

SEX IS AN ADVENTURE

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Pleasure. Communication. One word elicits tingles, the other brings tension. In all areas of life, especially with sexuality, we are trained to seek pleasure and avoid communication. What this leads to is *okay sex*. Or worse, *bad sex*.

How do we solve this horrifying dilemma? First, throw generalizations out the window. Just as we all choose different outdoor activities, we are beautifully unique in our preferred sexual activities. Not weird, or different, or abnormal, but beautifully unique. Second, we need to talk about those preferences. Just like you talk to your partner about your favorite hobbies, it's time to talk about sex.

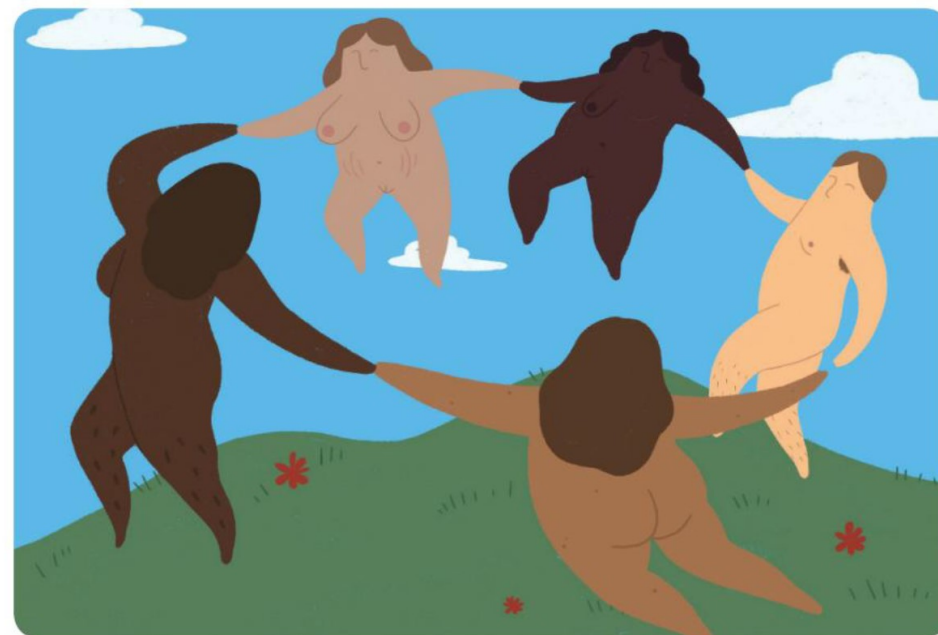
Kris Roudebush, a licensed Marriage and Family Therapist who specializes in serving the LG-BTQIA+ community, believes that we should verbalize the specifics of when and how you get excited, and then ask your partner to share in return. Accept and explore those differences. When you understand your own type of desire, and your partner's, then you have something to work with!

Just as there is a spectrum of how we get excited about sex, there is also a magical rainbow of sexual acts. We boast about our hobbies on social media, on resumes, and when outside, instantly bonding with others engaged in shared and socially acceptable activities. Yet when it comes to sex, we keep it locked up tight, never to be discussed. The result is dull, repetitive, unimaginative sex. This is unacceptable. We deserve to experience exciting sex! To get there, first we must figure out what we like and what we don't. This is challenging because, as Roudebush points out, "Sex education has nothing to do with pleasure." We were never taught the options or how to explore them. Instead, we were taught what is

"normal" versus what is "unconventional," touting the latter as immoral.

What if we treated sex like any adventure—where we find ourselves open, curious, and exploratory, solo, or with a partner? For example, say you have never gone camping before (or you never tried anal), but your partner is a backpacker (and loves it). You would like to explore this world (because backpacking is definitely next level camping), but you are nervous (for many good reasons). Communicate both those feelings—that you are nervous and want to explore, and that you need to take it slow. Start with car camping, sleeping on an air mattress with pillows and a duvet. (Start with just the tip of a finger, applying pressure to just the opening). Agree that if you are miserable, it is okay for you both to go home (agree on a "safe word" to stop the anal play). Know that if you don't complete the camping trip that time, it does not mean you cannot try again. After, when you are back home (or are not naked in bed), both of you share what you liked and what you did not like. Be honest with one another. Repeat for other activities you or your partner are curious about.

Let's be real—honesty is fucking hard. Communicating about our unique sexual identities is challenging because of one feeling—shame. Sex and shame go hand in hand, and layers can run deep. Everyone is embarrassed about something and most of us are actually ashamed of the same things: low/high libido, an interest in a sexual activity that society has deemed unconventional, a contracted sexually transmitted infection, or religious beliefs we were raised on. Trauma from an unwanted sexual act is hidden even deeper and for longer, and unfortunately is also a shared experience. The problem is that we rarely talk about these areas of shame. Roudebush insists



that "The way in which we talk about [sex] will set the tone for how it will be received." In other words, if you present what you are embarrassed about as horrible and relationship ending, that's likely what it will be. But, if you present it as part of who you are and something you want to work on, then it's far more manageable.

We need to present these topics not as a hopeless negative trait, but as a normal part of the human experience.

Still, with all this exploration and acknowledgment, we can get stuck. We hit a wall and find we can't navigate the terrain on our own, or even with a partner. With a lifetime of generalizations, bottling up our fantasies, and shame, we need help from experts. Fortunately, help is out there. Most of us never received a proper education on the individuality of sex or how to talk

about it. Now is the time. Find a class at your local college, online, or seek out an experienced couple's counselor.

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We take lessons to learn how to ski, we attend weekend-long mountain biking clinics, and we watch videos to build a bed platform in a van or truck. Yet when it comes to sex, we must maintain a persona of being as skilled as an Olympic athlete, *without* the years of obsessive practice, or being coached by an expert. Sex

can be amazing and to get there, it takes effort and assistance. Even with the challenge, every adventurer knows that feeling at the top of a pass, a pitch, or at the base of the single track. It's worth it.



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