

Different love-making positions make for the most erotic fantasies.



How often do you experiment with different positions during sex?

| | | |
|----------------------|----|--|
| Once in a while | 45 | Positions are about changing. But only 10 per cent say they are always experimenting. Those who say never must be partial to the missionary. Take a guess. |
| Always experimenting | 10 | |
| Never | 22 | |
| Don't know/Won't say | 23 | |

Figures in per cent

What would you do if your partner was unfaithful to you?

| | |
|---|----|
| Talk and sort it out | 67 |
| Tell him you had the right to do the same | 8 |
| End the marriage/relationship | 6 |
| Forgive, forget and carry on as usual | 6 |
| Don't know/Won't say | 13 |

Figures in per cent

If men are adulterous, talking it out is the most sensible choice, say women. Only 6 per cent would go to the extreme: end it.

these changes. Luccha gidda, the coy, sexual-innuendo-filled Punjabi folk dance for women performed during weddings, is now on its way out even in rural Punjab. Replacing it are dances with a direct sexual outpouring that dominate popular culture. Unambiguous sexual talk tumbles out of women in torrents. "Men have always talked to our breasts. It is time we talked to their crotches, ignoring their faces and brains," says Anupama Verma, 41, a much-married working woman from Delhi. Verma says she has had wonderful sex in her married life and has done it all ... played out fantasies, worn stilettos while making love, done racy bedroom numbers.

There's another bomb. "I can speak eyeball to eyeball with men, in their language. Why, I can even get into the men's loo should there be a need," says Sudha Sadanand, Delhi-based television anchor. Sadanand isn't your regular, fumbling-for-the-right-lexicon, woman. "If a man stares at my body for longer than he should, I go up to him and say, 'Hey, what do you want? I am not interested, okay'," she says, adding that a let's-get-over-with-it manner is the only way to break the barrier. Sadanand says she also goes to stag parties and is at ease with sharing men's sexual jokes. She isn't surprised that women never call her for kitty parties or baby showers. But the irony, as she points out, is that all this has actually desexualised her. "Sometimes I realise I want to be chased too," she adds with a big smile. Harathi Reddy, public relations manager at The Leela Palace, Bangalore, says she too can look men in the eye when she talks about sex. "We shouldn't undermine the importance of sex talk. It has a rightful place in bond-building with your partner," she says.

Fade in. An evening in Bhopal. Over cups of cappuccino, a group of women tell INDIA TODAY that woman-on-top is a hot sexual position. Their prime fantasy is a threesome, though they are not "bisexual". Premarital sex still has them giggling, but there is much smooching, fumbling and kissing going on. Boys initiate the fun, but girls play on. Back in Delhi, Pratima S.—38, divorced and a hospitality executive—talks of her tryst with threesomes. "It is a very dynamic activity," says the woman who is currently involved with a younger man. "While being with a macho man is good, a woman satisfies me emotionally," she says. "Yet threesomes being riddled with insecurity, jealousy and heartbreak, the primary partners have to be very committed to each other," she adds.

Bisexuality, which even five years ago may have dampened sexual energy, now ignites it—for some women. Sixteen per cent women in the survey said they'd tried it. Men too don't seem to be out of sync. Rajesh Jha, vice-president of EPOS Health Consultants in India, who is involved with gay and bisexual support groups, says, "It is not about promiscuity, its about choice, and men are accepting these zigzag choices of women." Jha recalls a 30-year-old friend who works in the private sector. "She had a lesbian relationship for years but is in a heterosexual one now, and her male partner accepts her history," he says. Or, as Rohit Malkani, a 32-year-old Mumbai-based executive, comments, "For God's sake, men as always are sex-starved and they actually welcome the new woman's need for good sex." Film director Deepak Tijori reinvents this argument anecdotally. "When we were shooting with a professional male stripper, I got a phone call

Minority Report

Some women may be turning relationships on their heads, but it may not be a vantage position after all

by Shefalee VASUDEV

THE HANDKERCHIEF HE OFFERED TO HELP WIPE her tears was ironed smooth. Unlike his feelings, which were a knot of confusion. For on his first intimate date with Sunita M, Tarun Bhandari was taken aback by her dominating sexual attitude. The unattached couple, both in their late 20s, met on a flight and courted for two months before he invited her to a hotel room. Pink roses, red wine and white candles awaited her. She got in, said hi and asked to use the washroom. In the next instant, she was out—in a bikini. Pushing him to the bed, she began unbuttoning his shirt. "Hey, hang on," Sunita remembers Bhandari telling her. "Don't get on to me like that. You are a woman, behave like one." Sunita felt offended, whereas Bhan-

dari, well, he just cooled off.

