



The Scandal Clause ©2020

by Sydney Stern

www.SydneySternBooks.com

All rights reserved. Printed in the USA.

1. What made you think of writing a book like this?

Watching the media, I wondered why prominent leaders keep ruining their lives with profound personal scandals splashed all over the news.

Tell me more about that When I joined the workforce in the 1970's, struggles over sexual freedoms and women's rights had catapulted onto the scene. People experimented with lots of things, from sex, to drugs, to living styles. Pregnancy could be managed by a pill; Roe vs Wade gave women a choice to keep or terminate a pregnancy, AIDS was an epidemic in the future, and antibiotics still worked. I began my professional studies of human behavior during this wild decade. I'm still at it.

So, let's take a look at Harvey Weinstein, Jeffrey Epstein, Bill Cosby, Jerry Sandusky, Bill Clinton, Mark Sanford, the Catholic priests (not the nuns), and thousands more. I got the idea for this book in 1992 but the #MeToo movement proves this out of control behavior is even more alive and well than it was 20+ years ago.

If these prominent men continue to self-destruct after years of watching colleagues do the same thing before them, wouldn't you want to know why? I sure did—and still do. The question absolutely fascinates me. In all this time we haven't devised any healthy solutions as far as I can see. Mostly we punish, suppress, or hide.

Besides being a good read, I wanted *The Scandal Clause* to be a platform for discussion—about power, work, sex, and money. Is it possible for us to be respectful and open as social commentary about sexuality in the workplace occurs?

I hope so, because that's the real reason behind what made me write this book.

2. What part of this this story is taken from your life?

I developed many, but not all, of the story details from experiences in my life.

Tell me more about that: Although many ideas come from my own experiences, this novel is not a ‘hidden’ autobiography. The experiences I had drew me to the questions at the heart of *The Scandal Clause*—how can prominent (and not so prominent) leaders keep ruining their lives with sex-based misconduct? What kinds of solutions to this complex mess will work?

Because I am both an educator and clinical psychologist, I have experience reviewing and evaluating behavior professionally aside from just ‘living’ it. Having gotten married at age 60 and giving birth to a child at age 39 gave me many years of living life outside the typical perimeters of social codes. And a chance to assess how to work with our sexual needs.

Massage has been an important part of my life. We all need human touch—it doesn’t have to be sexual touch. Babies cannot thrive without being held and touched. They may live but they do not thrive. Nor can adults.

I’ll list a few other life events that found their way into the story. I experienced rape, sexual and physical harassments, depressions, anger, and confusion. I took self-defense classes, became discontent with jobs, had a miscarriage, traveled overseas, lived in the DC and Boston areas, had issues with birth control.

3. Do you think a contract like the one Dr. Russell invented would really work?

First Answer

Dr. Russell’s contract designed to avoid sexual scandal in the workplace is a ‘First of Its Type’ kind of thing. Dr. Russell’s contract holds some significant stumbling blocks for wide spread acceptance.

Tell me more about that: The idea behind Dr. Russell's contract as described in *The Scandal Clause*—to avoid/eliminate sexual misconduct in the workplace—is a worthy ideal. But I doubt it would find *widespread* acceptance in the current social climate

For instance, in his contract, you'd have to accept the premise of more than one sexual partner at the same time—one for your professional life and one for personal life. Laura, the main character, has to face that issue head on. The contract also offers an extremely high salary. I don't know how many businesses could match that kind of incentive. I point these two issues out as examples although there are more that could be identified.

The contract's weak point is that underlying civil rights cannot be signed away. Even with Laura's written consent to be Dr. Russell's sexual partner, the contract's real punch lies in a non-disclosure clause (legal) she signed and Dr. Russell's widespread influence which he would use to control her nursing license.

I do believe the time limits designed into Laura's contract are something we could think about—time limited relationships already exist on an ad hoc basis in many workplace situations. The difference is that, for Laura, there are written benefits to the relationship and a planned ending. Ad hoc situations frequently have unclear benefits and often deteriorate without plan.

The contract in this story is offered as a reflection of the predicament we are in—it asks you to wonder what *would* work. So, thank you for your question. That is exactly why I wrote the story.

