Let’s Talk About Sex!

17th April 2021

● 50 Shades of Sex; How the Media Shapes Our Lens on Pleasure
● Sex Conversations from an Asian Lens

18th April 2021

● Sexual Health and Accessibility

By Women Unbounded

Resource Booklet
50 Shades of Sex
Why do you work so hard at something as niche as sexual health and femtech?

- Sex is anything but niche! The only thing that’s niche about it is the honest conversation around sexual and holistic wellness.
- In the past, magazines like Teenage, Teens, Cosmopolitan, offered dating advice where you could anonymously ask questions.
  - But magazines are renowned for victim-blaming and crafting responses that teach women to be subservient to men or act according to their desires.
- Today, social media takes over the role of traditional print and has the tendency to propagate unrealistic body standards / distorted views on female pleasure from the point of view of the male gaze.
● Getting in touch with your sexuality and understanding what makes you comfortable shows realness.

● We need doctors and gynaes on TikTok to give us comprehensive sex-ed.

● We need ethical porn sites such as “Bellesa” and “Make Love, Not Porn” to teach us what real intercourse is.

● There’s so much work to be done in this regard and when we have achieved realness and fairness, I will be seen as having a normal job.
There’s so much more to sex than just penis-in-vagina penetration. The end goal is not just climax and orgasm – it’s the full experience of pleasure, intimacy and sharing with your partner.

- In the Asian context, sex is often seen as functional / purely for the purposes of procreation and rarely as a pleasurable act.

It involves the entire session - from making out to foreplay to aftercare.

- Aftercare - often neglected but so important - is used to describe (especially in BDSM) decompressing and calming your body down after the experience of pleasure. Sex is an intense act regardless of the relationship with your partner.

The media portrays sex as act which epitomises the relationship between the protagonist and his/her lover.

- The truth is, sex is imperfect, it’s messy, sometimes awkward and accompanied by smells and sounds, it’s all part of the process!
- Hollywood doesn’t show you the awkwardness and the struggle people who have sex go through while switching positions etc.
- We need to remove these unrealistic expectations, self-judgment and be mindful of how our bodies and emotions feel during the experience.
● These unrealistic portrayals often culminate in women feeling like they have some sort of deficiency for not looking the way the actress does or enjoying themselves as much as the actress on screen. They might also feel like they need to put on a ‘performance’ and focus on their partner.

● FACT: Only about 20% of women orgasm through penetration. Most need a mix of external stimulation and ample time to get ramped up because the state of mind matters for both parties during sex.

● We forget that sex is fun and playful. We sometimes get lost in the emotional expectations we put in framing and approaching this topic. It is about mutual pleasure, exploring you and your partner’s unique pleasure points and what makes both feel safe and intimate.

● Truth is, your partner is likely also focused on ensuring your pleasure during the process or they’re probably feeling their own insecurities. Being mindful and feeling all the sensations in the present, rather than worrying what to ‘perform’ next will help you shift your focus and enjoy sex more.

● P.S. Bellesa.co is one of my bookmarked sites and I’d recommend it to anyone wanting to check out ethical depictions of porn where sex looks real and women are the subject of pleasure!
● When it comes to lesbian sex, non-lesbians always wonder whether women do it out of sheer curiosity or genuine sexual desire.

● A large part of physical lesbian relationships focuses on “before care”.
  ○ Are our hands clean? Are our nails cut? Have we brushed our teeth? Are we using finger condoms / dental dams? How do we smell?

● There’s so little information about lesbian sex. Information that is available tends to focus on sex from a Western perspective. It’s often about positions, how to please and so on.

● There’s even less information about lesbian sex in an Asian context.
  ○ We have to talk about sex for Muslim queer women who have undergone female circumcision.
  ○ We have to talk about Asian women who have been brought up with conservative values who feel guilt for firstly showing a desire for other women and secondly for engaging in acts of sexual intimacy with women.

● I have a post about fingering and bleeding because there’s so little awareness on this.
  ○ People wonder if they’ve injured their vaginas or someone else’s vagina when this happens.
The fact that queer sex therapists are so rare makes things even more difficult for queer women,

Straight women have some sort of idea (though hardly reflective of real-life) of what sex would look like because of porn / Western films etc. Is lesbian porn a good guide for lesbian women?

