

HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF NEW MASTURBATION ATTITUDES IN MORMON CULTURE: SILENCE, SECULAR CONFORMITY, COUNTERREVOLUTION, AND EMERGING REFORM

Mark Kim Malan

The Institute for Advanced Study of Human Sexuality
San Francisco, CA 94109
(malanmedia@aol.com)

Vern Bullough

3304 West Sierra Drive
Westlake Village, CA 91362
(vbullough@adelphia.net)

This research investigates the development of Mormon masturbation attitudes and reports new data on the psychosexual struggle with masturbation that is prevalent in Mormon culture today. It is the first comprehensive overview of the entire history of Mormon masturbation policies and attitudes from the founding of the church in 1830 to the present. This history is invaluable to researchers, clinicians, educators, clergy, and individuals who seek to understand the unique sexual attitudes within Mormon culture. We believe these data may also prove valuable to those who are responsible to create health guidelines, moral standards, or spiritual policy that includes statements about masturbation. We begin by tracing the development of American masturbation attitudes that preceded Mormonism. These attitudes laid a foundation from which the subculture of Mormonism developed various unique and sometimes countercultural attitudes. Vern Bullough details these historical roots,

Sexuality & Culture, Fall 2005, Vol. 9, No. 4, pp. 80-127.

from the development of degeneracy theory in early American medicine to the dramatic changes in masturbation attitudes that resulted from modern medical discoveries and sexological research. We found that Mormonism sometimes ignored, and at other times appears to have adopted these various attitudes from secular culture. Mark Kim Malan reviews the literature of Mormonism, beginning with official church masturbation policy, followed by the various viewpoints promoted in Mormon popular literature. Mormon literature offers evidence that cultural masturbation attitudes vary and have continued to change over time. Next, he reviews the scientific literature on Mormon masturbation including available quantitative, qualitative, and phenomenological data. The data reveals a surprising diversity among Mormon viewpoints. This research demonstrates that official Mormon masturbation policy often contrasts dramatically with the private testimonials of individual rank and file Mormons. These data offer important insights into many of the unique psychosexual health problems that modern Mormons face within their culture today.

Development of American Cultural Attitudes about Masturbation

While nowhere in the *Bible* is there a clear unchallenged reference to masturbation, Jewish tradition was always seriously concerned about the loss of semen. The Book of Leviticus, for example states:

And if any man's seed of copulation go out from him, then he shall wash all his flesh in water, and be unclean until the evening. And every garment, and every skin, whereon is the seed of copulation, shall be washed with water, and be unclean until the evening (*Leviticus*, 14: 16-18).

It is obvious that the writers of the *Old Testament* regarded sexual emission as both sacred (the mysterious process of making a woman pregnant) and taboo (it was not to be wasted). Normally the purifying ceremonies required short periods of continence (*Exodus*, 19: 14-15).

The passage most often erroneously associated with masturbation is the *Genesis* reference to the sin of Onan.

And Judah said unto Onan. Go in unto thy brother's wife, and marry her, and raise up the seed to thy brother. And Onan knew that the seed should not be his; and it came to pass, when he went in unto his brother's wife, that he

spilled it on the ground, lest that he should give seed to his brother. And the thing which he did displeased the Lord, whereupon he slew him also (*Genesis*, 38: 8-10).

The scholarly textual interpretation is that the spilling of the seed was really coitus interruptus, and the punishment to Onan was not for spilling his seed but for his refusal to obey the Levirate requirement that Onan take his dead brothers' wife. It has not always been interpreted in this way, and certainly in the medieval penitential literature there were often harsh penalties for the masturbator, almost as harsh as for the fornicator.

It was not until in the eighteenth century that the term onanism was clearly equated with masturbation and regarded as a causal factor in disease. This was in an anonymous book published by a London, Grub Street writer. Grub Street at the time was the source of much erotic and pornographic writing of the time, anything that a printer believed would make money. The book entitled: *Onania, or the Heinous Sin of Self Pollution, and All Its Frightful Consequences, in Both Sexes Consider'd. With Spiritual and Physical Advice for Those Who Have Already Injur'd Themselves by This Abominable Practice* (London, c.1716),¹ was probably written to encourage individuals to buy the medicines which were said to be available to cure it (Bullough, 1977; Stolberg, 2000; Laqueur, 2003). The book, however, became an international bestseller and though it attracted some criticism, the supposed dangers of masturbation that it promoted came to be of great concern for both religious and medical reasons.

Giving the fear of masturbation a stronger "scientific" basis than in *Onania*, was the prominent Swiss physician, S.A.D. Tissot (1728-1797). His treatise, *Onanism*, convinced the medical community that masturbation was not just a sin but a major factor in disease and in death.² Tissot had observed that sexual intercourse, like any form of exercise, increased the peripheral circulation. He erroneously concluded from this that all sexual activity was potentially dangerous because it caused blood to rush to the head and in turn starved the nerves, making them more susceptible to damage, thereby increasing the likelihood of weakness and insanity. He recognized that sexual intercourse was necessary for procreation, but

felt it should be limited to that. For Tissot, the very worst kind of sexual activity was the solitary orgasm since it could be indulged in so conveniently and at such a tender age that excess was inevitable and the resulting supposed nerve damage irreparable. Some of the supposed dangers of wasted semen included weakness, cloudiness of ideas, madness, decay of bodily powers, pains in the head, rheumatic pains, aching numbness, pimples, blisters, itching, impotence, premature ejaculation, gonorrhea, priapism, tumors, and hemorrhoids. His association of masturbation with weakness and an almost endless list of symptoms were particularly frightening to his readers and he initiated in that era a popular new belief that came to be known as “masturbatory insanity.”

Following Tissot, there was an outpouring of anti masturbatory treatises throughout the Western world. Though many who wrote were little more than quacks, the intellectual leaders of American medicine also believed in the erroneously attributed dangers. Abraham Jacobi, for example, considered to be the founder of pediatrics in the United States, was only reflecting current medical ideology when he blamed infantile paralysis and infantile rheumatism on masturbation (Jacobi, 1876). Medical concern, however, was not just limited to masturbation. Many writers came to include almost every kind of sexual activity that did not lead to procreation as equally dangerous. Allen W. Habenbach, who studied some 800 male “insane” at Cook County Hospital in Chicago, concluded that while there might have been some overexaggeration of the effects of masturbation, the dangers were such that it was difficult to overrate them (Habenbach, 1879). Joseph W. Howe (1899) said that pederasts were diseased individuals whose problems stemmed from youthful masturbation. Homosexuality was believed to be an almost inevitable result of masturbation (Bullough, 1973).

What was put forth in the “scholarly” medical literature was exaggerated even further in the popular literature. J.H. Kellogg (1882) of Battle Creek, Michigan devoted pages to identifying the youthful masturbator with lists of symptoms that would include everything a teenager did. For example, if they were bold, they were masturbators, if they were shy they were masturbators, if they were indecisive they were masturbators, if they had acne they were mas-

turbators. He provided an all-encompassing net and raised fears among his readers. Women writers also contributed to the fear. Mrs. Elizabeth Osgood Goodrich Willard held that all sex was debilitating because it caused a person to lose strength since a sexual orgasm was much more debilitating to the system than a whole day's work:

We must stop the waste through the sexual organs, if we would have health and strength of body. Just as sure as that the excessive abuse of the sexual organs destroy their power and use, producing inflammation, disease, and corruption, just so sure is that a less amount of abuse in the same relative proportion, injures the parental function of the organs, and impairs the health and strength of the whole system. Abnormal action is abuse (Willard, 1967: 306).

So embedded was the idea of the dangers of masturbation that even some of the founders of modern sex research such as Richard von Krafft-Ebing (1894), at least in the early editions of his work, regarded masturbation as an inciting factor in many of the cases of sexual pathology that he reported. Sigmund Freud was somewhat more ambivalent about the topic early in his writings, but became less concerned about the dangers later. Still, his biographer, Ernest Jones, would still write in 1918 that the true cause of neurasthenia (nervous prostration) would be found to be caused by excessive onanism and seminal emissions (Comfort, 1969).

Parents were urged to be ever watchful that their children were not masturbating. They were advised to have their children sleep with their hands on top of the covers and to put mittens on them, to be ever observant for any sign of masturbation such as shifty eyes or undue brashness, or any number of other factors. Special belts were made for children so they would not masturbate and many parents bought them. Those for girls had screen sieves over their vulva and have often been confused with chastity belts. Those for boys were sheaths worn over the penis with prickly points turned inward designed to make any erection painful. Some desperate parents turned to surgery, and at least a handful of girls had their labia removed.

The hysteria led to the popularization of male circumcision as a means of masturbation prevention. The popular medical journal *Lancet* published the following advice:

In cases of masturbation we must, I believe, break the habit by inducing such a condition of the parts as will cause too much local suffering to allow of the practice being continued. For this purpose, if the prepuce is long, we may circumcise the male patient with present and probably with future advantage; the operation, too, should not be performed under chloroform, so that the pain experienced may be associated with the habit we wish to eradicate (Johnson, 1860: 344).

Although male circumcision had existed in various cultures since ancient times, prior to this time it was performed primarily as a religious rite and was not done expressly for masturbation prevention. Early Jewish ritual circumcision usually removed only a symbolic portion of the tip of the foreskin and was far less invasive (Goldman, 1997). Circumcision today is a cultural hold-over from this late nineteenth, early twentieth century fear of masturbation. When the Boy Scouts were founded, one of the major dangers boys were warned to avoid was masturbation. The list could go on.

It is no wonder that Mormon authorities became fearful of the effects of masturbation. That fear was even used by some to justify polygamy, at least in the twentieth century, when some fundamentalist Mormons still taught that any loss of semen in men was hazardous and dangerous. The men believed that to use their semen constructively they should have a non-pregnant female partner to put their semen to the most effective use. Though this was a unique Mormon interpretation, it fitted into the traditional erroneous fears of masturbation. It took science a long time to put the myths and rumors to rest.

A key factor in undermining the belief that masturbation caused disease was the discovery at the end of the nineteenth century of the existence of bacteria and the bacterial cause of disease. Research into masturbation itself as a topic was also begun by Havelock Ellis, Magnus Hirschfeld, and other early sex researchers. It was not until 1929, however, that a physician, Ralcy Husted Bell, could write that:

masturbation by every known law of nature, according to clinical data, according to the plainest commonsense ... is not more harmful than cooperative act between mates. Why should it be? Certainly, if it were, the race would have destroyed itself ages and ages ago. The act, as a physiological function, is not in any sense an outlaw, physiologically considered (Bell, 1932: 35).

Alfred Kinsey (1948, 1953) found that masturbation was very common; with the highest rate of incidence in boys taking place between puberty and age 15, while in girls the incidence tended to increase with age until by age 45 some 61 percent of the women had masturbated to orgasm.

A survey conducted by Morton Hunt in 1973-74, found that among 2,026 individuals, every other married male and one out of three married females had masturbated during the preceding year (Hunt, 1974). The National Health and Social Life Survey sample of 3,432 individuals conducted in 1992 found similar results using modern probability sampling methods (Laumann et al., 1994). Shere Hite's interviews with some 3,000 women conducted in the 1970s found that masturbation was the key to developing the capacity for sexual enjoyment for a significant number of women, although the reluctance to share this information with their sex partners was very high (Hite, 1976).

