

## SECTION SIX: COLUMNS ABOUT EXPLORING SEXUALITY

### HOT AND SWEATY BETWEEN THE SHEETS: What really turns us on

Given that I spend a large portion of my time writing about and pondering on matters sexual, my readers could be forgiven for thinking that I lead a rather exotic life. I too was under this delusion until a little book arrived on my desk which forced me to re evaluate things.

After spending a few hours reading through the Planet Sex handbook, I can only conclude that in fact I lead a most parochial and sheltered life. Indeed after reading this, I may even add the word "dull".

The handbook is published in England by the reputable sexpert Tuppy Owens, author of the infamous Sex Maniac's Diary and organiser of the equally infamous Sex Maniac's ball which she holds in London each year to raise money for charity.

Apparently, high society patrons and matrons pay vast sums of money to attend the annual event which includes an "under the table" service with volunteer sex maniacs crawling around the floor pleasuring guests while they eat.

Anyway, Owens, who has a degree in Human Sexuality from London University is a girl after my own heart. She has spent years travelling around the world researching all the various clubs and associations people frequent in order to indulge their sexual passions. She has collated this bizarre information of what turns people on into the Planet Sex handbook.

So what does turn people on? The first eye-opener came when I read under the "h" listing that there are clubs world-wide for lovers of hairy women. There is a club called Daughters of Hirsutism in Chicago and a publication called Hair Apparent for those who like their females unshaved and au natural.

If this makes you squirm you may want to join The Smoothie Club in the UK for "people who like shaved, smooth bodies". The US club is called "Bushwackers". One can only speculate as to why.

There are people who get turned on wearing raincoats. They would be well advised to join a club called International Mackintosh Society in the UK. Owens says they "put on annual weekends, and events abroad". Very jolly indeed, but don't forget to pack your raincoat.

There are clubs for people who get their rocks off wearing all manner of things but I think the one that shocked me most was under "a" for adult babies. Precious Baby Wear in England, and Especially For Me in California apparently supply super-sized diapers, bibs, dummies and other paraphernalia. Once dressed, adult babies can go to various play-groups in these cities. Both Diaper Pail Friends, and Mummy Hazel's Hush-a-bye Baby Club, offer special events in play-pens with nurse-maids. All I can say is the nurses must have very strong arms.

I was amused by a listing for a wonderfully strange group of people called "Giantess lovers". According to Owens they are: "people who want to be trampled."

There's a guy I write about a man who frequents Sydney's fantasy house Club Medea and gets turned on pretending he is a door-mat. He often pays \$300 an hour to lie in the hall and be walked over. In summer he goes to the beach, burrows into the sand and puts his towel on top so that people will unwittingly frolic over him.

For those who find this story unbelievable, there are several associations around the world that cater to this very obsession. Mr Carpet is based in Pocono Summit USA and is presumably a place where other carpets can meet and have a good time. There is Giantess in New York selling "books and magazines on gigantic women with enormous boobs crushing and interacting with wimps." There is also Squish in California for people who "dream of big bare-foot ladies trampling them."

The Hung Jury is a club in Los Angeles for men with giant penises and the women who love them. Meanwhile Taloned Women is a newsletter for those who get turned on by "women with long nails and scratching." Australians can join a number of swingers' groups or join a club for lovers of fishnet stockings or pop over to a club in Japan for men who want to do weird things with fish.

Under the chapter "shopping" Owens gives a big thumbs-up to Fetters "a wonderful group of friendly people who make bondage and fetish wear caringly and with empathy." She also likes Eroreak in the UK whose "hand-made dungeon and sexy furniture has now reached amazing standards."

Those away from home may benefit from Ms Owens helpful translations: She teaches her readers to say: "My wife and I would like to make it with you" in German, Arabic or Welsh. Meanwhile you can say: "I am a masochist. I need a sadist" in Portuguese, and even Hebrew for those looking for action in the Holy City.

Anyway, following in the footsteps of the marvellously entertaining Owens, I turn my attentions in this chapter to the alluring question of what really turns us on. What really goes on under the covers?

I take up where Owens leaves off, having spent the past year hanging about in dungeons, sitting in on orgies and wife-swapping sessions, visiting sex clubs, road-testing sex toys and interviewing the weirdest and wildest people, in a bid to bring you a shockingly intimate portrait of the world after dark.

For your sakes, I have peeped into people's windows, into their hearts and ultimately into their bedrooms. May this chapter make you hot and sweaty all over.

#### **"MERCY MISTRESS"**

Mistress Medea is exhausted. She has had a really busy week. She has organised a slave auction which will be held in the next few weeks. She has been putting the final touches on the dungeons she rents out to couples for the special rate of \$75 an hour. And she's been running mistress training workshops to help her staff get into shape.

All this while attending to the regular day-to-day duties of running her new S&M haunt Club Medea - Australia's first private S&M club. It is 2am and Medea has just finished disciplining a prominent QC in the school-room upstairs when I go to see her.

"It's pretty tiring," she says, leaning back in a chair and dragging passionately at a cigarette. She is one of the most extraordinary looking women I have ever seen. Tall, with a magnificent body and long black hair, she looks every bit the male fantasy. Tonight she is wearing a provocative black cat-suit of transparent mesh. Her nipples are huge and visible. I try to keep my eyes above the neck, but it's hard to concentrate.

"As soon as we opened the door we were swamped by requests for membership," she says, oblivious to my breast envy. "We already have 500 people on our books and there are new inquiries every day."

**"But I love this work. It's the best job I've had."**

**Medea's former work included many years as a finance journalist under the name Sandra Van Dijk and then press secretary to a well-known government minister. We chat about the my years as a finance journalist and share private stories about "in-depth interviews" we conducted. Basically concurring that businessmen are indeed a kinky breed of human species.**

**In fact, she says it was during her years of interviewing, and working with, leading businessmen, lawyers and politicians that she realised what an huge demand for her current services there was at the upper echelons of society.**

**"At \$300 an hour, and up to \$500 for "special" requests, it is a rich man's sport," she says. "We get some of the most prominent people in Australia through here each night - women as well as men." The fee does not include traditional sex. "Nothing as boring as that," she grins mysteriously.**

**Medea's lover, a Sydney businessman, helped her set up the club which is run from a three-storey Victorian terrace in Sydney's inner city and is lavishly decked out in rich and black reds fabrics. But she doesn't want to give too much away about him. "He is fairly well-known in the finance world, and his child goes to a private school, so I have to be sensitive," she says.**

**She says her clients pay for a qualified mistress or master to play out their fantasies, whether it be to get spanked, or to take them back to their school days. "S&M is intellectual sex. It is about using the mind."**

**She says that while many of her clients are wealthy or famous, she is trying to make the club accessible to the mainstream by hiring out dungeons to couples. "The couples that come here often want to just indulge in some light erotic play. We get plenty of your garden-variety, people-next-door coming along each night."**

**She says she opened Medea's because: "I get a lot of pleasure from this work." Pleasure is a not a word that comes readily to mind, touring the dungeons and fantasy rooms of the house.**

**The dungeons are equipped with racks, and various instruments of torture. In one, a naked woman is being whipped by a near-naked mistress in a military hat. Medea says the woman comes to the club twice a week. A third of Medea's members are female.**

**A door accidentally catches the wind as we pass and opens just enough for me to catch a glimpse of a woman in a nurses uniform standing open legged above a naked male who is lying on a mattress on the floor. In her hand is a strap-on dildo.**

**Quickly and aggressively she slams the door shut. There are sudden murmurs from two other mistresses who have seen what happened. They come rushing up and ask me if I recognised the man. I assure them I am myopic and they remind me that I am not to write anything without Medea's approval. "We get a lot of very high-profile people in here. Their confidentiality must be respected."**

**At that point I hear someone else yell "he's here". And I am bundled into a side room with the door shut until "he" passes. It is clear from the tension in the air that this is one of those well-known men who I am told later are usually celebrities or people in high-profile, high-pressure positions. Coast is clear and we are back on our way.**

**The medical room has a doctor's table, along with sutures, and can it be? Injections. The school room has desks, teddies, blackboard. And of course extra large**

ruler for teacher to use on aberrant children. There are any number of vibrators and phalluses around the joint, of varying sizes. Man size, snack size and bite size.

Mistress Medea smiles at my naivety. "Pleasure is what it is all about. Pleasure and pain are inextricably linked," she says citing her own exhilaration at a recent belly-button piercing she had done. "I sort of went out of my body. You release certain chemicals when you are in pain and it makes you feel high."

But most people get no pleasure in going to the dentist, childbirth, even getting one's legs waxed. Again she smiles. "The pain has to be associated with sexual pleasure. Not just pain on it's own. It's the combination that is so potent for my clients - and for me." She hands me what looks like a black leather bikini and urges me to experiment.

It takes quite a bit of convincing but finally I put on the garment, and allow myself to be harnessed in a dog's collar and led downstairs to the dungeon. Medea tells me she wants to let me spend a bit of time in the cage, so I can contemplate my bad behaviour.

I sit alone in the cage for about 20 minutes. Out of boredom I calculate that at close to \$5 a minute this is a very expensive form of foreplay for the businessmen and celebrities that come here. Specially considering that you could be thrown in jail overnight for free, and there'd be a meal or two included. I wonder if the clients think it's good value.

Medea pops in for a moment to ask if I'm okay, which I think is very nice under the circumstances. Being an honest woman I admit that I'd like the little blow heater in the corner to be turned on because it is very draughty on the floor and I suffer from the cold. It seems very odd to be telling a mistress about my bad circulation from the confines of a cage in a dungeon, but she cheerfully obliges.

When she returns she is not as cheerful. She has become firm and disciplinarian. She unlocks the cage and ties me up to a black leather chair and bosses me around. I hate being bossed around. I start to feel nervous. Then she picks up what looks like a horse whip and I almost pass out. The things writers will do to provide atmosphere.

She tells me that if at any time I want her to stop, all I have to do is beg for mercy. She says the idea that you lose all control is one of the many misconceptions about S&M. "What people don't understand is that there are firm rules to this game. The slave and dominatrix have mutual respect for each other. A slave only has to say "Mercy Mistress" and all pain stops. Our clients tell us what they want or can tolerate before the ritual begins. S&M is about safe sex in every way."

I feel immediately relieved and ready for the punishment I must endure. But after a few lashes I start feeling wimpy. I have always been adverse to smacking or hitting since my sister walloped me with a thong when I was young. I remember clearly the sting as the rubber object of torture descended on my nubile thigh. I sat in the corner and screeched until my mother scooped me up and calmed me down. Thereafter all thongs were banned from our house.

And now, instead of any erotic inspirations, with each flay all I can think about is a pair of over-sized, blue, rubber thongs. Which makes me think of men with fat feet walking along the beach in summer and mothers in thongs screaming after their screaming kids who are wearing thongs...

The mind is free-falling. Hidden associations are coming thick and fast with every lash just as Medea promised. These are my deepest, darkest thoughts. And they

are horrible. Thongs. More thongs. More fat feet in thongs.....at barbecues.... "Mercy mistress!" I yell.

"I have a low pain threshold," I mutter in embarrassment as she unties me.

"Ummm thanks," I say on the way out of the dungeons. I don't know if it is S&M etiquette to thank your persecutor but I've been brought up to be polite. On the way out we pass a whole lot of metal objects. "Branders," she says, "like the one's used for branding cattle. Often we use them on slaves." Often? I reply, wondering about my fellow humans.

Medea admits that some of her clients are drawn to S&M because they experienced some sort of trauma or abuse as children which they need to keep playing out. But she says many are drawn to it because they feel guilty about wielding so much power.

"One judge who comes here needs to be humiliated. I believe it comes from the exhaustion and responsibility of having to make life and death decisions all the time.

"Many of my clients want to just give up their enormous power and play a different role. They want that relief." She says that one of the favourite fantasies of powerful, straight men is that the woman straps on a dildo, and acts out a dominant male role with them.

Medea says all mistresses are trained as submissives first so they can understand their client's deepest needs. "We go on a psychological journey with our clients."

