



MIND THE O RGASM GAP

What's that? Women are *still* missing out on that most elusive of climaxes? New research shows that we really need to stop laying the blame on lazy, unknowing blokes. It's time to take responsibility for getting our rocks off

WORDS ROISÍN DERVISH-O'KANE



BAKER-O OOH LINE

Are you fucking kidding me, mate? you think as you lie in bed, eyes fixed on the ceiling, your sexual teammate floating on a post-coital high before putting a perfunctory stop to proceedings with the question, 'What do you think about Singapore noodles for dinner?' It all started so well; the middle finger moving deftly in circular then vertical strokes until your torso reverberated like a tuning fork. This, you told yourself, was going to be good. And yet here you are – horny, frustrated and not in the least thinking about the delicacies at the local Chinese.

Yes, it's a story so clichéd and tired you figure it can't possibly be true, but it turns out, despite it being 2017 and all, orgasm inequality is still a thing. And – shocker – straight women are those most likely to go without. Researchers at Chapman University in the US surveyed more than 25,000 couples and found that, while 95% of heterosexual men reported regularly orgasming during 'sexually intimate moments' (when else?), heterosexual women clocked in at a measly 65%. Go figure. 'We expected to find an orgasm gap between men and women,' says lead author Dr David Frederick. 'Largely because men frequently report higher sex drives than women, so there tends to be a number of "quickie" experiences during which a female orgasm isn't the end goal. What a treat.'

So far, so much potential for man-bashing. But actually, that isn't the full story. Lesbian participants reported regularly owning the big O 21% more often than their straight sisters, but that number is still lower than what straight men are enjoying – which suggests that there's something more fundamental than an eager (read: selfish) male partner leaving us females at a disadvantage. So what's the real deal?

MISSION IMPOSSIBLE

When it comes to orgasms, biology's a raging chauvinist. First off, from an evolutionary perspective, it doesn't really matter whether you orgasm or not – no amount of female excitement is going to make a baby. And because your orgasm isn't a procreation deal-breaker, biology's never had a real incentive to streamline

'WE NEED TO OVERTURN CENTURIES OF BELIEF THAT INTERCOURSE IS THE MOST IMPORTANT PART OF SEX'

the means by which you get there. Ergo, while men are set to climax from pretty much whatever they get up to, your orgasm calls for a more specific, personalised process. Hence lesbians trailing behind men, too.

Scientists aren't even sure what actually happens when we come. 'The main distinguishing feature is a series of eight to 12 contractions that occur throughout the pelvis, starting 0.8 seconds apart for the first two, then getting longer between each of the subsequent ones,' explains leading US orgasm researcher Dr Nicole Prause. They're accompanied by a flurry of activity in the brain between four key feel-good neurotransmitters: dopamine,

vasopressin, oxytocin and kisspeptin (aw). Bring it on. Dr Frederick's data suggests that a combination of deep kissing, oral sex and, er, 'manual stimulation' is the winning formula. As for hands-free penis-in-vagina sexual intercourse? That doesn't work for almost two thirds of women. 'We know 85% of women need their clitoris or outer lips of their vagina stimulated to reach orgasm,' adds Dr Laurie Mintz, author of *Becoming Cliterate**, 'because that's where your touch-sensitive nerve endings are found.'

It's likely that you're already aware of this, thanks to your solo explorations – Dr Mintz says just 1.2% of women insert

something into their vagina when they masturbate. So, if the quest for o-quality is simply a case of targeted effort, why hasn't the equilibrium been achieved yet? Well, it's not only physiological preferences we're up against. Society continues to reinforce the idea that the end goal of having any kind of sex is to make a man come. 'Throughout Western history, there's never been a time when most people value women's ways of reaching orgasm as much as men's,' says Dr Mintz. 'So we need to overturn centuries of belief that intercourse is most important.' In fact, she argues that, as a culture, our understanding of female pleasure has been in retrograde since the 1960s sexual revolution. 'Forty years ago, a man knew he needed to stimulate a woman's clitoris for her to reach orgasm,' she says. 'But that approach has gone underground now everything in our culture teaches



O-face

that sex equals penetration.' Sure, porn has played a titanic role in making us all think a thorough pounding is all it takes to propel women into ecstasy, but Dr Mintz says that romcom sex also reinforces this script, thanks to all those scenes that depict women getting off via penetration – just as their man offloads, of course. 'Just think how we use "intercourse" and "sex" interchangeably,' she says. 'This dismisses all the other forms of sex as foreplay; a perfunctory act before the main event.'