Recent scientific studies point to the health risk of male prostate cancer by those who attempt to be sexually abstinent or have low ejaculation levels (Giles et al., 2003). Females who avoid masturbation are at higher risk of sexual dysfunction and poor marital adjustment. Many are pre-orgasmic, even in marriage. Masturbation today is recognized as an important developmental step toward healthy marital functioning and is often prescribed as part of the treatment for some types of sexual dysfunction (Bockting & Coleman, 2002; Christensen, 1995; Hurlbert & Whittaker, 1991; LoPiccolo & Lobitz, 1972). The radical reversal of attitude, disproving the imaginary dangers of masturbation, which took place in the medical and scientific community in the past 60 or 70 years has yet to be adopted as policy by some in positions of religious authority, who continue to hold to former cultural beliefs and traditions. Contemporary Mormon leaders are among those

who have been slow to respond to these modern medical developments.

Development of Mormon Cultural Attitudes about Masturbation

Early Mormonism has a unique cultural history of being at odds with the dominant sexual values of American culture. Though Mormonism's founder, Joseph Smith, was only one of several sexually dissident religious revolutionaries of his time, his secretive sexual lifestyle stands in marked contrast to other nineteenth-century religious reformers who more openly advocated alternative sexual lifestyles. John Humphrey Noyes, for example, openly practiced his system of multi-partner "complex marriage" and discussed his theological health concerns about masturbation in print (Noyes, 2001). Smith tried to keep his multi-partner "spiritual wife" doctrine secret (Smith, 1842; Jensen, 1887) and remained completely silent about public concerns over masturbation. Early nineteenth century Mormon authorities under the leadership of Smith tried to publicly appear as monogamous cultural conformists while privately practicing a secret theology of culturally dissident sexual behavior (Compton, 1997).

Following Smith's death in 1844, Brigham Young finally went public with the secret plural wife doctrine in the 1850s in Salt Lake City, but even then, he still said nothing about masturbation. In Young's Utah there was much in print on sexual and moral issues but still no public Mormon masturbation health dialog or church policy.

In the late nineteenth century Mormons came under considerable national public pressure to conform to American sexual mores and abandon polygamy. It was within this cultural political climate that the tradition of Mormon silence on masturbation was finally abandoned. After nearly a half century of silence, a new historical period of internal Mormon masturbation dialogue and outward cultural conformity began. Mormons began to publicly agree with the generally accepted popular cultural viewpoint on masturbation that

was popularized by nineteenth century science and endorsed by American Victorian morality.

By the mid-twentieth century, when modern science had conclusively demonstrated that masturbation was harmless and had come to consider it an important component of healthy sexual development and marital adjustment, Mormonism's tradition of holding on to nineteenth century policies on masturbation placed the faith once again at odds with contemporary scientific health standards (American Medical Association, 1972). Today, masturbation continues to be controversial in Mormon culture. Mormon health professionals and church members hold diverse viewpoints. Some clinicians who are familiar with the medical evidence of the dangers of masturbation abstinence are calling for reforms. Many Mormons struggle to reconcile their faith's traditions with their own experiences as they seek answers to questions of personal and marital health.

Mormon Cultural Conformity and Dissidence

Mormonism, as every historian knows, did not develop in isolation from the culture of its time. Though Joseph Smith's claim to prophecies and revelations set in motion a unique religious movement, the believers were very much people of their time. They carried over into their newly established religion many of their traditional cultural beliefs that they did not think were in conflict with Mormon doctrine. Early Mormon culture embraced new moral views that challenged traditional customs that were both popular and unpopular in American culture. For example, abstaining from smoking and alcoholic consumption became popularized by the American temperance movement of the day. Joseph Smith's inquiry into the matter resulted in the adoption of the Mormon "Word of wisdom" that advised against smoking and drinking. On the other hand, the Mormon adoption of multiple wives went against American moral tradition. Dissidence or conformity with American cultural values was determined by Joseph Smith who claimed to have divine revelation on topics of concern.

At the time, most nineteenth-century medical texts, ranging from popular books on home remedies to serious medical treatises, condemned masturbation. Though the Judaic Christian tradition had always been somewhat uneasy about the topic, it was not until the eighteenth century that the medical science of the time also denounced it. Smith chose not to speak on the subject at all and early church members' questions were left to be answered by popular secular or medical opinion.

From its dissident beginnings as a unique sociopolitical theocracy practicing polygamy and economic redistribution, Mormonism has fought to survive within the larger American culture. Modern Mormonism has struggled to shed its nineteenth century culturally dissident image and its policies have generally evolved to socially conform to more acceptable culturally conservative views. Today, it continues to grow internationally. Mormonism's belief in a "living prophet" who can interpret its theology to adapt to contemporary social changes has allowed the faith to continually respond to developments within secular culture with contemporary pronouncements of socially acceptable moral appropriateness for its members. Mormon historians have documented the developmental changes in theological policies that have resulted in significant Mormon cultural changes in attitudes toward polygamy, race, dancing, birth control, gender roles, dress, and temple ceremonies among others (Bush, 1993).

Mormon attitudes toward masturbation have their own unique evolution. Unlike some Mormon attitudes that have a history of cultural non-conformity that later changed to conform to popular American cultural views, Mormon cultural attitudes toward masturbation have fluctuated in their conformity with those of the contemporary American culture.

Typology of Mormon Masturbation Literature

In order to understand the development of various masturbation attitudes in Mormonism it is essential to understand the Mormon cultural interpretation of authority in their literature. There exists a vast body of Mormon literature from which popular Mormon cul-

ture and sexual beliefs are influenced. Mormon publications are specially classified by the church and its culture. Authoritativeness is defined by the priesthood office of the author and whether or not the church is the publisher. Publications are culturally ranked as authoritative in the following manner:

1. Writings officially published by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints contain authorized statements endorsed by the church. Mormons accept these publications as statements of God's will on a topic as revealed through his prophets.
2. Mormons sustain church "General Authorities" as "prophets, seers, and revelators." Privately published writings by top church leaders are not official church publications, but they are generally received in Mormon culture as being as authoritative as those published by the church. These writings are often later quoted as authoritative in official church publications.
3. Privately published writings by members of the church who are not part of the church hierarchy of General Authorities bear the least cultural authority. They are generally accepted by most Mormons as authoritative if they reflect popular conservative Mormon cultural views and have not been disapproved of by church general authorities.

Portions of the literature that have relevance to masturbation reflect these cultural interpretations of authority. Therefore, this review will distinguish between official church publications and privately published ones. The literature will be reviewed in the following order: (1) Relevant church history; (2) Historical Mormon views of masturbation; (3) Modern official statements published by the church; (4) Statements by modern Mormon popular culture authors other than general authorities; (5) Quantitative statistical data on Mormon masturbation attitudes; (6) Qualitative data: Personal accounts of Mormon masturbation attitudes; (7) Qualitative data: Personal accounts of masturbation shame and Mormon youth suicide.

Relevant Church History

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (a.k.a. LDS, or Mormon Church) was organized in upstate New York in 1830. Official Mormon Church records have preserved various versions

of the first vision written by Mormon Church founder Joseph Smith Jr. In the canonized version, Smith states he had a vision of God the Father and Jesus Christ who directed him to restore Christ's original church. Smith said that this new church was the only church authorized by Jesus Christ and that all other denominations were an "abomination" in God's eyes (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1851).

Due to this event, all official doctrinal statements of the church are based on the claim of divine sanction. Members of the church are taught that the resurrected Christ is the head of the church and that the president of the church is his mouthpiece. Consequently, doctrinal statements claim the authority of Christ as their basis. Both the popular culture of Mormonism and its official dogma hold the president of the church and its 12 apostles to be prophets, seers, and revelators of God's will. For practicing, believing Latter-day Saints, these men's statements are "the mind and will" of God. These men, along with other special quorums of leaders, are known as "General Authorities" and they command the utmost authority in Mormon popular culture (McConkie, 1966).

Historical Mormon Views of Masturbation

Church founder Joseph Smith Jr. and his successor Brigham Young are not known to have ever made any public or private statement on masturbation. In fact, the literature of Mormonism appears to be entirely absent of any statements on the topic at all until the late nineteenth century. Since degeneracy theory made masturbation potentially life threatening, it was a topic of grave health concern for most Americans during these early years of the church. It is notable that early Mormons ignored such an important moral topic of the day in their own literature. Clergy generally spoke out on masturbation as an important health issue to protect their members. Many religious leaders published their denomination's moral commentaries on the issue. In the mid 1840s, Ellen White, founder of the Seventh-Day Adventists, received a revelation in a vision that masturbation would turn a person into a cripple and an imbecile (Tannahill, 1980). In 1849, John Humphrey Noyes dis-

cussed masturbation in relation to sexual health and morality when he published the *First Annual Report of the Oneida Association* (Noyes, 2001). During Brigham Young's day, Mormons were unabashed and outspoken in discussing sexual health and morality issues such as adultery, fornication, and prostitution in print. For the first pioneer Mormons however, the question of masturbation was never discussed in the church press and the Mormon prophets took no official doctrinal position. No known early Mormon doctrinal statements from this period exist specifically on the topic.

Regardless of the absence of early church masturbation literature, Mormons were not immune from the masturbation-as-disease hysteria of popular American culture and the erroneous medical views of the time. Mormon medical historian Lester Bush notes that in the late nineteenth century Mormon authorities,

accepted the popular notion that this [masturbation] led to genital atrophy and a variety of other physical ailments and could even result in insanity or death. Mormon brethren received specific apostolic warning of the "chronic and lifelong debility, insanity, and even Madnes [sic]" which followed this practice (Bush, 1993: 148).

Minutes from an 1870 meeting of the Salt Lake School of the Prophets verify Bush's statement. Masturbation was raised as an issue in this private church leadership meeting limited only to top Mormon officials. George Smith, first counselor to President Brigham Young, addressed fellow church leaders on "the evils of masturbation." Apostle Lorenzo Snow responded that "plural marriage would tend to diminish this evil self-pollution" (Quinn, 1997: 766).³ The following year, the 1871 School of the Prophets minutes recorded Apostle Daniel Wells as stating, "a great many of our young men [are] abusing themselves by the habit of self pollution." He regarded this as "one great cause of why so many of our young men were not married, and it was a great sin, and would lead to insanity and a premature grave" (p. 767).

These records offer no indication of any official "prophetic" or "revelatory" church statements on the issue, but rather that masturbation became a topic of concern and discussion in private top leadership councils. These discussions foreshadow the adoption by the

church later on of policies that would reflect the erroneous popular medical opinion of the times.

According to nineteenth-century medical degeneracy theory, the loss of too much semen from masturbation or even “excessive” marital coitus was a danger to mental and physical health. This concern is reflected in an 1883 meeting of the LDS First Presidency with stake presidents who received special instructions about “Masturbation ... self-pollution of both sexes and excessive indulgence in the married relation” (p. 782). This is the first documented indication that local leaders were instructed on the matter. It is also the first known Mormon reference to masturbation in both sexes.

An 1883 entry from the private diary of John Henry Smith indicates that some Mormons in Liverpool, England considered masturbation to be a sin by that time, “Scott Anderson confessed that he was guilty of self pollution [sic] and asked to be re-baptized. I instructed Bro. Parkinson to attend to it for him” (White, 1990: 106).

In 1886 the polygamous leader of Salt Lake City’s Fourteenth Ward, Bishop Thomas Taylor, “was excommunicated for masturbating with several young men in southern Utah” (O’Donovan, 1994, p.135).

