

CARNAL KNOWLEDGE

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SEX EDUCATION YOU DIDN'T GET IN SCHOOL

Zoë Ligon

Photography by Elizabeth Renstrom



PRESTEL

Munich ♦ London ♦ New York

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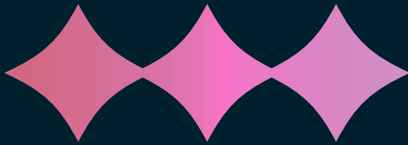
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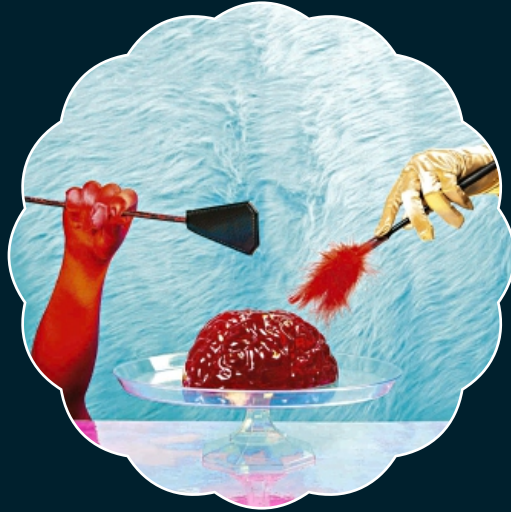
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After being sexually active for seven years with no orgasms and a sneaking suspicion that I was born without a G-spot, vibrators, dildos, and lube were the tools that helped me become able to climax regularly at age 21. Prior to this I'd received "sex education" in school and felt comfortable asking questions, but any desire to explore was eclipsed by covert sexual trauma that had occurred during my childhood. I was well informed about my period, and I knew that certain parts felt nice when pressure was applied

to them. But, in addition to my difficult experiences from my past, the world around me reinforced the message that pleasure was something intended for a penis; sex was something a vulva, mouth, or anus bestowed upon a phallus.

Before I'd ever touched my own body, I was having every kind of sex except solo sex. It's not that I wanted to try it and was embarrassed; I just had no desire to know my own body. The very items that changed my life for the better (sex toys) were things that the world taught me to

avoid—they prohibited “real sex” from happening. When young people are brought up like this, fearing the devices that can help them connect with sexuality, there’s a larger issue at hand than our schools or parents letting us down. Sexual shame is embedded into the fabric of our culture. Perhaps if I’d learned some of the simple truths of sex earlier on, I could have spared myself years of performative, exploitative sexual experiences. If I’d known that I wasn’t broken, and instead was recovering from and processing the distress from my youth, maybe I could have given self-pleasure a chance.


Being an advocate for blasting away stigma never felt like a choice for me; it was more of a revelation. I now own my own online sex toy store, Spectrum Boutique, and have been writing about sex, relationships, and health for five years. I’ve spoken at universities, conferences, events for Planned Parenthood, and even in the living rooms of strangers who have invited me into their homes. I proudly call myself the Dildo Duchess. I never sat down and decided to get into sex education and the sex industry; I just slowly waded in deeper and deeper, giving myself permission to continue as I undid the shame instilled in me by society. Given that I spend every day of my life pondering sexuality, you might think that I have this whole thing figured out by now, but if I’ve learned anything, it’s that we will never know *everything* about sex. While I love educating others, I have remained a student even as I teach.

If you’re lucky enough to have received sex education in adolescence, you’ll know that it focuses on STIs and pregnancy without any mention of pleasure. Beyond that, we are left to our own devices to learn about sex. Our main

tools end up being porn and Hollywood films: fantasy and fiction that don’t translate into real life. However, through frank discussions with our loved ones and our communities, we can collectively rethink sexuality and its role in our lives. Talking about it openly can help us to experience healthier, more fulfilling intimacy, and also to feel autonomous and present in our bodies.

Maybe this is the first time you’ve ever read a sex education book, or maybe you’re a sexuality professional yourself. This book is for you, no matter what your relationship with intimacy is. You can just look at the pictures and save the text for when you’re ready. You can read it cover to cover, or savor each tidbit individually.

This is indeed an educational book, but it’s also an art book full of images created by my dear friend Elizabeth Renstrom, whom I’ve known since I was 19. We met while working at a clothing store and became fast friends who clicked just like kids in elementary school. There is no collaborator better suited to illustrate the sex ed tips we should have learned as adolescents than Liz. She has photographed everyone from Jeff Goldblum to Grumpy Cat, and even though she is a heavyweight in the world of photography, there is something uniquely whimsical about her work. She breathes fresh air and light into everything she does.

However you choose to approach *Carnal Knowledge*, these words and images are here to give you judgment-free company. This is the book I’d want to give my younger self, who was more concerned with making her boyfriend come than making herself come. Just remember that these 50 sex education tips aren’t “lessons” you must perfect, but friendly reminders intended to complement your own self-exploration. 

1.

