

Unequal Pleasures

As Celeste's first year of college was coming to a close, her enthusiasm for hooking up was waning. She had hooked up with twelve men, proceeding to intercourse with five of them, and not a single one had given her an orgasm. "A girl's got needs, too," she complained, writing that she had started to feel like little more than a "piece of ass" used to satisfy the male hookup fantasy. She'd learned to expect nothing from men. "The guy kind of expects to get off," she wrote, "while the girl doesn't expect anything." Her resentment built and, after one especially upsetting night, she wrote, angrily, "I am not a masturbation toy."

To be fair, Celeste was having particularly bad luck, but she isn't wrong to think that women are getting shorted in hookup culture. Women in college, like American women more generally, have fewer orgasms than their male counterparts. The numbers vary but, in general, women have one or two orgasms for every three that men enjoy. The data on college students reflect this pattern. The Online College Social Life Survey results show that

in hookups men are more than twice as likely as women to have an orgasm.

Myths about men's and women's bodies suggest that this gap is a biological inevitability. Men's orgasms are easy to elicit, we are told. If anything, they arrive too effortlessly. The female orgasm, in contrast, is portrayed as finicky. If women don't have orgasms, the narrative suggests, it's because the clitoris is hard to find and difficult to operate. Even when conditions are ideal, an orgasm often fails to show. It's a mystery, we shrug. We tell ourselves that women are physiologically different—not as sexual as men—and so we presume that release is less important to them anyway.

Today's college students generally buy into these ideas. When sociologist Jess Butler asked students at the University of Southern California what accounted for gender differences in rates of orgasm, "by far," she said, "the most common explanation . . . was 'it's biological!'" Her students believed that orgasm was "harder" for women and "takes longer," but "just happens" for men. Given this sense of the nature of things, she said, her students were "unfazed" by statistics demonstrating that men were getting off more often than women.

The idea that the orgasm gap is natural, though, is wrong. Some countries, such as the United States and Russia, have up to twice as large a gap as others, such as Brazil and Japan. Among Americans, lesbian women report two to three times as many orgasms as heterosexual ones—as many, in fact, as heterosexual men. In masturbation, orgasms come easily and quickly to both sexes; on average, each requires just four efficient minutes to reach climax. Even women who never have orgasms with male partners often do regularly when they're alone.

The orgasm gap is not a biological fact; it's a social one, which reflects what people choose to do in bed together. Among college

students, for example, the likelihood of a woman having an orgasm in a hookup with a man varies from 15 to 63 percent, depending on whether he performs oral sex, they engage in intercourse, she self-stimulates, or they do some combination of those things. In relationships, if couples engage in all three activities, women's likelihood of having an orgasm is 92 percent. Not so finicky, it turns out.

If hookup culture has an orgasm gap—and it does—then the question isn't what might be wrong with women's bodies, but the extent to which the female orgasm is made a priority. What we should be asking is whether men and women care enough about female orgasm to give it the ol' college try.



One day in her journal, Ashlynn recalled a sidesplitting morning recap with her friend, Izzy. The night before Izzy had performed fellatio during a hookup and was pleasantly surprised when her partner moved to return the favor. But he "licked her," Ashlynn reported, just "once." She looked at Izzy. "A single lick?" she asked incredulously. "We laughed until our stomachs were sore." They found it hilarious, but obnoxious, too. "His short attention span indicates something more than laziness," Ashlynn insisted, trying to imagine what it would look like for a girl to go down on a guy and lick his penis just once. It was inconceivable. "The fellatio-cunnilingus double standard really irks me," she wrote.

It wasn't always this way. For most of European American history, oral sex of any kind was considered perverse and was forbidden alongside homosexual sex and masturbation. American marriage experts only started recommending it in the early 1900s. It was a response to the emergence of the home as a respite from capital-

ism and a place for care, a shift that newly required that spouses be lovers as well as life partners. Marriage, in other words, was eroticized. Husbands had a new responsibility for a novel idea: making sex pleasant for their wives.

