

Gentlemen, imagine if you were at risk of losing your penis because doctors weren't totally sure where it was or what it looked like.

Unsurprisingly, many women aren't too clear on their own genital anatomy either. You can't really blame them. The clitoris is often missing from many sex-ed diagrams too.

Women can sense that their culture views their bodies with confusion at best, outright disdain and disgust at worst. Many women still view their own genitals as dirty or inadequate. They're increasingly comparing their vulvas with the neat and tiny ones they see in pornography.

It's one reason why labiaplasty is becoming a skyrocketing business among women and teen girls. Some people feel that all this is a trivial issue.

I was writing my book when I was at a dinner party and someone said, "Isn't sexuality a first-world problem? Aren't women dealing with more important issues all over the world?" Of course they are.

But I think the impulse to trivialize sex is part of our problem. We live in a culture that seems obsessed with sex. We use it to sell everything. We tell women that looking sexy is one of the most important things you can do.

But what we really do is we belittle sex. We reduce it to a sad shadow of what it truly is. Sex is more than just an act.

I spoke with Dr. Lori Brotto, a psychologist who treats sexual issues in women, including survivors of [trauma](#). She says the hundreds of women she sees all tend to repeat the same thing. They say, "I don't feel whole." They feel they've lost a connection with their partners and themselves.

So, what is sex? We traditionally define the act of sex as a linear, goal-oriented process. It's something that starts with lust, continues to heavy

petting and finishes with a happy ending. Except many women don't experience it this way. It's less linear for them and more circular.

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This is a new model of women's arousal and desire developed by Dr. Rosemary Basson. It says many things, including that women can begin an encounter for many different reasons that aren't desire, like [curiosity](#). They can finish with a climax or multiple climaxes or satisfaction without a climax at all. All options are normal.

Some people are starting to champion a richer definition of sexuality. Whether you identify as male, female or neither gender, sex is about our relationship to the senses. It's about slowing down, listening to the body, coming into the present moment. It's about our whole health and well-being.

In other words, sex at its true breadth isn't profane, it's sacred. That's one reason why women are redefining their sexuality today. They're asking, "What is sex for me?" So they're experimenting with practices that are less about the happy ending — more about feeling whole.

So they're trying out spiritual sex classes, [masturbation](#) workshops, even shooting their own porn that celebrates the diversity of real bodies.

For anyone who still feels this is a trivial issue, consider this: understanding your body is crucial to the huge issue of [sex education](#) and consent. By deeply, intimately knowing what kind of touch feels right, what pressure, what speed, what context, you can better know what kind of touch feels wrong and have the [confidence](#) to say so.

This isn't ultimately about women having more or better sex. It's not about

making sure women have as many orgasms as men. It's about accepting yourself and your own unique experience. It's about you being the expert on your body. It's about defining pleasure and satisfaction on your terms.

And if that means you're happiest having no sex at all, that's perfect too. If we define sex as part of our whole health and well-being, then empowering women and girls to fully own it is a crucial next step toward equality.

ALSO READ: Dan Ariely on Self Control at TEDxDuke (Full Transcript)

And I think it would be a better world not just for women but for everyone.

Thank you.

Resources for Further Reading:

[Sofia Jawed-Wessel on Women's Sexual Pleasure: What Are We So Afraid Of? \(Transcript\)](#)

[Let's Talk About Sex: The Reality of the Sexual Pleasure Disparity by Grace Wetzel \(Transcript\)](#)

[Laurie Betito on The Pleasure Principle: The Secret to a Better Sex Life at TEDxMontrealWomen \(Transcript\)](#)

[Why We Love, Why We Cheat: Helen Fisher \(Transcript\)](#)

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