



GREYSTONE BOOKS

**Q&A with Ann-Marlene Henning,  
sexologist, couples therapist, and  
author of *Let's Talk About Sex***

**You've written six books. What inspired you to write one specifically about your experiences as a therapist?**

After my first two books, which were educational, I began to think more and more about the concerns many people have in going to a therapist's office. At parties people asked me: *Does one have to undress during sexual therapy? Or: Certainly, it is about fetishes, isn't it?* Another familiar one was: *I guess many clients are psychologically impaired?* Such false beliefs or insecurities made me want to write about what is really going on during therapy. I wanted to reveal to people some of my considerations and thoughts as a therapist—and show possible results of therapy, some of which seem to be very surprising to my readers. The fact is, misconceptions about sexual therapy prevent many people from getting the help they need. Most people are relieved when they leave after the first session in my office because they now have a better idea of what can be done about their problem. And no, it is rarely about fetishes, everybody is mentally healthy, and we stay dressed.



**Tell us about your decision to become a sexologist and couples therapist. What led you to this career in particular?**

I was encouraged by my best friend to become a sexologist. Until then, I hadn't had the slightest hint of that idea myself. How could I not have seen this possibility? When it occurred to me that my dream job as a sexual therapist was a *real* possibility in my life, I went for it immediately. I was 40 years old and working as a psychologist when I began my new studies. Since then, everything concerning the topic of sex seems to come flying at me. I had always been fascinated by the energy and the drive people develop when this topic comes up. As a psychologist I already knew how important it is to be able to open up and share your thoughts and feelings with others. Today, I simply love when a client's face lights up, realising how easy it can be to talk.

**As you say, many people may feel hesitant or skeptical about seeing a sex therapist. What are some reasons why it might be a good idea to see one?**

Any kind of sexual problem would be a good reason to see a therapist, such as having trouble orgasming or orgasming too soon. But also pain during sexual intercourse, erectile dysfunctions, desire problems or even just to learn some techniques that you are not familiar with. I often teach basic anatomy to clients. And of course, I also speak about sexual preferences, i.e. fetishes and other arousal-issues. Some clients of mine feel that they were born within the wrong body and have problems with their sexual identity. And then there are all the couples' issues: Jealousy, infidelity, stress, fighting and also being too close, meaning living in a strong symbiosis – which can really kill peoples' sex lives. I work with all human

psychological issues, like commitment problems and of course trauma that could affect a person's love life.

**You write about how many people believe that if something is not going well in the bedroom, it means there must be something wrong with them. Why is this hardly ever the case, and how do you help your clients realize this?**

Yes, common thoughts of many clients include: *Something is wrong with me. I am the only one. Nothing can be done, I will have to live with it.* It takes some knowledge to understand how wrong this kind of thinking is and to believe in other possible explanations for your sexual problem. Later on, when clients begin to understand how their bodies – and minds – work, they usually have a huge “aha” moment. It suddenly becomes clear how things are connected. From that angle you can see how the problem developed in the first place and also how it might be solved. At the same time, you do not feel as alone with the problem as you did before—I often mention (in an anonymous way) other clients with similar problems and how they worked their way out. I tell clients: There is no normal, which is why no one can be ‘not normal’.

In my practice, I work with people's mindsets as well as on a body level. I have clients practice exercises in front of a big mirror so that they can see themselves. The goal is for them to really feel and heighten their perception of their bodies.

**What advice do you have for someone in a romantic or sexual partnership struggling with an aspect of their sex life or sexuality?**

Originally, my card game was meant to be homework for couples who wanted to get back in contact, but now many more benefit from it. The game is illustrated with erotic drawings, which Louis Harrison, my husband, made.

**You've created an erotic-therapeutic game that you talk about in the book. Can you tell us about it?**

Originally, my card game was meant to be homework for couples who wanted to get back in contact, but now many more benefit from it. The game is illustrated with erotic drawings, which Louis Harrison, my husband, made.

The game has three rounds. Basically, whenever you are able to combine two erotic card-halves, you may draw an intimate question for your partner, the kind that makes people slightly nervous: *What do you think is my worst personality trait?* Or: *What are you most proud of in your life?* An hourglass gives you only one minute to answer. In the second round the same kind of questions come up, but now about sexuality. The third and last round is about physical contact—and no, not with the hourglass, but for ‘a felt minute’ .... Imagine, your partner is giving you a slightly erotic massage and you won't know when he or she decides that the ‘felt minute’ is done. This will make you feel inside your body and mind, but also really feel your partner's touch, which can be very arousing. I do not promise that sex will happen, but you will for sure “see” yourself and your partner in a new and exciting way, just like when you first met. And that *could* actually lead to sex. Have fun with it! But right now, the game is unfortunately only available in German.

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