

ROUNDTABLE

PORNOGRAPHY, MASTURBATION, SEX, AND MARRIAGE IN MORMONISM

with Dr. Stephanie Buehler, Natasha Helfer Parker, and John Dehlin

The following is excerpted from the Mormon Stories podcast (episode 245), "Pornography, Masturbation, Sex and Marriage in Mormonism," which was first released on 10 March 2011. To hear the full discussion (about twice the length presented here), visit <http://mormonstories.org/?p=1506>. This excerpt is printed with the permission of all participants.

NATASHA PARKER: Pornography is becoming a regular subject in general conference addresses, and its use is currently affecting many Mormons and our culture at large. There are many who feel the Church is making pornography such a prominent topic that it is actually causing even more problems. Others express appreciation for the frank discussion and accountability that is taking place within the Church.

Today we're diverging from the usual Mormon Stories format in that I'm not interviewing a Mormon. I wanted to try to get a different perspective on the topic, so I have asked a prominent psychologist and sex therapist, Dr. Stephanie Buehler, to join us today. She is the director of the Buehler Institute, which has offices in Newport Beach and Riverside, California, and she's the author of a recent book, *Sex, Love, and Mental Illness: A Couple's Guide to Staying Connected*. Dr. Buehler treats people of all different races, cultures, and religions, and is very familiar with problematic behaviors that can be associated with pornography. Hello, Dr. Buehler!

DR. STEPHANIE BUEHLER: Hello, Natasha.

PARKER: Thank you so much for joining this discussion today. I have also invited John Dehlin, the founder of Mormon Stories and himself a graduate student in psychology, to join us and help me make sure we cover all the angles on this topic. So, hello, John!

JOHN DEHLIN: Hello, guys! Happy to be here! Thanks for joining us, Dr. Buehler.

PARKER: I thought the first place we'd start is a definition of the topic at large. As a

therapist, one of the things I like to do when I first talk with people about pornography is to make a distinction between pornography and erotica, but I would love to get your sense of that distinction, Dr. Buehler, so that we can know what you're talking about when you refer to pornography.

BUEHLER: I think pornography is the depiction of sexual acts—whether in photos, or print, or video—designed to titillate people. Its purpose is to get people sexually aroused. Erotica does the same thing, but I think most people would think of erotica as being something that piques your interest and is maybe not so frank, so "in your face." It is more sensual and, I think, invites the viewer to think about their own sensuality whereas pornography is really more of an exchange between exhibitionists and voyeurs—people who simply like to watch other people engage in sex acts. I think people will have different definitions of what's erotic, and some people are going to want to stretch the boundaries a little bit, but I think if you were to look at a painting of a nude couple in an embrace, you'd call that erotic, whereas if you had movies of the same couple having sex for the sake of having sex, you might call that pornography.

PARKER: It seems to me that in the more traditional strains of Mormonism, we tend to define a lot of things as pornography that I wouldn't necessarily define that way, so I think what you've shared here is an important start.

DEHLIN: I'm wondering if we're exploring this distinction because sometimes people

say they need or enjoy having something to "get them going" sexually. Perhaps we're trying to ask whether it's okay for married couples, or for single people, or whomever, to have some light form of sexual arousal through erotica that can help them achieve whatever their sexual goals are. And if we allow for that, maybe it's important to then have a more clearly drawn line between that and something that is socially taboo or forbidden.

PARKER: Using erotica as part of your sexual repertoire is definitely an issue worth exploring. I often get someone coming in and saying things like, "I'm addicted to pornography," or a wife who is angry that her husband is looking at pornography, but when I dig deeper the pornography they are referring to is something like looking through a Victoria's Secret catalog or watching *Dancing with the Stars* or some other thing that can be erotic and sensual and maybe even inappropriate for some people but something I would never label "pornography." So I think that's why I want our audience to really understand what exactly it is we're talking about.

DEHLIN: I think that within the Mormon context, and probably just in most human experience, looking at pornography most often starts with somebody getting exposed to some pictures or some movies when they are in their adolescent years. In other words, their first sexual experiences are not in the context of having a partner at all, so there is probably a strong drive to engage in some type of self-stimulation. Let's start with the adolescent experience and then move into marital relations, because many LDS leaders see this as an epidemic—that our teens are looking at porn too much and masturbating too much, and, as a result, there's a lot of shame, a lot of charged language around this subject.

BUEHLER: In the "old days," exposure to pornography was pretty minimal. You had a "girlie" magazine, and it was probably very well worn. But these days, it's not just looking at a couple of pictures, you're usually on the Internet where there's just so much material—an endless supply. And I think that part of the problem is this endless supply.

