

A rolled-up piece of brown paper, resembling a scroll or a cigarette, is positioned diagonally across the center of the cover. A white, torn-edge label is attached to the top of the roll. On the label, the text 'THE sex diaries PROJECT' is printed. Below the text is a vibrant pink lipstick smudge. The background is a textured, light brown surface.

THE
sex diaries
PROJECT

WHAT WE'RE SAYING ABOUT
WHAT WE'RE DOING

ARIANNE COHEN



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PROJECT

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THE
sex diaries
PROJECT

What We're Saying about
What We're Doing

ARIANNE COHEN



WILEY

John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

Published by John Wiley & Sons, Inc., Hoboken, New Jersey

Published simultaneously in Canada

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ISBN 978-1-118-15725-1 (cloth); ISBN 978-1-118-18094-5 (ebk);
ISBN 978-1-118-18095-2 (ebk); ISBN 978-1-118-18096-9 (ebk)

A dare:

If you are in public right now, please make sure that everyone around you can see what you're reading. They're interested too. Promise.

A FEW TANTALIZING WORDS FROM YOUR SEX DIARIES EDITOR

We all like to know other people's secrets so we can live with our own.

—Jonathan Am

I have the best job in America. I collect sex diaries. Dozens per week, filled with love and lust and pining and people who say things like, “I’m leaving you, but when my mom calls, will you pretend that I’m still here?” It’s on par with eating ice cream for a living.

You probably grabbed this book because of the word *sex*. You’ve chosen well: *The Sex Diaries Project* is a life-changing read, and the pages ahead will open your eyes to what is *actually* happening behind bedroom (and kitchen, bathroom, and closet) doors nationwide, in enticing bite-size portions. Yes, you will read a great amount of sex in this book in ways that will keep you riveted. But the diaries are a phenomenon because they are about all the ways that people just like you connect with—and disconnect from—others: emotionally, romantically, physically. Relationships are the centerpiece of our lives, yet rarely do we see the available options or have a context to which we can compare ourselves.

I began the project in 2007 on a personal mission: I wanted to know how to have a happy private life. At the time I was in my late 20s (single, pining), with a relationship attitude best described as stoic acceptance. But how does one learn to have a smart, fulfilling love life? Private lives, by definition, take place behind closed doors, cloaking the many clever ways that others handle their erotic lives. I thought a lot about this. My education, up to that point, had been inspired: I’d attended top schools, trained under an Olympic coach, and written for some of the country’s best editors. And yet my main information on sex and relationships came from friends and . . . Vivid Videos?

This book is a tonic to that. I am thrilled to present the pages ahead, in which you can wade into the minds behind a wide array of happy bedrooms and pilfer freely. Whether you’re happily married or decidedly celibate, this is your first chance to gain context for your sex and relationship urges, and grab ideas. Stealing is strongly encouraged. Much of chapters 3–6 are about this; there’s a cheat sheet at the end of the book. I’ve structured the pages ahead so that you can spelunk through the diaries you choose, and also pop up to read the chapter essays as they intrigue you.

I assumed that I would publish the tonic, and move on to another project. But American bedrooms are nothing if not captivating, and three years in, something miraculous happened: I was sitting on my office floor one evening, surrounded by hundreds of shreds of paper, arranging the sex diaries for the collection. I had noticed years earlier that some diarists’ relationships differed vastly from others—the way that diarists interacted with their partners was sometimes so dissimilar that comparing two marriages was like comparing apples to donuts: both are spherical sweet foods, yes, but otherwise . . . different. And so on a whim, I grouped my shreds of paper by the *type* of relationship the diarist was in. And suddenly, patterns emerged—first in diarists’ sexual escapades, and then throughout the relationships and lives. I stayed up all night rereading my database of diaries.

I realized that I was sitting on a trove: Couples I found, relate to each other in three main ways

based on their shared relationship priorities. Those priorities, in turn, forecast their whole future: the sex life, friends, family, financial status, happiness, *everything*. It's predictable, and fairly obvious. Real-time relationship accounts, from the perspective of *inside* of people's minds. It was like finding a magic key.

Now, let's talk about you. Why are you holding this book? Because you're wired to. Evolutionarily speaking, your curiosity in your neighbor's bedrooms is natural. "The brain is built for love," says biological anthropologist Helen Fisher. "Those who didn't love never had children and died out, leaving people on the planet who are very interested in love." And until a few thousand years ago, humans knew a lot about their neighbors. If your fellow hunter-gatherer could only climax while donning a zebra-fur loincloth and screaming unsweet nothings, you knew about it. Now we only know what we accidentally hear through the walls, which is an odd, alienating, and misleading state of affairs. Reading *The Sex Diaries Project* is the equivalent of sitting around the campfire, learning equally about others and ourselves. It's fascinating to flip ahead and see what may be coming down the pike for you, or to read a sex diarist similar to an ex and gain new perspective.

I too began my flirtation with the sex diaries based on the word "sex," when I snagged a magazine assignment four years ago. The idea was simply to capture what people were *really* pondering and experiencing in their bedrooms and relationships. I instructed the sex diarists to include all sexual and relationship thoughts, behaviors, and arousals, and to keep it brief. The article became two covers, two stories and a popular weekly online column. It turns out that many people want to know how to have happy private lives. Readers eagerly awaited their weekly voyeuristic peeks in tantalizing four-minute dips. You have no idea the chaos that erupted in my inbox if I ran late.

