

Trust Reviews?: A recommended doctor has bad online reviews. What should be done?



Dear C and Dr. B;

I needed to choose a new doctor, so I asked a friend to recommend someone. She told me she liked Dr. _____, but when I went online to read reviews of this doctor, I was a bit alarmed. Out of 20 comments I found, across multiple review sights, 17 were very, very negative and only three were positive. Should I run away? These reviews don't sound at all like my friend's experience. Now I am not sure what to think. Should I get another recommendation?

- Hesitant Harriet

Dr. B says: No need to run, Harriet. You should take all reviews with a grain of salt. First, people don't

often write reviews for good experiences, only the bad ones. This is especially true in a service field. Also, the way the internet works is that items that increase traffic or make money always get preference. Negative reviews generate traffic and invite those reviewed to engage. In addition, if a doctor cared about his ratings, he would just hire a company that created new positive reviews in order to bury the bad ones. If you ever see a doctor with all positive reviews, they have probably hired a service.

Reviews online are like headlines - they can be very misleading. They aren't real statistics and they don't give the wider context. As one doctor said, "I have 20 horrible reviews online, this is great. That makes me happy because I have 100,000 clients."

The internet likes to push controversy, but that does not mean there is an actual controversy. A cartoon in the political satire journal, *The Onion*, illustrates this perfectly: A doctor checks his Yelp ratings and sees they are down so he says to himself, "My reviews are down, I have to prescribe more Adderall today!" You just have to see for yourself whether the ratings you saw have any relevance. If you have a good experience, you might want to write a positive review.

C says: Having written many positive reviews myself, I can't agree that people only write when they have a bad experience. However, I will agree that sometimes reviewers get it wrong, and some reviews are simply a matter of differing taste. For instance, I loved the film, *The Cable Guy*, for the same reason that most critics and fans hated it - it just wasn't what they expected.

Some products and services that get rave reviews turn out to be duds. I do know that there are companies that will pay consumers to write positive reviews online to boost sales. It does seem that a company would be far more likely to pay people to promote their services than to trash their competitors. But that is why, if you want a rating you can trust, it pays to consult a source such as *Consumer Reports*, which uses credible critics with experience in their field, rather than comments from consumers.

Unfortunately, doctors are not products and can't be subjected to controlled testing the same way cars and oven cleaners can. When it comes to physician reviews, I would caution you to read the comments carefully. Some patients just like to bitch - they can go into an office in a bad mood, get a prognosis they don't like, then decide to blame the doctor. Some people demand inappropriate treatments or drugs and get mad when a doctor won't prescribe them. I even know a woman who fired her doctor because he told her to lose weight and she felt insulted. That's the kind of crap you can ignore. But if the doctor was incompetent or caused the patient unnecessary suffering, I'd take those comments more seriously.

In these days of social media and reality shows, people are capable of causing a lot of damage with their words. This is a power that can be misused more often than not. If you have doubts, ask questions. Being your own advocate is always your best protection.

You can visit Dr. B's blog at drbrilliantcliche.wordpress.com

Resolve to Change?: One reader wonders if new year's resolutions are harmful

Dear C & Dr. B;

Every year, I make resolutions for the new year, usually to lose weight and stop drinking. Every year I break the resolutions after a few weeks. Last year, I decided not to make any resolutions, and I lost 5 pounds. My alcohol consumption remained about the same, but still...

Now as the new year starts, I want to make resolutions, because I want to make decisions in my own life that I can control, and follow through with them. I think it's a reaction to COVID and feeling stressed and restricted for so long. I want to do something. But now I am afraid that if I make resolutions, I'll just doom myself to fail - and if I just act without thinking, I will go in the right direction.

Can resolutions be bad for you?

Saint Sativa

Dr. B says: Any ultimatum doesn't work. Change doesn't happen in a day. You either make a lifestyle change that you do every day, or you don't. To quote my friend, Valerie Frank: "Did you know that if you eat perfectly and lose 13.5 lbs in a month you have to keep doing it... like forever?!!!!!!!" There is a great podcast about the science behind changing or maintaining behavior on NPR at The Hidden Brain.

Here is another relevant quote: "resolutions are made to be broken." So, either do it or not, but if you "do it," keep doing it... like forever.

C says: I beg to differ.

