

This article was downloaded by: [Arizona State University]

On: 10 March 2014, At: 08:32

Publisher: Routledge

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954 Registered office: Mortimer House, 37-41 Mortimer Street, London W1T 3JH, UK



## The Journal of Sex Research

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/hjsr20>

### Notes from the Back Room: Gender, Power, and (In)Visibility in Women's Experiences of Masturbation

Breanne Fahs<sup>a</sup> & Elena Frank<sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Women and Gender Studies Program, Arizona State University

Published online: 30 Apr 2013.

To cite this article: Breanne Fahs & Elena Frank (2014) Notes from the Back Room: Gender, Power, and (In)Visibility in Women's Experiences of Masturbation, *The Journal of Sex Research*, 51:3, 241-252, DOI: [10.1080/00224499.2012.745474](https://doi.org/10.1080/00224499.2012.745474)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00224499.2012.745474>

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

Taylor & Francis makes every effort to ensure the accuracy of all the information (the "Content") contained in the publications on our platform. However, Taylor & Francis, our agents, and our licensors make no representations or warranties whatsoever as to the accuracy, completeness, or suitability for any purpose of the Content. Any opinions and views expressed in this publication are the opinions and views of the authors, and are not the views of or endorsed by Taylor & Francis. The accuracy of the Content should not be relied upon and should be independently verified with primary sources of information. Taylor and Francis shall not be liable for any losses, actions, claims, proceedings, demands, costs, expenses, damages, and other liabilities whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with, in relation to or arising out of the use of the Content.

This article may be used for research, teaching, and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproduction, redistribution, reselling, loan, sub-licensing, systematic supply, or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden. Terms & Conditions of access and use can be found at <http://www.tandfonline.com/page/terms-and-conditions>

---

## ARTICLES

---

### Notes from the Back Room: Gender, Power, and (In)Visibility in Women's Experiences of Masturbation

Breanne Fahs and Elena Frank

*Women and Gender Studies Program, Arizona State University*

*While popular culture has more frequently depicted women's masturbation in recent years, scholarly attention to women's own meaning making about masturbation remains largely absent. Existing research that emphasizes women's masturbation frequency, health correlates, masturbation as a factor in couples therapy, and masturbation as a substitute for partnered sexual behaviors have dominated the research, largely neglecting social identity correlates and women's subjectivities about masturbation. This study drew upon qualitative interviews with 20 women (mean age = 34, SD = 13.35) from diverse backgrounds to illuminate five themes in women's experiences with masturbation: a) assumptions that most women self-penetrates during masturbation even when primarily using clitoral stimulation; b) masturbation as sexual labor; c) masturbation as a threat to male dominance; d) masturbation as routine tension release; and e) masturbation as a source of joy, fun, and pleasure. Because women revealed such a diverse set of experiences, we explored the advantages and disadvantages of the invisibility of women's masturbation. As a result of the internalization of stereotypically masculine scripts about sexuality—including an imagined penetrative focus, goal-oriented drive toward orgasm, sex as labor, and masturbation as nonemotional—women's masturbation experiences, regardless of sexual orientation, revealed the power imbalances often present in partnered (hetero)sexual dynamics.*

Despite the ever-present media fixation on women's sexuality—particularly the exploitation of imagery surrounding women's bodies and attractiveness—minimal scholarly attention has addressed women's experiences of masturbation as a relevant and visible aspect of their sexual expression. While representations or discussions of women's masturbation on popular television programs such as *Sex and the City* and *Oprah*, or feminist-minded online news outlets or blogs such as *Jezebel* or *dodsonandross.com* clearly provide a challenge to a cultural silence regarding women and masturbation, they stand in stark contrast to the plethora of long-standing depictions, representations, and discussions of men's masturbation as a valid, humorous, deviant, or important part of men's lives, particularly for adolescent boys as they “come of age” (Hall, 1992; Halpern, Udry,

Suchindran, & Campbell, 2000; Laqueur, 2003; Stein & Reiser, 1994). For example, while men have a fairly extensive lexicon to draw from when talking about and discussing their genitals and masturbation (e.g., “spanking the monkey,” “jacking off,” and “choking the chicken”), the cultural lexicon seems to have relatively few terms applicable to women's genitals and masturbation (e.g., “jilling off” and “double-clicking the mouse”). In fact, girls are often not even taught the terms or provided with representations of the details of their genitalia, such as *vulva*, *clitoris*, or *labia* (De Marneffe, 1997; Fields, 2008; Lerner, 1976), resulting in a “missing discourse of desire” for young women (Fine, 1988). Consequently, the relative *invisibility* of women's masturbation infects women's consciousness about how they *talk about*, *think about*, and *engage in* masturbation. Further, this invisibility often arrives in tandem with other power-laden assumptions about gender, power, and bodies. We argue that deeper examinations of women's own meaning making surrounding masturbation can reveal both cultural biases about gender and power that manifest in women's “private”

---

Special thanks to Eric Swank, Emily Dolan, and Jaqueline Gonzalez for their contributions to this manuscript.

Correspondence should be addressed to Breanne Fahs, Women and Gender Studies Program, Arizona State University, 4701 W. Thunderbird Road, Glendale, AZ 85306. E-mail: breanne.fahs@asu.edu

lives, while also highlighting different interpretations women have about entitlement to pleasure, techniques for managing their own and others' sexual needs, and, ultimately, their deeply entrenched feelings about the "sexually normal" body.

### Literature on Women's Masturbation

#### Historical Aspects of Research on Women and Masturbation

Academic cultural histories on the topic of masturbation tend to focus primarily on men, as there is little historical information available on women and masturbation (Bennett & Vernon, 1995; Brenot, 2005; Laqueur, 2003). While women's masturbation has appeared in both art and literature, including analyses of paintings of witches and prostitutes as autonomous agents of sexual pleasure (Weigerl, 1995), Jane Austen's "masturbating girl" (Sedgwick, 1995), historical accounts of masturbating women as "polluting" (Rosario, 1995), and late-19th-century poetry that referenced masturbating women (Bennett, 1995), far more historical attention has focused on men's masturbation.

Most of the information we do have on women comes largely from the records of medical practitioners. In the Victorian period, doctors treated "compulsive" masturbating women as mad and sent them to mental hospitals for treatment and cure (Maines, 2001). Furthermore, though some debate has ensued about the histories of these practices (King, 2011), doctors may have used vibrators in medical settings to "cure" women of hysteria and other bodily and psychological ailments, though these "treatments" did not constitute *sexual* exchanges but rather medical ones (Maines, 2001). Though Freud suggested (quite controversially and several decades later) that both men and women had sexual urges and that "mature" women could orgasm vaginally, little scientific attention was paid to women's masturbatory behavior or experiences.

Research conducted by Kinsey, Pomeroy, Martin, and Gebhard (1953), Masters and Johnson (1966), and Hite (1976) sought to extend the realm of knowledge regarding women's sexuality. These three game-changing studies provided the basis for research on women's sexuality and masturbation worldwide. Kinsey and colleagues (1953) published their landmark study of female sexual behavior in which almost half of the women interviewed ( $N = 2,800$ ) described masturbating at some time during their lives. Kinsey examined such variables as women's "first source" of orgasm, as well as frequency, techniques, attitudes, and sources of information about women's masturbation. In doing so, he helped debunk the notion that penises (or phallic objects) were necessary for women's sexual pleasure, as only 20% of Kinsey's subjects used vaginal insertion in connection with masturbation (Kinsey et al., 1953).

