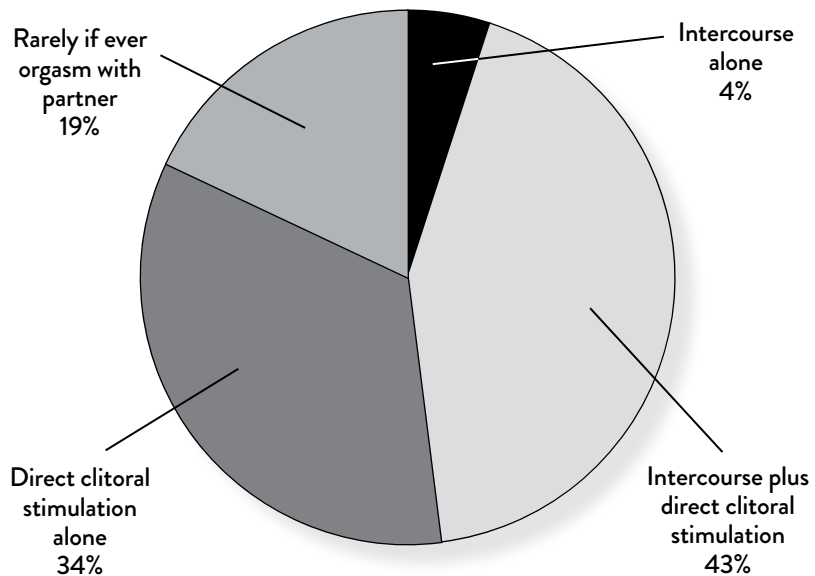


B E C O M I N G
CLITERATE

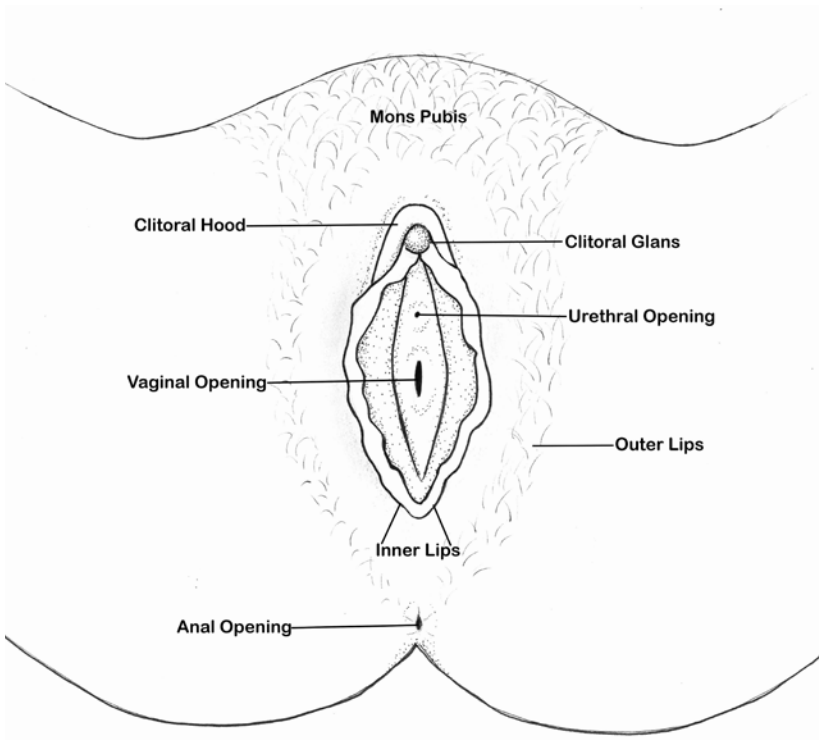
Why Orgasm Equality Matters—
And How to Get It

