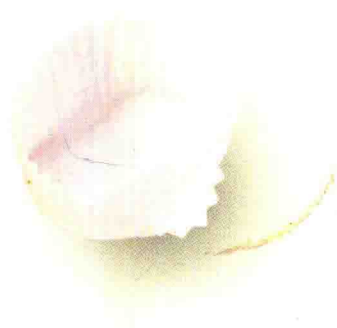


"If I had a choice  
between  
reading a good book and having sex,  
the book wins."

# *I'd Rather Eat Chocolate*



"HERE'S THE NEXT WILD TURN  
IN THE FEMALE SEXUAL REVOLUTION."

—Sandra Tsing Loh, *The Atlantic Monthly*

Joan Sewell

I'D RATHER  
*Eat*  
CHOCOLATE

*Learning to Love  
My Low Libido*

JOAN SEWELL

BROADWAY BOOKS  
NEW YORK



The events described in this memoir are factually accurate, although the names of several individuals have been changed to protect their privacy, and the order of events has been changed in places to organize the flow of ideas.

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*More praise for*  
I'D RATHER *Eat* CHOCOLATE

"Astonishingly frank and often funny . . . with a serious underlying message about the actual differences between the libidos of women and men."  
—*Kirkus Reviews*

"Valuable . . . intelligent."  
—*USA Today*

"Sewell is gleefully funny . . . As an armchair road trip and good story, it succeeds admirably."  
—*Library Journal*

"Even if you wouldn't [rather eat chocolate], you'll enjoy Sewell's engaging memoir about stoking her low libido to match her husband's."  
—*People*

"Honest and accessible, this is not just a guide for libido-impaired individuals, but for anyone who wants to take a closer look at one subject that continues to gap the genders."  
—*Publishers Weekly*

"Commendably honest . . . Sewell is right—and it can't be said too many times, brave—to articulately challenge societal views that define a woman's worth by her sexuality . . . She is also right to suggest that eating chocolate is often superior to *any* other verb."  
—*Seattle Times*

"*I'd Rather Eat Chocolate* is THE book for any woman with an appetite for humor and smart, provocative revelations about how real couples deal with sex."

—Regina Barreca, author of *Babes in Boyland: A Personal History of Co-Education in the Ivy League*

"A saucy, compelling memoir that lets the reader be a fly on the bedroom wall of a proudly low-sex, high-compromise marriage. Ms. Sewell's book is a pull-no-punches commentary on the femme fatale culture as seen through the eyes of a femme forget-it. It reads like the lost episode of 'No Sex and the City.'"

—Debra Macleod, coauthor of *The French Maid* and *Lube Jobs*

"Brave . . . Fessing up to a low libido may be a sexy new topic."

—*Entertainment Weekly*

I'D RATHER *Eat* CHOCOLATE

To my husband

*Kip*

for his love, honesty, and  
unflagging encouragement in the writing of this book

I'D RATHER *Eat* CHOCOLATE

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## HOW MUCH SEX DID YOU SAY?

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If I had a choice between reading a good book and having sex, the book wins. I notice I put in the adjective “good”—and that leaves me wondering if I’m not trying to put a better face on things. I still want people to read this and think, *Well, of course. If it’s a good book.* But my boyfriend—the man I would eventually marry—would take even bad sex over a good book.

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## CURIOSITY KILLS THE CAT

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Then I asked the question that really started the dominoes falling: I finally got the nerve to ask my boyfriend if he could have as much sex as he wanted, how much would that be? The fact is we hadn’t

directly addressed our sex lives, even though we were way along into the relationship. We'd surely had our problems. But at this particular moment, my question was only half serious: casual curiosity after reading an article on men and sex in a glamour magazine.

"As much sex as I wanted?" Kip sat down on the edge of the bed and slowly took off his shoes. I knew what he was thinking.

"Yeah. As much as you wanted," I repeated.

Kip delayed answering by adopting a puzzled look of concentration as if the question would *never* have occurred to him before my asking it. "Oh, I don't know . . . maybe about five or six times a week."

My eyebrows shot up into outer space. "Wow. Really?"

"Yeah, I'd probably want one day off."

I looked intently at him. Was he joking? I decided he wasn't. "That wouldn't tire you out? Every day?"

"No. It doesn't have to be a big production or anything."

"Right."

"Four or five days can be just . . . you know . . . plain . . ."

"Meat-and-potatoes sex."

"Yeah." He knew what that meant from our discussions about *Mars and Venus*. "And a couple of times a week I'd like gourmet sex." *Mars and Venus* again, code for extra-fancy sex.

"Gourmet sex twice a week? Wow." "Wow" was becoming my favorite fill-in exclamation. It shows surprise without necessarily designating a judgment.

"Well, really, I'd be happy with it once a week." He was making an effort to make his fantasy sex life more realistic. It wasn't working for me.

"Well, okay, um . . . Wow." *Yikes!*

Kip walked into the kitchen and got a Coke out of the fridge. I stood in the middle of the living room in wonder at how far apart

we were. My arms were crossed over my chest as I stared down at the carpet. I concentrated on taking even breaths.

"Of course I don't *expect* that," Kip called out from the kitchen. "That's just my fantasy. No woman is going to want sex every day."

"How do you know? Maybe there are women who do want sex almost every day. Maybe you just didn't look hard enough."

He walked back into the living room with the tiniest of smirks on his face. "Uh-huh. How many women are picking up guys for sex?"

"Some."

"Not a lot." Kip screwed off the bottle cap and took a couple of swallows.

"Well, even if it is rare to find a woman who wants that much sex, shouldn't you try anyway? Why settle?" I was feeling pettish by now.

