

The
Ultimate Guide
to

Solo Sex

All You Need
to Know About
Masturbation

Jenny Block, author of *O Wow*

The
Ultimate Guide
to **Solo**
Sex

The
Ultimate Guide
to **Solo Sex**

All You Ever Wanted to Know about
Getting Off

by Jenny Block

Foreword by Betty Dodson

CLEIS
PRESS

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For Robin

Contents

[FOREWORD](#)

[CHAPTER ONE: Introduction to Solo Sex](#)

[CHAPTER TWO: Solo Sex and Society](#)

[CHAPTER THREE: Solo Sex, History, and Science](#)

[CHAPTER FOUR: First Forays into Solo Sex](#)

[CHAPTER FIVE: Solo Sex—The Ways We Play Today](#)

[CHAPTER SIX: Solo Sex and Partnered Sex](#)

[CHAPTER SEVEN: Solo Sex—Methods and Accessories](#)

[CHAPTER EIGHT: Solo Sex and the Mind](#)

[CHAPTER NINE: Your Questions and Thoughts on Solo Sex](#)

[CHAPTER TEN: The Solo Sex Journey](#)

[ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS](#)

[RESOURCES](#)

[DEMOGRAPHICS OF SURVEY TAKERS](#)

[SOLO SEX SURVEY](#)

[ABOUT THE AUTHOR](#)

Foreword

Betty Dodson

I invented masturbation! Yes, I know that sounds preposterous but that's how I felt when I went public extolling the virtues of solo sex! This took place way back in the early seventies when *Ms Magazine* asked me to write an article about masturbation. My title "Liberating Masturbation" was changed to "Getting to Know Me." I had to write everything in first person to avoid any possibility of a lawsuit if it was just about my experience. Yes, in 1974, the subject of masturbation was that controversial!

When the article appeared, I was yanked out of the masturbation closet—a blessing in disguise. The article was great PR for the new workshops I'd just launched called "Physical and Sexual Consciousness Raising Groups." They've been renamed Bodysex workshops. *The Ultimate Guide to Solo Sex* is one of our textbooks. Happily, Jenny has the ability to communicate basic facts about the importance of this humble activity, and how solo sex can put each of us on the path to a healthy orgasmic sex life alone and with our partners.

Yes, we've made some progress in the past forty-some years. However, until masturbation enters the lexicon as a *primary* form of sexual gratification, we still have a long way to go. Jenny's book, *The Ultimate Guide to Solo Sex* takes us one step closer to cost effective and consistently available physical and sexual happiness. Keep a copy on your bedside table along with your organic massage oil and favorite sex toys as a reminder to consistently enjoy all the happy orgasms you desire for your mental and physical well being.

Introduction to Solo Sex

IT'S THE ONLY THING we have, really: our bodies and the pleasure we experience in them. Everything else is window dressing—clothes, jobs, cars, even friends and family. It can all come and go in a split second, and nothing is guaranteed or promised to us. We could lose anything—and everything—in an instant.

That goes for our bodies, too, of course. An accident, an injury, a disease, a terrible twist of fate. We could lose the very center where we dwell. But, despite their fragility, our bodies are our one home, our one strength. They are the closest thing we have to a guarantee. And they are the only—the *only*—things that truly and irrevocably belong to us.

Sadly, as women, we are often led to believe that this isn't true, that our bodies belong to our families, or to the public at large, or to religion. But I'm here to tell you—that simply isn't true. Not in any way, shape, or form. Our bodies are ours. Now. Tomorrow. Forever.

Why is that so important? Because the only way we can derive power and strength from our bodies is by taking ownership of them. There are lots of ways we can do that. We can dress as we like, eat as we like, take part in the activities and work of our choosing, share our bodies with whom we please and refrain from doing so as well.

But there is another way we can reside in our bodies. There is another, more ancient, more primal, more spiritual, and, truly, simpler way—by experiencing pleasure in them.

Now hear me out. If we only experienced pain and suffering in our bodies; if our bodies were only for the service of others; if our bodies were not our homes but instead merely vehicles that moved us from place to place—how sad that would be.

To have these glorious female bodies, to be the only gender that has an organ created solely and completely for pleasure (I'm speaking here about the clitoris, of course)—and then to *ignore* that? It's not only a devastating crime, it is also just plain foolish.

If you believe in intelligent design; if you believe in a higher power; if you believe in a universe of awareness; if you believe in God; if you believe in something more than randomness (and, believe me, there is nothing random about the mighty clitoris)—then you have to also believe in not wasting the human ability to experience and enjoy pleasure. Specifically, sexual pleasure. More specifically, female sexual pleasure. Even more specifically—female sexual self-pleasure.

We were designed for it.

Think about it. We have an organ—the clitoris—that requires nothing more than some focused rubbing to inspire not just waves of pleasure, but also all sorts of health benefits. Orgasm is a natural pain reliever, stress reducer, muscle relaxer, mood lifter, sleep inducer, and warm-fuzzy creator.

Yes, women can achieve orgasm through sex. But having sex involves—or at least *should* involve—the desires and interests of all parties present. That means focusing on your partner and not just on yourself.

But that's what women do all the time. Every day. Family. Friends. Work. Weekdays. Weekends. Women are caretakers, and we spend most of our time taking care of everyone but ourselves.

You know how on an airplane they remind you to first put on your own oxygen mask before helping others? This is the same thing—the same exact thing. Masturbation is about doing our best for ourselves, if for no other reason than because we want to do our best for others.

In other words, if you won't get yourself off for yourself, do it for the people you love!

I'm only sort of kidding about that.

Pleasure is something we owe to ourselves. Without it, what do we really have? It's the one thing no one can take away from you. Ever. You can lose all your worldly goods and everyone you love, but your body is yours.

It's like a safety net of sorts. It's like an ace in the hole. The extra dollar in your back pocket. You can have a lousy day, a lousy week. A relationship fail. Your dog can run away from home. Your girlfriend can leave you for

someone new. But—barring certain unforeseen circumstances—no one can take away your ability to give yourself pleasure.

Why is that so important? Because when we find pleasure in our bodies, we find ourselves. I know. I know. Feels a little ooey-gooey, woo-woo, hokey, all that. But it isn't. And the fact that we think it is is at the very heart of the problem.

Female pleasure is vital. Female self-pleasure is imperative. We have to know our bodies and trust our bodies and have faith in our bodies.

Do me a favor. Take note of how you're feeling right now. Happy? Sad? Anxious? Tired? Are you buying what you're reading? Feeling skeptical? Whatever it is, take note. Now, if you can—go masturbate. Seriously. Right now. If you can't, mark this page and try this experiment later. I'll ask you to give it a go several times throughout this book.

After you masturbate, take note of how you're feeling. Happy? Relaxed? Without worry? Empowered? A little emboldened? Self-assured? Sex-high? Peaceful?

You see what I'm getting at, of course. No matter what else is going on in your world, masturbating can bring you back to center and help you to remember what is important and what is noise.

And most importantly, masturbation helps to remind women who we belong to—no one but ourselves.

We don't owe anyone anything, ever. We can choose what we do with our bodies and when and with whom. The only people we owe anything to are ourselves. We owe ourselves pleasure. We deserve to be at home in our bodies and to derive our power from those bodies. That's what they're there for.

If you already masturbate, I hope this book will help you to improve your solo sex. If you masturbate infrequently, I hope this book will up your time on the field. If you aren't masturbating, I hope this book will help you to discover how to let your fingers—and toys—do the walking.

Female masturbation is imperative for several reasons:

1. We ought to be in control of our orgasms.

The feeling of control we get from solo sex is just as important as the orgasms. Orgasms are important. Very important. But what they stand for is even more important. Orgasms are about pleasure and about being in touch with

our bodies. So being in control of our own orgasms is about being present in our bodies, loving our bodies, respecting and caring for our bodies, and knowing how our bodies work. If we don't have control of our orgasms, we must ask ourselves: In what other areas of our lives are we not the mistress of our own domain?

2. We have to take care of ourselves.

Treating ourselves to solo sex has to be part of our self-care routine. We eat healthy—or try to. We exercise—or at least have it on the calendar. We brush our teeth. Bathe. Get ourselves to the doctor at least somewhat regularly. (I hope.) Orgasms are so incredibly good for you, and there is no need to rely on a partner to have them. In fact, relying on a partner is downright dangerous. It can compel us to have sex with people we really have no interest in giving our bodies to. Masturbating is about taking care of our physical, spiritual, and mental well-being.

3. We can't care for others without first caring for ourselves.

If you can't bring yourself to masturbate for your own good, do it for the other people in your life. Remember the oxygen mask metaphor from earlier? It's the same thing when it comes to self-care. It's not possible to be the best partner you can be, the best girlfriend, wife, mom, employee, friend—anything—if you're not your best self. Masturbating is an important part of taking care of your own well-being so you can look after the well-being of those you love.

4. We can't be our best as sexual partners without it.

I don't know anyone who doesn't want to be good in bed. Being good in bed has a lot to do with being confident, and masturbation is an excellent confidence booster. It reminds us that we are desirable and that we are orgasmic and that we are invested in pleasure. Being invested in our own pleasure helps us to understand just how important pleasure is to others, too. When you know how great it feels to get

off, you want to give that same feeling to your partner to the best of your ability!

5. We can't truly be at peace with our bodies without it.

Masturbating is one of the most centering things we can do for ourselves. It helps us to see how amazing our bodies are, how much pleasure they can bring, how perfect they are in all their imperfections. To masturbate regularly is to fall in love with your body again and again. It is to know your body, to trust your body, and to find your home in your own skin. And when that happens, the fun can really start.

Masturbation is also an incredibly important learning opportunity. There are innumerable things we can learn from it, including:

1. How incredible the female body is.

There is such dreadful messaging out there about women's bodies. We're too fat, too thin, too hairy, too waxed, too sexy, not sexy enough; we take too long, we get too wet, we don't get wet enough. When you masturbate, you realize how perfect and how perfectly incredible the female body is. It does precisely what it is designed to, in precisely the right way, in precisely its own time.

2. What we want in bed.

It's nearly impossible to let your partner know what works for you if you haven't even figured that out yet for yourself. You need to know the equipment, and you need to put in the practice time. It can be incredibly uncomfortable and unnerving to allow someone to touch you or look at you intimately when you haven't even done that yourself. We can't expect our partners to know things about us that we don't know about ourselves, and we can't expect them to desire the parts of us that we feel too scared or embarrassed to explore.

3. What is and is not important.

When we masturbate, we don't worry about how long it takes us or what we look like when we come or what noises we make or how we move or anything, really. And the same should go for when we're with a partner. That can be a hard concept to wrangle. But when you get comfortable with getting off alone, it's a heck of a lot easier to be comfortable getting off with a partner. (And just as an aside, that O-face that you think is crazy is likely to drive your partner wild when she or he is the one who inspires it.)

4. How to focus on ourselves.

When we masturbate, we don't have to think about anyone but ourselves. No one else's needs or concerns or desires have to be on our minds. The only thing to be concerned with is our own pleasure. When pleasure is the sole focus, any pressure that might otherwise exist when it comes to sex melts away. It's easier to see sex for what it is—a wonderful, astonishing, surprising practice—when we can focus only on ourselves. And then we can translate that into partnered sex the next time we are engaged with someone else.

5. Not to take sex too seriously.

Sex is easily one of life's greatest highs and most profound joys. But it's also an incredibly fun and even silly practice—when it's done right. Sex should include plenty of smiling and even laughing. It's meant to be fun! Masturbating allows us to see the less serious side of sex. I mean, we are talking about putting our hands down our pants and rubbing ourselves until we can't wipe the smile off of our faces here!

The best part is that no one has the right to tell us not to masturbate. No one. Why is that?

1. Our bodies belong to no one but ourselves.
2. There is nothing shameful about pleasure.
3. There is nothing shameful about self-pleasure.

4. Religion and society have no place between our legs.
5. No one knows what you need like you do.

In this life where we share so much in the public space, there are very few things that are all our own. Our bodies and our pleasure in those bodies are two such things. It makes no sense to waste that, and it makes even less sense that others would think they have a right to control or censor our behavior. And yet so many people who have no business poking their noses in are doing exactly that, and creating harmful myths as a result.

Here are nine of my least favorite myths about masturbation:

1. It's shameful.
2. Nice girls don't do it.
3. If you're dating or married, there's no need to do it.
4. It's gross.
5. It's not worth the time.
6. Women don't have strong sexual urges, so there's no point in doing it.
7. A woman will ruin herself for a partner if she does it.
8. A woman does not have a right to her own body or her own pleasure.
9. Women's bodies and sexuality exist solely for male enjoyment.

Not one of those is true. Here's what *is* true about masturbation:

1. It's healthy.
Masturbating is good for so many things that ail you. It helps with pain, depression, insomnia, lack of energy, and body image, just to start.
2. It's natural.
You don't need anything except yourself to do it. We all come equipped with exactly what we need—a female body and a natural, healthy desire to engage in it.
3. It's as important in a relationship as it is out of one.

Regardless of whether you are partnered or not, you should have a happy, healthy relationship with the body you live in, and that includes masturbating. You won't wear yourself out or use yourself up. In fact, orgasm and desire beget orgasm and desire. The more you do it, the more you want it.

4. All women should do it.

No matter who you are, or what your religion or cultural background. No matter your age or whether or not you are a virgin or what part of the world you live in. Masturbation is an important part of knowing yourself sexually, and nothing should keep you from it.

5. We could set the world on its end if all women did do it.

Masturbation is magical. Seriously. If all women masturbated, the world would be a better place. Women who masturbate regularly are happier, healthier, and more self-confident, self-sufficient, and self-reliant.

6. It's empowering.

It's next to impossible not to feel better about yourself when you masturbate. You know how to make yourself feel amazing, and that is amazingly powerful. You have the power to fuel yourself to do all of the incredible things you want to do. There is no reason not to tap into that source.

7. It can keep young women from looking outward for pleasure.

When you're hungry for pleasure, when you're filled with sexual desire—as I hope every woman reading this is—it can distract you from what you are seeking to achieve. It can also lead you to settle when it comes to partnering. “At least it's someone. At least it's access to an orgasm,” you find yourself thinking. But when you masturbate, you have an outlet for that desire, and you can focus on the things you want to do and on finding the partner you actually want to be with.

8. It's no one's business but our own.

It's great to talk about masturbation, if you feel comfortable doing so, because it helps others to feel comfortable with their own masturbation. But you also don't have to tell a soul. That is one of the best parts about masturbation. It's about no one but you. It involves no one but you. Masturbation is your birthright.

9. It's nothing to be ashamed about.

It makes me angry that a woman making herself feel good is something that some members of society consider a shameful act. I've said it before, I'll say it again, and it won't be the last time you'll hear it from me—there is nothing wrong with masturbating. Ever. For anyone. Whatever you have to do to get your mind clear of the critics, do it.

It's not always easy. But it's always worth it. Start by avoiding sex-negative conversations, people, and media. Instead, indulge in sex-positive dialogue and reading materials. In the moment, remind yourself that those naysayers are acting out of fear and clinging to misogynistic beliefs that have no value. Take a deep breath, remind yourself that what you're doing is healthy and safe, and trust that those critics are small-minded, hurtful people whose opinions don't deserve your attention. Then, turn your mind to pleasure!

It is absolutely imperative that each of us know our body and know it well. It can be so easy to ignore that in our overly connected, overly busy world. We get up, get dressed, race off to work and school, come home, grab something to eat, veg out with the TV or a book, go to sleep, and then do it all over again the next day. It's dangerous. We walk around in these amazing bodies, and yet we can so easily miss out on seeing just how amazing they are, because we are too damn distracted to notice.

We have to come to have a real knowledge of the bodies in which we live in order to do all of the following:

1. Find our power.

Knowing your body allows you to realize just how incredible you truly are and just how limitless the possibilities are in terms of what you can do in this life.

2. Find our pleasure.

Knowing how to touch yourself allows you to access pleasure whenever you want or need it. There are very few things more centering than pleasure, than orgasm. It's yours to tap into; take advantage of that.

3. Cement our self-confidence.

Knowing how to make yourself feel good allows you to feel good about yourself. When you bring yourself pleasure, you feel like you can do anything—and you can.

4. Ward off haters.

Knowing how to make yourself come makes it much easier to tell the haters to step off. You know you. You know how incredible you and your body are. They don't know a thing about you. So who cares what they have to say?

5. Find peace.

Knowing how to take your body from zero to sixty means always being able to find peace for yourself, whenever, wherever. It's like having a magic wand in your pocket. No matter what else is going on, you can always find your center.

One of the most important things about masturbation is that it helps us to tell the truth about how women's bodies work. The truth is that women have orgasms (contrary to some early medical beliefs), and women orgasm from clitoral stimulation. Women don't orgasm solely from vaginal penetration, and the women who say they do aren't giving credit where credit is due. The clitoris has long legs that extend internally, along the sides of the vagina. So when we come via penetration, it still involves some level of indirect clitoral stimulation.

When we masturbate, we learn about how our bodies work, and then we share that information with our partner or partners. That can mean

masturbating alone. That can mean masturbating for your partner. That can mean touching yourself while your partner does the same. There are many ways to incorporate masturbation into our lives, and all roads lead to a happier and healthier sex life—and a happier life in general.

Integrating masturbation into our self-care routine advances our understanding and acceptance of healthy female sexuality. As a society, we're not there yet, for sure. A painful amount of stigma is still attached to masturbation. But things are changing. And surveys are finally being done to show that change.

Adult store AdamandEve.com conducted a survey about female masturbation and compiled some interesting statistics. I use the word “interesting” because when it comes to any stats about sex—solo or otherwise—you have to take them with a grain of salt. Even when it's anonymous, many people find it difficult to tell the truth about their sexual and masturbatory practices. Still, all we can do is work with the info we have. So, here's a little fat to chew on.

Four out of ten women prefer masturbation to sex with a partner. I find this statistic depressing. No offense to straight men, but I would be very curious to know whether this statistic is the same for lesbian women as it is for straight women. Why do I wonder that? Well, lesbian sex tends to focus less on penetration as the main attraction, and lesbians are more aware of the fact that clitoral stimulation is the way to make women come. (Don't get me wrong—I am delighted to hear that there are plenty of women out there who feel that they are good at pleasuring themselves, because everyone should feel able and capable when it comes to that. But if you are one of those four out of ten women who prefers solo sex, I would suggest reading *O Wow: Discovering Your Ultimate Orgasm*, a book I wrote to help you enjoy the kind of partnered sex that makes sex worth having. Women's bodies are capable of remarkable orgasms all on their own, and when we share with our partners how our bodies really work, we can have earth-shattering orgasms with them, too.)

Two-thirds of women who masturbate do it about three times a week. Just as you should exercise at least three times a week, so too should you masturbate with the same frequency, and for the very same reason—it's good for you!

Eighty-six percent of Americans say they masturbate. As I mentioned above, surveys about sexuality are tricky. People lie, even on anonymous

surveys. They tend to be afraid or ashamed to admit the truth. I hope the real figure is closer to one hundred percent. But I'm afraid that because of the incredible harm religion and certain social mores have done—especially when it comes to women—the number may actually be a good bit lower.

By the age of eighteen, fifty-nine percent of women have masturbated, according to this survey. Ninety-one percent of women over the age of eighteen say they masturbate, although Kinsey's research says it's more like fifty to seventy percent. Of women over the age of sixty, forty-six percent masturbate, and twenty percent of those once a week or more.

You will likely not be surprised to discover that sixty-three percent of people say that the bedroom is where they generally masturbate. As for where else the fun takes place, thirty-two percent say the shower, twenty-three percent in front of the computer, nine percent in the living room, two percent in the car, one percent in the kitchen, and one percent while at work. (I have to admit, I had a little laugh at the “in front of the computer” option. I think “In the bedroom, in front of the computer or television” should have been included—why not both?)

In terms of frequency, nineteen percent of people said never, eight percent said “rarely” (which can be defined in various and sundry ways, of course), eleven percent said once every few months, eighteen percent said once or twice a month, twenty-seven percent said once or twice a week, nine percent said every day, and three percent said more than once a day. (Note that nineteen percent of people say they never masturbate here, but that doesn't add up with the eighty-six percent of Americans who say they *do* masturbate in an earlier question—another reason to take the data with a grain of salt!)

I did my own survey for this book. I even consulted with a social science researcher in the collection and analysis of the survey data. In other words, an actual researcher with a PhD wrote the questions and looked at the findings to figure out what it all meant.

Granted, I found people to take the survey via my own social media outreach using Facebook and Twitter. But, even so, I was able to capture data from a wide array of more than 160 women responding to the questions I presented. You can see the demographics in *Demographics of Survey Takers* (page 171), and you can read their responses throughout the book.

Sharing our experiences, researching this topic, and making it part of the public discourse is unbelievably important. Masturbating reminds us that we are sexual beings. Talking about it reminds others that women are sexual beings. And bringing it into a larger context and conversation reminds the world at large that women's wants and needs and desires are equally as important as men's.

Here's what happens when you masturbate: You touch yourself. It feels good. You become aware of what you are capable of.

You realize you can heal yourself.

You realize you can pleasure yourself.

You realize you don't need anyone else.

You realize your body is good.

You realize that there is no need to fear loss.

You realize that you can accomplish anything that you choose to.

To masturbate is to discover your power and your self-worth. Think of female masturbation as the metaphor for female power.

We are coming.

We are coming for our equality.

We are coming into our power.

Solo Sex and Society

SOCIETY'S TAKE ON FEMALE masturbation is very important, because it both informs and reflects how we as individuals feel about it. When it comes to men, we talk about masturbation all the time. There are a million terms for it. In *There's Something About Mary*, Cameron Diaz walked around with come in her hair, for goodness's sake. But when it comes to women, all too often, it's hush-hush. In this chapter we will look at why that is, why it shouldn't be so, and what we can do to move past it and stop shaming women out of doing a terrifically healthy thing.

Orgasm is at the heart of female empowerment, and self-created orgasm—orgasm through masturbation—is one of the most important kinds of orgasms a woman can have. Sure, partnered sex can be amazing. But solo sex is about so much more than the end result. It's about learning about yourself, both for your own self-knowledge and to lead you on a path to better partnered sex. How can you expect a partner to know how to get you off when you yourself don't even know?

This guide is designed to help you understand why solo sex is so important and how to make it great, whether you have never gone down the self-pleasure path before or are already a regular player. Either way, practice makes perfect, and having a coach can only help you along your journey. Consider me that coach.

Whenever the topic of masturbation comes up, the “why I can't”s come up too. Too many people have too many problems for too many reasons when it comes to masturbation. Religion. Politics. Society. Families. Friends. All of these barriers are understandable, but also unfounded, and certainly surmountable. You have to turn off the critics. They have no place in your bedroom. If things like shame or body image issues are at play, seek

a sex-positive counselor who can help you work through them. And if disability or aging or other physical barriers are presenting a problem, your doctor can help you to discover if there are workarounds you can employ. There may be people out there who find masturbating impossible, or near impossible. But, for the vast majority of us, it's a matter of getting out of our heads and discovering ways to allow ourselves this incomparable gift.

There isn't a thing wrong with touching yourself—even if a history of abuse is among your challenges—and it's one of the healthiest, most satisfying, safest activities around. It's time to take back self-love!

Google “masturbation” and these arise as the most common searches: *Masturbation is a sin in Hinduism. Masturbation is a sin in Christianity. Masturbation is a sin in Islam.* Google “female masturbation” and you don't get any suggestions at all.

It's almost too simple. When it comes to masturbation, all humans want to do it, and yet all humans are worried about whether doing it is “okay” or not. Nearly every religion has something to say about it. And too many of those religions take issue with it even though they have no business doing so. Granted, this is a gross overgeneralization. But bear with me here for a minute as I try to wade through the social history of masturbation.

The myth of the sexual superiority of men

The myth goes like this: Men are physically larger and stronger than women. Men are creatures of the body. Brutes. They cannot control themselves or their desires. Their role on this planet is to impregnate and provide. Women are creatures of the heart. Softies. Their role is to care for and please others. (Read: men.)

Therefore, sexually, men can't help themselves. They must get their sexual satisfaction, either by masturbation or partnered sex. When it comes to partnered sex, women are to be vessels, since this is what satisfies men's sexual needs. And, since the man is satisfied by the act, the woman should be, too. If she is not, she must be somehow afflicted. And there is little to no reason for her to masturbate, because she doesn't have the ever-present sex drive that men do.

This false logic has led to the commonly held misconception that penetrative sex should satisfy women sexually, as it does men, and that women don't need to and shouldn't masturbate. But neither of those ideas is

true. Women orgasm from clitoral stimulation. You can hem and haw all you want. You can want it to be different. Coming at the same time as your partner is a lovely experience. So I get it. If you're heterosexual, you want a woman to be able to reach orgasm from the same act that causes a man to come. When two women have sex, they want to come together, too, and they face their own set of challenges—I like to think of them as *enjoyable* challenges—in order to make that happen.

But we're talking about anatomy and physiology here, and it simply doesn't work that way. Not to mention that orgasm requires being relaxed and at ease, with your mind in the moment. So, focusing on your partner's orgasm can make it tough sometimes to reach your own, further complicating the situation.

So, here you have an entire society of women walking around sexually frustrated. Sex with their husbands isn't doing it for them because their physiology is being ignored. They are told not to masturbate because it's "unhealthy." They are told by doctors that they are ill, that they have "hysteria," when in reality they have blue box.¹

"Hysteria" is a term from the Victorian era, but sadly, this state of affairs hasn't entirely changed today. Many women feel inadequate if they cannot orgasm solely from vaginal penetration, when in reality, vaginal penetration isn't what causes most women to orgasm. They feel guilty about masturbating because of the virgin/whore complex, where women are somehow supposed to be virginal (read: mothers and housewives, but never sexual beings in their own right) and yet have sex with their partner—or, to put it less delicately, "a lady in the streets and a freak in the bed." We are to be whores for our husbands and virgins to ourselves and the world.

That makes us objects. It also makes us dependent and powerless.

Male control over female sexuality is the ultimate tool in the war against women and the maintenance of the patriarchy. In her book *The Technology of Orgasm*, technology and sexuality historian, writer, and researcher Rachel Maines explains, "If the penis did not represent the ultimate weapon in sexual warfare, claims to male superiority would rest entirely on the statistically greater potential of the male biceps and deltoid muscles, which did not in themselves seem equal to the task of sustaining patriarchy in Western civilization."

In other words, it is about the penis being the ultimate symbol of strength and power and its needs and desires being paramount over all else.

That way, only those with penises get to be the boss of things. When the penis is made king, female sexuality never has a chance to be any more than a loyal subject. To right this wrong, the clit must be crowned or the penis must be dethroned. An equal playing field is the only place to play.

The difficult thing about trying to explain and understand all of this is that it doesn't make any sense. It is nearly impossible to explain and understand something that is without reason. It was obvious that women had sexual desire and it was obvious that having orgasms relieved women of these "symptoms," and yet no one would accept the reality—that women are sexual creatures and that stimulation of the clit to orgasm is the only way to "relieve" desire. Since it was presumed and accepted that vaginal intercourse should be sexually satisfying to women—which, again, it is generally not—people assumed that women must be sick or diseased if they were not having orgasms, or if they were "suffering" from desire.

My research has been both incredibly informative and frustrating. In some ways, the truth is so incredibly simple. Women are sexual creatures with sexual desires who want and need sexual release. That is incredibly obvious and has always been incredibly obvious. But society and religion both want and need women to not be sexual, I suppose because they want women to need men so they will procreate. That's the only thing I can figure, anyway. It's great for women to want men. But it's imperative that women know they don't *need* men.

So instead of accepting female sexuality at face value, society had to instead make it a disease. When the cure (that is, penetrative sex, with the external bud of the clitoris being almost entirely ignored) didn't work, it was the woman's fault. Not the cure's fault. But now we know the truth: Women are sexual. Women do need to orgasm. Women have a right to pleasure. And because so many people, men and women, still continue to believe that vaginal intercourse should bring women to orgasm, and neither men nor women want to change their sexual behavior, masturbation becomes not only necessary, but also mandatory. (If I ruled the world!) I say "mandatory" because women should really masturbate for their health. But the truth is, too many of us don't do the things that are good for us unless we think we will drop dead or get punished if we avoid them. I honestly wish there were a way to require women to masturbate. It would bring spectacular change to women's health, both mental and physical, and create

a wave of change in women's sexuality—both in how it is perceived and in how women view themselves as sexual creatures.

The familiarity of frustration

If women are not sexually satisfied, then they are sexually frustrated, and a sexually frustrated woman is not as powerful or as confident or as capable as she could be. Which of course is what some people want, what some men want, and what in some ways society and certainly religion want.

Men were the scientists. Men were the theorists. Men were the writers and philosophers and social thinkers. Men wanted to maintain their status in those roles, and women were raised to believe that men belonged in those roles, and so they did not fight to release themselves or fight for their sexual autonomy, or fight at all, really. Until they did—for their right to vote, their right to work, their right to support themselves and live freely and move about the world freely. Sadly, still today we see more men in positions of power, making more money, directing more research, serving as the baseline for all things.

All of this boils down to getting women married off and controlled. If women had sexual desires and needs like men, that would imply that they were equal to men, and that could not be tolerated. So it had to be that women were sick. It's both hilarious and incredibly disturbing that women did and do accept this. It was deemed better to be thought of as sick than to be sexual creatures.

