



## 5 vices you should embrace

Film legend Mae West purred, “When I’m good, I’m very, very good. But when I’m bad, I’m better.” This month, consider those words to live by. Five experts—including a moral historian and a romance novelist—share the don’ts that are (occasionally) worth doing.

REPORTING BY Kate Rockwood ILLUSTRATION BY Shout



PAUL BLOOM

### Gossip at the office.

I don't talk about others more or less than the average person, but I have a friend at work with whom I jokingly have explicit trade-offs: If I present him with a piece of information, he owes me an equally juicy nugget in the future. There's an unseemly pleasure to gossip, but it can also be beneficial. Some people think human language evolved so we could gain social information. And you can see how that works: If someone is plotting against you or if someone's status has suddenly grown or dropped, you really want to know about that. Information is power, and its dissemination reduces the influence of the people who had it first.

**PAUL BLOOM** is a professor of psychology and cognitive science at Yale University and the author of *How Pleasure Works: The New Science of Why We Like What We Like*. He lives in New Haven, Connecticut.

ERICA JONG

### Embrace sloth.

Americans aren't good at taking vacations: It goes against our Protestant work ethic to give ourselves unstructured time. We think that if we're not working, we're being lazy. But continuous exertion impedes our creativity; it's very important to have idle days. When every segment of our time is booked—when we go deadline to deadline—we don't dream, we don't play, and we don't think of new projects. I know, because I've struggled with this my whole life. But I've realized that there's incredible pleasure and possibility in deciding to veg out and do nothing for a change.

**ERICA JONG** is the editor of the anthology *Sugar in My Bowl: Real Women Write About Real Sex* and the author of the iconic novel *Fear of Flying*. She lives in New York City.

GRAHAM HILL

### Eat meat.

Experts claim that there are environmental and health reasons not to eat meat, but an all-or-nothing approach is impossible for some people. I'm one of them. So I've chosen to be a weekday vegetarian instead. For those five days, I eat meatless meals with healthy fruits, vegetables, and whole grains. On the weekends, I yield to my cravings for pork, beef, and chicken. Once I started eating a pork chop or a hamburger only occasionally, it became something special. Now I appreciate meat's flavor and its ability to satisfy me even more.

**GRAHAM HILL** is the New York City–based founder of the eco-blogs *TreeHugger.com* and *LifeEdited.com*.

JOHN PORTMANN

### Enjoy schadenfreude.

Religious and secular scholars alike agree that envy is awful. It hurts to be jealous of people who are wealthier or more beautiful than you are. But schadenfreude—the pleasure you get from the misfortune of someone else—can feel great. For example, you're ecstatic when your mean boss is caught cheating on her taxes and faces a penalty, or when the demanding movie star who belittles everyone around him is caught in an embarrassing situation. You're not rejoicing that these people are suffering, but rather that the karmic system works. We all want to believe that what goes around comes around.

**JOHN PORTMANN** is a professor of moral history at the University of Virginia, in Charlottesville, and the author of *When Bad Things Happen to Other People*.

SABRINA JEFFRIES  
**Be lustful.**

While I was growing up, my mother made it clear to me that sex was supposed to happen only within the context of marriage and was not to be spoken about. Still, I began reading romance novels at age 12, and by the time I was in college, I began questioning the absurd duality of what I'd been taught: If sex is healthy and normal, why can't we talk about it? Even today we have to fight the conventional thinking that says good girls aren't lustful. Sex is an essential and pleasurable component in any intimate relationship, and it goes hand in hand with the natural desire for love. Not acknowledging your desires is as damaging as acting on them impulsively.

**SABRINA JEFFRIES** is the best-selling author of 34 romance novels, including *'Twas the Night After Christmas*, out this month. She lives in Cary, North Carolina.