Second answer

Do you think your book provides the solution to sex scandals in the workplace? I wrote the Scandal Clause to start a discussion about the problem of sexual desire in the workplace and how to manage it. Gender and sexuality are present in some form when people work together—period. We do not leave our genders or our attitudes behind when we start the work day. Dr. Russell's scandal contract is ahead of its time for general acceptance. It costs a lot of money and is probably too open in its concept of behavior for many people. But it's a reflection on the predicament and it gets you thinking. In the sequel to this story, Laura is hot on the trail of solutions.

4. Do sexual contracts exist in real life? 3/21/20

Yes, pre-sex contracts do exist but whether they have legal binding power in court is debatable. Don't forget, marriage contracts are also sexual contracts.

Tell me more about that: First of all, we are all familiar with marriage contracts. The contract itself is a sexuality regulator. It legalizes the sexual rights of the marital partners and provides recognized social structures for how people/families relate under the law. Virginity, sex, pregnancy, childbirth, adultery—all these are many (but certainly not all) of the issues involved with the marital contract.

Templates for pre-sex contracts can be found on the internet. These contracts are designed for legally consenting adults and are separate and apart from sexual activity defined as illegal by state law.

From the research I have done, it appears that no contract can sign away a person's civil rights. Any person who signs such a contract (called the *permissive*) has the right to withdraw permission at any point. Since the sex act is a behavior enacted over differing lengths of time, permission can be withdrawn at any moment—at which point the act becomes one of rape and sexual battery if not terminated.

Media articles seemed to agree that for dating situations, having a signed pre-sex agreement suggests consent was asked and given—unless signature under duress is determined. Discussions between partners can help to clarify health related issues, birth control, types of sexual activity desired, etc.

Such contracts may or not provide enforceable legal protection. An unenforceable contract is one that in itself may be valid, but that the court will not make the parties to the contract comply. To that end, consultation with a lawyer was suggested.

5. Isn't your book like *50 Shades of Grey*?

When I wrote *The Scandal Clause*, I didn't know the *50 Shades of Grey* story, hadn't read the book or seen the movie. The ideas in my novel are entirely my own, not prompted or taken from any of those written by author E.L.James.

Tell me more about that: Once my novel was finished, my book coach suggested I read the *50 Shades* trilogy in order to answer these kinds of questions.

Although I do not think the novels are alike. Certain details have similar elements—having a contract, birth control discussions between the characters, sexual scenes, money, powerful men.

However, in *The Scandal Clause*, the contract requires much more than sexuality—Laura professional skills are key to her position—medical training, nursing licenses, travel, passports, the work schedule, etc. Only after Laura passes all these requirements is the sexual aspect of the contract considered.

From the outset, the contract is clear—Dr. Russell’s focus is on work above all else. He runs a demanding, global neurosurgical practice. He needs Laura’s nursing skills to do this—they are critical to the balance between life and death for his patients. The story line shows this relentless work focus.

Laura is not in love with him, nor he with her. It is assumed she will have other male friend/lovers. The contract has a built-in time limit. It defines her duties and their relationship. Laura accepts the sexual nature of the job with effort, but neither wants nor desires an ongoing relationship.

In contrast, the story of Anastasia Steele and Christian Grey is a highly erotic, titillating romance story of unrelenting attraction between two people. He’s incredibly rich, they overcome looming challenges, and have hot, steamy, orgasmic sex that makes us all wish we had that type of relationship—without the pain. He overcomes his issues; they fall in love, and marry. This is definitely not the same plot as *The Scandal Clause*.

6. Did you realize your story would be so timely?

No—I didn’t. That’s because the idea came to me in 1992. As a single working mother, I wrote in fits and starts. Here we are 25+ years later, and the story is more relevant than when I started. That’s the surprise.

Tell me more about that: I lived through the struggles over sexual freedoms as they exploded in the 1970's—the turbulence of the women's movement, the introduction of the birth control pill, and drugs pouring into the recreational scene. Women pushed into the work force in unprecedented numbers; the Title IX Act prohibited sex discrimination in education (and sports), Roe vs Wade tore away the fears of unwanted motherhood. AIDS was an epidemic in the future, and antibiotics still worked.

Sex was on everybody's brain (as it often is), pregnancy could be regulated by a pill, and there were no diseases on the playing field. We experimented and made a whole lot of mistakes. Most of them could be fixed by miracle medicine—that is--except for the psychological traumas and spiritual confrontations of unbounded sex.

