Pleasure

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7th October 2021

Let's not forget sexual pleasure.

Throughout human history, sexual danger has regulated social lives and subjectivities. From the "yellow press" of the late nineteenth century with their lurid stories of rape, to the "all men are rapists" mantra of Andrea Dworkin, Susan Brownmiller, and Robin Morgan in the 1980s, finally, to today, when the sexual abuse of girls, boys, and women is provoking widespread despair, the pain associated with sex is palpable. This series of lectures will be reflecting on many forms of sexual vulnerability but, to begin, I want to explore pleasure. I am reminded of Carole Vance's famous statement at the 1982 Barnard Conference on Sexuality in New York when she contended that "Feminism must insist that women are sexual subjects", which requires a commitment to "increase[ing] women's pleasure and joy, not just decreas[ing] our misery".

What does this commitment to pleasure mean for the historian? It calls for a close analysis of the variable ways that the various "pleasures of the flesh" have been contested, given meaning, and revised. The talk has four sections. First, what do we mean by "sexual pleasure"? Second, what do changes in sex advice reveal about the way sexual mores and practices have shifted between the 1920s and the present? Third, how have recent changes in the medicalisation of sexual pleasure altered understandings of the sexed bodies? Finally, why should sexual pleasure matter?

First, what is "sexual pleasure"? It has no stable meaning: the norms, values, and practices attached to "sexual pleasure" have changed over time. Let me start with two broad perspectives or approaches to sexual pleasure: *pre*-social and *supra*-social models.

The pre-social approach believes that sexual pleasure arises in an uncomplicated fashion from the physiological body, typically gendered male. As Susan Lawrence and Kae Bendixen observed in their analysis of anatomy texts between 1890 and 1989, the "illustrations, vocabulary, and syntax" in these texts "primarily depict male anatomy as the norm or standard against which female structures are compared". It was a case of "male, then female; male as norm, female as different". The anatomical model doesn't deny that interpersonal, social, and environmental contexts *influence* the ways people experience pleasure. But they focus on the way instinctual urges ("animalistic") or biological imperatives (reproductive and evolutionary urges) underpin sexual acts. A typical example is the 1960s notion of a "human sexual response cycle", conceived by William Masters and Virginia Johnson in their classic 1966 text entitled *Human Sexual Response*. For them, sexual pleasure moves from arousal, to plateau, orgasm, then resolution. This occurs universally because it is deeply wired in human physiology.

The second commonplace but equally unhelpful model of sexual pleasure is the *supra*-social, which disparages the reductive physiological approach, insisting that there is something transcendental about sexual ecstasy. This model is similarly historically diverse. It believes that sexual pleasure is or leads to mystical transcendence (as in Bernini's statue of the medieval mystic, Teresa of Avila), or is an aspect of the romantic unity of "soulmates"; and, more recently, that it leads to revelations of the ultimate "truth" about the self and other.

A more productive way of thinking about sexual pleasure starts from the premise that sensual delights do not reside exclusively in bodies, nor do they transcend the political and social world. They are fluid, emerging from complex interactions between bodies and minds that occur within social relations and regimes of power. It takes seriously the insights of Michel Foucault about the nature of power as *constitutive* rather than

repressive. Power shapes and generates sexual pleasure rather than simply repressing it. Modern efforts to "repress" sexuality open the way for a *proliferation* of discourses about sex. Psychiatrists, psychologists, and sexologists generate new ways of producing sexual pleasure. These professions create the norms, taxonomies, and ideologies that constitute the desiring sexual subject. Sex manuals that compile medical professional views are particularly useful in revealing the norms and rules assigned to sexual practices (for example, the "missionary position", clitoral stimulation, or male homosexuality). Sexual pleasures are ascribed their dominant meaning and produce "(hetero-)normative" and "deviant" human subjects. What can we learn from changes in the advice given in sex manuals about the changes in sexual mores and practices between the 1920s and the present? What factors contribute to these changes?

