

What They Didn't Teach Us in Sex-Ed

Sexual Health Without Stigma or Shame (based on Come as You Are by Emily Nagoski)

No Two Alike

Until 6 weeks gestation (still in belly), every human has the exact same parts. After 6 weeks, each person's individual hormonal and genetic cocktail morphs the body and all its parts into one unique body. Even more cool? The biological "female" (*not male*) configuration of genitals is the standard, biological "male" parts only form under the influence of hormones. Some people develop both sexes fully, some people develop parts of each sex. And, once developed, no two vulvas are created the same way; they vary in size, colour, shape, hair density, and clitoral size. The bottom line is: **whatever your genitals look like, they are perfectly right.** *We all have the same parts, organized in different, unique ways.*

Brakes and Accelerator

We'll use the metaphor of a car here, even though there is no such thing as a sex "drive". (More on that later.) Just like a car, our sexual arousal has a gas pedal and a brake pedal. Different factors can press these pedals softly, or press them right down to the floor, and it's different for everyone. One thing that is certain though? *If the brakes are engaged, it doesn't matter how hard you press on the gas, things just aren't going to move.* What can press on our brakes? Stress, kids, to-do lists, pain, low self-image, trauma, temperature, lighting; really anything that makes us uncomfortable and takes our mind out of the moment. To disengage the break, we need to lift the foot (stress, pain, etc.) that is pressing down on it. We do this by changing the context.

Context

Imagine your mind as an empty room. *There may be some permanent fixtures, but even those can be modified* with some heavy renovations (therapy). The things that fill your mental room are the context:

- If you have a big, lush bed with candles lit around it, soft music playing, the lights are dim, and there are no distractions, things are looking pretty good for sex to occur.
- If, however, your kids are running around in your thoughts, your inner voice is sitting on a chair in the corner saying mean things under their breath, and the pile of dishes in the sink seems to be growing larger the longer you ignore it, it may be a lot harder to get in the mood.

Maybe you need to get a babysitter, maybe you need your partner to help you clear your to-do list, maybe you need to practice self-compassion, maybe you don't feel safe with your partner.

Even though sex can still feel really good within an unhealthy relationship, the sex should not make up for other shortcomings. **You can and deserve to have great sex in a safe and healthy relationship**, it may just take some work to let your body know that sex can shift from a safety-seeking behaviour (*if we have sex, it proves I am loved*) to a safety-based behaviour (*I know I am loved, and sex is a fantastic bonus*). Therapy is brilliant for helping yourself discover this.

Nonconcordant Arousal (when downstairs and upstairs don't agree)

If you get nothing else from reading today, at least know this: **Being wet does not mean that you are aroused.** (And it's dangerous to assume that it does.) Sometimes you can even have an orgasm and still not be aroused, it's just your body reacting to the physical stimulation. Our brains and our genitals work on two entirely different tracks:

- Our genitals recognize when something is sexually relevant (like if you see sex on TV and you feel yourself get a bit wet, but your kids or parents are sitting right next to you, so you have no desire to actually have sex).
- Our brains recognize when something is sexually attractive (like having your eyes lock with the hottie across the bar, or when your partner surprises you with your favourite meal, or you realize you have the house to yourself and want to have some alone time with your vibrator).

In cis-men, things that are sexually relevant and sexually attractive occur at the same time 50% of the time. In cis-women, they only occur at the same time 10% of the time. This means that 9/10 times when we are wet, we're not actually feeling sexy, and that 9/10 times when we begin to want to have sex, we're not wet yet. *This is completely normal.*

Responsive Desire

So, the context is right, your partner is ready to go, but you're not wet and you're not quite feeling it yet. What do you do? First, recognize that spontaneous desire (like you see in basically every movie, tv show, and in any porn ever) *is actually quite rare* for cis-women. This does not mean that you have a "low sex drive" (which, again, sex drive isn't a thing) or that you are broken in any way. You, like most of us, just need a little bit of time and coaxing to get there, with a partner who is more than happy to take their time slowly, gently, turning you on. Try sitting down over a nice meal and just chatting with each other about things that interest you. Go for a walk or do something else physical that you both enjoy. Give each other massages and touch each other (except for areas that underwear/bras cover) just for the pleasure of giving and receiving touch. **Sex isn't about orgasms, it's about pleasure.** For most women, orgasms don't happen every time, and that's (again) completely normal. What matters is that you feel safe, secure, and able to surrender yourself to whatever pleasure your body is asking for in the moment.

Sex Isn't a Drive

The idea that desire can happen spontaneously may be due to the cultural myth of sex being a drive. A drive is a survival mechanism. It keeps you at the right temperature, nourished, hydrated, and well rested. If you ignore your drive, whether to eat, sleep, or get out of the heat/cold, you will eventually die. **Sex is not a necessity.** You will not die if you do not have sex. (And while we're at it, having "blue balls" is not a real thing, a boner does not have to be "taken care of".) Sex is an incentive. Making babies ensures the continuation of our species (the human race), so it feels good to motivate us to do it. *But that doesn't mean we have to do it.* Women are not made to be mothers. Women are not objects for male pleasure. Your body is your own, your sexual experience is for you to decide. *As long as nothing hurts, your body is perfectly healthy, perfectly normal, and exactly what it was meant to be.*