Since women had been recast as "pure," this was believed to be a somewhat arduous task. The early sex educator Margaret Sanger, for example, likened women to stone. In her 1926 relationship advice manual, *Happiness in Marriage*, she explained that a husband's job "is to bring to life the real woman of flesh and blood concealed in the statue he adores." Elaborating, she wrote:

His first duty is the preparation of the hidden, deepest nature of his beloved to receive his love. In opening the portals of her being, or better still in persuading the woman to open these secret portals and to receive him, the young husband deepens and intensifies tenfold the love nature of his partner.

To do so, she said, he should use "all the resources he has at his command."

Cunnilingus was the trick.

The endorsement of oral sex for women would ease the way for fellatio, as experts noticed what wives had known all along: that women's bodies weren't the only ones that could sometimes use a little help. A flagging erection got the prescription of a "genital kiss," though in either case marriage experts were clear that oral sex was only to be used to facilitate coitus, not as its substitute. With that, fellatio and cunnilingus became a team, fighting the good fight for happy marriages everywhere. And then, things changed.

Now oral sex is common among sexually active people but, as Ashlynn rightly observed, there's a double standard. Teens of both sexes agree that cunnilingus is "a bigger deal" than fellatio. Reflect-

ing this, the majority of sexually active 16- to 18-year-old girls have performed oral sex on boys, seeing it as routine, but boys do not do the same for girls. Only 6 percent say they're in favor of the practice, though some, sounding a bit like Victorian husbands, say they will do it to gain access to intercourse. As a result, among young people, fellatio occurs much more frequently than cunnilingus.

It's true in hookups, too. When guy-girl hookups proceed to oral sex, the most common scenario is for men and women to give it to each other, but if the oral sex only goes one way, it goes the guy's way more than two-thirds of the time. In that two-thirds, when oral sex occurs, the women aren't getting a lick of it.

And if Izzy's story is any indication, this data overstates the balance between fellatio and cunnilingus because asking whether oral sex occurred doesn't tell us how much time and effort was put into each activity or whether it persisted to orgasm. We do know that when students receive oral sex in a hookup, men are almost twice as likely as women to have an orgasm. The orgasm gap, in other words, is no smaller even when oral sex is involved. Likely, these numbers reflect women's greater commitment to getting men off, but also the fact that men use oral sex like Victorian husbands did once and teenage boys do now, as a precursor to another sexual activity that favors male orgasm: intercourse.



"The Vaginas Are Coming," said the signs popping up around campus. They signaled the impending annual performance of the now-classic college theater event, *The Vagina Monologues*, and students involved with the production were piling on the publicity, getting creative with ways to draw attention and make their peers

squirm. On the walls of the campus game room and snack bar, they had hung posters of female student volunteers holding a whiteboard that read, "Let my vagina _____." Consistent with the theme of letting individual vaginas do the talking, students filled out the end however they wished and posed to be photographed.

As Ashlynn slid into a wooden booth with her biology textbook, an uncomfortable snicker came from the display. Curious after Izzy's "single lick" story, she opened her book but kept an eye on the people walking by. In her own experience, people seemed to think that the vulva was "at least a little bit gross" and, while sex was a near-constant topic of conversation, whenever anyone brought up cunnilingus, it got brushed off or laughed off. Talking about it crossed "some invisible line," Ashlynn guessed, between sexy and not-so-sexy sexual topics.

As she suspected, people walking past the display would sometimes "laugh and grimace." A guy guffawed at one that read, "Let my vagina froth." He twisted his face into a grimace, pointed at it, and said, "That's disgusting." This elicited laughter from the girl at his side. A bit later, Ashlynn wrote, "I saw a male friend pass one that read, 'Let my vagina flow.' He said, 'Ew, that's pretty gross,'" to his companion. When a guy and a girl eyed one that read, "Let my vagina pulsate," they began to laugh hard. "'Gross,' he said. The girl shook her head."

