

THE PLEASURE GAP

Lies About Getting Laid

"Mm you feel so good. Does that feel good, baby?"

No, not really, you think. "Oh yeah!" you reply. You roll your eyes because thankfully, in doggy style, he can't see your face. You are so ready for it to be over.

He grunts enthusiastically, breathing hard. You sense he's about to come so you start breathing hard and moaning too.

"Yes! Harder! Deeper!" you scream in order to hurry him to climax.

He finally finishes and asks, "Did you come too?"

"Yes, it was amazing," you lie.

Can you relate? Sadly, most women can. Here's the deal: There's a huge pleasure gap between women and men. Men are having way more orgasms than women are. And while this is true in all types of sex, it's especially true in casual or hookup sex.

What the F Is Going On??

- The F itself. There is way too much emphasis on intercourse—the way men reach orgasm.

- Movies and porn show women having fast and fabulous orgasms from male pounding. These images are lies!
- The idea that women should orgasm from intercourse is **the number one reason for the pleasure gap**.
- Other reasons, such as poor body image, slut shaming, the idea that women's role is to please men, and poor sexual communication, also contribute to the pleasure gap.

The Solutions!

- Truly understanding that for most women **penetration alone is not the route to ultimate pleasure!** Almost all women need clitoral stimulation to orgasm, which is not achieved during typical penetrative intercourse.
- Discovering an array of easily attainable, yet very powerful, skills and attitudes that will make your orgasm as much of a surefire thing as his.

THE PLEASURE GAP EXPOSED

You've likely already experienced the pleasure gap in your own life. Probably there's been a time or two (or more!) when your male partner—be it your friend, a guy you just met off Tinder, your boyfriend, your fiancé, or your husband—came for real, but your orgasm was either nonexistent or faked. What you may not know is just how many other women are experiencing the same problem, or just how wide this pleasure gap is:

In one recent survey of thousands of women and men, 64 percent of women versus 91 percent of men said they'd had an orgasm during their most recent sexual encounter.

In another recent survey of over two thousand straight women:

57 percent said they orgasm most or every time they have sex with a partner, while 95 percent said their partner orgasms most or every time.

If this wasn't bad enough, things get much worse during hookup sex. As you likely know, "hooking up" is a vague term that can include anything from kissing to intercourse. But when I specifically asked my students (in anonymous polls) about first-time hookup sex involving intercourse or other activities (e.g., oral sex) that could lead to an orgasm:

55 percent of men versus 4 percent of women said they usually reach orgasm during first-time hookup sex!

These numbers make it clear that you're not alone. Your missing orgasm is a reflection of a broader cultural problem.

THE PLEASURE GAP EXPLAINED

So what's the problem here? We're doing too much of what we consider "fucking" (aka intercourse) and not enough of other sexual activities. The reason there's such a massive orgasm gap between the sexes is because we overvalue men's most common way of reaching an orgasm (intercourse) and undervalue women's most common way (clitoral stimulation). Our cultural over-focus on the importance of putting a penis into a vagina is screwing with women's orgasms.

You don't have to look far to see this focus—just watch almost any movie with a sex scene. To quote one of my male students, "In the porn I watch, it's male pounding that turns women on." To quote one of my

Relationship Issues and Orgasm Problems

Sometimes women have difficulty reaching an orgasm because of a relationship issue. Not wanting to be in a relationship with someone anymore, not trusting your partner, or not being attracted to a person can lead to orgasm problems.

While this book can give you tools to get to know your body and to get the stimulation you need, it can't solve relationship issues.

Counseling can help if you're feeling stuck or conflicted about your relationship. See appendix B, "Additional Resources," for tips on finding a counselor. The communication skills in chapter 8 could also be useful to help you talk to your partner.

female students, "In mainstream movies and in porn, all I see are women having orgasms during intercourse."

No wonder women tell me they want to orgasm this way! I've even had a good number tell me they think this is what's best for their relationships. No wonder the most common complaint women bring to sex therapists is the inability to orgasm during intercourse. It's also no surprise that the most frequent question asked by my human sexuality students and sent into *Cosmopolitan* magazine is "How do I have an orgasm during intercourse?"