What I found in those early sex diaries was an invisible world of profound thoughts, aspirations, and experiences. Take yourself. You have spent the past week pounding the pavement, answering the phone, and hurrying around, all while contemplating thoughts that you would never tell even your best friend: perhaps your honest concerns about your partner, your masturbation habits, or your deeply rooted worry that you're unattractive and no one will ever love you. Or perhaps you've spent all week reliving Tuesday's mind-blowing sex, breath by breath. We all think these sorts of things, all day every day. And, until now, this world has gone unspoken, largely lived between parentheses.

Those first few hundred sex diaries overhauled how I thought about sex and relationships. As you will quickly find, all assumptions about your neighbor's bedrooms are just that—assumptions, based on your private life, not theirs. The truth is that people run their private lives with infinite varieties, much of which will be news to you. A few notions to help set the context for the book:

Private lives are just like jobs. Metaphorically speaking. While many people are 9-to-5ers, some prefer to work nights, while others juggle freelance gigs from their couch. And then there's the guy you went to high school with who seems to spend his days in Guam, eating lollipops. It's a range, and you can learn from all of them. Your experiences and fantasies are only a tiny slice of the options.

You can build whatever world you would like for yourself. Single and long-term coupledness are not the only relationship options. Relationships have infinite potential shapes, and scarcity is a myth—there are plenty of people who will love you, romantically or platonically, simultaneously or not. You can build the miniature kingdom you'd like—to meet *your* needs. Perhaps you would like one partner to stare dreamily at you for the next 50 years, with once-a-week sex. Or perhaps you're content alone but would like periodic no-strings-attached sex. Or perhaps you want kids, and sex is secondary. They're all in the pages ahead. Some diarists prefer one-stop shopping; some don't. What's so exciting about creating your own private life is that it's up to you.

It is only by witnessing others' behavior that you gain permission to do it yourself. I should know. When I began editing the sex diaries, dating ranked in my life alongside dental appointments and taxes. Thousands of diaries later, I've shifted to a much more fulfilled existence, pretty much based only on the influence of sex diarists who exposed me to options and outlooks that I otherwise never would have considered. I was particularly mesmerized to find diarists living quite stably in relationship structures that I previously hadn't known existed, far away from the dating-commitment-marriage-children-forever escalator that many of us were raised on. You set the tone of your relationships. And you'll know what tone you like when you see it. In a sex diary.

About The Sex Diaries Project

I am often asked whether *The Sex Diaries Project* is a mirror of relationships and sexuality in America. Good heavens no. I have included primarily sex diarists in healthy relationships, and this is a collection, *not* a statistical survey. The sex diaries are valuable in creating a 360° view of relationships and sexuality from the inside, exploring how diarists experience their relationships, from an individual perspective. This book has more in common with the first-person narrative work of Ann Devere Smith and Studs Terkel than, say, the sexual survey work of Alfred Kinsey. Every decade or so, a new tome of sexual behavioral statistics arrives. First from Kinsey, and later from Masters and Johnson, among many others, and most recently, the remarkable *General Social Survey* at the University of Chicago, which provides among the most varied and detailed available figures. But Kinsey himself said that you can't measure love. He knew perfectly well that sexual statistics ignore the deep (and not-so deep) urges that drive the very acts he studied. Without context—a true understanding of someone's relationship life—a sexual act has no meaning. My aim is to mine the meaning, creating a longitudinal portrait of contemporary relationship lives, which, along with sexdiariesproject.com, allows readers around the world to explore their options.

People often ask how I know that the sex diaries are real. This book joins sister *Sex Diaries Project* books in the U.K. and Italy, and continues as a journalism project, with truth as its driving mission. Though I cannot personally witness the sex diarists' experiences (and my doe eyes are quite content with this state of affairs), my frequent phone conversations with diarists confirm and elaborate details, and all diarists' circumstances are vigorously fact checked. Above all, there is no incentive to lie in an anonymous sex diarying project. The pay-off is a faithful view of one's own self. And I invite you, while you read, to go through the same process that the diarists went through, and keep your own anonymous diary at sexdiariesproject.com.

All the words you see ahead are those of the sex diarists, with the exception of minor wording adjustments for clarity. I do edit for length, because the diarists have *a lot* to say. The sex diaries are anonymous, but any fact that remains here is accurate. I have at times made details more vague, such as referring to a "bakery owner" as a "shop owner" or "small-businessman," and simply omitting the names of towns and establishments, and of course, changing all names.

The sex diaries are not all flowers and daffodils. I am always provoked by the number of men who display a level of disrespect and outright misogyny toward women that appears to be normalized in their communities and deep-rooted in their minds; I am also endlessly dazed by how often the diarists assume their partners know exactly what they want. (Let's say it all together now: Humans are not mind readers. Unless directly informed, they're rather clueless.) But overall, the sex diaries are a joyous celebration of the diversity of sexuality and relationships.

Key Observations from the 1,500 Diaries behind this Book

1. The Secret to Happiness

The happiest sex diarists share two commonalities:

- They know what their needs are (emotional, sexual, and logistical).
- They feel they are on the path to getting them met.