In adolescence, there is a natural curiosity about the human body and about sex. From my non-Mormon perspective, a teen's interest in sexuality is quite healthy; the desire to see the human body in all its

glory doesn't concern me. It's when the adolescent's social skills start to decline, when they get involved in a sordid world that has become their central world—that's when things become problematic.

PARKER: Can you speak to the separation between masturbation and pornography use? My understanding is that there are many adolescents and adults who masturbate without pornography being any part of it.

BUEHLER: That is very true. You can use your own fantasy material, or sometimes people just get into a sensual experience or begin exploring their body; so, you don't need pornography to get aroused. There are certainly other ways. Human beings are very creative.

DEHLIN: Let's hit that topic head on. When I was growing up, I was taught that masturbation is a really bad sin. There is a famous talk that was given by an LDS Church leader twenty or so years ago that basically had the philosophy that the body is like a factory that produces semen or hormones, and what you don't want to do as a teenager is get the factory revved up, because once you do you're always looking for opportunities to masturbate, which can then lead to sexual behavior with a partner or maybe even lead to perversions. That was, I think, the mind set at the time. As a result, masturbation had a lot of shame and fear connected with it.

From your point of view, is masturbation something we should fear? Does it lead to promiscuity, or homosexuality, as that sermon taught?

BUEHLER: I would say it doesn't necessarily lead to any of those. Understanding your own body and finding out that your body can give you pleasure is fine. And, actually, there are some health benefits to masturbation. For men it helps with prostate health; for women it helps balance the hormones. And, of course, it oxygenates the body and the brain. If you have a healthy attitude about it, it can

make you feel relaxed and vital.

But when you bring shame into the process, you can cause some unhealthy cycles. If you masturbate and are then filled with shame, and then masturbate again to relieve those anxious, negative feelings, only to bring on more guilt and shame, that's not good. It is at that point that you risk getting into some problematic behaviors.

As for masturbation becoming a compulsive behavior: in the field of sex therapy,

bation leads to promiscuity? The argument from some within conservative religious traditions would be that masturbation gets people too sexualized at too young an age, leading them to want to have sex outside of marriage.

BUEHLER: I don't think that masturbation does that; I mean if masturbation led to promiscuity, *everybody* would be promiscuous!

(Laughter from all)

PARKER: I've heard it called the safest sex ever developed. No STDs involved. No unwanted pregnancy.

BUEHLER: Those are really good points. I tend to think that masturbation can actually help prevent people from making bad decisions. If you know that you can bring yourself pleasure or that you can comfort yourself in this way, you might choose to not seek sexual relationships outside of marriage, or relationships that aren't healthy for you in other ways.

DEHLIN: So masturbation could possibly keep you from moral transgressions, you're saying . . .

BUEHLER: Yes. That's what I think.

DEHLIN: What about the idea of masturbation as a sexual release? Is there any psychological or physiological data that suggests that people have kind of a sexual clock that needs a release?

BUEHLER: At the mid-point of their menstrual cycle, when they're ovulating, women experience

surges in hormone levels that often cause them to feel "randy" or "horny," and if there's no partner available, then they might feel the need to have a sexual release. Men don't have the same kind of definitive clock, but they have build-ups of semen and hormones, and they can also feel a need for release. So we do seem to have a physiological need. Suppressed or repressing that need can cause psychological problems, disconnecting people from their

we would say that if it interferes with your day-to-day functioning, if it interferes with your relationships or hinders your ability to get to your job, or if it is something that you are actually doing on the job, or if because of masturbation you're not pursuing friendships, then you have a problem. But if it's not interfering with anything, well, maybe it's not so much of a problem.

DEHLIN: What about the idea that mastur-



sexuality and from bodily sensation. That's not a good thing.

DEHLIN: Why not? Why not just "pack that stuff down tight" until you are married? That's what I feel like I was taught.

BUEHLER: I actually understand that particular message. However, if you were to sit in my office for several sessions, you would see that I have a lot of people who are so sexually suppressed—sometimes they have never had the experience of self-pleasuring—and who have worked so hard to get rid of sexual feelings, that they can't recognize them once they get married. They can't "flip the switch." Consequently, they have a hard time enjoying sex.

PARKER: Yes, both inside and outside of Mormonism, we have so many women who have never been able to achieve orgasm. It's very sad.

DEHLIN: So are you making the argument that masturbation could be healthy for sexual relations in marriage?

