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# Orgasmic Expulsions of Women: A Review and Heuristic Inquiry

EDWIN G. BELZER, JR.

## Abstract

A literature review supplemented interviews with informants who were confident they had personal experience with female orgasmic expulsion. It was concluded that female ejaculation of secretion from the embryologic homologue to the male prostate is theoretically plausible. Research efforts to affirm or discredit its existence on an objective basis were seen to be warranted. The assumption that female orgasmic expulsions must be due to urinary incontinence was challenged. Anecdotal evidence prompted the hypothesis that orgasm accompanied by ejaculation tends to be followed by a refractory period in women, as in men.

Many contemporary sex educators assume responsibility for dispelling misconceptions (e.g., Johnson & Belzer, 1973; McCary, 1971) but often are responsible for creating new ones (Pomeroy, 1977). The case of female ejaculation may be one example.

Female ejaculation is generally considered a myth. However, Sevely and Bennett (1978) believe that some women ejaculate secretions of the "female prostate." They argued that, when the misconception that women ejaculate a semen essential to reproduction was dispelled, a new myth was fostered: since fluids expelled by women do not bear "seed," the word "semen" was no longer applied to these fluids, and "without

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female semen, there could be no female ejaculation" (Sevely & Bennett, 1978, p. 17). They called for additional research in this area. This paper supports their request for additional research and also supports their basic position by showing it to be theoretically plausible.

The paper is divided into four sections. The first section reviews English language literature that refers to expulsions of liquid from a female genital opening at orgasm. It includes material which supports and denies female ejaculation and also material on other expulsions that might be mistaken for ejaculation. The review omits references which have been construed by others as referring to "female ejaculation," but which were not found clearly to deal with a liquid expulsion at the time of orgasm (e.g., de Graaf, 1672, translated in Jocelyn & Setchell, 1972; Ellis, 1937). It is presented in chronological order.

The second section presents original anecdotal material from people who were confident that they had a personal experience with some sort of female orgasmic expulsion. The third section considers the apparent likelihood of various expulsions (e.g., urine, vaginal lubricant) leading to a belief in female ejaculation. The fourth section discusses the theoretical and practical aspects of further research into the concept of female ejaculation.

### References to Female Expulsions at Orgasm

Aristotle concluded that women expel a fluid during orgasm (Jocelyn & Setchell, 1972, p. 200). Pornographic Victorian literature frequently employed the concept of female orgasmic expulsions. *The Pearl* (reprinted in 1968), a Victorian periodical, contained many references to such expulsions. Whether such references were due to a belief in the concept or whether they were pornographic fabrications is debatable (Sevely & Bennett, 1978).

Van de Velde's "marriage manual" (first printed in 1928) stated that some women expel a liquid during orgasm. He said that this liquid squirts from the Bartholin's glands (Van de Velde, 1965, pp. 137-138).

During his study of the anterior wall of the vagina, Grafenberg (1950) noted that some women expelled large quantities of a clear fluid from the urethra during orgasm. He believed that this fluid was secreted from the intra-urethral glands.

Kinsey, Pomeroy, Martin and Gebhard (1953, pp. 634-635) reported that some of the genital secretions may be squeezed out and forcibly

ejected by muscle contractions of the vagina following orgasm. Bors and Comarr (1960), comparing sexual response in the male and female, concluded that the process is parallel in both sexes, including the emission and ejaculation of prostatic secretions. And in 1961, Yoshida (Note 1) reported that a Dr. Oshikane had collected "mucus" ejaculated from a woman's urethra during a series of orgasms stimulated by masturbation.

Masters and Johnson (1966, p. 135) reported that a small number of parous subjects in their study group mistakenly believed that they had experienced orgasmic expulsion. And, in 1967, Clark published a book based upon a "letters-to-the-doctor" column which appeared in *Sexology*. One letter questioned the statement that females do not ejaculate. Clark's response was that although some women did secrete a surprising amount of fluid in response to sexual stimulation, this secretion was in no way comparable to that accompanying orgasm and ejaculation in men (Clark, 1967, p. 37).