LAURIE MINTZ

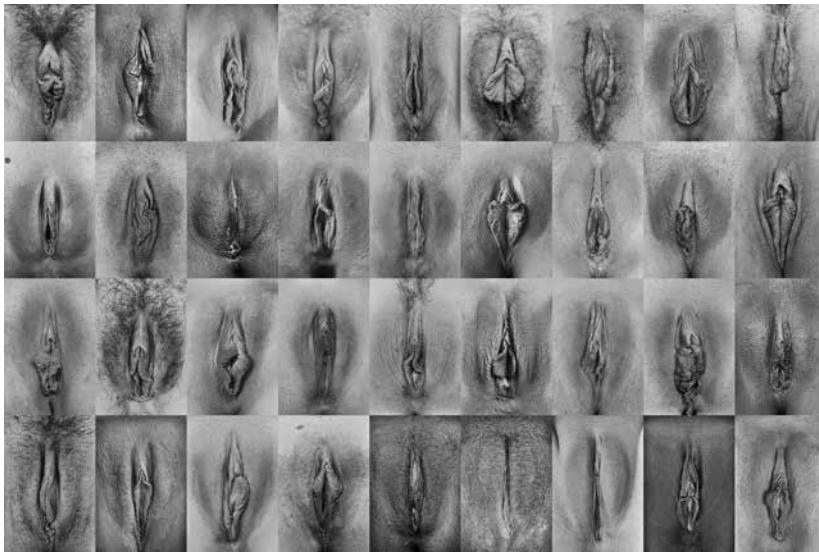
Averaging across multiple years of anonymous polls, here's what the women in my classes say their most surefire route to orgasm is:



Simple Picture of the Vulva (i.e., External Genitals)

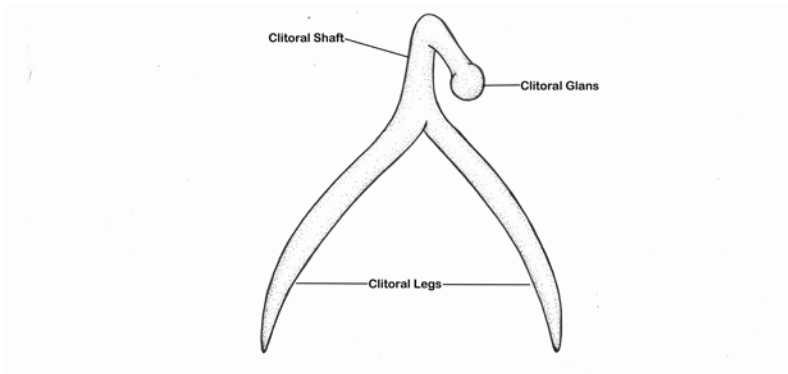


To counteract unrealistic porn images, several online sites and blogs have been created to show the diversity—and beauty—of women’s genitals. On many of these online sites, real women provide pictures of their vulvas. The following picture is from one such wonderful site, Gynodiversity.





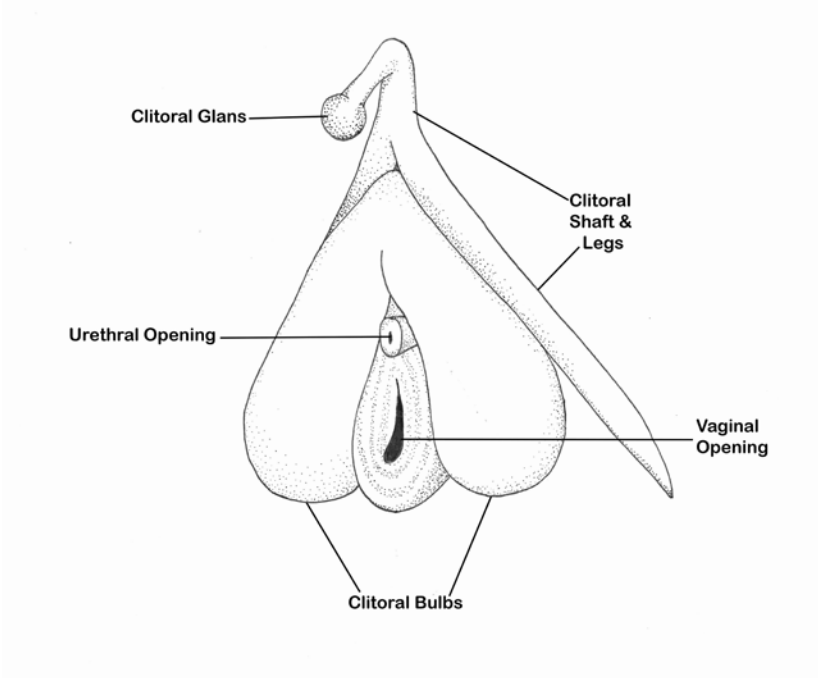
The Internal Clitoris:



