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FEMINISTS DO IT BETTER (AND OTHER SEX TIPS)

I'm better in bed than you are. And I have feminism to thank for it.

There's nothing more hackneyed than the notion that feminists hate sex (but I guess if you buy the ugly, man-hating stereotype, hating sex follows). Feminists do it better 'cause we know how to get past all the bullshit.

Women's sexuality is often treated like a commodity, a joke, or a sin. This is especially true for us younger women who end up getting totally screwed up by social influences telling us what "hot" or desirable behavior is. (Generally, it's flashing boobs or faux-lesbian make-out sessions. Never been a fan of either.)

When you're getting abstinence-only education during the day and *Girls Gone Wild* commercials at night, it's not exactly easy to develop a healthy sexuality. You're taught that sex before marriage is bad bad bad, but that if you want to be a spring-break hottie, you'd better start making out for the camera.

While these two messages are seemingly conflicting, they're actually promoting the same idea—that young women can't make their own decisions about sex. Whether it's a teacher telling you not to or a cameraman telling you how to, having sex that's about making yourself happy is a big no-no these days. Shit, you can't even buy vibrators in some states!

To get unscrewed, you really need to take a close look at all the insane things stacked up against women having a good old time in bed. And after marveling at the ridiculousness of things like the sexual double standard and the faux-sexy crap that's forced down your throat, you just learn to say fuck it.

Just (Don't) Do It

Women are taught that we're only supposed to have sex under these bizarre arbitrary guidelines: only if you're married; only if it's for procreation; and only with another girl if guys can watch. So unless you're going to do it the way other people want, just don't.

You're a Dirty Lollipop

Nothing freaks me out/pisses me off more than abstinence-only education. Basically, it's the most naive form of sex

education you can get: Sex is bad, don't have it until you're married, contraception doesn't work. Somehow educators think this will convince kids to not have sex. Compare that to comprehensive sex education that teaches abstinence but also makes sure that teens have medically correct information about contraception, STDs, and the like. It's reality-based sex ed that understands that no matter how many scare tactics you throw at people, they're still going to do what they want.

This isn't to say that I think holding off on sex is bad—abstain all you want, ladies. But if you're holding off, do it because you're waiting to have sex on your own terms. And don't *not* have sex because you think you're worthless if you do—which is exactly what these classes are saying.

As it stands now, the government is spending \$178 million a year to tell young women they're big whores if they give it up,¹ and various other untruths. Most (80 frigging percent)² abstinence-only education programs give out false information about sex—all of it sexist, most of it bordering on the ridiculous.

The medical misinformation is not just untrue—it's straight-up dangerous. For example, these programs teach not only that condoms don't protect you from pregnancy or STDs and HIV, but that they could cause cancer.³ (Condom cancer?) After kids are exposed to this bullshit, they are less likely to use contraception—'cause it doesn't work anyway, right? Because of abstinence-only education, we're going to have a generation of sexual dum-dums.

It seems unfathomable, but, somehow, teaching the truth about sex and contraception is just too scary for some folks. Conservatives and right-wing religious groups think that it's going to make us all slutty. I know proponents of the all-holy abstinence agenda bristle at the idea of girls being taught

In 2006, conservatives and religious groups tried to block a vaccine that prevents cervical cancer (which kills 200,000 women worldwide every year) because they were afraid it would make teen girls slutty. Better cancer than sex, apparently.

how to put a condom on a penis, even though studies show that real sex ed (you know—the kind that tells the truth) significantly reduces teenage girls' STD rates. Not to mention comprehensive sex ed actually delays teen sex and ensures kids are making informed decisions. Isn't that more important than being afraid that your kid isn't a virgin?

Apparently, not so much. Schools that get federal funding for abstinence-only sex ed *can't* teach safe-sex practices. You heard right. They can't even talk about it. Because god forbid your kids have safe sex. Much better that they resort to only-a-slut-would-use-a-condom sex. But what's just as disturbing as the bad science behind these programs is the unapologetic sexist crap they're spewing.

One program teaches that women need "financial support," while men need "admiration."⁴ Another tells students:

"Women gauge their happiness and judge their success on their relationships. Men's happiness and success hinge on their accomplishments."⁵ Yeah. I'll just let that one sit for a bit.

