

WHAT IS THE RIGHT LANGUAGE?

What should we call the whole of women's anatomy? Maybe you're thinking, *I know, how about "vajayjay"?*

The history of this word is telling. The word was coined because in 2006 the network producers and executives of *Grey's Anatomy* decided that the word "vagina" was being said too often on the show, and they weren't sure it was appropriate. (Never mind that they didn't have this same concern with the word "penis.") So they created a new word and used it in a scene. The word "vajayjay" quickly made its way into mainstream culture. Oprah Winfrey told millions of viewers, "I think 'vajayjay' is a nice word, don't you?" "Vajayjay" appeared in online dictionaries, including Urban Dictionary and Merriam-Webster's Open Dictionary. In a *New York Times* article on the popularity of this word, one linguist said, "There was a need for a pet name, a name that women can use in a familiar way among themselves." In this same article, the famous feminist Gloria Steinem said, "I'm hoping that the use of this new word is part of the objection to only saying vagina since it doesn't include all of women's genitalia, for instance the clitoris, in the way that vulva does." Urban Dictionary doesn't support Ms. Steinem's hope. In this online source, "vajayjay" is defined as another word for vagina. So while you may like this word (it really does have a nice ring, I agree), it's actually another word for vagina, and this is what I'm hoping we can get away from—calling everything down there a vagina and, in so doing, ignoring the clitoris.

Here are a few words for women's genitals that don't originate or stand for just the vagina: "yoni," "coochie," "love taco," "cha-cha." "Yoni" is an ancient Hindu term that some writers use to signify the vulva (or even the whole of women's internal and external genitals), recommending it due to its respectful, even reverent, connotations. While I like the idea behind this word, it doesn't quite work for me. Truth be told, one of my best friends and I actually use the word "coochie," and I call my sex toys my "ac-coochie-ments" (pun for "accoutrements"). Still, one of my trusted students says the word "coochie" doesn't work for her due to its use in rap music. She also found the other words ("love taco," "cha-cha")

Get Off the Floor!

In June 2012, Michigan State Representative Lisa Brown used the word "vagina" when addressing a Democratic caucus. The next day, she was banned from speaking on the House floor. Protests grew. Those who banned her backtracked and gave other reasons for her being barred (e.g., she threw a temper tantrum, something that a videotape of the session doesn't support). Most news sources reported that it was clearly the word "vagina" that got Representative Brown banned.

ridiculous (as do I). So how about we keep it simple and just call it by its real name? Let's just start saying "vulva" until it becomes as commonplace as "penis"!

Betty Dodson, a famous feminist from the 1960s (an era when women learned about the power of the clitoris for reaching orgasm), has a DVD titled *Viva la Vulva*. *Viva* is a Spanish word often used to signify a celebration. So come on, ladies, let's follow Dodson's advice and name and celebrate the vulva!

Most imperative, let's start naming and talking about the clitoris. As stated by the writers of *I Love Female Orgasm*, "The word 'vagina' regularly steals some of the clit's limelight. Perhaps someday the lusty, trusty clitoris will get her own day to shine." Today is that day!

NICKNAMING THE CLITORIS

What should we call the clitoris to bring her into the spotlight? A few nicknames are out there and most refer to the external tip, or glans, of the clitoris. For example, there is "nub," "magic button," "love button," "bean," and "C-spot." There is also the "little man in the boat" and the "jelly bean." Betty Dodson uses the word "clitty." Still, the most commonly used term is "clit."

But even saying “clit” feels uncomfortable to many women. When talking to a trusted student about this, she told me, “We don’t talk about it to guys. When we talk about it to our women friends, we call it ‘the clit’ and it feels weird and awkward.” During this same conversation, my student and I tried to brainstorm words for the clitoris and none sounded right. In frustration she said, “There *has* to be a better word!” My student’s utterance got me thinking. What nicknames do we use for the penis? We call the penis by people’s names (Dick, Peter, and Johnson). By doing so, we give it legitimacy as an entity unto itself. When I realized this, Tori popped out of clitoris for me. And then, freed up to perceive people’s names in the word “clitoris,” other female names emerged, including Tara, Iris, Rita, and a variety of “cl” names: Cleo, Chloe, Claire, Clara, and Clarisse.

When I first got the idea of nicknaming the clitoris with a female name, I was really excited. My goal became to pick a word and popularize it. I started asking friends, family, colleagues, and students, “Which name do you like?” All picked either “Tori” or “Cleo.” Interestingly, though, those who knew someone named Tori strongly objected to this nickname, saying they could never use it because of its association with a real person in their lives. When I pointed out that there were plenty of Dicks in the world, one student told me that no Richard she knows uses this name, and that for her generation, “dick” is not even thought of as a person’s name. “Dick” has become synonymous with “penis.” She also said she liked “Cleo” because it’s an uncommon name and thus wouldn’t be associated as frequently with the image of an actual person. “It will be a new word!” she proclaimed. And then, when I discovered that “Clio” is an alternative spelling of “Cleo,” which originates from a Greek word (*kleos*) meaning glory and fame, I was sold.

