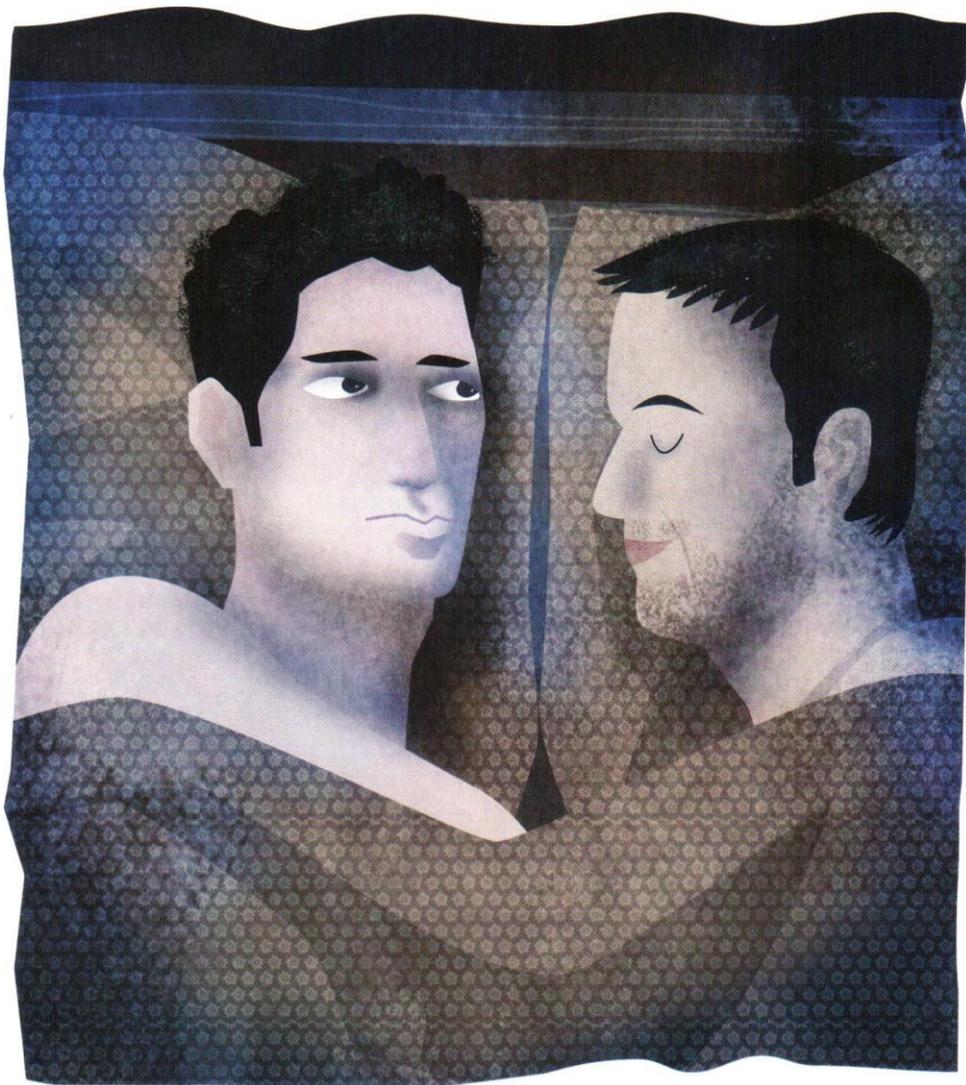


This month: JOE ON SEXUAL HISTORY

'I daren't tell my boyfriend about all the sex I've had'



Dear Paul,

I DON'T THINK you should have to tell him about your earlier sexual exploits at all. The things people do before they enter relationships are not necessarily something that needs to be talked about in your present or future relationships - especially since he has not asked you about them. Your past is not something that affects him today, as long as you are not carrying sexually transmitted diseases that you

Dear Joe,

My new boyfriend is lovely. We're both in our late 20s and feel as if we're getting into a really emotionally fulfilling relationship. The problem is that while he is relatively sexually inexperienced, having only slept with one guy before me, I've been quite the prolific lover. He knows some of my sexual past but not the nitty gritty. I feel I should be honest about it but I don't want him to think I'm totally easy. I'm starting to feel a bit insecure about really letting go in the bedroom as well, in case he cottons on to how much I've done.