Female sexuality is a massive part of the women's liberation movement, and there is nothing more liberating than to not have to rely on anyone but yourself for your pleasure. Which means there is an incredibly easy solution to all of this. If you are not enjoying sexual satisfaction with your partner, then take matters into your own hands. Masturbate. And if you *are* enjoying sexual satisfaction, masturbation is still incredibly important for maintaining your sexual autonomy and for improving your partnered sex, no matter how stellar it may already be.

Masturbation allows women to know their bodies. It allows women to know what it is that they want and need. It allows them to understand that—I've said it before and I can guarantee I'll say it again—vaginal penetration in general does not lead to female orgasm, and when it does, it's thanks to the internal "legs" of the clitoris, not to any nerve endings in the vagina

itself (as there are very few). Knowing this can then inform our sex lives, whether we are gay, straight, bi, queer, or anything and everything in between. Once we know our bodies and our desires and what brings us to orgasm, then we can know what to tell our partners, what to ask our partners, and how to arrange our sex lives so that we can find satisfaction with a partner if that is what we desire.

In the past, to rebel was social suicide, and—in some ways—it still is. So women accepted their lot then, and some still do today.

It's time to let go of that.

Time to stop doing what doesn't work

If women don't want sex, it should not be read as frigidity, it should be read as sanity. Why continue to want something that's always unsatisfying?

Masturbating puts us in a state not only of satisfaction, but also of wanting, as contradictory as that may sound. The more we come, the more we want to come. So people should not be afraid of their female partners masturbating—they should encourage it, because if a woman is also having satisfying partnered sex, masturbating will cause her to want it more, not less. If the partnered sex is unsatisfying, that's certainly something that needs to be explored. But in the meantime, masturbation can ease the sexual frustration. And when the partnered sex is good, masturbation only stands to make it better.

If a woman is masturbating, some say it's a commentary about her being unsatisfied by her partner. That may be true, and no man wants to think—or to have others think—that he can't satisfy his partner. But there really are three possibilities here. One: Perhaps it's that she is so pleased with what he does that she wants it more often than even he can provide, which is an excellent compliment. Two: Maybe it's true. Maybe she *is* unsatisfied. But instead of keeping her from masturbating, why not discover together how she can be satisfied during partnered sex? And three—now, hold on to your hats here—maybe it has nothing to do with her partner at all. Maybe she just enjoys masturbating. And that is the best reason of all for doing it.

If men understood women's bodies and facilitated their orgasms more often, then women would want to have more sex with them. It's not that we want orgasms any less than men do; it's that we don't want to do the things that don't pleasure us. But even the best sex is not and should not be a

substitute for masturbation, which is about knowing and connecting with yourself and constantly and consistently cementing your sexual autonomy.

The irony of all this is that Victorian doctors were prescribing orgasm because they knew that was what women needed—although they misunderstood why. They did not, however, generally prescribe masturbation, because that would empower women. What people didn't (and many still don't) understand is that when women masturbate, it empowers men too. It means that women know what they want sexually and can help men to learn how to please them, and isn't that what good men want? To please women sexually? Masturbation is the answer, not the problem. It empowers us in everything we do outside of sex, as well, because feeling in control and capable and knowing yourself transfers to nearly everything and anything else we do.

Which brings me back full circle to where this chapter began. Masturbation is considered fine for men—it's great, in fact—because they are understood to be sexual creatures. But for so long, women were seen as little more than helpmates to men and not as autonomous, sexual beings—and so the world couldn't see that masturbation is just as important for women as it is for men.

The time has come to see the truth. We are sexual. We seek pleasure, too. We masturbate.

A rose by any other name...

For me, language is always a good indicator of how we as a society feel about something, or how much or how little we understand it. If we have no words or only negative words for something, clearly we don't get it or don't want to get it. If, on the other hand, we have lots of language, particularly positive language, about something, we are clearly on board.

So I thought it would be interesting to take a look at how we talk about female masturbation. If I think about what I call it, or what I hear my female friends call it, I can come up with only a very short list. I tend to call it "taking care of business," and I hear my friends say simply "masturbating." But I was curious what kind of slang was out there; I was sure there was plenty. I was right, and it runs the gamut from the offensive to the ridiculous, with a stop at everything in between. Here's a sampling of what I found:

The amazing disappearing-finger trick, airing the orchid, auditioning the finger puppets, battery testing, beating the clit, being the downstairs DJ, bruising the beaver, buffing the beaver, buttering the biscuit, buttering the muffin, caressing the clitoris, churning the butter, cleaning your fingers, climbing Mons Veneris, clit-flitting, clitting, coming into your own, couch hockey for one, cunt cuddling, cunt-hunting, diddling yourself, digging for clams, digging your own hole, dirty dancing for one, double-clicking the mouse, dousing the digits, drilling for fish, dropping in the manhole, engaging in safe sex, erasing the problem, fanning the fur, feeding the bearded clam, feeding the beaver, finger-painting, finger-walking to the Y, flicking the bean, flipping the breaker, fluffin' the "muff" in, frigging, gash-lashing, genital stimulation via phalangetic motion, gentling the genitalia, getting a fat lip, getting a lube job, getting lost in the deep end, getting to know yourself, giving a noogie to your monkey, grabbing the goatee, greasing your hips, grinding the bump, groping the grotto, groping the beaver, handiwork, jilling off, mining the hole, a night in with the girls, oiling your holster, parting the pink sea, petting the kitty (or the pussy), playing the clitar, poking the flounder, polishing the pearl, riding the two-fingered cowboy, riding the unicycle, rowing the man in the boat, roughing the muff, rubbing one out, rubbing the button, rubbing the nub, scratching the snatch, self-abuse, shucking the oyster, slapping the lips, snuffing the muff, solo sex, spelunking the cave, squeezing the bean, squeezing the peach, stroking the magic lamp, stroking the nub, surfing the wet, tapping the keg, teasing the tuna taco, tenderizing the meat curtains, testing the plumbing, thumbing the button, tickling my fancy, tickling the taco (or the tuna or the twat), touch typing, twiddling the toggle, the two-fingered salute, the two-fingered tango, the virgin's release, visiting the Batcave, watering the flower, waxing the dolphin.

These expressions are very telling as to how we feel about women's bodies. Some of them are incredibly offensive, even downright awful. And I left off

the ones that I couldn't stomach. But what I found even more intriguing is the fact that I have never actually heard a woman use most of these terms, even jokingly. They are expressions that people have made up as jokes, and that's the problem. We don't really take female masturbation seriously. I'm not suggesting it's a *somber* matter, like child abuse or world hunger or bioterrorism. But it is important. Not just the act itself. But what the freeing of that act from shame could ultimately mean.

Women have to be in control of their own bodies and their own pleasure. We have to stop minimizing and shaming female sexuality. It is incredibly ironic to me that men so often complain about women not being interested in sex, and yet those same men are not interested in autonomous female sexuality. Men want their sexual pleasure, but don't respect that female sexual pleasure deserves equal importance—otherwise, why would women want to have sex? What's the point of being little more than a human masturbation sleeve?

The valuing of pleasure

So female masturbation is important because pleasure is important. But more than that, it's important because it cements a woman's place at the sexual pleasure table. Valuing female masturbation means valuing female sexuality. We can't demean women's bodies and their sexual desires and then wonder why they are insecure and uninterested in sex. It just doesn't make sense.

Masturbating is about accepting your body and your sexuality and your whole self. It's not just about orgasm—although orgasm is nice. It's about taking care of yourself. Women can get so wrapped up in eating right and exercising and meditating. But what about tending to our sexual selves? That deserves as much attention as—if not more than—anything else.

Perhaps a bit of the problem has to do with language. When I talk about feeling sexy or attending to one's sexuality, I'm not talking about wearing stilettos and red lipstick and sleeping with everyone in sight. I'm talking about being in your own power.

Please forgive the woo-woo language. But there just aren't great words for this conversation, because we don't talk about it enough. Being in your power simply means being confident and feeling good about yourself,

feeling whole. Think about the last time you had a stellar orgasm—that heady, delicious feeling of being the most glorious creature on the planet.

Now imagine starting every day with that feeling. Imagine how the world would look to you. It's like seeing the world through your own rose-colored orgasm glasses. Call me silly if you will. But test it out, if you dare. For one week, start and end every day by masturbating. You'll walk a little taller, sleep a little better, worry a little less about what other people think of you. You'll trust yourself and your body, because you know how to make yourself feel good.

From the expert's mouth

After reading and researching female masturbation as much as I have and surveying more than 160 women, I decided to pose some very specific questions to a few experts in the field to see what their thoughts were. I had a particularly enlightening e-mail conversation with Dr. Anne Katz, PhD, RN, FAAN who is an AASECT-certified sexuality counselor and clinical nurse specialist at CancerCare Manitoba in Winnipeg, Canada. (AASECT, or the American Association of Sexuality Counselors and Therapists, is a “not-for-profit, interdisciplinary professional organization...of individuals [who] share an interest in promoting understanding of human sexuality and healthy sexual behavior.” www.aasect.org)

When we began our conversation, she wrote, “Let me preface these responses with the caveat that attitudes and behaviors have changed—and the research about masturbation may not have caught up with societal trends and generational changes.”

I found this comment alone incredibly telling, as it spoke to exactly what I was finding. There is lots of research out there. But, as I mentioned earlier, it can be hard to trust, and it doesn't necessarily mirror the anecdotal information that one finds. In other words, books and papers say one thing, and the people you talk to say another. As always, the truth is somewhere in between.

Katz says that a belief about female masturbation commonly held by both men and women is that it is “a poor substitute for partnered sex.” I was particularly interested to hear this, as it seemed to me to directly contradict the AdamandEve.com survey I cited earlier, in which four out of ten women said that they prefer masturbation to partnered sex.

I think of masturbation as a way to empower partnered sex by making women more whole as sexual beings on our own. That is, if I am a fully actualized sexual person coming together with another fully actualized sexual person, we are going to have better sex than if either or both of us were not so. I would like to stop comparing masturbation to partnered sex and instead think of it as way to inform and improve partnered sex.

Because most of us want equal sexual partners, I have to wonder why, in general, we don't take issue with male masturbation. But there is a huge block when it comes to female masturbation. Katz explains some of the reasons for this:

General attitudes towards male sexuality are more accepting of all kinds of sexual activity. Also, male arousal is hard to miss, and there is an acceptance that even boy babies are going to touch their genitals, in part due to availability—but female anatomy is more “hidden.” Also, the focus of female sexuality is (erroneously) on the vagina (internal) as opposed to the vulva (external) and clitoris.

And that's when I found myself nodding my head vigorously. Indeed. Female sexuality has been such a cloudy issue for so long because our bits are not as self-explanatory as male parts are. As long as we continue to think that the vagina is the focus of female sexuality, it will be impossible to understand female pleasure. And if we don't understand female pleasure, how could we possibly understand female masturbation?

I recently had a conversation with a gay male friend of mine about guys masturbating in the sauna at the gym. He commented that guys could do that surreptitiously with no problem, but women couldn't. “Why not?” I asked. He mimed a woman inserting her fingers into her vagina and vigorously moving them in and out, and I laughed. “Is that how you think we masturbate?” I asked.

“Yes,” he said. “Like you have sex.” I was stunned. And yet I wasn't.

It's no wonder that female masturbation lives in such shameful shadows when so many people don't even understand what the center of female pleasure really is—the clitoris, of course. We have to start from the beginning. And knowing the female body and how it works is definitely the beginning. As a gay man, my friend very likely gets his knowledge of

female sexuality from popular culture. And pop culture defines sex as intercourse and depicts that intercourse as pleasurable to women—and so the myth continues.

Which makes me wonder: What kind of societal shift would have to take place to make female masturbation more acceptable? According to Katz, “A negation of the myths and taboos—and open discussion about the normalcy of [masturbation] and the benefits for all women of any age.” Hence this book. Hence my imploring in the first chapter that we make female masturbation visible. I don’t mean diddling ourselves in public. I mean talking about it and thus normalizing it by doing it and discussing it and telling the solo-sex naysayers that we have no need for their unhealthy and dangerous shaming ways.

As Katz explains, guilt, shame, low sexual self-esteem, not knowing what feels good or how to communicate that to a partner—these all negatively affect women psychologically in such a way as to inhibit their sexual growth and health. And that’s just not acceptable. Women—as much as men—deserve to be happy, healthy, whole sexual people, and masturbation is a big part of that.

Normalizing that idea requires that we include positive depictions of female masturbation in the media we are constantly consuming—which means we need to get to work, because right now encouraging messages are scarce. The same goes for sex education in our schools: Very little—if any—information about masturbation is included in the curriculum, and, Katz says, what is taught is dependent on district policy and subject to the whims of social and religious mores, parent groups, and other outside influences. Too often, that means that nothing is included.

When I asked Katz what she felt should be taught, she suggested simply drawing the Nike swoosh on the chalkboard—you know, the ever-present “Just do it” swoosh.

After I stopped giggling, I realized she’s totally right. She says, “I am not being snarky—but we ALL do it and we all SHOULD do it and I just don’t understand why this remains such a taboo!” Indeed.

Since schools are not going to do the necessary teaching on this front—not for the foreseeable future, anyway—parents are going to have to step up to the plate. So what should parents tell their daughters about masturbation? “That it is natural and normal and fun and the best way to learn about your own body,” Katz says. “It relaxes you and reduces stress and helps you to

fall asleep. It is a great way of delaying sexual activity and *it feels good*. And everyone does it—maybe not all the time and not in public places—but we have ALL done it, and many of us continue to do it even while in healthy and good relationships, because solo masturbation is about just *ourselves* and we deserve to have the pleasure.”

I love that message. And I hope that every parent will say exactly that to their sons and daughters. That is the only way to move female masturbation into the light. Too many women today don’t masturbate or feel guilty when they do, because, in Katz’s words, “no one teaches young women that it is okay and normal...more than allowed, and rather encouraged.”

That, coupled with all of the taboos out there, is what keeps most women from masturbating. One of the primary taboo-creators and perpetrators is organized religion. Which religion, exactly? “Most if not all,” says Katz. “Religion is a social construction that acts as a form of social control, and it is mostly to the detriment of women.”

Like so many other issues we face as women, the taboo around female masturbation stems from the fact that we have constructed a society that does not value women, or their bodies, or their pleasure. It may not be a popular thing to say. But it’s a true one.

We have to tell the truth. When it comes to kids, we have to tell the truth right from the start. And we have to keep telling it, to ourselves and to one another. Society is not a “them.” We are society. So, if society is the problem—and in this case it is—we are the only ones who can change it.

The good news is that the change is totally in our control, and it’s a very rewarding process. As women, we have to masturbate and we have to talk about masturbating. We have to joke about masturbating—three cheers for Amy Schumer! We have to include it in pop culture. We get to make it normal simply by expressing what comes naturally and making it normal.

There was a time when being gay was considered a mental disorder. There was a time when female sexual arousal was pathologized. Still today, female masturbation—at the very least—carries an “ick” factor. We simply have to wipe that out, one conversation—and one stroke—at a time!

Survey results

It’s no wonder that society’s take on female masturbation is so negative and backwards. The information we get is unclear at best, downright

dangerous at worst, and generally lacking all around.

In my mildly scientific and remarkably informative survey of 164 women, when it came to what they were told about female masturbation, this is how the results broke down: Five said they masturbated before they ever learned anything at all about it. Two said they were told to do it. Twenty-nine said they were told that it was wrong to do it. Four were told to do it in private. Four were told it was healthy. Five said they heard nothing more than jokes about it. Twelve said they don't remember being told anything at all. Sixteen were told that guys do it, but not girls.

As for how survey takers heard about masturbation, here's the lowdown: Only two said they learned about it in school. One said it was mentioned during "one of those sex talks." Five said they overheard others talking about it. Two said they learned from porn. Seven read about it in a book. One saw her mother doing it. Thirty-five said they learned solely through self-discovery. One learned from a Google search.

Survey takers seemed to encounter nearly every possible reaction. Some said they were encouraged. Others said they were shamed for even asking about it. Some were told to wash but never touch themselves. And others were taught about nearly every other element when it comes to sexuality, but never masturbation.

In terms of who told them about masturbation, the answers ran the gamut:

Mother: 18

Books: 16

Peers: 14

Media: 9

Teachers: 7

Church: 3

Grandmother: 3

Aunt (including one case in which the aunt was a child herself): 2

Cousin: 2

Family: 2

Internet: 2

Adult friend: 1

Brother: 1

Camp counselor: 1

Grandfather: 1

Survey takers' ages when they were first told about masturbation—those who were told anything at all, that is—also varied greatly, from kids (eight respondents) to pre-teens (twelve respondents) to tweens (ten respondents) to teenagers (five respondents) to adults (two respondents).

Naturally, far too many women were never told a thing about masturbation when they were growing up. An equally disturbing number say they were told it was wrong, or that it was a sin. One survey taker said, “I never even knew about it until I was nineteen years old. That’s when I began watching porn and saw how other girls touched themselves. Didn’t even know what a clit was until I was nineteen.”

And things don’t necessarily get better as we become grown women. One survey taker explained, “When I was an adult, I thought that we weren’t supposed to talk about it [with friends] and I was very embarrassed.”

One quote that particularly made my blood boil was this one: “I think I was around sixteen [when I learned about masturbation]. I heard men making reference to desperate women doing it.”

If you ever wonder about the great sexual divide that exists between men and women, you can rest assured that it is fueled by ignorant statements like this one. Obviously these men are to be pitied. Their own low sexual self-esteem requires them to ridicule female sexuality, which they fear and do not understand. Still, it is no excuse for those comments. If you ever hear anyone—male or female—make such disparaging remarks, take the time to correct them. Feel sad for them, yes. But then educate them. That is the only way that attitudes will change.

The religiously motivated commentary is the some of the most damaging and disgusting. One survey taker wrote,

I was originally told when I was about twelve years old not to touch myself, that it was a mark of the beast/devil if I did...I would go to hell once I passed, but [masturbating] would make me blind while living on the face of the earth. That my soul would be condemned to hell for eternity.

There were a couple of answers that made me giggle and smile. So I had to share them with you, too.

[I learned about masturbation from] my best girlfriend in school. She said it was amazing, and I said, Why masturbate when we could just have sex? So we then proceeded to have sex.

My mother told me that good girls didn't do "that." She never explained what "that" was.

All I knew was from a sex ed video I saw in class that was honestly very confusing to me. Particularly because it was accompanied by cartoon pictures of fireworks!

The answer I was most excited to read, although it was truly the only one of its kind, was this one: "An informal informative explanation was given to a group of us girls in my class by an older woman who explained that it felt good and you should do it as often as you felt the urge. By this time I was doing it quite often anyway."

The comment that broke my heart was from one young woman who said, "My mother told me when I was five, after I had figured out how, that it would give me cancer."

Other survey takers had these things to say.

I can't recall where I got the information officially. I just recall touching and rubbing myself. Then eventually pushing the limits to using Barbie doll legs to insert into myself.

It felt like empowerment.

I remember hearing very little about the clitoris. Most discussions about masturbation just involved putting things in the vagina...and most of them were jokes.

My mom had me read Where Do We Come From. She also had a vibrator under her bed, which she said was for headaches. I remember it wasn't very good for headaches when you put it on

your head. I got the idea to put it somewhere else. It was awesome. I thought I invented it. I showed this to other little girls I was friends with.

I was sixteen. My older cousin had an enormous collection of vibrators. I used one and haven't stopped.

I discovered masturbation on my own, probably around age four or five. But—I don't recall hearing the word or understanding the concept until I was in maybe sixth grade. I don't recall if I heard it on the playground or via the variety of colorful euphemisms heard on Beavis and Butthead, lol.

I was thirteen, and a neighborhood boy told me what it meant, and that only horny girls do it.

I can't remember how I found out about masturbation, but I know the information was imparted by my mother without shame. I was probably around twelve years old. Somehow she appropriately encouraged me to explore my body and figure out how to bring myself to orgasm.

As a kid I was raised in a way that meant sex education happened at school. Couldn't really talk to my parents about it, and the period chat was bad enough! Turns out my parents weren't sexually active themselves for most of their marriage, which certainly explains a thing or two.

One of my first memories about masturbation was from middle school. I remember boys were very vocal about masturbation and at times that filtered through to how they flirted with me, and my female friends. For instance, I remember more than one boy getting stuck on this question: "How many fingers can you fit?" As I grew up, I found this question very interesting, because often the association with more fingers was more impressive. At the same time, more fingers was tied to the idea that you were experienced. So early, before the boys probably even knew what it meant, they had these faulty ideas of

experienced girls being “loose.” Of course as you grow up you (hopefully) learn the politics of loose/tight and how the body works.

Conclusions

It seems only appropriate to end this discussion on solo sex and society with some insight from the woman who I would call the high priestess of female masturbation—Betty Dodson. Betty Dodson, now in her mid-eighties, is the author of the wildly famous bestseller *Sex for One* and still holds Bodysex workshops in her Manhattan home in order to educate women on the power and pleasure and sanctity of female orgasm.

In an e-mail conversation, I asked Betty why male masturbation is discussed so freely and female masturbation is not. Her answer: “Sexual double standard. The unspoken agreement. Men are entitled to lots of sex because it’s ‘natural.’ But women are to be chaste because it’s more appropriate.” In order for that to truly change, in order for female masturbation to become more “acceptable,” she says we need a shift when it comes to equal rights for women all across the board, from politics to work to pay to sexuality and contraception.

She said that our lack of acceptance of female masturbation strongly affects women psychologically, which is why it has to change. “It keeps women ignorant of our capacity to enjoy sexual pleasure... The natural exploration of masturbation establishes nerve pathways from the clitoris to the brain’s pleasure center.”

She blames shame- and fear-based parental and religious views, as well as negative messaging from peers and society at large, when it comes to why some women don’t masturbate. As for what we should be telling our daughters about masturbation, she told me, “Nothing, unless she asks. Then she needs to know it’s a natural activity that’s positive and healthy.”

But what stuck with me the most about our conversation is just how vital she says masturbation is for all women throughout all the stages of our lives:

“Masturbation is the foundation for all of human sexuality. It’s our first natural sexual activity, the way we discover our genitals and the good feelings they provide us when we touch ourselves.”

1 The female equivalent of blue balls. Special thanks to my sister, Rebecca Block, for helping me coin that.

Solo Sex, History, and Science

Solo sex and history: The tangled web from which we came

Masturbation has a curious history. Rumor has it Cleopatra did it with a gourd that she filled with bees! Apparently all that buzzing around created an impressive vibration. Doctors did it for women who felt anxious. And now it's time for masturbation to take its rightful place in the front of the history tomes. Historically, people have had a hard time talking about it and have felt guilty about doing it. But when you see why that was the case in the past, you'll understand why there is no reason for it in the future.

Here's a super-quick overview of the historical treatment of female masturbation.

There is little doubt that women have always masturbated. In 2005, a 28,000-year-old stone penis was discovered buried in a cave within the German mountain range called the Swabian Jura. It's eight inches long and 1.18 inches wide and was very likely used during the Ice Age as—you guessed it—a dildo. A number of other sex-toy artifacts have been unearthed over the years, making it clear that women have been self-pleasuring for as long as they've been on earth. Unfortunately, that behavior, as natural as it is, has not been universally supported.

As early as the fourth or fifth century C.E, early Christian theologian and philosopher Bishop Augustine of Hippo taught that masturbation was one of the gravest of sins of the hell-deserving kind. The only sexual act he supported was that of a passionless procreative act between a married man and a woman. The Ancient Greeks may have been a little friendlier towards masturbation, often portraying in their art women masturbating with *olisbos* (meaning “glide” or “slide” in Greek) made from leather or wood. But by

the end of the eleventh century, the Christian church was strongly proclaiming its strong anti-solo sex stance. In the thirteenth century, Thomas Aquinas reiterated the teachings of Bishop Augustine of Hippo, calling female masturbation worse than rape, incest, and sex outside of marriage. In the fifteenth century, Jean Gerson, chancellor of the University of Paris and dean of the cathedral school of Notre-Dame, was adamant about the dangers of masturbation. Why? Too easy and too enjoyable, he said. Sigh. What that guy had against pleasure, we'll never know. My guess? Some personal pent-up sexual frustrations and issues that he couldn't bear to address. Or perhaps an overwhelming fear of the power of women.

Between 1712 and 1716, the brochure "Onania: Or, The Heinous Sin of Self-Pollution, and All its Frightful Consequences (in Both Sexes) Considered: With Spiritual and Physical Advice to those who have already injured themselves by this abominable Practice" was distributed throughout London. (Quite a title!) In the mid-1700s, Samuel-Auguste Tissot published *L'Onanisme*, proclaiming a wealth of disorders that he argued were caused by masturbation, including a loss of strength, memory, and reason; blurred vision; a variety of nervous disorders; gout; rheumatism; a weakening of the reproductive organs; blood in the urine; appetite problems; and headaches, among other things. All grossly untrue, of course.

By the early 1800s, Goss and Company published *Hygeiana*, continuing to portray the horrors of masturbation (all myths, of course). In 1826, Richard Carlile published *Every Woman's Book; or, What is Love?* It sang the praises of female sexuality but sadly still proclaimed masturbation to be the great evil among evils. Even in the late 1800s and early 1900s, a plethora of doctors, including the first woman to receive a medical degree in the US, Dr. Elizabeth Blackwell, proclaimed women a fragile lot, for whom masturbation was strictly prohibited. But it was in 1858 when things really started to get ugly. Gynecologist and surgeon Issac Baker Brown performed clitoridectomies to make sure women felt no pleasure in an effort to "protect" them from their unnatural desires. He also wrote the book *On the Curability of Certain Forms of Insanity, Epilepsy, Catalepsy, and Hysteria in Females*, published in 1866. Around the same time, followers of Presbyterian minister Sylvester Graham believed that a meat-free life would lead to a masturbation-free life, and Dr. John Harvey Kellogg, an American holistic doctor (yes, the one who invented corn flakes with his brother),

preached (go figure) cold breakfast food and anesthesia-free circumcision for grown men and the application of carbolic acid on the clitoris. And get this. From 1856 to 1932, the United States Patent Office granted thirty-three patents for devices invented to prevent masturbation.

In 1868, an English psychiatrist named Henry Maudsley coined the phrase “masturbatory insanity,” proposing that masturbation actually caused damage to the brain. Other gynecologists of the time blamed and removed women’s perfectly healthy ovaries to “cure” them of the desire to masturbate. And in 1894, Dr. A. J. Block (sad coincidence and no relation) wrote the article “Sexual Perversion in the Female” and boasted of curing a female patient of a nervous disorder by removing her clitoris because, when it was touched, she had the “symptoms” that we now celebrate as an orgasm.

In 1936, *Diseases of Intimacy and Childhood*, a book by L. Emmett Holt, offered a “solution” for female masturbation that was a heartbreaking, though not surprising, product of that time—cauterization of the clitoris. This is painfully and frighteningly reminiscent of the female genital mutilation that is still practiced in parts of the world today in an effort to control women’s pleasure and, in turn, their power and freedom. When a woman’s right to her body and to her own pleasure is forcefully taken away, so is her ability to fully see herself as a whole human who is worthy of justice, equality, happiness, and the like.

Thank goodness for the end of the nineteenth century, when Havelock Ellis, a sexologist from Britain, wrote a six-volume series titled *Studies in the Psychology of Sex* that proclaimed masturbation in “moderation” to be an excellent stress reliever—although he also argued that too much solo play could cause problems with one’s skin, digestion, and circulation. It’s hard to know what “too much” means, exactly. I’m guessing that in that day and age, it meant anything that kept a woman from her duties to household, husband, and children. Still, other doctors gave the green light to men and a strong red one to women.

It will likely come as no surprise that famed sex researcher Alfred Kinsey was a proponent of masturbation for both sexes. And in 1950, a book called *Auto-Eroticism* by German writer Wilhelm Stekel was translated into English, calling masturbation “universal and natural.” Important feminists like Stella Browne saw masturbation as the best way for women to manage their own sexuality, allowing them to take care of

their incredible natural urges without giving in to “promiscuity.” This wasn’t ideal, of course, as it still implied that female sexuality was not natural and healthy. But it certainly was a move in the right direction when it came to attitudes about female masturbation.

Sigmund Freud represented a true step backwards, arguing that only the most self-centered of souls would bother with masturbation. Even worse, he argued for something he called the “vaginal orgasm” over the “clitoral orgasm,” calling the former the more mature and therefore “valid” of the two. We know now, of course, how ridiculous that is. Stimulation of the clitoris is what brings about female orgasm, as so much science and research have finally and conclusively proven, whereas the vagina itself has virtually no nerve endings. So few, in fact, that surgery can be done on it without anesthesia.

Along came Dr. William Masters and Virginia Johnson, whose groundbreaking research, including their 1982 book *Human Sexuality*, strongly supported masturbation, going so far as to call it “the ultimate source of our sexual self-awareness.” Then came the Hite Report in 1976, the Janus Report in 1993, and Surgeon General Jocelyn Elder’s proclamation in 1994 that masturbation is part of human sexuality and should be taught. And I don’t think anyone has done more for female masturbation than Betty Dodson, whose 1974 book *Sex for One* paved the way for generations of women to look between their legs and feel safe and confident about pleasuring themselves, whenever and however they see fit. I was lucky enough to attend one of Dodson’s Bodysex workshops in the spring of 2014. Even as a woman with what I would consider reasonably good pussy confidence, it was life-changing. Dodson has devoted her life to helping women take back their bodies and their sexuality.