Resolutions are neither all bad or nor all good. A resolution does not have to be an ultimatum, and it need not always be repeated FOREVER exactly the same. I've worked at diet centers, so I know - there is a science to effective weight loss and it doesn't involve eternal starvation. On safe weight loss programs, after reaching goal weight the maintenance diet isn't nearly as restrictive as the weight loss diet was. I think Dr. B's friend may have been referring to those fad diets that cause rapid weight loss, which is mostly water. But in a broader sense, I think that the mistake most people make with resolutions is that their goal is to STOP doing something. They don't consider that human nature deplores a vacuum, and if a new habit isn't formed to fill that vacuum, failure is imminent. That's where permanent lifestyle changes come in.

But the biggest problem most people face when they make resolutions is the discomfort that always comes with change. It has nothing to do with ultimatums or resolutions, it is simply a consistent feature of change: we have a result in mind when we make those new year's promises, but in between now and that result, there's going to be a whole lotta uncomfortable. There are very few changes that feel right when they first happen - quite the opposite. Humans are creatures of habit, and every habit we break screams to be reinstated, while every new unfamiliar habit we are trying to stick to feels completely wrong. Anyone who is not prepared to deal with that is doomed to failure.

Resolutions do have a purpose. In order for ANY change to happen the first step is a decision, ie, resolution, to change. Of course, that decision must be ACTED on. But the resolution comes first. If you just act without thinking, you are not likely to wander randomly into new, better ways of living. You are far more likely to wander where your instincts take you - right back to those comfortable old habits.

Don't be afraid to make resolutions. Just be aware of what comes next, and you will be on your way to keeping one.

You can visit Dr. B's blog at drbrilliantcliche.wordpress.com

Mom Is Making Everyone Nuts: One writer wonders how to deal with a complaint-filled family member



Free image/jpeg, cartoon Old Lady pointing with finger

Dear C and Dr. B;

I love my mother, but she is driving me absolutely nuts. She wants my help but then doesn't let me help her. She also makes everything about her, even COVID - you'd think it was a personal plot against her. She complains she is lonely but then refuses to go anywhere with our family when I suggest it. She says she doesn't feel well but doesn't follow through with the doctors appointments I make for her. The few she does make, she never follows through with the advice or treatments.

She is so frustrating I feel like I want to scream. I find I am lashing out at her in small ways, and it makes me feel so guilty I just end up hating myself. I can't just ignore her or let her be. She is my mother and she does have real problems that she is ignoring like diabetes. She has no one else but me; my dad died years ago. What should I do?

- Frustrated,

Dr. B says: Some people think in a very black and white manner and have no ability to separate themselves from any outside stimuli - this is what makes everything personal and about themselves. Do not take this personally, it is the way they think and it is more or less unchangeable.

This way of thinking often leads into behavior such as your mom's. There's actually a non-sanctioned term for it: "Help-rejecting Clingers." Inside they often feel trapped between helplessness and control, and, like a drowning person, they tend to grab onto anyone who tries to save them, and take them down too.

It is not easy to walk the line of compassion with neutrality. Maybe you could try addressing the core: "You seem frustrated, are you perplexed, confused?" Ask leading questions that make it her idea for what your goal is for her. This is called motivational interviewing. You might want to find her a counselor who works with this technique and take a class yourself. It is a very effective teaching tool because it works without the person knowing they are being taught.

It is normal to get so frustrated you want to lash out, but that's something your own therapist could help you with. Don't internalize the frustration - it is not your fault, and guilt doesn't help anyone.

Your mom is an adult and you can't make her a happy person no matter what you do. You have to learn to be happy yourself, not dependent upon your mom being happy. You have no way of knowing what is inside her head or what her thinking and motivations are, so don't make up her story for her. You can only do your best and know you tried. Be the person you want to be and appreciate yourself for who you are. Sometimes the hand we are dealt is a hard one to play.

C says: I used to have a friend - "Ken," a painter who lived alone. A few minutes with him showed why - his idea of communicating seemed to consist of fretting, worrying and bitching about things in lieu of conversation. He went on and on about problems and annoyances, like a dog settling down for a good chew on a bone, gnawing at whatever misery he was obsessing over.

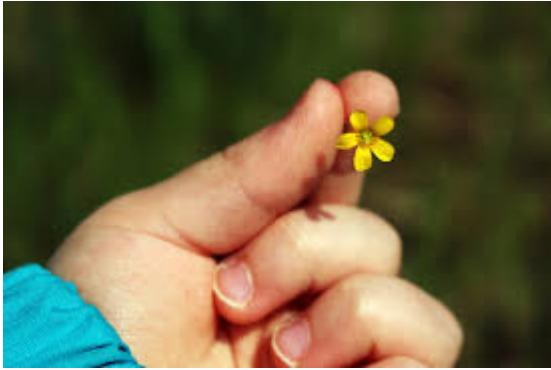
Other people, and his family, said nothing to deter him. They just played along, let him gnaw and fret, then avoided him afterward for months, even years, at a time.