Whether those needs are *actually* met matters less than you may think. Perhaps a single diarist has just joined a hiking club to meet potential new partners, or agrees to six months of marriage counseling after years of fighting. What matters is that the diarist feels that she is on the right track.

Unhappy diarists know that they're unhappy—yet often have no idea what their needs are, and they tend to be full of angst. These diarists often blame their partners, assuming they're with the wrong person, or that there's a trust issue; or they blame their relationship status, lamenting a prolonged divorce or their forever-single standing. (I assure you that your relationship status, no matter how devastating it may be, is not what ails you.) The happiest diarists approach their lives with an attitude of personal responsibility: “Okay, I have a great life or partner, but obviously some of my needs aren't getting met here.”

The happiest sex diarists also share a third trait: They structure their romantic relationships in a way that best supports their needs and their connection. For some, that means marriage and cohabitation; for others, that means seeing each other twice a month for years on end. There are no rules.

2. Monogamy Is Less Common Than You Think

The goal of monogamy is common—approximately 80 percent of the sex diarists intend to enter long-term monogamous relationships. But the sex diaries capture what people are doing at any one moment. And the great irony of monogamy is that many diarists spend years of their life practicing stringent nonmonogamy while looking for “the one,” overlapping casual and serious partners. Current monogamists make up just less than half of this book, with the remainder filled by diarists with zero lovers or multiple lovers.

It is not unusual for monogamous diarists to spend a third or more of their adult lives out of partnership; 43 percent of American adults are unmarried. A very large minority spends vast swaths of their life in a state that has, up to now, been defined as some amorphous form of singleness or dating.

There is an entire genre of self-help literature aimed at helping people reach and stay in two-person monogamous relationships. But many diarists are spending substantial periods of time alone by choice, or balancing multiple partners, so why not discuss that in terms that portray reality? In fact, let's do that right now.

3. Sex Diarists Come in Three States of Relationships: Solo, Partnered, and Poly

Sex diaries capture how diarists *experience* relationships, and make clear that it is pivotal to view the time period between committed relationships on its own terms. Diarists refer to these years with overtones of sex: “dating” or “playing the field” or “hooking up.” Which is a mistake, because it confuses sex with relationship. The three states are distinguished by how they are meeting their needs.

Solo: A diarist meeting his or her (sexual, emotional, logistical) needs through a combination of

friends and/or lover(s), and themselves. A Soloist may or may not be having sex; the common denominator is not having a primary partner.

Partnered: A coupled diarist, getting his or her needs met through a relationship with a primary partner.

Poly: More than one. A subcategory, where diarists meet their needs through multiple partnerships at once. The defining factor is engaging in multiple, overlapping relationships.

Note that these are states of mind—the sex diaries take the perspective of *inside* a person’s mind and as you’ll soon read, diarists’ psychological transitions in and out of partnerships take place on a timeline separate from their pairings and breakups. Chapter 2 includes two diarists who are married months into a relationship, yet still meeting all of their own needs; Chapter 6 examines diarists who are still experiencing relationships that have, from the outside, ceased.

Referring to soloism on its own terms removes the nagging need to label people based on their sexual ties, while also negating much of the inherent pressure on diarists to get into a relationship. Terms like “bachelor” or “dating” all imply an assumed later partnership, which leads numerous diarists into a cycle of self-hatred and inadequacy. As you’ll see in Chapter 1, some soloists have no intention of ever entering partnership.

4. Relationships Are Not Static

The diarists ahead are, at their core, a series of people moving in and out of emotional and sexual bonds over time. Partners come and go—some with half-century pit stops, some not. All partnerships end. It’s a flow. Diarists constantly toss around “forever” and “one and only,” but when you read the sex diaries all together, you see that they are experiencing something much more fluid. The diarists who are aware of this fare better in their breakups.

Why are relationships not static? I have, over the years, commissioned repeat diaries. Diarists rarely change, often handing in diaries that are near carbon copies. But their needs do change, sometimes quite dramatically. The same diarist who was oh-so compatible years ago with her spouse may still be compatible, but the needs of one or both have shifted radically. Even in the most stable of relationships, sex diarists’ needs and wants are constantly evolving, and the happiest diarists are aware of this.

5. Age Is Just a Number

The sex diaries ahead are organized blindly to age and sexuality, for the very good reason that whether you have a body part a diarist possesses, or how many gray hairs, has very little to do with how he or she relates to others. Age and sexuality (and, for that matter, education, race, and kids) are important in narrowing who one is attracted to. As sociologist Eva Illouz puts it, “In order to create moments of pure bonding, two people need to be in harmony together. Such harmony of the hearts is quite often social harmony, predicated on common cultural and social references.” Which is why sex diarists so often choose partners of similar race, age, class, and ethnicity. For the purposes of this book, all my comments that I make apply to both heterosexual and homosexual relationships.

For me, the experience of taking up temporary residence in thousands of minds has been life altering. Whether you simply flip through the book, become an online diarist at SexDiariesProject.com, or memorize every word, you will be inspired by one of the many ways that people come together and share their souls and bodies. Or perhaps you’ll transform from a foggy sense of sexuality to a more enlightened orientation. If you’re not happy with where you are, a flip through *The Sex Diaries Project*

may well give you a whole new game plan. Or at least a good night.

