



The Art and Science of Lovemaking



Myths about Sex

THE GOTTMAN INSTITUTE Gott Sex?

MYTHS ABOUT SEX

MYTH #1: Romance will never ever change if it is real.

WRONG. *On the contrary, we think it's necessary to accept that in a long term relationship, things will change.*

It's a fact that couples who are doing well intimately have accepted that certain things in life are going to change as they live their lives together. Life is a moving target, one that requires adaptation. Just because things change between you doesn't mean that there's something wrong with your relationship. On the contrary, change can be good.

For example, those of you who are parents know how "different" things become once your baby is born. It's a fact of life that having a child will drastically affect sex, romance, and passion. Couples usually aren't too thrilled about this prospect, but the smart ones are able to cope with it and accept the changes that come home along with their new baby. They hang in there.

They don't blame the relationship itself. They realize that everyone goes through the same thing once a baby arrives, and they actively search for new ways to connect with one another. As a result, they become a better team. They share their feelings and frustrations with each other. They talk to other couples that also have kids and learn that everyone is truly in the same soup. Ultimately, they come to understand that it is life with a baby, not a flaw in their partnership, that's responsible for a decreased sex life.

Weight gains are also common in life, especially during pregnancy, and many women feel unattractive after giving birth. One woman in a study we did said she felt about as sexy as a potato after giving birth.

The humorist David Barry said that when your wife asks you if she looks fat in this dress, the only thing you can possibly do is fall on the floor and pretend you're having a heart attack. Any other response will get you into trouble.

Our data on couples whose sex lives are going well after having a baby actually supports David Barry's advice. Even if her body has changed, or if he just thinks that it has changed, the man needs to keep his mouth shut. He needs to not comment on weight gains. He needs to avoid suggestions that she work out, or eat differently, or be more like him. He needs to be understanding and patient.

Our Advice Regarding Change:

Accept the inevitability of change in your relationship and work with it. Never comment adversely about your attraction to your partner. Instead, continue to be affectionate and appreciative of all the things that you do find attractive about you partner. Remember, all appreciations are foreplay.

MYTH #2: Conflict will kill romance. Never complain and never fight.

WRONG. Instead of shying away from conflict, we recommend that you discuss your innermost feelings and don't avoid conflict.

This piece of advice may seem very hard to follow at first, but it is absolutely critical to trust. The late psychologist Shirley Glass had the deepest insights into extra-marital sexual affairs.

Essentially, she is the one who took infidelity out of the pulpit, and showed how natural it can be. She explained how in many cases there is a natural progression into an affair:

Here's what she found typically happens. After a baby arrives it is very likely for both partners to neglect one another. Sex declines, and even conversation time goes down dramatically. It is very common for both people to feel unappreciated, and a bit lonely.

So let's take one of our couples, Harry and Liz, and explain their story. Harry was feeling exhausted, neglected, horny, and lonely. One day Harry had a very interesting conversation at an office party with one of his coworkers, Helen. He and Helen laughed together, told each other the stories of their lives, and had fun talking.

Harry complained about how difficult life had become since the baby arrived. He complained that Liz was now so absorbed with the baby that there was no time for him anymore. Helen was very understanding. Harry felt much better. Nothing physical happened between Harry and Helen. There was no touching or hand-holding or kissing. But Harry found himself thinking of Helen, not Liz, on the drive home.

As Harry drove home he thought to himself,

"Liz and I haven't had that kind of fun together in a long time. I should go home and tell Liz about this conversation I just had with Helen. I should tell her that I am worried that we aren't having that kind of fun with each other anymore."

It seemed like a good idea but then Harry imagined Liz's reaction. He knew that she would be furious with him, and she'd be right. Harry felt guilty. Liz would tell him to grow up. He might even agree with her. She would tell him that life with a baby was no picnic for her either.

He knew that when she said these things, he would feel even more awful and guilty. So, he thought,

“ just
because
things
change
between
you
doesn't
mean
that
there's
something
wrong
with
your
relationship ”

“The hell with it, I just won’t say anything. Nothing really happened anyway. What she doesn’t know won’t hurt her.”

But then Harry had a secret. He didn’t tell Liz about Helen and this compromised his intimacy with Liz. What she didn’t know actually ended up hurting him. He was now protecting his secret friendship with Helen.