Medea claims to have the total support of the surrounding neighbours. "This used to be a squat house before, with lots of noise. We are quiet and discreet." Also she says she supports the local establishments like the hardware store where she gets all her leather for the whips and wood for her racks.

One of Medea's mistresses makes dolls for children in her spare time. At least two are also journalists, one of whom I know quite well from her past profession. It's good to know that if one ever gets tired of lashing ones subjects with words, there is always a new, more literal place for old journalists to go to meter out our punishment.

## SEX TOYS

MY husband is not at all well. He is curled up on the couch sulking. He claims to be in substantial pain as a result of our last nights' activities.

It's all my fault. I was inspired by the latest survey out of America "Toys In the Sheets."

According to the survey which was done for the most recent meeting of the Society for the Scientific Study of Sexuality, the typical owner and buyer of sex toys such as vibrators is not the young and hip swinger of popular imagination. Rather a sober, married, educated and probably Christian, middle-class white woman, in her thirties - generally with children.

Her household income is between \$50,000 and \$70,000 and she is most probably a conservative voter. In the USA she votes Republican. Here she would be a Liberal or National Party voter.

Well-regarded San Francisco medical writer Michael Castleman who co-wrote the survey with the Lawrence Research Group says the study which was conducted on existing sex toy owners across America, suggests "that sex toys are not weird fetishes. They are used by people in the ordinary middle classes, by the family next door."

Jo-Anne Baker who runs The Pleasure Spot in Sydney and sells mail order sex toys all over Australia agrees. "My clients are both men and women. Many of them are average family people with children. I get a lot of corporate women buying vibrators and a lot of men coming in to buy them for their wives.

"I would agree that sex toys are increasingly selling to the main-stream rather than to fringe groups - particularly with sex shops for women opening up all over the world and providing a softer option than traditional hard-core sex shops."

Most people surveyed said they did not use sex toys as a substitute for sex, with most being married or in defacto relationships and having sex two to three times a week. Sex toys were largely used in the bedroom but a surprising number of people used them in a host of exotic locations including in cars, tents, spas, a golf course, an aeroplane and surprisingly, a chair lift.

Anyway the thing that got my husband and I going was the glowing testimonies at the back of the study from sex toy users.

"Sex toys saved our marriage!" says one woman. "We couldn't live without them," says another. "The variety keeps married sex life fun, interesting, exciting and creative....with awesome orgasms."

It was the awesome orgasms that got me. I insisted we road test these devices before I wrote my column. So off we went to get some toys in Sydney's famous Kings Cross.

For those who haven't ventured into a sex shop, the typical, hard-core store is more like a ghoulish wax museum than a house of erotica. There are too many dismembered body parts behind glass showcases or hanging on the wall, to be a turn-on.

My husband was most upset by the battery-operated "squirming finger" for girls. He was also a bit horrified by the "vibrating tongue" for women which was a pink bit of plastic poking out of a painted mouth with teeth. Meanwhile, I was mortified by the female heads hanging off the walls around the room like a scene from a guillotine horror film.

"We call these male sex toys "tunnels of love" the man behind the counter offered, without a sense of humour. "This is the Trudy model," he said pointing to a brunette head with an open mouth. "This is Jennifer," he said pulling down a pouting blonde and handing it to my husband who gasped as he threw the thing on the counter.

We laughed at the fur-lined hand-cuffs, edible undies, and genital-shaped food moulds to make penis pasta or chocolate "bosom" biscuits - just the thing for our next dinner party. We also giggled at the range of vibrators, most of which were big enough to excavate a road - a typical male view of what females want.

In the end we selected a vibrating butterfly for me, and a vibrating love tunnel for him, thankfully one without the face.

The evening started well enough. My butterfly was providing quite a bit of enjoyment fluttering about until suddenly it short-circuited. Unfortunately some of the

cheaper devices can burn-out on lusty women. So we focused our attention on the tunnel of love.

But we realised - alas, too late - that it was too tight. My poor hubby was literally trapped inside the tunnel of love.

We spent the next hour running around in a terrible panic trying to prize the thing loose, until I remembered an old trick I use when I can't get the lid off the pickled-cucumber jar. I run it under warm water which makes something expand or shrink or whatever.

Thankfully it worked, but not before we'd both done a lot of praying. It is little wonder such a huge percentage of sex toy users - over 90 per cent of those surveyed-believe in god.

### STEALING FOR A FIGHT

Don't be alarmed if you hear the neighbours yelling at each other or you see her tossing his prized record collection into the street. It may look like bad news but chances are your neighbours are just doing the dance of love.

After writing about what strange things got people hot, I was amazed to find the amount of readers who confided to me that good argument was one of the biggest turn ons to their relationship. Stirring the pot, and all that. Many people claimed to be happy in their relationships because they fought, not despite it.

So are humans born to bicker? Apparently we are - from the time sperm starts chasing the reluctant egg around the womb, according to the sexperts.

The respected Janus Report on sexual behaviour claims that a whopping quarter of all women and a third of all men surveyed declared that the best way to make up after an argument is to have a hot, love-making session. This lead researchers to conclude "... many couples will provoke a fight to attain the subsequent sex.

Meanwhile, an American study on file with the Family Planning Association of New South Wales called Shared Intimacies-Women's Sexual Experiences concluded: "Some women mentioned that their highest sexual experiences occurred after an intense argument or fight . Emotions are (often) aroused to a high pitch."

Rebecca, 32, and married for five years says: "I realised that sex is often best for me after an argument or fight. I think it may have something to do with...the energy that comes with emotions like hatred and anger that can be transformed into a powerful sexual experience."

Victorian-based psychologist Desiree Saddik says "For some couples arguing is like a game, marking out territory and boundaries. It is about control and desire, and most of all rage.

"This can be very sexually arousing particularly in certain cultures. All that blood pumping can physiologically resemble a state of lust. And angry women can really turn some men on - the heaving breast, the flared nostrils. There is something exciting in it, something dangerous. It's like the woman is an animal on heat."

While this is all very good for the male, experts aside, I am not convinced that arguing is necessarily a turn on for most women.

Despite the flushed cheeks, racing heart and flared nostrils, when I am angry with my partner I think more about thumping him than pumping him.

When voices get raised in our house it is not often the precursor to love. At least not until my husband has thrown himself on the floor, apologised for something he either did or didn't do (an irrelevant detail for most women), bought flowers and then, just for good measure, apologised again.

The point of the grovelling, gift baring, and elaborate apologies is to dissipate the anger which I believe is the single biggest killer of libido in most women.

Angry women can go without sex for weeks, months even years in order to prove to the person that they are really, really, really, pissed off! Far from falling into the arms of a man who has inflamed and impassioned her during a fight, a woman is more likely to push him away and send him off to rectify the offending situation.

He: "My darling. You look so sexy with your nostrils flared. Let us away to the bedroom!" She: "You go back and fix the washing machine the way it says in the manual. I'm sick of washing clothes by hand." By the time the offending problem is fixed, and many, many apologies have been made, those wild surges of testosterone have vanished into the twilight zone.

Anne Hollonds of Relationships Australia in NSW is apt to agree with me. She says although a significant number of the couples do fight habitually to inspire sex and passionate making-up sessions, she believes they are in a destructive relationship and probably frightened to get close.

Meanwhile Queensland sex therapist Dr Diane Meehan agrees anger dampens arousal for many women even though she believes the emotional intensity does probably inflame the ardour of a lot of men. She thinks that for women, sex after arguments is often the result of wanting to get away from the discomfort of the unresolved conflict - a form of procrastination or a yearning for reassurance- more than anything more romantic.

The thing the experts all agree on is that arguing is healthy if done to promote an exchange of views rather than as a form of put down. Constant bickering and demeaning one's partner, or physical aggression, are the killers of libido not a bit of verbal fisty-cuffs.

But is it really a turn on? Saddik says yes. Couples who never fight and who are conflict averse can become depressed because their relationships never give rise to heat and desire, and never carries the risks of daring to express a differing view. "People get bored in a completely perfect, ideal world," she says.

## KINKY KINDS

I once asked a boyfriend what he fantasised about in bed. I wished I hadn't. Without flinching he told me. "I always have a recurrent fantasy. There are cowboys coming over a mountain and they are chasing Indians. Hundreds of Indians wearing big head-dresses," he said, waving his arms about and puffing his chest like a warrior.

I figured he hadn't heard the question. "I didn't ask you what you watched on television last night. Do you fantasise about other women?"

"No," he said, very alarmed that I couldn't see the immediate sexual appeal of the scene he had created.

Years later, after he had galloped on out of my life, I brought this up with my therapist. I asked her if she thought it strange that a person get turned on by such a thing. She said absolutely not. She explained to me that people get turned on by

the strangest things often related to their childhood experiences.

If for instance someone is experiencing sexual feeling when they are young and they feel guilty about it, they may displace that feeling on to a nearby object. Like an orange juicer. Thereafter always getting aroused by the sound of oranges being squished. Or they may be watching mother doing housework and instead of acknowledging their Oedipal feelings, they may project them on to the vacuum cleaner. Apparently this is quite common.

Many people don't even know what is turning them on in later years. They may suddenly feel aroused eating an ice-cream or watching Mr Ed on TV.

The conversation with my therapist came to mind recently when I read that prominent psychologist and social commentator Hugh Mackay had, in his novel *Little Lies*, written about a man who could only reach orgasm while holding a train ticket in his hand. So I decided to do a quick ring around of some therapists, sex counsellors and fantasy workers to find out what really turns people on. And the results are quite amazing.

According to the experts forget the bubble baths, sexy lingerie, chocolates and champagne touted in glossy magazines. It's more likely to be the hills hoist, or our favourite pink blanket from yester-year that gets us hot.

Apparently, it's all to do with the safety and security of home or the latent yearnings of childhood. As I wrote last week, according to a recent study by the Smell & Taste Treatment & Research Foundation in Chicago perfumes produced only a 3 to 4 per cent increase in male arousal compared to 40 per cent for the homely blend of doughnut and black licorice, lavender, and pumpkin pie.

Mundane, boring domestic appliances are the subject of many fantasies that Sandra Van Dijk has to handle each day as Mistress Medea. Van Dijk, a former finance journalist and one-time government press secretary, now turned fantasy mistress, claims that one of her clients gets turned on watching her put flowers in a vase.

"It's definitely something to do with mother. I think it makes him feel safe. Or maybe he had his first orgasm whilst staring at a vase. Who knows? I'm afraid to ask," she says.

Another client gets excited by shirts. He likes to hold them close to his body and even glues buttons to the hair on his chest to remind him of shirts, before he can perform.

The funniest of her stories is a man who is fixated with carpet. He carries around a large square of it and often lies under it at parties. Van Dijk says the fellow comes over to her fantasy house each week, and pays \$300 an hour to curl up near the front door. He also gets sexually aroused by door mats, and watching women wipe their feet.

If this is all a bit too much, I have just finished reading a fair dinkum psychological report about a man who became sexually excited by his secretary because she waddled. He kept bragging about how beautifully she walked, imitating her and carrying on about the way her feet turned out.

Later it was revealed that he had a sexual fixation with ducks. It was something in the movement of their bottoms.

Melbourne psychologist Desiree Saddik has also heard stories of people who were aroused such exciting and sexy things as toothpaste - "the association of going to bed."

She says many men and women are apparently aroused by blankets, thermometers or things to do with doctors and sickness because when they were sick as kids they were given a lot of love and cosseting. "It is often the intimacy they crave as children and later in life this translates into sexual feelings."

Other things she has heard of include bad breath. "Often if a parent has alcohol or cigarette breath, and the child is in an Oedipal phase, this will translate to a life-long arousal trigger," Saddik says.

I know of two cases of being aroused by cupboards. One girlfriend's husband used to lick cupboards to get himself in the mood. Another woman likes to hide in them before sex.

The strangest story came from Sandra Van Dijk who has a client who gets aroused by excessively hairy arms and pimply bottoms. Which certainly proves that humans are a complex lot when it comes to sexuality. Otherwise put: "One man's trash is another man's treasure." Now I'm going off to crawl back under the door mat.

