



Sex: are you doing it *right?*

Brace yourself — the love revolutionaries are here and they want you to have better sex. *Kate Spicer* meets the couple who claim they can make this happen

You need a few skills to pull off a book with the title *Real Sex: Why Everything You Learned About Sex Is Wrong*. And the authors Louise Mazanti, 44, and Mike Lousada, 50, have certainly got some: sex psychotherapy, tantra, shamanism, to name but a few. Last year the pair founded the UK's first sexual wellness clinic. Lousada features heavily in Naomi Wolfe's *Vagina*. (Titter ye not, Wolfe's 2012 biography of the vagina is, ahem, seminal.) These two are bona fide sex gurus. But what really qualifies them to lecture us on the life sexual is that they have heaps of real sex themselves.

"The book is drawn partly from our clinical practice and partly, well, a lot from our relationship, wouldn't you say, my love?" says the Danish-born Mazanti, turning to Lousada, her British partner in life and work. "We live what we teach, and the book has grown out of our own experience. We've discovered what keeps a long-term relationship not only alive but also flourishing and growing. We've been together for five years and our love and sex life only gets better and better."

We three sit in their Belsize Park flat, surrounded by a mass of fat and smiling Buddhas, lots of floor cushions and the inevitable smouldering incense. The air is so charged with their sensual vitality and mutual respect that it practically steams like the mugs of cinnamon tea between us. These two vibrate on another plane to your more common breed of couple with their pass-aggressive bickers and purse-lipped silences.

Real Sex, which is out at the end of this month, is their first book together and was initially fleshed out over a bottle of Californian wine in a Big Sur guesthouse. The principles are broken down into seven "keys", and the reader is required to work through them. The keys are: understand your desire; know your sexual self; reclaim your body; be present; giving permission; pleasure not performance; and authentic communication. Just reading these is a good reminder of healthy sexual behaviour.

Make no mistake, though, discovering real sex is not a passive activity. Nor is it immediately very cheering, either. The couple are pretty down on sexual and relationship norms in contemporary culture. In the book, silence is described as "the cancer of sex"; a fair analysis, I'm sure, even if it is rather terrifyingly expressed. "It's true, it just kills it," Lousada says.

The normalisation of pornography is also a big concern. "If people think this is what real-life sex looks like," Mazanti says, "they lose touch with natural sexual self-expression." Having said that, though, the book comes out broadly in favour of the judicious occasional use of it, because, Lousada says, "porn speaks to our animalistic nature". Social media gets a rougher ride than porn; it has created a world "where we have more potential friend connections but less depth, so there's a tendency to avoid intimacy", he continues. And without intimacy, there can be no real sex.

While contemporary culture is a far better place to talk about sex and to be a sexual woman, Lousada still thinks 99.99% of people don't have good sex. All consensual sex can be potentially good, he says, there are no rules other than, obey your feelings, don't perform for the other. He describes the proportion of women who are not orgasmic as about 35% and "a pandemic", saying: "Women have been taught to disown their sexuality." While the Brits have a particularly sad and repressed sex culture,

the couple say there is no culture in the world that is worth emulating. As Mazanti says: "There isn't a society that has an advanced relationship with sex. It's just in the darkness — there is no real sex."

For those committed to working through the book's practical exercises, there is more than unfettered sex joy to come. Much more. Lousada describes "a growing band gathering around us, love revolutionaries, who want to transform the way that people relate with one another... of real intimacy and connection. Current strategies don't seem to be working too well, do they?"

The trend for conscious sex (karmamudra), mindful sex, slow sex and orgasm as a self-empowering practice has been simmering not only in the esoteric shadows but also well in the zeitgeist of late, alongside the body-positive movement. Love eggs, once pink and plastic from Ann Summers, now come in your favourite semiprecious stones — you're not a chic lifestyle boutique if you don't sell yoni eggs (yoni, Sanskrit for vulva, is seen as a more respectful word than vagina) that purport to increase libido. Gwyneth Paltrow's Goop sells them, of course, for £50; DroppinGems on Etsy charges £24. Yoni massage is something that Lousada sometimes uses as part of his therapeutic repertoire. It's not masturbating any more, it's about nourishing your feminine sexual energy.

Love revolutionaries put real sex at the centre of their self. Mazanti concurs, and tells me that a good sex life "makes you feel so happy". No one would disagree with that, except perhaps the odd religious weirdo, but in their book, the curative powers of sex go further even than happiness. In the *Real Sex* world, you fix your sexual self, you fix your whole life. "When we connect to our sexuality, we feel more alive, more empowered and fulfilled, and we show up in the world in a different way," says Mazanti.

Lousada agrees: "Address the sexual stuff and everything else in your life will change. Clients come to us and they're blocked sexually, but they're also blocked in self-confidence and communication, they're blocked in their creativity. They start having more authentic sex and they start painting or learning to sing." Mazanti continues: "They realise how stuck they were at work. They change jobs. Or relationships. Sex is the powerhouse of personal growth."

Honestly, I am starting to feel paranoid, as if these two are a highly evolved species from a planet that looks and feels like Earth but is just better. A place where people vibrate on a sexual plane that doesn't reference Carry On films or miserable "condom on the banana" sex-education lessons.

It sounds like bloody hard work to get from Planet Me to Planet *Real Sex*, though. I keep thinking: "And I really ought to do that Italian language course, too, sometime." I admit this to Mazanti and she gives me a radiant-goddess smile. "It's because this is a big thing," she says. "It requires a lot of psychological self-awareness. To work through *Real Sex* requires you to own your vulnerability and to be willing to embrace transformation. If you do that, you transform your whole life."

I nod, while secretly wondering if learning Italian might be easier. ●

Real Sex: Why Everything You Learned About Sex Is Wrong by Louise Mazanti and Mike Lousada (Hay House £12.99) is published on May 30