

**INTIMACY, SEX
& RELATIONSHIP**

**No One Wins
The Battle Of
'Who Do You
Love More?'**



DR. SANDRA SCANTLING

‘Who do you love more — your mother or me? Really ... well prove it!”

The two sparring partners glare at one another from opposite sides of the sofa — waiting for the therapist-referee to ring the bell.

Adrienne and Sam Brandon, in their mid-30s, are newlyweds, but their patience is already worn thin. Things didn't go well with their holiday visit to Sam's family. Adrienne gets along with Sam's dad, a kindly quiet man, but not his mom.

Adrienne says that Sam's mom, Hilda, refuses to cut the proverbial apron strings. She still calls Sam "Sammy" and uses annoying expressions like "Moms know their sons best, don't they, Sammy?" Whenever they go back "home" Sam automatically reverts to his obedient only child role, leaving Adrienne to fend for herself.

After only 10 months of marriage, this couple is on the verge of a break-up. Like a pair of granite bookends, they sit apart, arms folded across their chests.

"It's his mother," Adrienne reluctantly begins, as Sam silently fumes. "He needs to decide whose side he's on. Either he's going to be her baby boy forever, or my husband."

Adrienne continues. "I sent a holiday package with a special note to Sam's house because I knew we'd be there over Christmas and SHE opened the card!" Apparently he still allows "mommy" to open his mail.

"She's just an old woman," Sam finally blurts out. "I don't want to hurt her feelings."

"Her feelings?" Adrienne raises her voice a notch. "What about MY feelings!"

Sam shouts louder — "I'm sick of your jealousy about my mother. She's my mother, darn it — she gave birth to me! She's been through a lot and she's getting senile. What do you want me to do?"

"Choose, Sam. I expect you to choose," Adrienne says, snapping to face him.

"Whose feelings do you value more?"

Sam lowers his head and struggles to calm himself. "I value both of you, Adrienne," he barely chokes out the words through a quivering bottom lip. "I value both of you. ..."

Competition between a parent and a spouse is a common occurrence. Parents of married kids often call to ask the new "wife" what she's feeding their son and if he's getting enough rest. The spouse is powerless to set limits without the support of her partner.

As more boomers build additions onto their homes to accommodate aging or single-again parents, clear boundaries are a necessity if intimate relationships are to thrive. There can be no question about who runs the kitchen, the garage, or makes decisions about the kids.

That's not to say we no longer "honor our mother and father" or fail to treat them with respect. But in the final analysis, when we choose our life partner, we also choose a new direction — by their side.

If Adrienne hopes to have peace, she needs to get along with Sam's mom somehow. I suggest she consider what it must be like to be the aging parent of an only son and finding yourself irrelevant. And wouldn't it be great if Hilda could be encouraged to remember how she felt as a new bride, anxious to be special in her husband's eyes.

This is one of those situations that challenges us to examine what we're really fighting for. But if the "battle of who do you love more" is allowed to rage unchecked, we all lose.

"But Ruth said: 'Entreat me not to leave you, or to turn back from following after you; for wherever you go, I will go; and wherever you lodge, I will lodge.'" — Ruth 1:16

>> Dr. Sandra Scantling is a licensed clinical psychologist and certified sex therapist in Farmington. You can e-mail her at AskDrScantling@aol.com; her website is www.drsandy.com. This column is not intended as a substitute for professional advice. Case material used here is not intended to represent any actual individuals.