## **NOISY NEIGHBOURS**

Undoubtedly one of the most awful experiences known to man is finding yourself living next door to noisy neighbours.

The sense of powerlessness as the rock music thuds its ugly beat through the night, the knots in the pit of the stomach as bratty children run around yelling and shrieking, the annoyance of having to listen to someone else's TV show as it wafts through open windows or worse their mundane domestic fights - these are the sounds that urban nightmares are made of.

But all these horrors pale in comparison to the ultimate aural curse - the neighbour who is noisy in the sack.

There is nothing as infuriating, intimidating or embarrassing as hearing your noisy neighbour sigh and moan in ecstasy for hour after hour while you lie there looking up at the roof wondering why on earth you never had sex like that.

Then you think maybe you did have sex like that. But when? And if you did have sex like that why can't you remember it? Was it ever so good that you moaned and groaned and yelled in passion for so many hours that the neighbours had to put pillows over their ears?

We once lived next door to a woman who made such a fracas it woke us up every morning. She'd let out piercing shrieks that registered ten on the Richter scale. In the beginning we would lie there and giggle softly, amused at the din. Sometimes we'd even feel inspired ourselves. But after the novelty wore off it became downright irritating - a testimony that commented on our sex life, or rather lack of it at 6am.

"Oh, no! Not again", I'd grumble in my sleep as she'd go off again for the third time in a row like one of those alarm clocks that goes silent for a few minutes but then starts up again in case you've gone back to sleep.

"She couldn't be..." my husband would grizzle pulling the doona over his head and hoping I didn't dive over the fence in search of the stud who could give a woman that much pleasure. Actually she shared with two men which certainly had me thinking.

"She must be faking it," I'd answer from my sleep. "She's an actress for sure," he'd say. But really we were shaken to the core that such pleasure was possible.

Indeed my husband and I both got smitten with "noise envy" - a potent, destabilising modern affliction, as yet undiagnosed by yuppie shrinks, that drives thousands of people out of perfectly good marriages each year, in search of passionate carnal delights they believe "other people" are having.

But those with noise envy can relax. Having had a discussion with the experts, I have discovered that there is no medical correlation between the amount of pleasure one experiences and the amount of noise one makes.

Psychologists argue it all boils down to personality, how emotionally repressed you are, and how much noise you made in your formative sexual years, whether you feared getting caught.

But international sexpert Barbara Carrellas has a different theory. She says its all about what sort of orgasm you prefer.

Carrellas who regularly tours Australia from the United States is a teacher of sexuality who specialises in helping people have better orgasms. She says there are many different ways to experience sexual ecstasy.

For instance, if a person remains very quiet before and during orgasm and concentrates on the build up of sexual energy, he or she is likely to have a very intense "genital-based" orgasm.

This differs markedly from what is known in the eastern love-making tradition of Tantra as the "full-body" orgasm. If the person is a screamer, then he or she will most likely be inadvertently hyperventilating - drawing a lot of oxygen into the body with every moan or scream. Oxygen changes the way the muscles respond to pleasure and hence gives a person a very different type of orgasm.

Instead of holding breath and tensing against the orgasm, the person is letting go. All the muscles in his or her body are relaxing due to the oxygen intake which allows energy to move up the torso like a giant wave and results in a more consuming experience.

Having recently done one of Carrellas' Tantra workshops, it is clear that full-body orgasms are surprisingly less draining than the intense genital-based orgasms. In fact, you feel energised and invigorated afterwards, which accounts for why screamers are often at it again ten minutes later. But it's all really just a matter of taste - so to speak.

Carrellas says for those who want to know in advance how noisy their new love will be, they should observe what happens on a dinner date when the food arrives.

Does the conversation suddenly go silent while he or she concentrates on each mouthful, or is there a lot of chatter and breathing between bites? If the latter is the case, you may wish to buy your neighbours some ear muffs in advance.

## FAT BOYS

I have always loved fat on men. Schmaltz as it is known in Yiddish and German. "Voluptuous curves" as the condition was known in Renaissance times. Rubens and I would have been great mates, admiring together the glowing roundness of fleshy thighs, tummies and breasts.

I adore chubby, inviting arms. But I am most partial to fat bellies. Bellies that tell of over-indulgence, of over-eating. Bellies that tell of long nights spent in hedonistic pursuit with not a thought spared for that enemy of the fat cell - exercise.

I have never had anything but admiration for those orgiastic souls who have - as my mother always disapprovingly described it - "let themselves go".

The mere concept of total unrestraint has always whetted my ardour. Men who don't give a brass razoo what society dictates is etiquette and elegance. Men with unrestrained hair, appetites and emotions who cry in sad movies and never, never say no to oily chips, blocks of chocolates consumed in midnight feasts, and plenty of plonk. Men who only jog to catch the Mr Whippy icecream van before it drives off. To me a bit of schmaltz speaks of abundance, potency, fertility but most of all fun.

But having outlined in almost scientific detail the reason for my penchant, I must pose a question. I know why I like fat men, but what is the excuse of other women I talk to? Because lately I have discovered a most interesting and provocative new trend. Many, many of my women friends are increasingly admitting to me that they too secretly love fat men. Not your obese ten tonne-monster mind you, rather a voluptuous, curvaceous ball of fleshy manhood. "Warm and cuddly," was how one girl put it.

In the middle of a radio interview recently with comedienne Wendy Harmer, she revealed: I adore fat men. Men with cute bellies poking out over the pants. She said every time she went out to lunch she scoured the room for them.

During a recent dinner with a psychologist girlfriend of mine, I heard how much she missed her ex-boyfriend's bulging belly. "It was so cute," she sniffed. And to top it all off, two girlfriends admitted to me in separate instances last week that while their romantic fantasies concern slim, traditionally attractive men, their sexual fantasies often focus on fatter, larger men.

This is not the first time I have heard this. Countless books and articles written about women's sexual fantasies have confirmed that many women get turned on by schmaltzy men. Certainly enough women have told me this over the years.

Why? The psychologist I went for dinner with claimed the phenomenon was Oedipal. That many women still yearned for that large, cuddly father-figure. To a child, daddy is always big and bulky because the little girl is so small during her Oedipal phase. Adult women often still carry this image of "daddy" with them, and schmaltz can trigger in them feelings of perceived childhood safety.

She said some other women may subliminally be identifying with the concept of abundant "pregnant" bellies. A girlfriend reckons it is because a lot of women like to see themselves as smaller than men. So a large man will make them feel petite, frail and feminine.

Meanwhile another leading Australian psychologist, whose clients include some of the country's leading business men and women, says that many women are still subconsciously attracted to the connotations of power carried in the image of a man with an overtly active appetite.

She said that while recent studies of women's sexual fantasies have indicated that today's younger women aspire to dominate men in bed, many baby-boomer women still felt guilty and uncomfortable with their newfound power. During the day they were super-women, balancing the demands of career, home and children on their shoulders. But at a deep subconscious level they craved a man after dark who would

snatch from them the ominous burden of responsibility. Who would take control. Make all the decisions and often forcefully relieve them of a heavy load.

Thus women often sought the psychological as much as physical engulfment that a large, strong or portly male could bring.

Interestingly enough a male friend - who grew up with three sisters - summed it up like this. "Perhaps the attraction many women have to fat men is that a woman always wants someone who will love her as she is and not be put off by her wrinkles, crinkles, cellulite or pregnant tummy. Imperfect men provide a welcome relief from judgement."

He says that an interesting point which is often overlooked by the media is that a lot of men do also secretly have attractions to voluptuous women for the same reasons. "I know men romanticise about the slim, perfect woman, but I believe that a lot of men are also often sexually enchanted by the imperfect because the imperfect enhances their own sense of manhood, security and potency rather than having performance anxiety in the face of a young, spunky, perfect lover."

He says that many men also yearn to abdicate responsibility and control in bed to a strong, buxom woman which is why so many politicians and leading entrepreneurs keep getting caught in embarrassing S & M type situations. Men also have Oedipal feelings tied in with a large-breasted mother, he claims.

In light of all this it seems very strange to me that we all fast, diet and starve ourselves down to nothing, men and women alike, myself included, in a bid to please the opposite sex. Perhaps fashion will once again dictate a return to Rubenesque roundness. Perhaps aerobics will once and for all be outlawed. There'll be abundance throughout the land. The catch-cry of the 90's may well end up being: Viva la schmaltz-ball!

## SEX FOR ONE

One of the greatest taboos in society still remains the act of self-pleasure. In fact you can't even call it by its proper name. Just mention of the "M" word and people turn puce and start fidgeting. So I wasn't at all surprised by the reaction I got from friends when I did two workshops which focused on the "P" words - private parts and pleasure.

One was a workshop on erotic massage: two days of intense investigation into how to turn your partner on. And I'm not talking about wearing sexy lingerie.

The other was a girls-only workshop called "sex-for-one". Self-loving taken to the extreme! Very voguish in America with post-modern feminists all looking up their own dresses and seeking out their G-spots, but still very taboo here. This was the one that most shocked my friends. They glared at me like stunned mullets when I told them what I had spent the weekend doing.

Who in their right mind would spend two days learning how to pleasure oneself? What is there to learn? And anyway, who would feel justified in indulging in two days of intense self-love? Above all, who would do such a bizarre thing in front of a group of strangers? Well, of course, I would. And it was fantastic.

From both workshops I learned secrets about the male and female anatomy that stunned me. Wisdoms that were passed down in ancient cultures from mother to daughter and father to son, but that in western society continue to elude us.

Sadly, there is no mechanism in our culture to help us see sex as a positive force. No sexual initiation rites that educate us to the powers of our body, and the potential our bodies have for pleasure.

But it was the "sex-for-one" course had the most profound effect on me. It allowed me to see how "pleasure negative" we really are in this society.

It is considered quite normal in this culture to feel bad about touching our bodies, looking at them, enjoying them. We feel sickened at the thought of experiencing too much pleasure or loving ourselves too much. It is as if there is only a certain quota of joy owing to us.

More significantly, in Judeo-Christian societies, we tend to feel that our pleasure has to be reliant on another person. In fact, in the natural order of things, it very often isn't. There are times when we feel intensely sexual but we don't want to be touched by our partners.

There are many reasons for this. The most common being that we see our partners every day. We are intimate on so many levels that we often go into over-load. We often just want to retreat into our fantasies much the same way as we turn on the television or read the paper, at the exclusion of our partners.

This "time out" is a normal and healthy occurrence for both men and women, particularly in long live-in partnerships like marriage. It has nothing to do with love or the lack of it. And it is an enormously liberating experience to be able to distance ourselves for a while, without guilt.

Yet there is a huge stigma in telling our partners that we don't feel like sharing our sexuality with them for a time. There is an equally huge stigma about talking to our friends about it. Lucky for me I have a plethora of very open and honest friends who have joked with me about this rarely-discussed penchant many couples have for occasionally going it alone.

What intrigues me is that so many of us still don't trust the wisdom of our own bodies. Too many people are still trying too hard to live by rules that are set down by "other people" - rules on how we are supposed to experience sex, marriage or pleasure, how our bodies are supposed to look, how we are supposed to touch our bodies or our partner's bodies, and how often.

We're not encouraged to explore our bodies. We are not encouraged to discuss the truth behind many of the myths, and we are certainly not encouraged to listen to our own instincts. Hence, we deny ourselves the things we need when it comes to pleasure, particularly self-pleasure.

What struck me during the sex-for-one workshop was how much more tolerant we are of pain than joy. Each night on TV we watch people in their death throes. We witness people's most intimate painful moments: suffering, or dying whilst loved ones scream and cry. Yet to watch other people having pleasure is still so forbidden and so taboo.

Through these workshops I have now witnessed people experiencing pleasure - with partners or alone - and it was beautiful and spiritual. I know I'll get a swathe of furious letters from that statement. One woman wrote recently that I should be put into an asylum.

