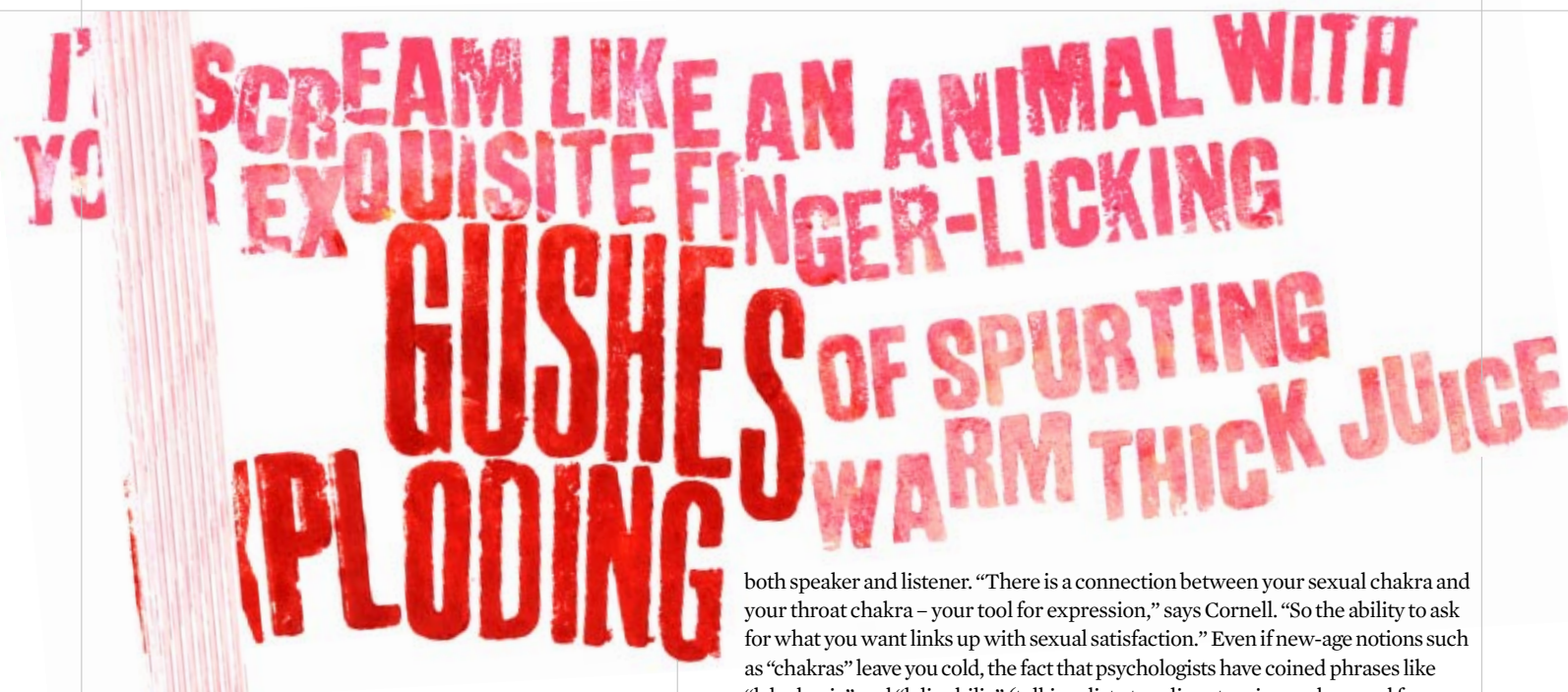


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## The loving tongue

Nothing will improve your sex life like saying what she wants to hear. But have you got what it takes to talk dirty?

**S**AY SOMETHING... HOT?"  
"Um... Ah... Vulva?"  
Ross's wooden dabble with dirty talk in an early episode of *Friends* denotes deeply ingrained sexual inhibition – and he's not alone. While many men think nothing of haemorrhaging £1.50 a minute for an indifferent third-jobber to hiss sour nothings down a sex line, most would no sooner introduce juicy sex-talk to their relationship than gurgled baby-speak. They're missing out, according to Michelle Cornell, Salon Curator at Sam Roddick's upmarket London erotic emporium *Coco de Mer*. "When people realise their ability to vocalise erotically to their partner, it's an amazing revelation," she says. "It has massive knock-on effects on how they experience themselves."