Masters and Johnson's (1966) subsequent research on orgasmic women also dispelled myths regarding the necessity of a phallus for women's sexual pleasure, finding that women's "inability" to orgasm generally corresponded with engaging in penile-vaginal intercourse. Masturbation served as a more effective and efficient means to orgasm, just as it functioned as pain relief for menstruating women and as a method for curing "sexual frustrations" when men were absent (Masters & Johnson, 1966). The following decade, activist and artist Betty Dodson (1974) established masturbation as an important women's liberation issue. Correspondingly, Hite (1976) injected feminism into the science of sex, finding that the conditions of sexuality mirrored the unequal conditions of the culture at large. Divorcing masturbation from partnered sex, Hite (1976) critiqued the way masturbation seemed to function as "replacement sex." Hite's open-ended survey encouraged women to express their individual experiences and perceptions of masturbation, illuminating various ways that masturbation may teach women about their bodies, pleasures, and sexual self-reliance.

#### Psychological Correlates of Masturbation

In the wake of these groundbreaking studies, a pool of small-scale psychological research emerged that examined women's masturbation practices. The findings of these studies tended to associate women's masturbation with perceived negative characteristics such as guilt (Greenberg & Archambault, 1973; Kelley, 1985), depression (Arafat & Cotton, 1974), pathological deviance (Clower, 1975), unattractiveness (Durham & Grossnickle, 1982), partnered sexual experience or promiscuity (Davidson & Moore, 1994; Herold & Way, 1983), and use of pornography or erotic literature (Clark & Wiederman, 2000). Focusing on the relationship between masturbation (or masturbation guilt) and public health outcomes, other studies specifically examined correlations between masturbation attitudes and behaviors, and attitudes about contraceptive methods (Davidson & Moore, 1994; Mosher & Vonderheide, 1985), and abortion attitudes (Kelley, 1979). Notably, few studies have assessed women's techniques for masturbation (e.g., breast self-stimulation), while far more studies have addressed techniques during partnered sexual activities (Basson, 2000; Levin & Meston, 2006).

In the first nationally representative study to address the topic for decades, Laumann, Gagnon, Michael, and Michaels (1994) gathered data on masturbation in adulthood, including frequency, whether orgasm occurred, and whether participants reported masturbation guilt, concluding that such social factors as education, ethnicity, sexual identity, religion, and marital status all influenced attitudes and behaviors about women's masturbation (Laumann et al., 1994).

That said, some more recent studies have linked women's masturbation and orgasms during masturbation

with other positive aspects of women's lives, particularly sexual satisfaction (Phillipsohn & Hartmann, 2009), improvement of mood (Escajadillo-Vargas et al., 2011), reduction in menopausal symptoms (Avis et al., 2009), emotional intelligence (Burri, Cherkas, & Spector, 2009), and better genital self-image (Herbenick, Schick, et al., 2011), suggesting that research from the past several years yields a more positive appraisal of women's masturbation.

### **Gender, Sexuality, and Racial Differences in Masturbation**

Much of the existing research on masturbation has focused on gender differences between men and women, with consistent findings that men masturbated more often than women (Arafat & Cotton, 1974; Oliver & Hyde, 1993; Petersen & Hyde, 2011), women felt more stigma about masturbating than did men (Kaestle & Allen, 2011), women relied more on (male) partners' approval and comfort with masturbation than did men (Kaestle & Allen, 2011), and women possessed a more negative attitude toward masturbation compared to men (Clark & Wiederman, 2000). In addition, in a study where male masturbators showed higher levels of "neuroticism" than did female masturbators, the author suggested that men "get sex" from women while women do not rely on "getting sex" from men (and therefore men without sex are more neurotic and need to masturbate) (Abramson, 1973).

When examining differences between lesbian and heterosexual women, another early study found that lesbians reported more frequent orgasms during masturbation and partnered sex, and were more sexually satisfied than heterosexual women (Coleman, Hoon, & Hoon, 1983), suggesting that lesbian women's more frequent reliance on clitoral stimulation may lead to higher satisfaction and orgasm compared to heterosexual women (Bressler & Lavender, 1986; Iasenza, 2002; Schreurs & Buunk, 1996) and more frequent masturbation compared to heterosexual women (Laumann et al., 1994). With regard to racial differences in masturbation, researchers have typically studied differences between White women's and Black women's masturbation experiences, with the results generally indicating higher rates of masturbation among White women (Bancroft, Long, & McCabe, 2011; Fisher, 1980; Robinson, Bockting, & Harrell, 2002; Shulman & Horne, 2003; Wyatt, Peters, & Guthrie, 1988). Another study found that both Asian/Pacific Islander women and Black women masturbated less often than White women (Das, 2007).

### **Vibrators and Masturbation**

Researchers have found positive benefits of both vibrator use and masturbation in general, though controversy surrounds the promotion of masturbation

as a public health priority (Coleman, 2002). While a few studies have explored how women use vibrators and what health behaviors correspond with vibrator use (Herbenick et al., 2009; Herbenick et al., 2010), other research has demonstrated links between masturbation (sometimes with vibrators) and improvements in women's self-awareness, body image, self-esteem, and overall sexual pleasure (Coleman, 2002; Herbenick et al., 2009; Hurlbert & Whittaker, 1991; Shulman & Horne, 2003). In a study of American women, participants reported primarily using vibrators for clitoral stimulation and to enhance sexual pleasure (Davis, Blank, Lin, & Bonillas, 1996). Nearly two-thirds of women used vibrators during partnered sexual activities and during masturbation; women described vibrators as contributing to intense orgasms and high levels of satisfaction whether alone or with partners (Davis et al., 1996). In the most comprehensive study of American women's vibrator use to date, researchers found that 52.5% of women used vibrators and 46.% used them during masturbation (many also used them in partnered sex). Vibrator users described greater likelihood of engaging in other healthy behaviors like getting regular gynecological exams and performing genital self-examinations during the previous month (Herbenick et al., 2009), and vibrator use also correlated with increased sexual desire, arousal, lubrication, orgasm, absence of sexual pain, and overall sexual functioning (Herbenick et al., 2009; Herbenick, Reece, et al., 2011).

### **Global Studies on Women's Masturbation**

While most masturbation research has studied women from the United States, some studies have examined populations from Europe and Asia. One British study found that women with same-sex partners and higher levels of education masturbated more frequently and that White women masturbated more often than women of color (Gerressu, Mercer, Graham, Wellings, & Johnson, 2008). Women who masturbated typically had more frequent vaginal sex, a greater repertoire of sexual activity, and more sexual partners in the past year compared to women who did not masturbate (Gerressu et al., 2008). Further, for men only, the likelihood of masturbation decreased with higher frequency of partnered sex and increased among those who reported less enjoyment of sex with a current partner (Gerressu et al., 2008).

Consistent with most U.S. studies and large-scale studies on masturbation, Nordic researchers studying women's masturbation found that, compared to men, women reported less frequent masturbation (Bergström-Walan & Nielsen, 1990). That said, in a public health study based in Norway, lesbian women reported higher frequencies of masturbation compared to heterosexual and bisexual women, while bisexual women masturbated more often compared to heterosexual women (Træen, Stigum, & Sørensen, 2002). Looking at intergenerational differences, Finnish researchers found that

each new generation engaged in more masturbatory behavior than previous generations (Kontula & Haavio-Mannila, 2003).

