

Audio Porn

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As a result of lockdown, there has been an increasing experimenting with alternative ways of having sex - for example, a jump in the number of people discovering the pleasures of video cam sex, and in particular sexting. There has also been an reported increase in porn use. The recent growth of audio porn can be seen against this backdrop. It is also worth noting that audio books in general are a huge and growing market, and audio porn is part of this too.

The benefits of audio porn are two-fold: those associated with with masturbation and fantasy in general, and then those benefits which are specific to this particular form of erotica.

Understanding masturbation & fantasy in general

There has been a revolution in the last 60 years in the way we think about masturbation. It used to be seen as the somewhat B-grade form of sex - (that is, if wasn't seen as downright grubby or even sinful!) Nowadays, thankfully, we can agree that masturbation is not only healthy and fun but virtually universal (even people that self-identify as asexual will sometimes masturbate). Perhaps, more importantly, it may *in some ways* be the most fundamental form of human sexuality, rather than couple sex.

This is not just because masturbation is more frequent as a sexual activity than couple sex. It is also because eroticism - the really interesting, mental and emotional aspect of sexuality - is not as based in couples, but in each individual. What turns one person on, is unlikely to be exactly the same for their partner. And the private thoughts and feelings that 'make our lights go on' are what we use when we masturbate. So, masturbation is *closer* to our actual sexuality than our behaviour in couple-sex (which is best seen as the complex process of two sexualities meeting.)

Of course , there is a long history of saying that sex is all about couples and is an expression of love, and that our individual erotic thoughts and feelings have very little to do with it. In fact, according to this myth, sex is co-created in the couple and - if we love each other - sexual desire will arise naturally as a product of love. We even change our language: when we were just dating, before we loved each other, we just *had sex*: but now we are serious, and love each other, we *make love*. Which is not only one hundred times more rich, but clearly morally superior!

Except that, for most people, long-term relationships generally deliver *less* sexual interest rather than more. So, it appear that loving someone doesn't - in the real world - actually help out sexual desire.

We are so wedded to the idea that couple sex is an expression of love, we even try to drag masturbation into the formula, by quaintly calling it 'self-love'! But masturbation doesn't happen because we love ourselves - it happens because we want some fun (or want to sleep, or displace anxiety, or stop feeling bored, or whatever).

Love cannot explain the erotic thoughts and feelings that offer us a transcendent moment, where we experience ourselves and the world in that heightened way. Masturbation is healthy, therefore, not just because the physiological effects of orgasm are good for you, but primarily because it is the primary way of experiencing our individual eroticism.

This is particularly important if we understand *our individual erotic thoughts, preferences and fantasies are meaningful*. They relate to our early experiences, either as defences against shame or guilt, or as a way of treating early, uncomfortable emotional experiences and replaying them as pleasurable ones.

They can be seen as a kind of mental re-enactment, this time around replaying the original uncomfortable emotional situation with pleasure. (In Michael Bader's now-famous phrase, our erotic thoughts take us 'from 'tragedy to triumph.')

So, erotic thoughts are a kind of individual therapeutic programme for each one of us. This explains why the type of fantasies we prefer are relatively consistent during out our lives. And why often there is an edginess to them.

For example: a child who felt not listened to, helpless in the face of their family's stronger will, might grow up to wanting full control in their lives, but simultaneously enjoy a submissive role in the bedroom, recreating the painful early experience and injecting it with eroticism. (This thesis I think also explains the common appearance of inversion in sexual fantasy.)

Another example: the child who felt the parental bond was stronger - either in passion or perhaps aggression - than their own relationship with the parents, may feel excluded, and experience a longing for the other relationship. The adult then creates an unconscious therapeutic re-engagement with the pain of being on the outside in the fantasy of voyeurism. Watching becomes more exciting than doing.

It is often said that, if you know how to pleasure yourself, you will be more able to show a partner how to pleasure you. This is a good reason to masturbate. But equally, if you engage with your own fantasies, and know something of how they work, you will be more likely to achieve a understanding of your sexual wants and needs, and, crucially, your differences, in couple-sex. This is not just about achieving better sex - it's equally about feeling accepted sexually, and understanding and integrating, our past.

