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Tense over your past perfections

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DON'T BRAG: LIMIT TALK OF OLD ROMANCES TO HEALTH ISSUES

By John Boudreau
Mercury News

It was a Super Bowl of sex, the kind of romantic encounter that makes a guy want to do a touchdown dance.

But then Marc Rudov fumbled.

He told his woman their moments of love reminded him of another time. With *another* woman.

D'oh!

“Of course, it set off World War III,” says the contrite Campbell investment banker.

He's lucky he wasn't sentenced to the couch for life.

In an era when sexually transmitted diseases are on every sexually active single person's radar, the need to talk about past intimate encounters can be a matter of health.

“You should come clean about any communicable disease you might have, from the common cold to HIV,” says Norine Dworkin, co-author of “You Know He's a Keeper, You Know He's a Loser” (Perigee, \$12.95).

But too much pillow talk can cause problems.

“It brings up jealousy issues, which tend to chip away at a relationship,” observes Beverly Hills psychologist Jenn Berman.

Indeed, gaining information about who a partner knew before you may seem like innocent curiosity at the start of a relationship. But as a couple grow closer together, details from those yesteryears can intrude like an unwanted lover.

Rudov, 50, who has been dating regularly since his 1992 divorce, says such information has hurt him, as well. (He's self-publishing a book to help guys: ``The Man's No-Nonsense Guide to Women," \$17.95, available at www.themansnononsenseguidetowomen.com.)

``I've always wanted to know how I compare with men from her past, and she wants to know how she compares with women in my past," he says. But, Rudov adds, ``It starts to become too painful."

While learning the details of a beloved's sexual history can be hurtful to both parties, Berman says, that, in general, men are more bothered by it.

``It backfires for both genders," she says. ``But men are instinctively more territorial."

In the past, Dworkin, 38, has been asked by boyfriends about how they compare in size and performance.

``It's such a vulnerable question," she says. ``Of course, there is only one answer, even if you are lying through your teeth. If you want him in your life, you say, `You are all I need. You satisfy me completely.' "

Men and women can be hurt by hearing about a partner's old romances, but for different reasons, says Rachel Greenwald, author of ``Find a Husband After 35 Using What I Learned at Harvard Business School" (Ballantine Books, \$22.95).

``Of course, these are stereotypes, but they seem very true based on the hundreds of singles that I've talked to," she says.

``I think that men have a harder time dealing with a partner's sexual past, and women have a harder time dealing with a partner's emotional past," she says. ``For example, the man asks -- competitively -- `Did you do it twice in one night?' And the woman asks -- insecurely -- `Did you really love her?' "

Berman proposes a Golden Rule for bedroom tales: Don't go there.

``In general, bragging about how great a former partner was is not kind," she says. ``It can be harmful."

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