I started telling more students, friends, and colleagues about the name “Clio.” Many liked it, but some expressed uncertainty. A few suggested other ideas. “How about ‘Doris?’” asked one student, at the same time admitting that, while rhyming with clitoris, “Doris” really didn’t sound right either. Another colleague agreed wholeheartedly that we need a name for the clitoris but didn’t fall in love with “Clio.” Thinking of the

show *Sex and the City*, she suggested “Samantha.” I was convinced I had not yet found the right name—so back to Google I went.

Similar to prior searches, what I found were a couple of new names and several forums where both the lack of a name and women’s hesitation in saying “clit” or “clitoris” were mentioned. I learned that in Australia, some people call the clitoris “Marcia” and that the Mexican slang word for clitoris is *pepita*.

Yet, most important, I realized the problem wasn’t my word choice at all. The problem, I grasped, is the same reason I’m writing this book. There’s discomfort and silence around women’s most orgasmic organ. No word for the clitoris sounded just right to everyone I talked to, and no other word has made it into popular culture, because language is a reflection of culture.

Until we solve this cultural problem, “penis” will remain a commonplace term. On the other hand, similar to Voldemort in the infamous Harry Potter series, the clitoris will remain She-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named.

THE DEEPER CULTURAL PROBLEM AND SOLUTION

We label “sex” as the act through which most men reach orgasm. We label women’s genitals by the one part (the vagina) through which most men reach orgasm. We elevate men’s sexual organ (the penis) with countless nicknames that no longer seem strange to us, but we have no word with which to comfortably name the clitoris.

Just what is the deeper, cultural root of this problem? It’s cultural privileging of the male experience. To illustrate the covert and insidious nature of this cultural privileging, one feminist writer discussed the last

Tomato, Tomahto

Perhaps you’re wondering how to pronounce “clitoris.” Some people say “clit-or-is,” and others say “cli-tor-is.” Either pronunciation is correct.

The Meaning of Sex for the Rest of Becoming Cliterate!

As you read on and see the word “sex,” while it will take some getting used to, imagine a whole sexual encounter, which might or might not include intercourse (e.g., giving and receiving oral sex). When I want you to think of any specific sexual act, I’ll make it simple and use just that word (e.g., intercourse, oral sex).

names of married couples. She pointed out that most people don’t take notice when a husband and wife share the same last name, also simply assuming it’s the man’s family name. Likewise, few even think to ask the wife how she felt giving up something that’s been part of her identity since birth. On the other hand, when a wife doesn’t share the same last name as her husband, people take notice. They might ask the woman why she made that choice, or even critique her for doing so. They might ask the man how he feels about his wife’s choice. The astute feminist writer who gave this example used it to define cultural privileging of the male experience. It’s when society prioritizes men’s interests and feelings over women’s—putting this forth as the natural way for things to be. Taking this a step further, it’s when society advantages *men’s* experiences as the default normal *human* experience, with anything else being considered a deviation from this normal. We do this with sex. We culturally privilege male sexual pleasure with the view that sex begins with penetration and ends with male ejaculation. We assume that the male way of reaching orgasm (penetration) is the normal way for both women and men to reach orgasm. Our language reflects (and at the same time further perpetuates) such privileging. As this chapter illustrated, we name everything in relation to male pleasure (e.g., equating sex and intercourse; labeling all of female genitals a vagina), whereas if we culturally privileged female sexual pleasure, we’d name everything in relation to female pleasure (e.g., we’d call foreplay sex; we’d call intercourse “post-play”). But we shouldn’t be

culturally privileging the sexual pleasure of *either* women or men. When it comes to sexual pleasure, we need sexual equality.

There can’t be true quality without equality.

That phrase comes from Dr. Peter Slavin, when talking about racial disparities in our health-care system. It applies here as well. Quality sex—for both women and men—is only possible with true sexual equality. Quality sex will come from holding women’s most reliable way of reaching orgasm, clitoral stimulation, as equal to men’s most reliable way of reaching orgasm, penile penetration. If we do this, a language change will most certainly follow.

While language reflects culture, language also shapes culture. Together, let’s stop calling intercourse “sex,” let’s stop calling everything “down there” a vagina, and perhaps most important of all, let’s place the clitoris in the public eye.

Start talking about your clitoris, your clit, your clitty. Start referring to your Pepita, your Samantha, your Doris, your Tori, your Clio. After all, calling the clitoris Tori, Doris, or Pepita is no stranger than calling the penis Tom, Dick, or Peter. Calling her Samantha is no more nonsensical than calling him Johnson. If my dream comes true, all these names will become commonplace. If my hopes are realized, when entering “names for the clitoris” in a Google search, someday people will find as many terms as when they enter “names for the penis.” Let’s make history with a linguistic sexual revolution!

Speaking of history, the next chapter will put our cultural views of women’s orgasms into a long-standing context. You’ll learn how the lie about the superiority of penile penetration started, and what our ancestors thought about the clitoris and women’s ways of orgasming. We’ll discuss the current-day landscape, including how women’s orgasms are falsely portrayed in porn and how the clitoris is ignored in hookup sex. Hopefully, you’ll be further inspired to become part of the cultural change to make your orgasm one quiver in a revolutionary shift in valuing the way we women come.