Four of Ashlynn's friends joined her at the table just as a group of *Vagina Monologues* promoters wandered in to hand out cookies frosted to look like vulvas. When the cookies came around, Ashlynn wrote, "all four people I was sitting with immediately averted their eyes. No one touched them." She got the distinct sense that her friends thought the cookies were obscene. Had they been in the shape of penises, she thought, her friends would have happily

eaten them, even mimicking blow jobs for a chuckle. There was something lighthearted about the penis, she'd noticed, but not the vulva, not at all.

In fact, many of my female students, and especially the heterosexual ones, had internalized a "general disgust" toward their genitals. Comments like the ones observed by Ashlynn exacerbated their insecurity. Women overheard men saying that "vaginas were dirty" and that women who "squirt" are "disgusting." One woman's friend announced that he would never go down on a girl "unless she was completely shaven and I saw her clean her vagina out." Another girl sat at dinner with a guy who complained that their Vietnamese spring roll appetizer tasted like "cooter." All of this was pretty hard for women to disregard, even if most men didn't feel the same.

For some lucky women, fantastic experiences with men who enjoyed performing oral sex turned the tide—"it really impresses most girls," boasted one cunnilingus-loving guy—but most women remained ambivalent, at best, about whether it was a good idea to let a guy go down on them. Even women who believed that the negative characterization of female genitals was unfair had a hard time shaking off their worries. "I tend to be more self-conscious about the way I taste or smell," wrote one, "even though I know I'm very clean and it's really his problem if he doesn't like it."

Lizzy felt the same: "I think the act that has been the most touchy for me is cunnilingus, because it's considered to be so intimate and possibly unpleasant for the person doing it." She discussed overhearing people saying, "Oh, it's smelly down there, it tastes bad, it takes forever." The single lick incident didn't help. Likewise, sexually audacious Celeste, despite being experienced and adventurous, wasn't immune to these comments. Only one of the twelve guys she had hooked up with had performed oral sex, and this was maddening—but it was a relief, too. Using the term most

common among my students, she admitted that "many girls are a little uncomfortable and insecure about being eaten out, including myself. We women are afraid of being judged and talked about as being smelly or whatever."

Interested in women's discomfort with cunnilingus, sociologist Laura Backstrom and her colleagues interviewed women at Stanford and Indiana University about their thoughts on receiving oral sex. Just over a quarter of the women had strongly negative views of the practice, using words like "weird," "bizarre," "dirty," and "nasty" to describe it. The rest had positive feelings about cunnilingus, but only a few felt comfortable asking for it from men, especially in hookups. Some expressed the familiar idea that cunnilingus is somehow a "bigger deal" than fellatio. "It feels like a guy going down on you is a bigger step than you going down on a guy," said one, "which is probably unfair." "I think I felt kind of guilty almost," said another woman of the men she hooked up with, "like I felt like I was kind of subjecting people to something they didn't want to do and I felt bad about it." Women seem convinced that men don't like it.



Of all of the parts of the female body, though, the one that men who like women seem keenest to access is the vagina. It is the veritable Holy Grail of heterosexual male sexuality. It's "all the way." In the 1600s they called it the "chapel of ease." In the 1700s, it was "love's altar" and "the shrine of Venus." In the 1800s they described it as a "carnal mantrap," and not in a bad way. One hundred years later it was a "knick knack" and a "ring-dang-do." Today it's "home base," "happy valley," and "the promised land." And we've been calling it a "honeypot" for nearly five hundred years.

Men—at least men who are attracted to women—put extraordinary amounts of effort into getting into the vagina. Men's desire for the vagina is half of why we exist as a species. And, in real life, there are *lots* of men who love cunnilingus. This is something that my female students, and the ones at Stanford and Indiana, are wrong about. In fact, according to the National Health and Social Life Survey, one of the largest, most comprehensive, and well-designed studies of American sexuality ever completed, men like performing cunnilingus even more than women like receiving it.

