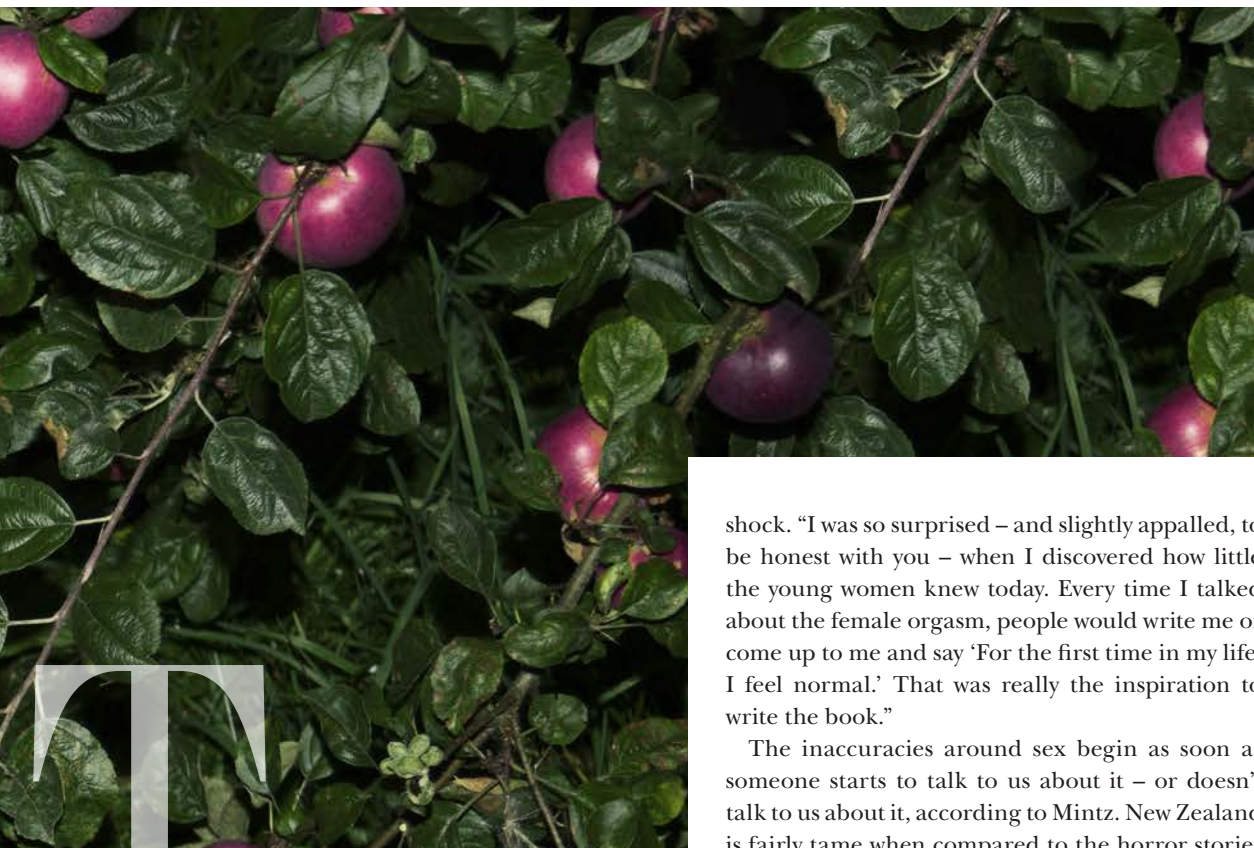




Coming soon:

THE NEW SEXUAL REVOLUTION

We're achieving equality in boardrooms, but not in the bedroom. Emma Clifton talks to the author of a radical new book on how to bridge the pleasure gap



There are wage gaps and thigh gaps, but a new book from an American professor of human sexuality wants us to focus on another gender inequality: the orgasm gap. In her new book *Becoming Cliterate*, Dr Laurie Mintz argues the true fight for sexual equality should start in the bedroom – and the crux of it centres around your clitoris. Yep, time to get nice and comfortable with the other ‘c’ word, because that’s what this revolution is all about.

If you are, or have been, a sexually active woman and you’ve ever worried whether or not you are ‘normal’, here are some facts Mintz wants you to know. First, 95% of women need clitoral stimulation to have an orgasm. Second, all of the nerve endings women need to reach orgasm are outside of the vagina. And third, it takes a lot longer for women to hit their pleasure peak – 15 to 45 minutes – than it does men, who take two to 10 minutes. So if a lifetime of movie sex scenes, impatient lovers, or articles on the ‘best positions for your orgasm’ have made you feel like maybe you’re just wired differently, you’re not. Odds are you fall within the majority. So, argues Mintz, why is the mainstream version of sex – and the priority given to the male orgasm – still so dominant in the modern world?

LET’S TALK ABOUT SEX

It was while teaching Human Sexuality at the University of Florida, to an undergraduate class of 18- to 20-somethings, that Mintz first realised how pervasive the penetration model of sex was, even to the younger, more sexually aware age group. Her class, she says, were part of “the most informed generation about sex ever” and yet the reaction to those facts before was always one of

shock. “I was so surprised – and slightly appalled, to be honest with you – when I discovered how little the young women knew today. Every time I talked about the female orgasm, people would write me or come up to me and say ‘For the first time in my life, I feel normal.’ That was really the inspiration to write the book.”

The inaccuracies around sex begin as soon as someone starts to talk to us about it – or doesn’t talk to us about it, according to Mintz. New Zealand is fairly tame when compared to the horror stories of US sexual-education classes – in some states it’s illegal to promote contraceptives – but if you remember your own sex-ed classes, they still focused on the dangers around it. And by ‘it’, they mean intercourse.