What I just can’t reconcile is how, despite the incredible work of Dodson and Kinsey and Elders and Hite and Masters and Johnson and Janus, women still harbor a great deal of shame when it comes to masturbation, feeling disconnected both from their bodies and from their right to pleasure.

It seems as though, despite how far we have come, our history still haunts us, fueling unfortunate popular attitudes towards masturbation that cause lingering shame and fear and disgust. It’s hard to imagine why so many minds would be so focused on something that is not only incredibly harmless but also incredibly helpful. One can only assume that these men

were so scared of their own desires—and even more scared that women might have the same desires—that the only way they could imagine maintaining control would be to implore women to avoid masturbating and therefore to remain in a frustrated state.

Imagine a world where people felt free to take care of their sexual desire in this simple, easy, healthy way. Stress and pain would be down (since orgasm is such a powerful remedy on those fronts) and joy and peace would be up. But the church wanted control of people and how they lived. It wanted them married and having babies and—like today—tithing their income to the church to provide for its well-heeled ministers and beautiful structures. Telling people not to masturbate is yet another way to control people and their natural desires and to put them in a very unnatural state.

A woman does not need a man to enjoy pleasure. But if she knows that, she might not be willing to put up with a less-than-ideal relationship. Being whole people forces everyone to be better, because you can only land a good partner if you are a good partner. It creates a society based on want instead of need. To my mind, that's far better. I want to be with someone who wants me, not someone who needs me to relieve sexual tension or pay for her or take care of her. I love to take care of my girlfriend. But I do it because I want to. Not because she needs me to. I'm not talking about in the case of being sick or getting injured or anything like that. I'm talking about being helpless by choice. Nothing is less attractive.

There's also the issue of money. If we have an ailment, we need a cure. So as long as doctors and sellers of snake oil make women believe that masturbation is an ailment, they can also make money by selling a cure, which would explain the Victorian era when sexually frustrated women were pathologized and diagnosed with hysteria. The cure? A doctor masturbating them. Manually, early on, and later with the invention of vibrating machines to relieve doctors of the heinous chore of getting women off.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF VIBRATORS

In 54 B.C.E., Cleopatra is rumored to have filled a gourd with angry bees.

In 1869, the Manipulator, a steam-powered beast of a sex machine, was introduced.

In 1883, the first electric vibrator used for medical purposes was created by Dr. Joseph Mortimer Granville.

In the 1880s, Dr. Macaura Pulsocon invented a hand-powered device called the Blood Circulator that resembled a hand-cranked egg beater.

In 1902, Hamilton Beach patented the first electric at-home vibrator.

In 1904, the Chattanooga was marketed for two hundred dollars plus postage and handling, which was an incredible amount of money at that time, more than five thousand dollars according to inflation calculators, in fact!

In 1906, the Detwiller Pneumatic was introduced.

In 1907, Dr. Johansen brought the Auto Vibrator to market.

In 1908, the Vibro-Life hit the scene.

In the 1920s, the Try New Life was the rage.

In 1928, the Polar Cub Electric Vibrator joined the offerings.

In the 1930s, the Rolex Three-Minute Masseur came into play.

In 1937, the Oster Stim-U-Lax was invented. It strapped onto the top of the hand.

In 1945 the Gyro-Lator was introduced, looking a little more like our modern-day vibrators.

In the 1950s it was the Miracle Ball Grip Massager that captured consumer attention.

In 1954, the first electric vibrator that didn't require a user's manual, the Niagara No. 1, was invented.

In 1968, the real game changer was introduced—the original Hitachi Magic Wand.

In 1983, the “animal vibrator” came into play, with both internal and external components—that is, a

vibrating dildo for penetration, as well as a piece designed to stimulate the clitoris.

In 1984, the almighty Rabbit Pearl vibrator was introduced.

In 2003, the sex toy companies Jimmyjane and Lelo were founded, both bringing sleek, modern, and highly effective vibrators to market.

In 2008, sex-toy maker Je Joue joined the market, also with a modern take on the vibrator.

In 2008, We-Vibe introduced the first vibrator designed to be worn during intercourse.

It's a wild story, if you think about it, one mired in religion and politics that somehow overrode common sense. Which brings me to our next topic.

Solo Sex and science: Why solo sex is so good for you

Orgasm is insanely good for you. It relieves headaches and stress. It amps up your pain tolerance and your mood. It keeps the vulva and vagina healthy and vital. And when it comes to having that big O during partnered sex, there is not one bit of science that shows masturbation to be harmful. If a doctor or scientist tells you that it's all benefit and no burden—as any one worth her salt would—why on earth wouldn't you improve your health with a little self-love?

But before we can even talk about the science of solo sex, we first have to talk about the science of female sexuality and—more specifically—of female orgasm.

Female orgasm centers around the clitoris and clitoral stimulation—not vaginal penetration. That is no longer up for debate. Let's clear up a few things right from the start:

1. There is no such thing as a “vaginal” orgasm. What can be seen externally is simply the tip of the clitoris—the rest is nestled inside the body. So even if a woman appears to orgasm solely from vaginal penetration, in reality, it's because that penetration is stimulating the clitoral legs.

Female orgasm relies on clitoral stimulation. End of discussion.

2. Clitoral orgasm is not some sort of secondary or “immature” orgasm. It *is* female orgasm. It’s the only orgasm a woman can have. An orgasm may be inspired by other body parts—the breasts, the skin, even the mind. But it is the clitoris that causes a woman to orgasm.
3. Penetration can be part of a woman having a blended orgasm (which calls for clitoral stimulation, vaginal penetration, and—if you’re game—anal play). But, at least ninety percent of women *do not* orgasm from penetration alone. Again, this is because the clitoris is the female sex organ. Not the vagina. The vagina is a canal that allows sperm to reach an egg or a baby to reach the outside world.
4. Penetration is not sex. It is one sexual act of *many*. Calling penetration “sex” disregards all the acts that are just as much sex as penetration is, as well as a massive chunk of the population who have no interest in, desire for, or ability to participate in penetration—from people who are LGBTQ to people who are disabled to people who simply don’t find the act of putting their penis in a vagina or having a penis put into their vagina particularly interesting or satisfying. Sex is the act of seeking pleasure with our bodies. Only you and your partner(s) get to determine what that means.

In case you are not entirely familiar with your parts and have not yet done your own personal show-and-tell, here’s a great diagram that will help you to understand a little more about what you have going on between your legs.

To dig a little deeper into this topic, I again turned to Dr. Anne Katz. In an e-mail conversation, I asked her what the actual scientific definition of masturbation is. “Good question,” she replied. “In all the papers and books I have read on the topic, there does not seem to be a definition—it is so ubiquitous that the assumption is that we know what it is. Self-stimulation

of the genitals to produce orgasm is perhaps close to a definition.” Works for me.

I have certainly offered my take on why masturbation is an important and healthy part of a woman’s life. But I was curious to hear Dr. Katz’s thoughts, and I was happy to hear her echo many of mine. It allows women “to learn what feels pleasurable and to communicate to her partner what feels good,” Katz explained. “Masturbation is also a partnered activity for some women, and that has all sorts of other positive consequences in terms of sexual satisfaction and increasing connectedness with [a] partner.”

Which prompted me to ask whether Katz thought that masturbation played an important part in keeping a couple’s sex life healthy. And she did: “It’s important to know what turns you on, and also, intercourse may not always be possible or desirable—masturbation (solo or mutual) forms part of the repertoire that can be called on when one partner is ill or absent or dies.” I have to admit, I hadn’t given much thought to dealing with sickness or death. But it certainly is a valid point.

Masturbation fulfills different needs at different stages in our lives. But at every stage, there is certainly a need to be fulfilled. When we are children, it helps us to be comfortable with our bodies. When we are teenagers, it helps us to be in control of our sexual desires and keep us from making lousy decisions for lousy reasons. When we are young adults, it helps us to learn about our own desires. When we are partnered, it allows us to communicate those desires to our partner. And when we are older and may have lost our partner, it allows us to maintain our sexuality whether we become partnered again or not.

Masturbation, of course, follows the same pattern as partnered sex when it comes to arousal and orgasm. Katz explains, “Stimulation causes blood to flow to genital tissues (internal and external), causing [an] increase in lubrication. Pleasurable sensations are carried by nerves from genitals to the brain, which in turn sends signals via the spinal cord to the muscles of the pelvic floor that contract rhythmically, and BINGO! You have an orgasm. Rinse and repeat.”

Although I have surveyed 160-plus women about how they masturbate and thus have a pretty good understanding, I was curious about the way someone “in the field” might address this question. Katz’s answer wasn’t surprising: “Commonly with clitoral stimulation (with or without a vibrator of some kind) but some women use a dildo (or other object) for vaginal

penetration in addition to or instead of direct clitoral stimulation. Some dildos can do both. There is no ‘right’ way to do this—some women rub against a pillow or the mattress instead of using hands or devices. There are probably as many ways to do this as there are women on the planet (well, almost...).”

As for the science behind why women masturbate, Katz says that’s simple: “Because it feels good.” Women also masturbate “to relax. As a stress reliever. When an alternative doesn’t exist (partner not able or absent or no partner).” But what interested me the most about her answer was that she also mentioned that women masturbate in order “to have an orgasm after penetrative intercourse.” In other words, after what many—even most—people define as having sex.

I find this very telling. It comes as no surprise to me that this would happen in a world where “putting a penis in a vagina” is the most common definition of sex. But it also makes me really sad. A woman should not have to “finish herself off” after sex. Needing to do that makes me wonder why she would bother having sex with a man in the first place. In other words, if sex leads to orgasm for the man and not for the woman, why would the female partner bother to participate? Because she thinks she’s supposed to. Because that’s just the way it is. Because the problem is that she is broken somehow, and it’s not his “fault” she didn’t come. Those are all the reasons we give. But the truth is that we still don’t understand and accept female sexuality and orgasm, and so we have to work around our lack of understanding.

Masturbating would fix that. It’s simple science. Learn the equipment. Experiment with it. Discover what it can do. Then you will know how to operate it properly and you’ll be able to share that information with your partner. And there won’t be any need to have sex after sex. It will all be sex, and everyone will come and live happily ever after. Or something like that any way.

So is there any science out there to explain what happens to you if you *don’t* masturbate? Well, I can tell you my highly unscientific answer. If you don’t masturbate, you will have a tougher time combating the things that masturbation helps you to combat, including insomnia, depression, stress, and pain.

But, as Katz explains, the twenty percent of women who never masturbate in their lives “likely have no ill effects. They may be more

sexually inhibited and less comfortable talking about sex with partner(s) and less accepting of their bodies, but no comparative studies have ever been done between those who do and those who don't and what the effects of not doing it are.”

I've done my own personal, less-than-scientific study by taking a week off from masturbating, and it was a lot like what I imagine it would be like to quit smoking or stop using drugs or suffer from sleep deprivation. I was grumpy and edgy and irritable. I felt off-kilter. And rightly so: I was missing a natural release to which my body had happily become accustomed.

Orgasm is so insanely good for you. Allow me to count the ways:

- 1.Orgasm has incredible health benefits—it can combat headaches, pain, insomnia, and depression. It's even been known to cure hiccups! It's great for your heart and for your skin. And it has zero negative side effects. It gives a whole new meaning to “self-medicating.”
- 2.Orgasm brings you closer to whomever you have it with, including yourself! When you orgasm, you release what's known as the “warm fuzzy” hormone—oxytocin—making orgasm a great way to connect with yourself. Anyone who tells you that masturbation is a bad thing is an insecure hater. To hell with what any religion or societal convention has to say. Just like orgasm connects you to your partner, it can also connect you with yourself.
- 3.Orgasm is the ultimate in self-care. Self-confidence and self-acceptance are key when it comes to being a good partner, friend, parent, colleague, whatever. So consider masturbation part of your self-care regime. Exercise, eat right, and get plenty of sleep and self-induced orgasms!
- 4.Orgasm is the key to world peace. Seriously. If everyone in the world were experiencing consistent orgasms on a regular basis, stress levels would sink and happiness levels would rise. In a world as overly busy and connected as ours, it can be tough to see the importance of something like

sexual pleasure. But orgasm grounds us in our bodies, connects us to ourselves and our partners, and releases us from the brains that so often control us. We can change the world. And all we have to do to get started is come. Now that's my kind of revolution.

Female masturbation has had a long and embattled history. But the truth is that science is on our side. It's great for you, and no one has a right to your body other than you. So, to my mind, it's a no-brainer.

In some ways, I see masturbation as the ultimate act of defiance. It says to all those quacks of days gone by and all those religious leaders who think they hold sway over women's bodies and all the men and all that cultural programming that deny women their inalienable right to their sexuality that all of that is BS.

No one can tell us not to touch ourselves. We know the truth now. It's good for us, and it's our right to seek pleasure. We don't need a man or anyone else to give us pleasure or permission. All we need are our own two hands, and those who try to stop us only look like controlling fools.

Female masturbation is the ultimate fuck-you to anyone who thinks that women are less than men. It empowers women to see themselves as whole beings, sexual and otherwise. Who knew you could get so political from the comfort of your own bed?

There are very few things in life that provide only benefits and that can be scientifically proven without any remaining doubt. Masturbation and orgasm are two of those things. Barring truly extreme cases in which masturbation becomes such an obsession as to preclude all else, there is simply no reason—I repeat, no reason—to refrain from masturbating.

It's good for your heart. It's good for your self-esteem. It makes you a better sexual partner. It relieves pain, insomnia, stress-related problems, and headaches. It can even improve your circulation and your skin. It costs nothing and means everything. There is nothing else in the universe that science has proven to have such dramatic and universal results while being undeniably healthy and safe and natural (and free).

You won't get hairy palms or get pregnant from doing it. Granted, your girly bits won't fall off from *not* doing it. Still, why wouldn't you partake? It's the best cost-benefit analysis you'll ever come across. All benefit and

no burden, from a scientific standpoint. And it's the easiest political statement you can make. So what in the world are you waiting for?

First Forays into Solo Sex

AS A KID AND even as a pre-teen, I didn't even know masturbation was a "thing." I didn't know that that was what it was called or that people did it or that it was normal—or even that some people found it problematic. All I knew was that when I rubbed certain parts of my body against the mattress or the pillow or even the edge of the bathroom counter, very happy things started to happen.

Everyone has a first-time masturbation story—good, bad, or otherwise. Hearing other women's stories can help you to better understand—and move beyond—any shame you may feel about masturbation and help you to feel like the perfectly normal girl you are for wanting to get off on your own. That's what this book is all about, as you likely know by now. And this chapter in particular is all about first times when it comes to solo sex.

I first discovered masturbating when I was too young to know what I was doing. I remember rubbing against my pillow in the bed and knowing that it felt good. I don't honestly remember if I ever actually had an orgasm or not back then. And I sensed that it wasn't something I was supposed to talk about. So I never asked my mom or anyone else about it, and no information was offered.

It seems strange to me that we don't really talk to children about masturbation. Here's this incredibly healthy, normal practice, and yet we find ourselves having a tough time discussing it among adults, let alone with our kids. I've spent a lot of time trying to figure out why that is. I have a few guesses.

1. We find it hard, if not impossible, to think of kids as naturally sexual.

2. We as adults are embarrassed about masturbation.
3. We have no idea what to say.
4. We are terrified about what our kids' response might be.
5. We don't want to "mess it up."

When I was growing up, there was a copy of *The Joy of Sex* on the bottom shelf of the bookshelf in the family room. But there were never any actual, real conversations about sex, and certainly not about masturbation.

I don't remember what, if anything, was taught about it in school. Growing up in Aberdeen and then Bel Air, Maryland, two nondescript, nothing little towns, my guess is it wasn't discussed at all. Or perhaps the boys were taught about it in their boys-only health class session while we were busy learning about getting our periods in our girls-only session.

What I remember most, though, is the several years during which I went to a friend's house after school before my mom got off from work. Her mother would babysit my sister and me because my mom thought we were too young to be home alone. We would play a game that we called "bra-ing" (I have no idea why) where we would each take a turn and lie down on the bed on our stomachs with our pants down around our ankles, rubbing against a pillow, and one of the other girls would put a popsicle stick between our butt cheeks. I think we made some pretense about taking each other's temperatures. Not sure what our explanation was for the rubbing. Seems funny now. But I remembered it felt good, and I looked forward to it every day after school.

I do distinctly remember that we knew it was something we were supposed to hide from the grown-ups, and we made very sure to do that. It makes me a little sad, now, to think about what a perfect opportunity it could have been for the adults in our lives to talk to us about masturbation, to tell us that it was healthy and safe and an excellent way to explore our sexualities and learn to love and be comfortable in our bodies. Instead, for many, if not most, people, childhood is a time to develop a sense of shame around pleasure and sex and living in a body.

Building a sex ed curriculum for schools is not as daunting a task as many people seem to believe. All you'd have to do is tell the truth and leave religion and stigma and personal opinion out of it. I can't imagine how different my life might have been if my parents and teachers had told me that masturbation was a perfectly normal, healthy thing that people do and

that the release—in other words, orgasm—that often results from it is incredibly healthy for you.

There would be so much less to deprogram and undo. So much less slut shaming. So many fewer girls trading sex for love and falling for boys who were only giving them love to get sex. Feeling that our experiences of body and mind are in direct contradiction with all the messaging around us is confusing at best and devastating at worst. It leaves us feeling that our very existence is wrong. It's a sad state of affairs. But sharing our stories and our realities, telling our truths now, is one way to combat that past and build the possibility of a better future of sex positivity for the generations of girls to come.

In high school, I continued to masturbate, now a little more aware of what was going on. But I was very careful to never, ever touch myself. I would only rub against the bed or pillows. I understood that I wasn't supposed to touch myself, even though I longed for someone else to touch me (and was also terrified of the idea). It wasn't that anyone told me directly that touching myself or masturbating was wrong; it was that no one had told me anything. And anything having to do with sex seemed very mysterious and something to be kept very private, especially from my parents, who, at the time, were probably the only two people who could have given me the information I really needed.

In college, I called myself a feminist and a "political lesbian." Not sure where that phrasing came from. But at the time, to me, it meant that I aligned more politically with women who were lesbians but wasn't actually sexually involved with women (or even aware that I was attracted to them). At the time, I still thought I wanted to be them, rather than sleep with them. But whenever I masturbated, which I did relatively frequently at that point, I thought about women. Even then, I still used the rubbing method, thinking that touching my pussy was something reserved for other people—which seems beyond insane to me now.

It's amazing to me how many human experiences we openly share with one another. Women in particular are so open when it comes to talking about nearly every aspect of their lives. But masturbation is something that just never seems to get talked about. Humans are pack animals. We like to feel a sense of belonging. Part of that belonging has to do with feeling akin to the group, with feeling a sense of sameness and normalcy.

The problem is, if we don't share our stories, we don't have a way to gauge our experiences and feelings and whether or not they fit within the "norm" of human experience. It can leave us concerned that something is wrong with us when, more than likely, we are perfectly normal. The true issue is that we are perfectly alone.

That is precisely why I wanted to survey women about their experiences with masturbation, and to share as many of those experiences with readers as I could. My guess is that no matter what your experience with masturbation, you will find a similar story within these pages.

In my survey, I asked survey takers to tell me about the first time they masturbated and describe what it was like. The ages of these women when they first masturbated were all over the place, from toddler to fifty-something. The practices ranged from humping pillows and blankets and stuffed toys to capitalizing on the water flow from the faucet during bath-time to using sex toys to manually stimulating the clit to penetration with fingers or toys.

Here is a sampling of what survey takers had to say about their first experiences with masturbation.

At first, I could only orgasm while lying on my stomach with my legs closed. I was lying down on my stomach, face on a pillow. With one hand I spread open my outer labia and used the index finger (moistened with lubricant) of my right hand to rub my clit in a circular motion. I experimented with pulling the hood back, but that was too much. I had to touch the outer right side of my clit, with the hood covering it, and press as if I was clicking a computer mouse to achieve the first orgasm I had on my own.

I discovered a very old copy of Our Bodies, Ourselves in my closet. It belonged to my sister, who was sixteen years my senior. I must have been twelve or thirteen. I read it cover to cover, and that was the first time I remember touching myself.

I was fantasizing that I was Batman's girlfriend.

I was twelve and I was in bed before going to sleep. I was rubbing my clit because it felt good. I kept rubbing until I felt

the “explosion.” (That’s what I called it.) I can’t remember how many times in a row I did it that night.

I was about ten and I remember lying facedown in my bed and rubbing my crotch frantically while shifting my body up and down on my hands.

I was six and I remember watching soap operas with my grandma and wondering what was going on [in the sexual or romantic scenes]. I began touching myself in my room frequently [thinking about those scenes] because it felt good.

The first time I tried anything, I might have been fourteen or fifteen. I just tried penetration because I didn’t really know about the role of the clitoris in masturbation and orgasm.

I bought a vibrator and gave myself permission to explore. Also, learning shortly beforehand that masturbating didn’t have to include penetration enticed me much more. I had bought a dildo years prior and tried it once and it was not hot at all—I don’t count that time at all.

When I was four, I masturbated by climbing trees. As I continued in elementary school, I’d climb the poles and masturbate. I kind of knew what I was doing and kind of didn’t. When I was in seventh grade, I touched myself with the round side of a wire hanger until I came.

The first time I actually masturbated I was twenty-four. It didn’t “happen.” I bought a little toy when I was twenty-five and for the first time, I got myself off! OMG. I was thrilled. I felt empowered. I felt in control. It was by far the best orgasm I’d ever had and maybe my first actual one. Let’s just say I was happy to “go fuck myself.”

I think I was in elementary school; I would take baths trying to get the water on my clit from the faucet. (Love that feeling.) I was no older than ten.

It all started with me getting it on with my then-boyfriend. He fingered me, and afterward I thought, "Seriously, I could do a better job on myself." So I did. I went home, thought of Ruby Rose, and practiced.

I was four and I lay in the bath with the water running down to hit me. I had my legs spread and my feet on the bathtub wall.

I was maybe seven and didn't know what I was doing at all. I humped my pillow in order to feel good. That's all I understood of it, really.

I was nine or ten and figured out that it felt really good to squeeze my largest stuffed animal between my legs.

I was about thirteen and I was fingering my clit. I stole one of my dad's Penthouse magazines and read it.

I was eighteen years old, and my best guy friend told me how to do it. He showed me where my clit was. After that day, I was hooked!

I think I was sleeping. I must have been grinding against the mattress. I realized how good it felt. I didn't know how to finish and I felt very guilty but intrigued at the same time.

I was about ten or eleven and sitting astride a fence. I moved back and forth on the fence.

I was maybe ten or twelve. I used the bedknob to put inside of myself.

The first time was when I was twelve and I moved my nether regions against an item that I would not like to mention because it is pretty weird.

I was nine years old, approximately, and came upon advertisements for women's brassieres in a Sears catalog.

That's all it took. I was off to the races humping my pillow! Lol.

I remember being in kindergarten and touching myself while I thought about a certain boy I thought was cute. I remember placing my finger between my labia, but not in my vagina, and wondering what it would feel like to have sex. As I got older, in my early teens, I would get my curling iron or a brush handle and put it inside of me. I remember feeling pleasure, but also guilt and shame that this wasn't normal.

I was really young. The kid down the street taught us to play doctor and I liked being touched on my vaginal lips. He used a toy drumstick to pretend he was examining me up from the top of my vagina to my stomach. It made me all squishy in my vaginal area. I wasn't sure why, but it felt good. I didn't want it to stop. Of course I always loved it when my friends would trace letters and shapes on my back; that also felt good. But after that first encounter, I wanted to touch myself in my vaginal area and make it squishy all the time.

I don't remember much about how it felt. I must have been eleven or so. I used a mascara tube for a dildo, and I thought, "What's the big deal? This doesn't feel that good." I found my clitoris later that year. Then I understood.

I think I was about seven or eight years old and I had been looking at a Playboy magazine. I learned that I could get the right place and right tempo by rubbing myself against the edge of my mattress.

I was five and at school. I was bored and trying to sleep during nap time. I started rubbing my body up and down on my mat, playing, like kids do. I orgasmed. It was fun, so I continued.

I was probably in the sixth grade, about eleven years old or so. I was in the bathtub and happened to have an electric spinning toothbrush. Just out of curiosity I placed it "down there" and realized it felt good.

I don't know if this counts. But when I was about twelve, I had a really sore cramp in my leg from gym class. My mother gave me a hot water bottle that could vibrate to help with muscle pains. I put it on my inner thigh and lay in my bed and within a couple minutes I had my first orgasm and it terrified me! But after a while I decided to try it again and for the next little while, until I learned to do other things, the water bottle was my best friend.

*I believe I was fifteen-ish. I remember reading romantic novels, and books with detailed sex scenes, like in *Clan of the Cave Bear*, and becoming aroused. I would then touch myself in bed, or go to the bath and run the water over my clitoris. The latter is what I remember doing the most. It was really cool when I experienced my first orgasm. It was like, "Ahhh, this is what they are talking about, with the buildup and the release!"*

I remember being about seven and dreaming up Snow-White, princess-type rescue fantasies and I would sort of "hump" the bed and it felt great. I would breathe pretty heavily but that was it. Then I first had a successful orgasm at twenty-three-ish with a vibrator—I stayed home a lot that week with the new toy. It felt fantastic to be able to make myself feel so good and relaxed.

The first time I remember masturbating I was in fourth grade, I think, probably ten or eleven years old. I used the face of my Cabbage Patch doll.

I was about ten years old and I tried to use, as sad as it sounds, a tampon applicator, which is very embarrassing to admit.

I was seventeen and it was right after having sex. I remember feeling really turned on but didn't know how to take care of it. After he left, I got a condom and a carrot (yes, a carrot! I couldn't go buy a vibrator yet from Spencer's). I wrapped it up, and had my very first orgasm. Sex after that was disappointing because I felt broken. Like I was the only one who could take

care of myself. At least until I had a threesome and another woman knew what to do.

I was twelve years old when I decided to find out what was going on down there. One night in my bed I began exploring my vulva with my hands. I remember being surprised that it felt tingly and good. Then I felt inside my vagina, first with one finger, then two, and then three fingers. Although I remember getting wet (which was a surprise!), I did not have an orgasm—I had no clue what that even was at the time. Afterward, I was curious about the smell, so I smelled my hands, expecting it to smell bad, but I was glad to find out that it didn't, just different. I was afraid that someone would catch me even though I slept with my bedroom door closed and nobody ever came to my room after I went to bed. But I definitely felt like I was doing something that I wasn't supposed to be doing.

My parents had this electric massager. It looked almost like an electric shaver or beard trimmer in shape, but had different little nubs that you stuck on the end of it. They looked like suction cups, kind of. I was massaging my legs after basketball, and as I got further up my thigh and toward my inner thigh, I realized something nice was happening, and I just sort of experimented from there.

The first time I masturbated, I was about thirteen-ish? I had the "brilliant" realization that my Playstation 2 controller vibrated on certain games and settings. So I got down on the living room floor (don't worry, no one else was home) and used one of the handle bits of the controller as a makeshift vibrator.

I started fingering myself every night before bed around nine or ten, not understanding what I was doing. Before long, I had discovered my mother's back massager and, well, my clitoris. That was my first orgasm.

I think the first time I remember was when I was babysitting some kids. I was about thirteen. I remember I used to go

outside while the kids were down for a nap and masturbate on their back patio, which was very private, and I would do it in the sun. I enjoyed the heat and the “naked outside” feeling.

I used to try to masturbate, but I lacked the ability to fantasize while I was using my own hand to pleasure myself. I had sex at an early age, and I think this may have contributed to my not feeling comfortable with having sex with myself. The first time I masturbated where I really got the point was when a lover was on the phone with me while I was doing it. The soft encouragement coming through the ether helped me to envision sexy stuff while using my own fingers to fuck myself. It was lovely.

From what I can remember, I was ten or twelve years old, I think. And I used my hands and fingers externally and internally and touched my breasts. Though I remember using pretty much anything that would fit in the hole. Pens, small shampoo bottles, whatever I could find that looked like it would work and not harm me.

I remember as a small child, probably about five, rubbing a plastic Easter egg against myself and how good it felt. I also love the shivers it gave me until I was about to come, but at the time I thought I was going to pee, so I always stopped before, since I didn't know it was climax.

The first time I knowingly masturbated, pool jets aside, I was twelve or so. I was on the couch in the basement. I used the TV controller to, through my clothes, hit my clitoris over and over and over. I essentially recreated the effect of the pool jets with what I had at hand, because that was what I knew would make me feel good.

I was probably around thirteen years old. It was all about trial and error, feeling around for what felt nice. I didn't put any fingers in my vagina. I only stroked my clit. I remember loving the feeling, but also having thoughts that I shouldn't be doing

it. I can remember this feeling of knots and built up pressure before I finally had an orgasm and it shocked me.

I was about ten years old. I remember reading one of my many books and I had a bit of an itch downstairs. I didn't think too much of it, just kept reading as I scratched. But I kept going, I was so engrossed in the book that I didn't even realize what I was doing or why. After a couple of minutes it started feeling good. I didn't have an orgasm until I was about sixteen.

Sadly, because of my upbringing, the first time I masturbated, I was seventeen, about to turn eighteen. I'd just taken a shower, and I lay down on the bathroom floor. I wasn't sure if I was doing it right (I think I may have been a little too enthusiastic), and it hurt a little (I know now that I'm very sensitive), but I rubbed my clit until I came. That was pretty spectacular. I had no idea that you could feel like that.

