

Drama Queen

Former Pageant Queen **Nancy Redd** Addresses Young Women's Body Concerns

by chandra r. thomas

Nancy Redd is all about the drama—*Body Drama*. The 27-year-old Harvard grad penned the *New York Times* bestseller, billed as the first-ever photographic health and body book, in an effort to help young women embrace the uniqueness, strength and beauty of their bodies. As the first African-American woman crowned Miss Virginia in 2003 (she later won the Miss America swimsuit competition), it would seem she was immune to the body issues that stress many of us. But Redd says her experiences growing up inspired her to write a book that addresses young women's concerns about everything from lopsided boobs and an "ugly" vulva to "poo" problems and how to make a sanitary napkin in a crunch—complete with provocative photos.

"I wrote this book for teenagers. It's the book I wish I'd had when I was growing up."

Q Why a health book? I didn't think there was anything out there answering questions many young women have. We tend to dodge these types of issues. When you're 15 you're lucky if you learn anything about your period.

Q Did you target a specific age group? I wrote this book for teenagers. It's the book I wish I'd had when I was growing up. But a lot of women have written me to tell me how much this book has helped them. Overall this is for anyone who wants to learn about the female body. I've even had some dads write to tell me it was helpful to them

with their daughters. A parent can use this book as a conversation starter, or they can just give it to their daughter so her questions get answered.

Q You include a lot of photos in the book, including a spread featuring women of various shapes, sizes and colors in the buff. Why did you feel that was important? I used to look at health books and medical books all the time, but there were never any photos so I could see examples. I want everyone who opens *Body Drama* to see someone who looks like them. I want the girls who read this to embrace their inner and outer beauty.

Q Was it difficult finding women to model nude? I placed ads explaining this was for a health book, and the response was great. People are tired of being ashamed of their bodies. I wanted to be inclusive so everyone who reads this book could feel beautiful and normal. What they're seeing in a lot of magazines is airbrushing. That's not good because it makes people feel like they're the only ones dealing with cellulite, nail fungus, back acne and inverted nipples.

Q Was it hard writing about complicated medical issues? I wanted it to be medically accurate, but easy to read, so I teamed up with Angela Diaz, director of Mount Sinai Adolescent Health Center, who wrote the foreword. She sees thousands of teens a year.



Q What kind of response have you gotten so far? The majority of e-mails have been from women asking questions about vaginal discharge. It concerns me. I tell them to see a doctor. If you had a runny nose you'd go to a doctor, no problem. Somehow when something happens 'down there' we don't want to get it checked out.

Q Speaking of 'down there,' you shared a lot of personal information in the book, like the fact that you experienced bacterial vaginosis while writing the book. Was it tough getting so personal? It was really embarrassing at first, and I kept thinking, 'I can't believe I'm writing this!' But then I realized I had to take one for the team so other people could know everyone deals with these issues.

Q Besides the many pictures, what makes *Body Drama* unique? It's easy to understand, and it doesn't hold back. My book addresses what's going on and how to deal with it. For example, I've never seen a health book that deals with dandruff. That's a health issue; it affects your self-esteem and that affects your stress level.

Q As an African American, did you feel the need to include issues affecting us? Growing up, I found a lot of issues I was dealing with as an African-American woman were totally ignored in most health books and magazines. I was so fortunate to be able to include a lot of those issues that affect us at a higher rate, like, keloids and hyper-pigmentation. I wanted to make sure black issues were incorporated into a mainstream book. I was happy to talk about keloids, but show a photo of a white person with one to show that we, as women, are dealing with many of the same issues. ♥

Visit nancyredd.com for more information.

Chandra R. Thomas is an Atlanta writer.