Metaphorically speaking, there are usually walls in a relationship to keep the world out, and a couple looks out the windows together at the rest of the world. But now that had changed for Harry. Now Helen had a window into Harry and Liz’s relationship, and there was a wall shutting Liz out of Harry and Helen’s relationship. A boundary had been crossed - a small one, but a boundary nonetheless.

Harry avoided Helen because he felt bad about having a secret from Liz. But Harry and Liz didn’t get the opportunity to repair their emotional distance. So the next time Harry and Helen talked, Harry was even lonelier. Harry and Helen very quickly got back to that place again where Harry was opening up, and this time Harry gave himself permission to touch Helen’s hand and gaze into her eyes.

He realized that she was quite attractive, and that he had feelings about her. He got scared and ended the encounter quickly. This time he was certainly not going to tell Liz about Helen.

Harry felt so awful about holding these secrets from Liz that he and Liz finally discussed the feelings they were most reluctant to share - feelings like being attracted to other people, and feeling lonely. It was a little bit of hell for a while.

But Liz had somehow known something was going on all along. Harry was surprised that Liz actually was relieved to hear about Helen - angry, but relieved. She had also been attracted to men, and had felt lonely. Their conversation was difficult, but it drew them closer. Harry then set up boundaries with Helen. Walls and windows were reversed to their original state.

Without discussing these types of feelings, couples will find that emotional distance builds up. It is a slow progression and very natural. Loneliness can leave us vulnerable to people outside our partnership. Walls and windows can quickly become reversed. Yet it does not mean Harry is an evil person, or that Liz is a bad partner, or Helen a home-wrecker.

Only by understanding this process can we start to heal from an affair if it has happened. And only by understanding this can we prevent an affair from happening in the first place.

Believe it or not, most affairs are not about sex. They are about finding someone to talk to who finds you interesting, amusing, listens to you, who laughs at your jokes and wants to spend time with you. Some of this process of bonding with a stranger is biologically based.

When we affiliate with and feel close to someone, particularly a potential sexual partner, the hormones oxytocin and vasopressin are secreted by the pituitary gland in our brain. Oxytocin is also the hormone associated with the milk letdown response in lactating mothers. In mammals both genders create oxytocin and vasopressin, and they are the hormone of affiliation and pair bonding. Men secrete these specific hormones when they make friends and become closer to another man; women also secrete these hormones when they make friends and become closer to another woman.

Since these hormones facilitate emotional bonding, part of what is happening to Harry is hormonal. By letting himself get closer to Helen, even innocently, his brain begins the process of bonding.

Over the years we have treated many couples that are recovering from an affair. People often tell themselves that no one will be hurt as long as the affair remains a secret. They think that if their partner doesn't know, nobody will be hurt.

But one thing we have learned is that even if an affair remains a secret, the person carrying the secret is hurt. That person's ability to be close and free with his or her partner has been irrevocably damaged. And unless they can talk about what happened, this damage will not ever be healed.

The process of recovering from an affair involves a lot of willingness to talk, to answer questions, and to get over the trauma of betrayal. The process of recovering from an affair often involves changing the relationship so that both partners can talk to one another when it is most difficult.

MYTH #3: Affectionate touch hurts the erotic part of a relationship.

WRONG. In your relationship, make sure to use lots of non-sexual affection, especially touch.

For the majority of men when it comes to sex, it's not that they want *more* sex. They want to feel *desirable*. They want to feel at times that their wives cannot help but touch them. How can a woman convey this? If she puts her arms around her man and says something like,

"You look so delicious and handsome in that blue shirt this morning, I can't keep my hands off you... I'm having very lewd thoughts!"

Then she has done it. That is every man's dream. And what is the major need we hear from women? They want to feel *desirable*.

For both men and women some of these needs can be met by non-sexual affection and words that express attraction. Non-sexual affection is important for both partners – one feels more desired, the other feels more desirable. One feels more intimate and emotionally closer to the other; they feel like allies, not adversaries. In fact, in our workshops we

recommend that people learn to give one another a 15-minute deep massage every day. Why?

