

LIBERATING MASTURBATION

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1. Understanding

Among the many issues involved in the liberation of women, the two major fronts in my own personal liberation have been economics and sexuality. And ultimately, they are not separable -- not as long as the female genitals have economic value instead of sexual value for women. Effective action, therefore, must consist of a simultaneous attack on both fronts. But so far, the sex issue has not been faced head on. The extent to which women have been sex-negatively conditioned has, understandably, made this basic confrontation the one that terrifies us the most. The answer for women lies not in trying to avoid or deny or do away with sex, but in trying to get joy and strength and liberation from it. A sex-positive woman will have a positive attitude toward herself and the world she lives in. That is the reason I am almost obsessed these days with the necessity for women to "go public," that is, to speak out about the importance of female masturbation. In my opinion it will be our real Declaration of Independence. It is that revolutionary!

How can masturbation be so important? I know it is difficult to understand. We all have to wade through ten tons of firmly implanted fear, guilt, repulsion, and misinformation to think or talk about masturbation with any kind of open mind. In struggling to understand the extent of my own repression as a woman, I have had to face these sexually-based negative emotions every step of the way. I now know from my own sexual history that repression does indeed start with and relate directly to masturbation, and that the double standard definitely includes masturbation. But it follows then that masturbation can also be important in reversing the process and achieving liberation and freedom of choice.

In the past seven years, I have had a series of valuable confrontations with the world which have thrown a great deal of light on the whole subject of sex and liberation. It started with my deciding to do erotic art. Now I have always painted the nude, but I originally thought of the nude as sensual, not really sexual. I was always on the periphery of sex, but not openly and consciously into it. All that changed after I was able to disentangle myself from a sexually-diminished five-year marriage. Right after my divorce, I became involved in a beautiful orgasmic love affair, and it was then that I began the liberation of my masturbation and my sexuality.

A little recent reminiscing made me aware that masturbation has been a continuous part of my sex life since the age of five. I am not typical in that respect. As I later learned, very few women masturbate regularly once they're past childhood exploration. But I am typical in all other respects. I was subjected to the same barrage of negative sexual conditioning all women get. I was made to feel shameful and guilty about masturbation. I was convinced it would lessen my sexuality. I thought it was immature. I should get my sexual pleasure from male penetration only, not from my clitoris by myself. I especially shouldn't want to do it if I was making it regularly with a boyfriend. And these views were well supported. Of course, coming from the "Bible Belt," I knew very well where the church and "conservative" moralists stood. But even supposedly liberal, intellectual boyfriends put down masturbation and made it clear that if there were any touching of my genitals to be done, they would do it. A lot of my girlfriends didn't do it, had never heard of it, or simply looked shocked. Most of the psychiatrists I knew were into Freud and male-oriented Victorian sexual morality "for the sake of civilization," so masturbation, especially in women, was either oral, anal, compulsive, or infantile behavior - mature sex was vaginal.

The non-typical (healthy) part of me, however, refused to be "shaped up," so even if masturbating was "wrong," I kept on doing it. Consequently (I now realize), I really enjoyed sex, but the

hitch was that women certainly weren't supposed to wave any banners for that. Instant, ready-made schizophrenia? Yes, indeed, the female type.

At twenty-nine, after several affairs and an off-again-on-again art career, I got married - just in time to escape the horrible fate of going over the hill alone. Quite typically, my marital sex soon got down to once a month, and when it did happen, my husband would come too fast, and I wouldn't come at all. We would both be embarrassed, depressed, and silent. After he went to sleep, I would quickly and quietly masturbate under the covers. I did it without moving or breathing, feeling sick with frustration and guilt the whole time. Of course, it all fell apart. My ability to "settle down" in marriage and substitute bridge, golf, or work for diminished sexuality had been ruined by my moderately healthy sexual beginnings. Also I had a continuous reminder from my masturbation that pleasure from sex should be available to me.

