the chase is over, but what's more challenging than sustaining sexual intensity with the woman whose toothbrush drips dry each morning next to yours? Here are some suggestions to help wake up your sex life:

1. Indulge...*yourself!* Read erotica, watch porn, masturbate. Fantasize. Undress the pretty girls on the bus. Fixate on that FedEx woman who dashes into your office every morning. Like any other talent, without exercise your libido will atrophy.
2. Take responsibility for yourself. Remember when your

sexuality was yours alone—and not marital property? Regardless of your marriage vows, your girlfriend is not in charge of your inner life or who you dream about when you pleasure yourself.

3. Take a vacation together. Send the kids to your favorite PFLAG mom. Leave town. Don't take your dog. Or stay at home—no phone, no TV, no car, no shopping.
4. Tell each other a story. *The most outrageous fantasy I ever had...* Then make it true.
5. Take your girlfriend sex toy shopping—online or at your favorite sex toy boutique. Giggle. Be embarrassed together. Not interested in toys? Browse the DVD section instead.
6. Use lube. Lots of lube.
7. Stop being lazy about sex. You've probably been getting each other off the same way for years. You touch her; she touches you. You lick her; she licks you. Your fist goes in her vagina; her dildo goes in your anus. Over and over, year after year. Even a great program loses something in reruns. Next time you hop in the sack, declare your usual sexual activities off-limits. Unplug that tired old toy—or get a new one.
8. Try something different. If your sex play is exclusively genitally focused, take turns giving each other full-body massages. Try this exercise: Sit facing each other on the bed. Breathe in synch. Run your fingers along her face and neck. Or caress her hands. When was the last time you attended to your partner's body nonsexually? Describe what you're seeing and feeling. Offer her your appreciation. Take turns.
9. Switch. After all these years of being the top, have you secretly wanted to throw your heels in the air? Or have you nurtured a secret fantasy of giving your aggressive girlfriend a taste of her own medicine? 'Fess up, now!
10. Talk—to your partner. Sure, your best friend can recite your marital disappointments blow for blow. But have you talked with your partner about your sexual frustrations? Are you afraid that if you tell her your complaints, she'll tell you hers, and you'll realize you're not so happy after all, and soon you'll be down \$90 a week for couples counseling—forget

that trip to London—and besides, you'll just break up anyway.... Whew! Talk to your partner; tell her your erotic hopes and dreams.

11. Speak in positives; don't dump. Unless you've negotiated a humiliation scene, telling your lover of six years that she bores you is not likely to improve your sex life! Remind her how much you love her. Tell her you'd like to have the sex life of your dreams—with her. Be specific. Know what you want and ask for it. (See chapter 7, Communication and Finding Sex Partners, for hints.)
12. Don't assume you know what she likes, either. Ask. Then listen.
13. Be blissfully wedded...novices. Pick a sexual activity neither of you has ever done—and do it. Never played with anal beads? Rope bondage? Attended a live erotic performance? Have you thought of cross-dressing?
14. Find a role model. Whether in a self-help book or on your dyke rugby team, find someone who's in an intimate relationship and has hot sex. Get details!
15. Face your demons. Bet this isn't the first time your desire has fizzled out on a lover. If so, you're not alone! Many people find intimate relationships daunting. Why does closeness snuff out your desire? Why do you want to bolt before the ink is dry on the rental agreement? Finding the answers will require some soul-searching, and maybe some help. Do you want an intimate sex life—really? You may have to work very hard to achieve that, but the results can pay off, big-time.

Believing that loss of sexual desire is inevitable—which is what we have been told to expect³—discourages us from trying to do anything about it. That gives our sexual relationships a quality of resignation. This belief also makes it hard to maintain loving relationships—monogamous *or* polyamorous—since most of us would rather not have to choose between an active sex life and a stable love life.

None of this, by the way, is any more true for lesbians than it is for heterosexual or gay male couples. “My view is that my lesbian clients who come

in complaining of reduced sexual interaction are experiencing real life,” writes lesbian sex researcher and therapist Suzanne Iasenza. “[N]ot unlike their heterosexual brothers and sisters, and gay brothers, the women met, fell in love and created a life together. Their work and family lives developed and demanded attention and energy, sometimes at the cost of quality intimate time together.” Iasenza goes on to say that a “careful” reading of sex research “provides little evidence that lesbian sexuality is less active or less fulfilling than gay or heterosexual sex.” [4](#)

Real life need not doom us to a sexless existence. We can have thriving sex lives. Regardless of the demands we face, we can have fully realized, rich sexual partnerships. With as much sex as we can handle, many of us are not complaining.

So, if it’s possible to maintain a vibrant partnered sex life, how do you do it?

You make it happen. You bring intention (followed by action) to your sex life. You replace resignation (“We’ve been together ten years—we’re lucky we have sex once a month”) with curiosity (“What would it be like if we decided to have sex *twice* a month?”). You prioritize your shared erotic life with your partner—with each of your partners, if you have more than one. And you define what that means, which will be particular to each partnership.

That means doing some work.

Don’t Complain, Collaborate

We talked about how much sex we wanted in our relationship. I had never really ever thought about it. For the first time, I was able to figure out in myself what I wanted/needed in a sexual relationship, and my girlfriend encouraged me to share this with her. The outcome was amazingness.

Your sexual satisfaction is your personal responsibility. Don’t just react to what you think is wrong with the sex you are having—or not having—with your current partner. If you only attempt to fix what’s wrong, you’ll end up with a sex life that is shaped by your disappointments, past and present. Make sure you know what you want in a sexual partnership—not just what you don’t want.

Ask your partner to do her homework, too. What would she put on *her* Yes/No/Maybe list? What are *her* sexual standards for satisfaction? You may find that your partner is also not getting what she wants. Or that what she wants is very different from what you want.

You can compare Yes/No/Maybe lists—with the addition of a few items, like sexual frequency and variation. You can combine your sexual standards lists (see “Be Specific,” above).

There are many models for talking about your shared sexual values. Sex coaches and therapists can help here—they may ask you to clarify, on paper, each of your values, histories, expectations, concerns, and desires regarding sexual partnership.

Authors of books on relationships (see chapter 19, Bibliography) offer their own approaches to designing partnerships. Most of them are not specifically looking at sexuality, much less lesbian sexuality, but you can adapt their methods to your own needs. One author who does write about sexuality in the context of relationships is Jack Morin, author of *The Erotic Mind*. He is convinced that “couples who openly confront the difficulties of combining intimacy and passion are the ones most likely to thrive.”⁵

Remember that the goal isn’t necessarily to see where your wish lists match. If you look *only* for common ground, you will eliminate all the sexual possibilities that do not appear on both lists. Here you want to avoid winnowing your lists—which contracts your sexual possibilities. Instead, think about expanding your sexual possibilities.

Whatever your method, the main thing is that designing your sexual partnership becomes a conscious practice, considered and deliberate and done with awareness and intention. It’s work, yes, but it’s hardly drudgery. You may find the experience of talking about sex in this much detail to be a real turn-on.

The most courageous conversation we’ve had was about using toys in the bedroom and the outcome was great! We talked about who would feel more comfortable purchasing the items, what kinds of things we wanted, what was an acceptable size/shape/texture for a dildo. It made us more comfortable talking about sex with each other.

This practice can be as much a part of your ongoing sexual relationship as, well, sex. You needn’t think of this as just something you do before you get to

the good stuff—or an exercise you do to prevent your sex life from withering. Inventing sexual scenarios together, sharing fantasies, solving problems is part of who you are as sex partners. Some of the best conversations you will have with your partner will be ones in which you reveal yourselves sexually to each other. Partners who are able to talk about sex on this level say it's one of the best things about their relationship. Plus it will get you hot. *Promise.*

You make your sex life happen. You generate the energy, time, interest, and desire. You develop sexual standards for your relationship, which you can review periodically—you can check in to see whether or not your relationship is meeting your mutual hopes for it. You can also note where your priorities may have changed. Some couples do this on their anniversary, on Valentine's Day, or in the wee hours of New Year's Day.

And over time, your sexual partnership—in fact, your whole relationship—will deepen and grow as you enjoy a sexual connection that feels truly alive.

Difference ≠ Incompatibility

You and your partner may have perfectly matching sexual interests (you like fisting and she likes to get fisted; she dislikes being penetrated vaginally and you don't care one way or the other about strapping it on). Or not—you could find yourself in a relationship with someone whose turn-ons do not mesh with yours.

How does this happen? For starters, you probably did not discuss your likes and dislikes early on. You didn't know how to bring up the subject—you didn't want to hurt her feelings, and you didn't have the vocabulary to get down to the nitty-gritty.

Sexual compatibility wasn't high on your list. (Did you have a list?) Having fallen for your new lover, you assumed the rest would work itself out. Perhaps you thought that sex would get better over time.

(It is possible to have chemistry without compatibility. Just because you feel like a tomcat in heat whenever she walks into the room does not mean that she will satisfy you sexually over time.)

“But sex isn't all there is to a relationship,” you may say. True. Yet once you find yourself living with sexual frustration, you may realize it's more important than you thought.

Even if your desires complement one another perfectly now, in time you may discover sexual needs that weren't apparent in the first blush of sexual heat. You may be happy being sexually exclusive now; but having been polyamorous in the past, will you someday want to invite new sexual partners into your life? You may be in agreement on this point, but what about who those new partners will be? How often will you spend the night with your other partners, what activities will you share, and where? Can you invite her former fuck buddy home for a romp in the play room? Can she invite her new crush into your bed? On your vacation?

What if your lover dislikes your favorite turn-on—or likes something that leaves you cold? How do you negotiate differences in sexual interests? Over time you may discover new turn-ons. If you are committed to trying new sexual activities together, there's no guarantee you'll both like the same things.

Differences in sexual interest do not necessarily indicate incompatibility—in fact, your differences are a priceless resource. It may be the *frisson* that makes those sparks fly.

Take advantage of all the erotic possibilities your differences may offer. Your partner may request activities you never considered trying, and working that out may open you to new possibilities that will enrich your erotic life. Your sexual tastes, frequency, and range of interests will broaden as you try on those of your partners.

My most recent partners have put vocabulary to my sexual “deviancies.” I always thought I was a redneck conservative, but it actually turns out, I’m a fairly kinky woman.

As we teach them what pleases us, we learn, too.

When I first wanted to explore strap-on sex, my girlfriend barely knew harness from dildo. It really forced me to get past my shyness and vocalize my desires.

What at first may seem like an accommodation may prove to be revelatory. Not all of us were born knowing our kinks. Not all of us played bondage games with the neighborhood kids.

That’s how I came to be such a dirty S/M pervert. It was a critical part of a partner’s sexuality, and I stretched myself to do more of the things that didn’t necessarily come naturally to me. I’m grateful to her for the

learning experience. I have a richer and fuller sex life now because of experimenting with her. Same with my current partner and her love of anal sex.

Circumstances may force you to be inventive—and what you invent you may find you like.

My girlfriend and I share a room in a women-only university dorm, and the walls are paper-thin, so we've learned how to be quiet while still letting each other hear breathy moans. The combination of our silence-enforced sex and virtually no free time means that we try to use every free day as a holiday, and sometimes check ourselves into a hotel for a night or two, just so we can be noisy and wild.

A common symptom of my chronic health problem is loss of desire, so I have been working really hard to not have that be a symptom of mine. Also, it helps that I went five years without good sex and now I'm making up for lost time.

My girlfriends have always responded really well to the fact that I take the TIME to plan something special for them regardless of whether it was a romantic, sensual or hot, rip-off-the-clothes-in-the-hallway kind of affair. Preparation has really kept my sexual relationships alive.

I'm a feast-or-famine lover. I tend to gorge myself on sex for a week or so and then a couple of weeks can go by with little sexual activity. I'm distracted and temporarily sated. Then I start feeling deprived and the marathon begins again. I think my partner would like sex more consistently. She teases when I go into feast mode because then I can do it anytime, anywhere.... Sometimes, I like a time-limited self-imposed famine. We can only kiss or hug platonically. Then, we want each other like we did when we first got together.

I have a disability due to arthritis and trauma, and I find that I am not as flexible as I once was. I have adapted, use more pillows in different ways, so it is not much of a barrier. I got a sling to hold my legs up because that is my preferred position.

I have a serious blood disorder, which means I have to watch my physical exertion level, so marathon sex is out of the realm of possibility for me. But my girlfriend is quite understanding about the whole thing; we joke about how I need “commercial breaks” before returning to wild monkey sex.

It’s scary to rock the boat. But to get what you need, you’ll have to find the courage to talk to your partner. This is a conversation requiring good communication skills (see “Talk Talk Talk” in chapter 7, Communication and Finding Sex Partners). It will help to be both specific *and* tactful.

Do you have a vague sense that your sex life is missing the mark? Or is there some essential ingredient missing? Role play? BDSM? Is it an activity you enjoyed in the past—or one you’ve got an itch to try?

Here are some suggestions for negotiating differences in sexual interests:

- *Make it hot.* How deliciously can you describe your fantasy of wrists bound to bedpost and wax searing your skin as it drips from the candle held in your lover’s gloved hand? (“Baby, you never want to tie me up” is not much of an invitation.)
- *Be creative.* Call on one of your partner’s turn-ons to make your desire work for her. “My girlfriend wouldn’t go down on me—I mean, not for love or money—until I ordered her to get on her knees. She loves it when I get toppish on her.”
- *Give her time.* If she’s never considered play piercing, don’t put her on the spot. She honestly may not know whether she’d like it or not. Pressed for a response, she may err on the side of no rather than yes. “Eventually she comes round. She just needs time to get used to the idea, and watching other women helps.”
- *Educate her.* Bring home a video, take her to a play party, offer her an erotic story—with all the pertinent parts underlined.
- *Be curious.* Rather than respond to her reluctance with judgment, disappointment, or irritation, muster your curiosity. Who is this person? Where do her feelings come from? What makes her tick? What is she trying to tell you?

What's Holding You Back?

You may not think of yourself as adventurous, but you can be open to new experiences. Living relationships aren't fixed in plaster. They breathe, they change, they are flexible.

You even may find that accommodating your partner can work to your advantage:

My partner likes me to wear a harness and strap on, but it doesn't do much for me. I set a limit of once every 3 times, so if my partner is desiring penetration play then she has to initiate some "vanilla sex" to get the frequency up—and we both win.

You think your brand-new set of Fukuoku 9000 finger vibrators are your most excellent sexual asset? Think again. Curiosity and openness to exploration are what will make you a superb sexual partner:

Right now, I have a partner who wants me to explore anal sex and this has never come up for me before. In my typical fashion, I bought a book and am doing some reading and self-exploration to see if this is something I might reach some comfort with or, hopefully, desire for. I don't have any great moral issue with it, I just haven't had it as a need or desire. She is being really patient with me.

Not everyone will dive right into a new adventure. And even if you're well experienced in the sexual arts, there are a lot of reasons you may be hesitant to pick up on your partner's desires.

- *What if I don't like it?* You may be afraid you'll erupt with a resounding "ewwww!"—which will make your partner think twice about entrusting her precious desires to you in the future.
- *You want what!?* You may simply not understand your partner's desire. (OK, you understand that she wants you to put a 6-inch acrylic plug in her butt—but you don't get *why* she wants that.)
- *Why do I feel this way?* You may be utterly confused about your feelings. Your immediate reaction may be one of strangeness or even revulsion. It's not comfortable to look at things that disturb us and that we don't understand.
- *What if I'm no good at it?* Why expect yourself to be smooth with an

activity you've never tried?

- *I just can't see her as a Top.* Are you OK with the activity—but not with this particular partner? (Are you willing to be convinced?)
- *What if I bust up laughing?* Uh-huh. Think you'll feel ridiculous with a silicone dildo strapped to your pelvis? Can't imagine pulling off a repairman-and-housewife role-play scenario? Well, maybe you *will* fall into a heap of giggles—maybe she will, too, and you'll have a wonderful (albeit not-so-sexy) time together. Having gotten the giggles out of your system, next time you may collapse in a heap of sexual exhaustion instead.
- *What if she changes?* Well, she may be changing—in fact, she may be undergoing a profound transformation in gender or sexual identity. Or she may be revealing to you a part of herself she has never shown to anyone before. She may also just want to dress up and fuck you silly, OK?
- *That's just wrong!* Do you think that lesbians shouldn't like penetration, watch gay male porn, engage in age-related role play, or fantasize about having a penis? What judgments like these do you hold for yourself? How much sexual delight are these ideas costing you?
- *This freaks me out.* Are you fearing abandonment if this doesn't work out? Do you feel jealous (or fear you'll feel jealous)? Are you in competition with your partner?
- *This makes me feel icky.* Anal sex, age play, inflicting or enjoying pain or humiliation are taboo. They may also be associated with a history of shame, particularly for survivors of sexual abuse and other trauma. Naturally, you don't want to do something that makes you feel that horrible coating of shame you've worked so hard to be rid of. But on the other hand, investigating (not reenacting) that shame—and the turn-ons that trigger it—can empower you sexually. (See “Facing and Healing Triggers of Sexual Trauma,” below.)

Remind yourself that your fulfillment will come from opening, frustration from closing in. That doesn't mean saying yes to everything; it does mean considering the possibility that you might be OK with something new.

Low Libido High Libido One Libido No Libido

You can have an active sex life even if one or both of you is experiencing diminished libido. Maintaining an erotic exchange is especially challenging when you just don't feel very sexual. What's important is that you share sex as a value in your relationship—and are both willing to take action to generate sexual desire.

I could fill a chapter with myriad reasons for lost libido: pregnancy, perimenopause, menopause, clinical depression, trauma, grief, illness, medication all can be named as culprits. If you know the specific source of a downward change in your libido, attend to that. (See “Nurture Your Libido” in chapter 2, Desire and Fantasy, and “Sexual Response Over a Lifetime” in chapter 3, Anatomy and Sexual Response.)

Don't use low libido as a free pass—“I'm perimenopausal” is not a reason to opt out of life. Here's one woman's can-do response to shifts in her partner's libido during menopause:

First, we discussed it without whining, yelling, or accusing. We talked about how we felt. It was an eye opener for both of us. Second, I bought lube for those limited times when she was in the mood. It's amazing how it helped. Third, we spoke to our gynecologist. She recommended a limited dosage of testosterone. These days it comes in a patch. Fourth, I stopped pressuring. I was amazed that taking the pressure off her allowed for more touching. Sometimes that touching turned into wonderful sex. Fifth, I read erotica to her every once in a while. (I kept the lube close by.) I'm not saying that we are at the same level that we were when we first met, but things have improved substantially.⁶

You can commit to regularly scheduled times of intimacy, including physical intimacy which may or may not include sex. Set aside an evening a week, a weekend each month, to focus on each other. Married sex is good sex, too.

When we didn't live together, sex was often and fantastic. But now that we're married, once or twice a month is the norm. Unfortunately, this is mainly my issue. My partner is always ready and willing—me, I'm too tired, or stressed about work, or just not interested. I think she's incredibly sexy, and she turns me on, but actually getting to the action is hard work sometimes! We sometimes schedule a “date.” It seems terribly unromantic, but it works. Actually, knowing for a day or two in advance that I'm gonna get laid, I get pumped up, and it turns out great.

Invite your partner to masturbate in your loving presence. With your arms around her, self-pleasuring may seem less like a compromise. You can read her an erotic story or retell her favorite fantasy. Your participation will assure her of your commitment to her sexual pleasure. Plus you might end up getting aroused yourself.

I have been blessed or cursed with a very healthy sex drive, while my partner tends to roller-coaster with hers. When she's up, we're pretty much on the same wavelength and it's great. But when she is not interested, I will sometimes masturbate with her arms around me.... On occasion, this will turn her on and she will join in and we'll have a nice sweet time. Masturbating with her there is far more satisfying than doing it alone.

Use lube. Lots of lube. When you were dating, you probably left wet spots on restaurant seats. In that state of limerance, your sexual response seemed always at the ready. Now your physiological response has changed and you may need to build arousal to get your juices flowing. Put some lube on your fingers before you touch yourself. The increased wetness will lead to increased sensitivity and increased turn-on.

Facing and Healing Triggers of Sexual Trauma

Intimate relationships stir things up—for *all* of us. Whatever your history, being in an intimate relationship will call on you to look at yourself in new ways. For survivors of childhood sexual abuse, sex in the context of intimacy can be an opportunity to attend to the issues of the past and to deepen your own capacity for intimacy and sexual pleasure. It can also be scary.

You get into a relationship, everything's great...at first. But then all those old triggers, memories, and fears come bubbling up. It's not that there is anything wrong with the relationship (though you might jump to that conclusion). Your history is offering itself up for healing. Your job is to pay attention.

Many lesbians and bisexual women are survivors of childhood sexual trauma. Since one in three girls are sexually abused before they

turn 18 years of age, it's not unusual for both partners in a couple to have experienced sexual trauma. Each may be in a very different stage of healing. One partner's work may cause the other to face events she had never explored. Or her partner's healing process may cause her to revisit issues she thought she had resolved long ago.

For couples dealing with sexual trauma, Staci Haines offers the question: "How can we support each other in this healing process and also take care of our adult relationship?" In her DVD, *Healing Sex*, Haines outlines what she considers the key elements to taking care of your sexuality over a lifetime: self-pleasuring, discovery, and dedicating time to your sexuality inside your partnership relationships.⁷

While there may be times that partner sex takes a backseat to your healing, you are in a *sexual* partnership. Do not allow the process of healing past abuse to rob you of that.

As a trauma survivor, the key is to continually to turn *toward* triggers rather than avoid them. Of course, in order to face the sources of your pain, you'll need to create a context of safety for yourself—support may come from a therapist, coach, group of friends, or more formal network, as well as from your partner.

What exactly *is* a trigger? It's an automatic response to present-day stimulus that is caused by past trauma. Triggers can be experienced as emotions, like anger or sadness, and as physical sensations in the body. (For instance, this sidebar may be pushing your buttons. Is your stomach tense? Are your shoulders tight? Do you feel an overwhelming urge to close the book? Want to toss it across the room? Are you breathing?)

Turning toward triggers doesn't mean recreating or mimicking trauma. Putting yourself in harm's way will not toughen you up. Past trauma doesn't go away if you "butch" your way through it. Though you may become desensitized to your own painful emotions, you'll also lose the sensations of pleasure and joy. That's not healing; in fact, that's a capsule description of how your body (quite intelligently) shut down to protect you from trauma in the first place.

Turning toward triggers means intentionally risking discomfort in order to stretch your capacity for sexual engagement. The point is not to avoid triggers, but to face them. This is how you can heal. Over time, you will be able to experience a wide range of sensations and feelings without needing to shut down. Sexually, this means you will be able to tolerate more and more pleasure.

What about partners? Partnering with someone in the midst of healing from sexual trauma is not easy. Your support and love really can help your partner heal. Just the fact of being loved, over time, with all of her triggers and all of her history, can be healing. Certainly, your steadfast presence can help your partner to learn how to trust. Most importantly, by taking care of yourself—including your sexual fullness—you can stand as a reminder to your partner that sexual wholeness is possible. On a bad day, that will go a long way toward encouraging your partner to stay present for herself.

Here are some suggestions for you:

- Be authentic. That doesn't mean being selfish. It means that *you* remember who you are. What are your concerns? What are your aspirations?
- Negotiate sexual frequency, sexual activities, affection, and nonsexual touch. Be proactive.
- While you may negotiate a time out from sex—for either of you—remember that your sexual heat is good. It's good to be sexual. It's good to want sex, to get horny, to get hot, to feel turned on.
- Masturbate. Keep that intimate connection with yourself vital.
- Don't take it personally when your partner gets triggered. You didn't cause the trauma, and you didn't do anything "wrong." For survivors of sexual trauma, it is inevitable that triggers will arise during sex.
- Don't shrink your shared sex life in order to avoid triggers. Keep gently expanding the comfort zone—for both of you.
- Develop a trigger plan. *The Survivor's Guide to Sex* suggests survivors create a detailed, step-by-step plan for handling

triggers during sex. You can create a similar plan for yourself. How do you want to handle triggers that come up for your partner? By listing your options ahead of time, you'll have more choice in responding to triggers that arise during sex. You can talk about it with your partner and come up with a joint strategy for maintaining your shared erotic life while respecting the need for safety—for both of you.⁸

- Don't be a martyr or a savior. You can't "save" your partner from the pain of healing by sacrificing your own well-being.
- Get your own support, including touch. Along with friends, therapists, and discussion groups, support can include massages, bodywork, and hugs from friends.

Two helpful resources for both survivors and partners: *The Survivor's Guide to Sex: How to Have an Empowered Sex Life After Childhood Sexual Abuse*, by Staci Haines, and her DVD, *Healing Sex: The Complete Guide to Sexual Wholeness*.

Bathe your senses. Aromatherapy candles, sensuous fabrics, dreamy lighting, fresh flowers, music, art.... Engage all your senses to feed your libido.

Share your fantasies and invite your partner to share hers. For some women, hearing a sexy story can be just enough stimulation to get the motors humming. On the other hand, some women prefer to keep their fantasies private—a personal source of sexual potency whose power, one woman explained, she doesn't want to dilute in the telling.

One woman decided to give herself a "no decline" rule. She reasoned that with so many practical things coming in the way of sex, she would say "yes" to every invitation. "This comes out of my commitment to my partner," she said. Her partner, she said, knows her well enough to approach her in a way (and at a time) that would work for her. And she knows herself well enough to know that she can "get over the hump of *not interested, distracted*" to come back to her body and notice the sensations of sexual stirring. (Her partner, a survivor of childhood sexual assault, does not share that practice—in childhood, her entire body was a "no decline" zone.)

Make sure you do not sacrifice touch. Maintain your physical connection.

Take a massage workshop together. Engaging in nonsexual touch can keep you in a physical connection while taking the pressure off. And speaking of pressure: negotiate—don't avoid, play the victim, nag, demand, or blame.

My girlfriend and I have had numerous talks about what to do about my low sex drive and her through-the-roof sex drive, and we came up with some things that we both were willing to change in order to help the other out. For example, she won't try to have sex with me every time I kiss her goodnight, and I will try to initiate sex.

Take responsibility for your own libido. What turns you on? Buy an erotic novel, rent a DVD. Understand that there are times when you have to create sexual energy in yourself.

Take responsibility for your health as well. If you experience a sudden drop in libido, check in with your physician or other healer to make sure there isn't an organic reason for this.

You can also experiment with herbal libido support, like yohimbine, or medical solutions like testosterone patches. (See "Herbal Supplements" in chapter 2, Anatomy and Sexual Response.) Watch out—don't medicalize the normal fluctuations of desire over a lifetime. The pharmaceutical industry will be only too happy to label your changing libido a sexual dysfunction.

Real-life sexual relationships have ebbs and flows. Sex is not consistent: three times per week for the duration of your relationship. If it were, your sex life might not be nearly as interesting and varied. Observe the flow of your internal erotic life—just don't rely on it to maintain your sexual partnership.

I am a cancer survivor and when I was going through treatment, even when I was having good days and was feeling sexual, my partner didn't want to have sex with me. I guess it was difficult to separate the disease from the person, especially because I had lost all my hair, had a tube in my chest, and while going through radiation, had burns on my skin. The issue for me was that I felt worse—because I am a sexual person and I really wanted the feeling of being intimate and was being denied that, along with everything else the disease was denying me.

What? No Sex?

I tell her that I'm always willing and able, and she tells me she's too tired and passes out and then we pretty much have to wait until we can have three hours of quality sex time.

How far should you go to stay in a relationship? Well, what are your sexual standards for satisfaction in a relationship? How important is sex to you?

Can you handle no sex for a month while one or both of you sorts out a personal issue? Is a month long enough for you to worry about your relationship? Or is a month over the course of many years no biggie? How about six months? Or a year? Is that where you draw the line?

I feel that she controls our sex life because she has less desire than I do.

i have a fairly high sex drive + went out with a girl who didnt, it didnt really work out, she felt that if i kissed her i always wanted it to lead to sex (not entirely true) + i was frustrated, we broke up although not entirely over that it probably helped the feeling of "this isnt working out"

What if you want more sex than your partner? Must "no" trump "yes" if you are to be respectful of your partner's limits? Not necessarily—if you are *both* motivated to explore what is possible between you.

You can negotiate a time out—say, a month, or even three months, during a time of inner work, after which you will revisit the matter. Be intentional about this. Support your partner in facing difficulties like recovery from sexual trauma, depression, addiction—or hormonal changes. You can allow for the "inevitable changes/challenges that face partners" [9](#) and take care of your sexual relationship. Knowing your standards for sex in a relationship is not an excuse to abandon a partner with whom you have a shared commitment to a relationship.

But don't allow her "no sex" to preempt your sex life. Addressing this could be the most intimate and courageous conversation either of you has ever had.

You can also negotiate changes in the structure of your relationship. You may have agreed to monogamy from the outset. And over the years, monogamy may have come to mean that you refrain not only from sex with others, but from any outside sexual stimulus. You may have stopped fantasizing or even masturbating. "I have seen in my practice that many lesbian couples believe that they should, above all else, remain sexually monogamous regardless of changes

in sexual satisfaction and sexual needs over time,” writes Suzanne Iasenza. “In some of these couples, one partner may either consensually or in secret find alternative sexual outlets (affairs, sexual fantasy, sex clubs, paid sex, phone or Internet sex).”¹⁰

You may have reasons for staying in the relationship despite a lack of sexual satisfaction. Love, companionship, family, or economics may trump sexual satisfaction for you.

If you are staying in a relationship out of fear of loneliness or because you believe that you won’t find another partner—or even because you believe you are needed to care for your partner and family—understand that this is not your lover’s “fault.” You are making a choice—don’t blame your lover for your decision to stay with her regardless of your sexual dissatisfaction. Taking responsibility for your choice can go a long way toward easing resentment—and helping you move forward in your life.

It is your right to end a relationship because you see no possibility of sexual happiness. You are not selfish, immature, perverted, or misguided to prioritize a full and rich sex life.

Find Your Passion

Passion is energy, a specific kind of energy that you can feel in the sensations of the body. In the heightened state of falling in love, your passion is fueled by dopamine flooding your neurological system. But even after those weeks, months, or years have passed, passion is still in you.

It’s a romantic myth that if you’re meant to be together, the flame of your passion will never flicker—and that if sexual passion doesn’t last forever, well, then there must be something wrong with the relationship. Or with you. Or your partner.

It’s also a myth that the most passionate sex is spontaneous. What you most likely mean by spontaneity is that “something”—an overpowering lust—comes upon you. All other cares fall away, and you fuck fuck fuck until you and your partner are a blissed-out sweaty heap of limbs and discarded clothing.

What really *is* that buzz? Can you describe the sensations of passion? Sexual

pleasure radiating from your genitals? Your vaginal muscles vibrating with anticipation? Heat flushing your chest and face? Every hair ringing with arousal? An energy propelling you forward—as if you could come anytime, anyplace?

If you can't locate sexual passion in your sensations, can you locate your passion for something else? When was the last time you were so excited about something you couldn't sleep? Or sit still? That feeling of excitement is passion, and it can be nurtured in all areas of your life.

Your capacity for sexual fire is something you cultivate. If you want to increase passion in your sexual relationship, first try increasing it in your *self*.

Sexual Community

I once told my girlfriend I wanted to try a threesome, so she talked about it to a really good friend of ours, and one day they surprised me while in my sleep. I was freaked out, but in a good way because I enjoyed it a lot.

One of my favorite partners and I invited my gay friend over and he photographed us while we made love for three hours. The photos were not great, but it was hot to have someone else in the room.

For many of us, sexual community provides the larger context for our erotic relationships. These are the people whose examples we learn from and to whom we pass on our expertise. In a culture where inheritance is not biological (most of us grew up in heterosexual families), our community is our legacy.

Who hears your sexual stories—victories, disappointments, frustrations, dreams? Who tells you hers—or his? Where do you go for advice? Who's got the first-hand report on the new sex party, sex toy boutique, lesbian video, or strip club? When your partner wants to try something new, whom do you talk it over with? Who helps you sort out your questions about gender and sexual identity?

What good are bragging rights if there's no one to brag to?

Think of your sexual community as a place you can go to replenish (and share) sexual energy. Hearing about others' exploits can put ideas in our heads—

and get us hot. Sexual community doesn't necessarily mean group sex (though that may be a perk) or that everyone has slept with everyone else.

Sexual isolation can be a problem particularly for monogamous couples and those whose sexual interests don't match up with ready-made networks, such as women's leather organizations or discussion groups for women whose partners are in the midst of gender transition. It can be difficult, too, if you are isolated geographically as well.

If you share your inner life with no one but your partner, your relationship exists in a kind of bubble world: Nothing comes in, nothing goes out, and you could suffocate for the lack of fresh air. The same holds true for your erotic inner life.

You may feel disloyal sharing the intimate details of your relationship with others. Your only model for doing so may be couples therapy—which is OK, but what if you don't need a therapist? What if what you really need is sexual community?

I'm not talking about gossip or maintaining secret friendships, or keeping from your lover the nature of the inquiries you are in. I am talking about cultivating a community of people with whom you share your erotic life.

Your local sex toy boutique may be the locus of an informal community through events like book signings, classes, and workshops. You may have access to specific sex and gender communities—for instance, coming out support groups, safer-sex education projects, and BDSM organizations. There are online communities to match every possible sexual interest. Many members of email lists and discussion boards invest these venues with a great deal of trust.

Here are some ideas for reaching out—including having sex with others. Many “monogamous” couples have a negotiated nonmonogamy when it comes to sex parties and other erotic events. (Wrote one woman, “Playing with others together is great, a reminder to both of us who is number one—and a celebration of sorts.”) But you don't have to have sex outside of your partnership in order to participate in community:

- Enjoy some erotic entertainment. Go to a lesbian strip show or a drag king show.
- Volunteer to teach Bondage 101 at your local community center.
- Don't skip the explicit screenings at your town's gay and lesbian film

festival—take a group of friends.

- Go to a sex party. Decide in advance whether you want to attend as voyeurs, engage in open flirting, or hook up individually or as a couple. (A sex party is not a good place to bring up the subject of opening your relationship!)
- Sign on to an email discussion list—together. Read, post, and make new friends.
- Take a class or workshop.
- Arrange an afternoon with a professional dominatrix.
- Tell your friends about the new queer porn DVD you just discovered. Encourage them to do the same. You'll create a sense of community.
- Ask your friends how they would answer sex survey questions in magazines like *On Our Backs*—or even in the women's glossies.
- Arrange a three-way—or four-, five-, or six-way. New sexual partners offer the opportunity for conversations of a kind you and your partner may not have shared in years.
- Join your local BDSM organization—get involved.
- Don't hoard—lend out your erotica collection.
- Bring out the eyebolts and invite your friends over to play. You may find that spanking your partner in the presence of another couple makes your play more fun.
- Start a book discussion group at your local gay community center or independent bookstore. You can read erotica collections, memoirs, or books on sexual and gender politics. You can organize a queer reading group, or one for lesbians, for transgendered people and friends, and so on.

I have a wonderful sex life full of laughter and pleasure. That has taken a bit of work to maintain because life intrudes. Still, my partner is beautiful and sexy, so it hasn't been too difficult.

Keep It Happening

We have a Sunday rule. Sunday is Sexday...we have lots of sex on Sundays. It is our law. We cook a lavish breakfast of bacon and eggs on the BBQ with orange juice and freshly brewed coffee and read the papers

in the sun. Then we retreat back to the bedroom for some more loving. Monday is always a joy after that!

Your sexual partnership is your erotic playground. (If you maintain more than one sexual relationship at a time, you are playing on a big field.) Bring your creativity, sense of humor, sexiness, receptivity, aggressiveness, and love to the swing set:

We have this cuppa tea and mint biscuits joke that only she and I get. Dunk the choc biscuit in the hot tea and then smear it all over the nipple and then lick it off. Even just when we are fully clothed at the table having a bowl of ice cream after dinner, it is like “Shirt up, bra up please....” Yeah, you get the picture.

One night, I asked her to pretend she was a sex doll. She couldn't move or respond or touch me. I used her however I wanted and twisted and turned her all around the bed. I fucked her like she was a plastic toy. It was wild for both of us. She didn't keep quiet for long.

We played a game where we had to bonk every night. It lasted over ten nights.

I frequently help my partner undress. This can involve me roughly or slowly removing all of her clothing, caressing her as she's exposed. That always leads to fun.

We get clothes and take turns at cutting them off each other. We have a whole drawer of clothes we have made, for instance, we cut the nipples out of this one tight tee and we cut the breasts out of another one. I have cut the material out of the bras so it is just the straps, seams and underwires. We make G-strings out of cord. We get jeans and cut and cut until you are just left with some very scanty hot pants. The resulting orgasms from a night of doing these sorts of things is always mind-bogglingly amazing....

I feel sexy when I perform a striptease for my partner. I know she gets excited watching me put on a naughty show.

We simply indulge in our sexual desires whenever possible. If we can't do it, we talk about it, write notes, send emails.

One Friday night, I had left a note, a key and a map on the table for my partner when she got home. The note told her to meet me at a local hotel room. We pretended we were strangers having an illicit affair. It was very rejuvenating and naughty.

The most important thing might be talking. We try very hard to talk to each other about what feels good, what doesn't, what we aren't getting enough feedback about, either physically or verbally. The next thing is probably setting aside time for each other, time to make love, and showing lots of affection. We touch each other, kiss, look—just small signals of love that are continual reminders.

Without a doubt, we are living vibrant, diverse, richly fulfilling sex lives. We share sex filled with heat and surprise, delicious lovemaking and hard, hard fucking. We play out scenarios that would put a filmmaker to shame. We have threesomes and sex parties, sex in public and private, and adventures to stretch the limits of our imaginations. We have great partnered sex. Don't believe anyone who tries to tell you otherwise.

I have the best sex life possible. I have wonderful diverse sex partners. a loving amazing primary partner. I feel great about myself. I have vanilla and kinky sex and everything in between. I continue to learn something every day. I don't know what more I could have other than all my sex partners in one house with a dungeon in the basement.

Suggested Web Link

“THE BIG LIE: LESBIAN BED DEATH,” BY SUZANNE IASENZA, PH.D.

www.GayHealth.com

SOURCE OF QUOTES

Jack Morin, *The Erotic Mind: Unlocking the Inner Sources of Sexual Passion and Fulfillment* (HarperPerennial, 1996), 276.

Wendy-O Matik, *Redefining Our Relationships: Guidelines for Responsible Open Relationships* (Defiant Times Press, 2002), 4-5.

chapter nine

Breast Play

I like it all—rough, gentle, caressing, grabbing, pinching, sucking.
Got the picture?

OUR BREASTS OFFER A DELICIOUS RANGE OF SENSATIONS. We enjoy caresses, fluttering kisses, moist lips on nipples. We like squeezing, pinching, kneading, slapping, and nibbling. We like having our nipples tugged and bitten, pulled and twisted. We enjoy soft touches around the curves. We crave feeling our breasts nestled together with those of a partner. We relish a woman's hands on our pectoral muscles. We luxuriate in voluptuous breasts overflowing our grasp and we adore pert breasts with pointed nipples teasing the palms of our hands. We delight in juicy bee-stung nipples that fill our mouths. We love hard masculine chests proudly fronting a woman's body. We even like to suck a drop of colostrum from a partner's nipple.

Breast play isn't only for partner sex. You can stimulate your breasts during masturbation—some women keep a set of nipple clamps by their bedside for just that purpose. Women with large breasts can even suck on their own nipples as they stimulate their clits.

Women who love breast play crave attention to their breasts, especially to the nipples. Their breasts seem to perk up at the possibility of touch, and once stimulated, they experience a current of sensation running from nipple to clit. Some women can reach orgasm from prolonged nipple stimulation alone.

As you get aroused, your nipples become erect and your areolas swell and may darken. Your breasts may seem to get larger. Like your clitoris, an aroused nipple may take a *lot* of stimulation. You may enjoy more intense nipple play as you approach orgasm. In fact, some women must be extremely aroused to enjoy any nipple play at all.

My nipples are extremely sensitive. I can't even wear clothing with seams there or bump against the edge of a table without feeling uncomfortable.

So I have to be sexually stimulated before someone can touch them—but then I want it all, especially sucking—but not hard.

How women like their breasts and nipples touched is as individual as how they like their clits touched. It's not just a matter of whether you prefer light or hard touches, though that's important. You may be very particular about *how* you like your breasts touched. You may like the whole breast cupped and the underside caressed and held, or perhaps don't like the undersides touched at all. Experienced breast-play aficionados can get quite specific in their instructions for nipple stimulation.

I prefer delicate touches or licking around the nipple. Almost—but not quite—a tickling feeling. That's great! Love it!! Mmmmm...

Sensitivity

Sometimes I'm very sensitive and just a gentle stroke will make me shiver or jump.

Breast sensitivity changes from day to day, over the course of your menstrual cycle, and over a lifetime. During your period, your breasts swell to their fullest and roundest—and may look quite succulent. Your breasts may be more sensitive in the days leading up to your period or during your period. Both PMS and pregnancy can make you feel as if you have “atomic tits.”

New piercings, of course, will make your nipples especially tender. Fibroids can also make breast play painful. Any surgical procedure, such as a breast reduction or breast implants, can result in scar tissue that affects sensitivity. Of course, breast cancer will affect women very individually. Some women lose sensation after treatment, while others experience pain.

Two years after my lumpectomy, other people can hardly see the scar even when I point it out. I lost sensitivity in the nipple for a while but it's back almost full-strength now. I have ongoing irregular nerve pain inside the breast tissue around where the tumor was. Pressure directly on that area of the breast hurts like hell, so positions like lying on top take care. Sometimes if I mention this to a lover she or he seems scared and then avoids touching that breast. I understand but would prefer a more careful touch and inclusion of that breast in our sex play. I loved my

breasts before, and I treasure them even more now.

Teach Your Partner

I never used to enjoy breast stimulation until I met my current partner. Perhaps no one had a soft or gentle enough touch for me...or maybe I just never allowed myself to feel what I've felt with her.

Breast play is an area where good communication skills can pay off. A delicate kiss on an oversensitive nipple can be pleasurable or excruciating—or both. Ask before caressing, sucking, pinching, biting, or using clamps or other toys. Don't assume that if you like light, subtle touches she'll like that, too—or even feel it. Or that if you like to have your chest mauled, your partner will as well.

I enjoy having my partner lick and suck and even nibble my nipples, but I think the thing I most enjoy is having the curves of my breasts caressed.

Next time you're in the mood to entertain your partner, show her exactly what you like. Let the exhibitionist in you run wild. Touch your breasts exactly as you would have her touch you. Then take your partner's hand in yours and show her what you want.

I like rough play with my nipples. I want to be tugged and sucked and bitten and pulled and twisted, and I want more and more and then some.

Just as important as showing your partners how your breasts feel is discussing how you feel about your breasts. You can't predict breast play preferences by breast size or even gender identification. How we feel about our breasts as objects of erotic attention is extremely personal. Just as not all femmes delight in breast worship, not all butches will retreat from a hand on their breast. However, they may be very particular about the kind of attention they receive.

I like my chest rubbed more than my nipples played with. I like it treated like a guy's chest.

Not all women eroticize their breasts. Many survivors of sexual abuse find the memory of it triggered by having their breasts touched. Which makes sense—if one's breasts were the site of unwanted, harmful attention. Some survivors skip breast play entirely; others guide their partners in how they can enjoy breast play.

How-To's of Breast Play

Here are some favorite breast play techniques:

- Lick your partner's chest and underarm, working your way to her breasts.
- Experiment with a range of sensations from very light touches to very rough.
- Lick and nibble the sensitive underside of her breasts.
- Bury your face between her breasts.
- Cup the breasts in your hands, squeezing them together.
- Press her breasts into your chest.
- Lick your fingers and swirl the wetness over her nipple. Or, use a drop of lube, edible flavored lotion, or even her own juices (if you don't intend to suck her nipple again or are fluid-bonded).
- Stroke her nipple quickly and lightly, alternating with sharp pinches.
- Blow air on her moist nipple.
- Roll a nipple between your fingers. Lick and suck the tip as you would her clit.
- Squeeze her breasts together and lick both nipples simultaneously.
- Pinch and squeeze the nipples between thumb and forefinger.
- Grab a pair of nipple clamps to stimulate her breasts, leaving your hands free for other things.
- Rub your vulva over her breasts; or rub your nipple on her clit after orgasm.
- Turn a blow job into breast play. "Tit fucking" needn't be reserved for heterosexual porn. After she's sucked your strapped-on cock, slip your saliva-lubed cock between her breasts and thrust inside her cleavage. You can slide your cock back and forth between her breasts as she sucks.

Nipple Piercings

My piercings make my nipples one of my main sources of sexual pleasure. I can come from just nipple play.

Nipple piercings can make breast play even more deliciously erotic. Not only are the rings and barbells attractive and fun to play with, many women even find

that their nipples become extra sensitive after they get piercings.

Nipple piercings can take several months to heal. New piercings can be quite raw. They're also vulnerable to infection. So, if you're playing with someone who has a piercing, make sure you ask how recently she got it. Ask your partner how her piercing affects nipple sensation, too—some women lose nipple sensitivity as a result of scar tissue forming at the point of entry.

*I like when she wakes me up in the morning
by suckling my nipple. My lover can make me
orgasm just from stimulating my breasts.*

Toys for Breast Play

You may not ordinarily think of your clothes as sex toys, but lingerie and fetish wear are popular erotic playthings—especially for the exhibitionist. Delicate structures of lace that emphasize the shape of the breast, corsets that enhance cleavage, brassieres with holes where nipples can peek through, leather harnesses, and chain-mail halters—all are designed to draw the eye to your breasts.

Bondage enthusiasts can create elaborate corsets of rope as beautiful and alluring as any garment you can find. Breast bondage is especially fun with large-breasted women. Wrap thick, soft rope around each breast and then in a figure eight linking the breasts. All bondage safety precautions apply: *Do not* use thin wire or string that can cut, *do not* wrap rope tightly enough to cut off circulation, and *do* make sure you have safety scissors handy in case of emergency.

For sensual breast play, you can experiment with feather boas, fur mitts, battery-operated vibrators, light slappers, and soft whips. You can play with suction toys, such as tit pumps and snakebite kits. You can create a range of sensations by altering skin temperature through the use of ice cubes, mentholated cough drops, Tiger Balm, and hot wax. You can produce ecstatic (or excruciating) sensations with fingernails, feathers, slip-on talons, and even the neuro wheel your chiropractor uses to test your reflexes.

Nipple clamps are perhaps the most popular toy for breast play. Clamps come in a range of styles and intensity, from barely hugging the nipple to biting hard

enough to leave teeth marks. Some are adjustable. Homemade substitutes for tit clamps include clothespins and clips you may find in an office supply store.

*When my lover sucks and pulls my breasts,
I sometimes like to imagine that I'm restrained
by some kind of device that holds my nipples
as people explore my body. God, I love that.*

Examine the clasp or teeth of the clips—some are sharp enough to draw blood, so choose accordingly. Clamps can be placed directly on the nipple—which is very intense. You might want to experiment with new clamps on your own breasts to gauge their intensity. Pinch a small amount of skin on the side of the breast or even on the areola—see how much sensation you like.

I like nipple clips. I like to wear them pretty tight for about ten minutes, have them taken off, and then have my nipples rubbed, licked, and sucked on.

