

Book Review

The Elusive Orgasm: a Woman's Guide to Why She Can't and How She Can Orgasm

Vivienne Cass

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344 pp, including index

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Considering baby girls possess the natural ability to achieve orgasm, why do so many women experience difficulties reaching orgasm? 'What has happened to stop us (women) using our natural ability to orgasm?' This is one of the primary questions Dr Cass explores in her new book titled 'The Elusive Orgasm' designed to assist women in overcoming orgasm difficulties. The Elusive Orgasm provides a comprehensive, easy-to-read text for women that aims to: (i) increase women's knowledge of female sexual arousal and orgasm; (ii) identify different types of orgasm difficulties and their causes; and (iii) offer practical sexual and non-sexual strategies to re-learn the natural skill of achieving orgasm both alone and/or with a partner.

The text offers a cognitive-behavioural approach to managing orgasm difficulties in women, which are conceptualised as obtaining insufficient levels of sexual arousal. In the first half of the book, readers are provided with clear and factual information regarding women's sexual arousal to enhance their understanding and self-awareness and are later, in the second half, encouraged to complete cognitive exercises and behavioural strategies to enhance their sexual arousal, and thus, orgasm potential.

Following introductory information on female sexual arousal, complete with useful illustrations, the author suggests women's orgasm difficulties can be grouped into five different types. These include: (i) the ordinary 'garden-variety' orgasm difficulty, (ii) women who never have an orgasm, (iii) women who rarely have an orgasm, (iv) women who used to be able to orgasm, and (v) women who can orgasm at some times, but not others. The author further suggests there are 25 causes of these difficulties, all of which can be specifically related to the five types of orgasm difficulties. These causes, or factors which inhibit sexual arousal, can be further classified according to lifestyle (e.g. stress), personal (e.g. beliefs), health (e.g. physical conditions), sexual (e.g. limited information) and relationship (e.g. resentment) related issues.

Once readers have identified their particular arousal inhibitors in the first half of the book, they are referred to the remaining relevant chapters (e.g. lifestyle, personal, sexual) which provide non-sexual strategies to overcome these inhibitors. These include exercises to examine underlying beliefs that can perpetuate orgasmic difficulties, relaxation and visual imagery exercises and positive coping statements, as well as simply giving women education and

permission to enjoy sexual behaviours. Readers are next advised to complete the personal change and then, if applicable, the couple change program, which involve sexual strategies to enhance levels of arousal.

Throughout the book, the author provides detailed and accurate information to dispel sexual myths and normalise factors that can inhibit sexual arousal. The information is delivered in a clear and light-hearted fashion, often using analogies and appropriate examples to illustrate relevant points. Readers are also encouraged to complete a range of exercises to increase their awareness of the past and current impact of factors that inhibit their arousal, as well as to become more comfortable with their genitalia and sexual functioning. These exercises are creative and fun—how many books do you know that suggest you identify a flower that reminds you of your genitals? The author also engenders hope and enhances women's confidence in their ability to increase their sexual arousal whilst also providing encouragement for their perseverance and courage in personal change along the way.

There are many attractive features of this book. First, women are able to gain insight and understanding into the factors that inhibit their sexual arousal and are able to implement strategies to minimise the influence of these factors. This permits women to tailor their individual change program to their specific inhibitors which they can then complete in the privacy of their own home. Second, the book encourages the belief that women are responsible for their sexual attitudes, beliefs, and behaviours that either inhibit or promote their level of sexual arousal (e.g. no sexual communication). Thus, women learn to accept that they are ultimately responsible for their arousal, which can lead to empowerment and hopefully reduce inappropriately directed resentment and/or frustration toward partners.

Another attractive feature is that individual differences in the causes of orgasm difficulties in women are explained by the comprehensive and holistic listing of the factors that can inhibit sexual arousal. This is particularly useful for health care professionals working with women experiencing orgasmic problems, especially when these causes are broken down further into more specific areas that require change (e.g. personal and lifestyle related areas). In addition, the author does not pathologise women's orgasmic difficulties. In the first chapter the author advises only those who cannot achieve orgasm *and* who also perceive this as a problem to

continue reading. Lastly, the strategies and exercises in the book are presented in a clear step-by-step manner and promote positive change in both sexual and non-sexual areas, such as managing lifestyle issues which offers many benefits in addition to in the area of sexual functioning.

Perhaps the only drawback of the book is that the reference section was particularly limited. It may have been useful for readers, particularly health care professionals, to be able to view the author's resources as well as to access further readings if interested. However, this limitation does not take away from the high quality of the text and the text *is* based upon the author's vast (over 20 years) and clearly evident experience in the area of women's orgasmic difficulties. Overall, the layout of the book was clear with a comprehensive yet easy-to-follow contents and index section.

In summary, the 'Elusive Orgasm' is an excellent and enjoyable read that offers women of all ages a fun and

practical layman's approach to relearning the skill of achieving orgasm. The content is relevant and comprehensive yet presented in an easy-to-understand manner, often employing humour to illustrate sensitive and/or confronting topics. This book is suitable for women and their partners as well as health care professionals involved with women experiencing arousal difficulties. I would certainly recommend this book to all of my female clients experiencing orgasm difficulties as well as to women who can achieve orgasm yet wish to enhance their sexual understanding, awareness, and satisfaction.

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