

# Is it really give and take? New research examines how young people talk about oral sex

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Popular culture may suggest we live in an era where men and women have achieved sexual equality. But new research finds that, when it comes to oral sex, disparities persist - and young men and women tend to gloss over these gender inequalities.

The study, conducted in England by University of the Pacific sociologist Ruth Lewis and Cicely Marston of the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, appears online in the *Journal of Sex Research*.

The researchers interviewed 71 men and women ages 16 to 18, and conducted follow-up interviews a year later. The study focused on accounts of oral sex between men and women, rather than same-sex partners.

They found that despite often talking about an ethic of equal give-and-take in oral sex, most interviewees described performing oral sex on women as a "bigger deal" than oral sex on men. In particular, both men and women said giving oral sex was more distasteful for men than women, and receiving was "easier" for men than women.

"There has been a lot of research on vaginal intercourse but we know much less about young people's expectations and experiences of other sexual practices," Lewis said. "This was an exploratory study to start to give us an idea of how young people talk about oral sex."

For example, the interviews revealed that the language men used to talk about women's genitals was often highly negative, and that women were often ambivalent about receiving oral sex because of their awareness of these perceptions. In addition, [young men](#) were much more likely than women to say they simply did not perform oral sex if they didn't want to, while young women tended to describe strategies to make giving [oral sex](#) more palatable.

According to Lewis, the implications from these findings indicate an urgent need for explicit focus on gender dynamics in sex education programming.

"Sex education should cover much more than just pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections" Lewis said. "It's clear that we also need to be encouraging [young people](#) to think critically about how [women's](#) and [men's](#) bodies are talked about in society, the nuances of consent and coercion, and how gender equity might be negotiated in practice."

Provided by University of the Pacific

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