My first post-marriage affair was a turning point. Both of us sexually starved, we plunged headlong into an intense, experimental physical exchange. My lover, just out of a "good" 17-year marriage, was overjoyed to be able to be completely open sexually, and so was I. Our very exploratory conversations quickly got onto the subject of marriage, monogamy, and sexual repression, and I was ultimately able to "go public" with him. I told him openly and honestly about my guilt-ridden marital masturbation. And he told me about his! The "toning down" of sex that had evolved in his long marriage and the consequent lack of sexual communication had been very depressing to him. Sometimes he would sneak another orgasm by masturbating in the bathroom just thirty minutes after lovemaking. He had longed for variety, but his wife believed in monogamy, and he was too idealistic to seek outside double-standard sex. His only variety then had to come from masturbation, which would have been O.K. if only he could have done it positively and joyfully. But like me, he had felt sick with frustration and guilt. He had begun to regard himself as a "dirty old man," and his self-

esteem sank lower and lower. As we talked, I began to understand on a gut level how our whole anti-sexual social system represses and destroys us, and I was able to let go of any sexual guilt. We both realized that masturbation had saved our lives and our sexual sanity and vowed that we would never again consider it a "second-rate" sexual activity.

What was vitally important for me was that I had finally found someone else who had fought the same battles I had and agreed with me about sex and masturbation without male-female role distinction. With our natural inquisitiveness about people and sex, we were able to start gathering fascinating scraps of sexual information which supported our ideas about masturbation -- although most researchers (all male) still had lots of reservations. Then Masters and Johnson (a male and female team) publically announced their invaluable findings about female sexuality which demolished most of the established myths I had been fighting against. All orgasms, they found, centered in the clitoris, and separation of orgasms into vaginal and clitoral was completely wrong. Most women have multi-orgasmic capability. Their female subjects agreed that their most intense orgasms came from masturbatory manual stimulation! Although I had nothing to do with their research, mine had been validated and more was underway -- all of it revolutionary. It was clear that the next significant contributions to understanding human sexuality would come from women!

That first year I was divorced was fantastic, and I felt incredibly good about myself and life. I was so sex affirmative again that it was the most natural thing in the world for me to say, "Of course! I'm going to put my nudes together on canvas. They will be huge, magnificent drawings and paintings of humans celebrating physical love!" Today, I realize the importance of that decision. Looking back, I can see that my erotic art has related directly to my own sexual liberation. I have always been concerned with fighting for freedom from society's restrictions and censorship, but in the end, the worst kind of censorship has been the kind I've been conditioned to apply to myself! Because of that de-

cision to do erotic art, I now understand that once I am able to put it on paper — whatever it is I fear — I've won! And that, in essence, is what I mean when I talk about "going public."

2. Going Public

So my discoveries in bed got transferred to canvas, and my first one-woman exhibition was held in New York City in 1968. The whole concept of displaying my sexuality publically naturally caused a lot of fear in me, but I had learned that the first enemy a person encounters on the path to knowledge and growth is fear, and the person must overcome that fear by defying it. I had to fully feel the fear and take the next step in learning. This understanding carried me through but not without a lot of sweating. I had envisioned irate citizens throwing rocks or getting busted for pornography, but I needn't have. The exhibition dealt with fashionable heterosexuality. It was beautiful and enormously successful. Life-size, heroic figures fucking behind huge bright-colored plastic sheets right next to the Whitney Museum was cause for some sensation at that time.

Eight thousand people attended that show in a two-week period, even though advertising was largely word-of-mouth. There were funny incidents, embarrassing, exciting, and sad ones — all of them profoundly educational. But one thing stood out above all others: everyone was interested, even if they often tried to disguise their interest in many different ways. My being a woman was a key ingredient. It was upsetting all kinds of basic social postures. Why should a woman want to show her interest in sex publically? She obviously would not just be interested in getting laid like a man so there had to be social significance involved. Something had happened in the world. A lot of people were very pensive. Another thing: it was painfully clear that everyone was hideously crippled from socially-imposed sex-negative attitudes, and it seemed terribly unjust because I was so aware that my own sex life had become so joyful and gratifying. Finally, and most important: I

realized that women were more available than men for exchanging sex information. They admitted their hang ups, asked questions, and were willing to listen. The men did none of these although it's now clear they have just as many hang ups or more. Thus, I recognized how tragic it is that men have the illusion of making it and are in such locked-in positions as a result of having constantly to bolster (or get women to bolster) their precarious "masculine images." I concluded that women would just have to go first.

I decided to devote my second show to the celebration of masturbation! By that time, I had been reading extensively in the field of human sexuality, and my new recognition gave me access to a multitude of people and their personal sex histories. I had become more convinced than ever that sexual liberation was crucial to women's liberation, and that masturbation was crucial to sexual liberation and the destruction of paralyzing sex roles.

