

The background of the cover is a vibrant, abstract composition. It features large, flowing shapes in shades of red and orange, set against a deep black background. The edges of these shapes are highlighted with a bright, glowing yellow-orange light, creating a sense of depth and movement. The overall aesthetic is modern and evocative, suggesting themes of passion and desire.

WOMAN DESIRED,  
WOMAN DESIRING

DANIELE FLAUMENBAUM



WOMAN DESIRED,  
WOMAN DESIRING



WOMAN DESIRED,  
WOMAN DESIRING

*Danièle Flaumenbaum*

AEON

Aeon Books  
PO Box 76401  
London W5 9RG

Copyright © 2020 by Danièle Flaumenbaum

The right of Danièle Flaumenbaum to be identified as the author of this work has been asserted in accordance with §§ 77 and 78 of the Copyright Design and Patents Act 1988.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without the prior written permission of the publisher.

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A C.I.P. for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN-13: 978-1-91280-764-2

Typeset by Medlar Publishing Solutions Pvt Ltd, India

Printed in Great Britain

[www.aeonbooks.co.uk](http://www.aeonbooks.co.uk)

# CONTENTS

<i>INTRODUCTION</i>	ix
<i>CHAPTER ONE</i>	
We love men like we love our mothers	1
The first object of love	2
Loving like a child	2
The woman and the mother in us	4
Why do we regress when we love?	6
Maternal love is not sexual	6
<i>CHAPTER TWO</i>	
The dynamic of sexual anatomy	9
The circulation of sexual energy	9
The role of the uterus in sexual pleasure	13
The clitoris, the hymen and the vagina	14
The uterus, the fallopian tubes and the ovaries	17
Hormonal control	19
The lesser pelvis, the hips and the perineum	20
Breasts and breastfeeding	23
Changes and transformations in a woman's body	23
Setting sexual energy in motion	25

### CHAPTER THREE

The barrier of fire: recurrent disorders	29
Acute ailments, recurrent ailments	29
Looking for the origin	31
Fire in the genitals: blocked sexuality	33
Chinese medicine	36
Disrupting the repetition	37
Making love	38
Teaching our genitals about pleasure	40
The life force that inhabits us	42

### CHAPTER FOUR

How little girls construct their sexuality and how daughters come undone when their mothers die	45
Expecting a little girl	45
At birth, the child becomes the magnetic catalyst	47
The power of names and surnames	48
Breast-feeding	50
Building the baby girl's sexuality	52
The dyad stage	55
Wanting to know the true story	57
Finding self-recognition	59
The father's role and the difference between sexes	60
Telling a little girl that later her genitals will welcome a man's	64
Parental intimacy	65
"But where was I before?"	67
The bottomless pit: falling into depression	69
Quest for meaning and renewal	72

### CHAPTER FIVE

The gynaecological family tree	75
Painful menstruation	75
"Phantom" disorders	81
Premenstrual syndrome	82



Gynaecological ailments and their origins	83
Symptoms generated by family line disorders	85
Sterility and infertility	86
Unwanted pregnancies	86
The importance of knowing one's genealogy	87
The effects of building a genosociogram	89
Care	92
 <i>CHAPTER SIX</i>	
Desire	95
Inherited social and cultural burdens	96
First change: women think (1945)	97
Second change: birth control (1965)	97
Third change: sexual liberation?	98
Parental fulfilment	100
Continued ignorance about sexuality	100
Desire: the energy that makes the encounter possible	101
When desire is inhibited	102
The body is not invaginated	105
How to break the cycle of transgenerational repetition	106
The starting point of a man's sexual desire is the genitals, while a woman's is in her heart, between her two breasts	109
Woman and their desire: floating heads	111
So, what is desire?	112
 <i>CHAPTER SEVEN</i>	
What is making love?	113
Courtship displays	114
Creating a shared space: foreplay and the encounter between the genitals	114
Fondling the breasts	117
Fixation on the clitoris	118
Desired, but also desiring	119

