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Masturbation is tactile sexual stimulation other than through intercourse.

Techniques. Masturbation is harmless, legal, and carries no risk of disease. Typical masturbation, involving pleasurable stroking, caressing, or massaging of the genitals and other parts of the body, is healthy fun and cannot be overdone. Soreness or chafing heals easily if treated gently, and use of a lubricant reduces irritation. For men an oil, including household oils (Crisco, cooking oil, baby oil) and some hand lotions, will work well; [p. 776] for women a water-based lubricant intended for genital lubrication, such as K-Y or Astroglide, will give better results. Through experimentation with different strokes and caresses, not just on the genitals but all over the body, each person can discover what, for him or her, is most pleasurable. Some find the use of a vibrator helpful, and a variety of gadgets, store-bought or homemade, are used to assist in providing the desired sensations. However, a good masturbation machine for male use has yet to be developed. Thoughts or pictures of stimulating scenes (*fantasy, *pornography) can increase one's excitement. If desired, masturbation can be prolonged, and the intensity of orgasm enhanced, by stopping just before orgasm, to begin again when excitement has somewhat subsided.

Masturbation with friends, a common male experience of adolescence, is becoming an adult practice as well. Pairs or groups can either masturbate separately while watching and talking to each other, or partners can masturbate each other, either simultaneously or taking turns. Masturbation while talking over the telephone (*phone sex) has been a spreading practice in the 1980's.

Masters and Johnson reported that many find masturbation produces more intense orgasms than intercourse, and it also avoids the discomfort that anal penetration produces in many men. It is also reported that masturbation by a partner produces more intense orgasms, for some, than masturbating alone. If free of guilt, masturbation is said to have a positive effect on the personality.

Masturbation, alone, with a partner, or in a group, can be part of a spiritual experience.

History. Men. Masturbation by males is nearly universal. It is engaged in spontaneously by infants and children, and is found in many mammalian species, although no animal other than man masturbates to orgasm on a regular basis. Anthropological evidence suggests that masturbation rituals have been part of male coming-of-age ceremonies since prehistoric times. Temporary abstention from sexual activity, including masturbation, may be presumed to have been a common means to summon extra physical performance (as today in the advice of some athletic coaches), and abstention from and indulgence in masturbation have been part of the worship of the generative powers.

Civilizations have been indifferent or hostile to adult masturbation according to the birth rate needed. (Masturbation by children has usually been treated more leniently.) In bellicose societies, those trying to populate new land, and those subject to heavy losses from a hostile environment, there was pressure to direct sex towards reproduction, although masturbation's simplicity no doubt made it impossible to suppress. In more urban and pacifist cultures, in which population pressures were felt, reproduction then became a problem rather than a necessity. In such settings masturbation could be tolerated, along with prostitution and homosexuality, all of which were preferable to the infanticide which was common in parts of the ancient Mediterranean world.

In classical antiquity masturbation was called a "natural sexual practice," and physicians recommended it as preferable to harmful continence, and as a treatment for impotence. Indeed to be masturbated was recognized as a delicacy, and masseurs, prostitutes, and especially slaves provided this service. Anal masturbation using fingers, phalluses, and eggs is reported, as is auto-fellatio. The Cynic Diogenes, and others following him, openly masturbated, saying that experience revealed masturbation to be the easiest and best sexual practice, that it was not shameful and did not need to be concealed, and that masturbation could have prevented the Trojan War. Masturbation's mythical inventor was said to have been Hermes, who taught it to his son Pan.

Among the extensive Islamic sexological literature is the first treatise on masturbation, by the ninth-century Al-Saymari (*Encyclopedia of Islam*, article "Djins"); it is today unavailable or lost. Classical Islamic culture was supportive of partnered sex,

and masturbation, especially in solitude, mildly condemned. In part this was because one was not supposed to touch the “unclean” genitals; handless masturbation through use of a melon, though, is widely known in Arabic folklore. In the modern Islamic world it “is often considered as more reprehensible than sodomy and bestiality.” Classical Chinese culture encouraged masturbation without orgasm; emission of semen was only supposed to take place during intercourse with a woman.

Early Christian writers paid little attention to masturbation and fantasy. In the fourth and fifth centuries, with the spread of clerical celibacy and monasticism, masturbation and nocturnal emission appear as concerns, though in the hierarchy of sexual offenses these were among the mildest offenses. Handbooks to assist priests in taking confessions, including a treatise of Jean Gerson (1363-1429) on taking the confession of masturbators, reveal that Catholics masturbated just like everyone else. Concern within Catholicism reached a peak after the Council of Trent, when masturbation was seen as a more serious social problem than fornication or even adultery. Masturbation and sodomy were seen as related expressions of the same allegedly perverted sexual instinct, and the former was believed to lead to the latter.