A conservative past knocking heads with an unabashed female chemistry has jumbled India's sexual arithmetic. Men don't know what to make of the new liberated woman, who in turn feels men haven't kept pace with her "awakening". Men might be feeling a mite insecure but women aren't feeling too much like well-rounded emotional beings either. After all, they can't be having mind-blowing sex if men don't match up to their expectations. And men can't be playing their old hunt-conquer-move-on game if women no longer allow it. Great sex still seems to be at an arm's length.

But the permutations and combinations have gone all topsy-turvy. There is no single statement that can generalise these imbalanced equations. Single women are mating and dating like never before, married women are walking down

the extramarital sidewalks. Women have men friends, some have buddy sex too. Then there is sex without love and love without commitment. Metrosexuals, heterosexuals or homosexuals, the pervading image seems to be that of a blatant pre-occupation with the body. Sample some results from the survey. Thirteen per cent have experimented with anal sex. It was a taboo area till some years back and was understood primarily as a male desire. Seventeen per cent of unmarried girls admit that they don't mind masturbating before their partners, an activity that needs a high degree of comfort with oneself and conviction in one's pleasure. In Lucknow, 94 per cent women admitted that they had killed boredom in sex by taking it out of their bedrooms and 100 per cent claimed they knew about their erogenous zones. Considering that Lucknow wasn't the easiest place to conduct this survey, these revelations are noteworthy. Although very few across the age group say they've tried kinky sex like bondage or sado-masochism, the average foreplay time in all cities was 15-30 minutes in each sexual encounter. That's a clear indicator that sex is not a quick and forgettable activity anymore.

Language and body language confirm many of

22 is average age for the first sexual encounter.

Sexual experimentation is often accompanied by self-doubt.

Who do you usually discuss sex with?

| | |
|----------------------------|----|
| Women friends | 52 |
| Don't discuss sex at all | 29 |
| Men friends | 5 |
| Relations/parents/siblings | 10 |
| Don't know/Won't say | 12 |

Figures in per cent; Percentage does not add up to 100 because of multiple responses

Female bonding didn't only happen in the *First Wives Club*. It is in the Indian woman's sex files too. Men friends showed up last on the confidant list, which is a disappointment. Only 8 per cent knew couples who had swapped partners. Reasonable, isn't it?

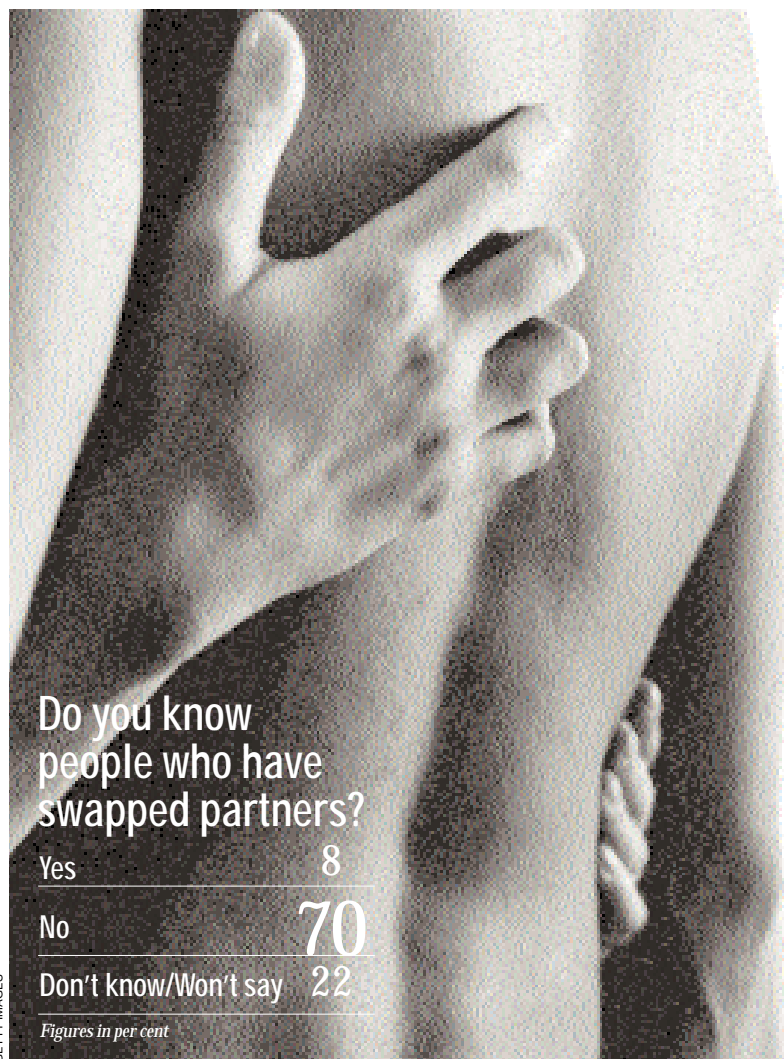
from a guy asking if I could allow the stripper to leave early because he had promised him as a birthday gift to his girlfriend for a hen party," says Tijori.