This talk only explores Anglo-American cultures during the twentieth century. However, sex manuals have existed for centuries. The first was (pseudo) *Aristotle's Master-Piece, Or, The Secrets of Generation*, published in over 100 editions between 1684 and 1930. In the twentieth century, sex manuals did not rely on either divine instincts or biological impulses to guide married couples. Both men and women needed to be instructed in the "art" as well as "science" of achieving pleasure through intercourse. This could only be achieved by a combination of sexual knowledge, no-nonsense experimentation, and perseverance. Many of these manuals became best-sellers. It would be wrong to infer actual sexual practices from their advice, but they offer an indication of people's interests as well as circulating norms and ideals.

Who were these sex manuals addressed to and what instructions do they give to readers? Early twentieth century manuals were written primarily for husbands based on the assumption that men were responsible for the sexual pleasure not only of themselves (which, in this period, was largely taken for granted for "normal" men) but also their wives. The key goal was *mutual* genital satisfaction within marital heterosexual intercourse. To achieve this mutuality, husbands required physiological knowledge of female anatomy, accompanied by their deliberative labour and perseverance.

The degree of prescription could be daunting. For example, in Oliver M. Butterfield's *Sex Life in Marriage* (1937) male readers are solemnly informed that they need to insert their penises into vaginas at a precise "forty-five degree angle downwards". More typically, sex manuals provide broad generalisations. Best-selling authors such as Marie Stopes in her 1931 classic *Married Love* (which sold 750,000 copies in only six years) and Thomas Van De Velde in *Ideal Marriage* (which was the most widely read manual of the 1930s) implied that while men were sexually aroused by visual triggers, women required prolonged emotional "wooing". They emphasised the need for competent male technique, urging husbands to invest time and energy into "giving" their wives an orgasm. Female orgasm was necessary because its pleasure would ensure marital stability. Husbands were the "knowing" sexual partner who had to be "in charge" if they were going to succeed in "awakening" the sexual desires of their wives. This is the "sleeping beauty" notion of sexual pleasure. As Van De Velde put it, "the wife must be taught not only how to behave in coitus, but, above all, how and what to feel in this unique act!" In contrast to relatively passive wives, whom husbands needed to labour over, the sexual pleasure of men was assumed to be straightforward, based primarily on physiological impulses. Their main challenge was to maintain erection and control ejaculation sufficiently long enough to ensure their wives' enjoyment.

A lot was at stake. The 1920s and 1930s were marked by the turmoil of the 1914-18 war. Gender relations had been disrupted, creating tensions. Women had enjoyed the autonomy associated with enhanced employment opportunities, greater social freedoms, and the success of suffrage demands. Yet men believed that their "sacrifices" should be rewarded, and masculine privileges restored. Increased access to birth control (many of the sex manuals were written by advocates of contraception) had also enabled wives to feel more positive towards sex without anxieties about pregnancy. Poor male technique in the bedroom, it was feared, could place the entire institution of marriage at risk. The sexually "frustrated" wife was an "unsatisfactory" one. As J. F. Hayed warned in *The Art of Marriage* (1920), a sexually unsatisfied woman "becomes irritable, nervous, restless, sleeps poorly, worries over nothing, becomes ailing, and rapidly ages". This fate could be averted through the treatment or education of *husbands* on how to sexually satiate their wives. Achieving this goal would create a contented wife. Her

> *"complexion clears up, her eyes acquire a luster, her walk has a spring to it which it did not possess before, her appetite is fine, she is jolly and happy, life has a new interest which it did not possess before – in short, she is thoroughly permeated with the joy of living."*

As historian Jessamyn Neuhaus perceptively observes (in her article entitled "The Importance of Being Orgasmic"), by "advocating women's pleasure", the authors of sex manuals in the 1920s and 1930s "allowed a greater range of expression for women in marriage". However, by "linking that pleasure inextricably to male sexual skill, they bolstered the older gender norms shaping marriage and marital sex".