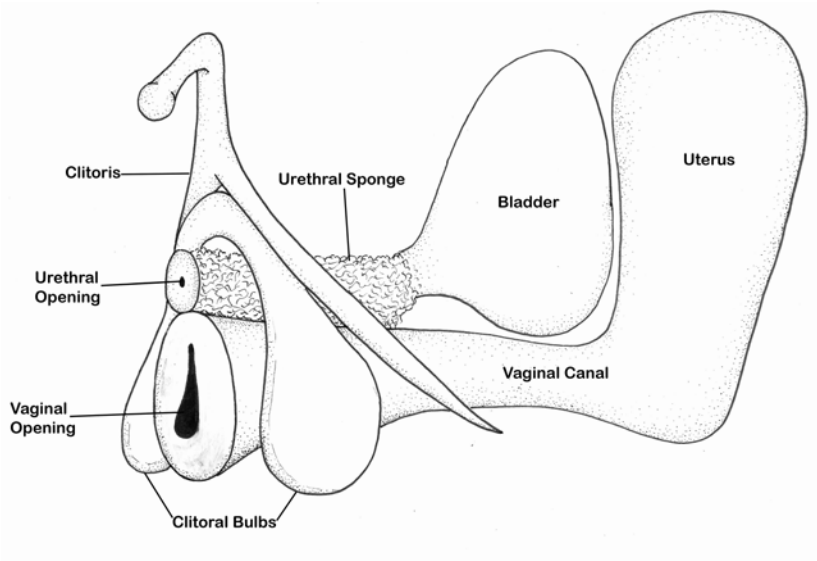
Feeling the Shaft of the Clitoris



The Internal Clitoris and Clitoral Bulbs



The Clitoris-Urethra-Vagina (CUV) complex:



The Twelve Commandments for Orgasm Equality and Quality Sex

1. Whenever I see lies about female sexuality being perpetuated, I will do my best to correct them and educate those around me.
2. I will educate others about female anatomy and pleasure.
3. I will cease to use non-equality-based sexual language. I will not use the words “sex” and “intercourse” synonymously, and I will not refer to clitoral stimulation as “foreplay.” I will not use the word “vagina” to represent all of a woman’s genitals. I will also do my best to correct others’ language.
4. I will use the word “clitoris” and all its variations openly and proudly in conversations.
5. I will use the term “making a sexual debut” and define this as a person’s first orgasm with a sexual partner.
6. I will not slut shame other women, and I will do my best to confront others who do.
7. I will not tell jokes about penis size, and I will do my best to confront others who do.
8. I will do my very best to love my body and appreciate its amazing abilities, including its capacity for sexual pleasure.
9. I will continue to pleasure myself, and I will educate other women on the benefits of self-love.
10. I will take a pleasure-oriented, rather than a goal-oriented, view of sex.
11. I will choose the type of sex I want to engage in, and whatever that is, I will use both my knowledge of myself and my communication skills to make it as satisfying as it can be, with the focus on an *equitable* giving and receiving of pleasure.
12. Throughout my life, I will continue my erotic education, including seeking solutions to sexual problems as they arise.

APPENDIX A

COOL TIDBITS FOR YOUR LADY BITS

Vulvas and vaginas do some awesome stuff, and there are cool things you can do to keep them as healthy as possible. In fact, there are so many that I can't include them all, but in this appendix you'll find an assortment of useful information, including details about grooming, smells, farts (yes, vaginas fart!), lubricants, and exercises.

BARE OR HAIR DOWN THERE?

The topic of genital hair removal can be sensitive and touchy (and I don't just mean the "Ouch!" of waxing). Often women either don't talk about what they do with their hair down there or get into a heated (like the hot wax) discussion about why they do this (For themselves? For a partner?). Sometimes this heated discussion includes a focus on how this genital fashion trend started and is perpetuated (e.g., the hairless, prepubescent look that dominates porn and the big business that hair removal now is). I'm not going to get more into this topic, except to encourage you to read a little about this on your own (just do a web search for "genital hair removal and feminism").

To lighten up the topic of genital hair a bit, did you know that when you get to be my age, you'll no longer need to worry about what do with all the hair down there? It will start to fall out on its own. My mother says

that when it does, it hits the floor and bounces back up, attaching itself to your chin. Now, there's something to look forward to!

