

BY TOBI SCHWARTZ-CASSELL

At 13, she was Bette Midler's younger self in "Beaches;" at 14 she landed her own TV sitcom. Since then she's earned a PhD in neuroscience, become a brand ambassador for Texas Instruments and the celebrity spokesperson for the Holistic Moms Network, writes an extremely popular blog, has authored a recently released book on Attachment Parenting, home schools her two young sons and stars in a top-rated TV sitcom for which she has just scored a Primetime Emmy nomination! Mayim Bialik, a devoutly religious kosher vegan cook, has managed to squeeze more into her 36 years than most people do in an entire lifetime. And *Girlfriendz* got to chat with her!



We also offered our readers (via www.facebook.com/girlfriendz) the opportunity to ask their own questions, so read on to see if your question was chosen!

Q TSC: How did your relationship with Texas Instruments come about?

MB: I was approached by TI last year to explore a relationship with them as a brand ambassador for Nspire™, their new graphing calculator, which is more like a handheld computer than a graphing calculator. I've used the same TI graphing calculator from

high school all the way through graduate school, so it's not even like I have to pretend to love TI!

TI is huge on teacher preparedness and gives both students and teachers the confidence to explore careers together in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math). I think the general goal is to empha-

size the fun because I'm a real life scientist who plays a scientist on *The Big Bang Theory*, plus I have a PhD, I'm a female face, and hopefully a fun, recognizable face to a lot of young people.

Q TSC: This question is from Lee who asks if there are any female scientists who've inspired you.

MB: I arrived late to the world of science. I was 15 and I had an amazing tutor when I was on *Blossom*. She literally changed my life. She's now a dental surgeon. She's a more personal role model. To be honest, I'm kind of a second wave feminist, so I've always been inspired by the Gloria Steinems and the Hillary Rodham Clintons. But whenever I learned about a female scientist, it was always encouraging. And there's a tremendous number of women in the sciences, but we absolutely need more.

Q TSC: I read your new book *Beyond the Sling*, and found it fascinating. My two favorite theories you present are: "you already have everything you need,"

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MAYIM BIALIK

and "always go on your intuition." That is very empowering for a new mother.

MB: We are pretty much mammalian primates and the things we feel or desire to do are generally geared toward perpetuating the survival of our DNA. It's a normal intuitive feeling to hover over your baby. It is a normal hormonally driven feeling to want to prepare your home for a baby. And I don't just mean in the way Western culture tells us we should.

And the desire to know what your baby is doing at night, especially when it's just born, is absolutely intuitively primed in your DNA. All of the notions of what you should do are generally coming from a very different perspective—a primal intuitive one.

Q TSC: So holding a mirror under your sleeping baby's nose doesn't mean you're crazy?

MB: Nope! That's called making sure your baby is doing okay! And honestly there are a

lot of OCD-like behaviors that we see in new moms and this is part of my thesis.

Q TSC: Another fascinating aspect of your book is EC (elimination communication), or tuning into your baby's elimination needs. When you and your husband were using EC, did one of you always have to stay home and miss weddings and social occasions until your boys were potty trained?

MB: No, not at all. First, I should make the distinction that EC is not potty training; it's infant hygiene. All the methods people think of with potty training are not EC, so we like to make a distinction. There's been some criticism of this "early potty training," but it's not potty training; it's more adult training. Many people EC part time, meaning only at home. We used cloth diapers when we went out. Some use disposables but we used cloth for what we called our back up, and at a very young age, our boys could be taken to the restroom wherever we were and they would use the potty. We would hold them up—you can't put them on the seat when they're that tiny. But our life got incredibly easier when they were 18 months or so and they were finally in underwear. But no, we did all the things other people do.

Q TSC: My daughter had a question: Considering you are an Orthodox Jewish woman, how have you been able to waltz with Sheldon, kiss him and hold his hand?

MB: Obviously Orthodoxy is complicated and I fall much more under the umbrella of "aspiring" Modern Orthodox. For some Orthodox people, it would be unacceptable for me to do those things, but others would consider doing them as part of my job. And that's one reason I don't wave the flag of Modern Orthodoxy. I am not able to have the kind of control over my career that allows me to refuse to do something. So I've gotten emails from prominent Orthodox scholars who've said, "You absolutely are Modern Orthodox." But I sort of consider myself aspiring Modern Orthodox. I have tremendous respect for the Maccabeats and Matisyahu who have very publically been able to put themselves out there as all the way—no complications.

Q TSC: Let's talk about *The Big Bang Theory*. As a former immature, bullied nerd,

He never says she's not pretty enough or she doesn't wear makeup enough or she's not skinny enough. It's actually been very sweet. But I think it's a great larger point that sure, people note there are quirks Sheldon has, but there's really not a lot of clinical pathologizing of these characters and, in a culture where every child is pathologized pretty much, many of us grew up with plenty of people on the autism and Asperger's Spectrum and no one called it that, and it was okay, I think it's very interesting that this show is really trying to present a normal set of people. To them it's normal!



