



Light My fire

Married sex has long been the butt of so many jokes. But relationship sexpert Esther Perel, author of *Mating in Captivity: Reconciling the Erotic & the Domestic* (HarperCollins, 2006) says it is possible to two-step your way around the dreaded married sex curse.

—Interview by Catalina Margulis

2: Why does sex seem to go sour, or disappear altogether, in long-term partnerships?

Perel: There is a paradoxical relationship between our need for security, safety and stability on the one hand and the fact that eroticism thrives on novelty, mystery and even risk. What eroticism needs is often what family life defends against: the unpredictable, the unexpected, the transgressive. Desire is often powered by the very ingredients that we seek to tame in our domestic lives.

2: So how do we reconcile the erotic and the domestic?

Perel: Reconciling the two is about bringing together two contradictory human needs: our need for security and our need for adventure. In other words, our need for connection and intimacy and our need for space and independence. The task is about finding a balance where people are allowed, in the context of their relationship, to experience both the closeness and the freedom. A little kid who sits on your lap and feels

nested and secure and then jumps off to run and explore and discover, for example, experiences the confluence of closeness and autonomy. So too do adults need to balance these two needs.

Fire needs air and too often today's couples don't give each other enough air.

2: Failing sex lives are often seen as a scheduling problem, with better time management as the prescription. Your thoughts on this?

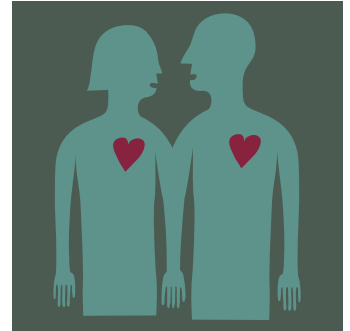
Perel: The pragmatic can-do attitude toward sex focuses on measurable results, frequency, number of orgasms, etc. But the erotic is mightily inefficient: It has no other purpose than cultivating pleasure for its own sake. The erotic deals with the poetics of sex, what keeps sex alive, not how often you have sex and if all the organs function and perform their tasks.

2: So is it possible to bring the erotic home?

Perel: It is a challenge. We carry inside of us the idea that this is not okay, so we have some disentangling to do in our heads. In order to bring these erotic parts of ourselves to our partner, we have to stop regarding marital sex as simply something wholesome, or as a statement of long-lasting, abiding love, but rather as furtive, imaginative, naughty, playful. But it's scary, and that is the main obstacle. We are afraid to show ourselves naked in front of the person we love—our erotic nakedness, the way our deepest wishes, needs, desires are expressed through sex.

2: Is there a danger in sharing our deepest, darkest desires with our partners?

Perel: The sharing of fantasies with a partner has much to do with erotic fit. If you think it will enrich the relationship and introduce mystery, individuality and complicity, then do it. If you anticipate judgment, criticism and disgust, then keep your fantasies to yourself. Have your private garden up there in your head.



I LOVE YOU!

HERE ARE SPECIAL WAYS YOU HAVE SHOWED—OR BEEN SHOWN—THE LOVE. —Ian Harvey

- ♥ "Making dinner and doing the dishes when I've had a long day." —Trudy, Hampton, N.B.
- ♥ "She thinks I watch way too much soccer, but she bought me a Toronto FC season ticket." —Justin, Toronto
- ♥ "It could be the briefest touch when we passed in a hallway." —Donna, Louisdale, N.S.
- ♥ "He surprised me with a spa day...just because!" —Tina, Toronto
- ♥ "My wife and kids sent me to the Detroit Tigers Fantasy baseball Camp in Lakeland, Florida." —David, Toronto
- ♥ "We met briefly in Austria when I was 19. Eight years later I found him again on the web back in Canada. He sent me a package with a birthday card for every year we were apart. We married in 2005." —Heather, Calgary
- ♥ "He couldn't pick me up at the airport so he put 'I missed you' Post-it Notes all over the house—inside shoes, shirt cuffs, on mirrors, everywhere!" —Caroline, Toronto
- ♥ "On Valentine's Day he came over with a cooler of food and wine, wearing a tux. He cooked the most amazing dinner while I put on a nice dress. Let's just say he got his just deserts." —Tina, Toronto
- ♥ "When he said: 'I was asleep all my life until I met you!'" —Judy, Ottawa
- ♥ "Popping by the office to get my car keys to have my car washed and detailed." —Sylvia, Kingston, Ont.
- ♥ "I kidnapped him for a weekend alone and dinner theatre." —Louise, Pickering, Ont.



POLE POSITION!

No longer confined to seedy strip clubs, portable dance poles are springing up in people's homes, allowing couples to reconnect through playful fantasy. Oprah featured the well-known Lil' Mynx poles on her show, and Josh Duhamel ordered one for his and Fergie's pad. Instructional DVDs on exotic dancing and a variety of pole styles are available at lilmynx.com. —Katie Drummond