It turns out that we are a very low-touch culture. A psychologist named Sidney Jourard observed couples out to dinner in several cities, recording how many times they simply touched one another. The average was 115 times an hour in Paris, and 185 times an hour in Mexico City. In London the average was zero.

In Gainseville, Florida it was 2 times an hour. Here in the USA we simply don't touch each other, or our children, very much. It's gotten worse in recent years with the advent of sexual abuse scandals in schools and churches. Now teachers and teachers' aides are advised not to touch children, even when very young children are physically hurt.

Psychologist Tiffany Field of the University of Miami has set up a "do touch" nursery school. Parents know that in her school their children will be physically comforted if they fall down. There are video cameras in the school to insure that there is no unwanted or inappropriate touch. However, in an experiment Field compared 60 means of physically comforting children with 60 methods of verbally comforting them. She found that 53 of the physical methods were effective, but only 3 of the verbal methods were effective. The "do touch" nursery works. Kids feel loved and safe there.

Field has also set up "touch research centers" throughout the world to study the effects of touch and massage. She has already conducted 95 studies on touch. The effects of touch are remarkable. Field discovered these effects when she herself had a premature baby. The baby was kept in an incubator and the parents weren't permitted to touch the baby. Field was inspired by this experience to conduct a study in which special incubators were designed for parents to give their very fragile premature 15 minutes a day of exercise. There was a control group of babies who received the standard hospital treatment. Babies who were massaged increased their weight 47% in ten days! No such large weight gains were observed in the other group. Field also found that there were dramatic effects on post-partum depression for mothers who received 15 minutes a day of massage. These effects were comparable to anti-depressants, but the massage doesn't have the problem that 35 to 50 percent of people stop taking it after two years, in part because of unwanted side effects (such as loss of sexual desire). People don't want to stop the massage. Massage also has the added effect that if dad is massaging mom, they have a way of literally staying "in touch" with one another, even when she is feeling no sexual desire.

MYTH #4: Asking directly for sex will kill romance.

WRONG: Make sure to honor the wishes of your partner, but ask directly when you want sex and make it a priority in your relationship.

For instance, take a woman we know whom we'll refer to as Mary. Mary recently gave birth to two children. Mary says that she is happier with her sex life now than she was before she and her husband had children.

Why? She says there is more openness in sexual communication now. Because there isn't as much time to connect sexually, she and her husband are forced to talk openly with one another if either of them wants to make love.

Mary never did this before she had children; in fact, she said that she actually had trouble being open with her husband in sexual discussions. If he wasn't interested in sex and she was, she thought,

"He must think that I'm unattractive."

Even when she was in pre-pregnancy shape she was still insecure. However, now that they talk openly about their feelings, Mary takes it much less personally when David isn't interested.

For many years in our 'Love Lab' we recorded heterosexual couples talking about their sexual issues. In general, most of these couples seemed embarrassed to discuss it. Conversations were often fuzzy or murky. From the actual content of their dialogues, it was very hard to tell what people were really talking about. Here's an excerpt of one of these conversations:

"So we're going to talk about this?"

"I guess so. So do you think it's gotten better?"

"Well, sure, it's gotten better, but there's still a long way to go."

"You don't like it?"

"Sure I like it, but there's a lot we can still do."

"Well at least we're not like Paul and Diane."

"I never said we were. I don't know how he puts up with her."

"He's no picnic either, I can tell you that."

"I know that, I don't know how they put up with each other."

"So we're okay?"

"Sure we're okay. But we could be better, right?"

"I have been trying."

"I know you have, and I appreciate that."

"Good."

See what we mean? This couple is uncomfortable asking directly for what they want. Maybe you're thinking that this is because a camera

and a camera operator were present, but in fact that isn't the case. Even when couples were home alone, using personal audio recorders that they had become used to, they were still vague and unclear about what they needed. They were very worried about rejection in the sexual domain.

This was not the case when we studied gay and lesbian couples talking to their partners about how to improve their sex lives. Altogether they were much more direct, far less embarrassed and much less defensive.

For instance, one man we interviewed said to his male partner,

"Who do you think initiated sex this morning?"

His partner said,

"Before we begin you know that your body isn't the kind I find most attractive, right?"

He answered,

"Yes, I know that, but who do you think initiated sex this morning?"