~~Books like this one hit nerves. You're about to read many sex diarists who made very different choices than your own. Every time you feel a wince, examine that feeling. You might find that you like the sting.~~

PART ONE

solo

dalliancing

I'M ENJOYING MYSELF

A lot of people are afraid to say what they want. That's why they don't get what they want.

—Madonna

Some diarists are extremely good at being solo. You know these people in your own life: the friends who come out of a relationship and they seem, well, fine. And years later, after they've been playing the field for a while and nothing sticks, they're self-contained and, well, fine. That's because they are fine. The first Diarist in this chapter could be their mascot. "I must say, I have plenty of love around me," she writes. "My family, exes, my crushes, dates. I do what I want. I am the love of my life, and it feels *really* good."

I point this out because every day, I read soloists who are fixated on the fact that they want a partner, and don't have one. Rest assured, most soloists who want a partner eventually find a great partner. But it typically takes years; longer if their personality and relationship needs are a rare match. In the meantime, the reality is that many diarists spend their teens, twenties, and (among certain demographics) thirties primarily solo, pausing for a few years here or there in relationships, not to mention the years spent alone later in life after a divorce or the passing of a partner. Throughout their many solo years, they still need to fulfill the sexual, emotional, and financial needs that previous partners once met. Being alone truly is the default state, returned to again and again. And so this chapter looks at soloism on its own terms, not as a setback, but as a frequent and normal state of being where diarists happily meet their own needs, and engage in dalliances with others when it makes sense.

This happy solo concept tends to confuse people. While I was writing this book, I read a *New York Times* article about the CEO of Zappos, Tony Hsieh. His friend told the reporter that Hsieh "has a lot of close friends and he loves a lot of people." The reporter inquired about this and Hsieh, to his credit, replied: "I don't usually define dating or not dating. I prefer to use the term 'hang out.' And I hang out with a lot of people, guys and girls. I don't really have this one person I'm dating right now. I am hanging out with multiple people, and some people I hang out with more than others."

Let me summarize: He's a soloist. He likely had sexual ties with more than one person, but that's really not the point; he was fundamentally meeting all of his own emotional, sexual, and daily needs in the combination of his choosing. He may be a soloist forever, or not. His relationship status was confusing to the reporter only because she was looking at it in terms of sex. And sex is just one of many needs that relationships can fulfill.

Every diarist in this chapter is sexually active and loosely seeking a relationship partner. So why are they solo in the first place? Because of their priorities. They either want to continue meeting their own needs, or their personality/sexuality/relationship priorities are more selective. In the diaries ahead, it's quite obvious which diarists will likely remain solo for the longest: The Photographer seeks a partner

with a specific constellation of personality traits to fuel a relationship of intellectual and sexual exploration, which will probably take her a while to find; The Pretty Mom seems to fall in love with any man who walks slower than she does, so she'll likely transition into Partnership imminently. Whether or not diarists find partners is a fairly predictable game of numbers.

It's also a predictable game of nonmonogamy. Every diarist in this section is a monogamist, and yet their path to finding a monogamous partner is the precise opposite: rampant, nonmonogamous. Overlapping is the norm. Despite this, soloists spend most nights alone. They can easily rack up a handful of lovers in a few months and dozens of flirtations and kisses yet point to consistently empty beds. Cohabiting diarists later in the book have much more sex, because it's fairly easy to get laid when sharing a bed. Soloists have more variety. We begin in a happily empty bed in suburban Detroit.

The Photographer Home for the Summer, Breaking Hearts

35, Suburban Detroit, Michigan

SATURDAY

9:00 a.m.: I've temporarily moved back home following a stint on reality TV. I am currently very single, though my biggest fear is that because I'm happy and not looking, someone will find me and I'll end up settling down in my hometown. Oh, no no no!

10:00 a.m.: Facebooking gorgeous guy from the TV show. I Internet-stalked him after I got the book from the show, which required a lot of craft as I didn't know his last name. Not sure what I am expecting, as we live in different states.

3:00 p.m.: Off to a photography class I'm taking. I love being single. I have all sorts of interesting trysts that my partnered friends don't.

8:30 p.m.: Went to a party with Brian, a guy from my class, and we made out. I've also developed a crush on Jake, a coworker at my new waitressing job, and he is attractive and tall like me and much younger. Eleven years younger. His casual touches are electric.

8:32 p.m.: It should be noted that my best relationship was with a man a decade younger. It was a year of good sex, we enjoyed each other's company, and he inspired me creatively.

10:15 p.m.: Home. I love living with my mom and sister, who are rad. Though I have to be much more on the down-low about masturbating and staying over at men's houses.

SUNDAY

9:06 a.m.: Trying to figure out what I want to wear on my date tonight. Nothing too sexy, as I'm not taking that into Brian. Staying focused on where I see myself in six months, which is in New York City with a photography job, and lots of urban men with long-term dating potential. In the meantime I want to have as much fun as I can.

10:15 a.m.: Pass a giant store called House of Bedrooms. All sorts of interesting thoughts pass through my mind.