In India, researchers studying first-year college women who self-identified as virgins found that 30% of those who masturbated described feelings of guilt, anxiety, and shame associated with masturbation (Sharma & Sharma, 1998). Further, those who masturbated typically had more educated mothers, possessed more knowledge about human sexuality, and did not live at home compared to nonmasturbators (Sharma & Sharma, 1998). In China, women who masturbated did so both to compensate for a lack of partner and, for some women, as an expression of high sexual interest in general. Liberal sexual values and more sexual knowledge correlated with more frequent masturbation (Das, Parish, & Laumann, 2009).

### Adolescent Girls and Masturbation

While some studies have targeted younger children and the normativity surrounding genital self-touching (DeLamater & Friedrich, 2002; Friedrich, Fisher, Broughton, Houston, & Shafran, 1998), a larger proportion of recent research on women's masturbation has targeted adolescent girls. One study found that adolescent girls masturbated less frequently than adolescent boys and that masturbation represented the most reliable source of orgasm for both sexes (Smith, Rosenthal, & Reichler, 1996). In addition, based on a nationally representative sample of 14- to 17-year-olds, Robbins and colleagues (2011) found a relationship between female masturbation and a number of partnered sexual activities, such as mutual masturbation, giving and receiving oral sex, and penile-vaginal and anal intercourse. When examining the phenomenology of girls' sexual desires and experiences, Lamb (2001) and Tolman (2002) also touched upon the complexity of girls' feelings and behaviors regarding masturbation. Hogarth and Ingham (2009) studied masturbation attitudes among a small sample of adolescent girls in the United Kingdom, finding that those with positive attitudes toward masturbation typically felt more comfortable talking about sex, communicated more with parents about sex, and discussed desire and pleasure in their narratives about sex. By contrast, girls who expressed indifference toward masturbation more often mentioned their boyfriends' sexual needs and pleasures and did not express enjoyment or excitement when talking about sex. Girls with negative attitudes toward masturbation spoke of their bodies as "property" of boys and did not mention desire or pleasure in their narratives. This study suggested that attitudes toward masturbation link up with girls' attitudes about their bodies, relationships, and the "purpose" of sex.

Taking this literature into account, this study draws upon qualitative interviews with 20 women to illuminate several previously understudied aspects

of women's masturbation experiences. We explored women's techniques when masturbating, as few previous studies have actually asked women *how* they masturbate (notable exceptions: Kinsey et al., 1953; Hite, 1976; Leff & Israel, 1983), and we examine, from a feminist and gender theory framework, women's feelings and ideas about masturbation. Together, these narratives reveal how women's masturbation—in part because of the relative cultural secrecy that surrounds it—remains beholden to patriarchal scripts that women internalize in their private sexual lives. Further, because women so rarely discuss masturbation with others (e.g., mothers, friends, and partners), and because all women in our sample reported masturbating at least once, we explored the implications (both positive and negative) of women imagining their own cultural stories about how *other* women masturbate and what so-called normal masturbation might look like. In doing so, we contribute to a much-needed gap in the literature about women's sexual subjectivities and women's tangible experiences with masturbation.

In particular, this study asked: What kinds of themes appeared in women's descriptions of their feelings, attitudes, and behaviors associated with masturbation, particularly across race, sexual identity, age, and socioeconomic class lines? How do gender and power inform women's masturbation stories, and how might women's techniques for masturbating suggest adherence to, or resistance to, patriarchal norms and social scripts? Finally, what insights do women provide when giving voice to something as culturally taboo, hidden, and invisible as women's masturbation?

### Method

This study utilized qualitative data from a sample of 20 adult women (mean age = 34,  $SD = 13.35$ ) recruited in 2011 in a large metropolitan Southwestern U.S. city. Participants were recruited through local entertainment and arts listings as well as the volunteers section of the local online section of Craigslist. Both outlets reached wide audiences and were freely available to community residents. The advertisements asked for women ages 18 to 59 (similar to Laumann et al., 1994) to participate in an interview study about their sexual behaviors, practices, and attitudes that would last for approximately two hours. Participants were screened only for their gender, racial/ethnic background, sexual identity, and age; no other prescreening questions were asked. A purposive sample was selected to provide greater demographic diversity in the sample: sexual-minority women and racial/ethnic minority women were intentionally oversampled, and a diverse range of ages was represented (11 women ages 18 to 31; five women ages 32 to 45; and four women ages 46 to 59). The sample included 11 White women and nine women of color, including three African American women, four Mexican

American women, and two Asian American women. For self-reported sexual identity, the sample included 12 heterosexual women, six bisexual women, and two lesbian women (though women's reported sexual behavior often indicated far more same-sex eroticism than these self-categorized labels suggest). All participants consented to have their interviews audiotaped and fully transcribed, and all received USD\$20 compensation. Identifying data were removed, and each participant received a pseudonym to ensure anonymity. Participants directly reported a range of socioeconomic and educational backgrounds, employment histories, and parental and relationship statuses. In addition, participants reported that they volunteered for a range of reasons: they wanted to break silences about sexuality; they needed the money; they felt curious about the study; they felt they had "boring" or "exciting" sexual lives; and they wanted to assist the university.

These 20 participants were interviewed using a semistructured interview protocol that lasted for 1.5 to 2 hours, during which they responded to 36 questions about their sexual histories, sexual practices, and feelings and attitudes about sexuality. Questions included aspects of their best and worst sexual experiences, feelings about contemporary sexual culture and media, personal experiences with orgasm and other sexual events, negotiations of power with partner(s), and reflections on their bodies. The questions about masturbation were asked as part of this series of 36 questions about women's sexuality; many questions targeted short and precise narratives (e.g., "friends with benefits" relationships, feelings about "female Viagra"), while others (e.g., masturbation, body image) targeted women's broader narratives about aspects of their sexual lives. Several of the prompts addressed issues relevant to this study on women's masturbation. For example, women were asked, "Many women describe masturbation as a pleasurable experience. Can you describe your experiences with masturbation, including your process for masturbating, emotional feelings about masturbating, and a particularly pleasurable experience you've had with masturbation?" with the follow-up question: "What kind of relationship do you have with sex toys or props during masturbation or during partnered sex?" These 36 questions were scripted but served to open up other conversations and dialogue about related topics, as follow-up questions were free-flowing and conversational. As the questions were broad and open ended, participants could set the terms of how they would discuss masturbation and what information they wanted to share. The original questions served as sensitizing concepts that allowed previous research to lay the groundwork for topics and themes to look for (Charmaz, 2006).

Responses were analyzed qualitatively using thematic analysis, which relies heavily on feminist theory and gender theory (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This type of

analysis was considered the most effective and useful because it allowed for groupings of responses based on women's attitudes and feelings (e.g., significance of nonpenetrative pleasure, beliefs that masturbation is efficient and part of a daily routine). This method of analysis also supported an examination of the intersection between masturbation and other components of women's sexual lives (e.g., body shame). To conduct the analysis, we familiarized ourselves with the data by reading all of the transcripts thoroughly, and we then identified patterns for common interpretations posed by participants. In doing so, we reviewed lines, sentences, and paragraphs of the transcripts looking for patterns in their ways of discussing their masturbation (Braun & Clarke, 2006). We selected and generated themes through the process of identifying logical links and overlaps among participants. After creating these themes, we compared them to previous themes expressed by other participants to identify similarities, differences, and general patterns. This type of thematic analysis relied on a data-driven inductive approach in which themes were generated prior to the interpretation of those themes (Boyatzis, 1998). As such, initial themes were identified, codes were applied and then connected back to the themes, and these themes were then corroborated and legitimized using inductive thematic analysis (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). While some interpretation of subtextual meaning is inevitable when using a thematic analysis approach, we nevertheless worked to value and emphasize women's explicit narratives rather than prioritizing covert and implicit narratives.