These ways of conceiving sexual pleasure were dramatically overturned from the 1940s. These later authors paid significantly more attention to *male* sexual pleasure and shifted blame for unsatisfying sexual relations firmly onto women. It was *her* responsibility to ensure that her husband was sexually fulfilled. The "sleeping beauty" who needed to be aroused by her husband's wooing and kisses was suddenly fully awake; any "passivity" on her part was labelled "frigidity".

Husbands were transformed into the sensitive gender who required delicate emotional management by their wives. Wives needed to reassure their husbands of their masculine virility and masterful presence in the bedroom. This new "servicing" role for women in the manuals was accompanied by an antipathy towards the female body and its secretions. The most vicious expression of this can be seen in John Gill's *How to Hold Your Husband: Frank Psychoanalysis for Happy Marriage* (1951) when he lamented that

> *"Even before the honeymoon is over, some women "let down" grievously in the matter of feminine hygiene. The sweet daintiness that her husband prizes so highly, suddenly evaporates. The genitals… are allowed to give off a revolting odour of which she herself is quite unaware."*

He contended that "Nothing so sickens a man as this unforgiveable despoiling of his ideas of femininity and daintiness".

The female sexed body also underwent a transformation. The clitoris – which had played such an orgasmic role in the earlier texts – was downgraded, even denigrated. Many authors embraced Freud's notion about vaginal orgasms. First espoused in 1905, Freud had maintained that young girls unconsciously recognised clitoral pleasure. As girls matured, however, their "immature" clitoral pleasures would ideally be displaced to their vaginas. In this way, girls separated themselves from their fathers in order to prepare themselves for heterosexual coupling with their husbands. As Freud put it in *Three Contributions to the Theory of Sex*, "If the transference of the erogenous excitability from the clitoris to the vagina has succeeded, the woman has thus changed her leading zone for the future sexual activity".

Psychoanalyst Helene Deutsch made extensive use of the theory of the vaginal orgasm in her highly influential, two-volume book *The Psychology of Women* (1943 and 1945). According to Deutsch, the vagina was passive and could only be awakened by the penis. This was the origin of the deep female fantasy to be overpowered. The husband's "aggressive penetration" of the vagina led to its "transformation into an erogenous zone". For Deutsch, this explained the innate masochism of women's sexuality.

Authors of sex manuals in this period, however, didn't need to be Freudians to dismiss the clitoris as the source of pleasure for adult women. *Sex Technique for Husband and Wife* (1949) categorically declared that "the clitoris, while important, is not nearly as important as many of us have been taught or led to believe". In *A Guide to a Good Marriage* (1955), Richard Steiner announced that

> *"There are, I believe, many good marriages in the course of which the wife seldom achieves an orgasm in the sexual relationship. But this is possible only when there is a cheerful acceptance of this fact on the part of husband and wife."*

Unlike in the 1920s and 1930s, husbands no longer needed to patiently caress and kiss the clitoris; both partners should simply chirpily resign themselves to the fact that her sexual pleasure would be diminutive. In the widely purchased manual *Love Without Fear: How to Achieve Sexual Happiness in Marriage* (1947), Eustace Chesser even explicitly advised women to fake orgasms.

The misleadingly dubbed "sexual revolution" of the 1960s saw a reversal of these views. The audience for the new manuals changed. It was no longer assumed that sexual pleasure was the exclusive privilege of married couples. Authors began writing about women, men, partners, and couples, rather than "husbands`" or "wives". The title of Helen Gurley Brown's book, *Sex and the Single Girl* (1962), made this explicit. Its premise was that unmarried women sought sexual pleasure for their own satisfaction rather than as part of a marital contract or as a duty towards wives (1920s-30s) or husbands (1940s-50s).