Women's magazines often answer this question by recommending specific intercourse positions ("Try the woman-on-top position!"). This makes matters worse, because it implies that all women can orgasm during intercourse if only they do it right. But this isn't true. The vast majority of women cannot orgasm from the stimulation provided by intercourse alone. Unfortunately, very few women (and men) know this. So countless women end up thinking something is wrong with them, and like the woman portrayed in that all-too-familiar scene at the start of this chapter, they fake orgasms.

When researchers ask college women why they fake, one of the most

common answers is to avoid appearing abnormal. Other common answers are to avoid hurting their partner's feelings and to build their partner's ego. Women are faking orgasms because they think a penis should get them off and they want the guy involved to think his penis has these powers. But it doesn't! No penis does.

THAT'S NOT ALL

The idea that women should orgasm from intercourse is the number one lie women are told about getting laid. It's the primary reason for the pleasure gap. Still, it's not the only reason. A lot of other cultural issues mess with women's ability to orgasm. Here are just a few:

- We have a double standard that judges women more harshly than men for having casual sex. This leaves many women feeling conflicted about the sex they're engaging in. It's hard to have an orgasm when you're guilt-ridden or ashamed.
- We're bombarded with media images of "sexy" women whose role is to attract and please men. These images are plentiful in porn, but they're not limited to porn—open any magazine and you'll find advertisements using gorgeous, provocatively posed, scantily clad women to sell everything from cars to clothes. Researchers have found that these images lead girls and women to constantly assess how they appear to others. This puts women's main focus on being sexually desirable to *others* rather than on their *own* sexual desires. It places women's emphasis on how they *look* rather than on how they *feel*. Even worse, some women (and men) come to believe—even subconsciously—that a woman's main role is to pleasure men, rather than believing sex entails equally giving and receiving pleasure. A logical consequence of this is that some women gauge how good a sexual encounter is by their partner's pleasure rather than their own (i.e., "If it was good for him, it was good for me").

- These same media images of sexy, beautiful—and thin—women are also the main culprit in the fact that many women dislike their own bodies. And a woman who dislikes her own naked body is not going to feel open and free during a sexual encounter. It's impossible to have an orgasm while trying to hold your stomach in (believe me, I spent my younger years trying).
- Sex education focuses almost exclusively on the dangers of sex, such as pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections (STIs). Stating the obvious, you're less likely to enjoy something that's been billed as perilous rather than pleasurable.
- Most women (and men) have zero training in sexual communication. Good communication is especially necessary when it comes to female orgasms. Most men pretty much reach orgasm the same way and it's not all that complex. It's a lot more complicated for women to orgasm, since there are vast differences between women in terms of what they need to orgasm. Also, what a woman needs can vary from one encounter to another. Men can't read minds—or vaginas. Sexual communication is needed for women's orgasms, yet it's a skill rarely taught in sex education.

Conflicted feelings about sex, a greater focus on attracting and pleasing a partner than on one's own needs, body self-consciousness, and poor communication all help explain why the orgasm gap is widest between the sexes during first-time hookup sex, but progressively narrows with subsequent hookup sex, friends-with-benefits sex, and relationship sex. It takes time to get to know an individual woman's body. Self-consciousness diminishes with familiarity; people are more apt to say what they need with familiarity and trust. Still, issues like body shame and people's difficulty in expressing what they want don't just disappear during relationship sex; they still take their toll on women's orgasms.

Can you relate to any of these problems? Have you ever felt self-conscious of your body during sex, maybe holding in your stomach or attempting to get into a position where a part you consider unattractive won't show? Have you ever wanted to tell your partner what you needed but just

Sexual Trauma and Orgasm Problems

Sometimes women have trouble reaching orgasm due to more personal reasons. Sadly, way too many women have been the victim of rape, sexual coercion, or childhood sexual abuse.

If you're one of these women, the information in this book might help you reach orgasm, but you're also likely to need information specific to reclaiming your sexuality after being sexually abused. A great book for this is *The Sexual Healing Journey* by Wendy Maltz. Counseling can also help. Appendix B, "Additional Resources," gives advice about locating a therapist.