Male strippers are not limited to films. The past year has witnessed a change in the way women party in the cities. Some now seek private time with strippers and occasionally even pay for sex, earlier strictly a male prerogative. Richer because of rising incomes and fancy free in choices, some city women gladly go for the eye candy. Take Vandana Arora. A much-married and well-paid interior decorator in Mumbai, Arora lives it up as much as her businessman husband. She is juggling two lovers at the moment, and picked up an escort on a night out in Goa and in Delhi, where she travels occasionally. She prefers paying cash for a pleasurable night. "It makes life simple when one is paying for sex. It gives me the power to ask them to do all I like," she says.

As the shock of forbidden sexuality springs out of the closets of the socially mobile, marriage seems to be the biggest casualty of this uneasy revolution. Not to forget that the original four-letter word "love", the core of gender relations, is being paired off unceremoniously with "idyllic romanticism" and shrugged off by many. There will always be some happy marriages, but never before have so many been challenged by wives not willing to "make do". Urban psychotherapists are noticing it too. Mumbai sexologist Dr Mahindra C. Watsa, who does sex counselling for *weddingsutra.com*, India's first ever wedding website, says that for girls premarital sex still means non-penetrative touching, fondling and kissing. But Dr Paras Shah, sex specialist from Ahmedabad, says that his clients fall into two main categories: teenage girls having sex, and married men coming to seek sexual counselling at the behest of wives who aren't satisfied with their lot.

THE familiarity of marriage can never substitute the thrill of forbidden sex," says Vandana Mukherjee, 37 and a television professional. "I believe in mental orgasms out of marriage and being complimented on my sex appeal by men other than my husband is very flattering," she says. Delhi psychologist Arpita Anand, who works with married couples, says that in the past year she has come across many women feeling the need for fulfilling sex in marriage. On women tempted to try sex out of marital relationships, Anand cites the case of a 35-year-old homemaker, mother of two, who is contemplating separation because of the absence of regular sex after she conceived her second child. Ramya Kailash, a 40-year old from Chennai, explains this: "Women need sex. They may put up with scanty sex in marriage but it is difficult if it is totally denied."

A plurality of voices appears to be over-



Do you know people who have swapped partners?

| | |
|----------------------|----|
| Yes | 8 |
| No | 70 |
| Don't know/Won't say | 22 |

