



## **Just the Facts: The Role of Orgasm**

Many of us measure both our sexuality and ourselves in terms of orgasm: Did we have one? Did our partner have one? Was it good? Did we have simultaneous orgasms? When we measure our sexuality by orgasm, however, we discount activities that do not necessarily lead to orgasm, such as touching, caressing, and kissing. Our culture tends to identify sex with sexual intercourse, and the end of sexual intercourse is literally orgasm (especially male orgasm).

### **An Anthropological Perspective**

A fundamental, biological fact about orgasm is that male orgasm and ejaculation are required for reproduction, whereas the female orgasm is not. The male orgasm is universal in both animal and human species, but socio-biologists and anthropologists have found immense variation in the experience of female orgasm.

In our culture, women most consistently experience orgasm through clitoral stimulation; penile thrusting during intercourse is not always sufficient for orgasm. In cultures that cultivate female orgasm, there is, in addition to an absence of sexual repression and an emphasis on men arousing women.

### **The Tyranny of the Orgasm**

A sociologist suggests that our preoccupation with orgasm is an extension of the Protestant work ethic, in which nothing is enjoyed for its own sake, everything is work, including sex. Thus, we achieve orgasm much as we achieve success. Those who achieve orgasm are the "successful workers" of sex; those who do not are the failures.

As we look at our sexuality, we can see pressure to be successful lovers. Men talk of performance anxiety. We tend to evaluate a woman's sexual self-worth in terms of her being orgasmic. For men, the significant question about women's sexuality has shifted from "Is she a virgin?" to "Is she orgasmic?"

### **Faking Orgasm**

Although during sexual intercourse women are not as consistently orgasmic as men, there is considerable pressure on them to be so. In one study, college students were asked whether they had faked orgasm; 60% of heterosexual women and 71% of lesbian or bisexual women said yes, while only 17% of heterosexual men and 27% of gay or bisexual men acknowledged doing so (Elliot & Brantley, 1997). The reason most women fake orgasm is not to protect their own feelings as much as to protect those of their partner. They want to please their partner and avoid hurting or disappointing them. Other reasons include fear of their own sexual inadequacy and a desire to prevent their partner from seeking another partner and to end boring or painful intercourse.

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# PURE Romance

## **Was It Good for You?**

A question often asked following intercourse is, Was it good for you? or its variation, Did you come?

Such questions are often asked by men rather than woman, and women tend to resent them. Part of the pressure to pretend to have an orgasm is caused by these questions: What is really being asked? If the women enjoyed intercourse? If she thinks the man is a good lover? Or is the question merely a signal that the lovemaking is over?

If a partner cares about the other's enjoyment and wants to improve the couple's erotic pleasures, the appropriate time to inquire about lovemaking is not during or immediately following intercourse. Such discussion should be initiated at a neutral time and place. Moreover, each partner needs to be free to inquire about the other's satisfaction. The goal should be to increase a couple's fulfillment, rather than to complain about performance or soothe a ruffled ego. Even among lesbian women, who undoubtedly are more acquainted with female anatomy than most men are, partners need to be careful in making assumptions about what is sexually arousing.

The one true way to celebrate your orgasm this month is to communicate openly with your partner about what arouses you. Work out with your partner what each of you specifically can do to make the other feel best. Once you have done this you'll find real sexual pleasure and satisfaction.