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Attitudes Toward Masturbation Scale
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The Attitudes Toward Masturbation Scale (ATMS) was developed to measure individuals’ complex and often conflicting thoughts and feelings about masturbating (Young & Muehlenhard, 2009). We found two existing scales for measuring attitudes about masturbation: Abramson and Mosher’s (1975) Negative Attitudes Toward Masturbation Inventory and Miller and Lief’s (1976) Masturbation Attitude Scale. Both are more than 30 years old, both yield only one global score, and both assess respondents’ attitudes about masturbation in general rather than about their own masturbation. The purpose of the ATMS is to measure respondents’ (a) reasons for wanting (or being tempted) to masturbate, (b) reasons for avoiding (or trying to avoid) masturbating, and (c) positive and negative feelings related to masturbating.

Description
The ATMS was developed using a multistep process. First, in a pilot study, 236 undergraduate women and men wrote answers to open-ended questions about their attitudes and feelings about masturbation. Second, we compiled their responses and used them to create scale items. We also created scale items reflecting themes identified in prior studies of attitudes toward masturbation (e.g., Clifford, 1978; Elliott & Brantley, 1997). Our preliminary scale included 223 items divided into three sections reflecting reasons for wanting—or being tempted—to masturbate, reasons for avoiding—or trying to avoid—masturbation, and feelings about masturbating. Third, a new sample of 518 undergraduate women and men rated these items on a 7-point scale. We used their responses to divide the items into subscales, based on factor loadings derived from principal components analysis, Cronbach’s alphas, and conceptual considerations (Young & Muehlenhard, 2009).

The ATMS consists of 179 items, divided into 28 subscales in three categories. (a) The 13 reasons-for-wanting-to-masturbate subscales assess themes such as pleasure, self-exploration and improvement, and mood improvement. Items are rated on a 7-point scale, from 0 (Not at all) to 6 (Very Strongly). The scale was developed and tested using samples of college students, but it could be used with other populations. It is designed so that anyone can complete it, regardless of whether they masturbate.

Response Mode and Timing
The ATMS is a paper-and-pencil questionnaire. It can be completed in about 15 to 30 minutes.

Scoring
Subscale scores are calculated by averaging the respondent’s ratings for the items on the subscale. Subscale scores can range from 0 to 6. For the reasons-for-wanting-to-masturbate subscales and the reasons-for-avoiding-masturbation subscales, higher scores reflect a greater importance of the reason tapped by that subscale. For the feelings-related-to-masturbation subscales, higher scores reflect greater intensity of feeling.

Each subscale score can be used individually to assess the specific content of each subscale. In addition, four composite scores can be calculated: the Wanting Composite (the mean of the 13 reasons-for-wanting-to-masturbate subscales), the Avoiding Composite (the mean of the 10 reasons-for-avoiding-masturbation subscales), the Negative-Feelings Composite (the mean of the Guilt, Anger, Anxiety, and Indifference subscales), and the Positive-Feelings Composite (the Satisfaction subscale score). These composites can be used to assess the respondent’s overall positive and negative attitudes toward masturbation.

The subscales and items on each are as follows:

Reasons-for-Wanting-to-Masturbate Subscales
- Pleasure: 1, 2, 35, 41, 42, 44, 50, 51, 52
- Self-Exploration and Improvement: 11, 13, 17, 23, 39, 54, 55, 56, 63, 68
- Mood Improvement: 47, 60, 62, 67
- Relaxation and Stress Relief: 6, 7, 16, 40, 46, 58, 61, 64
- Avoidance of Partner Sex: 26, 28, 29, 30, 34, 65
- Arousal Decrease: 18, 21, 33, 49, 59, 69
- Compulsion: 8, 25, 27, 32, 43
- Pleasure of Partner: 15, 66, 70
- Adherence to Social Norms: 12, 14, 19, 20, 38, 57

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Validity

Based on data from 518 undergraduate women and men, Young and Muehlenhard (2009) found significant differences between participants who masturbated and those who did not, even after controlling for gender. Compared with nonmasturbators, masturbators scored significantly higher on 9 of the 13 reasons-for-wanting-to-masturbate subscales and the Satisfaction subscale, and significantly lower on 5 of the 10 reasons-for-avoiding-masturbation subscales and the Guilt, Anger, Anxiety, and Indifference subscales. Consistent with meta-analytic findings that more men than women masturbate (Oliver & Hyde, 1993; Petersen & Hyde, 2007), there were significant gender differences on 18 of the 28 subscales. Men generally reported stronger reasons for wanting to masturbate, weaker reasons for avoiding masturbation, and stronger positive and weaker negative feelings related to masturbation. When controlling for masturbation status, there were fewer gender differences, but some remained: For the reasons-for-wanting-to-masturbate subscales, women scored higher on Self-Exploration and Improvement, Avoidance of Partner Sex, and Pleasure of Partner; men scored higher on Boredom. For reasons-for-avoiding-masturbation subscales, women scored higher on No Desire or Interest, Fear of Negative Social Evaluation, and Sex Negativity. For feelings-related-to-masturbation subscales, women scored higher on Anxiety.

