Dear Alice,

My partner says she does not care for the "doggie" position because it causes her pain. I, on the other hand like to experiment and want to try everything. I guess I want more than just vanilla and she says if vanilla is great, continue to go for it. I guess I'm trying to sort out facts first. First, I know that only about 8 percent of women engage in this position. I guess I want to try it occasionally because the position gives me sight sensory as well as feeling. Anyway, I tell her I'd do anything she wants, anything to satisfy her in exchange for having sex in this position. I guess it's an obsession which becomes more of an obsession when it is denied!

Back to what she says. First, is that the angle is painful. She says the position is against the normal "curve" of the penis as it would enter in missionary position. Now on to the emotional side. What happens is that she will eventually consent but then because I feel guilty I jackrabbit and I can't enjoy it! What can be done to stop the pain she says is there? Is some of it emotional?

— Barking up the wrong tree

Answer

Dear Barking up the wrong tree,

The pain your partner is experiencing could be due to a number of causes. Regardless of the percentage of people assigned female at birth who agree to have penetrative sex in the "doggie-style" position, as with all forms of sex, getting consent from your partner isn't only key, it's necessary. You can also see how you can help your partner feel more comfortable or find other positions or sensations that are equally pleasurable for both of you. It might also be worth exploring why you're feeling guilty and why this position has become an obsession for you. Doing so may provide some direction for how to move forward.

Before diving into what could be happening physically or psychologically with your partner, have you considered why you feel guilty and therefore can't enjoy the position that you've suggested and obsessed over? You state that she "eventually consents" but a large component of consent is making space for partners to be honest about what they want to do and what they don't want to do, including different positions and sex acts, and then listening to what they've said. Consent
requires that both participants be willingly and freely choosing to participate in a given activity. It must be enthusiastic and without manipulation or pressure. Could it be that your partner hasn't enthusiastically consented or hasn't consented without feeling pressured? Consent means your partner says yes not only with their words, but also with their tone and body language. For more on consent, check out Intimate ways to ask partner to make love [2].

You mention that you want to try everything; have you tried or suggested other positions that may be more comfortable for your partner? There may be other positions that can provide the sight stimulation you're interested in, while still finding a position that's comfortable for her. Additionally, it may be helpful to think about why you find yourself obsessed with this position. Is it simply the addition of sight sensory in addition to touch sensory (as you state), or is it more?

Since your partner has stated that she’s in physical pain during this sexual position, have you thought about ways to help her feel more comfortable? These could include using a water-based lubricant, taking it slow rather than "jackrabbiting," and making sure that you're both enthusiastically consenting at every change in position and pace. There are also variations of the doggie position that she might be more comfortable with, one of which entails you entering her from behind while lying down next to each other on your sides, instead of attempting it on your knees. Checking in throughout while trying new positions and styles is key; it'll help you both learn a bit about what is or isn't pleasurable. Additionally, it's possible that no matter what is tried, your partner may still experience pain while in this type of position.

Have you asked your partner if anything besides the painful angle bothers her? Some people may feel as though the "doggie" position is something being done to them, as opposed to something in which they're participating. It could also be that they feel distant from their partner when they're not facing them. If your partner feels this way, you could offer to touch her body or wrap your arms around her during sex if that will help her to feel closer to you. If she finds that this position isn't as arousing and doesn't create as much natural lubricant, it may be uncomfortable or painful. You may want to ask if she would like you to stimulate that area during sex or if more foreplay would be helpful, potentially increasing her pleasure during the act. Keep in mind that it can take some time for arousal to occur. If your partner finds no relief or enjoyment in any of these changes, then you may want to take a break from your obsession with doggie style. Not forcing an issue is critical in any healthy sexual relationship and can give you both the time to relax, explore your sexuality together in other ways, and potentially come back to the doggie position at another, less stressful moment. You may also consider that this may be a position in which your partner may never be comfortable or be able to engage in pain-free. If this is the case, you'll need to determine how this position plays into your overall enjoyment of sex. Can you be in a relationship in which your partner doesn't consent to this position? Can you enjoy other types of sexual pleasure with this partner without this position being an obsession? If you can't live without it, you may want to reflect on what it may mean for your relationship. She may also simply not enjoy the position, which is okay and her right. She as a right to have her dislikes and sexual boundaries respected, and it's not okay to talk her into or pressure her into a sexual position or activity that they don't like or want to do. It's ultimately about what you find works for both of you.

Here's to wishing you a happy, fulfilled, and consensual sex life.