**SHE'S A GIRL,
SHE'S A FRIEND AND
NOW SHE'S OUR
GIRLFRIEND!**



Q TSC: Back to reader questions. Irene wants to know if your parents and in-laws support Attachment Parenting, and if they do, how much assistance do they provide?

MB: The easy answer is 'not so much.' This is not the way my husband or I were raised, so it is unfamiliar to both of our parents. We don't use either of our sets of parents for child care, so it's really just been us. We have had some more complicated and heated discussions with both sets of our parents about different aspects of our parenting in general, but we always try and discuss it with tremendous respect and compassion for wherever our parents are coming from, and fortunately it's been a really good success story. There are some things we disagree on, but we've put them aside and try to emphasize the parts of our parenting that are working for our parents. And thankfully, it seems to be really working well and they can see our kids are happy!

it's been very healing for me to watch your show! It elevates nerds to a level of cool never seen by the American viewing public. I have also heard people speculate about whether some of the characters are on the autism spectrum, so TBBT seems to have helped mainstream the disorder. I also love that the characters don't tease Barry Kripke about his speech impediment.

MB: Actually, there's not a lot of teasing in general about others' spectrum-y things, which is a really good point I've never been asked about. I have been asked if I think my character is a stereotype and what does that mean for women in science, and I point out that Sheldon has never ever mentioned anything about Amy's physical appearance.

Q TSC: So is Sheldon indeed an Aspie?

MB: That's definitely a question for Bill Prady.* Actually, I've heard him speak about it in interviews, and I think it's not spoken about because for us, it's normal. We're presenting normal people in a normal universe. For them, it's normal. And I think part of the point that Bill, Chuck* and Steve* are trying to make is, "What if we didn't name it? What if it just was? What if we just deal with people and their quirks?" I went to school and there were plenty of people like those characters and like my character and even Bernadette's. I do know it's something that gets a lot of attention.

Q TSC: What do you love about the show, both as somebody who's in it and then sociologically as a person watching it at home on TV?

MB: I think, as you indicated, it's not a group of people being pathologized or teased.

Photo of Mayim Bialik by Denise Herrick Borchert. Photos from *The Big Bang Theory* courtesy of CBS. Photo from *Beaches* from Mayim Bialik's personal collection.

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There's a fine line between finding funny things about these characters and teasing them and I think that's very sweet. I love representing a female scientist. I love that there are two different kinds of female scientists on the show—Melissa Rauch's character, Bernadette, and mine are very different. Yeah. Those are the things I love. And then personally, I love my job.

TSC: Did your scientific background help you land the job?

MB: No! That was really just a P.S. In general, television shows don't care at all about what you've done before, in terms of your academic career.

TSC: I know none of the others are scientists but it seems like they are.

MB: Yes, because many of our writers and producers are scientifically minded or they have a science or tech background. They're just an exceptionally bright group, and they're a lot more like a group of professors than Hollywood writers.

TSC: Do you think the show makes science a little cooler for kids?

MB: I think so. I definitely think there's been a 'geek chic' revolution in culture in general and I hope we are part of it.

TSC: There was an episode called "The Bat Jar Conjecture," and it was before you were cast on the show. In it, Raj suggests asking "the girl who played TV's Blossom" to join their Physics Bowl team. Was that coincidental?

MB: Yes! I didn't know that (before my audition). I hadn't watched the show, but yes, everyone has asked me that. But I wasn't specifically called in. I really just went on the audition because it was an open call.

TSC: So are Amy and Sheldon going to "do it?"

MB: I actually don't know. We don't find out anything. We get every script the night before we start to rehearse it and we never

get to know the arc of the season. We literally learn week-to-week.

TSC: And everybody wants Raj to find somebody...

MB: Actually, at Comic Con, Chuck Lorre said there will be a love interest for Raj this year. Whatever that means.

TSC: Will he be able to speak to her?

MB: Right?! Exactly! I have no idea.

TSC: And the question everyone wants to know: What is Jim Parsons really like?

MB: Jim Parsons is very focused. He is a very professional actor. He's extremely bright; he's funny, very opinionated. We talk a lot about sports and politics and culture. I'd say he and Melissa Rauch are my closest buddies at work. He's a talented pianist; he's very scientifically minded, artistically very focused and we have a lot of fun together. **g**

*The Big Bang Theory was created by Chuck Lorre and Bill Prady, both of whom are executive producers of the show with Steve Molaro.

IMPORTANT DATES FOR TBBT LOVERS

Sun, Sept 23, 7 PM: The Prime Time Emmy Awards telecast. Mayim Bialik is up for Outstanding Supporting Actress in a Comedy Series.

Thurs, Sept 27, 8 PM: The Big Bang Theory's 6th season premier.

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