

# The State of Self-Love & Masturbation

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## INTRODUCTION

From Saskatchewan to South America, people are no longer shying away from talking about and engaging in masturbation. Self-love is finally getting the global love that it so rightly deserves. What for centuries has been a taboo practice has evolved into an individualized, intentional practice of self-love, with more ways to access and enjoy solo pleasure than ever before.

The evolution of communication and technology, along with shifting societal ideologies, is changing the way the world thinks and talks about masturbation, providing more avenues than ever before to explore curiosities, debunk myths, and find what feels right for you.

With all of this in mind, Quinn set out to discover what people really think about masturbation as a form of self-love and self care, how individuals approach masturbation and where we're still holding back from exploring, sharing and celebrating.

## ABOUT THE REPORT

The State of Self-Love report was developed utilizing over 18 million Quinn user sessions, a 2023 Quinn survey with thousands of participants, consumer trends, and interviews with subject matter experts. Our research revealed that while great strides have been made in how we look at, speak about and engage in self-gratification, there are still stigmas and myths that limit conversation.

In this report, we will look at the benefits of masturbation, examine how society's view has evolved over the last hundred years, go deep on the specifics of individual views and experiences, and explore what the future of self-love looks like.

Ultimately, the goal of this study is to better understand current attitudes and behaviors about masturbation in an effort to destigmatize and normalize engaging in self-pleasure.

## METHODOLOGY

This report has been compiled from Quinn platform primary data and results from an online survey, conducted in April 2023, with representatives from 39 countries between the ages of 18 and 56. Survey participation was both voluntary and anonymous. All data and quotes in this study are from these sources unless otherwise noted.

## THE PERKS

The physical and emotional benefits of masturbation are hard to dispute. From the release of healthy hormones like dopamine, oxytocin, testosterone, and serotonin, the rush of endorphins that comes with sexual pleasure brings a whole host of positive physical and mental rewards.<sup>1</sup> Increased clarity and focus post orgasm, increased ability to regulate stress, and anxiety and depression reduction are just a few ways that your body and mind benefit from time dedicated solely to your physical pleasure. With these benefits in mind, 63% of Quinn survey participants noted that masturbation is a part of their self-care routine. Moreover, masturbation is obviously unlikely to result in pregnancy or sexually transmitted diseases, making it a safe way to engage in sexual pleasure.

But that's just the tip of the iceberg. As neuroscientist Dr. Nan Wise explains, "A regular masturbation practice also has other benefits. When women learn to cultivate the pleasures of masturbation, we radically challenge some of the sex-negative notions pervading our culture. Rather than focusing on being a sex object for someone else, masturbation allows us to focus on being intrinsically sexual beings whose bodies are places of pleasure that exist at times just for us. It puts your pleasure first."<sup>3</sup> Many survey participants have embraced this, with 58% noting that they engage in self-pleasure activities at least 1-5 times a week. Quinn session data reveals a similar pattern. 25% of Quinn active users use the audio erotica app 21+

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times every month, and 35% use it 5-20 times every month.

The space and freedom to explore one's pleasure brings benefits of its own. The deeply intimate connection we develop with our bodies allows us to deepen our understanding of what turns us on, boost self-esteem, increase our self confidence and can open the door to better sexual relationships with partners. "I believe masturbation is one of the most unique and intimate experiences a woman can have with herself." a twenty year old survey participant shared.

While many compensatory studies suggest that masturbation is often used to fulfill an unmet need and often in essence "competes" with sex with a partner, complementary studies indicate that masturbation supports increased sexual desire, greater sense of self and higher levels of satisfaction both with intimate partner relationships and sex life in general.<sup>4</sup> This is backed by a Cleveland Clinic study, which revealed that those assigned the female gender at birth who masturbate are more likely to have an orgasm during sexual relationships with their partners.<sup>5</sup>

Women aren't the only ones to benefit from engaging in self-love. Studies suggest that people assigned male at birth (AMAB) who ejaculate frequently flush out old sperm, which prevents the build up of cancer causing agents that can lead to prostate cancer.<sup>5</sup>

Regardless of your gender, masturbation provides a whole host of benefits to enhance overall well-being. Quinn survey participants echoed this, with 63% noting that they feel better after masturbating.

