



## Tunnel of Love: Sex in an MRI Scanner



Antoine Faix, a researcher in Montpellier, France, is one of those who have looked at what happens inside the body during sex. He and his colleagues used magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) to see how a woman's internal anatomy accommodates a penis in different sexual positions.

In 1999, researchers in Holland published the first MRI pictures of couples copulating, but they observed just one position: the man-on-top, or "missionary" position. Faix went a step further. He got images of two couples having sex in the missionary position and in the rear-entry position.

He presented his findings in May at the annual meeting of the American Urological Association in Orlando, Florida.

"You can really very clearly see that it's different, anatomically speaking, between the missionary and rear-entry position," Faix says. Indeed, the images are as clear as any illustration in *Gray's Anatomy*.

They show that in the missionary position, the penis -- which looks like a boomerang because much of it is rooted inside a man's body -- butts between the woman's bladder and uterus, lifting the bladder up and forward, and shifting the uterus up and back towards the spine. The Dutch researchers saw the same thing. But in the rear-entry position, the penis pushes on the cervix, causing the uterus to swing down so that it presses on the bladder. This is an entirely new discovery.

"My goal now is to do ten, 15, 20 -- to see if it's only in these two couples," Faix says. "It could be different with other couples."

He also wants to find out if the way organs shift in either sexual position has anything to do with orgasm. "Maybe there are two kinds of vaginal stimulation," he says. The G-spot, said to be located on the wall of the vagina closest to the bladder, might be stimulated in different ways depending on how the penis bumps things around internally. Nevertheless, scientists still argue about whether the G-spot is a real source of sexual pleasure. Many women claim to have intense orgasms from G-spot stimulation, but some women don't seem to have a G-spot.

"It would be great to get female orgasm inside," Faix says. "It's one of my next goals."

Neither of the women in Faix's study reached orgasm. Both men ejaculated, but only after a long time, and one needed a dose of Viagra to stay erect. "It's really very difficult to have sexual intercourse in this kind of machine," Faix says. After over an hour in the cramped MRI scanning tunnel, it's no surprise the women didn't reach orgasm. "They were fed up," Faix says.

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The Dutch researchers had the same problem with all but one of the couples they studied: a pair of acrobats. All eight women in the study had orgasms, but they described them as "superficial." The researchers couldn't make out anything resembling a G-spot in any of the MRI pictures.

--Martin F. Downs

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