11:00 a.m.: Waitressing. Looking at the schedule to see when Jake and I work together next. Not seeing him all this week.

12:30 p.m.: A creepy, bald 75-year-old man at one of my tables keeps giving me the once-over in a very voyeuristic way. Creeping me out.

3:00 p.m.: Work is over, but don't want to drive all the way home and back. Decide to nap in the employee parking lot, hoping to run into Jake who works at 5.

4:30 p.m.: No Jake. Call Brian about our date plans. He wants me to come out between 7 and 8 p.m. I am annoyed.

7:00 p.m.: Killing time in my car. I suspect Brian has hepatitis B. He's been very ambiguous. He says he has antibodies but doesn't know if he had it or just had the vaccines (he travels). Decide to steal some wifi from my car. Google says it can be transmitted from making out. I AM FREAKING OUT. I AM A HYPOCHONDRIAC.

8:00 p.m.: Arrive at Brian's apartment, and we head to a wine tasting. He looks nice but not attractive to me. He's short and pudgy and poor. I don't look for stability in men. I look for ambition and wit and the ability to be taken in by the moment. I'm thinking about right now. Isn't that what the future is based on anyway?

10:00 p.m.: Talking to another guy at the wine tasting for twenty minutes. He's kinda cute, and I can tell Brian is annoyed, but doesn't come over.

3:00 a.m.: We are out at an illegal after-hours bar with three of Brian's guy friends, talking about exploits. I've always gone with whatever turns me on. I've been with girls, and in a threesome with two men. Also went through a sex-in-public phase.

3:30 a.m.: It comes out that he used to shoot drugs when he was 20 (he's now 35). I remember from Google's note that 60–80% of IV drug users have Hepatitis B. I AM FREAKING OUT. Maintain even keel.

4:00 a.m.: Brian wants me to stay over. I say NO. Will have to bring up this Hep B thing when we are both sober.

MONDAY

11:30 a.m.: Woke up with a splitting headache, said hi to Mom, took two Advil, had a glass of water and ate a strawberry. Immediately got back into bed and masturbated while thinking about Jake. Slept.

3:00 p.m.: Finally up with no headache. Cranky though. Brian left a voicemail making sure I got home alright.

3:15 p.m.: Thinking about how far I have come, leaving a relationship that was a vexing black hole. I think it was karma, a payback for my previous dating wrongs. You get what you give.

3:17 p.m.: He was a musician, and I would be so happy to see his face after he came back from traveling, even when I was furious with him. He made me joyful in a way that wasn't logical.

4:00 p.m.: Returned Brian's call, hoping for voicemail. No dice. Said I had fun (well, I sorta did). He sent me some links on new chemicals I'm working with in printing my photography. That was nice of him. I hate nice guys.

7:00 p.m.: Called my friend Jack. He was my first boyfriend when we were 16; now we're friends. Seeing what he's up to tonight. "Nothing." Code for "I have no money."

7:02 p.m.: I wish I had more girlfriends. All the girls I grew up with moved away, and I don't connect with many women my age.

10:00 p.m.: Saturday night and I'm watching *The Incredibles* with my mom and sister.

SUNDAY

6:24 a.m.: In the makeup room to model in a bridal show. All the women—makeup artists

hairstylists, models—are talking about what they drank last night and who they hooked up with. don't mention that I watched a Disney film with my family.

7:00 a.m.: One of the other girls just went into the bathroom and puked. She says she has the flu. She's like 17, and is hung over and afraid to say so.

1:00 p.m.: Bored. Sitting around waiting for the show to start. I want to leave. We all look so cheesy. Hair in big curls, lots of pastels and ribbons. Everyone else thinks this looks good. For real, they do.

1:15 p.m.: Kinda regretting saying no to Brian's brunch invitation. He lives right around the corner. I don't like seeing men more than once or twice a week in the beginning. Though I'd love to get away from the lameness I'm currently experiencing.

6:00 p.m.: At the restaurant training. Alex, the tall, attractive cook, caught me looking at him and smiled.

8:00 p.m.: Pushing my coworker for info about Jake. She says he's moody and doesn't like working here. His last girlfriend was a model.

8:15 p.m.: Alex started up a conversation. I don't want to sound mean, but he's not that smart. Bummer.

9:30 p.m.: In the manager's office making my schedule for the next week. Jake next works on Tuesday. Funny, that's when I say I can work next.

MONDAY

10:00 a.m.: Facebook message from the ex-girlfriend of my black hole ex-boyfriend. She wants to know if I'm going to see him in Brazil, where she is visiting now. Says it's beautiful and I should. Lmao. It is funny. My answer: NO WAY.

10:03 a.m.: Message from Jack, apologizing for not going to the Hamtramck music festival. He says he's stressed about money. That's cool, I get it.

10:05 a.m.: I must say, I have plenty of love all around me. My family, exes, my crushes, dates. I do what I want. I am the love of my life, and it feels really good!

11:49 a.m.: Let Brian go to voicemail. It's my day off and I want to work on my photos. Don't want to think about men.

2:12 p.m.: Break to masturbate. Jake is in my head.

3:00 p.m.: More self-loving. Jake comes to mind. I've been anxious lately and this is my release. I'm afraid that I'm going to get to know him and the crush will implode. But right now the fantasy person I have created is nice.