Another program tells a faux-fairytale that isn't so much about sex as about how women need to keep their mouths shut. One book used in abstinence curricula, *Choosing the Best*, tells the story of a knight who saves a princess from a dragon (original, I know). When the knight arrives to save her, the princess offers some ideas on how to kill the dragon. Her ideas work, but the knight feels emasculated, so he goes off and marries a village maiden, "only after making sure she knew nothing about nooses or poison."

The curriculum concludes with the moral of the story: "Occasional suggestions and assistance may be all right, but too much of them will lessen a man's confidence or even turn him away from his princess."⁶

Hear that, gals? Shh . . . if you let on that you're smart, your prince on the white horse is likely to run scared!

Abstinence programs are also *huge* fans of making sex the ladies' responsibility. It's up to us to make sure it doesn't happen, because guys just can't help themselves. One program actually advises girls:

- ☉ Watch what you wear. If you don't aim to please, don't aim to tease. The liberation movement has produced some aggressive girls, and one of the tough challenges for guys who say no will be the

questioning of their manliness. And because females generally become aroused less easily, they're in a good position to help young men learn balance in relationships by keeping intimacy in perspective.⁷

The logic is laughable. Seems that girls don't get horny, so it's up to us to make sure that The Sex doesn't happen. And if it does, well, you should have kept your legs closed, you big dummy. But really and truly, the following gem is my fave. It comes from an "educator" speaking at an abstinence conference last year: "Your body is a wrapped lollipop. When you have sex with a man, he unwraps your lollipop and sucks on it. It may feel great at the time, but unfortunately, when he's done with you, all you have left for your next partner is a poorly wrapped, saliva-fouled sucker."⁸

Holy. Shit. Is that clear enough for you? Without your precious "lollipop," you're a piece-of-shit, dirty-ass, already-sucked-on candy. Which is supposedly why you have to hold on to your most precious commodity—your virginity.

Our Hymens, Ourselves

I have never really understood what the big deal was about virginity. Really. Mine was lost without a great deal of fanfare to a high school boyfriend whom I dated for several years afterward. I expected to feel different—I didn't. The whole precious-flower-virginity thing always seemed silly to me. So imagine my surprise when I found out that I was just a used-up piece of trash (or candy) without it.

Remember how back in the day, your virginity was a valuable commodity and your "purity" was pretty much what your dad banked on to get a good price for when you got married? You think that's all in the past? Not even close.

One of the most disturbing stories I've ever heard was about Jessica Simpson and her dad, Joe. A gossip mag reported that during a ceremony when Jessica was twelve years old, Joe made her promise to stay a virgin until marriage. Wait, it gets worse. Jessica's dad, who is also her manager, gave her a promise ring and said, "I'm going to tell you how beautiful you are every day . . . and I'm going to be that person until the day you find a man to do that in my place."⁹

If you're like me, you're probably in the fetal position on the floor right now, trying to make that image go away. But this isn't unusual—there are virginity cards, rings, ceremonies, you name it. The one thing they all have in common is that girls' virginity and sexuality don't belong to them.

Not only are virginity pledges sooo creepy and wrong, they're not exactly effective. Recent studies have shown that teens who take virginity pledges are actually more likely to have oral and anal sex.

Their logic is that because it's not intercourse, it's not real sex. Somehow I don't think the folks who made up the whole pledge thing had sodomy in mind. (You would think the idea of good Christian girls taking it in the ass would motivate some change in the whole pledge system, but they're sticking to their guns.)

What kills me is that we're falling for this crap. Women feel so bad about losing their virginity that some of them are actually deluded by the idea that they can become "born again" virgins. Like a self-imposed dry spell. For fuck's sake, there are even women who are getting plastic surgery to get fake hymens put back in! Who the hell wants their hymen back?

And the people who are just shocked—shocked!—that younger women are looking to oversexualized pop culture to define themselves are the very same ones that are shoving virginity down our throats. (Not literally, of course. Ew.) For folks who are trying to tell us we shouldn't define ourselves by our sexuality, they certainly can't get past the whole dick-meets-vagina thing. And really, if you want to attach young women's worth to their virginity, you can't be surprised when they follow suit and attach all their worth to their sexuality. You can't have it both ways.

