

RETAIL DETAIL Maxine Mendelsohn

# It's a plus-size shop, but – please! – no diet talk

**Name:** Cheryl Glense, owner of Ritsi Plus, 4863 Sherbrooke St. W., 514-481-8600, www.ritsiplus.com.

**You emailed me saying I should visit your store to learn more about "the forgotten woman." Who is the forgotten woman?**

The plus-size woman is forgotten by designers. But we've got a couple of plus-size chains in Quebec, like Reitmans and Addition Elle. Yes, there are many lower-end plus-size chain stores, but what about higher-end designer clothes? When these women want something a little more stylish and well-made, there is virtually nowhere for them to go.

**What makes your boutique different from those chain stores?**

Obviously, there's nothing wrong with shopping at chain stores – that's not the point. The point is that plus-size women have no options. There are very few real designers who are creating high-end original fashions for them. Can you believe Holt Renfrew has phased out its plus-size designer sections? And why should plus-size women be forced to shop only in big-box stores? Their money is as green as anyone else's.

**I see your point.**

Look, we all know that trends are created for young, small women, but plus-size women want to shop, too, and they still want to fit in, so to speak. Some of my customers are lawyers and judges – you know, powerful women who don't only want to wear clothes from a big discount chain.

**Do the "skinny people" trends get reflected in plus sizes or are there trends that are exclusively for plus sizes?**

No matter what's going on in fashion, it's going to be similar for plus sizes, but the styling is different. You can't get around it – the look is always going to be more boxy. A tiny little fitted blazer that's trendy right now might look like a sack to you. But for a plus-size woman, it's a cute little fitted blazer.

The truth is that plus-size women don't like form-fitting clothing; most of them just won't feel good in something that reveals their body. A lot of women want to hide behind their clothes. That's just the way they feel, and there's nothing we can do about that.

But we can give them stylish designer options. Like instead of a big, mannish-looking shirt,



Cheryl Glense owns Ritsi Plus on Sherbrooke St. W. She's disappointed that there is still a lack of high-end original fashions being designed for larger women. "Some of my customers are lawyers and judges – you know, powerful women who don't only want to wear clothes from a big discount chain."

ALLEN MCINNIS THE GAZETTE

how about a loose, pink cashmere V-neck?

**Would you say that most of your customers are overweight but still healthy?**

I'll be honest with you: I think 60 per cent of my clients are healthy, big-boned women. They go to the gym, they have that glass of wine and that ice cream once in a while but they're basically healthy people. And the other 40 per cent – well, what can I tell you? They're probably overweight and it's probably not healthy, but this isn't a doctor's office. We're here to dress them.

**So is there a lot of diet talk in the store?**

You know, I've been on this street for 25 years, and doing plus-size fashion for 13 years, and one thing that never

changes is that women come in here telling me they're on a new diet. I never bring it up; I'm sick of talking about it. But for some reason they feel defensive, like if they don't tell me they're on a diet I'm going to judge them.

How wrong! I'm accepting and friendly to everyone, no matter the size. Seriously, sometimes I want to tell them, "Go around telling everyone else that you're on a diet, but please, don't bother telling me."

Sometimes they say they're a Size 16 and I can tell they're a 20. I just give them clothes that fit – who cares about numbers?

**Who are the best and worst dressed plus-size celebrities?**

Oprah does it best. She is definitely a plus-size fashion icon. She's a little chunky – you can

see her rolls when she sits down – but she wears white pants and gorgeous tops. She knows how to carry herself.

I don't want to say what plus-size woman is the worst-dressed. There's enough negative talk about overweight women – I don't want to throw my hat into that ring.

**Do you think that new Hollywood starlets like America Ferrera from Ugly Betty and Jennifer Hudson can inspire plus-size women to feel good about themselves and be more stylish?**

All those women have stylists and designers who dress and accessorize them. It's not really realistic, but they are still positive role models, I suppose. Jennifer Hudson looks fabulous on the cover of Vogue this month.

When I see that, I feel like the plus-size woman might not be forgotten for long.

**Don't you think if there were plus-size magazines it would help the situation?**

Over the years there have been some, but they have all gone bust, no pun intended. I think plus-size women don't want to see themselves in magazines. They'd rather look at the fashions on smaller women and then go to plus-size shops and find styles there.

**I've heard that plus-size clothing can be more expensive just because it requires more material to make the garments. Is there any truth to that?**

It's true. It's 15 to 20 per cent more expensive.

**I heard a fashion expert on TV explain that designers use**

**stick-thin models to show clothes because clothing looks like it's on a hanger. Doesn't that seem pretty crazy when women have curves and hips?**

A model who is a Size 0 is ridiculous. That's not even a real woman to me. They are the infinite minority. Baby boomers do not look like that, and we have all the buying power.

Beyond the obviously large women, I think you'd be surprised to know what a plus size really looks like. I'm a Size 14 and I feel great. Just because I'm not a waif doesn't mean I don't want to have beautiful clothes. Big is beautiful. That's the truth. Now getting women to believe it is another story.

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## She brought us the G spot; now she recommends other hot spots

LINDA A. JOHNSON  
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**VOORHEES, N.J.** – Sexuality researcher Beverly Whipple made her name a quarter century ago popularizing the G spot, the elusive female erogenous zone, but she has a different message these days: Move on.

"There's so many ways that women can have sexual pleasure," Whipple said. "We can't deny the experiences of women. We have to validate them."