Clamps restrict the flow of blood to the pinched tissue. After a little while, the pinching sensation fades as the area goes numb. When the clamp is yanked off, blood rushes back into the area, waking up the nerves. No wonder that clamps hurt *more* when they come off than when they go on. (*Do not* leave clamps on for more than 20 to 30 minutes, to avoid damaging tissue.)

Many of the toys used in sensual breast play can be intensified for those who like true torture. The temperature of melted wax can be controlled by adjusting the distance of the candle from the body. Holding a burning candle inches from your partner's nipples will result in searing drops of wax. Temporary piercings with sterile needles will produce very intense sensations. Some women's breasts bruise very easily, which may or may not be desired. Ask before you swing a cane or rubber flogger. (For more information, see chapter 15, *Play Nice! (...or Else)* and chapter 17, *Sex Toys and Accoutrements*.)

chapter ten

Clitoral Play

*Her fingers are like magic wands that do crazy things
I didn't know were possible.*

MOST WOMEN NAME THE CLITORIS as the most erotic spot on their bodies. For those of us who rate clitoral stimulation as our favorite source of sexual pleasure, no sexual encounter is complete without direct clitoral play.

I love when she moistens the tip of her breast with my wetness and stimulates my clit with the nipple.

Clitoral play includes stimulation with fingers and hands, thighs, butts, and pelvis, erect nipples, toes and feet, tongues and lips (see chapter 11, Oral Sex), as well as with vibrators and other toys.

Clits come in all shapes and sizes and are as individual as the women who own them. Your clitoris may be a tiny pearl hidden beneath the folds of its hood or as big as a thumb protruding from your labia. It can be deep red, pale pink, or dark purple—and the color will deepen with arousal. You may crave intense clitoral stimulation or quiver at the slightest caress of a fingertip over your clitoral hood.

Understanding that the clitoris is hardly the little “nub” described in traditional anatomy texts will broaden your approach to clitoral play. The clitoris is an extensive structure of erectile tissue, beginning at the top of the vulva with the body of the clitoris (glans, hood, and shaft), cradling the urethra, and reaching down to flank the vaginal opening. (See chapter 3, Anatomy and Sexual Response.) Stimulating the body of the clit is just the beginning. You can direct your attention to your partner’s labia, urethral area, vaginal opening, and perineum. Of course, when she begs, “*Please touch my clit!*” you can return your focus to her clitoral glans, hood, and shaft.

The Art of the Hand

Lesbians have sensitive hands—after all, we make love with our hands. We use our hands to caress and arouse our partners, and to bring them to orgasm. Many of us are very tactile; we get off from touching as much as from being touched. Through our hands, we ride our partners' pleasure. However, the myth that every lesbian or bisexual woman innately knows how to touch another's clitoris is just that—yet another myth. Women are far too specific about our preferences for this to be true.

I like my clit touched low, down near my urethra, and rubbed around in a circle, like a ball.

Traditional sex guides dismiss touching as “mutual masturbation”—as if pleasure we deliver with our hands (and, for that matter, masturbation) doesn't count as “real” sex. Of course, we know better.

Take a Tour

There are many ways to discover what kind of clitoral stimulation a partner will like, and the discovery can be as much fun with a new partner as with a partner of many years. For starters, ask her. In bed or at a café, you can initiate a conversation that may well be a prelude to hot sex.

You can request a tour of her vulva. If she has even a hint of exhibitionist tendencies, she'll be more than happy to oblige you. And if you have a hint of the voyeur in you, this could make an exciting sexual scene in itself.

Pick a time when you're both relaxed. Make sure the room is warm enough for you to be comfortably nude and sufficiently well lit for you to see every fold and detail of her vulva. Ask your partner to undress—you can strip down as well. Arrange lube, gloves, and sex toys nearby.

Ask your partner to touch herself for you. Watch how she handles her labia and clitoris. Notice how many fingers she uses, and whether she focuses her touch on the left or right labia, the clitoral shaft or hood, under the clitoral glans, or directly on the glans itself.

Then, take your own tour. Begin by massaging her inner thighs, butt, and

outer labia. Snap on latex gloves, add plenty of water-based lube, and open her lips. Notice the glans of her clitoris. Has it retreated in its hood? Is it erect? How big is it? Are her lips engorging under your gaze? What color are they? Do her inner labia protrude from the outer lips?

Our hands are our first sexual tools—stroking, squeezing, caressing, kneading, grabbing, tickling, pinching, and slapping. Although very little pornography celebrates hands, a connoisseur will look at a new partner’s palms, fingers, and forearms, and evaluate the quality of their touch, and give it equal weight with the more obvious attributes.

PATRICK CALIFIA

Stimulate her entire vulva—outer labia, inner labia, perineum, the opening of the vagina—before you concentrate on the body of the clitoris. Run your fingers through her pubic hair, or, if she’s shaved, stroke the silky bare skin of her outer labia. Ask her which of your caresses she likes best. Pay attention to her responses—both verbal and nonverbal.

Many women prefer indirect stimulation until they’re extremely aroused. They may like caresses to the side or just above the clitoral glans. With arousal, the clitoris becomes erect and swollen and can take a lot more direct stimulation.

Your partner may like small circles traced lightly over the glans with just the tip of a forefinger, or a back-and-forth rubbing motion on the side of the clitoral shaft. She may like to feel two fingers sliding rapidly on either side of the clitoris. She may like you to press firmly on her mons with one hand as you stroke her clitoris with the other. Many women enjoy clitoral stimulation combined with vaginal or anal penetration.

Most woman require sustained stimulation to come. Some women reach orgasm best with increased speed and intensity; others prefer a very slow progression to orgasm, drawing out every last wave of sensation.

After orgasm, your partner may desire continued stimulation and may ride that coming into another orgasm, a series of multiple orgasms, or one long tsunami

of pleasure. If she can't tolerate such intense sensation, but doesn't want to stop, back off. Slowly gather momentum. Subtle, indirect stimulation may work to get her up to that edge again.

What If Your Hand Gets Tired?

A tired hand may be a sign that you're trying too hard—or that your partner isn't aroused enough to reach orgasm. Is she turned on? Observe her body's cues—moans, rocking hips, breathing. If you begin your sex play with direct clitoral attention, her arousal may never catch up to your level of intensity. Make sure she's well aroused *before* you touch her clitoris.

“Please just caress me for a little while.” Of course, she can let you know that she's not turned on enough to even think of reaching orgasm. And she can tell you what kind of stimulation she would prefer. Ask her what she needs to come.

Lube, lube, and more lube. A slippery, moist vulva will get aroused faster than a dry one. Her perception of wetness will make her feel sexy; her own juices will start flowing. Lube up your fingers before you touch her clitoris. Refresh the lube from time to time as it dries up.

Human sexual response isn't linear. We move from arousal to plateau and back to excitement again and again before orgasm. Do you need to focus on orgasm right now? If your attentions are taking her nowhere, back off and build up again. Touch her in a spirit of exploration. Approach and back off over and over again to increase her arousal.

Combine direct clitoral stimulation with vaginal or anal penetration, rimming, nipple play, or other stimulation.

Invite her to touch herself or to guide your hand. Ask her to put your fingers in the right spot, and to show you the right pressure and rhythm. Lube up both your hand and hers, entwine your fingers, and let her take you both over the edge.

Grab a vibrator. You can hold a vibrator to her clitoris or put it in her hand. You can stimulate her nipples or penetrate her vaginally or anally as she uses the vibrator to reach orgasm.

Some positions are better than others for sustaining clitoral stimulation. With

your partner on her back, sit facing her with your pelvis close to her hip and your hand between her legs. You can toss one leg over hers, bringing your pelvis close to her thigh. Besides closeness, the advantage of this position is that your wrist is lower than your elbow, reducing stress on your wrist and hand.

What if you simply can't sustain the action she requires? Conditions such as carpal tunnel syndrome and other repetitive stress injuries (RSIs), arthritis, multiple sclerosis (MS), and other disabilities can limit your ability to use your hands as sex toys. Negotiate your needs. You and your partner can find activities that are gratifying—and pain free—for both of you. Ask her to describe what kinds of stimulation she needs to get off. Describe your physical limitations, and tell her what kinds of sexual activities are comfortable for you. (Don't forget to tell her which ones you find especially hot.)

If you can't sustain stimulation with your fingers, and if using a vibrator aggravates your RSI, you can combine hand stimulation with other forms of stimulation. You can use your lips and tongue to supplement your hand. You can stimulate her nipples, tongue her anus, or bury your fist inside her vagina as she brings herself to orgasm. (See "Sex and Disability: Toy Accessibility" in chapter 17, Sex Toys and Accoutrements, for suggestions on selecting toys that will work for you.)

Frottage

I can come by rubbing myself against my lover's body—especially if I've really got the hots for her.

Frottage (also called *tribadism* and *dry humping*) comes from the French verb *frotter*, meaning to rub. Frottage involves rubbing bodies together to produce heat and friction. You can hump a partner's thigh, rub vulva to pubic bone, or vulva to tailbone. Lying on your belly, you can squeeze your partner's clitoris and labia between your asscheeks; she can reach around, slip a hand between your legs, and stimulate your clitoris as she humps you.

Women with extremely responsive clits speak highly of frottage as a method of indirect stimulation. Those who prefer more direct sensation can add a vibrator to frottage. You can slip a wand-style electric vibrator between you. Or you can strap on a Leather Butterfly harness with an egg vibrator in its pouch.

You can also combine frottage with stimulation from nipple clamps, butt plugs, and other toys.

How-To's of Clitoral Stimulation

Here are some favorite techniques for clitoral stimulation:

- Caress and nibble her inner thighs.
- Rub your thigh between her legs.
- Tease her clitoris with your nipples.
- Cup her vulva in your palm, feeling her heat.
- Grab a glove; thoroughly coat your fingers with water-based lube. Then pull open her lips and caress her labia.
- Blow gently on the body of the clitoris. (Do not blow directly into the vagina.)
- Let her anticipate your touch. Let her experience her own wanting. Don't poke directly at the glans or immediately dive for her clitoris (unless, of course, that's what she likes).
- Start with a long, languid stroke from perineum to clitoris. (Take care not to draw bacteria from anus to vagina.)
- If she says, "I'm too sensitive," switch to an indirect touch.
- Gently stroke the shaft of her clitoris. Let the hood protect the glans until she's well aroused.
- As she becomes more aroused, swirl your finger around her clitoral glans; stroke the glans with tighter and faster circles.
- You can nestle her clitoris between the forefingers of both hands, stroking rapidly on either side of her shaft.
- You can combine stimulation from your fingers with her favorite vibrator. Try holding the vibrator slightly to the side to give her indirect stimulation as you stroke her clitoris. Vibration on piercings can produce interesting sensations.
- If she has a genital piercing, you can thread a piece of brightly colored ribbon through the ring and give her the ends to hold or tug on.
- You can combine clitoral stimulation with penetration—either vaginal or anal or both. You can add a dildo, butt plug, anal beads, or insertable vibrator.

Genital Piercings

The first time a lover touched my new clit hood piercing, I almost could not deal with the tremendous energy surge in my body—as metal conducts electricity, so does it conduct lust.

Genital piercings can be quite functional—they can increase clitoral sensitivity and can be great fun to play with. Female genital piercings include clitoral hood piercings, triangle piercings (which pierce the tissue under the clitoral shaft), perineum piercings, and labia piercings—among others. Piercings can take from one to six months to heal, depending on the location and type of piercing. So it's important to ask your partner how recently she got her piercing, if the area is still tender, and whether she's comfortable having the jewelry played with.

I celebrated my cunt with the most expensive piece of jewelry I own!

Clitoral hood and triangle piercings may place a bead right over the glans—which can make stimulation hugely exciting. Your thigh nestled in your partner's crotch can slide the ring back and forth over her clitoris. A vibrator touching the metal can make her jump. Some women like light slaps over the piercing—think of the little ring and bead ricocheting off her glans. Try holding a tuning fork to a partner's hood piercing—the vibrations of sound will go right through her clitoris.

Labia piercings *beg* for attention—they can be used for light bondage. (*Do not* use a piercing as a stress point for serious bondage, however.) You can adorn her piercings with colored ribbons and even hang bells from them—you can hear her coming in an entirely new way.

Genital Shaving

Shaving has always been a part of my sex life. There is more sensation and I love the closeness.

Many women love the look and feel of a freshly shaved pubic area. Shaving makes the entire vulva more sensitive. You may find that you respond to the slightest touch, even the caress of loose clothing. Many lesbians like the look of naked accessibility; they like to see the inner labia protruding from the outer lips.

There's nothing quite like the smooth skin-on-skin feel of caressing a shaved pubic area. That silky bare skin is heaven to inquiring fingers. Two shaved vulvas can make frottage delightfully intense.

Genital shaving is not to everyone's taste—you might cringe at the thought of a razor coming anywhere near your tender parts, and the sight of bare genitals on an adult woman may be unappealing or even disturbing. You might find the increase in sensitivity not worth the itchiness as the hair grows in.

But those who shave their pubic areas swear by it. They wouldn't dream of giving up the pure eroticism of gently and carefully manipulating a razor (even an electric model) along the contours of such sensitive flesh.

You can shave yourself, of course, but being shaved by a partner is a special treat not to be missed. Having your outer labia and mons handled so delicately and slowly by a partner is very intimate. It certainly requires trust. As your partner painstakingly wields the razor, you can completely relinquish control and enjoy her entire attention to your needs. You can sink into a delicious reverie as you feel the indirect brush of a hand on your clitoris, the pinch of her fingers as she pulls your labia taut. By the time she's done, you may find that you're extremely turned on—your own juices may have lubricated the razor as much as her shaving gel has. By all means, invite her to sample her handiwork.

How-To's of Genital Shaving

Start with a hot bath to soften your skin and your pubic hair. Wash thoroughly. Trim the hair as closely as possible with cuticle or other small sharp scissors. Pull the hair away from the skin to prevent nicking yourself with the scissors. Don't use clippers without a safety guard (even a #1 guard) because bare clippers can abrade the very delicate skin of your pubic area.

One trick to avoid irritation and nubs is to rub baby oil into your skin, let it dry for a few minutes, and then lather up with shaving cream or gel. While just about any shaving cream or gel will do, you may want to select an unscented or even a hypoallergenic gel for best results. Many women prefer a gel to a foaming cream—it's easier to see what you're doing. Never scrape your sensitive genital area with a dry razor.

Use a high-quality disposable razor—one with a pivoting head to get into

nooks and crannies. If you're shaving for the first time, grab a new razor halfway through. Don't reuse the razor.

I am always a bit titillated and ashamed of my shaved pussy. My lover adores it and strokes it like a cat.

Find a comfortable spot—leaning against the edge of the tub, sitting on the bathroom floor with your legs propped up—and use a hand mirror. You might want to sit on a towel and prop the hand mirror up against the side of the tub. Begin by shaving in the direction of the hair growth. You'll gain confidence in safely wielding the razor as you work the areas farthest from your tender bits. Pull the area taut so that you have smooth skin to work with. Shave *with* the grain first; lather up, grab a new blade, and then very slowly and gently shave against the direction of the hair for a smooth feel. Move on to the next area; you can always come back to catch the stray hairs you've missed. (Shaving the same spot over and over will irritate your skin.)

You can shave the labia and inner thighs all the way down to the perineum; you can shave around the anus for smooth ass play (particularly satiny for rimming). There will often be a few stray hairs on the inside of the outer labia—you can catch these very carefully if you stretch your outer lips to their most open position.

You can shave your mons bare or sculpt your pubes into an attractive shape. You can fashion a perfectly symmetrical triangle of thick hair or you can shave all but a tuft right at the top of the vulva—a handle for your partner.

When you're finished shaving, hop in the shower and rinse the area with antibacterial soap, such as Hibiclens. Pat dry. Don't use talcum powder, which has been linked to cancer. Moisturize with an unscented, quality lotion. Let your skin absorb the lotion and dry completely before you get dressed. You may feel a bit itchy after a day or so as the hairs grow back—you can shave again or take that itch as a signal that it's time for some attention.

Toys for Clitoral Play

What's the most essential item for clitoral play? Lube, of course. Even if your own natural lubrication is generous, it doesn't hurt to stock your toy bag with a supply of water-based or silicone lube. A wet clitoris will enjoy sensation far

more than a dry one, and the perception of wetness will encourage your own lubrication as you become more aroused. Latex gloves, thoroughly coated with lube, will provide a very slippery surface for clitoral play.

Silicone lubes, like ID Millennium and Eros, are far silkier than water-based lube. They're also latex compatible and don't seem to ever dry up, which makes silicone lubes ideal for clitoral stimulation. I don't recommend silicone lube for vaginal penetration; since it's not water soluble, silicone lube won't rinse away easily. (*Do not* use silicone lube with silicone toys, as it will degrade the silicone in your dildo or butt plug.)

I need constant, unchanging stimulation, so a vibrator is best for me. I like indirect touching, not too hard, but fast and consistent.

Vibrators are the most popular toy for clitoral play. If your partner prefers intense direct clitoral stimulation, you may find that the consistent intensity of a vibrator works best for her. You can hold the vibrator, or she can—which will free up your hands for other pleasures. You can stroke her labia and the opening to her vagina, or hold the body of her clitoris gently between thumb and forefinger. (See chapter 17, Sex Toys and Accoutrements.)

As with vibrators, water spray from handheld showerheads or Jacuzzi jets can provide intense stimulation. You can vary the water pressure by putting a finger over the hose or jet. Be careful *not* to spray water directly into the vagina, however.

Safer Clitoral Play

- Get a manicure. Make sure your nails are smoothly filed.
- Slip a glove or unlubed condom over the head of a Magic Wand or other vibrator with a tennis-ball-style head. Always use a fresh condom or glove when switching sexual activities or partners.
- Use latex, nitrile, or vinyl gloves.
- Put on a fresh glove when you switch activities or partners.
- Don't share vibrators and other sex toys without cleaning between uses.
- Use water-based or silicone lube. Don't use oil-based lube for clitoral stimulation.

CLITORAL STIMULATION.

- Don't allow bacteria from the anus to enter the vagina.

Many women enjoy using nipple clamps for genital play. Clamps can be attached to the inner or outer labia. Like nipple clamps, labia clamps produce an intense sensation when they go on—and an even more intense sensation when they come off. If your partner is standing, you can try hanging 1-ounce weights from the clamps for added sensation.

Clitoral Play—Safely

While hand-to-vulva contact is considered low risk for transmission of HIV and other STDs, consider using latex gloves. Blood or vaginal secretions coming in contact with small cuts or raw cuticles can increase your risk. (Pour vinegar over your hands. If you have any tiny cuts or open sores, you'll know.)

Herpes, HPV, and bacterial vaginosis can be transmitted via skin-to-skin contact. If you touch your partner's genitals and then touch your own, you can transmit bacteria or a virus. You need not have visible lesions or warts to transmit herpes or HPV; and you need not have visible breaks in the skin to acquire it. You can also transmit bacteria from the anus to the vagina; so change gloves or thoroughly wash your hands when changing activities.

Even with frottage—considered by most a safe activity—there's a slight risk of transmission of herpes or HPV with direct vulva-to-vulva contact. (See chapter 18, *Safer Sex and Gynecological Health*, for more information.)

Where to Learn More

Want to become an expert at clitoral play? You can attend a Body Electric workshop or pick up an instructional video or DVD, such as Annie Sprinkle and Joseph Kramer's *Fire in the Valley*, which offers step-by-step instructions in female genital massage. See the resources chapter for more suggestions.

SOURCE OF QUOTE

Patrick Califia, *Sensuous Magic: A Guide for Adventurous Couples*, 2nd ed. (Cleis Press, 2001).

chapter eleven

Oral Sex

I love the feeling of my tongue running over a hard clit.

THERE'S NOTHING LIKE TONGUE AND LIPS ON VULVA—the taste, smell, and wet hot feel of a woman's engorged genitals. Many lesbians and bisexual women love to feel a partner's insistent tongue and lips sucking on their labia and erect clit.

Oral sex includes licking, biting, sucking, kissing, and flicking the clit, labia, and perineum, and penetration of the vagina and anus with the tongue. Mouth-to-vulva contact is called *cunnilingus*, *going down*, *muff diving*, *eating pussy*, *carpet munching*, or *tipping the velvet*. Mouth-to-anus sex is called *analingus* or *rimming*.

And while you won't find this sexual activity listed on the contents page of almost any other sex guide, many women love fellatio (also called *cocksucking*)—with a strap-on dildo attached to the body of a lesbian, bisexual, queer woman, or female-to-male transsexual.

Oral sex is taboo in many Western cultures. We are taught to feel “dirty” down there. In parts of the United States, oral sex is still a crime. Yet some surveys report that oral sex is the favorite sexual activity of a significant number of people—both men and women. Certainly among lesbians, oral sex is extremely popular.

In 1999, the British lesbian monthly *Diva* published the results of a survey of 400 women readers of the magazine: 47 percent named oral sex as their favorite way to turn on a partner, and 38 percent rated cunnilingus as the form of “sexual attention they most liked to receive from a partner.” ¹ (An interesting discrepancy!)

I'm bisexual. I've had both female and male lovers tell me that they weren't into oral sex, which is my cue to tell them to get out of my bed!



Illustration 5. Cunnilingus

Cunnilingus

She sends shivers down my spine when she barely traces her tongue over

me. The anticipation is enough to drive me crazy.

Many lesbians and bisexual women are connoisseurs of the clitoris. What do we like about cunnilingus? The tongue and lips offer a delicious range of sensations that fingers simply can't match. There's nothing quite like that wet-on-wet combination of textures.

I love everything about giving oral sex. The smell, the taste, the way her lips and clit grow as I work them. The way she reacts when I slow down or speed up or suck her clit directly. The way she moans when I make my tongue hard and stick it in her cunt or lick her asshole.

For some women, oral sex produces the most intense, toe-curling orgasms. And women whose clits are especially sensitive may respond to the subtleties of a tongue more readily than a hand or vibrator.

I love that my girlfriend comes so easily when I go down on her. Sometimes I lie on top of my vibrator while I go down on her, and that's very sexy for me.

There's an intimacy in having someone's face so near to your genitals and in getting such a close-up on someone else's arousal. Having your most tender bits inside the mouth of your partner can make you feel vulnerable. You get to give up control. That sense of surrender may be quite freeing for you—and pure ecstasy for your partner.

I like knowing that I'm in complete control of her pleasure. I love feeling her melt in my mouth.

However, many women feel anything but submissive while furiously riding their lover's face.

It's just that sense of intimacy that can make cunnilingus such a powerful experience, one that for many requires a degree of trust. Having your partner's face between your legs can challenge your body image and self-acceptance. Do you really feel comfortable in your body? Do you feel beautiful opening up your sex for your partner's inspection?

My first girlfriend wouldn't go down on me, and we never talked about it. She wouldn't let me go down on her, either. I developed fear and shame that took several years to overcome. Now I love the taste of vaginal juice. I get wet imaging a cunt in my mouth. The softness, the sweetness, the

wetness, and the intimacy of it completely turns me on. I think being comfortable with body fluids and being comfortable with intimacy helped me open up to enjoying oral sex.



Illustration 6. Cunnilingus, Receptive Partner on Top

Many women worry that they may smell or taste bad. Of course, jokes about women's genitals smelling like fish don't help matters. If you're concerned about how you will smell and taste, take a bath before sex. Next time you masturbate, taste your own juices. You may be surprised at how sweet you taste when you're turned on.

My lover has the most amazing lips. They are slightly swollen, and a beautiful walnut color, and always soft and warm.... And her thighs feel splendid next to my ears.

Going Down on Your Girl

Oral sex begins with talking. Women are as individual in their cunnilingus preferences as in any other aspect of sex. Don't assume your partner likes long languid licks, responds best to rapid flicks of the tongue, or wants you to bury your whole face in her fur. Ask her what she likes. You can suggest that she take your head in her hands and put you exactly where she wants you. Show her—with your mouth on her vulva—how *you* like to receive oral sex and invite her to do the same for you.

Hair

I like bush. Furry girls. Getting pubes caught in your teeth—the whole enchilada.

Some women love the texture of pubic hair and the after-sex ritual of picking hairs from between their teeth. One woman wrote, “All of my best have been redheads. That's called ‘going down in flames.’ ”

Others find those errant hairs a distraction. Hold her pubic hair aside with your hands—you can grip her hair between thumb and forefinger, hold her lips open, and even pleasure her with little tugs. You can give your partner a trim, shaving the outer labia and mons and trimming the outer pubic area in preparation for sex. Think of her coif as very creative foreplay. (See “Genital Shaving” in chapter 10, Clitoral Play.)

Blood

I absolutely loved the way her cunt tasted, with just a hint of iron.

The popularity of lesbian vampire erotica attests to the hold of blood on our imaginations. Are you a vampire? Some women love to taste a partner's menstrual blood during oral sex. In fact, some lesbians like to play vampire so much they seek out menstruating partners.

Others find blood contact unappealing—and even terrifying, given the fact that HIV, hepatitis, and other STDs can be transmitted through direct blood contact.

Some women have found safe ways to play with blood. The tangy, iron smell of your partner's blood can be an adequate substitute for taste—you can enjoy the aroma before covering her up with Saran wrap. You can don a glove and anoint her thighs and breasts with her own blood. She may even enjoy licking your gloved hand clean. Of course, if you're fluid-bonded (having unprotected sex only with each other), you and your partner can make an informed decision regarding oral sex during menstruation. (See chapter 18, Safer Sex and Gynecological Health, for more information.)

How-To's of Cunnilingus

- Be a tease. Start with indirect stimulation to warm her up.
- Lick and nibble her inner thighs, belly, and outer labia.
- Rub your entire face over her vulva.
- Nibble her inner labia; take each one into your mouth and suck.
- Put a drop of water-based lube on the genital side of a dental dam. As you tongue her clitoris, let the latex slide with your strokes. (Mark one side of the dental dam with a pen, so that when things get slippery, you know which side is which.)
- Circle her clit with the tip of your tongue. Experiment with different pressures and speeds.
- Stretch a piece of plastic wrap between her legs and around her waist like a loincloth—and then take a long lick from clit to butt.
- Penetrate her vagina with your tongue. Lick the area right below her urethra and just inside her vagina

around and just inside her vagina.

- Hum. Sound produces vibration. Your partner will feel as well as hear you groan as you pleasure her.
- Blow warm air over her vulva. (If she is pregnant, to avoid causing an air embolism *do not* blow directly into the vagina.)
- Flick your tongue rapidly over the glans, hood, and shaft of her clit.
- Flatten your tongue and rub it over her glans and shaft.
- Some women love the excruciating sensation of sharp nibbles on their tender parts. Some don't, so ask.
- Grab a glove—or two—and combine cunnilingus with penetration (vaginal or anal, or both). You can match the rhythms of your tongue with the thrusts of your fingers. One woman wrote, “I love fingers inside of me while a tongue is licking me. When she uses the vibrator on me, too—whoa! Explosion!”
- If your partner likes G-spot stimulation (and you love the way she gushes when she comes), insert a finger or two and stroke her G-spot with that “come hither” gesture.
- You don't have to get her off by the clock. Back off, tease, go forward, tease some more. Stop and ask what feels best. Intensify your play as she gets more aroused.

Analingus

That musty scent along with her womanly scent is heaven.

You may never have thought that putting your mouth on your partner's anus would fill you with desire—or that having your partner's lips and tongue on yours would drive you wild. The idea of putting your mouth on someone's anus may conjure responses ranging from memories of schoolyard insult (“Lick my ass!”) to deep cultural taboo. But the delicacy and rich nerve endings of the anus combined with the soft, wet heat of tongue and lips provide for an extremely erotic array of sensations.

As with many turn-ons, there's no logic to what we love. One woman's ticket to ecstasy may be another's repulsion (“Rimming? Yuck! Why would anyone do that?”). Why would you want to tongue your partner's ass? Because she's so sensitive there, because rimming makes her squirm, and because the earthy taste

and smell make you feel so primal—or simply because it’s such a big taboo.

I’m not exactly sure why I love rimming a woman, but I do. I’m getting a bit wet just thinking about it.

What does having a tongue in your anus do for you? Well, the soft, subtle sensations can’t be compared to anything else. Perhaps because the anus receives so little sexual attention, it’s especially sensitive. The delicate, puckered mouth of your anus is ripe for play.

When my lovers rim me, they have me in the palm of their hand. I simply turn into flesh and bone offered up for their use.

It’s not uncommon to feel ambivalent about having a lover’s tongue in your asshole. You may worry that you smell or taste bad, or that your lover will find feces there. While your concerns may be inhibiting, they may also be exciting—one woman wrote that rimming makes her feel like a “bad girl doing the forbidden,” which is one reason she loves it.

I was so self-conscious that it wasn’t entirely enjoyable. It felt good, though. If I could overcome my initial discomfort, I’m sure I’d love it.

If you’re concerned about cleanliness, you can shower, use dental dams or other barriers, or have an enema before sex. There are usually small traces of fecal matter in the anus and rectum, and you can transmit hepatitis A, bacteria, or parasites through unprotected anal-oral contact. Licking her clitoris after rimming can lead to vaginal infections because bacteria from the anus may be carried by your tongue into her vagina.

Some women enjoy shaving the area around the anus—shaving makes for a smoother, cleaner-feeling surface and as preparation for sex it can be a turn-on.

How-To’s of Analingus

- Gently nibble the inner thighs and buttocks.
- Tickle the hairs around the anus with the tip of your tongue.
- Grab a glove and some water-based lube, to combine rimming with vaginal penetration or clitoral stimulation.
- Lightly circle her anus with your tongue.
- Flick your tongue rapidly against her opening.

- Lay your soft tongue flat against her anus and rub against the opening.
- Lick up and down her butt crack.
- Press your tongue into her opening.



Illustration 7. Analingus

Positions for Oral Sex

What are the best positions for oral sex? The ones that work for you, of course.

You can lie between your partner's legs, especially if you like to maintain eye contact. This position has the added advantage of drawing on your upper-body strength: Prop yourself up on your elbows as you cup her asscheeks in your hands, and then rock your upper body as you lick her clitoris.

But that's only the beginning. She may like to be licked while on her hands and knees. You can then slide your face under her—in either direction. You can lie on your back and have your partner straddle your face—it helps if she can steady herself by leaning on the wall or headboard.

Rear entry is perhaps the easiest position for rimming because it affords good access to the anus. But most cunnilingus positions can be adapted for anilingus as well.

You can bend over her vulva while kneeling at her side. With her legs spread wide and her hips raised, you can also reach her anus. She can sit on the edge of her chair with you eagerly kneeling at her feet. She can stand over you.

With your partner on her knees or standing, her clit and labia hang down and can be sucked into your mouth; with your partner on her back with legs spread, her genitals are stretched out, providing a wider surface for your tongue.

Many women love the mutual stimulation of the 69 position, either lying on top of each other or side by side. You may find it difficult to concentrate on licking your partner when your brain has slipped down between your legs. You can take turns pleasuring each other—there's no rule that performing 69 means you have to reach orgasm simultaneously.

And mutual pleasuring doesn't mean you both must like the same kinds of stimulation. You can penetrate your partner with fingers, a vibrator, or even your whole hand as her tongue and lips go to work on you. You can lick your partner while lying on a vibrator. Or you can simply reserve one hand for yourself.

What a Pain in the Neck!

A long session of oral sex can leave your neck feeling stiff or sore. You may have become so distracted that you may not have noticed the awkward position of your neck.

When my partner takes a very long time to come, my neck hurts!

There's no reason you should have to pay for your pleasure with a trip to the chiropractor. Choose a position that supports your neck. For instance, you can lie on your back with a pillow under your neck as your partner straddles your face. Or slip pillows under your partner's butt (or belly, if she's lying on her stomach) to prop her up.

You might also consider Liberator Shapes' high-density urethane core wedge, which slopes upward to support your partner's hip and butt, raising her vulva 7 inches closer to your mouth.

If you're prone to neck and back pain, here's an opportunity to vary your repertoire. Combine oral sex with other forms of stimulation; make sure your partner is extremely aroused before you begin oral sex; or treat oral sex as a tasty appetizer—plug in the vibrator when it comes to the main course.

I thought I was going to have lockjaw once. She was lying back enjoying it, and I was thinking, "I love you, but come, for God's sake, or my tongue's going to commit suicide!"

(Detachable) Cocksucking

The first time my girlfriend gave me a blow job, I came so hard I thought I'd shoot across the room.

Many women love to give head to a gorgeous dyke (or transman) with an eager cock. And many of those who "pack"—tucking a strap-on dildo into Levi's 501s or under trousers—enjoy the attention and stimulation of a blow job.

So why would anyone want to suck a hunk of silicone? The allure of this practice is part fantasy and part sensation. Most women who enjoy fellatio with a strap-on get off on the gender twist.

I love sucking lesbian cock. I'm really into the butch-on-butch thing.

(For those whose partners include FTMs, third gender, tranny boys, and butches who don't identify as women *per se*, performing fellatio is a marker of gender identity, not fantasy. That cock in your mouth signifies your identity as a woman who loves her transgendered partners; for your partner, receiving a blow job is one of the great payoffs of masculine sexuality.)

Getting on your knees before your partner is a bold admission of desire. Whether or not you associate cocksucking with submission, you can't miss the courage behind such a statement. You can feel your partner jump as you push the base of the dildo into her vulva. You can look up and watch her face as you lick the head of the dildo and slide it into your mouth. You're up close and personal with the very part of her that will drive you wild when she penetrates you vaginally or anally.

Having my cock sucked changed my whole consciousness about gender and power.

For the lucky one receiving that blow job? It's humbling to see your partner get on her knees for you. Having your partner worship your cock makes your gender fantasies come to life.

There's heat in holding her head and watching her take you inside her mouth. The pressure of her mouth and hands pushing the base of the dildo against your mons and clitoris may be enough stimulation to make you come. Many dildo-loving dykes name fellatio as their favorite way to reach orgasm.

I really can't explain the rush I get from a woman sucking my cock. It's almost like it's a real extension of me; and at times it has gotten me off.

You can combine silicone cocksucking with other kinds of stimulation. Your partner can lick her way to your butt or insert a finger into your anus or vagina. You can wear a butt plug and nipple clamps while your partner gives you head. You can slip a small battery-operated vibrator under the harness to provide direct clitoral stimulation or hold a wand-style vibrator between your thighs.

Sometimes while I'm getting sucked off, I'll put a pocket rocket on my clit and visualize myself shooting down her throat.

Some women combine fellatio with vaginal penetration. Vixen Creations, the San Francisco-based toy company, makes a double-headed dildo angled just right for cocksucking. You can insert one end of the double-headed dildo into your vagina and offer up the other to be sucked. (See chapter 17, Sex Toys and Accoutrements.)



Illustration 8. (Detachable) Cocksucking

Vaginal penetration and cocksucking can be a confusing mix. Some who enjoy receiving fellatio with dildos don't want attention paid to their vagina. How their female sexual anatomy fits with their gender identity is nuanced. Then again, your partner may like your fingers inside her vagina as you lean over to lick the tip of the dildo. Ask your partner what she likes.

How to Suck (Detachable) Cock

- Lick and nibble your partner's thighs and belly. Show what a tease you can be.
- Slip an unlubed condom into your mouth. Roll it onto your partner's dildo.
- Hold the base of her dildo in your hand; this will help you control your partner's thrusts into your mouth.
- Push the base of the dildo into her mons and clitoris.
- Circle the head of the dildo with your tongue.
- Grab a glove and slip your fingers behind the harness. You can stroke her clit as you suck the head of her cock.
- You can slide two fingers inside her vagina and stimulate her G-spot in rhythm to the thrusts of the dildo in your mouth.
- Keep a dental dam handy—while you're nibbling at her balls (featured on realistic models) or at the base of her dildo, you can lick your way to her vulva or anus.
- Alternate sucking on the tip of the dildo with slowly sliding the dildo into your mouth, taking more in each time.
- You can learn to relax your throat so that you can take more of her without gagging. You can practice in advance on your own dildo—or rent a how-to video or DVD, such as Nina Hartley's *Advanced Guide to Oral Sex*.

Oral Sex—Safely

Even if you don't believe that women can transmit HIV via oral sex—and there

simply haven't been enough studies to date to know for sure—we do know that other STDs *can* be transmitted through cunnilingus and anilingus.

Safer Oral Sex

- Use dental dams, Saran wrap, or a cut-up glove or condom as a protective barrier for cunnilingus and anilingus.
- Put a dab of water-based lube on the genital side of the barrier.
- Mark your side of the dental dam with a pen—so that if the dam slips you'll know which side's which.
- Always use a new dam or other barrier when you switch from rimming to cunnilingus, to reduce the risk of infection from anal bacteria.
- If you're allergic to latex, use plastic wrap or cut up a vinyl or nitrile glove.
- Use unlubed condoms on your dildos—always use a fresh condom when switching sexual activities or partners.
- If you enjoy rimming, consider getting a hepatitis A vaccination.
- Don't allow bacteria from the anus to enter the vagina.
- After unprotected rimming, rinse with antibacterial mouthwash before licking your partner's clitoris.

While the risk for transmitting HIV through unprotected cunnilingus (when no blood is present) is considered low, oral sex can transmit herpes and HPV (a virus linked to cervical cancer). Remember that if you like rough sex, with lots of biting, you may come in contact with blood even if your partner isn't menstruating.

When blood is present, the risk increases to include not only herpes and HPV, but also possible transmission of HIV, hepatitis C, and hepatitis B.

Anilingus can transmit hepatitis A, anal herpes, anal warts, parasites, and possibly HIV. Many health advocates strongly recommend that you get a hepatitis A vaccine if you engage in unprotected rimming.

I contracted genital herpes from a girlfriend. I didn't know about safer sex. I was young, in love, and invincible. None of these things protected me. My girlfriend's pleasuring me orally was all it took. It is still a very sad thing for me. I do a lot of HIV/STD work. The ignorance among other young people is very scary. Lots of lesbians don't even know what a dental dam is.

Of all these STD risks, the most common story is that women routinely transmit herpes, HPV, and bacterial infections to each other through cunnilingus. Given the prevalence of these STDs, you'd think we'd all be stocking up on Saran wrap and dental dams. But while many lesbian and bisexual women use latex barriers for oral sex, many do not. When lesbians let safersex practices lapse, odds are they're going down.

Mmmmmmm, I love rimming. I don't take any precautions, and I know that I should. This is the one risky behavior I won't forgo.

So What's a Girl to Do?

The whole dental dam thing is a drag—if I can't go “down” naturally... then I don't bother.

For some, STD risks are reason enough to opt out of oral sex. They don't want to risk transmitting or getting herpes and other STDs, but the thought of licking latex is unappealing.

Oral sex is not part of my sex life at all. My current partner will not engage in it with me due to the risks (I have had herpes since I first had sex!) and doesn't like dams or plastic wrap. In my professional life, I insist on dams or plastic wrap, and so most people decline!

Many women think barriers for oral sex will be awful, without even trying them. Gather some supplies (and your favorite sex partner) and give them a whirl in the spirit of experimentation. You may surprise yourself.

Dental dams were designed to be used by dentists, of course, to keep your tongue and saliva out of the way while working on your teeth. The small squares of latex are thought to be effective barriers in preventing transmission of STDs during oral sex.

Since dental dams have a certain medical aesthetic—they are unattractive, too small to handle easily, and a bit thick—sex toy entrepreneurs came up with alternatives designed specifically for sex. One of these is the Glyde Lollyes dam—a sheer, 10” x 6” sheet of vanilla-scented latex, designed for sex, not root canals. Glyde dams are lightly powdered with cornstarch (which can be rinsed off before use). These are more expensive, but also more appealing than actual dental dams. Good Vibrations designed a dam they call Slicks, which are individually wrapped in foil like a condom. Lixx makes flavored dams for cunnilingus.

Latex sorta tickles in a good way. Almost teasing, but I love being teased.

You can use plastic wrap—cheap and readily available. You can pull off as large a piece as you like and even wrap it around your partner like a loincloth. With plastic wrap, you can take a long forbidden lick from clit to vagina to butt and back again—without the worry of carrying bacteria from anus to vagina.

You can also cut up a latex glove or condom to use as a barrier. (See illustration, chapter 5, *The Road to Heaven Leads to You*.)

You may find rimming a more appealing practice when using a barrier. Try slipping an unlubed condom into your mouth, roll it over your tongue, and penetrate your partner as deeply as you desire. (Be aware that this technique works only if you keep your lips away from her exposed membranes.)

I'd never do rimming without a dental dam—I've known too many gay men who've suffered the medical repercussions of unprotected rimming.

Using a barrier, you can enjoy cunnilingus during menstruation without fear of blood contact. You can have oral sex with someone whom you may not feel you know well enough to put tongue to bare membrane.

You can even play with latex as a sex toy, creating sensations that might not be possible with your naked tongue. You can create a latex suction bubble, snap the latex against her genitals, put a dab of water-based lube on her side of the dam, and slide the latex over her clit. If you find direct clitoral stimulation to be too intense, latex can help by slightly decreasing sensation.

One complaint is that holding the dental dam in place occupies hands that could be put to better use elsewhere. The latex square tends to roll up. Holding it taut may require more effort than you care to devote to the task. You can buy a dental dam harness (JT's Stockroom sells a leather model that looks much like a

dildo harness) or modify a garter belt. Just shorten the garters to hold the latex square tightly against your vulva. If you sew on an extra set of fasteners, you can make a fashion statement with your Glyde dam and sheer black hose. Use your imagination—safer sex can become a fashion opportunity.

Is there a loss of intimacy in using dental dams and plastic wrap? Yes, many women find that licking and sucking a partner through a barrier diminishes taste, smell, texture, and that feeling of being so close to another's body.

Sometimes using latex makes me feel like I am not close enough. Especially with oral sex, because it is the taste of a woman that I find so pleasurable and arousing.

On the other hand, there's nothing like bonding over your mutual commitment to making healthy decisions. Talking about your sex histories, experimenting with safersex accoutrements, and laughing at your awkwardness can be very intimate. And while you're exploring the lube-and-latex options, you may just discover your partner's hottest fantasy of tongues and lips and her most tender places.

Suggested Web Links

GLYDE DAMS

www.sheerglydedams.com

THE SAFER SEX PAGES

www.safersex.org/women/lesbianss.html

chapter twelve

Vaginal Penetration

After a number of vaginal orgasms, I get this wonderful feeling that I can only describe as being thoroughly *done*.

PENETRATIVE SEX IS INTIMATE. With your fingers and hands, you can feel every pulse and contraction of your partner’s arousal and orgasm. With your partner’s hand or dildo inside you, you can enjoy a connection that is both immediate and emotionally powerful.

Penetration may be your preferred mode of reaching orgasm—you may enjoy multiple orgasms or wave upon wave of extended orgasm through vaginal penetration. Some women say they experience orgasms from vaginal penetration as deeper—“more bass than treble,” as one woman wrote. Many women come most reliably from vaginal penetration combined with clitoral stimulation—from fingers, a vibrator, or tongue. Even if you don’t reach orgasm through penetrative sex, you may crave that feeling of being filled. If it’s your goal to reach orgasm through penetration as either the insertive or the receptive partner, read on!

Take a Tour

A quick review of sexual anatomy will show that the clitoris is a system of engorging tissue—your clit isn’t just the externally visible glans, but rather a “pyramid-shaped mass of erectile tissue.”² Clitoral tissue cradles the urethra, and the crura extend back to the vaginal walls. During penetration, the clitoris is stimulated indirectly through the walls of the vagina.

Ten Myths About Vaginal Penetration

1. *If you want to be penetrated, you're not really a lesbian.* As Susie Bright says, “fucking is no more heterosexual than kissing.”¹ Penetrative sex stimulates the sensitive outer third of the vagina, including the G-spot, and provides a delicious source of indirect clitoral stimulation. That feeling of fullness is both emotionally satisfying and physically pleasurable. Contrary to myth, nerve endings have no identity politics.
2. *Hands and fingers are fine for foreplay, but if it ain't a dick, it ain't sex.* Behind this myth is the notion that pleasure we produce with our hands—whether “digital penetration,” “hand jobs,” or masturbation—doesn't “count.” Hands are dexterous. Fingers bend. They can produce a limitless variety of touch and motion, and can reach the G-spot more easily than a penis.
3. *Dildos are imitations of the real thing.* No, that strap-on dildo is the real thing—it's a real lesbian cock. Dildos have their own characteristics that make them uniquely well suited for sexual pleasure—even women who have sex with men at times prefer a dildo to a penis. You can pick dildos for size, shape, and texture. Dildos aim to please—they stay hard, long after either partner's orgasm. Dildos go back into the drawer after sex.
4. *I like penetration, but if I wanted something in me that looked like a penis, I'd go out and get a man.* You can find dildos to suit every taste (so to speak). Some are realistic, with veins, balls, and glans—you can even buy a dildo modeled after a famous porn star. Others are abstract, like Vixen's collection of variously shaped dildos that come in all colors and even swirl patterns. (See chapter 17, Sex Toys and Accoutrements.)
5. *But I can't come from penetrating my partner.* For some strap-on studs, getting off isn't the point. But if you'd like to reach orgasm while penetrating your partner, you'll find specific techniques for you suggested throughout this chapter.
6. *Women who strap on dildos want to be men.* Strap-on studs may identify as transgendered—some as butch lesbians and some as FTMs. And some butches and FTMs like to get penetrated. Some women wear strap-ons with garters, sheer fishnet stockings, and heels. You don't have to associate strap-

on play with gender at all—you can wear a dildo to penetrate your partner just because you like how it feels.

7. *Fisting is dangerous.* Not if you do it right. See “Vaginal Fisting,” below.
8. *If you get fisted, you’ll end up all stretched out (and you won’t be satisfied with a mere finger, dildo, or penis).* The muscles at the opening of the vagina get stronger with use, not weaker. If you’re concerned about maintaining muscle tone, do your PC exercises. (See chapter 3, Anatomy and Sexual Response.) Will you be spoiled by the intensity of that fist inside you? Yes!
9. *If you like to get fucked, you’re a “bottom.”* Vaginal penetration can be part of a dominance/ submission scene, with the top fisting her submissive partner or penetrating her with a strap-on or handheld dildo. Conversely, the top can be the receptive partner, directing her partner’s actions with great menace and authority. (“Get that cock in me! Now!”) The bottom can feel very compliant on her knees between her top’s legs. Of course, many women who enjoy penetrative sex have no interest in power play whatsoever. Penetration simply feels good.
10. *Women who crave penetration are really bisexual (or even heterosexual).* Maybe, maybe not. One woman wrote, “I never enjoyed vaginal penetration until I identified as a lesbian.” The hidden fear behind this myth is that your partner will reject you for a man. Many lesbians who have no interest in men love vaginal penetration, as do many bisexual women. Regardless of whether your partner enjoys sex with men, at this moment it is your hard cock, poised expectantly between her legs, that she desires. Enjoy it!

Most women find the area of the vagina nearest the opening to be the most responsive to touch, which makes sense since the outer third of the vagina contains the most nerve endings. The G-spot is located on the front wall of the vagina, fairly close to the opening.