In the new century, the personal diary of Mormon Apostle Ruder Clawson records that in 1902 church leaders discussed educating parents about the church leaders beliefs regarding masturbation.

the practice of masturbation was indulged in by many young people in church schools. Pres. Smith remarked that this was a most damnable and pernicious practice, and the face of every apostle, president of a stake, and high council should be set as flint against it. The priesthood should be called together at the stake conferences and the brethren and parents should be instructed and warned in relation to this matter” (Larson, 1993: 411).

Minutes from a 1903 meeting indicate church leaders discussed youth education on the topic. They indicate that Ruder Clawson told his fellow apostles, “the practice of self-abuse existed to an alarming extent among the boys in our community ... boys and girls should be properly instructed in regard to this evil” (Quinn, p. 806). These documents of leadership meetings indicate that verbal instructions to the general church membership about masturbation

may have begun during this era, but the Mormon nineteenth-century church press was entirely silent. Over 70 years had passed since Joseph Smith had founded the church and still nothing was published by the church for youth and their parents yet that mentioned a church policy or any advice regarding masturbation. There was no authoritative prophetic precedent established for the church other than silence for leaders to follow. It would be nearly a century since the church began before Mormon leaders felt it necessary to publish a word of instruction or policy for its members on the topic.

Eventually Mormons began to broach the topic in print. In 1913, the church magazine *Improvement Era* printed an article that discussed the causes of insanity. It analyzed admissions to the Utah State Mental Hospital between the years of 1855-1910. Although the author did not specifically mention the commonly used terms "self-abuse," "onanism," or "masturbation," he listed among other various causes for insanity "sexual immorality" (Beeley, 1913). That masturbation was euphemistically implicated is verified by Bush, who notes: "Syphilis and masturbation accounted for almost all admissions to the Utah State Mental Hospital attributed to sex immorality" (Bush, 1993: 101). He further states, "Masturbation, however, was said to account for over 7 percent (102) of admissions over the twenty-six years reviewed, and in the 1880s, ranked first among all cases" (p. 101).

In time, twentieth-century medical thinking abandoned the false theoretical concept of masturbatory insanity. Bush notes that the church also revised its opinion. He states: "Eventually an official instructional manual for adult Mormons on a variety of health issues spoke forthrightly of 'the pernicious fallacy that insanity is the result of excessive masturbation. The facts do not support any such view....'" (Bush, 1993: 148).

A new, factually based, era in church thinking about sexuality and sex education appeared during the end of the 1920s and into the 1930s. Research physicians by then had verified a link between masturbation shame and mental health risks in youth who reported suicidal ideation associated with attempted masturbation abstinence. There were also documented cases of completed suicide attributed

to psychological trauma that resulted from masturbation abstinence (Steckel, 1917/1953).

Official church manuals endorsed secular books about sexuality and suggested that sexual interests be guided rather than inhibited. During this time masturbation did not always carry the same onus that it does in the popular Mormon literature of today. Rather than focusing on abstinence supervision as is practiced today with current church youth interviewing policies, lessons instead warned parents that they could create emotional problems in their adolescents by an “unintelligent” over response to their masturbation (Bush, 1993).

This more moderate, psychologically sensitive, and factually based church posture in time reversed itself when several influential church leaders published their own differing opinions on the matter. They began a new era of once again emphasizing total masturbation abstinence. This was the first time that Mormon literature on masturbation diverged from, and did not fully endorse, that of popular American medical opinion. Prior to the 1950s the sparse church literature specifically mentioning masturbation generally agreed with moderate views of secular medical authorities.

When Dr. Alfred Kinsey published his volumes citing extensive new data on sexual behavior, the nation responded with a diversity of political reactions to the news. Popular American culture was alive with animated discussions of Kinsey’s data and what Americans really did sexually. In light of Kinsey’s statistics on the behavior of college students there was a reaction at, Mormon Church owned, Brigham Young University:

In October 1953, [B.Y.U.] President Wilkinson, alarmed at the implications of Alfred Kinsey’s reports on male and female sexual behavior, appointed a faculty committee to determine if the school’s sex education program was providing a strong defense of chastity ... at least two faculty committees were appointed to address the ‘Masturbation Problem’” (Bergera & Priddis, 1985, p.81).

In 1958, LDS General Authority Bruce McConkie published an encyclopedia of Mormonism titled *Mormon Doctrine*, which became a highly popular reference for most members. The following statement from the book identifies that masturbation guilt and shame

had become identified by psychiatrists as a mental health concern for some Mormons. It recognizes Mormon masturbation shame as a psychotherapeutic problem directly, and created an additional new “doctrinal” position on the treatment of masturbation guilt for Mormons.

An individual may go to a psychiatrist for treatment because of a serious guilt complex and consequent mental disorder arising out of some form of sex immorality—masturbation, for instance. It is not uncommon for some psychiatrists in such situations to persuade the patient that masturbation itself is not an evil; that his trouble arises from the false teachings of the Church that such a practice is unclean; and that, therefore, by discarding the teaching of the Church, the guilt complex will cease and mental stability return. In this way iniquity is condoned, and many people are kept from complying with the law whereby they could become clean and spotless before the Lord—in the process of which they would gain the mental and spiritual peace that overcomes mental disorders (McConkie, 1966: 610-611).

With this statement, McConkie authoritatively defined for popular Mormon culture the new Mormon doctrinal policy that mental disorders for masturbation guilt can be overcome by sexual abstinence, while at the same time theologically invalidating the scientifically proven therapeutic treatment of the psychiatric profession. Although *Mormon Doctrine* was not published by the church, and therefore was not an “official church publication,” McConkie’s apostolic authority bore such powerful influence on Mormon popular culture that few Mormons would consider to differentiate between his opinion and his high church position.

In 1969, another Mormon Apostle, Spencer Kimball, who later became LDS church president and prophet, published additional new statements that further defined and added to the new body of Mormon masturbation policy. Kimball stated, “prophets anciently and today condemn masturbation” (Kimball, 1969: 77). Although masturbation is not mentioned in the *Bible* or *Book of Mormon*, absence of scriptural authority on the matter, Kimball said, is irrelevant: “Let no one rationalize their sins on the excuse that a particular sin of his is not mentioned nor forbidden in scripture” (p.25). He also stated his opinion that sexual orientation can be socially changed rather than it being a biological phenomenon. He said that

masturbation often leads to “total homosexuality”: “done in private, it evolves often into mutual masturbation—practiced with another person—and thence into total homosexuality” (p. 78). His book, *The Miracle of Forgiveness* was not an official publication of the church but, like McConkie’s writing, it bore the unimpeachable cultural authority of apostolic personal opinion and was widely read by Mormons. Like McConkie, he states that religious authority and church tradition supercede and invalidate the empirical research data of health professionals: “Many would-be authorities declare that it [masturbation] is natural and acceptable, and frequently young men I interview cite these advocates to justify the practice of it. To this we must respond that the world’s norms in many areas ... depart increasingly from God’s law. The Church has a different, higher norm” (p. 77).

The youth interviews that Kimball mentions are regular evaluations of individual behavior by church leaders of individuals. These personal interviews regularly inquire into personal sexual behavior. Masturbation abstinence is a requirement for youth to be “clean” and “worthy” of the presence of God’s spirit, without which one would experience “spiritual death” and separation from God. “Worthiness” in popular Mormon culture is requisite for social recognition as a “good” person, advancement in church youth positions, leadership, missionary eligibility and temple entrance.

When masturbation was declared to be a normal behavior by the American Medical Association in 1972, the *Boy Scout Handbook* was updated to reflect current health information. The new edition stated:

Many young men like to masturbate.... People used to think this caused weakness, insanity, and other physical and mental problems. Doctors today agree that it doesn’t cause any of these and is really a part of growing up sexually (Boy Scouts of America, 1972a: 334).

This edition met with disapproval from Mormon and Catholic authorities, who are major sponsors of the Boy Scouts. The moral views of popular church culture were now at odds with modern medical science. Church influence on Boy Scout officials resulted in 25,000 copies being destroyed. A new revised printing removed

the medical facts about masturbation health that were in conflict with church leader's opinions (Rowan, 2000). This revision advised:

You may have questions about sexual matters such as nocturnal emissions (also called "wet dreams") masturbation and even those strange feelings that you may have. Talk them over with your parents and/or spiritual advisor or doctor" (Boy Scouts of America, 1972b, p. 334.)

As church leaders published counsel to ignore the empirical evidence of medical research in preference to their own opinions on health matters, Mormon health professionals were inadvertently pressured to compromise their professional oaths to uphold standards of care and concede to their priesthood oaths of allegiance toward religious authority. In 1976, the Institute for Studies in Values in Human Behavior was created at BYU. Psychologist Allen Bergin, its new director, noted, "too many LDS behavioral scientists do not harmonize their professional concepts with their religious stands" (Bergera & Priddis, 1985: 66). Institute member, Victor Brown Jr. wrote, "truth lies with the scriptures and prophets, not with secular data" (p. 69).

In the 1980s, LDS Psychiatrist Cantril Nielsen found himself caught between his conflicting religious and professional oaths. Nielsen paid a sizable wrongful death malpractice settlement in the masturbation-shame suicide of 16-year-old Kip Eliason. The lawsuit alleged that Nielsen violated professional standards of psychiatric care by prescribing that his patient should follow his Mormon bishop's advice to abstain from masturbation in order to be "worthy," rather than basing treatment on empirical medical evidence required by medical ethics. Medical experts in the case verified the empirical evidence that masturbation is not only harmless, but that masturbation abstinence has a documented history of suicidal risk (Eliason, 1983; Steckel, 1917/1953).

In an effort to help Mormon youth manage masturbation abstinence and church standards of "personal worthiness," apostle Mark Peterson authored an unofficial church handout distributed to youth missionaries in the 1980s titled *Steps to Overcoming Masturbation*. It emphasized thought control and psychological aversion tech-

niques. It stated in part, “if you are tempted to masturbate, think of having to bathe in a tub of worms and eat several of them as you do the act”; and, “tie a hand to the bed frame with a tie in order that the habit of masturbating in a semi-sleep condition can be broken” (Peterson, n.d.). Peterson’s handout was not well received by many of the youth. It used principles of aversion therapy and practices typically advocated by nineteenth-century physicians who believed in degeneracy theory; methods still popular during the time of Peterson’s own youth. In recent years it has been labeled spiritually abusive by some members and has become a subject of public ridicule of the church.

Modern Officially Published Church Statements

This portion of Mormon literature consists of scripture and authorized church publications. There are relatively few statements officially published by the church on masturbation. There are however, many official statements on “chastity” and “morality” that are euphemistically or implicitly accepted in popular Mormon culture to include masturbation. The bulk of advice mentioning masturbation specifically comes from “unofficial” publications privately authored by church leaders or respected church members.

During World War II, a bold statement was made to underscore the importance of sexual morality to the LDS military youth expecting to go overseas. An official statement was made during a general conference of the church. The First Presidency told youth they were better off dead than to be sexually “unclean.” Undoubtedly, this statement was primarily intended to keep departing servicemen abstinent from sexual intercourse while away from home. However the statement did not distinguish any form of sexual behavior from another. Therefore, it would include masturbation, since masturbation is considered “unclean” sexual behavior for Mormons. The official LDS church magazine *Improvement Era* printed the following article titled, “Be Ye Clean,” which stated:

An excerpt from the ‘Message of the First Presidency,’ delivered to the Saints during the April, 1942, General Conference of the Church, states: ‘Sexual purity is youth’s most precious possession; it is the foundation of

all righteousness. Better dead clean than alive, unclean (Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1943: 43).

