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Masturbating stats: Are there gender differences and why? ^[1]

Dear Alice,

I have searched your files for the answer to a question that has long been bugging me. It has to do with masturbation. I can see by the questions there are many men who masturbate, but I don't see many from women. Do many women masturbate? Are they just more shy about talking about it? Can you give any specifics on the percentage of women, versus the percentage of men, who masturbate?

-Wants to learn more

Answer

Dear Wants to learn more,

Many women masturbate, but they haven't beaten the men when it comes to solo sex frequency... at least not yet. Statistically speaking, various studies of the sexual behavior of men and women detailed connections between gender and self-stimulation. The authors of *The Social Organization of Sexuality* (Edward O. Laumann, John H. Gagnon, Robert T. Michael, and Stuart Michaels; University of Chicago Press, 1994) gathered information about masturbatory practices from face-to-face interviews and self-administered questionnaires of 2,969 men and women ranging in age from 18 to 59 years. The researchers found that 41.7 percent of women and 63.3 percent of men masturbated during the year studied. According to *The Janus Report on Sexual Behavior* (Samuel S. Janus and Cynthia L. Janus; John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1993), based on a large-scale, nationwide survey of adult Americans ages 18 and up conducted between 1983 and 1992, 10 percent of women reported masturbating frequently (several times weekly or daily) vs. 25 percent of men. Similarly, 38 percent of women reported masturbating on a regular basis (monthly to daily) in comparison to 55 percent of men. The Kinsey Institute also published statistics about gender differences in masturbation. They were compiled from renowned sex researcher Alfred Kinsey's studies on the sexual behavior of men and women. According to Dr. Kinsey's 1948 and 1953 studies, based on detailed interviews with white American adults, 92 percent of men and 62 percent of women reported that they had masturbated.

Several reasons have been suggested to account for the lower percentage of women (vs. men)

who have ever masturbated. Women are considered "good" when they adhere to their traditional sex role: to be sexually passive, naive, and dependent -- basically, to be nonsexual. Sexually experienced and independent women are frequently seen as threatening and "loose."

In addition, in many cultures, women are raised to believe that their genitals are repulsive and inferior to those of men. They're also encouraged to repress their sexual feelings until marriage, when sex is for the purposes of procreation and pleasing their husband. A woman learns that she is to receive sexual pleasure only from sexual intercourse (not from touching or oral sex, and especially not from masturbation) with her husband (not with anyone else or by herself). If a woman with a partner masturbates, it is often seen as though there's something wrong with her relationship. Likewise, if a woman is without a partner, masturbating is seen as an act of loneliness.

Not only is there a taboo for women to masturbate, but there's also a greater taboo against talking about it. No doubt, for some women (and some men), talking about sex can also be awkward, so shyness, as you mentioned in your question, may be another, though lesser, factor. It doesn't have to be this way. Masturbation is a healthy and natural part of sexuality. It enables people to learn about their own bodies and genitals as well as to recognize and develop their sexual responses or orgasms. It also helps to foster communication in intimate relationships by making it easier for partners to identify and express what feels good physically and sexually for them and to each other. Candid discussions about sexuality and sexual pleasure can help free women (and men) from the historically negative influences that have bound and prevented some women (and some men) from discovering, exploring, and enjoying their sexual selves. These conversations can make it easier to break the taboos and myths about masturbation and can encourage women (and men) to reach their healthy, sex-positive goals.

Here are some resources for more information:

[Sex for One: The Joy of Self-Loving](#), by Betty Dodson

[For Yourself: The Fulfillment of Female Sexuality](#), by Lonnie G. Barbach

[Yellow Silk: Erotic Arts and Letters](#), by Lily Pond and Richard Russo (editors)

Alice's [Sexuality](#) ^[2] archive (with a section about masturbation)

Alice!

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Published date:

Oct 08, 1999

Last reviewed on:

Jul 03, 2009

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