



Have you noticed that we live in a society which apparently adores success, yet lives and breathes criticism? Criticism starts well before we hit adulthood, training us for workplace assessments that stress yet more failings entirely "for our own good". And sometimes even family and friends are faster to nitpick than praise. To add insult to injury, whatever the style of criticism, and however far from fair we know it to be, we are expected to take it. It seems rather sad that as a society we place so much value on taking criticism well (by which is generally meant, being able to conceal your rage or pain in public) rather than "praising

well". In a compliments rally, there are often pitifully few contestants.

These sentiments, voiced so succinctly by *New Woman's* resident psychologist and counsellor, Stephanie Dowrick, in her piece "Criticism: Can You Take It?" (see page 64), got me thinking about the amount of praise and criticism in my life. I'm happy to say I receive sufficient good vibes in an average day – but not always as many as I give out! I enjoy noting the small achievements in everyday life, and for this I can thank my parents, who have a talent for expressing life's highs – a knack I'm thankful to have inherited.

A talent you may or may not wish to acquire: *How To Look After Your Husband*. I had to laugh when a reader sent me an extract from a 1950's home economics textbook which outlined a few tips for the Perfect Wife, such as: have a delicious dinner ready on time; take 15 minutes to rest so you will be refreshed when he arrives; and don't greet him with problems or complaints. Today, of course, the "perfect" relationship is something quite different. I get very suspicious when relationships appear too picture-perfect, and so does writer Claire Carmichael who talks about an interesting syndrome nurtured by certain couples: the illusion of a "perfect" relationship.

I've had some "perfect" relationships – perfect nightmares. With hindsight I guess the trick is to pepper some of the mutual admiration with an occasional reality check: have the courage to ask yourself where the differences are starting to gnaw. Alarm bells clanging? Turn to "We're Made For Each Other" on page 122 for some insights which could save you the agonies of a broken heart. Sometimes it's more than okay – it's *vital* – to be critical!

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Contributors this month: fashion editor Carolyn Oates (1) and assistant Elsa Morgan (2) turned six *New Woman* readers into models for a day; Sarah Marinos (3) talks to three women about their controversial choice to remain childless and Richard Donny (4) captures them on camera; psychologist Stephanie Dowrick tells you when it's okay not to swallow criticism hook, line and sinker.