This often repeated phrase, “better dead clean than alive unclean,” became a theme instilled in the youth of the church. The Mutual Improvement Association, a church youth organization that held weekly meetings exclusively for adolescents and young adults, used this phrase as a memorized “theme” that was repeated aloud each week by the youth congregation. Church president, Harold B. Lee stated:

May I remind you of what our youth repeated some years ago as a slogan in the MIA.... How glorious and near to the angels is youth that is clean. This youth has joy unspeakable here and eternal happiness hereafter. Sexual purity is youth’s most precious possession. It is the foundation of all righteousness. Better dead clean, than alive unclean (Lee, 1974: 376).

An official church pamphlet on masturbation titled, *To Young Men Only*, was distributed to the youth in 1976. It reprinted an address by apostle Boyd Packer delivered at a priesthood session of the church general conference where only males were in attendance. In it, Packer taught youth his own unique theoretical etiology of sexual desire that differed from that of medical science. He said that youth would hardly be aware of sexual desire during puberty if they could remain completely abstinent from masturbation: “When this power begins to form, it might be likened to having a little factory in your body ... unless you tamper with it, you will hardly be aware that it is working at all (Packer, 1976: 3). Packer told Mormon youth that masturbation was the cause of increased desire, “if you do that, the little factory will speed up.... You can quickly be subjected to a habit, one that is not worthy, one that will leave you feeling depressed and feeling guilty ... it is not pleasing to the Lord, nor is it pleasing to you. It does not make you feel worthy or clean” (p. 4-5).

The above statements make it clear that the Mormon Church during this period began teaching that masturbation is a causal factor in sexual desire, that masturbation is a causal factor in depression, and that it makes an individual morally “unclean.”

The entire impact of official Mormon publications about masturbation on church youth is difficult to measure. However, one nega-

tive outcome of official church publications on masturbation is illustrated by the previously mentioned case of 16-year-old Kip Eliason, who tried to faithfully follow the official church publications advocating total masturbation abstinence. The official church slogan “better dead clean, than alive unclean” unintentionally set the stage for a dramatic lawsuit against the church and its leadership. In 1982, Eliason took the slogan literally and committed suicide. Kip believed he was unworthy to live, due to his repeated failure to qualify as “worthy” during his Bishop’s interviews that required him to remain completely abstinent from masturbation (*Eliason v. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints et al.*, 1983). For suicidal LDS youth struggling to be abstinent from masturbation, who believe they are “unclean,” there may be an extremely life endangering message in the Mormon doctrinal slogan “Better dead clean, than alive unclean.”

In 1990 a new pamphlet *For the Strength of Youth*, was published by the church for distribution to the youth to teach morality. Under the heading of “Sexual Purity,” it states:

Our Heavenly Father has counseled that sexual intimacy should be reserved for his children within the bonds of marriage.... Because sexual intimacy is so sacred, the Lord requires self-control and purity before marriage.... The Lord specifically forbids certain behaviors, including all sexual relations before marriage ... masturbation, or preoccupation with sex in thought, speech, or action.... All Latter-day saints must learn to control and discipline themselves (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1990:14-15).

These statements constituted official doctrine of the church intended to be widely distributed among the youth. This pamphlet was commonly given to youth by their leaders in answer to their questions regarding masturbation and other sexual behavior. Its authoritativeness is summarized by the following statement printed on the first page.

This pamphlet summarizes standards from the writings and teachings of the Church leaders and from scriptures. The First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve [Apostles] have reviewed, accepted, and endorsed this pamphlet, which is printed at their request and with their approval for the information, guidance, and blessings of the youth of the Church (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1990:1).

The pamphlet's introductory message was signed: "The First Presidency," the church's most authoritative leaders. In it, church youth were told what psychological consequences to expect for either violating or adhering to the official church moral standards that are included therein:

We counsel you to choose to live a morally clean life. The prophet Alma declared, "Wickedness never was happiness" (Alma 41:10). Truer words were never spoken!

You cannot do wrong and feel right. It is impossible! Years of happiness can be lost in the foolish gratification of a momentary desire for pleasure. Satan would have you believe that happiness comes only as you surrender to his enticement to self-indulgence. We only need to look at the shattered lives of those who violate God's laws to know why Satan is called the "Father of all lies" (2 Nephi 2:18).

You can avoid the burden of guilt and sin and all the attending heartaches if you will heed the standards provided you through the teachings of the Lord and his servants. We bear witness to the truth of these principles and promise you the blessings of the Lord as you keep the standards outlined in the scriptures and emphasized in this pamphlet. Among the blessings will be the constant and calming companionship of the Holy Ghost and the feelings of peace and happiness that you will experience. The First Presidency (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1990: 4-5)

This pamphlet implies to youth that total abstinence from masturbation is the will of God. The consequences youth should expect to experience for violating this moral standard, among others, are authoritatively proclaimed to be: "not feeling right," "acquiring a burden of guilt and sin," "heartaches," and "a shattered life." The promise for keeping this standard of total abstinence from masturbation is: "receipt of God's blessings," "the calming companionship of the Holy Ghost," and "feelings of peace and happiness" (p. 4).

For the Strength of Youth was revised and replaced in 2001. It is currently titled, *For the Strength of Youth: Fulfilling Our Duty to God*. Although it bears a similar title, it is entirely rewritten, and the word masturbation is no longer used. The new sexuality section, titled "Sexual Purity," endorses marital sexuality and places its emphasis on the positive aspects of sexuality between a husband and wife: "Physical intimacy between husband and wife is beautiful and sacred. It is ordained of God for the creation of children and

the expression of love....” (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2001: 26). Youth are now counseled: “Before marriage, do not do anything to arouse the powerful emotions that must only be expressed in marriage.... Do not arouse those emotions in your own body” (p.27). The specific suggested harmful outcomes for masturbation in the previous *For the Strength of Youth* edition are notably absent. Instead the youth are reminded of the overall seriousness of sexual expression outside of marriage: “In God’s sight, sexual sins are extremely serious because they defile the power God has given us to create life ... sexual sins are more serious than any other sins except murder or denying the Holy Ghost....”(p.26).

Statements by Mormon Popular Culture Authors

Unlike official church publications and those authored by church hierarchy, the writings on masturbation produced by the general membership of the church express a broader range of opinions. Some of these writings move beyond idealized religious behavioral models and report the cultural reactions some Mormons have to masturbation doctrine.

There exists a body of Mormon literature that recognizes that Mormon culture views sexuality as problematic. It calls for reforms from church policies that promote negative sexual attitudes. Mormon sociologist Harold T. Christensen and Mormon social psychologist Marvin B. Rytting acknowledged that Mormon culture has become one of the most sexually restrictive, and that deviation brings almost unbearable personal conflict, guilt, and possible social alienation.

as American society has become more permissive and more openly occupied with sex, Mormon culture has become more restrictive, and once again there is a major gap between the views of Mormons and their contemporaries.... Sex in Mormon culture, even more than in the broader American culture, is a significant stress point, a serious source of personal conflict.... Sex is also a stress point *within* Mormon culture. While our socialization works well for most members, it is strong enough to make significant deviation almost unbearable. Individuals who don’t fit the mold are made to feel so guilty that they may even become alienated from the circle of Saints. While “black and white” positions may keep many people in line, they may also cause unnecessary anguish (Christensen & Rytting, 1976: 9).

Mormon psychotherapist Romel W. Mackelprang found in his clinical practice that his Mormon clients reflected this highly restrictive sexual attitude. He stated “when sexual problems occur, religious issues are more likely to be a factor for LDS clients than for any others (with the possible exception of Catholics). However unintentional, church membership contributes to sexual problems for some people” (Mackelprang, 1994: 48). One of the factors that may contribute to this phenomenon is the cultural approach the church takes to sexual regulation of members by calling individuals in for confession and regulating sexual behavior during worthiness interviews. Mackelprang continues:

Church leaders strongly and frequently emphasize the serious nature of sexual sins to members, especially young members. Bishops conduct regular worthiness interviews with adolescents from the age of twelve through young adulthood. Moral cleanliness is a major focus of these interviews.... Some bishops have even “helped” them by requiring them to confess their sins to their parents as well.... For example, in one ward in which I lived the bishop required deacons [12-14 years old] to tell their parents if they confessed to masturbation in priesthood interviews, whereupon several quickly learned to avoid this embarrassment by denying the activity (p. 48).

Mackelprang calls for a reform in Mormon sexual attitudes and for a shift away from policies that promote negative sexual emphasis within the church. He gives an example of the outcome of negative sexual attitudes in a Mormon marriage when a woman came to him to be treated for sexual aversion.

Parents and church leaders should present information and counsel in frank, positive ways rather than in negative moralistic terms. A possible consequence of such a negative, moralistic approach was evident in a woman I counseled who had an aversion to sexual intimacy. She related that the most powerful message about sex she received from her parents was, “I would rather see you dead than be immoral.” Though she was now a married adult, her overwhelming fear of doing something forbidden, even with her spouse, continued to plague her (p.50).

In 1988, Mormon researcher Terence Day identified erotophobia as a serious problem in LDS sexual culture. He stated:

Today, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and its people are struggling with sexual questions, perhaps as never before ... too often, injunctions encouraging chastity are burdened by negative connotations

and forebodings about the dark side of sex. Therefore the warnings often instill in Latter-day Saints an inordinate fear of sex, or erotophobia.... Many LDS couples, therefore approach the nuptial bed not only with a divinely sanctioned physical desire for each other, but with profound misgivings about the expression of physical love.

Few of us in Western societies escape the influence of erotophobia, which can impose needless guilt, undermine self esteem, and even impair sexual development ... it is important to recognize erotophobia so that its impact is reduced in the lives of its victims (Day, 1988: 8).

In his contact with members within the Mormon culture, Day further observed that, "in many cases individuals were suffering from hyperactive guilt complexes" (p. 8). With regard to masturbation shame he writes, "Autoerotophobia lingers yet today in the United States and perhaps particularly in the LDS church" (p. 8), and then asks, "Are the Church's teachings on masturbation gospel, or an autoerotophobic vestige of nineteenth-century Victorianism" (p.13)?

In contrast to Day's recognition of autoerotophobia in Mormon culture, is the view of other authors of Mormon popular culture literature who fear masturbation and continue to proliferate teachings of dire consequences for those who are not totally abstinent. Associate Brigham Young University Professor and LDS Bishop, Brad Wilcox is a popular Mormon author and youth morality speaker whose books and tapes are currently marketed to the youth. Although he agrees that there is no physical harm in masturbation, he states his opinion that there are serious emotional consequences. In his popular book, *Growing Up: Gospel Answers about Maturity and Sex*, he writes:

The world views the practice of masturbation as a harmless, natural sexual outlet that is a normal part of growing up. The truth is that for young men, nocturnal emissions and the dreams that accompany them provide a natural release for the body.... And while there is no evidence that masturbation causes impotence, pimples, or mental illness, or that it interferes with physical or normal development, there is evidence that this practice carries with it serious emotional and spiritual consequences (Wilcox, 2000: 104).