## THE EVOLUTION OF SELF-LOVE

From new data and technology to new attitudes, the way society views, talks about, and practices self-love has expanded and grown over the last several decades.

What started as a positive, relaxed view of sex and masturbation during ancient history (often depicted through art and written word), eventually devolved into much more negative. The 18th century brought a drastic change to societal views and attitudes, with the first documented accounts positioning masturbation as "heinous sin" and "self-pollution". The early 20th century maintained themes from the previous century, with many prominent medical and psychological figures of the time including John Harvey Kellogg and Sigmund Freud perpetuating the notion that masturbation was a disease and, along with it, a whole host of other myths that champions of a sex-positive society continue to challenge today. Up until 1968, masturbation was even included as a diagnosable condition in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) II. It was only in 1974 that the American Medical Association declared the act to be normal.<sup>6</sup>

Since then, social movements to knock down existing barriers have continued to propel conversations about self-love forward. In 1994, when President Bill Clinton forced then Surgeon General Joycelyn Elders to resign for suggesting that masturbation be included in sex education curriculums throughout the country, sex-positive retailer Good Vibrations created National Masturbation Day to honor the surgeon general<sup>7</sup>, serving as a crucial milestone that paved the way for greater conversation and strides towards normalizing self-love.

Today, data about male and female masturbation practices continue to provide deeper insight into the ongoing social narrative that men masturbate more than women. A 2020 report by sexual wellness company Womanizer discovered that men were masturbating nearly three times more than women, with men reporting engaging in self-pleasure 155 times a year and women practicing self-love only 54 times a year.<sup>8</sup> Their solution? The creation of Equal Masturbation Day, a self-love day developed to close

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the gender gap around masturbation and change social attitudes.<sup>9</sup>

Many survey participants emphasized the normalcy of women regularly engaging in masturbation, with one, age 22, stating, “I think in order to be able to love or connect physically with another person you need to be able to first do that with yourself.”

COVID-19 brought a globally dichotomous response to masturbation, with many struggling to feel comfortable engaging in solo sexual pleasure in close quarters with family and friends.<sup>4</sup> The restriction of in-person sex, however, resulted in many people turning to masturbation as a form of sexual pleasure and release that they had not previously explored on a more consistent basis.

According to Tenga’s 2021 Global Self Pleasure report, masturbation became a crucial part of many individual’s self-care routine through isolation periods, with 69% of Spaniards, 68% of Americans, and 65% of both French and British people indicating that masturbation made them feel better during this challenging time. This also marked an increased time of solo sexual exploration for many, with an average of 17.6% of the same individuals noting that they purchased their first or an additional sex toy during this time period.<sup>10</sup> Quinn monthly active users reflected this, doubling in the first three months of the pandemic.

These conversations are not solely driven by social movements, though. As Polly Rodriguez, CEO and Co-Founder of Unbound explained, market trends have also proven to be a strong driver in moving the needle on eliminating the stigma associated with masturbation. “When we first started working on Unbound, about 10 years ago, we obtained a market report that stated only 1% of womxn and femmes owned a vibrator in 1970 -- today that is estimated to be closer to 80%. This substantial increase in vibrator ownership shows that we are no longer embarrassed to own these tools -- and that hopefully

-- the stigma and shame associated with masturbation will only continue to erode”. This is evidenced by the increase in access to sexual wellness products in more places than ever before. Once sold exclusively in boutique stores, consumers can now purchase products like lubricant and vibrators in beauty retailers like Ulta and Sephora as well as big box retailers like Target.

With the shift in societal attitudes about masturbation brings increased honesty, vulnerability and curiosity. A recent study by Sexual Alpha, 95% of American men have masturbated in their lifetime, with 81% of American women reporting that they have.<sup>11</sup> These numbers continue to grow as the stigma, shame and embarrassment associated with self-love continues to create space for more authentic and transparent conversations.