Lesson No. 1: the biggest sexual organ is the brain.

The longtime Rutgers University nursing school professor officially retired about five years ago, but still keeps a hectic schedule, doing research, writing, giving interviews and speaking at conferences around the globe.

Her most recent book, *The Science of Orgasm*, co-written with Rutgers neuroscientist Barry Komisaruk and Mexican endocrinologist Carlos Beyer-Flores, explores how the brain produces orgasms and the complex biological processes involved.

Among other things, it documents groundbreaking work showing that some women with spinal cord injuries can still climax. Whipple said women with such injuries who were still experiencing orgasm came to her for support, so she began a study of others with the same injury.

"One woman had six orgasms in 24 minutes," after none in the

two years since her injury, Whipple recalled. "She was crying. I was crying."

Amusingly packaged in a plain brown wrapper, the book also reports that women can climax after stimulation to a number of body areas or from mental imagery alone. It also covers the health benefits of sex and how aging, medications, diseases and hormone changes affect orgasm in both men and women. Published in October, it's selling well enough that a second printing is in the works.

Internationally renowned, Whipple, 65, serves as a consultant on sexuality issues to the World Health Organization and other agencies. Last fall, she was named one of the world's 50 most influential living scientists by *New Scientist* magazine, the latest of many awards for her decades of research on sexuality and sexual health.

Whipple, who has been married for 44 years to husband Jim, a retired rocket scientist, seems single-minded in her goal of helping couples improve relationships and better enjoy sex.

"I would hope women are saying what they find pleasurable and satisfying" with their partner, she said in an interview in her airy, neat-as-a-pin home in Voorhees, a suburb southeast of Philadelphia. "I've devoted my whole career to this."

In the mid-1980s, Rutgers asked her to join the faculty. She told them she wouldn't come

aboard unless she could conduct research on women, who had been neglected in medical research. The university's nursing school then offered her a laboratory to seal the deal.

Whipple has particularly tried to help women who feel confused or weird because their own bedroom experiences don't match conventional wisdom or Hollywood portrayals of sex.

"Women just thanked and thanked and thanked us for helping them feel normal," Whipple said.

The new book discusses how orgasms or pressure on a woman's G spot can reduce pain, a discovery that may lead to a new painkilling drug and training people to limit pain with their brain.

"She's really on that forefront of trying to understand the relationship between how we perceive things in our brain ... and how they're related to anatomy and chemistry," said Stephanie Sanders, an associate director of The Kinsey Institute for Research in Sex, Gender, and Reproduction at Indiana University. "I think that's where her work is so exciting."

While some scientists still dispute whether the G spot exists, Whipple says she and her colleagues have found one in every woman they've examined and other scientists have duplicated their results, including through autopsies of women.

The G spot is a sensitive area



Researcher Beverly Whipple has tried to help women who feel confused or weird because their experiences don't match Hollywood portrayals of sex.

that can be felt through the front wall of the vagina between the back of the pubic bone and the cervix. It feels like a small lump, swells when stimulated with heavy pressure and can trigger intense orgasm. Because it's tough to find, it's remained controversial.

Brunhild Kring, a psychiatrist at New York University specializing in sexuality issues, said she thinks only some women have a G spot and that only some couples – sort of "sexual athletes" – are able to enjoy it.

Kring said Whipple's recent work is more sophisticated with its focus on issues including the

complex role of nerves and brain chemicals as they relate to sexual pleasure.

"What she's really contributed is that there are different ways to reach orgasm and that one's not more valuable than another," Kring said.

Whipple, a trained nurse, worked as a nursing school instructor early in her career, but switched to sexuality research and education after a student asked her: "What can a man do sexually after having a heart attack?"

Whipple realized that even then – in 1975 – nursing schools didn't cover sexuality. That nudged the Secaucus, N.J., native into her niche.

Unlike other researchers who had gleaned information on Americans' sex habits and preferences from face-to-face interviews or large, anonymous surveys, Whipple and her collaborators worked in a laboratory, doing studies on female volunteers to learn how sexual organs, nerves and the brain interact.

Early on, she and a former collaborator, psychologist John D. Perry, discovered their volunteers had a mysterious, sensual area inside. Researching medical literature, they found Dr. Ernst Grafenberg of Germany had reported in 1950 that women have an erotic zone there that causes orgasm.

They named it the Grafenberg spot, or G spot, and created a stir when they reported on it at a medical conference and in their

1982 book, *The G Spot and Other Discoveries about Human Sexuality*. The international best-seller, printed in 19 languages, was updated and reissued in 2005.

Some feminists and researchers weren't thrilled with the book.

Shere Hite, author of the groundbreaking 1976 book, *The Hite Report on Female Sexuality*, said Whipple's focus on the G spot slowed the drive for women's sexual equality, coming after both Hite and the Masters and Johnson research team documented that more women climaxed from clitoral stimulation than intercourse.

The G spot book suggested intercourse alone should satisfy women, said Hite, who continues to research sexuality and write books and columns on the topic.

On the other hand, Judy Norsigian, executive director of Our Bodies Ourselves, the education group that publishes the women's health bible of the same name, called Whipple's book an important advance.

"It really furthered the science of women's sexuality and of orgasm quite a bit," she said.

Asked how all her research has affected her sex life, Whipple, a petite woman who remains trim with frequent exercise, avoided a direct answer.

"Our bedroom is not my research laboratory," she said with a laugh.