The clitoris makes a miraculous reappearance after its neglect in texts in the 1940s and early 1950s. Female sexual pleasure returned. Alfred Kinsey's 1953 classic, *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female* was important in instigating this change. He insisted that women were "frequently not content with one orgasmic experience" and if there was "no psychosocial distraction to repress sexual tension, many well-adjusted women enjoy a

minimum of three or four orgiastic experiences before they reach apparent satiation". By the 1960s, Kinsey's observation had become common. Masters and Johnson's *Human Sexual Response* (1966) prioritised female sexual response, even positioning male responses "in the role of variation". They observed that, while men generally required a period of rest before having a second orgasm, clitorises "could repeat the pleasure cycle over and over again". This meant that female sexual pleasure was not dependent upon penises; it was also, *by its very nature*, different to that of men. It was much more active.

A driving force behind these changes was a revolution in gender relations, particularly the view that women had an equal right to erotic fulfilment as men. As in the 1920s, improved access to effective birth control, *for* women and *by* women, was important. The birth control pill was approved by the American Federal Drug Administration in 1957 for women with menstrual problems. Within three to four years, it had been made available widely as a contraceptive in both the US and Britain. Together with the introduction of intrauterine devices, reproductive and recreational sex were separated. Soaring levels of female employment, secularism, discontent with gendered domestic labour norms, and a burgeoning consumerist culture devoted to pleasure all contributed.

But the main driving force was ideological: the revolution inspired by feminist thought. In terms of female sexual pleasure, influential books include Nancy Friday's collection of female sexual fantasies in *My Secret Garden* (1973), Erica Jong's novel *Fear of Flying* (1973), and Shere Hite's *The Hite Report on Female Sexuality* (1976). They dwell enthusiastically and in exquisite detail on women's orgasms and the ability of female sexual pleasure to destabilise the patriarchy. Not surprisingly, some writers of sex manuals were threatened. The male author of *The Sensuous Man* (1971) starts one chapter with:

> *"I have a recurring nightmare in which the woman to whom I am making passionate love suddenly cries out, "Male chauvinist pig!" and kicks me out of bed. It could be worse, of course. The more militant members of the contemporary Women's Liberation movement would settle for nothing short of castration with can openers, scissors, and rusty razor blades."*

Despite this sensationalist account of the risks posed to men by feminism, *The Sensuous Man* endorsed much feminist thinking, including the view that "there is no such thing" as the vaginal orgasm: "All female orgasms are clitoral in origin".

Feminist authors would go much further than this. For them, sexual pleasure was not dependent upon satisfactory interactions *between* sexed bodies but could also be accomplished through masturbation and fantasy. Autonomy was a keyword. Biology, instincts, and "nature" were jettisoned for talk of patriarchy, prejudice, and power. Female sexual satisfaction was being hindered by politics, not personalities.

A new development was the publication of numerous explicitly feminist manuals, written by and for women. These manuals distanced themselves from male sex experts. Why did women need to listen to medical experts when they could consult their own bodies? Women possessed expert knowledge of themselves.

An immediate target was the "vaginal orgasm". Once again, female sexual pleasure was located in the clitoris. The most influential demolition of the vaginal orgasm concept was published by Anne Koedt in 1970. She argued that anyone who knew "the facts of female anatomy and sexual response" would know that "although there are many areas for sexual arousal, there is only one area for sexual climax; that area is the clitoris". But "since the clitoris is not necessarily stimulated sufficiently in the conventional sexual positions, we are left 'frigid'." Koedt predicted that "recognition of the clitoral orgasm would threaten the heterosexual institution". After all, it proved that women didn't need men. They could have lesbian partners or masturbate with a vibrator or their own hand.