## LET’S TALK ABOUT SELF-LOVE, BABY

We are talking about masturbation and self-love more than ever before. “The depictions of sexuality in our media are more diverse and inclusive.” explains Unbound CEO and Co-Founder Polly Rodriguez. TV shows like *Sex and the City*, *The Girlfriend Experience*, and *Dear White People*<sup>12</sup>, to name a few, have flipped the narrative on female masturbation, inviting with them a new era of conversation focused on empowerment and unabashed self-love. Quinn CEO Caroline Spiegel likewise remarked that “Self pleasure has really entered the mainstream in recent years – in 2022, we released our first celebrity-voiced series with Thomas Doherty. The series received almost 4 million minutes listened in its first six months on Quinn. We also did a series with Jesse Williams who starred in the longest running primetime drama of all-time, *Grey’s Anatomy*. These celebrity series are tangible examples of audio erotica and self-pleasure entering the mainstream.” Over 50% of Quinn survey participants indicated that they communicate with friends about masturbation in some capacity, with many reporting that conversation focused on sharing information around

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toys and media that they enjoyed. The where and when of these conversations varied from text only to the topic being brought on by card games to conversations in public over drinks, with participants divulging that they talk with friends about everything from the kinks they explore to the frequency that they engage in self-pleasuring activities. Regardless of the content, having a safe space to share and express curiosities supports more open and honest communication. “[We] talk about sex and masturbation pretty openly. We have a group chat and most of us are in our early 20s and we feel like there's nothing shameful and it's safer to have a group of people that you can talk to for advice or even just casually,” a 22 year old female survey participant explained.

Despite all of this, religious and cultural beliefs as well as relational barriers including individuals who prefer that their partners don't engage in masturbation continue to limit conversation around the topic, as does the stigma and shame that is still connected to it. “I still hold onto a lot of sexual shame due to being brought up religious/a part of purity culture, so talking out loud about sex and masturbation is something I haven't yet felt comfortable to do, although I know my friends would never be judgemental,” shared a twenty-five year old female survey participant.

CEO and Co-Founder of Feast, Amanda Marmer, acknowledges that the lead-in to these types of conversations can be uncomfortable, but are an important piece of normalizing and de-stigmatizing masturbation. “After starting FEAST, I began talking to my friends more openly about sexuality. It was so striking to me how comfortable my friends could be while talking about sex, but how uncomfortable they were around the subject of masturbation. Some of them had never used a vibrator before. Starting those kinds of conversations has been eye-opening, and I think it's helped them come to terms with self-pleasure in new ways.”

## DIGITAL AND TECHNOLOGICAL SHIFTS ALLOW FOR SELF-LOVE ON YOUR TERMS

Since its inception, the porn industry has predominantly been constructed from the male gaze, often fueling the stigmatization of female engagement in masturbation.

As a result, roughly 70% of women report that they keep their porn consumption under wraps due to feelings of shame and embarrassment.

With the evolution of technology, however, more traditional avenues like books, photos, magazines and film have made way for digital audio erotica platforms like Quinn, and video sharing platforms like MakeLoveNotPorn and OnlyFans, providing even greater access to tools that encourage engaging in self-love and expanding how erotic content is defined and consumed by all genders. These platforms have not only changed the game of how people engage in acts of self-pleasure, but are also shifting the narrative surrounding self-love.

Audio erotica platform Quinn reports over one million user sessions every month, and hosts audio content including erotic stories, guided masturbation, dirty talk and more, and features a range of voices and themes. Quinn's user base, which is comprised of 77% female users, with 56% of those falling into the 18-26 age bracket, gravitate towards the Boyfriend, MDom and Praise categories and users most frequently traffic the app between the hours of 2 and 5 PM.

Quinn reports that user sessions average 12 minutes, compared to 5 or 6 minutes on PornHub. Spiegel believes that this platform (and others like it) is being embraced by females because it was developed to position masturbation as the powerful, self-affirming act that it is. “We believe erotic content should be aspirational and should make your sex life better, not worse. It should be something you feel excited about sharing with your friends. For example, on Pornhub, you might see degrading or upsetting titles, and, on Quinn, we don't title audios with expletives,

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degrading language, etc. which make them much easier for users to share. Users often screenshot their favorite audios or playlists to share with their friends, and even share their Quinn Wrapped.” Cindy Gallop, CEO and Founder of MakeLoveNotPorn (MLNP) a video sharing platform for “real world sex,” emphasizes how the demonstration of masturbation through video sharing platforms has helped to de-stigmatize and normalize something incredibly natural. “We hear from our members in video comments about how much masturbation is still infused with guilt and shame for them, and how we help to remove that - many members tell us that masturbating to our #realworldsex videos is the first time they've ever not felt bad about themselves afterwards.”