Google “Dyke porn” or “Butch porn”. These are what “masculine” lesbians are called. The search results come up empty! These butches often prefer giving pleasure to receiving pleasure. Why does this not exist? Especially if there is a considerable number of such lesbians out there.
  ○ I can’t help but think that this is because the male gaze has an aversion to females having their breasts bound like butches do

Is lesbian porn therefore purely for men? There’s so much the queer porn industry needs to work on.

Making sex fun is easy but making sex a subject which can be easily talked about is something we should all work towards as society, especially given how conservative Singapore / Asia is.
Understanding the pleasure gap

- Did you know that 95% of straight men orgasm during partnered sex as compared with a meek 65% of straight women?
- This is fuelled by the male-centric sexual experience, which focuses on vaginal-penile penetration which is not the most effective way for females to achieve an orgasm!

Women get erections too!

- The vulva tends to swell / get more juice (i.e. becomes engorged) when females get erections.
- There is an entire erectile network that is activated when women get aroused. This is why women take longer to achieve orgasm.
- The clitoris is designed for pleasure - it is its only role! So embrace it, experiment with it, OWN IT.

The Sexual Response Cycle

- There are 4 stages that male and female bodies go through during sex. An orgasm is the peak of the sexual response cycle and it is not a linear path.
- If your mind wanders or if you are distracted, you may end up going back to the first stage even if you were experiencing increased pleasure.
Masturbation is NORMAL.

- Vulva-owners deserve orgasms just as much penis-owners. Do not be afraid to demand orgasms.
- In order to be able to demand orgasms, you need to know what you like. And masturbation is the best way to find out.
- Practice with different speeds, varying strokes, toys, etc.
- It helps you be more confident when having partnered sex as well.

Sex, pleasure, intimacy. It’s a constant cycle of learning and exploration! Enjoy the process!
I work with individuals and couples to help them with sex, love and relationships. I also give talks and conduct workshops.

I have noticed that there is a need to create empowering conversations around pleasure, sex, sexuality and relationships. There is a need to focus on orgasmic sex and closing the pleasure gap.

Asians see relationships differently and it is important to contextualise teachings / advice.

We need to create a new narrative, one that speaks about sex from an Asian perspective.

Asians are often fetishized by Western media. The Asian woman is subservient and compliant. This is a damaging stereotype as this is what we are exposed to and subconsciously internalise.

We need to break these stereotypes and create new visions of identities of ourselves in the sexual space. Recognise that each person’s version of “sexy” looks different.

It is up to us to accept our sexuality and reconcile that with our Asian heritage.
Sex Conversations from an Asian Lens
Exploratory dates

- A great bonding activity for couples.
- Be open to trying new things with your partner; someone with whom you are comfortable experimenting.
- Schedule exploratory dates and have a theme for each exploratory date (e.g. roleplay, temperature play)
- Remember that the intention of such exploratory dates is to figure out what you both enjoy, so go in without any expectation and immerse yourself in the experience.
- After the date, wind down by talking to your partner about how you felt the session went.
- Remember that honesty is pivotal, as your partner wants to please you just as much as you want to please them.
- One way to increase intimacy is to have a code word just for the two of you for when something feels good - it could be a sound, or your favourite drink. Similarly, for when something does not feel as good. This may help ease the harshness of being told “no” as your partner is trying something new that does not quite do it for you.
Exploratory dates

The “Yes, No, Maybe” List

- Create a “master list” of various sexual activities
  - Compile as many ideas as you can! Your imagination is your limit.
  - This could range from “neck kisses” to being tied up.
- Grab a piece of paper each. On each of your papers, draw three columns and label them - yes, no, maybe
- Categorise each of the sexual activities into the “yes”, “no” and “maybe” columns on your paper.
- Once you’ve completed that, exchange your paper with your partner and talk through the list.
- You’d be surprised by what your partner is comfortable with. This is a great way to strengthen your connection with your partner.
- Explore away!

“My body, my rules”

- Get two printouts of the outline of a human body. One for you and the other for your partner.
- Shade the zones on your body that turn you on when touched. A different colour based on the intensity of pleasure you feel. Be sure to clearly mark “no-go” zones.
- Swap with your partner and talk through your zones.
How should I discuss sex with my conservative family?