I couldn't stand Ken's crap, but I understood his lack of social ability and respected his painting, so I made an effort. Whenever I was with the guy and he went off too long on one of his rants, I'd just say, "No, Ken. Enough negative stuff. Now we are going to talk about something happy." If encouraged, he would babble on and on about his painting instead. Self obsessed people always enjoy talking about themselves. It's up to you to change the subject.

You aren't going to change your mom, but people take their cues from others on how to act; you can redirect them with a little practice. Dr. B gave you some useful advice - therapy for both of you is a good idea. You are just as much stuck in your role of "martyred daughter" as Mom is in hers of "Help-rejecting Clinger." Time to learn some new tricks.

You can visit Dr. B's blog at drbrilliantcliche.wordpress.com

In Kind: If kindness doesn't bring kindness, what's the point?



Dear Dr B and C,

I was raised in a Christian home and was taught that humans were made in God's image so there is good in everyone. I was taught to be patient, loving and kind, and that this would bring out the best in others. But what I have found is that this doesn't seem to be true. The more kind I am, the worse people seem to treat me. I am confused.

- Virginia

C says: The problem here is that whatever sect of Christianity you were raised in seems to have left out a great many of God's other attributes. The God of the Old Testament was not merely a kind and benevolent entity. He was also vengeful, angry and demanding. If we are made in His image, we also contain less gentle emotions, and there are few religions on Earth that do not address the fact that there is a dark side to humans as well as light.

Another problem with answering your question is that you are being incredibly vague about both what your idea of "kind" is and what your idea of "being treated badly" is. Do you help old ladies across the street only to be cursed at because they were, in fact, waiting for a bus? Do you lavish emotional sympathy upon those less fortunate than you, and are they surly in return because they are starving to death and desperately need food, not pity? Your attitude and expectations might be part of the problem for all we know.

You might need to learn the difference between "being kind" and being a door mat that nobody asked for. True kindness means seeing that something is needed and supplying what is required with no expectation of a reward or applause. Sometimes true kindness requires both training and courage - for instance, if a man is drowning, he is probably terrified and thrashing about. If you approach him with gentle concern, chances are he will not only be unreceptive, he will probably clobber you and take you down with him. Only a trained life guard is really of use in a situation like that.

Here's a fact you need to deal with: The world is made up of many people who were raised in different religions and cultures, and under different circumstances than yours. All of those differences allow for

the possibility that you are not all following the same script, and may not get the responses you expect. You are not wrong to be kind, certainly not as an initial gesture. But you have to understand something about this dual nature of humans - being kind over and over to someone who slaps you silly in return is not kind - it is just teaching them that they can act as badly as they want and they will still be rewarded with kindness. Dr. B will elucidate.