The most influential feminist manual on female sexual pleasure, *Our Bodies, Ourselves*, originated in 1969 when the Boston Women's Health Collective started a consciousness-raising discussion group that was to lead to the publication of the book the following year. By 1976, the book had sold 850,000 copies; by 1999, over four million copies. Between 1973 and 2005, it went through seven English language editions and two Spanish language ones in the US, in addition to over twenty worldwide. Today, it has been translated into nearly 40 languages. Not everyone approved. Jerry Falwell, leader of Moral Majority, attempted to get it banned from schools and libraries. However, *Contemporary Sociology* judged it one of the ten most influential books of the late twentieth century and the American Library Association called it one of the ten all-time books for young people.

Our Bodies, Ourselves contained extended and excited discussions about the clitoris, as the pleasure-organ. It provided women with autonomous routes to pleasure. The directness of the prose can be judge from one

passage dealing with masturbation:

> *"To masturbate you have to know something about your body, and in particular about your clitoris (klit'-o-ris). This is a small round ball of flesh located above the opening of the vagina and it is the center of most sexual stimulation. It functions like the penis in the man. When it's rubbed up and down rhythmically, you get excited. The clitoris is where all female orgasms happen, whether by masturbation, intercourse, or fantasy."*

The book was an extended celebration of the female body. It encouraged women to explore their body and openly enjoy it. One passage urged female readers to "take a mirror and examine yourself. Touch yourself, smell yourself, even taste your own secretions. You are your body and you are not obscene".

As new editions were published, changes were made. Within three years of its first publication, the clitoris was no longer described as a "small round ball of flesh" but as an extensive organ. The revised passage no longer focussed only on what women could actually see or feel, but also the vast expanse of tissue deeper within their bodies. The 1973 edition began with what was observable, encouraging readers to

> *"Let the hood slide back over the glans [of the clitoris]. Extending from the hood up to the public symphysis, you can now feel a hardish, rubbery, movable cord right under the skin. It is sometimes sexually arousing if touched. This is the shaft of the clitoris."*

But then it went further, providing women with a much more detailed account of the clitoris. The shaft of the clitoris, it continued,

> *"is connected to the bone by a suspensory ligament. You cannot feel this ligament or the next few organs described, but they are all important in sexual arousal and orgasm. At the point where you can no longer feel the shaft of the clitoris it divides into two parts, spreading out wishbone fashion, but at a much wider angle, to form the crura (singular: crus), the two anchoring wingtips which attach to the pelvic bones. The crura of the clitoris are about three inches long. From the fork of the shaft and the crura, and continuing down the sides of the vestibule, are two bundles of erectile tissue called the bulbs of the vestibule. These, along with the whole clitoris and an extensive system of connecting veins throughout the pelvis, become firm and filled with blood (pelvic congestion) during sexual arousal."*

This matter-of-fact description of anatomy replaced the earlier version which focused only on what could be felt or seen. It was also no longer considered necessary to reassure women that their bodies were not being "obscene".

Although *Our Bodies, Ourselves* was a revolutionary text, which emerged out of the experience of women for whom the personal was political, its "women" were actually a small subset. They were educated, middle-class, and white. Furthermore, the different editions gradually became less connected with its consciousness-raising founders. The manual had originally been collectively written and printed by a small Marxist printer on cheap newsprint. It sold for only 35 cents. It even included a controversial (for the time) chapter written by a Boston gay collective and a trenchant critique of the American health care system. As early as 1973, the manual was gradually turning itself into a glossy, expensive book, three times longer than its original and published by the mainstream publishing house Simon and Schuster. It was also produced by a Board as opposed to a Collective. As Chris Hobbs complained in the radical feminist periodical *Off Our Backs*, the 1973 edition was

> *"less angry and contains fewer mentions of "capitalism", "imperialism", "revolution", and "male chauvism" [sic]. "Pee" was changed to "urinate" and "communal fucking" became "communal lovemaking"."*

Black rights and liberationist movements were also making their protests heard. By the late 1990s, as Kathy Davis observed in *The Making of Our Bodies, Ourselves: How Feminist Knowledge Travels Across Borders*,