That's when I became fascinated with the study of human relationships—I'm still at it. What I know is sexuality and our relationship to it play pivotal roles in creating healthy, happy, connected relationships, families, and societies.

7. What's your answer to why powerful leaders keep getting involved in sex scandals?

The real answer to why these sex scandals still occur as such a rate, lies deep in the core of our social fabric not within the lone individual. However, a person's predisposition for very risky behaviors, does involves personality and biology heavily intertwined with family, cultural, and social influences.

Tell me more about that: **Biology** (such as gender, estrogen and testosterone levels, height, harmony of physical features, birth temperament, etc.), **and personality traits** (fairly well formed by ages 5-6) **are factors in early development that may predispose an individual to certain behaviors** (thrill seeking, optimism, pessimism, empathy, self-involvement, etc.). Biology and personality **intertwine over years with family, culture, social norms, and environment** until we arrive at the complexity known as a “grown-up.” Our leaders emerge from these grown-ups.

Research data indicates:

- Sex scandal cases in the news involve prominent *male* leaders.
- People in positions of power (ability to influence others) tend to be risk takers.
- Powerful people are generally highly competitive and ‘love to win.’
- Testosterone (male sex hormone) levels increase with competitive success—this fosters increased sex drive.
- These men prefer exciting lifestyles with intense challenges.
- Women can be drawn to power, or need/want the favors of the increasingly powerful man.
- Such people focus more on the reward side of an issue than the risk side,
- These types of leaders are more confident about getting what they want. This optimism leads to making higher risk choices.
- Power brings money (or money brings power); money leads to options, which lead to ongoing opportunities which eventually can turn to temptation.
- Many of these individuals do not feel guilt or shame until they are discovered.
- These individuals often ‘compartmentalize’ thoughts/behavior so one activity or thought does not contaminate/influence/generalize to another.
- Many live and move in a different reality. They make their own rules and others around them serve as buffers and supports—thus strengthening current behaviors.
- The longer the powerful person gets away with risky behaviors, the more he begins to feel confident, entitled and invulnerable—to feel no consequences will occur or that all problems have a ‘fix’ regardless of the impact on others.
- Disrespect can grow for the people around them—a feeling that everyone ‘can be bought.’
- Historically, sex has been part of the spoils of war—or the rewards of success.
- Characteristics of jobs that interest risk takers often include constant streams of new people, being surrounded by individuals intent on pleasing, no set schedule, ‘always ‘on’, travel, frequent decision making on important issues, very difficult to maintain a normal home/family life.

One might argue this list describes situations that might lead powerful men to make profoundly destructive choices. But it is not just the individuals who make the choices—these choices have been protected and sustained for centuries by the system within which they operate.

8. Isn't John Russell just using Laura like a slave?

No. She has signed a contract. With a very large compensation package. And she can withdraw from the contract at any time. No slave can do that.

Tell me more about that: Many jobs and contracts require actions and time commitment above and beyond the hours and efforts of what we think of as typical jobs. Enlisting in the military service, being a lawyer in a top firm, being a CEO of a company, especially during emergencies, being a police investigator, being a firefighter, being an elected official, and so on.

The only 'unusual' item in her contract is the sexual component, which is my primary reason for writing this novel—so the sex aspect can be discussed by the characters and therefore by the readers. And Dr. Russell makes it very clear Laura can decline requests for sex. The difficulty for Laura is that she has to 'grow into' the contract, discover her own boundaries within the terms she agreed to. That is the 'hero's journey' of this story.

9. In reality could someone like John Russell actually ruin Laura's professional life if she talks about her contract? And didn't she talk about it with her lawyer towards the end?

Yes. Maybe not as easily or as extensively as Dr. Russell does in the book, but yes. There are ways to cast doubt on professionals in a way that could influence their ability to practice. In the novel I wanted John Russell's level of influence to feel scary and intrusive—with connections everywhere.

Tell me more about that: People’s professional lives can always be ruined by other individuals—especially if they have the money or determination to do so. It may not be nice, or ethical, and there may be guidelines or rules against it—but yes, it can happen. Take the Watergate Scandal that brought President Nixon down, or Edward Snowden who released NSA records and fled the country; or the McCarthy era in the 1950’s where many people were blackballed for being suspected of having Communist tendencies. Or what Monica Lewinsky—certainly a victim of bipartisan politics. Or what happens if someone falsely reports child neglect on a disliked acquaintance or neighbor. Or a patient claiming malpractice by a doctor.