So, what is this cultural disgust at women's bodies *really* about? It's quite obviously not about whether cunnilingus is gross. It's certainly not any grosser than fellatio. I can still recall the moment that a male friend of mine first encountered the idea of receiving such a "genital kiss." We were first-year college students, he from a very conservative Mormon background, and his immediate reaction was disgust. "But you *pee* through that thing!" he said incredulously.

It's true. Men pee through that thing. And there are other reasons why someone might find fellatio unappetizing: the smell of a man's genitals after being confined in a pair of pants all day, the difficulty of getting a penis in one's mouth, pubic hairs caught in teeth, the effort to create suction that strains the muscles underneath the jaw, difficulty catching one's breath, and the taste of pre-cum and semen. In fact, when Jess Butler asked female students at the University of Southern California whether they liked fellatio, none of the more than two dozen she talked to claimed to enjoy it. As one said, "I'd rather not have to do it ever again in my life, but I feel like I have to." "It's gross," said another. "Nobody likes it," insisted a third in response. A person can truly and emphatically enjoy giving a blow job, but one has to be in the right frame of mind. Ditto for cunnilingus.

Yet, while the potential downsides of cunnilingus are front and

center in the minds of heterosexual students of both sexes, the similar downsides of fellatio are almost never discussed and are generally considered irrelevant. "No one," a student observed, "ever talks about what a penis is supposed to smell like or what 'cum' is supposed to taste like." Noting that "scented tampons and 'feminine sprays' line the aisles of drugstores," one pointed out, rightly, "Guys don't have to make sure their junk smells like jasmine." The potentially unpleasant things about fellatio are never used to suggest that women would be justified in refusing to do it. And men never seem to mention the possibility that fellatio might be "gross" as a reason to *fear* blow jobs.

If it was just about being gross, our attitudes toward cunnilingus and fellatio would still be symmetrical. They're not. So, the idea that vaginas are gross is not really about women's bodies at all. It's about what we *do* with their bodies. That is, do we use them for getting men off or getting women off? For his orgasm or for hers? Heterosexual students seem to take to the former just fine, but the latter—the privileging of female pleasure through cunnilingus—makes some uncomfortable. That's why they laugh. They're nervous.

Men have more orgasms than women in hookup culture, then, because the culture doesn't promote reciprocity. It's specifically designed for men's orgasm. Female orgasm is acceptable, even ideal, but it's not what it's about. A bisexual man I spoke to at a campus visit put this in stark perspective, observing sheepishly that he prioritized his partner's orgasm when he hooked up with men and his own when he hooked up with women. A guy at Stanford put it equally plainly: "I don't think any hookup is based on mutual orgasm, it's really just based on an orgasm for me."

This will not be a surprise to college women anywhere. "Hookup culture" really means "three years of bad sex," concluded

a student at Duke who'd had just about enough. He "didn't even care," said a woman at Brown about her most recent hookup. "I don't think he tried at all." "I think very few guys really care," a student enrolled at the University of Southern California reported. Women are "literally just there to let the guy get off."

My female students sang the same tune. They talked about desire, but it was rare for them to mention orgasm, or even physical pleasure more generally, as an outcome of hooking up. They often echoed Celeste when she complained about being a "masturbation toy." "I was just a warm body being used to give a guy an orgasm," wrote one. Men "treat me like two hands and three holes," grumbled another. "Ultimately," wrote a third, "it's about allowing the male to use your body." "The idea of being 'used' for sex like a masturbatory device," observed a guy about his female friends, "is a common complaint."

A complaint perhaps, but women, too, tend to prioritize male orgasm. "Most of the time we don't ask for anything in bed," Celeste admitted, "or at least I don't." Her priority was to impress her partners. "I want to kind of blow him out of the water," she explained. "If they attempt to do the same for me, that's great, though most of the time that does not happen." Other women agreed that they focused on giving orgasms instead of seeking them. "I don't feel like I've had a sexual experience if the guy doesn't come," wrote one. Male orgasm was paramount: "I will do everything in my power," insisted another, "to get [him] off." Another said that she would "focus completely" on her partner's orgasm. Their own pleasure was beside the point. "My sexuality was filled with anxiety and my need to please the guy instead of worrying about my own pleasure," wrote one student. "Even if I was in charge," another revealed, "I did not make sure I was being pleased."

