

"Ask Me Anything"

By Ellen Welty

Advice on the things that really bug, bother, or torture you

Am I Becoming a Prude?

Q: Last night I had the urge to go up to my husband in the kitchen and tell him I wanted to make love. I pictured undressing him as I said it, being incredibly seductive the whole time. Then I thought: *Wrong*. It's weird. You'd think that after seven years together, I'd feel comfortable enough to be really wild in bed. But it hasn't worked that way. If anything, I've grown more shy. Help!

A: Many couples do not start having really great sex until they're 50. No, I did not make that up. I heard it from psychologist David Schnarch, Ph.D., who runs the Marriage and Family Health Center in Evergreen, Colorado. He told me it's common for

married couples to feel shy and that, ironically, most of us found it easier to be daring in bed with someone we hadn't known long than we do with our spouses. We just didn't care that much if the new lover disapproved of something we tried.

Also, remember that we women were brought up to be passive sexually, to let the guy ask us out, unbutton the first button, get us into bed. It's not as if the message has changed. Sexually aggressive women are nobody's heroes, thanks.

Just look at the way they're portrayed in movies—as people who like to boil bunnies on the stove, or who walk around without underwear and stick ice picks into people, or who go for a dance in a bar, get raped in the parking lot, and end up having to drive off a cliff with a friend. And you wonder why you stand there in the kitchen willing your legs to move? Please.

Many couples don't have really great sex until they're 50, says one therapist.

One option is to tell your husband about that moment in the kitchen. Tell him you want to be as sexual as you know you can be and you want his help. Trust him to help you change. Dr. Schnarch strongly endorses a second option: Trust yourself. However it happens, let your erotic side take over. No matter how your husband reacts.

In either case, start small. The next time in the kitchen, don't feel you have to strip him. You could just go over and kiss him. You don't have to meet him for dinner in a blond wig with no underwear on. You can wear black underwear under your sweats. You don't have to talk dirty in bed. You can just hold his gaze as you say "hello."

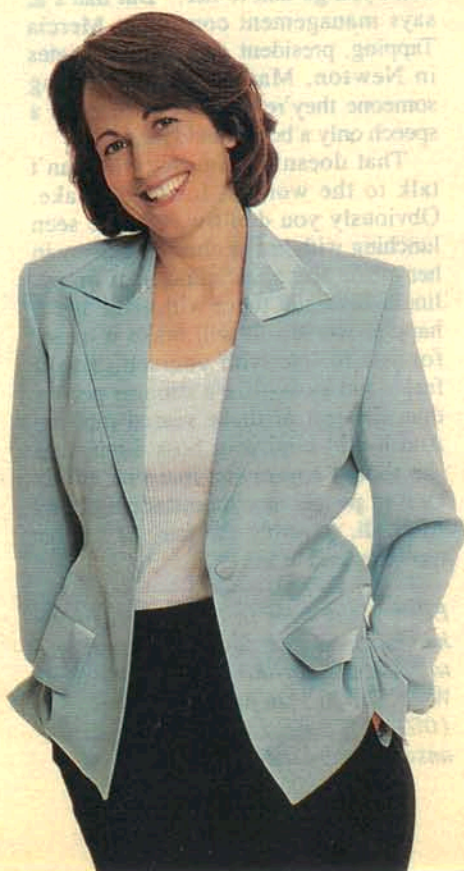
I Don't Want My Kid to Watch That!

Q: When I picked my 6-year-old up from a play date recently, he and his friend were watching a really violent movie on TV. I couldn't believe it. I yanked my son to his feet, turned to the other boy's mother, and sputtered something about how could she allow it. She said—get this—she didn't think it was that bad, that it was just a movie. Should I bar my son from going to her house? I don't want to turn him into a nerd who sits at home alone watching *Bambi*, but still...

A: Just as no two snowflakes are alike, no two mothers are alike in the way they raise kids. Some mothers are so different they're not really like snowflakes. They're more like big balls of hail that come crashing into our sunny days. That's how you think

of her, right? And it's exactly how she thinks of you too. You have to agree to disagree with this woman—and with most other mothers on this planet—and then find a way to let your child-rearing styles coexist peacefully.

You're going to hate this, but the next time you see her you must apologize. "Look, I'm sorry I blew up," you say. "I don't like my kids to watch those kinds of movies, but I recognize that not everyone feels so strongly." Then, when you've mollified the woman—and reestablished yourself as a reasonable person—simply ask her to turn off such movies when your kid is over, says Anne C. Bernstein, Ph.D., a family (continued on page 36)



PHOTOGRAPH BY RICHARD REINSDORF; HAIR BY BRENT LAVETT FOR CELESTINE; MAKEUP BY RUSSELL DURKE; STYLING BY CALVIN JON HAUGEN FOR CELESTINE

Breast Reconstruction after Mastectomy:

AN EXPERT OPINION ON AN INDIVIDUAL MATTER.

Women with breast cancer are often faced with losing a breast to mastectomy surgery. Many of the decisions that must subsequently be made center around breast reconstruction.