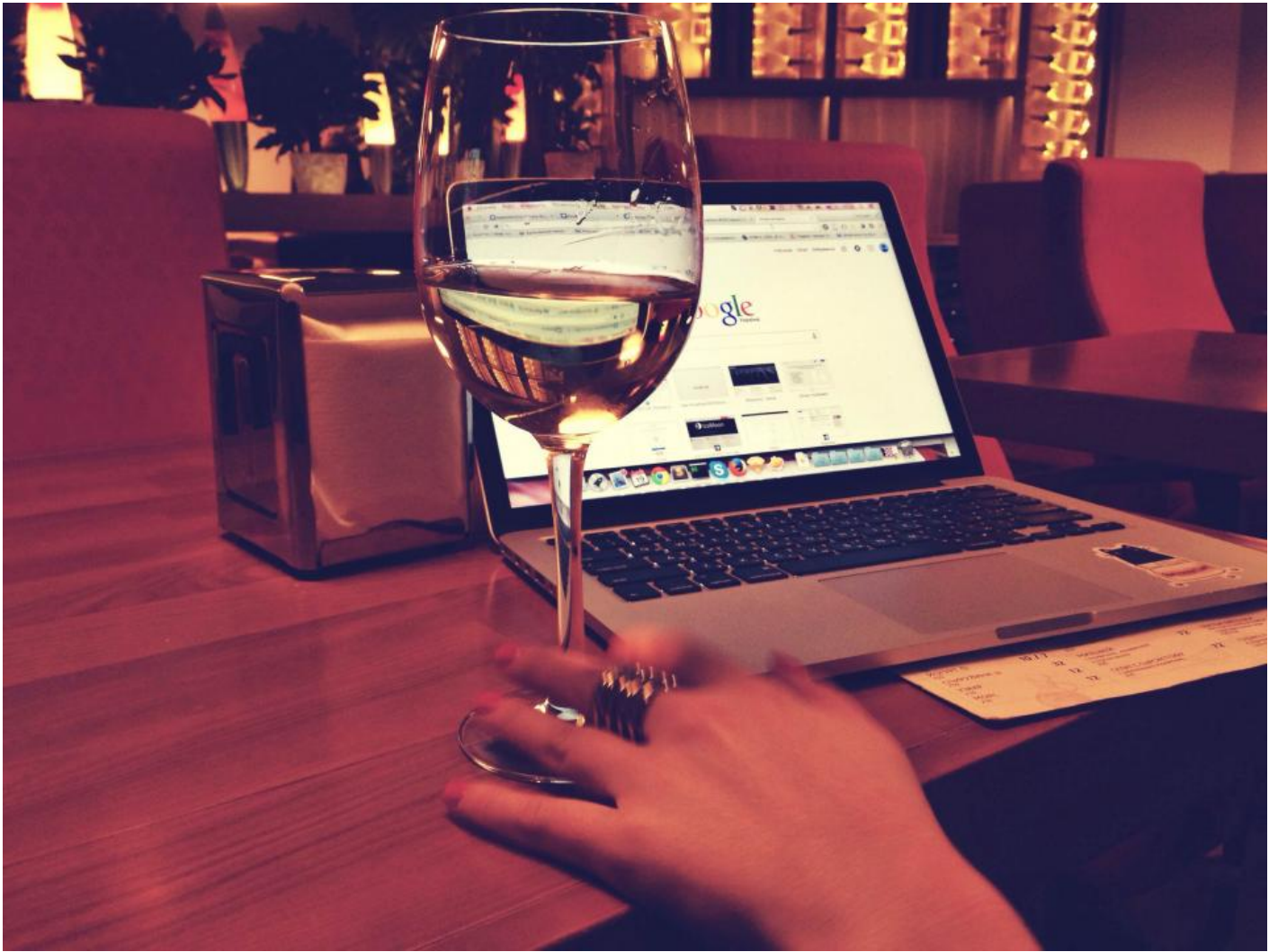
Dr. B says: If you have to believe in God know that god is everything so there is nothing that is not god thus God is good and God is bad. So even in your paradigm people can be good or bad, so just use common sense. Some people are good. Some people are bad. Some people are very bad but most people are just confused and trying to figure it all out. Good people can be too good thus causing bad outcomes like with enablers or codependents. In our culture, both economically and politically, people often succeed best by being very bad. Whistle blowers are often punished for trying to stop corruption.

Since people don't always get rewarded for being good, the best reason to be kind is because that is who you want to be. So, Virginia - judge people by their behaviors. If they have bad behaviors, they are bad and stay away from them. No goodness on your part is going to change them.

All the best in the New Year.

You can visit Dr. B's blog at drbrilliantcliche.wordpress.com

Hard Habit to Break: Is there harm in a bedtime glass of wine?



Dear C and Dr. B;

I am not a problem drinker - my one glass of wine before bed was something my doctor knew about and saw no harm in. I never drank during the day and two glasses was my limit at parties.

Then for some reason back in August, after I had an awful bout of the stomach flu, I didn't drink for a few days because I was recovering. I expected I'd go back to my usual habits, but for some reason, I just didn't want to drink anymore. The days went by. I thought I'd see big changes in my life after I'd been sober a month, but nothing much changed except I was a bit more awake sooner in the mornings and felt a bit stronger.

As I enter my fourth month of unintentional sobriety, I've been wondering as the holidays are upon us: Is it a good idea to perhaps have one toast to nod in the new year? It does seem like a social glass of wine, even if it's on Zoom, is an appropriate way of sharing and relaxing. Or should I leave well enough alone? I admit - when I did have that glass every night, even if I was already so tired I wanted to drop, I'd still want the wine before bed. I felt a bit like it controlled me in a way. Now it doesn't. What if I was right back to every night again and couldn't stop?

