

Health and Disease

I. Objectivist theories

Boorse's Biostatistical Theory (BST)

- **Health** is *normal species function*
- **Pathology** (or informally, disease) is anything less than normal species function (i.e., pathology is *malfunction*)

Applying the BST

- To find out if a part or system is malfunctioning:
 1. Identify the group sharing this individual's species, age, and sex. This is the individual's **reference class**.
 2. What is the **normal contribution** of this part or system to survival and reproduction in the reference class?
 3. Is this part or system functioning **less efficiently** than normal for this reference class?
 - If yes, it is a pathology; if no, it isn't.

II. Normativist Theories

Engelhardt

- Human values underlie *all* scientific explanations and categories
- Examples:
 - Masturbation
 - Drapetomania

event, masturbation was held to be potentially more deleterious since it was unnatural, and, therefore, less satisfying and more likely to lead to a disturbance or disordering of nerve tone.

At first, the wide range of illnesses attributed to masturbation is striking. Masturbation was held to be the cause of dyspepsia,¹¹ constrictions of the urethra,¹² epilepsy,¹³ blindness,¹⁴ vertigo, loss of hearing,¹⁵ headache, impotency, loss of memory, "irregular action of the heart," general loss of health and strength,¹⁶ rickets,¹⁷ leucorrhea in women,¹⁸ and chronic catarrhal conjunctivitis.¹⁹ Nymphomania was found to arise from masturbation, occurring more commonly in blonds than in brunettes.²⁰ Further, changes in the external genitalia were attributed to masturbation: elongation of the clitoris, reddening and congestion of the labia majora, elongation of the labia minora,²¹ and a thinning and decrease in size of the penis.²² Chronic masturbation was held to lead to the

development of a particular type, including enlargement of the superficial veins of the hands and feet, moist and clammy hands, stooped shoulders, pale sallow face with heavy dark circles around the eyes, a "draggy" gait, and acne.²³ Careful case studies were published establishing masturbation as a cause of insanity,²⁴ and evidence indicated that it was a cause of hereditary insanity as well.²⁵ Masturbation was held also to cause an hereditary predisposition to consumption.²⁶ Finally, masturbation was believed to lead to general debility. "From health and vigor, and intelligence and loveliness of character, they became thin and pale and cadaverous; their amiability and loveliness departed, and in their stead irritability, moroseness and anger were prominent characteristics. . . . The child loses its flesh and becomes pale and weak."²⁷ The natural history was one of progressive loss of vigor, both physical and mental.

What is the 'real' cause of the disease symptoms?

		Masturbation	Bulimia	Pedophilia
Cause 1	Biological predisposition	the (biological) proclivity to masturbate	(biological) susceptibility to insecurity about one's weight	(biological) susceptibility to sexual interest in minors
Cause 2	Associated acts	masturbation act	the acts of bingeing and purging	pedophilic fantasies, in extreme cases sex or rape
Cause 3	Social norms	social and moral norms prohibiting masturbation	youth, fitness, and thinness are socially idealized forms of femininity	moral and legal norms prohibiting sex between adults and minors and possession of child pornography
Effect	Symptoms/signs (sequelae)	fainting, anemia, insanity, death	malnutrition, dental problems, anemia, heart attacks, anxiety associated with bingeing and purging	mood disorders, anxiety disorders, psychoactive substance use disorder, other paraphilia Dx, sexual dysfunction Dx (see Raymond et al, 1999)

References

- N. C. Raymond, E. Coleman, F. Ohlerking, G. A. Christenson, and M. Miner. Psychiatric comorbidity in pedophilic sex offenders. *American Journal of Psychiatry*, 156(5):786–788, 1999. PMID: 10327918.