Getting models to masturbate for me turned out to be a very difficult job, much more so than getting them for regular sexual intercourse -- a very illuminating commentary all by itself. But finally, with a little help from my friends, I was able to get it down on paper. There they were: four magnificent, over-life-size classical nudes all jerking off! I was overwhelmed with dreams and visions of the redemption of masturbation in a chic Madison Avenue art gallery! Everyone said I was nuts and that the drawings would never sell. It turned out to be absolutely true. However financially disastrous the show may have been, though, it was an invaluable experience in sexual consciousness-raising.

The four big drawings arrived the day of the opening, and the director freaked out. All hell broke loose. He refused to hang the four masturbation drawings as planned, and I threatened to pull out all thirty pictures. Finally, two of the masturbation drawings were hung. Opening night the main wall of the front room in this very elegant establishment held the six-foot drawing of my girlfriend, Jackie, legs apart, clitoris erect, approaching orgasm with her vibrator. (Actually, she prefers penetration along with her vibrator and often uses a peeled cucumber plus her hair dryer covering her ears. I simplified her technique for artistic purposes.)

The response to the show was fascinating and informative. I found out that a lot of women did not masturbate, that a lot of people did not even know women masturbated at all (Why should they?), and that the vibrator made a lot of men very hostile and competitive. Several men said in no uncertain terms, "If that was my woman, she wouldn't have to use that thing." I found myself fielding hundreds of questions. Yes, I did it myself and loved it. No, you don't get warts. Just the opposite! It gets rid of warts (and cramps and cystitis and hysterectomies!). Yes, I use live models. Yes, the girl with the vibrator in the picture has a boyfriend — he's standing right over there. No, despite what society tells us, intercourse isn't necessarily better — it's different. I like to do both. In short, I was a one-woman crusade for the benefits and joys of masturbation. What a responsibility! It was both exhilarating and depressing.

Many women I talked to said, after loosening up a bit, they were afraid to use the vibrator for fear they would "get hooked" on it. I am not hooked on mine. I am, however, emotionally involved with it. I am also emotionally involved with my friends, with regular fucking, with oral sex, and with social sex. So far, my observation has been that women who like vibrators either like sex or are starting to like sex for the first time!

If I had any doubts about it before I started, the two weeks I spent in the gallery made it very clear that the sexual double standard applies to masturbation in an important way. Seeking sexual satisfaction is a basic drive, and masturbation, of course, is our first natural sexual activity. It's the way we discover our eroticism, the way we learn to respond sexually, the way we learn to love ourselves and build self-esteem. Sexual skill and the ability to respond are not "natural" as many people think. Doing only what "comes naturally" is to be sexually repressed. Sex is like any other skill. It has to be learned and practiced. Now when a woman masturbates, she learns to like her own genitals, to enjoy sex and orgasm, and furthermore, to become proficient and independent about it. And our society does not really approve of sexually proficient and independent women.

Which gets us back to the double standard, the concept that men have social approval to be aggressive (independent) and therefore sexually polygamous but that women should be non-aggressive (dependent) and therefore sexually monogamous. It's a basic social statement about the inequality of the sexes and the inferiority of women. And if anyone tries to tell you it's not around any more, it's probably a man who wants you to have sex with him but not with anyone else. Nor does he want his woman to masturbate. That is too scary. She might find out that his erect penis in her vagina may not be her only source of pleasure. He might not get his preferred kind of sex, or she might, then, be satisfied alone or with another woman! So how are you going to keep her down on the farm or sexless in suburbia? That is the point!

One of the best ways to make a woman accept and conform to this double standard of behavior is to deprive her of masturbation. In other words, deprive her of her own body and the pleasure of satisfying her basic sex drive. Start early. Instill the notion that female genitals are ugly and inferior and that their only social value lies in having babies. Avoid any information about the clitoris and life-affirming orgasm. Prohibit touching through physical coercion and the suggestion of supernatural punishment, and socially ostracize non-conforming women. Maintain the two sexual views of woman: (1) the virginal, sexless mother, and (2) the fallen woman -- the whore or prostitute.

