

HER WORLD CASUAL SEX REPORT

A Her World poll of 50 Singaporean women aged 25 to 40 reveals that:

67%

THINK CASUAL SEX IS ACCEPTABLE

56%

HAVE HAD CASUAL SEX

OF THOSE WHO HAVE HAD IT

60%

DIDN'T FEEL GUILTY ABOUT IT

77%

**ARE EMOTIONALLY
DETACHED FROM THE ACT**

Van Ann* is a 40-year-old freelance model. She has slept with a total of 40 men, and has contracted gonorrhoea once. Her current boyfriend has no idea she's been with so many men, but although she's ashamed of her past, she says she will not rule out having casual sex again if they break up.

If you are shocked by Van Ann's story, consider this: She is one of a growing number of Singaporean women who have no qualms about doing the deed without being in a relationship. In fact, 56 per cent of the women we polled have had casual sex.

kinds of contraception and their decreasing prices might have something to do with this, along with women being better-educated, and us having our own jobs and money now.

"In the past, a casual sexual encounter might have led to pregnancy, so women had to carefully select mates with the ability and willingness to invest in a long-term, committed relationship," Norman says. But now, women are less wary as they can raise kids on their own. "Basically, as modern women acquire their own resources, they are more open to engaging in shorter-term,

a woman has had works out to an astonishing 5.2. And no, this does not include serious boyfriends.

The why of it

Those we surveyed said they had casual sex for "a sense of adventure" or for "pure pleasure". "It was spontaneous for me," says Liana*, 32; a media consultant, who was already in a committed relationship when she had a fling. "There was sexual tension when we met and I caved in."

But a smaller number said they slept around simply because they got drunk.

THESE STARTLING FIGURES SIGNAL A SEA CHANGE IN LOCAL ATTITUDES. ANGELINE TSE DIGS DEEPER TO FIND OUT WHETHER CASUAL SEX REPRESENTS A STEP FORWARD – OR BACK – FOR WOMEN TODAY.

We first got a sense of this shift in attitudes just listening to the people around us – salacious office gossip about a receptionist having sex with her boss; girlfriends recounting drunken one-night stands; male buddies dishing on their latest conquests.

Times have changed

Somewhere along the way, our values have obviously changed. Then: Our grandparents thought it was scandalous to kiss before marriage. Now: More than half of women here are having casual sex. Which makes us wonder: When exactly did we start thinking it was okay to sleep around?

"In Singapore, sexual attitudes probably started becoming more liberal over the last 20 years," says Dr Norman Li, an associate professor of psychology at Singapore Management University. The increasing availability of different

casual sexual relationships," he adds.

The media has also influenced the way people view sex. Music videos, songs on the radio and wildly popular television shows like *Sex and the City* relay a clear message to us – that premarital sex is common.

There's also the fact that technology has made it easier for people to hook up. "People have access to hundreds of potential mates in one day on the Internet. As such, they have tons of options and have a tough time committing to just one partner," says Norman.

With so many opportunities for meeting people, it comes as no surprise that our recent survey revealed that the average number of casual sex partners

In some cases, women jumped into bed with a casual sex partner because they actually fancied him romantically. Like Linda*, 27, an accountant, who went home with one guy because she really liked him and hoped something would come out of their night together.

Clinical sexologist and founder of Eros Coaching Dr Martha Lee offers some insight: "Sometimes, women desire commitment from the guy, and think that sleeping with him could be the way to his heart," she explains.

Another – even rarer – reason was the need for an ego boost and a reaffirmation of their attractiveness and desirability to men. Charlotte*, 26, a banker, says she was hurt in a previous relationship and was seeking solace by going home one night with a guy she met in a club. →

"SEX SHOULD BE SHARED BETWEEN PEOPLE WHO ARE IN LOVE."

– Melissa*, 25, accountant

Having sex like men?

Whether or not these women had sex against their better judgment, what's disturbing is that only 40 per cent of the women we polled experienced guilt after the act. And scarily, for the rest, their immediate thoughts ranged from "I'm hungry" to "I should get home".