- First, ask yourself why or what you would like to talk to them about. Are you trying to share your experience with them or are you trying to ask them about theirs?

- Remember that having grown up with conservative values, they will likely be averse to this topic and unprepared to handle such conversations. Empathy and putting yourself in their shoes is therefore key.

- You might not get the reaction that you want.

- Understand that their response is not an indication that you’re a bad person or that you have bad values.
  - It is likely that they never had this conversation with their parents / family and so their initial response would always be shock.

- When you’ve mentally prepared yourself, approach the person you feel most comfortable with (e.g. someone in your age group or a non-authoritative figure like an aunt)

- Instead of diving head-first into the conversation, inform them that this is may be uncomfortable but that you value their advice and feel the need to talk to them about it.

- Having this conversation with someone whom you feel comfortable around but also do not live with can be a “rehearsal” of the conversation you would ultimately have with your direct family. It is a good gauge of how your direct family would also react to such issues.
How can parents talk about sex with their children?

- Firstly, parents need to understand their comfort level with sex and genitalia. Do they call the genitals of males and females “penis” and “vagina” respectively? Or do they use some sort of euphemism? If that’s the case, they are likely not ready to have the conversation with their children and have to work on themselves first.

- Next, the intention as to why they are teaching their kids about sex should be clear. It is probably to protect their children and keep them safe. With that in mind, parents have to go beyond their own shame and insecurities around sex / genitalia etc.

- Rather than putting on the “adult lens”, try to seeing things from a child’s perspective. Children are exposed to so much explicit content nowadays that it is best to tell them what things are (as they are) instead of trying to sugarcoat them.

- Be straightforward with your children - it is the best way for them to learn!
What changes should be made to sex-ed in schools and how can we encourage open conversations in society?

- In the past, the main message from sex-ed was abstinence. You’d be told why you shouldn’t do it and the adverse consequences that flow from it. What we need instead is comprehensive sex-ed involving
  - Sexual Health Education
  - Contraceptive Options
  - The various types of relationships
  - The peripherals of sex (instead of pure penetrative sex)
  - Consent and communication!
  - Managing desires that come with changes within your body

- It would probably also help if sex-ed teachers were not teachers with whom the student is familiar so that there is a safe barrier between the student and the teacher.
  - Whether teachers in schools are equipped to teach sex-ed is another question that we have to consider.
  - Aside from the fact that they have the relevant material to cover, have they got the proper training to answer questions students may have? Are they knowledgeable enough themselves?

- Because sex is an intrinsic part of human life, instead of shying away from it, we should be dedicating about an hour a week for about 2 months in schools.

- Consent and communication is a topic that we need to cover from as early as primary school. As Asians, we are taught to always say “yes” to adults. This may explain the number of child sexual abuse cases we read about so frequently.
The term “bi-curious” supposes that one needs to have some sort of sexual experience before identifying as bisexual. Thoughts on the term?

- “Bi-curious” is a term that some heterosexuals use to define themselves as they are curious about sex and intimacy with others of the same gender.

- A number of gay / lesbian individuals went through the bi-curious phase before realising that they are not in fact hetero / bisexual.

- A number of bisexuals also often go through this “exploratory” phase before confirming that they are attracted to both genders.

- However, one does not have to first label themselves “bi-curious” in order to know that they are bisexual. When you feel an attraction to both genders, that alone should be enough to confirm your sexuality. One does not have to have sex with an individual of the same gender in order to verify their sexuality. Take heterosexuals for instance. No one says to them that they first have to have sex with someone of the opposite gender in order to be sure that they are hetero.
How can I embrace my sexuality?

- If you do not identify as straight, chances are that you have been through a whole lot of guilt and shame for not being attracted to the opposite sex / for being attracted to more than just the opposite sex.

- There are lesbians and gays who have been through a whole lot more guilt and sometimes even disgust when being with someone of the opposite sex in hopes of trying to convince themselves that they are in fact “normal”.

- Societal and family pressures aside, you should always be true to ourselves. There is no point in trying to please people around you and attempting to conform to “norms” while being bitter and unhappy yourself.

- Social media can be a good source of support for anyone struggling with accepting themselves for who they are. When you hear stories from others in similar situations and how they overcame their struggles, you realise that being non-heterosexual is nothing to be ashamed of!