I was very little, and I humped my teddy bear. I called it "tickling teddy."

I think I was about twelve, and I was hugging a body pillow and rubbed against it by accident. It felt good, so I kept at it. I never knew that what I was doing was masturbation. A month later, my sister and I got the sex talk from our mom.

I was sixteen and used a vibrator called "the rabbit." It was amazing. My first orgasm.

I was in eighth or ninth grade the first time I ever digitally masturbated. It was on the bathroom floor and the room smelled of Irish Spring soap. I think I went balls to the wall straight out the gate and also penetrated myself with a (round) brush handle. Not my proudest moment, but a girl's got to do what a girl's got to do. The explosion of digital masturbation far exceeded the muted orgasm I got from [other methods]. That was when I realized that I could have more than one kind of orgasm. It was a game changer, for sure.

I was in my mid-twenties. I felt like ghosts of dead relatives could see and watch me, and I felt embarrassed. I liked how it felt physically. I was able to explore my body and what felt good. But I was also self-conscious.

I was probably around twelve. I was using the tap on the tub to clean myself out because I had my period, and the rushing water brought me to orgasm. It didn't feel as earth-shattering as I thought it would, so I remember I wasn't sure I had actually reached orgasm.

I started to have pleasurable sensations and feelings around my clit right before I would go to sleep. I remember rubbing them out and knowing that I had to hide these feelings.

I remember being younger and I had this pen that was called something like a "squiggle pen." It vibrated when you used it. After discovering masturbation, I remember using this pen as my vibrator. It was the best and helped me achieve many wonderful orgasms.

My earliest memories [of masturbation] in first or second grade are of hanging off the monkey bars and getting a "good feeling." I then figured out that I could lie on my back and have my legs up in the air and eventually get that good feeling. And at some stage I figured out that I could touch myself and get that same good feeling without all the hard work!

I would idly stimulate myself even as a toddler. The first time I orgasmed, though, I was...seven? eight? I was brushing my teeth and when I leaned forward to better see myself in the mirror, my crotch pressed up against the edge of the counter in a pleasing way. So I rubbed up against it some more. And some more. Until pow.

I think I was seven when I began exploring masturbation. I had seen pornography and wanted to know what was happening. After trying to figure out how many holes I had, I discovered

how pleasurable clitoral stimulation was and managed to have an orgasm through that.

As a young child (up to seven or eight, maybe nine) I mostly rubbed myself against things, often the side of the bath or sink, and in my room mostly by laying facedown on the bed. As I got a little older, I used my hand, and at about the age of ten or eleven, I remember experimenting with inserting eyeliner pencils of different thickness. At about eleven or twelve I read an interesting book which described the female orgasm very well, and I knew for sure what the sensation I had been having for many years was.

I was about thirteen, and I was at a party where I had my first real kiss from a boy. I remember him pushing against me and having this strange feeling. So when I got home, I was curious as to what would happen if I touched myself. So I tried. I just kept running my finger up and down. It was intense so I stopped.

Not sure. I remember holding myself going to sleep a lot, just placing my fingers between my lips and rocking into my hand, not focused on orgasm, more focused on riding the pleasure.

As a two- or three-year-old, I masturbated with a Playmobil toy (the shape really worked).

I was three or four years old. My mom had to work, as she was a single parent, and my brother and I went to a daycare center. I remember touching myself at naptime there. My usual method of “disguise” was lying on my stomach and pressing into my fingers or hand.

I was fourteen. I had been making out with my boyfriend and he got me off with his fingers. I was like, “Oh wow! What was that and how did you do it!?” So he taught me.

I had no school and my parents were at work. I sat on a step and put the handle of a butter knife into me for about a minute. It didn't feel that good.

The first time I remember is when I was pregnant with my second child. I was twenty-eight at the time and traveling alone. I made a pit stop at McDonald's. I sat on the toilet in the restroom, locked the door, and went at it.

I was twelve or thirteen. I was on the phone with a few of my guy friends, and they were talking about doing it, so I asked how they masturbated. When they told me, I just stuck my hands down my pants and started feeling around. I mainly played with my clit, and felt myself get wet, but I thought I had peed my pants and became extremely embarrassed. I didn't touch myself again until probably sixteen.

I was eleven. I followed the directions of someone in a chat room, and wiggled my finger over a tendon or something on the top of my clit. It felt great, but in my family, sex and periods were always a "bad" topic. So I felt pretty shitty. I knew that doing something someone in a chat room told me to do was bad.

When I asked survey takers if they had ever gotten "caught" masturbating as a kid and, if so, how it was handled, many of them said that they never did get caught, either because they were very stealthy or because they didn't masturbate.

The majority of those who did get caught said that their parents got angry or that they were made to feel bad or guilty or ashamed about what they were doing. One survey taker said, "I got the message it was dirty and forbidden, displeasing to grown-ups, and not something [that was] approved of."

Some said they were threatened with punishment, including spanking, if they were ever caught doing it again. Others said they were simply told that it was something they should do in private and that it was perfectly natural, which I was very happy to hear!

Here are some more specific responses that I found interesting.

My sister busted me with my mom's "massager" at night when I thought she was sleeping. We never discussed it. When I was about four, I would climb trees and "feel funny." I told my aunt to watch me once and she got embarrassed, but I didn't know why.

I remember being young. Maybe nine? And I woke up with my hand in my panties. I had no idea why or how it was there. My mom had a bit of a freakout and asked me many questions about what I was doing and why. She was adamant that I shouldn't do that. I remember feeling embarrassed and confused. I didn't know exactly what was going on.

I once masturbated in the seat next to my dad, but I didn't know it was masturbation. He looked and it was really awkward because I didn't know what I was doing, but he didn't say anything.

Hahahahaha! Yes. I was in my blanket fort in my granny's living room. She pulled back the "door" and saw me facedown humping a pillow and said, "What are you doing?" Me: "Um, it makes me need to pee..!" Granny: "Well, finish up, lunch is on the table." We never spoke of it again.

My mom came in and made me take my hand out from under the covers and smell my fingers when I was about four or five. I must have been touching or fondling myself, although I don't remember feeling scared or ashamed, just curious as to why I had to take my hand out of the covers. I didn't smell anything bad. But I made sure to keep my hands out of the covers after that.

Coming from a Southern Baptist background, I was told that it was bad and not to do it again. I still did; it was magnificent and something I could do while watching Sesame Street.

Honestly, I just told my mother that I was only "looking." She shrugged it off and later told me it was no big deal.

The closest thing might have been when I was watching TV once when I was little, and I was lying on my stomach with my palms underneath my thighs. I was a little giggly, and my mom seemed rather disturbed. I remember wondering why she was freaking out, since I wasn't touching my genitals.

*When I was in the ninth grade, I used to go to the “outhouse”—the tiny outdoor bathroom we had in our backyard (for the pool there)—and run the shower head over my clitoral area. I loved it so much. I would think about the sex scenes I had read in *Clan of the Cave Bear* or any other literature I had read with sex scenes, and feel the pressure of the water, and just moan and moan until I came. I would say “Oh yes” and increase my loudness as I became aroused. It was a private little space. But one time, the door to the bathroom opened, and my sister's friend was looking for my sister, calling, “Lauren? Lauren?” The door was right next to the shower. It was a good five seconds before I realized what was happening. Then I heard the silence of her just standing there, shocked and quiet. (The shower was inches away from the door.) She suddenly closed the door and scurried away (or at least I assume so!). To this day, I feel awkwardness about it. The woman is now forty-three and I am forty. She is still friends with my sister. I see her about once every five years. She is a lesbian and is in a long-term relationship. Neither of us has ever said a word to the other about it.*

I once tickled myself on the belly—I was like eight and my mother lost it and told me not to tickle myself because it was bad and gross. That pretty much killed that. I rarely even touched myself again. Before that I had really great “love” fantasies and I would stroke my legs at night—after the tickle incident I started just reading before bed until I was about twenty years old.

Yes, it was handled strangely. I masturbated with a larger-than-life doll my mother had made. She could tell by the ring around

the mouth of the doll that I'd been kissing it. My mom told me that I shouldn't kiss the doll; it wasn't sanitary.

I brought a Raggedy Ann doll out to the living room, somewhere around the age of three, threw it on the floor, lay down on top of it, and went to town. Apparently we had company that day, and my parents were mortified.

Yes but my parents acted like nothing was happening.

Er, yeah—as a toddler I masturbated lying on the living room rug in front of my parents and collected uncles and aunts. No sure how they reacted, but I somehow realized after that it perhaps wasn't usual and was more private thereafter!

Yes, I did get caught—my parents found my dad's dirty magazines and my mom's back massager in my room once while I was out at my friend's house. They just took everything out of my room and never mentioned it again. So embarrassing.

I don't know that I was really masturbating, but I had a pallet to sleep on in the living room as a young child, around seven or eight.

One night I was touching myself under the blanket with other people around. Later I can remember my mother telling me that was something we didn't do in front of people.

Never caught, but I did tell my mom about [the time] I felt a "strange fluttering feeling"—and she played dumb. When I cried to her about the guilt, she pulled out the Dr. Spock book and told me not to worry.

When I was a teen, my mom just kind of walked in talking about something we were going to do, and she saw what I was doing and kind of went "Pffft" and walked out and waited

upstairs. When I did go up, she said “Finished?” and went on with what she had wanted to tell me.

Yes, [I got caught] a few times as a teen. My mother called the minister of our church, a nurse from the church, and the principal of my private high school. They held an “intervention” to tell me it was dirty and wrong (which honestly just made me do it more).

Yes, and my parents told me that I should only do it in my room, alone, with the door closed.

In elementary school, I got caught so many times that to this day I’m still embarrassed! I had a little coat tree, kid-sized, that I would hold on to and hump. As a kid I was embarrassed because although I don’t recall being shamed about it, I just knew that it wasn’t really a socially acceptable thing. Not that that stopped me. Haha, I humped that poor coat tree for years until it broke!

When I was twelve, my mother left a bookmarked religious book about masturbation and why it’s wrong. Lol.

Yes. I did it at school during naptime. I was laughed at.

I didn’t get yelled at (memories are kind of vague here) but remember a sort of general feeling of disapproval. I have a hazy memory of being on my grandparents’ couch mid-day touching myself (I thought discreetly. My go-to method for self-pleasuring is on my stomach, and I think that started in childhood as a way to “disguise” what I was doing), and I was told to sit up when I was caught.

And even though this wasn’t a story about getting caught, I had to share it!

When I was thirteen, I found a small, white, innocuous-looking thing in my mom’s dresser drawer. It was a vibrator, but I didn’t quite know what it was. But of course I decided to pack it and

bring it with me on a family vacation in Ireland. One night I was up reading British Vogue in a guest room in my aunt's house and took the vibrator out to try it, and somehow lost it. We continued on our journey, and when we returned to my aunt's later on the trip, she discreetly handed it to me and said, "You forgot this."

And finally, this was one of my very favorite responses about first experiences with masturbation:

I was twelve years old and it felt like finding gold.

Solo Sex—The Ways We Play Today

WOMEN'S FIRST EXPERIENCES WITH masturbation are very telling. But it was equally interesting to me to delve into what women's current masturbation practices look like. You can find so many guides and how-tos online about what works. But the truth is that the only thing that matters is what works for you.

And the results are in. We all masturbate differently, and yet we all masturbate the same. When we do it, we think about having sex, about being men about having sex with celebrities, about being forcibly taken (albeit still with consent). We watch porn or replay in our minds the porn we have seen in the past, or we read erotica. We use toys and fingers, pillows and furniture.

The shower and bed are the most common locations for masturbation. And the ever-present element is the clit, which, for ninety-nine percent of us, needs direct stimulation in order to achieve orgasm. Although many survey takers said they greatly enjoy vaginal penetration along with clitoral stimulation. (And some of you like to throw a little anal stimulation in there as well.) No surprise there, since the “blended orgasm,” characterized by combining clitoral stimulation with penetration and sometimes anal play, is what leads most women to their most satisfying—or ultimate—orgasms.

Here are some of the stories from the women I surveyed about their own personal and current masturbation practices.

I lie on my back and watch porn or fantasize about other women while I use one finger to make myself come. If I'm in a hurry, I'll use a vibrator. Just recently I inserted the vibrator

into my vagina and fucked myself while watching an MMF bisexual threesome.

I masturbate with the Magic Wand and a hand towel folded over it (two layers). I lie on my back and think about various things, usually someone being fucked. Sometimes it's gay men. Sometimes it's my partner. It varies, but the more I can lock into a specific visual, the better. I need to be able to see the fucking and coming in my mind's eye in order to come.

I have never been able to masturbate manually without some other object. Most success is by humping a pillow. I do not masturbate often and I don't think much about it except a means to a pleasant end, especially for stress relief.

I do it different ways—sometimes just stimulation of the clit, and sometimes I insert something in my vagina and stimulate the outside. I always have to rub my clit or I can't come. My husband helps occasionally. I used to use a toy, but it's easier and faster with my hands. I think about being a man and having sex with a woman. I have figured out I like the perceived control a penis has.

These days I still rely on intense friction on my crotch with my hands, but also I've used a little battery-operated "bullet" vibrator. I don't use any penetration methods, just friction on the outer parts. I often use visualization of being taken against my will because for some reason those types of thoughts bring me to a quick self-orgasm.

I use lube and make sure everything is all slippery. I then use my vibrator to stimulate my clit and the surrounding lips while watching porn. I come in one and a half and two minutes unless I want to edge for a little, which delays it by maybe a minute.

Oh, I do it rough. I like to do it somewhere where I might get caught. I think about the girl I'm with usually. I'm into BDSM.

So, it's not always making love when I fantasize about them.

With toys and thinking about women's thighs, inner thighs and hip bones (grabbing onto them while she straddles me).

I masturbate at least every few days. I use a bullet vibrator and lie on my belly. I put a pillow between my thighs and grind my hips against the pillow and bullet. I read erotica or watch lesbian porn—usually oral scenes or vaginal fisting scenes that end with squirting. Lots of moaning sounds. I usually orgasm two or three times before I am satisfied.

I don't care much for penetration, so I mostly just finger my clitoris. Sometimes I use a vibrator, but not very often. I'm a butch so I mostly fantasize about topping another woman, frequently with a strap-on. I'm really into breasts and fantasize a lot about sucking them while fucking her.

Most often I masturbate in the shower with the showerhead. I always fantasize about women. I also masturbate with a bullet vibrator, and I either fantasize or look at a Penthouse letter magazine.

I think about my wife most of the time, and sometimes I look at porn or read something that turns me on. My go-to position is still on my belly, but now I like vaginal and clitoral stimulation.

Wow, this section could be a book. Even in an anonymous setting, this is challenging to discuss. I masturbate in my bed when I wake up horny, in the bathroom sometimes for assured privacy, standing in the shower, or on the living room couch. My thoughts drift toward women with large boobs. It's all about the boobs, I'm ashamed to admit. I wish it were their intellect or their sense of humor. Anyway, I'll put them in situations pairing them with a butch sometimes, imagining a torrid love scene. Sometimes I take on their identity and have the starring role in the sex scenes. Other times I just enjoy looking at their boobs and achieve orgasm that way.

I like to watch lesbian porn online and I typically use my favorite Lelo double-barrel dildo which stimulates my clit as well. I can masturbate manually, but I really enjoy the sensation of the vibrator on my clit and in my pussy at the same time.

I love to watch lesbians eating pussy. I am primarily straight (slightly bisexual) but I prefer relationships with men. I don't often fantasize about a male partner or watch straight porn, although occasionally I do. Perhaps it is because I get that often enough. But it is more difficult to find a female partner or threesome, so I enjoy fantasizing about that aspect. I have had several female lovers and I very much love going down on a woman, so that is what I enjoy watching while I masturbate. I love videos of a woman sitting on another woman's face or diving between her legs.

Once I feel myself have my first orgasm, I occasionally work through it and come again once or twice. But most often, I am satisfied with one orgasm, and then I am tired and usually nap. When my boyfriend masturbates me manually, he usually keeps going until I have come multiple times and beg him to stop, but I don't push myself that hard.

(Note: Here, the survey taker refers to her boyfriend stimulating her manually as masturbation. But "masturbation" refers to touching yourself. What the survey taker is describing is sex (or one sex act, anyway), just as oral sex and penetration may be called sex or a sex act.)

I read fanfiction to get in the mood—mostly Xena or Lost Girl fanfiction. (I am a purist when it comes to my pairings. Xena with Gabrielle or Bo with Lauren only.) Sometimes to make myself really come, I try to read a jealousy-themed story. But only as long as there is a happy reconciliation between my two favorite characters. And I've found that I need vibration now to cum, as well. I love vibrators but I can't seem to penetrate myself. In fact, I've never been penetrated by anyone or

anything. Even something as small and thin as an earbud wire or cable. My fingers can come close, but I don't think I've ever touched my G-spot.

I have a We-Vibe Tango. I put it on my clit and it doesn't take long. I have a lot of fantasies—group sex, humiliation, etc. Things I wouldn't really do because I'd worry about my relationship or safety.

I like to use toys that penetrate as well as vibrate on the outside.

I like a lot of sensation play—feathers or fleecy or silky fabrics. I enjoyed wet, nubby towels when I was younger. I have a pretty impressive collection of gay male porn (quite a few videos, a lot of photo books), and sometimes I'll indulge in those beforehand. (Those usually tend to make me want to add anal stimulation, go figure.) I often picture two guys together in my head—they might be edging each other, playing with a toy together, or just lazily sixty-nining or stroking each other at leisure. (Lately, I do seem to have more traditional fantasies of a very willing, beautiful submissive guy wanting to pleasure me at my every whim! I definitely have some strap-on fantasies, too...)

Half the “session” is spent searching for a porn scene that actually turns me on, rather than grossing me out. So much of porn seems to me like the girl is feigning interest for the guy. I hate that. I like to watch someone who's truly turned on. This is why I've recently turned to gay male porn. I love that I have proof that those two guys are turned on. I know it because there's visible evidence of their orgasms! I basically watch porn for the orgasm. When someone else is aroused to the point of orgasm, that's the thing that enables me to be turned on to the point of orgasm.

I like a firm but soft pressure. So I use a silicone cock ring with textured nubbies around it on my first two fingertips and rub

my clit, usually while watching a few minutes of porn or at least thinking about the lady I'm interested in at the time or about a previous sexual encounter. Only rarely will I use a vibrator, sometimes for just my clit, and other times for penetration.

I tend to masturbate only in front of my partner today. I think about her and the ways that she looks at my body while I'm masturbating in front of her. It is very erotic.

Now [my masturbation habits are] device-based. I have had the habit of creating romantic stories in my head that last for weeks, pretty much my own self-scripted movies. They range from sexy bodyguards, to office romps, to high school football players. Ha!

I use several toys. I also like to use random objects. Anything taboo makes it sexier, dirtier. I love pushing the limits even when I'm alone. I enjoy taking photos while I play and Snapchatting them to a small audience. It makes the moment that much better. I enjoy playing until I am squirting everywhere and can't possibly take it anymore.

On my belly, rubbing my clit on the sheets or a pillow, in a thrusting manner. I usually imagine that I am butt-fucking a straight man—consensually, of course!

Well, oddly enough, I prefer my own hand, even though I sell and own bedroom accessories. I usually fantasize about sharing and being shared by my husband. Thinking about watching him get off makes me super hot.

I usually think about naked girls; sometimes I also think about penetrating them (with a penis). Some other times I think of my girlfriend smiling while we have sex, touching and licking her, etc.

I am a single mom so I typically have to get it done quickly. I have a little pink vibrating bullet and it's wham, bam, goodnight ma'am. It only takes me three to five minutes to achieve orgasm. I tend to think about previous relations I've had. I'm bisexual so I like thinking of men and women. Nothing specific. No fetishes.

I generally lie on top of my crossed thumbs to exert a fairly hefty pressure on my clitoris and combine the pressure with a small up-down rub. As a personal challenge, I have occasionally attempted to masturbate to orgasm faceup, but it's not comfortable or reliable. I have to be very worked up for that to be successful. When masturbating I think about imaginary scenarios of impregnation, never imagining a real person or persons as the partner or partners. I generally do this at least once daily.

What I do depends on what I'm thinking about. If I'm thinking about gay (male-male) sex then I'll use a butt plug and vibrator. Normally I'm thinking about being a muscular tattooed guy with a massive dick and having sex with a tattooed skinny, muscular girl with dark hair. I normally focus on how much she likes it and what she is saying (like how much she likes my dick, etc.) while using a vibrator and large dildo.

I use my fingers, a small vibrator, or sometimes a larger one that I insert. It doesn't take me long. I usually pinch or otherwise stimulate my nipples.

I read BDSM porn to get the juices flowing. Then, once I feel like I am turned on enough, I like to "feel full." I put in a butt plug; insert something in my vagina, whether it is my barbell, a dildo, or just my fingers; and use my wand on my clit.

I like my G-spot. I like sticking my fingers in my vagina and working them back and forth, and I feel the sensation of my hand moving fast and rhythmically, making vibrations go throughout my body.

Depends. There's the quick fix. This is when the mood strikes me rather suddenly for whatever reason. I've had it happen at the office, out with friends, sitting at home watching TV, whatever. It's unpredictable. If at home, I'll sometimes use a quick visual aid (porn) to help get the imaginative juices flowing, because again, this is a quick thing. Nearly one hundred percent of the time, I'm pressing my clit against something and using my body weight to rub against it—table corner, chair edge, washing machine, etc. It's over in less a minute or two, generally.

If I use porn, it's girl-on-girl porn most of the time, most often oral. Girls with toys do nothing for me. Though sometimes it's a rough sex visual with a guy and gal.

If I don't use porn, then I imagine something similar. Me going down on a gal, her on me, or both at the same time. Or I imagine rough sex with a guy. Sometimes a guy and a gal. Sometimes I need not think about anything at all.

Then there are the bedtime events. This is something I'll sometimes do before going to sleep. This is more involved, and is solely based on imaginative fantasy. I will kind of act out—sort of—what I'm imagining, though there really isn't much movement involved. Generally this is something along the lines of a man (or men) who have me captive in some way. But I'm very attracted to the man—of course—but he's my captor so I can't let myself give in, right? He forces me, but I totally want him to. Sometimes he forces me to be with another woman, too. The man in fantasy is usually based on a book or movie character I find very hot. The woman or women are generally nonspecific. This doesn't always end in climax. In fact, I've fallen asleep in "the middle," so to speak, many, many times. It's something I've done since I started masturbating oh so many years ago. Sometimes it's purely a mental exercise, with next to no physical component. Not sure that counts as masturbation, then.

And then there are times I use my vibrator or the jets in my tub. Sometimes my anal vibe, too. (My vibes are waterproof.) Usually I'm not really thinking about anything specific. It's just

pure physical pleasure and doesn't always end with climax. (In fact, most often it does not.) It's just a matter of feeling the sensations. I will often do it until I get so sore I can't do it any longer. Completely hedonistic. No thought involved.

I masturbate using toys, my fingers, anything that feels good, and some different types of lubrication, for different sensations. I tend to play with my clit to start with until I begin to get wet—I may use a vibrator on it, or my fingers. Then I slide a vibrator into my pussy. If it is a rabbit, it has the vibrating ears that buzz on my clit at the same time, and the base of the vibrator has beads on it that rotate and stimulate my G-spot. This is one of the best vibrators I have found and I usually come within minutes. If I masturbate using just my fingers, I will rub my clit until I'm wet, then move my fingers in and out of my vagina. Once they are wet I'll move them back up to my clit and rub it in circles, changing pressure as to how it feels best. The wetter it is, the nicer it feels. I tend to think about whatever is a turn-on for me at the time. It can vary, from a person I fantasize about being with to a scene of a sexual act that appeals to me to a man or woman touching me.

I can find anything in my room to help me get off: pencils, erasers, deodorant, earphones, teddy bears, tampons, toothbrushes, plastic eggs...I'm not joking. Sometimes I leave my panties on, sometimes not. I make sure to have alcohol or something to sterilize my improvised sex toys. But by far I love tampons the most. Plus they are hygienic. I used to use vibrators before, but I stopped. They help me get off quickly, but the orgasm isn't intense enough. And I usually spend half an hour masturbating. Yes, I can get off quicker, but after discovering G-spot orgasms it's hard to go back to mediocre clit orgasms.

*(Note: In fact, all orgasms are clitoral. The G-spot is part of the clitoral complex. See my book *O Wow: Discovering Your Ultimate Orgasm* for more on that topic.)*

Sometimes I cross my legs while lying on my side and thrust my hips while Kegeling. Or I might lie on my back and use my hand, but not usually directly on my clit—just manipulating the mons to get indirect stimulation.

I masturbate by using my index and ring fingers to spread myself open and my middle finger to rub my clitoris.

I use a B.O.B. vibrator to stimulate my clit. That's all I need to have an orgasm.

Generally it's always the same. For me, masturbation is about scratching an itch, so it's usually quick. I use a vibe on my clit, and I have a few different things I think about. I also have a little thirty-second video a friend sent me of him wanking. I love listening to his grunts. It can push me right over the edge. Sometimes I'll have a longer session where I'll have three or four orgasms, usually a couple of clit ones and then a deeper one.

I always use a vibrator. I have never managed to get myself off manually. I just don't have the knack, and yet I can come from a guy's fingers really fast, easy, and multiple times.

I must admit to masturbating on the toilet. It's private (lock on door). I've been known to disappear in there for a quick wank with my Kindle. I like how wide my legs go and I can look down my body to see my hand working.

My set (quick) system is using a dildo. There's a corner wall in the bathroom that I press the bottom of the dildo against once it's inserted inside me. I'm down on all fours, and can reach up and easily touch my clit. I like the sensation of my breasts pressing against the cold tiles (again, super sensitive!). I can get off this way in under a minute. My nice, long, complicated masturbating involves piles of lesbian erotica, vibrators, nipple clamps...it's a complicated affair that I do maybe four times a year. I masturbate the "quick" way every day.

As embarrassing as it is to say, I still use a pillow. I can't get off using my fingers. I straddle one end with another pillow under it to make it taller and just rub against it at a relatively slow pace. I sometimes think about various fantasies, but it's usually when I'm fertile that I really feel the need to masturbate.

Usually I'm in bed. I'll begin touching my breasts, then between my legs. My finger explores between the folds, and then I make circular motions on the clitoris.

If I am not alone [in my house], I'll sit on the toilet and use my hand.

It's still all very clit-focused. I'm usually either lying on my back in bed or sitting leaning back in a chair, although sometimes standing up and leaning against a wall. It's mostly done with just one or sometimes two fingers on one hand, stroking and rubbing my clit. If I'm dressed, I won't usually get undressed; I'll just loosen my clothes enough to get a hand in.

I do it for my man and think about how he spansks me before fucking me.

I usually start by playing with my breasts and lightly stroking my erogenous zones on my lower stomach and inner thighs. I like to be well warmed up before I start playing with my labia, stroking inside and out, or just rubbing in a circular motion. Depending on my mood, I typically move on to either a vibrator or dildo. I generally prefer the vibrator, which I often grind against.

It's usually before I go to sleep. I warm my hands up, place them on the outer part of my labia majora—give a gentle hello and get warm. Then I lick my finger and play with my clit for a while. Building up and building down. I usually have to think about how good it feels. And it is really that simple. I rarely use toys and especially not when I masturbate. The majority of the

time I masturbate to go to sleep if my mind is racing and it won't shut up.

I like to lie on my back and almost always imagine some really sexually submissive scene (often involving bondage or even humiliation, which I've never actually done with a partner), and when I start getting excited and wet, I finger myself. That's pretty much it. I am in general not a submissive partner, though, and would be angry if someone attempted to humiliate me, so I am not sure why I find this so exciting for masturbation purposes.

I lie on my back with my thighs and stomach tensed, press my Magic Wand firmly against my clitoris just above the tip, and wiggle it up and down.

Mostly I use my fingers on my clit and also rub them across the area inside my outer lips. Sometimes I insert a finger from the other hand, but not for the whole time. I always rub and play with my breasts on and off throughout. I use vibrators and other objects sometimes, but not that often. When I am alone, usually I masturbate as soon as the urge takes me and don't stop to get my toys out! I mostly lie on my back but sometimes I do it standing or sitting. I'll also sometimes watch in a mirror—all of me, including my face.

It depends on how I'm feeling at the time. Most of the time I will use my hands and just massage, teasing myself for some time. I don't like to rush it. I like the buildup. If I'm in a hurry, I will add toys to the equation.

I have a box of toys that I take out and set beside me in bed. I have a variation on a theme that I use for self-pleasure. If it is at night I sometimes light a candle and incense. I start by putting lube on my breasts and my vulva and sometimes my anus. I begin touching myself, my breasts, my clitoris and stroke the inside of my vagina, but mostly play with and stroke my clitoris. I then put either my glass dildo or more often Betty [Dodson]'s Vaginal Barbell into my vagina. I move my hips in

the Rock 'n' Roll movement I learned in Betty's class. I keep the barbell inside, of course, and start stimulating my breasts, mostly by touching my nipples. My right nipple seems to be more responsive than the left one. In the last ten years I have enjoyed somewhat painful stimulation to my breasts. I start with a low level and after a while begin to increase the pain to levels that I like. I use an attachment from one of my vibrators that has very soft teeth on it and I use this to stimulate my nipples. It is very pleasing and makes me very hot. I continue to play with my clitoris. I don't do this all the time but if I'm in the mood I put clothespins on the flesh of my breasts. I put one on near my nipple. This heightens my nipple stimulation. After a while I might add more clothespins. Sometimes I add a blindfold, as this heightens my pleasure, too. Sometimes I add anal penetration. Also, I stimulate my clitoris with smooth things, like stainless-steel sex toys that have a nice ball on the end. I like the coldness. Sometimes I add more clothespins to my abdomen. The pain heightens the pleasure. What can I say? I recently purchased, through a sex store, some kind of small instrument that has a small wheel with sharp edges and something that has a point that is sharp but not too sharp. These are made for sex play, so they are not harmful to the point of breaking skin, although they might sound that way. I am still getting used to this instrument, how to use it for maximum pleasure.

