



Top 10 Sex Myths Dispelled

There are a lot of myths floating around when it comes to sex. Below are 10 of the most common.

Myth 1: Sex Requires Intercourse

In reality, sex has more to do with intimate connection, creativity, and pleasure than just intercourse alone. Intercourse alone is a limited idea of sex that totally quashes the diversity of the human experience.

Implied by this requirement is that sex is only heterosexual intercourse, erections, and orgasm. If we consider sex to be the time until one or more of us orgasm, then that could be anywhere from 1 minute to 7, with those who have a penis.

Except here's the thing—sex is so much more than just intercourse. Our work is to expand the erotic canvas, to focus more on the pleasure of not only the body, but also of intimate connection and partnership. This means that sex can be as long as we want it to be and doesn't require orgasm or a penis.

Myth 2: Masturbation is Bad for You

Fun fact: masturbation has been linked with a number of health benefits, including releasing tension, releasing feel good hormones, and easing menstrual cramps. Don't take my word for it, look it up for yourself.

Even better, you really can't masturbate too much. Yes, masturbation can cause some people distress, particularly around issues of shame or guilt, but it is not unhealthy all on its own.

Some benefits other benefits of masturbation include:

- Learning what feels good
- Enjoying the pleasure of touch
- Boosting self-confidence

If we expand our sexual canvas away from a focus on genitalia, to embrace a whole body experience, masturbation becomes an integral part of mapping the body's pleasure centers.

Side note: masturbation techniques vary and can impact partnered sexual experiences. For instance, a person with a penis might apply more pressure during masturbation than may be present during intercourse, which makes their arousal more challenging to peak. This could prompt masturbation to be preferred over partnered sex, so it may be helpful at times to decrease masturbation or vary the technique in favor of partnered sex.

Myth 3: Size Matters!

The truth is that sizeism is a tired trope that comes with stigma, anxiety, and low esteem, whether it's related to genitalia or anything else. Sizeism is a form of discrimination based on prejudice. Many of us already suffer greatly from poor body image and performance anxiety.

Humans come in a variety of shapes, sizes, genders, ethnicities, ages, abilities, sexual preferences, and backgrounds. Penises and vaginas also come in a variety of sizes and shapes. Vaginas expand and contract with penetration, particularly with an increase in arousal. When fearful or anxious, those same muscles can contract to make sex painful, if not impossible.

This variety is awesome. There is nothing more pleasurable than diversity in existence. It is way past time to celebrate our uniqueness.

Worse yet, sizeism often gets in the way of appreciating what really makes sex great, like compatibility, interests, values, education, mindfulness, and good old fashioned communication. If someone is worrying about size, there is definitely something else going on.

Myth 4: Sex Requires an Erection

Considering the sales of Viagra, you might think this is true. But the reality is that sex involves a variety of activities, most of which focus more on connection, fun, partnership, and creativity than erections or orgasms.

While many men, regardless of age or experience report a lack of erection from time to time, this does not suggest a problem. Lack of an erection does not mean a lack of desire. By focusing so much on the goal of an erection or orgasm, people can miss out on being really present with pleasure.

When we expand our erotic canvas, we can find many things that lead to pleasure. Putting pressure on ourselves or our partners to get an erection only decreases the pleasure making potential!

Myth 5: Sex Cannot Be Pleasurable without an Awesome Orgasm

The truth is that orgasm is just the bonus action for sexual arousal and sex *should* be pleasurable with or without an orgasm. Remember that sex is so much more than genitalia and orgasms.

Some people never have an orgasm, while others have multiple ones. They can vary in intensity and are highly subjective in experience and context. This means that not all orgasms are created equal. One may not be as awesome as another.

For those with a vagina, orgasms can be thwarted by a lack of stimulation. For those with a penis, psychological factors can precipitate rapid ejaculation, such as a phobic response to sexual intimacy, performance anxiety and more.

Whatever the issue, by shifting focus away from the pressures of having an orgasm to just enjoying the whole experience is a game changer for increasing pleasure.

Myth 6: Pornography is Bad

Yes, granted, there is some bad pornography out there. And you may be thinking that all porn is bad, though here is the thing – Some pornography highlights consent and focuses on intimate and mutual overall pleasure while other porn has a hyper focus on genitals and orgasms specifically. However, that doesn't mean all porn is necessarily bad, and it could even be good for you or your relationship. It's simply one of many tools we can use to help increase sexual interest and responsiveness.

