

Chapter 32 Solitary 'Pleasures'



General Information

Topic

Masturbation.

Content

- ▶ What is masturbation?
- ▶ Is it healthy: a) mentally; b) physically?
- ▶ Pleasure versus happiness.
- ▶ Combating masturbation.
- ▶ A matter of maturity.

Objectives

Knowing

- ▶ The difference between pleasure and happiness.
- ▶ Masturbation is seeking pleasure outside the natural context.
- ▶ Understanding the workings of the male body.

Accepting

- ▶ Rejecting masturbation as self-abuse.
- ▶ Cultivating strength and self-control to avoid the habit of masturbation.

Doing

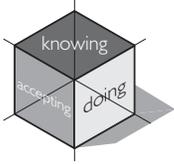
- ▶ Respecting the body and sexuality so as to avoid self-abuse.

Areas of Human Development to be Emphasised

- ▶ Self-control.
- ▶ Preparation for intimacy as opposed to isolation.

Class Plan

1 Knowing



Motivation

Acknowledge that discussing this topic is embarrassing. Assure students that no personal questions will be asked of them. Mention that, like pornography, masturbation is primarily, although not solely, a male problem.

Story context:

Mr Radigan continues his health and hygiene classes, and focuses on masturbation.

Introduction

Masturbation is not healthy for the mind or the body.

Presentation

Key Ideas

- ▶ Some people erroneously believe that masturbation is harmless—even healthy.
- ▶ The relational effects are the most serious, but there can also be physical effects.

Topic Development

A What is masturbation?

Start with Mr Radigan's definition: *The primary organs used in sexual intimacy are the genital organs. We all know how sensitive they are—get kicked in the wrong place and you really know about it! But rub or stroke the genital organs and the sensation is altogether different: it gives a sense of pleasure, the pleasure which is intended for intercourse. This is called masturbation.*

B Is it healthy: a) mentally; b) physically?

Some people, including some medical experts, believe that masturbation, far from being harmful, is actually healthy. This stance is questionable on the physical level, and contradicts the evidence on the psychological level since everybody agrees that it can isolate a person from others socially.

As to the physical effects of masturbation, a regular habit becomes rough on the penis. The blood vessels of the male pelvic region become gorged and congested with blood. These vessels are very long and irregular, and if they become congested, they can form little pockets (the technical term is micro-diverticuli) that can easily harbour bacteria. Infections in this area of the body are hard to reach with antibiotics because it is so well-protected by nature. So these infections can go on for a long time, and they can cause permanent damage—even sterility. Male sterility is on the rise at present, and looser attitudes towards masturbation could be a contributing factor.¹⁸ I should say that these risks are small and they are not going to come about from occasional lapses. But they are another reason why the habit is worth avoiding.

As Mr Radigan points out in answer to Alan's question about 'wet dreams': *they happen in your sleep—they're beyond your power to control. The formal name for them is 'nocturnal emissions'. It's when your body*

18. Isidori, Aldo. *Etica della Andrologia [= Ethics of Andrology]*. Palermo: G.Russo, 2003. (The author is Professor of Andrology at La Sapienza University).

See also Nieschlag, E. and Behre, W. *Andrology: Male Reproductive Health and Dysfunction*. Berlin: Springer, 2001.

releases semen in the night. That's your body's natural way of releasing itself—you can't stop it or make it happen. You just have to trust your body to take care of releasing itself in that way."

Alan mentions that masturbation can have the healthy effect of releasing stress. However, Mr Radigan says, "There are better ways to reduce stress."

Emotionally, masturbation requires fantasy—a type of unhealthy mental pornography.

Eric Erickson calls the phase of psycho-sexual development that follows adolescence 'intimacy versus isolation'. Without success in this phase, life is incomplete. It depends upon success in earlier phases. Masturbation is an isolated affair. When Alan mentions that masturbation can help people learn what gives them pleasure, Mr Radigan replies:

"It teaches us about pleasuring ourselves, not someone else. It's self-centred. Being with another person is very different. Masturbation means you've learned a lot of sexual responses that are not suitable with another person. It takes away the 'us,' or the mutual pleasure dance of sexual response."

Masturbation is like playing solitaire and then hoping to be good at games like bridge that require a partner. It teaches nothing about rewarding relationships that are integral to social and sexual life, and which must be built with effort, virtue, and skill.