Several other books report that females do not ejaculate. One sex education book, *Sexuality and Man*, clearly states that there is no female parallel to male ejaculation (Sex Information and Education Council of the United States, 1970, p. 25). In another, McCary (1973, pp. 40-41) wrote that the mistaken notion of female ejaculation was based on the occasional spurting of vaginal secretion caused by orgasmic contractions. The film "Physiological Responses of the Sexually Stimulated Female in the Laboratory" (Institute of Medical Physiology, 1974), shows a clear liquid, described by the narrator as the "product of lubrication," oozing from the female genitalia following orgasm caused by clitoral stimulation.

Based on their review of literature and consideration of unspecified anecdotal material, Sevely and Bennett (1978, p. 19) concluded that some women do ejaculate. They believe that the source of the ejaculate is the "female prostate," a system of glands and ducts which surrounds the female urethra and develops from the same embryologic tissue as the male prostate.

### Anecdotal Evidence

I taught a graduate class on research in sexuality in which Sevely and Bennett's paper (1978) was the basis for a cooperative, problem-centered project. As part of this project, each group member agreed to contact about five people whom they felt they could comfortably interview. Anonymity was to be assured and honored. Although each interview was

unstructured, all interviewers approached their subjects in the following manner:

I'm taking (or teaching) a course on research in sexuality. As part of a group project, we are supposed to contact a few people and ask if they have ever heard, read, or know anything about whether women sometimes ejaculate or emit a fluid when they have an orgasm. Will you be one of my people?

Each of the six interviewers found at least one person who reported that she herself, or, in the case of a male informant, his female partner, had expelled a fluid at orgasm. Group members agreed to contact these people again to try to learn why they believed ejaculation had taken place and under what circumstances the expulsion seemed to occur. None of the informants reported actually seeing a female orgasmic expulsion.

One woman reported that she could "feel" when the liquid appeared. When she was comfortable with her male partner and other aspects of the situation, her orgasm was more intense and ejaculation was more likely (about 80% of the time) to occur. Another woman also stated that she could sometimes "feel" liquid expulsion just before orgasm.

Two informants provided me with more detailed anecdotal information. The first information concerned a husband and wife who were both in their thirties. The male reported that when his wife had an orgasm with him, it was invariably in response to coital stimulation, with her straddling him while he lay supine. Her orgasm often fitted what her husband thought of as a "masculine pattern"—one orgasm with further stimulation unrewarding. He had noticed that immediately after such an orgasm his wife's vulva had greatly increased lubricity. Sometimes his wife would have two or three orgasms, but he had never noticed the extra fluid until after the last one.

The investigation aroused his curiosity so that the next time his wife had more than one orgasm he observed carefully. He noted that although she had had a vigorous orgasm, she remained "on top" in a way that he knew signified that she would resume her coital activity. Before she began thrusting toward another orgasm, he felt with his fingers to gain an impression of the amount of slippery liquid about her vulva. She went on to a second orgasm, after which another manual inquiry showed an obviously increased amount of liquid. The second orgasm was all she wanted.

The second informant was a nulliparous female in her late twenties who was living in a monogamous heterosexual union of about three year

duration. She reported that her first orgasms were relatively mild responses to caressing, but that recently they became much stronger. In the last few months she had felt a warm liquid appear on her vulva at orgasm. During autoerotic play, her well lubricated external genitalia would have a cool feeling which she ascribed to evaporation. Thus, the sudden appearance of the warm liquid at orgasm convinced her that she was expelling a liquid. After her orgasm, she would be refractory to further stimulation.

A subsequent meeting was held with this woman and her mate after they had both read the paper by Sevely and Bennett (1978). They agreed that the male partner would try to see the source of the woman's orgasmic expulsion. They reported that they enjoyed cunnilingual play until she was near orgasm. She then took a paper tissue and patted her vulva dry, dipped a finger in baby oil and brought herself to orgasm. He observed closely and saw "about a teaspoonful of clear liquid" expelled at the time of orgasm. He was not sure if it came from the urethra or vagina.