For a long time, humans have viewed sexual desire and arousal as only a spontaneous act and neglected the kind of responsiveness that can be nurtured and inspired. Taking ownership and embodying your sexual self is a good thing! You don't *need* pornography to do it though. There are other options for stimulating sexual interest, including journaling, erotic literature, fantasizing, wearing sexy clothing, flirting, masturbation, and more.

Just keep in mind that while pornography does not accurately portray sex or a diversity in humans, it can be sexually stimulating, prompting arousal so that we can show up for our real life intimacy.

On the flip side, one can also lean too heavily on porn, which can detract from showing for our real life intimacy. The key is to understand the limitations of porn and if need be, seek out other stimulus tools that better affirms our sense of self.

Myth 7: Pornography Accurately Portrays Sex

This is definitely not the case! Pornography never accurately portrays sex. It's an industry, which means when filming, they tend to go for the money shots and focus on genitalia, to the exclusion of all the other diverse elements that make up "sex" for any given person.

How people experience sex in the real world is very different, not just from porn, but also from person to person. We all have sex in very wonderful and unique ways.

Another challenge of porn is the focus on sexual stereotypes and tropes. Porn rarely shows diversity of breast, penis, and body types. It also does not highlight sexual communication and intimacy. This can create unrealistic expectations, not only in our body confidence, but also in intimacy and how we treat others.

Myth 8: Men Want Sex More Than Women

This is arguably one of the most pervasive untruths out there. Men do not necessarily own the corner market on high sexual interest. Everyone can have higher or lower sexual interest at any point in their life, regardless of gender.

What chafes my hide about this myth is the inherent misogyny found within it. This kind of misinformation also puts a lot of pressure on men to be more active sexually when they may not actually want to be. That means they might feel like they can't say no to sex or could even suffer a loss of confidence over not meeting social expectations.

It's important to recognize that sexual interest can vary for everyone, that we are all sexually responsive, and good sexual communication is key. If you don't feel like having sex, don't **want** to get into the mood, and have difficulty saying no, then learning how to speak up about your wants and needs can lead to more enjoyable sex, regardless of your gender.

Myth 9: Sex is Painful

Sex definitely shouldn't be painful! Sexual pain (i.e. dyspareunia) that occurs during sexual penetration, can inhibit sexual arousal and may create or increase anxiety.

However, sex **should** feel good, so if clients are experiencing any pain or discomfort, they should get it checked out. While anyone can experience pain or discomfort with penetration, orgasm, and touch, there is usually a reason.

For instance, if one has a penis, prostate problems can create painful ejaculation. Meanwhile, touch discomfort or pain is the most common pain disorder for the vulva. Also, if one has a vagina and feels anxious or tense, the muscles can contract and create discomfort upon penetration.

Another thing to keep in mind is that if someone has intercourse without enough lubrication, there could be pain and

discomfort that stems from that. Whenever something doesn't feel good, we should tell our partners, consult with our doctors, and adjust accordingly by slowing down, using a lubricant, and/or trying something different.

Myth 10: Everyone is Having Sex

Granted, sometimes it might *seem* like everyone is having more sex than you, but the truth is that every one of us, regardless of age, sex, or gender, experiences varying degrees of sexual interest and action.

Some people *want* to have a lot of sex (and do!), while others... not so much. What is important is that we be true to ourselves. Whether a client believes they are having too much sex or not enough, encourage them to try taking a deeper look into their values, needs, beliefs, and ideas, and skip worrying about what other people are doing. Life is definitely more fun that way!



MELISSA HARGRAVE is an inspirational speaker, therapist, and clinical supervisor, who mentors therapists to provide sex positive psychotherapy and advocates for healthy sexuality across the lifespan.

A member of AASECT and WPATH, she has presented on a wide range of topics promoting healthy sexuality and sex positive psychotherapy. With passion, energy, and a warm personal style, Melissa shares her knowledge with the hope of building a smarter, connected, and vibrant community of sex positive therapists. Melissa has a talent for connecting with her audiences and providing actionable strategies *for positive change*. Today she is most invited to speak to therapists on sex and relationships.

With over ten years' experience as a licensed marriage and family therapist, and licensed professional counselor, she knows one intervention does NOT fit all in this work. Melissa has an appreciation for the interventions, strategies, and methodology it takes to successfully work with a variety of clients. She also knows that the best psychotherapy or sex therapy in the world is useless without the integration of a variety of treatment options and considerations. Today, she seeks to inspire all therapists to include sexual assessment and treatment in their work with clients.

Audiences describe her as warm, direct, and engaging. Her presentations are known for being as practical as they are inspiring. She is a radical advocate for more inclusive, sex positive therapists. And a skilled teacher who can help therapists see more clearly the clinical possibilities open to them in their work with human sexuality.