I start using my vibrator when I am very excited. I use the Magic Wand on low and usually keep it on low. Every once in a while I might use the high speed, but low is my favorite. I usually take off the clothespins as I get very excited and just concentrate on my orgasm. I love the buildup of coming, and I sometimes turn off the vibrator for some seconds and turn it on again. I continue this way for a while, sometimes coming quickly, sometimes not. Sometimes I get on my stomach if I am frustrated with not coming while on my back. At times I try to come again if I have time and inclination. And sometimes many times, if I am in the mood! Also, I do masturbate when with a

partner sometimes, all throughout the sexual encounter. Sometimes I use a vibrator, sometimes just my fingers.

I lie on my side, one hand resting between my legs, and I squeeze my legs (and inner muscles) much as I would as a child.

Now I mostly use a Magic Wand and a dildo. I love the feeling of my lips vibrating slightly against the dildo while the wand works my clit. It works amazingly well. I don't always fantasize. In fact, more often than not I read and masturbate.

When I do fantasize, I work the dildo in and out of my vagina while I use the wand. It basically feels like a dick and gets me super wet. It's the best orgasm when I do that. I like looking at GIFs of dicks sliding in and out of wet vaginas and assholes.

The orgasms by hand are almost entirely more pleasurable. The orgasms from the Hitachi do not feel entirely satisfying, probably because they build and release too quickly, and I do not really get into the arousal like I do when I touch myself.

As you can see, most women need relatively direct and steady clitoral stimulation. Outside of that? Well, there really are no particular limits, parameters, or rules. Women do it all kinds of places in all kinds of ways with all kinds of props. I hope that will both put your mind at ease and assure you that you are perfectly normal, as well as inspire you to do whatever gets you seeing stars.

Solo Sex and Partnered Sex

I GET A LOT of questions about masturbation within a relationship. According to Alfred Kinsey himself, forty percent of men and thirty percent of women in relationships masturbate—but seventy-two percent of *married* men and sixty-eight percent of married women masturbate. I find this statistic particularly intriguing. It would be great if this surge was because married people are having so much sex that it makes them want even *more* sex, and so they masturbate, which makes them want still more sex, and the happy cycle continues. But I am fearful that this statistic is more likely because after the first year of marriage, the frequency of sex goes down and continues to drop, and so couples have solo sex because it's better than having no sex at all.

Masturbation is an excellent part of a healthy relationship. It is not, however, a proper substitute for partnered sex. If you and your partner are happy and healthy and you enjoy sex, have it! Masturbate to stay healthy and keep your sex drive amped up, but don't use it as a replacement. Instead, explore why you aren't having sex with your partner and do your best to remedy that.

None of that is to say that just because you're partnered, you have to stop masturbating. Not at all. Orgasms beget orgasms, and masturbation teaches us what we like. And when we do it for our partners, it teaches them what we like, too. You'll want to discover the ins and outs of your own personal pleasure not because you're alone, but because you are partnered with someone. Learn how to use this self-knowledge to take care of your sexual self and your sexual relationship.

Masturbating when you're partnered can come in three forms—doing it alone, doing it while your partner does it, and doing it for your partner

while he or she watches.

Here are five reasons to masturbate alone even when you're in a relationship:

1. To keep your sex drive up.

Orgasms beget orgasms. So no matter how little or how much sex you're having in your relationship, it doesn't hurt to keep the pump primed. And if you're not having much sex, it's even more important to masturbate so that you won't lose your desire for sex. You might even be inspired to take it to the next level and try some new positions or toys or locations...

2. To take the pressure off of your partnered sex life.

Relying on someone else for sexual release can be a dangerous game. It can lead you to be resentful if you're not getting as much as you want when you want it. Masturbating allows you to handle your own sexual needs without taking anything away from your partner. If you and your partner are a little mismatched when it comes to sex—that is, one of you wants it more frequently than the other—masturbating can help to even things out.

3. To keep your sanity.

There's so much going on in our lives these days: work, relationships, family, health concerns, world issues, and so on. Masturbating is an excellent way to focus inward and forget about all of that, at least for a minute. If you get home from work and feel like you just can't deal with the evening, masturbation is a healthy way to take the edge off. No drugs or calories required!

4. To maintain your health.

Masturbation is so good for your body and mind in so many ways. It is so often overlooked, and yet it is one of the easiest, most beneficial things you can do for your body. Eating right and exercising are always at the top of everyone's list when we talk about getting and staying

healthy. But masturbating should be right up there with those two. It has just as many benefits and yet it is *way* more fun to do!

5. To stay in touch with your body and what you enjoy sexually.
It can be easy to get lost in a partner. Masturbating allows you to stay in touch with your body—how it feels, how it likes to be touched, what brings you pleasure. Your body is yours. It's your home, your place, your pleasure. It is your right and honor to enjoy it. Sharing it can be a wonderful thing. But if we don't masturbate, we risk becoming someone else's vision of ourselves and not remaining true to our desires. Not to mention forgetting that we are whole all on our own. And nothing is more vital. We are sexual beings unto ourselves. We don't need a partner to be sexual or to be sexually validated. It's paramount that we keep that mindset, even if we're happily partnered.

And here are five equally stellar reasons to masturbate together:

1. To reach a new level of intimacy.
Because masturbation is a solo act and because there has been so much shame built around it, masturbating with your partner can really bring you together. It says, "I'm not ashamed of being a sexual person, and I'm not ashamed that you are, either." That's the kind of intimacy that can lead to mind-blowing partnered sex. Keep in mind that we are all humans looking for love and acceptance and approval for our wants, needs, and desires. Masturbating for one another is the ultimate in sexual acceptance.
2. To mix things up.
Let's face it. The longer you're together, the more stale things can become. Masturbating together can be a fun activity to throw into your regular repertoire. You can do it in the bedroom, the bathroom, even the kitchen or the living room. You can wear sexy lingerie or go *au naturel*. You can set a whole romantic scene or simply surprise your partner

with the idea. Keeping things fresh in the bedroom is key to keeping your relationship alive and kicking.

3.To create a new twist on the quickie.

No one knows how to get you off like you. If you know you and your partner only have time for a quickie, a mutual masturbation session can be just the ticket. Watching your partner take care of herself or himself is like having your very own live sex show, which should be just the inspiration you need to take care of your own sexy needs. Plus it can be an excellent way to get you revved up for later, when you both have time for a much longer play session.

4.To allow you to see that it really doesn't necessarily take women longer to come.

Women don't actually take longer than men to come if you're talking about going from totally unaroused to orgasm. The issue is more that the usual prescribed activities don't really lead to female orgasm, or take a lot more time to get there. Masturbating together can be the perfect tool for explaining this and a great way to show a male partner that when the right things are done to the right places on your body, you are just as likely as he is to get to the finish line in no time. (Not to say that you should *ever* be in a hurry to orgasm. But it is nice to dispel that myth. It's not about our equipment—it's about what's being done to our equipment.)

5.To reduce the stigma of masturbation in your relationship.

Once you masturbate together, it's less likely that you will harbor any ill will toward your partner about masturbating when you're not around. It's really important to see one another as humans with wants and needs and desires. And sharing that together can take the mystery out of it for when you're apart. Masturbation isn't about not wanting your partner; it's about taking care of yourself in one of the many ways we should be caring for ourselves every day.

And finally, here are five great reasons for masturbating while your partner watches:

1. To show your partner what you like.

It can be tough to have the “here’s how I want you to touch me” conversation. You don’t want a new partner to think you assume he or she doesn’t know what to do in bed. And you don’t want a longtime partner to think you haven’t been enjoying what you two have been doing. Masturbating for your partner is a great way to show your partner how you like to be touched in a nonconfrontational way. All your partner has to do is watch and learn!

2. To reach orgasm when you’re having trouble getting there.

Sometimes, no matter how great the sex is with your partner, an orgasm can be elusive. You certainly don’t have to have one every time. But if you want to and it just doesn’t seem to be happening, getting your own two hands in there just might do the trick. A sexy “Mind if I help?” while you slide your hands between your legs is likely to elicit a smile from your partner and, once you get busy, an orgasm from your body.

3. To turn your partner on.

Masturbating for your partner is incredibly sexy. It shows your partner that you love your body and that you know just how to make it sing. Masturbation is neither selfish nor shameful. It’s powerful and inspiring. While your partner watches, he or she will likely be imagining getting to do those very same things to you. So don’t be shy. Take it slow. Torture yourself and your partner and you’ll end up pleasing yourself and your partner as well.

4. To empower yourself.

Although it might be tough to get the courage up to do it at first, once you masturbate for your partner, you are likely to feel incredibly sexually empowered. There is nothing like having your partner’s eyes glued to you, taking in every

inch of you, wowed by your self-confidence and self-awareness. Even if you have to fake it 'til you make it, the power is all yours once you get past the fear. Feeling good about yourself plays a big part in having great sex. So let masturbating for your partner be a way to up your sexy quotient.

5. To take the pressure off of partnered sex.

It can be very distracting to worry about whether or not you're going to come and when. When you masturbate for your partner, you're saying, "Don't worry. I can make myself come. What I want is to enjoy each other and please each other and not be so focused on the endgame." Orgasm is a great part of sex. But it can also be a huge pressure that can take all the fun out of your play. Even just knowing you are ready, willing, and able to "finish up" if need be can make playing a lot more fun and a lot less goal-oriented.

If none of that has convinced you about the power and importance of masturbating, whether for or with your partner or simply alone, how about this? Masturbating during a phone or video chat can be a great way to stay connected when you're apart. Even if you're only separated for a short time, masturbating together virtually is a really fun way to stay connected. Distance may make the heart grow fonder. But bridging the distance with a hot phone or video sex session can also make the heart grow fonder—and beat a lot faster. It's good to miss each other. It's even better to crave each other. Playing virtually is sure to leave you hungering for the next time you can play in the real world.

Doing it virtually can also be less intimidating than doing it in person. So you can test the waters while you're apart and then try your hand at it again when you're back in the same bed. Virtual mutual masturbation is also an excellent way to build your "dirty talk" skills. You can talk about what you're doing to yourself or what you want to do to your partner or what you want your partner to do to you. Or, if that's a little too much too soon, try a little, "Yes" and "That feels so good" and "I'm so wet" for starters.

Interestingly, virtual masturbation can help you to see a longtime partner in a new light sexually. It can be easy to fall into a very specific pattern when it comes to sexual play. But watching your partner masturbate for you (or even just hearing your partner's voice on the line) can help you to see a whole new sexy side to him or her and can help you to connect in new ways and on new levels when you are back together again.

When it comes to how to masturbate for or with your partner, there are really no limits or parameters, besides what feels sexy and comfortable to the two of you. You may want to face one another, or you may prefer to be side by side. You may want your partner positioned for a real up-close-and-personal look at what you're up to, or you may want him or her at a more comfortable distance. You can touch one another, hold one another, or have no physical contact at all.

The goal of mutual masturbation is also totally up to you. You may choose to masturbate to orgasm, or just long enough to show your partner what you like. Like any other sex act, mutual masturbation is about what works for the two of you.

Here are some tips for talking to your partner about masturbation:

1. Set aside some quiet, stress-free time outside of the bedroom.
2. Explain why masturbation is important for your sexual health.
3. Assure him or her that it has nothing to do with a lack in your sexual relationship.
4. Explain how it can actually be a benefit to your relationship.
5. Ask your partner to share her or his feelings on the topic and welcome any questions she or he might have.

Even after you talk to your partner, she or he may still have some concerns. Some partners have been known to say things like:

“You have me. Why do you need to do that?”

“If you loved me, you wouldn't do that.”

“If you do that, it means that you don't think our sex life is good enough.”

“It's too embarrassing to do that in front of you.”

“I think it’s disgusting/wrong/inappropriate to masturbate for or with one another.”

It’s important to assure your partner that these issues need not be a concern. You can use the reasons at the beginning of this chapter to help you to explain and discuss how masturbation can be incorporated happily and healthily into a couple’s sex life, making it stronger and more satisfying than ever.

My personal journey of masturbating in relationships has been a complicated one. I had a male partner for some time who would get up early every morning and masturbate in the shower—and yet we weren’t having sex. It was hard not to take that personally. I asked him about it and told him I was happy to wake up in the morning to have sex with him—I would love to wake up in the morning and have sex with him, in fact. He said “Okay,” but we never did, and the pattern remained the same. He wasn’t much for talking, so I never really got to the bottom of it. He and I ultimately broke up. But for a long time that experience really colored my thoughts on masturbating in a relationship.

Things are *very* different for me now. I am with a partner who not only respects the fact that I masturbate but also loves that I do. She has a regular masturbation practice of her own, and sometimes we masturbate as part of our partner play. For some reason, of all the things I like, I feel strangely naughty about the fact that I love to watch her touch herself. If she is kneeling between my legs and touching me, sometimes I will nudge her legs open with my own so I can get a good view and request that she touch herself. She will more than happily oblige, and we will both come very quickly.

The point of all of this is to say that masturbation is a very healthy part of any healthy relationship.

My survey takers had loads to say when I asked whether they had ever masturbated with a partner. Many of them answered enthusiastically that it was a regular part of their sex lives. Others said it was a staple for handling long-distance relationships and time apart from partners. At least a few said either that they were too embarrassed or that their partner was too embarrassed to partake.

They reported that their mutual play was done with and without toys. And the majority shared that seeing someone else get themselves off really

turned them on. Voyeurism is alive and well. Many of those in heterosexual relationships said that masturbation was ideal for when one or both of you were not up for penetrative sex, and many of those in lesbian and straight relationships alike agreed that it was a great way to get to know what your partner really likes when it comes to getting off, particularly in a new relationship. As one respondent put it, “Nobody drives it like the owner!”

I was intrigued to hear one person write that she has been involved in circle masturbation groups, where men—and occasionally women—get together and literally masturbate in a circle (or, at the very least, in the same room). I was thrilled to learn that a number of survey takers would end a relationship if a partner was uncomfortable with sharing masturbation and not interested in working toward changing that attitude.

A number of people said they liked to make it a game in one form or another. Who can come first. Who can last the longest. Who can keep from devouring the other the longest!

One of the most curious things I found was people saying that they touched their partner and then their partner touched them, or that they touched one another at the same time, in response to my asking if they masturbated with their partner. But masturbation is when you touch yourself. Everything else is sex or sexual activity. This is important to note, because we have become too accustomed to defining sex as penis-in-vagina penetration. But that is just one act of *many*. All intimate play is sex. All of it. Self-play is the only thing that falls under the category of masturbation.

Here are a few stories right from the mouths of the survey takers themselves.

I’ve masturbated during sex, while in the woman-on-top position. Sometimes I do it now because I find it very sexy and intimate. In the past I had difficulty reaching orgasm if someone was watching me. I’ve also recorded myself masturbating for my current boyfriend and in past relationships. I find the idea of being watched a very big turn-on.

Sometimes, on nights when we’re both (or just one of us is) really tired but we feel like we need a tension release, we’ll masturbate side by side, or take turns helping each other come.

I think we did this about a week ago. We enjoy it and give each other permission to ask for this, but it's not a regular thing.

Yes, both with my late husband and new partner. Completely different experience: the first being made to feel almost like I was forced, did not enjoy much, turned into him becoming totally aroused and into sex long before I was ready (I didn't even want sex). The second being enjoyable and mutually satisfying for the most part. Still frustrated about that elusive completely satisfying orgasm.

It was fantastic. I really enjoy watching my partner pleasure himself and having him watch me. We decided to do it at times when having other kinds of sex (especially intercourse) doesn't feel appealing and we want to sexually enjoy ourselves and each other in that way.

Sometimes we help each other. Sometimes one of us will masturbate just for a few minutes while the other person touches and kisses that person's body. Sometimes if our arms get tired we will give each other a break. It's hot.

I have masturbated with a partner, for a partner, in threesomes. No one knows your body like you do, so to me it's a great opportunity to see how my partner likes to be touched. What turns her on and what gets her there.

I have done this with a partner, looking to bring some extra sexy spice into the bedroom. Also over Skype when a partner was out of town. It was wonderful but never regular. Really enjoyed the experience together and it maintained closeness.

I really get off watching so I ask. Some lesbian partners deny ever doing it. In 2013, I had a partner who considered it cheating.

I masturbated with a guy friend of mine. He wanted to have sex, but I wasn't into intercourse with guys. It actually was

really a turn-on, though, watching him as I masturbated myself. I love watching people having an orgasm. Or being pleased in general. I think that's why I love pleasuring my girl.

I have done some of that in the past when I had a date and didn't want to sleep with him. I would let him watch me masturbate. It gave me a thrill to do that for them and then have them masturbate with my panties or hose knowing they couldn't fuck me.

My current partner and I have not masturbated together but I have been working on doing this to help her understand how I like it. She is very good at pleasuring me, but when I feel frustrated that she isn't getting me there when I feel she should, I know it is my fault for not communicating this well. Describing it visually is much better than trying to do it with words. My past partner was open to us masturbating together but it wasn't that enjoyable for her.

I had one girlfriend who said she liked to watch, so I did it to turn her on. Sometimes penetration isn't enough, so I'll masturbate while being penetrated. My current partner has difficulty with orgasms and one day I encouraged her to masturbate with me there while I kissed her, etc. She came and I can tell it brought her out of her shell a bit and she said it was a first for her. I think it helps to build intimacy and trust. Her walls are coming down like I needed my walls to come down.

I am very much a take-charge person. I always like to provoke a partner to play for me. It is sexy to watch how they like touching themselves. I then like to join and show them what I like to do to myself. It is like showing your partner the ropes.

Yes. There have been times we masturbated together. It was quick and easy and less messy. There have been times when I haven't been completely satisfied after he passes out. I get myself off. I enjoy turning him on by masturbating. I enjoy

slipping my hand between my legs while he is driving. It is a normal part of my sex life.

Yes. After being with the same person for twelve years you have to have options.

I was receiving oral sex and I began to rub my clitoris. It was extremely hot and intimate. I used to do that more or less every time, and I know my partner loves that.

Early in our relationship, my husband and I would masturbate together. It was after we started having sex. I feel like masturbating together is definitely something that comes after sex in a relationship, at least for me, because I feel it's more intimate than sex. And actually my husband is the only person I've done that with. It's been a few years since we've done that.

I used to always [masturbate with partners] because I couldn't achieve an orgasm otherwise. Now I can. So I don't do it as much. My partners have always enjoyed it.

Sometimes it's to climax, sometimes it's the beginning of sex. It is a regular part of sex. It started with us discussing what we like to think about while we masturbate when we're alone. And that led to masturbating together.

I often use a clitoral vibrator while my girlfriend penetrates me, and then after she orgasms, I keep using it until I do, too. Often I have multiple orgasms while she watches. Sometimes we do masturbate simultaneously, but not very often.

It is a semi-regular part of my sex life. More me watching her, because it's something that turns me on.

I love having my partner watch me masturbate. My fave idea (which I'm still looking for in a partner) is for them to order me to masturbate, but not come until they give me permission.

My partner loves me to help him when he plays with me by rubbing my clit while he uses a vibrator in me. I think it's an incredible turn-on to be watched while masturbating, but you are also fully putting yourself out to them, completely opening up. You have to feel comfortable with each other. It's a good opportunity for a partner to see how you touch yourself. The experience was promoted by wanting to turn my partner on. I know my partner loves to watch, I don't know any men who wouldn't.

My husband and I regularly have mutual masturbation sessions—we both have high sex drives but due to physical issues can't always have sex. When we got together, we didn't want to jump straight into bed, so we edged closer and closer to sex, including masturbation, and have a very strong bond because of it. I've masturbated with partners in the past, too.

I was ordered to touch myself for an audience. (Consensually!) I used my fingers, which I don't usually do. It felt good, but being watched felt a lot better. This was the only time I interacted with those people.

It does feel like a slightly more personal and caring form of intimacy than some other types of sex. So I'd always consider it as a possible part of my sexual repertoire.

Sometimes when I am going down on a girl I like to masturbate at the same time. It usually excites her and takes the focus off her so that we can come together more easily.

I once tied a partner to a chair so he couldn't touch himself and made him watch me masturbate. It was one of the hottest things I'd done at that stage, and, well, the sex was amazing once I untied him.

My current partner sometimes holds me, kisses me, and plays with my breasts while I use a dildo.

I had a lover about fifteen months ago, and when we got together we always masturbated. That's about all we did. And it was fun and pleasurable. I used a vibrating dildo and he just used his hand. We talked about it before we even started being lovers and it was what was agreed upon. He was married and I think disease transmission was worrisome to him but also he told me he masturbated a lot every day and it was how he kept in shape. I was just fine with it as I love to masturbate too and doing it with him was hot!

I think I have always touched myself in partnered sex but I am far more conscious of it now. I use vibrators, my fingers, have dildos in my anus—not all at once! But I do use toys and tools!

Yes. Mostly with girls though. Guys usually get too turned on or jealous (I think because it's not their dick) and want to fuck you...I used to let my old boyfriend jack off to me when I was having lady problems and couldn't have sex.

I do this on the phone with a partner on a regular basis. I did it once in front of a webcam for a friend, as a favor. It was strangely empowering. I did it another time on Skype with a friend as a mutual experience. It was amazing!

In order for me to have the best sex, I believe I need to know how to touch someone first. No one knows you like you! Watching someone masturbate for me is incredibly stimulating, both emotionally and intellectually.

We both used various vibrators on me. He loved it. It was his idea. It was a regular part of our sexy times because clit stimulation is the only way I can come.

Luckily, most of the responses on this front were positive ones. But there were certainly the less-than-positive and even sad ones in there as well.

I enjoyed it as a regular part of sex/fun with a partner. That included insertion which I only do with a partner. It's not

currently part of my sex/fun with a partner and I no longer enjoy masturbation with a partner. Hormonal changes left it painful and my partner remains largely inflexible in what's required for me to enjoy it since those changes.

I'm open to it and have done so with all my partners except for my current partner. I think it's a terribly sexy sort of show and tell. I started masturbating one time with my current partner but she wouldn't join in so I never did again. What prompted it was that she said I didn't satisfy her so I was trying to get her to show me what she liked, how to touch her to turn her on. She seemed very uncomfortable with it all, which made me sad. In the past it's been a regular part of my sexual experience. I miss it.

I got married to my first boyfriend (who was pretty much the second guy I had become sexually involved with, and the first person I had intercourse with). I was twenty-one when we met. I was sexually open and so excited to have a partner, and ready to conquer the world. We would masturbate next to each other sometimes, and I completely enjoyed it. When he moved abroad for graduate school, we'd talk on the phone and masturbate to each other's noises. We'd come together. When we saw each other in person, we'd masturbate in bed next to each other as well. It was part of our regular sexual repertoire because it was pretty much the only way I came—I never had an orgasm from sex (and to this day I have still not). I'm forty. And I probably never will.

Sadly, over time, I have actually become increasingly inhibited. Now I do not masturbate with my partner anymore. I don't even feel comfortable with it. I have sex with him until he gets off, and then send him away so I can finish by myself with a porn video.

A little bit—I think that it's fun but I feel embarrassed. I used to fantasize about watching men masturbate—but then I did and I didn't like it. I didn't like being in on their intimacy and it

freaked me out—it felt creepy and a bit...dangerous. I know that sounds weird but I felt like I was part of something they shouldn't have been doing with me there. I once had someone masturbate over the phone with me on the line as a kid—under ten years old. I felt totally violated. I think in real life I often feel violated—but in my fantasies I feel great and it's really hot. In real life it was dirtier and more like a terrible movie than a sexy fantasy.

It's been several years since I've masturbated with a partner. I feel kind of weird about it. So, it's never been a part of my sexual repertoire with partner. Anytime I did it with someone it was because they said they wanted to watch me. But I feel uncomfortable with that, which is weird because I have a fantasy of being watched, but with my partner.

I masturbated with most of my past partners (and we all enjoyed it), but my husband has never done it with me because it makes him feel awkward and I think he's intimidated by sex toys, which is sad.

I have tried, but I don't enjoy masturbating with a partner in the slightest. I've tried because I was asked to, but any "enjoyment" I got from it was faked purely for the partner's enjoyment. Because of that, it's something I rarely do and I do it under protest. If there's another person there, I don't want to masturbate, I want to pleasure them or be pleased by them. Masturbation is something I do solely for myself—it doesn't work if someone else is there. It requires me to be wrapped up in my own head, or focused only on my pleasure. If there's another person there, it detracts from that.

I'm way too self-conscious to do that, and actually, in the erotic literature I read, it doesn't do anything for me. It's just a personal preference.

I have done it once. It was very weird and made me feel very pressured. I do hope to try it again sometime and think that at

this point it will be a better experience.

Once when I was in university, my then-girlfriend had a difficult time climaxing with a partner, so we decided to try masturbating together. It was mostly just very weird. I have a very “private time” association with masturbation and don’t want anyone to see me do it, not because I’m ashamed but because it’s so personal. We never did it again after that.

My ex was impotent. So we did it somewhat regularly.

I have but I don’t remember doing it often, even with my husband. I guess the only issue I have with it is that I feel it is a personal time activity, and when I am with someone I would rather pleasure them or have them pleasure me. I haven’t really thought about that. Maybe it stems from quietly doing it when I was a kid—trying to be secretive from my family.

I have not ever masturbated with a partner. I have never been asked to. I tend to be very shy in bed, even with my husband of two decades. I don’t discuss or share my masturbation with anyone.

My partner has told me several times that he would like it if I masturbated in his presence. But I can’t get myself to do it. It just feels weird.

I have with my husband. It’s kind of strange because I find his presence to be a bit distracting. It’s not something that we do often.

I have, but I don’t enjoy it much as I do not like being watched. Or I have to help myself reach orgasm during intercourse.

Oh, goodness, no. I’m too self-conscious to let him watch. Though generally, if I find him masturbating, it leads to a blowjob, despite his own self-consciousness about masturbation.

My longest relationship was five years and ninety percent of our sex was side-by-side mutual masturbation. Usually with our bullets, and she would lie behind me and grind/fuck against my ass until she came. I resented this. I wanted real touching but she wouldn't unless she was drunk and I wouldn't let her touch me when she was drunk. Stale beer breath kissing did nothing for me. She felt like any pussy was dirty. Even if we played in the shower she wouldn't touch my pussy.

Whatever your experiences, good or bad, remember, you are not alone. And you have the right to change your circumstances. Your body belongs to you and only you. If you feel unsafe or unsatisfied in a relationship—when it comes to masturbation, or anything else for that matter—speak up, make a change, advocate for yourself. If you fear your safety in doing so, seek help from the police or other authorities. No one has a right to make you feel ashamed of your body and your desires.

Solo Sex—Methods and Accessories

THERE ARE SO MANY different ways women can get themselves off. In bed. In the shower. In the kitchen. Even in the car. With their hands. With a pillow or piece of furniture. With a showerhead. Let's learn all the ins and outs. (No pun intended!)

Before we get started, let's talk about what your goals are when it comes to masturbation. I know that might seem silly or obvious. But if your natural response is "orgasm," I'm going to ask you to shift a bit and instead consider making *pleasure* your goal.

Orgasm is great. Don't get me wrong. But pleasure should be your main focus. If you can let your brain relax and focus solely on the pleasurable sensations, you will likely find yourself having an orgasm anyway. So no point in dwelling on it. This way, if it doesn't happen, there's no letdown, because orgasm wasn't the goal in the first place.

But even without orgasm, you can derive a great deal of both pleasure and empowerment through masturbation. As discussed in earlier chapters, masturbation is about so much more than coming. It's about coming to terms with what your body looks like and what it means to you and how it works and who is in control of it and how you want to manage it in terms of every aspect of your life.

Now, none of this is to say that orgasm is a bad thing. Not at all. Orgasms are a wonderful thing. They make us feel happy and strong, and when we achieve them through masturbation, they make us feel empowered and self-sufficient. Oxytocin, the powerful hormone released when we orgasm, makes us feel all warm and fuzzy about whoever we are with. So, if we're masturbating, it makes us feel connected to our own bodies and selves. And nothing is more empowering than that.

So, let's start with getting to know your equipment.

Whether you are a regular masturbator or not, this can be a very hard and endlessly helpful step. I want you to know that I understand and appreciate that. The world is not kind when it comes to women's bodies and our personal connection to them. We are taught that they are bad or dirty or something to be ashamed of. We are taught that our nether regions are smelly and ugly and something to be scrubbed and hidden and we should be beyond grateful if anyone should want to tangle with them and we ourselves should not bother with them and if we do we should do so quickly and under the cover of darkness.

Okay, so I exaggerate a bit. But there is not enough celebration of female masturbation or of the clit. Though I am excited to live in a time when artists like Sophia Wallace are creating projects like Cliteracy to celebrate the clit and all that it can do. But before we can expect the world at large to celebrate us, we have to start by celebrating ourselves. I know. I know. It sounds a little silly and perhaps a little woo-woo as well. But it's true. If we want to be fully actualized sexual beings, we have to love and know our sexual selves.