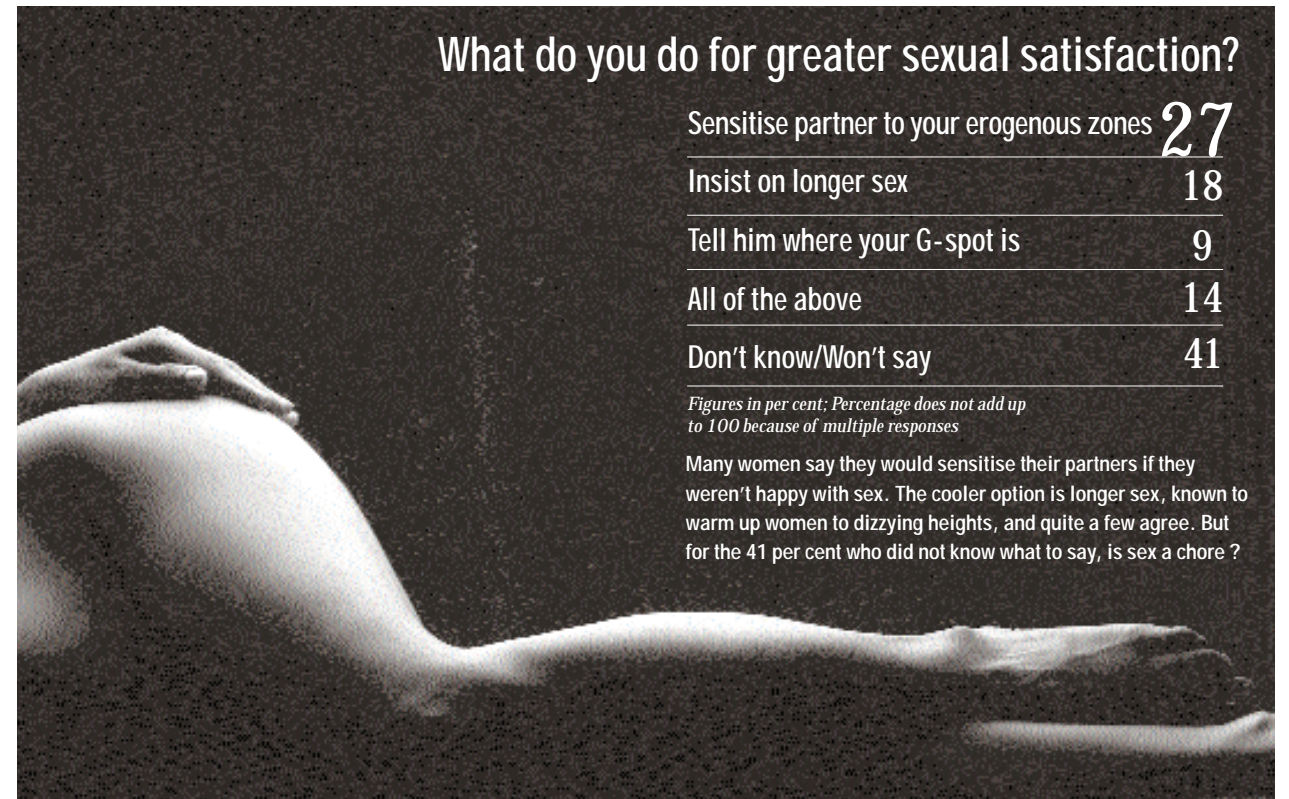
Figures in per cent

What do you do for greater sexual satisfaction?

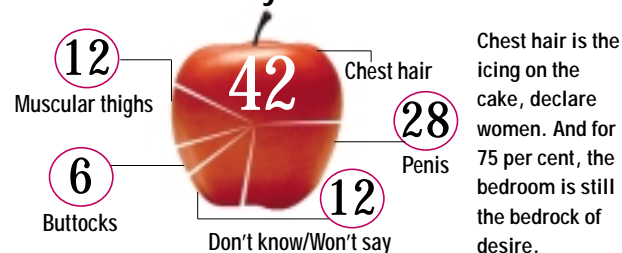
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|---|----|
| Sensitise partner to your erogenous zones | 27 |
| Insist on longer sex | 18 |
| Tell him where your G-spot is | 9 |
| All of the above | 14 |
| Don't know/Won't say | 41 |

Figures in per cent; Percentage does not add up to 100 because of multiple responses

Many women say they would sensitise their partners if they weren't happy with sex. The cooler option is longer sex, known to warm up women to dizzying heights, and quite a few agree. But for the 41 per cent who did not know what to say, is sex a chore?



Which part of a man's body are you sexually attracted to?



Figures in per cent

When and where do you prefer having sex?

| | |
|-------------------------------------|----|
| At night, in the bedroom | 75 |
| Anytime/anywhere | 10 |
| Early mornings | 9 |
| In the afternoons during work break | 6 |
| Don't know/Won't say | 13 |

Figures in per cent; Percentage does not add up to 100 because of multiple responses

throwing the notions of conformity. But it is not a happily-ever-after tale. Too much experimentation, leads women to judge themselves by their sexual histories. It leaves them neither conservative nor liberated and chained to self-doubt.

It is only maturity that makes these sharp curves negotiable, says actor Mita Vasishth. "These are risks that women take to feel needed, held or touched, sometimes out of deep confusion and anger. I could justify my character in *Oops* through personal experience and a close observation of women in marriages," she says in a convinced tone.

Conviction in one's choices may or may not lead to better sex but it does pull women out of their perennial confusion. As theatre actor, producer and director Mahabanoo Mody-Kotwal, now in her 50s, says, "I am afraid of nothing and nobody. I live my life on my own terms and do exactly what I wish to. I can't handle hypocritical relationships," she says. Mody-Kotwal travelled a tough road from a conservative background to being the woman who brought the controversial play *Vagina Monologues*—accounts of 200 women written by American activist Eve Ensler—to India.

The man-woman disagreement on who has changed and who hasn't rages inconclusively, but Mae West's take may adequately explain what many women are struggling to express. "It is not the men in my life, but the life in my men that matters."

Sorry Ekta Kapoor.

—with Neeraj Mishra, Nidhi Taparia, Uday Mahurkar, Ramesh Vinayak, Arun Ram, Stephen David and Anjali Doshi

Some names have been changed