> *"A racialized structure of privilege and power was built into the organization with a white, founder-dominated board making the decisions and representing the public face of the BWHBC [Boston Women's Health Book Collective], on the one hand, and staff members, several of whom were women of colour, doing the daily work of running the organization without getting recognition for it."*

This was no longer going to be tolerated. As the editions grew, the universal female body of *Our Bodies, Ourselves* started acknowledging difference – by race, sexual orientation, age, and class, for example. This recognition of diversity was increasingly typical of sex manuals published in the 1970s, as in *The Joy of*

Lesbian Sex, *The Joy of Gay Sex*, and *Toward Intimacy: Family Planning and Sexuality Concerns of Physically Disabled Women*.

Our Bodies, Ourselves was flawed but it heralded in a revolution in thinking about female sexual pleasure from a feminist perspective. Around the same time, however, a very different but equally radical model for sex manuals emerged. This was Alex Comfort's *The Joy of Sex* (1972). It would be difficult to find anyone more different to the collective of feminists who co-wrote *Our Bodies, Ourselves*. Comfort was not an expert on human psychology, behaviour or sexuality. He was a biochemist, gerontologist, and snail expert. (Biologist Steve Jones once joked that "it is an iron rule in our trade that no one gets anywhere until they give up snails", referring to the fact that Edgar Allan Poe, Lewis Carroll and Alex Comfort only became famous after abandoning their research on gastropods). Equally, while *Our Bodies, Ourselves* focussed on *female* bodies and their pleasures, Comfort's manual purported to be concerned with providing a sexual cookbook for both sexes. His book was an imitation of Irma Rombauer's *The Joy of Cooking*, which had been published nearly fifty years earlier but was (and remains) one of the most influential cookbooks in America. Although it failed to achieve the longevity of Rombauer's book, *The Joy of Sex* soared to Number 1 in the charts where it remained for more than a year. It was a best seller for six years.

Like many cookbooks, Comfort structured his manual around Main Courses, Sauces and Pickles, and Problems. If readers followed the recipes correctly, they could achieve the sexual equivalent of a perfect chocolate lava-pudding, complete with the requisite runny centre. Comfort informed his readers,

> *"Chef-grade cooking doesn't happen naturally. It starts at the point where people know how to prepare and enjoy food, are curious about it and willing to take trouble preparing it, read recipe hints, and find they are helped by one or two detailed techniques."*

But, just as "it's hard to make mayonnaise by trial and error… Cordon Bleu sex… is exactly the same situation". His manual was addressed to "adventurous and uninhibited lovers who want to find the limits of their ability to enjoy sex". Comfort did not assume that the partners were married and, indeed, he openly discussed group sex. Experimentation was essential, with nothing "off-limits", from the "missionary position" to phallic plugs, spanking, and wearing rubber. The book was lavishly illustrated with sketches of couples engaged in the "positions" discussed. This was a novel feature for sex manuals.

Despite Comfort's open, liberationist sentiments, *The Joy of Sex* was racist, heterosexist, phallocentric, and more concerned with male than female pleasure. The illustrations show only white people, except when dealing with the "exotic" sexual practices of India and Japan. It gives certain sexual positions offensive name, most notably the "Négresse", a highly racist term for a sexual position that involves total submission by the female partner. Comfort also believed that homosexuality was an inferior and immature form of behaviour. When describing sexual positions, he assumed an active male and passive female. For example, while men were given nine intercourse positions or techniques, women were only provided with three. Of these, one was nearly impossible for most women to perform while the other (women on top) came with warnings about the dangers to the penis if the woman was clumsy. Women were told to ensure they were slim, wore sexy clothes, trimmed their pubic hair, and had a shower post-coitus rather than using a bidet (because showering "looks better than sitting on a bidet like a battery hen"). Was it any wonder that he contended that the "matrimonial or missionary position" was the "most rewarding" of all sexual positions?