## Results

All 20 women in the sample reported that they had masturbated at least once in their lifetimes, with a range between two to three times ever to at least once a day. Most women (13 out of 20) reported masturbating at least once per week. Overall, 18 out of 20 described using sex toys either during masturbation or during partnered sex, while two said that they had never used sex toys. This high rate of sex toy use may stem from participants living in an urban center, where sex toys are readily available, or from the fact that these women chose to do a study on sexuality. From these responses about masturbation, five themes were generated. As noted in the descriptions that follow, some participants' responses overlapped among themes in that one participant's responses fit into multiple themes. The five themes included (a) assumptions that most women self-penetrate during masturbation even when primarily using clitoral stimulation; (b) masturbation as sexual labor; (c) masturbation as a threat to male dominance; (d) masturbation as routine tension release; and (e) masturbation as a source of joy, fun, and pleasure.

### Theme 1: Assumptions That Most Women Self-Penetrates during Masturbation

When discussing their processes and techniques for masturbating, many women reported that they did not self-penetrate with sex toys or fingers during masturbation but instead relied on fingers and clitoral stimulation. Interestingly, many women believed that *most* women self-penetrate during masturbation and that they were unique or abnormal for relying primarily on clitoral stimulation during masturbation. For example, Tania, a 25-year-old White heterosexual woman, gave a detailed description of how she masturbated, stopping halfway through to ask whether her method was normal:

I am usually in bed. I have a certain position that I always have to maintain. My legs have to be a certain way, and I have to be relaxed and comfortable. Then I just turn myself on. I actually—it's not inside, just clitoral stimulation for me. It takes about fifteen minutes, and I try to focus with my sex toy on the right spot. I don't touch myself with my fingers, just the sex toy. I actually have never been able to get myself to orgasm with just fingers. I might spread the lips of the vagina out a little so I can get in there. I don't insert though. Is that normal?

This lengthy description suggests that, even though her process felt intuitive to her, when narrating it aloud, she stopped to assess whether she masturbated in a “normal” way.

As another example of women feeling abnormal for relying on clitoral stimulation rather than self-penetration, Keisha, a 34-year-old African American bisexual woman, said that she routinely masturbated without penetration while also hiding her masturbation behaviors from her husband:

What I use is a vibrator and it's not—to tell you the truth on that, I don't penetrate while masturbating. I just use it on—I go around it, I go around the clitoris and that's it. I don't even penetrate when I use the vibrator. . . . I'm embarrassed to tell my husband about masturbating. If he's on the computer I would even sneak to the back room and take the time just for myself to masturbate while he's in the front room, without even asking for help, or “hey babe, come watch.” For some reason, I am embarrassed to masturbate in front of him.

Keisha's notion that she has violated *two* norms of masturbation—that women penetrate and that women allow their male partners to watch—suggests uncertainty about how other women masturbate along with shame about her imagined differences from other women. If women rarely discuss masturbation with partners, family, and friends, they have a less clear and established norm for how women “typically” masturbate and thus have to generate their own understanding of this norm.

### Theme 2: Masturbation as Sexual Labor

Though women overwhelmingly described positive and affirming experiences with masturbation, they also said that masturbation sometimes felt frustrating as they “quested” after an orgasm (or two). Leticia, a 41-year-old Latina bisexual, described putting notable labor and effort into masturbation and mentioned that it felt highly goal oriented: “Masturbation is generally really pleasurable but I know there have been times when it wouldn't happen. It happened the other day, and I was getting really frustrated. I don't know why—maybe because I was in a hurry—but it just didn't happen. I hate it when I can't have an orgasm.”

Other women described masturbating as sexual labor they invested in themselves after their partners did not satisfy them or help them orgasm. Leticia admitted that she used masturbation primarily to make up for a male partner's inadequacies: “There are times when I do have a sex partner and he hasn't made me have an orgasm, so I'll go make myself have one.” Similarly, Shantele, a 30-year-old African American heterosexual woman, recalled that she masturbated to compensate for her partner's lack of attention after *his* orgasm: “The sex was amazing, but I didn't get off. It was just him having sex and, when we're done, he left. I was still really aroused, but I had to finish myself off. . . . Normally I don't really enjoy masturbating.” The juxtaposition of Shantele saying that she had great sex when a partner left and she masturbated, combined with her general belief that masturbating does not please her, suggests a variety of possible interpretations: perhaps her standards for “good sex” may prioritize her partner's pleasure over her own (Nicolson & Burr, 2003) or she may have framed masturbation as an instrumental means to “get off.”

Some women also envisioned masturbation as labor devoted to fulfilling sexual needs in an easier and less performative way than partnered sex allowed. For example, Mei, a 22-year-old Asian American heterosexual woman, described her orgasms from masturbation as easier to obtain than orgasms from partnered sex:

Maybe I'm in the mood and he's not around, or maybe I just feel like doing it. I think it started one time when I was washing down there with a showerhead and it seemed to feel really nice. It became an easy way for me to orgasm. Compared to other girls I don't orgasm easily, so that's why I can't say I orgasm from oral sex or using fingers. It's just easier when I masturbate.

This suggests that Mei and other women may masturbate to avoid the labor they invest with partners to visibly, audibly, and tangibly have pleasure; in other words, masturbation provides a space where women can orgasm without any associated forms of labor (e.g., moaning, groaning, mutual “getting off”), shame, or guilt about their pace and speed of orgasm.

### Theme 3: Masturbation as a Threat to Male Dominance

In line with women believing that most women self-penetrate and that working toward orgasm represents sexual labor, other women reported, frankly, that masturbating threatened their male partners' assumed dominance and power. For example, Patricia, a 28-year-old African American heterosexual woman, said that she rarely masturbated because she feared that it would teach her to derive pleasure from sensations other than penile-vaginal intercourse:

I've tried masturbating, and it doesn't do anything for me. I don't know if it's because I'm afraid that I'm not going to get the same satisfaction that I would from having a penis in me. What I did, I just got some K-Y and just rubbed it on my hand and put my hand down there and started to rub. You know, I was visualizing porno flicks and people I would like to have sex with, and it just didn't happen for me, so I was like, "Oh well."

Women also sometimes transformed their private experiences with masturbation into an action that serviced men's sexual pleasure. Jean, a 57-year-old White heterosexual woman, explained that she masturbated to please her male partners rather than to please herself: "Usually when [masturbation] comes up, it's because, you know, guys like it. When it happens that I do it, it may be because the person I'm having sex with wasn't achieving satisfaction so—so in order to push him along, I would engage in that act, for him." This transfer of pleasure from something devoted to the self to something directed toward stimulating men visually suggests that, in some contexts, masturbation can easily be appropriated from a (rebellious) act of autonomous pleasure to yet another act in service of men's desires.