"Because she doesn't *exist*."

Who was he trying to reassure, him or me? Of course she existed, just in smaller numbers. But didn't he owe it to himself to try to find someone sexually compatible before settling for less? I didn't want him to be deprived and unhappy, I didn't want to be the one who held him back, I didn't want to be the one he settled for. More than that, I was tired of always feeling apologetic for my drive.

Kip sat down at his swivel chair and turned toward his desk. His way of saying, Enough, I'm not going to deal with this anymore. But I couldn't let it lie.

## TEARS AND WHISPERS

---

Clicking by the channels, I caught Oprah in midspeech saying that millions of women don't want sex. She said low female libido is a

problem that is, in her words, "big, big, big, big, big." Whoa. I lunged for a blank videotape and tore open the packaging with my teeth. I jammed it into the VCR and sat down. "Thank you, *thank you*, talk-show gods." With immense relief I listened to how millions of women were silently suffering in shame. Though there are books dealing with loss of desire in women that I read in private desperation, the literature didn't come close to the impact of seeing women on television in tears and listening to their words of despair over their low sex drives. Many of the women Oprah had on her show were young women in young marriages. Oprah was telling her audience, speaking to the camera, that you're not alone, millions of women have this hidden shame. I can only say I felt a mixture of exhilaration and gratitude while I watched. Somebody was talking about it, real people, and not just the sexperts. Women were talking about the pain, fear, insecurity, guilt, and shame of having low sexual desire. Yes. This is big.

TERRI: We have sex about every four to five months. This is a lot less than what my husband would like. I don't enjoy sex. I dread it. My husband's thought about divorce because of it. It would be totally fine if I never had sex again.

SHANNA: We are in our first year of marriage and we get along fine except for one thing. I never want to have sex with him. I'm never in the mood. I'm afraid that he's going to get tired of a sexless marriage and leave.

SAMANTHA: In our five years of marriage we have fought over and over about sex and my lack of desire. My husband has turned away from me. It makes me a nervous wreck.

BETTY: My marriage would be practically sexless if it were up to me. I've become totally uninterested, almost repulsed.

MICHELLE: Before we were married, we would have sex probably three or four times a week. Ever since we've been married, our sex life is more "let's get it over with." It's more a dread type thing. Some days, I do think it's dirty and nasty.

Women are using words like "dread" and "repulsion" and referring to sex as a personal invasion. Oprah notes seeing members of the audience in tears. Tears and dread and invasion. I think, "My God, are we just lying there taking it and faking it?" Judging by the above quotes, the answer is apparently yes.

## HOT, HOT, HOT

But there were other shows telling me the opposite is true. On their cable television program, *Berman & Berman: For Women Only*, sister sexperts Laura and Jennifer Berman sent out one of their people to interview women on the street, and the word is women want a lot more sex:

FEMALE INTERVIEWER: How often do you have sex?

WOMAN #1: As often as possible.

WOMAN #2: Three to four times a week.

WOMAN #3: I'm single, so I take sex when it is possible.

INTERVIEWER: How often is that?

WOMAN #3: One or two a month.

INTERVIEWER: How often do you have sex with your partner?

WOMAN #4: When I have a partner. Three or four times a day.

INTERVIEWER: A day?

WOMAN #4: Well yeah, with the right partner.

DR. LAURA BERMAN: That's the key.

DR. JENNIFER BERMAN: With the *right* partner.

LAURA B: With the right partner, but you can see there's a range.

I can't imagine having sex three or four times a day. I just can't. Even the Bermans' effort to show what constitutes a wide range of frequency still leaves me feeling bruised. I can't even make it to the low end. So, I'm still the odd girl out. But just when I was feeling down about not wanting sex at least every other day, Jennifer Berman took it down a notch for married folks:

JENNIFER B: But once you're in, you know, married, routine life, I think about two to three times a week is pretty normal.

LAURA B: For *you*. Yeah. I mean it really is personally defined. But I want to hear what our audience thinks.

ROXANNE: And first of all let me tell you my disclaimer is I've been married a long time. Almost thirteen years. And we have sex about once a week . . .

LAURA B: . . . Yeah. What else. Who else? Does anyone else have another answer? What about right here? What's your name?

BIANCA: Hi. My name is Bianca. And I'm in a great

relationship. And for me, three to four times a week is great. But I would personally settle for seven.

LAURA B: Seven times?

JENNIFER B: Seven times a week. Every day.

LAURA B: And you know that's nice because we're hearing that on tape and in the audience. The myth is that women aren't really game or wanting to have sex as much. And these women are saying, "Hey, anytime I can get it."

God, I feel so inadequate.

The one woman on this show who said she had sex only once a week was apologetic about it, asking for understanding . . . you see, we've been married for thirteen years. Why was she apologizing? In the face of all these randy women, she felt abnormal. It's how I feel even when watching from the safe distance of my living room. The Bermans don't make me feel better about myself. The more they educate me, the more I'm cast as the outsider, the dysfunctional wife, the inhibited, repressed, hormonally deficient problem child. Even though the Bermans are careful to say what's considered normal should be taken on an individual basis, they still are framing a range. Jennifer pulled the two-to-three-times-a-week statistic out of the air, while the rest of the show quoted women who wanted it every day or at any opportunity, whichever comes first. Then, with a touch of triumph, the Bermans ended their program saying that from what women were telling them, it's a myth that we don't want sex as much as men—we're trying to get it as much as we can.

So which is it? Are women more like the tearful bunch seen on *Oprah* or like the sexual enthusiasts on *Berman & Berman*?