Paradoxically, Wilcox does not offer any empirical evidence to support his argument. Rather, he opines that a loss of spirit for sin-

ning will bring with it the emotional consequences he speaks of, “The immediate consequence of any transgression is withdrawal of the Spirit. Instantly we feel alone and miss the peace, comfort, safety, perspective, strength, and joy we usually feel” (p.104).

In the book, *Is Kissing Sinful?*, author Grant Von Harrison undoubtedly argues one of the most extreme moral positions for self control in Mormon popular culture books published today. Harrison, who holds a Ph.D. in Instructional Science from UCLA, and was a Brigham Young University faculty member for many years, not only questions the propriety of passionate kissing, but he further teaches that: “If you allow yourself to become sexually aroused prior to marriage, you commit a moral sin” (Von Harrison, 1994: 4). Masturbation is not even mentioned specifically in this book. Arousal alone in any degree outside of marriage, according to Von Harrison, is enough to produce sin and guilt. “Outside the bonds of matrimony, the Lord does not condone any degree of sexual arousal” (p. 7). Presumably, Von Harrison’s approach to healthy Mormon psychosexual development and courtship precludes experiencing any arousal for the partner whatsoever.

Mormon marriage and family therapist, Carlfred Broderick has taken a more moderate view:

there is not the slightest evidence that there are any physically harmful consequences from masturbation. It does not lead to pimples or to mental illness or to impotency.... (I remember my own bishop bearing solemn witness that all these things were attendant to this practice....) The only reason that young people should not masturbate is that it is an indulgence which tends to undercut self-control in an area where self-control is much needed (Broderick, 1967: 105).

In response to Broderick’s comments one church member wrote:

I question Mr. Broderick’s defining masturbation as a problem. Masturbation by boys or girls is considered a normal phenomenon of development by professionals in the field of Behavioral Sciences. It is even considered necessary by many of these professionals for a satisfying psychosexual development. Since masturbation is normal, then it is not a problem and should be off limits as a question asked young men who are being advanced in the priesthood.... Questioning boys in this area could encourage them to lie to Church leaders, to feel unnecessary guilt, or both (Moore, 1968: 14).

Broderick replied,

science is qualified to speak on the subject of the objective consequences of an act, but not on its moral implications. The latter question is outside the realm of science. It would seem to be a legitimate concern of the Church to espouse values—in this case the value of self control in a significant area of life (Broderick, 1968: 14).

William Gardiner is a psychotherapist who specializes in the treatment of sexual disorders and is concerned about psychological damage and marital intimacy dysfunction induced by psychosexual shame. He has served as a Mormon bishop and as a seminary and institute instructor employed by the church. He writes:

within ... Mormonism lies a tremendous reservoir of shame surrounding sexuality ... church president Spencer W. Kimball once conceded that sexual issues were the number one etiological factor he found in [Mormon] divorcing couples ... Absent in his concession is any ownership or responsibility of the church institution for the sexual problems its members might experience (Gardiner, 2003, para. 2).

Gardiner has identified statements by church leaders that he believes may result in the internalized shame that underlies Mormon psychosexual dysfunction and marital instability. In a 1998 general conference of the church Mormon apostle Jeffery Holland emphasized the importance of chastity to church youth. Gardiner observed:

While Elder Holland could have used the time to teach the youth of the church the positive reasons why an expression of sexuality with healthy boundaries is favorable, instead he turned to the shame motive. Shockingly, his message to those who have been sexual outside of church defined boundaries is that they “desecrate the atonement of Christ,” they “mock the Son of Righteousness,” they “crucify Christ afresh” through their behaviors! It would be difficult to create a message more infused with Godly shame. Shame inflicted from a Godly perspective is potentially most disabling and distorting to an individual. The message that is internalized is that not only am I unacceptable to others or myself—but to God! ... An “if it is bad to lust, then I must be bad” conditioning ensues (para. 24).

Gardiner cites several clinical cases to support his argument that church members suffer psychological damage from internalized shame. In one of them, a Mormon woman attributes her eating disorder to her internalized shame that she says resulted from her Mormon beliefs about masturbation:

I hope you don't mind me writing this, but I know it'd be really hard for me to tell you ... this goes way past bad. I can't go back and change, but everyday I wish I can. Masturbate, that's the thing that's ruined my life. I can't deal with this guilt, it's taken over all my actions. I feel I have to be perfect, so to cover it up sometimes I hurt my body, by not eating as much, and making myself throw up. I think one day it'll [sic] will get rid of all the shame, but so far, nothing. Nothing has changed. Every night I have bad dreams of what I may turn into, and it really scares me. *I try so much to pray, but I don't feel welcome to the Lord.* [emphasis in original] ... Right now, I'm really scared, since I'm telling you this. I've never told anyone but God. I carry this big burden and it's carrying me down, but I feel I may never get back up (para. 31).

Gardiner concludes:

Many [Mormon] young people have discussed and written (most are too shamed to openly discuss the topic) to me concerning the crippling effect the shame they feel about masturbation has had on them. In my opinion, for many, the severe shame they experience due to this behavior, intensified by the God-infused guilt, can severely distort their self-image, healthy development, and consequent healthy behaviors/choices (para. 29).

In 2004, in an effort to help Mormons heal from psychosexual shame and develop a more positive and healthy attitude toward sexuality, Laura M. Brotherson published *And They Were Not Ashamed: Strengthening Marriage through Sexual Fulfillment*. Brotherson holds a bachelor's degree in family studies from B.Y.U. In her book, she states that she plans to become a marriage and family therapist and a sex therapist in the future. She mentions that her church service includes serving as a Relief Society president, Young Women's Organization president, and a Marriage and Family Relations instructor. She is also a wife and mother of three, who admits she struggled personally with psychosexual shame that led to marital dysfunction and is writing to help Mormon women have better marriages.

Brotherson advocates a unique new Mormon attitude toward masturbation based on personal intentions. She uses Christian situation ethics to link spirituality and masturbation together as healthy behavior. She advises Mormon women that masturbation is permissible under the special circumstance that the person's intention is to promote marital health and to strengthen the family. To distin-

guish what she considers appropriate masturbation from inappropriate, she has constructed a typology that labels acceptable masturbation as “self-learning” and unacceptable masturbation as “masturbation.” She states:

I have compiled a list of ways self-learning differs from the inappropriate self-stimulation of masturbation. - The intent of self-learning is to gain a healthy understanding of the body’s functioning. The intent of masturbation is to selfishly gain pleasure and sexual gratification. - Self-learning is for short-term purposes. Masturbation can become an ongoing habit or addiction. Self-learning is meant to further the expression of *love*.... Masturbation is meant as an act of *lust*.... - Self-learning is a conscious choice to improve sexual intimacy in marriage. Masturbation occurs on impulse with the intent to self-medicate or self-satisfy. Self-learning seeks to improve the couple’s relationship. Masturbation *weakens* or *replaces* the marital relationship, causing individuals to seek sexual satisfaction alone. - Self-learning can have the wonderful result of mutual sexual fulfillment in marriage. Masturbation causes distortions regarding love and sexuality.... (Brotherson, 2004: 241-242).

Brotherson has redefined masturbation for Mormons. She does not offer any data other than her own personal experience to support the various claims in her list, but it obviously combines elements of current scientific empirical research on the value of masturbation in treating orgasmic dysfunction with traditional moral prohibitions popular within Mormon culture. She uses “follow-the-spirit-of-the-law-rather-than-the-letter-of-the-law” New Testament theology to sanctify therapeutic masturbation. She gives Mormon women permission to masturbate under special circumstances without guilt or shame by creating a new set of limitations that are determined by her definitions of healthy marital intentions. Although Brotherson also continues to reinforce many traditional Mormon cultural forms of masturbation shame, she is the first popular female Mormon writer to acknowledge and promote therapeutic use of masturbation as spiritually healthy behavior. In doing so she has created a new set of criteria for Mormon attitudes toward sexual “worthiness.”

Scientific Data on Mormon Masturbation Attitudes

Quantitative Statistical Data

Available data on Mormon masturbation attitudes appear to indicate that church members are divided on their moral views about masturbation. Wilford Smith, a Brigham Young University sociology professor, surveyed sociology students on three occasions over a 22-year period (1950, 1961, 1972) about sexual attitudes and behavior. His data indicates that there are more Mormon students that accept masturbation as a moral behavior than those who agree with church authorities that it is immoral. His sample of 8,584 students was taken from five universities and two colleges in the northwestern states. He compared frequent and infrequent church attendees and divided the sample into Mormon and non-Mormon groups. Smith asked participants whether or not they judged masturbation to be immoral. Of the total sample, 66% of Mormons reported that they did not think masturbation was immoral. Mormons identified as infrequent church attendees held a more accepting view of masturbation than frequent attendees, yet even among frequent church attendees, 64% of females and 57% of males reported that they did not think masturbation is immoral (Smith, 1976).

This division of moral attitude towards masturbation appears to be reflected in the masturbation behavior of Mormon women. In a study conducted in 1995, Marybeth Raynes, Frieda Stewart, and Marjorie Pett analyzed a convenience sample of 103 married Mormon women. Ninety-six percent were active church attendees (91% weekly, 5% monthly). In their sample, 43% of married Mormon women reported they currently masturbated and a 54% reported they masturbated "when younger" (Raynes, Stuart, & Pett, 1995: 39).

Qualitative Data: Personal Accounts of Mormon Masturbation Attitudes

I (Vern Bullough) vividly remember in my youth one of the apostles (a general authority) addressing a group of Aaronic priest-

hood members and telling us in great detail what masturbation was and how we must avoid it. Many of us who did not know what it was now knew it, and many of my friends tried it out almost immediately.

Emerging in the Mormon literature are first person accounts of modern Mormon attitudes toward masturbation. Few church members risk public exposure of their personal sexual behavior or publicly expressing attitudes that are not socially approved, but some are willing to state their opinions anonymously.

In 2001, I (Mark Kim Malan) invited students from two Utah universities to participate in a classroom survey that measured their attitudes toward masturbation. Of the Mormon respondents, 55 identified themselves as religiously “active,” by attending church services once a month or more. The following statements were written in response to a request for participants to write additional comments on the back of the questionnaire. These comments document Mormon cultural attitudes about masturbation that range from endorsement and conformity to church teachings to disagreement and dissidence (Malan, 2001):

I believe that masturbation is a sin. I had an addiction to it that I have overcome. It made me feel guilty and my self-esteem went down. I also have had weight problems. I have repented accordingly with my religion and I am so much happier now. Every aspect of my life has improved since stopping [Female, age 21].

I agree masturbation is like any addiction [Male, age 20].

I feel that masturbation very frequently is not good, especially if you are married. I do believe that masturbation at least once is helpful to find what really pleases you [Female, age 22].

I did enjoy masturbation while young, but shortly felt I was trapped in an addiction. How often do people addicted to other things enjoy that addiction? I, like them, became very dissatisfied that I could not give up something I no longer enjoyed [Male, age 24].

I think just about everybody has masturbated or played with their genitals. I do not believe that it is good spiritually, which is an important dimension

of overall wellness. I have masturbated and was addicted at one time. I don't think I was depressed but I wasn't happy with myself. When I stopped and overcame my addiction, I freed myself and have been happier than I've ever been. The desires are still there and once in a while I do it. Through personal meditation and prayer, I think and feel that it isn't right. I believe that it decreases a person's spiritual happiness [Male, age 24].