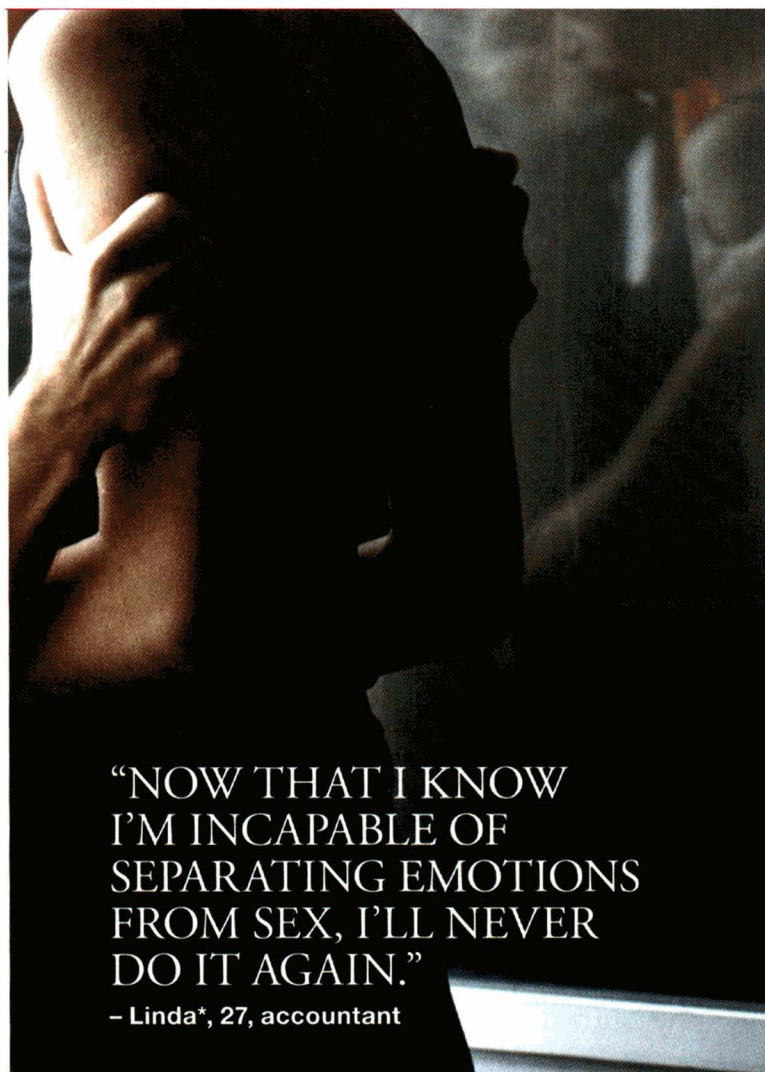
Joanne*, a 34-year-old financial analyst, hooked up with someone she was introduced to who soon became a "friend with benefits". She felt bad later not because she felt she'd done something wrong but because she knew she'd ruined any chance of building a friendship with the man.

As for whether or not the women felt any emotional connection with the men they had flings with, most said they were able to remain detached. A jaw-dropping 77 per cent of those who had had casual sex, to be precise. Our findings here run contrary to the belief that women are not able to have sex without getting tangled up in emotions.

Most women we spoke to turned out to be like Gemma*, 26, a nurse. To her, getting sex without having to commit to a relationship is a very enticing prospect. "Having sex with someone you don't feel for is a win-win situation," she says. She has slept with eight men.

The most surprising thing of all? Ultimately, 67 per cent of those who'd done it had no regrets about sleeping around. "I will continue having casual sex because it suits my current lifestyle. I'm not looking for a relationship because I'm more focused on my other life goals," says Clare*, 31, a public relations consultant.

Even Linda*, who had her heart broken after finding out her one-night stand didn't reciprocate her feelings, doesn't regret her experience. "I've chalked it up as a valuable lesson learnt. Now that I know I'm incapable of separating emotions from sex, I'll never do it again."



"NOW THAT I KNOW I'M INCAPABLE OF SEPARATING EMOTIONS FROM SEX, I'LL NEVER DO IT AGAIN."

– Linda*, 27, accountant

"Choosing to have sex outside of a relationship is a personal choice and I wouldn't judge someone if they did it."

– Miranda*, 25, teacher

"WE DO NOT SUPPORT CASUAL SEX, WHICH IS A MEANS TO RELEASE PENT-UP SEXUAL ENERGIES RATHER THAN A MEANS TO EXPRESS ONE'S LOVE."

– Counsellor Chang Song Eng

Should we worry?

The answer is yes, even though the destructive effects may not be immediately obvious. "There are negative social, medical, emotional and psychological consequences to deal with when people have casual sex," says Chang Song Eng, head of counselling at Reach Counselling. Monogamous relationships will be valued less, sexually transmitted diseases will become more common, couples will be less persistent in working out issues with their partners and divorce figures may rise, she adds.

