

## INTRODUCTION

# Fanning the Flame

I coasted downhill fast and liked it. Exhilarated, I welcomed the coolness on my cheeks and forehead. A car passed me on my right side. It gained momentum as we both sped farther down. The car moved in front of me and I could see it was signaling a left turn. It was braking. I saw the street that it was headed for and shock penetrated my system. The street was only a few feet ahead of me, fifteen feet at most. The car was in the left lane and turning directly into me. Impact was inevitable. I slammed the pedals back.

I was aware of the car moving on my right and the pressure of my feet against the pedals. Everything suddenly started to happen slowly as if time had become elongated and motion was suspended in something. The space around me felt oddly infinite. I felt as if I had become panoramic. I could see on both sides of me, in the front, and I could also see behind me. I could see behind me as if I had eyes on my back. I could see in all these directions at the same time. The car turned slowly into me as if it was weighted with time. It hit my front wheel and knocked the bike and me over onto the curb.

I crashed onto the cement. The slow motion suspension was over. I got up from the concrete and my body hurt— my elbow, knee, and hip hurt. The bike was torqued and the front fender twisted. I got up and walked. I walked past the café where I worked. I walked four more blocks to the three-story row house I shared with five other study-abroad college students.

The next morning I lay on a faded, purple, velour sofa in the tiny downstairs common room. It was the only sofa in the house. Jack, Ginny, Dianne, Bonnie, and Ron were still expressing concern and bringing me cups of tea. I kept thinking about the accident and how the most remarkable thing was how the moment got elongated, and how slow everything had become. I marveled that I'd seen in all directions at once, even behind me. I liked that experience a lot. I still treasure those moments and it is more than thirty years later.

Experiences that are a bit more than ordinary fascinate me. That is why I paid so much attention when women disclosed to me that they were having special experiences in their sex lives and in their relationships. Their sexual moments had become more profound, more connected, and more alive. They joined with their partners in ways that were exquisite for them and described moments of melting, merging, and feeling oneness. These women had done more than solve their vaginal dryness, or learn how to orgasm, they had found an inner "Yes!" for sex. For some, this change in their sex lives re-kindled and expanded the relationship they had with their mates. Their relationships had become more compelling. They didn't just feel mated, they felt they were in a big love affair, the love affair they realized they had been hungry for all along but had not imagined was possible. This delighted them. The aesthetic enjoyment they felt just being physically close with their partner, even when they were not having sex, was unexpected and surprisingly satisfying. Their relationships and their sex had new dimensions that were exciting, expansive, and unusually pleasing.

Personally, these stories delighted me. I liked the idea of long-term, committed couples in big love affairs, and sexual relationships that had x-factors of specialness. As a women's sexual health practitioner the stories were professionally meaningful. Women finding their desire for sex increasing is significant in this field. Low desire is the biggest sexual complaint women have. This is a fact that holds true whether you live in the United States, Brazil, Mexico, Canada, Italy, Japan, Korea, Kenya, or any other country. It is global. Low libido affects ten to forty percent of all women, which means as many as four out of ten women have low or no desire for sex. Ten percent of these women are bothered by their lack of sexual desire.<sup>1</sup>

Since 2002 I'd worked with this ten percent doing medical evaluations. Women who didn't feel a strong desire for sex, yet wanted to; women who missed that feeling, that interest, that urge; and women who wanted to want sex. I helped them find their desire again, or if they have never had it, I helped them locate it for the first time.

As I worked with women and listened to their bedroom stories, their successes continued to stand out to me. Women who had had no desire were finding it—even after decades of trouble with sex. Inspired, I decided to collect the stories of women who said they had successfully turned their sex lives around. In May of 2009, I did my first interview. At first I interviewed women who were either mated or unmated. I later decided to focus only on women in committed relationships. So many women came in to the office asking about their low desire while simultaneously saying they loved, respected, and were attracted to their mates. They did not want to change partners; they wanted to know how to bring the spice back into a relationship that they valued. I listened to their stories and then

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1. J.L. Shifren et al., "Sexual Problems and Distress in United States Women: Prevalence and Correlates," *Obstetrics & Gynecology* 112, no. 5 (2008): 970-978, doi: 10.1097/AOG.0b013e3181898cdb.

re-listened with specific attention to the actions they took and what they saw as their turning points and insights.

