

# “I Got Busy in a Sex Lab”



Mélanie peaked for posterity.

**Scientists at Rutgers University are studying female arousal by having participants masturbate inside MRI machines. Our gutsy writer signed up to be their guinea pig and reveals all the bizarre details.**

BY MÉLANIE BERLIET

As I sat nearly naked (except for a medical gown) on the exam table, it suddenly hit me: I was about to masturbate in front of six strangers in lab coats.

WTF?

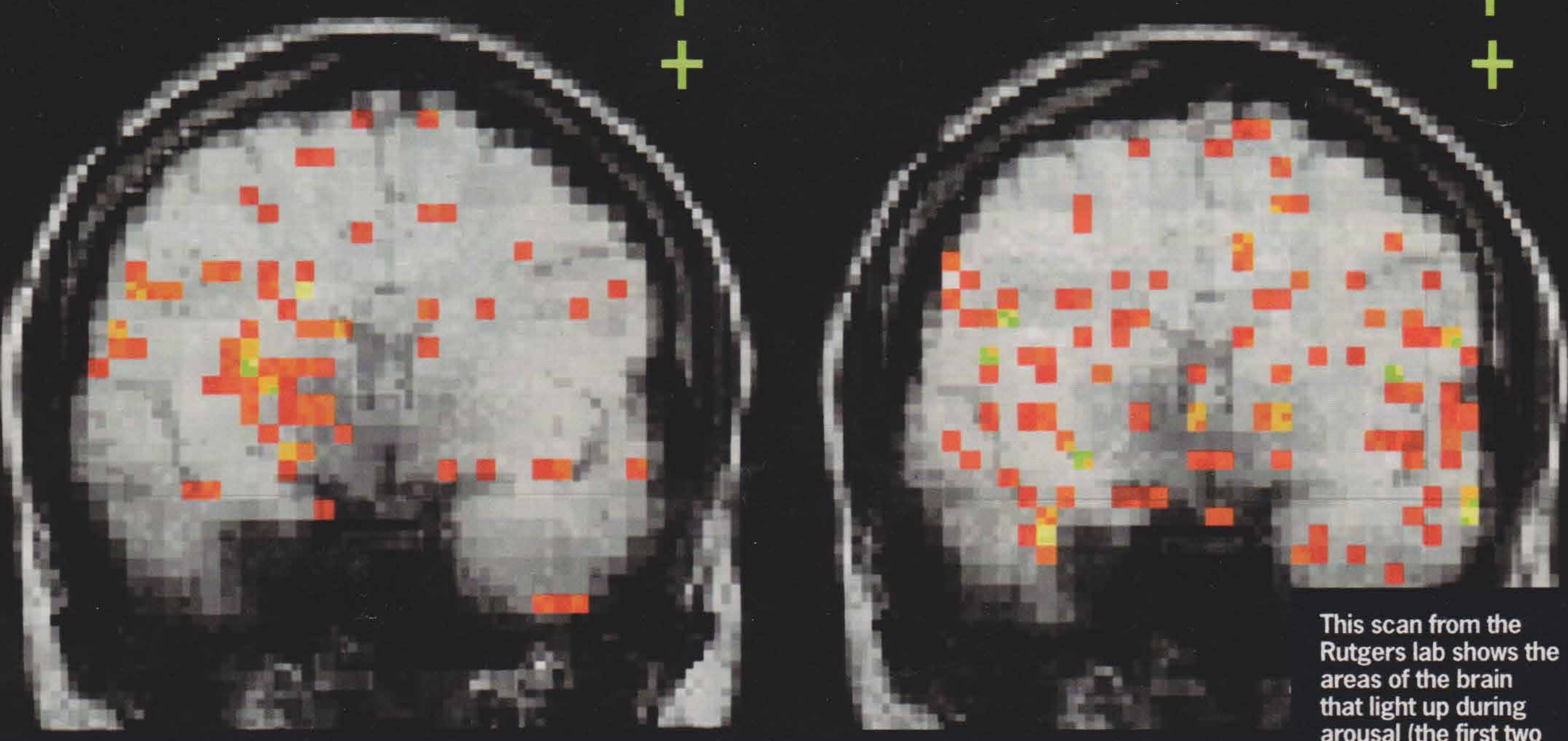
I couldn't believe I had signed myself up for this. I mean, I'm all for giving blood or donating my organs, but my orgasm?