People with influence have more power to manipulate situations to their own benefit. But social media is now leveling that playing field—for instance—online reviews hold great weight in today’s digital world.

Direct complaints about a practitioner go to a state oversight licensing board for that specialty. Numbers of such complaints can cause a review and possible loss of license to practice for a period of time. Individuals who sit on such boards can be influenced by the information presented to them, by the people they know, or by state or other entities. I do not expect this to happen. It would be difficult, probably unethical, possibly illegal. However, it does occur. In politics, the above board, legalized method of influencing is called ‘lobbying.’

In the novel, the mysterious ability Dr. Russell has to manage people and events around him alludes to the enormous influence money and power have in our society.

10. Why don’t more doctors incorporate the practices Dr. Russell uses—relaxation clinics before surgery, education and training before seeing the specialist, massages for the staff, etc.?

I’m sure many doctors would be willing to add such benefits for their patients. However, finances, insurances, and standard medical practice models are likely to be unavailable or unsupportive of such additions.

Tell me more about that: The extras—patient education, relaxation, nutrition, massage, supporting mental resilience, etc.—take a lot of money to support—along with embracing the idea of treating the ‘whole’ patient, not just a body part or a disease symptom. In the story, Dr. Russell has a lot of money and a wholistic overview of the patient.

In our health care system, medical facilities have high overhead costs; doctors hold huge educational debt, and everyone is faced with towering malpractice insurances. In our current system, doctors often face patient visits every 15 minutes (and that includes read the patient file and documenting everything discussed. Some statistics show general practitioners see upwards of 40 patients per day, and work 59 ½ hours a week. With the current system of health care and insurance reimbursements in this country, as patients we often feel lucky if our doctors have time enough to even talk to us, much less worry about our relaxation levels.

When money is available, the administrative team most frequently decides where to spend the money. They’re probably not going to vote for staff or patient massages.

11. Doctors and nurses always seem to get involved in sex—at least in the TV shows and movies. Is that true in real life? How does it affect the story line in the book?

I don’t know about always, but the answer is yes.

Tell me more about that: Absolutely, they get involved. Not everybody, but some people. If it didn't ring true at some level, there wouldn't be so many stories about it. But, so do many other people from other professions.

Certainly, in hospital settings, the long hours, the comings and goings of people at all hours in unregulated areas, the power aura surrounding doctors, the intense interactions, particularly in certain settings such as the ER and surgeries, and the hospital buildings themselves, with rooms, beds, and places to 'lose yourself—all this lends a hand to sexual encounters. People don't lose their morality or common sense when they step into a hospital setting—but the setting does provide more opportunity than a typical office building.

Ethical codes adopted and reviewed by licensing boards—not just for doctor-patient relationships, but for the teaching doctor-medical student connection and other situations. Although some relationships avoid the letter of the criminal law, the licensing boards are powerful regulatory agencies within the professions.

The power of these boards to punish ethical transgressions plays a major role in the story. It underlies Laura being violently removed from her New York City nursing job; the threat of losing her license if she discloses protected information; Dr. Russell's anxious reaction about transgressions with his trainee from France. Most of all the power of these boards to punish lies behind John Russell's total focus on remaining scandal free—he wants no threat to his ability to practice—ethical or otherwise.

12. In the book, Dr. Russell and Laura operate on a specific, controversial world leader in Costa Rica. Did such an operation occur in real life?

I'm not going to share the name of the leader here—it would be a spoiler to the story. In my research, however, I did not find any reference to any international operation on this individual.

Tell me more about that: I wasn't surprised that medical information, other than 'all is fine' was not readily available. The health of political leaders is a critical issue and often kept secret, particularly in dictatorships.

Which is why this chapter creates such an impact in the story. If the leader had died during the operation, both Laura and John would have been at the hub of an international incident. In the book Dr. Russell informs Laura of who the patient is only after the surgery is successful. She is flooded by anxiety—and adrenaline. How she deals with this and what she learns is a significant moment for her. I'll leave the rest for you to read.

13. How did you decide that \$700,000 a year was the job salary?

\$700,000 a year was the number that made people’s heads really swivel when I was discussing the story idea with friends.

