

# Looking Both Ways

It's all about sex, except when it isn't. | By Rachel Pepper

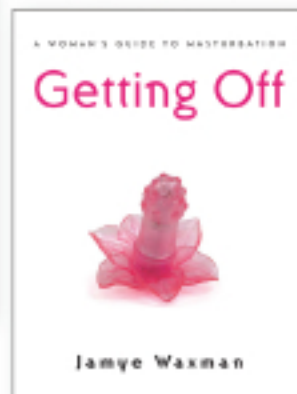
From the touchy topic of women's bisexuality to that of female masturbation, we've got dibs on the dirt you need to be happily buzzed, or bi, this issue.

**Look Both Ways, Jennifer Baumgardner (Farrar, Straus and Giroux):** At the conclusion of Baumgardner's latest book on bisexuality, *Look Both Ways: Bisexual Politics*, one is left unsure of the exact message she's trying to convey. Is it that feminism causes female bisexuality? That we're all bisexual, really? That college plus the music of Ani DiFranco make bisexuality a natural choice for young women? And is this book really about politics? Well, not really. But no matter. *Look Both Ways* is still an engaging read, exploring the many layers of female bisexuality (the book doesn't touch on male sexuality much, which isn't clarified in the title) for a generation influenced by feminism, lesbian activism on campus and yes, great music. Baumgardner, who was an intern at *Ms.* magazine in the early '90s, wrote several books on young women and feminism, such as *Manifesta: Young Women, Feminism, and the Future* and *Grassroots: A Field Guide for Feminist Activism*. She dated Amy Ray of the Indigo Girls and, after they broke up, got pregnant by a male partner. She's a lively writer, and the book is a personal, fun introduction to what bisexuality means to younger women, as well as the problems inherent in an often misunderstood identity. Indeed, bisexuality is a tricky identity to inhabit, especially in the lesbian world, where bisexual women are often seen as psychosexually incomplete, as competitors or even as traitors. Even the word itself is problematic. "The word bisexual makes me cringe at times, but saying I'm heterosexual or a lesbian feels inaccurate, regardless of who I am in a relationship with. [T]he label bi sounds bad because, at least in some ways, bisexuals are an unliberated, invisible and disparaged social group,"



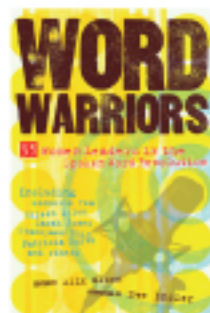
Baumgardner writes. Still, bisexual women must be seen as having their own identity, she suggests, not as part-time lesbians, since "bisexual women don't know what it's like to be lesbian, if there are even universal elements of lesbian experience." So how do we find common ground with our bisexual sisters, whom the author calls the "conduits for the cultural conversation America is having about gay rights?" Baumgardner doesn't seem to know, other than simply telling everyone to keep looking both ways. But hey, at least the view is good.

**Getting Off, Jamye Waxman (Seal Press):** Former Babeland employee and sex writer Jamye Waxman sheds light on one of the most taboo topics around: female masturbation. From definitions of what an orgasm is—and how to have one—to a rundown on current models of vibrators (sure, you've heard of the Hitachi Magic Wand, but what about the Lelo or the Cone?) to celebrity confessions, this book has the right buzz on the topic. Yes, there are other books on the subject out there, but Waxman is both seriously informed and



sweetly informal, lending this text a sense of history (who knew the Greeks were known for making dildos, or that the motivation behind Kellogg brand cereals was to prevent kids from masturbating by serving them a cold breakfast?) and science (the U-spot orgasm is a new one to me). Waxman is at her best when she's acting the sex saleswoman, like in

the "Self Love and Sex Toys Too" chapter, when describing the varieties of dildos one can buy, like "curvy, straight, or bumpy," "vibrating or static," "butt stuff" and even phthalate-free, an important consideration if you don't want toxic chemicals in your privates. There are, however, a few topics Waxman skimps on. For example, on the topic of multiple orgasms she fails to provide an accurate description. Still, for any woman who wants to know how to masturbate or expand her repertoire (should she already be experienced), this book will be a most pleasurable read. ■



## EDITOR'S PICK

**Word Warriors, Ed. Alix Olson (Seal Press):** Prize-winning poet Alix Olson has put together an amazing collection of work by 35 of today's most prominent female spoken-word poets. The essays by the contributors about a particular moment in their lives are especially interesting because they give a great insight into the work of these women. Most of the women from Sister Spit make appearances here, including the poetry group's founder, Michelle Tea. The book also includes pieces by Eileen Myles and Patricia Smith. Some of the more interesting contributors: Natalie E. Ilium, a poet born with cerebral palsy whose poetry helped her find her voice, and Aya De León, whose poem "Cellulite" encourages women to "go head" and jiggle. The poems are encouraging and inspiring; definitely a must-read for any spoken-word fan.

—Katie Peoples