

On concealing one's boob-tube addiction from a significant other

A Screentime Rom-Com

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Growing up, I spent weekends and vacations plopped down in front of the television. In the summer, I'd kick off the day around 9 a.m. with various back-to-back sitcoms like *Saved by the Bell*, *Who's the Boss*, *The Facts of Life*. That led into the 10 o'clock hour with *The Price Is Right*, followed by *Little House on the Prairie*. After that, the day was a blur. Somewhere along the way, a friend suggested I try *Days of Our Lives*. I tried it once and couldn't stop; noon was the gateway soap opera hour, seamlessly transitioning into the 1 p.m. offering *One Life to Live* and *General Hospital* at 2 p.m. Before I knew it, 3 p.m. had arrived, and *Oprah* was filling my family's living room with "Aha!" moments.

Skip ahead to my 20s, when I graduated from college and moved to Los Angeles, where I got a job in the television industry. I worked in TV research, analyzing the popularity of shows via Nielsen ratings. I was encouraged to watch as much television as humanly possible; I was even provided with a TV at my workstation. I felt like I had died and gone to *Highway to Heaven*.

Then I met *him*. He was smart, kindhearted and looked like David Beckham. *Don't fuck this up*, I thought to myself. So when my new boyfriend revealed that he did not watch television — he didn't even own a set — and that he just didn't find much value in it, I pretended that TV didn't mean much to me either. I claimed that I could take it or leave it, that I had just randomly fallen into working in the television industry.

But I could keep up the charade for only so long. I felt tortured, not turning on the TV. My heart was heavy, knowing I was missing the finale of *Project Runway* or the premiere of *The Real Housewives of Beverly Hills*. My only saving grace was DVR, but there are certain shows that just have to be watched live, like *The Bachelor*. It was the finale of Jake's season when I was finally forced to come clean.

"Look," I told my boyfriend. "I have seen all 14 seasons of *The Bachelor*, plus four of *The Bachelorette*. I am also recording at least 10 other shows."

He looked at me, stunned, and said, "There's no reason to feel bad. You can always be honest with me. It's OK if you like TV, even if I don't."

It took me a while to realize he meant what he was saying. He didn't judge me for watching TV — well, except for *The Real Housewives* of any city. That's where he drew the line. And after talking to a few married friends, I saw that it didn't matter if he approved or not. Apparently, we were going to have our differences. One friend pointed out that if watching *Celebrity Rehab* was our biggest problem, we were probably doing OK. It wasn't like we were the ones hitting rock bottom. This friend pointed out that I didn't have to pretend to be anyone but myself.

That concept blew my mind. Getting to be myself sounded lovely, but unattainable. I was the classic chameleon, always adapting to blend in with each relationship. In college, I even got into the WWE for a guy. For my worldly new boyfriend, I took equally drastic measures. I learned about local and world politics, which I read all about in something called a "newspaper." But now I could just be myself. I no longer had to pretend to *care*. I could go back to enjoying mind-numbing TV, and I tried to do just that.

But I began to feel guilty. What impact, I wondered, does a show like *Here Comes Honey Boo Boo* have on society? And what was I missing out on in my own life while immersed in everyone else's? I seemed to have grown a conscience, and it was horrible.

One day, after we'd moved in together, I discovered that Mr. Model Citizen had a secret, too. He had conveniently understated his love for video games. He'd stay up late playing *Call of Duty* and then be grouchy the next day. He'd invite his buddy Dan over for a session, and war would ignite in our home. One night, as I made my way up our driveway, I heard the all-too-familiar sound of gunshots coming from our living room. My guy must have heard the front gate opening, because next thing I know, I saw his silhouette jump up and turn off the TV. He claimed he only did that because he wanted to spend "quality time" with me, but I can't help but think that maybe he felt a little embarrassed too.



Here I was riddled with shame because I enjoyed watching TV, while my higher-education boyfriend — a registered Green Party member who opposes war of any kind — was spending a significant chunk of his life in mortal combat.

I am now married to this virtual warrior. My husband and I respect one another's autonomy. I don't try to figure out why he gets such a kick out of killing people and blowing shit up. And he's given up making sense as to why someone in a happy, committed relationship would set aside two-hour blocks of time to watch needy 20-year-olds fight for the love of a guy they barely know and likely won't stay with even if they "win." So, I'd say we're doing better than OK.

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