Take a tour of your own vagina before inviting a partner in. When you reach

inside with your fingers pointing toward the front wall of your vagina, you can find your G-spot by stroking in a “come hither” motion. Some women find G-spot stimulation really pleasurable, and others find it irritating. Using your fingers or a firm, curved dildo, experiment with movement and pressure. You can locate your cervix and note how your uterus lifts and your vagina balloons out as you approach orgasm. It’s much easier to tell a lover how to please you when you know what you like. (See chapter 3, Anatomy and Sexual Response, and chapter 6, Masturbation.)

Finger-Fucking

Your fingers are extremely communicative. You can feel and transmit very subtle sensations with your fingers. Your fingers are also dexterous. They can bend and reach to explore every nook and cranny. You can use your fingers as a prelude to something, well, bigger—more fingers, a hand, or a dildo—or as the main attraction. Not every woman wants four fingers inside her vagina; and those who do may enjoy the feeling of slowly adding fingers one at a time.

You can caress the opening of the vagina, and your partner can squeeze your fingers as you find her most sensitive spots. You can easily reach her G-spot by angling your fingers toward the front wall of the vagina. Try caressing her G-spot with varying pressure and speed, as you would the glans and hood of her clit.

As the receptive partner, you can push out toward your partner’s hand; your G-spot will be apparent as an area of tissue that’s spongier and rougher than the rest of your vagina.



Illustration 9. Vaginal Finger-Fucking

You can use one hand for penetration, reserving the other for clitoral stimulation. The finger circling her clit can match the rhythms of the finger thrusting inside her. You can hold a vibrator to her clit, or she can touch herself—leaving you to concentrate on her vagina. With two or three fingers you can rapidly thrust in and out, pumping at a pitch that you couldn't possibly sustain with a strap-on dildo.

Vaginal Fisting

When I'm being fisted, I am all cunt.

Fisting (also called *handballing* or *fist-fucking*) is the practice of inserting a whole hand inside a woman's vagina (or anus—see chapter 13, Anal Penetration). Contrary to its name, the balled-up fist isn't forced past the vaginal opening. Rather, the hand is slowly and gently inserted, and once inside, it's curled into a ball—hence the term *fisting*.

Fisting is about trust and desire. You have to *want* to be fisted to open so dramatically to another human being—and you have to trust your partner to allow her entry in such an intimate way. While not everyone can be fisted—and a particular hand may be too big for a particular vagina—fisting is more a matter of arousal than anatomy.

Those who love to *give* fisting speak of the primal connection of having one's entire hand inside the body of another human being. For emotional intimacy, nothing surpasses fisting, they say. You can feel every ripple and pulsation of your partner's arousal. Deep inside her body, it feels as if you have the core of her sexual power literally in the palm of your hand.

For women who crave deep penetration, fisting satisfies that need to be completely filled. You can ride every subtle movement of your partner's hand into an ocean of sensation. You can completely surrender to the overwhelming intensity of being inexorably penetrated.

How does fisting work? The vagina is quite elastic. After all, it stretches to accommodate a baby during birth. When you're sexually aroused, your whole vagina expands, opens, and balloons out. As you near orgasm, your vagina becomes quite spacious.

Some women discover fisting almost by accident: One particularly hungry day, when three or even four fingers aren't enough, your vagina engulfs your partner's hand. However, most women come to fisting more intentionally.

Fisting requires communication, patience, and lube—lots of lube. The receptive partner takes control to receive her partner's fist. She must communicate how much, how fast, how intensely those fingers, and finally that hand, can enter. To do so, she needs to be aware of her body. She needs to know what feels good and what doesn't, and what she needs and wants—and to be able to communicate these to her partner even when the sensations are overwhelming.

Unless you and your partner are veteran fisters, this is not an activity for a

lunch-break quickie. Take your time. Before you even *think* about penetration, make sure the receptive partner is thoroughly turned on.

Snap on a latex glove and coat your entire hand with a water-based lube—front and back, up to the wrist. Begin with two fingers. Then three fingers. Then four. Tuck your thumb into the palm of your hand. Try to make your hand as skinny as possible—fisting how-to guides speak of folding your hand into the shape of a duck’s bill. (See the chapter 19, Bibliography.)

Enter her vagina up to the widest part of the hand, with your palm facing the front wall of her vagina and your knuckles facing her tailbone. At this point, move only by millimeters. Stop frequently to add more lube. Talk to your partner—ask her what feels good and what doesn’t. Maintain eye contact. Breathe with her. You can place the palm of your free hand on her chest or hold her hand. Connect with her in any way that works for the two of you.

Some women love the circular pressure of a scooping motion on the fully stretched vaginal opening. You may be able to rotate your way inside of her. Or, you may be able to push straight in; you’ll feel a “pop” and your hand will disappear.

But what if it hurts? Most likely, if you are four fingers deep and about to sink your entire hand into your partner, the pain comes from the widest part of your hand pushing against the ring of muscles at the opening of her vagina. The bones of your hand also may be pressing painfully against her pelvic bones.

Just as the vagina opens with arousal, it shuts down with fear or stress. Don’t try to force your hand inside of her. Fisting is not supposed to hurt. Back off to three fingers or even two. Add more lube. You might try to enter her from a different angle. Let her take the lead.

Some women open more easily after orgasm. If your partner is rocking up against your hand, squeezing her thighs, and contracting around your fingers—in other words, if she’s working up to a colossal orgasm—you may want to ride that orgasm with her. After she comes, stay inside, moving very slowly. Let her arousal build back up again. You may find that her vagina opens wide enough for your hand to slip through.



Illustration 10. Vaginal Fisting

Other women open to their fullest during a long session of penetrative sex *without* orgasm. The more turned on they get, the more their vagina opens. You can postpone your partner's orgasm, a sweet torture all its own. Slow her down. Still your fingers. Ask her to relax the muscles of her pelvis and thighs, and to breathe with you, slowly and deeply. For the woman who loves to grip a finger or dildo, this will seem counterintuitive—but it works.

That having been said, fisting isn't something you "make" happen. Don't be goal oriented. Both partners need to be relaxed and open to possibility.

What to do when you get your hand inside your partner? Ball up your hand into a fist. Immediately. And then be still as your partner adjusts to the overwhelming reality of your hand filling her vagina—not to mention her consciousness.

When your partner is ready, you can move your hand. Remember that a small movement to you is a tidal wave to her. Some women like a slow rotation from the wrist in very small, subtle, corkscrew movements. Others like a gentle thrusting movement—just a centimeter forward and back, slowly and then more rapidly as she gets turned on. Eventually she may become so open that you're able to thrust in and out, pulling your hand completely out of her vagina and working your hand inside her over and over. The intensity of this is indescribable.

The first time she put her hand inside me,
I was looking into her eyes; it was very, very intimate.
She says that she can feel my orgasm start before I do;
I love letting her be that close to me.

Some women like the pressure on their cervix that comes with deep penetration. That doesn't mean banging on the cervix, which is delicate and can be bruised easily. Here's where you can appreciate the "ballooning" of the vagina just before orgasm. Depending on her menstrual cycle and the location of her cervix, you may be able slip your hand behind her cervix.

In fisting, your partner can ride the edge of her orgasm for a long, long time. In fact, some women like to be fisted endlessly with little thought of coming. Others will begin climbing to the peak of an extended orgasm the moment your fist begins to move. You can combine fisting with many other sources of stimulation, including vibrators, nipple clamps, and even a small butt plug. Some women like to use a vibrator on their clit while being fisting. Others prefer their

own fingers.

Don't yank your hand out of your partner's vagina. Getting out is best handled as gently as going in. If your partner has clamped down on your hand, you may have to slowly work your way out.

Fisting can be a vulnerable experience for both partners. Allow time to cool down together.

Strap-On Dildos

Dildos are perhaps the world's oldest sex toys. You can hold a dildo in your hand or wear it in a harness, freeing up your hands for other pleasures.

Dildos come in all shapes and sizes. A dildo appropriate for strap-on sex has a flared base so that it will not slip out of the harness. Harnesses come in several different styles.

Thigh harnesses wrap around one thigh, with the dildo protruding out of a ring in the fabric. Some women find movement with the thigh harness easier and more natural. If you like to hump a partner's thigh, this harness may be for you.

Single-strap (thong-style) harnesses feature a strap that goes between the legs. Some women love the stimulation of the center strap; others don't like a strap between their legs. You can attach a cuff to hold a dildo or butt plug in place on the center strap. Some women find these harnesses to be the most stable.

Two-strap (jock-style) harnesses have straps that go around the thighs and butt much like a jockstrap; they tend to position the dildo lower on your body, right over your mons. They may provide more stimulation for the wearer.



Illustration 11. Vaginal Penetration with Strap-On

You'll learn all about selecting dildos and harnesses in chapter 17, Sex Toys and Accoutrements.

Wielding a strap-on takes practice; you may feel very self-conscious the first time you look in the mirror and see a dildo bobbing between your legs. Try wearing the dildo and harness when you're alone. You can even masturbate

while wearing your new strap-on—with dildo in hand, push the base against your mons, thrust with your hips, and notice any sensations in your pelvis. Rachel Venning and Claire Cavanah of *Toys in Babeland* take this exercise a step further: “Close your eyes and push with your hips into your hand. Visualize the energy running from your shoulder down into your arm and from your body into the base of the dildo. Notice the sensation of the base pushing into your body. Put a little spit or lube into your hand and slide it around the head of the dick...”³ That’s right—bond with that new toy.

Use your fingers to explore your partner’s vagina before you penetrate her with a dildo. You can learn the size and shape of her vagina and discover what feels best to her. Roll a condom onto your dildo and apply plenty of water-based lube. Use your hand to guide the dildo into her. Go slowly and pay attention to her responses.

If you’re the receptive partner, you’re in charge during strap-on sex. Here’s an opportunity to hone your communication skills. Since your partner has no nerve endings in the tip of her dildo (much as it may feel that she does at times), she can’t know if she’s painfully banging your cervix unless you tell her. Do you want your partner to grind slowly and deeply into you? Do you want her to thrust faster? Harder? Tell her!

The thrusting of the dildo inside you may provide enough indirect clitoral stimulation to bring you to orgasm. Just the fantasy of a woman with a hard cock may be enough to make you come. You can also combine vaginal penetration with direct clitoral stimulation. You can stimulate your clitoris with a vibrator or your fingers as your partner is penetrating you. Your partner can slip a vibrating cock ring onto her dildo; she can stimulate your clitoris as she grinds into you. In the rear-entry position, she can reach around and touch your clit as she penetrates you.

But what about the thrill of having your partner come with her dildo deep inside you? What about the insertive partner who wants to reach orgasm while penetrating her partner?

Just the idea of thrusting your strap-on dildo into a partner’s vagina may be enough to make you come. Perhaps the base of the dildo rubbing against your clitoris provides the stimulation you need. If you require direct clitoral stimulation to reach orgasm, you can strap a battery-operated vibrator, such as an egg vibe, over your clit. You can slip a vibrating cock ring around the shaft of

your dildo (on the skin side of the harness). You can strap on a hollow dildo designed to take an egg vibe in its base. You can wear a harness with a small pouch designed to hold a vibrator in just the right spot.

Tristan Taormino recommends a realistic dildo with balls: “Balls do more than make it look real; they extend the base of the dildo and cover more surface area—which means more for you to rub up against.”⁴

You can wear a vibrating dildo or butt plug inside yourself—these can be attached to the center strap of a thong-style harness. You can each wear a thigh harness for simultaneous penetration. Your partner can hold a Magic Wand between your thighs. You can reach under your harness and touch yourself as you penetrate your partner.

For some strap-on studs, getting off isn't the point. They like seeing the dildo penetrating a partner's vagina and giving a partner all that pleasure. In fact, for some women, that's the best thing about strap-on sex—an enthusiastic partner with a hard cock whose attention is entirely focused on pleasing her.

When she's doing me with a dildo I feel wild and slutty—it's just good rough dirty sex.

How-To's of Vaginal Penetration

- As the receptive partner, you can take the lead. Tell your partner exactly how you want to be penetrated.
- Roll a condom onto your partner's strap-on. Lube her up!
- As the insertive partner, make sure your partner is really turned on before you enter her.
- Use lube—lots of lube—even if she seems fairly wet to you. You can warm the lube by running hot water over the bottle before you begin to play.
- Snap on a latex glove—lubricated latex will make your fingers and hand ultra smooth.
- Even if your intention is to fill your partner with your entire hand or your strap-on dildo, start with one finger. Build up slowly.
- You can take your partner's wrist in hand and guide her inside you.
- Tease her—give her less than she wants, and then a little more.

- Bring out the toys—add nipple clamps, bondage, vibrators, and butt plugs to penetrative sex.
- You can lean over and lick her clitoris while pumping your fingers or a handheld dildo in and out of her vagina.
- Use two hands—you can slip the fingers of one hand into your partner’s vagina while the other hand attends to her anus. Your fingers can “meet” through the thin wall of tissue separating the vagina from the anus. (Do not allow bacteria from the anus to come in contact with the vagina.)
- As the insertive partner, you can rotate your hips or move them in a steady in-and-out motion to vary the thrusts of the dildo.
- As the receptive partner, you can wrap your legs around your partner’s hips and rock her dildo into you. You can use her harness to pull her into you more deeply or to control the pace of her thrusts.
- Place the palm of one hand just above your partner’s pelvic bone and press—you can feel your fingers thrusting against her G-spot.
- Experiment with two-handed fisting. Hold your hands with palms together, and slip one hand in as the other slides out, rubbing your palms together.
- Hold a vibrator against your partner’s clitoris—or your own.

Positions for Vaginal Penetration

Kneeling or sitting between your partner’s legs

With your partner lying on her back, place yourself between her legs. This position is great for fisting, finger-fucking, or penetration with a handheld dildo.

You can maintain eye contact. You can reach your partner’s breasts and belly—and she can reach yours. You can reach both vagina and anus. You can bend over and lick your partner’s clitoris as you penetrate her.

There’s plenty of room for her to hold a vibrator to her clitoris or to touch herself. By raising her legs, she can adjust the angle of entry. For deepest penetration, she can rest her ankles on your shoulders or bend her knees almost to her chest and hook her arms behind her calves.

Missionary

The missionary position may sound old-fashioned, but it's ideal for intimate strap-on sex. With your partner lying on her back, you lie between her legs. This position works well with the thigh harness as well as harnesses that strap around the hips.

You can enjoy long, deep kisses and up-close eye contact. You can grind your pelvises together. The receptive partner can wrap her arms and legs around your shoulders and hips. You can slip a vibrator between your bodies.

This position works well in a sling. Many lesbians sing the praises of the sling. A sling is a type of hanging chair that fully supports your weight, allowing all your muscles to relax. With no muscle tension, many women find they can better enjoy penetrative sex. Slings can be constructed from nylon webbing, canvas, leather, or rubber. They generally hang from eyebolts in a ceiling or wall, or from a freestanding frame.

Receptive partner on top

Here's a strap-on position in which the receptive partner can most easily control the depth of penetration. The insertive partner can sit on a chair, lie on her back, or recline in a sling while you straddle her, raising and lowering yourself on the dildo. This is a good position if you can't bear weight on you, or if your partner can't maintain thrusting over time.

Not only do you control the depth, you can also control the speed and movement. You can thrust in slow, circling motions or pump as hard and fast as you like. By squeezing your PC muscles around the dildo, you can grind the base of the dildo into your partner's pelvis.

In a chair or sling, you can wrap your arms around each other and enjoy the intimacy of face-to-face contact. With the insertive partner lying on her back, she can stroke your clit or hold a vibrator for you. This position works well with the thigh harness.

Rear entry

Rear entry is the position often associated with anal sex. It's also great for all kinds of vaginal penetration—finger-fucking, fisting, and penetration with a handheld or strap-on dildo. The receptive partner kneels on hands and knees, with the insertive partner kneeling or standing behind her. This is a good position if either partner can't bear weight on her.

The picture in my head of me bent over, getting fucked from behind, is where my orgasm comes from.

Rear entry provides for the deepest penetration and most direct G-spot stimulation. This is a good position for those who desire intense, hard thrusting. The insertive partner can hold onto her partner's hips as she drives the dildo into her vagina. The receptive partner has freedom of movement—she can rock backward, slamming against her partner's dildo or hand.

The receptive partner can easily touch herself. She can also lower herself onto the bed and rub her vulva against the sheets or her hand.

Side by side

Like the missionary position, lying on a bed side by side is a very intimate way to enjoy penetrative sex. With the receptive partner's leg thrown over your hips, you can slip a dildo into her vagina as you wrap your arms around her, enjoying her kisses and face-to-face closeness. You can enjoy simultaneous finger-fucking in this position. This is a great position for slow, sensuous strap-on sex. This is a good position if either partner can't bear weight on her. Side-by-side sex works well with the thigh harness, as well as harnesses that fit around the hips.

Standing

Many lesbians entertain the fantasy of pressing a partner up against a wall, lifting her skirt, and slipping fingers deep inside her—or a strap-on, or even a whole hand. Standing sex carries with it a sense of urgency—as if you can't wait long enough to find a bed.

Of course, height is a factor. You have to be well matched to enjoy strap-on sex standing up—unless one of you is much bigger than the other and can pick

up her partner. You can make use of a staircase to equalize height, too. This position is useful if the receptive partner can't bear weight.

Toys for Vaginal Play

When it comes to toys for penetrative sex, lube tops the shopping list. Water-based lube is a *must* for pleasurable vaginal play—whether you plan to use dildos or your own fingers to penetrate your partner. Combined with gloves, water-based lube will turn your hand into a slick surface. (Use water-based lubes in the vagina; oil-based lubes, such as Crisco, and silicone lubes, such as Eros Bodyglide, don't rinse out of the vagina easily.)

Your basic 8-inch silicone strap-on is only the beginning when it comes to dildo play. The most exciting recent innovation in dildo design is Cyberskin, a remarkably realistic-feeling material.

If you wear a harness with a center strap, you can add a harness cuff to hold a dildo or butt plug—and you can even slip a vibrating dildo or butt plug inside the harness cuff for added stimulation.

Some women like to play with double dildos—you can penetrate your partner *and* yourself simultaneously. Designs such as Vixen Creations' Nexus are angled for easy use.

Handheld dildos are great for G-spot stimulation; some, such as the S-shaped Crystal Wand, are designed for just that purpose. You can find a large variety of battery-operated vibrators designed for penetrative sex. (See chapter 17, Sex Toys and Accoutrements, for more information.)

Vaginal Penetration—Safely

While penetration with fingers, hands, and dildos is considered very low risk for transmission of HIV, there has been at least one documented case of HIV transmission via shared sex toys. Unprotected penetrative sex can transmit STDs such as herpes, HPV, and chlamydia from woman to woman. Shared dildos can also lead to vaginal infections. Use a condom and clean your dildos with antibacterial soap.

Ungloved hands make finger-fucking and fisting risky. Your fingernails can scratch the lining of your partner's vagina, providing a transmission route for bacteria and STDs. Ragged cuticles or small cuts on your hand can provide a transmission route for STDs that may be present in your partner's menstrual blood or vaginal secretions.

Herpes, HPV, and bacteria can be transmitted via skin-to-skin contact. If you touch your partner's genitals and then touch your own, you can transmit bacteria or a virus. You need not have visible lesions or warts to transmit herpes or HPV, and you need not have visible breaks in the skin to acquire it. You can also transmit bacteria from the anus to the vagina; change gloves or thoroughly wash your hands when changing activities.

Safer Vaginal Penetration

- Get a manicure. Make sure your nails are smoothly filed.
- Use latex, nitrile, or vinyl gloves.
- Use water-based lube.
- Put on a fresh glove when you switch activities or partners.
- Don't share dildos and vibrators without cleaning between uses.
- Use condoms on your dildos. Always use a fresh condom when switching sexual activities or partners.
- Don't allow bacteria from the anus to enter the vagina.

Even if you're monogamous and don't use latex barriers with your partner, some safer-sex considerations still apply.

First, keep your hands clean. Not just lather-and-rinse clean, but seriously clean. Make sure there's no grime around the nails—if you choose not to wear gloves for sex, perhaps you should consider wearing them for work. Don't touch yourself and then your partner without washing your hands.

Second, get a manicure. Trim your nails as closely as possible, until there's no white showing. Make sure your cuticles are smooth. Remove hangnails. Does that mean that femmes with fabulous nails are prohibited entry? No way! Here

are a few precautions: File the nails until smooth, making sure there are no jagged edges or sharp points. Before you slip on that latex glove, grab some cotton balls. Place bits of cotton padding over the sharp ends of your nails—then pull on the latex glove. Voilà! If you don't use gloves, you must be very conscious of the location of your nails. Make sure that only the pads of your fingers make contact with the vaginal walls. Fisting may be easier for you than finger-fucking—you can tuck your nails into your palm.

Finally, don't forget to urinate before and after vaginal penetration. Emptying your bladder before penetrative sex will help make room for a dildo or your partner's hand. Peeing after sex can also help prevent urinary tract infections. (See chapter 18, Safer Sex and Gynecological Health, for more information.)

Where to Learn More

You'll find workshops on strap-on sex, fisting, and other techniques at some sex boutiques. In San Francisco, Karlyn Lotney (aka Fairy Butch) offers classes that cover the basics of strap-on sex. Other dyke sex educators teach ongoing classes in their cities through their local queer center or sex toy store. Most of the sex toy stores listed in the resources section offer workshops on a variety of penetrative techniques, including G-spot play and vaginal fisting.

If you can't find a workshop or class, you can view lesbian, bisexual, and queer women having penetrative sex by renting a lesbian sex video or DVD. The *San Francisco Lesbians* series features numerous scenes of strap-on sex. (See the resources.) You can also read online advice columns geared toward lesbians, such as "Ask Fairy Butch."

Suggested Web Link

ASK FAIRY BUTCH

www.fairybutch.com

chapter thirteen

Anal Penetration

Anal penetration is very intimate sex play for me. I love the whole process of building trust, and the slowness of it.

ANAL SEX IS DELICIOUS. The delicate folds of the anus and the tender lining of the rectum are rich in nerve endings and transmit very subtle sensations. Even a slender fingertip can produce enormous anal pleasure.

Many women say they experience their most intense orgasms through anal penetration, especially when combined with clitoral stimulation. Perhaps you like anal penetration because you experience indirect G-spot stimulation through pressure on the walls of the rectum. You may relish the naughty thrill of engaging in a form of sexuality that's so taboo.

The three keys to pleasurable anal sex are communication, relaxation, and lubrication. The women of Toys in Babeland call them their butt-play mantra: "You can never have too much of any of those three, so talk about it, breathe deep, slap on more lube than you think is necessary, start slow, and have fun!" [1](#)

Take a Tour

Make yourself comfortable—take a hot bath, put on some relaxing music, light some candles, and unplug the phone. Grab a hand mirror and your favorite lube. Slip on a latex glove. (If you'd rather not use a glove, make sure your nails are smoothly filed and your hands clean and soft. See "Basic Preparations," below.)

You can sit on the bed or lean back in a plush chair. Hold the mirror between your legs; or, for an even better view, kneel or squat over the mirror. Viewing the puckered folds of the anus, you can appreciate how delicate it is. We're often so crass in how we refer to our asses that we forget how tender we are there.

Rub a lubed finger over the opening. Get used to the feeling of your anus

being stimulated. Slip just the tip of your lubed finger inside. Notice the heat you generate, the firm grip of your sphincter muscles on your finger, and the pulsing sensation as the anus becomes aroused and the tissues engorge with blood.

You have two muscles at the opening of your anus: the external and internal sphincters. The external sphincter is a voluntary muscle—you can flex the external sphincter as you squeeze your PC muscles. The internal sphincter is involuntary—it reacts automatically to stimuli like pleasure or fear. However, like other involuntary muscles, it can be trained.

If you poke directly at the anus, the sphincter muscles will clamp down in an automatic response much like the blinking of an eye. This response, which some sex educators call the “anal wink,”² explains many bad anal sex experiences. Someone attempts to enter you by poking a finger or toy into your anus. Your internal sphincter closes against the intrusion. It hurts. You tell the errant partner to remove the finger, butt plug, or dildo. Next time a finger, dildo, or butt plug nears your anus, your unforgiving sphincter clamps down against the memory of that painful intrusion.

Rather than condition your anus for pain, you can condition it for sexual enjoyment. With relaxation, communication, and lots of lube, you can teach your sphincters to anticipate pleasure.

The anus opens into the anal canal, which is only an inch or two long. If you reach a lubed finger a bit deeper inside your anus, you can feel the tight anal canal opening into the roomier rectum. The rectum is 4 to 6 inches long and curves in a gentle S shape. The rectum ends in the rectosigmoidal junction (the top of the S), which leads to the colon. When you feel the need to defecate, you are feeling feces pressing on the rectosigmoidal junction. (Unlike the vagina, there’s no “end” to your rectum; objects really *can* get lost in there. See the guidelines later in this chapter for selecting anal toys.)

The lower portion of the rectum curves toward the front of your body; the upper portion curves back toward your spine. Your fingers are probably not long enough to follow these curves, but you can use a slender dildo to find the point at which your rectum curves forward. Of course, each person’s anus and rectum are unique.

Like the clitoris, the tissues of the anus and rectum engorge with blood as you become aroused. Your mirror may reveal your anus opening as you get turned

on. The rectum also expands—not as readily as your vagina, of course, but you can fit a finger, a dildo or penis, a butt plug, or even an entire hand inside your butt. Unlike the vagina, the rectum does not produce its own lubrication.

Ten Reasons to Have Anal Sex

1. Anal penetration feels fabulous!
2. Relaxation. Many of us hold tension in the anal area. Anal penetration provides a great way to get a massage—from the inside.
3. Anal penetration can help heal and even prevent hemorrhoids.³
4. You can make friends with a part of your body you've been taught (at best) to ignore.
5. You can have it all. On your knees, with your partner penetrating you anally from behind, you can press a vibrator to your clit, reach your fingers inside your vagina, stimulate your G-spot, and even feel your partner's fingers, dildo, or hand through the thin wall of tissue separating your vagina from your rectum.
6. Anal penetration can provide indirect G-spot and clitoral stimulation.
7. You can have mind-blowing orgasms.
8. Because anal penetration is associated so strongly with stereotypes about gender and power, it's great for playing out many fantasies. You can be a submissive girl being taken by her dominant lover. With dildos and harnesses, you can pretend you're gay boys in the backroom of a bar.
9. You can feel terribly naughty! Nothing like breaking a taboo to make you feel deliciously bold.
10. Anal penetration can create a sense of vulnerability and surrender. You can feel utterly taken. You can give it up in a big way.

The lining of the anus and rectum is very delicate and will tear easily—

reasons to be extremely careful in choosing insertive anal toys and to tend to your manicure.

In biological males, the prostate gland, which is located on the front wall of the rectum, several inches in from the opening, can respond to stimulation similarly to the G-spot. If you play with a male-to-female transsexual (MTF), remember that she *has* a prostate gland. Ask her whether or not she finds prostate stimulation pleasurable.

Basic Preparations

I like giving myself an enema with a red rubber bottle and hose, but it must be private. I love the way it feels when the warm water goes inside me.

Here are some suggestions for preparing for anal penetration:

- *Get a manicure.* Even if your ultimate goal is to penetrate your partner with a dildo, you'll most likely start with your hands. Trim your nails as closely as possible. File your nails until they feel smooth against the skin of your face. Remove hangnails. Use lotion to soften your cuticles. (If you want to keep your nails long, slip cotton balls over your nails before you put on a glove.)
- *Wear a glove.* Even if you and your partner are fluid-bonded, wearing a glove will enhance anal sex. Why? The glove will protect your partner from your nails and will provide a super-smooth surface.
- *Eat sensibly.* Make sure your diet includes plenty of fiber and whole foods. Avoid sesame seeds and strawberries—or any foods containing nuts or small seeds, which will scrape rectal tissue.

Anal penetration combined with clitoral stimulation will make me come like a freight train!

- *Empty your bowels* before you play.
- *Bathe.* Soaking in a hot tub will relax you as well as render you deliciously clean and pink.
- *Give yourself an enema.* Some people prefer to have an enema before anal penetration. Fisting experts recommend enemas before deep anal play. You'll find detailed information on enemas in Tristan Taormino's *The*

Ultimate Guide to Anal Sex for Women. Here are some enema basics: You can find enema kits, bulb syringes, and enema bags in any pharmacy, and nozzles that attach to your showerhead in mail-order catalogs (see the resources chapter). For the novice, the simplest method will be to purchase a prepared enema kit, such as Fleet, empty out the solution, and rinse well. Commercial enema preparations contain laxatives and harsh chemicals that can irritate your rectum. Plain, filtered water heated to 100° F is the best choice. Gently squeeze the warm water into your rectum until you feel full. Wait a few minutes and evacuate the water and any feces in your bowels. Repeat until the water you expel is clean. Have your enema several hours prior to sex. Do not have an enema after sex. Frequent enemas can wash mucosa out of your rectum; do not do this daily. Never add stimulants like coffee or alcohol to enemas—you could become very ill. Never share enema equipment.

- *Relax!* Both the insertive and receptive partner need to be relaxed for successful anal penetration. Bathe together. Kiss and touch. Trade massages. Talk to each other. Share your anal sex fantasies. Feed your desire for anal play with each other.

I had the pleasure of introducing my girlfriend to her first anal experience. I tried to do it in the way that I would like to have had it done. I spooned her from the back, kissing her neck and rubbing whatever my hands could reach. After whispering in her ear what I was about to do to her, I began massaging her butt, working my way to her anus. I put plenty of lube on one finger of a gloved hand. I played with the outside for several minutes, all the while kissing her neck and talking to her. I asked her how it felt and whether I should continue. Finally, I inserted the tip of the finger. She was relaxed, not tense, no sharp intake of breath. I increased the penetration until I got about half of my finger in. We decided that that was enough. Since that time, almost two years ago, she has become more adventuresome, taking in whole fingers or a cute pink plug.



Illustration 12. Anal Finger-Fucking

Finger-Fucking

Your fingers are perfect tools for anal play—they're communicative, sensitive, and agile. As with vaginal penetration, you can use your fingers as a prelude to penetration with a dildo or hand, or as the main event.

Begin with your partner lying on her belly, with her legs open and her hips propped up on a pillow, or on her back with legs spread and a pillow under her butt. Slip on a latex glove and put some lube on your finger. Spread your partner's asscheeks. With the palm of your hand facing up, run your lubed finger over the opening. Caress the anus with the pad of your finger; don't poke into the anus. Circle the opening slowly and then more quickly; and then run your finger across the opening. Watch her responses. Ask her what each stroke feels like. Build up a rhythm of touches and responses.

As the receptive partner, you are in charge. You can tell your partner exactly which touches you like and which you don't. You can ask her to slow down, to touch you with more or less pressure, or to add more lube to her finger. You may feel shy talking about your butt while a finger is stroking you. Or you may find it difficult to put words to such subtle physical sensations. Here's an opportunity to build up a vocabulary for anal sex. Soon you'll be telling your partner exactly how to stimulate your butt!

The insertive partner can put that information to good use. When the receptive partner indicates that a particular stroke is unpleasant—not enough lube, too hard, too scratchy—the insertive partner can watch for corresponding physical responses. Can you notice tension in the opening of your partner's anus? Has her anus closed? Are the muscles in her ass and thighs contracting? Do you notice a change in her breathing?

Similarly, when your partner is cooing with pleasure, notice how that translates into physical response. Can you notice her muscles relaxing? Has her anus opened? Is it contracting or pulsing with engorgement? Has the color of her anus deepened as blood fills the tissues? How's her breathing? What sounds is she making? Can you bring her to moans by gently caressing the anal opening with the pad of your finger?

You can ask her to instruct you in exactly how to enter her. She may say, “Just the tip of your finger, please” or “Slide your finger in very slowly.”

Draw your fingertip along the crack of her ass until the pad of your finger lies across her anal opening. Slip the pad of your finger into her. Enter her until just the tip of your finger is inside. Stay still until she adjusts to the pressure and fullness. As her internal sphincter muscle relaxes, her anus will seem roomier. Wait for her to tell you to insert more of your finger or to move inside her. She may like a subtle pulsing or fluttering of your fingertip; or she may prefer a subtle in-and-out motion.

When she’s ready, push your finger in a little further—perhaps to the second knuckle. Again, stop and give her a chance to adjust to the sensations. Then push your finger all the way in. As necessary, pull your finger out and add more lube. Reenter slowly.

What if it hurts? If your partner feels pain, *stop*. Anal sex is not supposed to be painful. Pull out, lube up your finger, and start over. Caress the outside of the anus. Ask her to tell you when she’d like you to enter her again. Go slowly. But don’t fill her as deeply—stop before you reach the point at which she felt pain. At each step of the way, let the receptive partner take the lead. As with vaginal penetration, give her just a little less than she seems to want. Let her desire grow to engulf your finger.

Once your finger is inside, ask her what kind of movement she likes. Experiment. You can circle the walls of her anus or rectum, or you can press against the front wall of her anus, providing indirect stimulation of her vagina, clitoris, and G-spot. You can gently thrust in and out. Remember that as you add more fingers, more fullness, more pressure, or try new strokes, you may need more lube.

Anal finger-fucking is a slow build-up. She may want two or three fingers as her arousal increases. Or she may be satisfied with one. The first time you play anally, you may get no more than part of one finger inside her—that’s fine. The goal is quality, not quantity.

Some women reach orgasm easily with anal penetration. The mounting pleasure in those ultrasensitive nerve endings radiates into an intense orgasm. If you prefer indirect clitoral stimulation, you may enjoy two fingers pressing rhythmically against the front wall of the rectum. That may be enough stimulation for your clitoris and G-spot. Or, you may like direct clitoral

stimulation from fingers, a tongue, or a vibrator. You may like to be filled both vaginally and anally. Once you're fully aroused, you may like a hard thrusting motion—just remember to add plenty of lube.

Anal Fisting

Everything said about vaginal fisting applies tenfold to anal fisting, since the tissue of the rectum is less pliable and more easily torn than that of the vagina. Anal fisting requires patience, trust, and desire—and prodigious quantities of lube. Why would anyone want to put a whole hand into a partner's rectum—or feel her own anus and rectum stretched to receive a partner's hand? Like vaginal fisting, anal fisting is very intimate and intensely pleasurable.

Your anal fisting journey may begin one day when you feel sexually insatiable. Or, after a session of anal play, your partner may turn to you and say, “I felt so open, I swear I could've taken your whole hand.”

Isn't anal fisting dangerous? Won't fisting stretch you out? No, fisting will *strengthen* your sphincters, not harm them. As one fisting devotee put it, “Training a muscle to do new and sometimes extraordinary things generally doesn't interfere with its function.”⁴ Tales of fisting enthusiasts wearing diapers are pure urban myth.

Anal fisting is a great activity for women who enjoy a long, slow session of anal play. You can't rush anal fisting. It also helps not to be goal oriented. Never force the body to accommodate more than feels pleasurable at the time. If you don't get a whole fist inside on the first try, you may on the next. Even if you never take an entire hand, you can have a lot of fun in the process of trying!

As the receptive partner, you have to *want* your partner's hand inside you for your anus and rectum to open enough to receive it. You have to trust your partner not to hurt you—to know what she's doing—and to treat your openness and vulnerability with respect and caring.

Fisting her anally is a huge rush. I am filled with aggression, yet am tender in my attempts.

As the insertive partner, you have to slow your desire down to the pace of your partner's responses. You have to want to feel your partner from the inside

—badly enough to make an art of a practice few understand. You have to trust your partner to communicate at every step of the way.

As with all anal play, make sure your partner is aroused before you penetrate her. Begin with one or two fingers. Slowly increase the number of fingers until you have four fingers inserted up to the widest part of the hand. Add more lube frequently. As in vaginal fisting, when you meet resistance, pull back. Add lube. Resume, slowly. Your partner may like you to slide straight in or rotate your hand to twist your way in.



Illustration 13. Anal Fisting

When you're inside, up to your wrist, be still until your partner adjusts to the

intense sensations of fullness. She may want you to go no further, or she may ask for even deeper penetration. She may want you to gently rotate your hand, apply pressure on the front wall of the rectum, or thrust in and out—but by millimeters!

She may be too overwhelmed to even *think* of an orgasm—or she may feel an intense need to come and then have your hand out of her. You can stimulate her clitoris with your fingers, tongue, or a vibrator to bring her to orgasm. *Even if she demands that you remove your hand immediately, pull your hand gently and slowly out.*

Fisting is an overwhelmingly intense and vulnerable activity. Make sure you take time to care for each other afterward.

Strap-On Dildos

There's just something about being fucked in the ass with a dildo that really gets me hot. I like the way it make me feel vulnerable and open and used. Not politically correct lesbian stuff, I guess, but it's one of the best ways to make me orgasm.

Having a big, tough dyke pound her enormous cock into your butt is a great fantasy—but in reality, you'd do best to start with fingers, working up to a small butt plug, then perhaps a slender dildo, to a wider plug, and finally a sizable dildo.

You might want to purchase a strap-on dildo just for anal play—not only is that hygienic (see “Anal Penetration—Safely,” below), but you may find that though you like a thick, hefty dildo for vaginal play, you may be more comfortable with a long, slender dildo for anal play.

Receptive partner on top is a good position for anal sex with a strap-on dildo. The receptive partner can control the depth and speed of the thrusts. Rear entry can work well, too, if the insertive partner remains still as the receptive partner pushes back onto the dildo. The receptive partner stays in control, because the insertive partner doesn't have nerve endings in the tip of her dildo and the rectal tissue is easily torn. Remember that rectal tissue is much more delicate than vaginal tissue.

Tristan Taormino's

“Beyond Our Bodies: Emotional and Psychological Aspects of Anal Eroticism”

Our emotional, psychological, and spiritual well-being plays a major role in our erotic experiences, and our experiences of anal sexuality are no exception.

People have a lot of fears and negative feelings about anal eroticism. Some of them stem from our society's myths and taboos about anal sex. Myths about anal sex being unnatural, perverted, dirty, painful, and dangerous have become very real fears in people's minds. It is important to realize that we are all made aware of the anal taboo and myths starting in childhood and therefore we are all affected in some way by them.

As the Receptive Partner, What Are Your Fears?

- My lover will think I'm weird for wanting it.
- I'll get hemorrhoids.
- It will be messy, and my butt will smell bad.
- I'll get constipated or have diarrhea.
- It will hurt; something will get ruptured.
- It won't feel good—I won't like it.
- I won't be able to take her dildo.
- I'll get an STD or another disease.

As the Insertive Partner, What Are Your Fears?

- I'll hurt my partner or make her bleed.
- It will be dirty, and I'll get shit on me.
- I won't do it right.
- I won't like it.
- My lover will think I'm weird for wanting it.
- I'll get an STD or another disease.

While most of these fears have their roots in myths and

misconceptions about anal sex, it is important to respect and validate your partner when she shares her fears. Reassure each other that either one of you can stop activity at any time and be fully supported by the other one. Set concrete ground rules and boundaries about what is OK and what isn't; as experiences progress, the boundaries can change if needed. Each person needs to know that she will be safe from both pain and disease during anal sex and that there is mutual trust and respect.

Fear and tension that are not articulated and resolved will ultimately be felt in your anus, which will be tense and unwilling. Nina Hartley reminds us, "Of all the parts of your body, nothing knows a liar like your anus. So if your mind is saying 'Yes! Yes!' and your heart is saying 'No! No!' your anus will always listen to your heart." [5](#)

Having an open, honest discussion can help illuminate what each person wants from the experience and why, so that both people are less likely to make incorrect assumptions about the other person's desires and expectations. You can ask each other, What do you want? What do you expect? What are your needs and desires?

- I want to work my way up to one finger, then stop.
- I want to be able to have the small dildo in my butt.
- I want everything to feel safe.

What have your previous experiences been with anal eroticism? Share them, discuss them. Why do you want to explore anal sensuality?

- I want to explore something new with my partner.
- I'm curious about what it feels like.
- I've done it before and want to do it again.
- You want to do it and I don't want to say no to you.
- I want to feel closer to my lover.
- It's something special and intimate and something I want to share with my partner.
- I saw it in a porn movie, it turned me on, and I want to try it.
- It's always been a fantasy of mine.

Fantasies can be incredibly powerful forces in our lives, erotic and

otherwise. Many people fantasize about erotic activities like anal sex but are afraid to vocalize their desires. The myths and misinformation about anal sex contribute to the silence and sometimes prevent us from satisfying our curiosities. Sharing our sexual fantasies with a partner can deepen a sexual relationship and help us communicate our needs and desires.

It is equally important to distinguish our fantasies from our realities. If your favorite masturbatory fantasy involves someone ramming your butt repeatedly with a swollen silicone dick that makes you come every time, don't be surprised if you don't get the same result when you try it out. There are some fantasies that we can share and help bring to life and others that should probably remain fantasies. Have realistic expectations for yourself and know the limits of your own body, especially when it comes to anal sex. One finger in your anus and a whisper in your ear about that big dick might just do the trick.

During the experience, talk to each other, find out what feels good and what doesn't, what's working and what's not.

- How does this feel?
- Would you like more or less movement?
- Do you want me to play with your pussy while I'm doing your ass?
- How is this position?
- That feels great—keep doing it.
- I love doing this to you.
- Do you want another finger now?

Afterward, have a little debriefing session to review how it went and get feedback you can use for next time. Remind each other about goals you set. Did I go too fast, did I use enough lube? Was there enough in-and-out movement, or do you want more of just that pressure feeling? What did you like about my fingers versus the butt plug? Is there something I can do differently next time? Do you want more genital stimulation while I'm playing with your butt?

Compliments always feel good—criticism does not. Be generous when you communicate with your partner. If you want to tell her or

him about something you didn't like, why not start that conversation with something you did like? But make sure you do talk about what wasn't pleasurable as well as what was pleasurable. Communication at all phases of an anal sex experience will ultimately enhance it, help both partners to articulate their needs, and, ideally, help everyone get what they want out of anal sex.



Illustration 14. Anal Penetration with Strap-On

How-To's of Anal Penetration

- As the receptive partner, you're in charge. Tell your partner exactly how you want to be penetrated.
- Use lube—lots of lube. You can warm the lube by running hot water over the bottle before you play.
- Snap on a glove and lube up just one finger. Build up slowly.
- Circle the anus, stroking just the opening; kiss and nibble her inner thighs and ass as you caress her anus.
- Tease her—give her less than she wants, and then a little more.
- Slide the pad of your finger inside. Don't poke!
- Press toward the front or back of the rectum, move in circles inside her, thrust in and out.
- Slide a butt plug inside your partner—then penetrate her vaginally or stimulate her clitoris. (Position the tip of the plug beside her anus and enter her at an angle. Do not poke the plug into her.)
- With your dildo or fingers inside your partner, caress her breasts and belly.
- Climb on top of your partner and slowly lower yourself onto her dildo.
- Slide a vibrating cock ring over your dildo and grind against your partner's butt.
- On your hands and knees, push back against your partner's fingers or dildo.
- Bring out the toys—add nipple clamps, bondage, and vibrators to anal sex.
- Slip the fingers of one hand inside your partner's vagina while the other hand penetrates her anus.

Positions for Anal Penetration

The only time I've had an orgasm with anal penetration was when I was on my knees and my partner inserted her finger into my anus and slowly moved it in and out while I held a vibrator on my clitoris.

Any position that works for vaginal penetration can be adapted for anal play. You can kneel or sit between your partner's legs—a great position for finger-fucking, fisting, or penetration with a handheld dildo. Receptive partner on top is particularly useful for anal sex with a strap-on because the receptive partner can easily control the depth, speed, and intensity of her thrusts. Missionary position is also fine for strap-on anal sex. Many anal sex aficionados prefer missionary

position in a sling to any other anal sex position. Side by side will work for more gentle and slow penetration.

Rear entry is a favorite position for anal finger-fucking, fisting, and strap-on sex. This position allows the receptive partner a lot of movement; if the insertive partner remains still, she can completely control the action.



Illustration 15. Anal Penetration with Butt Plug

Toys for Anal Penetration

Once again, lube tops the shopping list. When it comes to anal penetration, lubricant is the most important item in your toy chest. Unlike the vagina, the rectum is *not* self-lubricating. And the tissue of the rectum, while elastic, is

fragile and easily torn.

Many women switch to oil-based lubes, like Crisco, for anal play. Oil-based lubes do not evaporate as quickly as water-based lubes. They are thicker and more viscous and create a more slippery feel. Some find that mixing olive oil with their favorite thick water-based lube will make a slipperier concoction.

However, I encourage the use of water-based lubricant for two reasons: First, if, despite your best efforts, lube should drip from the anus into the vagina, the use of oil-based lube will make a bad situation worse. Not only will you get anal bacteria in your vagina, but the oil will help it stay there. Second, petroleum products break down latex, causing small perforations in condoms and gloves.

Can you use oil-based lube safely for anal penetration? Yes, but with care. First, take extra precautions to make sure lube doesn't drip from the anus into the vagina. Second, change your glove every 15 minutes. The oil will not degrade the latex in your glove in less than 15 minutes. Condoms, however, are much thinner than latex gloves; if you use oil-based lube with a latex condom, assume that you will have to disinfect the toy after use—since the oil will have made pinprick holes in the condom. If you really want to use an oil-based lube with your dildo, invest in polyurethane condoms. (*Never* use oil-based lube on a latex condom covering a penis—after coming in contact with petroleum in the lube, the condom will offer you no protection.)

Nitrile gloves—in addition to being useful for people with latex allergies—can be used safely with oil-based lube.

There are a few basic rules for choosing toys for anal penetration:

- The toy must have a flared base to prevent it from slipping inside your rectum and working its way into the colon. Anal beads must be securely fastened to their string and have a ring on the end to hold onto.
- The toy must have a smooth surface—no sharp edges or breakable parts.
- You must be able to clean the toy with antibacterial soap and hot water.
- If you intend to use the toy to penetrate your partner deeply, it must be flexible enough to maneuver the curves of the rectum.

Many toys used for vaginal penetration, such as dildos and harnesses, work well for anal penetration. There are also toys designed specifically for anal play. Butt plugs are designed to stay inside the rectum. They take advantage of the sphincter muscles' tendency to grip around an object. Butt plugs range in size

from a few inches long and no thicker than your thumb to bigger than a fist. You can even find butt plugs shaped like star fruit. You can purchase a variety of vibrating butt plugs as well.

Anal beads are small balls attached to a string. During anal play, you insert the progressively larger orbs into your partner's rectum. When she's about to come, you pull them out. Traditionally, anal beads were made from cheap hard plastic and even had sharp seams that had to be filed down. Now you can find anal beads in a variety of materials, including silicone, which is much softer and more hygienic (you can boil silicone to clean it).

There are a number of vibrators designed for anal insertion, including a long, slender, curving vibrator with a flexible spine that allows it to retain any shape you bend it to.

Don't forget to start small! Buy the smaller butt plug; you can always move on to something larger later on. (See chapter 17, Sex Toys and Accoutrements, for more on penetrative toys.)

Anal Penetration—Safely

The number one safety rule for anal penetration is: *If it hurts, stop!* Don't engage in any activity that could possibly abrade the lining of the rectum. Don't continue any activity that causes bleeding.

Why would a lesbian need to wear a latex glove for anal sex? No semen, no problem—right? Wrong! If you have small cuts on your fingers, you could be infected by your partner's *E. coli* bacteria.⁶ Before you toss out the gloves, pour some vinegar over your hand. If you have any small cuts, you'll know!