Young and Muehlenhard (2009) performed a cluster analysis on participants’ subscale scores. They identified four clusters: The enthusiastic cluster had high Wanting subscale scores and low Avoiding subscale scores. The lukewarm cluster had low Wanting subscale scores and even lower Avoiding subscales scores. The high-guilt cluster had low Wanting subscale scores and high Avoiding subscales scores. The ambivalent cluster had the highest Wanting subscale scores and the highest Avoiding subscale scores. These clusters showed numerous differences in the percentages of women and men in the cluster, the percentages who reported masturbating, and their qualitative comments about masturbation.

In another study (Stroupe, 2008), 210 undergraduate women completed the ATMS. Compared with women who had never masturbated, those who masturbated had significantly higher Wanting Composite and Positive-Feelings Composite scores and significantly lower Avoiding Composite and Negative-Feelings Composite scores; scores for women who masturbated infrequently were intermediate. Analyses of subscale scores provided additional information.

Other Information

With appropriate citation, the ATMS may be copied and used for educational, research, and clinical purposes, without permission. The authors would appreciate receiving a summary of any research using this scale.

References

Exhibit

Attitudes Toward Masturbation Scale

Reasons for Wanting to Masturbate

Whether they masturbate or not, people may want to masturbate (or be tempted to masturbate) for many different reasons. Below is a list of possible reasons. Please rate how strong each of the reasons is for your wanting to masturbate or being tempted to masturbate, regardless of whether or not you actually masturbate.

0       1       2       3       4       5       6
Not a Reason
A Not Very Reason
Important Reason

For you, how strong are the following reasons for wanting to (or being tempted to) masturbate?

1. If I’m feeling horny
2. I find it pleasurable
3. If there is nothing else to do
4. If I’m not getting as much sex as I want
5. If I’m bored
6. To relieve stress
7. If I’m anxious
8. Because—even though I try—I just can’t stop myself
9. Because it’s a substitute for sex with a partner
10. Out of sexual frustration
11. I hope that masturbating will help me reach orgasm with a partner
12. Someone else thinks I should (e.g., a friend or a dating partner)
13. To explore my own sexuality
14. So I could say that I’ve done it (it’s something to talk about)
15. My partner wants to watch me do it
16. It’s a good way to take a break (e.g., a break from studying, etc.)
17. I’m curious about it
18. If I want to avoid unwanted arousal later
19. My friends have masturbated, and I want to be able to talk with them about it
20. “Everyone” does it, and I want to feel “sexually normal”
21. If I’m so sexually aroused that it’s interfering with other things I want or need to do
22. If I don’t have a partner to have sex with
23. To make myself a better sexual partner (e.g., to figure out how to achieve orgasm or to become more comfortable having orgasms with my partner)
24. Masturbating helps me keep my mind off sex with a partner
25. It’s a compulsive sexual behavior
26. Masturbating helps me remain a virgin
27. I just do it without really thinking about it
28. Masturbating makes it easier to avoid sex with a partner, and I don’t want to have sex with a partner for moral reasons (e.g., I don’t want to have sex before marriage)
29. Masturbating makes it easier to avoid sex with a partner, and I don’t want to have sex with a partner for health reasons (e.g., I don’t want to risk sexually transmitted diseases or pregnancy)
30. Masturbating makes it easier to avoid sex with a partner, and I don’t want to have sex with a partner for self-esteem reasons (e.g., I don’t feel comfortable being sexual with someone else)
31. If I have a partner, but my partner refuses to have sex
32. I feel an uncontrollable urge to do it
33. If I want to decrease my sexual arousal so I can focus on something else
34. It’s more moral to masturbate than to have sex with a partner
35. If I want to have an orgasm
36. I get aroused by sexual activities that are not socially acceptable, so I fantasize about them during masturbation
37. I get aroused by sexual activities that are not possible in real life, so I fantasize about them during masturbation (e.g., sex with a movie star, sex on a beach, etc.)
38. Because I hear about it from TV, movies, magazines, etc.
39. Masturbating improves my sexual health
40. To help me fall asleep
41. Because it’s fun
42. Because I know exactly how to stimulate myself and maximize my pleasure
43. It’s a habit
44. If I am already sexually aroused (e.g., from watching a movie, reading a magazine)
45. Because I feel like no one is attracted to me
46. If I want to relax
47. If I’m angry
48. If I want to exercise my imagination
49. So that I can focus my concentration on a task after masturbating
50. Because I deserve to experience pleasure
51. If I see someone or something that is arousing
52. If I have an urge to do something sexual
53. Because I’m not comfortable enough with my body to be sexual with someone else
54. To learn how to give myself pleasure
55. To gain more sexual confidence
56. Because it’s good exercise
57. Because my friends masturbate
58. To calm myself down
59. So that I can stop thinking about masturbating
60. If I feel frustrated about something else
61. It makes me feel peaceful
62. It distracts me when I’m feeling down
63. To try a new method (e.g., sex toys, pornography)
64. It’s an escape
65. To avoid using another person for sex
66. Because it arouses my partner when he/she knows that I masturbated
67. If I’m in a bad mood
68. To learn how to have better orgasms
69. If I’m already sexually aroused, and I want to decrease my level of sexual arousal
70. Because it arouses my partner when I masturbate in front of him/her
71. If I’m feeling unattractive
72. I enjoy my fantasies during masturbation