According to the Department of Statistics Singapore, the 2009 divorce rate was 7.7 per 1,000 married resident males, and 7.3 per 1,000 married

resident females. This figure has risen by 11.6 per cent for males and 4.3 per cent for females since 1999.

And a recent survey by the Ministry of Community, Development, Youth and Sports (MCYS) found that 37 per cent of respondents aged between 15 and 34 feel that divorce is an option for a couple, regardless of whether or not they have children.

Song Eng reveals: "At our centre, we have seen how the consequences of casual sex can ruin the life of a young person, a couple and a family. So we do not support casual sex, which is a means to release one's pent-up sexual energies rather than a means to express one's love for another."

But if the statistics are anything to go by, putting a stop to promiscuity will probably be an uphill task. The majority of women (67 per cent, to be exact) find casual sex acceptable – even the ones who don't engage in it. "I think it's okay if others do it as long as they aren't cheating on someone, and safe sex is practised," says Kay*, 28, a marketing manager. "I just don't think it's my place to judge."

The age of amorality

It appears that we have entered an age where sex has little, if any, association with morality for some women. "It's just sex," argues Gemma. "It's an activity between two adults. It doesn't have to be frowned upon if people realise this simple truth."

Simple – or disturbing? Since women gained independence and started choosing short-term affairs over lasting loves, our values have evolved to allow us to do so. Norman explains: "Morals against having sex early on are aligned with a long-term mating strategy. But as the mating landscape has changed to a short-term one, our morals have adjusted accordingly to allow us all to have sex with others. So naturally, morals have become looser." →

“No-strings” consequences

“The trends of increased female interest in casual sex will probably continue,” says Norman. “Long-term relationships will become less common and less stable.” This means divorce rates will also be likely to rise as women become better-educated, climb higher in the corporate world, have ever more advanced technological tools at their disposal and continue to travel around the globe.

“Promiscuity is not acceptable. You could get pregnant, or contract sexually transmitted diseases.” – Mary*, 30, marketing and sales executive

The question to consider is this: Is the momentary sexual gratification we seek worth the lack of relationship stability down the road? To look into the crystal ball and see that the relationships we’ll someday have may never even get off the ground, or that our marriages may dissolve before our eyes – that is surely not a desirable outcome for any woman. Casual sex can’t possibly be as liberating as it’s made out to be if it compromises the quality of our relationships 10 years from now.

“Asserting your sexual freedom for the wrong reasons is not actually empowering,” says Martha. “Real empowerment and liberation means embracing and honouring your sexuality, recognising that you are the driver of your own sex life, and asserting your right to safe sex, to saying yes, and more importantly, to saying no.”

What this means is that we don’t have to please anybody – and any man, for that matter – but ourselves. But whether we choose to abstain till after marriage or take 5.2 cars out for a test-drive before buying, we do need to think about the notion that our actions today define the relationships we have tomorrow.

As the old saying goes, you make your bed and you lie in it. *HW*

**Names have been changed*



IS IT ACCEPTABLE FOR WOMEN TO SLEEP AROUND?

Men give their honest opinion.
By GILLIAN GOH

NO

“Honestly, I think most guys believe it’s unacceptable. We don’t mind getting it on with girls who are ‘easy’, but when it comes to settling down, we don’t want to marry a slut.”

– Wang Zhi Ming, 30, banker

“The measure you use will be used against you. Regardless of whether you’re a man or a woman, if you expect your partner not to sleep around, then you shouldn’t be sleeping around either.”

– Jonathan Lee, 25, undergraduate

“It is as acceptable as sharing a toothbrush with random strangers. I’m not sure about other people but I wouldn’t touch my best friend’s toothbrush even with gloves on!”

– T.K. Cheng, 26, hypnotherapist

YES

“I think a woman has every right to fool around just like men do. I wouldn’t not date a girl just because she’s had casual sex.”

– Alexander Goh, 25, undergraduate

“In this day and age, most people are a lot more liberal than before. Besides, having multiple partners is one way to find the ‘right one’ to settle down with.”

– Dennis Ooi, 27, businessman

“It’s fine. We may live in a society that lets men get away with more things than women, but I believe that if men can be promiscuous, so can women.”

– Farokh Fan, 33, senior marketing executive