Perhaps she's right. But aren't we all tired of the so-called "normality" of violence, deprivation, self-hatred, cruelty and pain? Where is the pleasure lobby? Maybe I'll form my own Pleasure Positive Party and I'll force everyone to have a few

hours of wanton, abundant, meaningless joy before they come to lock me up and throw away the key.

## THE RATING GAME

I was having drinks with some old girlfriends the other night and we did what girls are apt to do when they've had a few too many drinks - we compared notes on the lovers we had shared during our single years.

Over a couple of bottles of chilled white, and with a great deal of laughter, we decided to rate our various 'conquests in common' from one to ten. This of course may come as a nasty shock to men who tend to think that giggling girls in groups are discussing fashion. In fact, women discuss sex far more than the men I know ever do. And they are a far raunchier lot than men are, at that.

Anyway back to our discussion. The interesting thing is that a lover who I rated a four without flinching, actually rated ten with another one of my friends. Then one who I rated ten-plus, was demoted to a mere three by a couple of his former girlfriends.

The very reason I rated him a ten was the reason they rated him a three. I adored the fact that he was into erotic things. It took him ages to get to the actual business of sex. He delighted in hours of delectable teasing and mind games. He loved fantasies and exploration. When he finally got to the act, he wasn't what we girls call a "stayer" but by that stage I had had such fun, I hardly noticed.

In complete contrast these two were complaining that he took ages to get to the real stuff of sex and then "conked out".

This conversation together with a survey that was released recently by Durex the condom makers, got me thinking. According to Durex's global survey, the French are considered to be the best lovers in the world whilst the Poles are the worst.

But what really is a "good lover" if one person's trash is clearly another's treasure? There is a simple answer to this vexing question, according to psychologists. Contemporary "New Age" wisdom has people falling into three basic psychological categories: those who are visual, those who are aural-verbal, and those who are sensual.

Being a visual person means you tend to speak in terms of "I see what you mean," whereas an aural person will say: "I hear what you are saying." A sensual/feeling person will often say: "I understand where you are coming from, or "I relate to that."

Although most of us have all three characteristics, one is the dominant orientation, with many people also having a very strong second trait. For instance, I am a very aural-verbal type with a strong visual orientation. This is a common make-up for writers.

How does this relate to sex. Quite logically. In the case of the guy I rated number ten and myself, we were clearly into the same sorts of things: fantasies, word games and visual delights. Not surprisingly, he was in the communications industry.

The other two women are predominantly sensuous. They need to feel skin against skin, body against body in order to have any joy in the sex act. They love to be held and touched. They also need to be told "feeling" things in bed, words that denote tenderness.

Whilst this fellow enjoyed the physical exchange of sex, he was clearly spinning out with pleasure well before it ever even got to the point of touch. The way a woman's body curved, the way she looked in sexy lingerie, the sound of a deep and throaty laugh would be enough to thrill him.

Interesting he also used to ring up phone-sex hotlines. The girls were aghast when they discovered this, describing him to me as "kinky" and "bizarre". I was not alarmed, having always understood why certain people enjoy phone-sex, erotic stories, sexy lingerie and videos, and various other visual and aural accessories to sex.

I use the word "people" because I think it is a myth that men are basically into emotionally-detached sex, whilst women are the feeling ones. Again it depends on which category you fall in to.

I have known many men who need to feel connected both physically and emotionally during sex and who shun erotic movies because they have no deep and meaningful plot. And I know plenty of women who get turned on without a shred of emotion. It's just that it is socially unacceptable for women to admit this.

The theories on people's psychological orientations goes a long way to explaining the huge gulf between many lovers and why the notion of being universally "good in bed" is so stupid.

In my opinion the only universal thing that makes someone good in bed is a willingness to accept differences in their partner and not get all insulted if he needs the visual stimulation of sexy lingerie, or get frustrated if she would rather experience sex as an act of love.

A good lover will indulge their partner generously and, most importantly, without judgement.

## PEEPING TOM

What really goes on in the homes of suburban Australia? What do people really say to each other and do to each other?

If one is to believe the tele and the magazine articles that ply the news stands, there are wonderful, exotic and erotic things happening out there to "other people".

Other people are having the times of their lives. Other people are having affairs with exciting celebrities. Other people are travelling. Other people are doing drugs, doing time, doing just about anything that is bizarre, out of the ordinary or just plain, old riveting. Most annoying of all, other people are having kinky sex, one-hour orgasms and have loads of energy to play all night regardless of children, mortgages or unemployment.

Well, finally, I got fed up with reading about other people with long legs, straight teeth, and large wallets. I got sick of trying to decipher the urban myths from reality. So I have decided to yield to a bad habit I kicked long ago, in a bid to uncover the truth about the Aussie heartland - spying. For the sake of providing an unbiased, empirical bit of reporting, for the sake of all my readers who deserve a realistic picture of what goes on in this country, I have taken my binoculars from their resting place.

Before I start I must say that everything they tell you on Hard Copy and other schlock-TV shows about America is true. Having spied on my neighbours for over a year in Manhattan (perving on the neighbours in high-rise apartment blocks is a national past-time) I am happy to report that behind closed doors in Rambo-land "other people" do exactly what you would imagine them to be doing.

For hours and hours I would sit on my balcony in Manhattan and watch the TV-sized windows and what went on in the frame. On a clear night, specially in smouldering, smutty Summer you can watch people made love or have fights. There are countless channels. My friend actually had a powerful telescope so I could study in great detail the Indian fellow opposite who would strip himself naked and then drink himself into oblivion before doing Karma Sutra type things to his wife. I learnt a lot.

There were two prostitutes across the road. I watched in horror as one woman's pimp dragged her screaming into the street. I saw crack being traded just under my window because the metho clinic was on the corner of my street and addicts were attracted to the neighbourhood. Many of the crack dealers were women with babies in pushers. They used their kids as a foil.

The woman next to me was a sex therapist who used to bonk her man on the kitchen table with the blind up. These tales are all true. I justified my rampant voyeurism to myself by claiming it made me a better writer to watch "other people" at life. Except that I never got any writing done because I remained glued to the lens for hours and hours a day, month in and month out. So I had to give the distracting habit up.

But since I have recently moved into a high-rise apartment in a high-density area of Sydney surrounded by hundreds of windows, and since I now feel it is my duty to ascertain the truth, I prop myself up in a comfortable position, binoculars focused and prepare for the worst. I expect to see drugs, orgies, wife swapping - all the things they tell you in magazine and tele stories are happening out there in the Aussie suburbs to "other people".

Things start slowly. The man across the road is out all day. At night he comes in, scratches his privates, eats an apple, opens his mail and plonks himself in front of the television with his cat. This routine occurs most nights of the week. On Saturday night a lady comes over. They eat dinner in the kitchen, drink some wine and retire to the television. At 2am, I am dozing and they are still watching videos.

Two doors down I watch a family eat dinner every night. The daughter sometimes dances in her room. The family usually sits in front of the TV until about 10pm then all the lights go out. Down stairs I watch three women who live together. They never have men over. They don't seem to be gay. In fact, there seems to be no sex in this household whatsoever. Just a lot of cooking and washing dishes.

A man and a woman seem to be doing drugs two doors across. He keeps handing her something. She hands it back. After an hour of squinting and hopping about I realise they are playing chess.

A week later and not much has changed. I think I can see wild sex going on in one of the rooms. It looks exciting and passionate. On closer inspection it turns out to be a pink towel hanging over the bath which is being scrubbed by a cleaning lady.

Week three, there has been no kinky sex, no drugs, no Hitchcock-style murders or suicides yet. I determine to give it time. Australians have never been as greedy or self-destructive as the Yanks. They certainly wash a lot of dishes and watch a lot of TV.

Late one Saturday night I watch two chubby women date two chubby men. They start dancing in front of the window - quite frenetically, with arms flaying. Suddenly one of the woman falls to the floor. Sex. I am about to see sex. Heavy petting. The real thing. The other three suddenly drop too. I see several sets of legs in the air and then I realise what's happening. They are doing exercises. Leg stretches. A sort of dusk-to-dawn aerobics session.

Week four still nothing for Madonna to put into her next book. Where is the stuff from tele? Where are all the cross dressers and transvestites? Where are those "other people" who take amphetamines and have threesomes? Are things happening in other rooms of the house: the ones with curtains over the windows, or aren't they happening in the Australian suburbs?

In desperation I sink really low, to eavesdropping. At night I press my glass to the wall next door. She says: "Do you think the chicken was dry?" He says: "It was okay." He says: "Did you send in the car insurance payment?" She says: "Yeah." This is not at the kitchen table but in the bedroom.

Revelation TV has got it all wrong. This is real life. This is the true stuff our lives are made of in Australia. Routine. I'm throwing in my binoculars. I'm going back to the tube. It's far more exciting and unpredictable.

## EROTIC FOOD

I recently researched a story on erotic foods and why certain foods were considered aphrodisiacs. I interviewed several experts who each had a different view. One explained it was how the food looked that inspired libido. She drew my attention to the shape of oysters, the luxurious skins of various fruits, the heavy, erotic potential of cream.

Another claimed with equal verve that it was the smell and taste of foods that got people off. She talked of the "pheromones" in certain foods. Pheromones is the hormonal substance the body emits which creates sexual excitement. Apparently certain foods contain it - truffles, Chardonnay, coffee for instance. The mere scent gets certain people going, which may explain why I often get rather perked up by the smell of coffee. Coffee has always reminds me of the delightful wafting of a freshly-showered male arm-pit.

Apparently smell is registered in a place in the brain which also houses emotions which is why smell and taste can be so evocative.

Yet another fellow, a doctor, claimed that certain foods contained chemicals which are similar to those omitted by the body when a person is falling in love. PEA as it is known is released from the brain to create feelings of euphoria, delight and happy-ever-after which helps two people walk down the aisle and reproduce.

PEA is apparently present in chocolate and rose water, roses and chockies being the traditional Valentine's Day gifts of love.

TO BE CONTINUED AFTER WE GET SURVEY RESULTS OF WHAT FOODS TURN PEOPLE ON...

## SAFE SEX

We are standing in the kitchen, my husband and I, doing kinky things with last night's dinner. We've taken the left overs out of the refrigerator and are slowly, sensuously, kissing the plastic wrap covering each of our dishes. He is getting heavy with the chicken, I'm getting erotic with the egg salad.

We are trying hard not to laugh, because this is no laughing matter. I'm doing my research for a story on safe sex and what people are really using out there to protect themselves from disease. The fact is, condoms only serve to protect certain

parts of the human anatomy. There are plenty of other places unwanted germs and viruses can enter, particularly the mouth which is very susceptible to cuts, burns or bleeding gums. So, according to a friend who knows, people are experimenting with none other than the trusty kitchen wrap.

We decide to check it out. But my husband is a passionate man, and suddenly his tongue pierces the kitchen wrap and plunges head-long into the roast chicken. If the chook had been a genital, he'd be in a lot of trouble.

"That's the problem with kitchen wrap," my friend informs me. "It is sheer which is good for mobility and sensation, but it does tear easily. Try this dental dam," he says providing us with what looks like a rubber handkerchief.

We take the dental dam home and open the packet. It smells like vanilla which apparently is part of its appeal. It comes with lubricant so that it can be stuck in place. I playfully cover my mouth. My husband, in one gallant movement, sweeps me up in his arms and passionately kisses me on the dental dam.

"Yuk. Oh, yuk," he whines. "It tastes like I'm licking a vanilla-flavoured car tyre." Truth is, it doesn't taste too good from my end either. But I keep thinking about all those horrible viruses that are making their way around the world like sequels to a bad Hollywood movie. You've been scared out of your wits by Hepatitis A, B and C. Now there's D and the brand new Ebola virus coming soon to a body near you.

My doctor tells me that some strains of Hepatitis, as well as Herpes, Gonorrhoea, and Syphilis can be spread through saliva. Meanwhile HIV can be caught through oral sex.

STDs are becoming increasingly resistant to antibiotics and penicillin. The question on everyone's lips is: Would you rather have an amoeba eat your brain or perform cunnilingus on a plastic bag? Otherwise put, is sex worth dying for?