- Labels on sexuality are unnecessary and confines people in boxes that serves no real purpose. The key is to accept that you feel what you feel because everyone is wired differently. Some prefer dogs and others prefer cats. Your heart just wants what it wants!
How would you manage expectations for Asian women in bed?

- The key to managing any sort of expectation is communication. It doesn’t matter whether you’re Asian, White or Hispanic. Communicate with your partner and do not be ashamed to tell them what you want. Guide them through pleasuring you.

- Self-pleasure practice also goes a long way in managing expectations because you learn about what works for you and what does not.

- When practicing pleasure, it is important that you do not approach it with orgasm as an end-goal. It needs to be about what brings you pleasure. What feels good. What makes you smile.

- When you combine communication and knowing what you want, expectations become very easy to meet / manage.

- It might also be worth being open-minded, because your partner may have a skill that would blow your mind. Just as long as your boundaries are respected!

- A good lover is one who listens, respects you and ensures that you are comfortable no matter what.
Why is it that women feel like they are not free to express what they want?

- It probably stems from the manner in which we were raised. We are always taught to “close our legs” and dress a certain way, to cover ourselves, to ignore catcallers. We have been conditioned to be less vocal.

- We are taught to feel guilt and shame for wanting sex and pleasure, so much so that we often feel like we are asking for too much if we so much as tell our partner what it is that makes us feel good.

- This is why it is important that we have conversations to break this taboo and encourage women to ask for what they want. Letting your partner know what you like is also a great way for you to bond with them. It is a great way for you to feel safe around your partner and to build trust.

- Sometimes, women feel shy because of insecurities too. Because they do not look a certain way, or they do not act the way other women do.

- Being naked in front of another person takes courage and self-confidence. Insecurity stands in the way of that and as a result, some women feel like they are not “worthy” enough to ask for what they want. In such cases, it would help to have a partner that reminds you of your worth and assures you that your pleasure is their priority.
How can we help women heal from trauma and either reclaim or adopt a healthy approach towards sex?

- The origin of trauma may not always be sexual. Where there is trauma involved, the degree of trauma matters. AWARE is a great resource for women who suffer from severe trauma.
- Before being comfortable with touch, much less sex, the person needs to feel safe in their own body.
- **IMPORTANT: Not everything requires discussion.** Some prefer not to discuss their trauma so that they do not have to relive the traumatic incident. Depending on the severity of the trauma, sometimes it may be better to let time heal the trauma instead of forcing discussion.
- Self-compassion and self-love are two of the best antidotes to trauma. Always remind the person suffering from trauma to be kind and compassionate towards themselves. At times, some relapse and blaming themselves for what happened, but healing isn’t linear.
- A traumatic situation can leave a person feeling unsafe. Self-worth and self-compassion teaches them to feel safe with themselves again. This is not something you can get from an external environment.
- Once the person feels safe in their own body, they are likely to be more receptive to touch, though this varies from person to person.
Sexual Health and Accessibility
What is RutuChakra?

A student run organisation (85 volunteers) based in India working towards achieving menstrual awareness and equity. We aim to overcome the stigma attached to menstruation and educate people on how to deliver their periods in a healthy and hygienic manner. We work on 3 main fronts:

- Spreading awareness through workshops
- Raising funds through campaigns
- Using those funds to distribute sanitary pads and other menstrual products to menstruators in need.

Importance of Menstrual Health

We lack the medium through which we can maintain a good level of menstrual health because of the stigma, the inaccessibility for those who lack resources and the high prices assigned to these products. If we take small steps such as changing your pads/tampons every 5 - 6 hours, washing our hands everytime we change our sanitary products, it promotes the cause of maintaining good menstrual health, reduces the chance of infection by 97% & helps avoid pain and discomfort that comes along with an infection.
Why do people feel uncomfortable when talking about sexual health?