Can you imagine this same exchange between a heterosexual couple?

"Before we begin," says the husband, "you know that your body isn't the kind I find most attractive, right? Now, Judy, that neighbor of ours, she's really sexy, not like you." Now imagine the wife answering, "Yes, I know that, but whom do you think initiated sex this morning?" No chance! He'd be flying out the window. (Just to be clear, we are advocating SOME OF this kind of directness for heterosexual couples. This example may not be appropriate for all couples or situations.)



Open and effective communication about sex was also not a big problem for many Latino-American couples.

We learned this from doing a large national survey for the magazine *Reader's Digest*. In our survey, most Latino couples reported that they kept sex a priority even when children came along, and that they talked to each other about how to improve and keep improving their sex lives.

In addition, many said that they actually talked to one another *during* sex, and about their lovemaking *afterwards*. As a whole they were much more satisfied with their sex lives than any other population of couples we surveyed.

It looks like we have a lot to learn from the Latin cultures. Latino couples from all socioeconomic backgrounds seem to have made the sexual part of their relationship a top priority. Latino guys don't feel masculine unless they know what pleases their women, so they ask, and they listen.

Here's another cultural difference. Aside from Latino and gay couples, most American heterosexual couples tend to communicate indirectly about their amorous feelings for one another. They send out small "probes" to see if their partner is in the mood, and they say these indirect

things in a coy way.

For example, if one of them wants sex, he or she may flirtatiously say,

"Is it a little cold in here sweetie?"

Suppose their partner says,

"No. Not at all cold."

Then the response of the amorous partner might be,

"Let me check that stupid thermostat."

This kind of response would save face. It pretends that the attempt to connect didn't really have a sexual overture.

The reason that people ask indirectly for sex is because it is hard for most people to say,

"Would you like to make love?" and then hear their partner say, "No."

This is because when they hear "No," it feels like their partner is saying something like,

"Make love to you? No way. I'd rather walk the dog."

The rejected one takes it personally. So rather than risk hearing this, he or she prefers instead to ask indirectly or just not ask at all.

Accordingly, we want you to try not to ask indirectly for sex. Instead, agree with one another that you will ask for sex when you are in the mood, and then find a way to gently refuse it when you aren't. How do you do that? One way is to use a 9-point scale of amorous feelings, with 1 being "not at all" and a 9 being "extremely or very much" in the mood. Then one partner can say to the other,

"Honey, the kids are asleep and tonight I'm a 7. How about you?"

The reply can be,

"No, sorry, I'm a 2 tonight."

Or sometimes the response could be,

"I think I have been a 9 all day. Let's go to bed."

MYTH #5: Spontaneous sex is better than planned sex.

WRONG. Make sex a priority and make time for it (planned or not).

This sounds like a simple enough idea, but few couples actually make sex a priority. This is especially true in couples with new children. One of the most common complaints we hear from such couples is that sex feels like the last chore of the day. But it doesn't have to feel like a chore, even if it does come at the end of the day when the kids are asleep.

Stacey said,

"I'm worn out when the kids are finally in bed and everything is finally shut down. I will be in bed reading a book and he will put his arm around me, or

“ this
sounds
like a
simple
enough
idea,
but
few
couples
actually
make
sex
a priority ”

want to hug. I'll put down the book and think, 'okay, here comes my last obligation of the day.' But then he gets tender. I start warming up. It's a 5 or 10-minute transition to get me warmed up. But things have improved for me since the baby. Sex is better. It's happening less often but it's better when it does happen. I think that's because it's deeper now. There's love and respect, there's a sense of history together we never had when we were dating. There's the teamwork. He has learned to slow down and be tender and when I feel that, I melt inside. I'm ready.”

Mark said,

“Pre-baby we were at it a lot more. But it's not about not having enough time. That's not it. Our intimacy was completely blown open by having kids. There's so much more now, so many angles to it and more interesting dimensions in our relationship. There's us being mom and dad now and seeing our kid develop, and that adds to a growing love for each other that does play itself out in bed. Less frequency is not about being tired. Sure, I'm tired. My kid was up at 4 this morning. But there's a richness and a chaos that didn't exist before.” Mark said that for him, non-sexual touch fulfilled much of his need to be wanted physically.