Since loss of genital hair is in the far future for most of you, let's talk about two more currently relevant topics, including what other women do and advice from health experts on what they recommend you do. First, despite media images leading us to believe that almost every gal is bare down there, there's actually a lot of variety in what women do. One study found that among twenty-five- to twenty-nine-year-old women, about 12 percent go bare most of the time and 16 percent don't remove any hair at all. The rest remove some hair sometimes. To remove hair, women use a variety of methods—most commonly shaving or waxing. Gynecological experts, however, warn of the dangers of shaving and waxing, such as razor burns, painful ingrown hairs, micro-tears, and, most important, an increased risk of both minor and serious infections (including a couple of sexually transmitted ones). Some women's health experts advocate a total ban on hair removal, while others say there might be benefits of having less—but not totally missing—pubic hair. Here's something most experts seem to agree on: the safest route is carefully trimming your hair with scissors or a bikini trimmer, rather than completely removing it.

SELF-CLEANING AND NOT SMELLY

Your vagina is like a self-cleaning oven. The bacteria inside the vagina naturally destroy potentially harmful bacteria from outside the vagina. This is why douching is *not* a good idea (unless your doctor recommends it). Douching washes away that good bacteria inside the vagina. Also, there's evidence that douching can wash harmful bacteria up into the uterus and fallopian tubes, resulting in a higher rate of STIs and infections. So please don't believe that crap about your vagina being dirty and smelly.

Vaginas naturally have a marvelous, musky odor. Studies show that this odor is a sexual stimulant for men. However, in order to sell products (douches, deodorant sprays, scented pads), advertisers tell you that this odor has to be masked. Just like douching, feminine deodorant sprays and scented pads are bad for your vaginal health. They can increase infections and mask the smell of an actual infection.

Please get acquainted with your own unique vaginal scent, so when it changes and actually smells funky, you'll know to see a doctor about a possible infection. Similarly, your vagina secretes stuff all month long, so get familiar with your typical discharges too, and if they change, see a doctor.

WHO FARTED IN THE TENT?

Recall that when a woman is sexually aroused, her vagina turns into a tent—the front narrows and the back lengthens and expands. Well, your vagina also makes farting noises. But farts that come out of your vagina differ from the ones that come out of your ass: they don't smell. Vaginal farts are actually called “queefs,” although some nickname them “varts.” You're especially likely to vart after intercourse and vaginal tenting. That's because the thrusting penis pulls air into your vagina, and the air gets trapped in the tented back part. When your vagina shrinks back to its original size (i.e., the walls collapse against each other like a fire hose), air is released. Still, anything that pulls air up into your vagina (e.g., certain yoga positions) can result in vaginal farts. One of my daughter's friends discovered this when she was a preteen and liked to entertain friends by queefing on purpose. However, many women don't know how common queefing is and so they're embarrassed, but it is perfectly normal and nothing to be ashamed of!

MY TENT NEEDS TO BE MORE WET

Do you also remember that the tent gets wet (i.e., lubricates), and that some women need or like to add additional lubricant? There are oil-based, water-based, and silicone lubes, plus combination lubes that mix a water base with some silicone. The combination lubes are the most versatile, which is why the owner of *A Woman's Touch* recommends you start there. Still, it's good to know a little about all the types.

Oil-Based Lubes. Lubes with an oil base cause problems for many women, including irritations and infections. They're not safe for use with latex condoms; they'll break the material down.

No Cooking Oils on Your Coochie

Except for pure coconut oil, it isn't healthy to use cooking oils, such as olive, vegetable, or almond. The same goes for products from your medicine cabinet, such as shea butter or petroleum jelly. Pure vitamin E oil is safe but sticky and hard to wash off, so it's not recommended, although lubes containing vitamin E are fine.

Water-Based Lubes. Made of water and other ingredients (more on that shortly), these lubes wipe off more easily than other types, but many women don't find them slippery or long lasting enough for penetrative sex. They're compatible with all sex toys and almost all condoms, but check the bottle, because some haven't been tested and a few shouldn't be used with polyisoprene condoms.

Silicone Lubes. These are slippery and long lasting, so they're good for penetrative sex. They cannot be used with silicone sex toys, though they can be used with latex and polyisoprene condoms.