Dr B says: There are different types of addictions. By your description, you didn't drink enough to have had a physiological addiction to the alcohol itself but you did have a psychological addiction. You

created a state-dependent Pavlovian pairing between the relaxation that alcohol induced and the first stage of sleep, which is a slowing and relaxation that the body normally does on its own. When these things get paired, after a few times you can no longer induce the first stage of sleep on your own without the anticipated drink to do it for you. This is not an alcohol disorder, but a sleep disorder. Now that you once again can sleep on your own, I wouldn't screw it up by using alcohol to celebrate. Try some other ritual, perhaps an outdoor sparkler?

By the way, psychological addictions can occur with any type of pairing. This is often the way many products and placebos work. However, since alcohol is not a placebo, if it used on a regular basis for sleep you will rapidly not be able to sleep without it. Other depressants, such as marijuana or benzos, will have the same effect.

C says: I do understand your quandary - although you could celebrate by waving a sparkler around, it just isn't the same as sharing a nice bottle of wine with friends and sinking into that lovely floating warmth without effort. Sigh. If only you could do it just that once and then wait until the next celebration to imbibe again. But we know better, don't we?

Maybe it wouldn't be such a big deal if you started drinking again - after all, you weren't exactly a problem drinker. And research shows that for many people there can be health benefits in the moderate consumption of alcohol. But let's be very clear about this: You are not making a decision to have one celebration, you are making the decision to go back to an old habit. It is a very rare phenomenon for the door to Freedom From Alcohol to open as effortlessly as it did for you. For most people, stopping is an ongoing and difficult struggle.

This is a decision that only you can make, but consider this when you make it: Your body was trying to tell you something back in August. What does it say now? That's who you should be asking, not us.

You can visit Dr. B's blog at drbrilliantcliche.wordpress.com

What if the Norm Doesn't Work?: One reader wonders if it's her or her culture



Authentic Wedding Photography | www.patinaphotography.co.nz

Dear C and Dr. B;

I was having a difficult time with dating and thought my own expectations were the problem ... until I visited a friend living across the world, and saw how differently relationships are regarded there. They have a strong sense of family, but as far as everything else - it seems like anything goes! One woman I met was a yoga instructor who'd been married to a man from England for 15 years. They lived in different cities because they wanted different things in life, but it was an amicable agreement between the two of them, so he could keep his green card. Nobody else comments on it. The woman has a boyfriend, the man has a girlfriend, and they're both invited to mutual friend's weddings and events. In another house, the husband is having an affair, but the wife doesn't care because he's very discreet, is loving to the kids and doesn't embarrass her in public. The wife knows who the mistress is, but pretends not to.

In the US, this would all be everybody's business, lawyers would get involved, people would get greedy, backs would get stabbed. My friend told me that since she moved from the States, she was discovering that our social and cultural views on marriage have many variations in many other places she's visited.

Since I got back from my trip, I've looked at the guys I used to date and realized they weren't what I really wanted - they were what I was expected to want. So it makes me wonder - how much of the marital conflict and high divorce rates are due to cultural crap rather than personal or emotional issues? And what exactly is the goal of couples counseling - to make people better able to live with stuff they never wanted in the first place?

- Wendy Wonders

Dr. B says: I'll start with your last question - what is the goal of couples counseling? What I do is to ask: "What would you like your relationship to look like 20 years from now?" and work backward from that point in order to make sure the couple is practicing the behaviors, gaining the skill set and making the decisions that will actually make that happen. This is the same goal and method used for individual counseling. All the rest, what anyone else is doing or thinks of the relationship is entirely superfluous. Your other question addresses the superfluous.

Does culture dictate who we think we are and what we want? Yes, absolutely. Is there an I or self underneath the cultural loading that might have other needs and wants? Yes and no. We are our cultural story until we decide that it doesn't need to represent us any longer and we can write a different story.

Do different cultures have different cultural stories and expectations? Yes and no. Since Christianity has spread throughout the globe we have a much more limited view of "possible" than we used to, but at the same time, how each culture complies with or defies those rules and expectations differs greatly. Europeans in general comply only superficially as they also maintain old and ingrained habits of defiance - silent, but accepted, norms like mistresses and gigolos. Women have large social groups that support each other in their dysfunctional relations.

America lost these extended female support networks to deal with dysfunctional relations and replaced them with Xanax and valium. In Muslim countries a wife can be killed for looking at another man but there is a class of female prostitutes that do not marry and it's perfectly acceptable for men to have relations with them. Japan also has a female prostitute social class that is acceptable for married men to frequent.