I've never thought masturbating made me less of a person. My religion didn't affect my feelings much because even though they said it wasn't good I didn't believe 'em cause of something I read: "Everyone masturbates and if they say they haven't they're lying." So since then, I was convinced it was normal, joyful and less satisfying than after having intercourse. Masturbating will not disturb you, ya might be addicted because you are already disturbed [Female, age 19].

Masturbation is taught wrong by the LDS faith who say it stimulates unclean thoughts and actions. A lot of pressure is put on youth, in high school especially, about not masturbating. As I've gotten older I've gained a better understanding that it is common. While I don't think it is right, it seems a part of life. Excessive can cause serious problems [Male, age 24].

With the advent of the Internet, more Mormons are speaking out about their personal attitudes toward masturbation and church policy without fear of social sanctions. These highly personal accounts of sexual experiences are often anonymously authored. The most vocal writers are Mormons calling for reform. These authors often draw attention to their own psychological suffering, and many identify themselves as victims of spiritual abuse. This emerging new body of phenomenological data offers a rare inside view of Mormon cultural attitudes toward masturbation for qualitative analysis. The following comments frankly express the problem some individuals in Mormon culture have experienced with regulation of masturbation by well meaning church leaders.

Heber:

I have tested the words of church leaders about masturbation by following their advice to the letter by being abstinent and "worthy." I have the capacity to be highly self disciplined and have lived for periods in my life sexually abstinent as taught by the general authorities of the church. After using the spiritual tests taught by Christ and comparing the spiritual fruits of masturbation abstinence to my experience masturbating, my personal experience bears testimony that the well-meaning advice of LDS prophets on

masturbation is false and damaging to physical, mental, and spiritual health. I do not state this casually, but with serious and sobering experience. I have followed the words of Christ to see the fruits of church teachings on masturbation. Masturbation abstinence as taught by church leaders only has brought me suffering and feelings of shame (Heber, 2003, para. 5).

The problem was that I was just a 12-year-old boy. I was a deacon. What did I know compared to the bishopric? He was in the bishopric. He was Jesus' mouthpiece. I was Jesus' servant who held his holy priesthood. I loved Jesus and loved to obey him. My own tender testimony of love for my masculinity and my desire to marry and share love with my wife and family were totally crushed beneath the weight of authority. I was now an "evil" boy, who had been committing a sin next to murder in seriousness all through my innocent childhood. It was horrifying to realize I was so evil. Today I recognize this action by my priesthood leader as spiritual and sexual abuse of an innocent child. His authoritarian position invalidated my authentic inner spiritual voice. In that moment my priesthood leader created clinical neurosis in me that I struggled to heal far into my adult life. It was unquestionably abusive and damaging (para. 12).

Chris:

My teenage years were hellish because of the priesthood expectations, church pressures, churning sexuality, complete lack of self-esteem (which would haunt me for years) and crazy home life. I remember being 12 and having to see a bishop to make sure I was both worthy to go do baptisms for the dead and become a deacon. I was completely frightened because I had already discovered masturbation, and long before I knew I was in deep trouble.... I remember sitting in that bishop's office scared, absolutely scared. I knew he was going to go throughout the litany of questions and eventually come to the ones regarding sexual purity and morality. I knew I wasn't pure anymore (at 12!!) And knew that there was no way I could lie to him. Lying would have heaped entirely too much guilt on me, so telling the truth was the only way of maintaining some sense of integrity....

When he did ask me, I somehow managed to get the courage to say I did have a problem.... I was doubly damned because at the time my dad also was the stake president. This bishop, stone faced and in deadly serious form, told me I needed to go home and talk with my father in order to become fully repentant with the Lord. My father, he said, would be able to help me overcome my "self abuse." Of course like the good little "obedient" child I had been raised to be, I did. I still can't believe that I managed to muster the courage at 12 to wade through so much shame and talk to my dad about "my little problem."

For years after that my father would periodically check in to see how "my problem" was going. I had a low level of sexual anxiety whenever I drove in the car alone with dad because I was never quite sure when he was going to pop that one out. He was never overtly shaming about it of course. The shame was simply implicit in the whole situation.

Anyway, needless to say this set the stage for year after year of torment and pain. I prayed and prayed that God would help me stop masturbating. My god, I prayed. I prayed that he would help me overcome my feelings. I felt a vague sense that whatever I wanted; what I felt, must be against God. I learned to alienate myself from myself. I learned to suppress my feelings; to shut myself down emotionally. That's perhaps the thing I am most angry about now as I try to reconnect to myself, to repair all those years of psychic abuse and emotional neglect. I could go on.... (Chris, 1997).

Anonymous:

The Mormon Church's policy regarding masturbation has completely destroyed my sex life. I would give anything to be able to go back and tell myself as a little girl that it was okay to masturbate.... I fought against my body's desire for sexual release. I wanted desperately to be a "good" and "pure" Mormon girl. I did everything possible to keep from wanting to masturbate, but I could never overcome my "problem." I thought I was weak, full of sin, and had no self-control when really, I just happen to have a very high sex drive. So it was a constant battle. I never tried so hard at anything as trying not to masturbate (and I am a perfectionist, so that's saying a lot). Eventually I destroyed any kind of connection I once had with my body. I developed such an aversion to my own genitals that I was unable to even insert a tampon (when that time came). I never ever looked at my own genitals.... I ended up a very sexually twisted and frustrated person with more guilt hanging around me than any person should ever have to feel.... Years and years of sexual repression don't just go away. I still have never had an orgasm.... I have a loving, caring husband who does all he can to help me. Still, I have yet to attain that kind of sexual fulfillment, and it's all because I believed so much in the Church and its twisted views on sexuality, especially female sexuality (Anonymous, 2001a).

Anonymous:

One of the main reasons I left the church was its stance on masturbation. I certainly didn't know it was wrong until it was brought up during one of those hideous joint young men and women chastity lessons.... I was filled with guilt and remorse. I actually made myself physically ill and finally after almost two years, I went to the bishop and confessed.... I'm 18 now and my experience with the church's stance on masturbation has left my psyche scarred and my sexuality grossly retarded (Anonymous, 2001b).

Anonymous:

Being told to be fruitful and multiply is one thing, but after years of being told that sex is forbidden, evil, unclean, and transformed the woman into some revolting thing like "used gum" or a "half-eaten cookie," it is unrealistic to think that normal sexual functioning could result from such nega-

tive conditioning. I have the church to thank for having that problem in my life.... I realized how much the church had damaged my psyche. I realized that I had grown up afraid of a lot of things in life. I was afraid of sex ... and my body (Anonymous, 1997).

Jeff:

I expected the meetings with my bishop to be compassionate and reassuring. It was more like an IRS audit. I prayed endlessly to be delivered from those temptations. I felt there was something wrong with ME. I prayed to be healed from this “affliction.” I beat my fists on my pillow with agony. I used every ounce of faith I could muster to overcome this problem. I was puzzled why I could not control these natural urges via faith. The church taught that the Holy Spirit could protect you from temptation. With the Holy Spirit and faith, you could cast off the “natural man....” Of course, I blamed it on myself and felt there was something wrong with me. I thought I was perverted. I felt evil inside, I hated myself.... I have recently read LDS church material on controlling masturbation.... I was disturbed that the Mormon Church would promote such guilt among its members with the kind of strict enforcement detailed in this material. Evidently the Mormon Church is incapable of dealing with sexuality in any other way other than guilt. Was the guilt that I experienced that lead to my inactivity caused by my sins, or rather a result of the Mormon Church’s selective intolerance of human sexuality and their inadequate ways of dealing with it? I exposed my deepest, most personal sexual desires, acts and temptations to the bishop—things that I would never tell anyone. I did so because I had faith that it would bring about spiritual healing and cleansing, thus removing further temptation. Perhaps not completely, but sufficiently so that I could control it. All I got in return for spilling my soul to the bishop was to hum a hymn or get excommunicated (Jeff, 1997).

Anonymous:

I hadn’t enjoyed church since my annual bishop’s interview when I was 15 when he pried into my sex life and asked me about masturbation. I couldn’t understand why it was any of his business then, and I now know that it wasn’t any of his business! It made me very uncomfortable and shortly afterwards I began finding reasons not to be there (Anonymous, 1998).

Byron:

This is abuse of the worst kind. The church’s biggest fault is the interviewing process.... The words of your leaders are the words of the prophet we are taught. We are taught not to question (Byron, 2000, para. 1).

Ex-caliber:

The Church calls it self-discipline which is inane because this natural practice is impossible to avoid for the vast majority of young men.... Please don't subject your children to these damaging, guilt-inducing types of interviews by Church leaders. Don't gamble with your children's normal healthy development (*Ex-caliber*, 2000, para. 1-2).

In addition to the above accounts, a story published in *Libido* magazine chronicles a Mormon woman's own inner experience while masturbating. It contains lines that poignantly capture the feeling of sexual dichotomy many Mormons describe experiencing: joyous heartfelt feelings inviting self-acceptance, but at the next moment feelings of overpowering shame: "Her heart vacillated dramatically between self-loathing and sheer delight ... between overwhelming guilt and celebration for her sexuality" (Paul, 1999: 37).

Qualitative Data: Personal Accounts of Masturbation-shame and Mormon Youth Suicide

Some Mormon youth report experiencing suicidal ideation that they attribute to their experiences during church worthiness interviews. A Mormon physician described his reaction to this problem as follows:

A tragic wake up call to the General Authorities of the church came in 1982 when an Idaho priest [age 16] Kip Eliason committed suicide after deciding he was "unworthy" to live because he could not be 100% abstinent [from masturbation] all the time. His Bishop promised him he could. In his suicide note to his dad he said he hated himself for not being able to conquer this "sin" and could not stand to live any longer. Kip was a 4.0 student, Eagle Scout candidate, school track star and held up by his teachers at church and school as an ideal youth. He was the consummate Mormon boy who was dedicated to Christ far beyond the commitment of most boys. His innocent blood cries out as a testimony against the false Mormon teachings about masturbation. Unbelievably, even as one of Mormondom's finest priesthood youth lay dead before their own eyes, church leaders have not ended the abusive masturbation "worthiness" interviews that were unquestionably the direct cause of this innocent 16 year old priest's death (Heber, 2003, para. 17).

The Eliason suicide referred to previously in this paper is a rich source of documented cultural data on Mormon masturbation. Fo-

rensic evidence from the legal case against the church that ensued following Kip Eliason's suicide over masturbation shame included excerpts from his diary and his suicide note. In his diary Kip wrote:

It seems I have tried to stop a billion times.... Being rid of this ugly immoral sin will save my life and make it worth living.... I am willing to do anything I have to do to repent and be free of this sin (Taylor, 1986: 92).

In Kip's suicide note he acknowledges his feelings of self-hate for failing to live up to church standards of total masturbation abstinence.

Dear Dad, I love you more than words can say. If it were possible, I would stay alive only for you, for I really only have you. But it isn't possible. I first must love myself and I do not. The strange feeling of darkness and self-hate overpowers all my defenses. I must unfortunately yield to it. This turbulent feeling is only for a few to truly understand. I feel that you do not comprehend the immense feeling of self-hatred I have. This is the only way I feel I can relieve myself of these feelings now. Carry on with your life and be happy. I love you more than words can say. -Your son, Kip (p. 46).

