

## The Cookie Book: Celebrating the Art, Power, and Mystery of Women's Sweetest Spot

**Maritza Breitenbach**

Hunter House (Nov 1, 2012)

Softcover \$17.95 (200pp)

978-0-89793-606-4

Despite its title, *The Cookie Book* is not a handy guide for home bakers who want to whip up some new treats—instead, it's a rollicking, joyful, and highly informative guide to women's "cookies."

"Why a book about the vagina?" I often asked myself when I'd wake up in the middle of the night," writes author Maritza Breitenbach. "Why would anyone, other than a medical specialist or a pornographer," try to tackle such a "taboo subject?" For her, the answer came when her daughter needed some advice on intimate care and hygiene.

Embarrassed and uncomfortable, Breitenbach realized that she lacked the knowledge to answer some simple questions. That lightbulb moment led her to tackle the subject comprehensively, from medical issues like STDs and vaginal infections to "cookie coiffure" that involves grooming, body piercing, and pubic hair care. Along the way, she provides insight on the vagina's depiction in relation to art, menstrual issues, and changes with pregnancy and childbirth.

Breitenbach's background is in research, and she holds a master of philosophy degree in biomedical ethics, so it's not surprising that she took on the task with gusto. She writes with the fabulous curiosity of a researcher who loves her job, and her writing style is personable and friendly. Although she keeps the tone light, Breitenbach is careful to avoid sounding dismissive about the subject, emphasizing instead the importance for women to understand this often-ignored body area.

She writes that she hopes to "instill pride in you and give you a confident voice, strengthened with all the knowledge you need to take care of, understand, embrace, and celebrate your unique womanness." That seems like a formidable mission, but Breitenbach manages to reach that goal, imparting both guidance and encouragement.

One of the book's strongest sections deals with cultural norms, and although Breitenbach could fill more volumes on the topic, she manages to hit some highlights and incorporate historic attitudes about the vagina's place in society. For example, she notes that in Japan, where the vagina is called the "gate of jewels," it was believed until the 19th century that women carried an actual pearl inside it and that removal of the pearl would cause a woman's death.

Part inspiration, part education, *The Cookie Book* is ultimately a total celebration of a woman's most intimate part. Breitenbach's enthusiasm and comprehensive approach help to lift the long-held taboo of talking about the value of "cookies."

ELIZABETH MILLARD (March 11, 2013)

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