I first heard about the study through a friend, and in a moment of temporary insanity, I decided to have scientists track my brain activity while I went at it solo in an MRI machine. Although it seems crazy now, I figured it was an

opportunity to find out if my orgasms were, well, normal. The research was led by Barry Komisaruk, PhD, a professor at Rutgers University and coauthor of books like *The Orgasm Answer Guide* and *The Science of Orgasm*. His goal: to create a map of the female brain during climax in order to figure out why some women can't orgasm.

A week before I arrived at the lab, Komisaruk's colleague, neuroscience coinvestigator Nan Wise, called to prep me for my visit. Her first question: Would I need a dildo? God, this was awkward. I got my bearings and told her no, since I masturbate by rubbing my clitoris. Then she went over a few more specifics (lube would be provided, but no visual stimuli, like porn) before she hit me with the most important rule: I would only be able to move my hand. Any bodily movements like hip thrusting (my normal MO) can mess with the brain scan. Well, at least I had time to practice.

(Subject) NOEL J. FEDERIZO. Fashion editor: Charles Manning. Hair: Cesar Ramirez at Top 5 Management for Redken. Makeup: Sarah Graftman for Dior Beauty. Dress: Sportmax.



This scan from the Rutgers lab shows the areas of the brain that light up during arousal (the first two images) and orgasm (the last two pics).

## Prepping for My Public O

Seven days later, after waiting for a nerve-racking half hour in the exam room, I was led to the imaging lab, where I'd be getting busy inside an MRI machine. The room was very unsexy—white walls, medical equipment, and an observation window through which Komisaruk's team would be watching. As I lay down in my skimpy medical gown, I'd never felt less turned on. To complicate things even further, Komisaruk placed a cagelike device around my head to restrict movement (so the brain scans wouldn't be compromised). I couldn't budge my head or neck. Then he stuck large headphones on my ears to block out sounds, except for the instructions he'd later give me through a microphone. How the hell was I going to get off with this stuff on?

Before I could get in the MRI machine, I started to panic. I felt saliva flood my mouth, and with the headgear on, I thought I couldn't swallow. I started flailing my arms and legs. When Komisaruk removed the mask, I was nearly hyperventilating.

Eventually, I managed to sit up, at which point I saw four pairs of eyes staring at me through the window. I froze. These people were about to know intimate details about me.

Wise must have known what I was thinking, so she coaxed me into the observation room to meet the rest of the team. A young male technician and three female students greeted me. They were nice enough, but when I shook their hands, all I could think was, *Yeah, you know what that will be touching in a few minutes.*

## The Big Bang

A half hour and a few sips of water later, I felt calm. Locked inside the MRI, I went through the preliminary exercises: five rounds of Kegels in 30-second increments. When Komisaruk asked me to “commence nipple tapping” (another warm-up), I managed not to crack up. Finally, he told me to begin clitoral self-stimulation.

I started rubbing myself in a circular motion, which usually gets me going, but I didn't feel a tingle. Then I tried going slower and faster—nothing. I had to focus. I had an audience, after all.

So I started replaying my hottest sexual memory in my mind—the first time I slept with my boyfriend. I got lost in the fantasy, and suddenly, I felt the first shudder of my orgasm. I raised my hand (the agreed-upon signal), and when my climax was over, I lowered it, smiling.

## A Sexy Lesson

Komisaruk and his team thanked me profusely, and I beamed with newfound orgasmic confidence—no matter what distractions are around (a blaring TV, work worries, scientists in lab coats), I know I can get there.

A few weeks later, I reviewed my scans with Komisaruk and Wise. They pointed out that my brain activated in regions typically associated with arousal and orgasm. Then Wise revealed something else: Since I climaxed quickly (2 minutes and 6 seconds), I'm more likely to have multiple orgasms. I made a mental note to work on this with my boyfriend. Hey, if I can get myself off in an MRI machine in front of a bunch of scientists, reaching multiple Os in the privacy of my own bedroom should be easy, right? ■