



Carnal Knowledge *By Faye Flam*

From Freud to Lloyd, all the talk about female orgasm

Lest we get too caught up in this year's 100th anniversary of Einstein's special relativity theory, it should be noted that 2005 also marks the centennial of Sigmund Freud's theory of vaginal orgasm.

Freud's idea didn't cause a revolution in our understanding of the cosmos, but it did set off a debate that rages to this day. Now, a new genetics study and a book on the evolu-

tion of female orgasm may help bring a new understanding of this complicated reflex.

Freud proposed that female pleasure and orgasm should center on the reproductive tract. He was aware that many women experienced orgasm through a small but ultrasensitive organ known as the clitoris but dealt with this by declaring such orgasms "infantile." Any

woman who didn't transfer her center of sensitivity to the vagina he labeled as frigid.

It was the idea that launched a thousand fake orgasms.

Sex research has shown that about 95 percent of men nearly always have orgasm from intercourse while only about 25 percent to 30 percent of women do. Another 30-some-odd percent of women never

have orgasm from intercourse, and a middle 30 percent to 40 percent report having them sometimes.

In "The Case of the Female Orgasm — Bias in the Science of Evolution," philosopher of science Elizabeth Lloyd argues that this dizzying variety occurs because the female orgasm didn't evolve for a specific function. Instead, she said, it proba-

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bly rode along as a byproduct of male orgasm, the way male nipples appeared as a byproduct of female ones.

The byproduct idea was first proposed in 1979 by biologist Donald Symons. Harvard's Stephen Jay Gould extolled the idea but many other scientists dismissed it. A more popular theory holds that female orgasm evolved to increase fertility, the resulting muscle contractions helping suction sperm upward.

But Lloyd points out that contractions can occur without orgasm and, unfair as it may seem, a woman can get in trouble just as easily from disappointing sex as from the fireworks kind. Nor does orgasm seem to play the pivotal role in motivating women to have sex. Many factors beyond the wish for an orgasm can fuel desire.

Lloyd notes that female orgasm can happen in animals,

where it also appears dissociated from reproduction. In a primate called the stump-tail macaque, scientists found only a few females displayed signs of orgasm when they mated with males, but many more females could readily bring it on by rubbing the requisite parts against the backs of other females.

By mid-century, Alfred Kinsey's systematic studies redirected the center of female orgasm and sensitivity away from the vagina and back to the clitoris, which he found needs a certain amount of sustained attention. For some women that happened through intercourse alone and for others it did not.

Vaginal orgasm made a comeback with the discovery of the G-spot, which is located in the interior region and originates from the same bit of tissue that develops into a prostate gland in men. Scientists are still figuring out how common such orgasms are and whether they dif-

fer from the clitoral variety. But the latest research suggests not all women have enough of a G-spot to notice its existence, said Lloyd.

In early June of this year, a new study from St. Thomas Hospital in London echoed the wide variation among women in their orgasmic tendencies and traced that not to neurosis, as Freud proposed, but to genetics.

In other words, wherever you get your orgasms, there's no right or wrong way to be a woman any more than there's a right or wrong hair or eye color. It would be nice if all women landed on this planet with the same set of equipment, however complicated, but apparently we all get a little different configuration and wiring and there's no instruction manual for this stuff.

After all his theorizing, Freud eventually called female sexuality "the dark continent," implying he didn't understand us after all. Did Mrs. Freud finally admit to faking it?

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