James, a member of a Mormon Bishopric, recounted his experience when he was called upon as a minister to see if he could prevent a suicidal Mormon youth from jumping from a building:

One night the phone rang, the asylum was on the line telling me that my young friend was attempting suicide ... He mentioned my name, he would only be prepared to talk to me.... I got to the point where I could ask him why he wanted to end his life. He paused and then said because he had sinned so terribly. Which sin? He had masturbated ... twice in 18 months (James, 1999).

Personal accounts written by Mormons illustrate the problematic nature of masturbation and worthiness interviews that exist today within modern Mormon culture. The confession process for Mormons that entails being called in by their bishops for questioning during worthiness interviews differs from the voluntary confessional processes that are initiated by an individual common to many other faiths. As indicated in the quotations above, the potential for experiencing psychosexual shame appears to be increased for some Mormons by the mandatory confessional process.

Summary and Conclusion

Our research indicates that there is a wide diversity of attitudes toward masturbation in Mormon culture today. The available statistical studies indicate that a majority of Mormon Church member's attitudes and behavior are at odds with the modern church policy of abstinence. A review of Mormon literature demonstrates that official and popular Mormon cultural attitudes toward masturbation have changed during the course of Mormon church history as various official church pronouncements and new opinions of leaders have emerged and been published.

Today, there is a pronounced diversity of attitudes among Mormons that range from efforts to conform to a traditional morality of abstinence, to testimonials that such tradition has proven to be unhealthy, abusive, and immoral. Official Mormon attitudes have ranged from nearly a century of complete silence on the matter to the present modern policy of mandatory confessional interviews that make masturbation abstinence a requirement for personal "worthiness." For over one hundred years Mormon beliefs coincided with popular medical opinion and have only come into conflict with medicine in the last few decades.

Church efforts to influence secular institutions have included statements to LDS medical professionals and scouting officials. These statements have raised ethical questions and produced professional dilemmas regarding religious influence upon professional standards of care and secular policy making.

The empirical evidence that exists on Mormons and masturbation suggests that many Mormons currently have serious psychosexual struggles with abstinence doctrine, and that some Mormon youth are placed at higher suicidal risk. Some Mormon health professionals are identifying these health risks as not only potentially damaging to the individual, but also to marital functioning. They recognize them as undermining to family stability and are calling for reforms.

As Mormon leaders face growing new evidence of the health benefits of masturbation, and the mental and physical health risks of abstinence, they face the dilemma of maintaining a policy toward

masturbation that is now increasingly viewed as medically dangerous by church membership.

Historically, when church authorities become convinced that the church's position is in danger, prayerful inquiry on the part of leadership often results in policy change. Mormonism has a history of changing to adapt to new social developments. Policies that once had strong theological foundations, such as polygamy, birth control, and prohibition of priesthood to blacks, at one time were stated by church leaders to be absolute, yet over time they have changed. The same may prove true of the dangers of masturbation abstinence.

There is a recognizable constituent that remains within American culture that continues to consider masturbation a "closeted" health topic. Some politicians and theologians in particular have been sensitive and even punitive about public discourse, while some health officials, educators, and the media have begun to consider masturbation an important health topic worthy of public discourse (Cornog, 2003). When United States Surgeon General Jocelyn Elders publicly advised that masturbation was an essential sexual health topic and recommended its discussion as a part of sexuality education programs, her medical opinion was viewed as politically controversial and eventually contributed to her firing. Yet, advice columnists in newspapers and magazines continue to openly discuss the topic. For example, in 1993 Ann Landers advised the following:

Dear Readers: ...The sex drive is the strongest human drive after hunger. It is nature's way of perpetuating the human race. Males reach their sexual peak as early as 17. There must be an outlet. I am recommending self-gratification or mutual masturbation, whatever it takes to release the sexual energy. This is a sane and safe alternative to intercourse, not only for teenagers, but for older men and women who have lost their partners. I do not want to hear from clergymen telling me it's a sin. The sin is making people feel guilty about responding to this fundamental human drive. I love my readers, and my mission is to be of service. This could be the most useful column I have written since I started 38 years ago (Landers, October 24, 1993).

Landers later stated she was "buried under an avalanche" of letters thanking her.

In light of medical discoveries that masturbation abstinence increases risk of prostate cancer and youth suicide in males, and that it can undermine orgasm and marital functioning in women, public opinion today is now endorsing masturbation as a healthy and moral behavior more than ever before. Some churches have revised their former public positions and no longer consider masturbation morally wrong or sinful (Cornog, 2003; Rowan, 2000).

With the advent of the Internet, many Mormons can now speak out safely or with anonymity about their authentic experience without fear of religious sanctions. They are reporting their authentic experiences with masturbation and there is a new dialog calling for a reform in church policies. Popular Mormon authors are beginning to recognize that therapeutic use of masturbation improves marital intimacy and strengthens family bonds and are recommending it to heal sexual dysfunction.

American culture has only recently begun to socially accept an open public health dialog on masturbation. Mormon members and Mormon health professionals have been reluctant to confront church authorities on sexual health issues. Mormons are taught that since revelation comes from the top down, such confrontation is inappropriate at best, and may be grounds for social sanctions at worst. Few studies have been available on masturbation in Mormonism. Church authorities in a position to make policy have remained relatively uninformed. As new data and dialog on the healthy and moral aspects of masturbation continue to appear, Mormon authorities experience increased public pressure to respond with responsible policy choices that can be supported with empirically evidenced healthy outcomes.

Does this mean that Mormon leaders are obligated to follow sectarian science? Mormon doctrine claims to be prophetic and revelatory and therefore leaders who pronounce church doctrine or set policy may consider scientific advancements but ultimately do not look to the findings of sectarian science for answers. Church norms are often looked upon as both "different" and "higher" than sectarian science because they are believed to have divine origins. Mormons teach that when there is revelation from God, the value of sectarian science becomes secondary to God's word. However,

Mormonism does not reject methods that utilize observation and empirical evidence for determining whether or not Mormon prophets statements actually come from God.

How does a Mormon determine if a revelation actually comes from God? Early Mormon Church leader, David Whitmer states that Joseph Smith received the following revelations:

Joseph [Smith] looked into the hat in which he placed the stone, and received a revelation that some of the brethren should go to Toronto, Canada, and that they would sell the copyright of the *Book of Mormon*. Hiram Page and Oliver Cowdery went to Toronto on this mission, but they failed entirely to sell the copyright, returning without any money. Joseph was at my father's house when they returned. I was there also, and am an eyewitness to these facts. Jacob Whitmer and John Whitmer were also present when Hiram Page and Oliver Cowdery returned from Canada. Well, we were all in great trouble; and we asked Joseph how it was that he had received a revelation from the Lord for some brethren to go to Toronto and sell the copyright, and the brethren had utterly failed in their undertaking. Joseph did not know how it was, so he enquired of the Lord about it, and behold the following revelation came through the stone: "Some revelations are of God; some revelations are of man; and some revelations are of the devil" (Whitmer, 1887: 54).

Mormons theology provides a method for members to distinguish the source of a Mormon prophet's revelation. Mormons revere Jesus Christ as the head of their church and believe the New Testament to be God's revealed word. Mormons also believe that, in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus Christ taught individuals that they could use observable empirical evidence to evaluate prophetic validity:

Beware of false prophets.... Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit....Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them (*Matthew*, 7: 15-20).

With this methodology, Mormon Church members believe that they are given a checks-and-balance system from Jesus Christ that relies upon the individual's own observations to evaluate the validity of a prophet's statements. According to this doctrine, true prophets will produce observable outcomes as evidenced and measured by the "good fruit" that is produced, so although Mormon Prophets

are not required to turn to science for answers, church members may observe and evaluate the fruit of prophetic claims with scientific measures they consider are the evidence of “good” or “bad” fruit.

The Mormon film, *Man’s Search for Happiness* (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1964), first shown at the Mormon exhibit at the New York World’s Fair in 1964, continues to be shown daily to the millions of visitors who arrive at the Salt Lake Temple visitors center to learn more about Mormon beliefs. It too, teaches that proofs are a measure of validity. It quotes the Apostle Paul in his epistle to the Thessalonians: “Prove all things, hold fast to that which is good” (*I Thessalonians*, 5:21).

Historically, secular scientific observation and popular health opinion has sometimes lead to prayerful inquiry about current events by Mormon leaders. This, in turn, has resulted in doctrinal or policy change. For example, in the 1830s science and American popular culture decried the debilitating health effects of alcoholism. Tobacco was called by some, a nerve damaging, and soul-paralyzing drug. Coffee and tea were often thought to overly excite amorous passions, and the sparing use of meat or a vegetarian diet was touted as the path toward vibrant health. In the United States at that time, there were over 5,000 temperance societies calling for health reforms (Branch, 1965; Krout, 1925). Temperance filled the pages of the popular press and was a subject of intense public interest. In the midst of this time of public interest in diet, Joseph Smith also began questioning the health implications of food. His personal observations and prayerful inquiry resulted in the well known Mormon revelation that advised against alcohol, tobacco, tea, coffee, and encouraged moderate meat eating. The revelation, which was first given as advice, later on was canonized as a Mormon commandment, popularly known as “The Word of Wisdom.”

Our research indicates that Mormon culture has a history of changing attitudes and official policy toward masturbation. Based on the available literature and data on Mormon masturbation attitudes, it appears that Mormon cultural attitudes toward masturbation have evolved through four major stages: (1) Silence, that existed

from the founding of the church in 1830 until the first public statements on the matter; (2) Secular conformity, characterized by church literature that followed and endorsed the social changes in popular medical opinion ranging from viewing masturbation as unhealthy to being a harmless part of healthy development; (3) Counterrevolution, that opposed popular modern medical opinion and scientific data; and, (4) Emerging Reform, as indicated by recent Mormon literature suggesting that masturbation may be spiritually moral under Christian situation ethics or circumstances that promote individual health, well being and strengthens marriage.

Mormon doctrine has unique theological authority that authorizes the capacity for dramatic policy change. Modern Apostle Bruce McConkie advised fellow Mormons to accept new changes in church policy as they happen:

Forget everything I have said, or what President Brigham Young or President George Q. Cannon or whoever has said in days past that is contrary to the present revelation. We spoke with a limited understanding, and without the light and knowledge that now has come into the world (McConkie, 1989, p. 170).

Notes

1. No first editions of *Onania* are known to exist. Various authors have suggested dates from 1710–1717. In his paper, Self Pollution, Moral Reform, and the Venereal Trade: Notes on the Sources and Historical Context of *Onania* (1716), *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 9, nos. 1-2 (2000): 38-40, Michael Stolberg argues that the exact date may be determined with “precision” based on a monthly catalog of books from London bookseller Bernard Linott, that lists the publication date as October 1716.
2. In his paper, Friction of the Genitals and Secularization of Morality, *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 12 (2003): 345-364, Patrick Singy argues that, although both *Onania* and Tissot’s *L’Onanisme* condemn masturbation on theological and medical grounds, *Onania* is structurally theological, as opposed to *L’Onanisme*, which subordinates sin to medical morality. He states that it is, “historically inaccurate to read *Onania* as participating in the secularization of morality” and, “we should not think that physicians secularized masturbation simply by translating the word ‘sin’ into the words ‘cause of disease.’ Rather a moral object is truly secularized when there is a change in the ‘style of reasoning’ manifest in new rules for the formation of statements about this object.”

3. It is of interest to note that Vern Bullough found this attitude still existed among a group of modern Fundamentalist Mormon's practicing polygamy in the 1960s who told him one of their sexual justifications for modern polygamy was that wasting seed was still considered a sinful act.