MYTH #6: Keep a lot of mystery in your sex life.

WRONG. Talk about your sex life and what you like. Talk about what felt good, and how to make it better.

An important factor in making their sexual relationship work is a couple's willingness to talk about sex, and to discuss what might make it better. However, as you've seen, having a talk with one's partner about sex isn't such an easy thing for most heterosexual couples to do. Many of us need some guidance. What does a good conversation about sex look like? Here are four ground rules that, ideally, should be met:

Ground rule 1:

Both people have agreed that they will be honest, but very gentle with one another.

Ground rule 2:

Both people should mainly emphasize what they like in bed, instead of what they don't like.

Ground rule 3:

Both people should compliment one another, remembering and reminiscing about the good times they have had in bed together.

Ground rule 4:

Both people should try to remain open-minded, and realize that over time they will become better lovers of one another if they talk about sex.

In one of our workshops, during an exercise, one couple had stopped talking to each other. We stepped in and asked them what the problem

was. The man said that he was very hurt. When asked why, he said,

"I make love a certain way. It's my way. If she doesn't like it, too bad. There is my way, and there is always the highway."

We asked about how we learn to give a good massage to our partner. This man quickly said that he simply would ask her what felt good and what didn't. After he answered that question it was as if a light bulb went off in his head. He said,

"I get it. Is that what you want?"

His partner said,

"That's it."

We told him that it was very common for people to feel the way he did. We often take feedback about our lovemaking as a personal rejection. That's why most couples in the USA prefer not to talk with one another about sex at all.

MYTH #7: If sex is not always "love-making," it will destroy love.

WRONG. Have quickies and see that they are as important as gourmet sex.

Couples whose sex life is doing well seem to have accepted that sometimes sex is going to be a quick (perhaps rapid) release for one or both parties. For hetero couples, they find other ways for her to have an orgasm during quickies, through manual manipulation. Sometimes she is okay with only him having an orgasm; many women talk about this as giving him "a sexual gift." These women are not angry about the fact that sex is sometimes satisfying for him, but not for her. But some women also enjoy a quick sexual release. These couples speak openly about "quickies," and they sometimes ask one another for a quickie. They find ways to feel close to one another during these less romantic and less gourmet sexual encounters. Again, important components for successful quickies are the presence both of verbal and physical affection.



MYTH #8: Love needs to happen on its own, or it's worthless.

WRONG. Really take time for romance, passion, gourmet sex, and getaways.

There's an old adage that a man needs sex to open up to love but that a woman needs love to open up to sex. We asked couples whether they thought the adage fit them. Most couples said that even though the saying is overly simplistic, there's a basic truth to it. Both men and women said that they had experienced great sex in the past with no love present at all, but in their current relationship they found the adage to be mostly true. Men say that it is true that their heart opens up much more when they are having regular sex, that something closes down when they don't feel desired by their women. Fred said,

"When we're having sex, I can listen to her much better than when I feel deprived and sorry for myself."

Women tend to say that men forget about romance too much, and men tend to say that women disregard men's sexual feelings too much. Making time for romance and passion is very different from making time for quick sexual encounters. Romance and passion emerge from maintaining and deepening friendship, and keeping courtship alive and well. It is important to remember that.

MYTH #9: Masturbation is selfish. It will take away from a couple's sexual life.

WRONG. Accept masturbation to orgasm, and oral sex (if you enjoy it).

The famous Sex in America study reported that married and cohabiting people have more sex than single people. The study also reported that despite having more sex than single men, married men also masturbate more than single men. Accepting masturbation is important for the sexual health of a couple.

Couples whose sex lives are doing well seem to have reached an acceptance of many different kinds of sexual experiences within their lives with each other, including some forms of masturbation. That can be masturbation alone or together.

When that acceptance does not happen, it can cause an enormous rift in a relationship. For example, James and Brenda were having a lot of conflict. Brenda was very angry with James because one day she walked in on him masturbating to Internet pornography. She felt very hurt by this, betrayed even. She explained how it made her feel rejected when he was masturbating to pictures of other women's bodies. James said that he understood, and he promised not to do it again. But James actually didn't understand Brenda's position; he gave in to avoid more conflict with her,

and he tried to be more discreet. But then a few months later the same thing happened. Brenda unexpectedly showed up at home when he was doing the same thing. Brenda said that at that moment her trust in the relationship was shattered.

