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Sex on the job

What happens when so much of your work deals with sex, can you have a normal love life?

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Ian Willms/National Post

An exotic dancer gets ready to leave work. What happens when your work deals with sexuality on a day-to-day basis?

LISA RONIS

As a little girl, Lisa Ronis says she had an inherent understanding of people – their likes and dislikes, desires and fears. Self-understanding followed – albeit more slowly – and when Ms. Ronis found herself divorced before the age of 30, her busy dating life spawned a business idea. Now one of Manhattan's most sought-after matchmakers, Ms. Ronis' calendar is so crammed that dating is a luxury. In her mid-40s, she is now with an "amazing, incredible" man exclusively, but remains fascinated by the magic of what brings couples together. She appears to have a knack, successfully introducing dozens of clients who have outsourced their quest for love.

"Before I started my company, I was divorced and I had boyfriends and always got set up, but I used to say, 'If this one bites the dust, where am I going to meet someone else?' Because, I was in the same circle ... A lot of people don't have the resources to meet people and this is what I do morning, noon and night. Every day I meet people. Every freaking day I am meeting a bunch of new people.

"I touch so many different people in so many different worlds so I never worry about my social life, ever. Ever.

"I've never let the lines get crossed. I think that would be a big problem. Age-wise a lot of the people that come to me are looking for marriage and family and I might be open to being remarried, but I am not looking to have a family at this stage. I keep it very professional and I am usually dating someone, I usually have someone in my life and if I don't, I keep it very professional.

"My clients like to set me up though, so that's a kind of cute thing. I don't date potential clients or current clients, but lots of times a client will say 'I have someone really great, I'd love them to meet you.'

"I call [relationships] a puzzle. I think it's a case by case study. I think if we had to make a list of all the things that you should marry and the picture of the kind of guy you should be with or the kind of woman you'd want your brother to marry, or guy clients or whatever, that's all fine, well and good, but you can't really explain chemistry.

"Looking at my friends settling down – maybe sometimes a second time – and just sort of seeing with age as well as the world and life around me, companionship is a piece I think about. The whole companionship thing is more desirable. And, maybe I do this dating thing because I was a dating machine my whole life and I know how to find people dates and I always think it's fun to get dressed up.

"Still, whomever I am dating, if it's one man or three men, I like to get dressed up and go out for a nice dinner and feel like a princess and have a nice glass of wine. It's a great town to do it in and it's a fantasy and all that kind of stuff. But, the reality of life is that it's really nice to share with someone. You can be in a diner if you're with the right person."

PAUL GILLESPIE

For six of his almost 30 years with the Toronto Police Service, Paul Gillespie ran the child exploitation unit, gaining world renown for successfully tracking pedophiles online. When viewing countless images of child abuse began to exact a toll on him, Mr. Gillespie retired from the force to co-found a not-for-profit organization which focuses on Internet safety for children. He says the images he saw through his police work scarred him, but says his suffering does not compare to that of innocent children. Separating work and family required counselling and the support of his co-workers. Even the most well-intentioned spouse is not equipped to properly deal with those who investigate sex crimes.

"It's often surreal. You just can't get your head around some of the things people will do to other people and especially such vulnerable victims – children.

"It's certainly not something that most people can stomach, but when you do find yourself feeling sorry for yourself then you just are constantly reminded what would it be like to be on the other side of that camera. What if that was one of my children or a child that I cared for, would I want somebody to do whatever they had to do to rescue that child?

"I will say that I am married and have children, but I really won't talk about much more than that. Realizing the horrible life circumstances that some children face makes you more likely to try to enjoy every moment of your own life and try to ensure that any children around you are treated properly.

"The challenge is when you see children in these horrible images that might remind you of let's say a niece or a nephew or a loved one ... Or, you're out shopping or you're at WalMart, you'll see a child and you'll have flashbacks, or you'll see a parent yelling or mistreating a child, then sometimes your imagination starts to get carried away.

"It's not something you can park and pack away. It's there. It certainly leaves a scar on your soul and your internal being and that will never go away. But, that's a small cost to try to extract a child from these circumstances.

"One day, I just woke up and talked to my wife and said, 'You know what, I just can't do this.'

"This is not something most members of the unit can take home and talk about for the reason that most spouses - like most normal people - don't want to hear about it.

"That's why it's so important that there is so much camaraderie and esprit de corps amongst the officers, because the last thing you want to do is go home and in the sanctity within your family start talking about what you did today because it would really potentially bring harm to your environment.

"You speak in general terms, but nothing specific. You don't come home and say, 'Boy, let me tell you about the 15-minute movie I watched today involving 'This.' You just don't do it."

