

The 'M' word



Written by [HopefulGirl](#)

‘Some Christians say masturbation is sinful and we must strive to conquer it,’ said the email. ‘Others consider it normal and natural. I have to admit, it helps me cope with sexual frustration. What’s your take on it, HopefulGirl?’

They say that 99 per cent of men masturbate – and the rest are lying! But it’s not just a male habit. Research shows that 89 per cent of women have masturbated, and over half do it regularly. In church, however, it’s a subject that’s often surrounded by guilt and shame. I clearly remember, as a teenager, hearing a ‘youth talk’ on the evils of masturbation – suddenly I had a new sin to worry about!

When I appealed for input for this second blog on dealing with sexual frustration as a single Christian (you can [read part one here](#)), the floodgates opened again. Some people were wracked with guilt, others felt masturbation was a positive thing – and some couldn’t see what all the fuss is about!

Some Christians strongly consider masturbation to be a sin. Theologically speaking, objections often rest on two Biblical texts. The first is Genesis 38, where Onan was struck down by God for 'spilling his seed'. However, this story is actually about Onan's refusal to impregnate his brother's widow (family etiquette, eh?). The second is Matthew 5: that by looking at someone with lust, you've already committed adultery in your heart. This may mean that a willingness or intention to commit sexual sin is as bad as actually doing so, even if circumstances prevent it (some translations say 'lustful intent'), but it's open to debate. We also read references to 'purity', without much explanation of what that actually means.

Masturbation is certainly a contentious issue. Some Christians argue that taking matters into our own hands (so to speak) invites lust into our hearts, and constitutes sex outside of marriage – and that we should flee sin and wage war on the habit. If that's you, you'll consider my take on it too nonchalant by half – because I take a more pragmatic approach. I believe it's only really a problem if it becomes compulsive or addictive (controlling you). I'm also strongly opposed to using pornography, for reasons I'll explore next month, and I think we should be mindful of dragging other people into our fantasies without their consent (the thought of being used in someone else's lurid imaginings... yuck!).

Those issues aside, I can't really get worked up about the 'evils' of masturbation. The majority of people do it, they just don't advertise it. Many singles say it helps them deal with sexual frustration and sexual temptation. **Research shows it can lower stress, aid sleep and is even beneficial for our health (lowering the risk of prostate cancer in men,** and possibly increasing resistance to heart disease and type-2 diabetes!). Christian sex therapist Maggie Ellis adds that it can help women in particular understand and feel positive about their bodies, and prepare for a healthy sex life if and when they marry.

My personal opinion (and mine alone – I'm not representing Christian Connection here) is that the guilt, shame and sense of failure that plague many Christians when they can't break the habit is far more destructive than the act itself. I'm open to other viewpoints of course, but I'd suggest it would be healthier to drop the guilt and accept that we're all human with a God-given sex drive.

Ultimately, it's between you and God. I'll give the last word to my brave army of Facebook followers...

'The Bible has something to say about all aspects of sex except masturbation. On that, it's silent. I don't believe it's a sin in itself. However, I'm careful with my

fantasies – for instance, I'd never fantasise about someone else's husband or boyfriend.'

'If any man claims not to masturbate, he's lying! But it can go deeper than sexual frustration. For me, it's more about, "No one wants me – this is the only way I'll ever feel this feeling".'

'We're told masturbation is immoral, so we feel guilty. But although there's a lot in the Bible about sexual immorality, I've found nothing that states masturbation is wrong.'

'I had an abusive father and a violent, sexually abusive fiancé. It took me years to recover. Masturbation helped me get over my debilitating fear of sex and realise that sex isn't always scary, but can be enjoyable.'

Next month: Pornography and the single Christian.