C Pleasure versus happiness

Life's pleasures need a right context. The examples of 'freedom' in Chapter 1 could be reviewed. Freedom is always linked to responsibility. If we eat only on impulse, ignoring the body's need for proper nutrition, we will become unhealthy and fat, and lose out accordingly. Any pleasure must be taken with a responsible attitude; if indulged in the wrong way or circumstances, at the wrong time, or with the wrong person, so-called 'pleasures' lead to unhappiness.

Sexual pleasure is meant to be shared between husband and wife. Mr Radigan says of it, *"It nurtures closeness and intimacy. The endorphins and oxytocins which are released in sexual activity are intended to make us feel bonded to one another and fulfilled. The problem with masturbation is that these hormones are released only in relationship to ourselves, and the fulfilment is a cheat."*

Masturbation also diminishes us as people because it ignores the respect due to the gift of procreation. To take part in giving life to another human being is an awesome responsibility and should be treated accordingly. Mr Radigan says: *"There is another reason why masturbation isn't good for us, and that is that it reduces the respect we should have for the gift of fatherhood. The ability to give life is very precious. It's bigger than us, something which goes beyond us, something which is touched by mystery."*

Emphasise that the purpose of sex is not physical pleasure—this occurs incidentally. The whole person, mind, heart, body and soul, is involved. It should be a bonding act of intimacy within the context of total commitment. Then it leads to happiness with another person, not just the empty pleasure of yielding to uncontrolled sexual impulses.

D Combating masturbation

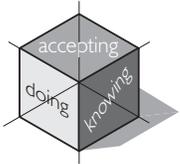
Mr Radigan gives some practical tips for avoiding masturbation, centring round right attitudes to those of the opposite sex—they are precious people, not objects for pleasure. *"Avoid situations that lead to thinking about sex. We've already spoken about pornography. But there are other things. For example, don't listen to sexy songs or talk about sex. Avoid dirty jokes—either telling them or listening to them."* He advises against spending a lot of time in bed, daydreaming or listening to music. He suggests instead that students release their energy by playing sports, going for walks, running, and getting going physically. That way they will also feel much better.

E A matter of maturity

Like the use of pornography, masturbation retards the maturing process because it isolates one from healthy relationships, which stimulate growth. Often, people use it to escape their problems.

Charlie sees this point well demonstrated after Mr Radigan's talk: *After class, Charlie was surprised how much most of the boys seemed to just take Mr Radigan's talk in their stride. It was quite a contrast to last week, he thought, when there had been a lot of sniggering after the pornography session. Oh well, they were all growing up, he supposed. That's the funny thing about becoming a man, he mused. The very things you think make you grown up and manly—like playing around with your sexuality—are the very things that make you remain a boy.*

2 Accepting



Guided Work

Emphasise that we do not judge or condemn others. Students need this perspective to help them choose options that will contribute to a healthy and happy life.

Activity 1

Ask students to think about situations in which people act in a self-centred way, and the ill effects this has on others and society. Newspapers may be helpful in this. The story of a crime, for instance, might show the criminal disregarding other people's rights or property for his own enrichment.

Encourage students to analyse the self-centred elements in these situations. Is it good for people to do things that encourage self-centredness?

Activity 2

Ask students to talk about situations (it could be from their own lives) when someone acted altruistically (for the benefit of others). What benefits came from acting this way?

Again, newspaper stories about altruism, a Good Samaritan, benevolent groups, etc, could be used to show how acting for others benefits society.

Activity 3

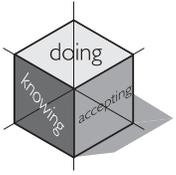
Ask students, in groups, to answer the questions in Activity 32 in their Books (p.235).

Activity 32

We've spoken before in this book about there being no freedom without responsibility.

1. How do 'free' attitudes about sexual matters take away from our freedom and the freedom of others?
2. What is the difference between 'pleasure' and 'happiness'? Which one is temporary, which is lasting? Name some things in life that can bring us pleasure but leave us unhappy in the end.
3. Name some things that are pleasant in life, but lead to unhappiness in the end.

3 Doing



Evaluation

Activity 1

In class, moderate a debate between several students or between the whole class on the situations they have looked at.

Explain that criminals start with small selfish acts and progress to serious crime.

Activity 2

List positive examples, contrasting them with the results from Activity 1. It is better if the results of both exercises provide a positive vision.

Activity 3

In class, ask each group to find common answers to the 3 questions.

Hold a debate, allowing all students to speak. Ensure that students understand that sexual pleasure now might hurt their chances for future happiness; happiness, on the other hand, includes pleasure, which is part, for instance, of a happy marriage.

Specific Resolution

From the perspective of physical and mental health, to make the best possible choices—not to masturbate.