Why was this experience so hard for this couple? Why was it so difficult for Brenda to accept James' masturbation? The answer is that unlike pornography, sex is personal. Unless it is accepted by both people, pornography can seem like non-monogamy to some people. In this case, the feeling was also heightened by the recent birth of their child.

Brenda gave us some understanding of the dynamics operating during her interview. She talked about how much her own sexuality had changed after having a baby. She said that even though James helped with cooking and cleaning and was a great father, she found herself angry with him a lot. She explained,

"All Anna really wants is me, me, me. I am the primary parent, even though James tries very hard. But he's just not enough for her. So I can't have any kind of life of my own. But he can."

There was more to the story. Brenda went on to explain that she had always initiated everything in the relationship. She was the prime mover. In their courtship she was the one who wrote poems to James, not the other way around. She also almost always initiated sex. Sometimes James turned her down. So seeing him masturbate to pictures of other women really hurt. But there was still more to the story.

Many times when a woman becomes a mother her own sexuality changes even if she doesn't plan on it. Brenda was a very attractive woman, and she was used to men lustfully staring at her body, checking her out. Brenda said that she couldn't adjust to the fact that men no longer stared at her since she had become a mother. Why was that, she asked? Then she answered her own question.

She had recently been alone at a shopping mall, wearing a sexy dress, and she had walked by three young men sitting around a fountain. They looked up only briefly, then turned away. She was crushed. She immediately rushed home, took off all her clothes and looked in a full-length mirror at her naked body. She said, *"I am more buff now than before the baby. Why didn't they look at me lustfully?"* At first Brenda couldn't understand this change. But as the interviewer asked questions, Brenda admitted that her mind at the moment she walked by those three men was filled with thoughts of errands and to-do lists. She was a mom on a mission to get things done. When asked more about what she was feeling at that moment, she said that, as always, she was angry at James,

"I'm always angry at him."

She laughed when she said this, and added,

“Probably these thoughts of mine didn’t transmit a sexy image, or a sexually available one, to these guys.”

Brenda was right. Women’s sexuality definitely changes when a baby arrives. As we know, it’s an incredibly exhausting and busy time. A great deal of her mind is also preoccupied with the biological survival of this baby. Psychiatrist Daniel Stern calls this “the motherhood constellation.” He would say that the mechanisms operating in Brenda are primarily a natural biological preoccupation with the baby. Mother bears can fend off a dangerous predator three times her size to protect her cubs. The system that makes her nurturant is coupled with the anger-rage system, and makes her fierce at times. That’s part of the motherhood constellation. And part of that is biology. It’s why we survived as a species.

We think Stern is right in many ways. However, we disagree that the changes in Brenda are only caused by biology and that they are necessities. We also take a *couples* view of what is going on for Brenda. There was a lot that James contributed toward Brenda’s not feeling sexy or attractive, and toward her anger. He didn’t initiate most things in their relationship. He also didn’t initiate sex very much. He often said, “No” to Brenda’s initiations. What may be the most harmful is that he was never very romantic with Brenda. Once she stopped being romantic toward him, and once she doubted her own attractiveness, the sexual energy drained out of their relationship and was replaced with anger. Brenda actually needed James to be romantic more than she ever had before. But instead James turned to internet porn.

How do couples manage their differences in sexual desire and in how romantic they are? Mary and David found a great way to manage. Mary said that when she married she had a lot to learn about men and masturbation. It was also against her religious upbringing. She had no brothers growing up, and she was somewhat sheltered. At first, she was put off by David’s talking about his masturbating. Then she talked to other people about masturbation, as well as to David. She asked him questions about his sexual development, and came to accept masturbation as healthy.

Some women also use masturbation when their men aren’t in the mood, or just for fun. They talk to their men about it, and it can draw them closer. Sometimes the men help their women to have an orgasm. The important point seems to be an acceptance of many different kinds of sexual experience.

