

What It's Really Like To Be A Hands-On Sex Coach

By Mark Shrayber | May. 30th, 2017



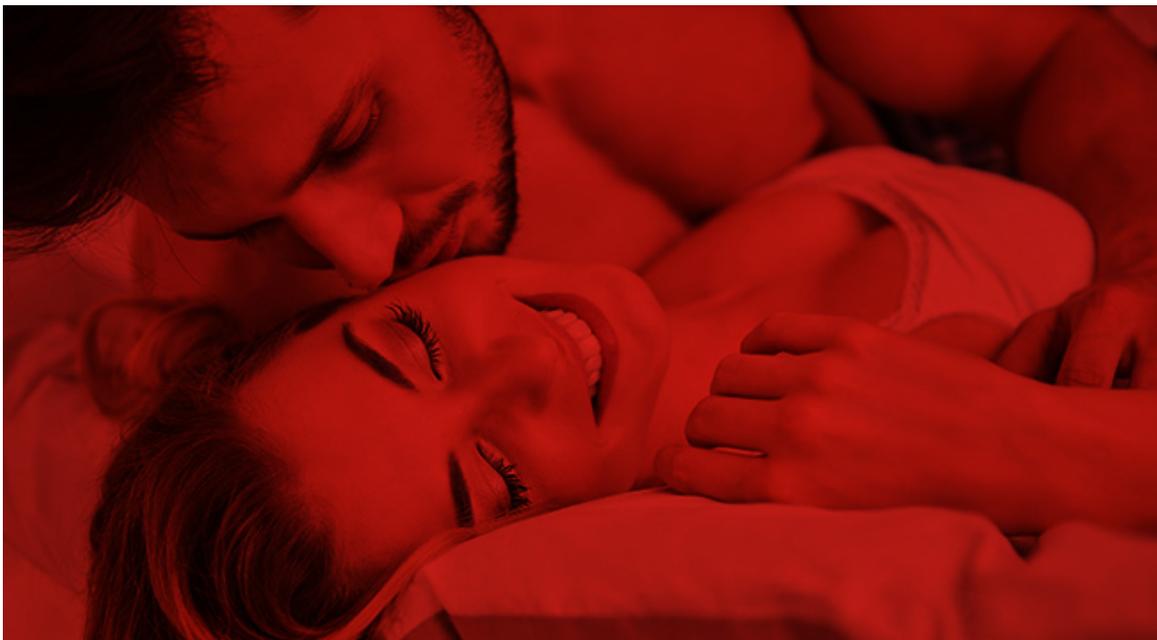
Millions of Americans struggle with sex. We don't like to talk about our coital troubles, though — so we read *Men's Health* and *Cosmo* in private, hoping that one tip, one magic bullet, will allow us to become sex gods. Maybe sometimes these rapturous new moves work, but more often they lead to disappointment.

So what should you do when you want to be a better lover but don't have a roadmap of how to get there? Who do you turn to when Hollywood has failed you and x-rated features have filled your head with unrealistic expectations of what sex ought to look like? Sometimes you see a sex therapist or an intimacy coach to talk about your problems. And other times... you need a little bit *more*. That's where Celeste Hirschman and Danielle Harel (they'd prefer you just call them Celeste and Danielle) come in. They're the founders of The Somatica Method, an interactive, experiential approach to sex coaching that helps clients break down emotional barriers connected to sex.

What makes The Somatica Method different than most other forms of sex therapy is that it exists in a place between counseling and sexual surrogacy. While

communication is the bedrock of Celeste and Danielle's practice — because good sex can't happen without it — the duo also recognizes the importance of the physical realm during sessions, meaning that an appointment with them may include everything from a frank discussion about your sex life to a hands on lesson on how to bite your partner's neck (they'll practice with you) or throw them up against the wall (if that's what you're both into).

So who should get hands-on sex therapy? Can all of us achieve our dreams of leaving our partners gasping for more? We spoke to Celeste and Danielle about what being a sex coach is really like, what clients can get out of it, and how they handle even the toughest sexual problems.