In the past, we lacked sanitary products/facilities to maintain a good level of menstrual hygiene or deal with periods effectively. As a result, society came up with detrimental concepts of menstruation which are still widely clung on to, and people are yet to rid themselves of those beliefs. Euphemism is a great way to propagate that stigma, with phrases such as ‘periods’, ‘on the rag’, ‘on flu’ being used as alternatives to “menstruation”. This stigma has restricted our approach towards menstruation, as well as innovation and development in the field. There is a lack of awareness for people who undergo menstruation and there is a lack of knowledge in people who aren't a part of this process. With birth control pills, there is an association with sexual activity which is considered “immoral” prior to marriage. To overcome these stigmas, we should fully leverage on the various social media platforms to encourage such conversations and educate more people about sexual health.
Is having your period a valid reason to be excused from school or work?

It definitely is! Periods come with cramps, mood swings, discomfort. It is disappointing that menstruators themselves do not recognise this and struggle to be excused from work. Periods in no way limit a woman - it is a natural process. If society deals with it better, it would make the process easier. This can be done through innovation (for sanitary products) & open discussions.

How do we go about changing the mindset/stigma

The stigma of ‘being impure’ during your period is difficult to overcome. But that does not stop us from having conversations with the older generation to educate them that these beliefs are not grounded in science. If you try talking to them and make them understand why their beliefs are flawed, it may form cracks in their beliefs. It is also important to educate the younger generation about menstruation at an early age to prevent stigmas from propagating.
**What is DearDoc?**

Having observed women around the region and how they handle their sexual and reproductive health, Shruti noticed that women tend not to reach out for help. Shruti wanted to use her experience from having worked in the women’s healthcare space to address these gaps. Deardoc aims to make healthcare easy, judgement-free, affordable and discreet. Currently they focus on birth control services (pills, patches, emergency contraception) for women who know what they want and the chance to consult a doctor and find a method that is best-suited for women that are unsure.

**How it works**

1. Log on to the platform, submit a request which comprises of a very detailed health profile + personal preferences.
2. Deardoc will then arrange for a consultation with a doctor to discuss the various birth control options.
3. After the consultation, Deardoc will deliver the medication and refills (if necessary).

*(Cont. on next page)*
**How it works**

4. If there are any questions or concerns about the birth control medication or any symptoms experienced, simply contact Deardoc and they will get you the right advice from their doctor to ensure that users don't have to look for information online or talk to their friends to solve or address something that you are experiencing personally.

The idea is to provide professional advice which is very personalised to their health profile and birth control preferences.

**How does Deardoc address the affordability issue?**

Services offered are on par with offline care costs, with the added advantage of convenience and privacy. Depending on their preference, women can get the recommendation that is best-suited for them. Women can share their price concerns with their doctor, who will then recommend a method that fits their budget. An online platform allows women assess all options available, enabling them to choose what works best for them from a medical and pricing point of view.
Does birth control affect your chances of being pregnant?

This is a common misconception. Scientific data suggests that there is no effect on the fertility of a woman once she stops using birth control. Fertility can return from up to 1 - 3 months after a woman stops using birth control.

How reliable is Google for sexual health advice?

Google is a great platform for generic information as it provides comprehensive information, often highlighting some of the risks that may be involved. It however lacks personalisation, and this is where doctors come in - To properly assess and provide the accurate diagnosis/treatment. That is the gap Deardoc is trying to bridge. It is good to be educated and be aware of certain risks. However when it comes to medicine and health, it is important to get the right advice from a medical professional.
How often should I get tested for STDs, and what should I get tested for?

There is a misconception that one does not need to be tested if they are not “sleeping around”. However, so long as you are sexually active, there’s always a chance. Even people who only have protected sex contract STDs. As a general guideline, if you’re active, you should get tested at least once a year. If there is a change in partner or if you’re active with more than one partner, it is encouraged to get tested once every 3 - 6 months. It is recommended that you get tested for chlamydia (most common STD) and to do a comprehensive screen which will include vaginal swabs and a blood test to test for HIV, hepatitis, syphilis and herpes.

What are the symptoms of STDs in females?

- About 80% of females who have it do not show symptoms.
- Common STD symptoms include abnormal vaginal discharge and mild vaginal itch.
- Common herpes symptoms include painful blisters around the genital region, genital warts.
What factors are considered when prescribing birth control?

- Medical history of the patient (for prescription-only pills)
- Current medication that the patient is on (whether it would affect the birth control method)
- Lifestyle (a birth control that’s hassle-free & long term)
  - The biggest pitfall is forgetting to take daily birth control pills. This makes the method ineffective.

