



The Case of the Female Orgasm: Bias in the Science of Evolution

Elisabeth A. Lloyd

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Why women evolved to have orgasms--when most of their primate relatives don't--is a persistent mystery among evolutionary biologists. In pursuing this mystery, Elisabeth Lloyd arrives at another: How could anything as inadequate as the evolutionary explanations of the female orgasm have passed muster as science? A judicious and revealing look at all twenty evolutionary accounts of the trait of human female orgasm, Lloyd's book is at the same time a case study of how certain biases steer science astray.

Over the past fifteen years, the effect of sexist or male-centered approaches to science has been hotly debated. Drawing especially on data from nonhuman primates and human sexology over eighty years, Lloyd shows what damage such bias does in the study of female orgasm. She also exposes a second pernicious form of bias that permeates the literature on female orgasms: a bias toward adaptationism. Here Lloyd's critique comes alive, demonstrating how most of the evolutionary accounts either are in conflict with, or lack, certain types of evidence necessary to make their cases--how they simply assume that female orgasm must exist because it helped females in the past reproduce. As she weighs the evidence, Lloyd takes on nearly everyone who has written on the subject: evolutionists, animal behaviorists, and feminists alike. Her clearly and cogently written book is at once a convincing case study of bias in science and a sweeping summary and analysis of what is known about the evolution of the intriguing trait of female orgasm.

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