

Following is the full transcript of Psychology major Grace Wetzel's TEDx Talk titled: Let's Talk About Sex: The Reality of the Sexual Pleasure Disparity at TEDxStLawrenceU conference. This event took place on February 3, 2018.

Grace Wetzel - Psychology major at St. Lawrence University

Today I'm going to be talking to you about sex. I'm going to be talking about the clitoris, orgasm, oral sex. I thought I should throw a few of those words out there right now so that we can all get prepared for what's coming over the next 15 minutes.

Sex is a taboo topic, one that people typically shy away from speaking to large groups about — large groups that may even include their professors and family members. But I'm here talking about it anyway. And that's because I have a problem with the way that we are currently thinking about sex.

And that's the reality that straight women often have a very different experience with sex than straight men do. And we live in a sexual world that revolves around the pleasure of the penis.

In this speech, I'm going to start by talking about the ways that we define sex. I'm going to talk about the differences in orgasm rates and pleasure distribution for women and men. And finally how we can move towards a more equal sexual experience.

I want to preface this entire speech by specifying that I'm addressing heterosexual encounters only. So for the remainder of this talk, whenever I refer to women or to men, I'm referring exclusively heterosexual and cisgender women and men. Additionally this speech is directed towards college-aged women living in the current generation and sexual climate.

So let's start with how we define sex. According to the Cambridge

Dictionary, sex is listed as “the activity of sexual intercourse”. Sexual intercourse is defined by Merriam-Webster as “heterosexual intercourse involving the penetration of the vagina by the penis”. So essentially the definition of sex is just the definition of penetrative heterosexual sex.

So what does this mean? Why does it matter how we define sex in the dictionary? Well, think about it for yourselves. What do you count as sex? When you're thinking to yourself, the people that you've had sex with, what acts are you thinking of? For a lot of people, this centers around penetration.

Centering sex around the penetration of the penis is problematic not only for any sex that doesn't involve a penis — God forbid — but also for the straight women's experience. This is because if you're in the three quarters of women who don't experience regular vaginal orgasm, a statistic found by [Harvard professor Elisabeth Lloyd's analysis of 33 studies regarding human sexuality](#). So if you're not — if you're in the three quarters of women who don't vaginally orgasm, then your orgasm is already considered extra. Your orgasm isn't even part of the textbook definition of what real sex is.

The significance of the clitoris as the main and most consistent form of female pleasure and orgasm has been proven time and time again with — from researchers like Alfred Kinsey to the survey studies of Brianne Fosse. So essentially the pleasure that stimulates women's main sexual organ which, sometimes hard for people to accept, is actually the clitoris, not the vagina, is not even considered real sex but something else. Foreplay — something extra.

Here is the reality of the sexual pleasure disparity. According to a large-scale survey of American adults conducted by Lawman and colleagues, women are having on average one orgasm for every three that men have during heterosexual encounters. One for every three! I've met women who

thought that this number sounded pretty accurate. And I've met a lot of women who in their experience, this gap was a hell of a lot larger.

So why are men having so many more orgasms than women? There are two common cop-out explanations for this orgasm inequality. The first is that sex is a means for reproduction. If reproduction were the purpose of sex, then female orgasm may be unnecessary, because male orgasm is the way that reproduction would be achieved. Makes sense, except that this argument is outdated and just completely irrelevant, because reproduction is clearly not the purpose of sex in the majority of cases today as you can see through the prevalence of many birth-control methods.

ALSO READ: Dr. Shimi Kang: What One Skill = An Awesome Life? at TEDxKelowna (Transcript)

So then why are people having sex? For pleasure, right, because it's fun; because it feels good. So if the purpose of sex is pleasure and not reproduction, then this argument just does not apply. In a mutual pleasure-based encounter, theoretically both parties should be benefitting equally from that encounter. This idea of the male orgasm as the means for reproduction represents an excuse for this orgasm to retain privilege and nothing more.

The second cop-out explanation is — *it's just more difficult for women to orgasm excuse*. There's this idea that women's bodies are somehow naturally just less capable of orgasm, and that the clitoris is elusive and difficult to operate. This so-called scientific explanation of sexual difference ignores crucial social factors that play a huge role in how we experience our sexuality, like hookup culture, anatomical misunderstanding, gender roles, and power dynamics.

The myth that the female orgasm is naturally less easy to achieve can be

proven false with two very simple statistics. The first is that according to research done by Alfred Kinsey, the average time that it takes women to orgasm from masturbation is the same as the average time that it takes men, which is about four minutes. So this means that if you know what you're doing as in doing it to yourself, then sex differences in the time it takes to orgasm literally disappear.

Additionally, women who have sex with other women have orgasm rates that are much higher than straight women, orgasm rates that are almost as high as straight men. This research was conducted at the Kinsey Institute by Dr. Justin Garcia and colleagues.