The key thing to keep in mind, according to Dr. Garry Brody, a board certified plastic surgeon with University Plastic Surgeons at the University of Southern California, is that every woman is different: "Some women want to wake up with a new breast immediately after their mastectomy, while others need time to consider their choices. And some women choose not to have reconstruction at all." Dr. Brody also notes that candidates for reconstruction have many different types of effective procedures available to them, and that the plastic surgeon "can personalize the reconstructive surgery within the framework of treatment options available for each individual patient."

A clear understanding of what to expect from this type of surgery is imperative. "I've found that patients who receive appropriate counseling on the procedure and what to expect are usually satisfied with the results," says Dr. Brody. "Most women who undergo reconstruction realize that a perfect, unscarred breast is not possible; they're looking primarily for symmetry, balance, and a good fit in their bra and clothing. We can often provide this."

It's also important to keep in mind that reconstructive surgery generally does not compromise medical follow-up or interfere with chemotherapy. "Candidates for radiation therapy may want to wait for reconstruction, as the radiation may alter the shape, texture, or quality of the outcome, requiring more surgery," says Dr. Brody. "But beyond that, reconstruction is a reasonably safe and effective procedure with proven techniques and new advances that make it an appropriate choice for many women."

When it comes to breast reconstruction, there is no such thing as the right decision for everyone—only the right decision for you.

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Ask Me

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psychologist in Berkeley, California, and author of *Flight of the Stork*. If she doesn't respect your wishes, have the boys play at your house. You'll teach your son by example that it's possible to believe someone else is wrong without tearing the person down.

He's Got a Disgusting Habit!

Q: I can't stand it, I just can't stand it. I cannot stand the noises my husband makes when he chews. I don't know when it started to bug me. All I know is, listening to him eat raises my blood pressure. I realize I'm being rigid and ridiculous, but I cannot take a lifetime of this. What can I say to the man?

A: Tonight at dinner, turn to him portentously, let your fork clatter to the table and say, "Peter," or whatever his name is, "I want to eat out." Now, you won't race out immediately, but you need to get the restaurant-ball rolling. You're in one of those phases of marriage where the roommate aspect of the institution is getting you down. Someone once said that marriage gets in the way of love. I don't know about that, but I do know that being someone's roommate can sometimes strain a friendship and tax a marriage. When you're always stepping over a person, you pick a mannerism (picking nails), or physical feature (the way his butt looks, now that you look at it closely) as a symbol of your irritation. (Chewing is apt, isn't it, since he used to wine and dine you, and now all you can focus on is how you're stuck at home listening to the tines of his fork hit his teeth: *Click, click. Click, click.* This is why Simone de Beauvoir and Jean-Paul Sartre lived in separate houses.) Worse, you feel guilty for reducing him in your mind to this one lousy, oafish habit. So get out to a restaurant, where it's too noisy to hear him chew and where you're travelers in the world again, not just roommates. This phase will pass.

Sometimes it makes sense to say something about an annoying habit. If he chews with his mouth open, for instance, he can close it. If he picks his nails, ask him if he would please consider stopping it for you. Since everyone gets surly when asked to change his or her perfect self, acknowledge that you must have some irritating

habit too. So you'll trade. You'll stop yours if he'll stop his. If he says no way, just remember his good points.

Should I Tell Her She's About to Get Fired?

Q: A coworker of mine is going to get the ax soon. (The boss thinks she's a total loser.) She doesn't know this, but the other people on the floor do and all are distancing themselves from her. Today she stuck her head in my office and asked, "Are you avoiding me?" I felt so bad. Should I take pity on her and tell her what's going on?

A: You'd be out of your mind—and possibly your job—if you do. Look, I feel sorry for her too, but it can't be done. Once you arm her with the information, she'll run to the boss or personnel department with it, demanding the truth. Then they'd force her to name her source. Unless you got word directly from the boss that she's doomed, you're not really sure of anything anyway, so you have nothing concrete to pass on. And if the boss did say something to you—well, if your colleague ever asks what's up with the boss's attitude toward her, you can say something suggestive like "Maybe she does have a couple of things on her mind. Why don't you go talk to her?" But that's it, says management consultant Mercia Tapping, president of MJT Associates in Newton, Massachusetts; telling someone they're about to be fired is a speech only a boss should make.

That doesn't mean that you can't talk to the woman, for God's sake. Obviously you don't want to be seen lunching with her or chuckling away in her office. But a few minutes of friendliness here and there will make her a happier woman. It will make it easier for you to live with yourself. You'll feel—and look—like a stronger person than the rest of those scared rabbits. And it will send your boss a message she should appreciate: that you are as kind to people as circumstances allow. After all, someday she may be on the receiving end of the ax. □

Ellen Welty lives in Los Angeles with her husband and son. Send questions to "Ask Me Anything," Redbook, 224 West 57th St., 6th floor, New York, NY 10019. We regret that we cannot answer letters individually.