

*What these women  
don't know about your*

# SEX LIFE



*...isn't worth knowing*

*Ever wondered what goes on behind closed doors? From how often other people have sex, to how, where and what they fantasise about, these women know. Find out how...*

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WORDS Genevieve Roberts



From left: Michelle, Jacqueline, Arianne

## 'Yes, your partner fantasises about your best friend'

Researcher **ARIANNE COHEN** collated more than 2,000 relationship diaries from people all over Britain as the basis for her project and book, *The Sex Diaries*\*.

'Until I started my research project, which involved interviewing thousands of people about their sex lives, I never fully appreciated just how much men notice women. I never realised, for example, how often I – along with every female – was being checked out. But having interviewed many men about their sex lives, I understand that as soon as the weather improves, men start looking around because women's flesh is on show once again. And, yes, it's true that your partner has probably fantasised about women you know – your best friend, the mail lady and your sister.

But, as I discovered, men and women think about sex quite differently. Men's fantasies tend to be a slideshow flicking through their head of lots of sexy women. In contrast, women's fantasies have a coherent beginning, middle and end, and often follow a narrative – a bit like a romantic film.

According to my research, the most common fantasy among women is *other* women. More than a third of women fantasise about this, even though they're not attracted to women in

real life. Violence and group sex fantasies are also more common than you might imagine, and again, these are usually things women wouldn't want in reality.

I interviewed men and women of all ages and found that younger women – particularly university graduates – tend to be much more conservative, toeing the line of monogamist marriage. They're not really pushing boundaries, and seem to think whoever they're in a serious relationship with will be their future husband. They feel they have a choice to either sleep around or be in a serious relationship. They have good, vanilla sex; it's not until their forties that they're more comfortable with their needs, and act on them.

One of the biggest surprises for me was that older men and women – in their fifties and onwards – tend to be much more flexible in their definition of a relationship. I see many couples who adore each other but don't want to live together, instead sleeping over once or twice a week but retaining a degree of independence. There were also quite a few people in open relationships (perhaps one in 100). In all these cases, neighbours assumed they were a monogamous couple.

I've carried out the same research in the US and the UK, and it was interesting to see that British diarists are massive compartmentalisers; they see sex as separate from their lives. In the US diaries, there's a tendency to mix sex with family life in a very healthy way – having sex with your husband, then opening the door and cooking dinner for the kids. In the British diaries, everybody goes to bed – and then has sex. This may explain

why the nation has a reputation for being very shy about talking about sex.

If I learnt anything from reading other people's sex diaries, it's that whatever you want from a relationship you can find. There are a million ways to run a private life. For some, sex is a means of communication; for others, it's purely a physical thrill or an exploration, a lifestyle. Sex lives are like jobs, there's a huge range: some people work nine to five; others work nights. Being aware of your needs and making them heard is crucially important.'

## 'French maid outfits are as popular as ever'

**JACQUELINE GOLD** is the CEO of Ann Summers, where she has worked since 1981.

'Attitudes towards sex have changed dramatically in the past 30 years. I remember going to the board of Ann Summers, when I was 21, to ask for money for my party plan idea. That day, one of the (male) board members told me that the concept wouldn't work "because women don't like sex". I thought that said more about his sex life than mine – and luckily, I was right.

Today, women are much more confident about their sexuality. In the 1980s, they were