In the eighteenth century the medical profession proclaimed loss of semen a serious threat to health, and condemned above all the voluntary and unprocreative “wasting” of semen with masturbation. In the nineteenth century concern over masturbation rose to hysteria, and it was said to cause homosexuality as well as diseases: insanity, epilepsy, heart disease, impotence, and many others. Masturbation was even called “humanity’s worst vice.” Means employed to control masturbation included circumcision, pharmaceuticals, mechanical devices, and foods (Graham crackers and Kellogg breakfast cereals). Inasmuch as physicians based themselves solely on anecdotal (unsystematic) observations, and emission of semen is healthful rather than a threat to health, this medical “breakthrough” may confidently be attributed to puritanism.

In the twentieth century opposition to sexuality has been deflected elsewhere, and masturbation is no longer condemned in Western culture, except by the Catholic church and a small minority of conservatives. The influential Kinsey surveys (1948, men; 1953, women), documented how widespread masturbation is. Physicians have admitted that masturbation is harmless, and masturbation is an important part of sex therapy. Enlightened advice books recommend to

parents that they allow their children privacy to masturbate. That adolescents need to masturbate to become fully functioning sexual adults is recognized, although the point is not made, in the U.S., in sex education materials directed to youth. (Masturbation is presented as harmless but optional; instruction in masturbation is only given informally, usually by peers.) There are no figures by which to check, but it seems likely that over the past generation there has been more masturbation and less guilt about it. The recent boom in pornography is itself evidence of a similar increase in masturbation. It remains a socially suspect practice, however, and is often viewed as a poor alternative to intercourse. In most of the third world masturbation is still condemned.

History. Women. As with all aspects of women's sexuality, the history of female masturbation is much less known than is that of men; since it did not involve semen, it was seldom discussed by moralists. Furthermore, what glimpses we have of female masturbation are mostly through [p. 778] the eyes of male writers and artists, and it is likely that in large part they observed what women found it profitable to show them, i.e. what they wanted to see. The vagina was believed to be the focus of women's sexual pleasure, and thus masturbation was seen as focused there. Masturbation with dildos made of leather and other materials was known in both Western antiquity and the Renaissance, and evidence for its existence is found in the prohibition of it by medieval Christian writers. In Islamic culture the use of both dildos and vegetables is reported. It is very likely that such masturbation existed in many other parts of the world. Classical Chinese culture was one of the most tolerant of female sexuality, and there are reports of masturbation with a variety of objects inserted into the vagina, including small bells; special instruments made of wood and ivory, with silk bands attached, could be used by two women together or, through use of the leg, by one alone. Female masturbation using the hand alone (i.e., clitoral stimulation) is documented in antiquity, but until the nineteenth century there is no further mention of it. To the Victorians who discussed the topic, female sexual desire was threatening, and female masturbation caused terror. Clitoridectomy (surgical removal of the clitoris) was used as a "treatment," especially in England and the United States. The operation was last performed in a western country (the United States) in 1937; as a means of forcing fidelity to husbands, however, it still survives in Africa.

Betty Dodson, Joani Blank, and other feminists, trying to

help women get more and better orgasms, have taken the lead in removing the stigma from masturbation. The use of vibrators has been repeatedly recommended, and they are now sold openly; the San Francisco store Good Vibrations, which specializes in vibrators, is openly pro-masturbatory. Sex therapist Ruth Westheimer has recommended the use of a cucumber, and that this was broadcast on network television itself shows a big change in national attitude. Dodson has organized masturbation workshops and parties. Somewhat belatedly, the post-AIDS sexual revival has seen gay male masturbation clubs founded in a growing number of cities, and heterosexual clubs will presumably follow. In San Francisco, St. Priapus Church has made group male masturbation a worship ceremony.

Politics. As it is the only sex practice available to an unpartnered person, masturbation has often been associated with loneliness. While apparently there have always been a number of cognoscenti who preferred it, masturbation has had a stigma and been ignored as a partnered activity. Thus it has not been, historically, a practice of the rich and powerful, who could purchase or otherwise compel the service of sexual partners. It has, rather, been a practice of the powerless. This means the poor and the isolated, those with elaborate fantasy lives or specialized sexual tastes, and, in recent times especially, it has meant the young. Among men, the average age of those reaching orgasm through masturbation is much lower than those reaching it through intercourse. Some of the opposition to masturbation has been hostility to the sexuality of young people.

Masturbation, like homosexuality, has been opposed because it has been believed antithetical to human relationships. However, as writers on the topic point out, masturbation can not only be a pleasurable activity for a couple, it can be relationship-enhancing. Masturbation can discharge an imbalance of sexual desire, a hidden and destructive issue in many relationships. It can be a means of low-risk adventures outside the relationship for those who find a single sexual partner confining. Masturbation can also enhance the bonds between a group or community, and it is inherently equalitarian.

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