Getting Carded for Sex

In addition to the fact that it's pretty much never okay for women to have sex (unless you're married and doing it to procreate, of course), there's a special emphasis placed on younger women. We're *really* not supposed to have sex.

The logic is pretty simple: Girls aren't supposed to like sex, especially teenage girls. So if you're having sex, either you're a slut or you're a victim who's being taken advantage of. Neither are particularly attractive options. It's like the virgin-whore complex on crack. The idea that teen girls

want to have sex is just too much for some people to handle. Girls are supposed to think sex is icky and make excuses about headaches.

I'll never forget the first time I realized just how nutty people could get over the idea of a teen girl's choosing and wanting to have sex. I was watching *Oprah* a while back, when Dr. Phil (pre-self-help empire) was a regular. He was discussing the "problem" of teenage sex. There was one seventeen-year-old on the show talking about how she and

The U.S. government is expanding abstinence-only programs to target not just students, but unmarried adults. Soon they'll expect everyone to abstain!

her boyfriend had oral sex. She was superarticulate and smart, and made her position very clear. She said she had been with her boyfriend a long time, and they loved each other but weren't ready for intercourse, and so they had decided to have oral sex instead. Dr. Phil ripped into her like a maniac, saying, "A friend doesn't ask you to go in the bathroom, get on your knees in a urine-splattered tile floor, and stick their penis in your mouth." The girl looked at over at her mom and said, "That's not what happened to me," but she was ignored. Nice, huh? But insults and scare tactics against teen sex are par for the course these days.

One conservative Christian group, Focus on the Family, is so concerned about teens having sex that it came out with a study (a very dubious one at that) concluding that having sex before you're eighteen makes you more likely to be poor and divorced.¹⁰ I suppose I have a life of poverty-stricken solitude to look forward to. And that master's degree I have must be a mistake of some sort. Oh, and just so you have some perspective on this, Focus on the Family also made a public statement that accused the cartoon *SpongeBob SquarePants* of promoting homosexuality to children.

No matter how smart and straight-up you are about wanting to have sex, if you're choosing it, you're making a mistake that could ruin your life, or you're a big whore. Done and done. It's no wonder that so many people would rather think of teen girls as victims unable to wrap their poor little heads around the complexities of sexuality.

The victim role is played out in a lot of ways, but the most blatant are seen in our existing consent laws. If you're under a certain age, you can't consent to sex. Period. Now, I'm not going to say that I think consent laws shouldn't exist—clearly, there are plenty of creepy-ass pedophiles running around. But the way that the laws are implemented—not to mention the implication that young women can't make their own decisions about their sexuality—is seriously flawed.

There's a bill in Missouri, for example, that would require teachers, doctors, and nurses to report kids who are sexually active to a state abuse hotline.¹¹ That's right—have sex, get reported. The kicker? The law says that the sexually

active teen need only be reported if they are unmarried. Ahem. Marriage is the ultimate Get Out of Jail Free card—sometimes literally—for teen sex. In a case in Nebraska in July 2005, charges were brought against a twenty-two-year-old man for having sex with a fourteen-year-old girl.¹² A

The newest trend in anti-sex weirdness is "purity balls," a prom-like event where girls as young as six pledge their chastity—to their dads! Creepy.

bunch of folks weren't too happy about the charge because the "couple" was married after the girl became pregnant. How does a thirteen-year-old get married, you ask? Oh, her parents just took her over to Kansas, where kids as young as twelve can wed with their parents' consent. Lovely.

Clearly, this case is fucked up in a thousand ways. But what really kills me about this was that a large part of the community in Nebraska was pissed that it had even been brought to court, because the guy had done "the right thing" by marrying her. So if you don't get married you're a rapist, but if you do you're a stand-up guy? In either case, it seems to me the point of all this is to make sure that the girl in question (who has no real say in the matter) stays "pure."

This kind of faux concern about teenage girls and sexual activity has nothing to do with keeping girls safe. It's

about legislating morality and ensuring that someone—whether it be a parent, husband, or the state—is making decisions for young women. Because god forbid we make them ourselves.