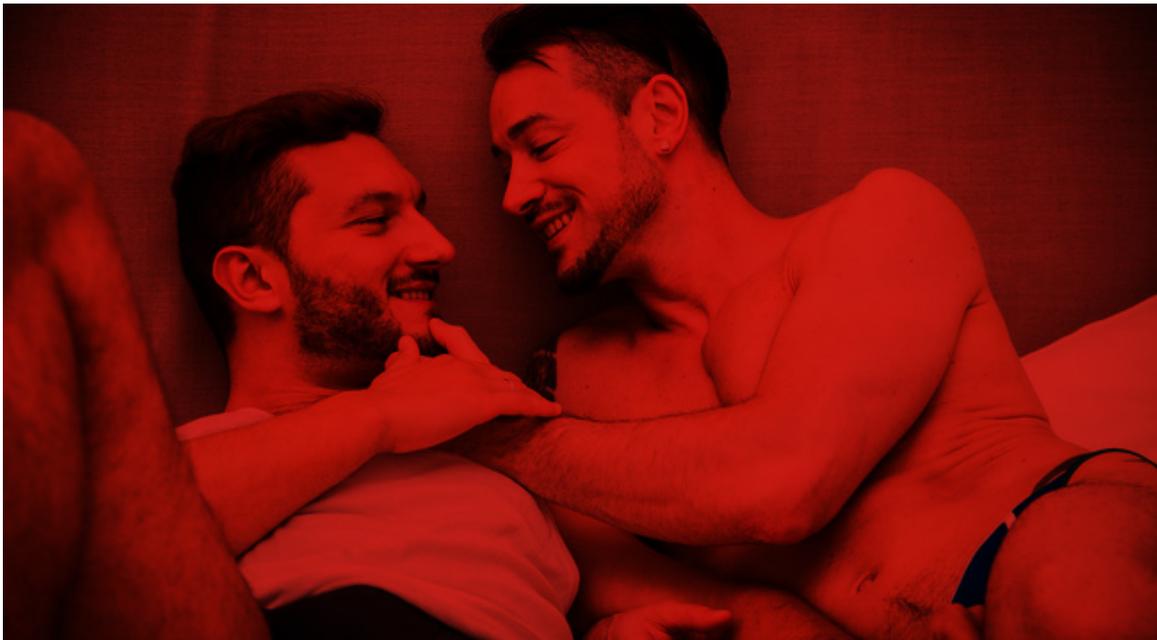
Picture the type of person you think might seek out a sex coach. Is that person generally happy and healthy? Are they fulfilled in other areas of their lives? Are they already in a relationship? The cultural narrative (and every rom-com that revolves around professionals who help clients lead better sex lives) suggests that only the strangest, neediest people will pay someone to coach them to be better lovers. That's simply not true.

Committed couples come in regularly, Danielle tells us. They may seek out services because they have desires that they may not be able to talk about on their own. Or their levels of sexual desire may be vastly different and they want to find a happy medium. And men (both single and partnered) may come in because they're realizing that being good at sex isn't all about intercourse.

“Men come in because they want to figure out women,” Danielle says. “They can’t understand their wives or girlfriends or women they want to date and also to overcome physiological challenges including getting hard and controlling their orgasm. They want to be better lovers.”

Women set appointments for different reasons — often to work on pain during sex, to ask for help achieving orgasm, or to talk about low levels of sexual desire. Regardless of the reason, the first step in the Somatica Method is to make sure that no one feels stigmatized.

“There’s already so much shame in our culture about sex,” Celeste tells us. “Even now, when you’re seeing sex everywhere, we still have this underlying idea that sex is dirty or extraneous or unimportant, but the bottom line is we’re all sexual beings. We are wired that way from the beginning, but people have learned that sex is bad from many places. I do feel that we’re raising consciousness around sex and shame and we can see the people we work with get so more relaxed around their sexuality.”



“When clients first come in we’ll sit and talk for a while to discover their issue,” Danielle tells us. “Then, depending on what the issue is, we’re going to do something experiential in that first session.”

If the word experiential sounds daunting, you may be relieved (or disappointed) to know that it’s much less scary than you think. No one’s going to demand that you undress. Instead, Danielle says, the practitioner may start with deep breathing exercises to get the client to feel more in their body and connect with themselves

in a way that ignites erotic energy. Sometimes, the experiential portion of the session may include learning how to make eye contact (terrifying for many) or working on relaxing in sexual situations.

“It could be just talking about their fantasies or what turns them on,” Danielle says. “That’s an experience that so many people have never had in a safe nonjudgemental environment.”

That place of non-judgment is essential to the practice. Because most of us have grown up thinking of sex as something shameful (or only reserved for the very attractive and well-endowed). We forget that all of us are entitled to have good sex and not be ashamed to explore the things that turn us on, whether that be BDSM or 20 minutes in the missionary position.

