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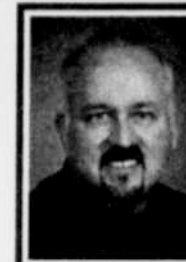
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Love and Communication: I'm a Talker, He's So Not



ms. behavior

BY MERYL COHN

The relationship world is easily divided into communicators and non-communicators, who usually end up in tortured pairings. The chatty among us are initially drawn to and then endlessly frustrated by those who don't talk, and the silent types wish the talkers would just shut up.

For people uncomfortable with talking, a mere 15-minute conversation may feel like breathing underwater. But for those who experience talking as an actual need, non-communicators seem like recalcitrant teenagers intentionally withholding communication.

It seems natural for this concern to arise at the scary one-year mark, which is when most couples are forced to move beyond the initial thrill of sex, movies and infatuation. Once you bring up this issue, John's reaction will reveal a lot about his willingness and ability to talk. As for whether he could be trained to communicate, it depends; unless he views non-communication as a problem, he probably won't change. So the burden will be on you to push it, because John is probably comfortable with how things are right now.

You can try to motivate John by engaging him in small, non-threatening conversations and

then rewarding him when he chats with you.

Many sages of the universe have tried to address the mystery about why communicators are always paired with non-communicators, even though it creates homicidal impulses for both sides. Ms. Behavior offers three theories:

- 1) We recreate our early wounded relationships with our mothers: Those of us who felt suffocated are drawn to communicators, and those who have felt abandoned are drawn to non-communicators. Though it seems counterintuitive, we unconsciously seek people who might torture us into healing.
- 2) No other combination works: Two communicators would talk each other into a coma, and a pair of non-communicators would ignore each other to death.
- 3) God is mean and punishing.

DEAR MS. BEHAVIOR:

I adore my boyfriend and we're having the most incredible and lovely romance. My concern is that John was raised to believe that it's better not to talk about uncomfortable situations.

This came up yesterday when John told me about a problem he is having with his housemate. He told me that they've been emailing each other about it. I said, "YOU LIVE IN THE SAME HOUSE! WHY ARE YOU EMAILING AND NOT TALKING? THAT'S NOT HEALTHY!" It got me to thinking: What if I ignore this sign and then this happens with us in a year or two?

So far, there have been no problems, but we're just ending our first year. I talk about everything in a very direct manner, no matter how uncomfortable. I want to ask John whether or not he can learn to be a more overt communicator. I want to deal with it now, before we have a problem.

So I want to say, "I hope we can always make it a rule to talk about stuff as it happens instead of waiting until any real harm is done... And if that isn't an option, could you say so now?"

Do you think John could be trained to talk?

— Steve

DEAR STEVE:

The relationship world is easily divided into communicators and non-communicators, who usually end up in tortured pairings. The chatty among us are initially drawn to and then endlessly frustrated by those who don't talk, and the silent types wish the talkers would just shut up.

DEAR MS. BEHAVIOR:

A photographer recently asked my girlfriend, Jane, to pose for a lesbian calendar. This photographer's work consists primarily of tasteful but sensual black-and-white nudes, sometimes in couples.

Jane realized that I wasn't crazy about the idea and said she won't do it if I don't want her to. My dilemma is this: Jane's body is her own and I don't want to appear controlling and tell her not to do it. But on the other hand, it also upsets me to imagine her kissing or touching another woman. Any suggestions?

— Connie

DEAR CONNIE:

Perhaps the solution need not be as black and white as it seems. It doesn't sound like you necessarily object to the nudity in the photographs, but rather to your girlfriend posing in sexual positions with other women. If this is true, you might explain which specific aspects make you uncomfortable, rather than asking her not to do it at all.

Try to say something really clear, like, "Go have your naked photos taken with my blessing, pumpkin, but I'd be more comfortable if you could please refrain from kissing, dry humping and muff diving with others, even for the sake of art."

Meryl Cohn is the author of *Do What I Say: Ms. Behavior's Guide to Gay and Lesbian Etiquette*. Send questions or correspondence to msbehavior@aol.com.