BUEHLER: Yes. I think a woman who understands her own body can communicate with her partner what is pleasing to her, and that can make sex more enjoyable for the couple. It seems to be difficult for women—especially when they are shy or repressed about their sexuality—to "connect all the dots," if you will, when they're with a partner. They are trying to negotiate being with a partner who comes to the marital bed with his own ideas and his own needs, and they are trying to accommodate to those needs as well as their own. If the woman is willing to do some self-exploration, that usually does help the couple with their enjoyment of sex.

PARKER: In LDS culture, people tend to get married very quickly. It's common to have anywhere from a two-week to a three-month engagement. I wonder if masturbation might relieve some of the sexual tension and help those engagements to run a little bit longer. That way, the couple could get to know each other a little better before they make a huge commitment.

DEHLIN: But on the flip side, is there a limit to the health benefits of masturbation and self-exploration? Are there any dangers involved—any downsides at all?

BUEHLER: Well, yes, masturbation can be-

come a problematic behavior. For instance, I've heard of men developing carpal tunnel syndrome or actually damaging their genitals. So you can do it too much! I think the primary element that leads to this kind of excess is when one doesn't recognize that one is using masturbation as a coping mechanism. One could be trying to cope with unresolved family-of-origin issues, with work-related problems, with low self-esteem, with feelings of inadequacy, and get caught up in a cycle of excess.

DEHLIN: What you're saying jibes with what I've been learning in my Ph.D. program. We experience anxiety, emotions, and sadness but don't know what to do with them. So sometimes we take drugs; sometimes we inflict dietary restrictions on ourselves; sometimes we cut; and sometimes—it sounds like—we compulsively masturbate. It's all an attempt to regulate emotion, feeling, and distress.

BUEHLER: Yes, those are all maladaptive coping mechanisms. The person hasn't developed healthy ways of coping with negative feelings.

PARKER: Sometimes on Mormon blogs, I'll come across headlines like: "Pornography: Is it really that bad?" or, "Are there good things about porn?" My feeling is that in many of these cases the bloggers are starting to use pornography and want to believe that they can do so healthily. What evidence do you know of on either side of that equation? Does pornography negatively impact our psychology or our arousal templates? Are there positive aspects? And now I'm talking specifically about pornography and not erotica.

BUEHLER: One thing that might shock people is that it seems that people who look at pornography are actually less likely to act out sexually. Sometimes there are fears that looking at pornography will lead to rape or sexual assault or pedophilia, but the opposite seems to be true.

DEHLIN: There's data for that assertion?

BUEHLER: Yes, there's actual data. A researcher did a study expecting to find that looking at pornography leads to violent or illegal acts. But he found that the opposite is true, which is quite interesting.¹

Consider people who have various dis-

abilities—whether mental or physical—that make it very difficult for them to have partnered sex; pornography and masturbation can be an outlet for them. And, actually in the Netherlands, many would think of it as a compassionate gesture to provide such an outlet. For some reason, here in the U.S. we don't talk about what we might do to provide for the sexual needs of the marginalized or disadvantaged.

DEHLIN: Are there lower incidence rates of rape and pedophilia in the Netherlands?

BUEHLER: That I do not know.

PARKER: I've read studies indicating that there are fewer sexual criminal acts in cultures where there's access to and acceptance of pornography. What we don't know is if having that outlet favorably affects the general public, or only those who have violent criminal tendencies to begin with.

BUEHLER: There are some researchers who make the argument that people who watch pornography are sexually savvy, that they understand the human body and the sexual response better, and thus have better partnered sex. And some people feel that pornography can be a celebration of one part of the human experience.

PARKER: Just to clarify, those are theories that are not based on hard data.

BUEHLER: Correct. One researcher tried to do a study of men who have never looked at pornography. But the study never happened because he couldn't find any men who had never looked!

(Laughter from all)

DEHLIN: So "everybody is doing it", basically.

BUEHLER: Well, "everyone *has done* it" is more accurate. My experience as a sex therapist working with hundreds and hundreds of couples is that there are plenty of people who really aren't interested in pornography, who don't need it, and who don't see why someone would look at it.

PARKER: To me, "doing it" connotes a more regular practice versus "Well, I was exposed to it once or twice."

DEHLIN: I'm interested in whether all pornography is alike in terms of its poten-

tial benefits or damage. In other words, is there “light” pornography that could be helpful versus pornography that could be damaging? Are there shades of good and bad pornography, and are there shades to healthy or unhealthy use of pornography?