The net result is a crippled human being. Her pelvis is severely locked. Her own genitals are repulsive to her and a source of constant discomfort. Her body lacks tone or muscle and is armored with fat. She deteriorates rapidly and at an early age. (Just compare women at forty to men the same age.) But more serious, the crippling is mental. She becomes fixed in non-sexuality, subservience, and supportive roles which induce her to seek security rather than independence, new experiences, and sexual gratification. Culturally induced frigidity! Sexual repression is a vital aspect of keeping us in our "proper" role.

One of the most insidious things about it is that the system gets women to help destroy their own sexuality. It actually makes them proud to accept self-serving male definitions of "normal" female sexuality and to vehemently or sullenly put down masturbation and overt display of healthy female sexuality. At that point, they are ready for their glorification as The Keepers of Social Morality. And that is the ultimate repression!

3. Teaching

To combat our repression and to begin to free ourselves, it is extremely important for us to share sexual information with our sisters, to teach each other what we are learning through great effort and struggle to change. This is the enormous value of consciousness-raising groups. I have been involved in CR groups for several years now, and to me it is clearly our sexual and political grass roots. Women are starting to tell each other how it really is, developing sexual honesty among themselves that men have yet to establish. A man might be honest with a woman, but with his brother he is in the rotten position of having to brag about his sexual accomplishments. That leaves no room for truth or honest questioning.

Going public about sex brought me letters, phone calls, and dynamite questions from all kinds of women wanting to know how to get turned on and to have orgasm. My experiences as a "sister-teacher" became another important step in developing my feminist consciousness.

A classical case of repressed female masturbation was that of my friend, Nancy. At the age of twenty-five, after six years of heterosexuality, she was not sure if she had ever experienced an orgasm. (It's hard to imagine a young man in a similar position!) Yes, you guessed it — she had never consciously masturbated. I explained that the only way for her ever to know for sure would be to learn how to masturbate to orgasm. I tried to explain some of the feelings I had experienced, and I drew a picture of the female

genitals and explained the clitoris, the magnificent female phallus. (Look up "phallus" in your dictionary.) I suggested that she moisten her fingertips with saliva or a cream like Albolene and gently massage her clitoral area: above, just below, to one side, or directly on it. She should experiment a lot, I added, to find out exactly what felt best.

A week later, Nancy said she felt silly and self-conscious trying to masturbate and, furthermore, nothing had happened. I asked her how long she had spent on it and got the answer, "About ten minutes." I gently pointed out that she spent hours on her face and hair and that she ought to be willing to devote at least an equal amount of time to her body and her genitals. I also suggested she create an erotic atmosphere, put on some music, light a candle, burn incense, try to have a sexual fantasy or read anything that excited her — in short, to do anything that might conceivably turn her on.

But first, I encouraged Nancy to get out a mirror and to spend some time making friends with her cunt. It is imperative for our sexual development to become what I call "cunt positive." Most women feel that their genitals are ugly, funny looking, disgusting, smelly, and not at all desireable — certainly not a beautiful part of their bodies. A woman who feels this way is certainly going to have a lot of reservations about sharing her genitals intimately with anyone. We therefore need to become very aware of our genitals. We need to know how we look, smell, and taste. Genital hygiene is also an essential part of becoming sex positive, and cleanliness, by the way, always includes pulling back the foreskin or hood of the clitoris as far as possible to clean out any accumulated smegma. Women rarely consider their exterior sex parts and are not given adequate information. Clitoral hood adhesions, for example, can prevent sexual response. (How many gynecologists examine the clitoris?)

I also suggested to Nancy that she trim or shape her pubic hair. Although this may sound frivolous, I assure you it is not at all. It actually enhances the woman's awareness of her genitals and makes her begin to understand that she "has something" there.

"Still nothing," Nancy reported several weeks later. Her hand, she said, had actually gotten tired, and she had become bored with the whole thing. I felt it was time to suggest the vibrator, but she said, no, it was too mechanical and that just the whole idea turned her off. Then I remembered another friend who had had her first orgasm in the bathtub with water running on her clitoris. She had been so totally inhibited about touching herself "there" that the water was perfect. It was like a spiritual lover caressing her, and even though she was alone in her home, she locked the bathroom door giving herself the tremendous amount of security and privacy she obviously needed. I passed this information on to Nancy, and it worked: Orgasm at last!