ROBIN MILHAUSEN

Robin Milhausen has often wondered what others think when they catch a glimpse of K-Y Jelly tube testers in the backseat of her car or a bag of dildos and sex toys on her living room couch. As a professor of human sexuality at the University of Guelph the 32-year-old mother's environments are littered with sex paraphernalia that she uses as props in her classes. At

cocktail parties, Ms. Milhausen, who is married to a psychologist who specializes in couple's therapy, is easily the most sought-after guest, endlessly fielding questions about sexual predicaments and pleasure. But for all the interest her research generates, the host of a defunct sex talk show, Sex, Toys & Chocolate, says people might be surprised by just how normal her marriage is.

"I get that 'Whoa, you're husband [is a lucky guy.]' I get those comments often, but really, we're just a normal couple who are dealing with the same demands and stresses that all other couples are dealing with. We probably just communicate about them a little better.

"He doesn't have an uptight partner. If he were to have questions about sexuality, he wouldn't have to worry about his partner judging him, or getting all upset and thinking, 'Oh my gosh, that act, or book, or video is disgusting.'

"He's married to a woman who is open-minded.

"We're open to talking about things related to sexuality and our sexual lives. I mean, I am very well aware of the stresses that happen for couples when there are two people who have careers and they have a young child. So, I know that intimacy is one of the first things that can go when you're living in that kind of a busy, hectic life. The fact that I know that, because of my work, allows me to bring up conversations with him that can head off conflicts at the pass.

"People, I think, have a lot of deep and burning questions about sexuality, but they don't have anyone to ask. Unfortunately, a lot of our general practitioners don't have in-depth knowledge about sexual problems; many psychologists don't have specialized training, so as soon as somebody finds someone who knows some of the answers they've been seeking, I think they find it quite exciting.

"All the questions have to do with women's sexual pleasure and they come from men and they come from women. Not just pleasure, but increase their desire: Women want to want sex more and men want women to want sex more.

"My dissertation research and much of the work I did at the Kinsey Institute ... which is where I got my doctorate, was on factors that inhibit and enhance arousal, basically, that is turn-ons and turn-offs. I am really aware of all the things that can impact women's and men's arousal: stress, being tired, having children in the home ... All of those things are land mines for sexual problems.

"I see the questions, I see the curiosity in my work. I see people who are looking for solutions to sexual problems and people who are wanting to enhance their sexual lives, I see a lot of inquisitiveness."

ANASTASIA KUZYK

After 23 years as a sex worker and dominatrix, Anastasia Kuzyk describes herself as "semi-retired." Ms. Kuzyk only sees long-time clients once a week. She is in school, working as a nanny, does volunteer work related to Hurricane Katrina and is running a not-for-profit organization for sex workers. Ms. Kuzyk believes sex work should be decriminalized and is quick to point out that some have chosen the profession and are not addicts who have no choice but prostitution. She admits that sex work and domination are not activities that the men to whom she has been committed are immediately comfortable with. At 39, she says she is less concerned with the needs of others and more interested in catching up on sleep, finishing school and travelling.

"Most men are too immature to deal with my job.

"I've been married in the past, had serious relationships, lived with people, not lived with people. I've had open relationships, I've had, you know, exclusive relationships, but they understand: my job is my job and if they need to have their hand held, I am sorry I don't have time for that. I am an adult and if you need some answers about my job as my partner, I am certainly willing to answer those.

"You develop a degree of intimacy over time with people you've had with you for 10, 20 years and I have a lot of men who have come to see in the 10-, 20-year period. But, it's not the same sort of intimacy I would have in my personal life. I am doing this because I am good at it.

"To me, I see it as sexual psychiatry. Why does a person go to a psychiatrist? To get their s--t together. Well, it's the same thing with me. I've heard all kinds of different stories about people's backgrounds and about how they have a particular fantasy and you know what, they're probably better to come and see me and working it out with a sex worker than going to see a therapist who's going to charge them much more money in the long run and probably screw them up worse.

"We don't sell intimacy. People who come to see me are looking for a fantasy, not always a specific fantasy, but there is the fantasy aspect of paying a call girl who does domination and going to their place, something mysterious, unknown, different.

"But believe me, I've also had my days of feeling like I am on an assembly line turning a screw. That was back in the days when there was a lot more business.

"I like [my job] for the freedom it gives me.... People are actually shocked that people would stay in this profession [this] long.... The other thing is, you're your own boss, you can set your own rates and you can set your own hours. People don't think you have the right to say no and we do. We do a lot."