BUEHLER: Definitely. I’ve worked with men who have looked at pornography that both aroused and disturbed them. They come into my office trying to figure out their conflicting reactions. There is easy access to so many different kinds of pornography—not just the light stuff—there are things that can be quite shocking or distasteful to somebody who stumbles upon it.

PARKER: And even more upsetting if they are finding themselves aroused by it at the time but then later feel ashamed about their reaction.

BUEHLER: Right. There is some evidence that men who are involved in downloading or looking at child pornography might never have looked at it in the first place if there hadn’t been such easy access. So there is definitely a dark side to Internet pornography.

Some men who look at pornography end up with quite a bit of sexual dysfunction when they try to have partnered sex. They encounter erectile dysfunction or delayed ejaculation. Partnered sex just doesn’t have the same “charge” as what he’s used to when looking at pornography—and that’s very problematic.

DEHLIN: Earlier you argued that masturbation in moderate amounts can actually be healthy. If we take violent, heinous pornography off the table, are you saying: Hey, it’s okay if a man or a woman wants to look at pornography every once in a while as long as it doesn’t interfere with their job or their marriage or whatever?

BUEHLER: I think each person must decide for him- or herself whether pornography is something they are comfortable with—whether it is something that improves their lives.

DEHLIN: That kind of statement might sound like moral relativism to a religious person—“Anyone can do anything they want.” If I put on my orthodox-believer hat, I wouldn’t want my psychologist to say, “Do whatever works for you.” I would want him or her to tell me what is healthiest. So, if you were to give me a guideline for what

provides the greatest health benefits for the greatest amount of people the greatest amount of time, what would you advise?

BUEHLER: In my practice, I never recommend looking at pornography. It really isn’t up to me to make that decision. I understand what you’re saying about moral relativism, but to me, it really is a matter of examining your own values.

If somebody asks me about pornography, I will ask questions like, “What do you believe? What does your church tell you? What do you think is healthy? What’s a healthy amount for you?” Those are all issues that can be explored. If an activity leaves someone filled with guilt or shame after they do it, then I don’t think that’s a healthy activity for them.

DEHLIN: But we just got through saying that some people’s interpretation of their church’s teachings can actually increase chronic, unhealthy masturbation and porn use. Yet you seem to be willing to turn people back to the wolves, so to speak—to say “What are your values?” knowing that so many people equate their values with their church’s teachings.

BUEHLER: Well, I do try to help my clients examine their church’s messages about masturbation and pornography since those are often such a big part of their identities. But I’m pretty sure people know that a therapy room is different from a pastor’s office. A therapy room is a place for free exploration; it’s up to them to determine what feels right. I’m simply a guide.

PARKER: Whereas if you go to a Christian counselor or an LDS therapist working for an agency associated with its religion, the therapist is probably more likely to lay out ground rules that go along with the values of the religion, versus a therapist who is going to be more experiential, asking what the client is bringing to the table.

BUEHLER: In my practice, I see people from all religions—including Mormonism—as well as atheists and agnostics. I get the whole spectrum. Since there are so many different ideas and values concerning pornography, I really feel that people have to be square with their ideas and beliefs about it. If they can’t figure that out in my office, I may suggest they go back to the church and have a discussion on these issues with somebody they trust.

DEHLIN: As we move on to a discussion of partnered sex, I can imagine some people encountering this conversation who will ask, “How could there ever be a healthy scenario for porn use when you have a spouse in bed next to you?”

BUEHLER: Well, I think some couples would say, “Variety is the spice of life.” Others might say that watching other people in sexual encounters keeps them from having extra-marital, in-person sexual experiences. Some couples watch it to get ideas about sexual practices. It can also trigger sexual arousal and interest. And some people simply consider it to be a form of entertainment.

PARKER: You’re talking about the couples who want to look at porn together?

BUEHLER: Right—when it’s a consensual act. If both partners are enjoying it together, it would be similar to enjoying a meal together or enjoying skiing together.

PARKER: I wonder, though, how often it’s actually consensual. Sometimes one partner—usually the woman—will say she wants to watch it, but what I hear is, “I’ll go along with it because I know this is what my husband likes, and I don’t want to be left out.” They are worried; they want to improve their relationship, so they don’t say, “Well, this doesn’t really do it for me.” I worry that they are putting themselves in a position that will build resentment toward their partner, which will feed into other issues within the marriage.

PARKER: I’d like to talk about whether or not someone can become “addicted” to pornography.