Just Do It (If You're So Inclined)

I was serious about feminism making me better in bed. You can't be good in that department unless you get past the anti-sex nonsense, and feminism allows you to do just that.

Feminism tells you it's okay to make decisions about your sexuality *for yourself*. Because when it comes down to it, what's more powerful and important than being able to do what you want with your body without fear of being shamed or punished?

Feminism teaches responsibility. You can't really enjoy yourself sexually if you don't have all the facts and aren't being safe. While conservative programs are doing their best to make sure that you stay in the dark about contraception, feminists are fighting to make sure that you have access to the information and resources you need to have safe sex.

And perhaps most important, feminism wants you to have fun. Sex isn't just about having babies after all, despite what young women are being taught.

"At Risk," My Ass

In itself, the act of having sex is considered irresponsible by some. These days, calling a teen "sexually active" is code for "troubled" or "at risk" (though if they're a product of

abstinence-only education, I wouldn't disagree with the "at risk" part).

But really, what could be more responsible than taking control of your body by making informed decisions about your sexuality? What's really irresponsible is telling young women there's something wrong with having sex. Naturally, just calling yourself responsible doesn't quite cut it. I know it's annoying, but sometimes you have to get off your ass and do something.

TAKE RESPONSIBILITY FOR YOUR HEALTH

- ☉ Get thee to a gyno! Get regular checkups—no one wants a sick vagina, after all.
- ☉ If you've been subjected to abstinence-only education, get out there and find comprehensive information on sex (and pass it around to your friends!). Planned Parenthood is a great place to start; its website has a ton of information: www.plannedparenthood.com.
- ☉ Use protection. If you're having straight sex, use two forms of contraception if you don't want to get preggers. One of them must be condoms. Always. Every time.

TAKE RESPONSIBILITY FOR YOUR PARTNERS

- ☉ Love and attraction are curious things, and there aren't many women who don't have at least one partner they regret. But that doesn't mean we can't at least try to choose wisely. I never liked the word "promiscuity," because it's defined as having sex

indiscriminately. So have sex with whoever you like, and as many people as you like, but I think we can all afford to be *a bit* discriminating.

- ⊗ Don't have sex with someone who won't use protection.
- ⊗ Don't have sex with someone who is anti-choice—they have no respect for your body or your ability to make decisions for yourself.
- ⊗ Don't have sex with someone who doesn't respect your physical and emotional boundaries.
- ⊗ Don't have sex with Republicans. (Okay, that one is just mine.)

TAKE RESPONSIBILITY FOR YOUR CHOICES

- ⊗ There'll be plenty on this later, but it's worth mentioning. As you probably know already, when it comes to the rights we have over our bodies, shit is going downhill. There are plenty of young women who don't have access to contraception and abortion. This is unacceptable. Fight the good fight in your schools, community, wherever, to make sure that you have as many choices as possible when it comes to your reproductive rights.

TAKE RESPONSIBILITY FOR OTHER WOMEN

- ⊗ We're all in this together, ladies—so help your fellow woman out. Whether it's taking a friend to get birth control, helping someone come out, or even just not calling other girls nasty names—it makes a huge difference.

See—now no one can give you shit! On to the fun stuff.

From *The Joy of Sex* to Joyless Sex

Can someone tell me when sex became such a goddamn downer? You would think from the way people talk about it these days that intercourse is a potential epidemic—teen girls running around like junkies trying to get a quick dick-fix.

No doubt, there are serious consequences to sex. But if you're well informed and being responsible, what's the problem? We need to get beyond the politics, the religious guilt trips, and the moral tsk-tsking and start to remember that sex is a good thing. A great thing. Perhaps the best thing ever.

Someone handed me a sticker at a women's rights march once. It said: I FUCK TO COME NOT TO CONCEIVE. I can't find that sticker and I want it back! Because what's been lost in this whirlwind of abstinence-only, married-only, straight-only nonsense is pleasure. I don't know about you, but when I have sex it's because it feels good, not because I'm gearing up to knit some booties.