A few women also upheld the notion that only men masturbated regularly and that only "unladylike" or "deviant" women masturbated. Rhoda, a 57-year-old White heterosexual woman, recounted the differences between her and her boyfriend disclosing masturbation to others: "I never really talked about it, but I know with my last boyfriend, he would always say it was a big thing for him to do. I didn't get it, I guess. I just think guys are made up differently and they can do it at the drop of a hat, so to speak, but for me it didn't work like that. It's not like I had to do it or not. I'm just blasé about it. I need that human contact." This description highlighted Rhoda's depiction of sexual desire as masculine and masturbation as nonemotional.

### Theme 4: Masturbation as Routine Tension Release

Several women talked about masturbation as a no-emotional, routine, and efficient part of their daily routine. For example, Cris, a 22-year-old White lesbian,

likened her masturbation (and her partner's disclosure of masturbation) to brushing her teeth:

It's just kind of quick, whatever, kind of efficient, yeah. It's just kind of quick, like brushing your teeth, like something fast, like, that you don't really even think about . . . Like if I'm gone, if I'm out at work and stuff, and [my partner and I] haven't done anything for a couple of days, she'll be like "Oh, I whacked it this afternoon," and I'm like, "Okay, that's cool."

Cris expressed no threat in her partner's disclosure of masturbating while also suggesting that her own masturbation signified a casual and guilt-free part of her routines. The predictable tension release aspects of masturbation allowed Cris to strip masturbation from stories and narratives of cultural shame and secrecy.

Other women also detached shame, guilt, and anxiety from masturbation, instead seeing it as a predictable and satisfying part of their daily routines. Dessa, a 19-year-old Mexican American heterosexual woman, reported masturbating every morning:

Masturbation is pretty freakin' cool. Usually I shower in the morning, and then I have a vibrator so I use that. I put music on and then I'll do whatever feels good that day so I'll lay down or stand up or lean over. Usually it's my vibrator in the morning and my hands at night. I masturbate about five times out of a week to maybe seven times a week, almost every day. Sometimes I skip days, and I'm fine with that. I guess I've, like, incorporated it into my schedule, so I'm just like, "Okay, time to do that," you know? It's just like a daily routine to me now so it's just like, "Okay, cool, boom, my day has started."

Notably, Dessa's implied ease with masturbation and her shame-free discussions about masturbation as a daily event contrasted sharply with her later stories about not feeling comfortable disclosing masturbation to girlfriends, male friends, or partners. This implies that even when she explicitly debunked notions that women do not masturbate (as Dessa clearly masturbated without shame every day), she often still could not comfortably disclose her masturbatory habits to others.

As a more celebratory example of women incorporating masturbation into their daily routines, Zhang, a 36-year-old Asian American bisexual woman, talked about masturbating as a routine form of self-affirmation and pleasure:

It's only pleasurable when absolutely private, no one bothering you, and there's a nice sound atmosphere, like nice music on the radio. I like masturbating in the fall or winter every day because it warms up your body. You can stay in the comforter for a little bit longer than usual before you go to work or after work. I honestly have lost count of how many times I masturbate. I do it all the time because it makes me feel better about myself.



### Theme 5: Masturbation as a Source of Joy, Fun, and Pleasure

For many women, masturbation allowed them to express positive feelings toward their bodies, and it served as a nurturing and affirming mode of self-acceptance. Whether feeling joy or pleasure, having fun, or relieving stress, masturbation enhanced many women's lives in positive ways. Angelica, a 32-year-old Mexican American heterosexual woman, described masturbation as a mode to relieve stress and relax during her pregnancy: "I've been under a lot of stress with my school and my other children, so when I feel like that I masturbate a lot and I feel better. I can't drink, I can't smoke, I can't do anything, so it's my stress reliever. Masturbating is something I do *for me*." Because Angelica faced numerous other pressures and stresses related to traditional gender-role expectations, masturbation helped her escape not only her life stressors but also the expectations placed on her as a mother and wife.

Other women masturbated to rebel against conservative, repressive, or sex-negative attitudes they encountered within their families, partnerships, or the culture at large. For example, Inga, a 24-year-old White bisexual woman, recalled growing up with religious parents who forbid her to masturbate:

We lived in a one-bedroom apartment and we had a bunk bed. [My mother] would tell me not to masturbate because it was gross and disgusting and I shouldn't be doing it. She was religious at the time and God frowned upon it. I was traumatized for a little bit about it, and then after I was raped, my whole relationship with religion kind of got shot so I didn't care and I started masturbating again. I loved it!

This narrative suggests that Inga herself internalized anti-masturbation religious attitudes as well, though a forced confrontation with religious beliefs following sexual violence dislodged her association between shame and masturbation. While certainly a disheartening way to return to masturbating, her self-pleasure nevertheless has its roots in the shame and taboo of her childhood years.

As a final example of masturbation as joyful, some women felt notable pleasure and self-affirmation from masturbation, even while expressing some reluctance to narrate those experiences. For example, when I first asked Florence, a 38-year-old White bisexual woman, about masturbation, she immediately responded, "Wow, well, this is kind of a strange question. I don't know if I would even want to go into this." She then followed up with a lengthy description of how masturbation lets her give back to herself:

It's so pleasurable. I just got out of a relationship, so I needed to learn how to please myself right now. I'm experimenting with a lot of different things, and it feels good. It feels relaxing, like I'm giving something to me.

It relieves stress, helps me to feel comfortable with where I am right now in my life.

For Florence, masturbation served not only as a physical way of relaxing but also as a symbolic tool of self-affirmation, agency, and autonomy following the loss of a partner. In this way, masturbation transcended the physical and became a way to emotionally connect to herself and her sexual needs.

### Discussion

Women's narratives about masturbation collectively point to the advantages and disadvantages of the cultural silences surrounding women's masturbation. As one advantage of the invisibility of women's masturbation, no single precise norm dictates to women how often they should masturbate and what method they should use to masturbate. Women routinely said they *did not* converse with partners, friends, and family members about masturbation, even for women (like Dessa) who felt relatively shameless about masturbation in their private lives. This lack of communication may indeed allow women to explore their own pleasures without precise norms about the scripts they should use during masturbation.

That said, a clear disadvantage of not having scripted norms about women's masturbation is that women easily and readily internalize easily accessible, traditional patriarchal scripts, particularly the imperative for penetrative intercourse (manifested here as women's belief that most women self-penetrate), concern about men feeling inadequate or undermined (leading women to masturbate either for a partner's pleasure or in secrecy), and goal-oriented and outcome-oriented labor directed toward orgasm as a product. This does not preclude women finding these aspects pleasurable—indeed, many women enjoy penetration and a drive toward orgasm—but it does suggest that women's masturbation experiences link up with traditional understandings of gender, power, and pleasure. When no clear scripts exist for how women should masturbate, other baggage from the culture at large seeps into women's consciousness, leading to clear gender imbalances about the purpose and meaning they assign to sexual self-pleasure.

Because the cultural lexicon largely ignores women's masturbation, and because the legacy of thinking about, studying, and theorizing masturbation often derives from the context of deviance (e.g., masturbation as "immature," associated with sex guilt, and driven only by the lack of a readily available penis), women have had to script their own stories about masturbation and its meaning. This has resulted in wide diversity of interpretations. While the majority of women incorporated traditional gendered scripts about sexuality in their descriptions of masturbation, particularly the idea that

goal-oriented, penetrative sex guides women's sexual pleasure, many women also had different interpretations for how they wanted to engage in masturbation. Some built masturbation into their lives as a routine and nonemotional experience; they brushed their teeth, masturbated, and went to work. This, too, could mimic the "detached sex" model of hegemonic masculinity (i.e., that men only need to "get off" rather than feel emotions during sex, or that men masturbate for simple physical release), or it could signal (as mentioned frequently in these narratives) that women, too, have fairly straightforward goals when masturbating: they want stress relief, physical relaxation, and a sleep aid.