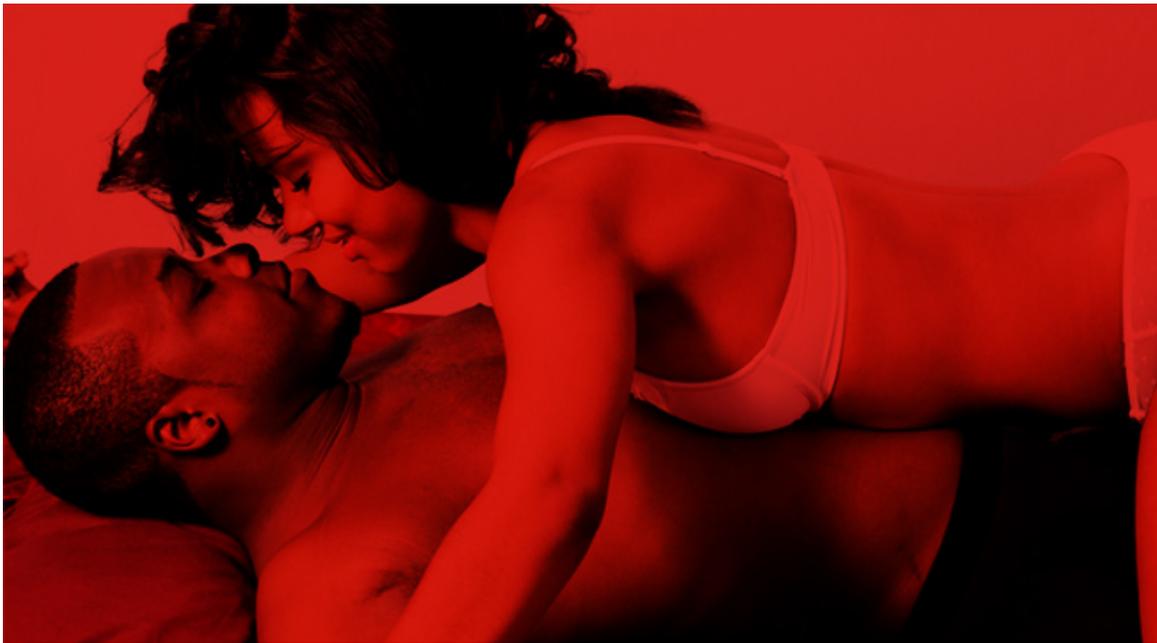
“A lot of what we bring to the approach,” Celeste says, “is celebratory, fun, and exciting, and we stay away from shaming people’s desires. We are normalizing what they are experiencing in all different areas of sex and desire, which is very helpful as it gives them a different perspective about how they can embrace themselves and transform in the ways they want to.

Here’s how this works: Imagine you’re a dude coming in to work on the issue of premature ejaculation (common! Normal! Will happen at least once to most of us!). The first thing your sex coach will do is demystify the experience and explain that because masturbation is viewed as something shameful that needs to be hidden, many men condition themselves to orgasm as quickly as possible, not recognizing that this kind of pattern will affect their sex lives, and then, when they do involve themselves in romantic situations, they end up not feeling adequate.

“I had this young guy who really thought he was supposed to be able to stay hard and not ejaculate for like an hour,” Danielle laughs. “No, honey, that’s not going to happen like that. It’s not realistic. We do a reality check around that.”

And then the work really begins. Once Celeste and Danielle (they work with clients individually) pinpoint the problem, they’ll teach a client how to slow his or her body down, how to touch, and how to relax and enjoy sexual experiences.

“We see many couples,” Danielle says, “many times one partner says, ‘You have to teach them how to do that, you have to teach her to respond the way you respond.’”



While traditional sexological bodywork is a one-way street when it comes to touch (the practitioner does touch the client's naked body, often with a glove on), Somatica is different in that the practitioner and the client touch each other. The clothes stay on, but instead of manual touch (just physical training), the client and the therapist work on both sexual and relationship techniques to prepare the client for the real thing.

“You’re learning everything from emotional connection and communication to erotic connection,” Celeste says. “A client could be learning about passion by practicing with us throwing each other up against the wall, or they could be learning about romance with tender, gentle touch. You’re learning different energies of erotic connection but also seduction and how to be more in your body in an erotic way. There’s a huge set of experiential tools we use to help people be fully realized sexually and emotionally in relationships.”

Wait up, throwing each other against walls?

“If you just think about it,” Danielle says, “we have this idea that we’re supposed to know those things and to do them. Spontaneously. How the heck are we going to get that information?”

Only the movies come to mind.

“You know there’s technique to everything.” Danielle continues. “You can really learn how to bring the right energy, you can learn how to say the right words, and touch in a way that’s going to make someone feel arousal and turn on. We see some

of it in the movies, but we don't get the full picture or the 'How To' – they cut out so many of the most important aspects of sexual connection.”