In both these cases I noted that the putative orgasmic expulsion was followed by a refractory period. This was also reported in a letter to Clark (1967, p. 37). This may be related to the refractory period experienced by the vast majority of men after ejaculation. Even in the multi-orgasmic men studied by Robbins and Jensen (1978), orgasms were not accompanied by an ejaculation until the last of a series.<sup>1</sup>

In later interviews with women who thought they "ejaculated" during orgasm, I asked if such occurrences were followed by a refractory period. I also asked if it was possible that their expulsion was urine. The first woman, in her late thirties and multiparous, said she assumed that all women expelled at orgasm. She was initially surprised that anyone would consider the phenomenon remarkable and worthy of research. She reported that if she had multiple orgasms, the one accompanied by liquid expulsion would be the last one. Although the liquid felt like it was coming from her urethra, she believed that she did not expel urine during orgasm as she could differentiate between the sensation of urination and that of "ejaculation."

The second woman, in her early forties and multiparous, said that liquid expulsions with orgasm did not occur until she was in her mid-

<sup>1</sup> The great variation among people is emphasized when we consider the report of Kinsey et al. (1953, p. 635) that some men "who are capable of multiple orgasm may have several experiences with ejaculation and then, when the secretions of the prostate and seminal vesicles are exhausted, they may have further orgasms without semen. The later orgasms may be duplicates of the earlier ones, except that they do not lead to ejaculation."

thirties. After orgasmic expulsion, she was generally disinterested in, and unresponsive to, further sexual activity, but there had been exceptions to this. She had been led to suspect that her expulsions resulted from urinary incontinence and had experimented to see if this was true. After taking Urised® tablets, which dyed her urine blue, she inspected the "wet spot" on her sheet following a number of orgasmic expulsions. In some cases there was a faint bluish tinge, and in others no color was apparent. She intentionally released some urine on a sheet to compare the color made by the dyed urine to that produced by orgasmic expulsion. The dyed urine resulted in such a deeper blue that "there was no comparison." She concluded that her orgasmic expulsions were not coming from the urinary bladder.

A third woman, in her early twenties and nulliparous, and her husband described their single experience with female orgasmic expulsion. When the woman was experiencing orgasm, brought on by noncoital play, she felt that she expelled something from her urethra. She thought it must be urine, although the sensation was different. Both partners sniffed the wet spot on the sheet and were convinced that it was not urine. The woman was sexually satisfied, and she was not further stimulated so they did not know if she would have been refractory.

### Possible Sources of Female Orgasmic Expulsion

The literature suggests at least four possible sources of liquid which may be construed as female ejaculate: the urinary bladder (Ellis, 1937, p. 154), the Bartholin's glands (Van de Velde, 1965, p. 138), the vagina (Kinsey et al., 1953, pp. 634-635; McCary, 1973, pp. 40-41), and the urethral glands or "female prostate" (Bors & Comarr, 1960; Grafenberg, 1950, p. 193; Sevely & Bennett, 1978). I will deal with each one separately.

#### *The Urinary Bladder*

Urinary stress incontinence may account for a liquid expulsion at orgasm in some cases (Ellis, 1937, p. 154; Masters & Johnson, 1965, p. 69). However, the anecdotal material presented in this paper and previously published material (Grafenberg, 1950, p. 147; Masters & Johnson, 1965, p. 70) suggest that it is unwise to assume all cases of orgasmic expulsion are due to this. Unfortunately, many physicians assume that urinary

pathology is the cause of such expulsions and convey this to their patients. This can cause needless distress, as illustrated in the following example.

Although the male in this case reported that he "knew" his wife ejaculated, because he often felt her "squirting" during manual and cunnilingual sex play, he was unable to convince her of this. She was aware of the literature that states women do not ejaculate and so believed the liquid that she expelled was urine. This embarrassed her.