But there are plenty of people out there—powerful ones—who want you to forget that. Take this nut job, for example: Former Senate candidate Alan Keyes once called homosexuality “selfish hedonism,” because gay sex isn't for popping out kids; it's just about feeling good. (The horror!) The fact that someone could outright say that it's a bad thing to have sex because it's fun is beyond ridiculous. Because that's the one thing we all have in common. Whether we're married, single, gay, young, whatever—we all want to have orgasms. Unless you're Alan Keyes, I guess.

That's where feminism comes in. Seriously. Feminism says that you have a right to enjoy yourself. An obligation, even. Young women need to get past the bullshit, scoff at the shame tactics, and get back to the hard work of getting off.

Note: Yes, I realize that I'm focusing on the physical aspect of sex, rather than the emotional. That's because it's generally the physical part where women are getting fucked-up messages about sex.

Reclaiming Your Number

It's easy to say that sex is a good thing. Living it is the hard part. Women have been taught for so long that having sex—or even just hooking up—means that you're a slut, so it's kind of a hard thing to get over. But if sex is a good thing, then why should we be ashamed that we're having it?

It's time to come out of the “fucking” closet!

Most women are all too familiar with the sexual double standard that says women are big hoochies for having sex but guys are players. And while most of us know it's total bullshit, we still follow the rules somewhat. My first experience with the good-girls-don't double standard came after a hiatus with a high school boyfriend. Though both of us had seen other people during our break from each other, turns out I was the big slut. The explanation by my then-boyfriend was predictable: Men are supposed to be slutty and women need to remain monogamous. It's in our genes, apparently.

If someone tries to pull this argument on you, make sure to call bullshit. The whole men-are-driven-to-spread-their-seed thing is just plain archane. Read Natalie Angier's amazing book *Woman: An Intimate Geography* for the hardcore facts. I promise it's worth it.

Since that long-ago high school drama, the sexual double standard has continued to be one of the most infuriating aspects of sexism for me. I've seen otherwise-great male friends

Research shows that women react just as strongly to erotic images as men do.

turn away potential girlfriends because of their number of sexual partners; I've had female friends who, upon hearing my “number,” told me I must must *must* keep it a secret. You know, 'cause the more dicks you encounter, the quicker you go to hell.

The Almighty Cock

Rambling aside, why is it that penises define how slutty women are? What about women who aren't straight? According to societal norms, it's not even real sex unless a dick is involved. So should lesbians rest assured that they're

not the nasty sluts their hetero sisters are? If I get oral from every girl on the block, am I slutty? (Or just smart?) Sorry, it just makes me crazy that whether I'm a whore is completely dependent on cock.

Cock or not, if it's one person or fifty—why all the shame? If you're making responsible, informed decisions that make you happy, who cares. In the timeless words of Salt 'n Pepa: "If I/wanna take a guy/home with me tonight/it's none of your business."

What's strangest to me is that the same people who adhere to the rules of the double-standard game will admit its flawed logic. Everyone knows it's screwed up; it's just that most people have given up. Or if you're a guy, perhaps you like the idea that you can whore around but "good" girls can't.

So it's really up to young women to fix this mess; we have to take the lead. Young women need to not just ignore the double standard, but to actively fight it by being proud of sex. I'm not saying you should hand out flyers with all the names of your sexual partners and a play-by-play of your favorite positions. But there's a lot of power in just telling the truth without any shame. If you lie about the number of people you have sex with, or if you call another girl a slut and mean it in a nasty way, you're supporting the notion that it's not okay for women to have sex when they want to, or with as many people as they want to. And please note that I'm saying *when* they *want* to. While I know it's all too common, there's nothing lamer than hooking up with someone for reasons other than desire and/or love.

I know it's easier said than done, but there will always be someone who will judge you . . . even if you're not hooking up! I think we all know someone who had a terrible reputation that materialized out of nowhere.

The only way to battle shame is with pride; we have to be proud of the choices we make and stand behind them. We have to take the power out of sexual insults like "whore" and "slut." There aren't many feminists my age who don't remember musician Kathleen Hanna—of Bikini Kill and Le Tigre fame—scrawling SLUT across her stomach as a way to reclaim the word. We need to do the same thing, not just with the word, but with the idea. There's nothing wrong with having sex; don't let anyone forget that.