In terms of social identities, while no clear patterns emerged for race, age, or class, some patterns did emerge for sexual identity, as heterosexual women far more often described masturbation as a threat to male dominance in comparison with lesbian or bisexual women. This finding that there may be a link between heterosexuality and the belief that men feel threatened by women's self-pleasure clearly warrants further research. As masturbation (and its focus on clitoral stimulation) has historically threatened men's dominance over women—as women no longer needed the penis for sexual satisfaction—it makes sense that heterosexual women (particularly partnered heterosexual women) might feel more concerned about their masturbating signaling a threat to a male partner's sexual prowess and sexual skills. Heterosexual women also seemed particularly invested in narratives of self-penetration (even when they prioritized clitoral stimulation), again reinforcing the heterosexist notion that "normal" sex—even during masturbation—required penetration.

Further, given the way women discussed orgasm, perhaps the goal-oriented focus of many (hetero) scripts has infected women's masturbation activities as well, as orgasms become the "product" women seek (often with great frustration) while masturbating. Several scholars have expressed concern that traditional sexual scripts often require men to invest labor into women's bodies, while women produce orgasm (real or fake) as a kind of product (Hyde & DeLamater, 1997; Roberts, Kippax, Waldby, & Crawford, 1995), a process that may now appear in women's sexual exchanges with other women (Fahs, 2011b) and in their own masturbation scripts.

Nevertheless, looking broadly at women's stories about masturbation, we argue that the work of making women's masturbation more visible could become a double-edged sword. While women have, to some degree, scripted masturbation norms for themselves, remarkable diversity appeared in women's stories about how they masturbated and what it meant for them. For some, masturbation allowed them to rebel against conservative childhoods (with the taboo and prohibition against masturbation possibly fueling the eroticism); for others, masturbation stimulated their (male) partners even if it did not yield personal orgasms. For still

others, masturbation triggered feelings of ambivalence and nervousness, while other women embraced masturbation as an effortless inclusion in their morning routine. For some, the silences surrounding masturbation have allowed (patriarchal) norms to infiltrate their masturbatory experiences, while for others these silences have generated room for resistance and creativity.

Additional qualitative research on men's masturbation may serve as an interesting counterpoint to this diversity; perhaps men would discuss masturbation more similarly to one another (e.g., a physical release and nothing more) or may show similar variability to women. Future research comparing men's and women's subjective narratives could provide useful insights about the different interpretations people have, depending on the cultural visibility or silence around masturbation. The rupturing of norms of silence can make visible all sorts of "inner workings" of how social and cultural scripts trickle down into women's lives, just as the direct confrontation of visible norms for men could prove useful.

The study of women's masturbation also has direct links to other areas of sexuality and body research. The study of sex toys, for example, has also received far too little attention, particularly outside of theorizing the phallic role of dildos in lesbian sex play (Bolsø, 2007; Findlay, 1992) and linking vibrators to health behaviors (Herbenick et al., 2009; Herbenick et al., 2010); only recently have researchers addressed women's subjective narratives about using sex toys in masturbation and partnered sex (Fahs & Swank, 2013). Women's narratives about masturbation may also link up with their stories about other "taboo" bodily experiences, such as growing body hair (Fahs, 2011a; Toerien & Wilkinson, 2004), menstruation and menstrual sex (Allen & Goldberg, 2009; Fahs, 2011c), genital self-image (Berman, Berman, Miles, Pollets, & Powell, 2003), and feelings about childbirth (Martin, 2001). Of these, the question of how women feel about their genitals seems particularly relevant. If women learn that their genitals compare unfavorably to men's, that their genitals "smell" or seem "dirty," and that touching their genitals and (autonomously) providing themselves with pleasure is an inherently negative experience, how can women then associate positive feelings with masturbation? In an age when plastic surgeons target women's genitals for "rejuvenation," "trimming," and "enhancement" via "G-shots," labiaplasties, tightenings, and fresh hymens (Braun & Tiefer, 2010), women may feel ever more concerned about the normality of their genitals even during private experiences with masturbation (Herbenick & Reece, 2010).

### Limitations and Future Directions

As with all sexuality research involving self-selected community samples, our study had some limitations

worth noting. Women who participated in the study self-selected for a variety of reasons, but all shared a willingness to disclose personal information about their sexual behaviors, feelings, and attitudes. This study likely excluded more conservative and reserved women and emphasized women whose openness to sexuality stood at the forefront of their decision to participate. In addition, while the wording of questions was designed to provide maximum comfort to participants, this may have biased participants' perceptions of comfort with masturbation and encouraged them to consider the more positive aspects of their masturbation experiences. Lack of geographical diversity may also have impacted the findings, as all participants in this study resided in a large Southwestern city; differences between urban and rural women may prove paramount when discussing sensitive subjects like masturbation and sexual pleasure.

Moving forward, this study helps debunk some of the common mythologies surrounding masturbation: women do masturbate whether partnered or single; some women view masturbation as highly practical rather than shameful and guilt laden; women largely do not self-penetrate (even though they believe others do) and largely do not quest for penises in their private masturbatory experiences; and many women feel joy, pleasure, and comfort from masturbation, seeing it as a tool for self-reliance and autonomy. That said, women still tend to construct masturbation in relationship to patriarchal and gendered norms and values, as their private sexual experiences often still perpetuate the notion of masturbation as threatening to men, in service of men's pleasures and desires, or as uneasy and ambivalent. By confronting stereotypes and mythologies about women's masturbation and giving voice to women's experiences of their bodies, we hope future studies will continue to create new spaces for critical inquiry and embodied resistance.