If you are a woman who yearns for more satisfaction and fulfillment in the bedroom, this book is written for you. I know you can have more. Even after years of sexual unhappiness or boredom, you can move to a radically more exciting place. I am not talking about perfection or a la-la land fantasy life; I am talking about real people having an interesting and compelling love life. If you have a partner whom you respect and whom you like, and you are willing to take action and perhaps a risk or two, you already have the essential ingredients. You don't have to wait for your partner to do anything, you don't have to lose twenty pounds, you don't have to wait for the children to grow up and leave home. I promise that you can change things starting today. Instead of describing your sex life as okay or boring or painful, you can be smiling from the core of your being. You can be a woman who treasures her sexual relationship with her partner and anticipates sex with enthusiasm. You can be pleased with a capital P!

Born in the Midwest with an education that began in a Catholic grade school, helping women enjoy sex was not on my potential careers list. I studied Sociology as an undergrad, and received a B.A. from Kirkland College (now Hamilton College) in Clinton, NY. I then obtained a Master's Degree in Nursing, which was issued jointly from New York Medical College in Valhalla, NY and Pace University in Pleasantville, NY. My internship as a Family Nurse Practitioner was done at Harvard Community Health Plan in Cambridge, MA.

Before I began a practice in this sexual specialty, I was an Associate Professor at Southern Oregon University in Ashland, OR. There I was the Assistant Director, and later the Director, of the Health and Wellness Center on campus. Gynecology and sexuality were a significant part of my Nurse Practitioner practice

during those fourteen years. Students came in to the health center with sexual complaints and concerns. I also led campus outreach and educational programs doing residence hall talks, sexuality fairs, and classroom lectures. I was a liaison to the LGBT club. I did more teaching and counseling about contraceptives, safe sex, sexual identity, and preventing date rape than helping women in the areas of arousal, orgasm, and desire. It was at the university, helping students disentangle the reasons for their sexual distress, that I discovered my own curiosity around sexuality. Not only was I curious about what was getting in their way; I surprised myself how strongly I lined up to help them figure it out. A bigger part of myself became engaged as their sex sleuth. I have been helping women figure it out ever since.

I chose to enter the Sexual Medicine field as an area of specialty in 2001. I resigned as Director. In the months it took to find my replacement, I continued my exploration of sexuality and began a transcontinental search for experts in the Female Sexual Health field. I traveled from Boston to Los Angeles and multiple points in between, doing internships, attending conferences, and joining professional organizations to learn more about female sexual health, hormones, and gender.

I found many *pearls*, innovative views of how to navigate some of the common obstacles women experience with sex. I was impressed by how much information and support was available to help women enjoy a better sex life, and yet, I was disheartened that these pearls were not more accessible to the public. In November 2003 I taught my first evening series for women called *In the Bedroom*. I included two other sexuality experts.

This book reveals many of the pearls I have collected, both in my quest and in my practice. I've included the stories of real women (whose names I've changed to protect their privacy) who have found their enthusiasm for sex and now have that excitement in their voices and the blush on their cheeks, which they lacked before. Each

of these women had specific hurdles they overcame. I chose these women because these challenges are the ones I see most. Perhaps you will recognize some of them.

### **WHAT IS THIS FLAME OF DESIRE?**

Sexual Desire is you wanting to be sexually intimate. It is you feeling an urge to have sex. You are thinking about sex, planning for sex, and anticipating sex. There can be hundreds of different reasons why you want to have sex and the bottom line is that you want it. Perhaps you want sex so you can feel the closeness of your mate's body, or you crave the physical release of an orgasm. You may want sex so that you can feel sexually desired yourself, or because you want to satisfy your partner. You may want sex so you can feel all the delicious, heightened body sensations that come with arousal and orgasm. Your reasons for wanting to have sex will fluctuate, and so will the intensity of your desire. Sexual desire is a variable experience.

