

## The Social co-host Cynthia Loyst wants to change the way we talk about pleasure

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ILLUSTRATION BY STEFANIE WONG

Cynthia Loyst, one of the hosts on CTV's *The Social*, is a self-described “pleasure pusher.” She runs the site [FindYourPleasure.com](https://www.findyourpleasure.com), where she chronicles pleasure as it relates to parenting, sex and style, and now has a book on the same subject. *Find your Pleasure: The Art of Living a More Joyful Life* offers tips, advice and anecdotes for increasing pleasure in every facet of

your life. The Globe and Mail spoke with Loyst about her mission to do away with the idea of guilty pleasure, the ways she's teaching her son, Jaya, to value pleasure and how people can find ways to give themselves the attention she says they deserve.

### **Why does pleasure feel like such a dirty word?**

I think it's been positioned in our society as this kind of superfluous extra. It's the dirty indulgent cousin of happiness and [we are told] that the loftier goal to reach for is being happy and content. Pleasure is often positioned as this kind of slippery slope to ruin. I believe strongly that we need pleasure in order to be happy and healthy. And actually, when we don't repress where our instincts are drawn to seek out pleasure, we're less inclined to become compulsive about it.

### **You see it as a health benefit?**

There's evidence to suggest that people looking out a window while they're recovering in hospital, if there is a beautiful view, will actually recover faster. There's some evidence to suggest that when we eat in a stressed-out way, it raises our cortisol levels, which makes us hang on to fat, as opposed to when we eat with intention, savouring, our body digests it faster. There's research that shows that when we create something with our hands, it activates the same pleasure centres in our brains, as things like drugs. And this replacement is being increasingly used to help people on the path to recovery. And I didn't even talk about sex.

### **A lot of people equate pleasure with luxury.**

One of the things I'm thinking about a lot are the women that I've met and talked to who are new immigrants, who are struggling to make ends meet, maybe they don't have a partner and are single parents, maybe they're looking after kids and their in-laws. How do you factor in pleasure? It shouldn't be a luxury, because we all know that it takes years off your life. When you're constantly in the service of other people and you're neglecting yourself, it does a number on your happiness, your mental health and your physical health. I don't believe this should be a privilege. [Pleasure] doesn't really need to take money, but it does need to take a different shift in the way

that we think about the world and how we prioritize ourselves.

### **Is this book only for women?**

I feel like when I was writing it, I definitely had a female audience in mind. But there are so many men who show up at the [book] events and talk about the fact that they've also felt sidelined. [Society suggests that] there are only certain sanctioned things that men are allowed to derive pleasure through. Men are raised with “[sex] is the only way, the sanctioned way! You can have sports and this,” and I think we need to shake all that down. We really need to aim for helping each other have the most pleasure-filled lives. I think about that in my relationship. I think we're better off when we understand the ways in which the culture has supported certain narratives around masculinity and femininity, but then also coming together and going “Okay, well, how do we move forward?” I really want to kickstart a kind of pleasure revolution.

### **You never really hear about “dad guilt.” Do you think motherhood uniquely affects the possibilities of pleasure?**

Men don't, generally, sideline their pleasures in the same way that women do. I think so many women are living scripts. They're being told this is your obligation and sometimes that's infused with culture, with gender expectations, but if we abandoned all that and just got to the truth about who we are, I think it's a very courageous and radical thing. It seems small but I think it is required.

### **What are you teaching your child about pleasure?**

I think I learned more from him about pleasure than I'm teaching him. I think kids know way more about this than we do. Jaya woke me up to all of the things that I was kind of blind to, the way that he was maneuvering through the world. I think all kids are like this. They pick up stuff. They re-examine a room that they've seen a million times. They're always noticing something different. They rediscover toys. The way in which he engages with art unlocked this memory in my head of how much I loved to do art when as I kid. Who the hell just sits around and paints? And now I do it. It's our thing, together we sit around and do art projects almost every weekend. So, I feel like the way he has fun, given almost any backdrop, has taught me so much. I

think we kind of lose that sense of being really deeply in touch with ourselves.

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