She was thrilled and exhilarated that it had finally happened, and this time there was no doubt in her mind! Another reaction was anger -- she was mad that it had taken her so long to discover orgasm. I reminded her of all the women I knew who hadn't experienced orgasm until they were forty, and I pointed out that Norma, a very close friend of ours, didn't have one until she was forty-five years old! Incredible! What should be our birth-right becomes a confusing and desperate struggle. Once again we see clearly that repression of masturbation plus the withholding of sexual information deprives us of our bodies and sexuality. Every woman experiencing her first orgasm under these difficult or virtually impossible conditions is essentially a radical feminist the moment she stops blaming herself!

For the next six months, Nancy's sex life remained the same -- except now when she had sex, she would go into the bathroom afterwards and "take a bath" (take an orgasm). It appeared she was going steady with her bathtub until she finally purchased a vibrator and added some variety. She had just started a new love affair and felt confused about how to handle the sex with him. Now that she knew what orgasm was, should she tell him that she could not come having intercourse? I urged her to get her lover involved in her sexual exploration immediately and stressed the importance of not faking orgasm. Once we do that, we are trapped in the biggest

collective lie of them all. We must stop sacrificing our own pleasure to protect the male ego or to avoid taking sexual responsibility for ourselves.

Nancy finally got the courage to bring out her vibrator one night. To her delight, her boyfriend was very reassuring and more than happy to be included in her sexual unfolding. They had a marvelous "threesome." Within a relatively short period of time, Nancy was able to have orgasm several different ways: with water, with the vibrator, by hand, with oral sex, and with intercourse plus the vibrator.

Nancy was one of my first teaching experiences during the time I was doing a lot of research. However, I soon found myself starting to be flooded with friends and even strangers who needed the same kind of direct help and encouragement from a sister. Many of them, like Nancy, had tried psychiatry and had gotten nowhere. And every day, someone else would call or show up at the front door. It got so I virtually had to decide whether or not I was going to give up my career as an artist to be a full-time sex therapist. Now I felt the full brunt of the damage that had been done to women. Of course none of them masturbated! I was overwhelmed with the realization of how very effectively the church and our whole culture had turned us into sexless mothers and house-slaves. We had been castrated and domesticated to serve the authoritarian father. I was absolutely furious. I started calling up every woman I knew and loved to tell her if she was not masturbating, to start immediately!

One of those calls was long distance to Kansas -- to my mother! She had been widowed for several years and lived alone. I started right off with, "Mother, are you masturbating to orgasm?" There was a very noisy pause and then a joshing, slightly embarrassed, "Why, Betty Ann, of course not. I'm too old for that sort of thing." I immediately launched into my whole rap about the connection between good health and orgasm -- the necessity to keep all systems functioning. If nothing else, she should do it just as a physical exercise to keep the lining of the vaginal wall lubricating, the hormones secreting, and the uterus contracting. Besides it was a

great way to relax and unwind, and it might reduce some of her lower back pains. And — she could also do it for fun! Her response was, "Well, honey, I don't know. What you say does make sense. You have always had such different ideas from most people, but I think you're probably right."

Our next conversation — some four months later — was beautiful. Yes! She had successfully and very easily masturbated to orgasm, and it was extremely pleasant! She felt she had slept more soundly afterwards, too. At that time, my mother was sixty-eight years old.

Over the past five years now, we have exchanged information about masturbation, our different techniques, our different uses of fantasy, and we have even shared our masturbation histories. One surprise for me: she actually remembered the time when I first started masturbating (at the age of five in the back seat of the car!), something I had no idea she knew. One time I asked my mother if she had ever talked about masturbation with any of her friends. She said, yes, a friend of hers was complaining about a terrible vaginal itch and irritation that the doctor had not been able to cure. Mother suggested that masturbation might help. When I asked what happened, she said her friend had just stopped calling her. That, I replied, was the price of being a sexual revolutionary. We often upset people, and they don't want to talk to us any more.

4. Sharing

One of the most liberating sexual experiences I have ever had was the time I was able to masturbate to orgasm in front of my lover. Does this seem like a far out thing to you? Well, it really isn't. It was very important to my sexual growth, which I will try to explain.

Although he and I had decided masturbation should be a natural part of our sexual exchange, actually sharing it for the first time was extremely difficult for both of us. Interesting, isn't it? As a child, I didn't have that kind of reservation. I first had to get up enough courage to watch myself masturbate in front of a mirror.

