

'Doing it' — your own way

BY SARAH HANSELL
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Sarah Mirk decided to write her book "Sex From Scratch" because, in her words, the majority of what she found in the dating section of her local bookstore "sucked."

Mirk set out to write a book that, rather than offering a series of rules to follow, offers insight and real experiences from people navigating different types of relationships.

"Sex From Scratch: Making Your Own Relationship Rules" focuses on modern relationship advice that explores non-traditional choices from deciding against marriage and kids to non-monogamy. At 28, Mirk has used her journalism career at both the Portland Mercury and The Stranger in Seattle to explore gender, politics and pop culture. She is currently the online editor for Bitch Media. She has faked pregnancy to get the inside scoop on Oregon pregnancy resource centers, shared Oregon's lesser known history through a comic series and worked with female Guantanamo veterans, writing a comic book that shares their experiences.

Sarah Hansell: Explain the title of your book, "Sex From Scratch." What does it speak to?

Sarah Mirk: It's basically a DIY approach to dating. People build chicken coops from scratch, and you make food from scratch, and it speaks to people deciding what they want their relationships to look like without leaning heavily on tradition or on what their parents did. So they're sort of figuring out for themselves what they want their lives to look like, and figuring out for themselves what feels healthy and happy for them,



Sarah Mirk

meaning they're making up their relationships from scratch.

S.H.: Do you think the way you title the book works well with Portland especially, with the whole DIY culture here?

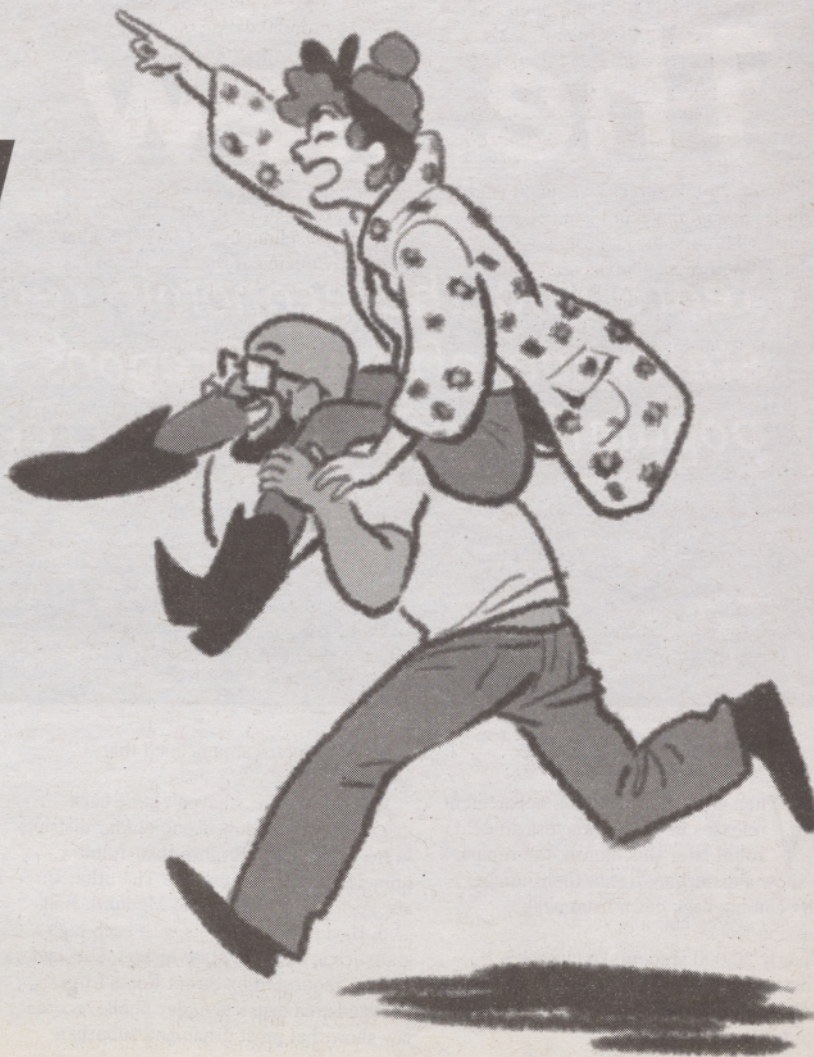
S.M.: I think that people in Portland really get it immediately. I think that it especially resonates with Portlanders, because we're on the whole a more liberal and less religious bunch. And a lot of people here are really invested in making their own relationships.

It's not just a Portland thing. I interviewed about 100 people for the book, all over the country, and it's not

like Portland is the only place where people are being progressive. You see it in nationwide trends in declining marriage rate, and people getting married later and people having fewer kids. I see all of those as examples of people deciding for themselves what they want their lives to look like.

S.H.: So, non-monogamy is one of the big non-traditional relationship choices you talk about in the book. What made you realize monogamy wasn't for you?

S.M.: Well, I'm still debating that question, I guess. It's kind of like, I wrote this book from a really sincere place in that here's what I'm thinking right now. But who knows what I'll be thinking 10 years in the future? And the idea is not to conform to one cookie-cutter type of relationship — that this is what I'm going to do for the rest of my life, but to develop the skills and personal resources to figure out what you want as you change and grow.



ARTWORK BY NATALIE NOURIGAT

I think non-monogamy and open relationships are a useful framework for thinking about what you want. So, the whole thing about open relationships is, the first thing you think about is, orgies, sex all the time! But I see it more as the approach I want to take to relationships, now and in the future, thinking honestly about desire and attraction and jealousy, and saying why we feel these things, like what's going on there, basically. Rather than in a traditional monogamous relationship, it's like you can never speak of it again. The whole topic of potentially being attracted to someone else is verboten. If you do talk about, that's grounds for anger. And I want to push that instead like, I know that I'm somebody who's naturally attracted to lots of people, and I love other humans.

S.H.: On a more practical level, how do you navigate new relationships? What are the guidelines that you set up with new partners to avoid problems?

S.M.: That's the thing about my book — there's not like a secret magic. It's pretty obvious stuff, that I just have to keep reminding myself, because although it's obvious stuff, I don't do it very well. I think a lot of people don't do it very well. So the one thing I try to do when I'm navigating a new relationship is be really straightforward about how I feel. I just try to be as honest as possible, and not try to be manipulative in any way.

S.H.: You talk about one of the biggest fears of monogamy for you was only having sex with one person for the rest of your life, at least when you first came to the idea. Do you think non-monogamy is humans' natural inclination?

S.M.: Yeah, I think so probably. You know, I think people are wired differently from one

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