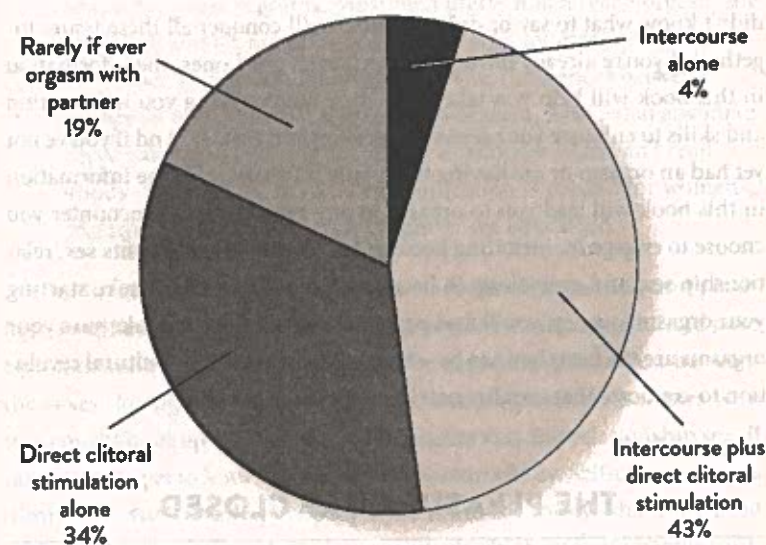
didn't know what to say or do? I promise we'll conquer all these issues together! If you're already having orgasms, even good ones, the information in this book will help you take them up a notch, giving you information and skills to enhance your sexual expression and ecstasy. And if you've not yet had an orgasm or are having them only inconsistently, the information in this book will lead you to orgasm in any type of sexual encounter you choose to engage in, including hookup sex, friends-with-benefits sex, relationship sex, and everything in between. No matter where you're starting your orgasm journey, you'll find personalized solutions to make sure your orgasms are the best they can be—and you'll be part of the cultural revolution to eradicate that number one lie about getting laid!

THE PLEASURE GAP CLOSED

Since our cultural over-focus on intercourse is the main reason for your missing orgasm, the solution is to truly and deeply understand that the overwhelming majority of women don't reach orgasm through penetration alone. Most women need clitoral stimulation—either alone or coupled with penetration.

Perhaps you're wondering exactly what "the overwhelming majority"

means. Most times when women's magazines talk about this they throw around the statistic that only 25 to 30 percent of women can reach orgasm during intercourse. But, as pointed out by a scholar who analyzed the studies that came up with this statistic, there's a big problem: most of these studies don't differentiate between women who can orgasm from *just* a thrusting penis and women who orgasm during intercourse by making sure their clitoris is also stimulated (e.g., by touching it with a hand or a vibrator). Interestingly, though, when this differentiation was made in two different recent surveys, both found that only about 15 percent of women have orgasms from thrusting alone. And the numbers decrease further when I ask my female students about their *most reliable* way to orgasm. Averaging across multiple years of anonymous polls, here's what the women in my classes say their most surefire route to orgasm is:



Even more striking, looking only at the women who can orgasm:

95 percent of women need clitoral stimulation to reach orgasm!

The clitoris is *the key* to women's orgasms. We must raise awareness of the clitoris in our culture. Most important, I want to bring it front and center during *your* sexual encounters.

Allow me to put my long-standing love of the clitoris into further context. I already told you I'm middle-aged. This means I reached my sexual coming-of-age during an era (the '70s and early '80s) in which the clitoris was in the spotlight. One of my favorite moments during this clitoral-focused era was when three graduate school friends and I were out for dinner and four men kept approaching us. Although all heterosexual, we finally decided that to politely get rid of these men, we would tell them they were wasting their time, because we were two lesbian couples. They all looked a bit shocked and then one exclaimed (in quite a lovely accent, I might add), "But intercourse, it is the ultimate pleasure, no?" In complete unison, with no preplanning, we all loudly said, "No!" Thirty years later, we continue to laugh about this when we get together, saying to one another, "Intercourse, it is the ultimate pleasure, no?" "No!"