Benefitting from what we do not have	121
The co-penetration of the genitals	122
Creating the phallus	123
Feeling the uterus and maintaining the fire	123
Being fully present to oneself and to the other at the same time	125
Finding words again	125
Pathways of sexual energy	126
Completeness and surpassing oneself	127
Projecting oneself into the other's body	127
Jouissance: sexual joy	128
What is an orgasm?	129
Coming down after making love	132
 <i>ACKNOWLEDGEMENT</i>	 133
 <i>INDEX</i>	 135

## INTRODUCTION

I was born during the Second World War, the third of three daughters. My sisters were eleven- and fifteen-years older than me. My parents, Polish Jews in hiding within the free zone in the south of France, had heard that pregnant women and those who had children under the age of one would not be deported to the concentration camps. My father had lost his mother when he was three years old and was worried about saving his wife and daughters. My mother, who had just lost her own mother whom she loved unconditionally, was absorbed mourning her loss. So, I was born to save my mother and sisters, as the ray of sunshine that could bring life back to human folly. On top of all that, my maternal grandmother, whom I never met and whose name I bear, was a midwife. It was only natural then that I should perpetuate her by becoming a gynaecologist.

Although I loved natural science, languages and travelling, medical school was baffling. I had a hard time during my medical studies. The curriculum was too dense. I could not digest so much information in so little time. We had to know everything, and I felt my life was passing me by. I made friends including the man who would become my first husband. We were activists, fighting for a practice of medicine in which patients were

considered not just as numbers, but as individuals with emotions, feelings and unique backgrounds.

Providing medical care to women meant helping them to respect themselves: they had a brain connected to a body, and I believed both should get along even though brains and bodies do not seem to function in the same way. Women of my generation had seen our parents suffer from isolation, each one shut off into his or her own world, incapable of speaking to and understanding the other. In my generation, women would have a freer life, as alter egos to men; we would become their companions. I did not anticipate the personal work required for this transformation of social roles.

During the first twelve years of my gynaecological practice, in which I divorced, did a first "round" of psychoanalysis, and met the father of my children, it was Chinese medicine and training in acupuncture that opened me to the idea of energy and introduced me to Chinese sexology. The ancient Chinese did not only describe pathways taken by sexual energy. They also explained how sexual activity was necessary for illness prevention, mental health and longevity. Their explanations satisfied the woman gynaecologist who was looking for a way to link the body with the mind.

The majority of women I met in my practice suffered from not being able to experience their sexuality in the way they wanted: feeling comfortable with their sensations, adjusting and exchanging them with those of their partner and, as a result, knowing the restorative benefits that come from shared love.

I began my career in 1971. At the time like nearly all the women of my generation, despite difficulties in my own personal life, I believed that the pill would automatically guarantee a fulfilling sex life. It seemed obvious that the pleasure of being a woman would automatically follow on from the pleasure of being a modern mother who had, only recently, seen her right to work recognized.

We had all suffered from the straitjacket imposed on our parents and grandparents that forbade and inhibited sexuality. We were going to be able to live a freer life. We felt lucky. And yet today, two generations after this liberation, even though our outlook on life has changed radically, women who come to see me—be they twenty, thirty, forty or fifty years old—are still caught in the grip of sexual difficulties. Relations between men and women continue to be a source of incomprehension, fatigue and drama.

Why do sexuality and sexual fulfilment, now accepted as social norms, continue to be so difficult to translate into real life? Why do our bodies not know how to feel desire or experience the pleasure of the sexual encounter to the fullest when the body has the capacity and inclination to do so?

Lifting the moral ban should be all it takes. Yet, wanting and being permitted to enjoy one's sexuality are not enough to feel at ease. The intimate does not necessarily follow the social because like all human functions and values that involve the body but are not its preserve, carnal love is the outcome of early transmissions we receive during infancy, information which moulds us and imprints our cells.

Little girls will only dream about becoming 'mummy' if their own mother was a happy one. Girls must be able to grow up knowing that the sexuality they will experience when they are older will give them both pleasure and strength. "If the mother is herself proud to be a woman and happy to have a daughter, everything is in order for the child, allowing her to invest her femininity and her genitals in a positive way," wrote French psychoanalyst Françoise Dolto (1). Otherwise, these same little girls will continue to be modelled on the old pattern, social and family propriety dictating that not only should they not show anything, or say anything about the pleasure of sexuality, but that sexuality itself was to be banished. This silence and incoherent self-expression blocks spontaneity and is at the root of the dissatisfaction, fear, confusion and shame

experienced by many girls during sexual maturation. When young girls become women, they always carry with them the baggage they inherit from their families.