America has no socially accepted prostitution but certainly has non formalized prostitution. I doubt there is any place that doesn't have crazy behavior and dysfunctional relations. Being human is messy. Most societal and religious rules are arbitrary and have nothing to do with human nature, but as people have to live together, so life and culture get interesting in dysfunctional ways.

C says: No one is going to change the social norms of the culture they live in, at least not during their own lifetime. So if you want to adapt a different model than the one you see here, you are going to have to either a) move to another country where people are more accepting of what you want, or b) cover up your propensities in public and keep your private life private. A surprising number of the diplomats in the UN who live in countries where homosexuality is a crime punishable by death are, in fact, gay. It's a secret that only gets publicized if they become an impediment in someone else's larger political aspirations.

There's actually probably a lot more alternative relationships going on in the States than you are aware of. Remember - a tacit agreement is silent. It is only known by the parties involved, and there's very little that goes on between consenting adults that really needs to be made public.

You can visit Dr. B's blog at drbrilliantcliche.wordpress.com

Avoiding the Maskless: One reader wonders why not everyone got the message



Don Dughi Collection

Dear C and Dr. B;

My Thanksgiving plans were ruined by an idiot non-mask wearing coworker. When seeing clients she doesn't wear a mask because she says that it interferes with communication and empathy. She just doesn't get the whole "protective safety measures" thing. So what happened? She tested positive for COVID the day before Thanksgiving, which means not only did she expose her many clients, but our entire office to COVID. Doesn't she realize the consequences on others of her idiotic decisions? How can we get it across to people: You have no right not to wear a mask in public, you are doing it to protect others and yourself - and masks do work if both people have them on and are 6 feet from each other or more.

What makes this even worse is my boss did not even send out a memo warning the staff of their possible exposure prior to Thanksgiving. I had to find out via the gossip chain! All idiots!

Surrounded by Idiots

Dr. B says: Unfortunately, you can't do too much about it, Surrounded. Currently, Republican conservative media is saying the pandemic is over and that it's only being perpetuated by the

Democrats. Of course they're 'idiots,' but there are a lot of them. The Supreme Court this week just backed them up saying you can't make people wear masks in large gatherings, it's unconstitutional. Unfortunately, it does require a uniform law and response from authorities like seatbelts or no smoking, as it is essentially the same thing.

Masks have been politicized by someone who is, in my opinion, the biggest idiot in charge, and all the lesser idiots have followed suit. Like with HIV, people should be able to hold others who blatantly infect them accountable. This is a crime, possibly murder, in fact. But with masks, it's seen by some as your right to kill others. This is what happens from the divided politics of this country anti common sense dangerous craziness. Not much you can do about it.

C says: Okay, enough ranting! This argument is getting old. Yeah, I know - idiots won't wear masks, they see a protective health measure as a plot against their person freedom - blah, blah blah.

Look - the prolonged stress and hardships of the pandemic are at such a point that we are like dogs chasing our own tails, each panting after their own cause because there's nothing else we can really DO. I don't want to hear about it anymore because it's wasted energy. Okay, it's just true - if people ARE idiots, there's nothing you can do about it. Dealing with the anti-masker conspiracy theorists is like dealing with someone who has Alzheimer's. They are lost in their own reality. Correcting them is pointless. If you are going to be with them, you have to play along and try to steer them gently, and without their knowing, in a better direction. Whenever possible, just stay away from them.

But please, Surrounded, don't give up! The one thing that is certain in life is change. Things are going to change. In January, we will have a responsible adult in the oval office again, one who believes in science and wants to get the country out of this mess, not promote himself, his personal businesses, or his next run for office. The whole "I won't wear a mask" thing is going to become as unpopular as smoking in restaurants. In the meantime, protect yourself. Avoid the maskless assholes. Wait it out. Our nation's four years of darkness are coming to an end.

You can visit Dr. B's blog at drbrilliantcliche.wordpress.com

FaceOffbook: A family argues about social media



Free image/jpeg, Resolution: 1420×1090, File size: 53Kb, dislike, thumb down, icon

Dear C and Dr. B;

This really makes me angry. I use Facebook to keep in touch with friends and family and a large part of that is posting photos. My wife and daughter think Facebook is “icky” and “a violation of personal privacy” although they both use other forms of social media, like Instagram. They will not let me post any photos of them on Facebook so my page ends up being lots of pictures of me. I look like a narcissist as it’s all a photo gallery of me, me, me! I don’t know how to deal with this. We have already discussed it to death, but nothing gets resolved. When I ignore them and post photos containing them anyway, they get really mad and they make me remove them. I really don’t see why it differs from the sites my daughter uses where she’s posting photos of herself every 10 seconds??