"No, No. No," I yell, pushing the dam off my face, unsure which of the two options I'm protesting most about.

I am saddened to discover how awful these things taste because I have always been a vigilant promoter of safe sex practices. I have written about them and preached them from the roof -tops, albeit from the smugness of a good marriage.

No use telling me that people shouldn't be promiscuous. They are - straight and gay - with certain statistics suggesting that between 40 to 70 per cent of Australians have had extra marital affairs at one time or another.

No use telling me teenagers shouldn't have condom machines in schools. Teenagers are amongst the fastest growing heterosexual HIV carriers in the USA and continue to be a worry in Australia, according to Dr Julian Gold director of the Albion street Aids Centre in Sydney. Kids do have sex. I have no time for puffy sentimentality or lofty morality in the face of a world-wide plague.

But does safe sex have to feel so bad? One safe sex introduction kit put out by AIDS awareness groups includes a pair of rubber gloves to protect nail biters, and those who are creative with their hands. Whilst playing doctors seems kinky enough, the feel of rubber-gloves on one's skin is less than satisfying.

My husband hates condoms describing them as "wearing a raincoat two-sizes too tight into a bathtub." Instead he has a safe-sex alternative for me - a female condom brought back from the USA. It's so huge, you could put the scraps from last nights

dinner in there and still have room to throw out a few old jumpers you didn't need, and possibly even the weekend papers. It feels as bad as it looks.

Glaring at the chewed up bits of rubber and plastic round the floor, signs of a Brave New World, I am full of dismay.

We do have to practice safe sex. No one is safe, not even in the sanctity of marriage. AIDS is not just a "gay" disease and there are plenty of other dangers lurking behind every sexual dalliance.

But personally I'd rather be sentenced to 25 years of chastity, and just fantasise about how it used to be in the good old days - hot, juicy sex that did not spell a death sentence, and those wonderful arguments about who slept in the wet spot. Then again, I always was an ol' fashioned gal.

### SEX AS A SPECTATOR SPORT

"An increase in decadent behaviour and exhibitionism, boredom with things natural, an obsession with artifice, shocking statements and images, sexual excess". These are some of the characteristics used by modern dictionaries and encyclopaedia's to describe the phenomenon known as fin de siecle.

A French term meaning end of the century, fin de siecle came to explain the burgeoning of decadence around the world that erupted as the last century drew to a close.

I find myself thinking about more and more about the fin de siecle as I venture out into the nightclubs of Australia. It is hard not to wonder, as this turn of the century - indeed the millennium - draws nigh, whether we are not turning into a deeply decadent society.

I visit the hottest "hot spots" in Australia: the Hellfire clubs. One in Melbourne, one in Sydney. They are doing for S&M in Australia what the Marques d'Sade did for the bizarre practice in Europe. Sadomasochism is being taken out of the closet and on to the streets of middle class suburbia. Torture, torment and ecstasy for the masses.

Whilst techno-funk music thuds its synchronised industrial sound around a huge warehouse, hundreds of people mill around watching two young girls in school uniform tongue-kiss. A man in black-leather with an executioner's hood over her head drips hot wax down their naked backs and bums. After the performance, one tells me she is a saleswoman from Tasmania, another is a nurse from Sydney.

I stand with a crowd of seemingly middle-class people watching a woman in leather hitting another woman's breasts with a paddle. I watch a male dominatrix - an interior decorator called Peter - bite another man's naked bum until there are welts everywhere, while the surrounding crowd touch each other, go off into corners and fondle. Go into the bathroom and copulate. Thinly clad bodies writhe and moan and it is Caligula all over again.

In a distant corner, a woman dressed in only kitchen-wrap, leads another near-naked woman on a leash into a corner. They both crouch down and I see nothing but flaying arms and legs between everyone else's feet. I am trembling with shock, with arousal, with confusion. No one ever told me I'd one day be stepping out of my middle class flat into a porn-flick.

A man standing next to me says that he is the father of a four-year-old girl. He's a professional man of 42. A regular, he has been coming to the club to watch for months. He says it turns him on. But after talking to him for 20 minutes it becomes

clear to me that the recent breakdown of his marriage has more to do with it. He seems to be so angry and in so much emotional pain that this scene is probably cathartic.

All week the visions, both erotic and horrific, play on my mind. Why is it happening? What is really happening? Melbourne-based psychologist and student of the fin de siecle, Desiree Saddik agrees that as we hurtle towards the end not just of this century but the end of the millennium, we are plunging into another more extreme period of decadence.

Saddik, who works for the Victorian-based Canterbury Family Centre says: "At the end of each century a certain madness pervades the human spirit due to feelings of fear that the world we know will disappear. People are full of uncertainty about the future. Identity becomes blurred. There is often death anxiety leading to a fascination with things violent or sexual."

"We can already see the signs of fin de siecle reflected in the sudden proliferation of S&M and body piercing into the mainstream, the trend to androgyny and gender bending, the increase in sexual exploration. There's a voyeuristic fascination in erotica, fantasy and flesh - just like at the turn of this century," says Saddik, whose passion is psychoanalytic thought.

Saddik's words swirl around in my head as I attend a fashion parade that is more about flesh than clothing. Indeed the attire seems to belong more to the darkest dungeons of S&M subculture than to the shopping malls of middle-Australia. And yet hundreds of people have gathered at another of Sydney's hot nightspots 'Sky' to witness a display of the latest fetish clothing hitting retail outlets around the country.

At the stroke of midnight, a tall woman with long, ebony hair and ghoulish, white skin, emerges from a billowing cloud of crimson smoke. She is wrapped in a black PVC corset, metal bra, transparent shorts and impossibly high, black PVC boots. As she minces down the catwalk with a dog collar around her neck to the thud of techno-funk, images of body piercing and tribal scarification flash on to the walls around the room. The crowd screams in delight.

Another cadaver-like woman is ushered out on a leash by a man in a devil-horn helmet whilst another slaps a whip against the behind of a slave. Images reminiscent of Nazi sadism and devil worship are pumped out to an audience seemingly indifferent to the more sinister undertones of their fashion statements.

"We're selling this stuff to the mainstream," says a cheerful Katy Milroy from The House of Fetish which recently opened up in Sydney to cope with the rising demand for studded dog collars, leather corsets and steel underwear. "We thought it would mainly be the gay scene and S&M enthusiasts who would be into this but it's everybody. People are walking in off the street. It's so busy, I'm run off my feet."

She's right about the sudden interest in such attire. So popular has fetish-wear become that Greenpeace has started protesting publicly about the dangers to the environment and body of wearing the artificial PVC. Even conservative department stores are stocking fetish-wear. Former editor of Mode Australia, Maggie Alderson, agrees with the fin de siecle theory. "I do believe we are an increasingly decadent culture. It isn't just fetishism but a total exhibitionism that we are witnessing she says referring to strip-tease fashion and the proliferation of lap-dancing clubs.

"There is an increase in sexual depravity, perversions and primitive practices like labia piercing. We have run out of other periods to plunder. There are no great challenges for us any more. We have done everything. And what we haven't done we can watch other people doing on TV.

"We are ailing, waning. I feel like we are watching the last of ancient Rome," she says alluding to the new obsession with the TV programme Gladiators where sweaty, near-naked men and women compete in a studio arena to the screams of wild crowds. "Gladiators is ritual violence. Just like fetishism recalls images of pre-war Germany, Gladiators is another icon of a declining culture," she says

Having toured the club-scene here and in New York, having consumed copious amounts of literary and visual erotica and interviewed hundreds of people both here and abroad, I have developed a view of my own as to why there has been such a stark increase in things erotic.

Whilst I give much credence to the fin de siecle theory, I think that we are witnessing more than that. I think what we are also seeing is the growth of sex as a spectator sport. Not so much a proliferation of true S&M or ritual violence and decadence, rather a look-don't-touch attitude to sexuality in the wake of HIV and the increasing nasties like Hepatitis A B C ad infinitum, super bugs, and serial killers.

Hollywood with such gems as Fatal Attraction has warned us off casual sex. We are petrified of health risks. The mind has bravely thrown itself in front of our wild, natural instincts in order to protect us from modern dangers to our species.

And the result is the steady burgeoning of burlesque and sex clubs where people can go to "watch" safely from the bleachers, spectators to the raunchy, rugged sport of sex. S&M, and fetishism have always excited and titillated. Even those who are not enamoured with the actual practise cannot fail to be aroused witnessing the fondling of naked flesh, and the sexuality of submission.

Movies, both arthouse and mainstream, are growing steamier and seamier. Appetites are wetted for erotic books and stories. Fantasy is back in fashion with the sharp increase in lap-dancing and strip-clubs, and well-known actresses amongst those endorsing the new trend to take it all off. Meanwhile phone-sex lines and videos for men and women are keeping our imaginations tantalised.

We are turning into a culture of voyeurs and exhibitionists. Perhaps the films, music, literature, fashion and other cultural indicators that are feeding us a decadent and erotic image are indeed hailing in the fin de siecle. Or perhaps we just feel better playing the part of audience in the increasingly dark, provocative pantomime that sexuality has become.

## **NAKED IN NEW YORK**

"Seesaw's" is a sex club inside a large warehouse in the lower part of Manhattan. I had rung up an old friend, 'Andrew', when I got to New York to see if he minded taking me inside.

'Andrew' (name changed to protect the guilty), a former fleet-street journalist and a typical English cad, always made a point of hanging out where most decent folk wouldn't be seen dead. I knew I could count on him to help prove my theory that sex had become a spectator sport.

He agreed to take me clubbing but said it would cost me my modesty. To get into some of the more famous clubs, one had to walk around in a state of undress. "You can keep a towel over you, but people will feel inhibited about making love in front of someone who is fully dressed," he informed me, still chortling at my claim that I was doing this for "research" purposes.

I agreed to disrobe and we bowled up at "Seesaw's" (not the club's real name) at around 11pm. People were queuing up outside a huge double door which had a two-way mirror at the front. Andrew explained the rules. Couples had to come together. No singles were let in. The reason was that the emphasis was on safe sex. BYO partner and condoms.

The thrill was having sex in public, being watched or watching. If couples wanted to engage in some swapping, that was fine. But this was not the free-for-all environment of Plato's Retreat and other infamous sex clubs like it that thrived during the excesses of the late 1970s and 1980s. The threat of HIV had closed those clubs down. Promiscuity was out.

"All the new erotic clubs that are opening up around the world are more or less voyeuristic," he explained. "There is a new sexual revolution erupting but the eroticism is in fantasy, masturbation, self-pleasure or self-pain - anything that is sexy but not overly promiscuous," Andrew said.

He paid the man behind the counter: a hefty \$US200 a couple. Safe, horny sex was obviously a sport of the middle-to-upper classes.

Andrew took me straight to the change-rooms so we could take off our clothes. He told me I could wrap a small towel around myself if it made me more comfortable. I undressed trying to pretend I was going into a sauna. Then stepped out of the change-room with the towel around my midriff. I was used to being topless on Australian beaches but I didn't want to let go of the towel. Or the high heels. I don't go anywhere I can't wear high heels.

"Great," said Andrew who was also in a towel. "Now we go into the disco area just to peruse the other couples." He pulled out a bottle of wine he had smuggled in.

The disco area was just like something out of the 70s. A large ball with glass mirrors twirled about in the middle of the ceiling, throwing fragmented light around the room. Some couples were in towels, others totally naked, but some were dressed up to kill. I was immediately horrified by the number of clothed individuals.

"You told me everyone was naked," I said growing alarmed. He laughed and poured some wine. "Come sit on the couch," he said leading me to an area facing the dance floor. "It's cool. Some people like to check each other out in clothes first. All that seduction stuff. Then they take off their things later. You have to be naked to enter the back of the club which has the spa and sex areas. In here it's optional.

"Because we aren't moving on anyone, I didn't think we needed to be dressed. Besides, I thought you'd enjoy the feel of being in a disco naked. Relax. No one here knows you."