To talk further about desire we can break it into two types, spontaneous desire and responsive desire. Spontaneous desire is when you want sex without any external prompting. You are on the prowl; you feel horny. You are feeling sexual on your own, not because you are responding to your partner's advances. You are initiating the contact, making the first move, giving the first wink.

Responsive desire or receptive desire, on the other hand, is when the idea for sex originates with your partner. He or she is stroking you in the right way or whispering sweet things into your ear. They are doing something that intrigues you enough that you say yes to sex. You may experience both spontaneous and responsive desires, or just one, or you may not experience any desire at all.

One pattern of spontaneous desire is called cyclical or biological desire. Most women who are having regular periods identify this as the main way they experience their own spontaneous desire. It occurs

in the middle of their menstrual cycle at the time of ovulation. You may have felt this. Somewhere between day 11 and day 16, sex is on your mind for a few days. At this time in your cycle, an estrogen surge occurs and testosterone may also increase slightly from its usual level. This is the fertile time in the menstrual cycle, so we are biologically wired to want sex during this phase.

Another time many women experience increased sexual desire is right before their period begins, and maybe the first day of the period. At this point, estrogen and progesterone are at their lowest levels of the month, and testosterone is the only hormone left standing. The presence of testosterone increases sexual desire in both men and women. Right before your period, testosterone gets to dominate the hormonal action for a day or two. This effect can increase your sexual desire (which you may like) at the same time it gives you those unwanted PMS symptoms: acne, irritability, and restless sleep (which can be annoying).

About 90 percent of the women who come to see me are looking for their spontaneous desire. They may still respond to sexual touch and they may still have orgasms, yet they miss the feeling of wanting sex without prompting. They wonder why they are no longer thinking about sex or initiating it. Where is that feeling? They want to want sex more often than they do.

## **YOUR DESIRE IS LINKED TO HOW AROUSED YOU GET**

How excited or pleased you are when you have sex is central to how much sex you want to have. Not many people get excited for more sex if it's boring or leads to disappointment. If you want to have a high desire for sex it's important that you feel turned on and excited during sex and pleased afterwards.

Being turned on means you feel sexually aroused. Arousal happens when you respond to a sexual trigger and your body starts

to get excited. Your face flushes, your breathing becomes faster, you feel hot, your nipples get erect, your vaginal walls lubricate. Your attention redirects from wherever it had been to focus on the physical sensations you are feeling.

Arousal is the signal of you saying yes to pleasure. Feeling pleasure is a good thing. The sexual pattern that women with low desire describe to me is often one of not getting aroused enough to truly get excited and feel especially good.

Sexual arousal is paradoxical. Arousal requires you to be both relaxed and excited at the same time. Your psyche needs to be relaxed enough to allow your body to build up excitement and tension for your pleasure. If you are like a lot of women, your psyche is not relaxed very often. Swirling thoughts and emotions can keep you from getting aroused even when the triggers that might excite you are present. This is common and Part 1 of the book is about this.

The best way to read this book is to remember who you are and also who you are not. You are not Snow White or Sleeping Beauty waiting to be kissed. You are not a machine looking for its missing part. You are a feminine being looking to connect sexually with enthusiasm to the one you love. You are willing to take action to make this happen.

Read this book with curiosity! You are on the hunt for your natural enthusiasm for sex. Other women have found theirs and you can too. The examples in this book are from heterosexual couples. Regardless of your sexual preference, if you are a woman this information and these strategies apply to you. Keep in mind that you are a multilayered being, you have a physical body, a mind, a certain way of moving, and an aesthetic that you project through the energy around you. These aspects of you have many variables so there is no one-size-fits-all solution.

This book is divided into three parts. Part 1 describes the mental and emotional reasons for low desire. Part 2 focuses on your body

and the most common physical reasons for low desire. Part 3 lists strategies that ignite your desire. The strategies are divided into five areas of action:

- ✿ Arouse your mind and emotions.
- ✿ Optimize your body's responses.
- ✿ Empower your communication.
- ✿ Use your feminine sexuality to spice things up.
- ✿ Set the stage for delicious sexual events.

Read through the book once, and then go back and read the text boxes in Parts 2 and 3. My wish for you is that first you see how accessible a satisfying sex life is, and second that you take the action you need to find and enhance your flame.