

norm. Because social norms are created by human beings, and there is no social norm that cannot be changed.

TWELFTH SUGGESTION

Talk to her about sex, and start early. It will probably be a bit awkward, but it is necessary.

Remember that seminar we went to in class 3, where we were supposed to be taught about “sexuality” but instead we listened to vague semi-threats about how “talking to boys” would end up with us being pregnant and disgraced? I remember that hall and that seminar as a place filled with shame. Ugly shame. The particular brand of shame that has to do with being female. May your daughter never encounter it.

With her, don't pretend that sex is merely a controlled act of reproduction. Or an “only in marriage” act, because that is disingenuous.

(You and Chudi were having sex long before marriage, and she will probably know this by the time she is twelve.) Tell her that sex can be a beautiful thing and that, apart from the obvious physical consequences (for her as the woman!), it can also have emotional consequences. Tell her that her body belongs to her and her alone, that she should never feel the need to say yes to something she does not want, or something she feels pressured to do. Teach her that saying no when no feels right is something to be proud of.

Tell her you think it's best to wait until she is an adult before she has sex. But be prepared, because she might not wait until she's eighteen. And if she doesn't wait, you have to make sure she is able to tell you that she hasn't.

It's not enough to say you want to raise a daughter who can tell you anything; you have to give her the language to talk to you. And I mean this in a literal way. What should she call it? What word should she use?

I remember people used “ike” when I was a child to mean both “anus” and “vagina”; “anus” was the easier meaning, but it left everything vague, and I never quite knew how to say, for example, that I had an itch in my vagina.

Most childhood development experts say it is best to have children call sexual organs by their proper biological names—vagina and penis. I agree, but that is a decision you have to make. You should decide what name you want her to call it, but what matters is that there must be a name, and it cannot be a name that is weighed down with shame.

To make sure she doesn’t inherit shame from you, you have to free yourself of your own inherited shame. And I know how terribly difficult that is. In every culture in the world, female sexuality is about shame. Even cultures that expect women to be sexy—like many in the West—still do not expect them to be sexual.

The shame we attach to female sexuality is

about control. Many cultures and religions control women's bodies in one way or another. If the justification for controlling women's bodies were about women themselves, then it would be understandable. If, for example, the reason was "women should not wear short skirts because they can get cancer if they do." Instead the reason is not about women, but about men. Women must be "covered up" to protect men. I find this deeply dehumanizing because it reduces women to mere props used to manage the appetites of men.

And speaking of shame—never, ever link sexuality and shame. Or nakedness and shame. Do not ever make "virginity" a focus. Every conversation about virginity becomes a conversation about shame. Teach her to reject the linking of shame and female biology. Why were we raised to speak in low tones about periods? To be filled with shame if our menstrual blood

happened to stain our skirt? Periods are nothing to be ashamed of. Periods are normal and natural, and the human species would not be here if periods did not exist. I remember a man who said a period was like shit. Well, sacred shit, I told him, because you wouldn't be here if periods didn't happen.

THIRTEENTH SUGGESTION

Romance will happen, so be on board.

I'm writing this assuming she is heterosexual—she might not be, obviously. But I am assuming that because it is what I feel best equipped to talk about.

Make sure you are aware of the romance in her life. And the only way you can do that is to start very early to give her the language with which to talk to you not only about sex but