Tell me more about that: It was a figure far beyond what most people make in salaried positions—especially in nursing. I wanted the salary to stand out in people’s minds but not hit the million-dollar mark. When you say ‘a million dollars’ it’s like a cliché—people tune out.

The salary had to be big but ‘reasonable.’ If you drive around and look at the yachts and houses in wealthy areas, you know there is big money around—way bigger than Laura’s two-year salary and bonus.

It also had to be big enough to make it difficult for Laura to turn down. Especially when you think that after two years at \$700,000 plus a \$50,000 bonus, she’d end up with \$1,450,000. As the job got tougher and the time frame shorter, I wanted the reader to understand her saying, “I can do this—but no more.”

14. How did you get information about Saudi Arabia and the genetic inbreeding issues there?

Information about inbreeding in Saudi Arabian royal families is available online. You can google it to get the basics.

Tell me more about that: My daughter is a nurse who lived and worked in Saudi Arabia with her husband for a year not too long ago. I was alerted to the issue when she mentioned it to me.

Because the country is so restrictive in who is allowed to enter and so different in their customs, I thought this trip would be both fascinating and difficult for Laura (and my readers) to undertake. It shows the power, excitement, and skills Laura’s job demands from her—as well as the dangers.

This chapter fascinated me as I researched and wrote it.

15. High fashion seems to be an integral part of Laura’s job requirements. Dr. Russell requires a dress code for work; Arlo Stephanopoulos sends a dress catalog for her trip to Buckingham Palace. Isn’t this controlling? Why doesn’t she react more strongly to this? Could you comment on this?

It’s not meant as a control issue, but an education for Laura. Washington, DC is a high fashion, expensive city with important people from all over the world. She will be interacting with them. For success in any of life’s arenas we have to know how to behave in different situations. Dr. Russell’s catalog for dressing, is a guideline for success, not a straightjacket or a uniform. It’s meant to be helpful. As is Arlo’s.

Tell me more about that: It's not easy to 'fashion up.' It takes time and skill and money to know 'how to dress.' The fashion industry is huge, and everyone is aware of what everyone is wearing—whether or not you are a 'fashion bug.' Dr. Russell provides Laura with the money and help to purchase/select her clothing items from a suggested range of items, to make mistakes, and receive feedback. Laura finds it helpful, and exciting, and difficult. Arlo provides her with similar support when meeting the Queen.

What's to feel negative about? If she wants to wear other clothes on the weekend, she is free to do so. In the story, she enjoys the expanded options—but doesn't get lost in them.

16. With all the birth control measures Laura and Dr. Russell use, do you think a pregnancy could really occur?

Pregnancies occur under many situations and a pregnancy is always a possibility when people who are fertile try to prevent a pregnancy with birth control.

Tell me more about that: In *The Scandal Clause*, Dr. Russell underwent a vasectomy and Laura was using an intrauterine device (IUD). It is unlikely a pregnancy would occur under those conditions, especially since Dr. Russell's vasectomy was long standing. Recent vasectomies have a somewhat higher chance of failure.

However, in all my research, no article indicated any birth control method guaranteed 100% effectiveness. 99.8% perhaps, but not 100%. I used that margin of error to create the deal breaker tensions between the John and Laura—to explore how each of them would react and what they'd decide to do. Readers get to follow along—to think about what they might have done or what might have created a different outcome.

17. Isn't Laura just a glorified prostitute?

No, Laura is not a prostitute. Many behaviors and relationships in our post-birth control, post women's movement landscape haven't yet had a word created to define them. Do we call Laura a work wife? A mistress? A sugar mama? Or, is Dr. Russell a serial monogamist? Work husband? Rapist? We have to develop the right words for new situations as they develop—just as we did when the internet came along. Who'd ever heard of a blog, or an IP address, or a URL?

Tell me more about that: What usually comes to mind with the word ‘prostitute’ is someone who sells sexual favors for money. The focus is on the sex act itself, often with many clients over short periods of time in unsavory circumstances—the feelings that go with the word might be ‘dirty, slutty, grimy, primitive.’

Since the 1960’s and ‘70’s, sexual freedoms have exploded—‘open marriage’ (a very pleasant term for what’s considered adultery in many religions), dating apps for travelers (free vacation and sex), couples who ‘swing,’ multiple partner sex, kinky sex, LGBTQ sex, transgender individuals, gay marriage, dating apps for married people, sex clubs—the list goes on and on, all easily available on the internet. If made public, such behaviors, even when they’re legal, come with moral judgements and sometimes devastating consequences. So, people tend to keep these ‘legal, but not widely accepted’ sexual activities very private or secret.