Don't share toys without thoroughly cleaning them with disinfectant soap and hot water. Even if you use a condom on that dildo, clean it before you use it on yourself or another partner. Always clean toys after anal sex and before vaginal penetration, to prevent anal bacteria from getting inside your vagina. If possible, buy silicone toys, which you can clean by boiling for two or three minutes. Or, keep a set of "dedicated" anal toys.

Where to Learn More

You may find an anal sex workshop at a sex toy boutique near you. If not, check out instructional videos and DVDs on anal sex—see the resources section for videos and DVDs by Tristan Taormino, Shar Rednour, and Nina Hartley. Sex ed begins with masturbation; to explore solo anal eroticism, see Joseph Kramer’s *Anal Massage for Relaxation and Pleasure*—it’s all about boys, but we have rose-buds, too. I highly recommend Tristan Taormino’s Anal Advisor pages (see link below). In Q&A format, Tristan addresses over 100 topics specific to anal play.

When it comes to sexually explicit content, lesbians have a long history of borrowing from gay men. Perhaps by the time of the next edition of this book, there will be websites for lesbians who want to learn about anal fisting. For now, I highly recommend RedRight, a website that takes its name from the hanky code. A red hanky in the right back pocket indicates that one is a fisting “bottom” (receptive partner). See below.

Safer Anal Penetration

- Get a manicure. Make sure your nails are smoothly filed.
- Use latex, nitrile, or vinyl gloves.
- Put on a fresh glove when you switch activities or partners.
- Use water-based lube.
- Use condoms on your dildos. Always use a fresh condom when switching sexual activities or partners.
- Don’t share dildos and vibrators without cleaning between uses.
- Don’t allow bacteria from the anus to enter the vagina.

Suggested Web Links

REDRIGHT

www.winternet.com/~redright/redright.html

TRISTAN TAORMINO ANAL ADVISOR

www.puckerup.com/anal_advisor/anal.htm

SOURCE OF SIDEBAR

Tristan Taormino, "Beyond Our Bodies: Emotional and Psychological Aspects of Anal Eroticism," from *The Ultimate Guide to Anal Sex for Women* (Cleis Press, 1997).

chapter fourteen

Gender (Not Destiny)

Lesbian sex begins and ends with who I am as a woman.

GENDER IS SEXY. That lesbian in heels and hose is so unmistakably feminine and so aggressively erotic—and so unconditionally interested in her own sex. That butch exudes sexual confidence—standing with thumbs hooked in belt loops, flexing her thigh muscles to draw attention to the lump in her jeans. That ambiguously gendered person is at once hotly erotic and so startling as to be disturbing.

For some, gender is a plaything, the best sex toy in the play room. They enjoy cross-dressing and purposely mixing gender signifiers—femmes with dicks, butches in femme drag. For others, gender's a matter of style, a way of presenting oneself to the world. And for still others, words like *butch*, *femme*, *queer*, and *transgender* speak to a deeply held identity, one that can't be peeled off at the end of the night like a costume.

Whether a dildo is just a dildo is up to you, of course. How you relate to gender is personal—and no opinion of your gender matters but your own. You needn't locate yourself on a gender continuum of masculinity and femininity or label yourself at all unless that's useful for you.

Your gender identity can shift and change over the course of a lifetime. Or your gender identity may remain constant—but your acceptance of yourself, your capacity to be on the outside exactly who you are on the inside, may grow over the years.

What does gender have to do with lesbian sex? Think of your sex as your physical equipment, your *gender* as what you do with it, and your *sexual orientation* as the territory of your desire.

What Is Gender?

How do you know you're female? Are you female because you have a clitoris? Because your adult life has been marked by cycles of ovulation and menstruation? Because you were raised as a girl? Because you were forced to be female? Because you "feel" female?

Gender is more than anatomical sex; gender is how you relate to your biological sex. Your gender identity may or may not agree with your biological sex. For instance, you may have a woman's body and identify as male. You may experience your clitoris as a cock, your breasts as a chest.

You may have a woman's body and delight in your femininity—yet know to the core of your being that your experience of the feminine bears little resemblance to that of a heterosexual woman. The distinctions may be beyond words. Your queer gender may place you utterly beyond the realm of "male" and "female"—and even words like *lesbian* and *bisexual* may have become irrelevant for you. You may find all of the outward signals of gender irrelevant—your woman's body speaks for itself. You may view yourself as androgynous. Or you may prefer to skip the discussion entirely.

You may be anatomically male and identify as female. On you, a penis is your clitoris; a prostate, your G-spot. Regardless of how you're "read" on the street, you know you're female.

So, then, what makes a person female or male? Is it anatomy? Identity? Some combination of the two?

Gender roles can be defined by fashion (who wears the pants), economics (who gets the paycheck), and sexual roles (who's on top), as well as the particulars of culture and religion, history and class. (Remember when Rosie the Riveter was expected to morph into a Stepford Wife? "No more power tools for you, honey!")

You may try to "read" gender by observing secondary sex characteristics, such as facial structure and facial hair, fat and muscle distribution, body mass, vocal pitch, movement, and linguistic style.

You can determine "sex" anatomically by looking at the external genitalia. Historically, women were defined as nonmales: penis = male; no penis = female. You can look, instead, to reproductive biology: A female has ovaries, a male testes. You can examine hormones, defining a female as a person who produces more estrogen and progesterone than testosterone. You can look at genetics,

defining a female as a person with XX rather than XY chromosomes.

Male and female sexual anatomy is actually quite similar—we share the same bits of engorging erectile tissue and the same nerve endings. We're simply arranged differently. In the early stages of fetal development, there is no anatomical difference between male and female. The genitals begin to differentiate at about the eighth week.¹ Glans tissue develops into either the glans of the clitoris or the glans of the penis. Clitoral hood and foreskin develop from identical tissue, as do the labia and scrotum, the testes and ovaries, and the shaft of the penis and the shaft of the clitoris. It isn't until the fourth to fifth month of pregnancy that you can reliably detect a fetus's sex from an ultrasound procedure.

Intersexuality

But what if all gender characteristics aren't in alignment? In fact, according to the Intersex Society of North America (ISNA), one infant in 1,600 is born with something other than XX or XY chromosomes, and one infant in 2,000 is born with what medical professionals refers to as “ambiguous genitalia.”² Intersexed infants may have genitals that don't appear distinctly male or female. So who's to decide whether that genital appendage is a clitoris or a penis?

Unfortunately, medical authorities consider it their prerogative to make that decision. A baby's phallus must be a minimum of 1 inch long to be considered a penis; however, a clitoris must *not* be longer than $\frac{3}{8}$ of an inch. That leaves more than $\frac{1}{2}$ inch of what one writer calls “a veritable pubic Twilight Zone, the land of ambiguous genitalia.”³ What happens to the infant born with a phallus longer than $\frac{3}{8}$ of an inch but shorter than 1 inch?

The medical response to intersex conditions has been to intervene surgically—in some cases soon after birth and in other cases at puberty (when unexpected sexual development may occur). Most intersex infants are determined to be female: the overly large clitoris is surgically reduced to a “normal” size. As a result of such mutilation,⁴ many intersex women have reduced clitoral sensitivity, and some are unable to reach orgasm.

The rationale for early medical intervention is that what a child doesn't know

won't hurt her—which, of course, is anything but true. The real reason behind most surgery on intersexed children is discomfort with the idea that “male” and “female” might be something other than immutable categories.

Not surprisingly, human variation doesn't fit into those two neat little boxes. According to the ISNA, “Anatomic sex differentiation occurs on a male/female continuum.” [5](#)

Yet the medical approach to intersexuality is rooted in the idea that to function “successfully” in society, children must have a “fixed” gender identity from an early age. The child's genitals must “match the standard anatomy” for his or her gender. Boys must have penises, and girls must have vaginas “with no easily noticeable phallus.” [6](#)

Are intersex women lesbian? Bisexual? Heterosexual? Can you tell by looking at a person's genitals if she or he is intersexed? What pronouns do intersexed people prefer? All of this will vary from person to person. Ask.

I'm transgendered due to an intersex birth condition, a dyke, and femme by nature. Thank the Goddess we are more than the adjectives we and society use to identify us!

Transgender and Transsexual

Transgender is an umbrella term that includes all who don't feel that their designated sex (female or male) exactly matches their gender identity. This can include male-to-female transsexuals (MTF) and female-to-male transsexuals (FTM), along with transvestites, drag kings and drag queens, and butches and femmes who view their experience of being “female” as different from the dominant social construct.

Some people think of their gender on a continuum, so some butch lesbians may identify more strongly with female-to-male transsexuals than they do with women.

A *transsexual* is a person whose intent is to live as a gender other than that assigned at birth. Most transsexuals engage in some process of altering primary and secondary sexual characteristics, through hormone treatment or surgery or both. Some transsexuals live full-time in their chosen gender without any

alteration of physiology. They don't feel that they must alter their physical bodies to match conventional definitions of male and female. Others engage in hormone treatment without any intention of undergoing genital reconstructive surgery—because the surgery is very expensive and the results are often less than optimal. Transsexuals can be homosexual, bisexual, or heterosexual, and may identify as either butch or femme. They may wish to pass as just another man or just another woman—or they may identify as transsexual or “third gender.” Regardless, male-to-female transsexuals are women and female-to-male transsexuals are men.

Gender reassignment can affect sex drive. Many MTFs in transition experience a drop in sex drive when they begin taking estrogen, and many FTMs notice a sharp increase in sex drive when they begin taking testosterone. But the hormonally driven changes in libido are only half the story. Greeting the world as a newly formed person is no small challenge—remember puberty?

Male-to-Female Transsexuals

I am a woman who happened to be born male through no fault of her own.

Hormonal treatment for male-to-female transsexuals involves taking anti-androgen and estrogen, which results in a decreasing of male secondary sex characteristics and an increasing of female sexual characteristics: less body hair, less muscle mass, higher-pitched voice, growth of breasts, softening of the skin, rounding of the hips, and the development of a girlish tush!

Surgical techniques include upper-body surgery to enlarge breasts (though many MTFs find estrogen enhances their breasts quite adequately) and lower-body surgeries to reshape the male genitalia into a clitoris and vagina.

Lower-body surgery techniques include vaginoplasty and labioplasty. In one technique, the penis is inverted to create a vagina, which is then lined with skin from the penis and scrotum. So while the new vagina isn't self-lubricating, it is made of tissue that engorges with sexual arousal. Some surgeons utilize tissue from the glans of the penis to create a clitoris capable of sensation. They may also construct a cervix from the tissue of the glans of the penis.⁷

Some MTFs report that they have difficulty reaching orgasm once estrogen

and anti-androgens render their penis nonfunctional. They must learn to experience arousal and orgasm in an entirely new way.

When I transitioned, I became friends with a bisexual girl. Since the hormone regime I was taking meant that my male genitalia no longer functioned, she taught me to experience pleasure in other ways. I had my first female orgasm, and I've never looked back.

Female-to-Male Transsexuals

Becoming comfortable with my body has allowed me to enjoy sex more. I haven't physically changed my body yet, but knowing that I will has freed me somehow.

For female-to-male transsexuals, hormonal treatment involves taking testosterone, resulting in increased body hair and muscle mass, deepening of vocal pitch, loss of those curves, and, often, increased sex drive. Surgical techniques include upper-body surgery to reshape the chest and lower-body surgeries to reshape the female genitals into a penis and scrotum.

I love breasts and a dick on the same body.

Testosterone produces an enlarged clitoris for many FTMs. The clitoris can grow to as much as 3 inches long. Some FTMs further enhance the clitoris by pumping it up with a clit pump or a nipple pump. A 3-inch erect clitoris can be inserted into the slit in the base of a dildo designed to hold an egg vibrator.

Some FTMs experience a male sex drive distinct from their sense of their sexuality prior to using testosterone. They speak of an urgency to reach orgasm unlike anything they had previously known.

Upper-body surgery involves a double mastectomy and reshaping of the nipples to produce a flat, masculine chest. Some FTMs find that gender reassignment surgery rekindles an interest in nipple play. Once the physical shape of the chest fits their gender identity, they may find that where once they preferred to ignore their breasts, they now like their nipples tweaked, pinched, sucked, or bitten. Of course, interest in nipple play will vary from person to person.

Lower-body surgery techniques include vaginectomy, metaoidioplasty, and

phalloplasty. Vaginectomy is removal of the vagina. In metaoidioplasty, the testosterone-enhanced clitoris is surgically freed from the surrounding structure and the tissue of the labia is used to create a scrotal sac. Phalloplasty involves construction of a penis using skin grafts from other parts of the body. Some procedures involve implanting inflatable prostheses for erection. Some FTMs also opt for complete hysterectomies.⁸

Many female-to-male transsexuals don't opt for genital reconstruction and so, physiologically, remain female-bodied—though they'd hardly wish to be called “women.” These transgendered men have a testosterone-enhanced clitoris, facial and body hair, and increased musculature—but they also have a vagina, a G-spot, and a cervix. Many identify as queer, bisexual, or gay.

Partners of Transgendered Women and Men

“What pronouns should I use to address my transsexual friends?” “If I date a pre-op MTF, does that mean I'm bisexual?” “What if her driver's license says she's female?” “Can I bring my FTM partner to a women-only party?” “My lesbian friends are acting as if I'm a traitor. Help!”

When your lovers and friends begin the process of questioning gender identity, most likely you'll have a few questions of your own. Thankfully, significant others of transgendered people have begun to organize resources, including email discussion lists and support groups. Contact any of the transgender support organizations listed in the resources for more information—and check out the Web links at the end of this chapter.

So what pronouns should you use? The ones your transgendered partner requests of you, of course. Can you be sexual with a transgendered partner and identify as a lesbian? Some female partners of FTMs identify as bisexual or queer rather than lesbian—if nothing else, they feel it's supportive of a partner who no longer identifies as a woman and therefore can't be in a lesbian relationship. What you call yourself, however, is up to you. Sexual orientation is a personal matter. (See “Sexual Orientation,” below.)

A quick survey of women's BDSM organizations and email lists reveals many different ways of defining “woman-only” space: genetic women only; genetic and transsexual women; genetic women and transgendered women living full-

time (24/7) as women; those having XX chromosomes or living as women 24/7; lesbians and bisexual women; gender identity other than male; genetic females (irrespective of gender expression) and MTFs (irrespective of genital surgery); women and FTMs; and anyone who identifies as a woman.

Partners of FTMs and MTFs have much to say about gender dynamics:

When we first started dating, I asked him a few questions—but I was determined not to make him into my Educator on All Things Transsexual. I read books, went to seminars, and watched films on my own. I found it (although I understand the reasoning behind it) very difficult to learn more about who he was as a person, because he really didn't want to talk about his life as a woman. Since that comprised about 35 years of his life, that was leaving out a lot. I don't think it helps when a person thinks you won't think of him as his current gender if he tells you about life as the other. I remember finding out, by accident, what his former name was. He'd never told me. At the time, I felt very strange about it. I would stare at his picture and whisper the name over and over, trying to make it fit with the person I know now. It never did fit, and it took me a little while to realize why not. It just wasn't him, and really it never had been. It didn't change my feelings about him as a man at all.

Most of the partners I've had in my adult life have been on the brink of wanting to make some move towards transition. At times it has halted their ability to be sexual with me and other times it has allowed us new places to go in our sex lives.

I enjoy touching his enlarged clitoris because it makes him feel like he has a huge penis, especially when I talk dirty to him and tell him that he does.

The most femme dyke I ever slept with was an MTF transsexual. It was rough, though—I found that I spent a lot of time defending her.

We are conscious about terminology. Cock instead of clit. Chest instead

of breasts.

My current long-term primary partner identifies as FTM. I think this has had a role in my bisexual identity.

One of my current lovers is FTM. He's the first one I've ever been with. I can't say that it's changed my sex life, but being in public is a trip! I haven't been out with a guy in years, so it's funny to see how people read us when we're out.

Well, I had to learn what it was like to touch an enlarged clit. I had to think a lot about my sexual identity (which happens to be queer). I had to think about how I could manage to not "out" my trans lover and not be read as straight. I had to learn to not gender a body as female because the person I was fucking had breasts and a cunt. After about a month, I could play with my partner's nipples and clit and think of him only as a boy.

I really enjoy boy-on-boy sex with women/genderqueer/transpeople—this is partly about stimulating the mind as much as the body—the attitude and roles involved—and partly about my sexuality/gender identity.

I like to be "daddy." I like to be in charge, in control. It's fun because I'm 5'2" and my MTF partner is 6'2" but somehow I'm so much bigger and taller than her sexually. I'm a generous lover. I get off by her giving me head, by fucking her anally, and by fucking her vaginally. Though she doesn't technically have a vagina, when we are having sex, she does. And it's as real to both of us as my dick is to both of us.

I feel more comfortable now with calling myself queer or pansexual as I am not solely attracted to women but to women, genderqueers, transmen,

and sometimes even men. I have come to an understanding that it isn't gender that matters to me but the actual person I fall in love with.

Sexual Orientation

Are you a lesbian because you desire women—or because you don't desire men? Are you bisexual if you fantasize about having sex with men? If you *have* sex with men? Many of us are familiar with the Kinsey scale, which offers a way of looking at sexual orientation on a 0-to-6 scale, with 0 representing exclusively heterosexual behavior, 6 representing exclusively homosexual behavior, and 3 representing bisexual behavior. Forward-thinking though he was at the time, Alfred Kinsey devised this continuum in 1948.

Kinsey was looking at his respondents' behavior. Sexual orientation is, of course, far more complex than which sex acts you perform with which partners. Whom do you desire? Who stirs your fantasies? Whom do you love? For instance, on the Kinsey scale, a lesbian who comes out in midlife after 20 years of heterosexual marriage would probably rank somewhere between heterosexual and bisexual—even though she longed for sex with women for many of those 20 years, rarely enjoyed sex with her husband, delights in her new sex life, and intends never to have sex with a man again.

Playing with the Boys

Imagine for a moment two women with identical sexual histories. One calls herself a lesbian, the other a bisexual. How is this possible? Sexual orientation is a matter of self-identification—labels others may toss onto you have little bearing on your realities. For some women, being bisexual means that they enjoy sex with both men and women equally. For others, it means that they feel they have the potential to fall in love with a person of either gender. Some women are sexual with both men and women for their entire lives without labeling themselves at all. You may have sex with men, yet feel that the term *lesbian* best describes who you are and whom you most desire.

Many women enjoy sex with partners who are as queer as they are. Your

preferences may run to gay and bisexual men, or to transsexuals of all genders and in all stages of transition. The sex you have with men and women may be qualitatively very different. For instance, you may enjoy strapping on a dildo to penetrate a male partner, but enjoy being penetrated by your woman lover—or vice versa. You may enjoy nearly identical sex acts with partners of either sex. The sexual activities, roles, or styles you like may vary from person to person and have nothing to do with gender at all.

Perhaps you prefer to be sexual with women whose sexual orientation matches your own. What if you're a lesbian who wants to have sex exclusively with women who also have sex exclusively with women? That's fine. State your preferences without apology—but remember, yours is a preference, *not* a moral standard.

Aspects of my erotic life with men get incorporated into my sex with women—I am unable to separate the two.

Butch/Femme

Many lesbians and bisexual women find that the dynamics of butch/femme attraction intensifies sex. The gender contrast between two women sparks a *frisson* that's very exciting. Some butches prefer “high” femmes as partners—whether they be powerful femmes fatales or cherished submissives. Some femmes prefer transgendered butches as partners, appreciating such a high degree of masculinity in someone who wasn't born and raised male.

The terms *butch* and *femme* may describe your gender identity as much as your sexuality. For you, butch/femme is not just about romance and fashion—or, for that matter, who's on top. After all, a femme is a femme—whether or not there is a butch in the vicinity. Her gender identity is her own, requiring no validation from her complement. Similarly, a butch is a butch regardless of whether a femme takes her arm.

What butch/femme sexuality means varies from person to person. Butches and femmes come in all genders and sexual orientations. You may enjoy butch-on-butth sex or femme-to-femme sex. You may find that you enjoy playing with gender signifiers—like hair, clothing, sexual apparatus, and roles—without adopting a full-time butch or femme identity. You don't have to fit a certain

body type or personality style to identify as butch or femme. You needn't wear makeup to be femme or change the oil in your truck to be butch—or adhere to any other gender stereotypes you may have spent years trying to escape. Think of butch/femme as a way of looking at how gender shows up in your life. Butch/femme is a potent sexual dynamic. It's *yours* to create.

From packing and penetration to passing, lesbians have much to say about butch/femme sexual dynamics.

I like it when butches pack. It shows me they're forward-thinking and well-prepared. Good form!

There is something so sexy when the female gender is mixed with that masculine finish. A butch woman makes me swoon.

I love the exchange of power that goes back and forth from butch to femme. As a butch, I protect my femme partner from harm and am dominant in sex. Yet, at the same time, I am a willing servant to my femme's desires, putting her needs and wishes before mine.

When I walk, my hips swish and my breasts bounce and my thighs roll with the fluidity that is my femininity.

High femme is not an everyday thing. But when I go out to cruise or party, it borders on the drag-que enly. This excites me—and attracts butches with balls!

While I am very pleased to be a woman, my body is read as a heterosexual one because of the way I live in it, move in it, and adorn it. I don't like that. But it's the femme conundrum.

I am a transgendered stone butch and it is crucial that my lover respect my body image. I have a female body but like to be touched in a way that honors my masculinity.

I prefer for my butch to “run the fuck.” I love the feeling of lying in my lover’s arms as she ravishes me! It thrills me to see the love and lust in her eyes as she makes love to me.

Sometimes, when my femme has orgasmed many, many times, I lie with my head down by her cunt and use a vibrator, imagining it as my dick. Both of us find this very hot and I have powerful orgasms this way.

I adore only feminine women—and men, for that matter!

I am sassy and willful and not easy to “take down” sexually. I need the authority, confidence, and uncompromising identity of a stone butch. Being a stone femme means that I do not want a sex partner who expects a 50/50 sexual relationship (she gets me off and then I get her off). If a butch softens when she’s with me and lets me touch her genitals and breasts without resignifying them as male parts, then I most likely would not want to be with that person sexually again.

Ten Myths About Butch/Femme

- 1. All bi girls are femme. Not so. Some very hot, tough butches identify as bisexual.*
- 2. Butches are stronger than femmes. Masculine = strong; feminine = weak. Butch = top; femme = bottom. If you believe this, go straight to your room and don’t come out until you have read Simone de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex*.*
- 3. Butches don’t cry. See #2. ’Nuff said.*
- 4. You have to locate yourself somewhere on the butch/femme continuum. Femmy butch. Butchy femme. Tomboy. Boychick. Butch. Femme. Nope! You’re not required to label yourself. And if you identify one way now, that may not be your lifelong identity. Gender can change over time.*
- 5. Real butches don’t get penetrated. Well, maybe in the ass. But*

if you eroticize your female genitals, you're not really butch. No way. Many butches enjoy vaginal penetration—with fingers, dildos, and fists. And, while we're on the subject, not all femmes like penetrative sex. And some butches love it.

6. *Femmes don't wear power tools.* Some femmes strap on a dildo and love to penetrate their lovers. What could be more sexually intriguing than a beautiful woman with a surprise under her skirt?
7. *All femmes wear lipstick. And heels, garters, and lacy lingerie.* Not necessarily so! Lots of women identify as femme without any interest in traditional girl gear. Femme is about sexuality and gender—not necessarily fashion.
8. *Butches are big and femmes are small.* Butches and femmes come in all shapes and sizes. Butches can have 40DD tits and femmes can wear training bras—or no bra at all!
9. *All butches play sports.* Not true. Some butches play the piano. And some butches would rather go shopping than play football.
10. *All butches are attracted to femmes and vice versa.* Lots of butches prefer sex with other butches. And many femmes love femmes.

Suggested Web Links

BUTCH-FEMME.COM

www.butch-femme.com

THE INTERSEX SOCIETY OF NORTH AMERICA (ISNA)

www.isna.org

FTM INTERNATIONAL, INC.

www.ftmi.org

PARTNERS OF TRANSGENDER PEOPLE'S JOURNAL

www.livejournal.com/community/partners_of_tg

chapter fifteen

Play Nice! (...or Else)

I don't think all sex is about power, but playing with power in sex has taught me a lot about power in the "real" world.

DO YOU FANTASIZE ABOUT binding a partner's wrists and ankles to the bedposts? Do you thrill to the notion of being helplessly bound? Perhaps your fantasies feature sensory deprivation—facilitated by blindfolds, hoods, body bags, gags, or elaborate bondage. Your tastes may run to erotic torture, denying and permitting your partners' orgasms as you wish ("Ask me nicely." "Please!" "No. Ask me again...."). You may employ sensual implements such as feathers and fur-covered paddles—or wield implements more traditionally associated with "heavy" S/M play, such as whips, crops, and canes. Your body may show permanent markings from cutting or branding.

Sadomasochism, dominance and submission, edge play, power exchange, and sensual magic are all names for a kind of sex play that involves the consensual transfer of power between partners. People use the term *S/M* to refer to a wide range of sexuality whether or not it really involves sadism or masochism. *BDSM* is an umbrella term combining bondage, dominance and submission, and sadomasochism.

Not all BDSM play involves pain—some devotees play for years with nary a bruise. Their interests are in dominance and submission, sensory deprivation, and sensation play. You can be extremely sadistic without laying a hand on your partner. (What could be more sadistic?) And not all BDSM players engage in the role play of dominance and submission; some folks simply enjoy a good, hard whipping.

What Is BDSM?

B/D Bondage and Discipline

<p>D/S Dominance and Submission S/M Sadism and Masochism</p>
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What all BDSM players have in common, though, is that they use this edgy form of sexuality to push their comfort zone and discover something about themselves. They are investigating an area of human sexuality that may be scary and overwhelming in its intensity, yet can yield pleasures unattainable by other means. It's most certainly taboo.

Why would you choose to play with dominance and submission, sadism and masochism, sensory deprivation, or physical pain in the context of sex? Well, because kinky sex is hot, of course. Many women find that dancing between safety and danger turns them on.

Ouch!!! (Yum...)

Why would someone like pain? Isn't that sick? Not at all. The human nervous system has the capacity to process a huge range of sensations. Whether those sensations are experienced as pleasure or pain is a subjective matter.

Have you ever discovered "love bites" on your neck the morning after a particularly passionate night of sex—and wondered just when they occurred? You may find that when you're sexually aroused, you thrill to sensations that under other circumstance you'd find annoying or intolerable. When you're sufficiently turned on, a twist of the nipple or a bite on the inner thigh may, in fact, heighten your arousal.

The line separating pain and pleasure can get quite thin once your endorphins kick in. Endorphins are hormonelike chemicals released by your brain when the body is under stress or in pain. Runners speak of attaining a state of bliss when they push themselves beyond their perceived limits. You can get an endorphin high at the gym, during sex, or while energetically wielding a flogger in a long S/M scene. And you can get an endorphin high while experiencing pain.

Like opiates, endorphins don't make the pain go away, but they make you feel awfully good while it's happening. Under the right circumstances, you may be able to ride wave after wave of pain, breathing into the sensations as they radiate

through your body. In fact, you may astonish yourself by requesting another and another and another....

There's an eroticism to a rhythmic beating. The repetitive thud of a whip can translate directly into clitoral pulses....

What are the right circumstances for getting blissed-out on pain? Naturally, response to pain will vary from person to person. Here are some common ways to manipulate pain in BDSM play:

- *Warm up.* A gentle warm-up will help make your scene last. Begin your whipping—or spanking or paddling—with very light strokes, continuing until your partner's buttocks or shoulders show a nice warm glow. A sensual whipping—in which no single stroke of the lash exceeds your partner's perceived pain threshold—will leave her ready for something more intense.
- *Pacing.* Let your partner recover from one sensation before going on to the next. Intermittent hard beating, mixing sensual strokes with sharper strokes, will also help her take more pain and stretch her limits (if she so desires). After a painful blow, place the palm of your hand at the point of contact. Soothe the rising welt or mark with the warmth of your body.
- *Breathing.* As the receptive partner, breathe *into* the sensations; don't hold your breath or tense your muscles *against* the pain. Ride with it.
- *Sensation.* Some women prefer thud to sting—or vice versa. Different toys produce different sensations. Generally, the thinner the toy, the more stinging its sensations. So a wide paddle or heavy flogger will produce a “thuddier” sensation than a thin rod or single-tailed whip. Some women who love the deep pounding of a heavy whip seem to be able to take it forever; others prefer the discrete, searing lines of pain laid down by an expert caning.
- *Erotic context.* Many women find they can take more pain when the context is eroticized. You may find that a finger slowly stroking your clitoris will more than ameliorate the pain of that strap on your butt.
- *Discipline and reward.* In some scenes, pain is a reward for a good deed; in others, it's delivered as punishment for a mistake, real or imagined.
- *Submission.* Some women may find they can eroticize pain in the context of a dominance and submission scene. Simply put, they wish to please their top, and if the top enjoys administering a good beating, they aim to take it.

- *Masochism.* Finally, a masochist craves pain in the context of an S/M scene. Even when pain isn't accompanied by erotic touching, and regardless of whether she gives a hoot about pleasing her top or whether the pain is being administered as punishment or reward, she may simply desire pain's sensations.

Negotiation

As a top, I like to ask the bottom to pick the toys she likes best, plus one she would hate to feel. I love the physical act of flogging, the swing and rhythm of both bodies giving and receiving. Paddling as well, if only to have a woman on her knees or over my lap. I would have to say orgasm denial is my all-time favorite activity. The rewards are lovely.

Negotiating an S/M scene involves exploring each partner's desires, needs, limits, and safety concerns to find a common ground from which to proceed. The keys to negotiation are honesty and mutual respect.

Negotiation is *not* about persuasion. Negotiation is an art all its own. You can negotiate a specific scene or an entire relationship. You can negotiate at a café over coffee, over the phone, or via email. You can even stop a scene to renegotiate a particular aspect of play. Longstanding partners may negotiate a scene in five minutes, while new partners may spend weeks discussing the details of a proposed scene. In fact, the anticipation may be half the fun.

Ten Benefits of BDSM Play

1. Kink is hot! Many women enjoy intense orgasms after a prolonged session of S/M play.
2. You can dance between pleasure and pain and enjoy an endorphin high.
3. You can let go of control—or take control. Few of us have safe or consensual opportunities in the daily grind to give up or take control.
4. You can play with dynamics that wouldn't be safe or even desirable in "real" life. You wouldn't really want to rape your

girlfriend or be humiliated by your closest friends—yet playing with these may turn you on like nothing else.

5. You can take risks. For the thrill seeker, an S/M scene is like a three-hour roller coaster ride. Sure, you're strapped in, but nevertheless you are hurtling toward the earth in an open car! You'll not lack for thrills when you find yourself tied to a post in a basement dungeon as a hooded woman approaches wielding a long, thin whip....
6. You can surrender your fears and revel in that shadow side of yourself you've done so well to keep hidden. "I never knew I could be so mean." "I didn't know I would feel so, well, serene on my hands and knees polishing a pair of boots."
7. You can strip away the armor of daily life. "Pain and humiliation move me to a raw place where I can access my genuine self, without fear or hesitation," wrote one woman.
8. You can experience healing and catharsis in letting go and trusting yourself (and your partner) at such a core level.
9. You can experience heightened intimacy with your partner as you embark on an erotic adventure together.
10. You may discover a spiritual component in the transcendence of everyday concerns, the quest for self-transformation, and the ritual of an S/M scene.

Many women say they learned more about healthy boundaries from S/M negotiation than from any support group or self-help book. Negotiating an S/M scene puts in stark relief the kind of self-denial that often masquerades as "politeness." To negotiate an S/M scene, you must know what you want and be willing to name it. You're expected to state your desires in detail and without justification, and to say no to anything you don't want—no explanation necessary. You're expected to take care of your wants and needs and let your partner take care of hers.

For many women, the open communication required in scene negotiation is a relief from the unspoken demands and contracts that can creep into many relationships ("If I do X for you, you'll do Y for me"). As one woman wrote, "I prefer to have my power exchange up front and out on the table."

So how *do* you negotiate a scene? Scene negotiation is best conducted between equals (that is, not in top/bottom roles) and outside of a sexual context. Everyone has a favorite method. You can pull out your Erotic Play list from chapter 2, Desire and Fantasy, and mark each item “yes,” “no,” or “maybe.” Your choices can be good for a day, for a month, or for one particular scene with one particular partner. You can begin by asking yourself (and your partner) a few basic questions:

What type of scene are you interested in? Do you fantasize elaborate role play with costumes and props—*Mutiny on the Bounty*? Or perhaps genteel torture in a Victorian boarding-school scene? Would you like to be tied to a whipping post and flogged in front of six of your friends?

What are your essential ingredients for a hot scene? Is bondage essential? An exquisite collection of S/M toys? What about orgasm? A woman who plays as a submissive bottom wrote, “I want to be fully recognized. I want to give myself up to someone else for the pure pleasure of having her be completely attentive to and conscious of me.”

What are your limits? Will you take a paddle? A cane? What about blood play? Is it OK to leave bruises? “I get off on seeing the marks I’ve left,” wrote one woman. “I’m impressed by the body’s reactions, the redness, swelling, and bruising. I like to admire my work the next day.”

What are the things you might like to try? “I fantasize about sensory deprivation, being blindfolded, gagged, and having my hands immobilized in thick rubber mitts,” wrote another.

Would you like to try play piercing? Over-the-knee spanking? Behaving like a brat?

What are the things you *don’t* want to try? No breaking the skin? No humiliation play? No resistance? No anal penetration?

What’s your safeword? (Remember: Tops need safewords, too.)

(See chapter 7, Communication and Finding Sex Partners, for more on communication skills.)

Creating the S/M Scene: Ritual and Theater

Much like a theatrical performance, an S/M scene has characters, a setting, and a beginning, middle, and end. (If you like, you can think of an S/M scene as having much the same framework as a classic three-act play.)

And, like a ritual or spiritual practice, an S/M scene may evoke meaning that's larger than the moment. Shining your Master's boots in the context of a dominance/submission scene will have a far greater meaning than polishing your wingtips alone at home.

What kind of scene do you wish to create? Will your scene involve pain and sensation play? Role play and costumes? Service? Resistance? Submission?



Illustration 16. Over-the-Knee Spanking

Who will be the participants? Generally, the top directs the action in the scene and the bottom receives the top's attentions or does the top's wishes. (I say "generally" because you can negotiate these roles to mean anything you wish.) While some women exclusively identify as a top or a bottom, most identify as "switches," alternating between roles. Do you want to be the top? Or the bottom?

What kind of top do you want to be? A slave Master or the Daddy of a disobedient child? Do you wish to inflict pain? Do you want to be obeyed? Worshipped? Resisted? Do you want to "force" yourself on your partner sexually? Do you want to embarrass or humiliate your partner? Do you want to dominate her?

What kind of bottom do you want to be? Do you want to be a slave or a pet? A brat? Do you wish to be controlled? Disciplined? Trained? Punished?

Where will your scene take place? In your bedroom? At a play party? How will your scene start? Many BDSM players use a ritual item, such as a locked collar, as a device for signaling the beginning and end of a scene. At the start of the scene, the collar goes on; at the end of the scene, out comes the key, the lock is snapped open, and the collar goes back in the toy chest.

Pushing the Emotional Edges

Many women opt for play that intentionally pushes their buttons—their psychological buttons, that is. An assault survivor may negotiate a rape scene—as either the victim or the rapist. A survivor of childhood sexual abuse may engage in Daddy/girl or Mommy/boy role play—as either the parent or the child. A woman who struggles with sexual shame may negotiate a scene in which she's "forced" to perform sexually in front of a group of strangers (who, of course, have consented to witness her "humiliation").

I like the loss of control. I like being in my top's hands and, in theory at least, not being able to get away.

Thank God this is anonymous. I've never admitted this to anyone, so please protect my privacy. Yes, I fantasize about rape with me being the "victim." This is difficult to express because I've always been such a strong advocate for women's rights. I'm strongly antiviolence and have

been in a domestic abuse situation, so I have a difficult time making sense out of my rape fantasy....

Why would anyone want to do such a thing as enact a rape scenario? Well, often things that make us uncomfortable also arouse us sexually—at times, it seems that the erotic charge is in direct proportion to the degree of unease we feel. Things that make us feel intense shame or anger can also evoke great sexual heat. Playing with emotional hot buttons is, well, hot.

I love being taken care of by my Daddy. I have a whole bunch of fantasies where I'm a little girl and am made to please Daddy.

Subjects that we keep under wraps—such as taboo fantasies and imagined complicities—may ignite an especially potent erotic charge. Do you feel guilty about having rape fantasies? Do you feel that your erotic response to your abuse history means you secretly wanted it? Not so! Sex is sex, and abuse is abuse. Sex is consensual, and abuse is not. If you're ever confused about this, compare a negotiated sexual encounter with an incident of abuse. The differences will be quite apparent. See “S/M Is Not Abuse (Abuse Is Not S/M),” below, for clarity.

In fact, the more you practice negotiation—whether for an S/M scene, a sexual encounter, or a trip to the Grand Canyon with your lover and her two kids—the more easily you'll recognize the difference between the negotiated consensuality of a mutually respectful relationship and the nonnegotiated manipulation and coercion of abuse. Still confused? Try concocting a (non)erotic (non)play list of your abuse history. List everything that happened between you and your abuser. Now, write “yes” next to every item you desired and *explicitly negotiated to achieve*. What? Not writing yet? Of course not! Abuse has nothing in common with consensual sex.

Some women consciously choose to play with the dynamics of abandonment and abuse because they want to understand themselves. Hardly a substitute for a good therapist, yet an S/M partner can help you facilitate a scene in which you get a good look at yourself. What about that traumatic experience is yet unresolved? Where do you feel shame? Where do you feel pride?

You can even turn the story around. S/M can be a tool in healing. As Patrick Califia writes, “As a top, I find the old wounds and unappeased hunger. I nourish. I cleanse and close the wounds. I devise and mete out appropriate punishments for old, irrational ‘sins.’ I trip up the bottom, I see her as she is, and I forgive her and turn her on and make her come, despite her feelings of

unworthiness or self-hatred or fear.... A good scene doesn't end with orgasm—it ends with catharsis.” [1](#)

My girlfriend surprised me by planning a scene to fulfill my rape fantasy. It was a powerful experience because the concept of rape was twisted and turned into sexual play between two women who trust and care about each other. Being a rape survivor, I thought our rape scene might bring up some old issues, but it actually didn't at all. The scene was totally about us—my girlfriend and me.

S/M Is Not Abuse (Abuse Is Not S/M)

S/M play is consensual.	Abuse is not consensual.
S/M is negotiated ahead of time.	Abuse is not negotiated.
S/M has responsible limits and safety rules.	Abuse has no rules or limits and there are no safewords.
S/M is fun, erotic, and loving.	Abuse is manipulative, selfish, and hurtful.
S/M play is enjoyed by both partners.	Abuse victims do not enjoy abuse.
S/M play can be stopped by either partner at any time.	Abuse can't be stopped by the victim/survivor.
S/M players exchange power in agreed-upon roles with negotiated boundaries.	Abusers force control using nonconsensual manipulation and violence.
S/M creates a bond of trust.	Abuse destroys trust.

Teach Yourself Some New Tricks

A how-to guide to BDSM could fill volumes. (See the bibliography in chapter 19.) Here are some favorite techniques, tools, and tricks:

Bondage

Many novice tops discover the pleasure of restraint by tying a partner to the bedpost with their favorite silk scarf. Scarves, twine, and other thin ropes are handy—you probably have some around the house. But they're not the best choice for bondage gear. The knot in that silk scarf will get tighter and tighter with stress and may prove impossible to undo in a hurry. Thin rope or string can cut into the skin like a garrote. Even if the string doesn't pierce the skin, it can cut off the circulation or cause nerve damage.

Thick rope not only is safer, but it's sensual and easy to manipulate. Choose rope that's a minimum of $\frac{1}{4}$ inch thick. A rope that's $\frac{1}{2}$ inch thick will be even more sensuous. Be generous. Get a good long piece—25 to 50 feet. You'll find ropes in a variety of colors, thicknesses, and materials on spools at the hardware store. Good rope isn't cheap—prepare to pay at least 50 cents a foot for high-quality rope.

For those of us whose homes aren't equipped with a St. Andrew's cross—the larger-than-life wooden *X* that serves as the centerpiece of most dungeons—an ordinary chair will provide a fine bondage station. Seat your partner in the chair with her feet firmly planted on the floor. Begin by winding rope around her waist, binding her to the chair. If her arms are at her sides, you can include them in the bundle for a mummy effect. You can leave her breasts free by circling them in a figure eight as you wrap her torso. If her hands are placed in front of her, palms together, you can wind rope between and around her wrists in a figure eight. And if the back of the chair is low enough, you can bind her hands behind her back; make sure her shoulder joints aren't stressed. Wind rope around each leg, binding it to a leg of the chair.

If you double the rope, you can wind the doubled strand around and around, and then pull the ends through the loop in the middle. You can tie off the job with any easy-to-undo knot; if the knot is out of reach of your partner's hands,

she'll be pretty secure. Illustration 17 (below) shows an alternative arrangement. Seated rope bondage offers numerous possibilities—use your imagination.

Since your partner is seated, and her wrists and ankles aren't stressed, too tightly bound, or held in a difficult position, she can stay in this type of bondage comfortably for quite a while.

In some scenes, your goal may be to put the bottom in bondage that allows no movement, leaving her completely at your mercy. In other scenes, the point is to allow the bottom the feel of the ropes themselves. The sensuality of being bound can give her a feeling of being held, much like a corset. As you wind the rope around your partner's torso, tell her that the rope is an extension of you, that it's your desire that's holding her in place. That feeling of being held by her top can provide your partner a delicious feeling of security. Thus bound, she can "let go."

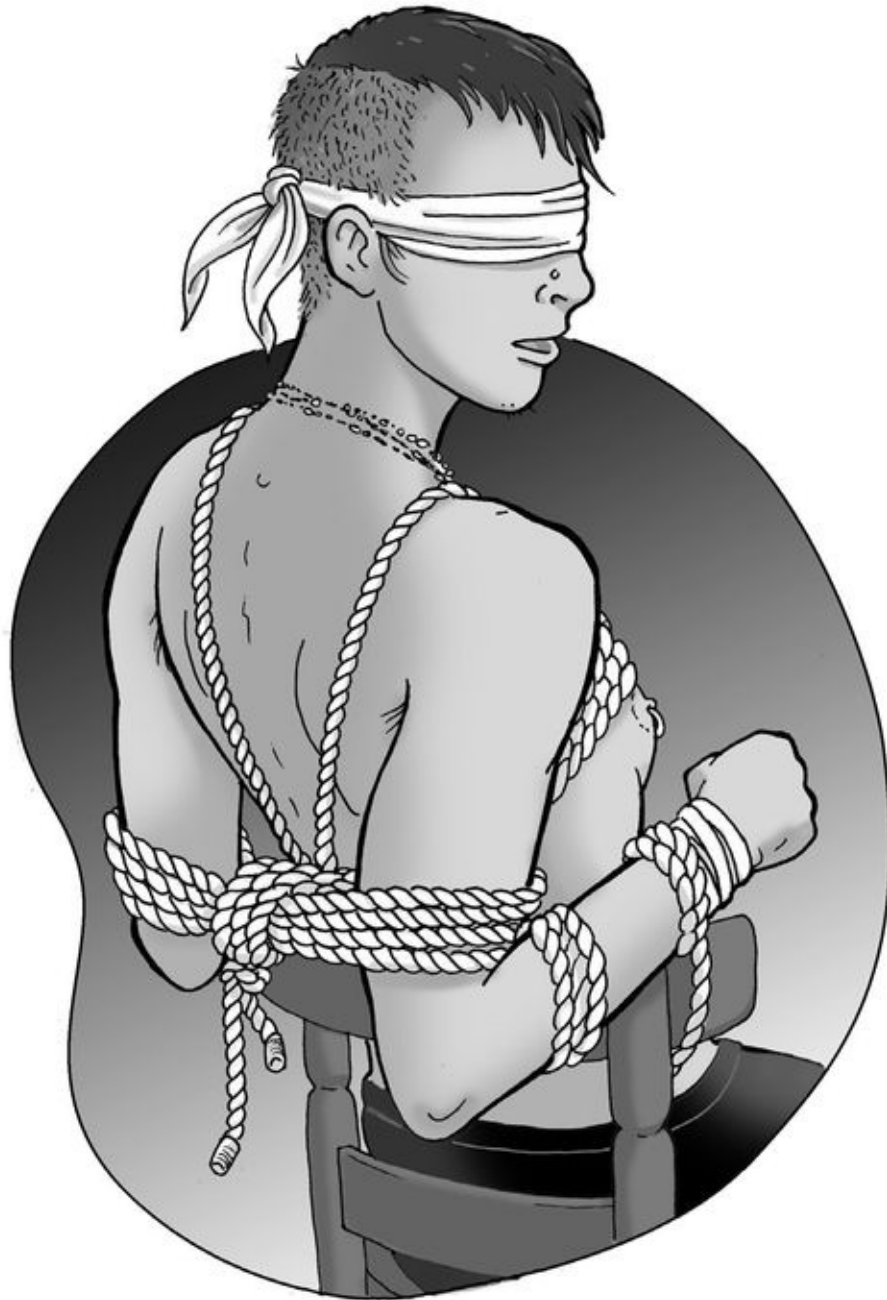


Illustration 17. Seated Rope Bondage

You can even use plastic wrap—rolls and rolls of colored wrap you’ll find in the supermarket—to bind your partner to a post, a chair, or a cross. You can wrap her entire torso, save for her pubic area—which you can then attend to with sublime torture. Keep the plastic wrap away from her nose and mouth. To avoid heat prostration, remove the wrappings after 30 minutes or so—depending, of

course, on the temperature of the room. On a very hot day, you'd do best to skip the plastic wrap entirely.

Conversely, the most challenging form of bondage for most bottoms is the bondage of will—no bindings, no rope, no lock and key. Simple obedience to a top's command—"Stand there and don't move!"—will stretch her capacity for submission. It's especially difficult to take a whipping or caning when held in place only by one's own desire to submit.

Restraints

Wrist and ankle restraints are often the first bondage gear we buy outside of a hardware store. You can buy fairly inexpensive wrist restraints made of cloth webbing and Velcro, or you can go upscale with beautifully crafted leather restraints. What's important is that the material be wide enough to avoid stress on the joints and that the restraints fit snugly and close securely—many are designed for use with padlocks. They all feature a ring through which you can loop rope or attach a chain. Many women prefer handcuffs—which evoke fantasies of law enforcement officers capturing escaped prisoners. If you're going to use handcuffs, buy a quality pair designed with a safety stop to lock them in at a comfortable point. Cheaper handcuffs tend to get tighter and tighter with stress. Don't lose the key!

A few basic rules for wrist and angle restraint: If restraints are too tight, blood circulation will be restricted. Check your partner's fingers and feet for numbness. Don't keep her hands above her head for longer than 30 minutes—she could faint. Don't allow your partner's weight to place stress on joints—wrist and angle restraints aren't suitable for suspension bondage.

