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Women's Holistic Health

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Healing Sexuality

Why is it that in a society centered around sex, it is actually considered taboo for a successful, strong woman to express her sexual desires? Sex is a normal and natural part of human existence, yet for many women this area of conversation is very uncomfortable to discuss. Many of today's cultural views of sex exploit and objectify women by parading them around in low-cut, sexual inducing outfits. The media portrays women as a sexual animal, ready to pounce, and this sex symbol is expected to be extremely thin, with a voluptuous backside and breasts. At the same time women are expected to fulfill the sexual fantasies and desires of their partners and avoid their own desires. When it comes time for a woman to express her own erotic needs she is miss-portrayed by her peers as "dirty", "raunchy", a "slut", or a "whore". Almost no woman looks the way our societies sex symbols look, and with this type of comparison it is no wonder the majority of women suffer from low self-esteem, do not fully love and accept their bodies and are extremely out of touch with their own sexual desires. This article will begin to discuss the disconnection between women's sexuality and normal and natural act of sex. It will also examine healthy ways for women to heal sexually and rediscover their own bodies and areas

of sexual pleasure in a collection of conscious exercises to be preformed with and without a partner. This in-depth program for restoring and developing sexuality will hopefully provide an outlet for women struggling with and ashamed to address their own sexual dysfunction.

Sex is a normal and natural part of our human existence. One of the most basic human impulses is procreation, (Mars, 2010, p.5). Conception of every human being on earth began with sex and it is our birthright to engage in sexual pleasure throughout our existence. "Appreciating and embracing our sexuality is a key part of flourishing", (Northrup, 2010, p. 231). Humans are the only primates that have sex for pleasure and not just for reproduction. Pleasurable energy is something that humans are naturally drawn to. When practiced healthily sex has an abundance of advantageous qualities.

Sex is a form of communication between two partners. When it is joyous, the body, mind and spirit of two unite as one. Sex is beneficial to the immune system because it stimulates antibodies needed to combat common colds. It increases circulation, lowers blood pressure and lowers cholesterol levels (Mars, 2010, p.3). With its ability to decrease stress, sex also lowers the risk of heart attacks. During the act of sex, heart rate increases, muscles are engaged, and the cardiovascular system is stimulated resulting in aerobic exercise. By releasing cortisone and endorphins the act of sex can relieve pain. For women sex can help regulate menstrual cycles and even improve PMS symptoms. Sex can also be considered yogic. It lifts spirits and gets creative juices flowing, (Mars, 2010, p.3). Experienced in its highest, and deepest form sex is said to be transcendental, (Maizes & Low Dog,

2010, p. 395). With all of the positive features sex has to offer why is so many females still struggle to converse about and express this normal urge?

Female sexual dysfunction is a term used to describe sexual problems including low desire or interest in sex, diminished arousal, orgasmic difficulties and dyspareunia or painful intercourse, (Shifren, Monz, Russo, Segreti, Johannes, 2008). Female sexual dysfunction is considered a normal struggle in middle-aged women. The reality is that 43% of women in the United States experience sexual dysfunction, and these numbers are based solely from the reported cases (Shifren et al., 2008). That number seems overwhelmingly high in a society that is so focused around sex. Why is it that almost half of societies women battle with the ordinary human act of sex? The causes of sexual dysfunction are considerable and fluctuate from women to women. According to Christiane Northrup (2010), "In this society, sexuality is closely linked with body image and self-esteem... Women are brought up to feel that they deserve sexual pleasure only if they look a certain way or weigh a certain amount" (p.238). With this false conception of woman portrayed in the media it is no wonder so many women have low self-esteem and believe they do not deserve transcendental love and sex.

Distress and stress have become such a dilemma in modern societies that they are not only causing heart attacks and strokes, but the conditions are also related to female sexual dysfunction, (Shifren et al., 2008). Depression, which can often be linked with the condition of stress, is a strong reason for low sex drive in women. Actually, depression is the leading cause of disability worldwide and it is twice as common in women than it is in men. Depression and the use of

antidepressants are reported to lead to more sexual problems than in nondepressed women. In a study done by Peleg-Sagy & Shahar, (2013), top performing females reported that they had feelings of depression caused by their struggle to find perfection, and become leaders. Now that these women have climbed the ladder and become what society and their families have expected them to become happiness eludes them. This sense of overwhelming unhappiness affects libido, and sex drive.

Sexual assault, trauma and even grief of losing love play a huge role in sexual activity. All the great love and sex in the world can be tainted when one has suffered from trauma. Rape, incest, miscarriage, abortion, female genital mutilation, infidelity, promiscuity, and even the end of a relationship can be traumatic. These types of traumas can sometimes lead to insecurities and complications related to sex. Loneliness, childhood abandonment and poor parental guidance can often times lead to a destructive sex life, one in which a woman medicates her fears by having sex with people she does not love, (Northrup, 2010, p. 239). This type of sexual relationship can potentially lead to the use of sex in an addictive manner often resulting in promiscuity and unfulfilling sex.