I myself was destined to become a happy mother with a profession, but I was never encouraged to become a sexual woman. The magic and strength of sex had not existed at all in my family. Its place in adult life was not handed down as a value. Quite to the contrary, my genitals did not exist or rather, even while being part of my morphology, they remained an enigma. They were nameless, and I did not know how they worked.

For women, making love is not only about giving herself over and surrendering to the man she loves. It is also about knowing how to welcome him and receive him inside, both into her mind and heart but also her genitals. For those who choose to embark on the journey, sex can lead to the discovery of a greater self and partner. For Hadrien, Marguerite Yourcenar's hero, this journey progresses from the love of a body to the love of a person (2). For others, this journey will bring them from the love of a person to the love of a body.

Sexuality is the privilege of adulthood that one discovers as a teenager. It evolves progressively and needs to adjust at each stage of life. A journey involves separating from and leaving what is known in order to open up to the unknown. With sex, the setting changes, bringing new landscapes and atmospheres with novel colours, scents, music and languages. It is a matter of taking the time to appreciate and integrate all these splendours so as to become stronger, richer and increasingly oneself. The more the pleasure of this journey becomes part of life, the more beneficial it can be. For that pleasure to exist, however, and to be able to appreciate it when it is present, we have to know the codes and what is at stake. Otherwise, we may miss out on this marvel, unable to find our way or paralyzed with fear by the new experience. Another risk—and one that is often the case—is to fail to take the trip.

Saying yes to integrating sexuality into one's life means saying yes to the journey and to discoveries made along the way. Both my life as a woman and my experience as a gynaecologist have shown me the extent to which, even today, women are still not readied for the journey of encounter between the sexes: they continue to be caught in a web of false beliefs and of ignorance.

Until my generation—the post-war generation—this journey was harshly judged, even forbidden. The ban disappeared with the advent of contraception in the mid-1960s. It is now socially accepted that women, like men, can live out their sexuality. But they still do not know how to imagine sex with a joyful attitude. They consent but remain completely inert. The pains and ailments that translate tragedies inherited from females in their family, catch up with women and stand in the way of their own desire. In the 1960s, French singer Georges Brassens said that “95% of women are bored when they screw.” This figure accurately reflected the reality of the time. Today, I would say that the figure is barely less than 85%.

Most women consider themselves open to loving the other's body and their own, but as we will see, they often remain closed without knowing it. This closure is invisible and cannot be felt. These women certainly desire to embark on sexuality's journey. They dream of it, but they remain paralyzed by a sexual education burdened with ignorance and taboo. They remain stuck on the threshold or in the vestibule, waiting to be “carried away” or initiated.

Our sexuality takes root within the emotional and affective climate of the family into which we are born. The way that family considers sexuality—the idea they have of it and the place they assign to it in their lives—literally models our behaviour and lays the foundation for how we communicate with others. It constitutes our “primary structuration” that creates our foundations and the conditions for what Françoise Dolto calls our “secure base” (3).

Yet, without even realizing it, these women are still prisoners of the fear and taboos in which their mothers, aunts and grandmothers were confined. They shaped themselves by identifying with these women, and so they are made like them. Their mothers could not release them from this confinement, because they did not know they themselves were shut in.

As long as their mothers remained “girls,” daughters too remain “girls.”

Dissatisfaction, conscious or unconscious frustration, sadness, fatigue, rows, anger: men and women do not know how to talk to each other, nor how to take the time to listen. It's always the other's fault. Unable to step back or to conceptualize the differences in the way men and women function, they withdraw, usually snapping shut like oysters, the men retracting like snails.