References

- American Medical Association. (1972). *Human sexuality*. Chicago: AMA.
- Anonymous. (1997). *A graduate of MIT and now a young wife*. Retrieved July 24, 2001 from <http://www.exmormon.org/whyift43.htm>
- Anonymous. (1998). *Ex Mormon friendly letters—part 5*. Retrieved July 24, 2001 from <http://www.exmormon.org/letters5.htm>
- Anonymous. (2001a). *Twisted views on female sexuality*. Retrieved December 16, 2003 from <http://www.latterdaylampoon.com/roulette/mword/>
- Anonymous. (2001b). *I'm a good moral and decent person*. Retrieved December 16, 2003 from <http://www.latterdaylampoon.com/roulette/mword>
- Beeley, A.E. (1913). *Insanity. Improvement Era* 16, 231-238.
- Bell, R.H. (1932). *Self-Amusement and its spectres*. New York: The Big Dollar Books Co.
- Bergera, G.J., & Priddis, R. (1985). *Brigham Young University: A house of faith*. Salt Lake City: Signature Books.
- Bockting, W.O., & Coleman, E.(2002). Masturbation as a means of achieving sexual health. *Journal of Psychology and Human Sexuality*, 14 (2-3).
- Boy Scouts of America. (1972a). *Scout handbook*, (8th ed. rejected printing), North Brunswick, NJ: Boy Scouts of America.
- Boy Scouts of America. (1972b). *Scout handbook*, (8th ed. as printed), North Brunswick, NJ: Boy Scouts of America.
- Branch, D.E. (1965). *The sentimental years 1836-1860*. New York: Hill and Wang.
- Broderick, C.B. (1967). Three philosophies of sex, plus one. *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 2(3), 105.
- Broderick, C.B. (1968). Letters to the editor. *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 3(1), 14.
- Brotherson, L.M. (2004). *And they were not ashamed: Strengthening marriage through sexual fulfillment*. Boise, ID: Inspire Book.
- Bullough, V.L. (1973). Homosexuality and its confusion with the "secret sin" in pre-Freudian America. *Journal of the History of Medicine and Sciences*, XXXVIII: 143-156.
- Bullough, V.L. (1976). *Sexual variance in society and history*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Bullough, V.L. (1977). *Sin, sickness, and sanity*. New York: New American Library.
- Bush, L.E. (1993). *Health and medicine among the latter-day saints*. New York: Crossroad.
- Byron (2000). *M word has resurfaced*. Retrieved December 16, 2003 from <http://www.latterdaylampoon.com/roulette/mword>.

- Christensen, C. (1995). Prescribed masturbation in sex therapy. *Journal of Sex and Marital Therapy* 21(2), 87-99.
- Christensen, H.T. & Rytting, M.B. (1976). Sexuality and Mormon culture. *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 10(2), 9-11.
- Chris. (1997). *Fear of eternal failure and separation from one's family keeps a Mormon in line*. Retrieved July 24, 2001 from <http://www.exmormon.org/why1ft65.htm>
- Comfort, A. (1969). *The anxiety makers*. New York: Dell Publishing.
- Compton, T. (1997). *In sacred loneliness: The plural wives of Joseph Smith*. Salt Lake City, UT: Signature.
- Cornog, M. (2003). *The big book of masturbation: From angst to zeal*. San Francisco: Down There Press.
- Day, T.L. (1988). A parents' guide: Sex education or erotophobia? *Sunstone* 12 (2), 8-14.
- Eliason v. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, et al.*, No. 80195, D.C. (Ada County 1983).
- Ex-Caliber* (2000). *Excaliber at recovery BBS*. Retrieved December 16, 2003 from <http://www.latterdaylampoon.com/roulette/mword>
- Gardiner, W.M. (2003). *Shadow influences of plural marriage on sexuality within the contemporary Mormon experience*. Retrieved Dec, 16, 2003 from <http://www.post-mormons.com/shadow.htm>
- Giles, G.G., Severi, G., English, D.R., McCredie, M.R.E., Borland, R., Boyle, P., et al. (2003). Sexual factors and prostate cancer. *British Journal of Urology* 92 (3), 211.
- Goldman, R. (1997). *Circumcision, the hidden trauma*. Boston: Vanguard.
- Hagenbach, A.W. (1879). Masturbation as a cause of insanity. *Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease* 6, 603-612.
- Heber (2003). *LDS physician—masturbation can be a spiritual celebration*. Retrieved December 16, 2003 from <http://www.latterdaylampoon.com/roulette/mword>.
- Hite, S. (1976). *The Hite report: A nationwide study of female sexuality*. New York: Macmillan.
- Howe, J.W. (1899). *Excessive venery, masturbation, and continence*. New York: E.B. Treat and Company.
- Hurlbert, D.F., & Whittaker, K.E. (1991). The role of masturbation in marital and sexual satisfaction: A comparative study of female masturbators and nonmasturbators. *Journal of Sex Education and Therapy* 17(4), 272-282.
- Hunt, M.M. (1974). *Sexual behavior in the 1970's*. Chicago: Playboy Press.
- Jacobi, A. (1876). On masturbation and hysteria in young children. *American Journal of Obstetrics* 8, 595-596; 9, 217-238.
- James (1999). *9/18/1999*. Retrieved December 16, 2003 from <http://www.latterdaylampoon.com/roulette/mword>.
- Jeff (1997). *A convert in Japan to the Mormon Church*. Retrieved July 24, 2001 from <http://www.exmormon.org/why1ft28.htm>
- Jensen, A. (1887). Plural marriage. *The Historical Record* 6, 233-234.
- Johnson, A.W. (1860). On an injurious habit occasionally met with in infancy and early childhood. *Lancet* 1, 344-345.

- Kellogg, J.H. (1882). *Plain facts for old and young*. Burlington, IA: I.F. Segner.
- Kimball, S.W. (1969). *The miracle of forgiveness*. Salt Lake City: Bookcraft.
- Kinsey, A., Pomeroy, W., & Martin, C. (1948). *Sexual behavior in the human male*. Philadelphia: Saunders.
- Kinsey, A., Pomeroy, W., Martin, C., & Gebhard, P. (1953) *Sexual behavior in the human female*. Philadelphia: Saunders.
- Krafft-Ebing, R. von (1894). *Psychopathia sexualis*, (Charles Gilbert Chaddock, Trans. from the seventh German edition). Philadelphia: F.A. Davis.
- Krout, J.A. (1925). *The origins of prohibition*. New York: Knopf.
- Landers, A. (1993, October 24). Ann Landers. *Daily Camera*. Retrieved March 28, 2005, from <http://spot.colorado.edu/~tooley/Lecture13.html>.
- Larson, S. (Ed.), (1993). *A ministry of meetings: The apostolic diaries of Rudger Clawson* (Significant Mormon diaries series, no. 6). Salt Lake City, UT: Signature.
- Laquer, T. (2003). *Solitary sex: A cultural history of masturbation*. New York: Zone Books.
- Laumann, E.O., Gagnon, J.H., Michael, R.T., & Michaels, S. (1994). *The social organization of sexuality*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Lee, H.B. (1974). *Stand ye in holy places*. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co.
- LoPiccolo, J., & Lobitz, W.C. (1972). The role of masturbation in the treatment of orgasmic dysfunction. *Archives of Sexual Behavior* 2(2), 163-171.
- Mackelprang, R.W. (1994). They shall be one flesh: Sexuality and contemporary Mormonism. In B. Corcoran (Ed.), *Multiply and replenish: Mormon essays on sex and family*. Salt Lake City, UT: Signature.
- Malan, M.K. (2001). [Masturbation-guilt and suicidal ideation study]. Unpublished raw data.
- McConkie, B.R. (1966). *Mormon doctrine*. Salt lake City, UT: Bookcraft.
- McConkie, M.L. (1989). *Sermons and writings of Bruce R. McConkie*. Salt Lake City: Bookcraft.
- McNeill, J., & Gamer, H.M., (Eds.). (1938). *Medieval handbooks of penance*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Moore, P.F. (1968). Letters to the editor. *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 3(1), 14.
- Noyes, G.W. (2001). *Free love in utopia*. Chicago: University of Illinois Press.
- O'Donovan, R. (1994). "The abominable and detestable crime against nature": A brief history of homosexuality and Mormonism 1840-1980. In B. Corcoran (Ed.), *Multiply and replenish* (pp. 123-170). Salt Lake City, UT: Signature.
- Onania: Or the heinous sin of self pollution and all of its frightful consequences*. (c.1716). London.
- Packer, B.K. (1976). *For young men only*. [Brochure]. U.S.A. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.
- Paul, R. (1999). Emma. *Libido*, 11(1), 36-38.
- Petersen, M.E. (n.d.). *Steps in overcoming masturbation*. Retrieved November 21, 2003. from <http://www.ebenezer.net/ritual/bizarresex/overcome.html>
- Quinn, D.M. (1997). *The Mormon hierarchy: Extensions of power*. Salt Lake City, UT: Signature Books.

- Raines, M., Stuart, F. M., & Pett, M. (1995). Sexual experiences of married Mormon women. *Sunstone* 17(2), 35-43.
- Rowan, E.L. (2000). *The joy of self-pleasuring*. New York: Prometheus.
- Smith, J. (1842). On marriage. *Times and Seasons* 3, 939.
- Smith, W.E. (1976). Mormon sex standards on college campuses, or deal us out of the Sexual revolution! *Dialogue* 10(2), 76-81.
- Steckel, W. (1917/1953). *Auto-Eroticism: A psychiatric study of masturbation and neurosis*. (J. S. Van Teslaar, Trans.) London: Henderson & Spaulding Ltd.
- Stolberg, M. (2000). Self-pollution, moral reform, and the venereal trade: Notes on the sources and historical context of *Onania* (1716). *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 9, 37-61.
- Tannahill, R. (1980). *Sex in history*. New York: Stein & Day.
- Taylor, M.A. (1986). Sin and death in Mormon country: A latter-day tragedy. *Hustler* 12(10), 44-94.
- The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (1851). *The pearl of great price*. Liverpool: F.D. Richards.
- The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (1943, February). Ward teaching: be ye clean. *Improvement Era* 44(2), 43.
- The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Producer). (1964). *Man's Search for Happiness* [Motion picture]. United States: B.Y.U. Motion Picture Studio.
- The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. (1988). Bible dictionary. In *The holy bible*. Salt Lake City, UT: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.
- The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. (1990). *For the strength of youth*. (Pamphlet). Salt Lake City, UT: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.
- The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. (2001). *For the strength of youth: Fulfilling our duty to God*. (Pamphlet). Salt Lake City, UT: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.
- Tissot, S.A.D. (1769 ed.) *L'Onanisme*. Lausanne.
- Von Harrison, G. (1994). *Is kissing sinful?* Sandy, UT: Keepsake.
- White, J. B. (1990). *Church, state, and politics: The diaries of John Henry Smith*. Salt Lake City, UT: Signature Books.
- Whitmer, D. (1887). *An address to all believers in Christ*. Richmond, MO.
- Wilcox, B. (2000). *Growing up: Gospel answers about maturation and sex*. Salt Lake City, UT: Bookcraft.
- Willard, E.O.G. (1867). *Sexology as the philosophy of life*. Chicago: J.R. Walsh.

Copyright of *Sexuality & Culture* is the property of Transaction Publishers. The copyright in an individual article may be maintained by the author in certain cases. Content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.