Sensory Deprivation

Depriving someone of her senses creates mystery. With her eyes covered by a blindfold, your partner will listen to every creak and rustle to figure out where you are and what you're doing. Since she doesn't know whether you're picking out a soft deerskin flogger or a stinging cane, she can't anticipate the sensation—which will be more intense for being such a surprise. (Keep that in mind as you

get ready to whack her with that toy—a little will go a long way with a blindfolded partner.)

A gag will disable your partner's ability to communicate with words or even sound. Not being able to speak may make her feel especially helpless. Remember, of course, that in negotiating use of a gag, you must arrange a visual safeword. Will your partner be able to snap her fingers? Hold up one thumb? You must also make sure that the device you use as a gag will permit your partner to breathe easily and to swallow saliva without choking.

A hood combines the effects of a blindfold with a sense of being enveloped. A spandex body bag will extend that feeling to the entire body. Some women find the experience of wearing a hood and body bag very securing and even transcendent—alone in the dark with only your own internal awareness, your experience of yourself is greatly heightened. Yet some people find hoods and body bags terrifying. If you use one, make sure the hood is well ventilated. Again, don't forget to arrange for an appropriate method of communicating a safeword.

You can make a hood from cut-up pantyhose. Tie a scarf or blindfold around your partner's eyes and then slip the thigh of the pantyhose over her head. Double it over to make it thicker. You can cut a breathing hole.

Spanking

Often the first kind of erotic beating many women try is a good (or "bad") spanking. Spanking can be very erotic because the hand comes in direct contact with the buttocks. The heat and force of the hand send ripples of sensation throughout the pelvic area. With the bottom's pelvis firmly planted on the top's lap, the clitoris can grind against the knee with each downward stroke of the hand.

A spanking can feel very sensual, with gentle pats and caresses, or punishing, with hard-pounding strikes of the palm against flesh. A spanking can leave very personal marks—the outline of a hand on a loved one's ass.

Many women have strong emotional associations with spanking, as they may have been spanked as a child—many women have similarly strong associations with face slapping. "There is something very personal about being hit with an

open hand,” wrote one woman. “It accentuates the power dynamic.”

Paddling

A paddle is an easy tool to wield for a novice top. Paddles are easy to find and require less skill than other implements. You can buy fur-covered paddles, or paddles with fur on one side and leather on the other. You can find a hard wooden paddle, like the ones fraternity members use. You can even use a Ping-Pong paddle. Strike only the fleshy parts of the buttocks and upper thighs. Don't strike bone or joints. Find the “sweet” spot of the ass—that place where the upper thighs meet the buttocks.

Caning

Canes are thin rods made of rattan, plastic, or fiberglass. Many people are utterly terrified of canes—and with good reason. Canes can produce a menacing amount of pain and leave welts. A formal British caning lays “six of the best” in a mean row along the thighs and buttocks. The red lines sting in a particularly nasty way. Good caning skill takes practice. Yet because canes are so scary, they're effective in producing an emotional reaction as well as a physical one. Many bottoms who at first reluctantly bend over for the cane eventually admit that they love getting caned.

Whipping

Whips are sensuous and beautiful—and require a degree of skill. Whips are harder to control than your hand, a paddle, or a cane. There are many different kinds of whips, such as floggers, cat-o'-nine-tails, quirts, and signal whips, to name a few.

Floggers are multitailed whips. A flogger can be constructed from a variety of materials, including deerskin, cowhide, bull hide, elk and buffalo skin—or even heavy rubber. A flogging can be sensual and subtle or pounding, and a good, hard flogging can feel like deep-tissue massage. Cat-o'-nine-tails are just what they sound like—floggers made of nine braided strands. They have the weight of

a flogger, but the individual braided strands can do more damage than the individual strands of a flogger. Single-tailed whips, like 4-foot signal whips used to drive working dogs, require considerable skill to use safely.

Janette Heartwood, a well-respected whipmaker, has identified three aspects of whipping: accuracy, intensity, and connection.² Accuracy and intensity, she says, are “manual skills” that you can develop by practicing on inanimate objects, such as a pillow, a stuffed animal, or a padded leather bar stool.

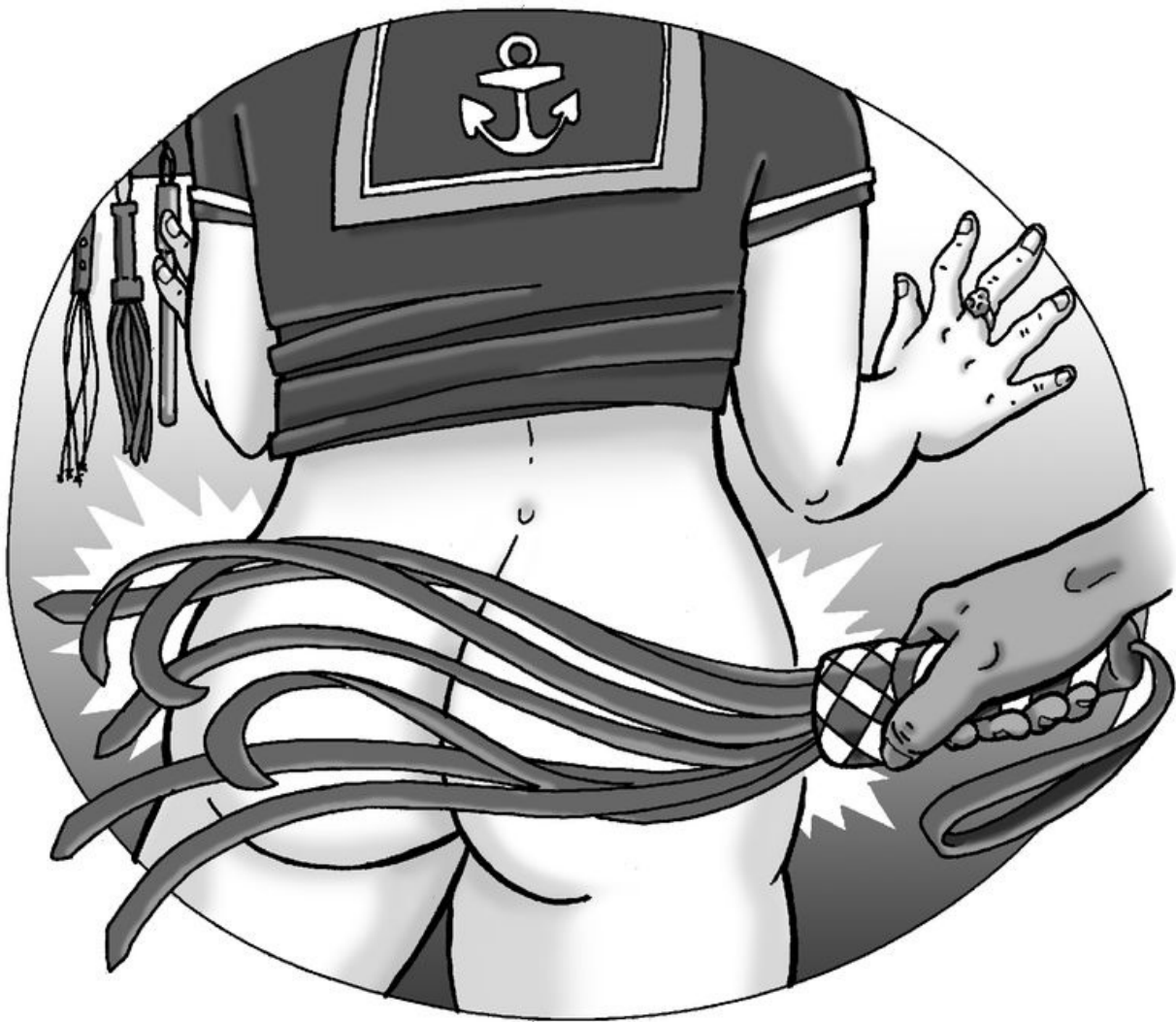


Illustration 18. Whipping

Accuracy is the ability to control a whip so that when the tails fly through the air, the tips land where you've chosen. “A whip should be visualized as an

extension of your arm,” she says. Floggers and cat-o’-nine-tails will wrap around the hip if you’re not careful in your aim. Since the ends of the whip are moving at a higher rate of speed than the midsection, your worst damage will be done where you least want it—the hip bone and the soft flesh of the lower belly. Practice with a pillow until you’re sure that you can aim the ends of the whip in exactly the spot you have selected—for instance, the upper back or the fleshiest part of the buttocks.

Do not whip joints. Do not whip areas of the body where bones lack the protection of fleshy padding—such as the tailbone, spine, and ribs. Do not whip the abdomen or kidneys. Keep the tails of the whip away from the face. You can whip the breasts and vulva *lightly*.

Heartwood defines *intensity* is the “severity” of sensation and the “cadence” with which it’s delivered.

How much of the flogger makes contact with the flesh will determine how thuddy or stinging the sensation is. If you get really good, you can send the ends of the whip whizzing by so that they barely brush the skin. This will result in a very stinging sensation. A dead-on whump of the heaviest part of the flogger will result in a heavy, thuddy sensation that many women find really satisfying, like a good, hard deep-muscle massage.

Connection, says Heartwood, is the “ethereal” aspect of the scene that draws on the top’s “empathy, centeredness, and creativity.” Connection is the ability to deliver a whipping that fulfills the needs of both the top and the bottom.

After a good, hard whipping, you can send your partner into orbit by lightly running your fingernails along her skin. The contrast can send her into fits of giggles as she begs you to stop. (“Stop! Don’t stop! *Stop!*”)

You can economize in many areas of your toy chest, but if you’re going to invest in a whip, select one from a whipmaker whose creations are respected among experienced S/M players. See the resources for suggestions.

Hanky Code

Do you flag left or right? A hanky worn in the left rear pocket identifies you as a top; a hanky worn in the right rear pocket identifies

you as a bottom. Hanky codes have a long history in the gay men’s community; like slang, the hanky code has evolved from generation to generation and from community to community. When it comes to sex, most hanky codes assume the top is the insertive partner and the bottom is the receptive one—but, of course, that’s a matter of negotiation.

Worn on the Left	Color	Worn on the Right
Heavy S/M top	Black	Heavy S/M bottom
Latex fetish top	Charcoal	Latex fetish bottom
Bondage top	Gray	Bondage bottom
Anal sex top	Dark blue	Anal sex bottom
Oral sex top	Light blue	Oral sex bottom
Light S/M top	Robin’s-egg blue	Light S/M bottom
Seeks menstruating partners	Maroon	Menstruating
Fist-fucking top	Red	Fist-fucking bottom
Shaving top	Red/white stripe	Shaving bottom
Tit torture top	Dark pink	Tit torture bottom
Strap-on top	Light pink	Strap-on bottom
“Anything goes” top	Orange	“Anything goes” bottom
Golden showers top	Yellow	Golden showers bottom

Piercing top	Purple	Piercing bottom
Likes drag queens	Lavender	Drag queen
Daddy	Hunter green	Seeks a Daddy
Uniform top	Olive drab	Uniform bottom
Spanking top	Fuchsia	Spanking bottom
Scat top	Brown	Scat bottom
Rimming top	Beige	Rimming bottom
Seeks novices	White	Novice
Victorian scene top	White lace	Victorian scene bottom
Voyeur	White velvet	Exhibitionist

Clamps

You restrict blood flow when you use clamps. They hurt when they go on, and hurt more when they come off, as the blood rushes back into the area that was constricted. You can experiment on yourself. Try attaching clothespins or small clips to the inside of your arm, sides of your breasts, or nipples.

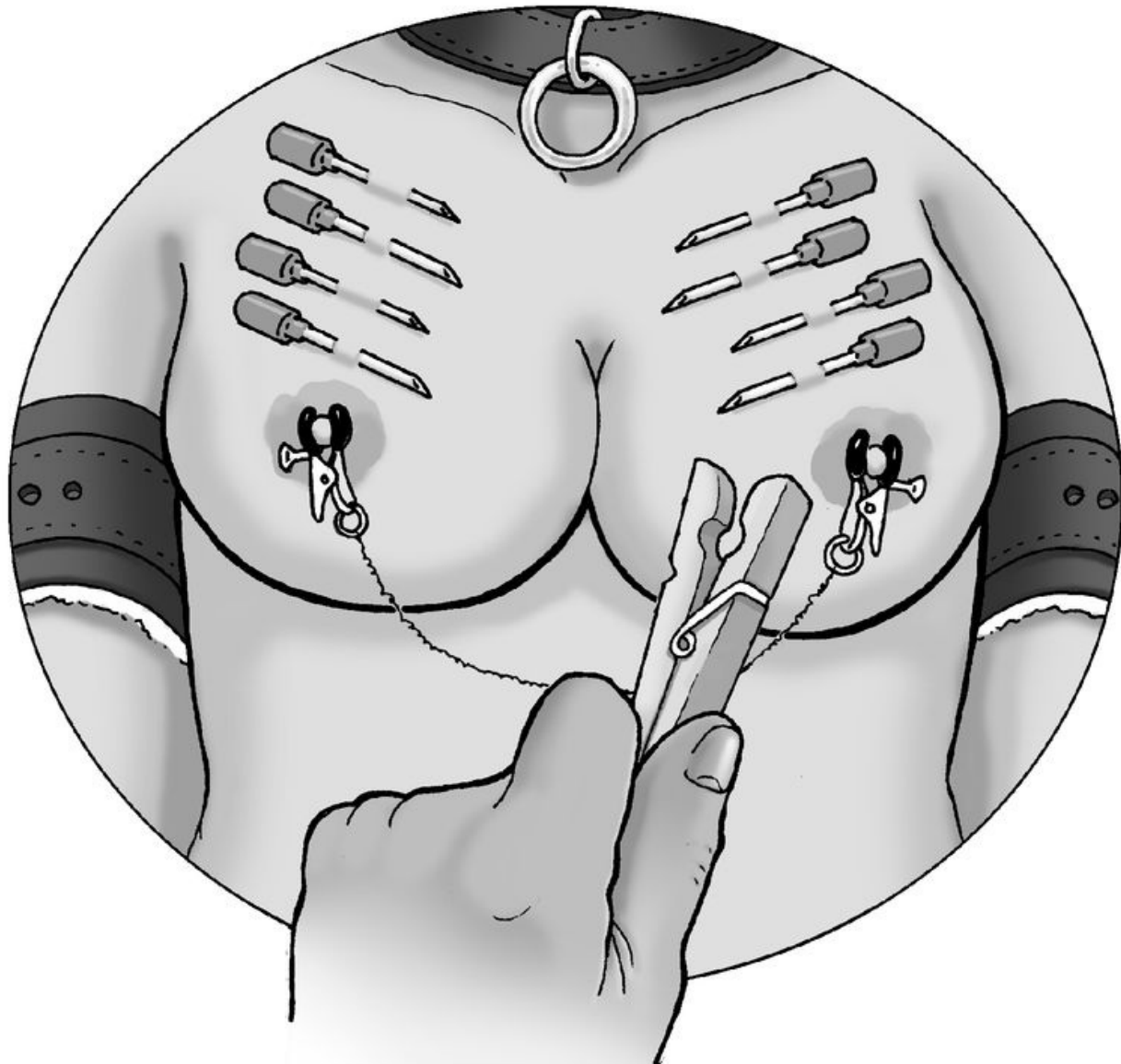


Illustration 19. Tit Play with Needles and Clamps

You can purchase several different types of nipple clamps (which can double as labia clamps): tweezer-style clamps, rubber covered alligator clamps (see Illustration 19), and Japanese clover-shaped clamps that get tighter when pulled. Clamps come in pairs linked by a thin chain. You can hang 1-ounce weights from the chain. Don't keep clamps on for more than 20 to 30 minutes, since restricting blood flow can damage tissue and nerves.

A zipper is an extremely nasty (or nice) toy made by stringing together ordinary wooden clothespins. Slide a piece of string through the metal hole in

the center of the clothespin and tie knots on either side so that the clothespin can't slide along the string. Repeat at 2-inch intervals until you have a dozen clothespins evenly spaced on the string. Attach the zipper by applying each clothespin to your partner's upper arms, thighs, or torso, and leave them on for about ten minutes. Then yank the string to "pull the zipper." Yowza.

Sensation Play

You can manipulate sensation in all sorts of clever ways. Two popular methods are to play with texture (feathers and fur mitts alternating with fingernails or neuro wheels) and temperature (Tiger Balm or hot wax alternating with ice cubes).

Common household candles are fine for wax play—in fact, they're preferred over beeswax, which melts at a much higher temperature. With your partner lying on her back, hold a lit candle several feet above her torso. Tilt the candle so that the hot wax drips down on her chest one drop at a time. The wax will sear as it meets her skin. The burning sensation will fade to a pleasant glow after a moment. You can intensify the sensation by holding the candle closer to her body.

What goes on must come off. You have to get all that melted wax off her skin, which can itself be fun. You can carefully pick individual bits of wax off her skin with the tip of a knife. The sensation of the knife barely scratching her skin as the pieces of wax are peeled away can be very intense on her already sensitive flesh.

Keep hot wax away from the face and genitals, and keep flames away from bedsheets.

Play Piercings

Many women are devoted to blood play, which may include temporary piercing with sterile needles and knife play with or without breaking the skin. Any opening of the skin opens a channel to the emotions as well. It's important to respect the potential for vulnerability in blood play, as well as to respect the need for sterile procedures. *These are advanced S/M techniques. Do not attempt play*

piercings or cuttings without instruction from an experienced player.

Many women enjoy the intensity and intimacy of temporary piercings. In play piercing, sterile hypodermic needles (ranging from 25 gauge to 16 gauge) are inserted under a layer of skin so thin that you may be able to see the needle through the skin's surface. (Never poke a needle into the flesh; slide it gently under the topmost layer of skin.)

You can pierce any fleshy area of the body, such as the breasts, chest, or upper arms. Unless you're a very experienced piercer, avoid areas dense with nerves, such as the face. In addition to sterile needles, you'll need latex gloves, alcohol wipes, and a proper container for disposing of used sharps.

Remember that any time the skin is opened, there's a possibility of infection. Clean the area with alcohol and wear gloves. Be careful not to stick yourself with a used needle. Don't reuse needles. Dispose of needles properly.

You'll find more information on play piercing in the Web link below. Do *not* attempt blood play without proper instruction.

“Home Despot”

You can create a dungeon at home with a little ingenuity—plus a trip to your local hardware store. (You'll never look at the store the same way again—and the folks in the logo aprons probably won't look at you the same either.)

You can attach eyebolts to the ceiling, the frame of a doorway, or other solid surface. Make sure you find a stud or crossbeam; the bolt will tear through plaster or Sheetrock the first time you play with a feisty bottom. You can attach lengths of chain to the eyebolts using panic snaps, and then secure the chain to wrist and ankle restraints. Panic snaps are clips designed to release easily—even with a person weighing them down. You'll find spools of chain of all gauges and colors at a good hardware store. Examine the links carefully; avoid chain that has sharp points where the links close. Generally, a heavier chain will be safer to use (it can't cut into a partner's skin), has smoother links, and will produce a much scarier effect. (Try blindfolding your partner before you attach her to the chains; let her listen to the chain clanking.)

While you're browsing for chain and eyebolts, check out the displays of rope, shackles, clips, clothespins, kitchen utensils, candles, and first aid and safety

supplies.

You can buy or make a sling, which you can hang from hooks in the ceiling or from a frame. See the resources chapter for vendors of S/M gear.

Make sure the room you intend to use as your dungeon has adequate lighting and is clean—particularly if you plan to engage in play piercing. You can install soundproofing insulation if you're worried about neighbors—or invest in a gag.

How Do You Know What You Want?

“Mostly, what I want to know is how do you know what you would like if you've never done it?” wrote one woman who expressed a fascination with BDSM—but had little actual experience. “How do you know whether to ask for a fiberglass cane, say, or a riding crop? Obviously, my perverted bottom child-self has had many fantasies about being hit—but I don't know that I pictured precisely with what. So, does one just say, ‘I'll let you know if I don't like it?’”

Faced with an endless list of possibilities, how do you know what you'll like? Or what you even want to try? Here are some suggestions:

- *Begin with fantasy.* What produces the most heat for you? What do you imagine when you close your eyes? “I fantasize having my hands bound—not so that I will be hurt, but so that I can't touch my lover. I love feeling desired and knowing that everything she does, she does completely of her own free will.”
- *Experiment with sensations on yourself.* From wooden spoons to clothespins, you've probably got an arsenal of implements of torture in your home.
- *Go shopping.* You can visit a leather S/M store and handle the toys. Which ones feel good in your hands? Or turn you on right there in the aisle? You can shop online as well. While you won't get a tactile sense of the potential of various toys, you'll get some impressive visuals. Some websites selling S/M gear show beautifully designed whips, crops, hoods, and other bondage devices.
- *Experiment with a friend*—outside of any scene or sexual context. Take turns paddling each other with that wooden spoon or swinging a belt against bare flesh.

- *Negotiate a scene.* Many experienced tops enjoy playing with novice bottoms. Why? It makes S/M new for them, too. Tops who play with novice bottoms have all sorts of tricks for helping their partners discover what works best for them. One popular method is to “calibrate” the bottom to each type of sensation. The top asks the bottom to assign each sensation a value on a 1-to-10 scale, with 1 being hardly perceptible and 10 being unbearable to the point of calling a safeword. The top then treats the bottom to a feast of sensations, from the lightest caress of a soft deerskin flogger to the most unforgiving whack of a wooden paddle. In this way, the bottom can discover what she likes in a very safe context. The top can discover how the bottom responds to the top’s particular style and decide whether she might want to explore further play.

“But won’t it be embarrassing to say my safeword? Won’t I look like a wuss if I can’t take it?” Not at all! Taking a lot of pain doesn’t make you a better bottom, nor does being able to push a partner to scarier edges make you a better top. Experienced players use their safewords all the time. Your ability to say your safeword as needed is what makes you a good bottom and a safe player. Likewise, a top’s ability to respond to your safeword is what makes her a safe partner.

“But I want to be a top. Isn’t a novice top a little, well, unconvincing?” Hardly! What makes you want to exert control over another person? When did you discover your desire to inflict pain? That urge to dominate is real; don’t doubt yourself. Many novice tops play with novice bottoms, discovering together their likes and dislikes. Others play with experienced players who are willing to teach from the bottom, so to speak. You may wish to enter into a mentoring relationship with an experienced top. (See the resources section to find a BDSM-oriented email discussion list or a local S/M organization.)

A Novice’s Story

My friend had just ended her relationship with her girlfriend, who was the only top she’d ever played with. She’d never participated in her local S/M community. She’d never played with anyone other than her ex-girlfriend and she was at a loss as to where to find partners.

So, she attended a workshop on negotiation at a local erotic boutique taught by a well-known BDSM professional. Emboldened by her new negotiation skills, she approached the teacher after the workshop and asked her if she ever worked with women clients. The Mistress was more than pleased by the idea of working with a woman client and offered my friend a reduced fee.

The Mistress offered a sliding scale of from \$150 to \$250—fees would be considerably higher now—for a two-to-three-hour scene, plus a 45-minute phone conversation in which they negotiated the scene. (A session with a professional dominatrix is not prostitution—since it does not involve the exchange of sex for money. “Sex” is usually defined as involving some form of direct genital contact.)

The day after the session, my friend was dancing in her seat at the café where we met for coffee. Her eyes sparkled with excitement and her face glowed. Soon after we sat down, she asked if I wanted to see the marks from her play piercing, and before I could say *Story of O* she had pulled down the neckline of her jersey to reveal the two little red dots where the needle had entered and then exited her chest.

My friend was three times a virgin: She had never been naked in front of a stranger (in an erotic context), she had never negotiated a “real” scene, and she had never paid for an erotic encounter.

As I admired her marks, she chattered on, telling me of the Mistress’s private dungeon, the whole wall just of multicolored and textured whips, and the rack to which she had been bound. Images and snippets of memory came tumbling out—the Mistress commanding her to select one whip she would like and one that frightened her; the elaborate rope bondage embracing her thighs, arms, and torso; the mixture of devotion and arousal the Mistress stirred in her; the tears that came finally as she released the grief over the loss of her lover/top. “At some point during the whipping, she let me suck her hand—and I was gone.”

Toys for BDSM Play

In your BDSM play you can use toys ranging from homemade and appropriated items (see “Home Despot,” above) to beautifully handcrafted leather and wooden implements. You can choose from whips, canes, crops, bondage furniture, hoods, restraints, and many, many other items. It’s not unusual for a well-equipped dungeon to boast thousands of dollars’ worth of toys and other devices.

So how can an ordinary girl play on a budget? For starters, check the resources for mail-order companies that offer inexpensive BDSM toys. Then, make some choices. Which toys must you have in your collection? Which can you improvise? Or borrow before you buy?

Canes and riding crops are relatively inexpensive. Impact toys like paddles and straps can be easily improvised with common household items. Of course, if you’re talented, you can learn to make your own toys.

That Sounds Dangerous!

Yes, there *is* danger in S/M play. You can’t restrict movement or stress the body without some risk. And if you also administer punishment, make demands for extreme levels of obedience and patience, concoct humiliating or embarrassing scenarios, or otherwise toy with a person’s emotional resilience, you’re playing the edge indeed.

Good players are safety conscious. They stand by the motto “Safe, sane, consensual.” Safety is supported by the use of safewords to stop play when necessary; sanity by the practice of playing when emotionally present (and not playing when inebriated or high); and consent by the practice of negotiation.

Any S/M top worth her leathers can tell you how to restrain your partner without restricting blood flow or causing nerve damage; precisely where on the human body you can and can’t safely aim your whip or paddle; and what emergency items to pack in your toy bag.

That same top can also tell you about emotional care—the importance of showering your partner with praise and tenderness, supporting her desires, nurturing her abilities, and respecting her limits.

Any experienced bottom can rattle off the key items on her Yes/No/Maybe list

—and tell you under exactly what circumstances she will use her safeword.

Yet S/M is not without risks. Physical accidents, unintended emotional harm, and the residue of intense vulnerability can leave either partner hurting. S/M players are dedicated to the play in spite of the risks.

BDSM Play—Safely

A guide to BDSM safety could fill the pages of this entire chapter. The bottom line is this: Do not pretend to expertise you do not have. *If you don't know how, don't do it!*

Here are some safety pointers:

- Make sure all your devices work and are of good enough quality to be safe.
- Never leave a person in bondage unattended.
- Watch for tingling in hands and feet or stress on joints.
- Use panic snaps so that you can release your partner quickly; release the feet before the arms so that she doesn't fall over. Keep bandage scissors on hand to cut through rope. Keep keys to handcuffs, restraints, and collars in your pocket.
- Do not whip bones or joints—see “Whipping,” above.
- Never play when under the influence of alcohol or drugs. Certainly, don't take any medication that dulls the senses.
- Provide for your partner's aftercare. Make sure juice or a high-protein snack is available. After an intense scene, the bottom may be shaky. Make sure she's kept warm. Don't leave her unattended.
- Create safety by playing at a party before playing privately. Dungeon monitors and other experienced players can help you learn how to do things safely.

Community adds yet another level of safety to S/M play. In a community, we're all accountable. BDSM players are known to their peers. You can find out if the people you admire consider that potential partner a safe, responsible player—*before* she's got you trussed up to her bedposts.

Where to Learn More

S/M and leather communities have a long tradition of mentoring novices. Many experienced S/M players love to pass on their knowledge. BDSM organizations, such as those listed in the resources, are great places to learn how to use a flogger, what you can do with hot wax, or the finer points of negotiation. You can watch demos of activities you may not even want to try—yet. Often workshops and educational events are open to nonmembers.

A number of BDSM professionals—educators, coaches, dominatrixes—offer workshops, classes, and private sessions. Some specialize in working with couples. While a session with a pro dom certainly can be erotically inspiring, it is not prostitution, which is defined as sex-for-pay. (Sex is defined as direct genital contact—news to sensualists and practitioners of erotic breathwork techniques.)

Fire Horse Productions, an educational project of “fetish diva” Midori, offers dozens of BDSM-related courses for both beginning and advanced students. Midori and her colleagues teach in a number of cities in the United States and Canada.

The Academy of SM Arts is the creation of Cléo Dubois, whose teaching style can be seen in her videos *The Pain Game* and *Tie Me Up!* Cléo offers women-only S/M intensives. These are four-day, hands-on workshops limited to eight women per course. Cléo also offers individual coaching and private classes for couples.

In the United States, there are a number of annual BDSM events which feature workshops, demos, and play parties. The BDSM Events Page (see Resources) lists many of these; others can be found in the Web links to women’s BDSM organizations.

You’ll find a number of guides in the bibliography that offer detailed information on techniques for BDSM play.

Suggested Web Links

THE ACADEMY OF SM ARTS

www.sm-arts.com

ALTSEX PAGES

www.altsex.org

FIRE HORSE PRODUCTIONS

www.fhp-inc.com/html/home.html

LEATHERDYKE

www.leatherdyke.com

Women-only online community run by leatherdykes, for leatherdykes.
Events bulletin board.

PLAY PIERCING

www.sexuality.org/1/bdsm/needle.html

SOURCE OF SIDEBAR

“S/M Is Not Abuse (Abuse Is Not S/M)” is reprinted with permission from a pamphlet published by AABL, now the Northwest Network of Bi, Trans, Lesbian and Gay Survivors of Abuse. (See chapter, 20, Resources.)

chapter sixteen

Play Parties and Public Sex

I really like to have public sex. It's the whole idea of doing something naughty and the possibility of getting caught.

MANY LESBIAN, BISEXUAL, AND QUEER WOMEN love sex in public. Does that mean they have sex in the backseats of cars, public bathrooms, or the park? Well, they might—though such scenarios carry serious risks, including the risk of assault or arrest. Public sex needn't be dangerous or illegal—nor must you involve bystanders as unwilling voyeurs to your scene. Celebrating sex in public doesn't necessarily mean that you get down with your girlfriend under the pool table at your local dyke bar. Public sex can include many safe, consensual forms of sexual expression that you can enjoy outside the privacy of your bedroom—from attendance at an erotic performance to a night of group sex at a play party.

Commercial Sex

Most people think of prostitution—the exchange of sex for money—when they think of commercial sex. Yet commercial sex can include any form of sexual expression or entertainment that you pay to enjoy—from the purchase of erotic books, magazines, DVDs, and videos to the dollar you slip into the lacy thong of a dancer at a strip club.

Prostitution is illegal in most of the United States and many other countries. Generally, “prostitution” is defined as exchanging sex for money; and usually “sex” is defined as involving some form of direct genital contact. So, in many places where prostitution is illegal, it may be perfectly permissible to charge clients for private sessions with a dominatrix or to host erotic performances and sex parties. Of course, local laws, regulations, and enforcement practices vary widely.

We usually don't think of women as consumers of commercial sex. Yet any dyke who has attended an all-women strip show, purchased a copy of *On Our Backs* or *Best Lesbian Erotica*, rented a lesbian sex video or DVD, called a phone sex line, logged onto a cybersex site, or bought a ticket to an explicitly erotic performance has paid for sexual entertainment.

Of course, it's an open secret that many lesbian, bisexual, and queer women work in the sex industry. The ubiquitous girl-girl sex scenes found in porn videos marketed to heterosexual men are often performed by bisexual or lesbian women passing as heterosexual women pretending to be lesbians. Lesbians and bisexual women who work in the sex industry are often delighted to find women in their audiences and among their clientele.

Other lesbian, bisexual, and queer women—whether paid or not—strip for the pleasure of seducing a room full of women.

I frequently work as a dyke stripper at a local dyke cabaret night. The first time I stripped I had forgotten that folks would be tucking money into my underwear. I'd never even seen a stripper before—and here I was doing a favor for a friend. The audience was so supportive! I felt so sexy! Folks were whispering dirty things in my ears as they tucked bills into my G-string. I felt like the sex goddess of the universe. I've never stripped for men, and I don't think I want to. But for women it's so sexy!

Unless you frequent lesbian strip shows or sex parties, you never may have observed other lesbians having sex—live and in the flesh. Lesbian-produced videos, DVDs, and magazines offer the opportunity to see images of real dykes having real sex. You can't pop a low-budget, lesbian-made video into the VCR and miss the fact that these are real lesbians having real sex for the pleasure of putting their lust on exhibition—something women just aren't supposed to do.

For many women, cybersex is their first experience with actually having public sex—rather than viewing it. You can enter an unmoderated chatroom, “listen” in until you feel comfortable, and then jump into the fray. Cybersex offers a safe introduction to anonymous sex, since you can “pick up” another woman, “go private” by creating a private chatroom for your encounter, and have cybersex—without risk of STDs or unwanted entanglements.

What about live sex? Where can a lesbian or bisexual woman go to enjoy live sexual performances? Some women go to strip clubs. You can go in a group, cheer on the erotic dancers, and even pay for a lap dance.

Play Parties

I had the most intense orgasm of my life while being caressed, kissed, and penetrated by two women. This was just about the best sex I have ever experienced!

A play party is a social gathering where people engage in sex. There are all types of play parties—some are for women only and others are pansexual, welcoming all genders, all sexual styles, and all sexual orientations.

Some parties are small, private affairs—a lesbian invites three friends over for a romp in her bed. Others are large public events, hosting as many as 200 women who have learned of the event from a flyer or ad. Most play parties are semipublic. The host draws up an invitation list, encouraging guests to bring their friends, who are then added to the list for future events. Most party hosts charge a fee to cover space rental, safer-sex supplies, food, and other expenses.

Parties, of course, come in all flavors, with styles as individual as their hosts. From sensual affairs with hot tubs and scrumptious buffets to dungeon parties where women engage in elaborately negotiated BDSM scenes, you'll find play parties to suit a wide range of tastes. Some parties begin with games and ice-breakers; others feature rituals intended to create a particular mood.

What does a play party look like? Typically, you'll find a social area with refreshments, an area to change out of street clothes and into fetish wear, and a play area. Some party spaces even have showers. You may find an impressive array of dungeon equipment, including St. Andrew's crosses, racks, cages, and slings. You may even find a gynecologist's examination table. Or, you may find a room lined with futons or foam mattresses.

You'll see women naked, or wearing all manner of fetish gear, including corsets, G-strings, dildos and harnesses, chaps, and stiletto heels. You'll find women watching others having sex, or chatting in small groups, as at any other party. You may see couples in discreet corners, lost in deep kisses; a group of women in a "puppy pile" of jumbled limbs and torsos; or a daisy chain of women engaging in oral sex. You may see women getting fisted in slings. You'll certainly get to see and hear many women's orgasms.

Twelve Reasons to Go to a Sex Party

1. You can nurture your inner exhibitionist. You can perform for an audience of eager voyeurs.
2. You can indulge in sensory overload, watching and hearing others engage in sexual activities—while you're having sex.
3. You can leave your inhibitions at the door and try sexual activities you've only imagined. Nothing like a change of venue to make you feel adventurous.
4. Your body image will get a big boost when you see women of all shapes and sizes being admired erotically.
5. You can scream out your pleasure (or pain) without worrying about your neighbors.
6. You'll get plenty of encouragement for being a slut. You may even get a round of applause when you come.
7. You can make friends and find sex partners.
8. You can have group sex, and you can have sex with strangers in a safe environment.
9. You can play on good equipment—like a St. Andrew's cross or sling. You can play with that new 6-foot single-tailed whip you can't safely swing in your living room.
10. You can enact your favorite public sex fantasy without the risk of encountering cops and queer-bashers.
11. You can have sex without the complications of dating.
12. You can heat up your relationship. Even if you and your partner wish to have sex exclusively with each other, you can enjoy an entirely new erotic environment.

At a BDSM party, you'll find women tied to whipping posts, crosses, bondage tables, racks, and (in standing bondage) to eyebolts in a low ceiling. You'll hear the crack of single-tailed whips, the smack of paddles on buttocks, and, of course, lots of sighs and screams.

You'll see women practicing safer sex, too. You can learn how to introduce latex and other barriers into a scene. You may see a woman erotically teasing her

partner as she slowly slips on a glove or licking a partner's thighs as she spreads a dental dam over her vulva. You'll see women lube up condom-covered dildos and butt plugs, and slip gloves over the heads of electric vibrators.

Many party hosts post safer-sex rules. They may be as simple as “no exchange of bodily fluid” or quite detailed, specifying when gloves and condoms are to be used. You may find etiquette rules posted as well. Hosts may remind guests to ask before touching and to refrain from interrupting others' play. Often S/M parties employ dungeon monitors who can help guests with safety concerns. In many communities, *safeword* has itself become the universal safeword—if you call out “safeword,” folks will come running.

How to Have Fun at a Sex Party

How can you have a good time at a sex party? Lower your expectations. If your goal for the evening is to have sex with a particular individual or to meet the woman of your dreams, you may go home disappointed. Set a reasonable goal for yourself. For instance, just showing up and watching a scene, or saying hello to one person you don't know, is a reasonable objective for a first play party.

Play parties can be great places to learn how the principles of negotiation and safer sex work in “real” life. In your everyday life, you might feel awkward asking for sex or turning down an offer of a date. Being surrounded by women who boldly state their erotic interests and preferences gives you support for asking for what *you* want, too. You can practice saying “Would you like to...” and “I'd love to...” and “No, thanks” in an erotic context.

Give yourself permission to seek out any form of pleasure that feels right to you. You can get a foot rub. You can be fed strawberries as you watch women engage in sex. You can try new sexual activities, experiment with roles and costumes, and have sex with six women—if you find willing participants and have the stamina. You can play with women or men, or both, if you so desire.

Don't do anything that doesn't feel right to you. Attendance at a pansexual party doesn't necessarily mean you're interested in having sex with men—regardless of whether you identify as lesbian or bisexual. In fact, going to a play party doesn't obligate you to have sex at all. You may be wholeheartedly appreciated as an enthusiastic voyeur.

Don't want to go to a party alone? So take a friend or lover—just be sure you discuss your expectations for the evening *before* you get to the party. Will you be having sex with each other? With others as well? Is it OK if one of you goes off on her own to engage in sex play? Can the other watch? What happens if one of you wants to leave?

What if you witness a scene so erotically compelling you just *have* to join in? Can you join a group engaged in sex? You can make your presence known *subtly* without interrupting or crowding the scene. Wait until you have an opportunity to make eye contact. Smile. Let the women involved in the scene initiate communication. If there's no interest, move on. If there is, ask: "May I join you?"

Where to Find Play Parties

You may have to hunt to find a play party if you don't live in a big city—or if you're new in town. Your local S/M organization or sex toy boutique is the best place to start when looking for sex parties. If that doesn't work, get online and ask members of your favorite sexually oriented email discussion list if they know of any parties in your area. (See the resources for suggestions.)

Play Party Etiquette

Don't...

- Don't touch anyone without asking permission.
- Don't crowd scenes. If someone asks you to back off, do so graciously.
- Don't try to join a scene unless invited.
- Don't interrupt someone's scene or play or talk loudly in the play area.
- Don't gape judgmentally. Don't snicker.
- Don't borrow toys without asking.

Do...

- Respect the party rules regarding safer sex—even if you and your date are fluid-bonded. Why? You'll set a good example and encourage others to practice safer sex.
- Clean up after yourself. Wipe down surfaces. Pick up your used gloves and condoms and dispose of them properly.
- Be generous with your compliments.
- Bring food if the invitation requests it. Real food—homemade bread, veggies and dip, and organic juices—will be appreciated by tired souls at 2 A.M.
- Respect the anonymity of your fellow partygoers. Your erotic tales will be just as spectacular without names or identifying details.
- Thank your host. Giving a sex party is a big risk.

How to Throw a Safer-Sex Party

You can host an erotic event of your own. Be forewarned that hosting a play party will require more work than you probably can anticipate and will stretch your sexual self-confidence—you really *are* putting your desires out there when you host an explicitly sexual event.

What kind of party would you host? An intimate evening of group sex? An S/M play party? An erotic cabaret with strippers, dancing, food, and sex? (You could even organize your event as a fundraiser and raffle off sex toys and erotic DVDs.)

Are sex clubs legal? Will you get arrested for hosting a private play party? A public play party? Is it legal to charge admission for the event? Can you advertise? Laws regulating sex businesses vary from city to city and country to country. In some cities, nudity isn't legal in an establishment that serves alcohol. In other cities, sex clubs are legal if the patrons purchase memberships. In many places, no such business would be tolerated at all. You can ask the proprietor of a local sex club or gay bathhouse or your local civil liberties organization for information on regulations in your area.

Whom would you like to invite? Will you limit the party to close friends and lovers? Or will you send an invitation to every known lesbian within a 30-mile radius? Talk to your friends as you plan your party. What kind of event would

they enjoy?

Your invitation can reassure your friends that participating in erotic play is entirely voluntary. Encourage them to bring their favorite food, beverages, and music—people often feel more comfortable at an event if they have a role to play. You can also invite your most gregarious (and least threatening) friends to take shifts at the door.

Don't forget to remind your guests not to wear scented cosmetics or perfumes if any of your guests may be chemically sensitive. Also let your guests know what kinds of safer-sex supplies you'll provide. Will you have Lollyes dams? Plastic wrap? Latex gloves? Water-based lube? Will you have latex-free alternatives, like nitrile gloves and polyurethane condoms? Glycerin-free lube? If not, say so—let your guests know that they need to bring these supplies.

Will your space be accessible to disabled guests? Say so on the invitation, and be specific. Don't say "wheelchair accessible" if there are three steps up to your front door or if your bathroom door isn't large enough to accommodate a wheelchair. State whether or not your event will be ASL interpreted. What other accessibility issues might you address in your event planning? Here's a prime opportunity to consult with disabled lesbians and bisexual women in your community. Ask what would make the event feasible for them.

Where will the party be held? Will it be big enough to accommodate your guest list? Is there parking? Public transportation? Make sure the space is adequately heated (or cooled, depending on the season) and *clean*. (There's nothing worse than grabbing a sticky lube bottle to find it's coated with dust.) Will you borrow BDSM equipment? Futons? Cover mattresses and other upholstered surfaces with plastic sheets and then with cloth sheets. Make sure you provide plenty of paper towels and trash receptacles.

Carol Queen on Voyeurs and Exhibitionists

Voyeurs who bring love and appreciation to their watching are another species altogether. In a sense, everyone in a public sex environment is both voyeur and exhibitionist—if not, they'd probably prefer to stay home. But dyed-in-the-wool voyeurs are the glue that helps a party cohere. They add sexual energy instead of taking it

away; their rapt and watchful presence can turn up the heat on any scene.

If voyeurs add glue, exhibitionists add kindling. Many times, my partner and I have fueled a sluggish, slow-to-start party by placing ourselves in the center of the room and beginning to do something explicit or outrageous. First we attract the voyeurs. The next thing we know, couples and groups have formed all around us. The party has ignited.

You can employ a few tricks to get things rolling. You can “seed” your guest list with a few exhibitionist friends whom you can count on to ignite the rest of the crowd, as Carol Queen suggests, above. You can start the evening with a ritual, erotic performance, or a game, such as passing sex toys around a circle—hands free.

Soon you won’t have to worry about stoking the action—even your most introverted guests will be happily occupied. And you’ll be so busy restocking lube and safer-sex supplies that you’ll hardly have a minute to wonder what’s become of all those shy friends who swore they’d be too nervous to “do” anything.

Suggested Web Link

SOCIETY FOR HUMAN SEXUALITY—ENJOYING AND HOSTING
EROTIC EVENTS

www.sexuality.org/ehee.html

SOURCE OF SIDEBAR

Carol Queen, *Real Live Nude Girl: Chronicles of Sex-Positive Culture* (Cleis Press, 2002), 71.

chapter seventeen

Sex Toys and Accoutrements

My silicone dildo has wonderful ridges that rub my G-spot just the right way. If I was stuck on a deserted island, this is the one sex toy I would take with me.

ONCE UPON A TIME there were few places to buy sex toys other than porn shops catering primarily to men. In those days, sex toys were hardly designed with lesbians in mind. Marketed as novelty items, many toys were quite shoddy. Along with silly floppy dildos, you could find battery-operated vibrators so cheaply made they'd land in the trash quicker than you could say "preorgasmic." Of course, classic porn shops are still around, and while you may get a kick out of the corny displays of toys in lurid packaging, many women find these shops truly awful.

Now you can find women-friendly sex toy boutiques from coast to coast in the U.S. and Canada, and in some cities in the U.K. and Europe: Good Vibrations in San Francisco and Berkeley; Toys in Babeland in New York and Seattle; Grand Opening! in Los Angeles and Brookline, Massachusetts; Smitten Kitten in Minneapolis; Early to Bed in Chicago; A Woman's Touch in Madison; Forbidden Fruit in Austin; Good for Her in Toronto; Come as You Are in Toronto and Montreal; Womyn's Ware in Vancouver; Sh! in London; Tiberius in Vienna, and many more.

Quite a few are staffed by lesbian and bisexual women, as well as gay men and queers of all genders and proclivities. Some specialize in S/M and fetish gear, others in women's sexual education. A few even have started branding their own lines of lubricants, toys, and other supplies. (A review of sex toy store websites will reveal toys turning up with different names on different sites, which can complicate comparison shopping.)

Many sex toy stores offer educational programming, from evening presentations to day-long workshops and ongoing classes. Check the resources chapter for stores with websites. You'll find their calendars of events online.

Online sex toy sources seem to multiply daily, some with quite elaborate websites. You should have no trouble finding retail and mail-order sources for well-made, attractive dildos, vibrators, harnesses, and other toys designed with you in mind. You can get accurate information and helpful advice, along with books, magazines, videos, toys, fetish gear, and safer-sex supplies.

What are the most popular toys and accoutrements among lesbian and bisexual women customers of sex toy boutiques? Happily, women's preferences are so varied and so individual that sex toy popularity contests are worthless. So *what* if seven out of ten lesbians prefer that 8-inch silicone wonder—all that matters is whether it feels good to *you*. Still, a casual survey of toy saleswomen yields some interesting information.

The biggest recent innovations in sex toys are in materials (Cyberskin dildos, silicone lubes, glycerin-free lubes), in design (beautifully proportioned, high-end—pardon the pun—chrome and acrylic butt plugs and dildos), and in function (Fukuoku finger vibes, remote-control vibrators, and other techie delights).

Many women say Cyberskin (also called softskin) feels just like skin. Made from a mixture of silicone and PVC (polyvinyl chloride), Cyberskin dildos feature a hard core with a softer outer layer. “Not only does Cyberskin quickly warm to body temperature, it's also very resilient—it can be stretched and pulled and will ‘remember’ its original shape,” say the folks at Good Vibrations in San Francisco.¹

“When Cyber Cock landed on our shelves,” say the women of Come As You Are in Toronto, “it quickly became the must-have dildo. Its hyper-realistic look and feel made it the centerpiece of at least one dyke party we heard about. And the stampede began.”²

The downside of Cyberskin is that it gets dirty—fast! The slightly tacky surface attracts lint and other particles of dirt floating about your play space. That means that you really have to clean Cyberskin toys thoroughly after use—or use condoms, though a condom will cover up the skinlike feel of the material. Since Cyberskin contains silicone, avoid use with silicone lube. (See “How to Care for Your Toys,” below.)

