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7
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7

SEX

LET'S TALK ABOUT IT



eternal flame

San Francisco sex and intimacy coaches Celeste Hirschman and Danielle Harel (www.celesteanddanielle.com) are more than qualified to instruct you and your partner on the pleasures of the flesh—the secrets to a controlled ejaculation and full-body orgasm only skim the surface of their expertise—but they warn that while such skills can make a good relationship better, they aren't substitutes for frequent tête-à-têtes. "Men and women have very different ideas of intimacy," says the 34-year-old Hirschman (near left), a certified sexological bodyworker with an M.A. in human sexuality from San Francisco State. "While sex can be very intimate for men, women usually need an additional emotional layer." Sound familiar? "Men tend to tense up when women get emotional," says the Israeli-born Harel (far left), who recently received her doctorate from SF's Institute for the Advanced Study of Human Sexuality. "Women can solve their own problems. They just need to be heard." Not exactly an aha! moment—every therapist from Dr. Ruth to Dr. Phil preaches communication as the key to healthy partnerships—but judging by Hirschman and Harel's sold-out workshops and booked-solid private sessions, we're still not getting it. "Most of us don't really know ourselves, so how can we possibly understand someone else?" asks Harel. The first half of the duo's workshop "Become an Extraordinary Lover," at the SF Center for Sex and Culture on August 20, will focus on building personal intimacy—sexual confidence, positive body image and flirting—while the second half translates those skills for the benefit of mankind. "World peace through better sex," claims Hirschman. "Now there's an aha! moment."

ALL'S FAIR IN LOVE AND WAR, BUT YOU SHOULDN'T RUSH INTO EITHER ALONE. ENTER CUPID'S CRONIES, FOUR LOCALS WHO COME TO THE RESCUE, WHETHER YOU FUMBLE AT THE BEGINNING, MIDDLE OR END OF THE AFFAIR. BY LEILANI LABONG PHOTOGRAPHY BY JEREMY HARRIS

rules of engagement

eye on the prize

Gone are the days when your friends and family merely made up your cell-phone plan; if Dawn Miller has her way, they'll be responsible for your love life as well. The Pac Heights resident recently launched MatchmakingMoms.com, a new concept in online dating that takes the pressure off wary, bashful and halfhearted singles by enlisting the natural matchmakers in their lives. What started as a joke between girlfriends has materialized into a website that puts loved ones in charge of finding suitable prospects for their dearest. "Since our mothers always seemed to meet these 'perfect guys,' we figured we'd let them network and do the job for us," laughs Miller. If love is a battlefield, mothers (and fathers, friends, siblings and kids) man the front lines, creating and researching the profiles themselves and actually arranging dates for their singletons. "I liked the idea of being one step removed from the process, because I was really uncomfortable with online dating," says the 32-year-old Miller, who was leery of insincere suitors (her mother helped her weed them out) and wouldn't even post a photo on her Yahoo Personals profile. "It was a security issue for me." This month, Miller is celebrating her one-year anniversary with Matt, a triathlete and real-estate sales associate she met online while "doing research" for MatchmakingMoms. Using her seven years of management experience at a local Internet startup ("I really learned how to do this from the bottom up," she says), Miller predicts a more-than-500-percent increase in profiles within the next six months. At press time, there were only 100. "It's a tried-and-true approach," Miller says confidently. "Matchmakers have been at work for thousands of years."



split ends

The Crayola-colored world of *Breakup Girl* (a cartoon superhero for the lovelorn) features Paul the Intern as one of her trusty sidekicks: A cuddly, lovable man who fruitlessly bakes scones, builds lofts and donates bone marrow in hopes of winning a woman's heart. Sadly, being Mr. Nice Guy is not a fate that escaped 34-year-old KQED producer Paul Sullivan—Paul the Intern's real-life alter ego. "I was once dumped by a girl who was so uncomfortable with how nice I was that she broke up with me by accusing me of stealing a dollar from her wallet," recalls the New England native (now a Palo Alto resident), whose good friend and shoulder-to-cry-on, NYC writer Lynn Harris, debuted *Breakup Girl* in her 1996 book, *He Loved Me, He Loves Me Not* (Avon). "The Dollar Girl" character soon made her way into *Breakup Girl* lore alongside Paul the Intern, with appearances in the advice column and comic strip (www.breakupgirl.net), animated cartoon and live variety show. "Breakup Girl told Paul that if he kept acting like a friend, he would only be viewed as a friend," says Sullivan, who took the advice to heart and is now suffering from wedded bliss with Lisa, his wife of nearly three years. "It sounds basic to me now, but it's pretty fucking confusing when you're down in the trenches." Also Harris' go-to for the lowdown on the straight-male experience, Sullivan has donated other romantic ghosts from his past—a mute, a racist and a fiery opera singer who fell in love with another man ("It sounds harsh, but it's beautiful in the original Italian," he jokes)—for use in the caped crusader's exploits. "Breakup Girl could have easily assumed the 'all-the-good-men-are-taken' position," says Sullivan. "But that's a lazy attitude unbecoming of a superhero."