Some women feel that expecting an orgasm from a male

hookup partner is demanding or rude. The women at the University of Southern California did as well. They told Butler that women "cater to guys," "want men to be happy," and "wanna make the guy feel good about himself." Said one interviewee, "We want them to be happy with the hookup, with the orgasm or whatever, and with us. And our ability to create that for them."

If women deprioritize their own orgasm, it might be because they suspect that it's pointless to do otherwise. Some men, like the Stanford guy above, willingly admit that they're not interested in giving women pleasure. "I don't think [her orgasm] matters as much to the guy," said another. "Say they meet a girl at a party and it's a one-night thing," explained a third about guys in general, "I don't think it's gonna matter to them." When asked about the importance of female orgasm, another male student retorted, "I don't give a shit."

Importantly, men aren't *uniformly* uninterested in female orgasm; they are *specifically* disinterested in the orgasms of women they're hooking up with. The guy who didn't "give a shit" about women's orgasms, for instance, followed up to clarify that he was "all about" orgasm if the woman was his girlfriend. Differentiating between sex with girlfriends and hookups, it turns out, is common: "I think if you're in a long-term relationship," said another guy, "it's essential that she has an orgasm during sexual activity. Short-term relationships, he specified, were entirely different.

Men generally agreed that a woman's orgasm is "more important if it's in a relationship than if it's a one-night stand" or if "it's somebody I care about." Another man explained the expectation that he gives his girlfriends orgasms like this:

Now that I'm in a relationship, I think [her orgasms are] actually pretty important. More important than I think the hookup

because you have more invested in that person... it's more a reciprocal thing.

Invoking the ideas of care and reciprocity to differentiate hookup sex from relationship sex is consistent with Mimi Schippers' idea that students think that relationships are a site for interpersonal kindness, but hookups are not. Many men think of relationships as a meeting of equals in which they're accountable for treating the other person with respect. Another guy made it explicit: "In a relationship," he said, "there's much more expected as far as like equality-wise, like give and take sexually."

The data on orgasm reveals this dynamic clearly. Women in relationships are having almost seven times as many orgasms as women hooking up for the first time, and the orgasm gap between men and women shrinks by half. Many men want to give orgasms to their girlfriends—whom they care about, want to please, and believe should be treated as equals—but feel little need to do their hookup partners the same courtesy.

Men, then, aren't uniformly dismissive of women's pleasure, just that of the women they're hooking up with. That's because men in committed relationships aren't playing by the rules of hookup culture. The guys who are hooking up, though, often are. And while the rules of heterosexual relationships are at least a little influenced by what women want, the rules that men play by when they're just looking to hook up are made and enforced, first and foremost, by other men. In this game, women's pleasure isn't a bonus at all; it's a bargaining chip.



Corey and his friends were at a late breakfast on Saturday when his friend Simon sheepishly admitted that he'd hooked up with Tegan

the night before. Tegan was a bit frumpy, not a "10," and so he waited for the ridicule that he knew would come. And, sure enough, Corey admitted, "All of my friends, including myself, immediately judged him for hooking up with a girl that we all thought was unattractive." Simon took the ribbing and backpedaled. He agreed that she wasn't good-looking (although we don't really know if he thought so) and tried to change the subject.

That night they all went out again and they lost Simon in the blur of drink and noise and people. At about 1 a.m., Corey and his friends decided they'd struck out and went back to one of their rooms to post-party. Simon barged in about an hour later with "a big smile on his face." Ready to redeem himself from the night before, he announced that he'd just had sex with Tyree, a girl he was confident everyone agreed was hot. "His enthusiasm was a lot different than from the morning," Corey commented, "as he knew that he was going to get a better reaction. And a good response he got." High fives all around.

