

ENTERTAINMENT

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Learning to cope with sex

BY JAY SCOTT



THE WORLD FILM FESTIVAL

Maureen Sullivan is a sex surrogate in Los Angeles who agreed to allow Kirby Dick to film two of her cases. John, 45, had been married for 20 years when his wife left him because he was sexually inadequate, and Kipper, 25, finds it impossible to initiate physical relationships with women.

Sullivan looks a bit like Tyne Daly, the dark one on Cagney and Lacey, and she appears to be exceptional at her exceptional profession, but *Private Practices: The Story of a Sex Surrogate* easily has the depth to transcend mere voyeurism. The film follows Sullivan to sessions with her own psychiatrist, and it records a tremendously revealing confrontation with her alcoholic father. "I figure," says Maureen with astounding candor, "that maybe, if I practice it enough, I'll catch on, and I think I do it better. I don't know how to have."

She certainly does know how to make love. Dealing with the warped and wounded on referral from conventional therapists, she opens her home to her clients and teaches them a variety of techniques to overcome a variety of problems. (There was much tittering during the Montreal screening, much of it uncomfortable—as Maureen says, "We're all in the same boat.")

Kipper learns to like his body and to appreciate the bodies of women, at the outset of his therapy, he tells Maureen he finds female sex organs "a turn on, but kind of gross." He believes his feeling to be universal among males, but she counters with, "I think people who have their sex act together find genitals very appealing." Kipper also hantents the presence of the camera but is philosophical: "I realized that's the price I paid for getting such a good deal."

John, whose ex-wife appears in the film to state that, while it is true her husband was sexually inadequate, his major failing in her eyes was that he was "a slob," causes Maureen consternation. He re-minds her of her father, and she finds his announcement of love for her to be galling. "He brings out the bitch in me," she confides to John's regular therapist. Even his two Valley Girl teenage daughters (this is a tres California film) arrive to

criticize Dad's interest in younger women. "He's out looking for a more energetic lady, but they aren't looking for him," one of them laughs.

Maureen works through her aversion to John and teaches him with infinite patience how to control his tendency toward premature climax. "My timing record is Johnny Carson's monologue," he reports, deadpan. Maureen suggests he turn off the television set.

A postscript to *Private Practices*, which despite its subject is discreet enough to be screened even in Ontario, lets us know that Kipper is doing okay, that John is doing better than that, and that Maureen has found a boy friend and cut back on the number of clients. Like Elizabeth in a different context in a different country, she's paid her dues.