

The Orgasm Gap: What Role Does the Patriarchy Play in the Bedroom?

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Introduction

The second wave of feminism introduced female sexual empowerment and questioned the gender roles the patriarchy subjected women to play within the household. However, it failed to ignite the conversation of comprehensive sexual education and pleasure, within an intersectional lens. In the current third wave of feminism, an intersectional conversation of women's pleasure is newly explored to fully regain female sexual empowerment and destroy the orgasm gap. Our patriarchal society has constantly been focusing on men's pleasure and sexual desires but fails to recognize women's sexual desires, especially non-binary or trans folks. Our society oversexualizes women for capitalist gain which is fueled by the male gaze. Despite decades of oversexualization of women, society has continued to portray harmful narratives and double standards that continue to put women down. By not allowing them to express themselves through their sexual power, women's needs are not being met. Thus, the Orgasm Gap was born, solidifying what every woman was already thinking: I'm not satisfied in the bedroom. Essentially, the Orgasm Gap states that men are 30% more likely to orgasm in heterosexual encounters versus their female partner (Dr. Laurie Mintz). The orgasm gap is a direct correlation to the role the patriarchy plays in the bedroom which denies women's ability to use their erotic as a power.

The Orgasm Gap Explained

Besides the Gender Pay Gap, there is another gap in which women are at a disadvantage to men: orgasms. The Orgasm Gap is evidence that men have more orgasms than women in heterosexual sexual encounters (Psychology Today). This "gap" was investigated in the *Archives of Sexual Behavior* which is a sample of over 52,000 sexually active Americans. This data was analyzed to depict differences in orgasm frequency between different sexual

orientations. Heterosexual men were the most frequent to orgasm, and heterosexual cis women, experienced the least frequency of orgasms. They found a notable gap in between the frequency between the sexes. Heterosexual men were recorded to “usually-always orgasm when sexually intimate,” recording a frequency of 95%, whereas heterosexual women were recorded to orgasm 65% when sexually intimate (Archives of Sexual Behavior, US). Meaning straight, cis, women are 30% less likely to orgasm versus their male counterpart. Unfortunately, this astounding gap, is nothing new in society. The most interesting part to note in this data is that when masturbating, women orgasm the same amount as heterosexual men do in their typical sexual encounters. So why is there such a gap for cis heterosexual women, and bisexual women in heterosexual encounters?

While there is a gap between heterosexual males and female, it is important to compare that to different sexual orientations. The *Archives of Sexual Behavior* also compared the orgasm frequency of heterosexual males and females, to gay and bisexual couples. Surprisingly gay men orgasmed 89% of the time, and bisexual men orgasmed 88% of the time. Right alongside these statistics, lesbian women are recorded to orgasm 86% of the time in their sexual encounters. This research shows the differences across different orientations, but reaffirms that cis, straight women are having the lowest amounts of orgasms. This research also shows that for women, their orgasms vary across different sexual identities but for men, their orgasms stay consistently above women despite their sexual orientation. It was normal for woman’s orgasms to be written off as mysterious until a groundbreaking study that found when women masturbate, they orgasm 95% of the time (Dr. Laurie Mintz). So why the contrast in orgasm frequency depending on their partner? As Dr. Mintz shares in her sexual research, 99% of women focus on clitoral stimulation when pleasuring themselves, and further shares that “78% of women’s orgasm problems in

heterosexual sex are due to not enough or not the right kind of clitoral stimulation.” (Dr. Laurie Mintz) So why are women not getting the stimulation that they need?

Trans women are also impacted within this orgasm gap because they are often denied their sexuality in our society. In, *How Trans Women are Reclaiming Their Sexuality*, Trans feminist, Kai Cheng Thom shares her transition and how her sexuality was repressed during it. Kai writes that most medical professionals don't know the sexual side effects to most hormones, and they don't care to look in it. When sharing her concerns of if treatment would affect her sex drive and sexual pleasure, her doctor disregarded it entirely. Kai remembers her doctor saying, “Most transsexuals find, that their masculine sexual...urges are very disturbing to them. So that when they become women, they don't need orgasms.” (Kai Chen Thom). The truth is most medical experts have not taken the time to research or educate themselves in this area. In Kai's and many other Trans women's experiences, they've had to learn from their own shared experiences. Otherwise, their sexual narrative would get lost in the patriarchal shuffle of our society. With the harmful stereotypes of Trans folk in mainstream media, Trans women have a harder time embracing their bodies and sexual desires. With the lack of education regarding Trans folk's sexual desires through treatment, most are led to think that sexual urges are not normal. This outdated and harmful thinking comes from a psychologist Ray Blanchard who published his work in 1980's. In his work, he infers that there are two types of transsexuals, a “true Transsexual,” and “fake transsexuals, who are really men who fetishize the idea of playing a female role, wearing female clothing, or having a female body.” (Kai Chen Thom, Ray Blanchard). This detrimental ideology that to become a “real woman”, trans women must give up their sexual desires, is thoroughly rooted within the Orgasm Gap, and where misogyny and

transphobia intersect. It also reaffirms the inability to recognize *all* women's sexual power and pleasure.