The problem is Laura doesn’t know how to define herself *because* of her sexual responsibilities. There is no definition because Laura and Dr. Russell stand at the leading edge of a new epoch—one in which certain appropriate work-related sexual behaviors have an accepted place. All of Laura’s contracted duties, not just her sexual ones, are kept secret for the reputation and safety of the organization and its clients, not just the sexual part.

18. Laura’s character seems a bit naïve—why doesn’t she stand up for herself more—why do you have her wait until so late in the novel?

Laura is earning an enormous salary and she’s doing it inside the circles of the super-rich and super-powerful. The opportunities excite her; but living at this level is complicated and dangerous. In order to find out what the *real* survival rules are, she has to watch, learn, and tread with caution. That takes time—and practice.

Tell me more about that: Let’s take a for-instance. How long do you think it would take someone to adjust if they were thrown into a job speaking for the Queen of England at international functions? And then, throw in the fact if they make any mistakes people might lose their lives. That person would want to be really well trained for that situation. And that takes a lot of time, desire, and practice.

It’s the same with Laura. Plus, new aspects of the job keep showing up, such as travel to Saudi Arabia and brain surgery on world leaders. So, Laura faces constant change and a steep learning curve. It takes her a while to find her balance.

19. *The Scandal Clause* is a great title. How did you come up with it?

The title went through several revisions. At first, I titled it *The Job*, because the story was about a very unusual position. But that title didn't allude to anything about the story, and wouldn't grab your imagination. When I realized the core of the story centers on the unusual job contract, the name changed to *The Power Broker's Contract*. Feedback was this title sounded like a Wall Street financial caper. Rik Feeney, my book coach and editor was the one who thought of *The Scandal Clause*.

Tell me more about that: I wanted a title that was catchy and would suggest the theme of the book. *The Scandal Clause* definitely fits the bill. First, with the word 'clause' you can be pretty sure it's about a contract or something written. Secondly, the word 'scandal' lets you know immediately there's some intrigue involved. The book cover illustration centers on the haunting face of a beautiful, auburn-haired woman, with a doctor over her shoulder and the White House below. So, when you pick up the book, its title and cover give you a sense of what areas the story covers.

20. You have several examples and degrees of sexual violence or harassment in the story. Could you comment on that? Would you consider Laura's job as part of that?

The driving question in this novel is how powerful leaders are allowed to continue with ever worsening sexual behaviors in the workplace. In the novel, three different levels of sexual violence against Laura are described—a full rape, an attempted rape, and a work-related seduction attempt. They also show how Laura is increasingly able to protect herself: first by recognizing what is happening, and then managing to avert or reduce the consequences.

Tell me more about that: I do not consider Laura's job to be part of what is termed sexual aggression or harassment. Although there are times when she would wish not to be sexual in the ways that John wants, she does not relate to his behavior as a rape. She states her sense of violation by the frequent checking of her IUD, but does not do so around the sexual act.

We have to acknowledge there are times in relationships where the sexual contact is not ideal, or may be 'given in to,' but is not felt by either party to be rape or violent. As Laura explores her contractual sexuality, we watch her assessing and formulating boundaries. When John finally crosses a boundary beyond which she will not go, her actions are very clear.

21. Were you ever a sex therapist?

A sex therapist is a trained counselor who helps people with sexual problems. I thought I might like to focus on issues but found that the focus was too limiting—I was interested in how sexuality helped people create relationships, families, and social structures that support our societies. My specialties in family and multicultural therapies as well as sexual abuse treatment focused more on how our sexuality creates social structures, rules, taboos, and boundaries in the larger social system.

Tell me more about that: Sexuality is what creates an ongoing society. We define our families by who gets to have sex with whom. Our social groups are formed around families. Historically, ‘being single’ is unconventional—outside the rules beyond a certain stage of development. Bearing children out of wedlock was a recipe for disaster. The boys-will-be-boys cliché almost always included sexual behaviors outside of marriage. Only since the 1960’s and ‘70’s have these traditional structures been significantly challenged. How a social systems and families makes room for their unmarried and/or non-traditional single population is a defining factor in the openness or rigidity of a system.