## **AUTONOMY, SELF-LOVE AND SELF-ACTUALIZATION**

In today's world, autonomy and self-love are at the forefront of conversations on well-being. Knowing and loving yourself is not only encouraged, but highly sought after as individuals work to navigate the complexities of today's society. When asked what they wish people knew about masturbation, one survey participant, 18, responded, “How awakening it is, you're no longer in need of another person. Full independence and no more sexual frustration.” Survey participants described masturbation as “guilt-free,” “empowering,” “liberating,” “healthy,” “beautiful,” “sexy” and “meditative,” noting that through masturbation they feel more grounded and present, and in turn, are able to navigate the world with more confidence. “Doing research about how to enjoy masturbation more is so important. Finding how your soul matches with your body in those moments is one of the most empowering feelings,” shared another survey participant.

This mindset is also encouraging individuals to define and engage in self-love on their terms, making the experience authentically theirs. From audio, to books to visual media, individuals are accessing things to set the mood based on their preferences. For many, no erogenous zone is off limits. In addition to 59% of

participants who shared that they touch both externally and explore penetration when masturbating, 45% of participants shared that they also explored their breasts. Thighs were also featured as a prominent body part that many enjoyed exploring.

Nearly two thirds of participants noted that they are happy with the frequency in which they engage in self-pleasure, while 41% of participants indicated that they climax every time they masturbate. How they get there differed for everyone, with audio and visual media being used by 30% of survey participants, audio exclusively by 21%, and audio, visual and text by 18%. Hands, vibrators, and pillows were identified as preferred tools to support reaching the big O.

As noted earlier, 63% of survey participants noted that masturbation is a critical part of their self-care routine. Customized self care routines extend beyond the physical act of self pleasure and into what happens after you're all done, with post-masturbation aftercare routines becoming a crucial piece of me-time and including everything from showering to cleaning toys to reading. As survey participants have shared, self-gratification can be a customized experience with endless ways to find satisfaction.

## **THE FUTURE OF SELF-LOVE**

Despite continued evidence that supports increased acceptance, Rodriguez illustrates that there is still a lot of work to be done. “The current political and institutional landscape is a massive regression backwards. The legislative assault on gender affirming care, contraception, and abortion access are all in direct conflict with society's more accepting and progressive views on sex. Furthermore, products that enable masturbation for femme and non-binary individuals are still prohibited from advertising. It is my hope and sincere belief that this will change over time, but there will always be power structures in place that will feel threatened by our bodily

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autonomy and pleasure. It's our job to keep fighting and championing sexual wellness for all."

This advocacy comes in many forms. For Marmer, it includes increased education to decrease the stigma and invite more acceptance. "I would love to see masturbation included in sex education across the country. It's so important for young people to know that those options exist, and that no one should be more comfortable with their body than themselves. Getting to know yourself and what you like makes a huge difference when you start to become sexually active. Talking openly about sex and masturbation is something we've already started to see more of, and I hope that only makes the subject less taboo, and more accepted overall."

Spiegel notes the importance of the evolving erotic media landscape, "I would like to see more context and consent for kink-related content. In mainstream porn, you almost never see the conversation around why someone wants to participate in a "scene," or what their boundaries are. Because people are de facto learning how to have sex from porn, it's really important to equip them with examples of consent conversations that are, frankly, the most important part of a sexual interaction."

Despite many areas for focus and growth, the future of masturbation and self-love is bright. Curiosity, openness, and a strong sense of how physically and emotionally beneficial masturbation is are continuing to expand and grow conversation and acceptance. CEO and Founder of Dame Alexandra Fine predicts a continued positive shift in the industry, expressing optimism about what is coming, "More mass retailers carrying vibes, more public spaces dedicated to intimacy. More, more, more!"

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