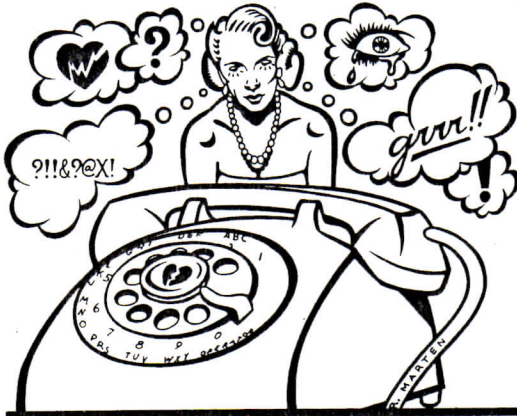


Ms. 9/76

WHEN HE SAYS,

"I HAVE A HEADACHE..."



"Sexual rejection. I had experienced waiting for the phone call that was never made. But now I was going out to meet rejection head-on, with no excuses and no armor..."

When I was 10, I asked a boy in my class if he would go to a party with me. He said no, and though I wasn't surprised (What boy in his right mind would want to go anywhere with a girl whose socks were always slipping into her shoes and whose pleated skirts never lay flat on her behind?), I was embarrassed that I had had the nerve to ask at all. And for the next 10 years I didn't do it again.

I did, however, call a boy six years later. It was 1957, I was 16, and the boy was my "steady." All through the school year we had talked on the phone during the week and gone to movies and parties on the weekend. He had always called me. Until the night he suggested that I call him for a change. The following day I realized the enormity of what I had promised to do. Anxiety settled around me like a horsehair crinoline. I ate dinner with a shaking hand. Afterward I went straight to my room, sat down on the floor, and put the telephone in front of me. It was seven o'clock, too early, I felt, to make the call. The exact time I dialed seemed almost magically important, as if only by calling at precisely the right

moment could I avert some fearful, undefined consequence. I couldn't call too early, because then I would seem too eager. And I couldn't call too late, because for all I knew his parents went to bed at eight o'clock.

At precisely 20 minutes of eight I started to dial. Halfway through the number I slammed the receiver down! What if his mother or father answered the phone? What would they think of me, a girl, calling up their son? Would they think I chewed gum and wore tight skirts and pin curls under a Woolworth kerchief? Clearly I had to have a smooth bit of patter for such a contingency. I rehearsed "Hello, Mr. or Mrs. McBurney. I'm a friend of Eddie's. Could I please speak to him?" Then I dialed the number. After the second ring—it was then that I learned that a telephone takes seven seconds to ring twice—Eddie, bless him, picked up the phone himself. I'd done it.

In 1957 the lines of communication between male and female went strictly one way, *from him to her*. To try and reverse the order was perilous and in most cases futile. I remember a friend who went out on a blind date with a boy she really

liked. She hoped he would call again, but when he eventually did, he asked her out on a night she couldn't accept. Afraid that he would think she didn't want to see him, she quickly suggested another night when she was free. To this he acidly replied: "Sure. When do you want to pick me up?" She had stepped out of line and her retribution had been swift. One wonders what would have happened had her overtures been sexual. In 1957, when it came to matters sexual, the man initiated and the woman reacted, either accepting his advances or rejecting them.

However, things are changing for me and women like me. We're learning we are sexual in our own right, and that asking for sexual attentions which give us pleasure does not make us ballbreakers.

But, I've learned, there are problems. For one thing, as I was reevaluating my sexuality and the sexual system during the late sixties and early seventies, I discovered, men were not. And for another, as I made the leap from sexual respondent to initiator, I found that making demands also meant taking the risk that those demands would in some cases be

BY BETTE-JANE RAPHAEL

rejected. Sexual rejection. I had experienced that, but only passively—waiting for the invitation that didn't come, and the phone call that was never made. But now I was going out to meet rejection head-on, with no excuses and no armor.

It wasn't a game I felt especially equipped to play. Although men have found me attractive, I am not what you could call confident about my appearance or my appeal. I work hard to *appear* confident, but it's not the same thing. I am like many other women—a mixture of poise and fear, independence and loneliness, talent and blindness, exuberance and neurosis.