6:15 p.m.: Finally listened to Brian's voicemail. He tried a photo technique I told him about and was happy with the results.

9:30 p.m.: Just sat and talked with Brian outside the darkroom for two hours about art, literature, screwed-up people, and strippers. Then we spent another hour in the darkroom. He helped me figure out the enlarger. I helped him choose prints. I like how his mellow vibe makes me feel.

TUESDAY

8:00 a.m.: Awake. It's those lazy moments in the morning that I miss most and long for.

8:30 a.m.: Brian emailed about hanging out with him on his birthday. I hate spending occasions with boyfriends until we are serious.

3:30 p.m.: Working a double shift. Went to a temple on my break to meditate. I'm not very thrilled

with my job and everything doesn't seem so great today. It's just a bad day. Need some perspective.

5:00 p.m.: Back at work. Jake is working. Sweet. He looks cute.

7:00 p.m.: The hostess mentions that Jake and I would make super tall babies. Inappropriate, but secretly love it. He said, "Hmmmmmm. Maybe we should try it." I laughed.

7:15 p.m.: Another server walks up and totally out of the blue says that he didn't know that Jake was dating Chrissy, a fellow server who I really like. I am bummed. And confused. Jake has been rather boldly flirting and never mentioned it.

8:03 p.m.: Still bummed by this news.

8:30 p.m.: Jake totally just gave me that sparkly eye when we passed in the hall. He and Chrissy must not be serious.

9:15 p.m.: Jake and I are in the manager's office, and without my asking, he volunteers to contact a contact of his who might be able to help get me shooting work. I like this guy.

10:02 p.m.: Standing out back, when the busboy asks when we are going out on a date. Is he serious?! He offers to walk me to my car. He's a nice *kid*.

WEDNESDAY

12:00 p.m.: Catch myself thinking about Jake. When he trained me last week, it seriously felt like we were on a date. A good one, too.

2:22 p.m.: Okay. I feel foolish that I've been thinking about my coworker and masturbating especially now that he's dating a coworker. I feel tricked.

3:30 p.m.: This doesn't keep me from continuing to do it. Three times in one hour.

10:00 p.m.: Long talk with my mom about relationships. She thinks it's natural for older woman to date younger men, and brings up director Katherine Bigelow, and her 21-year-younger boyfriend. She also says I don't have my standards too high, and when I find the right one, I won't have to think about it. I'll just know. I love my mom.

10:13 p.m.: She also advises me to stay away from Jake, unless he has another job on the side. She's so funny. And right. ***

How to Be a Happy Soloist

The previous and next diarists, along with the hundreds of happy soloists I've read, share a few common features:

They know what their current needs are, and they meet them. Both women have looked at their needs for 6–24 months, and determined which relationships would make them happy on a week-to-week basis *until* they meet their next partner: lots of friends, and when it makes sense, a casual love life. The Pretty Mom takes great glee in her online lover who obviously fills a need while she's single. The Photographer is in close contact with her vibrator. They see their solo time not as a means to an end, but a chapter in itself.

They're flexible in the many roles lovers can play in their lives. Both women build casual relationships with men they know will never be life partners. Diarists more experienced at dating are often much more open-ended in the many happy roles potential lovers and friends can play in their lives. It's the younger diarists, like The Single Virgin in the next chapter, who tend to be much more conservative in their relationship structures, prone to toeing the line of heterosexuality.

monogamy with every potential partner, simply because it's the only path in their minds.

They fill their lives with "friend families" of interconnected friends and relatives who fulfill many of their needs. You'll see it throughout this book. The Photographer spends Saturday night watching Disney with her family; The Pretty Mom—who is still recovering from a years-long heartbreak—spends the same Saturday dancing with loose friends. There is a Buddhist concept that there is only one "right now," so it's best to enjoy it. And the diarists who enjoy their "right now," no matter how sexless or Disney-involved it may be, are contented people. It's the diarists who pine to be in someone else's arms "right now" who are miserable. "Having wonderful friends is in many ways similar to being in a relationship," writes The Pretty Mom. She is right.

The Pretty Mom with Many Suitors and a Meticulous Sexual Memory

37, Ventura County, California

SATURDAY

7:40 a.m.: Fell asleep last night thinking about Nathan, a single dad who's had a crush on me for about a year. Again. He likes me, but he's too entangled with his new divorce. Come on Nathan! I want you to be my bunny slope back into love.

7:50 a.m.: A "bunny slope" is exactly what I'm looking for. I want a practice run before getting too involved with a man again; a long-term lover who can rebuild my sexual confidence. Nathan is my first choice, although my kaleidoscope of possibilities is vast these days.

7:54 a.m.: Voicemail from Philippe. He sang me a message. Philippe was my first foray back into dating, a year ago. He smells better than any man I've ever met. He plays guitar better than anyone. Too bad he knocked up that other girl, or else we'd still be lovers. We are still dear friends. Maybe we'll be together again in 10 years or something.

9:51 a.m.: Making plans for a big dance party this evening with my friends, my weekly evening out. Being a single mom is limiting, but my mom helps me a lot since my five-year-old son's father, Carlos, is a jackass and has totally disappeared. I'm almost over that disaster, though it's hard to look into my son's eyes every day and see Carlos.