New research on oral contraceptives shows that women using birth control pills for an extended period of time can contribute to sexual dysfunction. The pill can lower testosterone levels and make the hormone unavailable for use by the body resulting in decreased sexual desire, arousal and lubrication and increased sexual pain, (Panzer, Wise, Fantini, Kang, Munarriz, Guay, Goldstein, 2006). With all of the twenty-first century burdens it is no wonder so many women of today struggle to express their inner erotica. How can women reclaim their sexual energy?

First, we must change the context of sex. There are so many swearing terms linked with sex. When we are angry, stressed or fearful we sometimes spout out the words *fuck, motherfucker* (you get the picture) to release this anger. In order to find the high vibrations associated with sex and heal sexual vocabulary, we must let go of the anger and negativity in these words, (Mars, 2010, p.10). We must begin to embrace the normalcy and natural existence of sex and disregard the sinful and shameful act of sex that puritanical traditions have placed on society. A disbelief in the sacred power of sex allows no sexual energy to flow, (Maizes & Low Dog, 2010, p. 395).

Next, women must find a positive self-image. She must begin to love and accept the inner beauty within her self. We must realize that the portrayals of women in the media are not real, and we cannot compare ourselves to them. Make a conscious decision to allow yourself to experience pleasure. Positive affirmations can help increase inner beauty and self-esteem and allow pleasure to flow (Northrup, 2010, p. 243). When using affirmations, say them out loud and at least twice a day. The following can help promote sexual energy, "I am a sexy, irresistible woman," "I allow pleasure into my life." Also do not be afraid to make up your own affirmations. Above all you must love yourself. Tell the universe what you want and need to fulfill your sexual desires. Become completely familiar with your own body, including your clitoral system and your pelvic floor. Do not be afraid to explore it yourself. When you know what you like you can share this with your partner.

Health plays such an important role in every aspect of life; it is without disregard that health, nutrition and the food that enters our body impacts sexual

desire. A woman who feels unattractive and unsexy is usually not as healthy as she could be, but a woman confident in her sexuality is a healthy woman. Food is a necessity, but if it is eaten with positive intention, cooked with love and presented with creativity it can promote sexual energy. Eat natural food and avoid processed foods, because poor-quality foods not only impact your health but also your libido. A raw food diet has incredible potential for supporting health, energy and sex, (Mars, 2010, p. 14). When preparing a meal for or with your partner use the creative force within to embellish and display your food. Use sexy food garnishes and present your food on nice dinnerware or fine china. While eating the meal with your partner take turns feeding each other and give thanks for the food. Brigitte Mars, (2010), has an extensive list of foods that can be used to benefit sexual energy, from her selection here are some my favorites. Asparagus because of its phallic shape and mangos are known to promote sexual excitement. Cacao also known as chocolate became famous for its love inducing qualities by the Mayans. Fish, providing phosphorus, improve sex drive and responsiveness. Oysters, resembling the female genitalia, are the ultimate aphrodisiac. Nuts and seeds promote sexual desire and fertility; ones particularly high in zinc also help lubricate the vagina. Coconut water is a good source of electrolytes and is considered a supreme sexual food. Other great foods are peaches, pomegranates, garlic and many more.

We all know that to stay healthy we must exercise. Exercise can also boost libido, promote sexual vitality and intensify orgasms. Any exercise is better than no exercise but listed below are exercise specifically used for sexual vitality. Kegels help tone and strengthen the muscles in the pelvic floor. Squatting, hip circles and

pelvic lifts will help move blockages and improve chi circulation in the pelvic area while at the same time strengthen the lower back and buttocks. Dancing charges the chakras, and makes you more flexible for love. Dancing with a partner is also its' own kind of foreplay. Yoga can be extremely constructive for sex. Especially butterfly, cat stretch, cobra, lotus, bow, fish and tree poses. (Mars, 2010, p. 118-125).

Sadly, too many people, not just women, have been harmed from trauma. As mentioned before trauma comes in all types of forms. These wounds must be healed and cannot be repressed in order to experience sexual bliss. Trauma has been a part of my experience, and I personally needed a lot of time and a lot of resources to heal. I suggest that any or all of the below recourses be used to move through trauma as well as grief. You must talk about your experience and wounds; in order to heal you must let go and release your pain. This talking can be done in a therapy setting, with a close friend, or with other women sharing similar experience. Professional therapy, counseling and EMDR (Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing) provide genuine opportunities for healing and growth. Spiritual healing is incredibly valuable; burn sage, call upon spirit guides and angels, talk to a spiritual healer. Doing a holistic pelvic exam can open pent feelings and release blockages. Also, don't forget about colors, wearing the healing color of green can promote health and love, (Mars, 2010, p. 444). Whatever type of healing needs to be done to move forward, remember to be easy on yourself; healing from grief and trauma is an ongoing journey.

