



Why Women Moan During Sex

By Ian Kerner

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All you have to do is watch nearly any depiction of female orgasm on screen to get an idea of how a woman is "supposed" to react during sex.

From "When Harry Met Sally" to "Sex and the City" to your basic porn film, women in the throes of passion aren't just shouting their ecstasy from the rooftops - they're moaning with pleasure. Loudly.

But is this just cinematic license, or is there really something to noisy sex?

Experts wondered the same thing. Last year, Gayle Brewer of the University of Central Lancashire and Colin Hendrie of the University of Leeds published their research on the topic - technically known as "copulatory vocalization" - in the [Archives of Sexual Behavior](#). In the study, they asked 71 sexually active heterosexual women between ages 18 and 48 for more details about vocalization during sex.

The researchers found that many of the women did make noise, but not necessarily while they were having an orgasm. Instead, 66% said that they moaned to speed up their partner's climax, and 87% stated that they vocalized during sex to boost his self-esteem.

Are female orgasms really just a 'bonus'?

"While female orgasms were most commonly experienced during foreplay, copulatory vocalizations were reported to be made most often before and simultaneously with male ejaculation," write the researchers. Women also reported making noise to relieve boredom, fatigue and pain/discomfort during sex.

So is female vocalization during sex just a performance for a guy's benefit? (After all, Meg Ryan's over-the-top moans were meant to prove a point to "Harry" that men are easily duped by a fake orgasm.)

"There isn't a lot of research in this area," says [Kristen Mark](#), a sexuality researcher at Indiana University, "but we're bombarded with images through mainstream media that tell us moaning is associated with orgasm and sexual pleasure. So it would be a fairly wise faking strategy to moan since men already tend to associate moaning with orgasm."

Of course, there's nothing smart about faking it.

"If you're faking an orgasm, you are signaling to your partner that he is doing everything right, when in fact he isn't," says sex educator and author [Patty Brisben](#). "Use moaning as a way of signaling that you are excited and things really are feeling good, not as a way to hide that they aren't."

Fake or not, women aren't the only primates who vocalize during sex. Research in the animal kingdom reveals that female baboons, for example, have a variety of copulation calls, which appear to relate to their fertility: The vocalizations tend to become more complex when the females are closer to ovulation, and also vary when a female is mating with a higher-ranked male baboon. And female macaque monkeys give a shout to help trigger their mates' orgasm, too.

Performances and primatologists aside, vocalizing during sex can actually be a great tool to help women get what they want in bed. As I discussed in [my column](#) a couple of weeks ago on the topic of talking about sex, it isn't always easy to translate sexual thought into action, so a little strategic moaning can definitely help get the point across.

"Women are learning to take responsibility for their own sexual needs and wants in the bedroom," explains Brisben. "We need to take this one step further and give ourselves permission to become teachers. Use vocalization to teach your partner what feels good. It can help you say, 'stop, go, yes, more please' - without sounding like a traffic cop."

And when it comes to noise, "partner benefit isn't the only piece of the puzzle," says Kristen Mark. "Perhaps making noise turns some women on and helps them experience pleasure." Brisben concurs: "I think there are many women who need to be vocal to help themselves achieve orgasm - it helps move them and their orgasm along. There are certainly phases. As a woman gets into it, she may become extremely vocal, and then move into a period of quiet as she is on the verge."

So do what feels right to you. Any other benefits are just a great bonus. And when it comes to "copulatory vocalization," perhaps men should take a lesson from the ladies.

"Women understand that moaning is a turn-on for guys, and many women ultimately enjoy it because they've made an effort to push a little beyond what comes naturally," says Logan Levkoff, a sex educator and author of a guide for men entitled "How To Get Your Wife to Have Sex With You."

"But sexual self-esteem is a two-way street, and, for their part during sex, guys should aim for more than a single grunt at the end. It's not about faking or doing something you don't want to, but more about being sexually present and in sync with each other."

So let's all make some noise.