### *The Bartholin's Glands*

I found no empirical evidence in the literature to support the hypothesis that the Bartholin's glands sometimes make special expulsions of material during orgasm, although Van de Velde (1965) supported this possibility.

However, I recently received a letter reporting orgasmic expulsion from the Bartholin's glands. The writer had an extensive background in sex education. After hearing me speak on possible sources of female orgasmic expulsions, she decided to try to ascertain the source of her own orgasmic expulsions.

She was in her mid-fifties, multiparous, and had had a hysterectomy and an ovariectomy. She was then taking 0.625 mg of Premarin® daily. She used a strong light, a large mirror, and a small but powerful pair of field glasses which she rested on her nose. One hand was used to separate the labia, and the other manipulated an electric vibrator. She used the vibrator to bring herself to orgasm and reported observing a fluid spurting from the openings of the Bartholin's glands in synchrony with the pulsations of the pelvic floor and urethra. She said that no fluid issued from either the Skene's glands or the urethral meatus. Five other orgasms, with no refractory period, were accompanied by expulsions of fluid from the Bartholin's glands.

### *The Vagina*

There is some reason to believe that the liquid produced by the "sweating" of the vaginal walls might sometimes be expelled in such a way as to give the impression that female ejaculation occurs. The best publicly available material that supports this possibility is Kinsey et al. (1953, pp. 634-635) and the film, "Physiological Responses of the Sexually

Stimulated Female in the Laboratory" (Institute of Medical Physiology, 1974).

*The Urethral Glands or "Female Prostate"*

Reviews of studies about the structures surrounding the female urethra are available in Evatt (1911), Huffman (1943, 1948), Krantz (1950), and Sevely and Bennett (1978). The controversy over whether or not women have glands and ducts which are homologous to the male prostate was reviewed by Huffman (1943).

Although the Renaissance scientist, de Graff, first wrote that females did not have a prostate (Jocelyn & Setchell, 1972, p. 43), four years later, he wrote of what he said could be called the female "prostatæ" (Jocelyn & Setchell, 1972, p. 104). In Europe, Virchow's work led him to believe that the glands of the distal portion of the female urethra were homologous to the male prostate (Evatt, 1911, p. 125). Another European, Tourneaux, conducted studies that indicated that the prostatic homologue in an adult woman corresponded developmentally to that of a five- or six-month old male fetus (Evatt, 1911, p. 125). (This conclusion would not lead one to expect the female prostate ordinarily to produce an ejaculate.)

The American physician, Skene (1880, pp. 266-267), was apparently, not aware of the European work in this area when he discovered the most distal of the glands and ducts of the female urethra. He was interested in them only because of the problems caused by their being diseased and wrote that the nature of their function "... is a question to be answered in the future. This will doubtless be attended to at an early date, if the subject is considered worthy of attention" (Skene, 1880, p. 267).

Further Canadian and American research (Caldwell, 1941; Evatt, 1911; Huffman, 1943, 1948; Johnson, 1922) established that the urethra of the female is surrounded by a system of glands and ducts which is the embryological homologue of the male prostate. Johnson (1922, pp. 22-26) found little evidence of secretory activity in the urethral glands of one adult female which he studied postmortum. Caldwell's (1941, pp. 631-632) more extensive studies led him to note that there was a considerable variation of this system's development from woman to woman. He reported that these glands were similar to the male prostate in structure and in production of secretion in response to functional stimuli (Caldwell, 1941, pp. 631-632). Huffman (1949, pp. 97-98) also noted that the extent

of development of these glands varied among women. He later considered the female homologue to the male prostate to be "vestigial" (Huffman, 1951, p. 615).

What should this female homologue of the male prostate be called? One suggestion (Huffman, 1948, p. 97) was "Skene's ducts and glands"; this name would cover all the prostatic homologue in the female rather than just those that Skene discovered. They could also be called "para-urethral," "periurethral," or "urethral" glands. Each of these has a precedent.