Medical Complications

There are medical complications that should be considered when examining the Orgasm Gap in an intersectional lens. For example, there are some sexual conditions that could prohibit someone from being fully aroused during sex. Anorgasmia, for instance, is a medical condition common in both males and females which can hinder someone's ability to orgasm. According to this Mayo Clinic article, anorgasmia is the "inability to experience orgasm despite adequate stimulation and arousal." Only 8% of men have anorgasmia or an absent orgasm (Mayo Clinic). It is not to be confused with erectile dysfunction, but the two can co-exist. It can be related to psychological stressors, medications, illnesses, or deeper psychological issues. Anorgasmia is more common for women and research from the US National Library of Medicine, suggest that roughly 40-45% of women struggle with an orgasm dysfunction. They also conducted a study in Hesarak, Iran on the prevalence of anorgasmia for women of reproductive age. The study found that out of the 1200 respondents, "5-10% of women experience primary anorgasmia," and applying this to the population of Iran, they found that 23.6% of Iranian women experience this dysfunction (US National Library of Medicine & National Institute of Medicine). Most young people are not familiar with anorgasmia, or the mental health affects surrounding it. In contrast, erectile dysfunction in men, is commonly advertised on in mainstream media and can be fixed with one simple pill. It is interesting to note that the recommended treatments for each sex with this dysfunction are not the same. The Mayo Clinic lists therapies and ways to there is more of a focus for women to go to therapy to deal with anorgasmia than it is for men. While this article

cited it could be due to psychological issues, therapy intervention is mentioned very little versus female treatment in the Mayo Clinic article.

The Failure of Sexual Education

As previously stated, many young people are uneducated about certain sexual conditions that can hinder their experiences. Sexual education in our country is also to blame considering there is not a national mandate on sex education in schools, and it is up to each state to decide their sexual education plan. This means that depending on the state and the funding for their schools, certain schools could not get that education whatsoever. The politics within the state's government can also determine the type of sexual education being provided. Historically, conservative administrations have funded abstinence-only sexual education (Ms. Magazine). Even some liberal comprehensive sex education classes still skew to share abstinence or prevention methods versus having a conversation. Our education system is flawed in this country, but our comprehensive sexual education is barely prevalent. In most sex education classes, female reproductive system and internal organs are only highlighted, solidifying ignorance of the clitoris. In a study conducted by Dr. Laurie Mintz, "60% of college students falsely believe the clitoris is inside the vagina," further showing the lack of sex education, but also proving the lack of attention to women's sex. Sexual education fails to recognize pleasure, and sexual communication which is more important than abstinence or prevention. Both sexual pleasure and communication are integral topics when introducing sexual consent, something that is also rarely talked about in most sex education classes. It is important for young people to develop these communication skills so that they can stop the trends of sexual violence and have desirable experience for themselves. The more these topics can be spoken about, the less of societal stigmas surround sex. Conversations such as these can also tackle homophobia and

harmful gender norms prevalent in society. Speaking from personal experience, my sexual education classes emphasized the aggressiveness in males and the submissiveness in women, solidifying gender norms that are harmful in any relationship, let alone in the bedroom.

There is a common theme within the frequency of orgasms, and that is: When folks aren't prioritizing the male orgasm or male pleasure, they are more likely to orgasm. In our culture, and most sexual education classes, penetrative sex is only mentioned. As a society, we put too much value on penetrative sex which in most instances does not please women. It has been studied that around 10% of women are able to orgasm from penetration alone (Dr. Laurie Mintz). Like mentioned before, women are still having as many orgasms as men when they are pleasuring themselves. This is mostly because women need clitoral stimulation to reach an orgasm, the thing often referred to as "foreplay". Female stimulation has always been regarded as foreplay and is rarely brought into the bedroom. However, while it is now socially acceptable for women to engage in casual sex, their pleasure is not at the forefront. There is a new double standard that accepts sexually active women but does not accept their pleasure and the power it gives them. Women's pleasure has always been viewed as an option in sexual encounters instead of a need, whereas for men their pleasure is as regular as clockwork.

The Erotic as Power

This gendered gap is yet another reason that women must reclaim their sexual power. Our society has been caught up in the oversexualization of women for decades but has failed to recognize essentially how it impacts women. This capitalist society thrives off sex and the male gaze but will not recognize the strength behind women's sexuality, simply because they know the power it will give them. In *the Erotic as Power*, Audre Lorde explains that the erotic is "a resource within each of us that lies in a deeply feminine and sexual plane, firmly rooted in the

power of our unexpressed or unrecognized feeling.” (Lorde 53) Society has suppressed the erotic because they see the strength women will have when they embrace their sexuality and use this power to their advantage. Once women regain their sense of self within their pleasure, they will be able to accept newfound experiences and a different type of self-love and expression.

Eroticism can bring a power of change in our world once women reclaim it; we can channel the erotic through self-love, life or career passions, activism, spirituality, and love for others. There are many toxic beliefs in our society that keep us from embracing our emotions, pleasures, and mental struggles which prohibit us from truly loving ourselves. In her writing, Audre Lorde emphasizes the true necessity for bringing eroticism into our daily lives and passions. Lorde writes that in contrast, “When we look the other way from our experience, erotic or otherwise, we use rather than share the feelings of those others who participate in the experience with us.” (Lorde 59) How are we able to help others when we cannot help ourselves? Once we use the erotic as a power, we can understand different stories and experiences to create a collective change for everyone. After we embrace the erotic, women’s pleasure will be prevalent for all.

Conclusion

Cis, heterosexual females are having least frequent orgasms due to mental health issues, societal barriers, failure of proper sexual education, and plain ignorance of pleasure. The more that society denies women’s sexual pleasure and puts their needs above men, the less power we have. The oversexualization of women for men’s pleasure has gone on for too long. It is time for all women to reclaim their sexuality and realize the power it gives us. Women’s pleasures are not an option, they’re essential to positive mental and physical health. Men have never been denied

their desires and have historically conquered and pillaged communities for them. We must stop viewing sex through the patriarchy's lens so that women can control their own narrative, lives, and pleasure. Our class study of love and feminism has allowed me to understand the bond of eroticism and the power it gives to ourselves. If we use the erotic in our lives and regain our sense of self through it, we will be able to accomplish so much and learn valued experiences from ourselves and others.

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