Mary now enjoys giving oral sex to David, but she has to remind him that women like oral sex too. She has now learned to ask for it when she wants it. David finds that very sexy. Mary sometimes assists David’s having an orgasm by helping him masturbate. Some women whose sex

lives are doing well after the baby are tolerant of their man's masturbation, but prefer not to help him have an orgasm. Both accommodations seem to work equally well.

Aiesha says that she is a big supporter of masturbation as well as oral sex. If she isn't in the mood for sex, she will ask Leon to rent one of the sex videos they both like and she will help him have an orgasm. Leon looks forward to these sessions, but he says that love-making is better. Karma tells Bob that all he has to do is ask for oral sex and it's his. Many different accommodations are possible, but all these couples have found a way with masturbation or oral sex to open a door to sexuality or to keep it open.

MYTH #10: Men and women are not different in the area of sex.

WRONG. Realize that in most cases he's a microwave and she's a crock pot.

No couple only has one kind of sex. There's a wide range within each couple, and even more range across couples. However, here's a story we kept hearing over and over again among partners. For her, sex is a slow buildup; for him it's a quick release. Men often turn toward a woman for sex once they are physically aroused and have an erection. But she isn't there yet. When sex is working well they both say that he needs to first be aware of her arousal rather than his own. One of our men said that he realized he is as fast as a microwave oven and she is as slow as a crock-pot. We really liked that image.

What does that actually mean? It means that when sex is working well, he has learned to slow way down, to caress and to touch her slowly, to talk first, and perhaps to talk to her during sex. He tells her how much he loves her and how much he finds her attractive, and she talks to him. That doesn't mean, though, that every sexual encounter needs to be like this, as the next two secrets reveal.

MYTH #11: Sexual fantasies are private. Discussing sexual fantasies will hurt a relationship.

WRONG. Talk about your sexual fantasies.

Many couples whose sex life is going well playfully share their own fantasies of what they find erotic. As we grow up, we all develop a "map" of the things we find particularly sexy. This map may change over time. When partners talk to each other about what they find especially sexy and then talk about these images during sex, or act them out during a sexual encounter, they are honoring one another's fantasies. They are making what we call a "sexual love map" of each other.

“ for
many couples
opening up
one's
fantasy
life
can be
one of the
most intimate
things
that ever
happens
in the
bedroom ”

Opening up this aspect of your inner lives to one another takes a great deal of courage and a high level of trust. So start small and try things that are mild. Build your trust in sharing your fantasies slowly. For many couples opening up one's fantasy life can be one of the most intimate things that ever happens in the bedroom.

Here are some examples of shared fantasies. One couple pretended to be strangers picking one another up in a night club for an illicit sexual encounter. They acted out this fantasy all evening and continued it in the privacy of their bedroom. Another couple pretended that she was his boss at work and she seduced him. Some fantasies focus on particular sexual acts such as cunnilingus or fellatio, or they focus on specific body parts. Some fantasies involve actually dressing up in particular clothes and pretending.

In general, men's fantasies tend to be more visual and brief, while women's tend to be longer with more narrative and emotional content. For example, there are fantasies that involve control; fantasies involving sexually confident women (including domination and bondage fantasies); strangers meeting on a plane; the seduction of professors, pastors, teachers, journalists; a woman's being dominated by a man and ordered to do the things she really finds erotic; taboo breaking fantasies (for example, pretending to have sex in public places, or with more than one partner, or group sex); temporary changes in gender and dress; switching roles; and so on.

An internet search on this subject will produce many websites listing men's and women's top sexual fantasies. Don't put too much stock in these, but they do provide some ideas of what other people's fantasies are. Some couples use written or visual pornography together for new ideas about what they might find arousing and erotic. Then they role-play these stories and fantasies in their own sex life. Acting out sexual fantasies often involves talking to one another in role during sex.

Some couples use erotic material to stimulate their sexual fantasies, and some couples do not. Mark said that he and Marge have only used erotica in the past eight months, which *"has come from a mutual desire to have more fun. She knows my fantasies now, and she never did before. And now I know hers. It's very cool."* This exploration and openness can lead to other new sexual experiences. Mark went on to say that *"she teaches me about the holiness of sex, the healthiness of it. She's more adventurous than I am and I like that."* Adventure and playfulness are important to Mark and Marge.