I didn't look funny or awful at all! I simply looked sexual and intense. With that bit of reassurance, I was able to make the breakthrough with my lover. It was the beginning of my freedom from the bondage of idealized romanticism — a Sexual Independence Day. I celebrated by openly demonstrating my own sexuality, showing my lover that I could have a first-rate orgasm by myself. This kind of exposure naturally made me feel very vulnerable. But I was willing to assume responsibility for myself. That meant I had to face (1) the fear of losing my lover (He would actually see I wasn't dependent on him for orgasm), and (2) the possibility of devastating criticism backed by the moral indignation of 2000 years ("That's disgusting!"). You feel delicate and tender because you are uncertain about this new kind of exposure. Any criticism at that point is bound to send you scurrying right back into the missionary position. By sharing masturbation, then, I demystified female response and heterosexuality and stepped down from my pedestal and became an equal.

New discoveries and insights came quickly with that new freedom. First, being able to share masturbation made all sorts of experimentation possible. The enrichment of our sexual exchange was fantastic. My lover could learn directly from watching me which patterns of manipulation and contact were the best for me. I started having more orgasms, and I expanded my orgasmic capacity. I also learned a lot about male sexuality by being able to observe him carefully and in detail without the interference of my own responses. I discovered the totality of body involvement in sexual build up and release. It was esthetically very pleasing to my eyeballs, and as you now know, it provided the basis for my second exhibition.

Psychologically and physically our intimacy expanded. There was an even greater freedom to talk more honestly — probably some kind of deeper recognition of each other's humanity brought about by the sharing of this basic sexual activity. There certainly was an increased feeling of comfort and ease. For example, my sexual build up to reach orgasm had always been very slow, and I would often hang up worrying that his mouth or hand or penis, or all three, would be getting tired. Because I could now continue by

myself, the pressure was off my lover — and consequently, off me. And interestingly enough, the same was true for him!

Another thing: if one of us did not feel like having sex, the other was free to masturbate to orgasm, which would often turn both of us on. With the liberation of our masturbation, my lover was able to tell me that there were times when he would prefer to masturbate with me than to have intercourse. Dig it! Men, too, are under a lot of pressure to perform and prove their masculinity. It is nearly impossible for a man ever to say he does not want sex when it is offered. The only way for him to avoid sex and "save face" under these circumstances is to start a fight. If men could be liberated and honest, they would quickly and naturally get over their socially conditioned fixation that penetration is the only "real" and good kind of sex for them. (Kinsey pointed out married men often liked to go to conventions — not for outside sex — but because they could masturbate in their hotel rooms!) It became clear to me that men, too, are enslaved by the insistence of our culture on heterosexual intercourse. You see what kind of information comes with a little liberated masturbation?

Honest-to-goodness sharing is the basis of intimacy. However, to share we have to feel that we have something worth sharing. We are seldom in that position. Masturbating together breaks through most of the layers of reservations. It is a basic statement about independence. It establishes us as people with something worth sharing. Only then are we in a position to be equals.

5. Getting It Together

Crucial sexual information for women is that masturbation puts an end to the concept of frigidity forever. If a woman can stimulate herself to orgasm, she can be orgasmically potent and sexually healthy. "Frigid" is a man's word for a woman who cannot have an orgasm in the missionary position in five minutes with only the kind of stimulation that is good for him. We must totally reject the male notion, which we all steadfastly cling to, that we "should" have orgasm from intercourse alone. And we must not be intimidated by chauvin-

ists in white coats who still refer to "coital inadequacy" in the woman when their own laboratory and statistical evidence clearly contradicts this whole male concept of female response! The truth is that very few women ever consistently make orgasm in intercourse without some kind of additional stimulation. To be liberated, a woman must be free to choose and state her preference in sexual activity without prejudice or judgment when it is her turn — and her preference may often be oral sex, manual stimulation, or masturbation.

Also in this connection, we must deny just as emphatically the common idea that women do not necessarily have to have orgasm. Now this is a pure bullshit rationalization. Once or twice — sure. Part of the time — maybe. But you know that any woman who is not achieving orgasm most of the time can not possibly maintain a positive joyous attitude toward sex over any period of time.