That was true. I have always believed that our inhibitions about nudity come from being "seen" or "recognised" looking other than our perfect best. Women in particular didn't want their large buttocks or thighs to be revealed if they could be hidden under the illusion of an elegant skirt or dress. But when you realised that no one knew you or would remember a thing you did, inhibitions mysteriously vanished.

The mating rituals around the room were intriguing to watch. The room was filled with Mr and Mrs Suburbia. One woman had on a large, pink, taffeta dress which she probably had from her Prom days. Her hair was coiffed 1960s-style. Her husband looked like someone out of an American kids' show: Dennis the Menace's dad, or Mr Brady from The Brady Bunch. He had brill-cream through his hair and wore a checked jacket and tie.

Another couple looked a bit more modern but were still "the people next door". She was blonde, about 45, with lots of diamond jewellery on and a bad face lift. He was podgy and had the hungry look of a salesman. "These people come in from the boroughs," said Andrew. "The B&T people: Bridge and Tunnel people. They come in to town from Brooklyn or Queens. They are suburbanites who are bored after 10 or 20 years of marriage, looking for some kicks. Mainly professional."

While the Bee-Gees sang: "Night fever...night fever..." Mr Brill-cream was smiling at Mrs Diamond-necklace and Mr Salesman was trying to crack on to the prom-queen by licking his lips provocatively in her direction. It was hilarious to watch. But then a whole new crowd arrived. A younger, trendier set. The women were drop-dead gorgeous.

"What's this?" I asked.

"The corporate crowd. The women are often call-girls or mistresses."

There was a dark woman who looked like she had just stepped out of a Hollywood movie - tall, tight mini-skirt, long hair, sultry face. She was with a Latin man who had on the flashy shirt and the big gold chain. "She's probably his mistress," said Andrew informatively. "Puerto-Ricans. He probably doesn't swap her. He just likes other men to see him turn her on."

After an hour of watching the crowd, I was drunk enough to venture back to "the other part" of the club. People were in the spa although I figured that it couldn't be too healthy to sit in that water.

There was a large room that Andrew dubbed "the orgy room" beside the wet area. It had a sign on the door saying: 'Wear Condoms. No Anal Sex Permitted'. "Wonder how they would police that?" I joked.

Everyone was naked although most of the women were still wearing high-heels, even in the swimming-pool area. Still playing the mating game as prescribed in women's magazines. The Puerto-Rican woman emerged from the change room naked except for her black, suede heels. "Mama!" said Andrew.

The woman's silky, brown skin looked as if it would feel like velvet to touch. She was perfect. Hypnotically so. Every eye was upon her. She and the man Andrew dubbed "Carlos" got into the spa. Suddenly twenty other people crammed into the spa. "See he loves that. Loves that other people love his lady. It makes him feel so machismo to see other men drool."

In the "orgy room" couples were beginning to lay down on mattresses which were laid out in a big circle. I was looking forward to being a fly on the wall. To watching sex happening between people. To seeing first-hand what other people really did, and how they did it.

Soon it started. A couple started fondling each other, then another, then another. Doing what they did in the privacy of their bedrooms, publicly. Before long all the beds were moving. On the roof was a large mirror. I looked up to what looked like the film set of the movie Caligula.

On my right was a middle-aged fellow and his wife. The fellow leaned over and placed his hand on my stomach. Andrew leaned across. "We're just watching," he said.

"Sure, said the guy," and went back to fondling his wife. When Andrew got up to go to the toilet, the fellow tried again.

"No, I'm just here to watch," I said, trying not to laugh at the stupid line. "Oh!" said the man exclaiming loudly. "You're Australian."

He was yelling with excitement. He was truly more excited than anyone else in the room. "Oh! I love Australia. I've seen Crocodile Dundee one and two. I'd love to go there. Maureen, she lives in Australia."

Maureen looked as excited as her husband. "I'm Dan," he said holding out his hand which had been God-knows where. He didn't notice that I wouldn't shake it as he exuberantly continued: "And this is my wife Maureen. I'm a lawyer and Maureen is, well, you know, a house-wife. We have two kids. We live in Brooklyn." He was whispering loudly. I was terrified it would interrupt the orgy. I was more terrified the whole orgy would sit up and start saying things like "G'day mate" or "I love Koalas".

But before he was able to give me a profile of his entire life which was destined to include how many times he saw his therapist, what he did to cure himself of dandruff and how he felt about his mother, Andrew came back and spirited me off to another part of the room.

"Can't let them start talking, bloody Yanks. Once they start they never shut up," he whispered. "The one thing Americans love more than food and sex is a good talk."

I was trying not to laugh. I really wanted to watch. We went up to a balcony where we could watch the orgy from a safe environment.

It was fascinating. But it was more than fascinating. Rather than feeling horrified or turned on by what I was witnessing, I felt oddly moved. People were so free. People were so comfortable with their bodies, not caring if bums wobbled or thighs wobbled or bellies hung down too low. Not caring if dicks weren't big enough or boobs were drooping. Just pleasuring themselves and pleasuring others in a wonderful love-a-thon. I felt it sad that such sexual bonding was more socially frowned upon than violence.

I wished I had a video recorder so I could film just the faces and put the images on television all over the world. "Look," I would say, "Witness happiness. Witness joy." Andrew was amused by my reaction. I must have been the only woman who had gotten emotional in a sex club. "C'mon," he said pulling me up. "Time to have another drink."

He took me upstairs to "the love fest". This was an area where people roamed around and just fondled and touched each other, spontaneously, against walls, on the love-seat, on couches.

The blonde with the diamonds came up to me. "Hi, honey. That's my husband over there. George." George waved. "We saw you in the disco. George is a doctor. We're from Connecticut. Anyway, George was wondering if you'd like to join us...if your partner...ummm...doesn't object that is."

"We're just watching," said Andrew, politely. "Oh HEY. Look George won't go with her. George just goes with me, but I'd like to go with her, if that's okay," she said chewing on something which smelt like an orange lolly.

"Sorry, I'm eating candy. I have this awful sore throat. OH...Nothing contagious. You know. I mean, you won't get it...just a cold. Actually I'm almost better," she said with a twangy drawl. "I mean, you know...you won't catch it or anything."

I was intrigued. Andrew was right. American's loved to talk. And I wanted to hear. "Do you guys come here often?"

"Oh, about once a week. George likes to watch me go with people...you know...women. He gets bored at home. We have two kids. They're both at college...Simon is studying law... ummm ....so, you know....George likes somewhere to go once a week...you know."

"Do you like it?"

"Well, yeah. Kind of. But, it turns him on so....you know...I'm actually very tired tonight. I had a lump on my breast. The doctor thought it was cancer. It was just a cyst, Thank God. But he thinks I'm menopausal...I mean my doctor does, not George. Which...you know...is a bit depressing. I feel quite low at the moment..." she said, chatting on and on without air while George waved hopefully. Finally George came over and introduced himself. I introduced myself and Andrew.

"Oh," said George in the same gushy twang his wife had. "You've got a cute accent. Where are you from?"

"Andrew is English. I live in Australia."

"Oh. I'd love to go to Australia," he began like the other fellow, talking of his great love for koalas ("they are so cute") and kangaroos.

"Sorry we have to go now," said Andrew dragging me away once again. By this stage I was giggling uncontrollably.

I had had a bit to drink and somehow managed to lose Andrew by stepping sideways. So off I stumbled downstairs. But on the way down I banged head-long into Miss Puerto-Rico. Still in her high-heels. She was leaning against a wall, looking sexy.

"Sorry," said I feeling a bit startled. "That's okay, babe," she said, running her hands down my hair. "Why you in such a rush? Stay and talk a while."

Carlos was standing nearby smoking heavily. He smiled at me and nodded his approval. I felt a twinge of danger but it soon passed. It was like being in shark infested waters when there was an abundant school of fish around. I presumed I wouldn't be eaten for dinner. I was wrong.

Suddenly I heard Carlos' deep voice. "Cummon babe. I wanna love you," he said, roughly pushing away his woman to get to me.

For a moment I was in shock. Carlos didn't look like the sort of man who took no for an answer. Andrew, who had been watching gleefully from the side-lines entered the fray. "Sorry, she's with me," he said, wrenching me away.

My head was spinning. My eyes were big as saucers. Andrew, grinned and dragged me back to the change room to get dressed.

An hour later we bowled up to another club. This was once one of New York's most notorious gay clubs. Now it is mixed. We asked the door man to let us peep in just for a comparison.

Cubicles lined the walls, like toilets blocks but with beds in them. A porn flick was playing in one part of the room. The floor was totally transparent and below was a swimming pool. There were ropes hanging off the glass floor. I stood mesmerised looking down at the contorted human shapes as they swung off the ropes and did gymnastic-type sexual things.

I could see people's brains from their posteriors. Just then I caught a glimpse of a man dangling from the rope with several long feathers sticking out of his behind. It was too much to handle. "Take me home," I said feeling fatigued, and somewhat battered.

"Tomorrow I'll take you to some really hard-core places," Andrew said, grinning at me. But as we got in the taxi I just knew that I'd walked as far as I was prepared to walk on the wild side.

## G-SPOT

Poor men. They really thought they were making progress in the complex and dangerous world that is female sexuality.

Like lemmings to the sea they have spent the past couple of years throwing themselves enthusiastically at the G-Spot. With courage and torch in hand they have gone off exploring treacherous terrain. Many have been seriously maimed in the process, falling from a towering bed and cracking the skull or being smashed in the face by a thrashing knee.

Many have been disillusioned and defeated, unable to hold their heads up in public due to feelings of failure. Still mankind has pressed on in search of that elusive pot of gold, that mysterious Eden that so many have sought and so few found.

Many G-spot explorers have ended up around my coffee table, feeling forlorn, grossly inadequate and shell-shocked in this New Age era of pleasing women. They begged me for maps to help them navigate the unpredictable peaks and troughs while their women-folk grew impatient. "Hoy! How much longer you gonna be? Go left. Left, you fool, not right."

Then a strange and wonderful thing started happening. "Eureka!" men started yelling at me over the phone. "I found it!" Someone had cracked the code and spread the good news around: "It's to the right of centre!"

But men's joy was short lived. Just when G-spots were being uncovered in yuppie households all around Australia, a new movie was being released which would reduce men's gallant efforts to nought. Now women have a new and more complex set of demands.

"Sacred Sex" is a documentary about the newest sex sensation. The latest word out of the US is that sex should no longer be genital based. Annie Sprinkle, sex goddess and one of the stars of the film, describes it thus: "Sex is almost exactly like food. There is junk sex, health sex and gourmet sex."

Genital sex is junk sex. Bye bye G-spot. Sacred sex is the higher form of "gourmet" sex. It is spiritual according to its practitioners. It brings people closer to god. It is modelled on ancient sex rituals as outlined in the Karma Sutra and other mystic, secret, Eastern texts. Most importantly, it feels fantastic.

It is more a meditation than an act. A couple, by using breathing and meditation techniques, takes the rising sexual energy and directs it up the base of their spines towards the brain. The energy travels up through various energy points inside the body called 'chakras'. When it finally hits the brain, the mind explodes in ecstasy.

This explosion is akin to an orgasm only it's in the head not between the legs and can last one to two hours. In the film, one woman is seen to be having a mind-blowing mind-gasm or full-body orgasm. The only connection between herself and

lover is his foot which is placed on her chest, otherwise known as the "heart chakra". He is channelling his energy into her chakra and it most certainly seems to be working.

So suddenly every women I know wants one. Has to have one. Is grabbing their men's legs as they walk in the front door and trying to milk the left foot for every last drop of energy. Being New Age and ever-vigilant in the area of satisfying women's needs, men desperately want to oblige.

My husband, feeling fabulous and mighty heroic from having discovered my G-spot is ready and willing to explore the next uncharted terrain. He says he's going to give me the newest, hottest, hippest gasm in town. I warn him in advance: "You are not allowed to touch me sexually, okay? You have to try and unlock my erotic energy at the base of my spine and bring it up through my chakras, okay?"

"Sure, babe," he says, enthusiastically, not knowing what the hell I am talking about. Men never do know what we want, and they never admit that they don't. He sits, staring into my eyes, with his leg stupidly on my chest wondering where this new chakra-spot is supposed to be.