But when Simon went back to his room to crash, the guys started gossiping about whether Tyree got around and agreed she did. Given her reputation, said one of Corey's friends, "it's not worth hooking up with her." This started a debate about Simon, whether he "had game" (could talk women into sex), and if the women he had hooked up with "counted."

Simon was buffeted by two contrasting imperatives: have sex with hot, elusive women but, whatever you do, have sex. Sometimes guys get lucky with a girl who is both beautiful and selective about whom she hooks up with, but often they have to choose between hooking up with an available woman or no woman at all. Those who hook up with women who are considered ugly or easy may attract reprimands because it means that they can't successfully play a higher-status woman. "They'll tease you like that," said one male

student. "Talk about her, say she's a dog." Another explained why he tried to avoid sexual contact with women his guy friends disparaged: "I'd never hear the end of it," he said.

Matthew Desmond, the Harvard professor and MacArthur "Genius" grant recipient, calls it "shit talk." Desmond studied forest firefighters, tough men with a dangerous job who spend a lot of time in all-male, or nearly all-male, groups. "There's a large amount of shit talking that goes on out here," said one of the firefighters. "There's a large amount of teasing each other and picking on each other and poking fun at each other, and it goes back and forth all the time." Crewmembers threw barbs and tossed insults as a matter of routine. They were "loud, quick, crude, and abrasive." Shit talk had winners and losers. "To be successful," Desmond wrote, "a player must be clever and mean; his comments must prick." When insulted, he has to return an insult that is at least as sharp and he must do so "swifly and eloquently." Most important, he must never ever lose his cool.

The denigration of women, Desmond observed, was primary fodder for shit talk. Insulting men's masculinity with feminizing slurs and making crude claims about what they did to each other's moms or girlfriends was par for the course. Its other primary fodder was the skills involved in being a good firefighter. God forbid one wielded a chainsaw poorly, didn't know what a cotter pin was, or had to take a break while digging line. Ignorance, incompetence, mistakes, or lapses could attract a volley of insults.

It was fun, said one of the firefighters: "It's a fun thing to do. To upset people out here is *hilarious*. . . . When you know you're getting under somebody's skin, it's like, yes, I'm there. I love to do it, it's awesome." They claimed that it was just good joshing and generally the guys did like it. Counterintuitively, perhaps, it was a way for them to show each other that they were close. As one of

Desmond's firefighters argued, you can't shit talk just anybody. You can only be humorously horrible to people you really love. "Like family," he said, "you can make fun of each other and they're not gonna get mad at you."

This phenomenon is not unique to firefighters, nor even to all-male groups. When two people are getting to know each other, there is often a first tease. An opportunity to crack a joke arises, and a person may wonder, "If I poke him in a place we both know is sensitive, will he trust that I am doing it in a friendly way?" If she decides to try it out and gets a laugh in response, the friendship has just leveled up. Teasing brings people closer because it's a way of saying, "I know you well enough to know where your buttons are and how hard I can push them without actually hurting you. And you know me well enough to know that I mean no harm."

Shit talk is teasing, but on steroids. "Shit talk," Desmond explains, "through a strange admixture of fraternity and antagonism, conveys both affection and belonging. It is a secret handshake, a hug and a wink, and it functions as a means of passage into the ranks of the firecrew." But, since shit talk has winners and losers, it also serves to arrange the firefighters into a hierarchy. They're brothers, but some are tougher and quicker and meaner than others, and those guys are on top.

So, when Corey and his friends gave Simon shit for hooking up with Tegan, it was a way of bonding and stratifying their band of brothers. Just like the firefighters, they used shit talk to mark Simon as part of the group, but also to grapple for position within it. This talk was often misogynistic, as it was among the firecrew, and, while masculinity was at stake for both groups, for men on campus the object of their skill set wasn't fire, but the very bodies of their female peers.