Understanding audio porn

Porn - and other erotica - is a perhaps the most common aid to masturbation. One of the main problem with mainstream visual porn is that is is clearly *gendered*. This is not to say that only men enjoy porn - in fact, research shows that women who masturbate use porn in much the same way as men.

The problem is two-fold. Firstly, the majority of heterosexual visual porn uses camera angles predominantly from the male point of view. Finding female point-of-view

heterosexual porn is quite difficult. It has its own category - 'POV', or 'point of view, meaning *female* point of view.

Secondly, the content usually depicts acts which guys enjoy - blow jobs, penetrative sex, and anal sex. Less common is oral sex for women, or a lover using their hand. The most common act depicted is penetrative sex: despite the fact that very few women climax during penetrative sex.

Without looking here at the politics of the porn industry in general, there is, of course, a misogynistic aspect to the content of much porn too.

All in all, mainstream visual porn may not work for women in quite the same way it does for men. There are more visual porn sites in recent times that try and address this gender imbalance with female-friendly erotica. But one interesting alternative is text-based porn and audio porn.

Text-based porn sites contain hundreds of fantasies, usually classified by type (BDSM, Threesomes, Cheating, etc) and women often report they have a less gendered flavour than their visual counterparts: or, at least, there is a breadth to the categories that makes them more attractive. (It is significant in terms of understanding gender and text-based erotica that '50 Shades of Grey' was popular predominantly with women rather than men, despite the fact that the BDSM *content* may appeal to equal number of people of both genders).

Text-based porn can be useful as ways of exploring one's own erotic ideas, and communicating them to a partner. In fact, before the internet, the late Nancy Friday (the American sexologist and psychotherapist) published collections of female fantasies (still available) and which were often used in psychosexual therapy to open up discussion for couples about fantasy.

More recently, audio porn arrived: offering a wide range of categorised fantasy, again without such obvious male bias. Perhaps one reason for this is the old myth that men are 'more visual' than women - so perhaps the providers of audio porn assume that their audience may contain a higher proportion of women.

The great advantage to audio porn over both visual and text porn is that *you can close your eyes!* Most people close their eyes if they are masturbating to their own fantasies, to reduce distraction. But audio porn offers a unique combination: it is an external stimulus to masturbation like visual or text porn, but also allows the the drift-off closed eyes of private fantasy. For some, a perfect combination.

Audio porn also has the effect of *lulling* that we all remember from being read stories as kids: it feels comforting to be told a story. But in this case, we are adults, and the story is designed to excite us. Consequently, *we get both that comforting feeling and the arousal* at the same time. At the same, of course, listening can also can feel more private.

Most people at different times have tried phone sex, which - if it doesn't make you laugh, can be fun. But the difference is that you are probably expected to participate (!), whereas in audio porn the pleasure is one-way, which can make climax easier.

Clients' experience

Lockdown was unhealthy for couples. The affect of forced togetherness was rarely positive. In a relationship, we benefit from being strong individuals with our own lives, friends and spending time apart. Without this, we become two-dimensional to ourselves and to each other. And desire wanes. Desire can flourish only across a gap.

As sex become more difficult as a result, many clients reported either that they had turned down the volume on their libido (partly consciously, partly just finding they were less interested). At the same time, some people looked for different ways of feeling sexy. Old boyfriend and girlfriends might show up online, and chatting might blur into sexting. There was undoubtedly an explosion of virtual infidelity.

Women in particular reported that, having to say what they wanted - in a sext - took them into a new experience of sex that was unfamiliar and exciting. Couple-sex does not always make it easy to ask for what we want (particularly since historically the idea of autonomous female desire is seen as either non-existent, bad or mad).

In the same way, many clients reported that they were experimenting with more private forms of sexual pleasure, including the relatively new area of audio porn, and learning more about their sexual identity.

If one good thing has come out of lockdown, it is probably that it has freed up our experience of sex in some ways. Audio porn may be part of this new era of discovery.

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