BUEHLER: Whether you can actually be “addicted” to pornography, or be a “sex addict” is something we argue about constantly in professional circles.

One of the problems with applying the “addiction” label in this case is that it’s similar to calling food an addiction. We need to eat; we have a drive to eat; and we have a sex drive, whereas we don’t have a drive to consume alcohol or drugs. There’s nothing intrinsic about those substances that causes us to seek them out. So, I’m not really sure you can become addicted to pornography

from that standpoint.

However, there are some similarities to an addiction. It seems that some viewers of pornography do need increasingly intense material to achieve the same charge. Compulsion can also show up—urges that a person feels he or she must satisfy lest some terrible thing happen to them. So it has some of the characteristics of an addiction, but I don't know if we can call it a pure addiction.

PARKER: Are there personality traits that you notice when you work with compulsive pornography users?

BUEHLER: I'll use the word "men" in my reply because I haven't encountered women with that kind of problematic behavior.

Often the men I work with are emotionally detached from their partner. They may say they love their partner, but their behavior shows they really haven't made a good attachment. They don't feel truly bonded to their partner—and pornography is just another wedge. It can become a way for the man to regulate the emotional intimacy in the relationship. And that to me is one of the saddest things about using too much pornography.

PARKER: I've counseled couples where the man will say, "Well, I only use it once a week. I don't know why she's making such a big deal out of it." But she is devastated because she doesn't want this to be a part of her marital life.

BUEHLER: To me that speaks to the man's emotional detachment. In effect, he is saying to his wife, "So what if my behavior disturbs you? I don't care." The not-caring is what allowed the man to get into the pornography and use it to cut his partner out of the picture. The not-caring is the most destructive part of that scenario.

Sometimes men who overuse pornography do so because they are dissatisfied with aspects of their relationship but are poor communicators or conflict avoiders. Pornography is often only a symptom of

other emotional deficits like handling intimacy and conflict—being able to communicate with one's partner.

PARKER: It seems that a lot of women find out that their husband is watching pornography, not because the husband comes and tells her about it but because the husband is "found out" in some way. When this happens, I hear a lot of very intense emotions, almost the same type I encounter when there's been an extra-marital affair. The spouse feels like the porn use is an infidelity.

BUEHLER: For some people, it can be a form of infidelity. Some people feel that texting

repentance plan, because they consider it a gross, egregious violation of their marital vows.

PARKER: I love your provocative language, John! I agree that there is very little wiggle room for masturbation in Mormon culture.

DEHLIN: However, it's probably common, especially when babies come, for there to be valleys in the number of sexual exchanges going on between husband and wife. Or sometimes people's libidos wane.

Let's just say bluntly that a man doesn't "get it" as much as he wants to. Sometimes he's faced with weeks or even months without regular intimacy with his wife.



or "sexting" is a form of infidelity, and others don't feel so threatened. I think couples need to have a "sit down on the sofa" talk and lay it out. "This is my definition of infidelity." Or "If you're getting sexual gratification—any sexual gratification—outside the marriage bed, I consider that to be a form of infidelity." It has to be spoken up front; it has to be discussed.

DEHLIN: But there are going to be spouses who feel that way about masturbation. There are probably plenty of Mormon wives who, if they were to find their husband masturbating, would want to take him to the bishop; they would want him to confess; they would want to put him on a

Maybe she's nursing; maybe she's sore; maybe she's just not in the mood. We were talking about that natural clock earlier. I imagine that the man would occasionally masturbate to get a release. Maybe he wants something to help stimulate him and turns to soft porn and eventually to harder porn. He's likely doing all this in secret because he doesn't want his wife to think he's evil and terrible.

PARKER: Meanwhile, he's feeling evil and terrible.

DEHLIN: Yes, and that's feeding the shame cycle.

BUEHLER: Wait! Why is he unable to tell his wife about his sexual needs? Why can't the two of them have a "sit on the sofa" conversation about the change in their life, the stressor that's occurred, and talk about how they are going to continue to have a satisfying intimate relationship?

They should explore all the avenues. Does it have to be sex? Does it all have to be intercourse focused? Maybe he just needs to be cuddled or hugged or have his feet or neck rubbed. Maybe they simply need to be consciously nicer to each other, giving each other treats that don't require the energy level of sex.

So will a guy go off and take care of himself because he doesn't want to bother his wife? Yes. Is that okay sometimes? In my mind, yes. But the more important thing is having conversation. We are not taught how to have an adult-to-adult, sit-down chat about sex. We're raised that sex is something you don't talk about. It's too embarrassing. Which doesn't really make any sense. Talking about sex should carry a lower level of tension than actually having it, but we have so much shame, so much guilt. We're not given an adult vocabulary for talking about our sexual needs. That is what creates the problem.