Defaced Dad

Dr. B says: We each have a fantasy of what lies on the other side of our magic mirror devices. Each social media platform advertises to these fantasies. One says our images are safe because they disappear but since people can screenshot, that’s not really true. Others use other false reassurances.

If humans were rational creatures, your wife would be right and we shouldn’t use social media at all, but alas, we are emotional creatures and social media is here to stay despite the consequences. So

rather than sulk, why don't you just create an old fashioned year-in-review photo book or calendar for close friends and family? More than likely, they will appreciate a real old fashioned book that they can hold in their hands.

C says: Your family IS right, Dad - and there's more than one reason.

For your daughter this could be the big deterrent - Facebook isn't cool anymore. There may be some teens who still use it, but they prefer for the most part to use a variety of newer apps to connect in different ways. Instagram, Snapchat and Twitter are more popular and have become household names. Teens love to try out new apps they hear about from friends, see in ads, or find on the trending list at the app store. When your daughter says Facebook is icky, that's probably because she is seeing it on the same level as poodle skirts and AOL.

But your wife probably has other reasons in mind. Here's a headline for you: in 2018, it was revealed that the U.K. based campaign strategy firm Cambridge Analytica used 50 million Facebook users' personal data without their permission. A lot of people tried to deactivate their accounts when they heard this and that's when things got interesting, because here's what happens if you try to do delete a Facebook page - NOTHING. I can tell you this from personal experience. Mind you, I am sure it is eventually possible to delete a Facebook account ... but I gave up after the first dozen or so twists, turns and dead ends. I did a Google search and discovered that literally thousands of other Facebook users have had the same problem. Facebook is part of an ecosystem of apps, which makes the decision to delete far more complicated. Dating apps such as Tinder and Hinge, and services like Spotify can all use Facebook to create user profiles. Once you have a FB account, it's a bit like having an invasive plant taking over your yard - the roots and tendrils establish runners far from the original plant. Pluck one from the earth, and you still have dozens more to find.

I get it, Dad - you see Facebook as an innocent online photo album. But just because you don't see the difference between your favorite app and Instagram doesn't mean there isn't one. Facebook also has a reputation for making victims easy marks for stalkers, allowing political propaganda, and looking the other way as unverified conspiracies theories repeat themselves.

But the real issue here is a respect for personal preference, AND the right to privacy. If you are concerned about looking like a narcissist, then you are not unaware of public opinion - if you care about what people think of you, don't you imagine your wife and daughter have similar concerns? If they don't want to be on Facebook, then back off. It's not your choice to make.

You can visit Dr. B's blog at drbrilliantcliche.wordpress.com

Just Smile!: Should she call out her sexist board member?

Dear C and Dr. B;

I am really mad, but don't know what to do or say. Last night during a 12- person zoom meeting of nine men and three women, the head of the board I am on kept asking the women to smile. He didn't do this to the men. I didn't want to embarrass him so I said nothing but it really made me feel icky. He probably doesn't realize he is doing something wrong, we do live in a patriarchy, but It is demeaning, sexist, and wrong. I don't know what to do about it and I am not sure who to talk to about it. It really irks me to even be in this position. What do I do?

- Bring on the Clowns

Dr. B says: This brings to mind 2016 when Trump's frown was seen as a sign of strength and seriousness, but Hillary was expected to smile. Hillary talked about this and there were a lot of articles written at that time about how woman were asked to smile so as not to threaten men. It is a token of submission and placement in a patriarchal society. It is socially expected for woman to smile but not men. There are even names for body shaming of women like spider legs and camel toe but there are no equivalents for men.

Men aren't made to wear high heeled shoes and stockings, does this bother you, too? Being forced into anything by expectation would make me feel trapped and icky as well. But on the other hand there are all kinds of social rules about appearance, dress and etiquette, which are built on tradition and social expectations. They are really all costumes people are forced into, most of which people have internalized, welcomed and have no problems with. Do you wear a business suit, high heeled shoes, stockings, makeup, or dye your hair? Do you shave your pits and trim your pubic hair? A social smile is no different than these. It is all really the same thing.

It may be helpful to print out an article on this subject, present it to the other women on the board and ask how they feel about it and plan from there. "The Sexism of Telling Women to Smile" in The Atlantic is a good example, but Google can bring up a zillion others. Or maybe print it out give it to the board director and have a discussion about how it feels?