There are many herbs used to help sexuality. They offer a safe natural way to nourish the body and boost sexual vitality. Herbs can be taken as teas, tinctures and

capsules. The following herbs are beneficial to sexual energy according to Brigitte Mars, (2007). Ashwagandha enhances libido, boost fertility and strengthens the adrenal glands. Schizandra berries and raspberry leaf can be taken to heal sexual trauma. Damiana stimulates the genitals, boost nerve sensitivity and improves orgasmic ability. This herb can be used as a ritual smoke before lovemaking rolled with a pinch of peppermint and rose petals. Dong quai is a classic women's herb and increases a women's sex drive. Maca increases the production of estrogen, testosterone, and progesterone. It also enhances libido and treats vaginal dryness. Damiana, milky oats, passionflower and rose together make a tasty libido boosting tincture. There are many more herbs used for increasing sexual vitality.

Essential oils, the aromatic, volatile and chemically rich substance found in plants can have a powerful effect on human sexuality. These are some of my favorites. Coriander promotes harmony in relationships and has been long used as a love potion. Ginger's stimulating scent helps open the heart. Jasmine helps move emotional blocks and calms fears and anxiety related to sex. Rose is a supreme heart opener and it will help bring closeness to the emotional center. Sandalwood and vetiver are good for calming, comforting, grounding and uplifting. Essential oils can be used to enhance massages, scrubs, baths and bath salts, even bedding. Candles made from hemp, beeswax, or soy and essential oils can set the mood for sexual vitality. Candles of color can have a powerful effect on the psyche and the flow of chi; the most arousing colors are red – passion, ambers, oranges, and purples, (Mars, 2010, p. 156).

Spirituality and sexuality are a part of human nature. Becoming aware of the connection between sexuality and spirituality can empower and elevate the capacity for ecstatic sex. Women are creations of God and we must see the body as a sacred expression of the universe. We must feed our souls and our bodies. God also gave us the ability to experience pleasure and it is important for women to understand that lovemaking can invigorate the soul and become a spiritual experience. Meditation can provide answers to overcoming sexual dysfunction. Tantra is an advanced branch of yoga that includes sexual ritual to unite the energies of female and male, (Maizes & Low Dog, 2010, p. 394). This practice is founded on the belief that everything in nature is divine and it is thought that the human body is a possible medium for spiritual fulfillment.

The cycles of mother earth are greatly reflected in the female body. For example, the female menstruation cycle is a mirror of the moon cycle. Sexuality is also abundantly reflected in nature. Another way to become more balanced with feminine sexuality is to connect with nature and become attuned to the sexual reflections in nature. Let all of the earthy scents, sights and sounds awaken your erotic abilities. The symmetrical qualities of flowers – orchids, lilies, roses, and hibiscuses – can symbolize the vagina. The ocean and its crashing waves can illustrate the bond between you and your lover. Go outside and make your own connections with nature and your sexuality. If you can, find a private place where you feel comfortable be naked outside, try sunbathing naked and exposing your genitals to the open rays of the sun. Sunlight increases the level of androgen, the testosterone-like hormone associated with sexual desire, (Northrup, 2010, p.246).

Have mindful sex. Be with your partner in every move he makes and teach him to be with you. Try not to let your mind wonder, and if it does notice your thoughts and bring them back to the immediate sexual experience. Approach your sexual experience with openness and acceptance. Mindfulness is an effective way of moving the attention of negative sexual thoughts or anticipated sexual dysfunction to the sensations that are unfolding in the present moment, (Brotto, 2013).

Most importantly women must be able to forgive themselves. Forgive yourself for any sexual mistakes made in the past, and let go of any shame you are holding onto. The path to a glowing sexuality lies within forgiveness and self-acceptance. "When we accept ourselves and our lover in all our imperfections... we create a place where shame falls away and beauty prevails," (Maizes and Low Dog, 2010, p. 394). Remember also, to be easy on yourself and know that sex will not always be perfect. It will take a great deal of hard work and communication with your partner to reach transcendental, tantric sex. However, you (I) now have the tools to enhance and reclaim your (my) sexuality. Sex, love, health and happiness are what most humans spend their lives searching for. In ancient times sex was considered sacred. Let us restore this sense of sacredness in sexuality. Let us love each other with a sense of gratefulness for being here, on this planet, in this body, capable of love, sex, union and pleasure. Let us take back our womanhood and reclaim our sexual vigor.

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