So, first things first. Get comfy. Get a mirror. Turn up the lights or pull a lamp up close and have a look. Yes, I am totally serious. Spread your legs. Spread your lips and examine yourself. Notice the color variations, the textures, the way your lips open on their own or require you to spread them. Notice how your touch feels and what feels the nicest. Notice how red and engorged your lips get the more you explore them. Notice how you begin to get wet.

Find your clitoral hood. Pull it back gently and have a look at your clit. Experiment with different ways of touching it, with feathery strokes or gentle taps or repeated circles. Explore the opening to your pussy. What does your pussy feel like inside? Which spots respond the most to your touch? How far do your fingers want to go?

Take your time. Breathe. And as hard as it might be, let go of whatever anxiety or apprehension you may be feeling. This is your body, after all. Your body. And it is amazing. You have a right to check it out, and you owe it to yourself to enjoy it. All of it.

Okay. Now that you know what you're working with, it's time to figure out just exactly what works for you.



I love these incredibly explicit instructions for exploring your nether regions, provided by Betty Dodson on her website.

[Spread] your outer lips apart to explore your vulva's intricate internal design with its delicate folds. Locate your clitoris at the top of your vulva just below where your pubic hair begins. Find the shaft and hood of the clitoris. Pull the hood back so you can see your clitoral glans. With a well-oiled finger, touch the glans softly to understand why those eight thousand nerve endings are protected with the hood. Now massage your clitoris using different kinds of pressure from light to firm on either side, on top and underneath your clitoral glans. Observe the different sensations. Spread the inner lips apart with both hands. Locate your vaginal opening, which will appear as small folds that will part when you enter with your finger. The vaginal vestibule is the recessed space inside your inner lips. See if you can locate your urethra, a tiny opening nestled somewhere in the vestibule below the clitoris and above the vaginal opening.

Whether you're a seasoned solo sexer or new to self-play, it's a great idea to hone your manual skills. Here's why:

- Touching yourself with your own two hands is the best way to discover how you like to be touched, which means you'll be better equipped to share that information with your partner.
- If you use your fingers to masturbate, it will likely take you longer to come than it would with a vibrator. And that's a good thing. Taking it slow generally means more focus, more pleasure, and, once again, more of a chance to learn what really works for you.

- You always have your fingers with you. I don't believe that anyone can actually become "vibrator-dependent." But I do think that old habits can be hard to break. So it's important not to set yourself up for disappointment when it comes to masturbating. What if you're out of batteries or you forgot to pack Old Faithful? That's no reason to have to skip the self-love.

When it comes to using your hands to masturbate, the only limit is your imagination. Some women like to explore their entire bodies, spending additional time at certain personal pleasure points such as their breasts or inner thighs. Other women like to get right to the best bits. The great thing about masturbation is that it is totally and completely up to you! Here are a few tips for getting you started.

As you know, the clitoris is an impressive structure that is primarily internal. But the most prevalent way for women to masturbate is to focus on clitoral stimulation, or "clit stim." There are so many ways you can attend to your clit and very few rules here. You can use as few or as many fingers as you like, as much or as little pressure as you like, and any kind of pattern that works for you. (Have lube at hand in case you aren't as wet as you'd like on that particular day. The time of month, your hydration, how worked up you are, and so on can all affect how wet you become.)

Try these techniques:

- Cup your pussy and gently move your hand up and down and from side to side.
- Trail your fingers lightly over the edges and across the surface of your pussy.
- Pat your pussy.
- Slap your pussy. (Some women love the pressure and the seeming "naughtiness" of this one. Don't knock it 'til you try it!)
- Trace and stroke and play with your inner lips.

- Pull and tug at your outer lips.
- Alternate between pushing your lips tightly together and pulling them open wide.
- Flutter your finger inside the folds of your pussy, starting at the top and working your way to the bottom.
- Make circles around your clit with one finger, gently, and then more firmly with two. Try doing the same directly on your clit.
- Draw figure eights up and around your clit and down into your inner labia.
- Rub up and down the sides of your clit or from side to side across it.
- Gently tap your clit.
- Stroke diagonally across your clit.
- Flick your clit, slowly and gently at first and then faster and with more pressure.

As you play and experiment and figure out just what it is that works for you, don't be afraid to take breaks. A short respite can make your body crave an orgasm even more and so come even harder when the time is right.

Some women enjoy penetration when they masturbate, whether using their fingers or a sex toy or even a cucumber. Most women report that their best orgasms are blended orgasms, which means clitoral stimulation along with vaginal penetration and even a little anal stimulation if you're game. (This works for partnered sex as well as masturbation, by the way.)

As for what you wear, that is completely up to you as well. Totally naked. Fully dressed. Deckerd out in lingerie. It's all about what makes you feel comfortable and sexy. What you wear can even become part of your play. For example, you can leave your underwear on and touch yourself

over or beneath it, or start by touching yourself over it and then move under. This can be really nice with super-soft cotton or super-silky fabrics.

Don't feel pressured to have an orgasm the first time you masturbate, or any time that you masturbate, for that matter. We have become so finish-line focused these days in everything, including sex! But when it comes to solo sex—and partnered sex, for that matter—the only agenda should be pleasure.

Whether you are just starting out or trying to improve your skills, it's a good idea to try as many methods as you feel comfortable with and see what feels best. Although it might sound a little crazy, it would be valuable to keep a masturbation diary of sorts where you record the following info about your solo sex sessions:

What time of day was it?

Where were you?

What state of dress or undress were you in?

How did you touch yourself?

How much time did you spend masturbating?

Did you have an orgasm?

Another popular method of masturbation is rubbing against something. You can try placing a pillow between your legs or simply gather up some bed linens. Some women find that the armrests on a chair or sofa can also do the trick. As long as the surface is safe and you cover it with a clean towel or sheet, you really can't go wrong if it feels good.

There are also a number of things you can find around your home that can spice up your self-play. Here are a few common go-tos:

- The dryer—many women find that sitting atop the dryer provides just the right amount of vibration for a stellar solo-sex session.
- The electric toothbrush—you can wrap the handle in plastic wrap and hold it against your clit to approximate a vibrator if you don't have one on hand.
- Cucumbers, bananas, and the like—it's best to cover them with a condom first to avoid risk of infection, but any

phallus-shaped food item with enough substance to hold up to penetration (and removal) can be lots of fun to experiment with.

Betty Dodson, one of the greatest advocates and educators of all time when it comes to female masturbation, teaches a method that she calls the Rock 'n' Roll Method that I find incredibly effective. Here's the breakdown:

1. Relax on your back, bend your knees, and allow your legs to fall open and to the sides.
2. Massage your vulva with plenty of oil (almond, for example). Don't be shy. Massage the oil into your lips generously.
3. Begin paying close attention to your breathing. Breathe in and out deeply and slowly.
4. When you feel relaxed and ready, begin to slowly penetrate yourself with a dildo or vibrator. (Betty's Vaginal Barbell is great for this practice. It's weighted so it stays in place, and it has perfectly placed bulbs and ridges.) First insert just the end. "Observe the space you are entering," Betty advises.
5. Squeeze and release as you slowly penetrate. "No expectations," Betty suggests. "Remember, this is a muscle. Not a hole."
6. Begin to manually stimulate your clitoris. Small circles or an up-and-down motion or anything in between. Experiment until you find something that feels right for you.
7. Rock your pelvis up and inhale. Then rock down and exhale. Continue this pattern as you masturbate.
8. Begin using a vibrator, starting on a low setting. Do not begin directly on the clit, and do not leave the vibrator on the clit. Tease yourself, using the vibrator on your outer and inner

lips, eventually coming to your clit and then moving away and coming back again.

9. Continue breathing rhythmically and rocking your pelvis.

10. If you feel an orgasm coming, pull back. The goal is the tease.

11. When you can't take it any more, give in. Follow it. Stay with it. Let it take you where it wants to go for as long as it wants to go.

Playing with Toys

According to the AdamandEve.com survey I mentioned in Chapter One, more than fifty-three percent of women and seventeen percent of men say they use sex toys to masturbate. I have to say, I was not surprised to see that many more women than men reported using toys when masturbating. But I was surprised to read that the figure for women was only fifty-three percent. My guess is that the number is much higher but that many women are ashamed to admit it, which is a very sad state of affairs.

Not only is there nothing wrong with using toys to masturbate, it's actually an excellent way to achieve your very best orgasm, especially if you're pressed for time—but it works even if you have all the time in the world.

There are lots of toys out there to help you get the job done, from the classic Rabbit to the tiny bullet. You can find the simplest dildos as well as all kinds of things that go buzz in the night, in every possible shape and size. There are toys that are hands free. Ones that are remote controlled. And there are even solar-powered vibrators. The key is to find out what's out there, how to use it, and what's right for you.

Here's the basic sex toy lowdown:

External vibrators—these can be nearly any shape and can be made from a variety of materials. They can be quite small or pretty hefty. They are generally designed to be placed against the clit, although some are designed to be placed inside the vaginal lips to vibrate as much of the vulva and the clitoris as possible.

Internal vibrators—these are phallus-shaped, generally, and can be used both internally and externally.

Dildos—these come in as many shapes and sizes and colors and materials as you can imagine. They are primarily for internal use. They can be used vaginally or anally. But once they are used anally, they must be cleaned impeccably before being used again vaginally.

Anal plugs and beads—these are exactly what they sound like. Anal plugs come in a vast array of sizes and are designed to fit snugly into your anus and to stay put while you play. Beads are designed to slip in and to slowly pull out to increase pleasure during play.

Etc.—whips, handcuffs, masks, feathers, nipple clamps, and the list goes on and on. Take a field trip to a local sex toy shop. Do a little browsing online. If you can use it during partnered play, there's a good chance you can use it during a solo session as well. If it turns you on, test it out. That's the only way to really find out what works for you.

When I asked friends and colleagues what their go-to toys were, I got all kinds of answers, from the Magic Wand to all kinds of bullets to toys by Lelo and Jimmyjane to glass dildos to Betty's Vaginal Barbell to anal plugs of many varieties to clothespins, which one survey taker explains thus: "I don't use them always but I use them on the flesh of my breasts near my nipples. Sometimes on my outer labia and even on my tummy sometimes."

When using sex toys to masturbate, I recommend warming up by touching yourself with your fingers first. Then you can simply place a vibrator near your clit and work up to putting it directly on your clit, or as close to it as you like. Or, you can combine practices:

- Use your fingers to explore inside while using a vibrator to stimulate your clit.
- Use a dildo (vibrating or not) for penetration while using your fingers or a vibrator to simulate your clit.
- Use your fingers to stimulate your clit while using an anal plug.

- For what I call the “ultimate orgasm,” go blended by stimulating your clit while enjoying penetration and exploring a little back door play. Any of these can be done manually or with a toy.

The best part about masturbation is that there is no one to please but yourself. You don't have to be embarrassed about trying something. You can move however you like. You can make as much or as little noise as you like. You can take as long as you want, and you can orgasm—or not—as much or as little as you want.

You may want to read some erotica or watch some porn. You may want to fantasize about someone you know or a familiar scenario, or you may want to conjure up the wildest possible fantasy. It's your time and your brain and your pleasure. So don't feel as if you have to do anything in a particular way with any particular tools. Don't feel like a particular position or place is required.

Your bed. A chair. The tub. The shower. The bedroom. The kitchen. The living room. Wherever you feel happy and comfortable and safe. *That* is the best place to masturbate.

Solo Sex and the Mind

YOUR BODY IS, OBVIOUSLY, incredibly important when it comes to masturbation. But the truth is, your mind is equally important. When it comes to solo sex, nothing is as important as getting your brain on board. Without it, your body has a much harder time getting in gear, and, I dare say, it makes orgasm virtually impossible.

It's just like having partnered sex, in that way. If you're thinking about the dishes or your job or that phone call with your mom, it can be very hard to get aroused, let alone have an orgasm. So before you even think about getting down to business, it's important to assess and address how you feel about masturbation.

When I surveyed women about their feelings on masturbation, their answers made me equal parts happy and sad. Happy to see so many women at peace with it, and sad, of course, to discover that so many women wrestle with such feelings of guilt and shame about it.

Here are a few examples of what survey takers had to say.

I have been in a relationship with the same man for two years, and I feel guilty for the amount of masturbation I engage in. We live apart and have small children from previous marriages, so we rarely have sex. My drive is much higher than his to begin with, so I find myself masturbating to keep us from arguing about sex. Normally I find masturbation very erotic and enjoy touching myself while someone watches.

[When I masturbate] I feel high; it's like a tingling that starts at the base of my skull and radiates throughout my head. I can

feel my vaginal walls pulsating like they want to be sucking in someone's fingers but there's nothing there to suck in. When I come and my breathing is calm, I start to feel shame for giving in to my urges, which I've been told by the church should only be used toward procreation, and I never intend to procreate.

Masturbation is how I have reconciled my interest in sexuality with some of the inhibitions I've had to deal with, and it helps me embrace these contradictory sides of myself. I do keep it private. Right now I have no partner. I can't wait to show the right guy all the amazing sensations and experiences and help them discover new pleasures himself.

I'm a huge fan. Everyone should do it. I don't know where those feelings come from exactly. I figured God made us just exactly perfect, including our pleasure parts.

I feel empowered, and I'm very proud of masturbating. I think this feeling stems from the fact that I never had "the talk," to be honest. I may not have been taught the basics about sex, which isn't ideal. On the other hand, because I wasn't taught anything, I wasn't taught to be ashamed or embarrassed about sex. We weren't overly religious or anything. There were no "sinner" talks at all. I was a tabula rasa. I had a blank slate for my opinions on sex and masturbation. Plus masturbation helps you become a better lover. It helps you learn about yourself so that you can more easily tell a partner what you want, what you like, and what you don't like in bed. I also like to think it makes me a better lover, too. Masturbating has made me more familiar with the equipment, so to speak.

I am conflicted about it. I think I was raised believing that sex is an interactive activity. Intellectually, I don't believe this at all. However, that belief is in my psyche and is one that I'm trying to overcome. I used to feel guilty, like something was wrong with me, like I was a pervert or something. But as I've gotten older, I've become a more competent masturbator. I

think that comes from being accepting of myself and comfortable in my own skin.

I used to feel guilty and ashamed about it due to how I was raised, in such a strict fundamentalist Christian home. I just finally made a conscious decision to walk away from the purity-culture crap I was raised with. Within the last eight months or so since then, my feelings towards masturbation have shifted a lot. I find it empowering and fulfilling in a lot of ways. I think it's fun and nothing to be ashamed of.

I feel empowered, always. Sometimes I feel ashamed or disappointed that it's not something a partner can enjoy with me.

I still feel a little guilty sometimes, especially when I have days where I'd rather masturbate than have sex with anyone else (i.e., husband), but it can also be empowering and filled with self-love. I think it depends a little bit on how it happens—sneaking it in midday or in the shower vs. husband is out of town and I take myself on a date with candles, music, etc. It also started to feel “safe” at some point, because I have some issues surrounding sex after getting an STD from the man I gave my virginity to—I could meet my own sexual needs without being at risk or putting someone else at risk.

Once you are ready to masturbate, take these steps to getting your brain on board.

1. Set the scene. That means choosing a space that is comfortable and that appeals to your five senses, whether dramatically or minimally—from candles and music to simply a closed door and some white noise on your phone.
2. Breathe. Breathing is incredibly important when you masturbate. Pay attention to the speed and depth of your breath. Being aware can really add to your experience.

3. Let go. Whatever's going on in your head, at least for that moment, let it go. Forget about the laundry, your job, that neighbor who is obsessed with Top 40 music, and allow yourself to really be in the moment.
4. Relax. There should be no stress when it comes to masturbating. Your mom doesn't know best. Your church doesn't know best. Those conservative pundits don't know best. When it comes to your pleasure, only you know best. So relax, and focus on doing what feels good.
5. Scan your body. Start at the top of your head and work down to the soles of your feet. Sense how each part of your body is feeling, and focus on the sensations you are having and seeking. Release any feelings that are not serving you in that moment.

When you're in the right frame of mind for pleasure, the next step is to let your mind really wander to wherever it might want to go. This is a no-rules, no-judgments, no-holds-barred proposition. Whatever turns you on is fair game. Because it's only in your mind, anything goes.

The best part about fantasies are that they can be about nearly anything—the hot delivery guy who wants to do more than drop off a pizza; a threesome with that young, gorgeous new assistant at the office; a first-time lesbian encounter; a tryst with a stranger on a train going from London to Paris, or a roadside playdate with that college student who just started nannying for your newborn twins.

If fantasizing is new to you, here are a series of “story starters” to whet your solo appetite.

Beautiful Bound

“I bet you'd look beautiful bound,” Grace whispered to Sarah as the lights in the theater slowly dimmed. Suddenly Sarah couldn't catch her breath. She knew the band was beginning to play. But she couldn't hear it. Grace tightened her grip on Sarah's wrist, and Sarah knew a moan must have escaped her lips as her head fell back ever so slightly.

She wanted to hold it together. She had to. They were in public. But just those few words whispered in her ear had set her mind spinning, and now, with Grace's grip, which was surely leaving marks by now, Sarah was finding it hard to even ensure that air was filling her lungs.

The two sat amid the crowd of women like they were in a world all unto themselves, teasing and taunting, whispering and stealing kisses. Grace bit Sarah's neck hard and Sarah yelped, biting her own tongue to hold back the sound. Sarah knew she was in trouble. There were a lot of things she could resist. This was not one of them.

After the show they drifted to dinner with friends, doing their best to participate in the eating and drinking and conversation making. But all Sarah could think about was Grace's words: "I bet you'd look beautiful bound."

Dinner was followed by dancing, and then Sarah couldn't manage her composure any longer.

"I am," Sarah whispered. Grace looked puzzled for a moment, and then Sarah saw the moment of recognition cross her face.

"Let's get out of here," Grace said. Sarah nodded, and Grace led her out of the club and into the winding paths of the resort. Fingers entwined, the two walked beneath the Mexican sky, breathing in the air of the night and the delicious space they were enjoying, as far from the real world as one could get and yet finding themselves feeling emotions more real and true than any reality either of them had even known.

Grace slipped the key in the door and held it open for Sarah. As Sarah stepped into the room, she heard the door slam shut behind Grace and was surprised by the sound. Grace always gently closed it. In that instant, Sarah realized everything had just changed.

"Take off your clothes. Now," Grace said.

"Oh baby," Sarah purred.

"Excuse me? Such impertinence will be punished and not forgotten. I won't ask you again. Do it." Sarah shuddered. She so loved Grace's power and strength and ability to switch from devoted partner to wicked mistress. No one before had ever been able to match Sarah in that way, dancing along all the lines of gender and power and all the other arbitrary lines that the world had drawn but which meant nothing.

Sarah undressed slowly, never breaking eye contact with Grace. She knew how much Grace loved her body. She adored Grace's, too. It meant

the world to Sarah that Grace understood her gratitude for Grace's lavish praise, despite how silly it might be to need such approval.

But there was nothing of the kind right now. No praise. No gentle touch. No love in Grace's eyes.

"On the bed," Grace said. "On your back." Sarah complied. She could feel her breathing hasten again. "Spread your legs." Sarah looked at Grace pleadingly. Naked and on her back at Grace's command seconds after entering the room was one thing. But to be spread wide like that? Sarah wasn't sure she could do it...

The Dressing Room

The store is empty when I walk in. The walls are lined with the most beautiful and delicate things. Bits of satin and lace in the most delicious configurations. I catch your eye behind the counter as I walk in. I start to giggle and ask what you're doing there. But it's clear to me that you are already in character. You do this. For me. For us. Set up elaborate fantasies in which we star and overtake one another.

Clearly you have sweet-talked the shop owner to allow you to take her place behind the counter. I slip into my role quickly so as to not ruin the moment, the passion I feel for you rising in my body. But I am also overwhelmed with love by the gesture, knowing how much you put into crafting these sumptuous experiences.

You lock the front door to the shop surreptitiously and then return to the counter.

"May I help you?" you ask.

It takes me a moment to reply. I am taken aback by your beauty, now, still, always, and a rush of want washes over me. I want to tell you how much I love you. I want to devour you. But I resist, refusing to ruin the pleasure that's in store.

"I want to find something incredible to wear for my girlfriend," I say.

"Lovely," you reply. "What is she like?"

"Sexy, smart, strong, successful. Incredibly loving and kind. She's enviably adventurous and has a wit as sharp as tacks."

You smile broadly. "How nice for you," you say. "But what about her taste in lingerie?"

“Her tastes run the gamut,” I say. “Leather and lace. Satin and ribbons. Corset lacings and intricate straps. She likes any lingerie when it’s my body that’s in it.” The look on your face slips from polite to deviant back to polite in an instant.

“Why don’t you make yourself comfortable in the dressing room and I’ll bring you a selection of things?” you say, showing me to the back of the store. You draw the heavy velvet curtain aside to let me in, opening it only narrowly so that I have to rub the full length of my body against yours as I pass. I hear you murmur, “Mmmmmmm...” as I go by.

I sit on the divan and shake my head as you leave, forever amazed at the fantasies you cook up for us both.

The curtain is drawn aside and you are back, arms full of every variety of lingerie one could possibly dream up.

“You’re not naked,” you say, scolding me.

“No. I’m not,” I say.

You don’t care for my impertinence. “Well, come on then. You can’t try these on with that on,” you say motioning to my tight tank and jeans.

“Are you going to leave?” I ask.

“Must I?” you ask, looking at me with that stare I have never, ever been able to resist.

“Not at all.” I stand up and pull my top over my head and then slide my jeans to the floor. I start to unfasten my bra when you step towards me. You reach your arms around me and undo the clasp.

“Are you going to help me with these too?” I ask, gesturing to my impossibly small lace panties.

You kneel in front of me and ease them down and there’s that sound again coming from your lips. “Mmmmmmm... You have the prettiest pussy,” you say.

“Is that how you talk to all of your customers?” I ask.

“Only the ones I want to fuck,” you say...

The Doctor Will See You Now

I wait in the hall outside our room, just as you’ve told me to do. I’m equal parts nervous and excited.

You come out into the hall and call my name. Though no one else is there, you look around as if trying to determine whose name it is you’ve

just called. Finally your eyes catch mine.

“Follow me,” is all you say.

When we enter the room you point to the bed. “Undress and lie here,” you say.

“In front of you?” I ask, suddenly feeling self-conscious.

“Of course,” you say. “It’s part of the exam.”

I swallow hard and pull my shirt over my head. I can see you watching me, appraising me, making notes on your clipboard. You lick your lips as I take off my bra.

“Nice,” I think I hear you whisper.

“Excuse me?” I say.

“Nothing. Continue,” you reply, waving your over-sharpened pencil at me.

I take off my jeans and then my underwear, a tiny hot-pink thong. I wonder what you think and wish I had put something a little more conservative on. I never know what kind of games you have in store for me.

I sit at the end of the bed, forgetting your instructions.

“Lie down,” you say, a little agitated with my disobedience. You stand at the end of the bed. “Knees up,” you say, “and scoot down so I can get into that pussy of yours.”

“What?” I say.

“You’re here for your sex exam. I need to make sure everything’s working. Make sure it looks good, feels good, tastes good...” Your face finally softens a little. But you refuse to give up the game. Sharply you say, “I don’t want to have to ask you again.” Your look is all business again.

I scoot down to the bottom of the bed and put my knees up.

“Spread your knees, please. Wider,” you say, opening my legs and pressing my knees to the sides with your hands to show me just how wide you want them.

I grip the sheets with my hands. I know how wet I am, and I’m anxious about your reaction when you discover the honey dripping from between my legs.

“Mmmmmm. Seems someone’s already wet,” you say. “Why is that?” You smile, with a little devil in your eyes.

“Um, I don’t know,” I stutter.

You run your finger from the top of my pussy down to my ass, and I shiver. “You don’t know? Really? Maybe it’s because you like having me

look at your pussy. Could that be?”

“Maybe,” I mumble, and you laugh as you begin to tease my clit.

“Well your clit is certainly in good health. It’s getting nice and stiff, and your pussy is so juicy and swollen. Maybe I’d better slip inside to make sure everything’s okay...”

You’ll Do As I Say

The room is pitch black when you arrive. I see the light stream in as you open the door and watch you reach for the light switch.

“Don’t do it,” I say. “Shut the door behind you.” I strike a match as the light from the hall fades and the door shuts.

I light the candles by the bed and watch as you come toward me. I hear you gasp when you see me clad only in a lace-and-silk bustier, tiny panties, and black thigh-high stiletto boots.

You reach for me and I step back.

“Take off your clothes,” I demand, and you comply. When you are naked, I take a minute to take you in. I want to ravish you that instant but know you will love what I have in store, so I stick to my plan instead.

“Lie down,” I say. You lie down on the bed, legs together, arms at your sides. I laugh. “Spread ’em.” You draw your legs open. “Wider. And put your arms up and out.” Before you can argue, I cuff your limbs to the bed.

“Now you’re totally mine,” I say, taking a step back and enjoying my handiwork. You look beautiful. Equal parts helpless and defiant. I move in closer so I can take in your pussy, which seems to be blooming under my gaze.

Your lips are parting and swelling and your clit is stiffening from nothing more than my eyes on you. Your lips start to glisten with honey and I hear you moan.

“Such a pretty pussy,” I say. “Such a good girl.” I want to touch you. But I want to torture you more. So instead of dipping my finger into your sweetness, I lift one of the candles from the bedside table.

“Don’t scream,” I say. “If you scream, I’ll just hurt you more.” I begin to drizzle the wax on your breasts. You flinch, but your grimace quickly turns to a smile. I knew you would love the sensation of warm wax dripping onto your body and hardening where it lies. I draw spiderwebs of wax

across your breasts and belly and arms and finally over your legs and your open pussy.

You squirm against the restraints and I am wet from your display.

I kiss you and rub my pussy against your thigh, leaving a wet mark on your leg.

“I’ll be back,” I say, leaving you protesting on the bed as I disappear into the bathroom. I take longer than necessary to get ready, knowing how desperate you’re growing in the other room...

If Only for One Night

All the note said was, “Pack.” You’d never left a note like that. We had met only a week before, at that party. Art and people were all around us. But the only thing I could see was you.

“I’m August,” I said.

“Kate,” you replied, holding out your hand for me to shake. You weren’t my type. Not at all. Clearly a woman, enviable curves and green eyes that could only be described as dreamy. But there was something markedly masculine about you too. The navy blazer, so well fitted it had to be custom. The short and clearly expensive haircut. The glasses, retro and blue. Everything about you a statement. Nothing to hide. I was hooked.

“Do you dance?” you asked.

“I do.” You reached out your hand and I accepted it, and from that moment on there wasn’t an instant that our bodies weren’t touching. We danced until our faces were flushed and we couldn’t stop laughing. Neither of us was very good. But what we lacked in talent we certainly made up for in enthusiasm.

I had been with other girls. But there was already something different about you. About this. This wasn’t a dare or a game or a lark. I could imagine this. I could imagine a future. I laughed at my own folly, reminding myself that only an hour had passed since we had met, that we had spent most of that hour dancing and laughing and exchanging quips. I knew nothing of you and you nothing of me.

Except then you led me off of the dance floor and back through the halls of the gallery until we found ourselves completely alone save for the bounty of sculptures that seemed to leap and dance around the otherwise still and quiet space.

You pulled me into your arms and kissed me hard. I caught my breath and my balance and then allowed myself to lose it again and again in you. As you lowered me to the floor, your eyes never left mine. As you lifted my dress above my head, your eyes never left mine. And as you slid your hands between my legs and a gasp escaped my lips, your eyes never left mine.

That night, in the dark of the museum, on the cold of the stone floor, beneath the gaze of dozens of marble eyes, something changed.

So as I held that small slip of paper bearing only one word on it, my body shivered and I found myself shaking my head as I wondered just what on earth you might have in store for me. This girl who knew little more than my name, whom I had allowed to know me in a way that I had allowed so few others before.

There was only one thing to do: Pack.

Fuel Your Mind

So much of sex is fueled by the brain, so get yours working for you when you take a time-out to pleasure yourself. These story starters are designed to get your imagination going. And if none of these do it for you, don't worry. There are all kinds of erotica out there, from Wild West to Outer Space and from Super Posh to Downright Trashy and from Good Girl Gone Bad to Naughty Girl Gone Wrong. No matter what your taste, there's sure to be something that will get your head in the zone.

Here are a few examples of stellar erotica to help get your wheels turning:

9½ Weeks, Elizabeth McNeill

Ada, or Ardor, Vladimir Nabokov

Beatrice Palmato, Edith Wharton

Best Lesbian Erotica 2015, Laura Antoniou (editor)

Best Women's Erotica 2015, Violet Blue (editor)

*Bondage Bites: 69 Super-Short Stories of Love, Lust, and
BDSM*,

Alison Tyler (editor)

Come Again: Sex Toy Erotica, Rachel Kramer Bussel (editor)

Delta of Venus and Little Birds, Anaïs Nin

The Fermata, Nicholson Baker

Justine, Marquis de Sade

The Lover, Marguerite Dumas
The Sexual Life of Catherine M., Catherine Millet
The Sleeping Beauty trilogy (*The Claiming of Sleeping Beauty*,
Beauty's Punishment, and *Beauty's Release*), Anne Rice (as
A.N. Roquelaure)
Story of the Eye, Georges Bataille
The Story of O, Pauline Réage
Tropic of Cancer, Henry Miller

Some survey takers shared their go-to masturbation fantasies. I want to share some of their thoughts to again assure you that whatever you've dreamed up, someone else has fantasized about something equally—if not even more—racy.

