

Know Thyself

Women talk about masturbation

Fifth Estate Collective

1971

A few of us got together to talk, as women, about masturbation, because we felt that it is an important and much-neglected topic. Here is the resulting conversation:

Carol: I can't remember ever masturbating when I was a child. And I know I see little girls do it all the time!

Joanne: I did it a lot when I was a little girl, with a stuffed elephant I had, and I always had this feeling that my mother was watching me. I knew it was the wrong thing to do. I used to look for her feet under the door. Then I just stopped. When I was five or six, I started believing the chastity thing—and thinking that sex and those parts of your body were nasty.

Barbara: I knew what the word masturbate meant, but it never occurred to me that women do it. I knew men did it, because they have a sexual organ. I didn't think that women had a sexual organ. I didn't think that they could masturbate.

J: Me neither. Even in this sex-education class that I had in high school, where they tried to get rid of myths like "you'll go crazy" or "you'll get warts," it always sounded as if they were only talking to the boys. They would say, "Masturbating is better than getting a girl in trouble."

C: Besides that, the gruesome stories that circulated in my high school said that girls masturbated by sticking bananas or frozen hot dogs up them! That never exactly appealed to me!

B: I discovered orgasms accidentally, by masturbating. It didn't occur to me til later that the word orgasm was what had happened. I had been doing it for a while because it was really pleasurable. I had never heard about any women, anywhere, who masturbated. Here I was, and could have an orgasm too; it was such a great thing, but a lot of guilt went with that too.

C: I never had an orgasm, until I told a friend and she said, "Oh, you should try masturbating." I remember having mixed reactions, from, "Oh yeah? Why didn't I think of that," to thinking that it didn't make sense. I didn't understand how you could have an orgasm without a man, without having intercourse.

My friend explained to me that there isn't any such thing as vaginal orgasms. She told me to feel around for my clitoris, which is where female orgasms come from. I tried to find it by touching and looking at my genitals for the first time, while sitting on the toilet. I felt this super tingly sensation, and sure enough, I had found it. I started to masturbate after that and had my first orgasm. Then I was able to tell men much better what I needed in the act of sex.

J: I had my first orgasm with a man. I couldn't get into the idea of masturbating, because I thought that you were supposed to have a man to give you an orgasm and they usually don't!

C: I know what you mean. It's just recently that I could think, "Wow, I want to go masturbate," just because it feels good. Sometimes it's a lot better than having sex with a man, especially cause that can be such a frustrating, unsatisfying experience.

J: I wanted to get into "how to do it." I think a lot of women try to do it. but because of the head-stuff, and not really knowing what to do, they give up.

One thing I discovered was that the myth about rock and roll culture, “sock it to me baby,” doing it hard and fast, doesn’t work. At least not for me. Hard pressure and speed just desensitizes my clitoris. When I started masturbating, I had to manipulate my clitoris really slowly and stay relaxed.

B: It’s nice to touch different areas too, besides what is contributing to the orgasm. That whole area is pretty sensitive.

J: Also, the clitoris shouldn’t be dry. Your clitoris and your vagina are a certain distance away, and the juice from your vagina won’t necessarily get onto your clitoris. If it’s too dry, it’s too intense. Flips me right out.

B: K-Y jelly works well.

J: I like spit, or vaginal juice.

C: I can dig what you’re saying. But everybody’s body is different, so people find ways that are good for them. Like for me, a fast, circular motion seems to work best. But the main thing is experimenting around, not being afraid to try different ways of touching yourself. Different combinations—speeds and pressures work at different times.

B: You know, I really don’t like to masturbate that much. I must still have a lot of hang-ups. The anxiety of wondering if its going to work can be a drag.

C: Yeh, when I think of the word masturbate, I associate it with orgasm. Just lately I’ve gotten into touching my body, my clitoris, the edge of my vagina, the insides of my legs. It feels nice. I do it for a while—then I go to sleep or something. I think it’s good not to worry about having an orgasm all the time.

J: It’s hard, though, because I still have a lot of insecurity about orgasms. That thing about frigidity is so strong. According to a lot of books, a woman is frigid if she can’t have a vaginal orgasm—and that means all women are frigid!

I used to fake orgasms with men. When I admitted to myself that I never had one, I felt terrible. When I started having them, I thought, “God-damn! That’s all that it was!”

C: You know, there are so many things in this society to make people feel shitty about themselves that way. You’re always trying to do things as well as somebody else, or be as beautiful, trying to meet some crazy standard.

One of the ways that we, as women, feel shitty about ourselves is in sex. We don’t have these orgasms that we’re supposed to; we don’t know how to ask for what we need; we feel guilty about giving pleasure to ourselves, or we don’t know how.

J: Loving yourself is really a political thing. And it really changes your attitude about yourself when you feel good about your body. If you don’t love yourself, you can’t get it together with a woman or a man or a movement.

I think that sexual experiences, when they’re good, when you’re close to another person, make you feel good for days. And that’s true for masturbating too, especially when you like yourself. Sometimes I feel so good afterwards, real relaxed.

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