Silicone lubricants like Eros Bodyglide, ID Millennium, and Wet Platinum are remarkably silky. They're slipperier than water-based lubes. They don't dry up or get sticky. They're never stringy. They can be used for massage, a plus when

erotic massage includes the entire body. No wonder they've become so popular. They're condom compatible, too; they contain no oils and won't destroy latex. Since they *do* last and last, you'll have to use soap and water to wash them off—which is why I don't recommend them for vaginal penetration. Don't use silicone lube with silicone toys—the silicone in the lube may bond with the silicone in your toy, disfiguring your dildo. Silicone lubes are much more expensive than water-based lubes—but a little of it goes a long way.

Glycerin-free lube has proved to be a god(dess)-send to many women who experience yeast infections that can be traced to the glycerin contained in most water-based lubricants. Glycerin is similar in chemical composition to glucose—sugar—which can create a fertile environment for yeast infections to flourish. Liquid Silk by Bodywise leads the pack of the new glycerin-free lubes. “Our customers rave about this creamy British lube,” writes the Good Vibrations toy buyer. “It contains no glycerin and never gets sticky.” ³ Good Vibrations also markets its own brand of glycerin-free lube, Slip Inside, which they say is thicker and longer lasting than Liquid Silk. Liquid Silk is by far the best-selling lube at A Woman's Touch in Madison, Wisconsin. “For fisting and anal play, women tend to prefer Liquid Silk or its cousin, Maximus. It doesn't get sticky, has no smell, and feels close to the real thing.” ⁴

The websites of Good Vibrations and Blowfish list the ingredients in every brand of lube they sell—an added bonus for those of us who are concerned about putting mystery substances in our bodies. The Early to Bed site features a page of “all-natural” lubes, like O'My, which even contains hemp (to discourage yeast, bacterial, and fungal infections, according to the manufacturers).

Pyrex, steel, chrome, granite...butt plugs?!? Yes. There is something about a hefty toy that “offers a uniquely weighted sensation in the ass,” says Tristan Taormino. “Tap the base with a cane or fingernails, and the sensation vibrates through the ass like you've got a tuning fork in there!” ⁵ Metal, glass, and stone are a good choice if you like the fullness of a solid weight exerting pressure on the walls of your rectum. Try rolling over or lifting your ass in the air—the gravitational pull on a half-pound butt plug is something to be experienced. Pyrex and metal are easy to clean, and they conduct temperature. You can easily warm up toys in a basin of water. Plus, the highly polished surfaces help the plug slide right in.

Acrylic and glass dildos now come in a wide variety of exquisite designs. The shapes are graceful as well as functional, with lovely curves just right for G-spot play. Or bold ridges, veins, and balls, as on the Crystal Cock, an acrylic realistic available from Blowfish. Innerspace makes a large assortment of acrylic toys—voluptuous, durable, and discreet. (Many fit securely into special stands for display as objets d’art.) You’ll also find ruby curved-glass dildos, juicer-style glass dildos (the cock head looks like an orange juicer), and glass dildos with bumps, spirals, and handles that invite you to crank that baby up.

Technologically innovative vibrator designs abound: dual-action vibes (clit stimulation plus penetration), remote-control vibes, pretty vibes, waterproof vibes, stronger battery-operated vibes, strap-on vibes, and vibes that swirl and pulse as well as vibrate. Pocket rockets are among the most popular battery-operated vibrators. Hardly bigger than a lipstick, they can be kept anywhere. They’re cheap and their many imitators come in colors to match your favorite purse. Or your entire shoe collection.

Fukuoku 9000 finger vibes caused a sensation when they appeared in sex toy stores. They’re cute, fit on your finger tips, and pack a whole lotta buzz in such a small package. Then there’s the Audi-Oh Butterfly vibe. The vibe straps on where you want it most, and a control (which looks like a pager) innocently hangs off your belt. The vibrator pulses in time to music. As if you needed a reason to go dancing.

Other innovations in multitasking include a pantheon of toys that provide additional stimulation during strap-on sex. Harness cuffs fasten onto the center strap of a thong-style harness to hold a dildo or butt plug inside the wearer of a strap-on dildo. Either partner can tuck any of a dozen small vibrators into a harness or pouch for clitoral stimulation during dildo play. You can also wear a corset harness to hold up your stockings while you strap it on.

Introducing Sex Toys into Partner Play

The same communication skills you use to negotiate any type of sex will help you introduce your partner to your favorite sex toys. (See “Sex Talk Guidelines” in chapter 7, Communication and Finding Sex Partners.)

- *Tell your partner your sex toy fantasies.* She may have no idea what you want to do with that vibrating cock ring.
- *Bring up the subject in a relaxed setting.*
- *Speak in positives.* She may jump to the conclusion that if you want to bring your vibrator to bed you must find her techniques inadequate. Tell her what you like about her sexual style and what you like about sex toys.
- *Trust your senses.* Are you concerned that sex toys are contrived or unnatural? One woman wrote, “I used to believe that ‘real’ lesbians only had sex in a ‘natural’ way—hands, mouth, tongue, fist.” The blood pulsing through your clitoris, the contractions of your vaginal and anal muscles, the rush of pleasure through your genitals—all are deliciously “natural.” So trust your body, not your judgments.
- *Demonstrate on yourself.* Show your partner exactly what you like to do with your favorite sex toy. (See “Masturbating with a Partner” in chapter 6, Masturbation.)
- *Be playful.* We call them toys because they’re meant to be fun. “My lover and I keep our lubes chilly in the fridge and then shock each other by dripping the cold lubricant on each other’s steamy vaginas,” wrote one woman.
- *Go shopping together.* Perhaps your partner isn’t turned on by the toys you’ve got at home. You may be surprised by what catches her eye.
- *Talk about your misgivings.* Are you afraid you’ll feel silly wearing a harness and dildo? Approach sex toys in the spirit of learning. “I still have some work to do on my comfort level with strapping it on,” wrote another. “But, you know, practice makes perfect!”

Many toys try to do too much, with too little attention to design and engineering—they appeal to impulse rather than your “smart-shopper” savvy. The women of Toys in Babeland describe such toys as “huge, slimy, battery powered monsters [that] will ‘vibro twist’ and ‘corkscrew delight’ their way right into your trash can.” [6](#)

I strap on a thick, 7-inch vibrating jelly dildo. What a godsend! It seems to fit my partner's needs perfectly and the vibrating soft jelly-like texture feels absolutely fabulous on my clitoris.

There are exceptions, of course—including vibrating jelly dildos and vibrating anal probes featuring flexible spines. One such toy is the Flex-O-Pleaser. “Yes, the name is dorkiness incarnate,” say the folks at Blowfish, “but if you’re looking for a vibrator for insertion play, we recommend this one highly.”⁷ This battery-operated vibrator features a 3-inch cylindrical head on a strong, flexible 5-inch shaft. The whole thing is attached to a 5-inch handle with an adjustable switch. Other vibrating anal probes feature a vertebral column that allows the toy to retain any shape you give it. The Adventurer, featured in Rachel Venning and Claire Cavanah’s *Sex Toys 101*, ups the ante: not only does the shaft vibrate, it twirls in little circles. A little goes a long way.

How to Choose Sex Toys

There are so many toys you can purchase or adapt for your pleasure, you may feel overwhelmed by the possibilities. A quick surf through the websites of retail and mail-order outlets will show a virtually limitless choice of sex toys. You can invent your own toys, making clever use of household items, or search the produce aisle of the grocery store for erotic inspiration. How can you find out what you like? A little window shopping will help, whether you browse on the Web or in person at your local sex toy boutique. Below are some questions to consider as you begin your search, along with suggestions for play and cautions regarding safety. You can purchase the toys and supplies mentioned here from the mail-order and retail outlets listed in the resources section.

Do You Like Clitoral Stimulation?

My Hitachi Magic Wand sends me into spiraling heights of orgasmic ecstasy! I like the Magic Wand because it's very fast and it can allow me to reach orgasm in a few minutes. It's like a quickie, but with a toy.

Vibrators provide steady, reliable clitoral stimulation. You can choose from electric vibrators, rechargeable vibrators, battery-operated vibrators, remote-

control vibrators, waterproof vibrators you can use in the bathtub, egg-shaped vibrators you can slip inside a harness cuff, and vibrators shaped like rabbits, beavers, and even bears.

For an intense buzz, try a coil-operated electric vibrator, like the Wahl, which produces quite strong sensations and features a small point of contact that can focus sensation on a very small area. The all-time best-selling Hitachi Magic Wand, with its tennis-ball shaped head, produces somewhat more diffuse sensations, though you can slip an attachment over the head for more specifically focused vibrations.

Battery-operated vibrators tend to produce sensations that are less intense than those of electric vibrators, though recent models offer much greater sensation. They also don't hold up to years of use, unlike many electric vibrators. However, they come in many more shapes and styles than electric vibrators and are much less expensive. Battery-operated vibrators are quite versatile—they're easily adapted to use with dildos and harnesses as well as other toys. Plus, they'll fit in your pocket, purse, backpack, suitcase, and the glove compartment of your car. (See chapter 10, Clitoral Play.)

For solo delights, I like the Rabbit Pearl, a rotating dildo with revolving “pearls” in the shaft and two vibrating bunny ears that fit on either side of my clit.... Yum!

Do You Like Nipple Stimulation?

You may enjoy playing with clothespins, tweezer and alligator clamps, tit pumps, suction cups, hot wax, piercing needles, and other toys. Try wetting your nipple with lube and then caressing it as you would your clitoris. (See chapter 9, Breast Play, and “Teach Yourself Some New Tricks” in chapter 15, Play Nice!....)

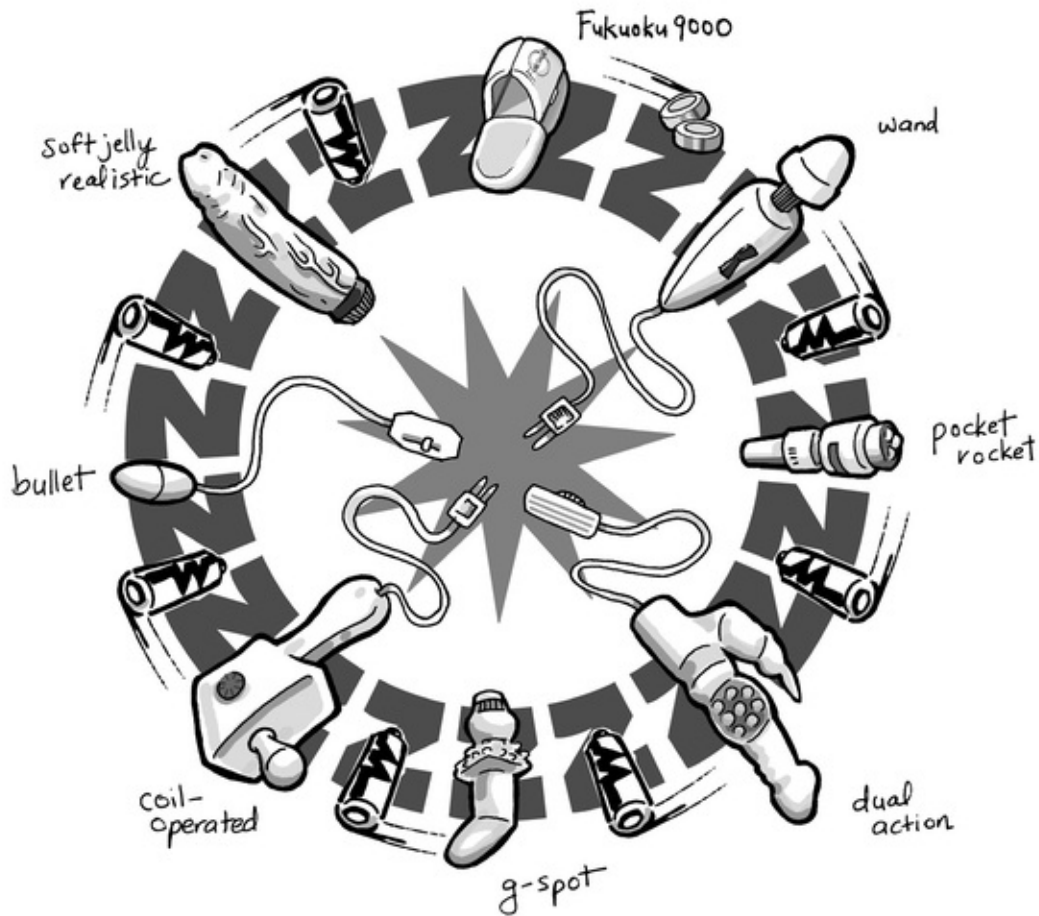


Illustration 20. Vibrators

Do You Like Vaginal Penetration?

My favorite toy is my slender, curving, purple-and-black-swirled silicone dildo, Champ. I think its form is elegant, and its coloring beautiful. It's just the right size for me when I'm really hot and loose.

Dildos come in all sizes and shapes—from the diminutive 5-inch Pal to the meaty 10-inch Prince. You'll find dildos in silicone, rubber, Cyberskin, and other materials. Dildos are available in a variety of colors—black, lavender, and swirl patterns, among many others. You no longer need to put up with a sickly pinkish hue marketed as “flesh tone” (which one savvy retailer calls DOA Caucasian). You can buy dildos in a variety of abstract designs, realistic dildos with veins and balls, dildos shaped like dolphins, double dildos, battery-operated

vibrating dildos, and dildos with a slit in the base to fit a small egg-shaped vibrator.

Do you like deep thrusting rather than a feeling of fullness? Try a long, slender dildo. Make sure it's firm enough to stay rigid. Do you like a feeling of being stretched wide? You might like a thick, squat dildo.

I love my amethyst Jelly Jewel. It's a bit too long (10 inches) but it's the perfect width—almost 2 inches. It's realistic—it doesn't apologize for its invasive attitude.

Double dildos have long been popular among women who are captivated by the fantasy of simultaneous vaginal penetration—but they have rarely lived up to their promise. Either too floppy or too rigid, these double-headed dongs suffered from poor design. Traditional models worked for the few women who could “manage the scissors-like positioning and pulled shoulder muscles that come with the territory of a ruler-straight double.” [8](#)

The Nexus changed all that. It's a harness-compatible silicone double dildo, angled and curved to actually work. The shorter, curved end fits inside you; the longer end “juts jauntily out” to penetrate your partner. “We love it's ultraqueer chic: reciprocal pleasure, hands-free functionality, and tasteful marbling,” wrote the toy reviewers at *Girlfriends* magazine. [9](#) The newest innovation in double-dildo design is the Feeldoe, which features an extra-short short end angled to hit the wearer's G-spot.



Illustration 21. Dildos and Harnesses

Dildos are sold by diameter and length. For strap-on sex, you'll want a dildo at least an inch or two longer than one you'd use by hand, since the harness and your body will absorb some length. You can "measure" your vagina with a zucchini or cucumber. Experiment with vegetables of varying length and girth; when you find one of a thickness that suits you, cut it lengthwise in half. You can now measure the diameter. Dildo length is measured from the base to the tip.

Even if you shop organically, remember to slip a condom over that cucumber.

You can also experiment with dildos by purchasing inexpensive rubber models. When you find the length, girth, shape, and style you like, you can then invest in a high-quality silicone dildo. Remember that you *must* use condoms on rubber dildos, since they're more porous than silicone and will absorb dirt very easily. (See chapter 12, Vaginal Penetration.)

Do You Like G-Spot Stimulation?

Any curved, firm insertive toy is a candidate for G-spot stimulation. Of course, whether or not it hits the spot will vary from woman to woman. Some women get the best results from G-spot attachments designed to fit over the head of an electric vibrator, such as the G-Spotter for the Hitachi Magic Wand. Others prefer insertable vibrators with rotating shafts, or dildos with ridges or a prominent, cocklike head. The all-time classic G-spot toy is the Crystal Wand, which Toys in Babeland describes as “10 inches of clear acrylic hand molded into a shallow S-shape.”¹⁰ (See chapter 3, Anatomy and Sexual Response, and chapter 4, Orgasm, for more on your G-spot.)

Do You Like Anal Penetration?

I have a fairly small silicone butt plug. I like how it warms to my body and is flexible so that it doesn't tear or otherwise brutalize me. It's great for added zing during almost any sexual activity.

Butt plugs are popular toys for anal penetration. Butt plugs aren't intended for thrusting. They're designed to be held inside your rectum by your sphincter muscles. Like dildos, butt plugs come in all shapes and sizes—from the miniature Flirt (which is hardly bigger than your index finger) to the great big Triple Ripple plugs (which dwarf your fist)—and in a variety of materials. Again, if you're not sure what size or style you'll like, buy a cheap rubber plug before graduating to higher-quality silicone. Don't forget that what may seem rather diminutive when placed on the counter at your local toy store may seem humongous when placed inside your butt at home.

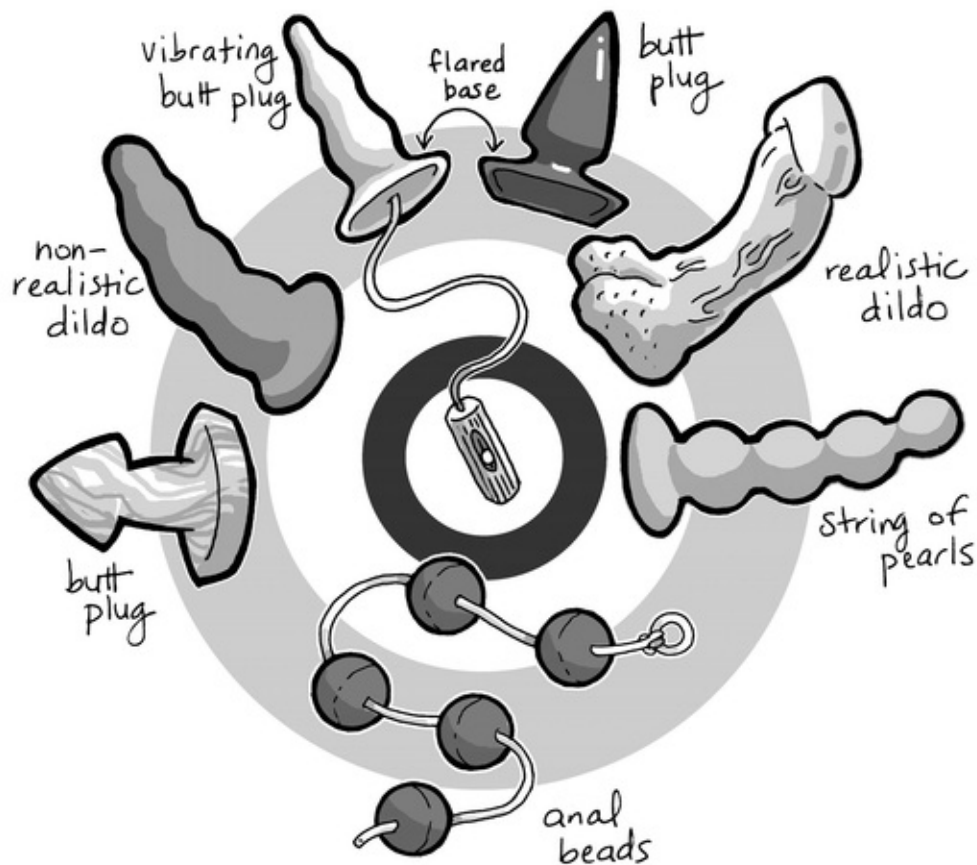


Illustration 22. Anal Toys

Once you've sat on a few starter plugs, anal advisor Tristan Taormino will steer you toward an advanced model. Taormino's website offers silicone, vinyl, glass, steel, and granite butt toys, like clear acrylic Nova (whose magnifying property gives a peek into the wearer's butt) and the Cherry (which is actually for the advanced user; it earns its name because Taormino recommends it as a warm-up for first-time anal fisting). She's also designed her own butt plugs for Vixen Creations, the Tristan I and Tristan II—these plugs are designed to go in and stay in.

Jelly dildos are a great choice for anal penetration, since the soft rubber won't abrade delicate rectal tissues. At Grand Opening! in Brookline, Massachusetts, a popular vibrating anal toy is the Butt Buzzer, which combines flexible jelly rubber with an egg vibrator embedded in its shaft.¹¹ Of course, women are very individual in their choice of materials for anal toys—you might prefer a heavy

chrome butt plug to a jelly dildo.

Don't overlook anal beads, vibrating butt plugs, flexible anal probes, and other toys specifically designed for butt play. (See chapter 13, Anal Penetration.)

The rules for anal toys bear repeating here:

- The toy must have a flared base to prevent it from slipping inside your rectum and working its way into the colon. Similarly, anal beads must be securely fastened to their string and have a ring on the end to hold onto.
- The toy must have a smooth surface—no sharp edges or breakable parts.
- You must be able to clean the toy with antibacterial soap and hot water.
- If you intend to use the toy to penetrate your partner deeply, it must be flexible enough to maneuver the curves of the rectum.
- Use lots of lube! Since the rectum isn't self-lubricating like the vagina, make sure you coat your toy thoroughly with lube.

Do You Want to Strap On Your Dildo?

I definitely like the ability to strap it on. It leaves both of my hands free to use on other parts of her body. There is no better feeling in the world, for me, than to wrap my arms around her while I am penetrating her as she reaches orgasms.

Dildo harnesses come in several styles and materials. They can strap onto your hips, your thigh, a chair—or even your face. Choose your harness to fit both the dildo you wish to use with it and the style of sex play you prefer.

- *What size dildo do you want to use?* Any dildo with a flared base can be worn with a harness—if it's not too thick to fit through the cock ring or opening in the harness. The key is selecting the right harness. Many come with interchangeable rubber cock rings that snap into place. Theoretically, you could swap these for any size cock ring and thus any dildo with a flared base—even the 2-inch-diameter Prince. Other harnesses have a fixed cock ring or a reinforced hole through which the dildo protrudes. Your choice of dildo is limited by the diameter of the hole. If you intend to wear your harness with a variety of dildos, you'd do well to select a harness with a detachable cock ring.
- *What kind of material do you like?* You can find well-constructed

harnesses in leather, vinyl, rubber, and nylon webbing. Nylon is less expensive than leather, of course, and quite sturdy.

- *What's your aesthetic?* Hard-studded black leather, velvet-swirl corset harness with lace-up back and satin garters, spandex shorts with cod piece, or a comfortable packing harness which fits under boxers or briefs for all-day wear—take your pick.
- *Do you want to strap on additional penetrative toys?* If you want to use a cuff to hold a butt plug or dildo inside the wearer, select a harness with a center strap.
- *What's your hip size?* The Crown harness works well for women of substantial size. Since the harness rides high on the wearer's hips, her belly won't get in the way of deep penetration. The Crown comes in hip sizes up to 60 inches. Aslan Leather makes harnesses that accommodate hip sizes up to 38 inches, but they'll customize their designs to fit larger women. Stormy Leather's Texas Two-Strap and Terra Firma harnesses fit hips up to 46 inches. (D-ring models can be expanded up to 56 inches.)
- *Are you curious about other ways to strap on a dildo?* In addition to harnesses you wear around your hip, you can also try a thigh harness, a harness you strap onto a chair, and even a face harness, which lets a dildo protrude from your mouth or forehead (in a 69 position, you can penetrate your partner vaginally while performing cunnilingus). You can even try a dildo harness that doubles as a chastity belt.

Do You Want to Explore Gender Play?

My favorite is a Cyberskin dildo. He's almost 8 inches long and made of very realistic material, complete with balls that are actually two balls inside a scrotum. Unfortunately, he's not rigid enough to be used for serious fucking, but I love him just the same.

If you want a dildo you can wear as a cock, check out these models:

- *Want a realistic feel?* Cyberskin now comes in several models—the basic realistic dildo, a vibrating version, and a stretchy sleeve you can pull over any dildo or cylindrical vibe.
- *Want a realistic look?* Realistic dildos feature detailed glans, veins, and

balls. You can emulate Jeff Stryker with a dildo modeled after the porn star himself. Or try the Johnny—7½ inches long and almost 2 inches in diameter. Why would a lesbian buy a dildo with balls? Aside from the realistic look and feel, the balls provide extra stimulation for the receptive partner—when thrusting in a rear-entry position, they slap against her vulva.

- *Do you pack?* You'll find packing dildos to create a realistic bulge in your pants in silicone and Cyberskin. Some are intended for penetration as well. Many Cyberskin dildos bend easily enough to tuck into your briefs. You'll find a variety of dildos made from soft "fleshy" material—comfortable enough to wear under clothing, plus you won't look like you've got a baseball bat in your pants. Aslan Leather sells what might be the most realistic soft cock you'll ever find. Mr. Right is made from silicone with detailed balls and lifelike shaft and head. They also sell a packing strap (fits up to 50-inch hip size) to go with it.

Packing somehow completes me. It makes me feel real.

Do You Want to Explore BDSM?

You'll find discussion of a number of BDSM toys and devices in chapter 15, *Play Nice! (...or Else)*. Make sure your toys are well made and come from reputable sources. Many makers of whips and other S/M toys are truly artisans; their passion for the erotic exchange of power translates into their products. Some of the mail-order and retail outlets listed in the resources section have fabulous websites with photos of toys (and gorgeous models). Others offer print catalogs. Blowfish, JT's Stockroom, Extreme Restraints, and Purple Passion, among others, carry a full line of bondage and S/M toys. Some websites offer helpful information on toy care and safety as well.

Sex and Disability: Toy Accessibility

"Toys are imperfect," write the authors of *The Ultimate Guide to Sex and Disability*, "and the best approach to take is that you can make them your own, sometimes by the things you do with them,

sometimes by the things you do to them.” Here’s their advice:

Make your sex toys your own—be inventive in adapting and playing with your toys. If you want help adapting your toys, consult an occupational therapist. Although some occupational therapists may not share your sexual politics (and may even blush at your request to build up the handle on your vibrator), they do have the training and materials to help you make your sex toys more functional.

Consider the weight, size, and shape of the toy. If you can’t hold a toy in your hand, try a vibrator that fits in a pouch, such as the Leather Butterfly. The straps fit around your waist and between your legs. You may also be able to use a larger electric vibrator by positioning yourself beside it. Be careful not to lie directly on top of a vibrator, as this will cut off the ventilation for the motor and can be dangerous. Use pillows to position yourself for play.

If you’re able to hold a toy, but tire easily, choose something lightweight. Consider the fact that, all things considered, you may be distracted while holding the toy. Try a vibrator that you can fit on your hand or, like the Fukuoku, on your finger. The same company also makes the Five Finger Fantasy, which is a waterproof glove that has five tiny vibrators in the tips of the fingers. You can also slip an egg-shaped vibe inside a glove. The only thing more annoying than your batteries dying at exactly the wrong time is dropping the toy!

Consider the material of the toy. If you have allergies, environmental sensitivities, or a reduced immune system, stay away from products with heavy scents. Many people have allergies to latex. A lot of toys are made primarily of nonlatex rubber products. However, even “nonlatex” products may contain some latex. If you have a very sensitive latex allergy, stick with hard plastic or silicone toys.

Consider the switch on an electric or battery-operated toy. This is

often the most aggravating part of buying toys. Manufacturers tend not to think about accessibility, and it shows in their switches. Some toys are easy to turn on and off, and others are not. If you find a toy you love with a difficult switch, you may be able to find someone to rig an accessible switch.

Choose a toy with a long reach, such as the Flex-O-Pleaser or an extra-long dildo.

Vibrating cock rings fit snugly on the fingers. The jelly rubber rings are especially nice; the rubber extension provides a little extra support as you press the vibrator against your body.

Thigh Harness and Night Rider: The Thigh Harness is particularly good for people with lower back problems who find their back gives out before they do. The Night Rider, which straps onto furniture, is an incredibly versatile harness and comes with some ten feet of extra cord.

Know the quality of the toy you are buying. Sex toys do have different quality levels, and if you know you're likely going to drop your toy a lot or be rough with it, be aware that some may break more easily than others. Better-quality sex stores, like those listed in the resources, will give you honest answers about the durability of the toy you are interested in.

The folks at Come As You Are in Toronto are dedicated to making sex accessible to everyone—including people with disabilities. Their website is packed with specific information on making sex toys accessible for disabled customers.

To learn more, see *The Ultimate Guide to Sex and Disability: For All of Us Who Live with Disabilities, Chronic Pain and Illness*, by

Miriam Kaufman, Cory Silverberg, and Fran Odette.

Need some new furniture?

Hold that position—without straining your neck, back, or wrists. Liberator sells sturdy foam-core wedges, ramps, cubes, and other shapes designed to make it easier to have sex in a variety of positions.

Gay men have always known what a difference a sling makes. Lesbians who frequent dungeon parties find out how much easier it is to get fisted—vaginally or anally—with a sling supporting your muscles. Strap-on sex is easier, too, when you can position your partner at a height that spares your lower back. You can find leather slings, complete with stirrups, at JT’s Stockroom, Extreme Restraints, and Mr. S. You supply the chains and eyebolts and ceiling to hang it from. You can also purchase a sling stand if you want to spare your ceiling.

Madame S, JT’s, and others sell a line of well-constructed bondage beds. Forged from reinforced steel, with strategically placed restraint points, these beds are for seriously rough play. Full, queen, king. Extreme Restraints sells a folding bondage bed which looks suspiciously like a massage table with cuffs and straps. Hmmm. That gives me an idea....

Do You Want to Explore New Fantasies?

Porn! Whether you rent an explicit video, read a collection of erotic fiction, or surf erotica websites, you’ll find that porn can fuel your imagination. What do lesbians look for in video porn? Tastes vary: Hard core. Soft core. Tranny porn. Trannyfag porn. Girl-girl. Girl-boy. Boy-boy. Some lesbians prefer gay male porn for its raw depictions of sexuality.

Whether looking for images of tenderness and romance or down-and-dirty back-alley sex, lesbians want authenticity. Having viewed a glut of mainstream porn featuring heterosexual-appearing actresses and unreal sex, lesbians want to see “authentic pleasure and chemistry between the performers,” as one Good Vibrations saleswoman wrote.¹² (See chapter 2, Desire and Fantasy, for more on

lesbian porn. You'll find a selection of lesbian porn titles in the bibliography.)

Got Your Lube?

I love Probe Thin and Silky because it dries quickly without being sticky. It also doesn't taste bad and feels soooo slick when rubbed on me.

Lube is the most essential item in your toy bag. Not only will lubricant make sex more pleasurable, it will keep you from getting raw during vaginal penetration. For anal penetration, lube is a must—the rectum is not self-lubricating, and the friction of a finger or dildo thrusting in and out could tear the delicate tissue.

Everyone has an opinion about lube. While one woman loves Probe, another will swear by ID Liquid, or Astroglide, or Wet. How do you find out which lube you might like? If your local pharmacy stocks only one brand of lube and the nearest sex toy store is 200 miles away, order a sampler pack from one of the retail or mail-order outlets listed in the resources. You'll get a variety of little plastic “pillows” containing just enough lube for one use (sufficient for clitoral stimulation, but certainly not enough for fisting). When you decide which brand of lube you prefer, you can order more economical sizes. These individual-sized packets are great for travel and for group sex—you won't end up with many sticky fingers handling the same bottle. (Shared lube containers, like shared sex toys, can lead to transmission of many STDs.)

Most lube manufacturers offer a full line of water-based lubes, including a silky, light lube for clitoral play or vaginal penetration, and a thick, viscous lube for anal penetration and vaginal fisting. Here are some questions to think about when choosing lube:

- *Will you engage in clitoral play?* Try a thin, light lube such as ID Liquid, Probe Silky Light, Astroglide, Liquid Silk, or Eros Bodyglide.
- *Will you engage in vaginal penetration?* Some women prefer a light lube for penetration, others a more viscous lube, like Slippery Stuff, Maximus, and Probe.
- *Will you engage in vaginal fisting?* Buy the pump bottle! You may want to try a thicker lube, like Probe Thick and Rich.
- *Will you engage in anal penetration?* Try ForPlay, Maximus, Probe Classic, or Slippery Stuff for a thicker water-based lube. Some women

use oil-based lube, such as Crisco or Elbow Grease, for anal play; be careful, though, that the lube doesn't drip into the vagina. Oil deteriorates latex; you'll have to change your latex glove every 15 minutes. If you use an oil-based lube with a latex condom-covered toy, plan to disinfect the toy. The oil in the lube will have destroyed the latex.

- *Will you engage in oral sex?* If you anticipate oral contact as well as penetration, choose a lube that's tasteless, such as ID or Probe, or intended for oral play—such as the flavored lubes from Wet or ForPlay. Avoid lubes containing nonoxynol-9, which will numb your tongue and lips.
- *Will you be using latex?* Any water-based or silicone lube will be compatible with your latex gloves and condoms. Avoid oil-based lubes (see above).
- *Will you be using silicone toys?* Don't use silicone lube with silicone dildos. The silicone in the lube will degrade your silicone toy.
- *Do you get yeast infections?* Choose a glycerin-free lube such as Liquid Silk, or its thicker counterpart, Maximus.
- *Do you want a lube that will last and last?* Silicone lubes such as Eros Bodyglide and Wet Platinum won't dry up or get sticky.
- *Are you sensitive to chemicals?* Avoid lubes containing nonoxynol-9, a detergent added to lubricants as a spermicide.

Got Your Safer-Sex Supplies?

Stock your toy bag with these basic safer-sex supplies:

- Latex, vinyl, or nitrile gloves for penetrative sex.
- Finger cots, which are like little finger-sized condoms. You may have noticed that I've said nothing about finger cots in this book. Since a caress of a fingertip often leads to more—a second finger, the palm of the hand—I find that finger cots have limited use and recommend gloves instead.
- Condoms to cover dildos, butt plugs, and vibrators.
- Dental dams, Lollyes, or plastic wrap for cunnilingus and rimming.
- Hibiclens, antibacterial hand soap, or a toy cleaner such as ForPlay Adult Toy Cleanser to clean dildos, vibrator attachments, lube bottles, and

other toys after use. Wash your hands with antibacterial soap.

- Alcohol wipes to clean handles of vibrators and other toys, as well as for use in play piercing and other activities where blood may be present.
- A simple BDSM first-aid kit, including antiseptic ointment, bandages, adhesive tape, and scissors.

Does Latex Make You Itch?

If you notice a rash after wearing a latex glove, you may be developing a sensitivity to latex. Some women are so allergic to latex that they develop hives, become nauseated, or have trouble breathing when they come into contact with latex products.

Who's at risk for latex allergies? People who come into frequent or continual contact with latex. Health-care workers are especially at risk. Not only do they snap gloves on and off all day long, their work environment is permeated by the fumes given off by latex products. Add safer-sex practices to that scenario and you can see why licking a latex Lollye could be a nightmare for a latex-sensitive woman.

The only solution to latex sensitivity is to avoid latex as much as possible. Here are some alternatives:

- Nitrile gloves contain no latex, and they're thinner than most latex gloves. They can be used with water-based, oil-based, and silicone lubricants. They're more expensive than latex, however. Vinyl gloves are also an alternative to latex.
- Plastic wrap is a cheap alternative to latex dams.
- Polyurethane condoms by Avanti are an alternative to latex condoms. They're thinner and larger than latex condoms and can be used with water-based, oil-based, and silicone lubricants. However, they are much more expensive than latex condoms. *Do not* use lambskin condoms for safer sex; they won't prevent transmission of viruses such as HIV.

Latex-free safer-sex supplies are available from a number of suppliers, as well as sex toy stores listed in the resources.

How's Your Budget?

If you want to have fun on a budget, try some of these suggestions:

- Buy latex gloves by the box. Most large pharmacies have a house brand.
- Get your condoms for free at gay bars and events sponsored by AIDS prevention organizations. Safeguarding your health is as important as safeguarding anyone else's.
- Use plastic wrap, cut-up gloves, or condoms for dental dams.
- Keep a spray bottle of water by your bed. Rather than continually adding more water-based lube, spray a little water on your glove or dildo to reactivate the lube.
- If you like silicone or glycerin-free lubes, look for the cheaper brands. Eros Bodyglide and Liquid Silk are so popular as to have spawned less-expensive imitations.
- Buy cheap rubber dildos and butt plugs—they cost half as much as their silicone counterparts. You can hide their less-than-pleasing look and texture under a condom.
- Nylon harnesses cost less than leather and will do the job quite well.
- Some BDSM toy vendors cater to customers who want to stock their play rooms inexpensively. Certain toys, such as canes and crops, lend themselves to economizing, while others don't—cheap whips are just that: cheap. Use your imagination—a wooden spoon makes a great paddle; a chair works well as a bondage station.

How to Care for Your Toys

Clean your toys with warm water and soap—preferably antibacterial soap, Hibiclens, or a toy cleaner such as ForPlay Adult Toy Cleanser. Never submerge electric or battery-operated toys in water.

Silicone can be cleaned by boiling for two to three minutes. You can also clean silicone dildos in your dishwasher. Keep silicone lubricants away from silicone toys.

Rubber dildos are more porous than silicone and will absorb dirt. Always use condoms with rubber dildos, and clean them thoroughly with soap and water

after each use.

Cyberskin is a challenge to keep clean—the easiest solution is to use condoms with Cyberskin dildos. The skinlike surface attracts dirt. Cyberskin toys can't be cleaned by boiling, so use soap and water, dry thoroughly, and dust with corn starch. (*Do not* use baby powder or talc, which have been linked to cervical cancer.)

Nylon harnesses can be washed in the sink—or you can toss them into the washing machine. Hang to dry.

Clean leather harnesses with soap and water and hang dry. To disinfect, wipe with a cloth soaked in 70 percent isopropyl alcohol and then wipe clean with soap and water. After cleaning, use a leather conditioner to prevent the leather from drying out (never hang in the sun).

To clean a leather flogger, wipe each tail individually with a damp cloth soaked in either soap and water or leather cleaner, such as Lexol. To disinfect, wipe with a cloth soaked in 70 percent isopropyl alcohol and then wipe clean with soap and water. Don't store leather until it's completely dry, to avoid mold. Use a leather conditioner to prevent the leather from drying out.

Suggested Web Links

COME AS YOU ARE

www.comeasyouare.com

GOOD VIBRATIONS

www.goodvibes.com

TOYS IN BABELAND

www.babeland.com

SOURCE OF SIDEBAR

“Toy Accessibility” is adapted from *The Ultimate Guide to Sex and Disability: For All of Us Who Live with Disabilities, Chronic Pain and Illness*, by Miriam

Kaufman, Cory Silverberg, and Fran Odette, and the Come As You Are website,
www.comeasyouare.com.

chapter eighteen

Safer Sex and Gynecological Health

I have herpes. I'm very up-front about it.

DO YOU THINK THAT IF YOU'RE NOT SEXUALLY ACTIVE with men, you're not at risk for STDs? If so, you're not alone. Many lesbians think that living an exclusively "lesbian lifestyle" immunizes them against sexually transmitted conditions—and, for that matter, most gynecological concerns. Not so!

Unfortunately, when it comes to sexually transmitted diseases, some health-care practitioners think the same thing. Knowing very little about lesbian sexual practices, they make assumptions—that lesbians don't have penetrative sex, or anal sex, or that lesbians don't have sex at all.

More troubling, those who research STD transmission may not know much about lesbian sex either. They may use terms like *oral sex* and *vaginal intercourse* in safersex guidelines without defining them. Does oral sex refer to cunnilingus? Or just fellatio? Does penetration with a dildo count as intercourse? How do you know what's safe?

Relatively few clinical studies have been conducted of woman-to-woman transmission of STDs. Can chlamydia be transmitted by sharing a dildo with an infected partner? Can you give your partner herpes or trichomoniasis through frottage? Can you get HIV by going down on a menstruating woman who has the virus? What about hepatitis? A cautious physician will tell you that, yes, all of these scenarios are quite possible—but that not enough studies have been done to offer conclusive answers.

Since women who have sex with women are often left out of health research, our health-care needs are neglected. Jeanne Marrazzo, of the Lesbian-Bisexual Women's Health Study at the University of Washington, says that because "lesbians do not fit the very narrowly and poorly defined risk profile, they are being told that as lesbian/bisexual women they do not need Pap smears or STD

screenings.”¹

None of which inspires confidence when you’re sitting on the examination table in a paper gown and your health-care practitioner cheerfully asks whether you’re sexually “active” and what kind of birth control you use. No wonder few of us feel comfortable speaking candidly about our sexual histories and practices.

But if medical research skirts the issue of woman-to-woman transmission of STDs, and if you don’t feel comfortable coming out to a physician, how will your gynecologist know what to look for?

Talking to Your Doctor About Sex

As Tristan Taormino says, “Your gynecological visit is no time to play ‘Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell.’ If they don’t ask, it’s your responsibility to tell.”² It’s important for your health that you come out to your health caregiver. Find a physician you feel comfortable with. Look for someone you think you can talk to. Even a lesbian gynecologist can’t guess what you do in bed.

You can’t rely on your health-care practitioner to make you feel comfortable talking about sex. Physicians trained in the United States receive less instruction in human sexuality than volunteers at some sex-information hotlines. Your doctor may be even less comfortable than you discussing the details of your sex life—especially if your physician sees few other lesbian, bisexual, or transgendered patients.

Charles Moser, author of *Health Care Without Shame: A Handbook for the Sexually Diverse and Their Caregivers*, recommends that you come out to your physician during your first visit—if not sooner. Don’t wait until you suspect you have an STD. What should you tell your health-care practitioner about your sex life? Here are some of the points Moser suggests you cover:

- The sexual activities you typically engage in—such as oral sex, vaginal or anal penetration with fingers or a dildo, or fisting.
- The safersex precautions you employ.
- The number of partners with whom you have sexual contact.
- Whether you engage in activities that might involve bruising or breaking

the skin (such as caning or play piercing).

- The family structures or relationships you wish to have taken into account for hospital visitation or decisions regarding your care.³

Finally, if you don't feel comfortable following Moser's recommendations, some health advocates suggest you simply say that you are sexually active and want to be tested for the full spectrum of STDs.

Gynecological Care

All sexually active females should get annual gynecological exams, including Pap smear, pelvic exam, and breast exam. Whether you have sex with one partner or many, with women only or with both women and men, you need regular gynecological care. Regardless of your gender identity—stone butches (and many FTMs)⁴ require gynecological care, too.

If you engage in unprotected sexual activities, ask to be screened for STDs. If you engage in anal sex, ask for a rectal exam—some STDs can infect you rectally as well as genitally. As you'll see below, STDs often occur without any symptoms—or with symptoms you could easily mistake for the flu. A Pap smear, blood test, or culture may be the only way you know you've been exposed to an STD.

If you're diagnosed with an STD or have had an abnormal Pap smear, your physician will recommend treatment. It's important that you follow up on recommended procedures and return visits. Your annual Pap smear can prevent cervical cancer *only* if you treat any dysplasia or other conditions revealed by the test.

Consult a gynecologist if you experience pain during penetrative sex or if you experience spotting after deep thrusting with a dildo, fingers, or fist. You may have a small tear or abrasion on your cervix.

If you notice a rash or sore on your genitals or anus, unusual discharge, or irregular bleeding, or if you experience genital itching or irritation, painful urination, abdominal or pelvic pain, nausea, fatigue, or fever, consult a physician. Don't ignore these symptoms.

STDs and Gynecological Concerns

Many gynecological problems can be cleared up easily. Left untreated, they can lead to very serious health problems. Bacterial STDs can be treated with antibiotics. Viral STDs can't be "cured"—but there are medications to alleviate outbreaks, as with herpes, as well as new treatment protocols for HIV that have been effective for many people.

Butches and Gynecological Care

Many butches feel profoundly uncomfortable in the pastel pink-and-blue world of the ob-gyn's office. The presumptions of mainstream health-care providers about female bodies and gender are painful to bear. Even "feminist" and "lesbian-friendly" health-care providers may not necessarily be sensitive to the needs of butches.

For a butch who does not engage in receptive vaginal penetration, putting your feet in the stirrups can be hell. For many butches who don't identify as women, *per se*—stone butches, transgendered butches, butches who view "butch" as a third gender—a gynecological exam is an experience of dysphoria.

Numerous butches have a simple solution to the problem: they don't go. They don't receive regular Pap screenings, mammograms, or well-woman exams. They don't see a gynecologist unless something's wrong. And since many STDs are asymptomatic—well, you get the picture.

FTMs aren't exempt either. "For the FTM specifically, dealing with the female reproductive organs can be a nightmare. Most of us do not have regular Pap smears. The procedure is invasive. And again, finding a gynecologist who is sympathetic is difficult."⁵ FTMs need access to appropriate gynecological health care. Some health-care providers serving the transgendered community advocate pelvic exams after age 40 for "people assigned a female sex at birth."⁶ Others say health maintenance routines should be determined by the

organs present. “Health maintenance for transgender patients should be based on age, family and personal health risk factors, and the organ systems present. Physical exams should be structured based on the organs present rather than the perceived gender of the patient.... If the uterus and cervix are present, pelvic exams and Pap smears need to be done on a regular basis.”⁷

Wherever we fall on the gender spectrum—from butch to transgendered—we need health care. What can we do?

- Use local and regional email lists and discussion boards to find referrals. Some national organizations and websites also offer local referrals. (See the resources section.)
- Educate your doctor. [Butch-femme.net](#) posts an informational brochure for gynecologists and other health-care professionals, “Female = Woman, Right? Not Always ...”⁹
- Is there a butch-friendly physician in your area? Spread the word. Even a single queer staff person in a medical practice can be a support.
- Tell your health-care provider how you wish to be addressed. Likewise, health-care providers can ask patients if they prefer “he” or “she.”
- Tell your health-care provider what you do sexually, with whom, and whether or not you use latex barriers.
- Take a friend or partner with you to your exam. Tell the office staff that she (or he) will be accompanying you for the exam.
- If you are partnered, you may feel more comfortable getting your health care in the same office as your partner. You can support each other.
- Take care of yourself. Learn about gynecological health, do breast self-exams, get tested for STDs, and practice safer sex.

“Latex provides protection on whatever surface it is covering,” according to the researchers on [LesbianSTD.com](#).⁸ Use of latex or polyurethane barriers on insertive sex toys such as dildos and vibrators prevents transmission of bacterial STDs like chlamydia and gonorrhea. Use of plastic wrap or latex or nitrile

gloves on skin prevents transmission of viruses like herpes and HPV. Plastic wrap is considered a better barrier for oral sex than conventional dental dams, which are too small. Of course, if you do have sex with men (penis-vagina, penis-anus, or fellatio), use a condom. (See chapter 5, *The Road to Heaven Leads to You*, for a complete list of safersex guidelines.)

Here are some STDs and other gynecological conditions you should know about:

Allergies and Chemical Sensitivity

While allergies aren't sexually transmitted conditions, they certainly will affect your sex life. The vaginal discharge, itching, and irritation they cause may lead you to mistake allergic vaginosis for a yeast infection—or even new-onset genital herpes. You may be sensitive to latex, the powder used on latex gloves, glycerin in a particular brand of lubricant, spermicides or microbicides like nonoxynol-9, or other products. The best treatment is to discontinue use of the irritant. (See chapter 17, *Sex Toys and Accoutrements*, for information on lubricants, latex allergies, and alternative safersex supplies.)

