

THE SEX DIARIES: *Couples' Edition*

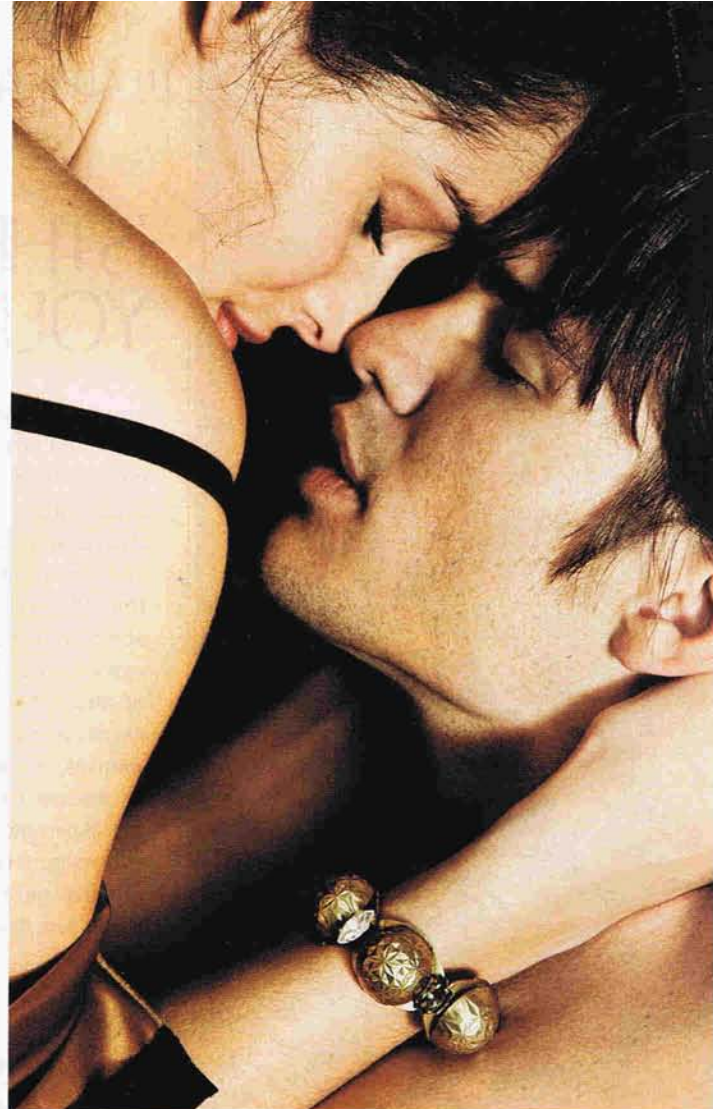
New York Magazine's weekly Sex Diaries – anonymous accounts of random New Yorkers' sex lives, with titles like *"The Cosmetician on the Rebound"* and *"The Mid-Divorce Mother"* – are the ultimate window into other peoples' bedrooms. We asked editor Arianne Cohen what these frank dispatches (which inspired a book, to be released in 2011) have taught her about long-term lust. BY LESLEY YOUNG

When it comes to sex, what's one of the biggest mistakes couples make? "People focus too much on intercourse as a measure of whether their sexual relationship is good or not, particularly as they get older. Comparing your sex life to the one you had when you were younger is a useless metric. You can have less sex the longer you're together as long as the quality is great."

Is there any single thing that defines those contented couples? "Yes, both partners know exactly what their needs are and both feel like they're on a path to getting them met. Actually getting those needs met is less important to them than feeling like they're moving forward. I read a lot of entries where one partner is complaining and blaming the other partner when, in reality, they just haven't clued in to the fact that they don't know what they really need."

How can you tell when a couple is going to last? "It's really obvious to me whose relationship will last and whose won't; where what one person is saying doesn't jive with what that person is doing. Some people write that they're happy in their marriage but that they're cheating; others say that they're really miserable but don't communicate that to their partner. What never ceases to amaze me is how little partners communicate to each other. To do that requires a previous step: being honest with yourself."

How common are open relationships? "About 20 percent of the relationships in the Diaries involve a third party, whether both partners are consenting [to that arrangement] or not. And for those couples where both partners have



agreed to be in an open relationship, the choice to have sex with others comes from a reasonable place. They've both decided that the other person is their favourite person in the world and there's nothing wrong with seeing what it's like to sleep with someone else. One couple tried it and then closed the marriage off again. The important thing is to look at relationships as flowing, not static. Forever doesn't carry much weight in the Diaries. People change over time, and that creates different phases in a relationship."

What's your best advice for couples who are trying to keep the passion alive? "Look at the number of positive interactions you have with your spouse every day. How many times did he give you a hug or make a funny face that made you laugh? Those moments add up, and they are what define a happy marriage in the long run." ▶

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