**Reasons for Avoiding (or for Trying to Avoid) Masturbating**

Whether they masturbate or not, people might avoid (or try to avoid) masturbating for many different reasons. Below is a list of possible reasons. Please rate how strong each of the reasons is for you avoiding (or trying to avoid) masturbating, regardless of whether or not you actually masturbate.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>0</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not a Reason</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>A Very Important Reason</td>
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<tr>
<td>A Moderately Important Reason</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*For you, how strong are the following reasons for avoiding (or trying to avoid) masturbating?*

73. It’s against my religion
74. It’s against my morals or values
75. It’s against my parents’ morals or values
76. I’m just not interested
77. It just doesn’t appeal to me
78. I am uncomfortable with any sexual behavior
Masturbation

79. It would make me feel cheap
80. If I am committed to someone
81. I would feel guilty about it
82. I am anxious about sexual behavior
83. I know I’d regret it
84. I fear it will damage my reputation
85. I feel uncomfortable or embarrassed about my body
86. I think it would be physically uncomfortable
87. It seems weird to me
88. I feel strange doing it
89. I think I should have more self-control
90. If I’m currently sexually satisfied
91. Society says it’s wrong
92. If I’m stressed
93. I’m afraid of someone knowing I masturbate
94. It makes me feel lonely
95. If I’m afraid of being caught
96. It makes me feel sexually inadequate
97. It’s bad for my health
98. If I’m in a committed relationship
99. I like to feel in control of my urges
100. I’m not sure how to masturbate
101. I don’t like how it feels
102. It’s embarrassing to me
103. Because I like intercourse better
104. Because I like any sexual contact with a partner better
105. I feel bad about myself afterwards
106. If I’m depressed
107. Orgasms are better with a partner
108. My partner doesn’t want me to do it
109. If I’m worried about something else
110. If I’ve recently had sex
111. It makes me less able to orgasm during sex
112. It makes me less horny during sex
113. I want to improve my self-discipline
114. It’s boring
115. I feel like I’m cheating on my partner
116. My fantasies during masturbation bother me
117. If I’ve had a bad day
118. It’s a waste of time
119. It seems pointless
120. I don’t find it sexually arousing
121. Other people might find me gross
122. My family is against it
123. My friends are against it
124. It makes me feel empty inside
125. I was raised to believe it’s wrong
126. It makes me feel ashamed
127. It’s disrespectful to myself
128. If I’m satisfied with the quantity of the sex I’m having
129. If I’m satisfied with the quality of the sex I’m having
130. My sexual thoughts during masturbation bother me
131. Masturbation in an adult is immature
132. It makes me feel like I’m sinning against myself
133. It’s not as good as sex
134. It does not fit with my religious views
Feelings About Masturbation

Check which set of directions applies to you:

_____ If you masturbate: People feel many different things when they masturbate. Below is a list of possible feelings. How strongly, if at all, do you usually experience these feelings when you masturbate?

_____ If you don’t masturbate: People feel many different things when they masturbate. Below is a list of possible feelings. How strongly, if at all, do you think you would usually experience these feelings if you did masturbate?

0       1       2       3       4       5       6
Not at all Somewhat Very Strongly

How strongly do you experience this feeling when you masturbate?

OR

How strongly would you experience this feeling if you did masturbate?

135. happy 158. refreshed
136. guilty 159. frustrated
137. empty 160. aggressive
138. pathetic 161. angry
139. healthy 162. nervous
140. indifferent 163. content
141. nothing 164. unemotional
142. strange 165. stressed
143. embarrassed 166. attractive
144. anxious 167. immoral
145. tense 168. remorseful
146. horny 169. disgusted
147. focused 170. thrilled
148. awkward 171. disappointed
149. good 172. detached
150. calm 173. aroused
151. relieved 174. relaxed
152. in control 175. passive
153. ashamed 176. comfortable
154. regretful 177. satisfied
155. degraded 178. invigorated
156. pleased 179. sinful
157. connected to myself