Nonoxynol-9 is a detergent that's added to some lubricants (including some lubricated condoms) to kill the HIV virus. Many women find nonoxynol-9 irritating to the mucous membranes of the vagina and rectum. There has been much debate regarding the use of nonoxynol-9. While some sex educators still recommend nonoxynol-9 for use with condoms during penis-to-vagina and penis-to-anus penetration as added insurance against HIV transmission, most do not. They argue that the irritations caused by nonoxynol-9 outweigh the benefits. Especially regarding anal sex, they recommend that you *not* use nonoxynol-9. [10](#) Irritating the delicate rectal tissue, they argue, can encourage HIV transmission by providing the virus with an accessible route to the bloodstream. As of June 2001, the CDC recommended that nonoxynol-9 *not* be used as a microbicide or lubricant during anal intercourse. [11](#)

When I first logged onto LesbianSTD.com, I wanted to leap out of my chair. Finally, a website addressing *our* safersex concerns. Here are some things I learned:

- Human papillomavirus (HPV), one of the most common STDs, can cause genital warts and abnormal Pap smears, and in some women can lead to cervical cancer.
- HPV can be transmitted from one woman to another.
- Bacterial vaginosis (BV) is strongly associated with preterm labor and low birth weight.
- BV is often diagnosed in both partners in lesbian couples.
- Both HPV and BV have been seen in many lesbian and bisexual women, even those with no prior sexual history with men.
- Medical literature contains case reports of woman-to-woman transmission of HIV. The most likely sources of transmission are menstrual blood, vaginal discharge when there is vaginitis (because more white blood cells containing HIV may be present then), and traumatic sex practices.

Bacterial Vaginosis

This condition may be transmitted sexually between women with such frequency that one researcher calls BV an “STD among lesbians.”¹² One study of lesbian health reported an 80 percent concurrence rate for bacterial vaginosis among monogamous lesbian couples.¹³ Yet, it has not been medically proven that bacterial vaginosis, caused by an imbalance of bacteria normally found in the vagina, is, in fact, sexually transmitted at all.¹⁴ Still, partners should be evaluated. If you notice a yellowish vaginal discharge, vaginal itching or irritation, or a strong odor, you may have a vaginal infection. Bacterial vaginosis is treated with antibiotics. Use only water-based lubricants in the vagina; oil-based lubes are difficult to wash out. Do not allow anal bacteria entry into the vagina. Change gloves when you move from anal to vaginal penetration—or wash your hands with an antibacterial soap. Use condoms on shared sex toys.

Change condoms when you change activities or partners.

Chlamydia and Gonorrhea

According to the Lesbian-Bisexual Women’s Health Study, woman-to-woman transmission of chlamydia and gonorrhea “seems to be rare,” though such transmission is possible.¹⁵ Why don’t we know how frequently women transmit chlamydia and gonorrhea to each other? Jeanne Marrazzo thinks this is a problem of surveillance and reporting. Both chlamydia and gonorrhea infect the cervix and can be transmitted through penetrative sex. Researchers, she says, assume that lesbians don’t have penetrative sex. (Interestingly, of the 149 women in Marrazzo’s study of HPV in women who have sex with women, 147 had penetrative vaginal sex with women in the year prior to the study.)¹⁶

In fact, Marrazzo believes that chlamydia and gonorrhea can be transmitted by dildos and hands. According to her, a shared dildo can carry chlamydia and gonorrhea from cervix to cervix, as can an unwashed hand. If you engage in fisting and then touch yourself, you could acquire chlamydia or gonorrhea.¹⁷ Wash your hands with bacterial soap when changing partners or sexual activities—and before you touch yourself.¹⁸ Use condoms or gloves on shared sex toys, and use gloves on your hands.

With 3 million new infections each year in the United States alone, some health educators call chlamydia the “silent epidemic” because it’s so frequently asymptomatic. In fact, most women with chlamydia have no symptoms. Others may notice a yellowish vaginal discharge, painful urination, abdominal pain, or irregular bleeding. Untreated, chlamydia can lead to pelvic inflammatory disease (PID), a cause of infertility. Chlamydia is caused by *Chlamydia trachomatis* bacteria and is treated with antibiotics.

Symptoms of gonorrhea are similar to chlamydia—vaginal discharge, irregular bleeding, and PID symptoms. As with chlamydia, it’s possible to have gonorrhea without symptoms. Gonorrhea is caused by *Neisseria gonorrhoeae* bacteria and is treated with antibiotics.

Hepatitis

Hepatitis is an inflammation of the liver most commonly caused by three virus strains: hepatitis A virus (HAV), hepatitis B virus (HBV), and hepatitis C virus (HCV). Symptoms include fatigue, depression, nausea, loss of appetite, fever, chills, stomach pain, body aches, diarrhea, weight loss, headaches, and jaundice. Some people carry the hepatitis virus without having any symptoms at all. Hepatitis is diagnosed through a blood test. For many people, hepatitis is a lifelong chronic illness. If you have hepatitis B or C, don't share toothbrushes, razors, or piercing/cutting instruments, and don't expose partners to your menstrual blood.

Hepatitis A (HAV). You can transmit or acquire hepatitis A through unprotected rimming—regardless of the gender of your partners. If you engage in unprotected rimming, consider getting a vaccination for hepatitis A and use a latex barrier or plastic wrap for rimming.

Hepatitis B (HBV). You can transmit or acquire hepatitis B through cunnilingus, especially during menstruation. Hepatitis B is more likely to be transmitted through sharing needles for IV drug use, tattooing or piercing, and accidental needle sticks. If you engage in unprotected cunnilingus with menstruating partners, or if you engage in *any* activities where blood contact is possible, consider getting a vaccination for hepatitis B. Use a latex barrier or plastic wrap for cunnilingus.

Hepatitis C (HCV). It's estimated that almost 4 million people in the United States are infected with hepatitis C [19](#)—and perhaps as many as 200 million worldwide.[20](#) In most cases, hepatitis C is asymptomatic for years, even decades, before progressing to chronic liver disease. Many people who are infected with hepatitis C don't know they have it. Clearly, hepatitis C is epidemic.

The risk of sexual transmission of hepatitis C hasn't been determined, though the risk is probably higher if you engage in S/M blood play or come into contact with blood during sex. Hepatitis C *may* be transmitted through woman-to-woman sex involving cunnilingus during menstruation. Hepatitis C is most often transmitted through sharing needles for IV drug use, tattooing or piercing, and accidental needle sticks. Use dental dams or other barriers to prevent transmission during cunnilingus. There's no vaccination for hepatitis C.

Herpes

An estimated 150 million people in the United States have been exposed to the herpes-2 virus.²¹ And one in five adults in the U.S. has genital herpes; an estimated 90 percent don't know they have it.²² Herpes is a chronic, viral STD that's extremely contagious:

- Many believe that the virus can be spread only during an outbreak—which is not true. The herpes virus may be shedding even when there are no visible symptoms.
- Herpes can be transmitted through skin-to-skin contact, including frottage (without clothing), hand-to-vulva, and hand-to-anus contact.
- Herpes sores can break out not only *on* the genitals but in the area *surrounding* the genitals. Condoms and dental dams may not cover a large enough area to prevent transmission during outbreaks.
- Herpes can be transmitted from one mucosal membrane to another—from mouth to vulva and from vulva to mouth. As the receptive partner in cunnilingus, you can get genital herpes from a partner who has oral herpes. As the partner performing cunnilingus, you can get oral herpes from a partner who has genital herpes. Oral herpes can be transmitted from mouth to mouth.

Herpes is caused by one of two viruses: *Herpes simplex type 1* (HSV-1), which is oral herpes; or *Herpes simplex type 2* (HSV-2), which is genital herpes. Prior to a herpes outbreak, you may experience flulike symptoms or itching and tingling in the affected area. You may develop a very painful, raw herpes blister in the affected area. Outbreaks can be brought on by stress or a compromised immune system. Health-care providers diagnose genital herpes by visual inspection and by testing a tissue sample from the sore. While there's no cure for herpes, there are medications that can help prevent or alleviate outbreaks. Use gloves on hands for finger-fucking and fisting, and plastic wrap for oral sex. Cover sex toys with a condom or glove. Change condoms and gloves between partners.

Talking about sex histories and negotiating safer sex has improved my sex life, because I feel closer to my partner—and we also talk about what turns us on.

HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus)

HIV is transmitted when semen, blood, vaginal fluids, or breast milk of an infected person enter the bloodstream. Small lacerations or abrasions in the mouth, anus, vagina, or skin can provide a route for transmission of the HIV virus. Sores from herpes or other STDs can also provide a way for the HIV virus to enter the bloodstream, which is why having certain STDs can increase your risk for HIV.

Since HIV is present in both blood and vaginal secretions, it's possible to transmit HIV through unprotected cunnilingus, particularly when the receptive partner is menstruating and the other has bleeding gums or sores in her mouth. It is assumed that HIV-positive women who have sex with women acquire HIV through IV drug use, sperm donor insemination, or sex with men.

Understanding the potential for woman-to-woman transmission is complicated by the fact that models for reporting incidents of HIV infection don't account for lesbian sex. An HIV-positive lesbian or bisexual woman with other risk behaviors (for example, unprotected anal intercourse with men, injection drug use, needle use for piercing and tattooing, or use of unscreened semen for insemination) won't be "counted" as a case of woman-to-woman transmission.

However, now there is proof of lesbian transmission. According to *POZ* magazine, a researcher found a genetic match between the HIV virus in a newly diagnosed woman and that of her HIV-positive partner. How did transmission occur? The woman had tested negative six months prior to the positive result. For the previous two years she had had only one sexual contact—her HIV-POSITIVE partner. She had no history of IV drug use or sex with men. She had never received a transfusion. She had no piercings or tattoos. She did not share razors or toothbrushes with her partner. They did not have sex during menstruation. Her partner used protection with only her male partners, "as instructed by her physician."²³

Ruling out other possibilities, the researcher, Dr. Helena Kwakwa, whose study was reported in *Clinical Infectious Diseases*, determined that transmission occurred via blood on shared sex toys. Not menstrual blood—but blood from hard play. Apparently, the HIV-positive partner had not been told to use condoms with sex toys. While the risk for transmission between women is low, "it's there." Kwakwa reported that she saw women "who would not be coming

in with HIV if they'd had the proper information and recognition of risk."²⁴

Most people infected with HIV have no symptoms, since the virus can lie dormant for months and can take years to produce symptoms of AIDS. Symptoms of HIV in women resemble those of a number of other STDs, such as recurrent or difficult-to-treat yeast infections or PID. Use gloves on hands for finger-fucking and fisting, and plastic wrap for oral sex. Cover sex toys with a condom or glove. Don't share needles, razors, or piercing/cutting instruments, and don't expose partners to your menstrual blood.

HPV (Human Papillomavirus)

HPV is the virus commonly associated with genital and anal warts and with cervical cancer. More recently, it's been established that virtually *all* cervical cancers (99 percent) are caused by HPV, though only a few of the many strains of HPV are thought to cause cervical cancer.²⁵

Woman-to-woman transmission of HPV seems certain, even among women who have never had sex with men.²⁶ HPV is so prevalent in the United States as to be ubiquitous, some health educators say.²⁷

Like herpes, HPV can be transmitted through skin-to-skin contact when the virus is shedding—which may or may not be accompanied by the appearance of warts on the genitals or anus.

I came out to my partner about being HIV+ and having HPV on our first date. That was one intense date, let me tell you! We also talked about the kind of sex we like, and we had a very hot night of sex after our long personal discussion.

HPV can be transmitted through frottage (without clothing), hand-to-vulva, and hand-to-anus contact. You can acquire HPV by touching the affected area of a partner with your hand and then touching your own genital area without washing your hands.

You might discover you've been infected with HPV when warts appear on your genitals or anus. More likely, HPV is discovered through a routine Pap smear. Treatment may involve removing external genital and anal warts and

treating cervical abnormalities through colposcopy, biopsy, and other procedures. HPV is infectious even after the warts are removed or cervical dysplasia disappears. There's no cure for HPV, though progression to cervical cancer can be prevented by regular gynecological screening and follow-up. Use gloves on hands for finger-fucking and fisting, and plastic wrap for oral sex. Cover sex toys with a condom or glove. Change condoms and gloves between partners.

Syphilis

Syphilis is rarely transmitted through woman-to-woman sex—though it's been documented to occur as a result of sex between women, according to Marrazzo. She adds: “Because rates of syphilis, a previously uncommon disease, have been skyrocketing among gay men, women who are involved in sexual networks that may also involve bisexual/gay men may be at increasing risk of exposure to this disease.”²⁸ Syphilis initially appears as a single sore or chancre. It is caused by *Treponema pallidum* bacteria and is treated with penicillin. Refrain from unprotected sex until the infection has been treated.

Trichomoniasis

This condition can be transmitted through woman-to-woman sex, via contact with vaginal secretions.²⁹ You can acquire trichomoniasis by touching the affected area of a partner with your hand and then touching your own genital area. Partners of an infected woman should be checked for trichomoniasis. “Trich” can lie dormant for months or years. As with bacterial vaginosis, symptoms include vaginal discharge, burning, irritation, painful urination, and strong vaginal odor. Trichomoniasis is caused by *Trichomonas vaginalis* protozoa and is treated with antibiotics. Use gloves on hands for finger-fucking and fisting, and plastic wrap for oral sex. Cover sex toys with a condom or glove. Change condoms and gloves between partners.

Urinary Tract Infections (UTIs)

While not sexually transmitted, *per se*, urinary tract infections deserve mention because women often get UTIs when bacteria are forced into the urethra during vaginal penetration. Often, women who have penetrative sex after a long hiatus get UTIs—hence the nickname “honeymoon disease.” You’ll know you have a UTI when you feel a persistent, painful need to urinate—even when your bladder is empty. If you suspect you have a UTI, see a physician immediately to prevent a more serious infection. You can help prevent UTIs by drinking a minimum of eight glasses of water a day and urinating before and after penetrative sex.

Yeast Infections

According to the Lesbian-Bisexual Women’s Health Study, it’s unknown whether yeast infections can be transmitted sexually from woman to woman.³⁰ They certainly are common. Yeast infections are caused by an imbalance in normal yeast found in the vagina. It is thought that the condition can be aggravated by high sugar intake—and some woman are finding that this includes exposure to lubricants containing glycerin—by stress, or by moisture from wearing wet clothing. Symptoms include a white, clumpy vaginal discharge, and itching and burning in the vagina. Yeast infections are treated with antifungal medication. Recurrent or difficult-to-treat yeast infections may be symptomatic of diabetes, HIV, or herpes.

What If Your Partner Won’t Use Barriers?

You have a right to employ safersex techniques—regardless of whether your partner believes STDs can or can’t be transmitted through woman-to-woman sex.

Safer Sex Is More Than Latex

The women of the Northwest Network of Bisexual, Trans and Lesbian Survivors of Abuse are quick to point out that safer sex requires more

than latex—your emotional and physical safety needs must be met as well. How do you determine whether a sexual relationship is abusive? Here are some questions to ponder:

- Do you ever have sex to “keep the peace”? Or because you were tired of resisting?
- Has your partner forced you to have sex against your will?
- Has your partner refused to practice safer sex, or refused to discuss safer sex?
- Does your partner make fun of your sexuality?
- Does your partner expect you to report to her about masturbating? Does she tell you you shouldn’t masturbate because it’s “cheating”?
- Does your partner demand that you tell her your fantasies? Does she shame you because of your sexual desires or fantasies?
- Does your partner accuse you of having affairs? Does your partner threaten to have affairs when you both have agreed to be monogamous?
- Has your partner accused you of not being a “real” lesbian?

If you feel your relationship is abusive, get help. You can call your local (or regional) domestic violence or sexual assault hotline. Some hotlines are staffed by lesbian-friendly and transgender-friendly volunteers—after all, lesbians and bisexual women have volunteered countless hours for many local feminist antiviolence resources (and in some cases even founded them). However, be aware that not all domestic violence hotline volunteers will understand or even sympathize with the needs of lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered clients. Contact the Northwest Network of Bisexual, Trans and Lesbian Survivors of Abuse to find supportive resources in your area. (See the resources chapter.)

Discussing safer sex is part of sexual negotiation. As with other aspects of sexual communication, you have to know what you want to tell your partner. What are your safersex standards? Dams for rimming? Gloves for fisting? Tell your partner.

If a woman refuses to use a barrier for oral sex, or to wear gloves for penetration, or to put a condom on her dildo, or to use lube, you don't have to have sex with her. Many women out there would love to be sexual with you *and* be respectful of your health concerns.

What If You Have an STD?

Sometimes I feel dirty, like nobody would want me. And when my girlfriend doesn't want to have sex with me, I immediately assume it's about my hepatitis, even though it's really about her, like she's told me a million times before. Even so, if I think about it too long I wind up beating myself up for having hep C.

In addition to gynecological care, make sure you get emotional support, too. Acquiring an STD can wreck havoc with your self-esteem. You may feel untouchable or ashamed. Because even progressive communities at times treat STDs as moral rather than health issues, you may be left feeling as if you have no right to a sex life at all. You deserve as much pleasure now as you ever did—but you do have a responsibility not to transmit the STD to your partners. Practicing safer sex will prevent you from acquiring a new sexually transmitted condition, too.

Here are some things to think about and do:

- *Get treated.* Don't attempt to self-diagnose and treat your STD.
- *Follow up* on gynecological care.
- *Notify your recent sex partners*, so that they can get tested, too.
- *Care for yourself* as you would when facing any other illness. Avoid stress, eat well, get eight hours' sleep each night.
- *Don't beat yourself up.* Sexually transmitted diseases are caused by bacteria and viruses—not weak morals.
- *Take responsibility.* Don't pass the STD along to your partners. Follow recommended safersex guidelines.
- *Tell new partners about your STD.* They're responsible for their sexual health just as you are for yours. Your full disclosure enables your partners to make decisions regarding safer sex.
- In some communities, you can *find support groups* for women with herpes

and other chronic conditions. Or seek help from members of Internet support groups. It helps to have someone to talk to.

Remember: You're entitled to a fulfilling, healthy sex life. You're no less deserving of sexual pleasure because you've acquired an STD. *Play safe!*

Suggested Web Links

LESBIANSTD.COM

www.lesbianstd.com

SAFERSEX.ORG

www.safersex.org/women/lesbianss.html

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“LesbianSTD.com” is excerpted with permission from www.lesbianstd.com.

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chapter nineteen

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The Good Vibrations Guide to Sex: The Most Complete Sex Manual Ever Written, by Cathy Winks and Anne Semans, 3rd edition, (Cleis Press, 2002).

A Hand in the Bush: The Art of Vaginal Fisting, by Deborah Addington (Greenery Press, 1996).

The Lesbian Sex Book, by Wendy Caster and Rachel Kramer Bussel, 2nd edition, (Alyson Publications, 2003).

Paying for It: A Guide by Sex Workers for Their Clients, by Greta Christina (Greenery Press, 2004).

Safer Sex Handbook for Lesbians, by Cynthia Madansky and Julie Tolentino Wood (GMHC, 1993, pamphlet).

Sapphisty: The Book of Lesbian Sexuality, by Pat Califia (Naiad Press, 1979).

Sensuous Magic: A Guide for Adventurous Couples, by Patrick Califia, 2nd edition (Cleis Press, 2002).

Sex for One: The Joy of Selfloving, by Betty Dodson (Crown, 1996).

Sex Toys 101: A Playfully Uninhibited Guide, by Rachel Venning and Claire Cavanah (Simon & Schuster, 2003).

The Sexuality of Latinas, edited by Norma Alarcon, Ana Castillo, and Cherrie Moraga (Third Woman Press, 1993). In English and Spanish.

Sexy Mamas: Keeping Your Sex Life Alive While Raising Kids (Inner Ocean, 2004).

The Strap-On Book, by A. H. Dion (Greenery Press, 1999).

The Survivor's Guide to Sex: How to Have an Empowered Sex Life After Child Sexual Abuse, by Staci Haines (Cleis Press, 1999).

Susie Sexpert's Lesbian Sex World, by Susie Bright, 2nd edition, (Cleis Press, 1998).

The Ultimate Guide to Adult Videos: How to Watch Adult Videos and Make Your Sex Life Sizzle, by Violet Blue (Cleis Press, 2003).

The Ultimate Guide to Anal Sex for Women, by Tristan Taormino (Cleis Press, 1997).

The Ultimate Guide to Cunnilingus: How to Go Down on a Woman and Give Her Exquisite Pleasure, by Violet Blue (Cleis Press, 2002).

The Ultimate Guide to Sex and Disability: For All of Us Who Live with Disabilities, Chronic Pain and Illness, by Miriam Kaufman M.D., Cory Silverberg, and Fran Odette (Cleis Press, 2003).

The Ultimate Guide to Sexual Fantasy: How to Turn Your Fantasies into Reality, by Violet Blue (Cleis Press, 2004).

The Ultimate Guide to Strap-On Sex: A Resource for Men and Women, by Karlyn Lotney (Cleis Press, 1999).

Sexual Politics

Annie Sprinkle's Post-Porn Modernist: My 25 Years as a Multimedia Whore, by Annie Sprinkle (Cleis Press, 1997).

Caught Looking: Feminism, Pornography, and Censorship, edited by the FACT Book Committee (LongRiver Books, 1986).

Her Tongue on My Theory: Images, Essays, and Fantasies, by Kiss & Tell (Press Gang Publishers, 1994).

I Used to Be Nice: Reflections on Feminist and Lesbian Politics, by Sue O'Sullivan (Cassell, 1996).

On Our Backs Guide to Lesbian Sex, edited by Diana Cage (Alyson Publications, 2004).

PoMoSexuals: Challenging Assumptions about Gender and Identity, edited by

Carol Queen and Lawrence Schimel (Cleis Press, 1997).

Public Sex: The Culture of Radical Sex, by Patrick Califia, 2nd edition, (Cleis Press, 1994, 2000).

Sex Work: Writings by Women in the Sex Industry, edited by Frédérique Delacoste and Priscilla Alexander, 2nd edition, (Cleis Press, 1987, 1998).

Speaking Sex to Power: The Politics of Queer Sex, by Patrick Califia (Cleis Press, 2001).

Technology of Orgasm: "Hysteria," the Vibrator, and Women's Sexual Satisfaction, by Rachel P. Maines (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001).

Tristan Taormino's True Lust, by Tristan Taormino (Cleis Press, 2002).

S/M and Fetish Sex

Coming to Power: Writings and Graphics on Lesbian S/M, edited by SAMOIS, 3rd edition (Alyson Publications, 1987).

The Compleat Spanker, by Lady Green (Greenery Press, 1998).

Intimate Invasion: The Erotic Ins and Outs of Enema Play, by M. R. Strict (Greenery Press, 2004).

Juice: Electricity for Pleasure and Pain, by Uncle Abdul (Greenery Press, 1998).

The Lesbian S/M Safety Manual, edited by Pat Califia (Alyson Publications, 1988).

The New Bottoming Book, by Dossie Easton and Janet W. Hardy, 2nd edition, (Greenery Press, 2001).

The New Topping Book, by Dossie Easton and Janet W. Hardy, 2nd edition, (Greenery Press, 2003).

The Second Coming: A Leatherdyke Reader, edited by Pat Califia and Robin Sweeney (Alyson Publications, 1996).

The Seductive Art of Japanese Bondage, by Midori (Greenery Press, 2001).

The Sexually Dominant Woman: A Workbook for Nervous Beginners, by Lady

Green (Greenery Press, 1998).

The Toybag Guide to Dungeon Emergencies and Supplies, by Jay Wiseman (Greenery Press, 2004).

The Toybag Guide to Foot And Shoe Worship, by Midori (Greenery Press, 2004).

21st Century Kinkycrafts, by Janet Hardy (Greenery Press, 2004).

Spirituality and Sex

The Art of Sexual Ecstasy: The Path of Sacred Sexuality for Western Lovers, by Margo Anand (Tarcher, 1991).

Lesbian Sacred Sexuality, by Diane Mariechild and Marcelina Martin (Wingbow Press, 1995).

The Multi-Orgasmic Couple: How Couples Can Dramatically Enhance Their Pleasure, Intimacy, and Health, by Mantak Chia, Maneewan Chia, Douglas Abrams, and Rachel Carlton Abrams (HarperSanFrancisco, 2002).

Radical Ecstasy, by Dossie Easton and Janet W. Hardy (Greenery Press, 2004).

Sacred Sex, by Jwala (Mandala, 1993).

The Tao of Natural Breating: For Health, Well-Being and Inner Growth, by Dennis Lewis (Mountain Wind, 1996).

Urban Tantra, by Barbara Carrellas (Cleis Press, 2005).

Women's Bodies and Health

The Black Women's Health Book, edited by Evelyn C. White (Seal Press, 1994).

The Clitoral Truth: The Secret World at Your Fingertips, by Rebecca Chalker (Seven Stories Press, 2000).

Cunt: A Declaration of Independence, by Inga Muscio (Seal Press, 1998).

Dr. Susan Love's Breast Book, by Susan M. Love and Karen Lindsey (HarperCollins, 2000).

Dr. Susan Love's Menopause and Hormone Book: Making Informed Choices, by Susan M. Love M.D. and Karen Lindsey (Three Rivers Press, 2003).

Femalia, edited by Joani Blank (Down There Press, 1993).

Getting Free: You Can End Abuse and Take Back Your Life, by Ginny NiCarthy (Seal Press, 1997).

Health Care Without Shame: A Handbook for the Sexually Diverse and Their Caregivers, by Charles Moser Ph.D., M.D. (Greenery Press, 1999).

The Lesbian Health Book: Caring for Ourselves, edited by Marissa C. Martinez and Jocelyn C. White (Seal Press, 1997).

New Menopausal Years the Wise Woman Way: Alternative Approaches for Women 30-90, by Susun S. Weed (Ashtree Publishing, 2002).

The New Ourselves, Growing Older: Women Aging with Knowledge and Power, by Paula B. Doress-Worters and Diana Laskin Siegal (Touchstone/Simon & Schuster, 1994).

A New View of a Woman's Body, by the Federation of Feminist Women's Health Centers (Feminist Health Press, 1991).

Nuestros Cuerpos, Nuestras Vidas, by The Boston Women's Health Book Collective (Seven Stories Press, 2000)

Off the Rag: Lesbians Writing on Menopause, edited by Lee Lynch and Akia Woods (New Victoria Press, 1996).

Our Bodies, Ourselves: For the New Century, by the Boston Women's Health Book Collective (Touchstone/Simon & Schuster, 1998).

Restricted Access: Lesbians on Disability, edited by Victoria A. Brownworth and Susan Raffo (Seal Press, 1999).

The Ultimate Guide to Pregnancy for Lesbians: Tips and Techniques from Conception to Birth—How to Stay Sane and Care for Yourself, by Rachel Pepper (Cleis Press, 1999).

The Wisdom of Menopause: Creating Physical and Emotional Health and Healing During the Change, by Christiane Northrup (Bantam, 2003).

Women En Large: Images of Fat Nudes, by Laurie Edison and Debbie Notkin (Books in Focus, 1994).

Magazines

Bad Attitude

Lesbian S/M fiction.
P.O. Box 39110, Cambridge, MA 02139

Bitch

1611 Telegraph Ave., Suite 515,
Oakland, CA 94612
(510) 625-9390
bitch@bitchmagazine.com
www.bitchmagazine.com

Bust

P.O. Box 1016, Cooper Station,
New York, NY 10276
subscriptions@bust.com
www.bust.com

Curve Magazine

1550 Bryant St., Suite 510,
San Francisco, CA 94103
Tel. (415) 863-6538
Fax (415) 863-1609
editor@curvemag.com
www.curvemag.com

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3 Broadbent Close
20-22 Highgate High St., London N6 5GG
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edit@divamag.co.uk
www.divamag.co.uk/diva

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Available in standard print, large print, audio-

cassette, braille, DOS disk, or modem transfer.
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San Francisco, CA 94142
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www.fatso.com

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San Francisco, CA 94110
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editorial@girlfriendsmag.com
www.girlfriendsmag.com

LOTL Magazine

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Fax + 61 2 8347 2022
lotl@lotl.com
www.lotl.com

Lespress

Dyroffstr. 12, D-53113 Bonn, Germany
Tel. + 49 (0)228-9768044
Fax + 49 (0)228-9768048
info@lespress.de
www.lespress.de

On Our Backs

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HAF Enterprises
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San Francisco, CA 94110
(800) 475-3763; (415) 648-9464

staff@girlfriendsmag.com
www.onourbacksmag.com

Skin Two

Unit 63, Abbey Business Centre, Ingate Place,
London SW8 3NS
Tel. +44 20 7498 5533
Fax + 44 20 7498 5565
editorial@twpublishing.co.uk
www.skintwo.com/magazine

Transgender Tapestry Magazine

IFGE, P.O. Box 540229,
Waltham, MA 02545
editor@ifge.org
www.ifge.org/tgmag/tgmagtop.htm

Velvet Park

210 Cook St. #311,
Brooklyn, NY 11206
info@velvetparkmagazine.com
www.velvetparkmagazine.com

DVDs and Videos

Hundreds of porn videos feature girl-on-girl sex. This list emphasizes woman-, trans-, and lesbian-produced videos and DVDs. Where to find videos and DVDs? You can purchase them from many of the mail-order and retail outlets in the resource listings in chapter 20 and from the producers (listed below). You can also rent videos and DVDs from The Blue Door.

Video Sources

Annie Sprinkle's videos may be ordered from her

website: www.anniesprinkle.org

and from The New School of Erotic Touch
PO Box 3893,
Oakland, CA, 94609
(510) 428-9063
www.eroticmassage.com

Betty Dodson's videos may be ordered from

Betty Dodson Productions
P.O. Box 1933,
New York, NY 10156
(866) 877-9676
www.bettydodson.com

Bleu Visions

Bleu Productions, Inc.
P.O. Box 20280,
New York, NY 10011
info@bleuproductions.com
www.bleuproductions.com

Dirty Pillows Inc.

#19030
360 A Bloor St. W.,
Toronto, Ontario M5S 1X1, Canada
orders@dirtydirtypillows.com
www.dirtydirtypillows.com

Fatale Video

(888) 5-FATALE
www.fatalemedia.com

House O' Chicks

2215R Market St., Ste. 813,
San Francisco, CA 94114
(510) 658-1719
dorrie@houseochicks.com
www.houseochicks.com

Hyena Films

info@hyenafilms.com

www.hyenafilms.com

New School of Erotic Touch

(800) 432-3767

wisdom@eroticmassage.com

www.eroticmassage.com

Passion Fruit Video

info@passionfruitvideo.com

www.passionfruitvideo.com

Sex Positive Productions/Good Vibrations

www.goodvibes.com

S.I.R. Video Productions

3288 21st St., #94 PMB,

San Francisco, CA 94110

sirvideoinfo@aol.com

www.sirvideo.com

TLA Video

www.tlavideo.com

Erotica

Afterschool Special, directed by Apriluscious, 20 min., b/w, Fatale Media, 2001, VHS. Winner of Fatale's first Real Lesbian Sex video contest.

Bathroom Sluts, directed by Lulu Sanchez, 45 min., Fatale Video, 1991, VHS.

The Black Glove, directed by Maria Beatty, 30 min, b/w, Bleu Visions, 1996, VHS/DVD.

The Boiler Room, directed by Maria Beatty, 51 min., Bleu Visions, VHS/DVD, 1998. According to the producers, this was "the most graphic, hard-core, S&M lesbian film made in the United States."

Clips, directed by Nan Kinney and Debi Sundahl, 30 min., Fatale Video, 1988, VHS. Three ten-minute lesbian-smut vignettes, including Fanny Fatale's famous ejaculation scene.

Dress Up for Daddy, 30 min., Fatale Video, VHS. Real-life lesbian lovers do Daddy/girl play.

Elegant Spanking, directed by Maria Beatty, 45 min, b/w, Bleu Visions, 1996, VHS/DVD.

Full Load, produced by Nan Kinney, directed by Barbara DeGenevieve, 100 min., Fatale Media, 2002, VHS. Scenes from www.SSSpread.com, a great (and much-missed) lesbian porn site for "hot femmes, studly butches and lots of genderfuck."

Gallery Erotica, directed by Alpha, 75 min., Passion Fruit Video, 2002, VHS.

Hard Love and *How to Fuck in High Heels*, directed by Jackie Strano and Shar Rednour, 96 min., S.I.R. Video, 2000, VHS.

Home Cookin', directed by Alpha, 48 min., Passion Fruit Video, 2002, VHS.

Hungry Hearts, directed by Nan Kinney and Debi Sundahl, 30 min., Fatale Media, 1989, VHS.

Ladies of the Night (Les Vampyres), directed by Maria Beatty and R. Pettet, 32 min., Bleu Productions, 2000, VHS.

Pornograflics, directed by Angela Phong, Dr. Lau, and Miss Bea, 90 min., Dirty Pillows, 2003, VHS. According to Good Vibrations, an "exceptional collection of butch/femme vignettes. Gushing orgasms, surprise endings, magnetic butches, crafty and curvy femmes..."

Private Pleasures and *Shadows*, directed by O. Wow, 60 min., Fatale Videos, 1985, VHS. Butch/femme sex and fisting.

Real Girlfriends Vol. 1, Ron Richardson and Lydia Swartz, 90 min., MWI Productions, 2001, VHS.

Safe Is Desire, directed by Debi Sundahl, 60 min., Fatale Media, 1993, VHS. Take a trip to a lesbian sex club.

San Francisco Lesbian Bondage Club, directed by Cindy Martin, 74 min., Pleasure-Dungeon Video, 1998, VHS.

San Francisco Lesbians, vols. 1-10, directed by Cindy Martin, 75-85 min., Pleasure Productions, 1992-2002, VHS. Not only are these real lesbians having real sex—but they also feature a wide range of sexual styles.

Sassy Schoolgirl, directed by Maria Beatty, 45 min., Bleu Visions, 1998, VHS.

Seduction: The Cruel Woman, directed by Monika Treut and Elfi Mikesch, 84 min., subtitled, HyenaFilms, 1985, 35 mm, VHS. Inspired by the novel “Venus in Furs” (1870), by Leopold von Sacher-Masoch.

She’s Safe, 40 min., Frameline Arts Foundation, 1993, VHS. If you think safe sex is, well, dry, check out this compilation of lesbian-made shorts.

Suburban Dykes, directed by Debi Sundahl, 30 min., Fatale Videos, 1990, VHS.

Sugar High Glitter City, directed by Shar Rednour, 80 min., S.I.R. Video, 2001, VHS.

Take Her Down!, directed by Sondra Goodwin, 80 min., Fatale Media, 2002, VHS. Lesbian erotic oil wrestling party.

Trannyfags, directed by Morty Diamond, 55 min., 2004, VHS. The sexual encounters of four gay transmen with both bio-men and each other. For info: www.mortydiamond.com.

Turn Me Up, Over and On, directed by Carolyn Caizzi, 28 min., b/w, Fatale Media, 2003, VHS. Winner of Fatale’s 2003 Real Lesbian Sex video contest.

Voluptuous Vixens, directed by Sadie Foxe and Sadie Valentine, 75 min., Sex Positive Productions, 2001, VHS/DVD.

Sex Guides and How-To

Anal Massage For Relaxation and Pleasure, Joseph Kramer, 160 min., New School of Erotic Touch, 2004, DVD. Expert, hands-on demonstrations by professional bodyworkers, sex educators, and real-life couples, including one lesbian couple.

Annie Sprinkle’s Amazing World of Orgasm, directed by Annie Sprinkle and Sheila Malone, 60 min., 2004, DVD/VHS. Carol Queen, Betty Dodson Ph.D., Cléo DuBois, Jwala, Barbara Carrellas, and others.

Annie Sprinkle’s Herstory of Porn, directed by Annie Sprinkle and Scarlet

Harlot, 69 min., Erospirit Institute, 1998, VHS. Annie Sprinkle's film diary of 25 years of making porn. Based on the stage show directed by Emilio Cubeiro.

Bend Over, Boyfriend, directed by Shar Rednour, 60 min., Fatale Video, 1998, DVD/VHS. Sex-ed goddess Carol Queen and friends.

Bend Over, Boyfriend 2: More Rockin', Less Talkin', directed by Shar Rednour, 60 min., S.I.R. Video, 1999, DVD.

Best of Vulva Massage: An Anthology of Erotic Touch, Joseph Kramer, 83 min., video; 115 min. video plus 120 min. additional teaching, DVD, New School of Erotic Touch, 2003, VHS/DVD. Featuring both male and female teachers, including Betty Dodson, Annie Sprinkle, Carol Queen, Deborah Sundahl, and Jwala.

Celebrating Orgasm, produced by Betty Dodson, 60 min., 1996, VHS. Betty Dodson demonstrates her masturbation coaching techniques in private sessions with five different women.

Faces of Ecstasy, produced by Joani Blank, 55 min., Fatale Media, VHS. Ten women and three men of diverse ages, sizes, and races masturbate to orgasm for the camera.

Fire in the Valley, Annie Sprinkle and Joseph Kramer, 101 min., video; 180 min, DVD, New School of Erotic Touch, 2004, VHS/DVD. "The most comprehensive female genital massage in the world" now available for home study.

G Marks the Spot: A GV Guide to the G-Spot, directed by Lena Hass, 57 min., Sexpositive Productions, 2003, VHS/DVD.

Healing Sex: The Complete Guide to Sexual Wholeness, directed by Shar Rednour, 112 min., S.I.R. Video, 2004, DVD. Based on the groundbreaking book *The Survivor's Guide to Sex*, by Staci Haines.

Hearts Cracked Open: A Documentary Film about Tantra for Women Who Love Women, directed by Betsy Kalin, Itchy Bee Productions, 2004. The first film on lesbian Tantra, featuring Annie Sprinkle, Evalena Rose, Pamela Madison, and Marcia Singer. For info: www.heartscrackedopen.com.

How to Female Ejaculate, directed by Nan Kinney and Debi Sundahl, 60 min., Fatale Videos, 1992, VHS/DVD. Fanny Fatale shares her skill with a group of women whom she teaches to squirt.

How to Find Your Goddess Spot, Dorrie Lane, 30 min., House O' Chicks, VHS. Dorrie Lane teaches G-spot play. Features the Wondrous Vulva Puppet.

Linda/Les and Annie: The First Female-to-Male Transsexual Love Story, Annie Sprinkle, 32 min., 1990, VHS. Annie's video documentary of her relationship with her FTM lover.

Magic of Female Ejaculation, Dorrie Lane, 15 min., House O' Chicks, VHS. Dorrie Lane shares her own experience of female ejaculation.

Masturbation Memoirs 1 and 2, Annie Sprinkle, Carol Leigh, Dorrie Lane, and Juliet Carr, 60 min., House O' Chicks, VHS. Dorrie Lane sought out sex experts in their sexual prime, women in their 40s and 50s, to share their experiences of masturbation.

Masturbation Memoirs 3 and 4, Dorrie Lane, 60 min., House O' Chicks, VHS. "...authentic footage of lovely Lesbos getting hot and bothered with themselves."

Nina Hartley's Guide to Anal Sex, Nina Hartley, 45 min., video; 77 min. DVD, Adam & Eve Productions, 1996, VHS/DVD.

Nina Hartley's Guide to Better Cunnilingus, Nina Hartley, 50 min., Adam & Eve Productions, 1995, VHS.

Pain Game, Cléo Dubois, 54 min., Academy of SM Arts, 2000, VHS.

Please Don't Stop: Lesbian Tips for Givin' & Getting' It, directed by Oriana Bolden, 74 min., Sexpositive Productions, 2001, VHS.

Selfloving: Portrait of a Women's Sexuality Seminar, Betty Dodson, 60 min., 1991, VHS. Betty Dodson's women's masturbation workshop featuring ten women, ages 28 to 60, exploring their sexuality.

Slide Bi Me, directed by Felice Amador, 72 min., Sexpositive Productions, 2001, VHS.

The Sluts and Goddesses Video Workshop, Annie Sprinkle and Maria Beatty, 52 min., 1992, VHS.

Talk to Me Baby: A Lover's Guide to Dirty Talk and Role Play, directed by Jackie Strano, 60 min., S.I.R. Video, 2003, VHS.

Tie Me Up!, Cléo Dubois, Academy of SM Arts, 52 min., 2002, VHS.

Ultimate Guide to Anal Sex for Women, directed by Tristan Taormino and Ernest Greene, 210 min., Evil Angel Video, 1999, VHS/DVD. Based on Tristan Taormino's popular book. Taormino leads an all-star coed cast in a sexy anal sex workshop. Two volumes. If you liked the book, you'll love the movie.

Ultimate Guide to Anal Sex for Women 2, directed by Tristan Taormino and Ernest Greene, 135 min., Evil Angel Video, 2001, VHS/DVD.

Viva la Vulva, produced by Betty Dodson, 51 min., 1998, VHS. Betty Dodson's close-up on female genital anatomy with ten women posing for their pussy portraits.

Whipsmart: A Good Vibrations Guide to Beginning S/M for Couples, directed by Laura Plotkin, 82 min., Sex Positive Productions, 2002, VHS/DVD.

Zen Pussy: A Stimulating Meditation on Eleven Vulvas, Annie Sprinkle and Joseph Kramer, 60 min., Joseph Kramer Productions, 1999, VHS/DVD.

chapter twenty

Resources

Bisexuality Resources

Bisexual.org

Personals, chat, forums, resources.

www.bisexual.org

Bisexual Resource Center

Educational and support center. Publishes the *Bisexual Resource Guide*, facilitates Boston-area support groups for people who are or think they might be bisexual, houses the bisexual archives, and organizes conferences. Website features resources and links.

P.O. Box 1026, Boston, MA 02117

(617) 424-9595

brc@biresource.org

www.biresource.org

Butch/Femme Resources

ButchFemme.com

Online and real-world community. A large, active web portal since 1996, ButchFemme.com offers personal ads, forums, mailings lists, galleries, local connections, and numerous resources for dykes who identify as butch or femme. Trans friendly.

webmaster@butchfemme.com

www.butchfemme.com

ButchFemme.net

Online resources for butches, femmes, stone butches, transgendered individuals, transmen, and FTMs. Hosts email discussion lists (through Queernet.org): ButchFemme, Stonebutch, TG Butch, Leather, Femme Talk, Femmephoria.

www.butchfemme.net

ButchFemme Socials of the San Francisco Bay Area Hosts events in local bars, clubs, and other venues, including leather events. Open to all: dykes, queers, lesbians, FTMs, trannies, lipstick lesbians, butches, bois. (“You do not have to identify as butch or femme but most of us do.”) Some events are clean and sober. Singles and couples, all ages. The group is made up of “artists, writers, academics, blue collar, leather, professionals, students, *etc.* We are ethnically, spiritually, politically and sexually diverse.” To receive information on events, contact:

ButchFemmeSocials-owner@yahoogroups.com or B/F Socials of San Francisco/Oakland P.O. Box 99402, Emeryville, CA 94662-9402 (510) 812-5080

Butch/Femme Society

New York City’s oldest and largest butch/femme social and support group open to all lesbians and TG/TS who support the beautiful butch/femme dynamic.

P.O. Box 750652, Forest Hills, NY 11375
(212) 388-2736
bfsnyc@aol.com
www.butchfemmesociety.freeservers.com

Disability Resources

The Deaf Queer Resource Center

A nonprofit resource and information center. Website features links to chatrooms, mailing lists, and more. Publishes *FLASH*, an email newsletter reaching 11,000 readers.

feedback@deafqueer.org
www.deafqueer.org

DisAbled Women's Network (DAWN)

Ontario's provincewide organization for women with all types of disabilities. DAWN is a feminist organization that supports women in their struggles to control their own lives. Website includes extensive links to disability resources. E-lists, events calendar, articles.

Box 1138, North Bay, Ontario P1B 8K4
dawnontario@sympatico.ca
<http://dawn.thot.net>

GimpGirl Community

Created by a group of young women with disabilities, from varying backgrounds, who faced a huge lack of support services for themselves and others like them. "We strive to enlighten, empower and support young women of all colors, creeds, and sexual preferences." Very inclusive definition of "women." Feature articles, opinion surveys, newsletter, bulletin board, and links to online sexuality resources for people with disabilities. Hosts a LiveJournal.com community, also called Gimpgirl. Maintains two mailing lists: QueerLadies, for queer women of all ages with disabilities, and Girlies, for young women aged 15-25 with disabilities.

ggc@gimpgirl.com
www.gimpgirl.com

Living

Mailing list for lesbian and bisexual women with disabilities, and the women in their lives.

"Although the primary purpose of LIVING is that of support, it is an unmoderated list and any topic may be discussed. Since women with disabilities are NOT defined BY their disability, we encourage content of nearly any kind." For information, contact:

living-owner@groups.queernet.org

Queering Diabetes

For lesbian, gay, bi, trans, intersex, queer, or questioning people who are diabetic (along with friends, families, allies, and significant others).

becca@queeringdiabetes.org
www.queeringdiabetes.org

Sexual Health

Provides access to sexuality information, education, mutual support, counseling, therapy, health care, products, and other resources for people with disabilities, illness, or natural changes throughout the life cycle and those who love them or care for them.

www.sexualhealth.com

Health and SaferSex Resources

General Health

Alcoholics Anonymous

The original 12-step program, which has helped millions of alcoholics.

P.O. Box 459, Grand Central Station,
New York, NY 10163
(212) 647-1680
www.alcoholics-anonymous.org

Al-Anon Family Groups

Support groups for family members of alcoholics.

1600 Corporate Landing Parkway,
Virginia Beach, VA 23454
(888) 4AL-ANON
wso@al-anon.org
www.al-anon.org

Boston Women's Health Book Collective

Authors of *Our Bodies, Ourselves for the New Century*. Numerous women's health links.

www.ourbodiesourselves.org

Callen-Lorde Community Health Center

Serves the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender communities and people living with HIV/AIDS.

356 West 18th St., New York, NY 10011

(212) 271-7200

www.callen-lorde.org

The Clitoris.com

Fascinating site with all sorts of information about female sexuality. Links to sources of information on anatomy, cancer, disability, childbirth, clit pumping, and masturbation.

webmaster@the-clitoris.com

www.the-clitoris.com

Community United Against Violence

CUAV is a 20-year-old multicultural organization working to end violence against and within lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer/ questioning (LGBTQ) communities. Offers a 24-hour confidential, multilingual support line, free counseling, legal advocacy, and emergency assistance to survivors of domestic violence, hate violence, and sexual assault.

24-Hour Support Line: (415) 333-HELP

Tel. (415) 777-5500

Fax (415) 777-5565

www.cuav.org

CoDependents Anonymous

P.O. Box 33577, Phoenix, AZ 85067

outreach@coda.org

www.codependents.org

Fenway Community Health Center

Comprehensive, community-based health-care clinic.

7 Haviland St., Boston, MA 02115

(617) 267-0900
information@fenwayhealth.org
www.fenwayhealth.org

Gay Lesbian Medical Association (GLMA)

GLMA works to combat homophobia within the medical profession and in society at large, and to promote the best possible health care for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered patients. Online referrals to doctors, dentists, therapists, and chiropractors sensitive to the needs of gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgendered, or intersexed people. Supports research in lesbian health through its Lesbian Health Fund.