I am masturbating and various men I know walk in, see me, watch, and help me along. (No intercourse; manual or oral stimulation only.)

I am having sex with another woman.

Someone performing oral sex on me in a public place (e.g. work, cinema, job interview), but I have to act normal.

A man I know is tied up, watching me having sex with another woman, but is unable to touch us.

I'm performing oral sex on men I know, but they don't know it's me.

Being gently spanked and fingered at the same time and not knowing what is coming.

Being fingered in a public place.

Dominant/submissive role-play stories involving anal or vaginal sex.

Three-ways.

Being tied down.

Being in a public place while we do it.

Once I saw a clip from a porn. Gosh, it was awful and boring, but I liked one scene. I kept imagining that girl in my fantasies. It took me a while to realize that I wasn't bisexual; I just get off on her tears and humiliation. Yeah, it was a kinky clip. Maybe I have a sadistic side to me. Just a little bit.

I think of erotic, sometimes BDSM situations involving the women I've read about in lesbian erotica, myself, and my wife, or characters I find super sexy (cough, Xena, cough).

I'm in a lesbian relationship but I think about men.

Dark sexual thoughts. Usually BDSM-type stuff. I love the whipping, spanking, flogging.

One of my fave fantasies is that my boyfriend stands behind me, lubes up my asshole, and sticks a vibrator in my ass as he plays with my clit, causing me to come over and over again until he finally takes me from behind with the vibrator still in my ass. He enjoys the vibrations as I fight his hard cock in my wet pussy.

I usually see scenarios playing out inside my head, almost like watching a movie. They're rarely first-person and I'm usually not "involved," although that has changed somewhat in the last few years. Generally there're only a few different ones that go in and out of rotation. Many of them rotate around manipulation, coercion, and even force.

When I deliberately look for material to masturbate to, the material usually includes anal sex, threesomes, rough sex, or bestiality. I rarely deliberately masturbate to heterosexual sex scenes, despite the fact that I'm heterosexual.

Mainly having control taken away from me.

I have rape fantasies.

What do I think about? I think about "Daddy," not my real father of course, but someone who I can call that. I don't know why, but I love the idea of incest. Maybe because it's so taboo. And submission fantasies. Talking dirty to me, ordering me around, pulling my hair, bites, spanking, but I don't like bondage. I'm a tiny girl, they don't call me "doll" just from affection, you don't need to tie me up to control me. So I'm never tied down in those fantasies. But I have this fantasy of having a dominant man controlling me and I have the blindfold so I don't have any idea who he is. I think it helps me to remove the guilt, since I have a lot of kinky fantasies. But yeah, I can't deny it anymore. But it's still hard.

I imagine myself as the man, in control, coercing a woman to fuck me. She is resistant at first but then gives in to the moment and loves it; loves to be dominated by me. It's funny because I fucking hate men like that. I've slept with men like that and didn't like them, or myself for it afterwards. You could psychoanalyze the shit out of that. I'm sure it's my mind's way of getting off on the idea of power. I also love to watch nipple play and imagine myself being the one to do it. I do not, however, enjoy being on the receiving end.

I typically imagine being given cunnilingus by my boyfriend, or I'll watch certain kinds of porn.

Imagining a man masturbating or imagining watching my husband with another woman usually gets me off pretty quickly.

I usually think about my partner and often read through our sexts to help set the mood, then think about actually realizing those sexts in real life.

I'll sometimes spend an entire day or even two days thinking about what it would feel like to have sex with someone in particular before I masturbate.

I always think about sex with multiple partners, both male and female; the fantasy might start with only two people but will develop further, or at least those people will be watched by others. It is mostly fantasies about things that I would be very unlikely to do, never romantic, often not even with me as the woman but with a version of me I've made up who lives a completely different life. My partner is rarely in the fantasy either, although my relationship with my current partner is so emotionally and mentally open and connected that I do more often have fantasies where we are doing these things together. I am more able to do this with him without it feeling like a betrayal, but in the past with other partners it was always someone other than my partner in my imagination!

I have a very strong emotional and physical connection to my best friend, and I quite often think of her. Porn doesn't really do it for me. My best friend and I have fooled around before in drunken states and we both know what effect we have on each other, but we just couldn't date each other.

I fantasize about various scenarios where I am totally focused on and adored and controlled and compelled to pleasure myself in front of someone(s).

I always think about my current partner. If I don't have a partner at the time, I just imagine the girls in the porn movies. My thoughts vary between thinking about dominating them or about them dominating me. They always end with the girl I'm having sex with saying that I'm better than the men she's had, or the best sex she's had in her life. It's then that I can come.

I tend to think about BDSM or non-consent scenes about pretend people or myself.

Never underestimate the power of the mind. It can mean the difference between a stellar solo sex session and a perfectly lackluster one. So get your head in the game, whatever that means to you. Remember: Virtually nothing is off-limits—and what happens in your mind stays in your mind.

Your Questions and Thoughts on Solo Sex

SO MANY OF MY survey takers asked so many amazing questions that I wanted to take the time to answer them here.

How often should I masturbate?

I am not a big fan of the word “should.” It implies that there is a right thing and a wrong thing to do. When it comes to masturbation, there are very few wrong things. If you’re masturbating so much that it’s keeping you from your job or family responsibilities, I’d say that’s a problem. If you’re not masturbating at all, I’d say that’s at least something that is potentially a problem.

But, barring those situations, there really is no “should” when it comes to how often a woman masturbates. It’s so insanely good for you. Once a day seems like an excellent guideline. If you have time for morning and night, or maybe morning wake-up and then afternoon pick-me-up, all the better. If you skip a day here and there because life simply doesn’t allow for a little self-play, there’s no reason to fret; just get back in the groove as soon as you are able.

How much is too much?

As I mentioned previously, gauging how much is right for any given woman is not an easy task. It’s not something you can generalize. But as with most things, if this one activity is keeping you from every other activity in your life, then it has most likely reached a problematic level. There’s nothing wrong with tending to yourself once or even twice a day.

And sure, if you woke up all riled up, read some erotica at lunch, and then had evening plans to see your partner in crime that fell through, even three times in one day is no need to worry. But if you find yourself missing out on life because of it or depending on it for your very ability to exist, get thee to the doctor. It's time to figure out what's going on and how you can get back to living a healthy, happy, balanced life.

I have so much else to do. Why should I bother?

Masturbating is an incredibly vital form of self-care. We manage to make time to sleep and bathe and—hopefully—eat right and exercise. Masturbation belongs on that list of must-dos in order to have a well-rounded life that's good for your body, mind, and spirit.

Women have to stop thinking of masturbation as an extra, an add-on, a throwaway, a thing that men *have* to do and only a few women do. Women masturbate. Women need to masturbate. If you had cancer, you would make time and space for treatment. As women, we have a terrible disease called “time for everyone else and no time for ourselves.” Masturbation is an excellent step in the direction of healing that.

I feel too ashamed to do it. What can I do to get over that?

Read about it. Talk to friends and family about it. Discuss it with a sex-friendly counselor and/or doctor. Switch up your internal monologue and, instead of telling yourself it's bad or wrong, tell yourself it's healthy and empowering.

You will be amazed at how many stories you can find online featuring women talking about how important masturbation is to them and what it does for them. You will be equally blown away at the fact that somewhere, hidden among your friends and family, there are women who thrive from their masturbatory practices and would be happy to tell you about the important role it plays in their lives.

My body isn't sexy. I don't want to touch myself. Why do I have to?

Every human body has the capacity to be sexy. Touching yourself is actually a great way to find your sexy. You need to touch yourself, because it's hard to fully enjoy someone else touching you when you don't even think you're worth touching. Masturbation isn't just about sex and orgasm; it's also about being in your body and feeling comfortable in your own skin.

*My partner caught me masturbating and is really upset. How do I explain to him that it has nothing to do with our sex life? In fact, I do it because I am always so revved up because we have a **great** sex life! How can I help my fiancé be more comfortable?*

This is a really difficult question that I am asked with incredible frequency. It can be hard to help your partner understand that your masturbation practice is about you, and that it is not about filling a void that they have created, but instead about tending to your own sexual—and overall—well-being.

It's imperative that you talk to your partner about this. If you are having difficulty getting through, consider having your partner talk with a doctor or counselor. Encourage your partner to read this book and to explore other resources that can help explain that masturbation is a perfectly healthy practice.

What you will also want to share is that your masturbating alone is actually very beneficial to your partnered sex life. When you masturbate regularly, you are able to bring your best sexual self to your partner.

If you can't get your partner to understand, it's likely time to consider a new partner. It's not healthy to allow someone else to dictate your relationship with your body.

Is it ok to penetrate myself when I masturbate?

Absolutely. That's the short answer. The long answer is: Be sure you're doing it safely. Clean hands. Clean objects. Put a condom on anything you plan to insert into your body, if you want to be extra careful. Start slow and shallow, just like you would with a partner—especially a new one—and work your way up to where you want to be.

There are lots of toys designed for just this activity, made out of nearly every conceivable material, that vibrate, twirl, wiggle, and pump, as well as ones that don't do anything at all. So, no matter what you're into, you'll likely be able to find something that works for you.

Is it okay if I think about things when I masturbate that I would never actually want to do in real life?

Absolutely. Again, that's the short answer. That's the great thing about our minds—we can think about anything we like, and we can't be held liable or responsible for those thoughts. Just because you think about a mess

of clowns climbing out of a car to have their way with you one by one, or a masked villain taking you in the alley, or commanding an army of troops to do your sexual bidding, doesn't mean that you want that in real life or even think that that is acceptable social behavior.

Many women have forced submission fantasies (sometimes referred to as "rape fantasies"). But they are just that, fantasies, with no connection to reality. They are about relinquishing control by *choice*, not about being taken by *force*.

So fantasize away.

Can I use up the nerve endings in my clit and cause it to go numb?

No. Again, no. A thousand times no. Not forever, anyway. A heavy-duty vibe may cause it to need a break. But no vibrator has ever destroyed a woman's clit with a curse of forever numbness. You cannot "use up" your clit. So love it, enjoy it, play with it, take pleasure in it. It's a completely renewable resource.

Is it possible to make yourself squirt when you masturbate and, if so, how?

Yes, it certainly is possible. Stimulating the G-Zone (which many refer to as the G-spot, but since it's a whole area I prefer to call it a "zone") can lead to squirting. How do you stimulate the G-Zone? Well, it's about two knuckles in and up towards the front. There are vibrators out there designed to get to just that spot. But squirting is little more than a bodily function or a party trick. It doesn't increase sensation, but it does increase cleanup time. There's not a thing in the world wrong with squirting. But there's also no reason to feel like you're missing out if you don't happen to be a squirter yourself.

Is it cheating if I masturbate? What if I fantasize about other people when I masturbate?

Masturbating is not cheating on your partner. Ever. Even if you think about other people when you masturbate, it doesn't constitute cheating. It's perfectly common and acceptable and healthy to fantasize about other people. In fact, some people argue that thinking about other people when they masturbate alleviates their desire to cheat in real life.

Time in your head and time spent touching yourself is your time to think about and feel whatever you like. It's the perfect time to act out all the things that you would never want to actually do because they are dangerous or harmful to your relationship. Fantasizing is fun because it's just that—fantasy. The truth is—even Salma Hayek or Ryan Gosling would leave towels on the floor or forget to pick up the dry cleaning after you've been married for a few years!

Why do people pretend they don't masturbate?

Unfortunately, one of the primary reasons is that people are ashamed. And it's no wonder, when we live in a society that refuses to discuss and recognize and thus normalize female masturbation. We don't teach it in sex ed. We don't talk to our kids about it. We hardly talk to our friends about it.

We have to stop pretending and start telling the truth, though, because it's the only way to bring female masturbation out into the light where it belongs. Certain religions have made this extra hard. But no one—church leader or otherwise—has a right to tell you that you don't have permission to find pleasure in your own body. No one.

Set a good example. Be a good sex-positive role model. Talk about female masturbation. Be a resource to friends and family. Support those who need it and, for goodness's sake, masturbate, enjoy it, and tell anyone who wants to hear all about it.

Why don't I ever climax with penetration?

Because penetration does not provide the kind of direct clitoral stimulation that ninety percent of women (or more) need in order to orgasm. There is nothing wrong with you. It is a physical impossibility for the majority of women to orgasm solely from vaginal penetration. So stop worrying about that. Stop. It's a long-held myth, but it's time to let go.

Do you know any good songs about masturbation?

I love this question. Not sure what made this particular survey taker ask it, but I am happy for the late-night giggle that it gave me.

There are lots, actually! Some require more interpretation than others. Here's a sampling: "She Bop" by Cyndi Lauper, "I Don't Need a Man" by the Pussycat Dolls, "If" by Janet Jackson, "Fingers" by Pink, "I Touch

Myself” by Divinyls, “Darling Nikki” by Prince, and “Icicle” by Tori Amos.

I don't know if I have any questions. I feel like I've gotten increasingly repressed as I've gotten older, though, and I wonder if I shouldn't do something crazy like attend a Betty Dodson seminar or something similar.

No matter your age, masturbation is an important part of self-care. If you feel like you are not enjoying masturbation like you used to, or if you feel as if you have never really reached the level and amount of pleasure you would like to get from masturbation, reading as much sex-positive material as you can as well as attending a Bodysex or other sex-positive workshop can do you a world of good.

Why is it so hard????

Because sometimes it is. But it doesn't have to be, I promise. If you are having a hard time, take a look at Chapter Seven herein and try out some of the techniques offered. My guess is that you just haven't hit on the method that really works for you.

And if the issue is that you can't get your brain on board, it's time to get it where you want it to be. See a sex-positive therapist. Make sex-positive friends. Read only sex-positive material. If you have been programmed with negativity, positive reprogramming is the only way out. It might not be an easy road. But it will certainly be worth it.

Why can't I use my hand? Is anyone else like this?

There are plenty of women who find that only a vibrator can help them to reach orgasm. Other women simply don't feel comfortable touching themselves with their own hands. Although I do think it's important that you feel comfortable enough to use your own hands, there is nothing wrong with using a vibrator or another sex toy (or a safe, clean alternative object) in order to masturbate.

Someone once told me that I shouldn't masturbate very much because it would make it harder for me to reach orgasm when I was having sex with a partner. I don't really believe this, but

what do you think? At some point, is it a bad thing for me, I mean, if I do it a lot? Can you possibly do it too much?

This just simply is not true. You can't do it "too much," unless it is adversely affecting your daily activities—for example, if you can't go to work or take care of yourself or your family because you are too preoccupied with masturbating. Masturbation won't ruin you for partnered sex. It should, in fact, inspire and inform partnered sex.

This harmful rumor was likely started because men feared that their partners would no longer want sex with them if women could satisfy themselves. But the truth is, as long as women are having satisfying partnered sex, there is no reason why masturbation would make them want to stop having it.

Where the f###k is my G-spot!?

In *O Wow: Discovering Your Ultimate Orgasm*, I discuss how you can have your partner help you find your G-Zone. If you have someone you want to explore with, this can be a great way to get a sense of where your G-Zone is, and these instructions can easily be adapted for solo play, as well!

If you want to do a little G-Zone research, have your partner insert two fingers into your vagina, curve them up and into the zone, and execute a slow and repeated come-hither motion, adjusting speed and pressure and location based on your feedback.

The more you play with the G-Zone, the more juiced up with fluids it becomes. It will swell, giving it an impressive firmness. Once it gets good and worked up, orgasm will likely follow, possibly with ejaculate. This is definitely one of those all-hands-on-deck, participatory exercises. You need to be wet and ready, and your partner needs to be of the "seek and explore" ilk rather than the "search and destroy" if you're going to get anything out of this exercise.

If you're really in it to win it, here's my step-by-step plan for discovering and exploring your G-Zone.

1. *Remove any clocks, phones, or other devices that keep track of time. This is not the time for timing.*
2. *Make sure you have secured whatever level of privacy makes you feel comfortable. Kids at Grandma's. Roommates out of town. Music or fan on to cover sounds. Windows covered. Or not. Whatever will keep your mind from leaping to "What if...?", take care of it.*
3. *Get on the bed or on the couch or on a cozy pallet on the floor. This is about being somewhere where your body is comfortable.*
4. *Keep the lights on. Looking and being looked at is sexy. Adjust the blinds, light the candles, dim (or turn up!) the lights. Make it as bright as you feel comfortable with. Are you seeing a theme here?*
5. *Lie on your back with a pillow under your head and one under your hips. Bend your knees and let them fall naturally to the sides. I know what some of you may be thinking. "Am I at the gynecologist?" "That's too weird." "I don't feel comfortable being that exposed." I hear you. But I'm also going to tell you this. Your partner wants to see you and enjoy you, and if she or he doesn't—you know what I'm going to say by now—get rid of the bum.*
6. *Have your partner use lots of oil or lube and massage your vulva. No feathery fingers here—a real, full-on juicy massage.*
7. *Once you are amply jazzed up—that is, your clit is hard and your outer lips are swelling—have your partner slide two fingers inside you. They only need to be a few inches inside—the texture of the G-Zone will be apparent, and it will make itself more known as you become more aroused.*

8. *Have your partner use an “up, in, and down” or “come hither” touch to tease the G-Zone, following your lead for speed and pressure.*
9. *The best use of the G-Zone—like the best use of all of your zones, really—is in combination with other zones. So, tell your partner what other parts you would like to put into play. This can include sucking on your clit, using a vibrator on your clit, teasing your ass with her fingers... you get the idea.*
10. *Have her or him keep it up for as long as you can stand it, and then allow yourself to give in.*
11. *Allow the orgasm to come. Don't hold back, even if you feel like you have to urinate. If you emptied your bladder prior to playing, you most likely do not have to urinate, and you may well be about to squirt. This is the point where you have to simply trust your partner and your body and let go.*

I don't understand why every woman doesn't do it at least periodically.

Unfortunately, ridiculous, outdated societal conventions and seriously misguided religious teachings keep women from feeling comfortable enough to explore and enjoy their own bodies. If you meet someone who doesn't masturbate, please thrust this book into her hands and assure her that masturbation is the one cure-all with only positive side effects!

I would like to know if my sex life with my partner is going to be no good anymore if I masturbate on my own.

Quite the opposite is true, actually! The more you come, the more your body wants to come. Orgasms beget orgasms. Not to mention that masturbation helps you to better understand what gives you the most pleasure. Once you know your body, then you can share that information with your partner. Plus, pitching in while you're having partnered sex can really up the ante as well. There's no reason you can't rub your clit, for example, while your partner penetrates you. That can be a great way for everyone to enjoy a great orgasm.

Is it normal to be broken and not orgasm?

Let's start by unpacking this question. Lots of things are normal, from being able to orgasm quite often and easily, to orgasming less frequently and having to expend a great deal of effort and energy in order to make it happen. Very few women are "broken," if by that you mean flat-out physically unable to have an orgasm. And truth be told, if you can't orgasm, that doesn't mean you're "broken." It simply means you can't orgasm. You still are likely to be able to experience some varieties of pleasure. The key is to discover what those are and how to experience them.

If you are never able to orgasm, it's wise to see a doctor to ensure that there's not a health issue at play. But before you head for the exam table, experiment a little. Masturbate. Use your hands. Use toys. Try to discern whether you're actually unable to orgasm or whether the sexual activity you've been partaking in is simply not doing it for you. I've said it before and I will never stop saying it: Vaginal intercourse does not lead to orgasm for most women. That's because women's bodies are not designed to come that way, not because there is anything wrong with women or their bodies!

I question why it's such a taboo topic. It should be something women can talk about with girlfriends, but I can only imagine the reaction my girlfriends or sisters would have if it was brought up. We talk to each other about other girls-only things like periods, hairstyling tips, breastfeeding...but masturbation is not a comfortable topic. Why is that?

Sigh. I wish I knew. I don't get it either. But I do know that it has to change. One of masturbation's biggest problem—its only problem, really—is a PR problem. It's gotten a bad rap for being gross or weird or something that has to be kept hush-hush. I like to think of myself as masturbation's new publicist, here to bring it out into the light of day. I'm kind of like its cheerleader! "Come on, everybody! Let's give it up for masturbation. The one cure-all that won't make you gain weight or sleep for days. Everybody's doing it! Let's bring it out of the darkness and into the light. Three cheers for solo sex!"

I want my experiences to be normalized. Are my answers common?

Your experiences are normal. Your questions are common. All women worry about the same things. Each of the questions in this chapter was

raised by a number of survey takers, and I get the same questions via e-mail and from women I meet who find out what I do for a living.

All humans worry about whether or not they are normal, especially when it comes to bodies and sex and sexuality. But trust me, chances are beyond good that you are incredibly normal. And if you really have concerns that there is something so abnormal about you as to be unhealthy, talk to a professional, who will very likely be able to ease your fears.

I want to stop feeling shame about feeling repressed. Is there any way to stop yourself from feeling guilty or ashamed afterwards?

There are a few things you can do to work through feelings of shame and repression.

First, practice good self-talk. Nothing is more important than what we tell ourselves. So, first and foremost, you have to shut down that negative tape and replace it with a positive one. Whenever you find yourself thinking, “Masturbation is wrong. I shouldn’t do it. I’m a bad person for touching myself,” stop yourself mid-thought and instead say to yourself, “Masturbation is healthy. I have a right to my own body. I have a right to pleasure. Nothing is wrong with touching myself.” It will take some time at first. But the more often you replace the tape, the easier it will be, and the less you’ll have to do it.

Second, find support in friends and family. Seek out people who don’t harbor the same shame and repression and talk to them about what you’re feeling. Allow them to be sexuality role models of sorts. If all you see around you are people who also feel ashamed and repressed, it can be difficult to not absorb that. So surround yourself with the kind of whole, sexual people who you want to emulate.

Third, talk to a sex-positive counselor or doctor. There’s nothing wrong with masturbation, and there is nothing wrong with getting professional help to get you on the right track.

Finally, read all the sex-positive material you can get your hands on. Rely on sex-positive websites and magazines, and avoid any and all media that feeds into your feelings of shame.

Can some women really get off by sitting on the washing machine during the spin cycle? Or is that just an urban legend?

Well, all I can say is that lots of women have told me they can get off from sitting on the washing machine, riding a bike, or even taking a long bus ride. I can't say that I have ever personally experienced this. But depending on a woman's anatomy and sensitivity—and trust me, we are all as different as we are similar—it certainly is possible! The general rule is this: If it stimulates your clit enough, it can get you off.

I also asked survey takers, “What else do you want to tell me about your experience masturbating?” I got a wealth of interesting answers. Most respondents said they were grateful to have masturbation as a part of their lives and that their only regret, if any, was not coming to the practice sooner. They said it helped them learn about themselves as well as feel more confident with partners.

Here is a sampling of the responses I received.

Being older (in my forties) is liberating in many ways. I don't care what others think, and that has trickled over into my sex life, including masturbation.

It has been a weird path. I was molested by my stepfather for many years as a young child, so sex became twisted. For a long time I thought I was weird. I didn't know if I was normal. Now, I'm okay with my sexuality. All parts. I claim my right to be a sexual being however I choose to be.

I wish I had known about it sooner. I wish it had felt like an option sooner. I think that it would have helped me be real with myself about my sexual orientation sooner. It would have been better.

OMG it was freaky. I think, looking back now, that how I was raised and was never talked to about masturbating got me into BDSM. I like public sex because I like being caught. It's a thrill.

I wish I had learned how to do it well earlier. I think I might have made some better choices in partners if I had. It definitely

helps me feel powerful and sexy. It has opened me up to different sexual experiences.

I once masturbated in a movie theater like a dirty old man. Ha. My girlfriend and I were watching one of those Emmanuelle movies in the eighties and I had on a pair of overalls. I was in my forties and could not help myself, I was so turned on. Also, I can give myself an orgasm by doing Kegels.

When I was a kid I thought I could get pregnant by masturbating. My fifth-grade sex ed class changed that.

If you haven't tried the "running water" trick, you're missing out!

It's amazing—masturbation is like the one last thing I'm hanging on to, like a thread, to be able to perceive myself as a sexual being. My sex life with my partner is so depressing for me. (All I do is make some noises so he can come efficiently. No attention is paid to me, and while this used to sadden me, now I don't even want it, because I feel self-conscious and uncomfortable.) My "self-love" is the only way I get some love! I like that we humans were gifted with this ability to have a form of release. It's just cool—it adds variety to being alive on this earth. But it's also amazing how masturbation has somewhat paralleled my sex life in its increasing lack of flavor or excitement. I just do what's predictable and expedient (just like I do with my partner in bed). Filling out this survey has reminded me that I should at least try to have a little more fun with myself.

Masturbation for me is such a blessing. I can choose to pleasure myself whenever I am able. I don't have to be in a relationship to have a wonderful sexual experience. How freeing is that?!

In high school I read a Jehovah's Witness book or something for teens. I was brought up in a Christian household. And [the

book] covered masturbation and how you shouldn't do it and should be ashamed of yourself. So I did think about it and wondered about whether I should be ashamed, and that didn't last long. I just thought to myself, why? Who does it hurt? No one. It's my body and damn, it feels good!

I hate that people still feel it is so naughty. It should be empowering. I feel it makes you a much better partner in the bedroom. Own your orgasms!

There are times I would prefer it over intercourse.

It's a life changer. It allowed me to feel proud of myself, raise my self-esteem, and connect with myself and with the Universe around me.

I have sometimes used carrots (peeled), bananas, and love balls for vaginal penetration, with or prior to clitoral masturbation.

I believe it should be promoted and accepted more. Kids should be told it is okay and healthy but a private activity.

When I first started [masturbating] as a kid, my sister happened upon me doing it. She is younger and always wanted to do what I was doing, so I told her and she tried it. Looking back, as an adult, it seems odd. But neither of us really understood what was going on, and we never asked anyone or mentioned it, either.

I would advise other women to explore their own sexuality this way.

I think it makes me hornier.

I read this book in high school, called The Sunday List of Dreams, by Kris Radish, which my mom read after me. Although I was never told about masturbation, this book

sparked a very good discussion between my mom and me where she told me that she regretted never talking about masturbation with me. She said she wished she had told me that it was natural. It was a really great and empowering talk between the two of us, mainly because as a teenager it made me feel a lot better about my masturbation habits.

I am a virgin. I have been knowingly masturbating since I was twelve years old and I am still a virgin. I have zero intentions of saving myself for marriage. I am waiting for when it feels right, a partner I trust. I know there are arguments out there that say teaching girls to masturbate will only make them promiscuous, to which I claim, hogwash. In my experience, masturbation taught me about my body and how the “lady parts” work. It meant that I didn’t sleep with someone before I was ready because I was curious to know what it felt like, because I already had some idea. Obviously, having sex with a partner is different from having sex with myself, but as a teenager, it really took away a lot of my curiosity about the act of sex. Also, the sex ed they teach you in school sucks because it did not bring up female masturbation, nor did it teach me about any element of the female sex aside from the reproductive parts. For example, I did not learn about a clitoris. I learned all of that on my own through masturbation and reading about sex in romance novels.

It’s sad that I felt such overwhelming and intense guilt over it as a teen. I really cried over it.

It just occurred to me that when people talk about masturbation, I always think of a hand job and never anything involving toys. I’ve had a couple of toys in the past but never used them or got off with them properly. I did feel weird [about using my hands] for so long, as everyone else I knew who talked about it struggled to orgasm without penetration or a vibrator.

When my divorce was going through, I bought myself a bullet and used it, but I couldn't orgasm with that alone. Since meeting my now-husband, I have finally found a toy that will make me orgasm without needing manual input—that was an incredible experience, as I didn't think it was possible.

Masturbation has gotten me through tough times. A couple of times I had a period of long-term celibacy (two years, twice) after a bad breakup. I didn't want to have to rely on other humans for sexual pleasure, or confuse that pleasure for love. During these times was when my sexuality expanded the most, maybe because it wasn't someone else asking me to do something I may or may not have liked—anything I did came from me. I surprised myself.

My ass looks better ever since I started to masturbate regularly.

When I was sixteen or seventeen, my best friend and I confided in each other that we masturbated, and we talked about it openly from then on. We had a code word, "buffet." I can't even remember how we came up with that. It felt good to talk about it, though.

I found out in my twenties that my older sister (who had been sexually active since she was fifteen) had never had an orgasm and didn't masturbate. I was so shocked and sad for her. We immediately made plans to go and get her a vibrator. It seems not everyone does it. Masturbating has made me aware of what my body needs to get off during sex. Because I know, I think that has made me more confident in my sexual relationships.

Well, one of my most exciting experiences: I have been able to orgasm without touching myself a few times. One time was on the train. It was all mental and muscle contractions.

I had a cousin who died from autoerotic asphyxiation in high school. I can't help but wonder if that would have happened if

he had truly understood what he was doing and how dangerous it was. I feel lucky that despite my upbringing, I managed to have a positive outlook on sex and have learned so much.

I feel like knowing and discussing masturbation with other women has really been a positive experience for me.

It's definitely helped me get to know myself, and I'm able to communicate that to my partner.

I enjoy it. It is my lifeline. I have seriously considered cheating on my partner, but I haven't yet. That doesn't mean that I won't, but masturbation keeps those urges at bay.

I used to sell Usborne books, and I was taken aback when my seemingly liberal sister was upset that their sexual education book for preteens mentioned masturbation in a positive light.