Still another option is "female prostate" (Sevely & Bennett, 1978, p. 11). Such a term could be used only if the prostate of the male was consistently referred to as the "male prostate." Price and Williams-Ashman (1961) did just this in their comprehensive review of mammalian accessory reproductive glands. However, there is some opposition to this term. This issue was raised in the "Abstract of Discussion" published following the presentation of a paper by Folsom and O'Brien (1943, pp. 579-580). Everett (1948, p. 101) wrote that use of the term "female prostate" had already led to "... the too frequent use of the cautery punch or resectoscope on the female vesical orifice." Curtis (1948, p. 101) similarly insisted that any term referring to this prostatic homologue should not carry implications that would "... tempt physicians to resort to surgical extirpation."

The review done by Price and Williams-Ashman (1961) indicated that well-developed prostates have been found in females of at least some species of four mammalian orders—insectivora, chiroptera, rodentia, and lagomorpha. In such species, the male always possesses a larger prostate. In some species, only the occasional female has an identifiable prostate (e.g., *Rattus norvegicus*), while in others all females seem to possess the gland (e.g., *Mastomys erythrodaucus*). Selective inbreeding in laboratory rats has increased incidence of female prostates from 28% to 99% (Price & Williams-Ashman, 1961).

Secretory activity of the female prostate has been studied most extensively in rodents. Pregnant rodents have larger prostates with greater secretory activity than nonpregnant rodents. This relationship has also been found in one lagomorph—the cottontail rabbit (*Sylvilagus* sp.), (Price & Williams-Ashman, 1961). Endogenous androgens have been shown to stimulate female prostates to secrete, and exogenous androgens have been shown to cause development and retention of a female prostate in species that ordinarily do not have this gland (Price & Williams-

Ashman, 1961). Thus the development, retention, and secretion of female prostatic tissue vary considerably among species, among members of a species and within individuals of a species. The secretions of these glands have no known function (Price & Williams-Ashman, 1961, p. 376).

Price and Williams-Ashman (1961) stated that in primates a female prostate is either absent or vestigial. From this we can infer that they do not consider these tissues as well developed in humans as in animal species they characterize as possessing a "female prostate."

### Conclusion

The preceding literature review, the anecdotal material, and the numerous testimonies provided in response to working drafts of this paper have led me to conclude that some women do indeed have orgasmic expulsions. Whether any of these expulsions can properly be called "ejaculations" depends on whether subsequent research finds them to be partial, infertile homologues of male ejaculations.

In stressing the basic similarity of the sexes, Kinsey et al. (1953, p. 635) stated that ejaculation was the only phenomenon in the physiology of sexual response which is not closely homologous in male and female. Perhaps this is true. However, perhaps this singular gap may be similar to the blanks in chemists' early tables of periodic elements. These blanks led to research, which eventually confirmed the existence of elements which "ought" to have existed.

Among males, variations in anatomy, physiology and, perhaps, experience affect ejaculation. In very few men no ejaculate is produced at orgasm. In the majority ejaculate is exuded from the urethral opening or ejaculated a minute distance. A smaller number of men ejaculate from several centimeters to more than a meter. Another group of rare men ejaculate a distance of over two meters (Kinsey et al., 1953, p. 634).

It would seem reasonable to expect the female distribution to overlap the male. The majority of women may manifest no ejaculation at orgasm, others may exude barely perceptible ejaculate, and a rare few may expel their ejaculate some distance.

If objective evidence demonstrating the existence of female ejaculation is found, it could be used in diametrically opposite ways. It could free those who, in deference to the voice of authority, have denied the reality or acceptability of their own experience. Or it could trap those who believe that a woman's orgasm is "imperfect" unless accompanied by ejaculation.

Such a belief could cause people either to try to ejaculate or to try to cause ejaculation, considering failure to do so as an indication of sexual inadequacy. Additional research is, on theoretical and practical grounds, quite justified.

### Reference Note

1. YOSHIDA, H. *Female sexual response*, N. pl.: N. pub., originally published in Japanese in 1961; English translation presented to the Institute for Sex Research, Indiana University, Bloomington, in 1969 by the author.

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