59 Fulton St., Suite 107,
San Francisco, CA 94102
info@glma.org
www.glma.org

Healing Sex

Website of *Healing Sex*, a DVD by Staci Haines, author of *The Survivor's Guide to Sex*. Mixing documentary-style drama with education and mind/body exercises, the film follows a diverse cast of women and men healing from past sexual abuse. We witness their path to a more pleasurable and healthy sex life as they struggle to find peace, healing, and real intimacy.

www.healingsexthemovie.com

Kink Aware Professionals

International referrals to psychotherapeutic, medical, dental, complementary healing, and legal professionals who are knowledgeable about and sensitive to diverse expressions of sexuality. All listed professionals have volunteered to be available for referral to people involved in “kinky” sexuality (leather, S/M, fetish, and so on).

www.bannon.com/kap

Lesbian Health Information Network (LHINetwork)

A worldwide network for distributing information relating to lesbian health research, education, and services. Serves as a resource and

networking tool for those involved in lesbian health. To subscribe, send a request to lesbianhealth-owner@groups.queernet.org, including your full name, email address, how you heard about the list, and a brief description of your work in lesbian health.

Lesbian Health Research Center

University of California, San Francisco

The Lesbian Health Research Center (LHRC) is “specifically and uniquely concerned with the health and well-being of lesbians, bisexual women, transgendered individuals, and their families, and with the health care available to them.” Sponsors an annual conference. Website features articles on various aspects of lesbian health and links to other queer-friendly health sites.

3333 California St., Suite 340,
San Francisco, CA 94118
Tel. (415) 502-5209
Fax (415) 502-5208
info@lesbianhealthinfo.org
www.lesbianhealthinfo.org

Lyon-Martin Women’s Health Services

Provides personalized health care and support services to women and transgendered people who lack access to quality care because of their sexual or gender identity, regardless of their ability to pay.

1748 Market St., Suite 201,
San Francisco, CA 94102
Tel. (415) 565-7667
Fax (415) 252-7490
TDD (415) 252-7499
info@lyon-martin.org
www.lyon-martin.org

Mautner Project for Lesbians with Cancer

Direct services to lesbians with cancer, their partners, and caregivers as well as community education and advocacy.

1707 L St., NW, Suite 500,

Washington, DC 20036
Voice/TTY (202) 332 5536
Fax (202) 332-0662
mautner@mautnerproject.org
www.mautnerproject.org

Narcotics Anonymous

Twelve-step program for people in recovery from drug addiction.

World Service Office
P.O. Box 9999, Van Nuys, CA 91409
Tel. (818) 773-9999
Fax (818) 700-0700
fsmail@na.org
www.na.org

The Northwest Network of Bi, Trans, Lesbian and Gay Survivors of Abuse

Provides counseling, support, legal advocacy, shelter referrals, safety planning, and peer support to lesbian, bisexual, gay, and trans folks who are surviving abuse. Also provides community education, training, and consultation about battering /abuse and homophobia. Leather friendly, wheelchair accessible. Website features directory of local resources throughout the United States, Canada, and other countries. ASL interpreters on request.

P.O. Box 20398, Seattle, WA 98102
(206) 568-7777
(206) 517-9670 TTY MSG
info@nwnetwork.org
www.nwnetwork.org

Overeaters Anonymous

Twelve-step program for people in recovery from compulsive overeating.

World Service Office
P.O. Box 44020, Rio Rancho, NM 87124
Tel. (505) 891-2664
Fax (505) 891-4320
info@overeatersanonymous.org

www overeatersanonymous.org

Susun S. Weed

Website of herbalist Susun S. Weed, with articles about women's health and information about courses offered by her Wise Woman Center.

www.SusunWeed.com

STD Information and Prevention

American Social Health Association

P.O. Box 13827,
Research Triangle Park, NC 27709
(919) 361-8400
std-hivnet@ashastd.org
www.ashastd.org

Avert.org

Lesbian, Bisexual Women and Safe Sex

www.avert.org/lesbiansafesex.htm

Centers for Disease Control National Center for HIV, STD, and TB Prevention

P.O. Box 6003, Rockville, MD 20849
(800) 342-AIDS
nchstp@cdc.gov
www.cdc.gov/nchstp/od/nchstp.html

Gay Men's Health Crisis (GMHC)

119 West 24th Street, New York, NY 10011
(212) 367-1000
LAP@gmhc.org
www.gmhc.org

Lesbian AIDS Project (LAP)

LAP provides HIV prevention education and support for women who have sex with other women. GMHC publishes the *Safer Sex Handbook for Lesbians* (1995).

Lesbian Safer Sex

Safersex basics for lesbians, originally published by the L.A. Gay & Lesbian Community Services Center.

<http://safersex.org/women/lesbianss.html>

LesbianSTD.com

This is the site I recommend for information on lesbians, STDs, and safer sex. The goal of LesbianSTD.com is “to provide information and resources regarding sexual health and sexually transmitted diseases in women who have sex with women and to further our collective knowledge about lesbian STDs.” The site offers findings from past and current research done at the University of Washington, including a 5-year Vaginal Health Project that began in 2003.

www.lesbianstd.com

National AIDS Hotline

(800) 342-2437

(800) 344-7432 (Español)

National STD Hotline

(800) 227-8922

Planned Parenthood Lesbian Safer Sex

www.plannedparenthood.org/sti/lesbian.html

San Francisco Sex Information

Free information and referral switchboard providing anonymous, accurate, nonjudgmental information about sex. SFSI answers questions by telephone and online.

(877) 472-SFSI or (415) 989-SFSI

Ask-Us@sfsi.org

www.sfsi.org

Online Resources

Many of the listings throughout this resource guide have an online presence, whether a website, bulletin board, or email discussion list. Check the appropriate subject categories to find Internet resources of interest to you. The online resources below provide portals to extensive information on the Web or assistance in finding Internet resources, or just don't fit into any of the specific subject categories and are too juicy to miss.

AltSex

Comprehensive site with information on all aspects of BDSM.

www.altsex.org

BMEZINE.COM

Body Modification Ezine is devoted to all forms of body modification. Contains photo galleries, articles, interviews, personal ads, and chat. Earn a free membership by submitting a photo or an article about your own body modification experiences.

www.bmezine.com

Dyke Planet

Pour les filles de Dyke PlaNET. Le premier site lesbien français.

webmistress@dykeplanet.com

www.dykeplanet.com

IRC Help

www.irchelp.org

Jane's Net Sex Guide

Jane reviews hundreds of websites featuring “erotica, sexuality resources, escort services, telephone sex services, fiction, reality, art, anime, and alternative lifestyles.”

www.janesguide.com/index.html

KUMA

“Dedicated to Black same gender loving womyn everywhere, whether it be BDSM, Leather or Cherry-Vanilla.” Black lesbian erotic art, poetry, short stories and audio.

www.kuma2.net

Leatherdyke.com

Women-only community space with free membership, run by leatherdykes, for leatherdykes. Everything about this site, right down to the web-hosting company that hosts it, is owned by leatherdykes, and is done on a volunteer basis by BDSM-loving lesbians for other kinky dykes. Bulletin board, articles, mailing list, personals for members only.

www.leatherdyke.com

Lesbian.com

Large web portal.

www.lesbian.com

NOLOSE

The National Organization for Lesbians of SizE, ending the oppression of fat people and creating a vibrant fat queer community and culture. Trans inclusive. Annual conference, email list, events calendar with local listings, links to community members and supportive organizations, and LiveJournal community.

1204 Ave. U, Suite 1239, Brooklyn, NY 11229

(718) 622-7631

info@nolose.org

www.nolose.org

QueerNet

Provides dozens of email discussion lists for the gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgendered, HIV/AIDS, and S/M communities, as well as offering email and web hosting for individuals, projects, and nonprofits in our communities under the auspices of its parent organization, Online Policy Group (www.onlinepolicy.org). The website gives detailed information on how to subscribe to the lists, which include many supportive lists for women exploring all facets of sexuality and gender. (You can start your own list, too, with the enthusiastic support of the folks at QueerNet.org.)

www.queernet.org

SIECUS (Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States)

SIECUS develops, collects, and disseminates information on sexuality, promotes comprehensive education about sexuality, and advocates the right of individuals to make responsible sexual choices.

130 West 42nd St., Suite 350,
New York, NY 10036
Tel. (212) 819-9770
Fax (212) 819-9776
siecus@siecus.org
www.siecus.org

Society for Human Sexuality

A comprehensive online library of sexuality resources—one of the most useful sites on the Web. The site includes guides to sex-positive resources in Seattle, Portland, Vancouver, and San Francisco.

PMB 1276, 1122 East Pike St.,
Seattle, WA 98122
shs@sexuality.org
www.sexuality.org

Erotica and Pay Sites

CyberDyke Sex Network

Hosts a network of pay sites featuring explicit photos, illustrations, videos, and stories. DarkPlay (an artsy fetish and BDSM site) is the best known of the bunch; others include: Playbutch (butches stripping down), Shaved Dyke (“shaving head to...tail”), Big Beautiful Heaven (beautiful BBWs), Sappho’s Girls (“sweet like honey dust and a feather...”), and Posteriority (“for backdoor girls”). Membership in the network provides access to all—sign up on any of the sites.

www.cyber-dyke.net

Femmerotic Network

Includes Heather Corinna’s personal erotica site, Scarlet Letters, Scarleteen, Femmerotic.com, and more.

<http://scarletletters.com/current/femmerotic.html>

[SexySappho.com](http://www.sexysappho.com)

Pay porn site by lesbians for lesbians featuring video and photo galleries of real lesbians: butches, femmes, trannies, queers, and andros. Custom videos, too. Want a video of a hot lesbian porn star who calls your name?

info@sexysappho.com

www.sexysappho.com

Shades Beyond Gray

“Queer/pansexual erotic journal by and for the freaktribe,” made up entirely of submitted material, images, stories, poetry, and columns.

soc@shadesbeyondgray.com

www.shadesbeyondgray.com

Transsexual-Man

Hot, hot, hot erotic images of Buck, a very hot (did I use that word already?) transman. Buck is not shy about putting his genitals on display—including his testosterone-enhanced clit. Photographs, downloadable videos, including explicit sex and S/M with both women and men. Pay site.

www.transsexual-man.com

Mailing Lists

You can find an email discussion list to match just about any interest you can imagine. You’ll find information on specific email discussion lists throughout this resource guide.

Many email discussion lists of interest to lesbian, bisexual, and queer women are hosted by QueerNet, which provides a wonderful service by supporting mailing lists for the gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and BDSM communities. The 200 QueerNet lists serve more than 36,000 subscribers. QueerNet is supported entirely by donations. The complete list of lists (with technical instructions) can be found at: www.queernet.org.

Joan Korenman maintains a large list of “genderrelated” lists.

www.umbc.edu/wmst/forums.html

Lesbian.org maintains the mother of all lesbian lists:

www.lesbian.org/lesbian-lists

Where to Meet Girls on the Web

A number of lesbian Web portal sites offer personal ads, either independently or through services like www.match.com. You'll also find personal ads posted on community-specific sites catering to leatherdykes, older dykes, women of color, bisexuals, butches and femmes, and more. Below you'll find a list of sites offering personal ads, bulletin boards, and other resources to help you hook up.

Classic Dykes

www.classicykes.com

Lesbians Click

Directory of links to online lesbian communities.

www.lesbiansclick.com/Online_Communities/index.html

Lesbotronic

www.lesbotronic.com

The Pink Sofa

www.thepinksofa.com

Strap-on.org!

Progressive, queer-centered, sex-positive, girl-friendly online community.

www.strap-on.org

Technodyke.com

www.technodyke.com

Play Parties and BDSM Organizations

The BDSM Events Page

International calendar of leather conferences and other events.

www.thebdsmeventspage.com

EU BDSM

BDSM information site for the European Union. Includes a directory of organizations.

www.eubdsm.com

Informed Consent

U.K. directory of BDSM groups, events, shops, and more. Personal ads sorted by gender and interest, so you can seek F4f (female Top seeking female bottom) as well as f4F (female bottom seeking female Top).

www.informedconsent.co.uk

Scene USA

Listing of BDSM organizations in the United States. Scene USA lists BDSM groups, clubs, nightclubs, and munches (think: potluck in fetish gear) by city and state. Cruise for local contacts or submit news of your BDSM community.

webmaster@darkheart.com

www.darkheart.com/sceneusa.html

United States

Arizona

Arizona Power Exchange

Pansexual BDSM organization. Weekly and monthly events, including play parties, demos, hands-on educational opportunities with instruction from local BDSM players. Occasional women's play parties hosted by

Arizona Amazons.

P.O. Box 67532, Phoenix, AZ 85082-7532

www.arizonapowerexchange.org

California

The Exiles

A social and educational organization in San Francisco for women with a positive personal interest in S/M between women. Publishes a monthly newsletter. Monthly educational and social events, information on local play parties.

P.O. Box 14338, San Francisco, CA 94114

(415) 835-4739

membership@theexiles.org

www.theexiles.org

LARAWW

Los Angeles Radical And Wicked Women is devoted to the educational and social well-being of the women's BDSM, leather, and fetish communities. LARAWW welcomes all women and transfolk, 21 years of age and over, regardless of sexual orientation or preference.

la_raww@hotmail.com

www.laraww.org

Power Exchange

Adult sexual play space in San Francisco. Hosts Wet Wednesdays, women-only parties held the first Wednesday of each month.

74 Otis St., San Francisco, CA 94103

(415) 487-9944

power_exchange_girl_party@hotmail.com

www.powerexchange.com

Queen of Heaven

Carol Queen's infamous San Francisco play parties are open to invited guests and their guests. "QOH is a pansexual pagan event, although an

attendee need not identify as either pansexual or pagan; s/he simply must be comfortable enough sharing an erotic space with others.” Safesex rules apply. To get on the party list, contact Queen at:

2215-R Market St., Suite 455,
San Francisco CA 94114 or
mail@carolqueen.com

SF Citadel

Play space, leather community center, and BDSM education center in San Francisco’s South of Market district. Regularly scheduled play parties, classes, discussion groups, and other activities serving the kink community. Sign up for the event announcement list on the website.

245 8th St., San Francisco, CA 94103
(415) 626-1746
info@sfcitadel.org
www.sfcitadel.org

Colorado

Collar

Colorado Leather Lesbian/Ladies Alternative Resource is an information and support group for all women interested in the BDSM/Leather lifestyle. All self-identified women are welcome, whether lesbian, bisexual, or heterosexual. Its main purpose is to provide a safe forum for discussion, education, and exploration with regard to BDSM/Leather issues. Hosts and supports a variety of activities such as monthly meetings, play parties, group outings, community education, and fund raisers. To get involved in the local group or the Internet discussion group:

info@denvercollar.com

Thunder in the Mountains

Annual pansexual BDSM conference.

www.thunderinthemountains.com

District of Columbia

LLABIA

Leather Lesbians and Bisexual Information Association of Washington, D.C. Provides information, support, and social opportunities. Monthly parties and other events are open to leather women who enjoy woman-to-woman S/M. "All S/M dykes, straight, bisexual and transsexual/gender women are welcome. FTM transgender bois/boys/men who feel they have a place in the S/M women's community are also welcome."

<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/LLABIA>

Illinois

CLAW

Chicago Leather Alliance of Women is a monthly discussion group for women of all sexual orientations involved in the BDSM lifestyle. Hosts women-only and pansexual parties.

mjc312@aol.com

The Next Generation Chicago

A Chicago-based pansexual Support/Education/ Discussion/Social group for people ages 18-35 who are interested in BDSM.

<http://www.tngc.org/tngc/index.html>

Iowa, Missouri, Nebraska

Janet R. is a contact person for an informal network of kinky women in Kansas City, Des Moines, Omaha, and Lincoln. Contact Janet R. at:

P.O. Box 32732, Kansas City, MO 64171
(816) 523-4154
photojan@aol.com

Maryland

FIST

Females Investigating Sexual Terrain

Open to women 21 years of age or older who are interested in S/M, leather, or fetish sex between women. FIST hosts an email announcement list for notices about upcoming events of interest to women. FIST does not host parties, but helps publicize parties for women in the Mid-Atlantic area. FIST does hold periodic educational and social events.

P.O. Box 41032, Baltimore, MD 21203

FISTWomen@aol.com

FISTWomen-owner@yahoogroups.com

<http://members.aol.com/FISTWomen>

Massachusetts

MOB New England

Social and play group for women 21 and over who are interested in woman-to-woman BDSM or kink sexuality. “Welcome to our big, scary gang of chain wielding, sex radical, queer women—the MOB!” Website links to the group’s online events calendar.

P.O. Box 391927, Cambridge, MA 02139

info@mobnewengland.org

www.mobnewengland.org

New York

Dyke Uniform Corps (DUC)

A private association of women of honor, integrity, and discipline (“Yes, Sir!”) whose mission is to explore common interests in wearing military and law enforcement uniforms within the S/M, leather, and fetish communities.

DUCNY@aol.com

www.dykeuniformcorps.com

Lesbian Sex Mafia

Founded in 1981, LSM is a support and information group for lesbian, bisexual, heterosexual, and transsexual women interested in S/M. Website lists monthly programs as well as NYC events for the BDSM community. Go here to find out about New York City-area play parties. Also links to BDSM groups in the United States and Europe.

P.O. Box 404, 70A Greenwich Ave,
New York, NY 10011
(212) 726-3844
LSMNYC@hotmail.com
www.lesbiansexmafia.org

Submit

Play parties for women and transgendered people. Presented by Red, first Thursday of every month.

(718) 789-4053
www.submitparty.com

TES Women's Group

The Eulenspiegel Society of New York is one of the oldest S/M groups in North America. The TES Women's Group's purpose is to network, socialize, and share knowledge and experiences among sisters in the BDSM scene.

tes@tes.org
www.tes.org/welcome.html

Oregon

Lulu's Pervy Playhouse

A group for S/M women from Portland and the surrounding area. Open to women 18 years of age or older, lesbians, bisexuals, heterosexuals, and transgendered women who identify as female. Hosts monthly play parties.

lululist@excite.com

www.spiretech.com/~awntie/lulu.htm

PDX/Bad Girls

Portland's lesbian social and educational BDSM/ leather club. Welcomes self-identified women over 18 of all sexual orientations who are interested in consensual BDSM with other women.

contact@pdxbadgirls.net

www.pdxbadgirls.net

Pennsylvania

Philly Fetish Resource Guide

www.phillyfetish.com

Texas

Bound by Desire

For lesbian, bisexual, heterosexual, and transgendered women interested in dominance and submission and S/M. Monthly educational, informational, and social events in Austin.

P.O. Box 3733, Austin, TX 78704

contact@boundbydesire.org

www.boundbydesire.org

Virginia

The Black Rose

A pansexual support, education, and social group for adults who share an interest in expressions of power in love and play, including D/S (dominance and submission), B/D (bondage and discipline), fetishism, and cross-dressing. You must be over 19 to attend functions. See website for information on the women's group.

P.O. Box 11161, Arlington, VA 22210

(703) 715-6507 information hotline

info@br.org
www.br.org

Washington

The Wet Spot: Seattle's Sex-Positive Community Center

The Wet Spot provides meeting and event space for sex-positive organizations. Events include regular women-only parties as well as meetings and workshops. Details about specific events are available on the website. Membership is required for some events. You must be over 18 to attend events at The Wet Spot.

(206) 270-9746
info@wetspot.org
www.wetspot.org

Wisconsin

Bad Grrrls

A support group for women who do S/M in Madison. Contact A Woman's Touch (see Retail and Mail Order) for current information.

Satyricon

Pansexual, pangender BDSM social group in Madison. For more information, contact Ellen Barnard at A Woman's Touch (see Retail and Mail Order, below).

Canada

Libido Events

A small production company promoting sex education and other Vancouver events celebrating alternative sexuality in our culture. Past events include workshops by Midori, Laura Antoniou, and Deborah Addington.

www.LibidoEvents.com

The Pussy Palace

A somewhat irregular women's night at a men's bathhouse. "There is lots of sensual dancing, cruising and sexy outfits of all descriptions."

(416) 925-XTRA (9872) x2115

info@pussypalacetoronto.com

www.pussypalacetoronto.com

Vancouver Leather

Website with calendar of events, links to local organizations.

www.vancouverleather.com/bdsm

Vancouver Women in Leather

VWL is a nonprofit organization dedicated to claiming a space for all women who are into leather, fetish, or a BDSM lifestyle.

Contact: Bird (604) 779-6434

<http://vwleather.com>

Europe

For more information about European resources, subscribe to Leather Letters, an occasional email newsletter about woman-to-woman S/M. The emphasis of Leather Letters is on European events, but it also contains news from other continents. To subscribe, contact: tania@xs4all.nl

Austria

Sadomasochismus in Österreich

Austria's pansexual S/M group; website features links to other European S/M resources.

sadonis@bdsm.at

www.bdsm.at

England

Informed Consent

Website packed with information on the BDSM community in the U.K., including events, personal ads, and a listing of organizations.

P.O. Box 152, Manchester, England M20 2YZ

webmaster@informedconsent.co.uk

www.informedconsent.co.uk

SM Dykes Manchester

For women who do S/M with women. Supports lesbian and bisexual S/Mers through monthly meetings, workshops, play parties, and an annual conference. Also escorts women who are new to the scene (or new to the area) to mixed BDSM club events.

SMDykes@SMDykes.org.uk

www.smdykes.org.uk

France

Les Maudites Femelles (LMF)

c/o Nathalie Dalla Corte

13 rue Beautreillis, 75004 Paris, France

Germany

Knights of the Round Table

Hosts play parties in Hamburg.

Die_Tafelrunde@hotmail.com

Lifeguard

Support network for S/M women.

neuce@informatik.uni-muenchen.de

www.mela.de/Frauen

SchMacht!

Germany's nationwide network of bisexual and lesbian women (including transgendered people) interested in BDSM. Publishes a newsletter and hosts play parties and educational events.

c/o AHA

Mehringdamm 61

10961 Berlin

www.schmacht.org/front_content.php

The Netherlands

WALP

The primary aim of Women at Amsterdam Leather Pride (WALP) is to create a social and educational network for leatherwomen within Europe and to encourage connections between leatherwomen in Europe and other continents. WALP is for leatherwomen of all persuasions and all nationalities. All straight, bisexual, and transsexual women are welcome. XX-transgender boys/men and FTM transsexuals in transition who feel they have a place in the women's community are also welcome at WALP. Holds an annual WALP Conference.

P.O. Box 842, 2300 AV, Leiden

Tel. +31-(0)71 512 8632

info@walp.nl

www.walp.nl

Wild Side

Welcomes all women with a personal and positive interest in S/M with other women—from total novices and beginning players to old-guard leatherdykes, poly bi-girls, professional sex workers, and straight women with a taste for playing with women. Transsexual women are welcome as well. Wild Side hosts regular workshops and play parties, as well as the occasional educational weekend (SM Academy: Classes I, II, & III). *Wild Side News* is published four to six times a year.

Rozenstraat 14, 1016 NX, Amsterdam

www.wildside.dds.nl

Sweden

LASH

The club for women who like it rough. Established in 1995 in Stockholm. Lash welcomes all women dykes, lesbians, bisexuals, transsexuals. Publishes ten newsletters per year; sends email announcements of events. Hosts monthly play parties.

c/o SLM Stockholm
Box 172 41, 104 62 Stockholm, Sweden
Tel. 4673-992 62 82
clublash@hotmail.com
www.welcome.to/clublash

Polyamory Resources

alt.polyamory

Home page for the Usenet newsgroup alt.polyamory, with links to mailing lists and web pages about polyamory and organizations friendly to polyamory, including local groups. Also links to a directory of poly- and alternative-friendly counselors.

www.polyamory.org

poly-dykes

Mailing list open to self-identified women who wish to discuss the problems, joys, and general issues that arise in the practice of nonexclusive relationships between women. For subscription information, contact:

poly-dykes-owner@groups.queernet.org

Retail and Mail Order

Many sex toy stores offer workshops and other programs of interest to lesbian and bisexual women. Some stores also post information about local events. Most retail outlets also welcome mail-order business.

Mail Order Only

Aslan Leather

Manufacturer of leather, rubber, and vinyl strap-on harnesses and BDSM gear for all genders and sexualities. Lifetime guarantee on all products. Dildo harnesses, bondage gear, and whips can be purchased at many of the stores listed here or direct from the manufacturer. Owned by a self-identified transgendered butch whose interest in S/M, role play, and strap-on sex plays a large role in the creation of Aslan designs (“we make toys to fit your fantasy”). The website picture gallery is well worth the trip.

Box 102, Stn. B,
Toronto, ON, M5T 2T3, Canada
(416) 306-0462
carrie@aslanleather.com
www.AslanLeather.com

Black Hanky Toys

S/M toys made by two experienced leatherdykes, a top and a bottom, with over 40 years of S/M experience between them. Rattan and thermoplastic rods and canes for players who “crave an intense and beautiful pleasure/pain experience.”

silva@blackhankytoys.com
www.blackhankytoys.com

Blowfish

Blowfish tests and reviews every product they sell: they watch the videos, play with the toys, squirt the lube, and offer their opinions on everything they carry. Toys, books, DVDs, videos, comics, and safersex supplies, including nitrile gloves sold by the hundred-count and opera-length black latex gloves.

P.O. Box 411290, San Francisco, CA 94141
Tel. (800) 325-2569; (415) 252-4340
Fax (415) 252-4349
blowfish@blowfish.com
www.blowfish.com

Blue Door

Adult video rentals; features a selection of lesbian videos, from *Suburban Dykes* to *Leather Bound Dykes from Hell*.

ETP, Inc.
P.O. Box 64378, Sunnyvale, CA 94089
Fax (408) 733-2372
blueinfo@bluedoor.com
www.bluedoor.com

CDS Bookstand

Books and videos for the transgender community.

JoAnn@cdspub.com
www.cdspub.com

Dj. Knows Dicks

Lacking the factory-installed dick that he knew should have been his at birth, Dj. designed the Pissin' Passin' Packer, a comfortable, realistic packing dildo—"a dick for wearing every single day—something that looked right in his BVDs, and could even be whipped out in front of the other boys and used to write his name in the snow. Because Dj. was gettin' sick of sitting to pee."

P.O. Box 666, Pt. Roberts, WA 98281
dj@djknowsdicks.com
<http://djknowsdicks.com>

Extreme Restraints

Manufactures and sells, well, *extreme* bondage, fetish, and sexually stimulating gear.

(866) 4MY-BDSM
info@extremerestraints.com

www.extremerestrains.com

The Frugal Domme

Reasonably priced S/M toys. Catalog available for \$5.

TFD Enterprises
P.O. Box 1801, Pacifica, CA 94044
domina@frugaldomme.com
www.frugaldomme.com

Glyde Dams

Source for latex dams.

Glyde USA
P.O. Box 9783, Seattle, WA 98109
Tel. (206) 283-7664
Fax (206) 284-7554
glydeusa@aol.com
www.sheerglydedams.com

Innerspace

Manufacturer of acrylic dildos and other toys.

(818) 897-4444
info@innerspace1.com
www.innerspace1.com

JT's Stockroom

Carries an impressive line of S/M and bondage gear. Website features a sizzling gallery with photos of toys and gear modeled by JT's staff.

2140 Hyperion Ave., Los Angeles, CA 90027
Tel. (800) 755-TOYS; (323) 666-2121
Fax (800) 357-8697; (323) 913-5976
info@stockroom.com
www.stockroom.com

LesbianSexToys.com

Online lesbian-owned sex toy store.

www.lesbiansextoys.com

Liberator

“Bedroom adventure gear,” including wedges, ramps, cubes, and other shapes designed to support a variety of sexual positions.

OneUp Innovations
6300 Powers Ferry Road, Suite 600, Box 346,
Atlanta, GA 30339
(866) 542-7283
customerserv@liberatorshapes.com
www.liberatorshapes.com

Sorodz

Handcrafted S/M toys.

P.O. Box 10692, Oakland, CA 94610
(510) 482-8252
info@sorodz.com
www.sorodz.com

Stompers Boots

Engineer boots, biker boots, lace-up boots, riding boots. They carry women’s boots.

323 10th St., San Francisco, CA 94103
Tel. (415) 255-6422
Fax (415) 255-6424
info@stompersboots.com
www.stompersboots.com

Vixen Creations

Women-owned and -operated manufacturer of handmade silicone dildos and plugs. “Worth every inch.” Visit the website to order online or to find a Vixen retailer near you.

1302 22nd St., San Francisco, CA 94107
(415) 822-0403
sales@vixencreations.com
www.vixencreations.com

Xandria Collection

For over 30 years, the Xandria catalog has offered a wide array of vibrators, dildos, lingerie, leather, videos, books, and more.

P.O. Box 319005, San Francisco, CA 94131
(800) 242-2823; (415) 468-3812
info@xandria.com
www.xandria.com

Retail Stores

United States

A Woman's Touch

A feminist store operated by Ellen Barnard, M.S.S.W., and Myrtle Wilhite, M.D., M.S., A Woman's Touch offers toys, books, and safersex supplies. "We celebrate sexuality and pleasure for women and those who love them." The website features Ask Aphrodite and Ask Dr. Myrtle, some of the best advice columns you'll find on the Web. Carries nonlatex gloves and dams.

600 Williamson St., Madison, WI 53703
(888) 621-8880; (608) 250-1928
wmstouch@midplains.net
www.a-womans-touch.com

Come Again Erotic Emporium

Woman-owned store offering toys, books, and lingerie, plus a catalog of books and fetish magazines.

353 East 53rd St., New York, NY 10022
(212) 308-9394

Condomania

Retail stores and mail-order catalog of condoms and safersex supplies. Stocks an extensive array of products, including nonlatex barriers.

7306 Melrose Ave., Los Angeles, CA 90046

(323) 933-7865
351 Bleecker St., New York, NY 10014
(212) 691-9442
info@condomania.com
www.condomania.com

Early to Bed

Chicago's first women-owned, women-oriented, boy-friendly, queer-and trans-positive sex shop. Website lists vegan-friendly products (no animal products testing). Workshops, author appearances. Offers PleasureWare Parties for at-home group shopping in the Chicago area.

5232 N. Sheridan Rd., Chicago, IL 60640
(866) 585-2BED (2233)
(773) 271-1219
info@early2bed.com
www.early2bed.com

Eve's Garden

Woman-oriented store and catalog of toys, books, and videos.

119 West 57th St., 12th floor,
New York, NY 10019
(800) 848-3837
customerservice@evesgarden.com
www.evesgarden.com

Forbidden Fruit

Every day is Valentine's Day at Forbidden Fruit, a woman-owned and-operated business whose mission is to "help create erotic self-awareness and improve intimate communication in relationships." Operates a toy store, fetish wear boutique, and body modification studio.

Ordering: (800) 315-2029

Intimate Items Boutique and Educational Center

512 Neches St., Austin, TX 78701
(512) 478-8358

Fantasy Boutique

108 E. North Loop Blvd., Austin, TX 78751
(512) 453-8090

Body Arts Salon

513 E. Sixth St., Austin, TX 78701
(512) 476-4596

info@forbiddenfruit.com
www.forbiddenfruit.com

Good Vibrations

Promoting sexual pleasure since 1977. “At Good Vibrations, we believe that sexual pleasure is everyone’s birthright, and that access to sexual materials and accurate sex information promotes health and happiness. Our goal is to serve as a resource for quality products and information, to model honest communication about sexuality, and to take every possible opportunity to promote the philosophy that sex is fun and natural. We hope you’ll join us in our pursuit of pleasure!” Three retail locations and a mail-order catalog of books, toys, videos, and safersex supplies, including nonlatex dams and gloves. Check the website for the schedule of store events.

Stores:

1620 Polk St., San Francisco, CA 94109
(415) 345-0400
603 Valencia St., San Francisco, CA 94110
(415) 522-5460
2504 San Pablo Ave., Berkeley, CA 94702
(510) 841-8987

Mail order:

938 Howard St., Suite 101,
San Francisco, CA 94103
(800) 289-8423
(415) 974-8990
customerservice@goodvibes.com
www.goodvibes.com

Grand Opening!

“No matter what your persuasion, you’re always welcome at Grand Opening! Since we’ve been open, thousands of people have visited and have been made to feel at home in our cozy little boutique. We are hoping you’ll enjoy the same homey atmosphere when visiting us from your desktop or laptop!” Offers many workshops and other events. Two retail stores and an online catalog of books, toys, and videos.

Orders: (877) 731-2626

318 Harvard St., Suite 32,
Brookline, MA 02446
(617) 731-2626

8442 Santa Monica Blvd,
West Hollywood, CA 90069
(323) 848-6970

office@grandopening.com
www.grandopening.com

Madame S

Fetish fashion, bondage furniture, and BDSM gear. Companion store to the famed Mr. S.

321 7th St., San Francisco, CA 94103
Tel. (415) 863-WHIP
Fax (415) 863-7798
service@madame-s.com
www.madame-s.com

Mr. S Leather & Fetters USA

310 7th St., San Francisco, CA 94103
Tel. (415) 863-7764; (800) 746-7677
Fax (415) 863-7798
www.mr-s-leather.com

Purple Passion/DV8

Toys, magazines, books, and fetish clothing for men and women—

rubber, leather, chain mail, patent leather, and PVC. Custom corsets, ballet shoes with 9" heels, boots by Westco, leathers by Vanson, medical supplies, vibrating nipple clamps, dildos, vibrators, and pages of butt toys. "We have rated most of our impact toys, ranging from 1, which is soft and sensuous, to 5, which is heavy and severe." Yeow!

211 West 20th St., New York, NY 10011
Tel. (212) 807-0486
Fax (212) 807-6165
info@purplepassion.com
www.purplepassion.com

The Smitten Kitten

A truly feminist store: "We put our money where our mouth is and our pussy where our politics are."

2223 East 35th St., Minneapolis, MN 55407
(612) 721-6088
(888) 751-0523
info@smittenkittenonline.com
www.smittenkittenonline.com

Spartacus Leathers

300 S.W. 12th Ave., Portland, OR 97205
(503) 224-2604

Stormy Leather

"A San Francisco landmark for 15 years, Stormy Leather is a woman-owned company dedicated to providing the highest quality garments and toys. There is something for everyone here: beginners, intermediate players, and pros." Specializes in leather and PVC fetish wear. Known for its beautiful corsets and attractive, durable dildo harnesses. Hosts events in its San Francisco store.

1158 Howard St., San Francisco, CA 94103
(800) 486-9650
online@stormyleather.com
www.stormyleather.com

Toys in Babeland

Sex toy shops run by women, dedicated to providing women and others the support, information, and equipment they want to have fun and fulfilling sex lives. “We sell sex toys to make money, make friends, and change the world. We share a belief in every person’s right to define their own sexuality and gender, and to pursue pleasure in any way that does not harm others. We are S/M, transgender, queer, straight, vanilla, and bi friendly.” Retail stores and a catalog of toys, books, and videos, including nonlatex gloves.

Stores:

711 East Pike St., Seattle, WA 98122

(206) 328-2914

94 Rivington St., New York, NY 10002

(212) 375-1701

43 Mercer Street, New York, NY 10013

(212) 966-2120

(800) 658-9119

www.babeland.com

Canada

Come As You Are

Cooperatively owned store and mail-order catalog of toys, books, and videos, including nonlatex gloves. Website features resources on sex and disability. “Our approach to sexuality is one of respect, openness, humor, communication, and responsibility. We are service and community oriented. We are accessible and disability-positive . *Nous offrons des services limités en français.*”

701 Queen St. W.,

Toronto, ON, M6J 1E6 Canada

(877) 858-3160; (416) 504-7934

Venez tels quels

Tel. (514) 495-0444

Fax (514) 495-0464

info@veneztelsquels.com

mail@comeasyouare.com
www.comeasyouare.com

Good for Her

“Toronto’s cozy, comfortable place where women and their admirers can find a variety of high quality sex toys, books, videos/DVDs, seminars, sensual art, and much more—including nonlatex gloves. Women-focused and queer owned and operated.” Store space is wheelchair accessible.

175 Harbord St.,
Toronto, ON, M5S 1H3 Canada
(877) 588-0900
(416) 588-0900
www.goodforher.com
whats@goodforher.com

Lovecraft

Retail stores and online catalog of toys, books, videos, and lingerie. Yorkville store is wheelchair accessible.

27 Yorkville Ave.,
Toronto, ON, M4W 1L1 Canada
(877) 923-7331
2200 Dundas St. East,
Mississauga, ON, L4X 2V3 Canada
(905) 276-5772
www.lovecraftsexshop.com

Venus Envy

Education-oriented sex and book store. “Our goal is to provide women and their partners with a respectful (and fun!!) place where they can find tools and toys to explore their gender and sexuality.” Sells nonlatex gloves.

1598 Barrington St.,
Halifax, NS, B3J 1Z6 Canada
(902) 422-0004
venus@venusenvy.ca
110 Parent Ave.,
Ottawa, ON, K1N 7B4 Canada

(613) 789-4646
ottawa@venusenvy.ca

www.venusenvy.ca

Womyn's Ware

Retail store and catalog of toys, books, and fetish gear. "Products, services, and an environment for the celebration and empowerment of women's sexuality." Sells nonlatex gloves. Strong emphasis on education.

896 Commercial Dr.,
Vancouver, BC, V5L 3Y5 Canada
Tel. (888) WYM-WARE (996-9273);
(604) 254-2543
Fax (604) 254-5472
info@womynsware.com
www.womynsware.com

Europe

Sh!

A women's sex shop.

39 Coronet St.,
London N1, U.K.
(0207) 613-5458
info@sh-womenstore.com
www.sh-womenstore.com/intro.html

Tiberius

Leather Latex and Tools

Wien 7, Lindengassw 2, Austria
43 1 522 04 74
leather@tiberius.at
www.tiberius.at

Sex Education Workshops, Classes, and Resources

Many sex toy stores offer classes, workshops, and demonstrations. (See “Retail,” above.)

Betty Dodson

Betty Dodson Ph.D. is famed for her masturbation workshops, in which women explore the varied experience of orgasm through practicing masturbation skills.

www.bettydodson.com

Center for Sex and Culture

Classes, workshops, library of sex ed materials, social gatherings, and hands-on, practical skills-building events.

info@centerforsexandculture.com

www.sexandculture.org

Cléo Dubois Academy of SM Arts

Cléo Dubois teaches safe erotic bondage and S/M play to couples and singles in the privacy of her fully equipped dungeon. With Sybil Holiday, she offers the Erotic Dominance Intensive For Women, a four-day course in powerful eroticism.

P.O. Box 2345, Menlo Park, CA 94026-2345

Tel. (650) 322-0124

Fax (650) 326-2639

CleoDubois@sm-arts.com

www.sm-arts.com/home.htm

The Fairy Butch Dynasty

Karlyn Lotney (aka Fairy Butch) offers ongoing sex ed classes in San Francisco. “Dyke Sex: Nuts & Bolts” and “Dyke Sex: Power Tools.”

fb@fairybutch.com

www.fairybutch.com

Midori’s Fire Horse Productions

Classes for both beginners and experienced players in a variety of BDSM

techniques. Taught by Midori and other presenters in the USA, Canada, and Europe. See website for calendar of classes.

(415) 282-6555

584 Castro St. #843, San Francisco CA 94114

midori@fhp-inc.com.

www.fhp-inc.com

QSM

The Q stands for “quality” (as in quality S/M) not “queer.” Offers classes in S/M and power play for all sexes and orientations in San Francisco.

(415) 550-7776

qsm@sonic.net

www.qualitysm.com

San Francisco Sex Information

Offers a 55-hour training course in all aspects of human sexuality, in a positive, supportive atmosphere.

www.sfsi.org

Tristan Taormino

Learn about anal sex (and other sexual pleasures) from author Tristan Taormino, whose lectures, workshops, and demonstrations are hosted by sex toy boutiques, leather conferences, and universities throughout the United States and Canada. Schedule of upcoming appearances can be found on her website.

www.puckerup.com

Vulva University

Online classes from the House O’ Chicks: Sex and Intimacy, Advanced Orgasm, Sex and Sprit, and more.

www.houseochicks.com/vulvauniversity/index.html

WorkshopPlayshop.com

Elaine Miller and Silva Tenenbein, “two opinionated leatherdykes with an enormous and eclectic accumulation of skills,” offer demos and workshops in Vancouver on flirting, fisting, bondage, drag, BDSM, porn

writing, and more. Miller and Tenenbein say, “Come and Participate. Not necessarily in that order.”

A New Perspective Workshops and Seminars
P.O. Box 814, Station A,
Vancouver BC, V6C 2N6 Canada
(604) 253-2850
workshops@workshopplayshop.com.
<http://workshopplayshop.com>

Tantra and Bodywork

Annie Sprinkle

Classes, workshops, rituals. “Learn to breathe into orgasm, experience a sex magic erotic massage ritual, learn ancient and modern sexual techniques.”

www.anniesprinkle.org

Barbara Carrellas

Author and sex educator Barbara Carrellas teaches basic Tantra, breath and energy orgasms, and her signature Urban Tantra workshop, blending the techniques of Tantra and Tao with the intense stimulation and heightened awareness of S/M.

www.barbaracarrellas.com

Body Electric

Teaches touch, conscious breath, and honoring the wisdom of the body. Offers women-only workshops, including “Celebrating the Body Erotic for Women,” “The Lusty Crone,” “Dancing the Fire Within,” and “Sacred Intimacy for Women,” in Seattle, Oakland, Atlanta, Boston, and New York.

6527-A Telegraph Ave., Oakland, CA 94609
Tel. (510) 869-4383
Fax (510) 653-4991
info@bodyelectric.org

www.bodyelectric.org/women_index.htm

Jwala

Masseuse, rebirther, and designer of sensual boudoirs, Jwala has taught Tantra internationally for over 20 years in Australia, England, India, Germany, and throughout the United States.

<http://tantra.com/jwala>

Women's Sexuality Center

Pamela Madison offers workshops and classes with the goal of sexually empowering women through education. Lesbian classes include Tantra, with both evening and weekend-long workshops. Classes offered in Santa Barbara and Sausalito.

30 West Mission, Suite 8,
Santa Barbara, CA 93101
(805) 563-1071
(866) QTANTRA
info@womenssexualitycenter.com
www.womenssexualitycenter.com
www.pamelamadison.com

Transgender and Intersex Resources

American Boyz

Serves people who “were labeled female at birth but who feel that is not an accurate or complete description of who they are,” including FTMs, butches, transmen, drag kings, boychicks, she-bears, shapeshifters, transfags, tomboys, passing women, two spirits, tranny boys, intersexuals, and significant others, friends, family members, and allies. AmBoyz provides education, support, social events, newsletters, publications, email lists, and hosts the national True Spirit Conference.

212-A So. Bridge St., Suite 131,
Elkton, MD 21921
Tel. (410) 392-3640

Fax (410) 620-2024
info@amboyz.org
amboyz@amboyz.org
www.amboyz.org

Butchdykeboy.com

Intersection of Boston's Queer, Transgender, and Gender Queer Communities. Resources, rants, and information for everyone on queer, transgender, and gender queer issues.

butchdykeboy@aol.com
www.butchdykeboy.com

Drag Kings

Announcement list for show dates, news, and other information from drag king performers and fans. Write the list owner. For information, contact:

dragkings-owner@groups.queernet.org

FTM Informational Network

The FTM Informational Network website is packed with information—legal and political news, sources for testosterone, packin' gear in several sizes, personal stories, shaving tips, and clothing advice.

webmaster@ftminfo.net
www.ftminfo.net

FTM International, Inc.

FTM International represents a diverse group of transgendered men: “We come from different backgrounds, include every imaginable sexual orientation, and are multicultural. We range in age from our teens to our 70s and include persons who are just beginning to examine gender issues as well as persons who have been dealing with them for many years. We are here to help—whether in the form of providing information, or through our newsletter and other publications, through support from volunteers who are willing to help if you need someone to talk to, or through our list of online mailing lists and links, and also through our monthly meetings and special events.”

1360 Mission St., Suite 200,
San Francisco, CA 94103
(415) 553-5987
www.ftmi.org

IFGE

The International Foundation for Gender Education, founded in 1978, advocates for freedom of gender expression. “We promote the understanding and acceptance of all people: Transgender, Transsexual, Crossdresser, Agender, Gender Queer, Intersex, Two Spirit, Drag King, Drag Queen, Queer, Straight, Butch, Femme, Homosexual, Bisexual, Heterosexual, and of course, You!” Also publishes *Transgender Tapestry*.

P.O. Box 540229, Waltham, MA 02254
(781) 899-2212
info@ifge.org
www.ifge.org

Intersex Society of North America (ISNA)

“The Intersex Society of North America (ISNA) is devoted to systemic change to end shame, secrecy, and unwanted genital surgeries for people born with an anatomy that someone decided is not standard for male or female. ISNA works toward this end primarily through public education and through reforming medical education.” Contact them through their website:

www.isna.org

Press for Change

A political lobbying and educational organization working to achieve equality and respect for all transsexual and transgendered people in the United Kingdom. The well-written website reads like a *London Times* of the trans world.

editor@pfc.org.uk
www.pfc.org.uk

TransGenderCare

Provides health information for MTF and FTM transsexuals, with extensive information on transitioning.

www.transgendercare.com

Transgender Health Program

Provides anonymous, confidential, free support in British Columbia for transgendered people, their family members, partners, and friends. Website offers care guidelines, online library, links to other resources.

Three Bridges Community Health Centre
1292 Hornby St.,
Vancouver BC, V6Z 1W2 Canada
Phone/TTY: (604) 734-1514
(866) 999-1514 (toll free in BC)
transhealth@vch.ca
www.vch.ca/transhealth

TransHealth.Com

The online magazine of health and fitness for transsexual and transgendered people.

www.transhealth.com

Youth Gender Project

Youth-led organization working to empower and advocate for trans, gender-variant, and questioning (TGQ) youth in the San Francisco Bay area.

www.youthgenderproject.org

Notes

chapter one

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chapter two

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4 *Webster’s Unabridged Encyclopedic Dictionary* (1989 edition), as quoted in alt.sex.fetish.fashion, 1996. See www.sexuality.org/1/fetish/fashion.html.

5 Rachel Pepper, *The Ultimate Guide to Pregnancy for Lesbians* (Cleis Press, 1999), 126.

6 *Sexy Mamas: Keeping Your Sex Life Alive While Raising Kids* (Inner Ocean, 2004), 106.

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10 Violet Blue, *The Ultimate Guide to Adult Videos* (Cleis Press, 2003), 213-14.

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Reserved.

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5 “Body of Knowledge,” Interview with Helen E. O’Connell, Australian Broadcasting Corporation, October 22, 1998.

<http://abc.net.au/quantum/scripts98/9825/clitoris.html>.

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7 Williamson.

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- [21](#) R. G. Walton, R. Hudak, and R. J. Green-Waite, "Adverse Reactions to Aspartame: Double-Blind Challenge in Patients from a Vulnerable Population," *Biological Psychiatry*, vol. 34, no. 1-2, 13-17, July 1-15, 1993. See also Christiane Northrup, *The Wisdom of Menopause: Creating Physical and Emotional Health and Healing During the Change* (Bantam Dell, 2001), 322.
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[28](#) Carol Leonard, “Hotter Than a Red-Assed Bee: The Menopause Experience,” posted on Power Surge. Leonard specifically mentions Polycarbophil found in Replens, www.powersurge.com.

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[31](#) Gracia. The study also found that “other independent risk factors for decreased libido include vaginal dryness, depression, and living with children.” *No kidding*.

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chapter five

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