-Dr. B

C says: Oh, for gods sake, Clown, stop being such a girl! You are acting out your own cultural stereotype just as much as your board director is following his. If you were a man you would feel no need to gather support or circulate memos before speaking up. If you don't want to embarrass the guy, then wait until after the meeting. But I'd leave the sexism accusations out of it. You may see his request for smiles as demeaning, sexist and wrong, but for centuries, such behavior has been taught as polite chivalry. Our perception of compliments and smiles has only recently shifted in classification from "friendly" to "oppressive." Deeply rooted programming doesn't change overnight.

The Me Too phenomena has been a double edged sword. On a number of levels, it was powerful and important - men should never be allowed to conspire to prevent women from equal pay or demean them by demanding sexual favors in return for advancement. But I am totally sick of women who now think that they are entitled to kid gloves treatment and they shouldn't have to stand up for themselves anymore.

Both men and women are oppressed by cultural expectations. Do you honestly think that men don't have to deal with being put in their place, insulted, or held back unfairly? If they aren't the boss chances are they have as much crap to deal with as you do. The difference is that society expects men to hold their own, be the bread winner, and stand up to territorial invaders, so men don't question

themselves the way women do. But men are oppressed by other cultural standards - if a man wanted to stay home and nurture his kids while his wife supported the family, he'd be seen as a free loader. If you wanted to do the same thing, no one would think twice.

As adults, we all need to learn to stand up for ourselves. Anyone who is in power is constantly assaulted by those who would take it away - and if you ever try to get ahead, both men and women will give you grief every inch of the way. In my experience, women hand out as much crap as the men do...they just smile while they do it, which is a lot sneakier.

You can visit Dr. B's blog at drbrilliantcliche.wordpress.com

Punch and Judy: Are her parents providing a good relationship model?

PUNCH AND JUDY



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Dear C and Dr. B;

Are my parents insane? My dad is always telling my mom (who babbles on a lot) to shut up. She will have some snippy come back like "nice manners, fatso!" He also has a habit of holding his hand up to her when she talks, in a dismissive gesture. For some reason, she doesn't see him as rude and crude. She will get in his face and go on about how when he is dead, she will get to... She paints a rosy picture of life as his widow.

They have been married over 30 years. I don't get it. Couples today you are lucky if they make it to two years and here my parents constantly berate each other but they will probably make it to their deaths together. How can they stand each other's B.S.?

Son

Dr. B says:

I call it the Punch and Judy routine of a couple. All couples have a schtick - it's the personality of the relationship. Not all personalities are kind, but that doesn't mean they don't FIT together. They are meeting each other's expectations and might actually find each other amusing and their mutual bad humor attractive. You don't have to model this behavior in your own relationship, but if it works for your parents let it be. Haven't you ever seen the Honeymooners on TV or Fred and Wilma Flintstone in the cartoons? On both shows, couples picked on and found fault with each other. It might help to remember that your parents had Archie and Edith Bunker as role models for husband and wife.

C says:

I see a BIG problem with the Punch and Judy Show your parents are putting on - the atmosphere it creates for the family as a whole is one of constant negativity. Amusing as it may be for Mom and Dad, it is hardly nurturing for a child. I imagine that your memories of holiday dinners and family celebrations are all tainted by the back and forth volley of insults your parents kept hurling at each other. Kids don't know any better. You grew up thinking this is the way people treat each other. Among caring, considerate people, it is not.

However, as you say, your parents have kept this up for over 30 years and they don't seem to show any sign of stopping and neither one is filing for divorce. There is a reason for that. Your parents may not be the healthiest of people, but they apparently have an agreement between the two of them and neither is in violation of whatever terms are in the contract. They may be annoying, but they are not pathological or abusive. Neither one is going to destroy the other, although you may wish they would.

It is sometimes difficult to tell what is just normal marital bickering and what is domestic abuse, but there are distinct differences. When couples go back and forth, like your parents do, each giving as well as taking, chances are they are just bickering. But if one of them constantly dominates and berates, and the other is hurt or cowed by it, this is unhealthy. If physical violence is involved, it is abuse no matter what agreement the couple has.

The biggest problem with your parents? I didn't hear you mention any signs of affection between them, and this doesn't give you much to go on if you want to develop a healthier model for yourself. It would be good to get some counseling, and read some books that give you a better idea of what a more supportive relationship should look like. If you rely on your own instincts at this point, you are liable to

pick out a partner who will land you both in another perpetual puppet show, whacking each other in the head with mallets 'til death do you part.

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