10:10 a.m.: Off to work—I'm a language teacher. I have a big crush on one of my students. He is 20 and from Switzerland. Young. Flirtatious. Hot. He looks deep into my eyes and smiles and makes me blush. I wonder if my other students notice. I have never had an affair with a student, although I have come close.

1:10 p.m.: Just finished class, and Swiss Guy tells me to give his regards to my husband. I tell him I don't have a husband, and he smiles at me slyly.

8:57 p.m.: Just dropped off my son and am getting ready. There are a few men I'd like to run into, and only one I'd like to be with: Nathan. The rest are simply too young or far from my reality. I plan to just do as I always do and have fun with whomever I connect with and dance.

2:10 a.m.: At the party. I am asked, as I always am, why I don't have a boyfriend. I look 28. I have amazing legs, great hair, nice skin, a beautiful face. The only reason I can think of is that I'm not ready. Carlos hurt me really badly. I am still recovering.

4:00 a.m.: Just home. Most definitely danced my little heart out. A Scorpio ogled me and asked me out, but he was drunk. His wife showed up after he passed out and my feelings passed quickly. Met

French boy whom my friend invited, apparently for me. He was sweet, and all over me. I had to wa
away from him to leave, exhausted. I can't stop thinking about Nathan, and how I wished he was ther

SUNDAY

10:40 a.m.: I never feel better than after a night of dancing. I love the person I am when I danc
bold, flirtatious, spiritual, and sparkling.

10:46 a.m.: I check my email every morning for news of my son's father. I wish I could forget. W
met as housemates while living a bacchanalian life in Europe. We were together nearly three years—
was passionate and tumultuous, with a dynamic sexual attraction like no other I've had. We lived
make love to one another. But when I got pregnant, we were breaking up. He was so angry at me fo
keeping the baby. I may still be in love with him. I know for sure that I think of him every day. It's to
bad that I haven't heard from him in five months.

11:27 a.m.: I remember the first time we made love, after we had confessed our love for on
another. We started kissing in the hallway outside of my bedroom, and he tore off my skirt and pushe
me against the wall and we had sex right there in the hallway, while our other housemates slept. The
we moved into his bedroom and made love as if we'd known each other all of our lives. We kissed an
touched and licked and sucked and felt and grinded every part of our body, until the next day when
had to pack my things to go back to the States. No wonder he followed me to the U.S.

3:18 p.m.: I didn't date at all for four years, save one or two one-night stands, and many close ma
friends. I am still recovering. The anger, at least, is gone. It wasn't until I moved here last year that
began to blossom.

7:00 p.m.: At dance party number two this weekend, with my son. It's a celebration of music an
dancing, a bit of a hippie love fest. Great music. Lots of eye candy. Groovy.

10:40 p.m.: Home. A single dad named Martin was there tonight, who I had a little thing with
while back. I also met a single dad who I've seen at the park who seems nice. And the Scorpio w
there. I've been having so much fun lately, giving off and getting so much sexual energy.

11:29 p.m.: Looking for El Greco online. He is my cyber lover. I'm in the mood for some cyberse
with him. My friend introduced us, and he moved away before we could get to know one another. W
broke each other's Internet cherries a few months back. Now it's kind of a tradition. He is so ho
Cybersex is the best masturbation ever, because you are truly not alone—you know that someone
thinking about you, you read their words, and they are doing the same thing.

MONDAY

8:24 a.m.: Son woke me up, of course. Today Philippe and his pregnant girlfriend are getting kicke
out of their house around the corner. I was quite jealous at first—she got pregnant to trap him—b
now it's normal to stop by their place, and I've come to enjoy them as a couple. Out of it came a ver
solid and beautiful friendship that has helped me grow more than most others I've had.

9:30 a.m.: Ostensibly helping Phillippe move, but really remembering my first night in bed with hi
He said he wanted to know who I was before we had sex. It was so enlightening and sweet. W
couldn't stop kissing.

6:07 p.m.: Sometimes I surprise myself with how brazen I can be. Two of my men are coming ov
right now. Single dads with daughters. Both at the same time. Lovely.

9:22 p.m.: So, that was interesting. Martin came over with his daughter, per my son's request. I'

not sure how I feel about Martin these days. Our kids get along really well. Nathan came too. We hang out pretty much every Sunday, but he is in the beginning stages of divorce.

10:38 p.m.: Bed. I'm having crazy fantasies about my Swiss student this evening. After all of the men, I'm thinking about him! He is so sexy to me. . . mmmm. I think it may be time to finally quench some of my sexual hunger that has built up from this weekend.

10:48 p.m.: I am lucky to have had some wonderful sex. I like it kind of rough. I like to be dominated. I like a man to push me against a wall and tear my clothes off. I like to be grabbed and fucked wherever we are—an elevator, on a trail, in the car. You get the picture.

TUESDAY

6:01 a.m.: Getting up this early is so difficult. Damn. With a schedule like mine, who has time for sex life?

