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TRAPS AND TRIGGERS
 BY DAN SAVAGE

SAVAGE LOVE

My husband is nearly 20 years older than me, which was never an issue early in our relationship. However, for approximately the last eight years, we have not been able to have fulfilling sex because my husband can't keep an erection for more than a few thrusts. I love my husband and I am committed to our family, but I miss full PIV sex. I'm still fairly young and I enjoy sex, but I feel like I am mourning the death of my sex life. I miss the intimate connection and powerful feeling of sex with a man. My husband tries to please me, but oral sex is just okay and toys don't have the same effect. We have tried Viagra a few times, but it gave him a terrible headache. I try to brush it off because I don't want to embarrass him. I am curious about casual relationships, but I fear they wouldn't stay casual. Also, I would feel guilty being with another man even though my husband said I could do it one time. On one hand, I feel like I should be able to have a fulfilling sex life. But on the other hand, I don't want to be a cheater.

Now On To Having Awkwardly Realistic Discussions

It's not cheating if you have your husband's permission, NOTHARD, but fucking another man could still blow up your marriage—even if you manage to keep it casual.

Story time: I knew this straight couple. They were good together, they loved each other, and they had a strong sexual connection. (Spoiler alert: my use of the past tense.) The woman was all about monogamy, but her boyfriend had always wanted to have a threesome. She didn't want to be the reason he never got to do something he'd been fantasizing about since age 13, so she told her boyfriend that if the opportunity ever presented itself, he could go for it. So long as the sex was safe and he was honest with her, he could have a threesome one time.

The opportunity presented itself, the sex was safe, he was honest—and my friend spent a week ricocheting between devastated and furious before finally dumping her devastated and flummoxed boyfriend. During a drunken postmortem, my friend told me she wanted her boyfriend to be able to do it but didn't want him to actually do it. She didn't want to be the reason he couldn't; she wanted to be the reason he didn't. So her permission to have a threesome "one time" was a test (one he didn't know he was taking) and a trap (one he couldn't escape from). I urged my friend to take her boyfriend back—if he would have her—but he'd touched another woman with the tip of his penis (two women, actually), which meant he didn't love her the way she thought he did, the way she deserved to be loved, etc., and consequently he couldn't be allowed to touch her with the tip of his penis ever again.

Back to you, NOTHARD: My first reaction to your letter was "You've got your husband's okay to fuck some other dude—go for it." Then I reread your letter and thought, "Wait, this could be a test and a trap." You say you've brushed off the issue to spare your husband's feelings, but he may sense it's an issue and, consciously or subconsciously, this is his way of finding out. If you take him up on his offer "one time," and you make the mistake of being honest with him about it, he may be just as devastated as my friend was.

So don't take your husband up on his offer—not yet. Have a few more conversations about your sex life instead and address nonmonogamy/openness generally, not nonmonogamy/openness as a work-around for his dick. There may be some solo adventures he'd like to have, there may be invigorating new sexual adventures you could enjoy as a couple (maybe he'd love to go down on two women at once?), or he may rescind or restate his offer to let you fuck some other dude one time. Get clarity—crystal clarity—before proceeding.

Finally, NOTHARD, there are other erectile dysfunction drugs out there, drugs that may not have the same side effects for your husband. And low to very low doses of Viagra—doses less likely to induce a headache—are effective for some men. Good luck.

Partner and I adopted a 2.5-year-old mutt a month ago. We are also trying to get pregnant and are having sex every day for 15-day stretches a month. Dog does NOT like being shut out—we love dog but do not love the idea of him being in the room. Should we get over it? Should dog get over it? What is dog/human sexual privacy etiquette?

Don't Oversee Getting It On

I'm not into pups, human or otherwise, but I live with two actual dogs and, man, if those dogs could talk. Some dogs loudly object to their owners fucking, others don't. If your dog barks when you're fucking, I can see why you'd want to keep him out of the room. But if he just wants to curl up in a corner and lick his ass for a minute before dozing off, what's the big deal?

I am a 30-year-old woman with some sexual hang-ups I'd like to get past for the sake of my husband. When I was 14, I was in a relationship with a guy who wasn't nice to me. One particular incident sticks in my mind: He pulled my hair and tried to force my head down while I was saying no and trying to get away. He shoved me and called me a prude. Another time, he convinced me to let him go down on me (I finally agreed) but then bit me. I eventually broke up with him after spending too much time putting up with the crap. For a long time, I hated oral sex and freaked out at any sexual interaction. I had a great college boyfriend who always asked "Is this okay?" and was generally very attuned to any "no" signals I gave, which was a turn-on for me. I got over my past crappy experiences. My husband is all about what gives us both pleasure, but he has always been up-front about being interested in some (tame) kinky stuff. I am still turned on by "Is this okay?" and eye contact during sex, but any time we try to do anything even a little off the wall—me tied up, blindfolds, etc.—my ears start ringing and I feel like I can't breathe. I'm trying to find a way to spice things up and fulfill my husband's desires, and I cannot find a way around it. How do we move past "just" vanilla?

Reconsidering Otherwise Unlikely GGG Habits

If your shitty early teenage sexual experiences—if those violations and sexual assaults—are still affecting you 16 years later, ROUGH, that suggests PTSD. Getting past this will be gradual, it may require therapy—counseling, a support group, a shrink.

While you're getting help, ROUGH, you and your partner can explore some mild non-vanilla moves. Mindful breathing, like the kids are into these days, may help, and so will incorporating some soothing sensory input, e.g., soft lighting, calming music, scented something-or-other if you enjoy scented somethings. And whatever your husband is doing—whatever you two are doing together—he can and should ask "Is this okay?" at every step. It turns you on and it makes you feel safe. You need to feel safe and in control. Slowly, slowly, slowly you may be able to advance to more aggressive play. It's possible, however, that rough sex might be permanently off the table for you, ROUGH, and that's not something you should feel guilty about. There are other ways to spice up your sex life, other (tame) kinks that don't trigger you.

Check out Dan on Blabbermouth—The Stranger's political podcast: thestranger.com/blabbermouth.

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