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Solitary Sex: A Cultural History of Masturbation
(Review Essay) (Book Review)

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Download or Read Online Solitary Sex: A Cultural History of Masturbation (Review Essay) (Book Review) Journal of Social History Free eBook PDF/ePub/Mobi/Mp3/Txt, A Post-Modernist Theory of Wanking: Solitary Sex: A Cultural History of Masturbation. By Thomas Laqueur (New York: Zone Books, 2003, 501pp.). In Solitary Sex Thomas Laqueur aims to provide a comprehensive explanation for the anxiety over masturbation which gripped the western world from the early eighteenth to the mid-(or perhaps late) twentieth century. He particularly wants to answer the question posed by Lawrence Stone and other scholars who have tackled this topic: why did the "hysteria" over masturbation appear "at a time when, he thought, all signs pointed to great [sic: greater?] acceptance of sexual pleasure." Laqueur thus focuses on the eighteenth century, though he concludes with a (rather scrappy) chapter on a range of counter discourses, stressing the "redemptive

qualities" of masturbation, which emerged in the 1980s. Surprisingly, the nineteenth and most of the twentieth centuries receive only fleeting glances, and their battery of cruel interventions to stop masturbation in children is ignored. The result is a text of 500 pages, including 75 of endnotes, which signals the author's ambition to have written the most serious work in a field already quite crowded: a search on Amazon brings up over thirty books on masturbation, though only one of these (Jean Stengers' recently translated *Histoire d'une grande peur*) is intended as a full-scale history. Scholarly interest in the phenomenon, as evidenced by a continuing flow of articles in journals, remains strong, and it is likely to be further stimulated by this learned, wide-ranging, provocative, often fascinating, sometimes irritating, yet finally disappointing study.

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