It's a good stress reliever and a good way to explore your sexuality.

Nowadays, with porn and such, you can pretty much experience anything by yourself and discover your own comfort zone without having to sleep with a bunch of men.

I would actually like to learn to masturbate better!

I think it has helped me grow sexually over the years and gain a better understanding of my own body.

It's getting better and better for me, like a lot of things in my life. I love the human growth potential if one is unafraid to ask and look for help.

I don't understand why everyone expects it to be a regular normal thing for guys, but people are horrified when a woman admits it. I encourage my kids to.

It's been great to describe to you what I do in self-pleasuring, and it helps me to eradicate that negative internal voice that says not to talk about it. I have very little of that voice left, but I notice that when I tell you about my masturbation, I want to censor—but I won't, as vocal liberation is key in my process. I will also add that using a vibrator was something I was not quite ready for until I was in my late thirties. That's when I was more successful with it, liked using it. I probably needed a gentler one, but like everyone else, I did not have proper education. I learned about vaginal penetration and clitoral stimulation being the keys to pleasure on my own, but Betty Dodson's affirmation was good to have.

I am very proud of the fact that I did it and do it. I wish more women knew how wonderful it can be. I feel it helped to shape me as a sexual person and gave me experience prior to being with another person. I knew what I liked.

One time my Hitachi Magic Wand short-circuited as I was beginning to use it. I don't know what was worse, the call to Amazon to see if I could get a refund, or the fact that I really wanted to continue the session, and was disappointed.

I think masturbation is a form of self-care/self-love that is important to having pleasurable sexual experiences with a partner, if you choose to be sexual with a partner. Knowing my own body has made me more self-aware and has improved my sex life with my partner, because I can articulate what I know about myself. Masturbation feels good and is a great way to de-stress.

I enjoy it maybe in a way it has made me freer when making love to a man.

And these two gems, which were among my favorites of all the responses I received:

It keeps me sane.

Some of the best sex I've had has been with myself.

The Solo Sex Journey

I'VE COME A LONG way since I first started masturbating. Since then I have tried all kinds of toys, experimented with partners, and even attended Betty Dodson's famed Bodysex workshop, where I masturbated in a circle with the eight other women in attendance.

Like everything else in our lives, our masturbation practices are journeys all our own, and they speak volumes about our lives, our experiences, our relationships, and our futures.

I asked survey takers to speak to how their masturbation practices have evolved or changed since they started masturbating. The most common answers included feeling less guilty, adding toys to the mix, and becoming more "efficient." Any changes that make you feel good are positive ones. And if you have felt guilt in the past, losing that guilt is the most important evolution you can experience. You don't have to suffer with guilt. You don't deserve to suffer with guilt. Guilt is about other people and their issues. You don't have to live under their burdens and discomfort. Masturbation is about you, and only you.

Lots of respondents also said they feel like they know their bodies better now, and what works and what doesn't. Some noted that their orgasms have become more intense as they have gotten older, and others said they felt their hands were no longer enough to get them off. Interestingly, some people say they masturbate more now as adults and others say they do it less.

Many women say they began to use it as a way to fall asleep as time went on. And others mentioned needing mental stimulation as they got older—books or pornography or simply fantasizing, which they didn't necessarily need as a kid. Most say it has improved over time! A number of

respondents said they have added penetration to their solo play, as well as incorporating other body parts, like legs and breasts. And some said they have come to enjoy having a partner watch them when they masturbate.

Here are some more of respondents' stories in their own words.

I didn't start masturbating until I was nearly twenty. At first I was masturbating every chance I had. Multiple times a day, any time I was alone. I remember once, having been turned on by a make-out session after a date, I pulled into a car wash and masturbated in the front seat because I was turned on so much it was actually hurting and I needed to release the tension.

It hasn't changed much. I am not a very successful masturbator without the wand. I pretty much need porn to come if I don't have the wand with me. It's very hard for me to focus otherwise, and I get extremely impatient with myself. I think I use the wand to come (especially with partners) mostly because I'm not patient and I feel bad for taking so long, and then it becomes something I'm self-conscious of, and that's never going to get me off.

I went through a period in college (not so much these days) in which I fucked myself with a dildo to come and ejaculated and came that way. I still like that but I don't bother much anymore.

Full circle. I started with external stimulation, then moved onto [penetration with] vibrators, and am now back to external only.

When I first discovered that I had this option, I was single and living alone. I was so excited! Then I tried to be in a relationship with a man. I didn't understand my sexuality yet. And didn't understand why I hated having sex. Why I avoided it at all costs, but enjoyed masturbation, and did it regularly. Then I got into my first relationship with a woman and loved sex. It's amazing. So, I don't feel like masturbating very often because I have amazing sex. And, as I mentioned, she is uncomfortable with me masturbating alone.

I find myself self-satisfying instead of looking for or accepting offers of sexual experiences that could ultimately put me into danger.

In the beginning I would use pillows to grind up against. Now I use my fingers on my clit and simultaneously rub my nipples and breasts.

It took a long time to go from using water coming out of the spout to actually touching myself. And I still do sometimes masturbate by touching myself, but a vibrator is so much faster and more intense.

Well, when I was younger, it was always just the clitoral stimulation. Then, as I grew older, wiser, and more in tune with my needs and wants, it included penetration as well.

I have gone from rubbing against surfaces as a kid to using my hand to using toys.

I used to not really know what I was doing and used random objects to masturbate with. And I always denied it. Now I couldn't give less of a fuck if people know I masturbate. And now I know there so many toys that you can purchase!

I was so young when I figured it out, there was so much going on with me then; but now I know who I am and am empowered by it. And honestly, it all stems from my masturbation at a young age. If my parents had found out when I was a kid it probably would have screwed me up, because I know they wouldn't have handled it the right way. I learned by myself and have spent almost my entire life perfecting the art of masturbation.

It has become more monotonous and quiet, and less joyful, since I started as a teen. When I first started, I would vocalize my arousal, and become excited at the sounds of my own moaning! I used my fingers, I used showerheads, and also, in

college, rubbed my vulvar area against the edge of the mattress until I came. Or I would sit on a (covered!) toilet in the college library and touch myself there. I would touch my body all over, and relish that.

Now, my masturbation is unvaried. I don't touch myself all over; I just touch my clitoral area. I don't make noises. I do it in bed, under my sheets, with an iPhone to watch a porn video with the volume turned down. I'm pretty much always trying to make it quiet and relatively quick. Once a year or so I'll go to the bathroom and try the showerhead. But I feel self-conscious with that, like someone will wonder why I'm taking so long. So basically, my masturbation life has become more pigeonholed as I've gotten older. When I was younger, my own fantasies, or erotic literature, were enough to focus me and arouse me to the point of orgasm. Now, I am easily distracted, even with a porn video in front of me. (I'll even start pontificating about the fakeness of the video...) So I spend a good deal of time flipping through videos, trying to find one that seems "real." Most people go through sexual awakenings as they age; I'm going through an increasing sexual inhibition.

I'm more creative getting myself off. I enjoy it more. I take my time and savor the moment.

Now I involve more of my body parts. I need to stretch my skin more now to increase stimulation.

Now that I know what happens to my body, I can feel every little sign before the orgasm, and I have multiple orgasms.

When I first started, I didn't know what was really happening. Over time I learned what a female orgasm was, learned more about my body, what I like, what turns me on, etc. I have always noticed that if I'm not in the right frame of mind, like if my mind is on other things, it can take a long time to reach climax. So I've learned to meditate just before masturbating to clear my head of whatever was going on in my day.

I try to switch between different positions to avoid getting myself off in only one specific way.

Knowing very little about the clitoris at first, I spent a lot of my early adolescence inserting things into my vagina and wondering why it didn't feel good. Even when I did try to stimulate my clitoris, it took too long and my hand would get tired. Then, when I was sixteen, I read in an online forum about using the bathtub faucet to masturbate, and that was what gave me my first orgasm and remained my preferred method for the rest of high school. In college, I bought my own sex toys, but I also learned how to get myself off with my fingers if I needed to. I now enjoy collecting sex toys and experiencing all the different sensations they can offer.

Well, I am lazy now and rarely masturbate to climax without a bullet. And I use porn like ninety-five percent of the time now because I am lazy and it's easy.

I quit touching myself after boys started touching me in junior high and didn't start again until I was with one who encouraged me to touch myself in bed with him at sixteen. I didn't start masturbating alone for my pleasure until sex in my marriage stopped being as great as it once was. Also my toys have upgraded significantly.

It started when I was young, putting pressure on my clitoris using tapping motions over my clothes. Then as I aged it evolved to direct skin-to-skin contact, and circular motions. As I read more, I wanted to experience penetration, so I started using a marker to penetrate myself. However, penetration took me a really long time to clear that mental hurdle. Being a virgin, I resisted the thought of being penetrated for the first time by an inanimate object. I got over it eventually. When I got to my first year of university, I ordered a simple vibrator and began using that for penetration. That was an evolution in and of itself. As a virgin, going from a marker to a vibrator took a while because of the size differences and my inhibitions. That

pretty much brings us to where I am now: mostly clitoral stimulation with the occasional foray into penetration via vibrator. Though I'm thinking about branching out to include more sex toys, because why not?

I became more creative. I have better orgasms.

When I started, I never used my hands. I didn't even understand how that could make someone come until I was in my thirties. I always just crossed my legs on my side and thrust my hips and Kegeled. Hand manipulation seemed too intense, and simultaneously not enough. Also, occasionally now I penetrate myself with a dildo. But that's kind of an ordeal, and I don't usually feel like I need it.

I always wear underwear now when I masturbate. And making even the slightest of noises makes it feel better. Learning how to masturbate and using what I know has made sex better.

Starting to use toys has been a huge game changer for me. It's much more enjoyable and the sensations are a lot more intense that way. Also, I was initially afraid to use my hands (which I suspect is due to being molested as a child) and pretty much just rubbed against a pillow. Getting comfortable with touching myself has been a bit of a process and is something I really enjoy, now.

When I started I was a teenager, so I didn't have access to toys. Toys became a much more regular thing in my mid-twenties. Now I tend towards clitoral toys, as they make less noise. Rabbits are very loud, and I live in a house where the walls are paper-thin! I do miss penetrative masturbation, but I don't really want my weird housemate listening in on me!

I started out by basically humping things. Which eventually began to strike me as impractical (what with the arm of the couch being in a public area of the house), so I taught myself to hump my hand instead. And then at age thirteen or so I was

under the impression that hetero sex always meant missionary-style PIV, so I trained myself to bring myself to orgasm while on my back. Now my anxiety and the meds I'm taking for it are fucking me all up and I need fast, jackhammer-hard stimulation, so it's the Magic Wand every time. On the high setting.

It was first about the end result, but as I've gotten older, it's more about the tease, exploration, buildup, and then the release.

I learned a lot through watching Carlin Ross and Betty Dodson's video in which Carlin explains that she always had more of the "leg tension" orgasms. I followed Betty's advice on how to move your pelvis (she calls it the Rock 'n' Roll technique), breathing and fantasizing throughout. A couple of times I had much more intense orgasms doing that—the feeling spreading throughout my body and coming up through my feet. I find it does take more time, and I have to kind of initially force myself to take the time needed—most of the time I go back to the tried and true, which gets me there faster (Betty talks about how this basically means following a more male pattern of orgasm, overly focused on how fast you get to the orgasm).

The biggest change is adding nipple play, which is interesting since I have always dearly loved my nipples being played with in partner sex. Why I didn't think of doing it when I was alone beats me! Glad I finally saw the light. I don't remember when I started doing this. Could have been after my divorce about twenty years ago. The pleasure/pain aspect I added on at about age fifty, eleven to twelve years ago. This would have been around menopause.

When I turned fifty I experimented more because empty-nest had set in and I lived alone, no children, which helped me to feel more free with myself.

I have practiced edging more frequently as the years have gone by, purposefully extending my orgasms to make them more powerful. I also use my Kegels, and have learned to touch in certain ways, in certain places, to make the orgasm longer or more powerful.

The Future

Women were kept from masturbating for generations. To masturbate now is the ultimate act of rebellion and expression of freedom. To allow others to tell you not to access your own pleasure, your own power, your own body, is to allow others—not to put too fine a point on it—to manipulate and control you.

If you have to rely on someone else for your pleasure, you are forever in fear of losing that person. That is the definition of being trapped. You are owned when you allow someone that. It is a terrible, terrible place to be in. Your pleasure and your right to pleasure belong to you, and you alone. Anyone who tells you otherwise is doing so only out of fear and a desperate need to control you and your body.

Talking about female masturbation is ultimately about telling the truth. Historically, women's orgasms were treated as medical issues to be resolved. Many doctors claimed that women didn't even have orgasms. Here you had all of these women experiencing these feelings and not necessarily knowing what they were, or that their feelings were part of healthy sexual desire and behavior.

A woman who could not orgasm during vaginal intercourse was considered "frigid." This was a medical diagnosis. The treatment was for a doctor to masturbate her to orgasm—that is, to stimulate her until she came. However, this was not considered orgasm, because the medical establishment did not consider women to be orgasmic. Do you see the circuitousness and insanity of all of this?

Sadly, this continues to be a problem today. I receive so many e-mails and questions from women asking how they can orgasm during vaginal intercourse. The answer is simple—you need clitoral stimulation at the same time. Masturbation is the key to unseating this myth that women should be able to come via vaginal intercourse alone.

Sex is still too commonly defined as a man putting his penis into a woman's vagina and moving in and out until he ejaculates. This is antiquated and incredibly limiting. Women generally don't orgasm that way, and holding that as the norm makes normal women feel abnormal and somehow lacking. But they are not lacking—at all. They are normal, and masturbation can show them that.

In *The Technology of Orgasm*, technology and sexuality historian, writer, and researcher Rachel Maines explains, “It is hardly worth belaboring the point that most men enjoy coitus and that men have been the dominant sex through most of Western history. Yet the fact remains of our normative preference for coitus, in which the constant from Hippocrates to Freud—despite breathtaking changes in nearly every other area of medical thought—is that women who did not reach orgasm by means of penetration alone are sick or defective.”

The only thing about this that I might take issue with is that I think it *is* worth belaboring the point. That is the point. Men's desires and definition of sex are still valued over women's by men, women, and society at large. If we haven't learned that yet, we need to learn it, and female masturbation the best way to get us there.

How do we start? We have to change women's attitudes about masturbation by doing these things:

- Talking about it. We have to talk about masturbation. We have to remind one another to do it. We have to joke about it. We have to treat it with the same ease that men do, and with the same ease that we talk about our other self-care, like eating right and exercising. We all do it. And talking about it makes it feel more normal.
- Coming up with new names for it. Not having comfortable language for something makes it that much harder to talk about. This feels like a really big issue when it comes to female masturbation. Calling it that seems so formal, and the expression “self-love” does seem a little woo-woo. And so much of the slang is either goofy or gross. So find language that feels good to you and use it—freely.

- Supporting movies and TV shows and books that talk about it in the positive, normal way that it should be discussed, like Amy Schumer's skit about going to see *Fifty Shades of Grey*.
- Doing it. It may seem too simple. But it's true. Women need to masturbate. And taking the time to take care of yourself in this simple way supports your well-being, and—believe it or not—the well-being of other women, too. By masturbating, you're saying it's okay to do it, and you're helping those women who don't feel comfortable enough yet to take care of themselves in this super-simple, super-healthy, super-sex-positive way.
- Working towards eliminating body shame. It's hard to masturbate when you don't love your body, and it's hard to love your body when the world spends so much time telling you to be anything and everything other than what you are. So take a media break. Step away from those magazines and Google searches and spend time with other women who love and support you and remind you how amazing you and your body really are!

That's just the first step. Next stop: men.

What can we do to change men's attitudes towards female masturbation?

- Discuss it with male partners and close friends. We have to tell the men in our lives that we masturbate, too, and that it's as important for us as it is for them. If all they know is what they get from the media, they are going to get the same murky information that we get. But we have the opportunity to tell them the truth. We do it. We love it. We have every right to do it. It means we're empowered, self-actualized people. It doesn't mean we're sluts or weirdos or freaks. It means we're human, just like them.

- Tell our sons that masturbating is something humans do. Plenty of parents tell their sons about masturbation. But they don't mention that girls masturbate, too. It's important to tell them this so that they grow up to be men who see women as sexual equals. It's about masturbation, but it's also about more than that—it's about normalizing real female sexuality.
- Masturbate for and with your male partner. If you have a male partner and you masturbate for and with him, you show him that you're not ashamed and that you have no reason to be ashamed. If he takes issue with you doing that, it's important to find out why. It's likely because he has some unfortunate notions about women and sexuality, and it's imperative to clear those up. Your body is yours. Period. And masturbating is a vital part of taking care of that body.

But there's more to the movement. We also have to teach our daughters about masturbation. Female masturbation is really important. It is. It's not a joke or something to be dismissed. It's really important for all women, and it's equally important for teenage girls. It's vital for them to know their bodies. It's imperative for them to have a way to relieve stress. But more than anything, it's paramount that they know they don't need anyone else to bring them pleasure. They can "take care of business" all by themselves. No risk of pregnancy or disease or slut shaming or anything.

Think about it. If you're all hot to trot, you make choices based on what your body is craving. But if you can please your body, you can ease your mind. What if teenage girls made decisions about sex not because they wanted to get off, but instead because they wanted to connect emotionally and physically with a partner of their very specific choosing?

I know. I know. It's often said—despite also often being incredibly untrue and most certainly a dangerous way to look at sex—that boys use love to get sex and girls use sex to get love. If it's love that girls are seeking, no amount of masturbating is going to fix that. But hear me out: If a girl is feeling empowered by being able to pleasure herself, if she is feeling strong and confident and in control of her own body, if her stress level is low and her self-esteem is high, if her serotonin levels are soaring,

she's going to be far less likely to give herself away sexually for acceptance or "love" from a partner, because she already accepts and loves herself.

It also frees girls up to date but take sex out of the equation. Or at least wait until they're good and ready. I'm the last person on earth who would sing the praises of abstinence. But I would be the first person to hope that every young woman is able to choose a happy, safe, healthy first time when she is ready—emotionally, physically, spiritually, mentally, and otherwise. If masturbating can make it easier for girls to wait, then why wouldn't we sing the praises of—as I like to call it—"taking care of business"?

And if we teach our sons—and stress to our teenage boys—that girls like to masturbate, just like they do, then we teach them that girls don't need them for sexual release. They may well want boys. But they don't need them. The only thing girls need is themselves. Girls are whole sexual beings on their own, and girls and boys are sexual equals. That is an absolute truth to which there is no counter, no argument other than misogyny, fear, or self-loathing.

Masturbation is a powerful thing. No other tool is so easily accessible to so many people with virtually no limitations on who can do it or when or how or how much benefit can be derived from it.

Imagine a world full of humans who understand that they and they alone are responsible for their own pleasure, and that sharing that pleasure with someone is about intimacy and trust and sexual exploration—not just a simple need for sexual release. This is like a dream to me. It levels the playing field. It puts sex in its proper place. And it sets the stage for healthy, happy, mutually satisfying, egalitarian sexual relationships, the likes of which we have never seen before.

And that's a world I sure would love to live in—wouldn't you?

We're only a few strokes away.

Acknowledgements

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Thank you to all of my friends and family who put up with me every time I embark on this crazy book writing process that feeds me body, mind, and spirit.

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Finally, I want to thank my ever-devoted girlfriend Robin Brown for always being there at my side with the just the right words of encouragement and for the never-ending supply of hugs and kisses that get me through all of the writing and the thinking and the endless over-processing that marks the work I do. Thank you.

Resources

JUST BECAUSE MASTURBATION CAN be done alone, that doesn't mean you have to go it alone. Along with this book, there is all kinds of information out there about how and when and where and with what. This resource section will point you in the right direction for whatever you might be looking for!

Workshops:

Bodysex workshop with Betty Dodson and Carlin Ross
www.dodsonandross.com/topic/bodysex-workshops

Books:

Getting Off: A Woman's Guide to Masturbation by Jamye Waxman
Sex for One: The Joy of Self-Loving by Betty Dodson
Solitary Sex: A Cultural History of Masturbation by Thomas W. Laqueur

Woman-Friendly Sex-Toy Purveyors:

Adam & Eve
www.adamandeve.com

Babeland
www.babeland.com

Babes and Horny (United Kingdom)
www.babes-n-horny.com

Blue Boutique
www.blueboutique.com

Coco de Mer (United Kingdom)
www.coco-de-mer.com

Come as You Are (Canada)

www.comeasyouare.com

Early to Bed

www.early2bed.com

Eve's Garden

www.evesgarden.com

Fairvilla

www.fairvilla.com

Good Vibrations

www.goodvibes.com

Honey Gifts (Canada)

www.honeygifts.com

Just for Pleasure

www.justforpleasurenc.com

Nomia

www.nomiaboutique.com

Pink Bunny

pink-bunny.myshopify.com

Pleasure Chest

www.thepleasurechest.com

Pleasures N' Treasures

www.pleasuresntreasures.com

Pleasures of the Heart

www.pleasuresfromtheheart.net

My Pure Pleasure

www.mypurepleasure.com

Romantix

www.romantix.com

Self Serve

www.selfservetoys.com

SHAG

shop.weloveshag.com

She Bop

www.sheboptheshop.com

Smitten Kitten

www.smittenkittenonline.com

Sugar the Shop

www.sugartheshop.com

The Tool Shed

www.toolshedtoys.com

Venus Envy (Canada)

www.venusenvy.ca

Wild at Heart

www.wildatheartxxxonline.com

Womyns' Ware (Canada)

www.womynsware.com

Sex Toy Brands:

Jimmyjane

www.jimmyjane.com

Lelo

www.lelo.com

Ohmibod

www.ohmibod.com

JeJoue

www.jejoue.com

WeVibe

www.we-vibe.com

Sex Furniture:

Liberator

www.liberator.com

Pornography:

For this section, I turned to porn expert and Good Vibrations sexual health educator Andy Duran for some top picks of female-focused, sex-positive porn sites, companies, and even how to search and find just what you're looking for. Here's what he had to say:

Porn is more available now than at any other time in our history. No longer must you venture out to movie houses or the backs of dirty bookstores or share your erotic interests with your cable provider. Through the Internet, social media, and apps, adult films and images can be found with the same ease and convenience as ordering a pizza! But with great power comes great responsibility, and in a time when anyone with a smartphone can be a director or an actor, not all porn is created equal. Though the access has grown, the types of films that are most accessible often don't represent the vast level of diversity porn has to offer. Just as mainstream media has films of different genres, porn is no different.

There are films with plots, humor, suspense, and even romance. Whether you're looking for a documentary that looks into the love-making of real couples or how-to tips from the professionals, porn has something for everyone interested.

Here is a list of some amazing sites that have curated high-quality, sex-positive, women- and couple-friendly porn, taking away a lot of the guesswork and leaving you time to sit back and feel good about what you're viewing. After all, porn is about pleasure. Find what pleases you!

www.beautifulagony.com
www.candidaroyalle.com
www.crashpadseries.com
www.erikalust.com
www.goodvibrationsvod.com
www.handbasketproductions.com
www.hotmoviesforher.com
www.indiepornrevolution.com/indie-porn/clip-store
www.joybear.com
www.ladycheeky.com
www.lustcinema.com
www.nina.com/ninahartley.php
www.orgasmictipsforgirls.tumblr.com
www.pinklabel.tv
www.playgirl.com
www.pornmoviesforwomen.com/inpulse.html
www.theromanceseries.com/tour_rs/index.php
www.xconfessions.com

Demographics of Survey Takers

	Number of survey takers	%
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Sex

Female	155	94.5%
No response	9	5.5%

Gender

Female/Woman	150	91.5%
Genderfluid/Fluid	3	1.8%
Queer	2	1.2%
Feminine	1	0.6%
Genderqueer	1	0.6%
Masculine female	1	0.6%
Mostly female	1	0.6%
Two-spirit	1	0.6%
No response	4	2.4%

Age

16–17	2	1.2%
18–20	7	4.3%
21–25	21	12.8%
26–30	29	17.7%
31–35	20	12.2%

36–40	27	16.5%
41–45	25	15.2%
46–50	16	9.8%
51–60	13	7.9%
61 and up	3	1.8%
No response	1	0.6%

Sexuality

Gay/Lesbian	49	29.9%
Straight/Heterosexual	42	25.6%
Bisexual	37	22.6%
Bi-curious/Mostly straight/Open-minded	17	10.4%
Fluid/No label/Depends	9	5.5%
Pansexual	5	3.0%
Queer	3	1.8%
No response	2	1.2%

Race/Ethnicity

White/Caucasian	128	78.0%
Black/African American	10	6.1%
Latina	9	5.5%
Mixed-race	6	3.7%
Asian/Asian American	3	1.8%
American Indian	2	1.2%
No response	6	3.7%

Location

Suburbs	86	52.4%
City	51	31.1%
Rural area	26	15.9%
No response	1	0.6%

Relationship status

Committed	88	53.7%
Single	42	25.6%
Single, dating	16	9.8%
Exclusively dating	13	7.9%
No response	5	3.0%

Preferred relationship setup

Monogamous	106	64.6%
Open	18	11.0%
No relationship	9	5.5%
Polyamorous	9	5.5%
Undefined	1	0.6%
No response	21	12.8%

Solo Sex Survey

Let's start at the beginning...think back to when you were a kid.

- 1.What were you first told about masturbation? Include where you got that information and what you thought about it.
- 2.Did you ever get “caught” masturbating as a kid? If so, how was it handled?
- 3.Describe the first time you masturbated (the first time you remember). Include how old you were and what you did.

OK, now let's talk about your current masturbation.

- 4.Describe how you masturbate. Include what you do and what you think about.
- 5.Why do you masturbate? Think about what inspires you, motivates you or moves you to masturbate.
- 6.How do you feel about masturbation? (ie guilty, shamed, empowered, neutral, strong proponent, etc.) Where do you believe those feelings come from?
- 7.Have you masturbated with a partner either currently or in the past? Describe an experience masturbating with a partner. Include what prompted this experience, how you and your partner each enjoyed it and whether it is/was part of your regular sexual repertoire with that partner.
- 8.How has your masturbation evolved or changed since you started masturbating?

9.What else do you want to tell me about your experience masturbating?

10.What questions do you have about female masturbation?

Now for the easy questions:

11.What is your sex?

12.What is your gender?

13.How old are you?

14.How do you identify your sexual orientation?

15.What is your race and ethnicity?

16.What is your relationship status?

- Single
- Single and actively dating
- Exclusively dating
- In a committed relationship or married
- Other (please specify)

17.How is your relationship set-up?

- Open
- Poly
- Monogamous
- Other (please specify)

18.Which best describes where you live?

- Urban
- Suburban
- Rural

If it's ok for me to contact you for more info or to ask additional questions please provide your email address. You can always say no, if I email you

for more information. And, rest assured, nothing you share that I include in the book will have your name on it.

About the Author



JENNY BLOCK is a frequent contributor to a number of high-profile publications from *Huffington Post* to *Playboy*, and is the author of *O Wow: Discovering Your Ultimate Orgasm* and *Open: Love, Sex, and Life in an Open Marriage* (winner of a 2008 Lambda Literary Award). She appears regularly on HuffPo Live, the HuffPo Sex and Love Podcast, and is featured in HuffPo's first ever, free-standing multimedia project. She holds both her BA and her MA in English from Virginia Commonwealth University and taught college composition for nearly ten years.

Her work appears in and on a wide variety of publications and websites, including TheDailyMeal.com, YahooTravel.com, Jezebel.com, YourTango.com, American Way, Dallas Morning News, the Dallas Voice, edgedallas.com, and Curve Magazine.

She is often called on as an expert on sex and women's sexuality for Cosmopolitan.com, Romper.com, yourtango.com, bustle.com, *Woman's Day* magazine, SheKnows.com, and many others.

Her essay "And Then We Were Poly" is included in Rebecca Walker's book, *One Big Happy Family: 18 Writers Talk About Polyamory, Open Adoption, Mixed Marriage, Househusbandry, Single Motherhood, and*

Other Realities of Truly Modern Love (Riverhead Hardcover, 2009), which received a starred review from Kirkus. Jenny's essay "On Being Barbie" is included in the book *It's a Girl: Women Writers on Raising Daughters* (Seal Press, 2006).

Jenny has appeared on a variety of television and radio programs, including *Nightline*, *Fox and Friends*, *The Glenn Beck Show*, *The Tyra Banks Show*, *Good Morning Texas*, *The Morning Show with Mike and Juliet*, foxnews.com (online video), *Playboy Radio*, *The Alan Colmes Show*, *The Young Turks*, and BBC Radio.

Jenny's books have been written about or reviewed in and on a variety of publications and sites, including HuffingtonPost.com, *Playboy*, *YourTango.com*, *Publishers Weekly*, *Library Journal*, *Glamour*, *Marie Claire*, *Curve*, *Observer UK*, *Maxi* (Germany), *Psychologies* (UK), *Playgirl*, NPR's *Morning Edition*, *The New York Times*, feministing.com, *San Francisco Chronicle*, *New York Daily News*, *2: The Magazine for Couples* (Canada), wow-womenonwriting.com, and the *Baltimore City Paper*.

Jenny has also spoken in bookstores and at events all across the country, including the AVN Convention, Exxxotica Convention, Catalyst Convention, Brain Tease Dallas, the Wyly Theatre, the Texas Theater, Georgetown University, and the Science Museum of Virginia.

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