Our role is to offer and explain methods available to the patient, guiding them in making an informed decision. It also depends on the comfort level - some might not be keen on invasive procedures and might be more keen on pills or the patch. A birth control consultation is important before starting on birth control.

How does the morning after pill work? How effective is it?

This is taken after unprotected intercourse. It contains a high dose of progesterone which essentially tells your brain to stop/prevent ovulation immediately, although this is not guaranteed. If the woman has already ovulated, the morning after pill will not work. In most cases, this pill is only 70-80% effective, depending on when it is taken, whether they have ovulated, the point in their menstrual cycle during which it is taken. It is not recommended to take the pill more than once in one menstrual cycle. It is not going to work a second time and it may increase the chance of irregular bleeding due to hormonal fluctuations.
What are some self-care tips for when you are on your period?

Maintaining good menstrual hygiene is as important as maintaining a good lifestyle. In the days leading up to your period, stay hydrated, eat healthy. During your period, take small meals every 2-3 hours as this ensures that your sugar levels are maintained. Avoid too much caffeine and carbonated drinks. Change pads and tampons every 5-6 hours / wash your menstrual cup at least twice your day. Avoid sour foods as this may cause period cramps. If your cramps are unbearable, take a painkiller. Light exercise, breathing exercises and yoga may help to alleviate the pain too as it regulates the blood. High intensity workouts put stress on the body and may intensify the cramps.

Are there any vaccines that women are encouraged to take?

The HPV vaccine is by far the most important vaccine for all women above 12. The HPV virus can cause cervical cancer, vulva cancer, anal cancer, oral cancer and even genital warts. The vaccine goes a long way in preventing genital warts and cancer. This vaccine is also recommended for men.

The second vaccine to consider for both men and women is the Hepatitis B vaccine. Hepatitis B is a sexually transmitted disease.
**How effective is male birth control and how can we encourage men to use them?**

There are currently 2 birth control methods for men: condoms and a vasectomy. The use of condoms stems from healthy relationships with good communication. Condoms are 98% effective when used correctly. A vasectomy, though reversible, is more permanent and must be a decision autonomously made by the man. As with any type of birth control, a vasectomy is not 100% effective. There is still a 1 in 10,000 chance of a woman getting pregnant even if her male partner undergoes a vasectomy.

**Does having sex with both genders increase the risk of STI?**

Based on statistics alone, the highest risk of STI transmission is between 2 male partners. Then comes transmission in male & female partners followed by transmission in sex between 2 female partners. In general, gender does not matter as much as the number of partners you have and the number of partners your partner has. All in all, as long as you are sexually active and have more than one sex partner, you should get tested regularly. And always practice safe sex!
There are some birth control pills that you take for 30 days straight without having a period. Some are taken for 21 days followed by a 7-day break during which you have your period. If we take the 30-day pill, do we have to let ourselves bleed or can we continue taking the next pack and so on?

Scientific data has shown that women can take birth control pills continuously without a break. Having a period as little as 4 times a year when you are on the pill is acceptable. It is recommended that you take a break from the pill after taking the 30-day pills for 3 straight months. During this time, some sort of withdrawal period bleeding is common. Data has also shown that the effectiveness of birth control pills reduces if taken for longer stretches of time.

For women who take the pill in order to avoid severe menstrual cramps, it is not recommended to go more than 3 months without a break as your womb lining needs to be shed.
Women Unbounded (WU) is a volunteer-based community headquartered in Singapore, working for women's empowerment through connections, mutual aid, ideas, and events. WU is proudly feminist; our approach to intersectional feminist activism is grounded in our beliefs in fairness, respect, and empiricism. One step at a time, we work to break down psychological, intellectual, socio-cultural, and economic barriers to gender equality.

**WU’s Teams**

**Connections**
Provide a safe space for mentorship and guidance

**Mutual Aid**
Empower women with knowledge and skills to excel

**Ideas**
Start conversations on what it means to be a woman and the norms that constrain us

**Events**
Host meaningful events to empower the individual and bond the community

**Join Our Community!**

You may reach us at hello@womenunbounded.com

**Resource Booklet: Special Mentions**

The ideas in this booklet were developed by the panelists from WU’s Let’s Talk about Sex event held on 17th & 18th April 2021. The contents do not represent the views of any company or organization.

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