



Institute for
Relational Intimacy

The Couples Institute
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Great Sex for Life:

THE WHAT, WHY, AND HOW OF AN IMPROVISATIONAL SEXUAL STYLE

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What we
all know
about sex

If your partner wants it, you have to comply
There are definite rules; break
Some sexual things don't count as sex
them and it's a sin Keep it secret
Some body parts and
activities are off limits
Every happy marriage has lots of it
Painful sex is normal Sex is Good
If you do it alone, sex is a sin
Don't talk
Only do it with certain genders Sex is
As long as you follow the rules, sex
is natural and automatically good
For procreation Sex is embarrassing
Bad
You can learn about it from
Sacred
Between one man and one woman Sin Wait for Marriage
If you don't want it, there's something Scary
Girls don't like it, boys love it
Wrong with you Shameful
Naughty, secret fun



Common Beliefs about Sex and Self:

I'm a freak

I'm going to Hell

I'm broken

It's not safe to talk about it

A photograph of a man and a woman in a bedroom. The man, in the foreground, is wearing a grey button-down shirt and is gesturing with his hands while speaking. The woman, in the background, is wearing a blue and white striped shirt and is looking towards him with a slight smile. They are in a room with a wooden headboard, a bedside table with a lamp and clock, and a large window with white frames. A semi-transparent white banner is at the bottom of the image.

How we think about sex matters!



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Sympathetic and Parasympathetic:

Anxiety

Aversion

Resentment

Guarding

Withholding

Reacting

Performing

Relaxing

Appreciating

Luxuriating

Lingering

Savoring

Expanding

Experiencing



Definitions

Arousal is psychic (“turned on”) and is also a physiological response to sexual stimuli

Orgasm is a reflex response to a sustained high level of arousal





Sex as Linear Progression





X

X

X

X

X

X

X





Sex as Escalator



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Sex as Buffet



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Sex as Improvisation



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Pleasure-Oriented Intimacy



Why didn't
my
intervention
work?



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4 Big Reasons

It sounds like a behavioral intervention, but it is actually developmental

It involves changing extremely pervasive belief systems about sex and self...which requires a lot of personal motivation

It requires embodiment and connection to self...and other

Anxiety and arousal don't go together, and developing differentiation increases anxiety



Sexual Differentiation:

Are you connected to yourself?

Can you perceive pleasure?

Can you expand pleasure?

What fans your desire?

What might you like to try?

Can you notice when you shift internally from “yes” to “maybe” or “no”?

Would you like to ask for what you want?

Do you know you can give yourself pleasure?

Sexual Differentiation Con't:

Are you connected to yourself?

Get grounded

Keep it positive

Talk about yourself and your desires/preferences

Keep it playful if possible

Remember you can give yourself all the pleasure you want

Prioritize the connection with partner over any particular activity

Sexual Differentiation Con't:

Are you connected to yourself?

Get grounded

Keep it positive and playful

Honor your partner's desires/preferences/individuality

Remember pleasure is not a limited commodity

Prioritize the connection with partner over any particular activity

Be generous; pivot gracefully

Sexual Differentiation Superpowers



Don't Give
Up!

You can hold a vision
for something they
never knew existed

Celebrate successes.
Building capacity for
this takes time and
effort

What defenses are they
employing to avoid or
manage difficult
feelings during
intimacy?

Experiential
interventions are
helpful when building
capacity



Keys to Making it Stick

Introduce the concept
and sell it

Help client identify
what they want to
change

Help client identify why
they want that change;
strengthen motivation

Normalize sexual
variation and combat
shame

Hold vision for what is
possible and keep
thinking about how to
get from here to there

Normalize that this
takes time and lots of
practice with difficult
feelings and sexual
pivots

Mindful embodiment,
awareness of pleasure,
and strengthening
pleasure

Presence and calm with
difficult emotions (self
and other)

Normalize sexual pivots,
support self- and co-
regulation during sex



Upshifting and Downshifting Exercise

Therapist sets a
playful tone to
lower anxiety

Client chooses an
intimate request

Client practices
making the request

Partner responds
various ways

Therapist supports
and gives strokes
without derailing

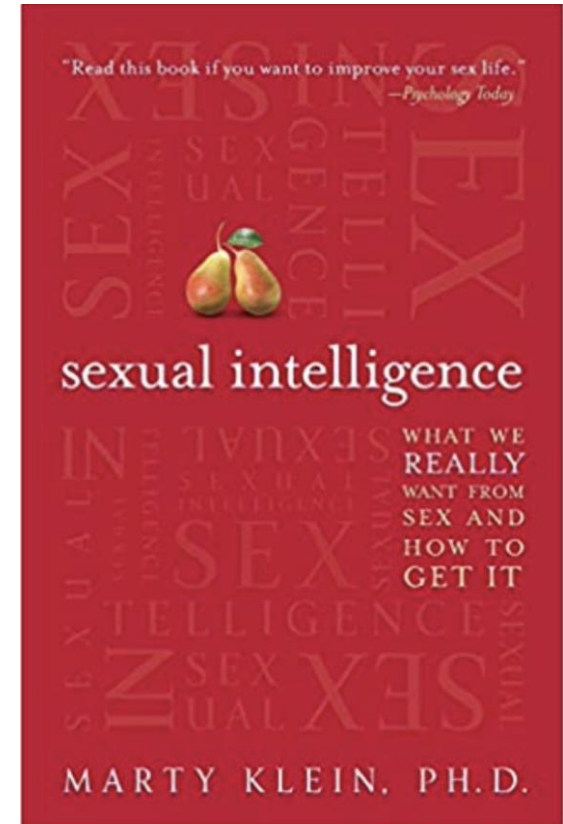
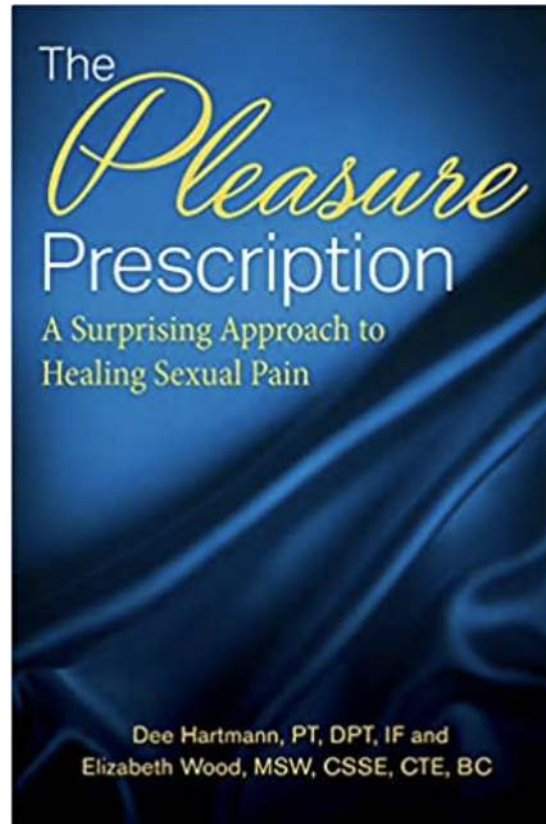
Therapist offers
stretch input with
strokes at the end





Laurie and Sam: Transcript

Resources: Improvisational Sexual Style:



www.instituteforrelationalintimacy.com

On my website I list upcoming classes and publish a blog about working with relational sex issues. I also have a free 2 video mini-workshop that includes a brief assessment that will help you sort symptoms and know how to prioritize and move a treatment plan forward.