

PRO BONER

Australian Penthouse met up with sex therapist Bettina Arndt to discuss her new book and to celebrate the majesty of erections

Interview: Meg White

Why did you write *What Men Want In Bed*?

This book was very much a sequel to my last one, *The Sex Diaries*, because what came through that really surprised people was the men talking so openly about their most intimate feelings about sex. I got a massive response, particularly from guys who were just so delighted that someone was writing about their problem, which is sexual starvation and the business of leading their lives having sex reluctantly doled out to them like Meaty Bites to a dog. The hundreds and hundreds of letters and emails I received afterwards made me decide to have another go.

Tell us about the new book.

The issue that most interested me in the first book was men talking about erections. Erections are very much uncharted territory, but we live in this extraordinary time where we finally have good erectile-dysfunction treatments. So I was interested in exploring the coalface of the Viagra revolution. What's it like to pop a little blue pill or inject your penis? What are the side-effects? How does your wife feel about it? There's a lot of research in the book, packaged in a way men will understand, plus the personal experiences, which I think are so important.

Can you give us a few examples?

There's some lovely stuff, like this guy whose partner is a very active partner and terribly into sex, but who has a capricious penis and can't always get erections... And she sometimes wants a second or third course, so he'll just stuff

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it in and give it a go, and if it doesn't get erect, then he just carries on and is fine with that. So some of the men are really inspirational in their persistence, in their joy. They talk about why sex is so important to them—I just think that is critical. Because so much of the way we discuss male sexuality is negative.

Why do you think that is?

I think the whole debate about relationships, the public discussion of sexuality in particular,

is dominated by women. Men never get involved in the debate because they've been howled down. I think that's really interesting and I think that's where we are now, in terms of our cultural history. We've had years and years of women defining what is normal and what is appropriate, and men have just opted out.

Is that why there's been a backlash against you—because you're advocating for men?

I think that's right. Women don't like it when you question some of the ideological assumptions they make. Such as the assumption that a woman has the right to say no, full stop, and that is the end of the story. I question whether that is reasonable. I've got a man in the book whose wife said no to sex after their last child was born, and he went for 19 years in a relationship with no sex! Is that reasonable? How can you expect a man to be monogamous, why would you expect a man to stay with you, if you are behaving like a sister to him?

Then there's the "just do it" controversy...

No-one ever let me properly explain the "just do it" thing. Thirty years ago, the people who were writing about sex said you had to have desire in order to get aroused, in order to have an orgasm. It turns out that's wrong. A woman studying this in Canada has found many women don't experience any spontaneous desire once they settle into a relationship. But it's not true that they don't enjoy sex once they get started. So I said, "Put the canoe in the water, start paddling and see what happens—and if you don't get aroused, fine, don't go ahead and bonk. Just give him pleasure with your hands, your mouth." It's always presented as me saying women should suffer through unwanted sex. I've never said that. What I am saying is, "You don't have to get aroused if it's not working for you. You can pleasure him without having to bonk." And, of course, I've always said it's an equal opportunity thing. And that really comes out in the new book, with older men in a panic about their erections retreating from all physical contact. That's awful for the women.

So you're saying there should be sexual compromise in relationships, too?

Exactly. But somehow it's got caught up with the ideology of "women have a right to say no", which I've never questioned. Of course they do. I'm just saying maybe they should think about saying yes a bit more often. But that's regarded as outrageous. Thankfully, normal people don't think like this.

How have normal people responded?

It's been great. I'm getting letters from men all over Australia, lovely letters, just saying thank goodness someone is talking about this. Look at the forum on my website (www.bettinaarndt.com.au) and you'll see men and women who agree with me about all of this. ☺

To read the extended version of this interview, please visit our website—

www.australianpenthouse.com.au.

What Men Want In Bed (Melbourne University Press, RRP\$34.99) is in bookstores now.