TIGHT-LIPPED

So, clearly, a brutal combination of biological and social failings aren't giving women a leg up, as it were. But are you helping yourself? Dr Mintz says a key reason that lesbians are catching up with the boys is that they're not labouring under the belief that a man can 'gift' a woman an orgasm. 'When women believe this – even subconsciously – they take a back seat in the pursuit of their own pleasure,' says Dr Mintz. Which does nobody any favours. 'The pressure on men to perform is essentially doubled,' she adds. And the subsequent urge to fulfil duty can be, well, anything but sexy. Izzy, 27, a curator from Ipswich, is in a long-term relationship with a man who insists she always orgasms. 'I don't take that for granted, but there's something about the way he touches me so purposefully that makes me feel like my pleasure is a box to be ticked.' She's orgasming, sure – but it's not the intuitive sex she wants. Has she said anything? 'I don't generally struggle to ask for what I need but, with sex, I worry that I can't express that without sounding accusatory.'

This lack of communication around the quality of sex goes for lesbian couples as well as heterosexuals. Just because you're doing

OMG! OMG! I'M NOT COMING!

it with a fellow clitoris-owner doesn't mean your needs will be met. 'I've slept with women who've been attentive and others who don't think anything of not returning the favour,' says Romy, 34, from Leeds. 'I don't think lesbians necessarily have a better understanding of the female body, or that we're any better at communicating what we want.'

Most sex studies focus on heterosexuals, and they all point to the fact that women are so stifled by unvoiced expectation and people-pleasing, it's easier to fake it than make it. A third of women in long-term relationships have faked or 'performed' an

'IT'S NEVER GOING TO HAPPEN IF YOU'RE WISHING THEY'D JUST MOVE THEIR FINGER A LITTLE TO THE LEFT'

orgasm, according to a 2017 survey[†]. But what of one-night stands, which deliver lust and excitement in place of romantic history and familiarity? Still no cigar – a fifth of females have feigned it, which perhaps isn't surprising when you learn that a woman's chance of climaxing during such an encounter is a meagre 11%, according to research in the journal *American Social Review*. Lucy, a 27-year-old advertising strategist from Cheshire, admits pretending to orgasm makes her feel more secure when sleeping with a man she's just met. 'I want him to like me and think I'm good in bed. Even if

the sex isn't doing it for me, I want to make him feel like it is. He's not going to think he's had a good time if I make him feel crap about his performance.'

SEX ON THE BRAIN

According to experts, the issue of women racking up more Os is less about the body and more about your mind. 'After initial arousal, it's necessary to let go and drop into a space of reduced control if you're actually going to experience an orgasm,' Dr Prause says. How? Well, by any means necessary – even if that means focusing on something other than your partner.

'If you're struggling to orgasm, you might have to visualise whatever it is that really turns you on,' says Dr Prause. 'And if that's someone else, that's okay.'

But what if the issue is more about what's going on down below? 'Great orgasms never happen when you're wishing your partner would just move their finger a little to the left but holding your tongue,' says sex and relationships therapist Cate Campbell. Dr Mintz agrees: 'Good sex requires clear communication and problem-solving.' So, whether you've been sleeping with your partner for 10 years or 10 minutes – speak up. Unless, that is, the person you're sleeping with believes sex finishes when they do. In that case, well, you know what to do. **WV3**

REACH YOUR PEAK

Experts reveal the tips that can help you get what's coming to you



FIND WHAT WORKS

Don't expect someone else to know what pleases you if you don't know yourself. 'Masturbate,' says Dr Mintz. 'If you don't know where to start, check out OMGYes (omgyes.com) – watching videos of other women doing it can be really instructive.'



SAY WHAT YOU NEED

'Talk outside the bedroom, so you both feel less vulnerable,' Dr Mintz advises. 'Also, take ownership of your pleasure by saying, "I really love it when you do this," or, "I'd love it if we could do this," rather than using blaming statements.' Just don't debrief immediately after the act, obvs.



SHOW AND TELL

'If you want them to do something differently, gently move their hand or head,' says Campbell. 'And let them know when they're doing it right to encourage them to keep going.' Not working? 'Show them what they need to do to make you orgasm with your hands or a vibrator,' suggests Dr Mintz.



LET GO

Too conscious of your played thighs or sex face to let go enough to climax? 'You *really* don't have to worry,' says Campbell. 'Your partner won't be turned off by your vulnerability or any facial expressions. If anything, they'll be turned on – it's rewarding to know your partner's climaxing.'



CHECK YOURSELF

'Many women grow up worried they've had too few or too many partners and thus aren't able to enjoy sex enough to reach orgasm,' says Dr Mintz. Relate? 'Let the negative shameful thoughts out, write them down and challenge them,' she says. While listening to Rihanna, ideally.