Combination Lubes. These are made of silicone, water, and sometimes other ingredients to make them slippery. Some can be used with silicone sex toys, and they can be used with almost all condoms (but check the bottle or the online store selling them).

What Are the "Other Ingredients"? Some water-based lubricants contain the ingredient glycerin, which makes the lube feel more slippery. While many women have no problem with glycerin, for some it increases their proneness to infections, especially yeast infections. That's why you'll often see lubricants advertised as "glycerin-free."

Also, some water-based and combination lubes have other ingredients that aren't good for vaginal or vulva health, can cause pain or irritation, and can increase the risk of sexually transmitted infections. A Woman's Touch doesn't sell any lubricants with these ingredients. Both A Woman's Touch and Babeland list the ingredients of their lubes, and here are ingredients to avoid:

- capsaicin
- chlorhexidine gluconate
- lidocaine
- menthol
- nonoxynol-9
- polyquaternium-7, -10, or -15

Some lubes also contain preservatives that people with skin sensitivities or allergies react to. If you have sensitivities, test some of the lube under your arm first to make sure you don't have a reaction.

Want even more safety information on lubes? Check out the wonderful downloadable PDF brochures under the “Learn” section at A Woman's Touch (SexualityResources.com).

PELVIC FLOOR PILATES

As you know, orgasm involves the pleasurable feeling of your muscles contracting in your genitals. Specifically, three layers consisting of fourteen muscles surround your urethra, anus, and vaginal opening. These muscles are collectively called pelvic floor muscles. Strengthening them (through Kegel exercises) can make your orgasms feel bigger and stronger. What follows is the best advice for learning to do Kegels that I've ever seen, adopted from a brochure available at A Woman's Touch.

Identify your muscles:

- The best way to find these muscles is to insert one or two lubricated fingers into your vagina and try to squeeze your pelvic muscles around your fingers. When you feel a tightening and lifting around your fingers, you've found the right muscles.

Do your first Kegel:

- Lie down on your back. This takes the weight off your muscles.

Don't Stop the Pee

You may have read elsewhere that you should find your pelvic floor muscles by stopping your urine midstream. Pelvic floor physical therapists don't recommend this, because you won't actually identify all the muscles that way. And doing this consistently can actually cause you to hold urine back without realizing it, which can result in urinary tract infections (UTIs).

- Contract and hold the pelvic muscles you just located for five seconds. It should feel like you're pulling the muscles up and in toward your belly button. Focus on tightening only the pelvic floor muscles, and don't flex the muscles in your abdomen, thighs, or buttocks.
 - As you practice, it will help to put your hand on these areas to make sure you aren't flexing these muscles.
- Release the muscles by just letting go. Don't bear down or push out.
- After you've relaxed the muscles, take a five-second deep belly breath to make sure you're truly relaxing all your muscles. (You've now completed your first Kegel exercise, which includes a muscle contraction, a muscle release, and a deep belly breath.)

Start exercising and build your strength:

- Do two sets of five repetitions of the five-second hold-and-release Kegel that you just learned. Do this twice a day.
- Gradually increase the contractions until you can hold them for ten seconds. When you do this, also increase your deep belly-breath release to ten seconds.
- Build up to doing two sets of ten repetitions of a ten-second hold-and-release Kegel, and do this twice a day.

When Not to Exercise

These exercises strengthen pelvic floor muscles, but some women have muscles that are too tight and some have muscles that spasm. This can result in an inability to have penetrative sex or pain with arousal, penetration, and/or orgasm. Other health issues can also cause these same symptoms, so your first step is to see a physician and verify that your pelvic floor muscles are the cause of your genital pain and/or discomfort. If they are, check out the books in the “Additional Resources” appendix (page 241) and find a qualified pelvic floor physical therapist.

Add a new exercise:

- Once you're comfortable with these exercises, add Kegel “flicks” to your routine. While still lying down, tighten your pelvic floor muscles quickly and then just relax—all while breathing normally. This should take about three seconds. Do twenty of these, and when you finish, take one deep belly breath. Do this twice a day.

Change positions and places:

- Once you're comfortable with all these exercises, try them in a seated position.
- Once you're used to that, do the Kegels at any place and any time. No one can tell you're doing them, making them especially fun to do if you're bored in class or at a meeting.