“The misinformation starts early and it’s both blatant and also really insidious,” Laurie says. “Even in the language we use when we talk to people about sex.”

The definition of sex, generally, means penis-in-vagina intercourse. But why is that still the norm? For one, it completely negates the experiences of the LGBT community, who could spend their entire lives having wonderful, active sex lives but never have it fit into those narrow terms. So when you consider the ‘ideal’ way to have an orgasm doesn’t work for the majority of women, not to mention all of the LGBT community, does it make you wonder if, well, a lot of us have been ripped off?

“Once you start realising that... I’m constantly angry in my job,” Mintz says. Changing the definition is the first step, she believes, because it also involves changing the priority.

“We have this standard foreplay – just enough to get her ready for intercourse; then intercourse, ‘the main event’; male orgasm, maybe female-faked orgasm alongside; sex over, done. Once we start valuing women’s most reliable route to orgasm as much as men’s most reliable route, then we have to say ‘let’s change the sexual script. Let’s do this differently.’”

READ ALL ABOUT IT

Her book, as Mintz puts it, was always going to be a combination of “female analysis and self-help”. But then a third angle was thrown into the mix, when she decided to add explicit guidance from couples sharing insider tips on how they make the ‘turn-taking’ orgasm model – one person has an >>



‘ONCE WE START VALUING WOMEN’S ROUTE TO ORGASM, THEN WE HAVE TO SAY “LET’S CHANGE THE SEXUAL SCRIPT”’

orgasm, then the other, in whatever way works best for them – happen in their own bedrooms. And so, *Becoming Cliterate* became “female analysis, self-help and erotica”. Her goal was to provide options that work for both parties and ensure everyone’s pleasure is a priority.

There’s no denying the title is provocative – never have I had so many questions about a book sitting on my desk – and Mintz says she’s bracing herself for potential controversy.

“I get two reactions to this book,” she says. “Number one: ‘You’re kidding me – we still need this? This is still a problem?’ and the other is ‘Oh my gosh, you’re going to get a lot of hate mail. This is radical.’ I think both are true. For some people it’s ‘How dare you talk about intercourse – and men’s pleasure – not being primary?’”

So why is this important, you might ask? Women having less-than-satisfactory sex lives isn’t the kind of thing that stops the world turning. And yet you have to wonder that if the mainstream definition of sex was leaving 95% of men cold, the reaction would be bigger.

“If orgasm equality was a problem that went the other way, it would have been solved by now,” Mintz agrees.

The bulk of the book was written before the US election and the women’s rights marches that followed. In the aftermath, Mintz admits she questioned whether her book had a place any more, when there was so much at stake. “But then I realised it’s all related to women’s agency, to women’s power over their own body,” she says. “When people ask ‘Why write this, aren’t there more important things to ask for?’ my answer is: they’re not mutually exclusive. Pleasure is an important part of life, sex is an important part of life. It would be really nice if it was an area of equality. And I think it’s an area where we have the power in our own hands” – she laughs – “to make that change.”

ALL BY MYSELF

Teaching women to masturbate is the easiest way for them to understand just how orgasmic they can be, says Mintz, but for those who grew up with a sense of shame around it, breaking through that psychological barrier is the first step.

“It’s knowing this is something other women do, this is something sex therapists recommend, it has health benefits,” she says. “I had one client who really struggled with all of this. She was a very religious woman, but then [one day] she came in and said, ‘I must have a clitoris for a reason. I think it’s God’s gift to me.’ People really need to embrace that this is an organ on your body that’s only purpose is pleasure. It is there for a reason – enjoy it.”

Masturbation also shows just how great the distance between how women orgasm and how women are expected to orgasm has become. A whopping 96% of women masturbate only externally – with no form of penetration – but yet, as Mintz says, “when they’re with men, they’re like “‘Oh wait, I’m supposed to be doing it this way.’”

It comes down, she believes, to knowing you deserve orgasms – both by yourself and with a partner.

“It starts with, ‘My pleasure is important, isn’t it wonderful my body can react this way, I want to get to know my body.’ So many women haven’t even looked ‘down there’, they feel ashamed. It really does begin with embracing and valuing your own sexual pleasure and your own body.” ✱

‘PLEASURE IS AN IMPORTANT PART OF LIFE, SEX IS AN IMPORTANT PART OF LIFE. IT WOULD BE REALLY NICE IF IT WAS AN AREA OF EQUALITY’



✱ *A change is gonna come*

All revolutions, sexual or otherwise, require bigger action. Being able to talk about what you want, starting a dialogue with your friends, or bringing about change in the bedroom if you’re in a long-term relationship, is the next step. Mintz acknowledges it can be a hard conversation to have if sex has been a certain way for a long time and you don’t want to upset the apple cart. The key is framing the conversation in a positive, ‘we’re in this together’ kind of way, she says. “Use ‘I’ statements... ‘I really love you, I really love being intimate with you, I really love being sexual with you. I’ve recently discovered some things about my sexuality and what I need to orgasm, and I’d like to talk to you about that because I’d like to incorporate that into our time together and our sex life.’”

Taking the onus off the intercourse side of sex and into the full experience can also be a big relief for men, with size and stamina no longer the be-all and end-all. “I’ve had young men from my class say they do feel so much better because they ‘don’t have to last long’. They’re relieved by the formula as well. Sexual pressure is the reason behind so much erectile dysfunction.”

But no matter your current relationship status or stage of life, Mintz stresses it is never, ever too late to start valuing your pleasure more. It’s an important part of your life and an important part of your relationship.

“It’s worthwhile to dig in and change the things that are not good in your life, if you have the power to do so. And this is one area where women really, truly have the power to change.”