## References

- Abramson, P. R. (1973). The relationship of the frequency of masturbation to several aspects of personality and behavior. *Journal of Sex Research, 9*, 132–142.
- Allen, K. R., & Goldberg, A. E. (2009). Sexual activity during menstruation: A qualitative study. *Journal of Sex Research, 46*, 535–545.
- Arafat, I. S., & Cotton, W. L. (1974). Masturbation practices of males and females. *Journal of Sex Research, 10*, 293–307.
- Avis, N. E., Brockwell, S., Randolph, J. F. Jr., Shen, S., Cain, V. S., Ory, M., et al (2009). Longitudinal changes in sexual functioning as women transition through menopause: Results from the Study of Women's Health Across the Nation (SWAN). *Menopause, 16*, 442–452.
- Bancroft, J., Long, J. S., & McCabe, J. (2011). Sexual well-being: A comparison of U.S. Black and White women in heterosexual relationships. *Archives of Sexual Behavior, 40*, 725–740.
- Basson, R. (2000). The female sexual response: A different model. *Journal of Sex and Marital Therapy, 26*(1), 51–65.
- Bennett, P. (1995). "Pomegranate-flowers": The phantasmic productions of late-nineteenth-century Anglo-American women poets. In P. Bennett & A. R. Vernon (Eds.), *Solitary pleasures: The historical, literary, and artistic discourses of autoeroticism* (pp. 189–214). New York: Routledge.
- Bennett, P., & Vernon, A. R. (Eds.). (1995). *Solitary pleasures: The historical, literary, and artistic discourses of autoeroticism*. New York: Routledge.
- Bergström-Walan, M. B., & Nielsen, H. H. (1990). Sexual expression among 60–80-year-old men and women: A sample from Stockholm. *Journal of Sex Research, 27*, 289–295.
- Berman, L. A., Berman, J., Miles, M., Pollets, D., & Powell, J. A. (2003). Genital self-image as a component of sexual health: Relationship between genital self-image, female sexual function, and quality of life measures. *Journal of Sex and Marital Therapy, 29*, 11–21.
- Bolso, A. (2007). Approaches to penetration—Theoretical difference in practice. *Sexualities, 10*, 559–581.
- Boyatzis, R. E. (1998). *Transforming qualitative information: Thematic analysis and code development*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology, 3*, 77–101.
- Braun, V., & Tiefer, L. (2010). The "designer vagina" and the pathologisation of female genital diversity: Interventions for change. *Radical Psychology, 8*(1). Retrieved from <http://www.radicalpsychology.org/vol8-1/brauntiefer.html>
- Brenot, P. (2005). In *praise of masturbation* (P. Buck & C. Petit, Trans.). London: Marion Boyars.
- Bressler, L. C., & Lavender, A. D. (1986). Sexual fulfillment of heterosexual, bisexual, and homosexual women. In M. Kehoe (Ed.), *Historical, literary, and erotic aspects of lesbianism* (pp. 109–122). Binghamton, NY: Haworth Press.
- Burri, A. V., Cherkas, L. M., & Spector, T. D. (2009). Emotional intelligence and its association with orgasmic frequency in women. *Journal of Sexual Medicine, 6*, 1930–1937.
- Charmaz, C. (2006). *Constructing grounded theory*. London: Sage.
- Clark, C. A., & Wiederman, M. W. (2000). Gender and reactions to a hypothetical relationship partner's masturbation and use of sexually explicit media. *Journal of Sex Research, 37*, 133–141.
- Clower, V. (1975). Significance of masturbation in female sexual development and function. In I. M. Marcus & J. J. Francis (Eds.), *Masturbation: From infancy to senescence* (pp. 104–143). Oxford, England: International Universities Press.
- Coleman, E. (2002). Masturbation as a means of achieving sexual health. *Journal of Psychology and Human Sexuality, 14*, 5–16.
- Coleman, E. M., Hoon, P. W., & Hoon, E. F. (1983). Arousability and sexual satisfaction in lesbian and heterosexual women. *Journal of Sex Research, 19*, 58–73.
- Das, A. (2007). Masturbation in the United States. *Journal of Sex and Marital Therapy, 33*, 301–317.
- Das, A., Parish, W. L., & Laumann, E. O. (2009). Masturbation in urban China. *Archives of Sexual Behavior, 38*, 108–120.
- Davidson, K. J.Sr., & Moore, N. B. (1994). Masturbation and premarital sexual intercourse among college women: Making choices for sexual fulfillment. *Journal of Sex and Marital Therapy, 20*, 178–199.
- Davis, C. M., Blank, J., Lin, H., & Bonillas, C. (1996). Characteristics of vibrator use among women. *Journal of Sex Research, 33*, 313–320.
- DeLamater, J., & Friedrich, W. N. (2002). Human sexual development. *Journal of Sex Research, 39*(1), 10–14.
- De Marneffe, D. (1997). Bodies and words: A study of young children's genital and gender knowledge. *Gender and Psychoanalysis: An Interdisciplinary Journal, 2*, 3–33.
- Dodson, B. (1974). *Sex for one: The joy of selfloving*. New York: Crown Trade.
- Durham, T. W., & Grossnickle, W. F. (1982). Attitudes toward masturbation. *Psychological Reports, 51*, 932–934.