Use Kegels with a partner:

- Once you know how to use your pelvic floor muscles, you and a male partner might enjoy it if you squeeze and release them during intercourse. While intercourse is not the source of most female orgasms, it's still quite a fun activity and this muscle action

could make it more fun! Of course, the squeezing motion isn't limited to penises; you can do this around the finger of any gender partner.

Want more tips to help you care for your lady bits? Check out *Read My Lips: A Complete Guide to the Vagina and Vulva* by Debby Herbenick and Vanessa Schick, and “Vulva Care: Keeping Your Kitty Happy” in the eighth edition of *The Guide to Getting It On*. And for more resources for keeping your kitty purring, read on.

APPENDIX B

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

I hope you've found the information in this book useful and you're now feeling sexually empowered, confident, and satisfied. I'm also hoping this book has spurred your interest in learning more about sexuality and other topics related to your overall well-being (e.g., communication, mindfulness). Maybe you'll become a self-help or sex nerd like me. If so, you'll find plenty of resources in this appendix to get you started on this fun-filled journey.

ALL THINGS SEXUAL

Books and Websites

- *The Guide to Getting It On* by Paul Joannides (Waldport, OR: Goofy Foot Press, 2015)
- Two websites with downloadable books and brochures on a variety of topics:
 - Good in Bed: Your Guide to a Better Sex Life, www.goodinbed.com
 - A Woman's Touch Sexuality Resource Center, <https://sexualityresources.com>

FEMALE SEXUAL CONCERNS

Genital Pain, Vaginismus, and Pelvis Floor Muscle Treatment

The following website has a section of self-help books. As a starting place, I'd suggest *Heal Pelvic Pain* by Amy Stein, DPT (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2009), although there are many other excellent books in their online bookstore:

- National Vulvodynia Association, <https://www.nva.org>

To find a physical therapist experienced in treating pelvic floor muscles, try these organizations:

- American Physical Therapy Association, <https://www.apta.org>
- Interstitial Cystitis Association, <http://www.ichelp.org>

Low Sexual Desire

- *A Tired Woman's Guide to Passionate Sex: Reclaim Your Desire and Reignite Your Relationship* by Laurie B. Mintz (Avon, MA: Adams Media, 2009)
- *Reclaiming Your Sexual Self: How You Can Bring Desire Back into Your Life* by Kathryn Hall (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 2004)

OVERALL WOMEN'S HEALTH

- *Our Bodies, Ourselves: A New Edition for a New Era*, 4th edition, by The Boston Women's Health Book Collective and Judy Norsigian (New York: Touchstone, 2005)

BODY IMAGE

- *Body Image Workbook: An Eight-Step Program for Learning to Like Your Looks* by Thomas Cash (Oakland, CA: New Harbinger, 2008)

COMMUNICATION AND INTIMACY SKILLS

- *The Dance of Connection: How to Talk to Someone When You're Mad, Hurt, Scared, Frustrated, Insulted, Betrayed, or Desperate* by Harriet Lerner (New York: William Morrow, 2002)
- *The Dance of Intimacy: A Woman's Guide to Courageous Acts of Change in Key Relationships* by Harriet Lerner (New York: Harper Perennial, 1990)

MINDFULNESS AND MEDITATION

Books and Audibles

- *8 Keys to Practicing Mindfulness: Practical Strategies for Emotional Health and Well-Being* by Manuela Mischke-Reeds (New York: W. W. Norton and Dreamscape Media, 2015)
- *Wherever You Go, There You Are: Mindfulness Meditation in Everyday Life* by Jon Kabat-Zinn (New York: Hyperion, 2005; Macmillan Audio, 2000)
- *Guided Mindfulness Meditation: A Complete Guided Mindfulness Meditation Program* by Jon Kabat-Zinn (Louisville, CO: Sounds True, 2005)

Apps

- Headspace, <https://www.headspace.com>
- Insight Timer, <https://insighttimer.com>

Book and Companion Online Course

- *10% Happier: How I Tamed the Voice in My Head, Reduced Stress Without Losing My Edge, and Found Self-Help That Actually Works—A True Story* by Dan Harris (New York: Dey Street, 2014)

- 10% Happier: Meditation for Fidgety Skeptics, <https://www.10percenthappier.com>