PARKER: And I have found that once couples learn to have this type of conversation, they can usually come to good compromises. Maybe it will be that he's going to masturbate but in her presence or at least with her knowledge and permission. And again, I feel bad that we're being stereotypical because I know there are women who have a higher sex drive than men, women who also look at pornography, and sometimes the shame there can be even greater because we don't talk about women looking at porn. But I find that once the couple can acknowledge their shared values and come to some compromises, a lot of this anxiety can dissipate.

DEHLIN: What if a good chunk of the women who aren't very interested in sex only feel that way because their husbands don't know how to help them achieve orgasm? Could a couple's sex life improve if the husband got a little savvier?

BUEHLER: Definitely. It's kind of interesting to me that women don't always put those two things together. They see their husband getting a lot of pleasure from sexual activity, but they're not getting much out of it themselves. If couples are more open to

exploring each other's bodies and understanding each other's sexuality and being freer with one another, then maybe there wouldn't be as much need for pornography.

We have a lot of problems with people being suppressed. And it's not just women who have their sexuality suppressed—it's men, too. They may have developed the idea that sex is dirty, or not something you do with a "nice" woman. We have a lot of sexual problems in our culture.

DEHLIN: Should a man get rid of the expectation that mere penetration is going to lead to his wife's sexual satisfaction?

BUEHLER: Absolutely. Absolutely. Most women find that they don't have orgasm through penetration.

PARKER: Seventy-five percent.

BUEHLER: One study showed that women who have been in a relationship for a long time are more likely to have a vaginal orgasm. A lot of a woman's response is bound up in how much she trusts her partner and how familiar she is with her own body. Men shouldn't feel like they have to bring their wife to orgasm through intercourse only. There are many other avenues.

It's important for the couple to understand female anatomy and the whole art of lovemaking—the nuanced touching and caressing that leads a woman to become aroused. Only when she is highly aroused do you want to try for orgasm. Just knowing that can be helpful.

When sex goes well, it is a wonderful experience. But it becomes perilous when it becomes too goal-oriented. A man can get his ego bent out of joint if he can't bring his wife to orgasm, and a woman can feel guilty and upset with herself. That's not a good scenario for the couple at all.

DEHLIN: And then if the woman feels as if she has to "fake" the orgasm so the man doesn't feel rejected or sad, then that can also drive her to want to avoid sex.

BUEHLER: And if at some point she can't keep up the charade and tells her husband so, it can be devastating. "Faking it" may seem like a good idea at first, but I think it just leads to very bad feelings.

DEHLIN: Here's my summary of what our main points seem to have been. It sounds like your advice to teens is to be moderate about masturbation and pornography

usage: don't have shame and guilt, use good judgment. You seem to be arguing that masturbation may even prevent sexual exploitation and the spread of venereal diseases.

BUEHLER: I would agree with that. We have natural curiosity about our bodies and about sex, and satisfying that natural curiosity is a healthy thing.

DEHLIN: And when it comes to sex in marriage, your mantra seems to be, "Communicate, communicate, communicate." Both members of the relationship need to give in order to come to a mutual understanding about their shared sexuality.

BUEHLER: That's a good summation.

DEHLIN: And then the final thing I'm hearing you say is to make sure that sex is pleasurable for both members of the couple. It's especially important to help the wife achieve orgasm regularly. The wife may need to explore herself, even through masturbation, so she can become familiar with what brings her pleasure, and then teach her husband how to help with that—and that is likely not going to be through penetration alone, but through oral sex or manual manipulation or whatever. You're saying that couples can increase their mutual sexual satisfaction, making pornography and masturbation less of an issue.

BUEHLER: I think you summed it up really well. The more you communicate about sex, the more you'll enjoy it as a couple.

NOTES

1. Milton Diamond, "Pornography, Public Acceptance and Sex Related Crime: A Review," *International Journal of Law & Psychiatry* (vol. 32 no. 5), 304–314.

Dr. Stephanie Buehler's book, *Sex, Love, and Mental Illness: A Couple's Guide to Staying Connected* is available in bookstores everywhere. Her website is thebuehlerinstitute.com, where visitors can link to a free e-book, *Sexual Discoveries: 25 Secrets for Incredible Sex*.

Natasha Helfer Parker's website is: natashaparker.org. She also blogs at: mormontherapist.blogspot.com.