"Concentrate. Focus your energy," I whisper, leaning back and breathing rapidly like the woman in the movie. "Unleash my erotic potential. Open my heart chakra! Open my chakra!" I yell.

Unfortunately, he gets totally baffled. He forgets that we are talking about gourmet sex not junk sex and does a very junky thing. He grabs my nipple with his foot and squeezes it passionately between his toes in a bid to turn me on.

"Ahhhh!" I scream jumping out of my skin, brutally transmogrified from my spiritual meditation back into a state of junkiness.

"I told you not to touch me sexually!" I sob. And take your hands away from my Yoni! This is not about junk, genital sex! It's spiritual. You've ruined my Karma," I say storming off to sulk.

So now men are sitting around my coffee tables begging for maps of the new "chakra-spot" or the "C" spot as one poor guy dubbed it. But I should warn them.

Having now done a couple of sacred sex workshops, I have discovered how to drive the energy up the spine and have a "mind-gasm". I can honestly say this. It's safe, it's clean, it feels unbelievably wonderful, and best of all you can do it on your own. As in no man need apply. Unless guys want to render themselves redundant, I suggest they stop trying so hard to help women discover their sacred sexuality.

## AROMAS OF LOVE

It seems that one of my letter writers has created quite a stink: literally. A few weeks ago a Ms L. of Mackay in Queensland wrote to me.

"I have a mate who refuses flatly to bathe himself at the end of the day's work. Instead, he goes to bed grubby (even when the fresh sheets are put on the bed) and showers in the morning before work. On top of all this, he expects me to have sex with an unclean body! It is a complete turn off. Is this the typical Australian male behaviour? What do other readers think about the stink?"

There then followed a barrage of mail, the likes I haven't seen for ages. Women were furiously responding to this very smelly kettle of fish.

Marilyn of Adelaide complained that this wasn't just Aussie behaviour as her English husband refused to bathe after 12 hour shifts because it would wake him up. "There are no quickies in our house," she huffed. Meanwhile M M from the Sunshine coast accused Ms L's husband of being beastly. "I feel sorry for her. She needs to put her foot down or their relationship is doomed. How can he be so selfish to expect her to be turned on by him like that."

Anon of Toowoomba theorised that Ms L's husband secretly had a low libido and was trying to drive her away with his pong. But a very angry Amy of Keysborough in Victoria lamented the lot of women.

"We poor females are expected to tease and tantalise with the latest fashions, so is it too much to ask our men to go to bed with at least a clean body and clean face? Dirt, sweat and sex just doesn't mix. So all you guys out there who expect the best of us, "clean up your act".

I have been very much enjoying the response and would like to add my voice to the growing throng about pong. Men have always made women feel very self-conscious about our own smells. The amount of ghastly, sickly-sweet perfumes and feminine hygiene products on the market are a testimony to how neurotic females have been made to feel about their natural odours.

I once went out with a man who before the love making act handed me a bottle of green liquid. "To put you know where," he said looking at my privates. "It makes women smell beautiful like plants."

I threw the bottle back in his face and walked to the door. "If women were supposed to smell like plants, than god would have made us that way," I said storming into the street, never to see him again.

My female readers are forever complaining that it is very annoying to be expected to smell beautiful, keep your figure, always look magnificent and yet be confronted time and again with men who don't seem to give a hoot about how they look or how they smell.

I am not suggesting that men smell bad. Heavens no. There are many women out there who go bananas over male smells and find them frighteningly erotic. But I think it is a matter of degrees on the smell-o-meter.

For instance, there is nothing in the world that gets me more excited than the pungent scent of men's arm pits. But what I am after is a "force five" on the smell-o-meter - that means somewhere in the middle.

A freshly-washed male arm pit probably rates a force two. By mid-morning on a hot day, it is getting up around the four mark. By lunchtime, presuming the fellow came into work in an air-conditioned car, not on the train which would accelerate the sweating process, it would just be hitting the five mark. Bingo.

Six is still tolerable but not pleasant. Anything getting close to seven is getting into migraine territory for me. By nine or ten, I am likely to faint on sight.

My husband has learned to monitor his own arm pit. He will walk in from work and announce "force nine" and head straight for the shower. Or he will grin and approach me with his pit in the air, knowing full well that I am about to be overcome with passion and lust.

Whilst I have a high tolerance of arm pit, I personally cannot tolerate even a "force one" in the smelly feet department, and feel ill at even a hint of onion breath.

But even with these most woofie pongs, I am not saying that all men have to be squeaky clean. Perish the thought. The only thing worse than onion breath is the saccharine smell of perfume or aftershave on a man's skin.

It is going to the other extreme to be overly hygienic and to wash away all those fabulous pheromones. Americans, for instance, recently cited bathing as their favourite form of "foreplay" in a survey, whilst most English people polled said that after sex the first thing they did was run to the bathroom to scrub up. Which brings to mind the word "sterile".

Many women I know adore the natural, earthy scent of men, and cannot get passionate with men who smell too sweet. The point is that where smell is concerned every woman has her own tolerance level and should be respected for that. I doubt a man would let a woman get away with smelling anything less than what he can tolerate. We've always prepared ourselves for delicate male nostrils. It is what men have come to expect of us.

Now we're telling you what we expect of you. By all means work up a sweat. By all means produce those gorgeous male smells that we love at our deepest primordial levels. But check our Richter scales every now and again.

#### SLAVE TO LOVE

American television is superbly audacious. One of the funniest, most outrageous programmes I have ever watched was a recent talk-back show (screened here late at night) discussing how often couples should or do make love.

I sat boggle-eyed as people stood in front of millions and millions of viewers, all over the world, and discussed their most intimate, private sexual secrets.

The first couple got up to share their nuptial experience. The man volunteered: "She only wanted it three times a week. I needed it about seven, or more."

She: "Yes, but I was tired. I had to stay home with two babies all day. Try feeling sexy after that!"

He: "Anyway we compromised. Now we do it four times a week - sometimes five." Pan to the audience, obviously touched by the sincerity of the admission. People start clapping, roaring and cheering in support.

"Thankyou. Thankyou for sharing", said the TV host, herself clapping to the guests.

Next came a woman who decided to share her secret with the world. She wasn't getting enough.

"Is your husband okay about you coming on the programme?" the host asked the scantily-clad lady.

"No. I think he's a bit upset," said the woman to a billion people. She then went on to describe the various techniques she used each night to get her husband in to bed.

"I often stand in sexy underwear while I fry his dinner. Or run around in little outfits with stockings and things...you know. It's never helped much."

"How often does he make love to you?" asked the interviewer without flinching.

"About five times a year," came the reply. There was a huge rumble from the audience as the camera made its way up the aisles to show all the shaking, disapproving heads. Bad, bad Mr John Brown from Illinois who now has to seek counselling - not only for his sexual problem but on how to show his red face in public.

Jokes aside, frequency of sexual activity is fast becoming an obsession in the States. In fact it is over-running other sexually-related issues such as date rape, sexual harassment at work, and celibacy as the national preoccupation.

Americans are incurable curious people and it is just no longer feasible for them to walk around the streets not knowing what really happens in the beds of their neighbours, their friends and their relatives.

They want to know, once and for all, if they are missing out on something, and if they should be feeling cheated or inadequate.

The trend has also focused attention on the hottest new neuroses. The term being bandied around is "sex addict", which is used to describe people who have too much sex.

Articles by well-known psychologists and social observers have begun appearing in magazines and newspapers condemning excessive sexual activity. And in keeping with the mania that surrounds any new American trend, scores of people each week are appearing on the tele confessing to extreme and often vulgar behaviour. "I am a love-a-holic which means I need to have sex ten times a day." It is intriguing viewing but it has upset many people who now fear themselves to be sex addicts.

The question on everyone's lips is: Am I doing it too much? Am I in love or am I a perverted addict who needs to shoot up on sex? How often is too often? How many is too many? Am I a bonk-a-holic escapist? Do I need help?

And there is help on the way, at a price. Apparently, clinics have started opening up to deal with a problem which has been deemed psychological rather than physical. The clinics are a kind of sexual AA where people can go to "dry out".

Which has really has the country confused about "doing it". In fact, the once-sacrosanct institution of marriage is now under intense scrutiny. "Honest couples prepared to talk about intimacy" are being hounded down by magazines and TV networks to discuss what goes on in the so-called nuptial bed.

This goes hand in hand with another trend which is burgeoning across America and parts of Europe: home-made sex movies, as in watching your neighbours at it. Recently, an industry has sprung up which provides home-movies to couples who want to watch what other couples literally get up to behind closed doors. It's certainly one way of having those nagging questions answered.

As the country grapples with the question: How Much? How Often? I would like to quote from a religious book that has been in my family for generations which gives the biblical answer to what should and shouldn't go on in a marriage regarding sex.

The book, which interprets laws of the Old Testament says the following:

"It is written (Exodus 21:10) "And her conjugal rights, shall he not diminish."

"Men of a strong constitution who enjoy the pleasures of life, having profitable pursuits at home and are tax exempt, should perform their marital duty nightly. Labourers who work in the town where they reside, should perform their marital duty

twice weekly; but if they are employed in another town, only once a week. Merchants who travel into villages with their mules, to buy grain to be sold in town, and others like them, should perform their marital duty once a week. Men who convey freight on camels from distant places, should attend to their marital duty once in thirty days."

I believe this will go along way to providing the answers the inquisitive mind is looking for.

## DRESSED TO KILL

I once had a girlfriend who would always wear the sexiest lingerie underneath her day-to-day clothing. As well as frilly bras and lacy undies she wore a silk garter-belt, suspenders and those old fashioned pull-up stockings from the fifties with seams up the back of her legs. Every thing was of the highest quality, bought in Paris.

She dressed the way men dream we dress in their fantasies, or when they undress us in their minds.

Which makes me smile when I think how men would react to what women really wear under their clothing - the old bra with the torn strap ("Oh, this will do") shrunken knickers ("My goodness! Have we run out of clean clothes this week already?") and the pantyhose with holes and ladders ("Who's gonna see?"). All the mismatched bits n' pieces thrown together as we dart about the house, shoving food at children, then dashing out the door to the office, to meetings or out to do the shopping.

We only dress in sexy lingerie on hot dates in the hope of getting lucky which deludes the poor dears into thinking that they are going to see us lay down in silk forever more, only to realise in horror that on cold winter nights when the initial thrill of hot love can no longer warm our stony feet and tired legs, that we prefer the comforting feeling of flannelette against our skin. Those wonderful pink and yellow nighties that my long-suffering husband refers to as "the best form of human contraception ever invented".

Anyway here was my friend dressed to kill, but the odd thing was that no one at the time got to see her lingerie. She was going through what we girls call a dry patch - recently separated from her husband, no male company in sight. I only found out about her underwear because we changed at her place before going to a movie. I was astounded that anyone not having an affair would bother to go to that much trouble.

"Why do you wear this stuff ?" I asked. "It makes me feel good," she said and then went on to explain that if she felt sexy, she was more confident and powerful.

Now, a decade later, a spate of recent surveys in the USA have made it official. I should have ditched my therapist and invested in some French knickers and crimson lipstick. According to these statistics when women feel sexier they achieve more from the bedroom to the boardroom. And they feel sexier when they diet, make themselves up, wear sexy lingerie and exercise, according to one of the researchers involved, Dr Debbie Then.

Dr Then, a psychology Ph. D from Stanford University, who was in Australia last week discussing sex and appearance, is currently finalising a survey on how body image effects women's sexuality. She says that preliminary results have revealed that over 75 per cent of the women she surveyed - married and single - had a sudden hike in sexual activity and pleasure when they changed their hair color.

"When the women created a sexier image for themselves they felt better and consequently made more of an effort which effected their attitude to sex and the way they performed sexually."

She says that another recent survey she has analysed showed that women actually had stronger orgasms when they lost weight and started exercising.