Welcome and reception are at the essence of the feminine dynamic. When these notions are ignored, they both hinder and deflect the benefits of erotic encounter. Allowing the other's sexual energy to enter one's body brings about regeneration, revitalization and a feeling of wholeness. This encounter of the flesh is not just a matter of trading feminine and masculine sexual energy. It is an alchemy that bolsters those energies enabling both partners to enjoy the benefits of what each does not have, thereby transcending the self. This enjoyment is a passage into another dimension of the real, causing us to grow through the encounter with newness and proximity to the mystery of life. It is where sexuality and sacrality meet.

My mother and her generation could not hand down this sexuality of pleasure, because they did not know it existed. My generation promoted an “anything goes” attitude, giving rise to permissiveness but not a lived experience available to pass on. Women today should accept that they have not been constructed to experience this pleasure and therefore must acknowledge the need to learn.



Such was my experience as a woman. It allowed me to discover that I was not built any differently from the patients I saw. Like them, I identified with old models. It took me years before I could hear, accept and integrate the idea that I did not behave like a “woman,” even though I was already a mother. The shock came as a blow.

I was going on forty and the man I loved, the father of my children, whose undertakings I supported and whom I respected, kept telling me he did not have a “woman” in his life.

I could not understand what he was saying. He did not know how to explain further, and I was unable to deeply listen to what he meant. It was during lovemaking when he put all his ardour into it one night that I opened up like never before. I suddenly felt his energy invade my body and flow through me: I was welcoming him in. I could not get over it. It felt like I was a new woman, someone else. I had undergone a mutation. Then I understood. That was the pleasure, the orgasm, the climaxing sexual joy—“*jouissance*” (4)—he had been talking about.

Once this sexual openness established itself, my life was never the same again. I no longer saw the world in the same way, a door had opened, a curtain had been lifted. I had landed on a planet where everything was vast, and this new birth of myself expanded me, gave me greater stature. Not only could I unfold my limbs and stand up straighter as if I had spent my previous life in a dollhouse, I also felt lighter, having jettisoned attachments to the past that had blocked my spontaneity. I became more flexible and stronger, because I was receiving new energies. Making love became the capacity to welcome and receive the energies of the man I loved inside me. I discovered the value of his genitals and in turn made him feel his power, confirming him as a man. Until then, I had been able to show him my love by giving, supporting and taking care of him. I had been able to give myself over to him, but only “on the surface.” He obsessed my heart and mind, but I did not

yet know how to welcome him sexually by taking him and his energy inside of myself.

Since then, this revitalizing sexuality has become an integral part of my life. I understood that to keep it alive required giving it time, that I had to learn to prepare myself, and make myself ready for an encounter with my partner. I was amazed by the vitality that this new life gave me and just could not understand why I never had the keys before. There was nothing disgusting, vulgar or complicated about it. It was, on the contrary, disconcertingly simple. All the nonsense, lunacy and wickedness in my education had led to my being ashamed of my genitals. These “dirty parts,” now restituted, became worthy and honourable. I had lost a chastity belt without even knowing that I had one. My genitals became part of my life. I felt whole—quite simply normal.

Sexuality is among the most difficult of human activities, because it demands that the most intimate part of ourselves be in contact with someone else’s most private parts. Setting up sexual communication is not magic. It entails a lot of effort, a reshaping of oneself. It is a task that has to be taken seriously for the encounter to happen at all and for it to develop over time.

### Notes

1. Françoise Dolto, *La Sexualité féminine* (Paris: Gallimard, 1996), p. 154.
2. Marguerite Yourcenar, *Mémoires d’Hadrien* (Paris: Gallimard, 1977).
3. See Françoise Dolto, *Le Sentiment de soi. Aux sources de l’image du corps* (Paris: Gallimard, 1997).
4. In French, the word “*jouissance*” is used here, a word that has no exact equivalent in English. In French, as powerfully captured in the text at this point, *jouissance* (from ‘joy’) includes

pleasures of the soul, spirit and body that one fully tastes, which of course include orgasm. However, orgasm(e) has a mechanistic connotation in both languages, a more narrowly corporeal flavour. For readability, the term “sexual joy” has been used throughout this translation. However, to designate key moments, “jouissance” has been adapted as it has been by certain philosophical and psychoanalytic works in English.  
[Translator]