

The LDS Church ban on oral sex

The 1982 First Presidency Letter

The First Presidency, in [January of 1982](#), sent a letter to all “Stake, Mission, and District Presidents; Bishops; and Branch Presidents”. In it, they emphasized that:

Married persons should understand that if in their marital relations they are guilty of unnatural, impure, or unholy practices, they should not enter the temple unless and until they repent and discontinue any such practices. . . The First Presidency has interpreted oral sex as constituting an **unnatural, impure, or unholy** practice.

After receiving a number of letters informing them that “some local leaders [had] been delving into private, sensitive matters” The First Presidency, in [October of 1982](#), informed leaders that they “should never inquire into personal, intimate matters involving marital relations between a man and his wife.”

The status of oral sex as “unnatural, impure, or unholy” (UIU) was not modified or clarified in the October 1982 letter, and it **has never been rescinded, modified, or clarified in any way** *since* the January 1982 letter.

Hence, the position of the First Presidency is that oral sex constitutes an UIU, even though leaders are not counseled to ask this question specifically as part of worthiness interviews. Still, if a member were to ask about it, the counsel is “suggest that if the member has enough anxiety about the propriety of the conduct to ask about it, the best course would be to discontinue it.”

Temple Covenants and the Church Handbook

Members raise their hand in the temple [and covenant](#) to avoid every “unholy and impure practice”:

Instruct them to give unto Adam and his posterity . . . a charge to avoid all lightmindedness, loud laughter, evil speaking of the Lord’s anointed, the taking of the name of God in vain, and every other **unholy** and **impure** practice; and cause these to be received by covenant.

In addition, [Church Handbook 2 section 21.4.5](#), using exactly the same three adjectives as the January 1982 letter, states that anything “unholy, unnatural, or impure” is sinful and that a person may be subject to formal Church discipline for such a practice:

. . . Adultery, fornication, homosexual or lesbian relations, and every other **unholy, unnatural, or impure** practice are sinful. Members who violate the Lord’s law of chastity or who influence others to do so are subject to Church discipline.

The verbiage in the January 1982 letter, the Endowment Ceremony, and the Official Church Handbook matches exactly (only the temple ceremony does not use the word “unnatural”) which strongly suggests that oral sex is considered by the Church to be both sinful and a direct violation of a solemn temple covenant.

The Female Orgasm and Oral Sex

Research suggests that “70% of women do not have orgasms through in-out, thrusting intercourse but are able to achieve orgasm easily by . . . direct clitoral stimulation.” ([source](#)).

Hence, one way to view the ban (and lack of its rescission) is that it may simply be a chauvinistic policy (overt or entirely unintentional). The Brethren, individually or in some combination: a) are ignorant of the statistics around female orgasm, b) genuinely believe women will be happier not having orgasms but remaining “pure”, or c) genuinely don’t care about the sexual pleasure of women.

All Mormon sex therapists of which I am aware either implicitly (see Appendix) or explicitly ([Jennifer Finlayson-Fife](#) and [Natasha Helfer Parker](#)) approve of oral sex within marriage.

Additional Reading/Listening

- [Ask a Mormon Sex Therapist - Jennifer Finlayson-Fife](#) (podcasts)
- [Oral Sex](#) (i4m.com)

Appendix

I asked (via email) practicing sex therapists in Utah who see many LDS clients:

As a (LDS?) sex therapist, what do you counsel your clients regarding oral sex?

On the one hand, you have the January 1982 First Presidency letter which has never been rescinded or modified. OTOH, you have Shere Hite’s research which suggests that 70% of women do not orgasm from PIV sex alone but that orgasm is (typically) easily achieved through direct clitoral stimulation.

[Sex Therapist #1]

Thanks for reaching out with some questions. When it comes to working with clients around what they feel is or is not ok with certain sexual behaviors, we look at is it safe, sane and consensual? On a broad level I would say that is the thinking we operate under (safe, sane and consensual). And obviously work with the individual and the couple to have the difficult

conversations and work through the discomfort that arises for a lot of couples as they navigate their sexual relationships.

I think that sexuality is very complex, has a lot of layers, and hopefully continues to evolve over time and age. Growing up in conservative religions, as my LDS clients do, I think they hear and internalize a lot of messages of fear around sexuality and around having sex. It can be tempting for clients to avoid the discomfort and difficulty of wrestling with all of this and instead substitute somebody else's opinion as their own. Listening to their church leaders about what is ok and what is not ok, what is good and what is bad. I see this hurt the sexual relationship for a lot of the clients I work with and find that as they step into the discomfort and wrestle with their issues around sex, they are able to own their own sexuality and have more meaningful and satisfying sexual relationships.

[Sex Therapist #2 - an active Latter-day Saint sex therapist in a private communication]

I can't speak for the LDS Church but I believe that the letter in 1982 was never meant to go out to the congregations. On top of that, I have heard from a well respected professor at BYU that the Church actually wrote a follow up letter rescinding that original 1982 letter. In my opinion the LDS Church is very good at letting the members know what is and is not okay concerning sexuality. If they did not want the members to act sexually in a particular way/regard or had preference for sexual expression, I believe that they would be very open about that. Their stance on pornography or premarital sex is a great example of this.

The education I have received has taught that the LDS Church wants the couple to determine what is sexually okay within the boundaries of their sexual relationship along with the direction of God. If the couple feels uneasy or unsure of a particular practice, they are counseled to talk to their bishop.

Note: After receiving this communication, I sent this therapist links to the documents they referenced and my above analysis but received no reply back.