6:22 a.m.: Showering, thinking about when I fell in love for a few hours last month. I was visiting friends in the Bay Area, and met a guy who looked like Jakob Dylan. It was as if we were very old friends or soul mates. The energy and connection was ridiculous. We hung out for a few hours, then he walked me to my car, arm in arm, like a gentleman. He grabbed me and held me as we giggled. I was anticipating the kiss. But the kiss never came. He had been seeing someone for a month. I was stricken. I had truly thought that I had finally met someone who met all of my criteria. He kissed me slowly and sweetly on the neck as I got in my car. And that was all.

10:48 a.m.: Working. Boring so far. Feel like I'm still waking up. Not even any fantasies.

11:46 a.m.: I think that being Catholic has greatly contributed to my insatiable attraction to Jewish men. Jewish men are my fetish. Sometimes I have no idea that someone is Jewish, and find out later. That happened with Philippe.

3:42 p.m.: Oh boy. That Swiss student is undressing me with his eyes. It's clear that I'm giving back his energy, and I don't want the class to notice. But I can't help it. He has such beautiful lips. I want to be completely alone with him in the dark, to push those amazing lips into mine, tangle my fingers in his hair, and wrap my body around his. Oh, boy. This is a student I'm talking about.

5:39 p.m.: Texting Nathan. Texting makes flirting easier, much less intimidating.

8:56 p.m.: Home from a friend's birthday dinner. I love my community here. I have such a great circle of friends who really nourish me and make me happy. Having wonderful friends is in many ways similar to being in a relationship.

9:57 p.m.: I'd like to meet a certain Swiss man in the park, late at night, under a full moon. I want his hands to creep under my shirt as we kiss, perhaps pushed up against a tree in the darkness, and find my nipples. I want to feel his breath in my ear, on my cheek, on my chest. I want to run my tongue all over his body, taste his skin, smell his hair, feel his skin on my skin, longing and pressing. I want it to feel forbidden and wrong, and very exciting. I want to not be able to stop, to be swept away by uncontrolled lust. I want him to fuck me standing up, holding me up by my open legs, as he kisses me until we both orgasm.

10:13 p.m.: Actually, something very similar happened to me not long ago. I ran into a guy I'd met a couple of weeks earlier. We started talking and hung out the rest of the night and, carried away by our sexual urges, had sex in the bushes, standing up, he holding me up by my open legs. It was one of my hottest sexual experiences in years. We remained lovers for a couple of months, and then it faded.

WEDNESDAY

6:13 a.m.: Woke up thinking about Carlos. It's shocking to me that he would not want to know about his son.

9:56 a.m.: I feel blue today. I'm wondering if I will ever find love. I'm tired of meaningless sex which is why I stopped it after my last little evening a few weeks ago. I am quite happy with all of the friendships I have with men, and the love I feel for them, but none seem to be able to commit to me. It's frustrating.

10:00 a.m.: I am only thinking of the most important man in my life today: my son. Just toured the local public kindergarten.

11:35 a.m.: Swiss student wearing glasses today. Lord help me.

2:46 p.m.: Fantasizing about another instance of brief love. Ten years ago I met a Peruvian guy in Spain. I ended up in his bed at around 2:00 a.m., and stayed until 8:00 p.m. the next day, sleeping, drinking beer, eating very little, kissing, playing guitar, talking, licking, sucking. He had these orange drapes which danced in the breeze. Honestly, I cannot remember how many times we had sex. We couldn't stop. I went home and we drifted apart. But I'll never forget those hours.

10:33 p.m.: Jeez. You'd think by all of my entries that I never sleep with Americans.

10:39 p.m.: Going to bed with memories of the Swiss smile. Tomorrow is a new day. And I have no doubt that I will find him, one day. He is out there waiting, just as I am waiting for him. . . my new fabulous, fantastic love.

Diary Insight

A sex trick for you: Why does The Pretty Mom enjoy chronically good sex? Because good sex is a mind-set. Psychologist Leonore Tiefer posits that great sex requires a "symbolic investment" to provide the necessary mental spark. The Pretty Mom invests meaning into all her sexual activities, such as the one-night stand in Spain that she recasts as *Eighteen Hours with a Stranger in a Strange Land with Orange Curtains Blowing in the Sun*. Without that infusion of meaning, the exact same sex would be ho-hum. And then there's our next diarist who does the opposite: he doesn't invest, and thus, is not particularly wowed by his encounters. . . .

Diarists Considering Not Being Solo

The Eligible Guy and The Outdoorsy Guy answer a key question you might have: *What the heck is he thinking?* The Eligible Guy is *that* guy you know who inexplicably has a small harem. The Outdoorsy Guy is the smart, early-30s male with many admirers and commitment phobia.

First, the harem. The book's resident lothario, The Eligible Guy, is searching for a wife, a task he accomplishes through volume. He uses text messages to interact aloofly with a large number of women, and is rather extreme in his soloist refusal to allow the women in his life to meet any of his emotional needs. He is emotionally detached because he hasn't vested enough needs to a partner warrant attachment. It's cyclic—by continually meeting his own needs, he doesn't provide his partners any way to meaningfully enter his life, so he has all the problems of partnership and few of the benefits beyond sex. He wakes up to an empty bed and writes, "I am completely dissatisfied with my personal life."

Not surprisingly, he hurts many women. His blunder is common in the diaries—he confuses honesty with responsibility. He is truthful with partners about his sexual activities, but he is not remote.

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