It was with this rather delicate balance that I first put myself on the line at a party two summers ago—a fine party, loud and friendly and loose. I was rested from a day at the beach and I knew a lot of people in the huge room. I was having a good time.

About an hour after I arrived, a man turned up with whom I had once had a brief affair. As I watched him from across the room, I felt the distinct, unmistakable stirring of desire. I made my way to his side. He seemed pleased to see me, and we stood talking about nothing very important for several minutes until, grasping my drink and my courage in both hands, I suggested that we finish up the evening at my apartment. At this point he shifted his eyes away from me uncomfortably. "Not tonight," he said. "Perhaps another time."

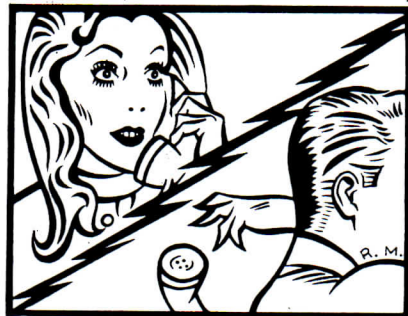
It was as if he had taken a small hammer and tapped lightly at the thin ice of my ego. The resulting cracks branched out from my center to all my edges. It was a shattering, a thunderous tap, one that I was sure everyone in the room had heard. With feelings of acute embarrassment and censure for my own temerity, I quickly left the party.

I vowed I would never again put myself in the position of facing such humiliation. But I was wrong. I could never go back to waiting for

the phone to ring. I had become an adult woman, ready to care for my own needs—and that included my sexual needs. Even if that meant risking rejection.

Sharing my experience and my decision with friends, I found that many women were facing the same dilemma and ultimately making the same, or nearly the same, decision I had made.

Yet, only one woman among the dozens I talked to seems completely comfortable with her sexual assertiveness. A writer in her mid-twenties, she credits her happy state to her work: "I find that the more recognized I am in my work, the less hesitant I am about putting my sexuality on the line; and that the more it seems right that men *should* find me attractive, the less a sexual defeat throws me. Now I have my professional identity



as well as my sexual identity. If the professional identity is empty, then the sexual identity weighs more heavily in the scale of things and a defeat there is more devastating."

However, none of the other women I spoke with feel so happily unconcerned about sexual rejection. Most of them recalled some private, agonizing experience as they learned they couldn't necessarily have what they wanted just by making their wants known.

"Sexual rejection, for me, is really the bottom line," a young photographer told me. "I mean if a guy is at my apartment after dinner and tells me he's tired, after I've expressed a wish that he quote, stay, unquote (all of which happened two nights ago), then I feel pretty wiped out. It's taken me a long time to reach the point where I

can say 'stay.' I grant that it's a euphemism—I still can't say in so many words 'let's go to bed'—but getting a no, no matter how euphemistically it's expressed, still wipes me out. After it happened the other night I looked at my face and my body in the mirror with distaste. After all, we were brought up to believe that they were the only important things we had to offer, and my offer had been turned down. I know that was a ridiculous response, and I'm trying to overcome it, but on the gut level it's still there."

A teacher in her early thirties, who recently met a very attractive man at a friend's house, reports that she "called him up and suggested that we get together for a drink. After that I asked him to dinner at my apartment. I was excited. It seemed to me very healthy that I was going after something I wanted. We didn't have sex, although I hinted at it the second night we were together, but that didn't bother me. I reasoned that he must have liked being with me to have accepted my invitations, and that he was probably just socially and sexually laconic. Then one day I called to invite him to a play. Before I could say anything more than hello, he said he couldn't talk but would call me later. Even as he said it I knew he wouldn't. And as I put down the phone I experienced a stab of pain and embarrassment so sharp that I could feel it physically. The pain was because he didn't want to see me, the embarrassment was due to the realization, at the same moment, that I'd ignored all the signals he'd been putting out since I met him."

According to a young female psychologist, who has herself fought several battles with sexual rejection, these two women and many others like them are rightfully excited with their newfound ability to tune into their body signals and ask to have their sexual needs fulfilled. But they may run into the problem of getting so

caught up with looking inside that they forget about looking outside, to the man, and gauging his mood and feelings. As a result they may find themselves being rejected by men they would never have approached in the first place—if they had looked at them more closely and judged more accurately.