The idea that the female orgasm is just as easy to achieve as the male orgasm can be a tough one for us to wrap our heads around, because we've been so conditioned to think of the male orgasm as the natural result of sex and a female orgasm as something extra. The problem does not lie in the nature of the female orgasm.

When women are put in a situation where the penis is not involved as in the situations I described before, then sex differences disappear. This means that it can't just be biology. Societal and gender dynamics must be at play here. But the problem is not men's alone. The problem lies in the way that all of us are approaching, viewing and participating in heterosexual sex.

Given the statistic I stated before that only about a quarter of women report regular vaginal orgasm, it shouldn't even be expected that women orgasm this way but it is. There is a huge pressure put on women to orgasm vaginally and when they don't, or can't have an orgasm this way, there's a stigma and a sense of shame.

Statistically speaking, the shame simply should not exist because it should be common sense that women typically need clitoral stimulation in order

to reach orgasm. This expectation for vaginal orgasm is one of the reasons why women are orgasming less. And this pressure to do so is one of the reasons why, according to Brianne Fosse's surveys, over 50% of women report having faked an orgasm before. That's the majority of women have faked an orgasm.

Women are so trained to put men's pleasure first that it's almost as if they would rather please their partner by giving the appearance of an orgasm than actually have one themselves. By believing whether consciously or subconsciously that their orgasm is less important, women accept and reproduce subordinate sexual status.

Sexual inequality can also be observed through the prevalence of certain sexual activity like oral sex. According to Wendy Chambers study on the sexual behaviors of college students, she found that women reported giving oral sex more and men reported receiving oral sex more.

So why are men giving oral sex less than women are? An easy way for women to help fix this problem is to ask for oral sex or to ask for orgasm or for clitoral stimulation or for whatever it is that they want. The problem is asking for pleasure as a woman is a lot easier said than done.

ALSO READ: Liz Murray on For the Love of Possibility (Full Transcript)

First of all, asking for pleasure comes with the assumption that you deserve it. Women always deserve it, but they often feel like they don't. It can be hard to ask for something from your partner when that person is making that act feel like an inconvenience or a chore.

Second of all, women shouldn't have to be asking. Men should be making woman's pleasure and orgasm an equal priority to theirs. Period.

And third, women often feel like they can't ask. I've known women who

have asked for things that focus on their pleasure and been straight-up told no and or treated like it was inconvenience or told that sex was over now because the man had had an orgasm. A lot of times women don't feel like they can ask or they just don't but. That doesn't mean that they don't want oral sex, or that they don't want an orgasm.

And when we're talking about sexual inequality, the differences skyrocket when it comes to casual, uncommitted sexual encounters or hookups. Sociologists Armstrong, England and Fogarty found in their study on college students that women were 56% less likely to have an orgasm in a first hookup than in a committed relationship. Women in this study reported their partners' complete disregard for their pleasure. And men in the study also reported being sexually inconsiderate. However this does not mean that the orgasm gap doesn't exist for many committed women because it really really does.

There are also a lot of women who have never had an orgasm from a partner. The reality of the situation is that women's pleasure and orgasm consistently becomes secondary, less important, less prevalent and sometimes ignored altogether or even disrespected. Women internalize this belief that they don't deserve the same sexual experience as men, or that it's just not a physical possibility, although I'd like to argue that the possibilities for women's pleasure are limitless.

Women actually have a huge varying capacity for orgasm. We're just not exploring it. I like to specify at this point that I don't want men's pleasure to go down. I don't want orgasm rates for men to decrease, and I don't want to diminish the importance of penetrative sex, because penetrative sex is really important. All I'm asking for is equality.

I'm asking everyone who's listening, all genders, to open your minds and just consider that the way you're currently viewing sex might be oppressive. The experience of pleasure is different for every single person,

but as long as our interactions have consent, respect, and a goal of equality, then we will have more pleasurable sexual experiences.

It can be hard to stop viewing sex as penile-vaginal penetration only. And it can be hard to start the female orgasm just as expected and important as the male orgasm. It's hard to accept these things at first. But once you do, the reality of sexual equality becomes really easy. It's really all in the hands of the individuals participating.

How long is it going to take for women to realize what they deserve, demand better and not accept anything less? And when are men going to start treating their partners as equal, active participants in sex? And when are we all going to realize that the way we're currently viewing sex is centered around penetration and centered around the orgasm of the penis. And it's a good thing to question the validity of that.

The trend of less pleasurable and less fulfilling sex lives for women limits the sexual power of women as a whole. If we could create a movement to abolish the sexual inequality and pleasure gap, if we could start viewing sex in a more equal and positive light overall, then we would be one big step closer to the reality of true gender equality.

Thank you.

Sharing is caring! [Share on Facebook](#)[Share on Twitter](#)[Share on LinkedIn](#)[Share on Pinterest](#)
[Multi-Page](#)