It has been many years since the critical role of the clitoris in female sexuality was proven and established. There are now even well-recognized university clinics which utilize masturbation therapy to help women develop long suppressed body response mechanisms. Yet the myths persist! Why? And no one wants to deal openly with masturbation. Why? At least the Roman Catholic Church is straightforward about it and openly condemns masturbation. Quite consistently, the Catholic Church also openly denies women equal participation or the right to control their bodies. But our supposedly democratic society at large is completely hypocritical about equal rights for women. Denial of the woman's phallus has for centuries been the essence of male dominance and female asexuality and subjugation. Therefore, our whole society, as long as it tries to maintain its highly male authoritarian posture, has a vested interest in the continuance of this mystification and denial of sexual liberation for women. So ---

1. Let's UNDERSTAND: Masturbation holds the key to breaking this socially approved bondage simply because it reverses the whole process of repression. With increasing sexual independence, we

women can gain control of our bodies and stand up straight and strong, spiritually as well as physically.

2. Let's GO PUBLIC: Making no secret of our masturbation is an open challenge to those who have a stake in our repression, who perpetuate the conspiracy of (grim) silence. By openly advocating masturbation and debunking myths about it, we begin to feel less intimidated and more confident about ourselves and our rights.

3. Let's TEACH: We must have access to knowledge about ourselves, our bodies, and our sexuality. Since our present society has a stake in not enlightening women about sex or encouraging them to grow and be independent, women must teach women. As soon as we get valid sex information, we must pass it along to our sisters — and mothers, and daughters. Conventional therapy does not work, so we must become "sister-teachers" with each other.

4. Let's SHARE: Honest sexual rapport and intimacy require the ability to share. Through intimidation and deprivation, we have been denied that ability. Therefore, breaking through all our reservations is crucial. After learning our sex responses by experimentation with our own bodies, it is important to share this knowledge with our lovers. We must no longer say, "Oh, everything you do feels good." We must be able to honestly state a preference (state our pleasure). Actually sharing masturbation with our partner is the final and most important (revolutionary) step in achieving intimacy. We are no longer afraid to be vulnerable: we are demonstrating our own sexuality. A sex-positive man is always grateful for any information from a woman about where she is at sexually. A man's attitude toward the vibrator and female masturbation is indicative of his attitude toward women becoming liberated: When we bring out our vibrators, it separates the chauvinists from the lovers.

5. Let's GET IT TOGETHER: This means assembling and acting on all our new sexual information and establishing a momentum toward liberation. Our first enemy on the path to knowledge will be

fear. ("I'm afraid to try it. I'm afraid of what people will say. I'm afraid...I'm afraid...") We will defy this fear. Then we will feel anger - as Nancy did - over our new realization: Masturbation is not just an effective treatment for personal hang ups -- it is, more than anything else, a gut-level confrontation with our whole social system. But we will get it together and support each other in our growth and reach a new level of living and loving.

In summing up, I would like to point out that in addition to heterosexuality, homosexuality, bisexuality, and group sexuality, there is also self sexuality. Masturbation as a total sex life is absolutely valid. Some of my sisters have been so hurt and turned off by heterosexual and male insensitivity that they prefer masturbation to intercourse. A lot of women out of long-term marriages find it just too painful to try to re-establish themselves sexually in a youth market. Relations with another woman can be a reasonable alternative for some women -- but not many. It is important to know, therefore, that there are all kinds of people who cannot establish a sexual exchange with another person or other people, and it is O.K. ! Complete acceptance of masturbation can make this life style fulfilling and liberated.

Masturbation is our primary sex life. It is the sexual base. Everything we do beyond that is simply how we choose to socialize our sex life. Under ideal circumstances, there would be no set or prescribed way in which we would sexualize. Our sexual preferences would naturally be multifaceted, varied, and independent, and could include a combination of all living things. Socially institutionalized dependent sex is depersonalizing. Masturbation can help return sex to its proper place -- to the individual.

EPILOGUE

I have a sexual fantasy about my old age. There are about seven of us feminists living together in a collective. Our ages range from seventy to ninety. Every night we gather in front of our closed-circuit TV to watch our pornographic video tapes. We light the incense, get stoned, put on our earphones and plug in our vibrators for several hours of ecstasy. The rocking chairs creak, the vibrators hum, and we occasionally tap each other, smiling and nodding "Yes" after a particularly good orgasm.