These overarching issues and questions were the ones that fascinated me and are not the general basis of sex therapy.

22. How much does Dr. Russell’s focus on endurance count in real life?
As the author, aren’t you taking a normal workload for a doctor into an extreme?

As one neurosurgeon of 21 years’ experience posted, backed by commentaries from others, neurosurgeons can often work up to 80 hours a week, with 50-60 being fairly common. Along with that, high divorce rates are not uncommon, and many complain about lack of family time. So, Dr. Russell’s focus on endurance in the novel is a true essential skill in this field.

Tell me more about that: Although salaries range from \$450,000 to \$920,000 or more, the demands of the job require dedication and understanding families. This is particularly true when part of a neurosurgeon’s practice is being ‘on call.’ Research shows neurosurgeons make up only 0.5% of all the physicians in the US. Traumatic injuries, such as those that end up in the emergency rooms, often involve damage to the nervous system, so neurosurgeons on call can find themselves pulled away from their private lives with frequency. This is a demanding profession, both in real life and in the novel.

23. Are you saying in your book that marriage can’t last thru a demanding job?
Could you comment on that?

Marriages and families can last through demanding jobs, but there are likely to be extra burdens to manage. Jobs, or other life situations, that interfere in the ‘normal’ routines and rhythms of family life can put significant strains on relationships. People may require extra coping skills and supports to reduce the added stressors.

Tell me more about that: If a perceived distress becomes chronic, it can overwhelm a person or system's ability to cope. When this happens, burnout occurs. Emotional exhaustion, negativity, cynical or difficult reactions with others, withdrawal, and reduced competence are symptoms of burnout. Even 'normal' events, such as having a baby, commuting excessive distances to work, financial problems, illnesses, caring for an elderly parent, can trigger burnout. People are stretched beyond their capacity to bounce back if situations go on for too long without relief. Without some change or intervention, the relationships become vulnerable to disruption.

24. Laura talks about how her personal life got taken over by her job. Don't you think many jobs interfere in family life—particularly high paying ones? What do you think is the solution to this in general?

Sigmund Freud said, "Love and work...work and love...what else is there really?" In context of current day issues, the answer to Freud's 'what else' question is—having a balance between the two. The solution to jobs interfering in family life depends on our society *as a whole* honoring and allowing a healthy balance between our work lives and our home lives. The decision cannot rest with lone individuals—it must become a social movement—as it was with voting rights for women, civil rights, the Title 9 gender equality act, equal marriage rights act, for example.

Tell me more about that: How to change systems is a well-studied science. It discusses bringing a system to a 'tipping point'—when a system (or person) teeter-totter between the old and the new. However, our social system is not teeter-tottering on a balance point. We are in an all-out tug-of-war between the familiar ways of living/being/thinking and the flood of changes coming in at exponential levels. Exponential is a mathematical term. But writers are using it to mean *overwhelming growth*. People don't have time to evaluate one idea before the next decision faces them. We've gotten severely divided as some of us pull toward a new direction, while others of us tug back toward the familiar. I don't yet have an idea or solution to balancing our jobs with our personal life styles. That's part of what Laura will investigate in my next novel. I wrote *The Scandal Clause* to get us talking about it.

25. Did you create John Russell's character on anyone you knew? Please comment on that.

The first image I had of John Russell's character came when I went to a six-hour psychology conference in the early 1990's in Massachusetts. The lecturer was dynamic, profoundly knowledgeable, humorous, and very intense. His knowledge impacted me, his intensity kept the room in his grip, and I remember thinking, "He's too thin—not my type." But that moment formed the first impression of John Russell in my mind.'

Tell me more about that: Of course, other sources influenced how I developed John's character. My parents acted in very authoritarian ways. Although they loved their children, I had an early introduction to how that style acts out. Also, in our society we have many examples of rigid 'I know what is correct' behavior—you just need to look in the news at how our political, financial, military, and religious leaders behave to those who question their decisions. As a citizen, being at the effect of these behaviors also shaped how I felt John might act—especially as he grew in power. All of us have our own personal examples of being commanded, disciplined, or put in place by people we've encountered in our lives who have power over us in some way or other. All of those experiences influenced how I developed his character. Don't forget, I'm a psychologist and always fascinated by human behavior.