A divorced woman in her mid-thirties found herself learning this

down men because I didn't feel sexy, or because I didn't feel good about my body at the moment—for a million different reasons that had nothing to do with the men themselves. And I feel I had the right to keep those reasons private, and I accord men that same privacy."

Even when a woman does try to read a man's sexual signals, she is not immune from a sexual put-

their problem. But one guy said, 'Hey, I'm not Superman!' Superman? What did that make me? Spiderwoman? I really think he wanted to make *me* feel like the one with a problem. And for a while I did."

To a lesser degree, this cold-shoulder-to-warm-response reflex is being described by women who aren't getting as far as the bedroom. "I had gone out with a man who took me back to his apartment after dinner and began making sexual advances," a graduate student told me. "At first I was apathetic, but when I got into it and began to really enjoy myself and initiate my own maneuvers, he became perceptibly cooler and suggested that we go to a movie. I felt distinctly reprimanded, as if I had done something wrong and was being punished for it. I honestly think he didn't want to have sex with me unless he felt he was seducing me. I was angry, but I was also a bit shaken. I mean it was scary to think that I had brought about his rejection simply by being myself and enjoying myself."

"A couple of times I've detected in men the same sexual skittishness traditionally associated with women," reports an attractive secretary. "In shying away from a sexual encounter, men have said to me things like 'I don't want to get involved in a heavy relationship,' or 'Let's not get too intimate right away.' They seem almost to be getting more romantic, in direct proportion to women becoming more sexual. I respect whatever position a man might take, as I expect a man to respect whatever mine might be; I just hope that the historical sexual polarization between men and women doesn't remain a constant, with a simple exchange of each other's poles."

Perhaps the most painful episode I heard in these sexual rejection scenarios occurred to a woman who agreed to meet with the boyfriend of a friend who was visiting from California. "We had dinner and a marvelous time," she

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One guy said, 'Hey, I'm not Superman! Superman? What did that make me? Spiderwoman?'

"do unto others" principle of sexual exchange the hard way. "I called a man pretty late one night. We talked for a bit and then he said that he was tired. I responded by saying I was horny, and when he didn't take me up on it, I felt rejected, hurt, and disappointed. Then later on I remember thinking it was very possible that I had been totally insensitive to him. After all, I know I'd be angry if a man called me late at night and wanted to come over and screw me. I'd feel used, and maybe that's how he felt." When I asked this woman whether she would ever again ask a man to make love to her, she thought for a minute before answering and then resolutely said, "Yes, probably. But I'd assess the situation and the guy's signals first."

A 27-year-old woman, who feels quite at home asking a man for sexual satisfaction, rejects the idea that very often when a woman gets rejected it's her own fault. "I'm not buying that any more. I refuse to say to myself, 'If only I were less aggressive, or more attractive, or more anything, then he'd have wanted to make love to me.' Crap. I figure it may just be where he's at at the moment; it may have nothing to do with me. After all, I've turned

down. As one 40-year-old divorced mother of three told me, "I don't make a move until I feel there is a mutual sexual tension between myself and a man. If I'm not getting sexual vibes from him, I don't make any overt sexual invitations. Unfortunately, sometimes when I *do* feel those vibes, and I *do* proffer an invitation, I find the man suddenly withdrawing in the face of my assertiveness. That happens a lot, but then I figure it's his problem. If he can't hack it, he's no great loss."

Unfortunately, a woman may find herself in bed with a man who can't hack it, and there she faces the most frustrating rejection of all: impotence. Whether that impotence is actually caused by her sexual assertiveness, or whether it's a long-standing problem of her partner's that has little to do with her attitude, is beside the point. The problem is that she may *experience* it as a personal rejection, one based on her assertive behavior.

In some cases she may even get a little push in this direction from her partner. As a lovely, sexually active dancer told me: "It's happened several times. I've gotten into bed with a man, feeling aroused and wanting to arouse him—and then, nothing. Some men will admit it's

math anxiety. Students talk about their associations with math ("How did you feel when you entered this room today?") and their last positive math experience. The client may balk at in-depth analysis, or resist a thorough reeducation ("I only want to learn enough to understand the demand curve in my introductory economics course. No more than that.") And the quit-rate also is high.