"The reason for this was two fold. One was that they were releasing more feel-good chemicals into their bodies. The other was psychological. The women reported that as they lost weight and got fitter, their self-esteem improved and they became more sexually experimental, trying new positions, dressing up in sexy underwear, flirting, showing off their bodies and playing with sex toys - which increased their enjoyment significantly."

She said that most interesting was the conclusion that when women felt better with themselves physically they achieved more in all areas of their lives, from the bedroom to the boardroom.

Whilst I have spluttered and laughed my way through a lot of this research I am hard pressed to argue with the results. I can't honestly remember the last time I went into the office or to a party with greasy hair or in a track suit. It isn't what men require of us that is changing women, it is what we require of ourselves.

But what we require of ourselves is still shaped by magazines, myths and advertising which make sure we never feel too good about ourselves for too long. Every time we get on top of one fashion, the rules change and undermine our sexuality, our growing confidence and power.

There is another interesting irony in all of this. Research shows that a vast improvement in looks or body weight will send husbands and boyfriends into a frenzy of insecurity. Apparently men fear their new, sexier woman will run off.

Which makes me feel better about wearing flannelette to bed. I mean, I don't want to threaten the whole of society or my husband too much, do I?

## LOVE STRUCK

"There is more than one kind of love", says the words of a well-known rock song.

So who am I to scorn at the sounds of love pouring from the mouths of marauding hordes outside my window. The burbled hiccups, the yells of "f...ing beauties", as drunken rabble spill into my street (next to the Hawthorn football club) in Melbourne the night of the Grand Final.

They are in love. Not my kind of love, but love none the less. Love bordering on worship. The muffled cries and squeals from pissed fans as touching in their own way as the sounds a mother makes on seeing her child walk, a lover on receiving the long awaited proposal.

"Ya f...ing c...ts" rings out over the crowd as one fan affectionately praises his winning team in his own personal and very special dialogue of love.

"F....ing bloody Hawks. Good on yers," yells another of the yellow and brown tribe of creatures passing under my window with balloons, scarves, hats and all other manner of baggage hanging off them, talking in strange tongues: "Awww...yeahhh.."

There are now about 10,000 people in my street. 10,000 love-struck people bumping into poles, smashing their cars into other cars in a bid to try to pass each other by in the narrow lane. All sense of reason and perspective gone. Watching them reminds me of the sort of romantic infatuations I had as a teenager. Their adoration is almost mystical.

Horns are honking, bottles are smashing. Particularly noteworthy are horns that play tunes. Like some deranged opera there are ten different tunes going at once as car loads of revellers seek to assert their individuality. To be something for a night.

The sound of glass under tyre rings in the air. I watch a man vomit on the pavement outside my window. Another pisses against the lamp post. Then I watch a group of kids across the road trying to pull a spike out of the neighbours wooden fence. It is a reminder of what love does to the human spirit. Liberation is in the air. A celebration of life. A time for Mr and Mrs Australia and the kids to break out of the harness of "ideal citizen" - just this once, in the ensuing exhilaration.

A small group start bashing at a neighbours fence. "Tear down the picket fence. Come out of your houses and unite," is the catch cry. This is middle-Australia's Berlin Wall.

I have been prepared all day to be in deep hate. In hate, hate, hate with the noisy, beer-swilling, traffic-making fans who would keep me up for two days. I cursed and awaited mass destruction. Bolting the doors, switching on the alarm and waiting to be highly annoyed.

It is not the case. I'm deeply touched as the lovesick herd begin singing some mottled, maudlin version of what sounds like the Hawthorn theme song: "We are the mighty fighting Hawks...(burble, warble..)..."

I begin burbling out the Hawthorn song too, even though I dislike football. I swanker merrily around my living room even though I am not drunk. "Awwwww ya f....g shit," someone screams piercing the night air as another glass shatters. I hope it is not the stained glass window. Love is often like this. After the exhilaration comes the let-down. The "Is that all there is?" of Peggy Lee. And then the anger, as the disappointment returns.

Those happy, love-struck people in my street are going to have to come down. On Monday they are all returning to work or to unemployment, or to their mediocre marriages and scouring bosses. They will have to face the unhappy reality that their objet d'amour, their treasured beloved, is not going to save them from themselves or from their own tired lives. That the moments of passion in life are but fleeting, ephemeral gifts.

A punch, a bash, a shattered window, alleviates the anger before a train ride back to the outer suburbs of disillusionment.

I decide to go off to mothers', the other side of town. It is safer to leave before things get messy. Police vans have already started to parade up and down. Impending violence is in the air. I have never liked sticking about for the morning after passion, preferring to grab my things and split before the harsh light of day hits. Split whilst I still feel hot and sweaty and flushed with excitement of love.

As I get into my car I fear for the fans in my street. I fear for their romantic souls. For I know that like me, they will grown far, far too sober as the hours of their lives tick on.

## READER'S LETTERS

Dear Ruth,

I am a single male, average height, build, and aged in my 40s. I am also bisexual. In my view, the best way to spruce up your sex life is to be kinky, like me. I wear Latex Rubber gloves. Latex fits like a second skin, and the smell is better than perfume. P.K, Glenorchy, TAS.

Dear Ruth,

What a relief to actually read in a mainstream newspaper that I am not so strange after all. I have enjoyed rubber clothing for as long as I can remember. Even as a child. I am glad people are becoming more accepting of differences. One day I may even be able to tell my wife. We have been married for 22 years and apart from my rubber interest, our sex life is normal. Ron C (fruit markets) Thornleigh NSW

Ruth,

In your piece on fantasies, you omitted mentioning the one that I've been most asked about - the ever-popular 'threesome' of two women and a man. I've been working in the sex industry for seven years, and yes, I've encountered clients who have the foot fetish or "let's pretend we're on tropical island and you're a native virgin girl". But it is the threesome that has kept a lot of us in business. C. H, Paddington, NSW

Dear Ruth,

Your article on turn ons reminded me of a woman I dated. She had a small silk blanket that she would place on the pillow before we made love. She would rub her face on the blanket whilst I did my duty from behind. Maybe this wasn't as silly as it sounds, as she always had incredible orgasms. Brad, Essendon, WA.

Dear Ruth,

My wife and I have been married for 40 years. We have always had good sex, as my wife decided from day one that she was going to be the domineering one. What I mean by this is that she administered the strap to my bare bottom before we had intercourse. Doing this seems to make her hot for sex, and our love making is still as hot as it was on our wedding night. Mr G, Richmond, NSW.

Dear Ruth,

I would like to see my wife making love to another woman. Initially she was taken aback, but has since mellowed with the idea although finding someone to go along with the idea is another problem. I'm hoping this fantasy will eventuate although I can understand if it does not, and I was wondering if any of your readers have had similar ideas. Peter T, Campbelltown, NSW

Dear Ruth,

I read your articles and letters with interest. One letter really astounded me. Every man CAN totally satisfy his woman by using his mouth and his tongue. As long as he does it slowly and softly, never fast and keeps on doing this until she has had an orgasm. The copulation afterwards can only be a success. I hope the doctor who wrote to you will find out about this, to help those desperate men. Mrs. N, Adelaide, S.A.

Dear Ruth,

I have never understood how anyone in their right mind, could engage in oral sex. When Mrs N described it last week in your column, I wondered if she would be just as willing to clean the inside of her toilet bowl with her tongue. John C. W, Strathpine, QLD.

Madam,

So John M loves oral sex - all versions - and sees his wife's genitals as one of his favourite places. Good luck to him for having such a cooperative partner, but has he

considered the risks and what hidden dangers lurk when the recreation park is so close to the sewage outfall? K.T, Hyde Park, QLD.

Dear Ruth,

I am 28 years old and partake in "self-pleasure" quite regularly and absolutely love it! I like to wear my stiletto heels as they make me feel very sexy and I seem to get a much deeper lasting orgasm whilst I wear them. Do any other women have similar fantasies? I hope I'm not alone in enjoying these pleasures. L. D, Darwin, NT.

Dear Ruth,

A Pleasure Positive Party? You've got my vote. We all need to spend more time pleasuring ourselves. It's free, it's fun and it feels wonderful. If this makes me guilty, I can only say I will be a repeat offender. Sue, Gosford, NSW.

Dear Ruth Ostrow,

I use prostitutes on a regular basis. I had an unsuccessful marriage, and have tried personal ads without success. Since I am afraid of intimacy I get more satisfaction out of having a prostitute beat me with a cane or whip than having sex. I have found prostitutes more helpful and understanding than most psychiatrists. "P", Sydney, NSW

Dear Ruth,

I am a "screamer" whilst making love, and I can tell you that my partner gets very aroused hearing me scream in ecstasy. J.J, Casuarina, NT

Dear Ruth,

To all those who married screamers. Half your luck. I married the sack of potatoes who shut the garden gate 25 years ago. Ex-spud digger, SA

Madam,

To those screaming alley cat females who like everyone to know they are indulging in sexual intercourse. I suggest a good cold bucket of water thrown over them would jolt them back into behaving like decent civilised human beings. Arthur, Caboolture, QLD

Dear Ruth,

There seems to be a lot of women out there who are having trouble achieving orgasm. May I suggest they try anal sex with their partner. I was a little bit sceptical when my boyfriend first suggested it to me, but now I'm a total convert - it's fantastic! I strongly recommend it to women of all ages. Kylie., SA

Dear Ruth,

I read your article about fantasies and would like to share an experience I had with an ex girlfriend of mine. We discovered by accident that we both had a fixation with doctors. After much discussion we realised we had been in hospital as children - I for my tonsils, she for a toe operation. After much laughter we decided to act on our fantasies. Yes, it's true. We played doctors and nurses and it was a real turn-on. A.N, Bondi, NSW

The Editor

I would like to complain about the disgusting explicit sex articles in Ruth Ostrow's column. She should not be allowed to write them. She is talking about people making noises during sex. We should be talking about love and loyalty. A. E, Wellington, NSW.

Dear Ruth,

Masturbation is a mortal sin. To set out to satisfy your body by yourself is completely evil. M.S., Moonee Ponds, VIC

Dear Ruth,

In response to your writer from Moonee Ponds, VIC. If masturbation is a mortal sin, why didn't God put our genitals between our shoulder blades, instead of between our legs?  
Anon., Toowoomba, QLD

Dear Ruth,

Spare a thought for me as a sexually active male with a medical disorder that I have to live with which makes me reliant on having to wear nappies. Self-masturbation is my only pleasure as women are not turned on when confronted with a 35 year old wearing a nappy and plastic pilchers. I would love to be embraced and have the pleasure of making love to an understanding lady. I have never paid for sex and never will, as I feel it would make my handicap feel worse than what it already is. John, Gold Coast, QLD

Dear Ruth,

I would like to know why is pornography such a bad thing when it helps me learn about sex and how to enjoy it to the fullest? I am 29-years-old mother of 3 and the role of sex with my husband was just a quick job and it was all over and done with. But now I have a new partner and I am experiencing sex in many different and erotic ways. Why is all this locked in the closet? Susy, Central QLD

Dear Ruth,

I am writing to you about anal sex as your paper never mentions anything about it. Having sex in the back hole is beautiful. I am married for 10 years now and my wife and I have been doing anal sex very regular in them years as well as normal sex. We both love it! Some people might think it wouldn't be nice, but I bet there's quite a lot of couples doing it. But no-one says anything about it. John, Mildura, VIC

Hello Ruth,

Last Thursday evening on the TV a rather nice lady on the Sex programme, was going on about various places on the body to fondle, kiss and lick. Anyway, it set me off with the giggles and when she mentioned the 'rim of the anus', I exploded with laughter. I mean to say young Ruth, this puts an entirely new meaning to the saying "you can kiss my arse". Should one's partner 'backfire' at that given moment, I guess one could land up on the top of the wardrobe. George, Bedfordale, WA

Dear Ruth,

I am a man in my late 20s with strong desires to indulge in anal penetration. I do this with fruits and vegetables and dildos. I don't think that I'm homosexual, but I have occasionally allowed gays to penetrate me because it feels terrific. My only problem is the looseness of the sphincter. But do you think that it is normal for a guy to enjoy this activity? Anon, Sydney, NSW.