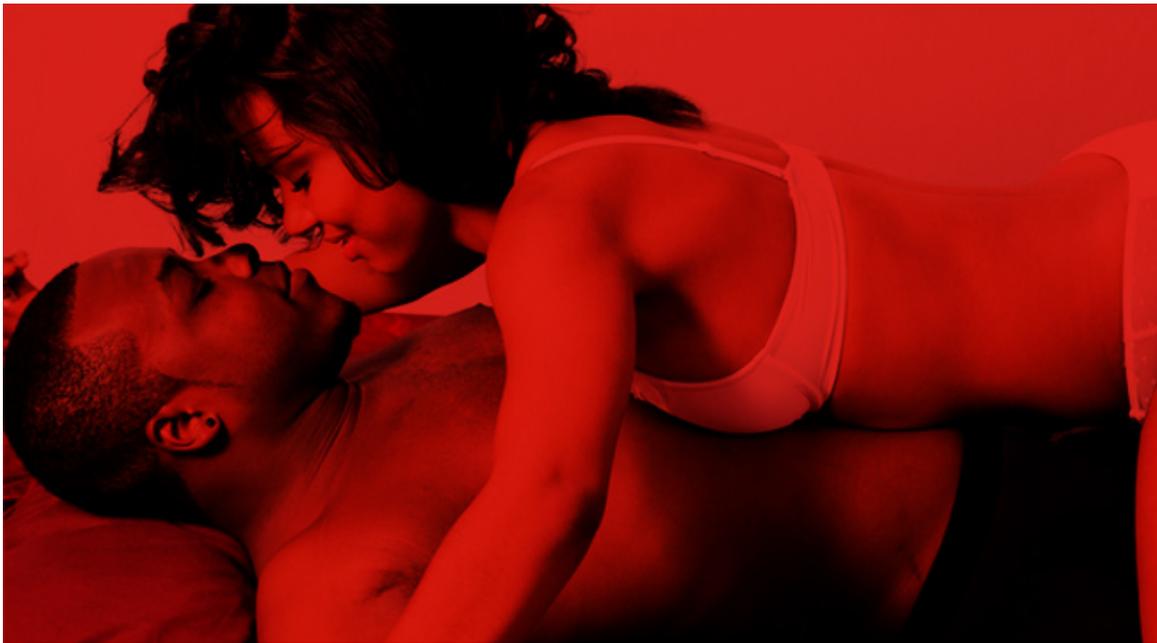
Media representations of sex tell us one of two stories: The first features people who, by some preternatural means, have become master lovers. We don't know how, we don't know why. We just know they're good at what they do. They know how to kiss, to nibble on ears, and, yes, even throw each other up against walls in ways that are sexy and dominating without being creepy.

The second story is more awkward: We either see people go from ugly ducklings into sex monsters in a brief montage or we never see them get there at all. They live in a world where sex is awkward and strange but enjoyable with the right person. Celeste and Danielle, however, are trying to tell a third story — the one in which even the most insecure people learn to feel comfortable and confident within their own bodies.

“People think we're going to do role-play, so it seems like it's going to feel phony,” Celeste says, “but we show up really authentically. When I'm practicing with somebody I'm Celeste. I'm not practicing, 'Let's pretend that I'm so and so.' It's a very real, very beautiful connection that we share with our clients.”

That connection helps smooth over any nerves, even when you're doing something that sounds silly or challenging.

“When you first throw somebody up against the wall, yeah there's definitely going to be some awkwardness and some laughter,” Celeste continues, “but we practice. When somebody comes into my office, they're not going to practice it one time. We're going to do it eight times, ten times. By the end, it's like, “Whoa, that was really hot, you are sensual and you're turning me on and it's super exciting. I think any learning curve can have some awkwardness and discomfort to it but the outcome is so profound and fun that I think people are willing to go through the awkwardness.”



With all this talk about being authentic, we wanted to know the answer to the age-old question when it comes to any kind of work in which sex is involved: Is the practitioner aroused?

Turns out, that's not just a hazard of the job; it's the goal.

"The best feedback that we can give clients is our turn on, and we're not faking it," Danielle says seriously. "We're letting ourselves respond authentically and get aroused. We're teaching them how to seduce us and turn us on because that's the best learning that they're going to get, an authentic and real response. They really appreciate it, because men especially, very rarely they get gentle and real feedback that points them in the right direction."

"I had a client in my office the other day and I was teaching him how to bite the back of my neck," Celeste adds. "We were taking turns and it was so arousing. I was like, 'Yay, this is my job.'"

But there are clear limits. Bites on the neck? Appropriate. Erotic touch? Part of the process. Kissing? Celeste and Danielle don't do that, because it's important to set boundaries when you're doing this work. "Besides," Celeste says, "there are other ways to learn how to be a good kisser." (Yes, this can sometimes involve practicing on hands.)

Even couples have to keep it PG: "They're making out and touching each other," Danielle says. "They can kiss each and they can put their hands underneath each

others clothing, stuff that we can't do with them in session. But they don't get naked."

Hey, just more excitement for when they get home.

<http://uproxx.com/life/hands-on-sex-coach/>