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OP-ED COLUMNIST

How to Train a Woman

 By [MAUREEN DOWD](#)
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time: if he drove just a mile an hour slower, tossed one pair of shorts into the hamper, or was on time for anything."

She also learned the concept of "incompatible behavior," training an animal in a new behavior that would make the annoying behavior impossible. To keep Scott from crowding her while she cooked, she set a bowl of chips and salsa across the room.

Could it be that simple? And does it work the other way around — can men train women using exotic animal techniques?

Helen Fisher, a Rutgers anthropologist and the author of "Why We Love: The Nature

Women may want to mold their men to be more obedient and less irksome, but there are nagging questions about nagging:

Does it work? And can you do it while you're dating or should you wait until you're married?

In "The Break-Up," Jennifer Aniston dumps her boyfriend because he not only won't do the dishes, but he doesn't *want* to do the dishes. But in "Guys and Dolls," Adelaide advises waiting because "you can't get alterations on a dress you haven't bought."

Amy Sutherland struck a chord with her recent Times essay — still high on the most e-mailed list — about how she successfully applied the techniques of exotic animal trainers to change some annoying traits of her husband, Scott. He became her guinea pig for methods she discovered as she researched a book on trainers teaching hyenas to pirouette, baboons to skateboard and elephants to paint.

"The central lesson I learned from exotic animal trainers is that I should reward behavior I like and ignore behavior I don't," she wrote. "After all, you don't get a sea lion to balance a ball on the end of its nose by nagging."

She began using "approximations," which means rewarding the small steps toward learning a whole new behavior. "With the baboon you first reward a hop, then a bigger hop, then an even bigger hop," she wrote. "With Scott the husband, I began to praise every small act every

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and Chemistry of Romantic Love," speculated that it might be easier for men to train women because "women are better at reading the emotions in your voice, better at seeing things in their peripheral vision, better at seeing in the dark. So just the man's tone of voice as opposed to even the words could be rewarding."

Both sexes would be better off following the lead of animal trainers and ignoring irritating bad behavior.

"Women are more verbal," she said. "But that doesn't mean that men aren't manipulative. I think both sexes are busy manipulating each other. Women will nag and men will tease. There's a kind of teasing that's just cloaked nagging."

She observed that it may be hard for men to use compliments to alter female behavior because women give and get so many polite or insincere compliments from other women that they're immune to flattering words.

"Men and women tend to get intimacy differently," she explained. "Women get intimacy from face-to-face contact. We do what we call the anchoring gaze. It comes from millions of years of holding your baby in front of your face. Men tend to get intimacy by doing things side by side, because for millions of years they faced their enemy but sat side by side with their friends.

"If I were a man rewarding a woman, I'd do it in the format women find intimate, which is face to face. I'd go straight up to her, while she was doing the dishes, I'd turn her around face to face, and I'd say: 'Thanks so much for being on time last night. It meant a lot to me.' " (You might also tell her that you will not only finish the dishes, but that you *want* to finish the dishes.)

Training your mate may be essential in an era when everybody is more connected and yet less. A new study in the American Sociological Review suggests that Americans may be getting lonelier and more isolated, with people relying more on family and making fewer close friends and confidants from clubs and the neighborhood than they did 20 years ago. So if they lose a spouse or partner, their whole social safety net can disintegrate.

The romantic relationship, Dr. Fisher says, "is more poignant, focused and important than ever. It's also the one part of our lives we feel we have some control over. It's hard to change your boss or the conductor on the train. But if we can keep our partner from dumping their dirty socks, that may make us feel sexier after dinner."

But if they must dump their dirty socks, let's hope they can at least balance a ball on their nose.

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