Some of Desmond's firefighters were more comfortable with

shit talk than others, and the same is true among college men. Simon seemed interested in playing the game, but wasn't quick or mean enough to do it well. If he had been a better shit talker, he would have brought up a woman that one of his guy friends had slept with that everyone agreed was uglier than Tegan or easier than Tyree. That would have turned the negative attention away from him and to someone else who could be brought down a peg. But Simon wasn't a good shit talker, at least not yet.

As for Corey, it made him nervous. He called it a "hostile environment," noting that if his friends were willing to make fun of Simon to his face and talk shit behind his back, there was no reason they wouldn't do that to him as well. "You have no idea what is going to be said about you," he wrote. It was an uneasiness that he had talked about with his closest friend. "I don't want our reputations to be hurt or judged" after a hookup with the "wrong girl," he protested.

If men are going to play this game, they need a strategy, a way to manage the contradictory imperatives to hook up only with women that count, but always hook up. The answer is to make a preemptive strike. I learned this from Brian Sweeney, a sociologist who interviewed a group of white middle- and upper-class fraternity men. These are the men who, on average, are the most enthusiastic about hooking up and most likely to endorse the sexual double standard. They are representative of the type of guy who adheres to a competitive "player masculinity" in which "men play and women get played."

There are men like this on any campus. "I mean, why do you think it's called 'scoring'?" asked a Dartmouth student rhetorically. "It's like you're scoring with the women, yeah, but you're like scoring *on* the other guys." It's "more about the social cachet it buys," said a New York University alum about hooking up. "It's a way

to prove our masculinity." Men are impressed when their buddies hook up, said a student at Stanford, because "if a guy hooks up with a girl, he sort of broke down her wall of protection."

As Simon's story suggests, though, the game isn't just about getting girls, it's about getting the *right* girls. A real player can "score" with a "good" girl that other men agree "counts" as "worth" getting. The most respected fraternity brother, said one of Sweeney's interviewees, "gets the girls all the guys are after. He's the man." But guys hook up with the bad girls, too. "No man, that's nasty," said Kevin when asked if he would hook up with women who seem to hook up a lot. But then he reconsidered: "Well, all right. Yeah. I'll give you that. Guys'll be interested. They're always interested."

The preemptive strike when hooking up with a "bad girl" is to treat her badly. The frat guys told Sweeney that when they had sex with lower-status women they would be crude: "rough, lewd and overly self-gratifying." Kevin, the one who conceded that guys will pursue women even if they're low-status, said that in those cases men try to make sure that they "get something . . . without giving in return." These women got "fucked" and "balled." "Ugly girls can get hosed," said another of Sweeney's fraternity men, "guys don't really like 'em, so they get hosed." Being single-minded about sex, sexually rough, and unconcerned with her pleasure are all ways of indicating that a woman is not valued.

In trying to save face and earn points with their buddies, some college men might push a woman to go farther than she wants to go, get sexual favors but not give them in return, and act aggressively or contemptuously in bed—and talk loudly about it the next day. These are ways that they protect their place in the hierarchy of men. Men's disrespect of women is the bargaining chip. It's a way of saying, "Yeah, I hooked up with someone you don't respect, but I don't respect her either. I gave her what she had

coming on behalf of both of us.” To put it crudely, if the best a guy can do at the end of the night is fuck a “house rat,” he’s gonna fuck a house rat, but he’ll make sure his guy friends know that he knows she’s shit.

This is what was behind the chant that stunned the Internet in 2010, and what made it especially chilling. It came from a group of Delta Kappa Epsilon members at Yale who flung “No means yes! Yes means anal!” loudly toward a dormitory filled with women. The first half of the chant is just your typical pro-rape sentiment, the idea that women don’t have the right to say no. But the second half of the chant is about what happens if she says yes. “If women say ‘yes,’” writes the masculinities scholar Michael Kimmel about the chant, “where’s the conquest, where’s the chase, where’s the pleasure? And where’s the feeling that your victory is her defeat?” “Yes means anal” is a counter-move that puts the sexual encounter back into the realm of a zero-sum game. “Back to something,” Kimmel explains, “that is assumed could not possibly be pleasurable for her.” “Yes means anal” is a preemptive strike.

