

FIERA BLOG

SEXUAL COMPROMISE: WHAT YOU WANT VS WHAT YOU NEED

Kristy Lin Billuni, 10/5/16



“We have a timing problem,” my pal Suzie said to me over coffee. She was complaining about her sex life. “He gets his intimacy needs met by having sex, and I want the intimacy up-front, as a sort of bargaining chip for sex.”

Fascinated by Suzie’s problem, I wondered first if it was a heterosexual thing—men getting intimacy through sex, women getting it before they’ll have sex. I wondered if it was a timing problem, as Suzie theorized. This argument, whether you wanted your intimacy as an appetizer or as a side dish, sounded familiar to me. I wondered if some couples solved it with compromise.

And then I thought of my friend, [Joe Weston](#). I often turn to his book, [Respectful Confrontation](#), as a reference for relationship challenges and strategies for compromise. I called him up and started with my most sexist questions about whether men and women relate differently to intimacy.

of touch and affection, to satisfy basic needs for survival and mental health, Joe agreed.

I remembered a skit from his [communication workshop](#), which I had the pleasure of attending years ago. In it, two friends are arguing about where to eat. One person wants tacos and the other wants pizza.

If you're in a relationship where one person needs intimacy to have sex and the other one gets intimacy through sex, maybe your challenge is as mundane as disagreeing about where to eat. You want tacos. Your partner wants pizza. You're both hungry, and you can't agree.

Right at the heart of conflict, in the common ground, lies an opportunity for compassion, for understanding and compromise. "Expressing desires is risk-taking," Joe says. "That is scary and challenging, but it is also exciting, creative and inspirational. There is an opportunity to learn more about one another and actually be surprised."

You both need food. Or, more to the point, you both need intimacy. One of you wants it as the appetizer. The other one wants a side dish. The problem has to do with what you both want, not what you both need.

I love this idea for handling all kinds of relationship arguments because every time I try it, every time my wife and I uncover the common need in a disagreement, it brings a flood of emotion, of compassion for each other.

Oh, my poor sweetie! We're both just hungry!

Oh, my sweet lover! We both just need intimacy!

Needs, when you really identify them, feel universal, vulnerable. You're hungry. You're lonely. You need intimacy.

Wants, when you step back and observe them in the shadow of your needs, usually feel more trivial. It's my turn to pick the restaurant. I never get to eat pizza.

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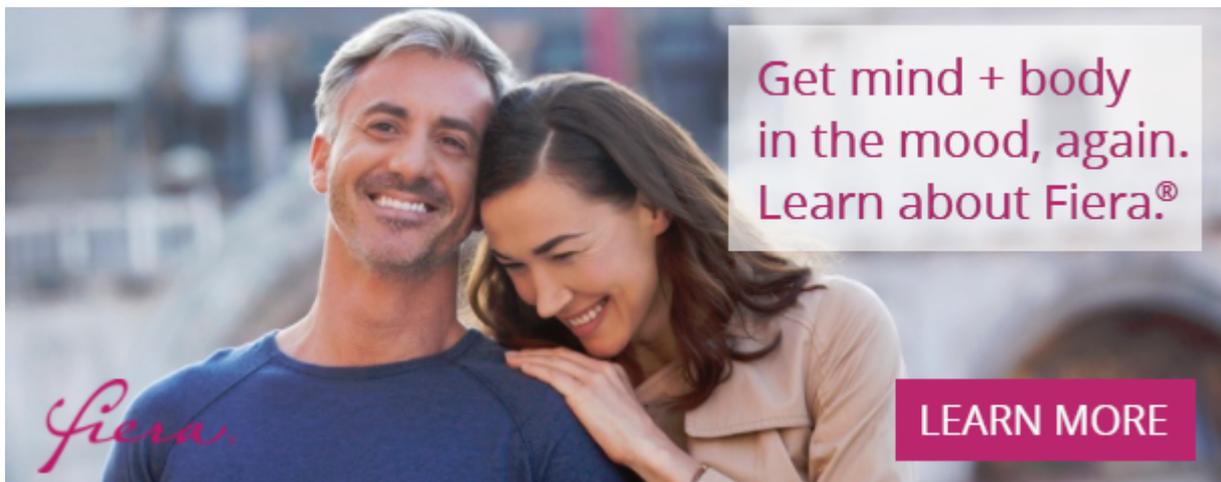
life? You both need intimacy. You
sex. But having sex is how your
always get what you want, but if
need," Joe sang to me when I
s of practicing his compromise

turn on for a partner and liberating, says Joe. Just voicing what you want, especially after you've gotten really clear on what you need, feels really good.

Finally, look for what you might be able to appreciate about your partner's perspective. If you usually want to feel intimate first, before you have sex, can you appreciate that sometimes, less intimate, more spontaneous sex is fun too? If you want to have sex in order to feel intimate, can you agree to also participate in other intimacy-building activities, like cuddling and talking?

What's great about compromise is that it works. It actually feels fun when you start practicing it. Try it when you don't know where you want to eat, or what movie you want to see. Try it too, with bigger conflicts in your life. And try it with sex.

Because it's not a timing thing, or a heterosexual thing. It's not a battle-of-the-sexes thing. It's a needs-and-wants thing. And the Rolling Stones, as it turns out, were right.



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