What troubles me is that much of this clitoral knowledge seems to have been lost to millennials. Most young women think they're abnormal if they don't reach orgasm during intercourse. Likewise, many of the men I teach say they feel pressured to make girlfriends and hookup partners reach orgasm with their penis. My clients and students are shocked to discover the truth: The vagina (by which I mean the *inside* canal of the female sexual organs, something we'll learn about in chapter 4) has very few touch-sensitive nerve endings. Instead, the overwhelming majority of the nerve endings that women need to reach orgasm are on the *outside*. I repeat: Penetration is not required. Clitoral stimulation is. This is why truly appreciating and attending to the clitoris is the simple secret to your orgasm!

The focus on clitoral stimulation is why women have more orgasms when they have sex with other women, as well as one of the reasons that women have more orgasms alone than with a partner. When two women get it on, they mostly focus on stimulating each other's clitorises; penetration (e.g., with a strap-on or dildo) is a *totally optional* activity, only incorporated if one of the women finds that it enhances her arousal

and orgasm. Likewise, somewhere between 88 and 99 percent of women don't include *any* penetration in their masturbation—and those who do almost always pair it with clitoral stimulation. When pleasuring themselves, most women focus exclusively on their clitorises, using vibrators, fingers, pillows, and other external stimulation, resulting in over 94 percent reaching orgasm. Clearly, both solo and lesbian sex focus on the clitoris, but when penetration is involved, that becomes the main event and less attention is paid to the clitoris. In fact, regardless of whether the encounter takes place in the context of a hookup, a committed relationship, or anything else in between:

During sexual encounters that include intercourse, 78 percent of women's orgasm problems are caused by not enough or not the right kind of clitoral stimulation.

The solution, then, seems pretty straightforward. Let's make both penetration and clitoral stimulation equally valued!

Let me be clear: I'm not trying to turn the tables and have us value clitoral stimulation *more* than intercourse. I'm just trying to level the playing field and have them be equally valued. *I'm not anti-intercourse; I'm just pro-clitoral-course!* And if you are one of those *rare* women (according to my class surveys, one of the approximately 5 percent) who most reliably reach orgasm from penetration alone, there's nothing wrong with this and I won't tell you to stop reaching orgasm that way. It's just that most women don't know how unusual this is—and (as you'll discover in a subsequent chapter) a biological impossibility for many women! Also, interestingly, I've had several women tell me that they thought they were having orgasms during intercourse—since intercourse does create really nice feelings—only to discover what an orgasm actually felt like when they took time to get to know their clitoris. The bottom line is that while many women love the emotional and physical feelings they get from intercourse, thrusting alone rarely results in orgasm. So to close the pleasure gap and have more women reach orgasm, we need to make internal

A Note to Women Who Have Sex with Women

As you can plainly see, a main focus of this book is to eradicate the myths about intercourse that are at the root of so many female orgasm concerns. Obviously, this concern is not as relevant to women who have sex only with other women. If this describes you, you can skip over the passages dedicated to squashing penetration-based myths. Or you might want to read them anyway, reveling in the fact that you're already a step ahead in the orgasm game! In this book you can still find useful information to enhance your orgasmic potential, such as the attitude and focusing skills taught in chapter 5 and the communication skills found in chapter 8. Additionally, you'll find advice for enhancing sex with a female partner in chapter 7. In short, I sincerely hope the focus on debunking myths about intercourse won't deter you, and instead you'll concentrate on the information that will benefit you the most!

stimulation (intercourse for him) and external stimulation (clitoral stimulation for you) equally important.

This is easier said than done. To make penetration and clitoral stimulation equal, you'll need more than just knowledge of the clitoris. I say this based on my experience as a therapist and on a fascinating study that found that women who knew about their clitorises had higher rates of orgasming during masturbation, but not during sex with a partner. To apply knowledge of the clitoris to sex with a partner, you'll need additional skills that go beyond anatomy. You'll need to feel positive, rather than guilty or ashamed, about the sex you have. You'll need to feel that your pleasure is as important as your partner's pleasure. You'll need to learn to relax and not feel self-conscious during sex. And you'll need good sexual communication skills. You'll find all of this in the pages that follow.