We don’t know how Simon treated Tegan; he did talk shit about her after the fact, agreeing that she was ugly before changing the subject. If he didn’t treat her badly during the act, he could at least save some face by sharing in his guy friends’ derision for her later. As he gets better at this game, if he accepts the challenge, he’ll likely get better at dehumanizing women he hooks up with and do so with more enthusiasm. Simon might learn to do more than talk shit; he might learn to *treat* some women like shit, and he’ll feel justified in doing so if he decides the woman he’s with is worthless. He’ll also learn to protect his own reputation relative to his friends’ by ridiculing *them* for the women they hook up with. As men try to protect their own status within the group by bringing their bud-

dies down, women—who are really just innocent bystanders in this game—get smeared right along with the men.



So, yeah, there’s an orgasm gap on college campuses. It favors heterosexual men, and there’s nothing natural about it. It reflects a privileging of male sexual pleasure, a focus on his orgasm on the part of men and women alike, and a narrative that justifies an aversion to giving women pleasure, one that many women internalize. That would be enough, but there are also men out there like the ones interviewed by Sweeney. Women who are unlucky enough to encounter those men may find that they actively take pleasure instead of giving it because using and exploiting the women they sleep with is the point.

It should be no surprise that more than half of the women who completed the Online College Social Life Survey felt disrespected by at least one guy they’d hooked up with. Some of this may just be anxiety about what men think of women who have casual sexual encounters—because they know that some men call women “nasty”—but much of it is also likely attributable to how they were treated. They notice when men are brusque or bullying. They notice when they are selfish, when they pay no attention, when they don’t ask. They notice when they get treated like shit. And they notice when they don’t have orgasms. We know that because, when they do have an orgasm, they’re six times as likely as women who didn’t to say that they enjoyed their last hookup “very much.”

“Good sex is so hard to come by,” complained a student named Veronica about women’s experience in hookup culture, “that we can be sure sexual satisfaction is not the primary motivation for

girls engaging in hooking up." She didn't understand why so many women, herself included, continued to actively seek out men to hook up with, writing:

I can think of several examples of my friends repeatedly hooking up with the same guys, unable to provide an explanation for why. Beautiful, interesting, seemingly self-respecting girls . . . It's not the sex and it's certainly not the emotional connection they're pursuing.

Veronica is right to notice that women actively pursue opportunities to hook up with men, and probably not primarily for pleasure or emotional satisfaction, but she'd likely be surprised to discover that the majority say they enjoy their experiences. Of the women who filled out the Online College Social Life Survey, for example, 84 percent reported that they enjoyed their last hookup at least "somewhat."

In fact, when I've asked women around the country what they are getting out of hookups, they string together a long list of pleasures: Alongside the occasional orgasm, women enjoy the simple pleasure of being turned on, the exhilaration of firsts, and the satisfaction that comes with honing sexual skills. They describe the uneasy thrill of exploring a sexual identity tentatively and the joy of embracing it wholeheartedly. And, since they never know if a hookup will turn into romance, some experienced the pleasure of hope and anticipation, too.

Veronica herself would recognize some of these. Elsewhere she described hooking up as an "adrenaline rush." "Being young and having this sexual appetite and being horny and knowing that you're getting closer to scratching that itch by being physical with boys," she wrote, was intoxicating. It was, she said, "a desperately

sexually frustrating time," but it felt good, too. There is pleasure to be had for women even in the face of hookup culture's deficiencies, to be sure.

Yet, in my discussions with students and in the pages of their journals, one type of pleasure stood out as especially common and strongly motivating for women. It was a real pleasure, but a troubled one—maybe, even, a dangerous one—and one that harmed not only women's relationships with men, but their relationships with each other. It was the pleasure of being chosen.