



EMBODY

By Sossity Chiricuzio

Perspectives

Embodiment – Other people's sex

by Sossity Chiricuzio, PQ Monthly

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It can be envy producing, beautiful, unsettling, or sometimes just noisy.

The truth of this economy is that many of us are living with other adults who have a sex life that we're not a part of, but still need to navigate and negotiate around. Perhaps you're having flashbacks to that house with particularly thin walls, or that housemate with a particularly vocal lover, but it's not just the big highs and lows that contribute to the atmosphere of a house.

Most of us have been socialized with an incredible amount of shame around sex. Our own, other people's, or just the fleshy facts of what bodies might do in the pursuit of pleasure. We often end up moving in with people with no idea of what kind of sexual activities they enjoy, until they impact us.

When those activities are things we're not into, we can get judgmental. When they are things we are

into, we can get fuzzy on boundaries. Regardless of how we feel, we may just want to try to pretend it isn't happening, which can lead to all sorts of repression and resentments.

If you are some flavor of queer, you are statistically likely to have extra layers of shame/guilt/repression around sexuality. Of course there are many other pieces that can further complicate this, including the actual physical space, survivor issues, or other imbalances in the power dynamics in the house.

It's reasonable to want to have some rules, but not to expect those rules to be centered on your comfort only, or to make it so that people have to pretend like they are not a sexual being in their home. Clear communication can go a long way to making room for everyone's needs, while projection and passive aggressive comments will likely lead to conflict. For example:

Direct: "Hey, so - I see that you prefer to clean your sex toys by boiling them, but from now on, can you please not do it while I'm cooking brunch?"

Project: "I already know you're having way more sex than me, do you really need to be so obvious about it? You're making it impossible for me to feed myself!"

That first comment is stating a need, and trying to work with someone towards a compromise that makes sure you both get as much of what you need as possible. The second one is intended to shame someone into doing what you want.

Wondering how to tell which one you're approach you're using? Take a look at our infographic and see which voice sounds familiar. Some quick clues include: Are you using "I" statements? Does the issue you're bringing up line up with your own issues? What feelings are coming up for you in this situation? Are you using language that is shaming? Are you giving the benefit of the doubt or assuming the worst?

Getting clear on that is not always easy, but can be really productive both for good housemate relations, and also for knowing yourself better. Approaching a conversation from a place of reflection rather than a place of reacting gives better odds for both efficiency of the process (ok, processing), and for mutual respect as the outcome.

Even better, of course, is when you can have that conversation before moving in with someone. I polled a dozen or so people (friends, coworkers, the other person waiting 30 minutes for the number 44 bus) and they all told varying stories with the same premise: be upfront about it. Even something as simple as telling a prospective new roommate:

“We’re a household of adults, and there will probably be times when we hear each other having sex. If it’s actually interfering with your sleep or well being, please check in the next day and we’ll make some ground rules together. Otherwise let’s just agree to be happy for each other and maybe put in some headphones.”

If that doesn’t work for them, better for you all to know before they are scowling at you over the breakfast table. Soundproofing is not easy or cheap, and while white noise can help (even just a simple fan), there’s no substitute for dialog and agreements before the situation gets tense.

Among all this recognition of other adults as deserving to enjoy their own sex lives, it’s also important to remember that what that looks like will vary widely depending on the person. Whatever it might be, it isn’t yours to comment on, judge, shame, or disclose to anyone else. You’re being entrusted with someone’s tender places, please treat them as such.

If you find yourself actually concerned for someone’s safety or well being in regards to sex, be sure to check in with them directly, in a private space, and without any assumptions of being right, or some knight riding in to the rescue. Sex is complicated, and often doesn’t look like what you think it should. Maybe she likes being called a tramp; maybe he likes the mind fuck of being left in the dark for an hour; maybe ze really does prefer to only have sex with people traveling through town; maybe they

don't have sex at all.

If you want to ask questions, do it respectfully, and understand it's not their job to explain themselves to you. Sharing intimate knowledge is a gift, not an obligation, even if you're curious about that extended rumbling sound, or the significance of the items placed just so on their dresser, or why they need a tarp. Our sexual autonomy and normalcy are challenged by the world at large every day, let's not do it to each other.

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