When Comfort discussed sexual organs, his phallocentrism becomes even more marked. "The penis is more symbolically important than any other human organ", he informed readers". It was "a dominance signal, it collects anxieties and folklore, and is a focus for all sorts of magical manipulations." In contrast, the vulva was

> *"slightly scary… to children, primitives, and males generally…. It looks like a castrating wound and bleeds regularly, it swallows the penis and regurgitates it limp, it can probably bite, and so on. These biologically programmed anxieties are the origins of most male hangups including homosexuality."*

Freud would have been delighted by such a transparent exposition of the Medusa myth and castration complex.

The main revolution in sex manuals from the 1990s was the medicalisation and pathologisation of sexual pleasure. Sexual pleasure was co-opted by big business and pharmaceutical companies. By the 1990s, Americans were spending more than $8 billion on sex performances, sex toys, and other sex objects.

This had a significant impact on ideas about male sexual pleasure, in particular, where medicalisation and consumer capitalism forged a powerful alliance. Many facets of this alliance will be discussed in other talks

in this series, particularly when we turn to pornography. For this talk, the marketing of vacuum pumps, intrapenile injections, and, from 1998, of that delicate blue diamond-shaped pill Viagra are the most important in cementing ideas about male sexual pleasure and a hydraulic notion of male sexuality. Penile penetration was conceived as the royal road to "real" male sexual pleasure. The result was the de-eroticisation of the rest of the male body. Indeed, survey evidence suggests that men who used Viagra *reduced* their non-penetrative sexual activities, prioritizing "coital sex as the primary incentive for – and mode of – sexual relations". Not being able to maintain an erection and ejaculate (labelled "impotence" and, from the 1980s "erectile dysfunction") was turned into an organic illness that required pharmaceutical intervention. But such pharmaceutical interventions meant that even "normal" men were conceived of as inadequate. The authors of *The Virility Solution: Everything You Need to Know About Viagra, the Potency Pill That Can Restore and Enhance Male Sexuality* (1998) expressed this view most bluntly when they asked "Should a man take the pill to improve erections if he doesn't think he has ED [erectile dysfunction]?" The answer: "if a man takes the pill and his erections improve, then he had ED after all".

The scientific research on the biological mechanisms of penile erection had a direct corollary for female sexual function. Many scientists who worked on vascular mechanisms of penile erection turned to the female equivalent, exploring vascular flow to the female genitals. Huge social and economic capital was invested in marketing products such as oestrogens to women, which, as I. Palmlund put it, serve to "construct robust beliefs that these products are needed for the good life".

One effect has been the increased primacy of orgasm as the teleology of sexual intercourse. A performance-based "successful" act of sexual intercourse had to end with orgasm for all participants. Some researchers argue that this has led to an increase of people "faking it", not only because they don't want to harm their partners' feelings or they fear that they might be regarded as abnormal, but also because it is the only way they know how to end an act of intercourse. Today, around one-quarter of men and half of women admit to having pretended to have an orgasm.

Finally, I want to conclude with a brief statement about why sexual pleasure matters. It is important for two reasons. First, sex manuals remind us that if we are to forge better *sexual* worlds, we need to forget sex manuals' prescriptive scripts and techniques on how better to seduce, stimulate, suck, and otherwise pleasure ourselves and others. Instead, we must explore the highly gendered cultural codes and material contexts that invest meaning in sex acts, sexual objects, and sexual partners. Second, to forge better *social and economic* worlds, academics, feminists, and activists need to pay more attention to sexual pleasure and its contexts. Only by knowing sexual pleasure can we unmake sexual pain. Pleasure is political. For the starving woman, the homeless man, the sans papiers, and the survivor of abuse, talk of bodily ecstasy is obscene. But Bell Hooks is right when she suggests that "our desire for radical social change is intimately linked with the desire to experience pleasure, erotic fulfilment, and a host of other passions". Addressing questions of inequality and abuse will require the political labour of bodies – including ecstatic ones – in solidarity with each other.

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