STRESS MANAGEMENT

- *The Relaxation and Stress Reduction Workbook* by Martha Davis, Elizabeth Robbins Eshelman, and Matthew McKay (Oakland, CA: New Harbinger, 2008)

SEXUALITY AND DISABILITY ISSUES

- Dr. Mitchell Tepper: Regain That Feeling, <http://www.drmitchelltepper.com>

PLEASURING MEN

- *Passionista: The Empowered Woman's Guide to Pleasuring a Man* by Ian Kerner (HarperCollins, 2008)

SEXUAL ABUSE RECOVERY

If you turned to this appendix to find resources for recovering from sexual abuse, the following three self-help books are excellent. Additionally, for this concern, therapy is strongly recommended. Please also see the next section on finding a qualified therapist.

- *The Courage to Heal: A Guide for Women Survivors of Child Sexual Abuse*, 20th anniversary edition, by Ellen Bass and Laura Davis (New York: William Morrow, 2008)
- *The Courage to Heal Workbook: A Guide for Women and Men Survivors of Child Sexual Abuse* by Laura Davis (New York: Harper Perennial, 1990)

- *The Sexual Healing Journey: A Guide for Survivors of Sexual Abuse*, 3rd edition, by Wendy Maltz (New York: William Morrow, 2012)

FINDING A QUALIFIED THERAPIST

It's possible that reading this book has made you aware that you need to seek counseling for more serious problems in your life, including, but not limited to, healing from sexual trauma or relationship issues. Although having such a realization is difficult, it's a brave and positive step. The next step is to find a good therapist. I have outlined how to do so in the following steps, which apply equally well to finding an individual or a couples counselor.

Get a Few Names

To find a good therapist, word-of-mouth is the best way. If you have a friend who's in therapy and feels positively about it, ask them for their therapist's name and number. If you don't know anyone who's in therapy but you know and trust someone working in the service sector—anyone from your hairdresser to your doctor—ask if they have other clients who have spoken positively about being in therapy. If so, see if they can get the name and phone number of this recommended therapist for you. You can also check *Psychology Today's* online referral service, which sorts therapists by zip code and provides descriptions of their training and specialties (<https://therapists.psychologytoday.com/rms>). If you're seeking help for a sexual problem, search the online directory of the American Association of Sexuality Educators, Counselors, and Therapists for professionals certified in sex therapy (<https://www.aasect.org/referral-directory>). No matter what your source, your goal is to get at least one—ideally two or three—names of recommended therapists.

Call the Therapist and Listen to Your Reaction

Your next step is to call the therapist or therapists. A good therapist should be willing to chat with you for a few minutes to answer your questions and help you determine if he or she is qualified to help you. Here is a list of potential questions to ask:

College and University Counseling Centers

If you're a student at a college or university, they'll likely have a counseling center that is free or has a minimal charge for students. Such centers generally have well-trained therapists. So a terrific option is to simply make an appointment, and skip to the following section about what therapy feels like and your role in it.

- Have you ever worked with someone with _____?
(Fill in the issue here, such as body-image issues or childhood sexual abuse.)
- What is your approach to this type of problem?
- What is your general therapy style?
- Are you and your services covered by my insurance company? If not, can you recommend any therapists who are?

Look for a therapist who is licensed to practice and has training and experience with your concern. I also recommend looking for someone who conveys that they'll take an active approach in therapy. While it's critical to feel connected and understood, having a therapist who does nothing but empathize with your concerns isn't likely to help you change.

Also, both while on the phone and during your first sessions, pay attention to your internal reactions. Though it's important to find a well-trained therapist, the "click" or chemistry that you feel with the therapist is equally essential.

WHAT THERAPY FEELS LIKE AND YOUR ROLE IN IT

It's vital that you be open and honest with your therapist. While developing trust takes time, your therapist can only help you if you truthfully reveal your feelings, thoughts, and behaviors. You should be able to

Speak the previously unspeakable when you're with your therapist, and you should feel both understood and challenged to make changes in your life. Therapy doesn't always feel comfortable, however. A good therapist will sometimes challenge you and confront you. Even so, you should always feel that your therapist has your best interests at heart. If you aren't making progress in therapy, talk to your therapist about this. A good therapist will want to hear your perceptions of how things are going and work with you to make appropriate changes to the process of therapy if needed. If you're open to the process of therapy and you find a good therapist, therapy can be truly life altering.