- Escajadillo-Vargas, N., Mezones-Holguín, E., Castro-Castro, J., Córdova-Marcelo, W., Blümel, J. E., Pérez-López, F. R., et al. (2011). Sexual dysfunction risk and associated factors in young Peruvian university women. *Journal of Sexual Medicine, 8*, 1701–1709.
- Fahs, B. (2011a). Dreaded “otherness”: Heteronormative patrolling in women’s body hair rebellions. *Gender and Society, 25*, 451–472.
- Fahs, B. (2011b). *Performing sex: The making and unmaking of women’s erotic lives*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Fahs, B. (2011c). Sex during menstruation: Race, sexual identity, and women’s qualitative accounts of pleasure and disgust. *Feminism and Psychology, 21*, 155–178.
- Fahs, B., & Swank, E. (2013). Adventures with the “plastic man”: Sex toys, compulsory heterosexuality, and the politics of women’s sexual pleasure. *Society and Culture*. Advance online publication. doi:10.1007/s12119-013-9167-4
- Fereday, J., & Muir-Cochrane, E. (2006). Demonstrating rigor using thematic analysis: A hybrid approach of inductive and deductive coding and theme development. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods, 5*, 1–11.
- Fields, J. (2008). *Risky lessons: Sexual education and social inequality*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.
- Findlay, H. (1992). Freud’s “fetishism” and the lesbian dildo debates. *Feminist Studies, 18*, 563–580.
- Fine, M. (1988). Sexuality, schooling, and adolescent females: The missing discourse of desire. *Harvard Educational Review, 58*, 29–53.
- Fisher, S. (1980). Personality correlates of sexual behavior in Black women. *Archives of Sexual Behavior, 9*, 27–35.
- Friedrich, W. N., Fisher, J., Broughton, D., Houston, M., & Shafran, C. R. (1998). Normative sexual behavior in children: A contemporary sample. *Pediatrics, 101*(4), 1–8.
- Gerressu, M., Mercer, C. H., Graham, C. A., Wellings, K., & Johnson, A. M. (2008). Prevalence of masturbation and associated factors in a British national probability survey. *Archives of Sexual Behavior, 37*, 266–278.
- Greenberg, J. S., & Archambault, F. X. (1973). Masturbation, self-esteem, and other variables. *Journal of Sex Research, 9*, 41–51.
- Hall, L. A. (1992). Forbidden by God, despised by men: Masturbation, medical warnings, moral panic, and manhood in Great Britain, 1850–1950. *Journal of the History of Sexuality, 2*, 365–387.
- Halpern, C. J. T., Udry, R. J., Suchindran, C., & Campbell, B. (2000). Adolescent males’ willingness to report masturbation. *Journal of Sex Research, 37*, 327–332.
- Herbenick, D. D., & Reece, M. (2010). Development and validation of the Female Genital Self-Image Scale. *Journal of Sexual Medicine, 7*, 1822–1830.
- Herbenick, D. D., Reece, M., Sanders, S. A., Dodge, B. S., Ghassemi, A., & Fortenberry, J. D. (2009). Prevalence and characteristics of vibrator use by women in the United States: Results from a nationally representative study. *Journal of Sexual Medicine, 6*, 1857–1867.
- Herbenick, D. D., Reece, M., Sanders, S. A., Dodge, B. S., Ghassemi, A., & Fortenberry, J. D. (2010). Women’s vibrator use in sexual partnerships: Results from a nationally representative survey in the United States. *Journal of Sex and Marital Therapy, 36*, 49–65.
- Herbenick, D. D., Reece, M., Schick, V., Jozkowski, K. N., Middlestadt, S. E., Sanders, S. A., et al. (2011). Beliefs about women’s vibrator use: Results from a nationally representative probability survey in the United States. *Journal of Sex and Marital Therapy, 37*, 329–345.
- Herbenick, D. D., Schick, V., Reece, M., Sanders, S. A., Dodge, B. S., & Fortenberry, J. D. (2011). The Female Genital Self-Image Scale (FGSIS): Results from a nationally representative probability sample of women in the United States. *Journal of Sexual Medicine, 8*, 158–166.
- Herold, E. S., & Way, L. (1983). Oral-genital sexual behavior in a sample of university females. *Journal of Sex Research, 19*, 327–338.
- Hite, S. (1976). *The Hite report: A nationwide study of female sexuality*. New York: Macmillan.
- Hogarth, H., & Ingham, R. (2009). Masturbation among young women and associations with sexual health: An exploratory study. *Journal of Sex Research, 46*, 558–567.
- Hurlbert, D. F., & Whittaker, K. E. (1991). The role of masturbation in marital and sexual satisfaction: A comparative study of female masturbators and nonmasturbators. *Journal of Sex Education and Therapy, 17*, 272–282.
- Hyde, J. S., & DeLamater, J. D. (1997). *Understanding human sexuality*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Iasenza, S. (2002). Beyond “lesbian bed death”: The passion and play in lesbian relationships. *Journal of Lesbian Studies, 6*, 111–120.
- Kaestle, C. E., & Allen, K. R. (2011). The role of masturbation in healthy sexual development: Perceptions of young adults. *Archives of Sexual Behavior, 40*, 983–994.
- Kelley, K. (1979). Socialization factors in contraceptive attitudes: Roles of affective responses, parental attitudes, and sexual experiences. *Journal of Sex Research, 15*, 6–20.
- Kelley, K. (1985). Sex, sex guilt, and authoritarianism: Differences in responses to explicit heterosexual and masturbatory slides. *Journal of Sex Research, 21*, 68–85.
- King, H. (2011). Galen and the widow: Towards a history of therapeutic masturbation in ancient gynaecology. *EuGeStA, 1*, 205–235.
- Kinsey, A. C., Pomeroy, W. B., Martin, C. E., & Gebhard, P. H. (1953). *Sexual behavior in the human female*. Philadelphia: W.B. Saunders.
- Kontula, O., & Haavio-Mannila, E. (2003). Masturbation in a generational perspective. *Journal of Psychology and Human Sexuality, 14*, 49–83.
- Lamb, S. (2001). *The secret lives of girls: What good girls really do—Sex play, aggression, and their guilt*. New York: Free Press.
- Laqueur, T. W. (2003). *Solitary sex: A cultural history of masturbation*. New York: Zone Books.
- Laumann, E. O., Gagnon, J. H., Michael, R. T., & Michaels, S. (1994). *The social organization of sexuality: Sexual practices in the United States*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Leff, J. J., & Israel, M. (1983). The relationship between mode of female masturbation and achievement in coitus. *Archives of Sexual Behavior, 12*, 227–236.
- Lerner, H. E. (1976). Parental mislabeling of female genitals as a determinant of penis envy and learning inhibitions in women. *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association, 24*, 269–283.
- Levin, R., & Meston, C. (2006). Nipple/breast stimulation and sexual arousal in young men and women. *Journal of Sexual Medicine, 3*(3), 450–454.
- Maines, R. (2001). *The technology of orgasm: “Hysteria,” the vibrator, and women’s sexual satisfaction*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Martin, E. (2001). *The woman in the body: A cultural analysis of reproduction*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Masters, W. H., & Johnson, V. E. (1966). *Human sexual response*. New York: Bantam Books.
- Mosher, D. L., & Vonderheide, S. G. (1985). Contributions of sex guilt and masturbation guilt to women’s contraceptive attitudes and use. *Journal of Sex Research, 21*, 24–39.
- Nicolson, P., & Burr, J. (2003). What is “normal” about women’s (hetero)sexual desire and orgasm? A report of an in-depth interview study. *Social Science and Medicine, 57*, 1735–1745.
- Oliver, M. B., & Hyde, J. S. (1993). Gender differences in sexuality: A meta-analysis. *Psychological Bulletin, 114*, 29–51.
- Petersen, J. L., & Hyde, J. S. (2011). Gender differences in sexual attitudes and behaviors: A review of meta-analytic results and large datasets. *Journal of Sex Research, 48*, 149–165.
- Phillippsohn, S., & Hartmann, U. (2009). Determinants of sexual satisfaction in a sample of German women. *Journal of Sexual Medicine, 6*, 1001–1010.

- Robbins, C. L., Schick, V., Reece, M., Herbenick, D., Sanders, S. A., Dodge, B., et al. (2011). Prevalence, frequency, and associations of masturbation with partnered sexual behavior among US adolescents. *Archives of Pediatrics and Adolescent Medicine*, *165*, 1087–1093.
- Roberts, C., Kippax, S., Waldby, C., & Crawford, J. (1995). Faking it: The story of “Ohh!” *Women’s Studies International Forum*, *18*, 523–532.
- Robinson, B. B. E., Bockting, W. O., & Harrell, T. (2002). Masturbation and sexual health: An exploratory study of low income African American women. *Journal of Psychology and Human Sexuality*, *14*, 85–102.
- Rosario, V. A. III. (1995). Phantastical pollutions: The public threat of private vice in France. In P. Bennett & A. R. Vernon (Eds.), *Solitary pleasures: The historical, literary, and artistic discourses of autoeroticism* (pp. 101–132). New York: Routledge.
- Schreurs, K. M. G., & Buunk, B. P. (1996). Intimacy, autonomy, and relationship satisfaction in Dutch lesbian couples and heterosexual couples. *Journal of Psychology and Human Sexuality*, *4*, 41–57.
- Sedgwick, E. K. (1995). Jane Austen and the masturbating girl. In P. Bennett & A. R. Vernon (Eds.), *Solitary pleasures: The historical, literary, and artistic discourses of autoeroticism* (pp. 133–154). New York: Routledge.
- Sharma, V., & Sharma, A. (1998). The guilt and pleasure of masturbation: A study of college girls in Gujarat, India. *Sexual and Marital Therapy*, *13*, 63–70.
- Shulman, J. L., & Horne, S. G. (2003). The use of self-pleasure: Masturbation and body image among African American and European American women. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, *27*, 262–269.
- Smith, A. M. A., Rosenthal, D. A., & Reichler, H. (1996). High schoolers’ masturbatory practices: Their relationship to sexual intercourse and personal characteristics. *Psychological Reports*, *79*, 499–509.
- Stein, J. H., & Reiser, L. W. (1994). A study of White middle-class adolescent boys’ responses to “semenarche” (the first ejaculation). *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, *23*, 373–384.
- Toerien, M., & Wilkinson, S. (2004). Exploring the depilation norm: A qualitative questionnaire study of women’s body hair removal. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, *1*, 69–92.
- Tolman, D. L. (2002). *Dilemmas of desire: Teenage girls talk about sexuality*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Træen, B., Stigum, H., & Sørensen, D. (2002). Sexual diversity in urban Norwegians. *Journal of Sex Research*, *39*, 249–258.
- Weigerl, L. (1995). Autonomy as deviance: Sixteenth-century images of witches and prostitutes. In P. Bennett & A. R. Vernon (Eds.), *Solitary pleasures: The historical, literary, and artistic discourses of autoeroticism* (pp. 19–48). New York: Routledge.
- Wyatt, G., Peters, S., & Guthrie, D. (1988). Kinsey revisited, part II: Comparisons of the sexual socialization and sexual behavior of Black women over 33 years. *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, *17*, 289–332.