In addition to diagnosis, we offer "standard" remedial sessions, reviewing algebra for the most part, though the instructors are willing to go back to fractions, percents, and long division if necessary; and "nonstandard" remedial work, still in the design stages. It is here that some development in spatial relations ability, or game-playing with math concepts may take place. Somewhere along the line, math has got to become fun, as well as make sense.

There is some risk that in focusing on math anxiety in women, feminist educators may unintentionally support the prejudice and

THE NEW NEW MATH

A few programs have begun to concentrate on improving the attitudes and achievement of very young women before math anxiety takes hold. "Math for Girls" is an eight-week, discovery-oriented course for 6- to 14-year-old girls, conducted by Nancy Kreinberg and Rita Liff at the Lawrence Hall of Science, University of California, Berkeley, Calif. 94720.

Several one-day conferences and seminars aim to stimulate high school girls' awareness of the variety of math-related fields open to them. On October 23, 300 seventh- to twelfth-grade girls will participate in math and science workshops, discussions, and lectures that are the second in a series of such conferences at Mills College, Oakland, Calif. 94613.

The Mathematical Association of America has established a visiting lecture-ship program, "Women and Mathematics," geared to tenth-grade girls. Regional information can be obtained from Eileen L. Poiani, St. Peter's College, Jersey City, N.J. 07306.

Several colleges have either full curriculums or workshops to prepare women students for entry into the calculus se-

quency required for advanced work in science and math. Contact Professor Lenore Blum, Department of Math and Computer Science, Mills College, Oakland, Calif. 94613, for information about the "Women in Science" program there. Lillian Faderman, Assistant Vice President for Academic Affairs, California State University, Fresno, Calif. 93740, can provide information about that university's tutoring and counseling program. A "Discovery Course in Elementary Mathematics and Its Applications" is part of a pilot program directed by Alice Schafer, Mathematics Department, Wellesley College, Wellesley, Mass. 02181. The program's aim is to develop new models for teaching math.

Sheila Tobias, Associate Provost of Wesleyan University, is codirector with Professor Robert Rosenbaum of the Math Clinic at Wesleyan University. The clinic is staffed by a learning disabilities counselor, Bonnie Donady, and Dr. Steven Shmurak, Jean Smith, and Susan Auslander.

A collection of papers on math anxiety may be obtained for \$3 from Sheila Tobias, Associate Provost, Wesleyan University, Middletown, Connecticut 06457.

Information about a one-week course or a week-end course for math-anxious women can be obtained from Ruth Afflack, Department of Mathematics, California State University, Long Beach, Calif. 90840. Information about an introductory math sequence for women is available from Professor Carolyn MacDonald, Physical Science Program, University of Missouri, Kansas City, Mo. 64110.

-Nancy Kreinberg

says. "Later on, back at my apartment, we began to make love. Then while we were still clothed, but when I was highly aroused, he got up, said it was fine to see me, and abruptly left. I know this might sound like an overreaction, but I respect my instincts and I'm convinced that he planned the whole evening to hurt me. I know he has always been jealous of the close relationship between me and my friend (who, incidentally, doesn't give a damn about sexual fidelity) and I am certain he planned the aborted sexual exchange as a vindictive act. It made me realize that with my awakened interest in sex, men can use it as a weapon against me, just as effectively as, traditionally, women were supposed to use it against men."

Obviously, there is still a great deal of distrust and misunderstanding among women and men vis-à-vis sex. But with more women choosing to face men as sexual equals, a growing rapprochement may be in the works. As one 25-year-old woman speculated: "Since men were always on the advancing side when it came to sex, I think I grew up assuming that men were always ready for, always wanted, sexual contact. So at first it threw me that a man could actually *not* want to make love to me if I indicated that I would be receptive and responsive to his advances. It made me reassess my assumptions about male sexuality, which was ultimately a good thing. I think it's as important that we rethink our inbred assumptions about them as it is that they rethink their assumptions about us."

A sexually fearless free-lance artist stated her growing empathy with men quite plainly: "Now I know how all those teenage boys felt when they called me for a date and I said I was 'busy.'"

Bette-Jane Raphael is an editor at "Working Woman" magazine, an actress, and a free-lance writer.