

A cougar by definition is a woman 40 years or older who pursues a man typically, at least 8 years her junior. The emergence of the Indian cougar has elicited many gasps. Gasps of Shock, gasps of dismay, gasps of awe and admiration and gasps of delight!!

But hey! Indian Women are not supposed to indulge in this cougar nonsense! Aren't they supposed to settle down by their mid 20's to a simple life of domesticity, raise babies and basically be boring?

A largely male chauvinistic Indian society has had a lot to contend with in recent times. It's had to wrap its head around a woman in her 30's being an unmarried urban professional, not because there was something wrong with her, but because she chose to be so! Then it had to contend with women divorcees setting forth in the pursuit of love and romance and second marriages, instead of playing traditional self sacrificing mothers to their kids. And now in a new provocative assault against conventional, bigoted norms emerges the "Indian cougar".

As per definitions I have been both a Puma (a woman in her thirties who dates a younger man (i.e., 20-somethings), and often considered a "cougar in training".) and upon turning 40 this year I have now graduated to fit the Wikipedia definition of a cougar. I pride myself on my empowered status, my sexual freedom, the ability to live my life on my terms and date whom I please. I've thoroughly enjoyed the energy, pace, irreverence, naughtiness, youthfulness, impulsiveness and the "crazily in love" feeling that came with dating a younger man. And yes, of course the sex is fantastic! So does the age gap make it an improper relationship? For me, religion, caste, nationality, financial status and age are not bones of contention in relationships. But most of society has blinkered views on such relationships and are quick to label the "outlaws". I find most of the terms used in relationships where there is an age disparity, distasteful. Sugar daddy/mommy, toy boy, boy toy, Puma, cougar etc are in effect degrading offensive references and have insinuations of sex being offered for anomalous reasons. I know of many "western and Indian cougar relationships" that are based on love, loyalty and commitment and have stood the test of time, and more so than most of the fleeting young romances one witnesses in urban India.

It's always boggled my mind as to why Indian society doesn't construe older men dating younger women as problematic, but will jump to finger pointing at the "cougars"! Traditional society may well view "cougar" relationships with tinted and tainted glasses but it's a phenomenon it will have to adjust to because the "so called cougars" are here to stay, loving it and thriving!

I say "so called cougars" because I exasperatedly feel that the expressions "Puma" and "Cougar" have been mistakenly coined. In theory the "Cougar" phenomenon could have been an empowering term but instead it tends to harp and focus on the words "women who pursue" and "predator"!!

Logically, it's ridiculous to assume a woman who is attractive, successful, confident, and financially sound to be a predator. I say this from experience, that she is the hunted, not the hunter. Far from being 'wanton', she is in reality 'wanted'!! At the gym, at parties, on facebook, and at various events I get scores of young hunky men in their mid 20's trying to catch my attention, showering me with compliments that range from "eye candy" to "Goddess", flowers, and asking me out on dates. If you take a good look at celebrity "cougar relationships" such as Demi Moore and Ashton Kutcher (15 years), Susan Sarandon and Tim Robbins (12 years), Madonna and Jesus Luz (28 years), Kim Catrall of the sex and city and Alan Wyse, (22 years) , Sandra bullock and Ryan Gosling (16 years) Raquel Welch and her string of younger men including ex-fiance Armstrong (9 years), Kid Rock ( 9 years) and

Owen Wilson (6 years) you'd realise men of all ages would love to date them all. Heavens!! All these sexy, well off, successful, famous, hot bodied, sensational women are Goddesses to most, prize catches... certainly not predators, although I'm sure it might stir a man's fantasy to see them as lusty carnivores. This brings me to focus on what is assumed to be the crux of "cougar relationships"... the apparent need for a staple diet of "fresh young meat". Let me say this clearly, be it a man or woman, predatory sex is tasteless sex as opposed to zesty, enthusiastic, wholehearted, fun-loving, mutually consenting sex which is precisely what sex is like with a younger man you connect with!

Predictably, It's not just the "cougar" that gets branded by an anxious, pernickety, apprehensive, and fearful society. Damn the hunter and damn the hunted! Given that most "Cougars" are financially sound, professional women, their younger partners automatically get saddled into the category of "toy boy" stripping them of all dignity, whereas in actuality, they should be applauded for their courage and open mindedness.

It takes a lot to pursue and be in a relationship with a "cougar". Sure her confidence, financial stability, sexual expertise, knowledge of a world beyond pimples and clothes and conversational skills are what drives a man to distraction but it is also a given that most women in their 40's come with a lot of baggage. Ex husbands, ex boyfriends, children, financial pressures and obligations, a time consuming profession are just some of the overwhelming factors he will have to be comfortable with and adjust to. Not to forget the stress and lectures he must endure by the "upholders of societal morality", and dealing with bewildered, frowning parents and family members. It's time for us to rise beyond petty social constructs based on prejudice and conventions.

I say let's do away with degrading terminology and liberate our minds, our hearts and our lives.

Age is a simply an issue of mind over matter. If you don't mind, it doesn't matter!!