From her Camden Town office – a curious parlour filled with hanging sarongs and priapic literature – Cornell has masterminded a series of sex workshops where pupils can learn about "Spanking for Pleasure" and "The Delights of Tantra", which start this month and run until June. The men's focus group on "Talking Dirty" will, says Cornell, awaken a "sleeping giant" in erotic education. "People find it inhibiting because they're scared of looking silly, shocking or offensive," she says. "Men also think they might sound a bit pervy." The last point is central to the problem: no man wants to come across as an unwholesome deviant who can't pass a netball court without emitting a throaty growl. But these are shackles to cast aside, says Cornell: "It's not a sin, it's not bad or unhealthy. You still get the cake – your mother will still love you."

Mum's blissful ignorance aside, there are plenty of pros, including hard evidence that talking dirty enhances sex for

both speaker and listener. "There is a connection between your sexual chakra and your throat chakra – your tool for expression," says Cornell. "So the ability to ask for what you want links up with sexual satisfaction." Even if new-age notions such as "chakras" leave you cold, the fact that psychologists have coined phrases like "lalochezia" and "laliophilia" (talking dirty to relieve tension and arousal from public speaking, respectively) suggests there's more to this sex and speech connection than is immediately obvious. But can coital communication be learned in a classroom?

Certainly, according to Cornell, who says that "the important leap of using language to arouse your partner" is just the beginning. Next, you need to master your vocabulary. "Before you begin your erotic-talk journey, you must negotiate your 'yes' and 'no' words, so in the workshop we play games." She nods towards a magnetic board on which an adult alternative to a children's word game has been arranged into a lexical mass of "exploding gushes", "trembling legs" and "exquisite finger-licking". "We use these to tell stories, making it easier when it comes to doing it for real," she explains. But it's not just about your sexual lexicon. "Congruity is key, so if I want you to take on the persona of a Victorian dandy, you'll need the words to go with that – like 'rosebud', 'quim' or John Thomas'."

The blood draining from my face, I deflect the invitation to make up a story based on the words "golden", "fondle" and "pole" by asking whether extreme tastes can pose problems between couples. "Sure," says Cornell, "but then it doesn't even have to be pornographic – you can just describe what your partner is doing to you then, if you want to go into pornographic talk, great. But if she likes being told she's a dirty ho, then bloody hell, why not? The more creative you are, the better."

As well as swallowing pride and prudishness, it is essential, says Cornell, to grasp tonality. "Think Marilyn Monroe singing 'Happy Birthday, Mr President'. There was nothing pornographic in the words, but it was the most erotically delivered message ever. There's a lot to be said for using your lower ranges, or for whispering slightly fiercely."

Creative freedom, assertiveness, bold intonation – all the skills involved with talking dirty point to the same thing: chutzpah. As with dancing, heckling or wearing skintight cycling gear, a faint-hearted approach will turn that fear of indignity into full egg-on-face humiliation. It's all about gusto, as *Friends*' Ross would testify; later on in that episode, he gloats over his sexual liberation, referring to himself as the James Michener of dirty talk. "It was the most elaborate filth you have ever heard," he says. "There were characters,

plot lines, themes, a motif. At one point there were villagers." Now, if he can do it... ☺

**'Salons in the Seductive Arts' take place until late June at Soho House, London W1. Enquiries: 020 7267 9700; www.coco-de-mer.co.uk**

TREMBLING LEGS

### Oral philosophy: handy hints for verbal erotica

- \* **Test the water.** Jumping straight in with a 'c' word could be the fast track to the spare room
- \* **Work on your vocab.** Gynaecological jargon and mutha-bitch rap speak are to be reserved for fantasy scenarios only
- \* **Perfect your tone.** You wouldn't reel off a list of DIY hardware in a rakish, Terry-Thomas drawl – the logic works both ways
- \* **Listen to feedback.** Like the act you're trying to enhance, it's a two-way process
- \* **Think gusto.** Talking dirty doesn't lend itself to the shrinking-violet approach