PAUL, ENNISKILLEN

need to tell him about.

I often get this question from clients who are recovering sex addicts and have concerns about when to tell new boyfriends in dating situations. I usually tell them to share that they are in sexual recovery within the first three dates, so that the guys will have a chance to ask questions and make informed consent about

Illustration: DERMOT FLYNN

whether or not to continue dating. Even then I don't recommend that the recovering sex addict tell everything about their past sexual behaviour as some of the details are private.

If you were to have strayed sexually during this relationship I would be having a completely different conversation with you and encouraging you to come clean and share with him about it, as it would be something that affects him. Even then, however, I am not a proponent of telling all - just enough to get the point across to a partner about sexual indiscretions. There is a directive in 10-step programs (such as Sex and Love Addicts Anonymous, slaauk.org) which I support wholeheartedly, and that is, 'Make amends to others except when to do so would injure them or others'. Telling everything to a partner can be overwhelming and hurtful.

Privacy versus secrecy

We all have a back story, some of which is important to share as it lets others know about you, but some of it is private and personal. There is a difference between privacy and secrecy. The difference between the two is the intention.

Coming from childhoods where secrets are kept to hide dysfunctional behaviour can confuse people as to what the differences are between keeping something personal and private and hiding and secrecy.

A secret is something you might be ashamed about. Shame often drives secrecy. There may be negative consequences if it were to be revealed, so keeping it a secret avoids them. Keeping a secret may allow certain behaviour to continue, of which a partner may disapprove. In essence, secrets keep you disconnected and distant from a partner. They may have even asked you about the behaviour and you lied about it, thus perpetuating the secrecy. In other words, secrecy involves hiding something that will risk ending the relationship.

Keeping something personal doesn't involve shame or risk. Privacy is more optional and involves choice. Privacy involves defining healthy boundaries while keeping you connected to a partner. It involves things such as beliefs, truths, ideas, and even might involve fantasies and certain feelings - none of which, if shared, would betray a partner.

In your case, your past sexual behaviour seems more personal than secretive. It sounds like you think it will impact on the relationship

if you decide to 'really let go'. Are you worried that you might be turned off to the fact that he is inexperienced? Or do you think he will be turned off to the fact that you are more experienced?

I think you do have some shame or embarrassment about your past sexual experiences in the way you are describing them in your question. The reason I say this is that when people get into new relationships there are always differences in how fast, slow and experienced each other is. Your bringing this up so quickly lets me know you are feeling self-conscious for some reason, which might be just because of his inexperience. But even so, you could be thinking to yourself that you will be his teacher and mentor him sexually. Some guys find that exciting. The fact that

you think he will judge you negatively if you 'let go' is your own issue, which reflects a belief and judgment about yourself, and I wonder what that is?

If you feel like you should be honest with him about your past sexual experiences, then by all means tell him. What and how you tell him is going to be key. First, I wonder why you call them 'exploits'? Are you feeling some shame about your past - especially?

because you're

comparing yourself to his previous lack of experience? Are you ashamed or uncomfortable with your sexual past? If so, why? By the time guys are in their late 20s they have had many different sexual partners. The fact that your boyfriend hasn't is a bit more unusual. Neither of you has anything to be ashamed of. The amount of sexual experience people have has more to do with personality traits, accessibility, comfort level, sexual desire and interests.

The thing to do would be to talk to him about the fact that you have had more sexual experience than him, but do so when you feel comfortable and not ashamed of your past. Perhaps talk to some friends about it, or even a therapist or life coach to get clear that your past is your past and doesn't have to be compared. Your boyfriend may also feel ashamed that he is not more experienced and that he has not had more sexual partners. I encourage you both to talk about this openly and honestly.

It is also important to check in with each other while you are having sex together. Let him know that if you are going too fast or if he feels pushed to go in a direction he is not comfortable with, you will slow down and/or stop, and you should do the same with him.

Good luck to you both.

**We all have a back story.
It is important to share
some of it as it lets
others know about you**