Beyond Bean-Flicking

I always wondered why there weren't more terms for female masturbation. I mean, men can jerk off, choke the chicken, rub one out, or spank the monkey, but the only one I've heard for women is flicking the bean, and frankly, that just sounds painful. But then I realized that women don't really talk about masturbating all that much, especially younger women. When I was in high school, my friends and I would chat about sexual positions and blow jobs as easily as we discussed our last math class. But masturbation was hush-hush. Looking back, that's just weird. Seems to me that masturbation should be the most-talked-about sex. After all, it is the safest sex of all. (Even emotionally—when was the last time you broke your own heart?) And it's not like most women

aren't masturbating. For as long as we've had vaginas, we've been messing around with them—scientists recently found a dildo from the Ice Age.¹³ I shit you not.

But unless you're screwing yourself silly in front of a camera for boys' viewing pleasure (you'll see what I mean when you get to Chapter 3, "Pop Culture Gone Wild"), female masturbation is taboo. Probably because it's the ultimate "selfish hedonism." Ain't no way any bean-flicking is going to get you pregnant. Masturbation is just for fun, so it must be bad.

Despite the fact that encouraging young women to masturbate might cut down on STDs, and even lower rates of supposedly evil teen sex, it's really not stressed in sex ed classes. It's just too much for the anti-sex folks to take. In

In Mississippi you can buy a gun with no background check,
but vibrators are outlawed.

1994, U.S. Surgeon General Joycelyn Elders said that masturbation "is a part of human sexuality, and it's a part of something that perhaps should be taught—perhaps even as part of our sex ed curriculum."¹⁴ Smart lady, right? I thought so, too. Unfortunately, being logical was just as frowned upon then as it is now. She was forced to resign.

But it's not just young women in school who are getting the shaft when it comes to masturbation. Women of all ages are discouraged from taking matters into their own hands. This is not to say that women only masturbate with battery-operated aids, but I think it's telling that pretty much anything that vibrates (and is therefore fun for the ladies) is outlawed in eight states. Seriously—Georgia, Kansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Texas, Virginia, Alabama, and Colorado all have "anti-erotic massager" laws. Something tells me these states don't have a similar ban on Lubriderm and *Playboy*.

A woman in Texas was even arrested last year for daring to throw a "Passion Party."¹⁵ (Kind of like a Tupperware party, but with naughty stuff.) Arrested! Apparently, in Texas you can sell vibrators, but only if you sell them as "novelties" or "gag gifts." Selling them in a way that admits their actual role in sex is the illegal part. You know, because girls masturbating should be funny, not real. Then, of course, there are the ladies who don't partake because they've internalized the same sentiment that these bullshit laws enforce. This just makes me sad. Did they fall for the vaginas-are-gross thing? Didn't they ever get the hand-mirror lesson?

Please, ladies—if this is you—hop to it! Don't worry, I'm not going to give you any step-by-step instructions; I'll leave that to the sexperts. I will, however, highly encourage some serious self-loving. Shit, it helps you go to sleep; it helps you know your body and be better in bed; it even motivates you to buy fun vibrators that are neon or shaped like rabbits.

Oh yeah—and it gives you orgasms. Do you really need any more convincing?

Getting Down to Business

I really couldn't resist writing something about oral sex. Yes, I know it's just one specific sex act and there are tons more, blah, blah, blah. But there is something about oral sex that really has people all riled up lately (especially when it comes to teen sex). Not to mention that sex is so often talked about in terms of penis/vagina intercourse that folks seem to forget that 1. not everyone is straight, and 2. penetration isn't the end-all for women when it comes to sex.

There is also something really interesting to me about the different reactions men have to oral sex. There are the guys who love to give it (treat them well) and can't get enough, guys who will do it as some sort of obligatory rest stop on the way to intercourse, and the guys who are so grossed out by pussy, you have to wonder what went wrong. But what I find particularly interesting about oral is that when it comes to teens and oral sex, it's always shown as girls who are sucking dick left and right with no reciprocation in sight. This myth is used all the time to highlight how girls are being victimized by the supposedly sexually lax attitude in pop culture.

The truth? A September 2005 sex survey of young women showed that the give-and-take when it comes to going down is pretty much equal between guys and girls.¹⁶ So there!